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*How the Soviets destroyed
the Fourth International*

LEON TROTSKY, DUPE OF THE NKVD

Rita T. Kronenbitter

"All they know about my movements is what they learn from the newspapers."
—Trotsky, 1932

It is generally agreed among students of the Soviet secret services that the principal aim of the OGPU and its sequel, the NKVD, through most of the 1930's was the destruction of Leon Trotsky, his family, his aides, and other promoters of the Fourth International. Within Russia, where Trotskyism never had a chance to evolve into a broad underground political organization, the movement was essentially imaginary, a provocation designed to serve the regime as a cardinal pretext for purges of real or potential opponents. The secret services were under orders to prove that the individuals and groups singled out for extinction were guilty of Trotskyism so that they could be accused as wreckers, saboteurs, spies, and assassins. Abroad, where Trotsky's theories of opposition to Stalinism attracted enough of a following to develop his Fourth International, with factions of adherents in many Western countries, the purpose of Soviet teams and agents was to neutralize or discredit the movement and, above all, to kill the leader and his important assistants. The campaign against Trotsky and his movement began with the OGPU and was successfully concluded, at home and abroad, by the NKVD. For operations abroad Stalin's services resorted at first to the use of penetration and provocation agents, spotters or fingermen, then to mobile teams for abductions and assassinations.

The early 1930's were favorable years for the growth of Trotskyism, the movement which eventually formulated the platform of the Fourth International. Leftist oppositionists adhering to it condemned Stalin's doctrine of "socialism in one country" as a betrayal of the ideal of world revolution as expounded by Trotsky. Disaffected communists everywhere formed new parties to follow Trotsky's theory and propaganda. By 1936, when he moved to Mexico, the movement in Europe was at its peak. From his exile Trotsky channelled his ideas and instructions to the office of his son, Leon Sedov, in Paris. The latter's *Bulletin of Opposition*, which published the writings, conveyed

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his ideological guidance to their followers everywhere. Public and underground party organs in France, Germany, England, the Low Countries, and elsewhere reproduced what Trotsky wrote in the *Bulletin*. The Secretariat of the Fourth International, located in Paris, also received Trotsky's guidance through Sedov's office. It was patterned upon the organization of Lenin's party before the October Revolution. It had its conferences and congresses, and it maintained *ad hoc* control committees to deal with organizational disputes and accusations of disloyalty. Unlike all other major Russian conspiratorial organizations, however, it never created a counterintelligence department to watch over the security of the movement and to prevent hostile penetrations. The members of the International Secretariat were Western Europeans, convinced Marxist-Leninists, theoreticians rather than aggressive conspirators, hardly more than dilettantes in leftist politics. Because they were perennially engaged in polemics with the pro-Stalinist communist press, the NKVD had no need to pay serious attention to them. The agents of the NKVD did of course manipulate individual leaders to promote internal friction and the splintering of the party, but the Soviet services concentrated on attacks upon Trotsky himself, his son, and the important aides who served as the channel of communication between the leader and the movement.

The wide array of international assets of the Soviet secret services were under one central control and direction. Perhaps its "order of battle" will never be fully revealed. Trotsky himself, however, adds indirectly to the understanding of how the NKVD agents operated in his and his assistants' headquarters. He failed to realize the dangers until the latter years of his exile, when it was too late. His grotesque naïveté made it possible for spies to insinuate themselves permanently and profusely into his full confidence and friendship, and eventually into his home.

Trotsky, his son Leon Sedov, and other leading comrades abroad were frequently warned about NKVD agents in their midst. His gullibility in dealing with people around him and the failure of the Fourth International to act by setting up some office to counter hostile espionage stand out as an enigma in Trotsky's life and work. One of the principal characters in staging the October Revolution, he organized the Red Army and its military and counterintelligence components. In the period of civil war he worked in unison with Dzerzhinski's secret service at the capital, while the armed forces under his command cooperated closely with the provincial Chekas. His entire adult life in the conspiratorial underground had been a rehearsal for revolu-

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tionary counterintelligence. The bulky folders of his correspondence of 1917 to 1921 include many messages which reveal his dominant position in starting the Soviet secret services. He recruited and placed in the Red Army political commissars as adjuncts or staffers of the military intelligence units. In addition, he commandeered Cheka representatives for joint operations with the political commissars and the Red Army intelligence staffs. His messages to Lenin, Dzerzhinski, and others are replete with instructions and requests relating to intelligence against counterrevolutionaries. His wires show that he used effectively his military intelligence, the commissars, and the Cheka agents "on loan" to him from Dzerzhinski. Lenin and Dzerzhinski likewise consulted him on intelligence matters, both foreign and domestic. In many ways Trotsky set the pattern for the early practices of the Soviet secret services. He prescribed the role of the Cheka area leaders attached to the Revolutionary War Councils at the front and gave and carried out recommendations on purges and summary courts. He stipulated the requirements in recruiting Cheka leaders and teams for intelligence assignments against counterrevolutionaries and for Bolshevik propaganda. His field messages to the Politburo dealt with the uses of codes, security of communications, methods of suppressing hostile rumors, and the role of the press in misleading foreign governments and organizations.

Throughout the civil war Trotsky was in close contact with Dzerzhinski, for whose organization and leadership of the Cheka he continued to express profuse admiration, even in his writings in exile. He never expressed antagonism to the Cheka's successor services. In fact, when an allegedly disenchanted agent, Yacov Blumkin, visited him in Turkey, Trotsky urged him to remain in his OGPU service for the good of the "workers' state." His references to the Soviet secret services and the security of revolutionary movements proved that Trotsky strongly believed in and supported the Cheka's successor services (although not the extent to which they were under Stalin's personal control).

In contrast to his past conspiratorial and intelligence activities, Trotsky in exile, although abundantly warned about NKVD penetrations of his offices and the Fourth International, failed to organize any form of offensive or defensive intelligence service. He insisted on the use of code names in communications and repeatedly admonished the Secretariat in Paris that the secrecy of his correspondence was imperative. Further, he was concerned about his own safety. He traveled incognito during his exile; and wherever he stayed for any length of time, he sought and obtained secure quarters, with guards.

But for the security of his revolutionary movement, which, he fully realized, was the paramount target of Stalin's services, he was incapable of organizing even a rudimentary form of counterintelligence.

Various writers have expressed surprise over Trotsky's failure to devote serious effort to counterintelligence as a matter of personal and organizational security. Important French and German followers had urged him to do so. He was engrossed in his doctrine of world revolution and the attacks on Stalin's personal regime; but like so many other revolutionary leaders before him, he had no interest in collecting information on the plans and operations of hostile agents. With the exception of news items from the press recording the GPU-NKVD assassinations of his aides, we have no evidence that he received reports on the Soviet services that were working against him and his movement.

The utter disregard of counterintelligence techniques, in which, Trotsky was proficient in the pre-revolutionary and civil war years, may be interpreted in several ways. Milovan Djilas wrote about Trotsky as "an excellent speaker and skilled polemicist, a man of exceptional intelligence, deficient in only one quality; a sense of reality."¹ Many others described him as conceited and arrogant, refusing to comply with well-wishing followers who were concerned about security. Summing up Trotsky's striving "to rally the underworld of Europe to the overthrow of Stalin," Winston Churchill described Trotsky's conspiratorial audacity and demoniac energy.² The same characterization was drawn by John Gunther, who interviewed Trotsky at Prinkipo in Turkey. His description gave the essence of the movement's structure in 1932, which remained about the same until Trotsky's death:

A Trotsky movement has grown up throughout most of Europe. In each country there is a nucleus of Trotskyist agitators. They take orders from Prinkipo direct. There is a sort of communication between the various groups, through their publications and manifestos but mostly through private letters. The various central committees are linked to an international headquarters in Berlin (in Paris, after Hitler's take-over).³

Its confidential communications with occasional uses of couriers, safe accommodation addresses, and code names for correspondents gave Trotsky's movement the semblance of an intelligence service.

¹ *The New Class*, London, 1957, p. 50.

² *Great Contemporaries*. Chapter on Leon Trotsky, Putnam, New York, 1937.

³ "Trotsky at Elba" in *Harpers Magazine*, April 1932.

But contrary to the voluminous pro-Stalinist writings which depicted the movement as a vast international espionage system aiming at the destruction of the Soviet Union,⁴ neither Trotsky nor any of his leading followers maintained any intelligence establishment.

Moreover, Trotsky was an easy prey for the Soviet services on other scores. Although he gradually realized that the GPU was under the absolute control of Stalin, he trusted its known agents in the Siberian exile of 1928, and in Turkey in 1929, when he feared his life was endangered only by the exiled Czarist officers. Depending on the GPU in the consular offices at Istanbul, he used them and their diplomatic pouch for correspondence with comrades in Russia, informing them about the oppositionist growth abroad. Thus, his first years of exile in Turkey were as fully covered by the GPU as his year in Siberian exile at Alma Ata. Although he realized that his mail was being tampered with and that important letters to comrades in Russia were being stolen, he took no precautions in Turkey or later in Norway. Naively assuming that his son's name would not be known to the GPU, he signed much of his correspondence with "Leon Sedov." He curiously underestimated the Soviet secret services. In 1932 he wrote that the GPU knew of his movements only what they learned from the newspapers.⁵

Another vulnerability of Trotsky was inherent in the composition of his political movement. The Trotskyites of the 1930's were predominantly former CP members, Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, leftist laborites, Spartacus Youth groups, and similar extreme radicals. Their unifying slogans focused on the negation of Stalinism, while with regard to their positive ideal, world revolution, their varied ideological background divided them in all efforts. Such differences and personal aspirations and jealousies of national Trotskyite leaders opened for the GPU many doors into the movement.⁶ Even in the early 1930's Trotsky discovered that his devout correspondents, com-

⁴ Example: Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn, *The Great Conspiracy*. Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1946. Whole chapters of this volume of grotesque falsehoods deal with Trotsky's "espionage" aimed at the destruction of the Soviet Union. The book contains an extensive bibliography in support of the allegations about Trotsky's spy system, which has now been exploded by the Soviet leadership itself in the XXth and XXIIth Party Congresses.

⁵ See John Dewey, *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1937, p. 551.

⁶ Examples: In Austria, with a sizeable membership, the Trotskyites split into three factions as a result of GPU manipulations. The same thing happened in Germany and Czechoslovakia.

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rades Melev and Senin,⁷ were responsible for the movement's disruption in Germany; but according to his own statements he refused to believe that the two were GPU spies.

The fact that the movement attracted mostly defectors from the CP's was a boon for GPU penetration agents. Especially when entire groups rebelled against Stalin's regime and the Comintern, as happened in several instances of bickering among German communist factions, GPU agents were invariably among them.⁸

Trotsky's vulnerability is obvious in much of his personal correspondence. In contrast with his internationalist appeal, he appears to have been partial to Jews, especially the leftist Zionists from Russia. His letters to the Palestinian comrades confirm this impression. He paid no heed to the warnings from non-Jewish comrades in Berlin and Paris; yet all his aides who were subsequently discovered as GPU-NKVD penetration agents were of that category. There is no record in his or Sedov's files indicating that Jewish or Zionist comrades were investigated when joining the movement, whereas applicants of other racial stock were subject to suspicion as possible provocateurs.

Individual defections from his ranks back to Stalinism and assassinations of his aides made Trotsky realize, belatedly, the thoroughness of NKVD penetrations. The writings of his last two years show that he sensed how the enemy was closing in on him. To every report on the liquidation of his followers he would add some marginal note to the effect that he himself would be the next victim. Warnings from loyal comrades and others also increased; but the GPU methods of planned confusion, promoted by agents in his own entourage, made it impossible for Trotsky to tell which threats were genuine and which were hoaxes.

The GPU-NKVD resorted to a great variety of schemes for the penetration and destruction of the adversary. The methods employed can be traced with some clarity by examining individual agent and team operations, as deduced from Trotsky's own files and some *ex post facto* data from other sources.

Stroilov's Provocation: The Downfall of Trotsky

The incident which served as overt justification for depriving Trotsky of all offices, including his Party membership, and for his

⁷ "Senin" was the pseudonym used in correspondence for Jack Soble. "Melev" has not been identified, but may have been the name used for Soble's brother, Robert Soblen, although the latter was usually known as "Well". Their roles are amplified below.

⁸ E. G., the Soble (Sobolevicius) brothers, Melev, and Olberg, discussed later.

arrest and exile to Siberia in 1928, was an act of GPU provocation. There is no record to show the date when the secret service was first ordered to keep Trotsky under surveillance. One can gather from his own writings that the campaign against him began in early October 1923 when a scapegoat was needed for the fiasco of the communist uprising in Germany. That abortive attempt was attributed to the rightists in the Party, and Trotsky was at the time being denounced as the author of rightist deviation. Recriminations began in the Politburo while rumors were circulated among the public that Trotsky was not a true Bolshevik. Comintern representatives to the Fifth Congress in July 1924 came as his admirers but were speedily aligned against him by a slogan about bolshevizing all communist parties abroad. Foreign Comintern delegates who persisted as Trotsky's friends were expelled from the Party.⁹ This period marked the beginning of Trotsky's downgrading. When Lenin died, Trotsky was taking a rest cure in the Caucasus. Stalin, not wanting him at the funeral, telephoned that he would arrive too late, although in fact the funeral was delayed for several days.

By May 1925 Trotsky was out as the War Commissar. He became deputy to Dzerzhinski, an inferior post in the Council for State Economy. The decisive contest with Stalin began in the summer of 1926 when a Joint Opposition was formed and started sending emissaries to the provinces. These steps were taken *sub rosa*, but Stalin knew every move ahead of time, and GPU ruffians were dispatched promptly to disrupt all oppositionist gatherings.¹⁰

By this time the GPU had initiated constant surveillance over Trotsky and his leading followers. The Joint Opposition was forced underground, with meetings in workers' homes, suburban tenements, cemeteries, and forests. Its tenets called for a return to Lenin's doctrine of revolution not in one country but throughout the world. In the Politburo the opposition constituted a regular faction. Efforts were made to compromise, but Stalin attacked when Max Eastman published Lenin's "last will" in the *New York Times*. Trotsky was blamed for giving the document to his capitalist friend, Eastman. He counterattacked by calling Stalin the "gravedigger of the revolution." The net result was Trotsky's expulsion from the Politburo.

⁹ Alfred Rosmer, V. Delagarde and P. Monatte of France and A. Bordiga of Italy. Bordiga formed the first oppositionist group abroad, the "Comitato d'Intesa" of Naples.

¹⁰ Extensive accounts are given in Edward Hallett Carr, *Socialism in One Country*. Macmillan Co., New York, 1964, Vol. III, Part I, p. 273 ff.

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The Joint Opposition responded with more virulent underground activity. It prepared a political platform for publication. Stalin of course knew all about it. Stroilov, a GPU agent posing as an oppositionist and working as an underground organizer of young anti-Stalinists, reported daily about the preparation of the platform to his chief, Yagoda. Stroilov had been a secret agent since the Cheka period and was assigned as a penetration of Trotsky's group. The opportunity now presented itself for a classic provocation, such as had been practiced by the Okhrana when agents set up printshops and provided paper and ink for revolutionary leaflets as a method of incriminating and apprehending subversive groups. Because the oppositionists could no longer have anything printed openly, Stroilov now supplied a mimeograph, paper, and ink. When the platform was printed and ready for distribution, the GPU arrested the whole group of participating oppositionists.

In this operation Stalin went a step beyond the usual Okhrana practice in setting up printshops for revolutionaries. When Yagoda reported to him the history of his agent, Stroilov, among the Trotskyists, Stalin ordered, according to Alexander Orlov,¹¹ "Now make Stroilov into a Wrangel officer." Stroilov, the Cheka's agent in the civil war, could not have been an officer of Wrangel, but that was immaterial. The GPU produced documentary evidence that the "former White Guard officer" was collaborating with Trotsky's conspirators to destroy the "workers' state".

Trotsky was absent from Moscow when his underground "printshop" was liquidated, but all the blame for the offense was on him and other leaders of the Joint Opposition. His papers and his testimony before the Dewey Commission allege that he knew nothing about who did the printing of the platform. He obviously accepted the GPU version that a former officer of General Wrangel worked among his young followers responsible for the publication.¹² He did not know that the GPU itself documented the agent as a former White Guardist. Such a status for the "oppositionist" Stroilov made the incrimination more serious and despicable in the eyes of the public. It marked Trotsky as working with the White Guards to overthrow the Soviet government. Such evidence was enough for *Pravda* to refuse to publish his explanations or any other articles. Expulsion and exile to Siberia followed within months.

¹¹ *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes*. Random House, New York, 1953, pp. 311-312.

¹² Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 325, 333.

Yacov Blumkin

As already stated, the GPU was in full control of Trotsky's correspondence with oppositionist comrades in Russia. That control began with his exile to Alma Ata. The physical conditions of this exile were pleasant. He and his family were not even under house arrest. They were accorded full freedom of movement within Alma Ata and an unrestricted supply of Party and other literature. There was no ban on correspondence by mail or wire. The GPU agents attached to the household were ostensibly concerned only with his safety and comfort. Trotsky himself duly informed the leading comrades among the oppositionists about his status, so that they felt free and safe in expressing their political views and ambitions in the exchange of correspondence. The fatal consequences of this fallacy became obvious years later in the great purge trials, executions, and suicides of 1936-1937.

For the same ostensible purpose of protection, GPU agents accompanied Trotsky to his exile in Turkey. He insisted on having as his personal bodyguards two persons of his own choice. In communications with GPU chief Fokin in Istanbul he named two of his loyal friends, former secretaries who had been with him at Alma Ata. The two were promised, but they never came. According to Trotsky they disappeared without a trace.¹³ Those assigned to Trotsky's household were subsequently dismissed by him after he signed a receipt for \$2,000 allowed as subsistence money from the Soviet government.¹⁴

The overt GPU agents dismissed from Trotsky's household were promptly replaced by two different types of informants: teams from the Soviet consulate to keep the residence villa on Prinkipo Island under covert surveillance, and individual penetration agents engaged by the GPU from among the Left Opposition in Germany. The former, in addition to watching the coming and going of visitors, made occasional forays to steal Trotsky's documents and, on one occasion, to set the place on fire. The individual GPU agents, always under cover as loyal followers, took turns as residents in the household. One of these, Sobolevicius, because of his more complex activities in the GPU program to destroy the movement, will be discussed subse-

¹³ The two were Poznansky and Sermuk, both of whom were shot, according to Natalia Sedova's account.

¹⁴ The sum given Trotsky by the GPU in Istanbul was disputed by Mrs. Trotsky (Natalia Sedova) in her accounts to Victor Serge (*Vie et Mort de Trotsky*. Amiot-Dumont, Paris, 1951, p. 201). She wrote that the amount was \$5,000. On the other hand, Stalin's propaganda machine claimed that Trotsky got away with millions of dollars of Soviet money.

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quently. Another one was Jacob Frank, the initial organizer of the Left Opposition in Germany, who was probably converted back to Stalinism by the time Trotsky arrived in Turkey. He was the first GPU agent to stay at Prinkipo Island for five months as a fully trusted friend and enthusiastic comrade. It can be assumed that the GPU knew everything about the exile's messages and secret projects, especially his anxious efforts to obtain visas for moving to Germany and, when that failed, to England. Sure that his correspondence with several influential friends who would help him obtain that permission would not be known, he was surprised when the GPU itself informed him that all his efforts would be in vain. He could not understand how the GPU could know about his confidential requests. Mrs. Trotsky described how Trotsky learned that Frank was a GPU informer only after the latter returned to Berlin to take part in the campaign of splintering the groups of German and Jewish oppositionists.¹⁵

Frank was in Trotsky's home at the time of Yacov Blumkin's visits, in 1929, so that the GPU had a double source on the exile's activities and the performance of its own agent. Trotsky's writings and statements regarding Blumkin are contradictory on several points. For instance, he stated before the Dewey Commission that Blumkin was a member of the Left Opposition, whereas in his letters to followers in Paris he insisted Blumkin was never a member. (The true allegiance of this important GPU agent could hardly be deduced from the Soviet statements giving the reasons for his execution without trial.) Equally unconvincing are Trotsky's writings about his meetings with Blumkin, whom he used as courier to Moscow. Trotsky's liberal propaganda exploitation of the execution of Blumkin also offers no clue about who controlled the agent.

One not too irrational deduction would be that Blumkin came to Trotsky upon GPU instructions. The Soviet story, proven completely false, called Blumkin the head of Trotsky's bodyguard at Prinkipo.¹⁶ As confirmed by Trotsky's followers visiting at the time in Turkey, and also by Mrs. Trotsky, there were only two visits of Blumkin to Trotsky's villa, after he met Trotsky's son, Sedov, "by chance" on a street in Istanbul. Trotsky, apprehensive at first, was persuaded by

¹⁵ See Deutscher's *Prophet Outcast*. Oxford, London, 1963, p. 25.

¹⁶ This story was repeated in Sayers and Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 212. The two authors quote out of context a string of biographic data on Blumkin, truths and half-truths to fit into their package of disinformation on the case.

his son and consented to see his old protégé,¹⁷ although he knew that Yacov was currently the chief counterespionage agent for the GPU in the Orient. Without explaining the reason for the roundabout route, Blumkin told Trotsky that he was on his way from Persia back to Moscow. According to Trotsky, he expressed disaffection with Stalin's regime and spoke of the dangers to Trotsky, insisting that he should be protected by at least twenty bodyguards in and around the villa. Then Blumkin volunteered to serve as Trotsky's courier for deliveries of communications to Moscow. Trotsky was eager to use this opportunity. He gave Blumkin the names and addresses of leading followers and a letter containing plans of the Left Opposition in the fight against Stalin.¹⁸ Trotsky may also have given Blumkin oral instructions of a conspiratorial nature. Whatever the messages about secret projects may have been, the GPU knew it all anyway from its agent, Frank, who was staying in the Prinkipo villa.

There are differing versions of Blumkin's doom upon his return to Moscow. Some maintain that he delivered the letter to Karl Radek, who had by then recanted, who had deserted the oppositionists, and who took the letter to Stalin. Blumkin was arrested. He confessed and was executed forthwith. Another Soviet story was that after seeing Radek, he realized that he was betrayed and therefore gave himself up as a traitor, asking to be shot without delay. Stalin, according to this legend, complied by telling Menzhinskiy to carry out Blumkin's request. According to still other stories, Blumkin did not confess, so a mistress was engaged to learn from him about the oppositionists whom he was still required to meet on behalf of Trotsky. The woman failed, but within a month he was arrested and executed anyway.¹⁹ In view of the fact that all details about Blumkin must have been already known to the GPU from agent Frank's reports, such efforts to trap the man would appear superfluous.

¹⁷ Blumkin, as a young Social Revolutionary terrorist in 1918, participated in the murder of the German Ambassador Count Mirbach and engaged in other assassination attempts in Kiev. When caught, Trotsky protected him and saved him from imprisonment and possible execution. Thereafter, Blumkin served as a Cheka agent with Trotsky's Red Army units and finally the GPU. According to Trotsky's and his wife's description, this Jewish "activist" was adventurous, intelligent, poetical, and a writer on French military strategy. Mrs. Trotsky's version in Serge, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

¹⁸ Deutscher, *op. cit.*, p. 87, states that in addition Trotsky arranged with Blumkin for shipping anti-Stalin literature to Russia with the help of Turkish smugglers. While Trotsky habitually made and saved a copy of every letter he wrote, his files contain no carbon of the letter he entrusted to Blumkin.

¹⁹ Orlov's account, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.

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What probably happened was that the GPU had Blumkin under arrest as soon as he arrived in Moscow, whether his visit to Trotsky had been a GPU assignment or not. His execution marked the beginning of the liquidation of active or potential Trotskyists, and killing a GPU agent was consistent with the policy of subsequent Stalinist purges. By 1929 all Trotsky's friends and associates were under suspicion; many of them were in prison and exile. Blumkin owed his life and his outstanding career in the Cheka and the GPU to his protector Trotsky. If he was disgruntled with the regime and had actually expressed himself to that effect to both Menzhinskiy, chief of the GPU, and Trilisser, chief of the GPU Foreign Section, as Trotsky stated in his letter, he was slated for elimination in the first place. Thus, if the GPU purposely sent him to Trotsky with offers to be his courier, it was an act of provocation against the exile and in the meantime a way of incriminating one of the key counterespionage agents scheduled for extinction. This GPU-NKVD technique of getting rid of secret agents no longer useful because of dubious allegiance or because continued service entailed possible exposures was particularly obvious in some other cases, such as that of Valentine Olberg, discussed below.

*The Brothers Sobolevicius: Jack Soble and Dr. Robert Soblen*²⁰

Immediately upon his arrival in Turkey, Trotsky made it known that he wanted to leave because there were no Marxists or oppositionist sympathizers. Claiming that he needed medical treatment, he made strenuous efforts to obtain a German visa. In reality, he wanted Germany as a base for political propaganda. The Left Opposition there, more numerous than anywhere else, constituted the most promising beginnings for a Fourth International. Among the followers in Berlin and Leipzig were leading communists who refused to comply with Stalinist policy. As repeated requests for a visa proved fruitless, Trotsky blamed the misfortune on a pact agreed upon by Stalin and Mueller with regard to the Left Opposition.

As a summary of the reams of correspondence with the comrades in Germany would indicate, Trotsky placed too much confidence in those who were of Russian Jewish origin. The leaders of his movement in

²⁰ The two Jewish brothers from Lithuania were also known under the Russified surnames Sobolevich, Sobolev, Sobol, and Soble. As GPU penetration agents in the Trotskyist movement, the older one was known as Roman Well (at times signing his letters to Trotsky as R. Schmidt); the younger as A. Senin. In the United States, continuing as Soviet agents, they went under the names Dr. Robert Soblen and Jack Soble, respectively. We shall use the latter names, which are more familiar in the United States.

Germany were predominantly Jewish anyway, but many of them had Austrian and German backgrounds. None of these were uncovered as GPU agents, whereas the Russian Jews in whom Trotsky had an apparently unqualified confidence betrayed him almost invariably. The GPU obviously knew and took advantage of his weakness in this respect. It recruited penetration agents before they joined the Left Opposition or after they had been active in it and inserted them into Trotsky's home and his movement. The Sobolevicius brothers, whose operational names among the Trotskyists were Roman Well, and A. Senin, were Trotsky's most constant correspondents. They were also occasional visitors in Turkey from 1929 to 1932. He probably never realized that they were brothers and remained ignorant of their teamwork for the GPU. Praising each other as devoted comrades and confirming each other's false information, in order to confuse Trotsky and make him disown loyal supporters, they wrecked all efforts toward a unified Left Opposition.²¹

As a first step to ingratiate himself with Trotsky and join the movement, Jack Soble wrote a brief biography of himself. He began with a short account of the Jewish Left Opposition, its strength and loyalty. Regardless of some appearances to the contrary, he wrote, their devotion was given to Trotsky only. For instance, Soble's own wife Myra, a Soviet citizen employed with the Soviet Trade Mission in Berlin, was in reality an ardent oppositionist, her whole heart with Trotsky. Equally devoted were many other Russian Jewish comrades living in Germany. Therefore, Soble reasoned, Trotsky should rely upon this group of Jewish comrades in the promotion of the international Left Opposition. Prompted by this letter, Trotsky wrote an article for the *Clarte*, a Jewish leftist organ. Soble replied with profuse thanks and said that the readers were "all joining Trotsky's movement."

Soble's persistent efforts to ingratiate himself with Trotsky continued throughout 1930. Among the hundreds of letters Trotsky wrote to dozens of leading followers in Berlin there is no indication of inquiries about the man's true loyalty, his income or political activities, just as there was no inquiry about Robert Soblen (Roman Well). No one was disturbed that Soble's wife Myra continued in Soviet employ, especially after Soble intimated that such employment was good cover for secret participation in the Trotskyite group. And no one ever

²¹ The elder brother, Robert Soblen (Roman Well), was editor of *Arbeiter Zeitung* in 1927, then *Bolscheristische Einheit*, extreme leftist organs in Leipzig. "A. Senin" returned from Russia to Germany in 1929 to resume his job as correspondent for the *Zeitung*, which he had held previously.

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inquired about the purposes of the travels of the Soble couple to Riga and Russia.

The GPU was obviously responsible for Soble's campaign through 1930 to become Trotsky's most trusted representative in Germany. The Soviet service handled him either directly or through his wife. He himself claims that the GPU did not recruit him until 1931, allegedly through blackmail; his wife was kept hostage in Russia. His testimony to that effect²² was a self-serving exculpation, for 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. His wife served as the GPU case officer or go-between and possibly also coordinator of Robert Soblen's correspondence with Trotsky. In 1931 Soble's assignment was markedly changed or intensified, and his letters to Trotsky became more lengthy and more frequent. They took on the form of intelligence reports about the movement: its rapid growth, its prospects, and assessments of the reliability of its leaders.

Early in 1931 the GPU assignment for Soble and his brother Soblen, as is evident from their letters, concentrated on the disruption of the unified Trotskyist movement in Germany.²³ Soble's letters first started with accusations against such individual leaders as Landtag deputies Landau and Urbahns, both actually Trotsky's loyal supporters. In a confidential manner they were now depicted as saboteurs. Robert Soblen's letters in roundabout fashion confirmed everything Jack Soble had written about the bad faith and treachery of Landau and Urbahns. Trotsky was convinced, and in the end he was obliged to recommend the expulsion of Landau and Urbahns from the movement.²⁴ A similar game was repeated with regard to other German leaders. The result was disunity, the breaking up of groups, and the expulsion of one opposition leader after another.

To split Landau's group from the movement the brothers not only wrote accusations to Trotsky and Sedov, they incited Landau

²² Soble's and Jack Lotto's *New York Journal-American* article of 10-20 November 1957, as published by the U.S. Senate Internal Security Committee, Part 87, November 21, 1957, pp. 4875-4889.

²³ In 1930 there were some twenty Trotskyist factions in Germany. These German and Jewish groups began to unify through joint conferences of leaders, such as the Prussian Landtag deputies Kurt Landau, Otto Seipold, Urbahns, and others. It appeared by the end of 1930 that unity, in a single political party, was finally in sight.

²⁴ An earlier expulsion of Landau's group from the movement was effected in December 1929 as a result of calumnies from another GPU agent, Jacob Frank.

against Trotsky as well. False reports and hostile notes began flowing into Landau's office. A set of documents "from Trotsky's personal file" revealed that the latter was "a vicious schemer who was resorting to dirty GPU methods." For this bit of disinformation Soble engaged a certain Melev, also a GPU man, to visit Landau's office with him. The pair defended Trotsky in such a way as to incense the parliamentarian still further. Landau and his influential group broke with Trotsky forever. To deepen the cleavage, Soble wrote to the International Secretariat in Paris about his and Melev's visit with Landau, who threatened to expose "Trotsky's dirty game." This letter was filled with pious expressions "for solidarity and against fractionalization so prevalent in the German Left Opposition."²⁵

The game continued after the expulsion of Landau's group. Calumnies against other leading followers were so planted as to incite one side against the other, at first only in Germany, then in Paris. A group of *Landtag* deputies including Otto Seipold deserted en masse, as did Pierre Naville, when Soble and Soblen initiated rumors through the party press that they were traitors who had turned back to Stalinism. The comrades did not realize until 1933 that Soble, Soblen and a few others were the troublemakers, but even then none suspected them as GPU agents.

Most of Soble's letters in 1931-1932 are obvious copies of what he was submitting to the GPU.²⁶ His exaggeration in describing the oppositionist growth in glowing terms served his purpose with regard to either recipient. In one report he wrote that in Berlin alone Trotsky's party had 50,000 members. Giving such a high figure to the GPU, he impressed his bosses about his own importance in pursuing the target, while at the other end Trotsky was deluded into false optimism.

Why did Trotsky fail to detect Soble's and Soblen's treachery? When at the end of 1932 the two broke all contact with the Left Opposition, he was convinced that they had only reverted to Stalinism.²⁷ He could have detected Soble's falsehoods merely by scrutinizing the volumes of correspondence exaggerating the strength of the German movement, but he trusted him more than scores of other activists reporting truthfully on the same groups. The contra-

²⁵ Dated 1 June 1931 and signed by "Senin" and Melev. See also Note 7 above.

²⁶ Some of the letters show his inadvertence in copying, such as copying some line or passage twice or apparently missing a line when rewriting from the original.

²⁷ Trotsky was on a lecture tour in Copenhagen in December 1932, where he accused Senin of capitulating to the enemy, with these words: "You will one day regret what you are doing. I never want to see you again." U.S. Senate, *op. cit.*, p. 4876.

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dictions in Soble's financial status, alleged extreme privation and sudden affluence at about the same time, were ignored. His trips to Lithuania and his wife's continued employment with the Soviets should all have caused suspicion. While "in Lithuania," Soble gave the address of Leopold Prasch in Berlin for forwarding mail; no one ever inquired about the identity of Prasch. Upon returning "from Lithuania," Soble was suddenly well-off. Without asking for consent, he wrote from Berlin that he was coming to Turkey for a visit with Trotsky. His sojourn lasted nearly three months. The Agent's channel of reporting from Trotsky's household or during the journeys is not known, but by his own word his communications were regular and direct to Moscow.²⁸ Trotsky should have been alerted by the questionnaires about his activities in expanding the movement abroad. These comprised a good portion of Soble's reports. But trust and confidence were boundless.

Soble's teamwork with his brother Robert Soblen explains at least in part the success of the game. Soblen wrote even more often than Soble, for he had more inquiries about the movement and its leaders and about Trotsky's channels into Russia. All these questions were ostensibly intended to find ways to ship oppositionist literature.

As editor of the leftist newspapers, Soblen was also the top leader of the Trotskyist groups in Saxony and thus well qualified to produce "proof" in support of Soble's allegations about traitors. While the brothers coordinated the stories, Soblen seldom and Soble never mentioned the other's name, and there was never a suggestion of their blood relationship. The triangular correspondence that developed in 1931 meant that Soble's reports to Trotsky were duly but indirectly confirmed by Soblen, while Trotsky's replies and instructions to Soblen were passed on to Soble as well. Soblen often added postscripts about his unbounded loyalty to Trotsky, asserting, "I cannot play a double game."

Trotsky's son Sedov, in Paris during 1932, began to suspect Soble and Soblen as the comrades responsible for the campaigns against individual oppositionist leaders. He reasoned that Landau and other top comrades were excluded because they were Austrian and German rather than Russian Jews. For this reason Sedov prevented Soblen's selection as delegate to a conference in Paris. Expressing his hurt to Trotsky, Soblen stated that he wanted to resign but decided instead to stay and transfer all future reporting on the German Socialist Party to Comrade Soble. Later Trotsky wrote that the

²⁸ U.S. Senate, *op. cit.*, p. 4876.

internecine strife among his German followers was caused not by Austrian or German but by Russian Jewish comrades.

Trotsky never inquired about the finances of Soble or Soblen. When Trotsky's house burnt down in Turkey, Soblen immediately offered help, although he himself and his paper were supposedly very hard up. He wrote of an offer of assistance from a comrade in Saxony, a strong workingman who could go to Turkey at once to help guard the household. Trotsky should not worry about expenses; Soblen and Soble could pay for the comrade's trip and maintenance. Soblen repeated the offer several times, but Trotsky failed to reply, perhaps because Soble wrote about the same time that he had no money for postage.

Soble left the Trotskyist movement in December 1932, Soblen the following month. Trotsky's total ignorance about their teamwork could be seen in his letter to Soblen after the break with Soble. He pleaded for Soblen's continued solidarity and a renewal of steady correspondence. Yet both brothers publicly proclaimed themselves as Stalinists and disappeared from the scene, apparently upon GPU orders.

In a letter to Raymond Molinier and the International Secretariat Trotsky demanded Robert Soblen's immediate expulsion from the movement on the grounds that "he had been caught *flagrante delicto* placing obstacles to the progress of the German Left Opposition."

Why the brothers were instructed to reveal themselves as Stalinists and thus terminate their extremely successful work in the Trotskyist movement remained unknown even after they were exposed as GPU-NKVD agents. As "Senin"-Soble wrote in the American press in November 1957, the Kremlin considered his penetration job well done. Even then Soble made no mention of the work of his brother "Well"-Dr. Soblen. They both returned to Russia to prepare for more important espionage tasks in the United States.²⁹

Valentin Olberg

Valentin Olberg received more publicity in the Soviet press than any other GPU-NKVD agent engaged in operations at home and abroad. The publicity was of course accorded only when he faced the tribunal posing as a remorseful terrorist and as state witness

²⁹ See reproduction of the article "How I Spied on U.S. for the Reds," U.S. Senate, *op. cit.*, pp. 4875 to 4889. Dr. Soblen was condemned in the U.S. but fled to Israel in 1962, where he was denied refuge. During a return trip to America, via England, he made two attempts on his own life, the second one successful, in London. See Deutscher, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

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against the Trotskyists. His success as a penetration agent was not as great as that of the Sobolevicius brothers. Yet Trotsky and Sedov, ignoring urgent warnings that Olberg was obviously a GPU man, granted him access to facts that fitted into the web of disinformation required for the prosecution in the first purge trial, in 1936. As his project to become Trotsky's secretary failed, his assignment became more varied. Operating as a journalist, he excelled in provocation. Placed by the NKVD as a college history professor (without academic qualifications), he fingered for trial and execution suspected Trotskyites among the staff and student body. Finally, to render the NKVD his fullest measure of service, he posed before the tribunal as a self-confessed conspirator sent by Trotsky and Sedov to kill Stalin. This perjury enhanced the prosecution, and Olberg went free after the trial, as did several other agents with the same task. Assurance of freedom had been given them before they testified, but after the death sentences were pronounced, the NKVD had no further use for Olberg; he and the other agents were executed with the rest of the victims.

Olberg's GPU assignment in Germany began not later than 1927, when he came to Berlin to serve with the Inprekor (a Comintern publication front: *International Press Correspondence*). As his first letters to Trotsky in Turkey indicated, he had left that agency in December 1929, ostensibly because he opposed Stalinism. On the other hand, he insisted that he had been an oppositionist for the previous five years and that he had joined Trotsky's movement in Berlin at the time of his arrival, in 1927. His very first letter to Trotsky, containing such inconsistencies, was an offer or request for a position as his secretary. He listed his professional, linguistical, and ideological qualifications. A few paragraphs described his background: a Latvian Jew by birth; a five years' record in the oppositionist movement, beginning in Latvia; associations with Anton Grylewicz, a leading Trotskyist in Germany; and an experienced writer with the INPREKOR. Describing himself humbly in subsequent letters, Olberg expressed great pride in being able as a young man to participate in the Left Opposition. Each letter noted his achievements and eagerness to learn more, so that he could be of greater use to Trotsky.

Impressed by the obviously very promising young comrade and in urgent need of a qualified secretary, Trotsky wrote to his friend and publisher Franz Pfemfert in Berlin to interview Olberg and render his opinion. The latter's prompt reply was completely negative and replete with observations that Olberg was probably a GPU agent.

Instead of a formal interview, the young man was invited to the home of the Pfemfert couple to meet three other leading Trotskyists: Max Shachtman from America, Pierre Naville from France, and *Landtag* deputy Kurt Landau. While the leaders were in conference, Pfemfert's wife, Anna Ramm, herself a Russian or Latvian, casually questioned Olberg. She found him evasive and false about his origin and occupation. She recognized in him the young man who in the past used to frequent the publishing offices to purchase large quantities of oppositionist literature, for delivery to Inprekor. Pfemfert and the other leaders were alarmed by Olberg's indiscreet questions regarding confidential matters of the opposition's leadership, organization and strength by countries, methods of communication, and the like. Their consensus was that he could not possibly be anything but a GPU agent. The Pfemferts, Shachtman, and Landau wrote to Trotsky separately, all in that vein, warning him to have nothing further to do with Olberg. Pfemfert's letter added:

. . . The cuckoo knows that the comrades are childishly naive and trustful. We must not underestimate Stalin's horde which would stop at nothing in order to place a spy among our ranks, even if it is for nothing more than having our addresses and information about our work.

. . . Olberg has not been proven in any way, and he is a hysterical, overbearing, and tactless type. Thus, Comrade L. T., I am sorry to tear up your possible hope of getting a Latvian comrade, but I consider it my duty as a comrade and revolutionary to state what I see.

Do not take this lightly: Have nothing to do with Olberg. In 24 hours he would become an unbearable burden and, more probably, he would try to insinuate himself into activities so as to gather reports useful to the GPU.

The urgent warnings from the oppositionist leaders in Germany, France, and the United States impressed Trotsky enough to prevent his accepting Olberg as secretary but not enough to end the correspondence with him. The contents of his letters to the "young comrade" became to a large extent operational, telling Olberg everything he asked for. Both Trotsky and his son Sedov, after May 1930, were supplying the Latvian with names and addresses of leading followers in Russia, the Baltic countries, and elsewhere. Trotsky's letters in no instance indicated doubts in the loyalty of the man or his wife, who also joined the movement. When the letters got "lost," as Olberg alleged, or when other incidents occurred that would have

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alerted almost anyone else, Trotsky wrote about his concern but kept up the same trustful communication, for somehow Olberg was always able to explain things promptly and convincingly. The mail, he wrote, was received and delivered to such and such a comrade. As a result, the comrade in question became suspect, just as Olberg intended. Or the discrepancies were caused by the miserable financial circumstances among the followers. Trotsky was apparently satisfied with the explanations. He sent him 98 pieces of correspondence in 1931, a volume equal to that addressed to Soble.

Olberg's role in the latter months of his association with Trotsky resembled that of Soble in other ways as well. He became an intelligence reporter on the movement, but his elaborate reports look like doctored copies of what he was submitting to the GPU boss. Into his longhand copying crept omissions and repetitions of lines and passages, similar to the oddities in Soble's papers for Trotsky.

Olberg never failed to weave lengthy questionnaires into the reports. He asked hundreds of questions about the movement, the couriers, the methods of shipping Trotsky's tracts to Russia, the addresses of confidants by countries, the mails expedited. Above all, he had made constant requests for new instructions. In a letter stating that he had no address for communicating with Arkhangelsk, Olberg confirmed the receipt of eight names and addresses of comrades in Russia. For reasons not known, he repeated this confirmation in an identical letter. Perhaps the copy had been intended for the GPU.

Olberg's correspondence and all record of him ended in March 1931. Trotsky apparently made no note about this termination. He did not mention, as he did in the case of the Sobolevicius brothers, that Olberg capitulated to Stalinism. In Trotsky's statements to the Dewey commission, however, it is noted that Olberg returned to Russia and soon thereafter went to Czechoslovakia, where the GPU launched a campaign to expel Trotskyist emigres, especially their German leader Anton Grylewicz, as agents of the Gestapo.

In 1935 Olberg was again recalled to the Soviet Union to serve as a provocateur against the Trotskyists at the Gorky Pedagogical Institute. He was supplied with Honduran citizenship.³⁰ The Consul

³⁰ Honduran citizenship was arranged by the Soviets for other emigres to the United States. See the case of Richard H. Abrey (Ryszard Henryk Abramowicz) before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, *Hearings*, Part 50, 1957, p. 3047 ff. David Yulievich Dallin, author of *Soviet Espionage* (who in 1941 married Lilia Estrinanie Ginsberg, discussed below), also came to the United States with a Honduran passport, issued in Berlin on 1 July 1933. Dallin at the time was a Soviet citizen and as late as 1939 he contributed writings to *Het Volk* which were favorable to Stalin. None of the holders of Honduran passports ever saw that country.

General of that country, Lucas Parades, stationed in Berlin, made the arrangements when visiting Prague, where an intermediary named Benda delivered the documents. Before the purge tribunal Olberg testified in 1936 that Sedov supplied him with the Honduran passport and 13,000 Czech crowns for the purchase of citizenship, so that he could go to Russia to kill Stalin.³¹

In Moscow Olberg was first assigned to the GPU political department, which was then under the direction of Molchanov.³² In the drive to suppress Trotskyist tendencies in Soviet universities the latter assigned him, as an expert, to act under cover as a history professor at the Gorky Institute. However, both the academic staff and the local CP secretary, Yelin, who controlled it, found Olberg unqualified to teach history or anything else. In the interview he gave contradictory responses; he was not a Party member, as required of all the staff; he had no record of Party education, or of any previous employment. He was not even a Soviet citizen but a Latvian who had entered the USSR with a Honduran passport. The Institute's rejection was immediately overruled, however, by Molchanov and his boss, Yezhov. Olberg became a historian overnight, while all those who objected, and an even larger number of "Trotskyists" whom he reported, were executed.³³

In addition to Olberg, the NKVD provided the prosecution with two other agents, Fritz David and Berman Yurin. All were shot within 24 hours of the verdict. Because he was the only one whose proof of personal contact with Trotsky, Sedov, and the movement abroad was well documented, Olberg served as the most important witness for prosecutor Vishinsky. The Honduran passport and the money, which he claimed to have obtained from Sedov, with instructions to go to Moscow to kill Stalin, were most direct proofs of his complicity which he fully admitted and elaborated upon in conformity with NKVD instructions. For this reason Olberg, the "would-be assassin hired by Trotsky to kill Stalin," received the greatest publicity in the Soviet press.³⁴ The proceedings of the Dewey commission in Mexico exposed

³¹ Trotsky-Sedov files belie such allegations by claiming that the Honduran citizenship and funds were obviously supplied by the GPU.

³² Probably Georgiy Aleksandrovich, appointed in November 1935, and reportedly shot in the third Moscow trial.

³³ With the exception of comments on the spurious Honduran citizenship and passport, Trotsky's records contain no information on the above incidents. The story on Olberg's placement and role at the Gorky Institute is given in detail by Orlov, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV.

³⁴ Sayers and Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 284 ff., give the Soviet version of Olberg as Trotsky's terrorist.

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the complex fabrication of the agent's testimony,³⁵ but Trotsky's depositions about him again attested to an irrational lack of security.

*Etienne*³⁶ and *Lilia*:³⁷ *Mark Zborovsky and Lilia Dallin*

Much is known about the involvement of this pair of alleged Trotskyists in the NKVD's maze of operations in France, but many facts best known to the Soviets have yet to be revealed. The papers of Trotsky and Sedov, who were ignorant of their true allegiance, contain dozens of folders about them. Among these are documents accusing the two as Stalin's spies and warnings from European comrades against them, though these contained more suspicion than concrete proof. Trotsky preferred not to believe them and, instead of investigating, drew Etienne and Lilia ever closer into his confidence. After Sedov's death the two co-workers replaced him for several years in publishing the *Bulletin of Opposition*, the organ for disseminating ideological guidance to the groups of followers around the world. Trotsky urgently needed researchers for his endless tracts and polemics. Above all, he could hardly communicate with the Paris Secretariat of the International without trusted go-betweens and the accommodation addresses they provided. He knew that Etienne and Lilia were well qualified to assume such assorted responsibilities and, as expressed in many of his notes, he was sure of their unfailing loyalty.

Although he told only a small part of his story, Etienne himself eventually confessed that he was the principal Soviet penetration

³⁵ John Dewey, *Not Guilty*. Harper and Brothers, New York, 1938. Chapter XIII.

³⁶ Etienne's original name was Mordka Zborowski (Sborowski, Zborofski and Zborowsky); his GPU-NKVD code name was Mark. Born in Uman, Russia, in 1908, he lived in Poland after he was 11 years old and had been a member of Socialist Zionist groups and the CP since boyhood. From 1928 to 1937 he attended the Universities of Rouen and Paris, majoring in sociology and anthropology. For immigration to the United States he obtained an affidavit from Harry Liverman, allegedly a native of Uman, who claimed to have known the Zborowski family. It was discovered, however, that Liverman's affidavit contained falsehoods similar to those he made in affidavits for others, including (see below) Lilia Ginsberg's brother Raphael and her subsequent husband David J. Dallin. When these affidavits were submitted to the immigration authorities, it was found that Liverman was in correspondence with a Maurice Stern, a suspect Soviet agent. Another 1941 affidavit for Zborowski stated that he had a brother and sister in Moscow, while on other occasions he asserted he had no relatives in Russia.

³⁷ Lilia's original name was Lola Ginsberg. She was born in Liepaja, Latvia, in 1898, and lived there until 1914, then studied law in Moscow. In 1923, she emigrated to Berlin where she married Comrade Estrin. The couple professed to be Mensheviks, then Leninists and Left Oppositionists. In 1933 they moved to Paris. In 1939 she still claimed Soviet citizenship and had apparently encountered no difficulty in extending her Soviet passport annually.

agent in the Trotskyite movement.³⁸ Lilia never confessed anything of the sort and was never effectively challenged about it. Trotsky's files, on the other hand, threw much light on the role of the two. The "Siamese twins," as Lilia referred to herself and Etienne, were "inseparable, neither undertaking anything without doing it together." In their weekly letter to Mexico, between Sedov's death in February 1938 and Trotsky's death, they were forever whitewashing each other. Shrewd and inventive, conspiratorial, and hard working, they never defended themselves directly by denying charges with arguments and alibis. Instead they casually put in a good word for each other, thus producing indirect and convincing evidence of loyalty and diverting suspicion toward the accusers themselves.

The services of Etienne and Lilia at the center of Trotskyite activities stretched across a period of six years, 1934 to 1940. During this time the GPU-NKVD teams abroad killed several of Trotsky's organization aides, while these two, the most important to Trotsky and Sedov, remained unharmed. The archive contains no indication that Soviet agents ever kept them under surveillance or threatened them; yet the pair invariably mentioned the dangers to themselves when other prominent comrades were reported abducted or murdered.

The records on Etienne show that his university studies in France extended over ten years but give no indication of adequate employment or other income for himself and family. It is possible therefore that the Soviet services kept him on the payroll throughout the period. In 1930 he became secretary of the Russian emigré Union of Returnees³⁹ in which he had served as a spotter and recruiter of emigrés to repatriate. First he associated with the French oppositionists; then he concentrated on the small Russian Section of the Fourth International, headed by Leon Sedov, whom he met in 1934. He promptly professed ardent anti-Stalinism and assiduously cultivated the new friendship. Sedov introduced him to Lilia Estrin, secretary to Boris Nikolaevsky at the International Institute of Social History. Continuing as secretary for the Union of Returnees even after that office was exposed as Soviet-subsidized, Etienne did odd jobs for Lilia and made himself indispensable to Sedov by helping in the shop where the *Bulletin* was published. After 1935 he was available to Sedov at all times but was never paid for his work. His friendship, loyalty to the cause, and

³⁸ U.S. Senate Committee of the Judiciary, *Hearings*, March 2, 1956.

³⁹ The Union of Returnees was established in its French name as the *Bureau de l'Union de Repatriement des Russes*, at 12 rue de Buci in Paris. It was known among the Russian emigrés simply as the *Vozvrashchentsi*, a welfare-type organization designed to help unfortunate emigrés to return to the USSR. It was an NKVD cover.

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exceptional ability gained him the absolute confidence first of Sedov, and then of Trotsky. His NKVD case officer, to whom he said he reported daily, was in the Soviet mission in the rue de Grenelle.⁴⁰

Etienne's true allegiance was plainly suspect because of his continued affiliation with the Soviet-controlled Union and the vague sources of his income.⁴¹ As for Lilia, her political past and other circumstances could similarly have provided ample grounds for suspicion. Admitting that she had been a Menshevik revolutionary, then a Leninist, she professed Trotskyism while she lived with her husband in Berlin; yet neither name appears anywhere on the rosters of Trotsky followers. The annual extension of her Soviet passport and her unexplained trips to Russia, although she was publicly known as a prominent aide of Sedov and Trotsky, was the most obvious cause for doubt.⁴²

Lilia's name first appeared among Trotsky's records in a letter from Sedov to his father, who was then in Honefoss, Norway, and asking for a Russian secretary. Sedov wrote that the "Menshevik typist" was willing to come for a month or six weeks, providing she could stay in Trotsky's household and was paid 1200 to 1500 francs plus room and board. Assuring his father of her skill, he mentioned a string of security problems in hiring Lilia. Her joining the household would alert the Deuxieme Bureau and she would probably talk, thus creating the risk of blowing the entire Trotsky system. If hired, she should have no access to the archive and political matters. Lilia was not hired for the temporary job, but this episode marked the beginning of her permanent affiliation with Sedov. She obtained a full-time job with Boris Nikolaevsky's Institute. She and her husband lived in an apartment full of unemployed relatives, including her brother, Dr.

⁴⁰ According to his admission before the U.S. Senate, Etienne reported to the Soviets daily. As secretary he was daily in the office of the Union of Returnees, but there is no record of the frequency of his contacts with the Soviets, except that Orlov wrote that Etienne constantly visited the Soviet mission. If Etienne did not exaggerate in his story to the Senate (which is also possible, for his testimony reads as if he were proud of his job), his transmission of daily reports could have been in part through some go-between among the *Vozvrashchentsi* officials.

⁴¹ He married Rivka (Regina) Levi in 1938. She came to Paris with her parents, from Lodz, but they moved on to Palestine. As a Stalinist herself she knew of her husband's services for the NKVD. Their only child, George, was born in Paris.

⁴² In 1939, when stopping in New York on her way to visit Trotsky, she still claimed Soviet citizenship. Victor Serge, one of her accusers, said she had made mysterious trips to Russia. In her letters to Trotsky she stated that her absences from Paris were only for vacations, but her dossier shows that she came to Paris in 1933 directly from Moscow, not from Berlin as she claimed in response to the accusations in Paris.

Ralph Ginsberg, and his wife, who used the name of Dr. Fanny Trachtenberg (or Tranchenka, as she was known to the Russian emigres). The two doctors had no license to practice in France, and Lilia's wages of 1500 francs a month was for years the only overt income in the household.

Once established in Sedov's home office, Lilia wrote an average of two or three letters a week to Trotsky and his secretary, Sara Weber. She described herself as a human dynamo, capable of working on two full-time jobs, seven days a week, without respite or vacation. This self-praise, not unwarranted, served the purpose of making herself indispensable from the Trotsky-Sedov standpoint. "I work like an ox," she wrote to Mrs. Trotsky, "from early morning to late into the night, and I am content. My job (with the Institute) is interesting. After it, I work for the *Bulletin* and other (Trotskyite) matters which keep me up until one o'clock at night. At seven in the morning I am up again . . . I need no Sundays, no respite. I am a dynamic person, I need action."

Lilia's voluntary and unpaid work in Sedov's establishment began in 1935, gradually, first as proofreader for the Russian *Bulletin*, then as research worker for Trotsky's writings and also Sedov's secretary handling correspondence with Trotsky and the leaders of various groups of followers in Europe and America. Her particular interest was in Russian Jewish groups in Paris. She "knew everybody," including such NKVD agents as Jack Soble and Robert Soblen (the brothers Sobolevicius).

When he introduced Lilia to Etienne in his *Bulletin's* printshop, Sedov did not know that they knew each other, for Etienne had already done some odd jobs for the Institute. The two developed a close friendship when Etienne began contributing articles for the *Bulletin*.⁴³ They became a team which met regularly to manage the Russian Section of the Fourth International. Sedov issued directives as instructed by his father; Lilia attended to secretarial work, research and communications; and Etienne was the go-between in organizing groups of followers. Lilia and Etienne worked with great zeal in collecting testimonies of various Trotskyist leaders needed for the presentation to the Dewey Commission in Mexico.

Etienne and Lilia perfected their teamwork for the NKVD, especially when, as this cooperation developed, rumors started circulating about their disloyalty. Several European leaders in the movement accused them as Soviet spies, but the fingers pointed to

⁴³ Under the pen name "E. Tienov" or mere "T".

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one at a time, and they "cleared" each other. Etienne was instructed to investigate the gossip against Lilia; he proved her innocent. Lilia in turn exonerated Etienne so convincingly that Sedov thereafter confided in him more than in anyone else in his circle of comrades. He let Etienne keep the key to his mailbox. Letters got lost and addresses had to be changed—but Etienne kept the key.

In November, 1936, Sedov made an agreement with Boris Nikolaevsky for the transfer of a portion of Trotsky's files to the Institute for safekeeping. Fifteen cases were delivered in secrecy, with only Lilia and Etienne knowing about the transaction. The following night burglars used a blowtorch to break into the cellar. They took no valuables, only Trotsky's files. The investigating police concluded that it was obviously a GPU job. But who could have informed them about the delivery to the Institute? The police wanted to question Etienne and Lilia, but Sedov vouched for them as being absolutely above all suspicion. Rumors circulated among the comrades that Lilia was involved. In defense against one of the accusers, Victor Serge, she wrote to Trotsky that she feared she was being accused because she had separated the more important documents from the boxes to take them to her home for sorting. On the other hand, Sedov stated that the more important documents were taken by *Etienne* to his home, for safekeeping. Etienne was obviously apprehensive that the police might uncover him as the culprit; Jeanne Martin, Sedov's mistress, pleading with Etienne to appear in court, felt it necessary to assure him that no question about the burglary would be raised. In 1956 he admitted that he took part in the burglary.⁴⁴

After Sedov's death Etienne and Lilia handled most of Trotsky's correspondence for Europe. They were a transmission belt for communications with the Fourth International in Paris, the leaders of oppositionist groups in various countries, Soviet defectors, and other figures of importance to the movement, as well as the Paris courts. They knew who suspected them of disloyalty and when and how to counteract. They wrote many skillful letters to Trotsky and his wife. Etienne's mail was businesslike; they showed him as a dependable successor to Sedov in managing the affairs of the movement, and they complimented Lilia unstintingly for her sacrifices. The letters of Lilia, many addressed to Mrs. Trotsky, were replete with sympathy, adulation for the family, and unlimited devotion to the cause. Between the lines, she seldom failed to insert piously worded barbs against

⁴⁴ U.S. Senate, Judiciary Committee *Hearings*, March 2, 1956. Exhibit No. 14, p. 131 ff.

Jeanne Martin, the late Sedov's mistress, who openly talked about Lilia and Etienne as traitors. The reports against other accusers were filled with countercharges aimed at several genuine followers. Their letters, based on ostensible investigations of who the NKVD agents might be, were usually signed jointly: E. or Et. for Etienne; Lola, L., Lil., Paulsen, or P. for Lilia.

For some months, March to June of 1938, Trotsky seemed somewhat sceptical about the pair's sincerity. It was not only the shock of his son's sudden death that made him stop corresponding with them. Jeanne Martin wrote numerous letters about her conviction that Sedov did not die from natural causes. The distressed widow voiced anger against Lilia and Etienne for refusing to make statements for the court then conducting the inquest into Sedov's death. Trotsky, after a period of silence, demanded an explanation. Lilia responded with a flood of letters containing endless condolences and chatter about Sedov's goodness, but always in such a way as to portray her own fine character and devotion. In response to Jeanne's accusations, Lilia and Etienne engaged a number of other comrades to write that Jeanne was a nervous wreck, irresponsible and full of hate without cause. Thus they succeeded in convincing Trotsky that they had been unjustly maligned and that the accusations against them had been inspired by one source only, the NKVD. Their efficient editing of the *Bulletin* prompted him to write a rare letter of praise.

Trotsky's affirmation of absolute confidence in Etienne and Lilia came at a time when rumors about the two being Soviet agents were most persistent. Talk circulated that Henk Sneevliet (Maring), the Dutch oppositionist leader, referred to Etienne as that "filthy Polish Jew spying for the GPU." Victor Serge told several comrades of his suspicion of both Etienne and Lilia. The pair informed Trotsky about the gossip before anyone else could. The reply was that comrade Etienne must take the initiative in setting up a commission, in concurrence with the International Secretariat, to put a stop to such calumnies. Trotsky wrote to Etienne: "Take most energetic initiative to push the accusers to the wall as soon as possible."

The rumor that the pair were Soviet spies helped them finally in gaining greater prestige and the absolute confidence of Trotsky. Replacing a commission, Etienne himself undertook the investigation to prove that he was no spy and that Lilia was innocent.

In this fantastic paradox the two interviewed a number of comrades and prepared a lengthy statement of the results. The reports of the "investigation" satisfied Trotsky as conclusive evidence that Etienne and Lilia were innocent victims of the troublemakers spreading false

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rumors on behalf of the NKVD. His subsequent letters contained frequent praise for the pair. He instructed them that his future mail would be intended for both, regardless of the name in the address. Even if he was not in charge of correspondence, Etienne was performing the important tasks. The "investigation" moved Trotsky to take still other measures. He broke relations with Jeanne Martin, the most persistent accuser of the pair. From the NKVD standpoint this break was a major victory, for it meant a split between the Secretariat and the French Section of the Fourth International. Jeanne's first husband, Raymond Molinier, and his brother Henri happened to be the key figures in the Secretariat and the French Section. Trotsky's break with Jeanne estranged the Moliniers and the majority of other French followers, but his decision was irrevocable.⁴⁵ Lilia and Etienne had convinced him, after a long campaign, that Jeanne and the "French clique" were working with the enemies.

From then on Trotsky wrote more letters of commendation for Etienne. In response to Lilia's offers, he invited her to visit him in Mexico in May 1939.

NKVD Surveillance and Ambush—Death of the Son

After the first great purge trial in Moscow Trotsky's son Leon Sedov was under constant surveillance in France. It was not enough for the NKVD to have Etienne in the young comrade's entourage; the separate surveillance team it set up was to follow the quarry and his associates in all their movements.

Considerable information on the organization of this surveillance came to light indirectly, from the interrogation of suspects in the Reiss murder case by the Examining Tribunal in Paris during January 1938.⁴⁶ Sergei Efron, posing as a political refugee in the Soviet-subsidized Union of Returnees, where Etienne served as secretary, organized the surveillance team and designated Dmitry Smirensky⁴⁷ as its leader. The latter was recruiting agents as early as 1935, ostensibly for innocuous jobs but obviously as a matter of testing. All

⁴⁵ Note, however, that according to Deutscher, Trotsky's break with Molinier and their subsequent feud dated from Molinier's establishment of his dissident newspaper, *La Commune*, in 1935, *op. cit.*, p. 295-7. At that time, Trotsky, was in Norway.

⁴⁶ Ignace Reiss, an important NKVD defector who tried to affiliate himself with the Left Opposition and Sedov, was murdered by an NKVD assassination team at Chablans near Lausanne. The Paris court acted upon a request from the Swiss Government for the extradition of Lydia Grozovskaya, her husband at the Soviet mission in Paris, and a number of other suspect accomplices.

⁴⁷ Smirensky also used the names of Frenchman Maurice Rollin and Czech Vaclav Chadek.

agents, however, had to be approved by Efron, who met the prospects in the home of another Soviet contact named Pozniakov. Pierre Ducomet, a photographer and detective, and Renate Steiner were hired in that way in 1935. In 1936 the surveillance team settled in a Paris apartment at 28 rue Lacrosette, opposite the building in which Sedov lived. The team of three—Smirensky, Ducomet, and Steiner—was joined by two officers from the Union of Returnees, Pierre Schwarzenberg and Vadim Kondratiev. There were still others whose true names the testimonies failed to produce.

The surveillance agents, as it turned out, formed a support group for the NKVD mobile team and in fact several among them "graduated" to become operatives in the team. Thus, for instance, Renate Steiner was sent on an urgent assignment in 1936 to go with Efron and Smirensky to Antibes in southern France. She had no knowledge of what the hurried mission might be but was told upon arrival to obtain room and board in Villa Marie Pension near Juan les Pins. After registering she was given a full description of a couple at the pension whom she was to keep under constant surveillance. She reported to Smirensky daily. Renate struck up a personal acquaintance with the couple and learned from them that they were Leon Sedov and his mistress Jeanne Martin. Being of Russian Jewish descent herself, she developed a close friendship and spent most of the time with the vacationing couple. Sedov's letters, never expressing any suspicion, described the new friend as a "pleasant, young, timid and insignificant female."

The intense surveillance by Renate may have been intended as a preliminary to an attempt on Sedov's life,⁴⁸ but more likely the girl substituted for Etienne and other watchers in Paris who could not join the couple while vacationing.

Steiner was detailed to another team dispatched from rue Lacrosette to Mulhouse in January 1937. This time the purpose was not merely surveillance. It appears that the girl was intended as a decoy: a friend who happened to be in town, and who would again find a chance for a friendly meeting, and who would finally lure the quarry to the mobile team. Efron was preparing for Sedov's assassination. The number of agents in this gang has not been recorded, but Renate's testimony in court showed that Efron was in charge and that she was in Smirensky's team with another agent called "Bob." The three had lodgings in different hotels and received instructions on shifts for covering railway station arrivals. She was then told that Sedov was

⁴⁸ According to Isaac Deutscher, Sedov stated that Steiner had urged him with strange persistence to go with her on sailing trips. *Op. cit.*, pp. 389-390.

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expected in Mulhouse. Her first job was to observe his company, the lodging taken, and other particulars. Smirensky would tell her what to do next.

Sedov handled the preparations for the Mulhouse trip with considerable secrecy;⁴⁹ yet the NKVD could have learned about it from several sources, not only from Etienne but also from a number of "lost" letters containing that information. Efron's group, therefore, was ready well in advance. It had waited in Mulhouse for four days when the leader suddenly left, then called everyone back to Paris. Sedov must have learned something about the danger in Mulhouse and decided not to go. After his death both Lilia and Etienne wrote to Trotsky that he cancelled the trip on account of illness, but other records show that he was in good health then.

It was at this time that Sedov finally realized he was under constant surveillance. He knew that the occupant of the building across the street was Smirensky with his crowd of "White Guards," but he learned this fact only after they murdered Reiss. Even then, as the records show, he took no precautions. He observed in his notes of mid-1937 that he was no longer followed. As was learned later, the NKVD had diverted all its assets in France to the hunt for Reiss.

Leon Sedov's health through the year prior to his death was described in two diametrically different versions. According to Lilia and Etienne, who wrote after his death, he was constantly ill. Etienne explained that Sedov could not travel to Mulhouse and then to Reims⁵⁰ because of illness, and meetings with the Dutch Trotskyist leader Henk Sneevliet and Reiss had to be postponed for the same reason. Lilia confirmed all that (but only after Sedov could no longer dispute her) by writing repeatedly that Sedov was sick all the time in 1937. On the other hand, Sedov never complained about his health but wrote that he was vacationing—at the time of his malady, according to Etienne. Others wrote about Sedov's sturdy nature in carrying

⁴⁹ The trip was for the purpose of seeing a Swiss lawyer in a suit which Trotsky was instituting against several pro-Stalinist newspapers for calumny and public defamation.

⁵⁰ Sedov intended to go to Reims to meet Ignace Reiss and Henk Sneevliet. Etienne handled the correspondence between Sneevliet and Sedov; by delaying the mail or purposely misinterpreting Sneevliet's requests he succeeded in wrecking several plans for a rendezvous. Tired of waiting, Sedov decided to do a little vacationing with his mistress, Jeanne Martin. Sneevliet, not knowing that Etienne had kept his cable instead of delivering it to Sedov, went to Reims, together with Victor Serge. The mobile NKVD team killed Reiss at Chablandes before his scheduled departure for Reims. The fact that Sneevliet took Serge with him to Reims was used by Etienne and Lilia as a major argument in convincing Trotsky that the two were in collusion with the NKVD.

on under immense strain and in privation. Only Klement once mentioned that Sedov had headaches from overwork and the realization of the danger to his life. That note, however, was intended to impress Trotsky with the need to remove his son to Mexico and safety; it did not imply that Sedov was sick. Sedov's mistress, Jeanne Martin, who lived and vacationed with him, never mentioned any illness of Sedov in her letters. Sedov himself wrote that he was enjoying excellent health and was not inclined toward despair, despite the persecution. If death should come suddenly, as he put it, responsibility for it would be lodged in Stalin's camp.

As stated in Jeanne Martin's testimony at the inquests, Sedov fell ill on 15 January of what the doctors diagnosed as appendicitis but was well again by 20 January. Abdominal pains recurred on 8 February; by noon of the following day Jeanne, Lilia, and her sister-in-law, Dr. Trachtenberg (Tranchenka) decided to take him to the Mirabeau Clinic, a small Russian hospital owned and directed by Boris Zhirmunsky.⁵¹ As he was taken by the ambulance, arranged for by Etienne, Lilia allegedly went for the money needed for hospitalization.⁵² She returned to meet Etienne in front of the building in rue Lacretelle—where the NKVD surveillance team was watching. Etienne's version in the notes for Trotsky differed in some details. He wrote that Dr. Trachtenberg arranged for the Mirabeau Clinic with Dr. Adolf Simkov because "there were no Russians in that hospital and Sedov was registered there under the name of Monsieur Martin in order to hide his identity."

Etienne and Lilia would have been contradicted in their explanations that the clinic was chosen because it had no Russian personnel, or in their defense of individuals suspected of implication in what happened, if other comrades in Paris had known what they were writing to Trotsky. Zhirmunsky came from Russia in 1928 with ample funds to open a hospital in Paris and live in luxurious apartments, maintained separately for himself, his wife, and his daughter. He was considered a Bolshevik sympathizer, but Lilia protested against such assertions from the police, assuring Trotsky that the doctor was apolitical. Dr. Simkov, who held a medical degree from Geneva, became medical director of the clinic in 1931. He was originally from Kiev. Lilia maintained at length that Simkov too was apolitical, despite the fact

⁵¹ Described in *Battalla* of 26 January 1937 as a Socialist with Stalinist leanings.

⁵² In her accounts to Trotsky, Lilia did not mention where she got the money. Sedov knew Lilia and her large unemployed family had no money, but she assured him not to worry about it. As on other occasions, Lilia was able to produce cash in emergencies.

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that he kept active membership in the Mechnikov Medical Society, a group deserted by all Russian doctors of non-Jewish origin because of its pro-Soviet orientation. Dr. Faum Trachtenberg (Fanny Tranchenka), without a license to practice, still maintained working relations with the clinic and initially took care of Sedov as a friend of Lilia's. Among the nurses there was only one Russian, Helena Eismond, née Rogina, of Leningrad. She took care of the patient more often than any other nurse. The surgeon who operated on Sedov twice was Dr. Marcel Thalheimer, the only one of the medics at the clinic not listed as of Russian origin.

Keeping Sedov in the hospital as Monsieur Martin was Etienne's and Lilia's idea. They wrote to Trotsky that not even the doctors, except Faum Trachtenberg, knew the true identity at first. She did tell Dr. Simkov, but even he allegedly did not know that the patient was registered as M. Martin. Etienne and Lilia wrote that the surgeon, Dr. Marcel Thalheimer, was told in order to impress him when the second operation was decided upon as a desperate chance to save the patient. The key followers in the International, among them close friends of Trotsky and Sedov, were to be told nothing except that Sedov was temporarily away from home. The incognito and the selection of the "non-Russian" clinic, Lilia and Etienne wrote Trotsky, were measures to protect Sedov from the NKVD. In reality, of course, it would have been much safer if the hospital had been French, and the doctors, and for that matter the public, had been told the patient's identity.

Etienne's and Lilia's presentations to Trotsky insisted that death came of natural causes as a result of post-operational complications. They received full support in this version from medical and autopsy statements. Only Jeanne Martin persisted in her accusations of foul play. On the basis of her appeals, seconded by French comrades, especially lawyers Jean Rous and Gerard Rosenthal, Trotsky demanded and obtained a grant for two inquests after the original post-mortem investigation and statements.

The first operation on Sedov was performed successfully on 9 February. It was described as "removal of an intestinal occlusion." For four days the patient felt well, and recovery was normal according to all statements of doctors and visitors, Jeanne, Lilia, and Etienne. He joked and engaged in discussions of political matters. The abrupt change, which the doctors could not explain, occurred during the night of 13-14 February. No one was with the patient to know what happened. Of the visitors, Jeanne had spent more time with the patient than anyone else; she said that Sedov felt well in the evening before

the relapse. Lilia, too, saw the patient daily, while Etienne made frequent trips to the clinic for talks with him and Lilia together.

Upon seeing the patient in the morning after the relapse, Dr. Thalheimer was unable to explain the abrupt crisis. He was of the opinion that there could be a case of "auto intoxication," but did not rule out other possibilities.⁵³ A second operation was decided upon as offering a slim chance of survival, but the patient died the following day.

The medical doctors, in unison but by individual depositions, corroborated the theme that death came from natural causes. The court accepted the staff's statements, which were unanimous on the following points:

Sedov's identity became known to the personnel only after his death.

No person other than those introduced by Mme. Martin, who was known as the patient's wife, contacted Sedov in the hospital. (*This was obviously false, but Lilia and Etienne refused to testify or reveal to the court that they had visited the patient daily.*)

No incident, visit, or event supported the supposition that death could have come from causes other than those resulting from illness and the two surgical operations.

Finally, none of the persons assigned to keep watch over Mr. Sedov could be considered from a political viewpoint, because none of them indicated any political interest or activity.

In their letters to Trotsky, Lilia and Etienne assured him of the staff's veracity, stating repeatedly that there could have been no agent who harmed the patient. It was at this stage that Lilia wrote of Sedov's constant illness through 1937, implying thereby that he was too debilitated to convalesce, particularly after the second operation. In the same reassuring letters Lilia invariably included hostile remarks against Jeanne Martin, the "neurasthenic with her lunatic imagination about foul play . . . who sees the GPU everywhere."

Despite the court's acceptance of the medical and laboratory depositions, the widowed mistress remained convinced that Sedov was murdered by the NKVD. Demanding additional inquests, she begged in vain both Etienne and Lilia to appear before the examining judge

⁵³ Jeanne Martin insisted at the inquest that Dr. Thalheimer stated such an opinion to her immediately after seeing the patient. Thalheimer, however, denied at the inquest that he ever mentioned the possibility of poisoning. His and all other doctors' replies to the investigators were unanimous in that the death came as a consequence of post-operational complications.

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to make statements and to answer questions. At Jeanne's prodding, Trotsky submitted appeals for additional inquests. These were granted, but all further investigation turned out to be a recapitulation of the first one, which ruled out all other possibilities except death from natural causes.

Jeanne undertook considerable investigation on her own. Before the fatal relapse she had insisted upon the removal of the Russian nurse, Helena Eismond, because in his delirious state after the first operation the patient spoke Russian and the nurse induced him to keep on talking in that language. The clinic refused to remove the woman from attendance.

In general, the establishment was hostile to Jeanne's probing. She challenged the clinic's version of what had happened during the fatal night. A story was formulated that in the middle of the night, unattended, Sedov jumped out of bed, ran to the adjoining room, picked up an orange, peeled and ate it, then fell on a bed in that room, where he was picked up and carried back to his room. Questioning the nurses and inspecting the adjoining rooms where Sedov had allegedly roamed, Jeanne spoke to the patient in the room where Sedov had supposedly stopped for the orange, had eaten it, and had thrown the peels on the floor. The patient said that he had seen nothing of the kind but had rung for the nurse when he saw the door left ajar. She was told further that Sedov must have gone through several rooms before he collapsed. She was particularly interested in questioning the man in the adjoining room, and another young man occupying a second bed in that same room whom she had noticed in passing during Sedov's stay. But the two had left, and the clinic would not reveal their identities or why or when they were admitted to occupy the three-bed room next to Sedov's. She was therefore suspicious not only of poisoning but of manhandling which might have caused the death. In her statements she recalled that on 14 February, when she visited Sedov, he uttered certain words that she dismissed at the time, for he was too weak to be allowed to talk. He said: "You know what they did to me last night." Jeanne began to think later about what Sedov wanted to tell her. She would have asked him but never had a chance to do so.

In her statements asking for a third inquest, Jeanne posed many questions for determining whether criminal action was the cause of death. In her first three statements, for the second inquest, she gave reasons explaining who should be questioned and along what lines with regard to possible poisoning. Her set of thirteen questions concerned the two autopsies. Did these include examination of the nervous

system and a search for possible lesions caused by chemical substances introduced by mouth or injection? What were the causes of a purple patch that she had observed on the abdomen of the patient before he died? Were searches made of the spots on the body where injections had been administered, and were those marks of injections at the spots usually used for medical injections? Were there traces of any mass of microbes injected? In this set of queries, Jeanne repeated that Sedov had always been of sound health. None of her professionally worded questions was answered specifically but rather in a summary manner which took into account the medical depositions and laboratory reports denying all traces of poisoning.

Trotsky protested the report of this inquest to Judge Pagenel by stating that the examiners had followed the "line of least resistance" in attributing death to natural causes. He explained to the judge the NKVD methods of poisoning and summed up his long request for still further investigation by writing that Sedov's illness and surgery offered the NKVD extremely favorable chances for intervention.

Trotsky's letters for the examining judge insisted that the assumption of natural death must be dropped, for "the organizers of the crime were GPU agents, pseudo-officials of the Soviet mission in Paris. The executioners were agents engaged from among White Russian emigres. . . . The GPU could not fail in placing its agents in a Russian clinic or in the immediate vicinity of that clinic." The court did not respond to Trotsky's appeal but reopened the case in answer to Jeanne Martin's pleading, which contained contentions more specific than Trotsky's general accusations. She claimed that former investigations had been inadequate and that the clinic's stories about what happened that night were contradictory and at best only guess work about what the patient did before he was found by the nurses on duty. She asked why the two patients in the next room were never questioned, and why the director of the clinic, Dr. Zhirmunsky, refused to reveal their names, so that they too could be questioned. Jeanne insisted that the two young patients next to Sedov's room be identified and the clinic's records examined as to the nature of their illness, when they registered, and when they left the institution. She stated in the appeal that she had seen the clinic's register for all persons coming and going, and now she wanted that book examined as well. Moreover, she again demanded an inquiry about the drugs administered to Sedov, as recorded by the nurses. Since she knew that Sedov the night before his relapse was still too weak to walk, she suggested that he could not have left the bed without someone's support or without some administered stimulant.

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The last inquest took place in November, but it turned out to be a mere formality. Only Drs. Simkov and Thalheimer were called upon for their comments. Neither Dr. Trachtenberg nor Zhirmunsky was questioned this time. The two doctors denied all of Jeanne Martin's assertions and refused to reply to her numerous allegations. Some of the questions they evaded on the grounds of customary professional privilege. As for the repeated requests that the names of the patients in the room adjoining Sedov's be revealed, Zhirmunsky took the same position for everything about the registrations in the clinic was supposedly confidential. The judge did not grant the request.

After the failure of the inquest in November, Jeanne started a campaign to round up witnesses whose testimonials would make it necessary to open the case again. She engaged for the purpose her former husband Raymond Molinier, his brother Henri, and several other comrades. Etienne and Lilia, who could have served as key witnesses, refused to cooperate to bring about another investigation even when Trotsky, in response to Jeanne's appeals, urged them to prepare statements. All that Jeanne asked them to do was to write down for the judge whatever they knew in connection with the hospitalization. The pair told Trotsky why they refused to cooperate. Lilia's letter explained their reasons: It would be foolhardy for them to go before any police examiners, for their mixing into the case would lead to their expulsion from France. After all, their association with Sedov had been clandestine. She repeated her previous assertions that she could contribute nothing to clear up the case, and "Etienne had nothing to tell the judge, not a word!"

Thus no further investigation took place, although Judge Pagenel was willing to comply with Jeanne's and Trotsky's requests. At this time dissension among the Trotskyists in Paris was at its peak because of rumors of betrayal. Among those whom Lilia and Etienne named in letters to Trotsky as the troublemakers on behalf of the NKVD, Jeanne and the Molinier brothers were now included with Henk Sneevliet and Victor Serge. Lilia's portrayal of Jeanne in her efforts to reopen the inquest became vicious but contradictory: Jeanne was insane but intelligent and shrewd, lying and selfish, confused yet scheming, so that only the NKVD could profit from her meddling.

Although Trotsky was a bit skeptical about Etienne and Lilia in early 1938, by the end of that year the pair had fully convinced him of their unflinching loyalty. He instructed them to break all contact with Jeanne, for he himself wanted no more to do with the Moliniers. This decision also meant that he accepted the verdict of the inquest

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about the natural causes of his son's death, as interpreted for him by Lilia and Etienne. He wrote to them:

Dear Comrades:

I completely agree with your decision not to respond to the invitation of Mme. Jeanne Molinier (Martin) concerning your depositions before the investigating judge.

At one time we proposed to Mme. Molinier that she act jointly with our commission.⁵⁴ She refused and formed her own commission composed of Leon's enemies. That commission naturally did nothing. It was nothing but an empty demonstration against the organization and memory of Leon.⁵⁵

Mme. Jeanne Molinier attempted to transmit my documents to one of Leon's slanderers, all because of political interests on behalf of Raymond Molinier's clique . . .

Trotsky accepted the version that his son died of natural causes as a result of post-operational complications because NKVD agent Etienne and his assistant Lilia were more convincing than his son's widow and the loyal French comrades around her. Working full-time as a team, they were able to cater to Trotsky's arrogant belief that he controlled the French followers. His term "the Molinier clique" and his disavowal stemmed entirely from the impressions he got from the pair's communications. Thus, he accepted the path of least resistance himself, not because he perhaps believed in his son's natural death but because the "French clique" insisted on the opposite line.

Lilia's Trip to Mexico

Lilia Estrin may have had nothing to do with the NKVD preparations for the culminating event in the anti-Trotsky operations, the murder in Mexico City. Yet wittingly or unwittingly she played a role that was useful in directing action teams or individuals. Because of strict compartmentation, her close partner and NKVD agent, Etienne, was probably as ignorant as she was of the intricacies of the

⁵⁴ This was the commission for taking custody of Leon Sedov's files. Jeanne objected to the inclusion of Etienne and Lilia as members of that commission because she never trusted the two.

⁵⁵ Described as such by Etienne's and Lilia's letters to Trotsky, who by now (February, 1939) accepted the pair's version of everything concerning the Secretariat.

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long range plans. As a replacement for Rudolf Klement,⁵⁶ he was responsible for the physical requirements of the Fourth International, which was assembled for a world conference in Paris. He arranged for the lodgings of delegates and observers, among them Sylvia Agelof, interpreter from the United States, and her fiancé, "Jacques Mornard" (Jacson, Ramon Mercader). At the time Lilia acted in unison with Etienne concerning everything in the International, so that she too met the delegates, including "Mornard" and Sylvia.

Lilia first proposed going to Mexico in May 1938, to take dictation for Trotsky's book on Stalin. She would use the vacation due her from the Institute of Social History. Stopping in New York for a week, she would speed to Mexico to have some six or seven weeks for intensive work. She did not explain where she was getting money for the trip and she asked for no remuneration.

Trotsky apparently did not accept Lilia's first offer, for there was no further correspondence about it. But Lilia kept on writing to Mrs. Trotsky and the secretary, Sara Weber. The letters were ingratiating, reminiscing about the goodness of the late Sedov and about her own and Etienne's amicable relations with him. They always contained "clever but poisonous remarks" about Jeanne Martin and others who accused her and Etienne of treason. The transparent purpose of several letters was to get an invitation from Trotsky for a visit to Mexico. In a letter of October 1938 she indicated her plan to visit New York. At that time she still carried a Soviet passport but was trying to secure a different one. The following February she was in possession of a "usable" passport. She wrote Mrs. Trotsky an optimistic note that Paulsen (her code name) would begin the trip on 20 April and would stay in New York for four or five weeks before visiting Mexico for some urgent talks. The Mexican visa, she stated, should be easier to obtain in New York than in Paris.

Trotsky's invitation in reply to Lilia's many proposals for a visit came only in March 1939. By then, as a series of his commending letters indicates, he was sure of Etienne's and Lilia's unbounded loyalty. As for the secretarial work for him, he had already acquired a Fanny Yanovich. Both Lilia and Etienne made persistent inquiries

⁵⁶ Rudolf Klement, a young German comrade, was Trotsky's secretary in Turkey during 1930 to 1932. He then organized the German Trotskyists, and in 1938 he was scheduled for election as Secretary General of the Fourth International, the post Etienne allegedly sought to attain. On 20 July 1938 Klement was kidnapped. A headless body fished out of the River Seine some three weeks later was believed to be his. His code names in the movement were Frederick, Adolf, and Camille. For data attributing his death to the NKVD see Deutscher, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

about her identity, but Trotsky never explained to them who "Fanny" was, nor does the archive reveal her identity.

Lilia left Paris on 19 April, and Etienne corresponded with her in New York. Both wrote to Trotsky requesting assistance in providing her with a Mexican visa. The mediator in the case was Jean Van Heijenoort, Trotsky's Dutch secretary. In answer to his cable Etienne wired from Paris that Lilia was "of Russian origin, no other nationality acquired." A visa of two months' validity was obtained, and Lilia took the bus from New York to Monterey on 24 May, for arrival in Mexico City on 29 May.

Trotsky apparently had no urgent discussions with Lilia. The two talked about the transfer of Trotsky's grandson Seva (Vsevolod Volkov) from Paris to Mexico. Lilia took notes regarding Trotsky's book on Stalin: its revision, editing, and translation into French. There were also talks about the organization of an inner secret circle of Russian Trotskyists in Paris as proposed by Etienne a year earlier.

In conference with Lilia, Trotsky brought up a letter he received in January 1939. It was an earnest warning against an NKVD agent among Trotsky's top aides, the most urgent and meaningful of all such notices. The letter clearly pointed to Etienne as a spy and traitor. It was not signed. It had come in duplicate, one copy in an envelope for Mrs. Trotsky, as insurance against NKVD intercepts. The writer introduced himself as a Russian Jew in New York and relative of General Henry Samoilovich Lushkov, NKVD chief for the Far East, who had defected to Japan.⁵⁷ He wrote that he had been visiting Japan, where Lushkov had told him that Trotsky had in the center of his organization a dangerous provocateur. The accurate and verifiable information about the top NKVD leadership and other data in the letter must have impressed Trotsky with the validity of the source and his information. It described Etienne's association with Trotsky's son and his reporting from Paris, reporting which earned decorations for several NKVD officials. It solved the riddle of Trotsky's stolen documents by stating that "Mark" did the job for delivery to Moscow. The writer's version was so thorough and definite that it allowed no doubt that Etienne was "Mark." It expressed Lushkov's amazement on noting that Trotsky's loyal comrades in Paris had failed to observe "Mark's" constant contact with the Soviet Embassy.

⁵⁷ General Alexander Orlov, another defector in 1938, admitted the authorship of this letter before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary. See Hearings, February 14 and 15, 1957, Part 51. The letter was dated 27 December 1938.

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Orlov's warning letter was actually an urgent appeal that Trotsky take heed for his safety. It read: "Believe no one, male or female, coming to you from that provocateur." The letter asked Trotsky to acknowledge its receipt by inserting a notice in the *Socialist Appeal*, with the wording that "Stein's letter was received by the editor."⁵⁸ Trotsky responded with the advertisement: "Mr. Stein, I insist that you immediately go to the *Socialist Appeal* for a talk with Comrade Martin," but no one came.⁵⁹ Orlov testified in 1957 that he went to that office; but when he took a side glance at Comrade Martin, he lost confidence and left. He tried instead to reach Trotsky by telephone but got only the secretary; wary that the caller might be just another persistent newspaperman, Trotsky would not come to the telephone.

Trotsky's presentation of the letter to Lilia in order to question her or to discuss it appears irrational, the negation of elementary security precaution. For almost a year prior to their meeting he had been receiving accusations of treason committed by both Lilia and Etienne. Whether he wanted to use the letter as a test to find how she would respond to the contents or whether he wanted, in his proud and arrogant way, to show that he was flooded with such warning notes, we do not know, since he made none of his usual records about this confrontation. He obviously disregarded the writer's specific request that he trust no one, male or female, coming from Etienne. (Questioned as Mrs. Dallin in 1956, Lilia testified that she felt uncomfortable when Trotsky showed her the letter because "the details were very unpleasant." She told him that the letter could be nothing else but "a dirty job of the NKVD who wanted to deprive Trotsky of his few dependable collaborators in France.")⁶⁰

It was logical for Lilia to argue that the warning letter was an NKVD hoax. Another such ridiculous note, also unsigned, stated at the same time that a woman (meaning Lilia) was coming for a visit to poison him. There were many previous warnings of the same type, some genuine though general, others more specific but obviously spurious. Arguing that the false warnings resulted from a common NKVD practice designed to confuse the opponent, and pointing to the preposterous accusation that she had any evil intention, she satisfied Trotsky about the loyalty of both Etienne and herself.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Hearings, op. cit.*

⁶⁰ See *Hearings, op. cit.*, 2 March 1956. Also Deutscher, *op. cit.*, p. 410. Note, however, that in his book on *Soviet Espionage* David J. Dallin, Lilia's second husband, made no reference to this incident or, for that matter, to any NKVD operations in Trotsky's movement.

It is obvious from Trotsky's correspondence that Lilia's visit strengthened the pair's position. He no longer had any doubts about their genuine loyalty and paid no heed when Lilia reported how certain European comrades had renewed allegations about her treachery. After June Lilia actually assumed a role secondary to that of Etienne, but remained the principal correspondent for matters relating to the Russian Section of the Fourth International, and was responsible for the *Bulletin's* publication. She informed Trotsky that she had become the assistant of her friend Etienne; and Trotsky, pleased with the arrangement, again congratulated the pair for their wonderful work. In one instance Trotsky was obviously elated with Etienne's performance. He sent him an autographed picture of himself, and Etienne dutifully thanked him:

Dear Lev Davidovich:

I am very grateful for the photograph sent to me. Your attention moves me deeply. If fate throws me to the country neighboring to yours, I shall do what I can to express to you personally my sincere devotion.

Hearty greetings to you and Natalia Ivanovna.

Etienne

Assault and Assassination—The Death of the Father

In one of his last written accounts describing the assault that the NKVD staged upon his villa at Coyoacan, Mexico City, Trotsky said: "I know that Stalin often admitted that my deportation abroad was his great error. Only a terroristic act could correct that mistake." Despite the international assets and capabilities of the execution teams, the plans for the final assault materialized slowly. Many operatives had priority jobs in Europe. For a year they concentrated on the leftist oppositionists in Spain, where "the bestial GPU," according to Trotsky, staged a purge en masse as a sequel to the purge trials in Moscow. From Spain individual agents started moving to Mexico, and this exodus was the beginning of the flow of warnings from loyal Trotskyists.

In January 1938 a man posing as a left oppositionist comrade came to Trotsky's house with a message from a political follower. It was evidently a rather amateurish effort, but the comrade came prepared to kill. The message was discovered to be spurious, a device to gain entry. The stranger was searched and disarmed. As a result of this first scare American and Mexican friends and President Cardenas in

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particular, arranged for the safety of the exile by placing day and night guards. The walls around the residence were fortified, and an alarm system was installed. The refuge became a virtual fortress under the protection of the Mexican state and President Cardenas personally.

Trotsky's records of more than two years after January 1938 mentioned no physical threat to his life but noted the mounting propaganda against him. Stalinist-oriented newspapers persisted with editorials and articles by leading communists who demanded that the Cardenas government expel the exile, the traitor to the proletariat. As if conditioning the public for the event, Stalinist newspapers intensified the agitation during the weeks before the commando attack took place. The Mexican comrades, led by NKVD agents, had to be given "moral justification" for Trotsky's liquidation. This intensified campaign was conducted by the "overt friends of the NKVD agents" whose sudden concentration in Mexico City came to the attention of the non-Communist press.

As described by Trotsky himself, the armed attack on his villa started at four a. m. on 24 May 1940. It was a thoroughly professional operation. Having worked intensively and late the evening before, Trotsky had taken pills and was fast asleep when the firing woke him. He thought at first that the natives were celebrating some holiday, but then noticed that bullets were spraying into the bedroom. His wife pulled him off the bed, and both crawled close to the wall. Crossfire was cutting through the windows and doors. Altogether some 200 shots poured into their bedroom alone. Their grandson Seva in the adjoining bedroom was screaming for Grandpa. The attackers had deposited two incendiary bombs there, but the boy escaped in the darkness. Mrs. Trotsky ran into his room, put out the fire, saw the empty bed riddled with bullets and thought that the boy had been kidnapped. Actually he had found safety in the guard's quarters. Before the attackers left, one of them rushed into Trotsky's room to spray more bullets into the rumpled bedding.

The attack was over in twenty minutes. All the assailants then rushed from the compound. The only casualty appeared to be Seva, with a bullet wound in his toe. The inside guards joining the household in the patio were dazed, not knowing what had happened to the guards outside the walls. These were discovered, disarmed, and tied up. They said that minutes before four o'clock twenty men in police and army uniforms surprised and overpowered them without firing a shot. One of the attackers, a "major," went to the gate. Another spoke to Robert Sheldon Harte, a young American, who was on night duty. Harte opened the gate, and the attackers rushed in. They surprised

and disarmed the inside guards. They placed machine guns at various points facing Trotsky's bedroom.

It was not immediately realized that Robert Sheldon Harte was missing. Trotsky was convinced that the young comrade had been abducted; but Colonel Salazar, the chief of the secret police who was at the compound within half an hour of the assault, had a strong suspicion that Harte too was an NKVD agent.⁶¹

The disappearance of Harte, whose body was exhumed about a month after the assault, lent temporary support to the Stalinists, who suddenly developed a propaganda story to the effect that the Trotskyists themselves had staged the attack, in which no one was hurt. The Central Committee of the Mexican Communist Party issued two announcements about Harte's participation in the assault, implying thereby that the whole affair was executed on behalf of Trotskyist propaganda to smear the Communist Party. Even before the corpse was found, Trotsky wrote protests to President Cardenas requesting the release of several of his domestic servants whom the police suspected of complicity. In a letter of protest he wrote that the GPU used David Alfaro Siqueiros and Vincente Lombardo Toledano, and he urged that both of them be questioned about their complicity. The police followed Trotsky's lead by arresting several participants in the assault. As soon as Siqueiros' name was mentioned in the press, however, he disappeared; and the Mexican CP disowned him overnight as well as some other CP leaders. Their names were suddenly included among those published as Trotskyists and traitors.

Trotsky wrote in considerable detail about how the GPU manipulated the Mexican CP in order to cover the organizers of the assault. Several top leaders whose names had long been deleted from the Party records suddenly had to be proclaimed traitors in the Stalinist press. The purpose of the campaign (developed by the NKVD, according to Trotsky) was to divert all blame from the CP and to provide a basis for the rumors that Trotskyists themselves had staged the assault.

David Siqueiros was arrested in a hideout on 4 October 1940. He did not deny participation in the assault, but he insisted that the Mexican CP had nothing to do with it. He defended himself with a story that he wanted to produce a "psychological shock" in protest

⁶¹ Although the Mexican police refused to abandon the notion of Harte's complicity with the GPU, Trotsky was probably right in his conviction of man's innocence. Two days after his abduction, Harte was murdered and secretly buried. The body was found lying on a bed which, as the police found, had been purchased by the wife of the Mexican artist David Siqueiros, who was eventually tried for leading the assault.

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against Trotsky's presence in Mexico but that he had not wanted to kill him. He was released on bail and disappeared from Mexico for several years.⁶²

Trotsky was assassinated on 20 August 1940. His widow's reminiscences of the event became part of Victor Serge's book, *Vie et Mort de Trotsky*.⁶³ She also prepared an account for the Trotskyists' *Bulletin*. Trotsky's English secretary, Joseph Hansen, issued a statement to the press on the morning after the fatal attack by "Frank Jacson." He said that Trotsky, at the moment in the hospital with only a slim chance to live, had predicted this blow from Stalin since the assault of 24 May, but no one could know the planned manner or timing of the assassination. Hansen stated that Trotsky had known Jacson for some six months. The young man, who had been a member of the Trotskyist movement in France⁶⁴ and the United States, was reputedly a financially generous sympathizer. Visiting as the fiancé of comrade Sylvia Agelof, he gained Trotsky's confidence. No one ever questioned his loyalty, so that there never was the slightest suspicion that he could be an NKVD agent. On the other hand, describing the character and behavior of the man, Hansen wrote:

The record of Jacson is sinister. He was in Paris when Trotsky's former secretary, Rudolf Klement, disappeared and was murdered by the GPU . . . Jacson's entry to the house in Coyoacan was, without a doubt, engineered a long time ago. It is possible that he was the leader in the assault of 24 May. Maybe it was he who

⁶² According to L.A.S. Salazar, *Murder in Mexico*, London, 1950, pp. 76-77, Siqueiros led the assaulting gang, but under the orders of the "French Jew" (allegedly Jacques Mornard-Jacson-Mercader), who was friendly with Sheldon Harte and talked him into opening the gate to the compound. While Trotsky and the household defended Harte as innocent, Salazar upheld the possibility that the NKVD placed him in Trotsky's household as a spotter who was subsequently converted to Trotsky's ideals. Thus, Salazar continued, it is possible that the attack lay so heavily on Harte's conscience that the gang considered it safest to finish him. As for the famous painter Siqueiros, Salazar quoted him from an interview of 23 April 1947 as saying: "I must state that I consider my participation in the armed attack at Coyoacan as one of the most honorable acts of my life."

⁶³ Amiot-Dumont, Paris, 1951.

⁶⁴ Jacson, as Mornard, was constantly with Sylvia Agelof, who attended as an American observer and interpreter the Fourth International's congress in Paris during September 1938. However, Lilia and Etienne, reporting to Trotsky about that congress and the participants, failed to mention Sylvia or Mornard. Etienne, as previously mentioned, played an important administrative role at the congress; he arranged for the housing of delegates and other essentials.

talked Robert Sheldon Harte into opening the gate to the killers that night. To keep Jacson's identity secret, Harte had to die. This explains why Jacson had to leave for the United States immediately after the May assault. He needed protection in case his name should be mentioned in the investigation. During the last weeks, when things quieted down, he returned to Mexico as ordered by the GPU to finish the job.

There is no doubt that the GPU had a firm hold on Jacson. It is possible that they would denounce him in France for the murder of Klement or the murder of Harte. It is possible they would have killed him after he failed as leader of the assault in May. While he was struggling with the guards (after he killed Trotsky) he cried out several times: "They are keeping my mother in prison!" . . .

The crime of Mornard-Jacson-Mercader, described by many authors in detail, does not differ in the essentials from Hansen's narrative. Jacson came to Trotsky's home at 5:30 p.m. The two met on the patio. Jacson had written an article and asked Trotsky to read it and give him his opinion about it. Without saying anything to his secretaries, Trotsky took Jacson to his study. The details of how the blow with the mountaineering pick was struck and of the short struggle that followed, as described by various writers, are mostly conjectures, although probably correct. No one else was in the study. Hansen wrote: "The first sign that something happened were the terrible screams and noise of struggle." Two of the nearest guards left their posts and ran to the dining room next to the study. They saw Trotsky leaving his office with blood streaming down his face. One of the guards jumped at the assassin, who held a pistol in his hand. The other attended to Trotsky on the floor.

Hansen's statement to the press appeared incomprehensible on certain points. How could he have suddenly realized, along with others in Trotsky's household, that Jacson, under no suspicion before, was implicated in Klement's abduction and murder? And how could it have occurred to Hansen that Jacson's past record was sinister if there had been no reports to that effect? If there had been grounds for suspicion, why were Trotsky and his aides so credulous as not to check up on the new follower? Trotsky's papers contain no record of a refusal to associate with Jacson, as they did in many other cases where such a refusal was based on ideological differences. As was true throughout the long series of atrocities committed by the GPU on the Trotskyists, the realization had come too late.

Mrs. Trotsky's story in Victor Serge's book⁶⁵ tells of times when she and her husband were disturbed by suspicion about Jacson. They did not trust him, but they failed to act. They were puzzled about his financial resources and strangely vague accounts of his big business deals. They were mystified by his sudden departure to New York after the assault in May. Upon his return they observed a strange change in his conduct; he was sullen, restless, excitable, absent-minded, and inconsistent. A former "vulgar *bon vivant*," he was now unable to conceal his obvious anxiety. His behavior toward his mistress Sylvia, of whose loyalty the Trotskys had no doubt, worried them; and they were confounded by his actions and remarks. Jacson once said to Hansen, who was supervising the fortification of the wall around the compound: "Why all this construction? You know that you can do nothing against the GPU!" On an outing with two of Trotsky's aides he once swerved his Buick toward a precipice, exclaiming: "This way and everything would be over!" Mrs. Trotsky was worried to see Jacson alone with her husband, who once shouted: "Who is this wealthy patron, anyway? We must investigate!" Trotsky realized that Jacson had no ideological acumen or capability as a writer. After one session with him in the study, which turned out to be a rehearsal for the slaying, Trotsky spoke to his wife: "Jacson showed me his paper. It is worthless, confused and trite. . . . I don't like it. Who is this youth? We must investigate!"⁶⁶

They never did investigate, however. They continued to accept Jacson as the "husband" of Sylvia. When an American aide recommended that Jacson be investigated, Trotsky actually protested against it.⁶⁷ It was Trotsky's nature not to do what others recommended; so it may have been the American's recommendation to investigate that deterred him from doing what he wanted to do himself. His conceit, expressed in the past in not following the advice of proven supporters to take security measures by breaking with such NKVD spies as the Sobolevicius brothers, Olberg and Etienne, all but ruined his political movement. His obstinate refusal to investigate Jacson, as prompted by others and obviously by his own premonition, destroyed him. The Mexican Government, as other host governments had done before, provided him with elaborate safety precautions. His life might well have been spared, despite the malevolent NKVD designs, if he had been endowed with a sense of humility and understanding, if he had listened to friendly and tested comrades.

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, Chapter V: "The Assassins," p. 317 ff.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Jacson's story about his motive for murder, as given to the Mexican police, exhibited the traditional NKVD trademark. Even in its wording, his rationale was identical with the text of what "Frederick" (Klement) allegedly wrote to Trotsky. He was another "disillusioned follower" who found in Trotsky nothing but a lackey of capitalism, an ally of Hitler and the Gestapo, a fiendish enemy of the proletariat. Victor Serge, analyzing the content and form of the killer's statement, traced its origins to the Soviet secret service. Apart from being a killer's justification, the statement was to serve as another propaganda blow against Trotskyism, now dead and never again to be a serious danger to the Soviet state.

This account of how the NKVD killed Trotsky reveals both the ruthless tenacity and skill of the Soviet service and Trotsky's own gullibility, arrogance, and waywardness. It is clear that the men in Moscow who drew up the blueprint for his murder understood his weaknesses and used them. If we compare Trotsky's death with Stalin's, we are immediately struck by the contrast between the two men. Trotsky trusted naively; Stalin, not at all. Trotsky was caught up in his cause and forgot himself. Stalin subordinated his cause to himself. Trotsky wanted to understand and persuade his enemies. Stalin killed his, or those his paranoia told him were his foes. The tactician defeated the theoretician—the pick killed the dream.

In the last analysis, then, it was not only Trotsky's defects of character that destroyed him but also his strength. His heedlessness was not scatterbrained; it was a single-minded devotion to his goal, an intensity of purpose that made him impatient with clutters of facts, like rocks in his path. Both Stalin and Trotsky were the enemies of freedom, but it is nonetheless true that the better man lost.