THE POLITICS OF REVOLUTION & COUNTERREVOLUTION: THE
ASSASSINATION OF LEON TROTSKY & THE POLITICAL
PERSECUTION OF THE TROTSKYIST MOVEMENT

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The Politics of Revolution & Counterrevolution: The Assassination of Leon Trotsky & the Political Persecution of the Trotskyist Movement

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DEDICATION

To Patricia Ferrari, a wonderful mother and friend. Thank you for your love and support, and for all of the wisdom you have shared with me in this journey of life. I love you more than words can express.
In point of fact, the lie in politics, as in daily life, serves as a function of the class structure of society. The oppressors erect the lie into a system of befuddling the masses in order to maintain their rule. On the part of the oppressed the lie is a defensive weapon of weakness. Revolution explodes the social lie. Revolution speaks the truth. Revolution begins by giving things and social relationships their real names.

--Trotsky

The Stalin School of Falsification
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Politics of Revolution & Counterrevolution: The Assassination of Leon Trotsky & the Political Persecution of the Trotskyist Movement

by

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Master of Arts in Political Science
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This thesis will explore a particular aspect of the life and ideas of Leon Trotsky, one of the most important historical figures involved in the history of class struggle. As a Marxist revolutionary for forty-two years, Trotsky’s political work embodies all of the crucial strategic experiences and lessons of the working class in the twentieth century. Specifically, this thesis will explore the penetration of undercover state police agents into the Trotskyist movement, both before and after Trotsky’s assassination in Coyoacan, Mexico. From an historical standpoint, this thesis depicts how Trotsky’s assassination was the culmination of a Stalinist war against Marxism. Moreover, it shows that the continued penetration of the Trotskyist movement after Trotsky’s assassination by Stalin’s secret police (Hereinafter, GPU), as well as by the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (Hereinafter, FBI) represented a war against the most threatening expression of working class politics. These are not simply important historical questions given that all of the fundamental class antagonisms existing then still remain. As social unrest engendered by the staggering degree of social inequality continues to erupt, governments around the world respond with systematic political repression.
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I would like to conclude by sharing my unyielding love and great appreciation for my fiancée, who has been an unshakable pillar of support in countless ways. Thank you for your love and affection, and for the tolerance you have shown during the many stresses of graduate school.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The world today is characterized by acute social, political, and economic crises. In the United States, the eruption of social unrest after decades of quiescence is indubitably a response to a long-standing trend of rising inequality, punctuated by the recent and seemingly endless implementation of austerity measures. The mass demonstrations in Wisconsin in 2011 provide a lucid illustration of the growing mood of social opposition, as over 100,000 workers protested against the slashing of wages and rights of state employees. Other examples of mass demonstrations include tens of thousands of striking Verizon workers in 2011 in response to cuts to wages, benefits, and jobs, as well tens of thousands of California students in opposition to the ongoing assault on education. Additionally in 2011 was the emergence of the Occupy Wall Street movement across the United States, and beyond, which sought to bring attention to and challenge the staggering levels of social inequality present in contemporary society.

In this context, one cannot deny that the illusions of change and the spirit of hope that intoxicated the American population in 2008 have been crushed. As the passage of nearly every policy of the Obama Administration continues to reveal its orientation to corporate America, discontent, frustration, and anger steadily increase among the public. Even the most carefully packaged, populist sounding policies are carried out in the interests of society’s most wealthy, and consequently at the expense of the working class. One example is the Obama Administration’s restructuring of the auto industry, which commenced in 2009.
Touting the policy’s success by salvaging the profitability of the American auto giants (Obama 2012), the restructuring scheme has in fact spearheaded the imposition of unprecedented concessions on autoworkers, including a fifty percent reduction in wages for new hires, significant cuts in workers’ health care and pension benefits, and the elimination of unemployment protections. Meanwhile, auto executives are raking in record high profits, as reported in 2011 (White 2012).

These ongoing attacks are part of a much broader process in which politicians in collaboration with CEOs are forcing the working class to pay for the 2008 financial crisis. But more fundamentally, we are witnessing a profound systemic restructuring of social inequality, as living standards for the vast majority are being reduced permanently into a new norm. Indicative of this reality are the findings of the 2011 United States Census Bureau, which revealed that nearly 1 out of every 6 Americans live below the poverty level, a record high proportion reported since the agency’s inception in 1959. The real proportion, however, is certainly much more alarming considering the agency’s disingenuous benchmark for poverty at $22,000 for a family of four (White 2011).

In conjunction with the immense social catastrophe engulfing the vast majority, the richest segments of American society- a financial class that is increasingly divorced from the process of producing anything of real social value- have experienced an unprecedented concentration of wealth. According to the Forbes article, The Forbes 400: The Richest People in America, 2011, America’s wealthiest have been doing great as their “total wealth is up 12% in the year [2011] through August 26” (Kroll and Dolan 2011). Notably, investors were the subgroup with the largest representation among the richest one hundred. This
parasitic social layer makes its fortunes by speculating in financial markets, and is among those primarily responsible for the 2008 financial crisis.

While working people continue to be bludgeoned into paying for the financial crisis, not one banker or Wall Street tycoon has been held accountable. On the contrary, the American government’s initial response to the crisis was to infuse trillions of dollars into the banking system, much of which has been used to inflate the annual bonuses of CEOs (Damon 2009). Most recently, the Obama Administration’s foreclosure settlement with major banks effectively safeguarded them from the criminal prosecution being sought by 48 out of the 50 states. The charges being brought against the banks were for engaging in illegal activity in their foreclosures on millions of people, which included forgery, perjury, and illegally evicting homeowners (Grey 2012).

The evident kleptocracy in American politics, however, is not peculiar to the United States. It is characteristic of a global phenomenon as governments around the world have responded in kind at the behest of its financial elite. The events that have unfolded in Europe this past year are instructive. Many highly indebted countries, such as Greece and Italy, have been inflicted with technocratic governments that are capable of implementing a barrage of austerity measures on their respective populations. Important to note is that these dictates are being delivered by the most powerful representatives of financial capital: the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, and the European Union, which in the process have been referred to as the “Troika”.

But similar to the United States, countries all over the world have currently witnessed an explosive escalation of social upheaval. From the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, to the mass demonstrations against deteriorating social conditions in Israel, Russia, and throughout
Europe, 2011 marked the beginning of an era of immense global class struggle. This reality stands in sharp contrast to the proclamations advanced by the champions of capitalism after the fall of the Soviet Union. Contrary to Francis Fukuyama’s promise of an “End of History”, in which bourgeois democratic governments are trumpeted to be the end point of human government, history has returned with a vengeance, as shown by the ongoing political, economic, and social convulsions of global capitalism.

While the current crisis is indubitably international in scope, revolutionary leadership oriented to an international program and to the interests of the international working class remains absent from the vast array of social upheavals manifest around the world. Instead, social opposition has been led and co-opted by several pseudo left, petty and national bourgeois political organizations. These groups have sought to placate the revolutionary climate and steer it back within the safe channels of the current political framework. The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 is a case in point. Deplorable living conditions remained for the Egyptian masses, as well political persecution perpetrated by the US-backed military junta in the months following the resignation of the Mubarak regime. Consequently, millions of workers spontaneously flooded the streets in the end of May 2011 and called for a second revolution. This call to action did not materialize, however, in large part due to the work of Egyptian bourgeois and petty bourgeois political organizations, which in the final analysis seek joint political power with the junta in some version of a coalition government. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood has recently announced that it will run billionaire Khairat al-Shater for the upcoming Egyptian presidential elections this year in May. Included in their party’s political platform is a call for a strong government capable of implementing the
necessary cuts demanded by the International Monetary Fund, which in Egypt is currently conducting negotiations for a multi-billion dollar US loan (Stern 2012).

The social and political situation in Egypt, characterized by the revolutionary fervor of the working class on the one hand, and the revolutionary impotence of the petty and national bourgeoisie on the other, is the product of a much broader process of historical development best articulated by Leon Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution. Indeed, the ideas and the political struggle that emerged out of permanent revolution remains of the highest contemporary significance, as it deals with questions of revolutionary leadership, and the fundamental nature of the state as a political unit. In the context of escalating class antagonisms, in which state repression has been the response across the board against social upheaval, these questions for many are a matter of life and death. This thesis will examine the persecution of the Trotskyist movement, which commenced as a political struggle against the program of permanent revolution. The subsequent section of the introduction will provide a brief articulation of the theoretical principles of permanent revolution and the social context in which it emerged.

Examining the objective political situation in Tsarist Russia, Trotsky contended on the eve of the first Russian Revolution of 1905 that it was possible for the proletariat to conquer political power in an economically backward country sooner than in a country with a high degree of development in the productive forces. This was a radical proposition as it ran against the grain of orthodox Russian Marxism, which, in one form or another, subscribed to the traditionally held concept of a two-stage theory to socialism. He insisted that since there

1According to the two-stage theory, socialist revolution will occur at some point in the distant future after the bourgeois democratic revolution, and a significant increase in the development of the productive forces.
no longer existed in the backward countries of the world a progressive bourgeoisie capable of accomplishing its historic mission, i.e. to carry out the bourgeois democratic revolution, the enormous feat now fell upon the proletariat. He further argued that the working class would, by the logic of its class position, push beyond the boundaries of bourgeois democracy and commence the socialist revolution (Trotsky [1906] 1996). Trotsky emphasized, however, that the fate of the proletariat revolution in any single country was contingent upon the international socialist struggle, hence, the revolution in permanence. In regard to Russia, Trotsky ([1906] 1996) wrote, “Without the direct State support of the European proletariat the working class of Russia cannot remain in power and convert its temporary domination into a lasting socialistic dictatorship”. This political perspective- permanent revolution- was developed from Trotsky’s theory of uneven and combined development.2

The industrialization of Russia that occurred during the period 1893-1902 was the product of European finance capital, working in collaboration with the Tsarist Government. This subsequently led to a class structure in Russian society that did not follow the conventional pattern of Western capitalism. While Russian industrialization produced a concentrated and burgeoning working class that was politically advanced, it simultaneously

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2 The theory of uneven and combined development contends that while countries develop unevenly as a result of their own distinct geography and cultural and socioeconomic histories, they also develop with similar characteristic features as part of a greater totality, a combined and interconnected system of world economy. This leads to a distinct social structure in the economically backward countries, one that does not mimic the exact trajectory of bourgeois democracy in the West.
produced a weak national bourgeoisie that was subordinated to foreign finance capital and to the Tsarist Government. This situation found political expression when the Russian bourgeoisie sided with the Tsarist Government against the working class during the Russian Revolution of 1905. By placing a central emphasis on the international character of capitalist development, the internal nature of the Russian class struggle, and the political maturity of the Russian proletariat, Trotsky concluded that the forthcoming revolution would be led not by the national bourgeoisie, but by the working class, which was the only truly revolutionary social force (Trotsky [1906] 1996).

Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution was vindicated in the following decade, as the proletariat conquered political power in the October 1917 Russian Revolution. The Bolsheviks, a working class political party that obtained popular support, toppled the Provisional Government that was brought to power by the February Revolution. Not only did Trotsky’s theory provide the political perspective and program that inspired the October Revolution, he, along with Lenin, were its co-leaders. It was under Trotsky’s command that the Bolsheviks seized power in its October insurrection. And as counterrevolution quickly mobilized, Trotsky formed, inspired, and led the Soviet Red Army to victory during the ensuing civil war (Deutscher [1959] 2003).

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3 The contemporary events in Egypt, discussed above, illustrate a similar process: the revolutionary impotence of the national bourgeoisie as it remains subordinated to imperialist domination.

4 The endorsement of permanent revolution as a political program within the Bolshevik Party is first seen in Lenin’s *Letters from Afar*, and then in his *April Theses*. In short, Lenin urged the Soviets to break with the Provisional Government, arguing that it would soon succumb to reaction and strike a deal with Tsardom. Notably, Joseph Stalin was among the group of Bolsheviks that initially rejected Lenin’s position, and supported a policy of “conditional” support for the Provisional Government.
After the Russian Civil War, Trotsky quickly found himself pitted against a hostile and growing bureaucracy, headed by Joseph Stalin.\(^5\) Lenin became increasingly alarmed during the final years of his life of the tremendous amount of power Stalin began to accumulate, and recommended his removal from the position of General Secretary to the Central Committee (Lenin 1922). After Lenin’s death in January 1924, the theory of permanent revolution became the central political issue of contention that emerged out of Trotsky’s struggle against bureaucratism. In contrast to the internationalist perspective of permanent revolution, which was endorsed by the Bolshevik party in its seizure of power in October 1917, Stalin advanced a nationalist perspective known as “socialism in one country”, which sought to create socialism within borders of the USSR alone. This political program was indeed necessary to defend the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Its nationalist outlook led to a foreign policy within the Communist International that revived the two-stage theory of socialism. The implications for the international working class were colossal, leading to one historic defeat after another in the social upheavals that followed, and were inspired by the October 1917 Russian Revolution.\(^6\) From the outset Trotsky waged a bitter struggle against this revisionist perspective, which in the final analysis, subordinated the prospects for international socialist revolution to the national interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is precisely at this historic juncture that Trotsky and his supporters, which

\(^5\) As early as 1923 Trotsky began to point to the dangers of the bureaucratism of the Soviet state apparatus (Trotsky 1923).

\(^6\) For example, the Stalinist policy within the Communist International during the 1927 Chinese Revolution subordinated the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the national bourgeois Kuomintang, led by Chiang Kai-shek. As the revolution progressed and the masses continued to move sharply to the left, the Kuomintang moved to the right joining forces with Shanghai big business and imperialist powers (Chan 2009). This culminated in Chiang Kai-shek’s Shanghai coup d’état in April 1927, which ended in the slaughter of tens of thousands of workers and CCP members.
first formed as the Left Opposition, became victims of what would develop into a long-standing campaign of political genocide.

The first chapter of the thesis will examine the beginning of the GPU’s penetration of the Trotskyist movement up until Trotsky’s assassination. Specifically included in this chapter is the onset of GPU penetration into the Left Opposition, the mass campaign of historical falsification conducted against Trotsky during the Moscow show trials, and Stalin’s systematic extermination of the Bolshevik generation of the Russian Revolution. The second chapter of the thesis will examine the continued penetration of the Trotskyist movement by the GPU, as well as by the American FBI, after Trotsky’s assassination. A particular focus will be placed on the political persecution conducted by both state police agencies against the American section of the world Trotskyist movement, the Socialist Workers’ Party (Hereinafter, SWP). The conclusion of the thesis will provide a political analysis of the most current campaign of historical falsification directed against Trotsky, which has been perpetuated by several academics within the past two decades.
CHAPTER 2

DEADLY BETRAYALS

The program of the Stalinist bureaucracy was to reach an accommodation with the leading capitalist countries. From abroad and exiled by Stalin, Trotsky continued to wage a relentless struggle against the growth of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its corresponding program of “socialism in one country”. Instead, Trotsky advanced the program of international socialism—permanent revolution—defended by him and Lenin in the 1917 Russian Revolution. Accordingly, Trotsky and the Left Opposition were in the eyes of Stalin, public enemies number one. Soon enough, Stalin came to the realization that exiling Trotsky, rather than having him killed while he was still within his reach in the Soviet Union was a grave mistake. It was in this political context that Stalin began a brutal campaign of espionage and murder against Trotsky and the Left Opposition. The attack on Trotsky and the program of permanent revolution enabled Stalin to on the one hand pretend to defend 1917, while on the other betray the fundamental principles it embodied. The various events related in this chapter are but a small fraction of the sum total of events that occurred. The goal is to provide the reader with a glimpse of the lengths Stalin took to silence Trotsky and the political alternative he represented.

Among the earliest penetrations of the GPU into the Trotskyist movement is the case of the Sobolevicius brothers (Haynes and Klehr 2006). Abromas Sobolevicius’ operational...
name within the Trotskyist movement was Adolph Senin, and later Jack Soble. His brother, Ruvelis Sobolevicius used the operational name Roman Well, and later Dr. Robert Soblen. The Sobolevicius brothers were born in Vilkaviskis, Lithuania: Soble in 1903 and Soblen in 1900. During their teenage years they left for Leipzig, Germany to attend college where they both joined the German Communist Party in 1921. In the late 1920s the brothers joined the German Left Opposition and became very active in the Trotskyist movement. According to the interviews of Jack Soble and his wife, Myra Soble with the FBI in 1957, both brothers were expelled from the Communist Party in 1929 (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI] 1957).

After being expelled from the Communist Party, Soble later alleged at his brother’s espionage trial in the United States that he was coerced into rejoining in 1931. The story Soble tells is that after his wife, Myra Soble, a Russian citizen, returned to Russia to visit her ailing mother, he was summoned to report to the Russian Embassy in Berlin. At the time Soble was a Lithuanian citizen and a student at a German university, and therefore, found it strange that he was asked to appear at the Russian Embassy. There, Soble states that he was given an ultimatum by the GPU: in order to see his wife again he must first quit the “Trotskyist movement and go back to the party” (International Committee of the Fourth International [ICFI] 1981a, 132). In addition, he claims to have been offered money at the Russian Embassy to rejoin the party. Soble states in his testimony that he eventually agreed to the GPU’s terms and conditions and for the first time went to work for the GPU.

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8 On January 25, 1957, Jack Soble and his wife, Myra Soble were arrested and charged with Soviet espionage. While in custody the Sobles were subjected to several interviews with the FBI, all of which have been made available to the public since the enacting of the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts of 1974.

9 In 1960, Dr. Robert Soblen was tried and convicted for espionage in the United States.
Some question the veracity of whether it was at this point that Soble began working for the GPU. Haynes and Klehr (2006) argue that Soble’s GPU work began much earlier stating, “there is evidence that he was working for the KGB (a.k.a. GPU) since 1927 and his adherence to Trotskyism was a sham from the beginning” (209). A CIA report approved for release in 1994 corroborates the assertion that Soble’s GPU work began before 1931. The report claims that the Sobolevicius brothers were active GPU agents as early as 1929 when they became “Trotsky’s most constant correspondents” (Kronenbitter 1996). At the time Soble was writing under his operational name Adolph Senin, and Soblen as Roman Well. Both brothers, according to the report, kept their kinship a well guarded secret, “praising each other as devoted comrades” to ultimately confirm “each other’s false information” (Kronenbitter 1996). To remain undetected, both brothers bolstered each other’s political activities within the Left Opposition. Ultimately, their concealed identities allowed them to report to Moscow on the moves Trotsky made and to cause disunity within the Trotskyist movement.

In response to Soble’s testimony that he was strong-armed back into the Communist party in 1931, the CIA report states, “there is no indication in Soble's correspondence of the period to show that his wife ever went to Russia alone. From his letters one can deduce that Soble began his work as a penetration agent among the Trotskyists in late 1929” (Kronenbitter 1996). The report continues by noting that the only distinction between 1931 and his prior activity in the Trotskyist movement is a qualitative change in his correspondence with Trotsky, which “took the form of intelligence reports about the movement: its rapid growth, its prospects, and assessments of the reliability of its leaders”
(Kronenbitter 1996). Thus, according to the CIA report, 1931 simply signified a heightening of Soble’s political career in the business of GPU espionage, and not its inception.

In 1931, Soble departed Germany for Prinkipo, Turkey to meet Trotsky in person for the first time. His sojourn lasted nearly three months. Soble testified at his 1958 espionage perjury trial that he reported “on this visit [to Prinkipo] to the Russians” (ICFI 1981a, 135). In 1932, Soble again visited Trotsky, but this time in Copenhagen, Denmark. Trotsky was invited that year by a group of Danish students to lecture on the Russian Revolution. Similarly, Soble admitted to the same grand jury that he reported back to Moscow on Trotsky’s activities. In addition, when asked if he ever reported to anyone on Leon Sedov, Trotsky’s oldest son, his answer was, “Yes, also to the Russians” (ICFI 1981a, 135).

Soble broke with Trotsky and the Left Opposition in December of 1932. His brother followed suit a month later. In response, Trotsky wrote to sections of the Left Opposition:

At the mildest estimate, we can call these people nothing but the garbage of the revolution. In the Comintern, in the GPU, in each national section, there is a special apparatus for the disintegration of the Left Opposition, composed for the most part of deserters of the Opposition or of Stalinist agents. (ICFI 1981a, 140)

Instinctively Trotsky was right in suspecting the possibility of Soble and Soblen’s connection to Stalin, as they publicly came out in the press announcing their allegiance to Stalin shortly after their break from the Left Opposition (Trotsky 1937b). Both Stalinist agents immediately departed to Russia, and prepared for their upcoming, more important operations in the United States (Kronenbitter 1996).

Confronted by Trotsky’s public break from the Third International in 1933, which called for the formation of a new International and for a political revolution in the Soviet Union, Stalin’s desperation to have his archenemy silenced rapidly escalated. Stalin’s cloak and dagger activities involving agent provocateurs reporting back to Moscow would no
longer suffice, and so the penetration of Trotsky’s circles and the Left Opposition needed to be ramped up. Accordingly, Stalin began to craft various machinations to indict Trotsky before the world stage of committing crimes he himself had been guilty of, i.e. espionage and assassination.

The 1934 assassination of Sergey Kirov, head of the Leningrad Organization and Politburo member, marked the beginning of what would develop into the first of three Moscow Trials. Although there is much controversy among scholars as to whether Stalin played a direct role in the Kirov assassination by ordering the hit, Lesley A. Rimmel (1997) points out that “most observers concur that once Kirov was dead, the [Stalinist bureaucratic] government attempted to orchestrate public opinion of his death as a calamity with broad implications” (481). More specifically, the Kirov affair served Stalin as a pretext to eventually accuse Trotsky as the mastermind behind the crime, and ultimately as the controller of a whole network of conspiring terrorists.

Kirov’s assassin, Leonid Nikolaev, a former member of the Communist Party who was expelled for minor differences with the party line, was immediately connected by the state controlled media to Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, two old Bolshevik party members (Deutscher [1963] 2003). It was said that Nikolaev had formerly been a member of the Zinovievist group in Leningrad, described by the court as an “underground counter-revolutionary group” (People’s Commissariat of Justice of the U.S.S.R [PCJUSSR] 1936). The underlining motive of this connection was to implicate Trotsky with the assassin, as Zinoviev and Kamenev had in 1926 broken with Stalin and gravitated towards Trotsky and

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10 For an outline of the scholarly debate on the Kirov affair and the role played by Stalin, see Matt Lenoe’s, *Did Stalin Kill Kirov and does it Matter?*
the Left Opposition. Notably, Kamenev and Zinoviev had a falling out with Trotsky in 1928 and capitulated back to the Stalinist line, never again to collaborate with Trotsky. Nevertheless, Stalin would still proceed in the near future to draw the connection. 

Nikolaev and the thirteen others who allegedly participated in Kirov’s murder, the majority of whom never admitted their participation in the assassination, were at a trial in Moscow on December 27, 1934 condemned to death by a bullet to the head (Sedov [1936] 1980). This trial has been commonly referred to as the “Trial of the Fourteen”. Zinoviev and Kamenev, after having been imprisoned for their alleged connection to the assassination were for the moment not judicially tried given the insufficient evidence summoned against them. They were, however, “handed over to the GPU for administrative punishment” (Sedov [1936] 1980, 15).

On January 16, 1935, just over half a month after the “Trial of the Fourteen”, Zinoviev and Kamenev were once again brought before the court at yet another trial where they were accused of heading a terroristic organization known as the “Moscow Center”. According to the court report, the Moscow Center specifically “guided the counter-revolutionary activities of diverse underground groups of Zinovievites” (PCJUSSR 1936). At this trial, Zinoviev and Kamenev admitted to bearing the “moral and political responsibility for the assassination of Comrade Kirov”, knowing that their adherents in the Moscow Center were inclined to terroristic activity (PCJUSSR 1936). This admission was most certainly strategic, as Kamenev and Zinoviev avoided the firing squad and instead were sentenced to long-term prison sentences. A few days later on January 23, 1935, another trial was held in which several members of the GPU Leningrad leadership were convicted and imprisoned for security negligence. The court found that they failed to take the appropriate
measures necessary to ward off Kirov’s impending assassination having known of it in advance (Shachtman 1936).

A year and a half had passed when in August 1936 a new case in relation to Kirov’s assassination came into fruition in what became known as the first Moscow Trial, lasting from August 19-23, 1936. Zinoviev and Kamenev were once again tried, and the new accusation by the prosecution was that not only did they know “their adherents in Leningrad were inclined towards terrorism, but were the direct organizers of the assassination of Comrade S. M. Kirov” (PCJUSSR 1936). This trial attempted to for the first time openly establish Trotsky’s connection to the Kirov assassination in what the indictment called, “the United Trotskyite- Zinovievite Centre”. According to the report of the court proceedings, the investigation “established that the Zinovievites pursued their criminal terroristic practices [in particular, the order to assassinate Kirov] in a direct bloc with the Trotskyites and with L. Trotsky, who is abroad” (PCJUSSR 1936).

Trotsky had been residing in Norway at the time of these defamatory accusations, and first learned of the alleged Trotskyite-Zinovievite terrorist plot and the ensuing trial from a static-ridden radio broadcasting an announcement made by the Moscow press (Trotsky 1936). Living in extreme isolation in the village by the name of Weksal, thirty-five miles from Oslo, Trotsky was essentially imprisoned by the Social Democratic Norwegian government for attempting to respond to his accusers (Provisional American Committee For The Defense of Leon Trotsky [PACDT] 1936; Trotsky 1938e). The government denied Trotsky all access to the press, cut the telephone wire to his place of residence, surrounded it with a twenty-four hour police watch, and censored all of his mail (Trotsky 1936; 1938e). Describing his situation in Norway, Trotsky (1936) wrote, “What Stalin had not dared to do
in 1928, the Norwegian ‘Socialists’ did in 1936. They imprisoned me for having refused to halt the political activity that is the very essence of my life”.

In the context of the Norwegian government’s silencing campaign, Trotsky’s son Leon Sedov wrote *The Red Book*. This revolutionary contribution was the first literary work to expose the first Moscow Trial as a frame-up. First published in Russian in the *Bulletin of the Left Opposition* in October 1936, *The Red Book* systematically analyzes the process of the trial, highlighting multitude contradictory statements and falsifications made on behalf of the witnesses and the prosecution. One of the many fabrications that played an important role in the trial and is commonly referred to is the question of Copenhagen. It was alleged that all of Trotsky’s instructions for terror came out of Copenhagen from 1931 to 1936. This allegation is sharply debunked as Sedov points out and proves that during these five years Trotsky had only resided in Copenhagen for a total of 8 days, the trip he made to speak to the Danish students about the Russian Revolution (Sedov [1936] 1980).

Another anachronism was provided by the testimony of Eduard Holtzman, one of the principle witnesses at the trial. During the court proceedings Holtzman stated, “I arranged with Sedov to be in Copenhagen within two or three days, to put up at the Hotel Bristol and meet him there. I went to the hotel straight from the station and in the lounge met Sedov” (PCJUSSR 1936). After having met Sedov, Holtzman claims to have been taken to Trotsky where he was explained the necessity of removing Stalin in order for the Trotskyists to come to power. Sedov and Trotsky were among the first to discredit this claim by highlighting that Hotel Bristol did not exist in the 1930s, given that it was demolished in 1917 (Sedov [1936] 1980; Trotsky 1938d). Recently, however, in the journal *Cultural Logic*, Sven-Eric Holmström has argued that there was in fact a hotel connected to a coffee shop named Bristol
café in 1932, which still existed during the first Moscow Trial. According to Holmström, it is therefore probable that Holtzman may have gotten confused in his testimony by mixing up the coffee shop’s name with that of the hotel. Holmström (2008) continues by noting that since the issue of the Bristol Hotel has been the primary piece of evidence used to prove the fraudulence of the first Moscow Trial, “this is the strongest evidence so far that the testimony in the 1936 Moscow Trial was true, rather than a frame up”. Conveniently noting that the discrepancy of the Hotel Bristol was the backbone of the Moscow frame-up argument, Holmström attempts to discredit Trotsky’s defense and implicate him in terrorism.

Holmström, however, fails to address the arsenal of other contradictions highlighted by Sedov and Trotsky. For example, even if we were to give weight to the possibility that Holtzman confused the café with the hotel, the simple fact that Sedov had never in his life been to Copenhagen, which is supported by irrefutable evidence in *The Red Book*, categorically discredits the Hotel Bristol affair as depicted by the Moscow trial (Sedov [1936] 1980; Trotsky 1938d). Holmström’s account goes to show that the falsifications of Stalinism still to this day manage to resurface in certain academic circles.11

Meanwhile, one particular letter the Norwegian Minister of Justice confiscated was Trotsky’s deposition to the French Magistrate presiding over a case dealing with the theft of his archives in Paris. These archives were housed at the Parisian section of the International Institute of Social History. On November 7, 1936, the Institute was broken into, and the burglars notably left all valuables and money behind, only to take the Trotsky archives (Deutscher [1963] 2003). Writing to the French magistrate in charge of investigating the

11 More on the emergence of new academic attacks on Trotsky will be further discussed in the conclusion.
robery, Trotsky (1937c) stated, “If the head of the Parisian section of the GPU had left his visiting card on the table in the premises of the institute, he would thereby have added very little to the other indices”. Feeling pressure from Sedov’s exposure of the contradictory and fabricated nature of the first Moscow Trial, the GPU’s break-in served as preparatory work to more accurately stage Stalin’s next round of accusations. Indeed, the GPU was well aware that material acquired could have provided dates and locations of Trotsky’s historical whereabouts. For the Norwegian government to prevent Trotsky to correspond with the Parisian investigation carries evident political implications: “The confiscation of my deposition was an aid to the robber against the robbed” (Trotsky 1937c).

This suppression developed into what appeared to be a threat of expulsion and deliverance to the GPU when the Norwegian government warned Trotsky that in order to prosecute the Moscow slanders abroad, he must first leave Norway, which insinuated extradition to Moscow (Trotsky 1936). In the face of such governmental hostility and censorship, Trotsky’s comrades and supporters in the United States, known as the “American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky”, quickly began to seek another country that would grant him asylum. Initially every European country denied him refuge, including the United States. It wasn’t until well-known Mexican painter Diego Rivera convinced President Cardenas that Trotsky was finally given a visa to and asylum in Mexico (PACDT 1936). Trotsky’s stay, however, was granted on the condition that he would not meddle in the political affairs of Mexico (Patenaude 2009). On the first of January 1937, Trotsky landed on the port of Tampico, Mexico and within a matter of days made his way to Coyoacan, the place he would reside for the remainder of his life.
The second Moscow Trial immediately ensued Trotsky’s arrival, taking place on January 23-30, just five months after the first. From the somewhat freer political landscape Mexico provided, Trotsky and his comrades began to work strenuously to expose before the world stage the Stalinist frame-up trials. Working with comrades in New York and with the Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, on the ninth of February Trotsky organized an event at the Hippodrome Theater in midtown Manhattan, a venue with a seating capacity of six thousand people. At the event, Trotsky was scheduled to speak for one hour over the telephone on the falsity of the charges being made by the Moscow trials, which would be transmitted over a sound magnifying system to the larger audience (Novack 1937). As the hour for the speech arrived, the telephone connection failed, and Trotsky’s speech had to be read aloud before the audience by Max Shachtman, at the moment a prominent New York Trotskyist. The connection was most likely sabotaged by local Stalinists, as they had then organized their own counter-committee with the sole purpose of disrupting and disorganizing the efforts made on behalf of Trotsky’s New York supporters (Novack 1937; Patenaude 2009). In any case, the speech was still delivered in front of a significant sized crowd, and Shachtman relayed Trotsky’s message, pledging before the world to appear before a neutral commission of inquiry to address the Moscow charges. Specifically, Trotsky offered to grant the Commission complete access to all of his archives, and vowed to turn himself in to the Soviet authorities if the verdict ruled against him (Patenaude 2009; Trotsky 1937a).

Accordingly, immediate discussion and plans began between Coyoacan and New York to establish as soon as possible a commission of inquiry. Learning of the New York
Trotskyists’ intention to ask John Dewey\textsuperscript{12} to chair such a commission, Stalin attempted to co-opt these efforts by sending emissaries that bribed Dewey with an opportunity to head a delegation to the Soviet Union on its 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary (Novack 1937). Despite these efforts, and his initial reservations of old age and his longing to finish a book he was currently working on, Dewey eventually agreed (Novack 1937). On April 10 the investigation began, and a Dewey-led sub-commission consisting of five members held several hearings at Trotsky’s residence in Coyoacan. Several representatives from the Soviet Union and from the American and Mexican Communist parties were invited to cross-examine Trotsky at these hearings, but notably not a single Stalinist appeared (Patenaude 2009). After the testimony taken in Coyoacan, two other sub-commissions of investigation were held: one in Paris on May 12-June 22, 1937, and the other in New York on July 26-27, 1937. The Dewey Commission from New York on September 21, 1937 publicly issued its final decision. The report stated:

\begin{quote}
(1) That the conduct of the Moscow trials was such as to convince any unprejudiced person that no effort was made to ascertain the truth. (2) While confessions are necessarily entitled to the most serious consideration, the confessions themselves contain such inherent improbabilities as to convince the Commission that they do not represent the truth, irrespective of any means used to obtain them. (Novack 1968)
\end{quote}

Unable to thus far discredit Trotsky and warrant his guilt before world opinion, on March 2, 1938 Stalin launched the Third Moscow Trial, and continued to indict Trotsky of espionage for foreign governments and of providing leadership for terrorist organizations with the intent of overthrowing the Soviet government (Trotsky 1938b; 1938c). With the sole exception of Trotsky, the sum total of the three Moscow trials was Stalin’s systematic

\textsuperscript{12} John Dewey (October 20, 1859 – June 1, 1952) was a distinguished American philosopher best known for his work on the philosophy of pragmatism.
assassination of the remaining leadership of the Russian Revolution. Members of the old Bolshevik guard such as Nikolai Bukharin, Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, Alexei Rykov, Karl Radek, Ivar Smilga, and Nikolay Krestinsky were shot dead. Roughly one year earlier Trotsky (1937a) stated in a cable to the Manchester Guardian, “how can one accept the fact that all the men who carried through the revolution, with the one exception of Stalin, have become terrorists, enemies of Socialism, agents of the Gestapo, ready to dismember the Union of Soviet Republics?”.

While the Moscow trials were the most public, in the context of the Great Purge, many other trials were held throughout the country and hundreds of thousands perished at the hands of the GPU, many of whom were labeled as “Trotskyists”. Indeed, many people close to Trotsky either mysteriously disappeared or were driven to suicide by the GPU. This included both of Trotsky’s daughters and his sons-in-law, his youngest son, Sergei Sedov, as well as many of his secretaries, Glazman, Butov, Blumkin, Sermaks and Poznansky, Wolfe, and Klement (SWP Report 1940a; The Socialist Party 2000; Trotsky 1938f). The GPU indubitably attempted to affect Trotsky’s political work by using any and all means necessary. Attacking family members who were not affiliated with the Trotskyist movement is an angle the GPU took to attempt to affect Trotsky psychologically, whereas murdering his secretaries were more direct political assassinations intended to impair his political work.

From Paris, Leon Sedov continued to expose these monstrous crimes. As a leading member of the French Trotskyist section and editor of the *Bulletin of the Left Opposition*, Sedov’s political work ventured far beyond exposing the Moscow trials. His involvement in oppositionist politics began as early as the 1923. While Trotsky was exiled in Alma Ata, Sedov served to connect his father to the outside world, and then later joined him in exile
(Sedov [1936] 1980). He worked as his father’s primary researcher on monumental works such as *History of the Russian Revolution* and *The Revolution Betrayed*. Cognizant of Sedov’s critical revolutionary role, he became Stalin’s greatest target after Trotsky. Accordingly, GPU surveillance was set in motion, and Mark Zborowski was called to action, becoming their most valuable spy within the Trotskyist movement.

Before a Senate Subcommittee hearing on Soviet espionage in the United States in September 1955, Mark Zborowski provided voluminous testimony about beginning his espionage activities in the 1930s when he was approached by the GPU in Grenoble, France (*United States of America, Appellee v. Mark Zborowski, Appellant* 1959). His assignment was to penetrate the French section of the Trotskyist movement. According to his testimony, Zborowski was introduced to Sedov by Sedov’s wife, Jeanne Martin, and gained his confidence by “regularly turning up at the Left Opposition’s headquarters and offering to do editorial and office work” (ICFI 1981a, 81). As his relationship with Sedov grew closer, Zborowski was entrusted with important political work within the party. Soon enough he became Sedov’s chief secretary and aided in the publication of the *Bulletin of the Left Opposition*. From this convenient and undisclosed position, Zborowski gained access to vital correspondence between Sedov and his father. Indeed, at one point Sedov placed Zborowski “in charge of the most confidential files of Trotsky’s archives” (Deutscher [1963] 2003, 283). In this regard, Zborowski testified to the US Senate that he had reported to Moscow the location of Trotsky’s archives when they were stored in Paris’s International Institute of Social History prior to the robbery (ICFI 1981a, 81).

Meanwhile, other agents in France were present and began to circle in on Sedov. The surveillance team consisted of three agents, Renata Steiner, who was later arrested in
Switzerland for her role in the gruesome Reiss murder, Pierre Ducomet, and Dmitry Smirensky, the controller of the operation (Trotsky 1937d). All three agents moved into the building across from Sedov’s apartment. Shortly after, Steiner was promoted into an operative, and went out into the field befriending Sedov and his wife. At one point she even vacationed with them. From her position she reported back to the surveillance team all of the moves Sedov made. According to the testimony she provided to the court that presided over the Reiss murder, Steiner noted that she was eventually ordered to lure Sedov to a house where his assassins waited to deal the final deathblow (ICFI 1981a). This operation has been commonly referred to as the Mulhouse trip. For reasons that have yet to surface, Sedov did not make the trip and for the moment was able to escape death (Kronenbitter 1996; Serge 1938).

It wasn’t until Zborowski informed the GPU of Sedov’s emergency hospital visit on February 9, 1938 that matters took a deadly turn. In his testimony to the Senate Subcommittee, Zborowski admits to relaying to the GPU the name of the hospital and the time of Sedov’s arrival (ICFI 1981a). He confesses tipping off the GPU at the same time he called in the ambulance (ICFI 1981a). Sedov had been urgently rushed to the hospital suffering from a sudden and unexpected severe abdominal pain. Upon arrival, an immediate operation was performed. Initially the operation appeared successful, as Sedov recovered within a matter of days. However, on the night of the 13th, Sedov was found wandering the halls of the hospital in a state of delirium with a high fever. He collapsed to the ground injuring the surgical site. Sedov was again rushed into surgery, but this time he died during the recovery on February 16. This was sixteen months after exposing the first Moscow Trial as sham.
In addition to the Zborowski tip-off, many other mysterious circumstances are present surrounding Sedov’s death. In a letter written to the French Judge who had investigated the case, Trotsky (1938g) highlighted the incompleteness of the investigation, which deemed Sedov to have died due to natural causes. He raised doubts concerning the physicians that cared for him who all happened to be Russian émigrés. For example, Sedov’s surgeon, Dr. Talheimer, refused to disclose a detailed explanation of his death hiding behind the veil of “professional secrecy”, equivalent to modern-day “doctor-patient confidentiality”. This legal privilege serves as a safeguard for the patient, and involves the doctor’s right to withhold evidence from discovery. Given that Sedov was dead when Dr. Talheimer invoked “professional secrecy”, Trotsky (1938g) pointed out that it must therefore be a “question of safeguarding the secret of the physician himself”. But Dr. Talheimer did report one thing prior to succumbing to silence. He stated to Jeanne Martin that Sedov was heavily sedated by barbiturates on the night he deliriously wandered the halls of the clinic and reinjured his abdomen. Given that Sedov had never struggled from addiction to drugs and had no suicidal tendencies, it is believed that someone else must have administered the drugs (ICFI 1981a). This matter was never again addressed and the question of who administered the drugs has never been disclosed, perhaps being kept as a well-guarded, professional secret.

The political affiliation of the director of the clinic, Dr. Jirmunsky, known to be a Bolshevik sympathizer, also raises some questions. As Trotsky (1938g) points out, these relations were at the time never platonic ones, and “under cover of all kinds of medical, judicial, literary, pacifists and other organizations and publications the G.P.U. creates basis of support which serve it, especially in France”.
Adding to the cloud of suspicion, the owner of the clinic, Dr. Simkoff reportedly stated to the French press that the kidnapping of his two missing sons was most likely an act of revenge on behalf of the Trotskyists (Trotsky 1938g). It was later discovered that his sons died from an unfortunate landslide. In response to Dr. Simkoff’s initially allegations, Trotsky (1938g) wrote, “such a supposition could only enter in the mind of a person whose conscience was not altogether clean, or to a person who mixed in political circles hostile to me and Sedov”. The mysterious clinical conditions, coupled with the larger context of GPU spies, which orbited Sedov looking for the perfect moment to strike, strongly supports the conclusion that Sedov was assassinated by the GPU.

With Sedov gone, the next order of business for the GPU was to fully concentrate on the assassination of its prime target: Leon Trotsky. Two networks for this operation have surfaced in the historical record. The code names for these networks are known as, “Horse” and “Mother”. But given that the GPU network was very intricate, sophisticated, and extensive, it is very likely that many others were concurrently in fully swing.

David Siqueiros, a Mexican icon who is one of the key figures in establishing the Mexican Mural Renaissance and then a member of the Mexican Communist Party, was instrumental in the network called “Horse”. His controller was a man named Iosif Grigulevich, who was directly involved in the torture and murder of Andres Nin13 during the Spanish Civil War (Patenaude 2009; Talbot 2007). Grigulevich was assigned by the GPU leadership in 1938 to move to Mexico and conduct surveillance on the Trotskyist household (Patenaude 2009). In Coyoacan, Grigulevich first rented a house a few blocks from

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13 As the leader of the POUM during the Spanish Civil War, Nin was murdered in Barcelona under the supervision of the GPU, an order that came directly from Stalin.
Trotsky’s place of residence to report back to Moscow all of the moves he made. He then recruited Siqueiros to his spy-team. Summoned back to Moscow in 1939, Grigulevich met with Lavrenti Beria, the Soviet chief of the GPU and among the most notorious historical figures associated with Stalin’s Great Terror. It was then that he was given the green light on his plan to raid the compound and kill Trotsky. On his return to Mexico, Grigulevich assigned Siqueiros to begin preparations and lead the groundwork of the operation (Patenaude 2009).

On May 24, 1940 at approximately 4am, twenty-seven men disguised in police uniform, working under the directive of the GPU and led by David Siqueiros, penetrated the Coyoacan household. Many of the perpetrators were GPU agents that arrived from Spain, while others were loyal local Stalinists (SWP Report 1940a). The five Mexican policemen outside Trotsky’s compound, guards provided by the Mexican government for Trotsky’s protection, were found tied up, restrained, and disarmed after the raid. From the inside, Trotsky’s compound was constantly under the protection of personal guards, a total of five at that particular moment. Armed with small revolvers, Trotsky’s personal bodyguards were defenseless against the perpetrators, who were able to pin them down with Thompson machine guns and 30-caliber automatic rifle fire. The perpetrators made their way toward Trotsky’s room, and crossfire from three directions unloaded over a hundred rounds into his room. The subsequent police investigation deemed that during the raid over 300 hundred shots had been fired in total. In addition to their automatic weapons, the perpetrators used multiple explosive devices, some of which caused a blaze to the outside of Trotsky’s door. After an explosive caused the door to Trotsky’s room to open, one of the multiple assassins entered the dark room and shot several slugs at the head of the bed, diagonally piercing the
mattress in an execution like fashion (Howe 1940). During the raid, and particularly during
the assault on his room, Trotsky and his wife Natalia were couched in a corner of the room,
and miraculously escaped the attempted assassination with minor scratches.

It wasn’t until the raiders fled the crime scene that members of the Trotskyist
household noticed that Robert Sheldon Harte, one of Trotsky’s personal guards and
secretaries, had been kidnapped. One month later Mexican police discovered his body buried
in a hut several hundred yards off of a highway near Mexico City with two thirty-eight-
caliber shots to the head (Patenaude 2009; SWP Report 1940a). The facts on whether Harte
was an accomplice in the raid, working as a GPU spy from within the walls of the Trotskyist
household are somewhat murky. But there are several suspicious pieces of evidence that
point in that direction, such as a photograph of Stalin posted on the wall of his New York
residence, a Spanish-English dictionary autographed by David Siqueiros, and the fact that it
was he that opened the door to Siqueiros and his gangsters on the night of the raid (ICFI
1981a).

Immediately after the raid, the GPU controlled Communist Parties in both the United
States and Mexico launched a campaign to portray it as a “self assault”, a pseudo attack
orchestrated by Trotsky on his own life in an effort to vilify Stalin before world stage
opinion. In Mexico this campaign was led by Lombardo Toledano, the secretary of the
Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), in concert with the Mexican newspaper, “El
Popular”. Both were closely tied to the Mexican Communist party (Cannon 1940a; SWP
Report 1940a; Trotsky 1938a). Trotsky immediately responded to the slanders before
correspondents of Mexican and foreign press:

Why should I arrange to have my home attacked and riddled with bullets and
thereby jeopardize my remaining in Mexico, the only country which offers me
refuge: to prove that Stalin is a bad character? But Stalin has exterminated nine tenths of my family; he has killed thousands of revolutionists in Russia and other parts of the world. Can I by arranging an assault on my home add any proof that Stalin is a bad character- absurd! (Notes on the May attack 1940)

A few weeks after the attempt on his life Trotsky warned that another attack by the GPU was imminent (Trotsky 1940). These warnings were soon vindicated by the implementation of the “Mother” network.

Trotsky’s assassin, Ramon Mercader, was the principle agent in the “Mother” network. Mercader’s penetration of the Trotskyist movement was the outcome of an operation spanning several years, beginning in Paris, France in 1938. It was then that Sylvia Ageloff, a Trotskyist from Brooklyn, New York, planned a vacation to Europe. She was contacted before her trip by an acquaintance named Ruby Weil, who noted that she too was planning a trip to Europe to visit her sister, and proposed that they travel together. Weil was at the time working for the Peoples Press, a well-known New York newspaper controlled by a GPU agent, Frank Palmer (SWP Report 1940c). Her bother-in-law, Harry Howel, also was a well-known Stalinist (ICFI 1981a). In Paris, Weil introduced Ageloff to Ramon Mercader, who was then going by the pseudonym Jacques Mornard. At all times Mercader deceptively and purposely made himself appear to Ageloff as a superficial individual who was politically apathetic. Mercader entertained Ageloff daily, taking her out sightseeing during the day and to dinners during the night, which ultimately led to the beginning of an intimate relationship. Their relationship continued as Mercader followed Ageloff to New York in 1939. His stay in New York, however, only lasted about a month as he quickly departed for Mexico City on October 1st, 1939. Purporting to be in the employ of an English broker involved in the commerce of war materials, he informed Ageloff that work require him to travel there (SWP Report 1940c). Mercader was at this point geographically positioned for the implementation
of the operation to kill Trotsky. The tasks now at hand for Mercader were to establish the necessary contacts in Mexico to get close to Trotsky. Ageloff would soon prove a vital asset.

Ageloff visited Mercader in January 1940, and given her involvement in the Trotskyist movement, she was invited to Trotsky’s house upon her arrival in Mexico City. This visit, however, was made without the company of Mercader, as the house was by this point heavily fortified, and only those closely associated with the movement were granted entrance. There, Ageloff ran into Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer, two of Trotsky’s old friends who were visiting, and who she had met at the founding of the Fourth International in Paris, 1938. She invited the Rosmers to her apartment in Mexico City, and upon their arrival, they met Mercader for the first time. Shortly after, Ageloff invited herself and Mercader on a weekend trip planned by the Rosmer’s and a few of Trotsky’s guards. The Rosmers later noted that Mercader proved to be entertaining company while showing no signs of political interests, thus giving no grounds for suspicion (SWP Report 1940b). Upon Ageloff’s departure from Mexico, Mercader maintained a relationship with the Rosmers. This proved extremely advantageous as it quickly led to a series of critical contacts, including Hank and Dorothy Shultz, visiting comrades from Minneapolis, James Cannon and Farrell Dobbs, the visiting leadership from the New York branch, and even Natalia, Trotsky’s wife (Patenaude 2009; Shultz 1940). Mercader strategically made himself available to chauffeur Trotsky’s associates when the household’s Buick was not serviceable, and at one point loaned his car to the household while gone to New York in June 1940, a trip he had taken to receive the final instructions from his GPU handlers (Patenaude 2009; SWP Report 1940b). Upon his return to Mexico, Mercader had developed the necessary relationships to place himself in the position to execute the mission: enter the house and assassinate Trotsky.
On the evening of August 20, 1940, Mercader appeared at Trotsky’s house unannounced. He had already maneuvered his way inside the house several times before this, using Ageloff and his car tactically, which gained him the confidence of Trotsky and others of the household. The unannounced visit, therefore, didn’t make the guards suspicious, and the imposter was invited in. Inside, Mercader informed the household that he was meeting Ageloff there to say farewell to everyone, as they were leaving to live in New York the following day (Patenaude 2009). Trotsky was in the patio tending to his chicken yard when Mercader approached him and asked for advice on an article he had written (Hansen 1940). Trotsky agreed, and after having notified his guards, invited Mercader to his study to review the work. Shortly after, a strident cry from Trotsky’s study was heard throughout the house, followed by the cacophony of a violent struggle. The two guards closest to the area, Joseph Hansen and Harold Robbins, immediately rushed in that direction and found Trotsky struggling to escape his study, severely injured, face covered in gushing blood. Inside the study stood Mercader with gun in hand, although it was later discovered that the assailant used an ice pick concealed in his coat to deliver the deadly blow to Trotsky’s head (Hansen 1940; Patenaude 2009). Robbins subdued him with the butt of his revolver, and while he continued to strike the perpetrator with vicious blows, Mercader cried out, “They made me do it. They threatened to kill my mother” (Cannon 1940b). On August 21, the following day, Trotsky was dead. Stalin finally succeeded in carrying out the task he set out to do a decade earlier.

Trotsky lived the last years of his life as a hunted exile because of the relentless political struggle he waged against the Stalinist bureaucracy. He produced voluminous work exposing the Stalinist betrayals of the working class, e.g. on the 1927 Chinese Revolution,
regarding the rise of fascism in Germany, and on the 1936 Spanish Revolution to name a few. From Mexico, Trotsky continued to expose the criminality of Stalinism and its treachery of the working class, such as when he wrote to workers of the Soviet Union informing them of deception in the Stalinist press and the need for political revolution in the USSR (Trotsky 1940). In the context of Trotsky’s grave political opposition, which dated back to the formation of the Left Opposition, Stalin created the GPU as a mechanism for political genocide. The GPU, under the direction of Stalin, sought to stifle and eliminate all political opposition of the Trotskyist movement, following and hunting Trotsky and his closest collaborators from country to country. By the end of the 1940s the GPU would have exterminated nearly the entire Bolshevik generation of the Russian Revolution, culminating in the assassination of one of the greatest champions of the working class in the 20th century.

For Stalin to protect his bureaucratic rule, it was imperative to silence the voice of his most staunch accuser and to expunge the political perspective that called for the liberation of the international working class: permanent revolution. Stalin succeeded in the former, but failed in the latter, as the Fourth International continued the political struggle for world proletariat revolution. In a Socialist Workers’ Party’s press release immediately after Trotsky’s death, James P. Cannon (1940c) wrote, “Today we stand with clenched fists at the grave of our martyred leader. Tomorrow we take up the forward march with firmer determination and greater energy. Trotsky is dead! But the party of Trotskyists will live and conquer!”. Albert Goldman (1940), Trotsky’s close comrade and lawyer, stated at his funeral, “But let not Stalin be unrestrained in his joy. For the man whom he murdered has left ideas, and ideas cannot be murdered. These ideas will grow more and more powerful, for they are the ideas representing the future of mankind”. And because after Trotsky’s death the
Fourth International vowed to carry on a struggle against Stalin and his political cronies in Moscow, the GPU would in the future continue to penetrate the Trotskyist movement with agent provocateurs.

The next chapter will proceed to examine the continued counterrevolutionary forces pitted against the Fourth International, which included not only the GPU, but also the American FBI.
CHAPTER 3

BETRAYING THE DEAD

Trotsky’s penetrating analysis of the world situation during the interwar period, which was marked by the greatest economic crisis capitalism had ever experienced, allowed him to foresee what none of his contemporaries could: the explosive global conflagration on the horizon. Beginning as early as 1937, Trotsky began to write on the inevitability of a second world war, and in many instances predicted the exact course in which specific geopolitical events occurred, such as the political dealings between Stalin and Hitler, and the inability of the United States to remain neutral, to name a few (Frankin 1970). In an interview with Sybil Vincent of the London, Daily Herald, Trotsky remarked on the general causes of the looming war:

Yes, a world war is inevitable, if the revolution does not forestall it. The inevitability of the war flows, first, from the incurable crisis of the capitalist system; secondly, from the fact that the present partition of our planet, that is to say above all, of the colonies, no longer corresponds to the specific weight of the imperialist states. (Trotsky 1939)

Not only did the eruption of World War II vindicate Trotsky’s Marxist analysis on the inevitability of the conflict, but also clearly counterpoised the Fourth International’s alternative to a reality that nearly brought civilization to the brink of its destruction. The only means of abating militarism and imperialism, Trotsky argued, was world proletariat revolution. The Fourth International continued to fight for this political program after Trotsky’s assassination, which was invariably at odds with Stalinism and Imperialism. And in the context of the post-World War II period, which is characterized by immense social upsurge, not only by the anti-imperialist struggles of the colonial world, but in the advanced
countries as well, the GPU and FBI worked strenuously to silence the political perspective and movement that epitomized the objective interests of the international working class. This chapter will sketch the political repression inflicted on the Fourth international by both state police agencies after Trotsky’s assassination. A particular focus will be placed on the penetration of the SWP, the American section of the Fourth International, which was at the time the leadership of the world Trotskyist movement.

In 1941 Jack Soble departed the Soviet Union for the United States to continue his espionage operations against the Trotskyists, an order that came directly from Lavrenti Beria (U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Judiciary 1956). Soble arrived in Boston, and shortly thereafter departed to Canada to ostensibly join his brother, Boris Soble, in a Canadian family business of animal hair that was underway. He was immediately contacted by a man named Fomin, chief of the Bristol division at Amtorg, a Soviet Trading company located in New York. This company has been infamously recognized as a business cover for GPU operations in the United States (West 2007). Under the guise of a business trip, arrangements were made for Soble to travel to New York and meet with Fomin, who would then introduce him to his future GPU superiors: Vassili M. Zubilin and Mikhail A. Chaliapin (FBI 1957). Zubilin and Chaliapin provided the financial backing for Soble’s relocation to New York City, and there he was set up running small businesses funded by the GPU, such as the S & V Cafeteria on 38th Street and 5th Avenue (Romerstein and Breindel 2000). These businesses served Soble as cover in his assignment to head and further develop an already

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14 For example, The Great Strike Wave of 1946, which is characterized by the largest percentage of people on strike in American history.

15 The concerted attack on the Trotskyist movement by the GPU and FBI during the Smith Act trials of 1941 is a case in point, and will be discussed later in the chapter.
intricately established spy-ring operation directed against the Trotskyist movement. Specifically, he was to be introduced and placed in charge of operatives who had by then already penetrated the SWP, as well as handling other incoming agent provocateurs soon to be put to work.

Mark Zborowski was perhaps one of the most important incoming operatives assigned to the Trotskyist detail for the GPU. He was the man who had by then successfully infiltrated the French section of the Fourth International, an operation with deadly implications. Travelling from war-torn Europe into the United States was at the time no easy task, and one needed the proper paperwork for such migration. In this regard, Lola Estrine Dallin, a local Trotskyist, was instrumental. Already in the United States, Dallin convinced a wealthy uncle of hers to endorse the Affidavit of Support that procured Zborowski with the needed visa to travel to the U.S. Moreover, she paid for a portion of Zborowski’s airfare and put him in contact with other Trotskyists. From Lisbon, Portugal, Zborowski arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania late 1941. Upon his arrival to the United States, Zborowski obtained a profession in academia, becoming a researcher at Harvard University in 1945. At the same time he began making the proper preparations for his continued surveillance of the Trotskyist movement (Costello and Tsarev 1993).

Immediately, Zborowski was ordered by Moscow to quickly established contact with his GPU superiors: Soble succeeded Chaliapin and preceded Stepan N. Choundenko, a GPU controller in New York who went by the code name, “The Professor” (United States of America, Appellee v. Mark Zborowski, Appellant 1959). Documented in the 1957 FBI reports on their interview with Soble, Zborowski is characterized by Soble as “an enthusiastic and eager supplier of info”, and that he “furnished written reports on a regular basis”
concerning the Trotskyists to the GPU (FBI 1957, 17). Not only did he report on the SWP, Zborowski would regularly passed along to Moscow intelligence on European Trotskyists, information obtained from the SWP leadership in New York (ICFI 2012). For example, in 1945 Zborowski provided the details of Jean van Heijenoort’s relocation back to France, who was then the head of the French section of the Fourth International. In addition, he was tasked with the surveillance of Mensheviks and defecting GPU agents, such as Viktor Kravchenko, a Stalinist diplomat in Washington, D.C. (Romerstein and Breindel 2000). Zborowski was such a critical asset that his espionage efforts earned him a monthly payment from the GPU of $150, a handsome income for the 1940s.

Zborowski was finally exposed as a Stalinist agent in 1954 by GPU defector, Alexander Orlov. However, it was at the Dallin’s apartment that Orlov first identified the Stalinist agent he knew as “Mark” in Paris during the 1930s. This man was Mark Zborowski, Dallin’s close friend who was now living in New York. On the following day, Orlov reported this information to the US government (Costello and Tsarev 1993; Romerstein and Breindel 2000). When the FBI subsequently investigated Zborowski, he admitted to his earlier espionage work in Europe against the Trotskyists, but denied any further contact with the GPU in the United States. Indeed, Zborowski alleged having retired from the GPU in 1938, and that he had in fact turned down the opportunity to resume covert operations when approached by Stalinist agents upon his arrival in New York City (ICFI 1981a). He asserted a similar accounting of his relations with the GPU while testifying in front of the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security in 1956. Specifically, Zborowski claimed that he had no relations with nor had ever met a man named Jack Soble. However, this testimony was debunked by evidence provided by Boris Morrow, a GPU agent who in 1947 was turned by
the FBI. Working as a double agent, Morrow furnished the FBI with correspondence between Soble and Moscow concerning the US government’s investigation of Zborowski (Costello and Tsarev 1993).

The Federal Grand Jury convicted Zborowski of perjury on April 21, 1958 for having lied about knowing Soble. Due to a technicality, his sentence of five years in prison was overturned by a federal court of appeals the following year (United States of America, Appellee v. Mark Zborowski, Appellant 1959). But in 1962, Zborowski was retried and convicted again, ultimately serving less than two years in Danbury Prison of Connecticut (Zipperstein 2010). Upon his release from prison, Zborowski was readmitted into the ranks of academia in San Francisco as he continued his work in cultural anthropology. All along he maintained support from prominent liberal academics, such as cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead, who wrote the introduction to his earlier book, *Life is with People*, written in 1952 (Patenaude 2009). Mead’s support for Zborowski serves to illustrate a much broader phenomenon which then prevailed in American politics: sympathy, and at times public and active endorsement of Stalinism among a great deal of liberals in the United States.

Another critical GPU agent who was ultimately incorporated into the Soble spy-ring is Cleveland Floyd Miller. In 1944 Chaliapin introduced him to Soble, as he was a highly prized GPU agent who had by then deeply penetrated the SWP. Indeed, Miller’s espionage work for the GPU began as early as 1936 when he joined the Communist Party. As revealed in his testimony during the Robert Soblen espionage trial in 1961, his first assignment for the GPU was to tap the telephone of James P. Cannon, the head of the SWP in New York. This operation lasted about one year.
Immediately after, Miller wormed his way into the SWP as an undercover Stalinist, and worked his way up its hierarchy, writing regularly for the party magazine by the end of the 1930s under the pseudonym Michael Cort (ICFI 1981a; The Spartacist League 1972). Disguised within the ranks of SWP membership, he provided the GPU with numerous typed reports on Party members and activities. Miller’s successful infiltration by this point had earned him a spot on the GPU’s payroll receiving monthly payments.

In 1941 Miller’s work in Stalinist espionage was steeped up as he infiltrated a waterfront union to provide Moscow with reports on Trotskyist seaman who were scheduled to sail to Russian ports (ICFI 1981a). There, GPU agents awaited their arrival and prepared surveillance, according to Miller’s testimony during the Soblen espionage trial. The implications, however, were most likely of a deadly character given the murderous campaign Stalin had long been waging against the Fourth International.

Miller was introduced to Soble for the first time when he was sent by the SWP leadership to Coyoacan to deliver a copy of Trotsky’s biography on Stalin to Natalia Sedova. He provided Soble with a copy of the book’s microfilm to be sent back to Moscow. Miller’s sojourn in Mexico, living under the same roof as Sedova and other Trotskyists, lasted nearly six weeks. Upon his return to New York, Miller supplied Soble, whom thereafter became his controller, a detailed report on the political situation in Mexico. Weekly meetings between the two ensued in which Miller briefed Soble on the internal affairs of the SWP (ICFI 1981a). Their rendezvous took place at the apartment of a woman named Lucy Booker, another key player in the Soble spy-ring.

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16 Prior to her espionage work in New York, Lucy Booker was connected with Zublin and to the GPU in Berlin. In New York, her apartment was used as a meeting location between operatives and controllers in the
Like Miller, Sylvia Franklin was a GPU agent who had deeply penetrated the SWP by the time of Trotsky’s death. Her espionage work for the GPU began in the mid-1930s. Louis Frances Budenz\textsuperscript{17} first exposed Franklin as a Stalinist agent in his book \textit{Men Without Faces}, written in 1948. In the section titled, \textit{The Rank-and-Filers}, Budenz explains his involvement in recruiting Franklin to penetrate the SWP in New York (Budenz 1948). Testimony given during the American trials of the 1950s and 1960s on Stalinist espionage, including Franklin’s own testimony, has verified the information provided by Budenz. Whereas on her first appearance before the Federal Grand Jury on October 7, 1954 she invoked the Fifth Amendment on all questions pertaining to Stalinist espionage, during her second appearance on June 18, 1958 she testified more truthfully, and confirmed Budenz’ allegations. During the Robert Soblen espionage trial of the 1960s, Franklin was named a co-conspirator in a Stalinist espionage-ring (ICFI 1981b).

Franklin’s espionage work began when, upon joining the Chicago section of Stalinist Young Communist League in 1935, she was tasked to infiltrate the Trotskyist faction of the Young People’s Socialist League. When the Trotskyists split off and formed the SWP, she followed and continued her intrigue (Romerstein and Breindel 2000). Franklin’s success in infiltrating the Trotskyists quickly earned her a promotion with the GPU. Under the instructions of Dr. Gregory Rabinowitz, head of the Russian Red Cross and an undercover Stalinist intelligence officer, Budenz met with Franklin in Chicago. In his affidavit to the exchange of information on the Trotskyists. Instructed by Zublin, Soble paid for Booker’s monthly rent. She was named a co-conspirator in 1961 during the Robert Soblen espionage trial.

\textsuperscript{17} Louis Budenz was the editor of the Stalinist newspaper, the Daily Worker, published by the American Communist party. His espionage work for the GPU ended when in 1945 he defected from the Communist Party. He later testified at the several governmental hearings on Stalinist espionage in the United States serving as a key witness for the prosecution.
Committee on Un-American Activities, Budenz states that the purpose of this visit “was…to get hold of some Stalinist agent infiltrating the Trotskyites, who could be moved to New York and put into the Trotskyite national office” (U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Un-American Activities 1951). After several visits with Franklin, Budenz recommended her for the job and introduced her to Rabinowitz, her future GPU controller. Franklin was provided an initial $300 to relocate to New York City, an apartment in Manhattan, and employment for a doctor connected to Stalinist circles. Additionally, Rabinowitz arranged for her husband, Irving Franklin, also a GPU agent who was at the time conducting espionage work in Canada, to move to New York City to an apartment nearby. The stipulations of his relocation were that they were to see each other only once per week, and that these visits could only take place at his apartment to keep her real identity concealed from the Trotskyists (Haynes and Klehr 2006; Romerstein and Breindel 2000; U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Un-American Activities 1951).

Once in New York, Franklin volunteered at the SWP national office and eventually worked her way up to becoming Cannon’s personal secretary. Regularly she would meet Rabinowitz at her husband’s apartment to supply him with key briefs on the Trotskyists. In his affidavit, Budenz states, “Roberts-Rabinowitz advised me that she [Sylvia Franklin] had proved to be invaluable in bringing copies of all of Trotsky's mail and other Trotskyite communications to him for his information” (U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Un-American Activities 1951). In this regard, the information she provided played, at the very least, an indirect role in the murder of Trotsky. GPU access to such confidential correspondence, a vast amount of which dealt with security matters in Coyoacan, Mexico, was most certainly used to work out the logistics in the plot to kill Trotsky.
Franklin’s work continued to play a key role in the persecution of SWP party members after Trotsky’s assassination. The SWP internal documents she furnished to the American Communist Party were given to FBI investigators and used as key evidence in the legal prosecution of the SWP leadership during the Smith Act trials of 1941 (ICFI 1985b). With the escalation of its imperialist war efforts abroad, the United States government simultaneously began its attack on democratic rights at home. This meant, first and foremost, silencing the anti-war sentiments of its most staunch accusers: the SWP. And the wartime alliance between Stalinism and American Imperialism allowed for a joint attack, as the American Communist Party publicly supported the Smith Act trials against the Trotskyists (American Civil Liberties Union 1952). Ultimately, twenty-three SWP members and sympathizers in the Indianapolis Teamsters Union were convicted of conspiring to overthrow the American government, including SWP national leaders such as James Cannon, Farrell Dobbs, Al Goldman and Felix Morrow (McLaughlin 1999; Morrow 1941; Rosenstein n.d.).

Around this time, and after Rabinowitz departed from the United States to continue his work for the GPU in Europe, Franklin was pulled into the orbit of the Soble spy-ring. Like Miller, she would meet Soble regularly at Booker’s apartment to continue to furnish vital typed reports on the SWP. Her covert work as a GPU agent continued until 1947, instantaneously disappearing after the Budenz exposure.

On January 25, 1957 the Soble spy-ring came crashing down when Soble and his wife, among others, were arrested and convicted of espionage against the American government. Soble was sentenced to seven-years in prison. His brother, Dr. Robert Soblen, was arrested and convicted of spying on the American government on August 7, 1961. His
sentence was life in prison. Soble was the prosecution’s primary witness during his brother, Robert Soblen’s trial noting that all of the agents he controlled were transferred to his brother between the years 1945 and 1946. These agents included the aforementioned ones, among others. Pending an appeal, Soblen was freed on a granted bail for $100,000 (United States of America, Appellee v. Robert Soblen, Appellant 1962). Travelling with a fake Canadian passport, he skipped town on bail to Tel Aviv, Israel, but was immediately apprehended by Israeli authorities and transported back to the United States by US Marshals. En route to the United States, the El Al airline carrying Soblen was scheduled for a stop in London. There, Soblen first attempted suicide by slashing his wrists and driving a knife into his abdomen. He was immediately taken off the plane and hospitalized, where, upon his recovery, and prior to his extradition to the United States, he succeeded in his second suicide attempt overdosing on barbiturates (Higgins 1962).

While the American espionage trials of the 1950s and 1960s revealed a great deal about the GPU penetration of the SWP, it is important to keep in mind that none of those convicted were charged in that regard. This information incidentally surfaced during the American government’s prosecution of Stalinist influence and spies conspiring against the United States, not the Trotskyists. In fact, inquiries and discussion of espionage against the SWP during the court proceedings were kept to a minimum and cut short preventing the full disclosure of the GPU’s attack on the Trotskyist movement.  

18 This method of investigation was tactically employed to protect the American government from its own exposure, as it too was then conducting espionage on the SWP.

18 For an example see Soble’s 1957 testimony about Sylvia Getzoff, a Stalinist agent whose exact role in spying on the Trotskyists remains obscure due to the Judge’s intervention during the trial.
The extent of GPU and FBI penetration of the SWP was further revealed by the ICFI’s 1975 investigation into the assassination of Leon Trotsky. The most significant revelation of this three-year long investigation was that, on February 24, 1978, the ICFI charged Joseph Hansen of covertly working for both the GPU and FBI while posturing as a Trotskyist within the SWP. As a leading party member for over three decades, the implications of Hansen’s infiltration were devastating, culminating in the political degeneration of the SWP.

Hansen’s first documented association with the Trotskyist movement is in the early 1930s in college at Utah University. It was then that he joined the Communist League of America (Hereinafter, CLA), the American Trotskyist section of the Left Opposition, founded by James Cannon, Max Shachtman, and Martin Abern in 1928 (Lubitz and Lubitz 2008).19 In 1936 Hansen moved from Salt Lake City to San Francisco where, within the movement, he began to make a name for himself, becoming heavily involved in trade union work and writing frequently for the Trotskyist weekly newspaper, Labor Action.

A grand opportunity arose for Hansen when he moved to Coyoacan, Mexico to assist Trotsky as a personal secretary and bodyguard in 1937 (Heijenoort 1937). He was a prime candidate for the task given his fluency in French, the household’s primary language, and his ability to drive a car. Hansen returned to the Untied States on a few occasions, but the

19 From exile in Alma Alta in 1928, Trotsky wrote Critique of the Draft Program of the Comintern, a sharp criticism of Stalin’s policy of “socialism in one country”. This document was prepared for circulation at the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International. While the document did not make it past censorship, James P. Cannon, who was there as a delegate of the Communist Party in the United States, obtained a leaked copy. He smuggled the document to the United States, where, upon a closer review of the material, endorsed the correctness of the analysis, and began to defend Trotsky’s positions. Cannon and his supporters, Abern and Shachtman, were consequently expelled from the Communist Party. Shortly thereafter they formed the Communist League of America.
majority of his time was spent at the Coyoacan household up until August 1940. There, he became Trotsky’s lead guard in charge of weapons training of incoming comrades, as security was then one of the most pressing matters. Accordingly, Hansen would frequently correspond with the SWP center in New York on all developments regarding security in Coyoacan (Cannon 1938).

After Trotsky’s assassination, Hansen relocated to New York and became part of the full-time staff at the SWP national headquarters. His experience in Coyoacan profited him greatly as he soon earned a position on the SWP’s National Committee, a role he would hold until his death in 1975.20 During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Hansen emerged as one of the party’s principle theoreticians, becoming editor of the Militant, the SWP’s weekly newspaper, and of the International Socialist Review, its theoretical magazine (Cannon 1953b). Furthermore, on multiple occasions he taught courses on Marx’s, *Capital* at SWP summer schools (Hansen 1954).21 Climbing the party hierarchy with an increasing influence on theoretical issues, Hansen would soon be in a position to play a leading role in the degeneration of the SWP.

The re-stabilization of capitalism during the post-war period, characterized by a rapid increase in the standards of living of the American and European working class, led to an impressionistic deviation within Fourth International. Peddling the illusion that permanent social gains could be realized through the politics of reformism, support was granted to various radical tendencies. Additionally endorsed were the various petty-bourgeois

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20 For many years Hansen also served on the SWP Political Committee.

21 Summer schools are a long-standing tradition in the Marxist movement for the theoretical training of party membership.
nationalist movements of the colonial world. Politically, this amounted to stark departure from the central emphasis placed on building a revolutionary party of the working class, first developed by Lenin and fully endorsed by Trotsky before the Russian Revolution of 1917. Revolutionary politics were replaced by a policy of adaptation, as it was argued for Trotskyists to enter the ranks of national Stalinist and petty-bourgeois parties and act as pressure groups. Ultimately, the contention was that centuries of deformed workers’ states along the Stalinist model would act as the transitory stage to socialism.

The International Secretary of the Fourth International, Michael Pablo, first advanced this revisionist perspective in 1949. Cannon led the opposition against Pabloism, which culminated in the 1953 split of the Fourth International: the ICFI, led by Cannon and the SWP, and the International Secretariat of the Fourth International (Hereinafter ISFI), led by Pablo (Cannon 1954; ICFI 2008). In contrast to Cannon’s principled line, Hansen’s first instinct was to gravitate toward political opportunism. After having read the minutes of a meeting of the political committee that Hansen attended, Cannon warned that he had not taken a principled position against the Cochranites, the Pabolite tendency in the United States led by Bert Cochran. In a letter dated January 7, 1953, Cannon (1953c) reprimanded Hansen for succumbing to a process of “double appeasement”, insisting that he “should examine his conscience”.

The end of the 1950s witnessed Cannon’s declining role in the political leadership of the SWP, and Hansen’s ascendancy. Concurrently, the SWP began to retreat on its

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22 For a more detailed summary of the issues at large, see Cannon’s speech at the Open Plenum of the National Committee of the SWP, November 1953 (Cannon 1953a).
uncompromising opposition to Pabloism, as illustrated by its political line on the Cuban Revolution. Under the leadership of Hansen, the SWP designated Castro’s Cuba a deformed workers’ state and openly endorsed the Cuban Revolution (ICFI 2008). The ramifications were immense given that a guerilla army, whose social composition was of a nationalist, petty bourgeois character, with no historical ties to the working class, led the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista. Moreover, there did not exist in Cuba under the Castro regime any forms of workers’ power, which is not surprising given Castro’s political record. In a Jesuit high school Spanish priests who supported the Fascist Franco regime first influenced Castro politically. There, he became very attracted to the works of Antonio Prima de Rivera, the founder of the Spanish Falange. Castro later became involved in armed student movements that were heavily nationalistic and openly anti-communist during the 1940s and 1950s (Vann 1998). But these factors were not considered when Hansen (1961) described the Cuban revolution as “the opening stage of the socialist revolution in Latin America, the beginning of the end of American capitalist rule in the Western Hemisphere”. Indeed, this was a stark repudiation of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution as it designated a progressive role to the petty-bourgeoisie, and retreated from a program that identified the working class as the only social force capable of bringing about the socialist transformation of society. This was most certainly the political line Hansen espoused on his trip to Latin America in 1961-62, as he was then one of most instrumental players in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.  

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23 The Falange, founded in 1933, was the official name of the Spanish Fascist party. This political movement was known for its open hostility toward Marxism.

24 The Fair Play for Cuba Committee was a campaign composed of various radical political tendencies that publically supported the Cuban revolution. Its membership included rather peculiar and shady elements, including Harvey Lee Oswald.
supporting the Cuban Revolution and the guerilla warfare tactics that were employed, the net effect of such policy would in Latin America throughout the 1970s lead hundreds of thousands of disillusioned youth to their graves, and to the subsequent political disenfranchisement of the working class (Vann 1998).

On the basis of an agreement on the Cuban question and under Hansen’s leadership, the SWP reunited with the Pabolite ISFI in 1963, forming the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (Hereinafter, USFI). The Socialist Labor League (Hereinafter, SLL), the British section of the ICFI, strenuously fought against the SWP’s Pabolite revisionism, and was supported by a minority faction within the SWP, led by Tim Wohlforth. All attempts at instigating serious political and theoretical discussion on the Cuban affair were stifled by the Hansen leadership, which ultimately led to the minority faction’s expulsion from the SWP.25 Henceforth, the SLL and its American supporters, which formed as the Workers League in 1966 (Hereinafter, WL), united as the ICFI in political solidarity (ICFI 2008).26

During this period of political and theoretical degeneration Hansen recruited into the ranks of the party leadership those who are now known as “the Carleton Twelve”. All twelve recruits, who, coincidently graduated from the same remote Midwest University, Carleton College, managed to obtain prominent leadership positions within the SWP in just a matter of years. Curiously, there existed on campus not even the slightest inkling of Marxist tendencies, let alone any form of student radicalism. On the contrary, it was a highly

25 For a more detailed explanation of the events surrounding the expulsion of Tim Wohlforth and eight others from the SWP, see part 7 of ICFI 2008.

26 Additional splits in the ICFI resulting from the emergence of other revisionist tendencies occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, but for the purposes of this paper, they will not be discussed. For more information, see parts 8, 9, 10 and 11 of ICFI 2008.
conservative university, heavily funded by the government for research purposes, and served as a military training ground for students after WWII. As such, a high proportion of those who graduated from Carleton went into government service (ICFI 1981b). It is not a farfetched suggestion to suspect that there existed a clandestine political association between these individuals and US intelligence agencies given that the CIA was actively engaged in penetrating over a hundred university campuses precisely during the years of their recruitment.  

Meanwhile, in 1974 the ICFI discovered that Wohlforth’s companion, Nancy Fields, had familial connections with high-ranking CIA personnel. Despite her lack of experience and qualification as a party member, Fields, being the companion of the WL’s national secretary, had by then attended several national committee meetings, including a high profile international conference of the ICFI in May 1974. No accusation was raised against Fields, but the issue was addressed as to why Wohlforth consciously concealed her familial connections from the party. On August 31, 1974, a commission of inquiry was formed, and both Fields and Wohlforth were suspended pending an investigation. These were not draconian measures but part of the long-standing tradition in the Marxist movement to, for security purposes, reveal such information to the party leadership. Indeed, both Wohlforth and Fields initially agreed on the commission of inquiry, pledging to fully comply with the investigation and voted for their own temporary suspension (ICFI 1985a).

Suddenly, both Wohlforth and Fields quit the party mid-investigation. When the commission later filed a report that cleared them from all suspicion and invited them to

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27 More information on the CIA’s mass infiltration of college campuses across the United States, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, can be obtained from the Senate Church Report of 1976.
return to their posts, both refused. Wohlforth immediately after wrote a diatribe against
Gerry Healy, the leader of the British section of the ICFI, and the one who first revealed the
Fields connection. This diatribe was defended and published by Hansen in his weekly
periodical, *Intercontinental Press*. Denouncing the Wohlforth affair from a subjective
standpoint, Hansen characterized it as the product of Healy’s ill-tempered and paranoid
personality. “How could a leader claiming to be a Trotskyist do something like that?”
Hansen wrote, “What kind of thinking was it that had raised the question of ‘security
clearances’ to central importance in a group that believes it is following the practices of
Lenin in party building?” (Socialist Workers’ Party [SWP] 1976, 4). Having been intimately
familiar with the security breaches involved in the Trotskyist movement’s history, which
culminated in Trotsky’s assassination, the position taken by Hansen was indeed peculiar. At
this point, the ICFI initiated a formal investigation into the circumstances surrounding
Trotsky’s assassination, a campaign that remained absent from the movement’s history since
the days immediately following August 20, 1940.

The ICFI’s investigation compiled a mountain of evidence over the course of several
years implicating Hansen in the penetration of the SWP by agent provocateurs. Perhaps the
most incriminating evidence mustered were the US governmental documents made available
in 1977 through the Freedom of Information Act, which detailed the relationship that
developed between Hansen and the FBI immediately after Trotsky was killed. Not only do
these documents show that Hansen passed along confidential SWP information to the US
Embassy in Mexico City,”²⁸ they also delineate the confidential contact that was arranged

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²⁸ Some of these confidential documents include a letter to Hansen from Albert Goldman, Trotsky’s
comrade and lawyer, a security letter removed from Trotsky’s desk after his assassination related to a possible
between Hansen and the FBI upon his arrival in New York City. A letter written by George P. Shaw from the US Embassy in Mexico to Raymond E. Murphy of the US State Department in Washington D.C. states, “I am resorting again to a personal letter in order to acquaint you with a desire of Mr. Joseph Hansen…to establish confidential means [emphasis added] by which he may be able to communicate with you” (ICFI 1978). Hansen’s confidential contact is revealed in a letter he wrote on October 23, 1940:

Dear Mr. Shaw, I received your letter concerning Mr. Sackett in good condition, and shall visit him shortly. There was a little delay in my receiving your communication due to my absence from New York for some days while I was at Boston. Respectfully, Joseph Hansen. (ICFI 1978)

B.E. Sackett, a high-ranking FBI agent, was Hansen’s new contact. Joining the Bureau in 1928, Sackett quickly became a prominent agent working alongside J. Edgar Hoover in his administration. In June 1940 he was appointed to lead the FBI’s New York division, specializing in the investigation of espionage and sabotage. It was precisely during Hansen and Sackett’s clandestine meetings that the FBI was preparing its raid on the SWP leadership in 1941 (ICFI 1978). Interestingly, Hansen was not included in the round up despite his higher rank in the party leadership compared to many of those arrested and legally prosecuted during the Smith Act trials.

Operating inconspicuously with state police agencies was apparently nothing new for Hansen. In a disclosed conversation he had with Robert G. McGregor29 immediately after Trotsky’s assassination, Hansen stated that in 1938 he had been in contact with a GPU agent in New York for over three months. According to Hansen, these meetings began when a

GPU agent, and the “W” document, a strange letter that details the exact list of Communist Party members provided by Whittaker Chambers to the FBI only two months earlier.

29 McGregor was an FBI agent operating under diplomatic cover at the US Embassy in Mexico City.
GPU agent, who had introduced himself as “John”, approached him in New York and encouraged him to desert the Fourth International and join the Third. Hansen further alleges that he was instructed by Trotsky to continue to discretely meet with “John”, presumably for counterintelligence purposes (ICFI 1981a). However, nowhere has it been documented that Trotsky ever gave Hansen such an order, other than Hansen’s own discrete and convenient accounting after Trotsky’s assassination. Noteworthy of attention is Hansen’s withholding of said information from the SWP, and not from the FBI. Indeed, it wasn’t until the ICFI’s investigation that Hansen’s undercover association with the anonymous GPU agent came to light within the Trotskyist movement.

The cloud of suspicion formed thicker around Hansen when the ICFI additionally exposed for the first time within the Trotskyist movement the revelations made by the espionage trials of the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, one would search in vain through Hansen’s *The Militant* for an article concerning the identity of the various GPU agents that were named during the trials (ICFI 1981a). And yet after the ICFI’s investigation and subsequent exposure of said information, Hansen engaged in what appears to be a deliberate cover-up. For example, commenting on Sylvia Franklin in an article published in his *Intercontinental Press* on November 14, 1975, Hansen wrote:

*Sylvia Caldwell (that was her party name) worked very hard in her rather difficult assignment of managing the national office of the Socialist Workers Party…In fact all of the comrades who shared these often irksome chores with her regarded her as exemplary.* (SWP 1976, 9)

Hansen’s methods of silence and cover-ups did not subside when on January 14, 1977, the ISFI held a rally in London under the banner: “Against Frame-ups; For Workers’ Democracy”. The purpose of the rally was to charge the ICFI’s investigation as slander and characterize the campaign on security in general as a frame-up, subsequently acquitting
Hansen and the SWP leadership from all suspicion. In response, the ICFI proposed the formation of a parity commission days before the rally, which would consist of an equal number of members from both the ICFI and the ISFI to further investigate the evidence then available. The proposal, however, was never acknowledged. One cannot help but notice the similarity of these events with Trotsky’s willingness to appear before a neutral commission of inquiry amid the heavily censored, one-sided Moscow frame-up trials. Indicative of the ISFI’s unwillingness to have an open discussion on such matters is the fact that Healy, who attended the rally, was silenced and denied the right to speak in defense of the ICFI’s findings (ICFI 1985a).

This form of censorship continued. In the late 1970s Alan Gelfand, a public defender from Los Angeles and SWP member, stumbled across material produced by the ICFI. When he began to ask questions about the security issues it raised, Gelfand’s inquiries were quickly met with systematic suppression by the party leadership. Indeed, the more he inquired, the heavier was the censorship, which culminated in Gelfand’s expulsion from the SWP on January 11, 1979. Worthy of attention is that Gelfand was expelled at a hearing of the Political Committee that he was forbidden to attend to defend himself. Additionally, he was denied the right to appeal his expulsion, which is a privilege given to all party members and outlined in the SWP constitution. Based on the ICFI’s findings and his own experiences, Gelfand arrived at the logical conclusion that US government agents had infiltrated the SWP. Thus, on January 17, 1979, Gelfand filed a civil-rights lawsuit against the US Department of Justice, FBI, CIA, NSA, and the SWP leadership. His contention was that his First Amendment right to freedom of speech and freedom of political association had been
violated given that US government agents were largely responsible for his expulsion (ICFI 1985a; 1985b).

An examination of the broader political context will help bring more clarity on the degree of FBI penetration of the SWP leadership, precisely during the years under Hansen’s watch. In the mid-1950s under the liberal Kennedy Administration, the FBI initiated a series of covert operations known as the Counter Intelligence Program (Hereinafter, COINTELPRO), which was devised to monitor, infiltrate, and disrupt various radical political movements. The SWP was among one of the main five-targeted groups (U.S. Congress. Senate. Select Committee on Intelligence 1976). While COINTELPRO officially initiated penetration of the SWP on October 12, 1961, these efforts began long before. Indeed, governmental records have documented tens of thousands of wiretaps between 1943 and 1963 (Jakopovich 2008). After the program’s exposure in the mid-1970s, it was publicly revealed that hundreds of undercover FBI agents, posturing as party members, were engaged in domestic spying within the SWP. This evidence coupled with the ICFI’s findings strongly supports the notion that not only was the SWP rank-in-file heavily eroded by the infiltration of agent provocateurs, but also its highest echelons.

Extensive penetration of the Trotskyist movement in the United States, both before and after Trotsky’s assassination, was perpetrated not only by Stalin’s GPU, but also by American intelligence agencies, namely the FBI. The objective was to infiltrate and ultimately dismantle the Trotskyist movement. Trotsky’s death did not assuage the machinations of both state police agencies; it propelled a stark escalation of their attack, which corresponded with a compounded class struggle during the post-WWII epoch. Several of Stalin’s most skilled and experienced spies were immediately dispatched to New York to
coordinate an already established, highly sophisticated espionage network. Concurrently, the American government initiated numerous covert operations that included not only technological surveillance, but also active infiltrators. The net effect of such vast array of external and internal hostile political forces indubitably played a significant role in the political and theoretical devolution of the SWP, which found expression during the Hansen leadership.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Trotsky’s life passes through all of the crucial experiences for the international working class in the twentieth century, including the 1917 Russian Revolution, two world wars, the rise of the fascism, and the Stalinist degeneration. Particularly important for millions of struggling masses are the fundamental political principles embodied in Trotsky’s theory and political struggle of permanent revolution. While a global crisis requires a global solution, the various petty-bourgeois political tendencies that currently seek to provide leadership for vast global social unrest remain bounded to the national state, and reformist in character. In contrast, the Trotskyist struggle for the liberation of the working class was international and revolutionary in scope. For these reasons, Trotskyism was subjected to immense political persecution. Given that all of the fundamental class antagonisms existing then still remain, the political struggle waged against the life and ideas of Trotsky continues in the world today, more than seventy years after his assassination. In particular, within this past decade there has been an assortment of academics that have published biographies of Trotsky. Included in them are the recycled Stalinist lies advanced against Trotsky, which perpetuate a long-standing campaign of vilification, slander and historical falsification.

Professor Ian Thatcher of Leicester University in 2003 wrote the first biography that was published in this regard, followed by Professor Geoffrey Swain of Glasgow University only three years later in 2006. One of the primary intentions of both books is to dispel what both authors refer to as the “myths” surrounding Trotsky’s life. Thatcher and Swain both
largely attribute these “myths” to Isaac Deutscher’s biographical trilogy series. The methodology employed by Thatcher and Swain is similar in that both omit a serious analysis of Trotsky’s own political works to support their argument, including major books, articles, and speeches. They make very limited use of the tremendous amount of Trotsky’s archival material available for research at both Stanford and Harvard University (North 2007).

Instead, Thatcher and Swain both attempt to corroborate outlandish claims about Trotsky by engaging in questionable methods of historical research, such as the act of misrepresenting the arguments of other historians for purposes of advancing their own anti-Trotskyist agenda. For example, in his astounding attempt to portray Trotsky as a supporter of Stalin’s program of “socialism in one country”, and consequently not an internationalist, Swain references Professor Richard Day’s work, *Leon Trotsky and the Politics of Economic Isolation*, in which he examines the highly complex debates surrounding Soviet economic policy during the 1920s. Responding to Swain’s grave misrepresentation of his analytical line regarding Trotsky, Day, who is not associated to any Trotskyist tendency, writes:

> There really has been so much interminable garbage written about Trotsky, and I am distressed to hear of another addition to the pile from Professor Swain. I truly cannot imagine how anyone could say Trotsky is not an ‘internationalist’ from beginning to end. It is a stunning misreading of the historical record. (North 2007, 28)

Indeed, in their attempt to discredit the life and political work of Trotsky, both Swain and Thatcher have in the process skewed and outright falsified the historical record, ranging from Trotsky’s role in the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, to the role he played within the Bolshevik Party during and after the Russian civil war. Thatcher’s depiction of the Lenin-Trotsky relationship during the final years of Lenin’s life, for example, contends that Lenin grew suspicious of Trotsky, and closer to Stalin. In fact, the exact opposite occurred,
as shown by Lenin’s Testament, where he extols Trotsky as the most capable and outstanding comrade, warns the Central Committee of the dangerous amount of power Stalin began to accumulate, and advises that he be removed from the position of General Secretary. Lenin’s warnings are not simply a response to Stalin’s offensive treatment of his wife, Krupskaya, as some have argued. His proposal to the Central Committee to have Stalin removed from power was political in nature, which included stark criticisms of Stalin’s national policy and of his treatment of the Georgians (Lewin 1969). Notably, these are the same recycled fabrications originally concocted by the Stalinist regime during its purging of Trotskyists after Lenin’s death.

The academic campaign of slander, distortion and historical falsification against Trotsky continued when in 2009 Professor Robert John Service of the University of Oxford published his biography of Trotsky. Service portrays Trotsky as a bloodthirsty monster that would have killed thousands, if not more, had he been given the opportunity. Moreover, the book contains a host of attacks on Trotsky’s personal life, which include salacious accounts of his romantic and sex life portraying him as a philander, anti-Semitic depictions, an egotistical individual indifferent to his comrades, and a man who was horrible as a husband and as a father. For example, in his accounting of Trotsky’s first marriage with Alexandra Sokolovskaya, Service writes that “he ditched his wife”, along with their two infant daughters when he escaped exile in Siberia in 1902 (Service 2009). What Service omitted from the story is that it was only after obtaining Sokolovskaya’s blessing that he fled to Russia to join his comrades, including Lenin, to continue his revolutionary work within the clandestine socialist movement. Also left out of Service’s depiction is that Trotsky’s family helped support Sokolovskaya and their children after Trotsky’s escape to Russia, and that
Sokolovskaya continued to support him politically, even after he remarried, and until her death during Stalin’s Great Terror.

David North, who is currently a leading Trotskyist of the Fourth International, first exposed the grand failure of Service’s work in producing anything remotely close to historical truth. In his book *In Defense of Leon Trotsky*, North provides the reader with an extensive list of the factual errors included in Service’s biography of Trotsky. A few of the astonishing errors, which would have not been made if one operated with even the slightest respect for serious scholarly research and historical objectivity, include: the assertion that a police informer by the name, Evno Azev was murdered in 1909, when in fact he was not murdered at all, but died in 1918 due to natural causes; incorrect dates, cities, and depictions of uprisings in Germany in 1923, and during the Chinese Revolution of 1927; confusing the Communist International’s Sixth Congress held in 1928 with its Fifth Congress of 1924; mistakenly noting that Trotsky’s wife, Natalia Sedova, died in 1960, when she in fact died two years later in 1962; as well as a mixing up the daughter and wife of Trotsky’s youngest son Sergei, with the daughter and wife of his older son Lev. Additionally, North points out the similarity in methodology between Service and that of Thatcher and Swain, in that Service omits a critical scholarly engagement with Trotsky’s writings and ideas, including his most important theoretical contribution to the Marxists tradition: the theory of permanent revolution (North 2010). In describing the biography, North (2010) states, “Service’s ‘research’, if one wishes to call it that, has been conducted in bad faith. His Trotsky is not history, but rather an exercise in character assassination”, while the abundance of factual errors contained in the biography “call attention to the author’s extremely limited comprehension of the historical material” (106-109).
A notable development occurred when in 2011 Professor Bertrand M. Patenaude of Stanford University wrote a review of both North and Service’s biographies of Trotsky in the prestigious historical journal, *American Historical Review*. Patenaude undisputedly endorsed North in his scathing critique of Service’s biography. Writing about Service’s deplorable work of historical fabrication, Patenaude (2011) states, “In his eagerness to cut Trotsky down, Service commits numerous distortions of the historical record and outright errors of fact to the point that the intellectual integrity of the whole enterprise is open to question” (900). He continues by noting that according to his count Service has made more than four-dozen errors in his book. Additionally, Professors Helmut Dahmer and Hermann Weber, in a letter to Suhrkamp Verlag publishing house dated July 30, 2011, and which was signed by twelve other prominent German, Austrian, and Swiss historians, vehemently contested plans for the publication of a German edition of the Service’s *Trotsky* in the summer of 2012. All fourteen academics concur with both North and Patenaude’s appraisal of Service’s biography, and in their letter state, “Service has not sought to deal with Trotsky and Stalin in an ‘impartial and genuine’ manner. Instead, the aim of his work is to discredit Trotsky, and unfortunately he often resorts to the formulas associated with Stalinist propaganda” (Dahmer and Weber 2011).

To make better sense of the revitalization of attacks on Trotsky, one must connect it to a broader political and social context. The champions of capitalism proclaimed its final victory with the demise of the Soviet Union, as noted in the introduction of this thesis. In their jubilation, they proclaimed to have driven the final nail into the coffin of communism, once and for all. Nevertheless, this sense of confidence has vanished, and the whole enterprise of global capitalism is currently on trial. Like a landslide descending rapidly from
a precipitous cliff, capitalism as a global system has within the past few years come crashing down; it is plagued by economic crisis, war, and staggering inequality, coupled with an indifferent and hostile political establishment to the plight of the masses. Class contradictions have consequently reached a boiling point, and social upheaval is manifest all over the world. For the toiling masses, this is an epoch of revolutionary revival; for the ruling classes, it is an epoch of tremendous uncertainty. It is in this context that the new assault on Trotsky must be placed.

As social unrest increases and people begin to seek political alternatives to the bankruptcy of those currently available, conscious social forces are mobilized to dismantle the most threatening forms of political opposition. The unabashed police violence inflicted on protesting students and participants of the Occupy Wall Street movement is one among many manifestations. Another example is provided by the ongoing attack on democratic rights spearheaded by the Obama Administration, such as the National Defense Authorization Act signed into law on New Year’s Eve, 2011. Under the guise of the “war on terror”, this law has effectively enabled the US military to indefinitely detain any person in the world without due process. Additionally under pretense of fighting terrorism, Attorney General Eric Holder has recently asserted that the right of the American government to kill is not limited to Afghanistan (Holder 2012). These police state measures are, and always have been, the ruling class’s response to the presence of a revolutionary tide in society. The current attack on Trotsky by the aforementioned historians is in its own distinct way part of the same general process of political persecution. It is a conscious attempt to discredit, slander, and falsify the life and work of an historical and revolutionary figure of immense contemporary political significance. A study of Trotsky’s assassination and the war waged
against the Fourth International provides critical insight to the essential nature of the state as a political unit, as well as to the supreme political issue confronting the working class in the world today: revolutionary leadership.
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