

Trotsky's Last Year

Part Three

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This is the third part in a four-part series. The first part was published on August 20. The second part was published on August 21. The fourth and final part will be published on Friday, August 28.

Following the completion of his *Manifesto* for the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, Trotsky's relentless and punishing schedule of writing projects was interrupted by an event he had long foreseen, though its exact date could not have been predicted. In the early morning hours of May 24, 1940, the Mexican painter and fanatical Stalinist David Alfaro Siqueiros led a squad of assassins, armed with 45-caliber Thompson submachine guns, 30-caliber automatic rifles and incendiary bombs, in an assault against the leader of the Fourth International.

The assassins did not have to storm the villa on the Avenida Viena. The guard on duty, Robert Sheldon Harte, unlocked the iron gate and allowed the assassins to enter. The gunmen clearly were familiar with the entire layout of the compound. One group moved toward the section of the villa that housed the bedroom of Trotsky and his wife Natalia and that of their grandson Seva. Another group moved rapidly to the opposite end of the courtyard, outside the section of the compound where Trotsky's guards were quartered. While the second group of gunmen laid down fire in the direction of the guards' rooms, effectively pinning them down and rendering them totally ineffective, the main team of assassins entered Trotsky's bedroom.

The room was dark, and the assassins fired wildly in all directions. Trotsky had taken a sleeping pill upon retiring for the night and was groggy as he was awakened by the gunfire. Natalia responded more quickly and saved Trotsky's life. As he recalled in "Stalin Seeks My Death," an account of the assault written in the first week of June 1940:

My wife had already jumped from her bed. The shooting continued incessantly. My wife later told me that she helped me to the floor, pushing me into the space between the bed and the wall. This was quite true. She had remained standing, beside the wall, as if to shield me with her body. But by means of whispers and gestures I convinced her to lie flat on the floor. The shots came from all sides, it was difficult to tell just from where. At one point my wife, as she later told me, was able clearly to distinguish spurts of fire from a gun; consequently, the shooting was being done right in the room although we could not see anybody. My impression is that altogether some two hundred shots were fired, of which about one hundred fell right beside us. Splinters of glass from windowpanes and chips from walls flew in all directions. A little later I felt that my right leg had been slightly wounded in two places. [1]

As the gunmen withdrew from the room, Trotsky heard his 14-year-old grandson, Seva, cry out. Trotsky recalled this terrible moment:

The voice of the child in the darkness under the gunfire remains the most tragic recollection of that night. The boy—after the first shot had cut his bed diagonally as evidenced by marks left on the door and wall—threw himself under the bed. One of the assailants, apparently in a panic, fired into the bed, the bullet passed through the mattress, struck our grandson in the big toe and embedded itself in the floor. The assailants threw two incendiary bombs and left our grandson's bedroom. Crying, "Grandfather!" he ran after them into the patio, leaving a trail of blood behind him and, under gunfire, rushed into the room of one of the guards. [2]

Trotsky credited his survival to "a fortunate accident."

The beds were under crossfire. Perhaps the assailants were afraid to hit each other and instinctively fired higher or lower than they should have. But that is only a psychological conjecture. It is also possible that my wife and I came to the aid of the happy accident by not losing our heads, not flying around the room, not crying out or calling for help when it was hopeless to do so, not shooting when it was senseless, but remained quietly on the floor pretending to be dead. [3]

The assassination squad made its escape, not realizing that its mission had ended in failure. Trotsky left his room and entered the courtyard, from which the smoke from gunfire was still rising. He was searching for members of the guard, who were still in their rooms. None of them had been trained to react to an assault of this character. Their efforts to return fire had been sporadic and ineffective. Harold Robins' machine gun jammed on the first round. He learned later that the wrong ammunition had been loaded into the weapon. Robins recalled that Trotsky's demeanor was remarkably calm. Having experienced numerous battles during the savage Russian Civil War of 1918-21, the former supreme commander of the Red Army was not unfamiliar with gun fire. But Robins also sensed that Trotsky was disappointed with the utterly ineffective response of his guards. [4]

The guards discovered that a detail of Mexican police, who had been assigned to man a post outside the villa, had been tied up. On Trotsky's instructions, they were immediately unbound. A more disturbing discovery was that Robert Sheldon Harte had departed with the assailants, which immediately aroused suspicions that he was involved in the conspiracy. In the absence of definite evidence of Harte's involvement, Trotsky upheld his innocence—a position that seemed to be vindicated when the guard's body was discovered several weeks later.

For reasons that can be well understood, Trotsky was reluctant, in the immediate aftermath of the assault, to level an accusation against Harte.

But he did not exclude the possibility that Harte had acted in collusion with the GPU. “Despite all precautions,” Trotsky wrote, “it is, of course, impossible to consider as absolutely excluded the possibility that an isolated agent of the GPU could worm his way into the guard.” [5] He noted that Harte, due to his disappearance, had come under suspicion. But based on the evidence then available, Trotsky was not prepared to conclude that Harte was guilty. He accepted the possibility that new information might require a reevaluation of Harte’s role. Whatever the final verdict, he continued, “If contrary to all my suppositions such a participation should be confirmed, then it would change nothing essential in the character of the assault. With the aid of one of the members of the guard or without this aid, the GPU organized a conspiracy to kill me and burn my archives.” [6]

Trotsky expressed confidence in the SWP’s choice of guards. “They were all sent here after special selection by my experienced and old friends.” [7] What Trotsky did not know was that the Socialist Workers Party did not seriously vet the individuals it dispatched from the United States to Coyoacán. In the case of Harte, the 25-year-old New Yorker had virtually no political history in the SWP. After his son’s disappearance, his father, Jesse Harte, a wealthy businessman and friend of J. Edgar Hoover, flew to Mexico. In the course of meetings with the Mexican police, the elder Harte informed them that a photo of Stalin had been found in his son’s New York apartment. When this information was leaked to the press somewhat later, Trotsky sent Jesse Harte a telegram, asking for confirmation of this report. Harte replied with an unequivocal and dishonest denial: “DEFINITELY DETERMINED STALINS PICTURE NOT IN SHELDONS ROOM.” [8]

As part of the investigation into the assassination of Trotsky, which it initiated in 1975, the International Committee of the Fourth International reviewed all the evidence relating to Sheldon Harte’s role in the May 24 raid. The ICFI concluded that Harte was, indeed, a participant in the conspiracy. This finding was denounced by the Socialist Workers Party, led by Joseph Hansen, and its allies in anti-Trotskyist Pabloite organizations all over the world, who were bitterly opposed to the exposure of Stalinist and other police agents inside the Fourth International. They denounced the investigation into Trotsky’s assassination as “agent baiting.” The ICFI was accused in a public statement issued by the SWP and its international allies of “desecrating the grave of Robert Sheldon Harte.” [9]

The release of GPU archives following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 established definitively that Harte was a Stalinist agent, who played a critical role in the May 24 attempt on Trotsky’s life. Several days after the assassination attempt, the GPU rewarded Harte for his treachery by murdering him. Contemptuous of the young traitor, Siqueiros and his accomplices viewed Harte as an unreliable individual who might talk if he were eventually questioned by police. While Harte slept, they fired a bullet into his brain, threw his body into a dirt pit and covered it with lime. Harte’s decomposed remains were discovered several weeks later.

Despite the obvious fact that the attempt on Trotsky’s life had been carried out on Stalin’s orders, the hirelings of the GPU operating in the Mexican Communist Party, the trade unions and newspapers initiated a campaign to disorient public opinion by claiming that the May 24 raid was actually a “self-assault,” initiated by Trotsky himself. In two major articles, “Stalin Seeks My Death” and “The GPU and the Comintern”—the latter was completed on August 17, 1940, only three days before the second, and successful, attack, carried out by Ramon Mercader—Trotsky subjected the Stalinist lies to a devastating refutation.

In “The GPU and the Comintern,” Trotsky exposed the absurdity of the claim that he would have or could have orchestrated the May 24 attack.

What aims could I pursue venturing on so monstrous, repugnant, and dangerous an enterprise? No one has explained it to this day. It is hinted that I wanted to blacken Stalin and his GPU. But would another assault add anything at all to the reputation of a man who has destroyed the entire old generation of the Bolshevik Party? It is said that I wish to prove the existence of the “Fifth Column.” Why? What for? Besides, GPU agents are quite sufficient for the perpetration of an assault; there is no need for the mysterious “Fifth Column.” It is said that I wished to create difficulties for the Mexican government. What possible motives could I have for creating difficulties for the only government that has been hospitable to me? It is said that I wanted to provoke a war between the United States and Mexico. But this explanation completely belongs to the domain of delirium. In order to provoke such a war, it would have been in any case much more expedient to have organized an assault on an American ambassador or on oil magnates and not a revolutionist-Bolshevik, alien to and hateful to imperialist circles.

When Stalin organizes an attempt to assassinate me, the meaning of his actions is clear: he wants to destroy his enemy number one. Stalin incurs no risks thereby; he acts at long distance. On the contrary, by organizing “self-assault” I have to assume responsibility for such an enterprise myself; I risk my own fate, the fate of my family, my political reputation and the reputation of the movement which I serve. What would I gain from it?

But even if one were to allow the impossible, namely, that after renouncing the cause of my whole life, and trampling underfoot common sense and my own vital interests, I did decide to organize “self-assault” for the sake of some unknown goal, then there still remains the following question: Where and how did I obtain twenty executors? How did I supply them with police uniforms? How did I arm them? How did I equip them with all the necessary things? etc. etc. In other words, how did a man, who lives almost completely isolated from the outside world, contrive to fulfill an enterprise conceivable only for a powerful apparatus? Let me confess that I feel awkward in subjecting to criticism an idea that is beneath all criticism. [10]

In his analysis of the GPU’s political preparation of the assault, Trotsky provided fresh evidence of his extraordinary perspicacity. He called attention to the Extraordinary Congress of the Mexican Communist Party, which had been held in March of 1940. The main theme that dominated the congress was the need to exterminate Trotskyism. Trotsky surmised that the congress’s decision to expel Hernán Laborde, the secretary general of the Mexican Communist Party, and Valentín Campa, a leading figure in the trade unions, was bound up with the need to remove from positions of authority individual leaders who were reluctant to involve the party in a politically dangerous and unpopular assassination plot. Trotsky emphasized that the initiative for this purge clearly came from outside the organization, that is, from the GPU acting on the directives of the Kremlin regime. Explaining that the implementation of the brutal organizational changes at the congress would have required several months to prepare, Trotsky argued that the order for the assassination attempt had arrived from Moscow in November or December 1939.

Trotsky’s analysis of the protracted preparations for the May 24 assault and the significance of the Mexican CP’s Extraordinary Congress has been substantiated by recent scholarship, which has demonstrated that planning for Trotsky’s murder began in the spring of 1939. Laborde was approached by an agent of the GPU who was operating under the cover of the Comintern. The agent’s mission “was to seek the cooperation of the PCM Secretariat in plans to eliminate Trotsky. Laborde allegedly consulted with Campa and Rafael Carrillo [another leading member of the

Mexican CP] and reached the conclusion that not only would such a move endanger the PCM's relations with the Cárdenas government, but that it was in any case unnecessary since Trotsky was a spent force." [11]

The GPU did not agree with Laborde and Campa's assessment of Trotsky's political influence. Laborde, Campa and Carrillo traveled to New York in May 1939 to seek support from Earl Browder, leader of the Communist Party of the United States, for opposition to an attack on Trotsky. They were not successful. The decision to convene an extraordinary congress was taken at the September 1939 plenum of the Mexican CP's National Committee. According to scholar Barry Carr, the CPUSA and the Comintern were concerned "over the inadequacies of the Mexican party's anti-Trotsky campaign and over its supposedly shallow defense of Soviet foreign policy, particularly the decision to intervene militarily in Finland in November 1939." [12]

The first public call for the Extraordinary Congress was issued in November. Comintern delegates from Europe, actually agents of the GPU, began arriving in Mexico from Europe. Among them was Vittorio Codovilla, who had been stationed in Spain. Carr writes that the Comintern envoys were dissatisfied with the preparations and agenda of the planned congress.

Codovilla suggested a complete rewriting of the agenda and a concentration on one essential point "so as not to distract the attention of delegates." He went on to outline the structure of the revised agenda, including a new item on the struggle against the enemies of the people (with the main theme being the struggle against Trotskyism...)

The envoys did not limit their activities to suggestions about the format of the Extraordinary Congress's preliminary documents. They also urged the party to conduct a "house cleaning" prior to the Congress, expelling Trotskyists... the services of exiled Spanish communists were offered for this latter task. [13]

Stalin viewed Trotsky as the most serious political threat to his regime. He had come to view the decision to deport Trotsky from the Soviet Union in 1929 as his greatest political mistake. Stalin had assumed that Trotsky, isolated in a foreign country, would be incapable of mounting serious opposition to the Kremlin. Stalin was mistaken. As Trotsky noted, "Events have shown, however, that it is possible to participate in political life without possessing either an apparatus or material resources." [14] Stalin's biographer, Dmitri Volkogonov, who had access to his subject's private papers, wrote that the dictator was obsessed by "Trotsky's ghost."

He [Stalin] thought of Trotsky when he had to sit and listen to Molotov, Kaganovich, Khrushchev and Zhdanov [members of the Stalinist Politburo]. Trotsky was of a different caliber intellectually, with his grasp of organization and his talents as a speaker and writer. In every way he was far superior to this bunch of bureaucrats, but he was also superior to Stalin and Stalin knew it. "How could I have let such an enemy slip through my fingers?" he almost wailed. On one occasion he confessed to his small circle that this had been one of the biggest mistakes of his life...

The thought that Trotsky was speaking not only for himself, but for all his silent supporters and the oppositionists inside the USSR, was particularly painful to Stalin. When he read Trotsky's works, such as *The Stalin School of Falsification*, *An Open Letter to Members of the Bolshevik Party*, or *The Stalinist Thermidor*, the Leader almost lost his self control. [15]

Stalin's hatred of Trotsky was not of a purely, or even predominately, personal character. The homicidal dimensions of his rage were the concentrated expression of the hostility that the ruling bureaucracy, as a privileged caste, felt toward its most implacable opponent. As Trotsky explained in *The Comintern and the GPU*:

The Moscow oligarchy's hatred of me is engendered by its deep-rooted conviction that I "betrayed" it. This accusation has a historical meaning of its own. The Soviet bureaucracy did not elevate Stalin to leadership at once and without vacillation. Until 1924 Stalin was unknown even among the broader party circles, let alone the population, and as I have already said he did not enjoy popularity in the ranks of the bureaucracy itself. The new ruling stratum had hopes that I would undertake the defense of its privileges. No few efforts were expended in this direction. Only after the bureaucracy became convinced that I did not intend to defend its interests against the toilers, but on the contrary the interests of the toilers against the new aristocracy, was the complete turn toward Stalin made, and I was proclaimed "traitor." This epithet on the lips of the privileged caste constitutes evidence of my loyalty to the cause of the working class. It is not accidental that 90 percent of those revolutionists who built the Bolshevik Party, made the October Revolution, created the Soviet state and the Red Army, and led the civil war were destroyed as "traitors" in the course of the past twelve years. On the other hand, the Stalinist apparatus has taken into its ranks during this period people the overwhelming majority of whom stood on the other side of the barricades in the years of the revolution. [16]

The political degeneration and moral decay were not confined to the Soviet Communist Party. The same insidious process was to be observed throughout the Comintern, whose leading personnel in every country had been changed in line with the political and ideological requirements of the Kremlin. National leaders were chosen not on the basis of their revolutionary intransigence, political intelligence and personal integrity. What the Kremlin sought in the individuals it selected as leaders of national parties was spinelessness, opportunism and willingness to take orders. Trotsky was very familiar with the type favored by Stalin:

Lacking independent stature, independent ideas, independent influence, the leaders of the sections of the Comintern are only too well aware that their position and reputations stand and fall with the position and reputation of the Kremlin. In the material sense, as will be later shown, they live on the handouts of the GPU. Their struggle for existence resolves itself therefore into a rabid defense of the Kremlin against any and all opposition. They cannot fail to sense the correctness and therefore the danger of the criticism which comes from the so-called Trotskyists. But this only redoubles their hatred of me and my co-thinkers. Like their Kremlin masters, the leaders of the Communist parties are unable to criticize the real ideas of the Fourth International and are forced to resort to falsifications and frame-ups which are exported from Moscow in unlimited quantities. There is nothing "national" in the conduct of the Mexican Stalinists; they merely translate into Spanish the policies of Stalin and the orders of the GPU. [17]

Trotsky documented the systematic corruption of the Comintern sections fostered by the GPU. Bribes, backed by threats, replaced political argument as a means of ensuring the implementation of policies desired

by the Kremlin.

The outbreak of World War II intensified Stalin's fear of Trotsky. Despite Stalin's desperate hope that Hitler would adhere to the Non-Aggression Pact and refrain from invading the Soviet Union, he certainly realized that, notwithstanding all the concessions he had made to Hitler, the danger of a German invasion was very real. If and when that occurred, the disastrous consequences of Stalin's policies—which included the launching of a bloody purge of the military in 1937-38 that involved the physical annihilation of the Red Army's most experienced and capable generals and approximately three-quarters of its officer corps—would leave the regime totally discredited. The defeats suffered by the tsarist armies during World War I had been a major factor in the eruption of the Russian Revolution only a little more than 20 years earlier. The tsar, who had assumed supreme command of the military, was swept from power. Did there not exist, therefore, the possibility that a new war would result in an uprising within the Soviet Union, especially if the outbreak of war were followed by defeats caused by the incompetence of the regime? Stalin was certainly familiar with the essay written in 1937 by the celebrated writer and revolutionary Victor Serge. Despite all the persecutions, Serge wrote, the "Old Man"—as Trotsky was affectionately called by so many of his followers—had not been forgotten by the Soviet people.

As long as the Old Man lives, there will be no security for the triumphant bureaucracy. One mind of the October revolution remains, and that is the mind of a true leader. At the first shock, the masses will turn towards him. In the third month of a war, when the difficulties begin, nothing will prevent the entire nation from turning to the "organizer of victory". [18]

There was yet another reason why Stalin sought Trotsky's death. The Kremlin dictator knew that Trotsky was hard at work on a biography of Stalin. One of the aims of the May 24 raid had been to destroy Trotsky's archives. Stalin certainly assumed that among Trotsky's papers was the manuscript of the biography, which the May 24 raid failed to locate and destroy. The only way the completion of the biography could be prevented was to murder its author. Stalin feared the consequences of Trotsky's exposure of his background, his political mediocrity, his minor role in the history of the Bolshevik party prior to 1917 and during the Revolution, his incompetence during the Civil War, and, above all, the pattern of disloyalty and treachery that led Lenin to conclude in early 1923 that Stalin had to be removed from his post as general secretary. Stalin's determination to stop the completion and publication of the biography was certainly a major factor in the very short period of time—less than three months—that elapsed between the unsuccessful assault of May 24 and the assassination carried out by Ramon Mercader on August 20, 1940.

The assassination did, in fact, prevent the completion of the biography. But Trotsky left behind a large manuscript that provided an extraordinary insight into Stalin's personality and political evolution. It was not until 1946 that Trotsky's biography was published; but this version was incompetently organized, mixing together completed chapters with fragments of notes and passages that had not been clearly integrated by Trotsky into the biographical narrative. The translator, Charles Malamuth, was incompetent. As early as 1939, based on what he had seen of Malamuth's initial efforts to translate sections of the manuscript, Trotsky complained: "Malamuth seems to have at least three qualities: he does not know Russian; he does not know English; and he is tremendously pretentious." [19]

Still worse, following the assassination, Malamuth took extraordinary

liberties with Trotsky's text, arbitrarily inserting his own words and phrases, intentionally imposing on the biography opinions that directly contradicted those of the author. Malamuth's interpolations frequently extended for several pages, thus diluting and distorting the narrative as written by Trotsky. This was the only version of the biography to which the general public had access for approximately 70 years. In 2016, a new version of the biography was published, with a far more conscientious approach to the translation and organization of the manuscript and previously unassimilated fragments. [20]

In the final volume of his Trotsky trilogy, Isaac Deutscher wrote that the biography of Stalin—even if the author had lived to complete it—"would probably have remained his weakest work." This criticism, which arose from Deutscher's political objections to Trotsky's unequivocal appraisal of Stalinism as counterrevolutionary, is profoundly wrong. Despite the fact that the biography was left incomplete, both in terms of its content and the evident absence of a final editing process that would have enabled the great writer to impart the full scope of his artistry to the manuscript, Trotsky's *Stalin* is a masterpiece. Countless biographies of Stalin have been written, including one by Deutscher that presented Stalin as a political giant. None of these works comes close to matching Trotsky's biography in terms of political depth, psychological insight and literary brilliance.

Trotsky's biography is informed by an unequalled knowledge of the economic, social, cultural and political environment in which the revolutionary workers' movement developed throughout the vast Russian Empire. Trotsky's recreation of Stalin's personality is not a caricature. The persona of Djughashvili-Stalin, as Trotsky demonstrates, was shaped by the backward conditions of his family upbringing and the cultural and political environment within which his early political activities unfolded.

This is not the place for a comprehensive and detailed review of this extraordinary work. But the one critical element of the biography to which attention must be called is Trotsky's preoccupation with the objective conditions, and the reflective subjective processes, which made possible Stalin's rise to supreme power. Trotsky calls attention repeatedly to the change in the social culture of the Bolshevik Party in the aftermath of the Civil War. The party that led the revolution provided a heroic example "of such solidarity, such idealistic resurgence, such devotion, such selflessness" as to be almost beyond comparison with any other movement in history. [21]

Within the Bolshevik Party there were internal debates, conflicts, in a word, all those things that are a natural part of human existence. As for members of the Central Committee, they too were only human, but a special epoch lifted them above themselves. Without idealizing anything, and without closing one's eyes to human weaknesses, we can nevertheless say that in those years, the air that one breathed in the party was that of the mountain peaks. [22]

But the atmosphere changed in the aftermath of the Civil War, as new, untested and socially alien elements poured into the party. There were episodic efforts to protect the party against the influx of careerists. But objective conditions were moving in an unfavorable direction.

After the Civil War, and especially after the defeat of the revolution in Germany, the Bolsheviks no longer felt like warriors on the march. At the same time, the Party passed from the revolutionary period to the sedentary one. Not a few marriages took place during the years of the Civil War. Toward its end, couples produced children. The question of apartments, of furnishings, of the family

began to assume an ever greater importance. The ties of revolutionary solidarity which had overcome difficulties on the whole were replaced to a considerable degree with ties of bureaucratic and material dependants. Before, it was possible to win by means of revolutionary ideals alone. Now, many people began to win with material positions and privileges. [23]

Trotsky was not arguing for a perpetual and unattainable asceticism remote from all personal and material concerns. He himself had four children. He was, rather, explaining how a conservative social environment gradually developed within the party and interacted with far-reaching socioeconomic processes within the country, associated with the New Economic Policy's revival of a capitalist market. The renewed importance of private enterprise in the countryside created a sudden acceptance and even encouragement of social inequality. The emphasis placed by Trotsky and his supporters in the Left Opposition on equality came under attack. Stalin adapted to and exploited this mood. Equality "was proclaimed by the bureaucracy as a petty-bourgeois prejudice." The animus to equality was accompanied by a growing hostility to the perspective of permanent revolution:

The theory of "socialism in one country" was championed in that period by a bloc of the bureaucracy with the agrarian and urban petty-bourgeoisie. The struggle against equality welded the bureaucracy more strongly than ever, not only to the agrarian and urban petty-bourgeoisie, but to the labour aristocracy as well. Inequality became the common social basis, the source and *raison d'être* of these allies. Thus economic and political bonds united the bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeoisie from 1923 to 1928. [24]

Stalin's rise to power was bound up with the crystallization of the bureaucratic apparatus and its growing awareness of its specific interests. "In this respect, Stalin presents a completely exceptional phenomenon. He is neither a thinker, nor a writer, nor an orator. He assumed power before the masses had learned to discern his figure from others at the celebratory marches on the Red Square. Stalin rose to power not thanks to personal qualities, but to an impersonal apparatus. And it was not he who created the apparatus, but the apparatus that created him." [25]

Trotsky shattered the "myth of Stalin" by revealing the socioeconomic and class relations from which it emerged. This myth, Trotsky wrote, "is devoid of any artistic qualities. It is only capable of astonishing the imagination through the grandiose sweep of shamelessness that corresponds completely with the character of the greedy caste of upstarts, which wishes to hasten the day when it has become master in the house." [26]

Trotsky's description of Stalin's relationship to his entourage of corrupt satraps brings to mind the satires of Juvenal:

Caligula made his favorite horse a Senator. Stalin has no favorite horse and so far there is no equine deputy sitting in the Supreme Soviet. However, the members of the Supreme Soviet have as little influence on the course of affairs in the Soviet Union as did Caligula's horse, or for that matter even the influence his Senators had on the affairs of Rome. The Praetorian Guard stood above the people and in a certain sense even above the state. It had to have an Emperor as final arbiter. The Stalinist bureaucracy is a modern counterpart of the Praetorian Guard with Stalin as its Supreme Leader. Stalin's power is a modern form of Caesarism. It is a

monarchy without a crown, and so far, without an heir apparent. [27]

In the realm of politics, Trotsky was the greatest mind of his age. He posed an intolerable threat to the Stalinist regime, which functioned in the final analysis as an agency of world imperialism. It could not allow him to live. Trotsky understood very well the forces arrayed against him: "I can therefore state that I live on this earth not in accordance with the rule, but as an exception to the rule." [28] But even in the face of such extreme danger, Trotsky maintained an extraordinary degree of personal objectivity:

In a reactionary epoch such as ours, a revolutionist is compelled to swim against the stream. I am doing this to the best of my ability. The pressure of world reaction has expressed itself perhaps most implacably in my personal fate and the fate of those close to me. I do not at all see in this any merit of mine: this is the result of the interlacing of historical circumstances. [29]

To be continued

[1] *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, p. 233

[2] *Ibid*, pp. 233-34

[3] *Ibid*, p. 235

[4] The author of this essay engaged in numerous discussions with Harold Robins (1908-1987) during our collaboration in the 1970s and 1980s on the International Committee's investigation into the assassination of Trotsky. [5] *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, p. 247

[6] *Ibid*, p. 248

[7] *Ibid*, p. 247

[8] Patenaude, Bertrand M., *Trotsky: Downfall of a Revolutionary* (HarperCollins e-books. Kindle Edition), p. 256

[9] "Healy's Big Lie," in *Education for Socialists*, December 1976, p. 36 [10] *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, pp. 363-64

[11] Barry Carr, "Crisis in Mexican Communism: The Extraordinary Congress of the Mexican Communist Party," *Science & Society*, Spring, 1987, Vol. 51, No. 1, p. 50

[12] *Ibid*, p. 51

[13] *Ibid*, p. 54 [14] *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, p. 352 [15] *Stalin: Triumph & Tragedy*, translated by Harold Shukman (New York, 1988), pp. 254-256. [16] *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, p. 350

[17] *Ibid*, p. 351 [18] *From Lenin to Stalin* (New York, 1937), p. 104 [19] *Writings of Leon Trotsky: Supplement 1934-40* (New York, 1979), p. 830

[20] The translator and editor of this new edition is Alan Woods. Though he is associated with a left-wing political tendency with which the International Committee has well-known and fundamental political differences, Wood's efforts in producing this edition of Trotsky's *Stalin* deserves appreciative recognition and commendation.

[21] Leon Trotsky, *Stalin*, edited and translated by Alan Woods (London, 2016), p. 545

[22] *Ibid*

[23] *Ibid*

[24] *Ibid*, p. 565

[25] *Ibid*, p. 676

[26] *Ibid*, p. 672

[27] *Ibid* [28] *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, p. 250

[29] *Ibid*

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