

From the archives

# The story of Mark Zborowski: Stalin's spy in the Fourth International

**International Committee of the Fourth International**  
17 November 2011

*Mark Zborowski was the most notorious and deadly agent of the Soviet secret police (the GPU) inside the Trotskyist movement in the 1930s. He played a central role in setting up leading members of the Fourth International, including Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov, for assassination. Zborowski survived his victims by many decades. Arriving in the United States in 1941, he made the transition from Stalin's leading anti-Trotskyist agent to a highly successful academic in prestigious American universities. Zborowski's eventual exposure as a Stalinist agent in the 1950s only temporarily derailed his academic career. But in 1975, as a result of the International Committee of the Fourth International's investigation into the events leading up to the assassination of Trotsky in 1940, Zborowski's crimes were brought to public attention. The GPU assassin was photographed in August 1975 in San Francisco outside his home by David North, a leading member of the Workers League (predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party). During the decade that followed, the International Committee's investigation into the crimes of the GPU against the Trotskyist movement—whose findings were published under the title "Security and the Fourth International"—produced a wealth of new information about Zborowski's activities.*

*In June 1990, two months after Zborowski's death, the International Committee published an obituary which reviewed the murderous career of this Stalinist agent. This obituary is republished below.*

\*\*\*

On April 30, 1990, the notorious Stalinist police agent Mark Zborowski, known as "Etienne," died of heart disease in San Francisco's Mount Zion Hospital at the age of 82. During the 1930s, the activities of Zborowski led directly to the murders of at least four leading figures in the Fourth International, including the eldest son of Leon Trotsky, Leon Sedov. The information provided by Zborowski to the GPU, as the Stalinist secret police was then known, contributed to the assassination of Leon Trotsky 50 years ago, on August 20, 1940.

Zborowski was never punished for his crimes against the working class. Even after his exposure as a GPU agent, the US government treated Zborowski with kid gloves. This was hardly surprising, for the victims of Zborowski's crimes were the most irreconcilable enemies of capitalism. Thus, after Zborowski's initial legal problems were ironed out, the US government provided Zborowski with a prestigious academic post from which he derived a comfortable income. He spent the final decades of his life in a fashionable section of San Francisco.

Nevertheless, even if Zborowski escaped physical retribution for his vile activities, his fate is a wretched one. He will be remembered only as an example of the dregs of humanity—the informer who served the counterrevolution for money.

Zborowski was a key operative within the vast network of GPU agents which spearheaded the destruction of the leadership of the Marxist

opposition to the totalitarian dictatorship of the Stalinist bureaucracy. When the Trotskyist movement was headquartered in Paris during the crucial years leading to the founding of the Fourth International in September 1938, Zborowski wormed his way into the confidence of Trotsky's son and most important political collaborator, Leon Sedov. His reports were so important that Stalin reviewed them personally. Zborowski's information and inside maneuvering were indispensable in setting up the GPU assassinations of leading Trotskyists, including Erwin Wolf and Rudolf Klement, GPU defector Ignace Reiss, Leon Sedov and, ultimately, Trotsky himself.

The brutal assassinations of the leaders of the Fourth International by the GPU in Europe and Mexico were the climax of the physical liquidation of all of Lenin's and Trotsky's closest collaborators during the infamous Moscow Trials and the purges which followed. Beginning in 1936, Old Bolsheviks such as Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin, Radek, Sokolnikov and Rykov, to name but a few, were framed as fascist "spies and wreckers," compelled to make false confessions that they had worked for decades as agents of imperialism, and then executed. The Moscow Trials and the assassination of Trotskyists by the GPU marked the culmination of the drive by the Stalinist bureaucracy to liquidate the Bolshevik Party and its leadership.

Mark Zborowski and Ramon Mercader, the assassin of Trotsky, were the embodiment of this murderous counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism: one the professional spy and informer, who arranged the murder of his closest associates; the other the cold-blooded assassin, who plunged an ice pick into the brain of the greatest revolutionary Marxist of the twentieth century.

At a time when the disintegration of the Stalinist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and China is trumpeted by the world bourgeoisie as proof of the "failure of Marxism," it is vital to recall the actual historical role of the parasitic bureaucracy which usurped power from the Soviet working class after the October Revolution. Stalinism is not Marxism, but its most vicious enemy. The Stalinist bureaucracy cemented its rule in the Soviet Union through the most massive extermination of Marxists and genuine communists ever carried out in history.

As the representatives of imperialism noted with satisfaction at the time, Stalin killed more communists than Hitler and Mussolini combined.

These crimes had a double significance for the international working class. The murder of millions of Old Bolsheviks, the entire revolutionary generation which had prepared and led the October Revolution and fought the Civil War, beheaded the Soviet working class and robbed the international proletariat of its most experienced and farsighted cadres. At the same time, the propaganda machine of the Kremlin incessantly proclaimed that the purges were carried out in the interests of socialism.

This grotesque lie—equating Marxism with mass terror against the working class—defiled socialism and did enormous damage to the class consciousness of millions of workers.

The Stalinist chieftains of today—Gorbachev, Yeltsin and their equivalents throughout Eastern Europe, who are all the heirs of the bloody work of Stalin and the GPU—seek to complete the counterrevolutionary work which was begun by the parasitic bureaucracy in the 1920s and 1930s. They are smashing whatever remains of the conquests of the October Revolution and the extension of planned and nationalized economics into Eastern Europe, and restoring capitalist property relations and capitalist exploitation of the Soviet and East European working class.

Fifty years ago the bureaucracy defended its mass murder of Bolsheviks, culminating in the assassination of Trotsky, by claiming that its revolutionary opponents were undermining socialism. Now the bureaucracy has dropped any pretense of defending socialism, and comes forward openly as the spearhead of capitalist counterrevolution inside the USSR. It seeks to provide a secure anchor for its privileged position by transforming itself into a comprador capitalist class operating as the agency of world imperialism inside the Soviet Union.

The pressures of world imperialism on the first workers' state—manifested in the encirclement of the USSR, the backwardness of the Soviet economy which had been devastated by three years of civil war, and the defeats of the working class in Europe during the early 1920s—created the material conditions for the growth of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union.

Despite the nationalization of the productive forces, the Soviet Union remained a land of “generalized want,” generating the growth of bureaucracy as the “policeman of inequality.” Stalin rose to power as the representative of the Thermidorian reaction against 1917 and the historical demands of the world revolution, which conflicted with the increasingly narrow caste interests of a bureaucracy preoccupied with assuring for itself the lion's share of the national wealth. The slogan of “socialism in one country,” the ideological essence of Stalinism, expressed the growing recognition by the bureaucracy in the party and state apparatus that its material interests were distinct from and hostile to those of the Soviet and international working class. As Trotsky explained, gathered beneath the official Stalinist slogan of “socialism in one country” were all those who were thinking: “Not everything for the world revolution... why not something for me too?”

The Left Opposition was formed in 1923 under the leadership of Trotsky to counter the growth of bureaucratism within the party. As the huge bureaucratic state apparatus was the product of objective economic problems within the USSR created by world imperialism, it was through this apparatus that the pressures of world imperialism were transmitted into the Bolshevik Party. The degeneration of a large section of the leadership of the Bolshevik Party was the product of this pressure.

While fighting for a correct policy within the USSR to develop its industrial base and prepare the foundations for economic planning, Trotsky recognized that the objective conditions which had given rise to bureaucracy and the related problem of the political degeneration of the Bolshevik Party could only be successfully resolved at the level of the international class struggle. The prolonged isolation of the USSR, the often-frustrated hopes for direct material assistance from the workers of Western Europe, the terrible hardships endured for so many years: all these elements combined to produce a mood of discouragement which aided the bureaucracy as it usurped political power from the Soviet working class. Trotsky understood that it would require the victory of the working class in Asia and Western Europe to rekindle the smoldering fires of Bolshevism in the consciousness of the Russian proletariat.

But it was precisely against the international struggles of the working class and the oppressed masses that the Stalinist faction delivered the worst blows. Its policy of bureaucratic centrism produced defeats in

Britain (1926) and China (1927). These defeats, in turn, accelerated the process of degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. The Left Opposition was proscribed and its leaders expelled from the Communist Party in 1927, after the defeat of the Chinese Revolution (due to Stalin's policy of subordinating the Chinese Communist Party to the bourgeois Kuomintang) dashed the hopes of the Soviet working class in a new revolutionary dawn in the East. Trotsky was expelled from the party and banished to the steppes of Central Asia, where he spent more than a year in exile in Alma Ata, and then, in 1929, was exiled from the Soviet Union altogether. He lived in Turkey, France, Norway and, finally, Mexico, the only country on the planet which would grant him political asylum.

Despite unimaginable personal and political hardships, including the disappearances and murders of virtually all of his family and his political co-thinkers inside the USSR, Trotsky continued tirelessly to expose the counterrevolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy and to build the political and organizational foundations for its revolutionary overthrow by the working class.

In the first years of exile, Trotsky fought for the reform of the Communist Party and the Third International, maintaining that these could be regenerated if the Stalinist faction was defeated and driven out. At the center of this was the fight to mobilize the unified strength of the German working class in a revolutionary struggle to smash the growing threat of Hitlerite fascism and take power. Trotsky was convinced that the victory of the socialist revolution in Germany would transform the position of the proletariat on a world scale, not least of all because it would decisively end the isolation of the Soviet regime, provide vast material resources for the economic development of the USSR and create conditions for the rapid liquidation of the bureaucratic deformities. The combination of a triumphant proletarian revolution in Germany and a resurgent Soviet Union would, Trotsky believed, transform socialism into an irresistible force. Thus, he referred to Germany as “the key to the international situation.”

But the Kremlin bureaucracy's policies systematically destroyed the prospects of a victory in Germany. The ultra-left line of the “Third Period” proclaimed by Stalin following the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 (initially with the support of Bukharin) repudiated the strategy and tactics developed by the first four congresses of the Communist International under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky.

As the Stalinists implemented the brutal and disastrous adventurism of the collectivization policy within the USSR, they imposed upon the sections of the Comintern a line which decreed that revolutionary policies were incompatible with any form of political collaboration with the mass social democratic parties, even in the interests of mutual defense against the bourgeois state and fascism. According to Stalin, social democracy was merely the left wing of the bourgeois state and *therefore* (!) the “twin” of fascism. In Germany, the impact of this line was catastrophic. Despite the ever-greater threat of fascism, the Stalinists opposed any form of united front action by the combined forces of the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party against Hitler. Rather, the Stalinists went so far as to claim that the victory of Hitler was a lesser evil than collaboration with the “social fascists,” because, according to the Kremlin theoreticians, a Nazi regime would quickly collapse and then the path would be clear for the victory of the Communist Party.

Trotsky fought with all his might against this insane and defeatist policy. From his exile in faraway Prinkipo, he analyzed the ruinous implications of the Stalinist line and appealed for the immediate formation of a united front of all working class organizations in Germany against the fascist threat. He explained that the Stalinist line played into the hands of the Social Democratic leaders, for it deprived the communist workers of a tactic which would demonstrate to the millions of workers who remained inside the reformist organizations that their leaders had no intention of fighting fascism. Works of unparalleled polemical brilliance flowed from

Trotsky's pen and his writings were widely circulated throughout Germany by the cadre of the Left Opposition. But it was not possible to change the line of the Communist Party. On January 30, 1933, Hitler came to power without a shot being fired and the international working class suffered the greatest defeat in its history.

The defeat of the German proletariat completed the transformation of the bureaucracy into a counterrevolutionary force within the USSR and international workers' movement. After the Stalinized Comintern issued a statement proclaiming that the policies pursued by the German Communist Party had been entirely correct, Trotsky issued the call for the formation of a Fourth International. He explained that it was impossible to reform a party which congratulated itself on policies which had led to an unprecedented political disaster. For the next five years, Trotsky labored to organize and educate a new international revolutionary cadre.

In the wake of the German catastrophe, which had brought to power a regime which proclaimed as its chief goal the destruction of the USSR, the Stalinist bureaucracy concluded that the defense of its material interests within the Soviet Union required the formation of political alliances with the "democratic" imperialist powers. These alliances were to be secured by utilizing the labor movements outside the USSR as "bargaining chips" in reactionary Soviet diplomacy. The Stalinist parties were directed by the Kremlin to subordinate the interests of the working class within their countries to the needs of the Kremlin's foreign policy. The Stalinist parties were not to mobilize the working class to overthrow the national bourgeoisie, but to ally themselves with those "democratic" bourgeois parties which were willing to sign treaties with the Soviet bureaucracy. This reactionary line, which betrayed every principle of Marxism, was concretized in the policy of "popular frontism."

Stalin's pursuit of diplomatic alliances with imperialism required the eradication of every surviving trace of Bolshevism within the Soviet Union. The Moscow Trials and the blood purges were carried out by the bureaucracy to terrorize the Russian proletariat, eradicate the revolutionary traditions of Lenin and Trotsky within the USSR, and assure world imperialism that Stalinism had broken all connections with Bolshevism and its program of international socialist revolution. The representatives of imperialist democracy, in their turn, hailed the Moscow Trials as models of judicial fairness: what could be more "democratic" than the systematic extermination of the flower of Bolshevism!

The foreign policy of the Soviet Union, determined by the objective interests of the bureaucracy as a privileged caste, was transformed by Stalinism into the defense of the international imperialist status quo. The immediate consequence of the popular front was the bloodbath in Spain, where the Stalinists suppressed the revolutionary uprising of the workers in Catalonia and GPU agents established prison camps and torture chambers to destroy all revolutionary working class leadership. Stalin delivered the Spanish proletariat to three decades of fascism in order to curry favor with British and French imperialism.

Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet bureaucracy as, in essence, a counterrevolutionary agency of imperialism within the international workers' movement, was the point of departure in his struggle against Stalinism. In his monumental work of Marxist analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet Union, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky warned that either the working class would overthrow the bureaucracy in a political revolution, returning the Soviet Union to the road of world socialist revolution, or the bureaucracy would overthrow the property relations and planned economy created by the October Revolution, restore capitalism and transform itself into a new possessing class.

The founding of the Fourth International in 1938 was the political expression of the irreconcilable social antagonism between the parasitic bureaucratic caste and the Soviet proletariat, between the needs of the planned Soviet economy and the corrupt privileges embezzled by the bureaucracy, between international "permanent revolution" and

"socialism and one country." Trotsky summoned the Soviet masses to political revolution as an essential component of the world socialist revolution.

World imperialism was not indifferent to the outcome of the struggle between Trotsky and Stalin. It unerringly identified Stalin as the representative of a conservative tendency within the USSR. In Trotsky and the Left Opposition, it recognized an implacable enemy. In the late 1920s, one leading British Tory—the political ancestor of Margaret Thatcher—publicly called upon Stalin to place Trotsky and other Left Opposition leaders in front of firing squads. It would not be long before Stalin would adopt this policy.

In December 1929, Jacob Blumkin, a former secretary of Trotsky who had helped edit his writings on the Civil War, *How the Revolution Armed*, was shot by the GPU. He had been the first Russian supporter of the Left Opposition to visit Trotsky in Turkey, in the summer of that year, and his execution was intended by Stalin as a warning against any contact with the exiled leader. This killing was a milestone in the degeneration of the party regime. For the first time, a Bolshevik had been murdered for opposing the leadership of the party. It was the precursor of the mass killings of 1936-38.

Blumkin was turned over to the GPU by Karl Radek, a former leader of the Left Opposition who capitulated and became an apologist for Stalin. Trotsky wrote bitterly: "The immediate reason for the death of this revolutionist—so exceptional for his devotion and courage—lies in two circumstances: his own idealistic confidence in people and the complete degeneration of the man to whom he turned. It is also possible that Radek himself did not sufficiently appreciate the consequences of his own actions because he, in his turn, idealized—Stalin" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1929*, Pathfinder Press, p. 412).

In late 1931, the German Stalinist daily, *Die Rote Fahne*, published a report that an exiled White Guard officer was preparing a terrorist attack against Trotsky. Since this report was not carried in the Soviet press, Trotsky diagnosed it as an attempt by Stalin to escape responsibility before world public opinion for a crime which he had been planning for some time. In a letter to the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, on January 4, 1932, he revealed that Stalin had discussed his assassination as long ago as 1924-25, a fact disclosed to him by Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were then Stalin's allies in the ruling triumvirate. Trotsky wrote:

"Stalin has come to the conclusion that it was a mistake to have exiled Trotsky from the Soviet Union. He had hoped, as is known from his statement in the Politburo at that time—which is on record—that Trotsky, deprived of a 'secretariat,' and without resources, would become a helpless victim of the worldwide bureaucratic slander campaign. This apparatus man miscalculated. Contrary to his expectations it turned out that ideas have a power of their own, even without an apparatus and without resources. The Comintern is a grandiose structure that has been left a hollow shell both theoretically and politically. The future of revolutionary Marxism, which is to say of Leninism as well, is inseparably bound up from now on with the international cadres of the Left Opposition. No amount of falsification can change that" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1932*, pp. 19-20).

At the heart of the preparation of the political revolution lay the struggle to expose the crimes of the GPU before the international workers' movement. Its crimes were not aberrations of Stalinism, but the inevitable product of the social position of the bureaucracy within the USSR and its objective role as an agency of world imperialism within the working class. Trotsky was particularly vigilant over the attempts of the GPU to infiltrate the sections of the International Left Opposition.

Several GPU agents played prominent roles in the German section of the Left Opposition, where Sedov established international headquarters after Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Union and exile to Prinkipo, Turkey.

These included the Lithuanian-born brothers Sobolevicius, known by their party names “Senin” and “Well” and later by their “American” names, Jack Soble and Robert Soblen. Through Sedov, Soble met with Trotsky himself in Prinkipo and, later, Copenhagen. Soble and Soblen revealed themselves as agents when, on the eve of Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933, they broke with the line of the Left Opposition, which sought to forge a united front among all working class parties against the fascists, by publishing the Stalinist program equating the social democrats with fascism.

After the German debacle, Trotsky publicly identified Soble and Soblen as GPU plants. He wrote to the various sections of the Trotskyist movement: “It stands to reason that no agent can destroy a historically progressive tendency embodied in the tradition of revolutionary Marxism. But it would be an unpardonable frivolity to ignore the actions of the Stalinist agents for the introduction of confusion and disintegration as well as direct corruption. We must be attentive and watch out!” (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1932-33*, p. 94).

After Trotsky’s arrival in Mexico in January 1937, he energetically undertook his own defense against the slanders of the Moscow frame-up trials. A commission under the leadership of the American philosopher and educator John Dewey was convened in the villa of the famous muralist Diego Rivera to review the charges and evidence against Trotsky and his son, Leon Sedov. Rather than simply rest on his impeccable revolutionary credentials, Trotsky answered all the charges and allegations against him and subjected Stalin’s “proof” to a savage critique, exposing it publicly as a flimsy frame-up.

On November 2, 1937, Trotsky issued an open letter to all workers’ organizations. It began: “The world socialist movement is being consumed by a terrible disease. The source of contagion is the Comintern, or to put it more correctly, the GPU, for whom the apparatus of the Comintern serves only as a legal cover. The events of the last few months in Spain have shown what crimes the unbridled and completely degenerate Moscow bureaucracy and its hirelings from among the declassed international scum are capable of. It is not a case of ‘incidental’ murders or ‘incidental’ frame-ups. It is a case of a conspiracy against the world labor movement” (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1937-38*, p. 28).

Despite the smallness of its ranks, lack of material resources and isolation, the Trotskyist movement and the brilliant theoretical work of its leader terrified Stalin. The *Bulletin of the Opposition* maintained a significant clandestine circulation in the Soviet Union, and Trotsky’s views were carefully followed, even by those in Stalin’s entourage. Though incapable in the sphere of Marxist theory himself, Stalin, as a veteran of the pre-revolutionary Bolshevik Party, well understood the power of ideas and the ability of even a small revolutionary cadre to become a decisive force under the right conditions. He was determined to destroy any trace of Marxist opposition to his regime.

Trotsky issued repeated warnings about the murderous activities of the Stalinist GPU, which acted as nothing less than contract killers on behalf of world imperialism. He noted the parallel between the assassinations of Jean Jaurès, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht at the beginning and the end of the First World War and the murder of Rudolf Klement on the eve of the Second. He wrote:

“The work of exterminating the internationalists has already commenced on a world scale prior to the outbreak of the war. Imperialism no longer has to depend on a ‘happy accident.’ In the Stalinist mafia it has a ready-made international agency for the systematic extermination of revolutionists. Jaurès, Liebknecht, Luxemburg enjoyed world fame as socialist leaders. Rudolf Klement was a young and as yet little known revolutionist. Nevertheless, the assassination of Klement because he was the secretary of the Fourth International is of profound symbolic significance. Through its Stalinist gangsters imperialism indicates beforehand from what side mortal danger will threaten it in time of war”

(*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938- 39*, pp. 76-77).

The GPU’s efforts to destroy the Marxist opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy culminated on August 20, 1940, in Coyoacan, Mexico, when Mercader drove an ice pick into the top of Leon Trotsky’s head. This act was the political crime of the century because it deprived the working class of its greatest Marxist leader during the high point of Stalinist counterrevolution.

Trotsky’s assassination was prepared by a network of GPU agents planted in the main centers of the Fourth International. These included Mark Zborowski, working in Paris, where Sedov had moved the center of the International Left Opposition after the Nazi victory in 1933; Sylvia Caldwell, the personal secretary to US Socialist Workers Party leader James P. Cannon, working in the SWP center in New York City; and Joseph Hansen, a personal secretary to Trotsky in Mexico, who returned to the United States after the assassination and remained a prominent leader of the SWP until his death in 1979.

Zborowski was born January 21, 1908, in Uman, Russia, to petty-bourgeois parents. His family emigrated to Poland in 1921. Zborowski obtained a degree from the University of Paris in 1928, attended graduate classes in Rouen, France, studied philosophy at the University of Grenoble, and returned to the University of Paris in 1933, where he obtained his “Licencie es Lettres” in 1937 and “Diplome in Ethnology” in 1938.

The records presently available do not indicate exactly why or when Zborowski began regular GPU activities. There is no question, however, that sometime after his return to Paris in 1933, Zborowski began meeting his GPU contact on a weekly basis, exchanging 200 to 300 francs each time for information on the Parisian Trotskyists. He signed his receipts “Mark” or “Etienne.”

By 1935, Zborowski had established relations within the circle of European Trotskyists which included Jean van Heijenoort, a secretary to Trotsky, Henryk Sneevliet, a Dutch Trotskyist, French Trotskyists Raymond Molinier and Pierre Naville, and Jeanne Martin, Leon Sedov’s female companion. Through them, Zborowski eventually met Sedov, and he became one of Sedov’s closest confidants, making his considerable language skills available for the research and publication of the Russian *Bulletin of the Left Opposition*.

Zborowski worked closely with Lola Dallin, then known as Lola Estrine, a fellow Russian émigré who referred to Zborowski as her “Siamese twin.” Dallin, who died in 1980, has long been suspected of GPU activities, but definitive proof of her role has not yet emerged.

In 1936-37, Sedov saw all those he admired from his days as a youthful revolutionary in the Soviet Union framed up and murdered by the Stalinists. Both his sisters had died, one of tuberculosis, the other of suicide, and his politically inactive brother, an engineer who chose to remain in the USSR, had disappeared without a trace. His parents lived in exile, hounded from country to country, isolated, gagged, and hunted by the GPU. Nevertheless, Sedov worked tirelessly, providing his father with the information needed for *The Revolution Betrayed* and his other epic works on the crimes and political trajectory of Stalinism, while publishing the Russian *Bulletin*.

Zborowski kept stirring the pot around Sedov. By subtle actions, he kept factionalism brewing among the European comrades. His role aroused suspicions, and Molinier, Naville and Sneevliet openly began expressing concerns about him. Zborowski set up the theft on November 6, 1936 of a portion of Trotsky’s archives from an apartment on the Rue Michelet in Paris, the quarters of the Nicolaevsky Institute. That was only an omen of far more serious crimes to come.

During July 1937, Erwin Wolf, a leading Trotskyist secretary, was dispatched to Spain in the midst of the civil war to intervene against the popular front tactics of the Stalinists. Zborowski informed the GPU, which intercepted Wolf at the border and murdered him.

Two months later, Ignace Reiss, a high-level GPU agent who had joined the Communist Party when it was still a revolutionary organization, defected. In an open letter to the central committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, he stated: "The working class must defeat Stalin and Stalinism so that the USSR and the international workers' movement do not succumb to fascism and counterrevolution. This mixture of the worst of opportunism, devoid of principles, and of lies and blood threatens to poison the world and the last forces of the working class.

"What is needed today is a fight without mercy against Stalinism! The class struggle and not the popular front... Down with the lie of socialism in one country! Return to Lenin's international!" (Elizabeth Poretzky, *Our Own People*, University of Michigan Press, p. 2).

Reiss contacted the Dutch centrist Henryk Sneevliet, who at that time maintained political relations with the Trotskyist movement. Sneevliet arranged a meeting with Sedov in Reims, France. As a member of the inner circle, Zborowski was one of the few who knew Reiss's movements. He informed the GPU. On September 4, 1937, Reiss was machine-gunned by GPU thugs outside a train depot near Lausanne, Switzerland, with a ticket to Reims in his pocket.

Elizabeth Poretzky, Reiss's widow, escaped the GPU and joined the circle of exiles around Sedov, which included Zborowski. In her memoir, *Our Own People*, she describes how the man who organized her husband's assassination would conduct himself, posing as Sedov's devoted follower: "I rather liked Etienne as a person, and was glad to talk with him about events in the Soviet Union; he readily agreed with me about the dreadful things that were happening there. He was a devoted family man, and once or twice brought his child to my place. He obviously adored this little boy and would tell me, in his obsequious, flattering way, that he hoped he would grow up to be like my son" (Ibid., p. 263).

Suspicious of Zborowski mounted. Sneevliet told Elizabeth Poretzky, "There is an agent and it is that little Polish Jew, Etienne... I say and I repeat that this secretary and right-hand man of Sedov's is a GPU agent." Pierre Naville was so suspicious of Zborowski that he "made a point of fetching him in a car at the very last minute, so that Etienne never knew in advance where the meeting was being held," according to Poretzky. Raymond Molinier followed Zborowski, but never caught him with his GPU controller.

In February 1938, Leon Sedov was stricken with intestinal pains. Zborowski made two calls, one for an ambulance, another to the GPU. Zborowski and Lola Estrine arranged for Sedov to be transported to the Clinic Mirabeau in Paris, a facility known as a haven for Russian émigrés and, therefore, GPU agents. Estrine's sister-in-law, Dr. Fanny Ginsburg, assisted with the operation. After four days of apparent recovery, Sedov suddenly relapsed and died an agonizing death.

There is little doubt that this was a medical murder instigated by the GPU, which was informed of Sedov's location by Zborowski. Both Jack Soble and Mercader, Trotsky's assassin, admitted that the GPU murdered Sedov. After he was unmasked, Zborowski said that the death of Sedov "was the happiest day of my life."

The following July, Rudolf Klement, a Trotskyist secretary who was preparing the founding conference of the Fourth International, disappeared in Paris. His decapitated corpse was retrieved from the Seine river weeks later. Rumors have persisted that Klement was gathering information to expose Zborowski when he disappeared.

Despite the butchering of its leading cadre, the founding conference of the Fourth International was held in Paris during September 1938. Zborowski attended, representing Trotsky and the Russian section in exile, and addressed the convention. It was during this conference that the GPU arranged for a peripheral young American Trotskyist, Sylvia Ageloff, to meet "Jacques Mornard," one of several aliases used by Mercader, the son of a Spanish GPU agent, who used his relationship with Ageloff to

infiltrate the group of Americans around Trotsky.

Zborowski himself was never able to penetrate the Trotsky household in Mexico, in part because further suspicions were raised about his role in an anonymous letter which Trotsky received on January 1, 1939, in Coyoacan. This letter, which gave precise details of the operations of the GPU agent but without giving his full name, was sent by Alexander Orlov, a high-level GPU official who had defected and sought to warn Trotsky about the plans of the Stalinist secret police to assassinate him.

Because of Orlov's fears for his own security, he did not sign the letter with his real name and presented it as a message from a former sympathizer of Trotsky's who had discovered the identity of the agent from his conversations with a defecting Red Army general, whom he gave the name Lushkov. Despite the complicated cover story, Orlov's information was specific and damning. He wrote:

"This agent provocateur had for a long time assisted your son L. Sedov in editing your Russian *Bulletin of Opposition*, in Paris, and collaborated with him until the very death of Sedov. Lushkov is almost sure that the provocateur's name is 'Mark.' He was literally the shadow of L. Sedov; he informed the Cheka about every step of Sedov, even his activities and personal correspondence with you which the provocateur read with the knowledge of L. Sedov.

"This provocateur wormed himself into the complete confidence of your son and knew as much about the activities of your organization as Sedov himself. Thanks to this provocateur several of the Cheka have received decorations...

"This agent provocateur is about 32-35 years old. He is a Jew, originally from the Russian part of Poland, writes well in Russian... This provocateur wears glasses. He is married and has a baby... Ask your trusted comrades in Paris... to check on his past and to see whom he meets. There is no doubt that before long your comrades will see him meet officers from the Soviet Embassy" (*How the GPU Murdered Trotsky*, New Park Publications, pp. 100-101).

Orlov concluded by proposing a procedure for confirming that his message had been received: "In order that I may know that you have received this letter I should like you to publish a notice in the newspaper Socialist Appeal in New York that the editorial office has received the letter from Stein; please, have the notice appear in the newspaper for January and February" (Ibid., p. 101).

Trotsky's response was immediate. He sent a letter to the SWP reading: "Extremely confidential, extremely important, and extremely urgent.—I have received extremely important information from a source that is unidentified but claims to be in contact with senior GPU agents, to the effect that a long-standing collaborator of the Biulleten Oppozitsii is allegedly an agent provocateur: Mark."

Trotsky instructed the European comrades to form a commission "for the task of shadowing" Zborowski-Etienne. He declared, "If the information is confirmed, the opportunity must be arranged to denounce him to the French police as the robber of the archives under conditions that won't permit his escape" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, Supplement (1934-1940)*, Pathfinder Press, 1979, p. 818).

The next day, Trotsky wrote to one of his most trusted comrades in the SWP, John G. Wright: "In the next issue of the Socialist Appeal it is absolutely necessary to publish an announcement on the following order... 'Letter from STEIN received. We insist upon your meeting an absolutely trustworthy comrade. Address the Socialist Appeal ATTENTION MARTIN.'

"If such a letter is received then you personally should meet the man. The issue can become very important."

Orlov described the events which followed the letter to Trotsky in his 1957 testimony to a United States congressional subcommittee: "Soon enough, a month later, I received his frantic ad: 'I insist Mr. Stein, I insist that you go immediately to the editorial offices of the Socialist Appeal and

talk to Comrade Martin.’

“I went there without disclosing my identity. I took just a side look at that Martin, and he did not inspire too much confidence in me, so that was all.”

If Orlov suspected that GPU agents were planted inside the headquarters of the SWP, he was correct. The principal office secretary was Sylvia Callen/Franklin/Caldwell (see [1]), who was later exposed as a GPU plant. The extremely cautious Orlov escaped the fate of a second top GPU official who had also defected at about the same time, General Walter Krivitsky. He was murdered in 1941 in his Washington hotel room, undoubtedly silenced by GPU assassins before he could reveal what he knew of Stalin’s crimes.

Trotsky, unaware at that time of the defection of Orlov, believed that Krivitsky was the author of the letter implicating “Etienne,” and he continued his efforts to make contact. The documentary record indicates that Trotsky gave one of his American secretaries, Joseph Hansen, a copy of the partially completed manuscript on the life of Stalin to take back to the United States for use as a credential with the anonymous writer. Despite Trotsky’s almost frantic hope for the success of this mission, Hansen failed to make contact. This probably saved Orlov’s life, since Hansen too was a GPU agent and would have made sure that Orlov suffered the fate of Krivitsky.

One person who jumped to Zborowski’s defense after Orlov’s letter was his coworker and self-styled “Siamese twin,” Lola Estrine. She referred to discussing the Orlov letter with Trotsky during her 1956 testimony before a congressional hearing on the activities of Soviet agents in the United States:

“The first rumor that I heard about it [that Zborowski was an agent], was in the summer of 1939, when I visited Mr. Leon Trotsky in Mexico. He had received an unsigned letter from a man who told him that the closest friend of his son, not mentioning his name, saying only ‘Mark,’ is an agent of the NKVD. The letter was rather unpleasant because it has too many details, and it was stated in the letter, as far as I remember, that, ‘You tell somebody of your friends in Paris to follow the man, and you will see where he reports, with whom he meets, what he is doing.’

“And when Mr. Trotsky showed me this letter and asked my opinion about him, I felt a little bit uncomfortable, because the details were very unpleasant. Too many of them were in the letter. And then I thought it over and I talked it over with him, and I said, ‘That is certainly a definitely dirty job of the NKVD, who wants to deprive you of your few collaborators that you have in France.’

“And, at the same time, he had another letter from another unnamed agent, telling him that a woman, meaning me, is coming to visit him, and will poison him.

“So we both decided, ‘See how they work? They want that you shall break with the only people that are left over in France, Russians, let us say, in France, in Paris.’ And we decided that it isn’t to be taken seriously, but it was a hoax of NKVD” (*Scope of Soviet Activity in the United States*, US Government Printing Office, 1956, p. 137).

Her interrogator then asked, “And you so advised him?”

Mrs. Dallin replied, “And when I came back to Paris, the first thing I did, I told Mr. Zborowski” (Ibid).

The second letter, to which Estrine refers, was not from another “unnamed agent,” but was again from Orlov, repeating his warning about Zborowski and including the new information that Lola Estrine herself was an agent of the GPU. The existence of the letter is known through various references to it, but its contents have been suppressed by the SWP, which possesses the original.

The growing suspicions, fueled by the Orlov letters, neutralized Zborowski’s activities within the Fourth International, at least while Trotsky was alive. But the main thrust of the GPU conspiracy, the preparation of the physical elimination of Trotsky, continued. On May 24,

1940, a group of Stalinist thugs under the leadership of the Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros were let into the Trotsky compound by a young American guard, Robert Sheldon Harte. Although they blasted Trotsky’s bedroom with automatic weapons and threw incendiary devices, miraculously, Trotsky and his family emerged unscathed. Harte disappeared with the raiders. His body was found one month later.

Trotsky summed up the political lessons of this assassination attempt in his final finished article, the powerful statement published under the title “Stalin Seeks My Death.” He wrote:

“The movement to which I belong is a young movement which arose under unprecedented persecutions on the part of the Moscow oligarchy and its agencies in all countries of the world. Generally speaking, it is hardly possible to find in history another movement which has suffered so many victims in so short a time as has the movement of the Fourth International. My personal and profound conviction is that in our epoch of wars, seizures, rapine, destruction, and all sorts of bestialities, the Fourth International is destined to fulfill a great historical role. But this is the future. In the past it has known only blows and persecutions. No one could have hoped during the last twelve years to make a career with the help of the Fourth International. For this reason the movement was joined by people selfless, convinced, and ready to renounce not only material boons, but if necessary, to sacrifice their lives. Without any desire of falling into idealization, I shall nevertheless permit myself to say that it is hardly possible to find in any other organization such a selection of people devoted to their banner and alien to personal pretensions as in the Fourth International” (*Stalin’s Gangsters*, New Park Publications, pp. 8-9).

He concluded:

“To justify their persecution of me, and to cover up the assaults of the GPU, the agents of the Kremlin talk about my ‘counterrevolutionary’ tendency. It all depends on what one understands as revolution and counterrevolution. The most powerful force of the counterrevolution in our epoch is imperialism, both in its fascist form as well as in its quasi-democratic cover. Not one of the imperialist countries wishes to permit me inside its territories. As regards the oppressed and semi-independent countries, they refuse to accept me under the pressure of imperialist governments or of the Moscow bureaucracy, which now plays an extremely reactionary role in the entire world. Mexico extended hospitality to me because Mexico is not an imperialist country; and for this reason its government proved to be, as a rare exception, sufficiently independent of external pressure to guide itself in accordance with its own principles. I can therefore state that I live on this earth not in accordance with the rule but as an exception to the rule.

“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” (Ibid., p. 12).

Trotsky knew that the GPU circle of death was pulling tighter around him, that it was only a matter of time before the conspiracy would achieve its objective. Only days before his death, he told a Mexican journalist, “I will be killed either by one of them in here or by one of my friends from outside, by someone who has access to the house. Because Stalin cannot spare my life.” Trotsky’s prognosis was tragically accurate. On August 20, 1940, Ramon Mercader was admitted to Trotsky’s study, where he plunged an ice pick deep into the great Bolshevik leader’s skull. Trotsky struggled with his assassin, preventing any escape, but soon lapsed into a coma. He died the next day.

Mercader was tried, convicted and served 20 years in a Mexican prison, without ever admitting his role as a GPU assassin. However, the noted Mexican criminologist, Dr. Quiroz-Cuaron, definitively established Mercader’s identity in 1949. As soon as he was released in 1960,

Mercader traveled to Cuba, where he was warmly welcomed by Fidel Castro. He continued on to the Soviet Union, where the murderer of Trotsky was decorated as a hero by the Stalinist bureaucracy under Khrushchev. According to press reports, he died in 1978.

Mark Zborowski resumed his career as a GPU spy against the Trotskyist movement, this time in the United States. When the German fascists overran France in June 1940, Zborowski fled to the south of the country, winding up in a Vichy concentration camp. Lola Estrine came to his rescue, traveling to Vichy to arrange Zborowski's release and his immigration to the United States through Lisbon, Portugal. He arrived in Philadelphia on December 29, 1941.

Zborowski moved to New York and resumed his GPU activities by spying on Trotskyists and other opponents of the Stalinist bureaucracy in New York City. Meetings of the leadership of the Fourth International—which had been forced to move to New York in order to maintain international communications under wartime conditions—were held in Zborowski's living room, even though Joseph Hansen was familiar with the suspicions raised by the Orlov letter.

Zborowski worked in the network of anti-Trotskyist agents under the direction of Jack Soble, who had immigrated to the United States, along with his brother Dr. Robert Soblen, to continue working for the GPU. He regularly passed along information gleaned from his discussions with leaders of the Fourth International and his contacts throughout the émigré community in New York City, no doubt aiding the GPU to locate and exterminate members of the Trotskyist underground in Europe.

The real political views of this GPU agent were revealed in one conversation related by the former correspondence secretary of the Fourth International, Jean van Heijenoort, which he recalled took place in 1943 or 1944.

“At the time, the extent of the Russian concentration camps had become known. There were about 20 million people in camps. That had been known for the first time in the whole extent and everybody was thinking seriously about that, and myself, I was revising my ideas about Russia. So I had a discussion with Zborowski about Russia, the Russian state, Stalinists and so forth, and we came to talk about the concentration camps, and the extent to which they are spread over Russia. I mentioned the extent of the concentration camps and what he said at that time was that there were always concentration camps in Russia, so what, it doesn't change anything. At that time I got quite angry, I broke off the discussion, and that was about the last time I had a serious talk with him” (*How the GPU Murdered Trotsky*, p. 167).

Meanwhile, Zborowski built up his public career in anthropology at Columbia University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Cornell Medical College and developed close professional associations with such leading anthropologists as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. He held staff positions with the Yiddish Scientific Institute in New York and the American-Jewish Committee and a teaching position at Harvard University. He published a book about growing up in Uman entitled *Life Is With People*.

Zborowski's quiet life as a respected anthropologist exploded when Alexander Orlov surfaced, again, after the death of Stalin in 1953, and published his revelations about Stalin's crimes. In December 1954, Orlov discovered that Zborowski was in the United States, and immediately turned him over to the United States Attorney and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who questioned him repeatedly over the next several years.

Orlov later described Zborowski's importance in congressional testimony: “He was so highly valued that even Stalin knew about him. His value, as I understood then, was that he would become the organizer of the assassination of Trotsky or Trotsky's son any time, because in view of the great trust Trotsky and Trotsky's son had in him, that Mark could always recommend secretaries to Trotsky, guards to Trotsky, and in that way could help to infiltrate an assassin into Trotsky's household in Mexico.”

(*Testimony of Alexander Orlov before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and other Internal Security Laws, of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, December 28, 1955*, US Government Printing Office, 1962, p. 2).

Orlov's revelation that Sedov's right-hand man in Paris, the ever-present Etienne, was a GPU agent caused a far greater reaction from the FBI than the SWP. The FBI questioned Zborowski repeatedly and in 1956 he testified publicly before the Subcommittee on Internal Security of the Senate Judiciary Committee. During this same period, the FBI picked up Soble, the leader of the ring. Twice Zborowski testified before the 1957 United States Grand Jury for the Southern District of New York, which carried out an extensive investigation of GPU activities.

On April 21, 1958, the grand jury indicted Zborowski for perjury for denying under oath that he knew Soble. Zborowski's arrest was reported on the front page of the *New York Times* the next day. Zborowski was tried, convicted and sentenced to five years imprisonment, the maximum. Both his conviction and sentence were heavily publicized in the bourgeois press. His conviction was subsequently overturned by the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, however. Zborowski was tried a second time, convicted again in 1962 and sentenced to three years and eleven months in federal prison. He served only a small portion of the sentence, however; upon his release in 1964, he was permitted to resume his career in anthropology in the San Francisco Bay area.

The fact that Zborowski was allowed to return to a comfortable life as an academic demonstrates how imperialism, despite its squabbles with the Kremlin bureaucracy, appreciated the contribution of GPU agents to its own maintenance of power. Certainly, while slapping Zborowski on the wrists for illegal espionage activity in the United States, the American bourgeoisie was not at all bothered by his role in murdering Trotskyists. Indeed, the liberal intelligentsia—which had in its vast majority endorsed the Moscow Trials and supported Stalin against Trotsky—treated Zborowski with special sympathy. Elizabeth Poretzky, the widow of Ignace Reiss and also an anthropologist who knew Zborowski, wrote about the trial: “Many of Etienne's fellow anthropologists attended the trial and gathered round him during the recesses, ostentatiously demonstrating their friendship and faith in him. They knew nothing of agents or secret police, or of Soviet political matters; to them a Soviet agent and a perjurer was merely an innocent victim of political persecution. They were determined to apply their methodology of primitive cultures to modern terror, as I realized when a prominent American anthropologist said to me after the trial: ‘In this country we are against human sacrifice’” (*Our Own People*, p. 274).

Jack Soble pled guilty to espionage charges and spent four years in prison. Dr. Robert Soblen was arrested for espionage on November 29, 1960—by this time, Soble's brother was a prominent New York psychiatrist. The SWP's office secretary of the late 1930s and 1940s, Sylvia Franklin, was named on the indictment as one of his co-conspirators. [1] Soblen was convicted of espionage and given a life sentence. He committed suicide on September 6, 1962, in London's Heathrow Airport while under heavy guard en route to the United States from Israel, where he had fled while on bail.

Though the revelations about Zborowski, Soble and Soblen and their legal travails were widely publicized by the capitalist press, the Socialist Workers Party, which was then in a condition of serious political decline and degeneration, remained strangely silent. Even though the trials of Zborowski and Soblen took place in the United States Courthouse in Foley Square—mere blocks from the SWP's national headquarters—nothing at all appeared in the SWP's press about the Soble trial, the Soblen trial or either of Zborowski's two trials. The only article about Zborowski published at all was a superficial report under Joseph Hansen's byline which appeared in the April 9, 1956 issue, largely plagiarized from two articles written by David Dallin, the husband of Lola Estrine, for the

March 19 and 26, 1956 issues of the magazine *The New Leader*.

The silence of the SWP—duplicated by the revisionist International Secretariat, headed by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel—appeared all the more perplexing because others in the Trotskyist movement were demanding clarification. Most notable was Georges Vereeken, a Belgian revolutionary who knew Zborowski during his Paris days. In his book *The GPU in the Trotskyist Movement*, Vereeken described the interest aroused by the initial revelations from the congressional hearings.

The French Pabloite Pierre Frank commented, according to Vereeken, “Zborowski has been questioned by a subcommittee of the American Senate. We can’t expect much more about his activity in our ranks to come out from that direction. The American groups ... ought to get together on it and try to make this Etienne speak. Unfortunately we get the impression that they are not very keen on the whole business” (Georges Vereeken, *The GPU in the Trotskyist Movement*, New Park Publications, pp. 4-5).

At a Pabloite congress during April 1964, Vereeken later wrote, he “explained the whole Zborowski affair in detail, as well as the ravages caused by the GPU in our movement. Three times Mandel tried to stop me reading out my statement. But another leading member who had been part of our tendency before and during the war intervened energetically to enable me to read it through to the end” (Ibid., p. 351).

Mandel and Pablo had very definite political considerations for their refusal to engage in the kind of systematic exposure of the crimes of the GPU on which Trotsky had always insisted. [2] They had developed, from 1949 on, a political perspective which held that the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union had demonstrated, through the overturn of capitalist property relations in Eastern Europe, that it could play a revolutionary role. They claimed that Stalin’s death in 1953 had opened the way to a process of “self-reform” of the bureaucracy which made Trotsky’s perspective of the violent overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy outdated. The exposure of the bloody work of the Stalinist secret police against the Trotskyist movement—a record covered up then by Khrushchev and still suppressed today by Gorbachev—was politically inconvenient.

Moreover, it is likely that GPU agents, including some of those involved in the GPU network which organized the assassination of Trotsky, were still on active service within the Fourth International. These agents certainly did not want an investigation into the role of Zborowski which could raise uncomfortable questions which might lead to their own exposure.

In 1961, Gerry Healy, the leader of the Socialist Labour League, the British section of the International Committee, wrote to Joseph Hansen about “Etienne,” after reading *The Mind of an Assassin*, a book on the Trotsky assassination by Isaac Don Levine which summarized part of the Zborowski story. After the Second World War, Healy had met a European Trotskyist who used the name “Etienne.” He wanted to know whether this “Etienne” was the Zborowski to whom the Levine book referred. Moreover, Healy stressed the importance of conducting a full investigation into the role of the GPU inside the Fourth International. Healy wrote, “I think, Joe, we need a full discussion on the whole matter and I will be glad of your observations. Is Levine right on the question of Etienne?”

“If he is, then it is necessary for us in the not-too-distant future to have a very real examination of the whole international ramifications of the Trotskyist movement” (*The Indictment Stands*, Labor Publications, p. 10).

Hansen and his Pabloite allies were not interested in any “very real examination” of the GPU in the Trotskyist movement. Hansen did not explain to Healy that the “Etienne” with whom Healy had worked was an entirely different individual from Mark Zborowski.

Instead, after lamely claiming that the SWP could not cover “Etienne’s” hearings because of “our personnel problem,” Hansen wrote: “One of our primary concerns was not to give the slightest encouragement to the view

Levine seeks to implant—that our organizations are loaded with spies. Such a view is deadly poisonous and can do incomparably greater harm than the occasional stool pigeon that turns up in any organization” (Ibid., p. 11).

At its Sixth World Congress in May 1975, the International Committee of the Fourth International launched *Security and the Fourth International*, the first systematic investigation into the GPU penetration of the Trotskyist movement. All available information on the machinations of the Sobolevicius brothers, Zborowski and Mercader, and the assassinations of Reiss, Wolf, Klement, Sedov and Trotsky was assembled and analyzed.

During August of that year, David North of the Workers League located Zborowski outside his home in the fashionable San Francisco neighborhood where he lived in comfortable semiretirement. North photographed Zborowski with his wife Regina. Zborowski attacked North while Regina threatened, “You can do nothing with these pictures if you know what’s good for you.” [3]

The International Committee published the photographs with documentation of the activities of Zborowski, Jack Soble, Robert Soblen and Mercader in *How the GPU Murdered Trotsky* and other works of *Security and the Fourth International*. As a result, cadre and politically advanced workers around the world were educated on the bloody, counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism and the burning necessity for security within the revolutionary movement. The ICFI also reviewed the overwhelming evidence that Cannon’s secretary, Sylvia Franklin, was an agent of the GPU.

The ICFI investigation uncovered documents which showed that Joseph Hansen had maintained previously secret relationships, first with the Stalinist GPU in the period before Trotsky’s assassination, then with the American FBI in the period afterward. [4] These relationships were entered into without the knowledge of the SWP leadership, and culminated in Hansen sending a letter to the State Department seeking the name of a government official “to whom confidential information can be imparted with impunity.” He was referred to the FBI bureau chief in New York City, B.E. Sackett. Just as Zborowski’s reports were reviewed by Stalin, Hansen’s relationship with the FBI received the personal attention of J. Edgar Hoover. Hansen himself labeled the International Committee’s work on Zborowski a “dry well” and defended Sylvia Franklin as an “exemplary comrade.” [5]

Aside from the International Committee, no organization in the world supported the work of *Security and the Fourth International* or published its findings. Instead, the investigation was denounced by the SWP and its Pabloite revisionist allies, such as Ernest Mandel, around the globe. [6] Their campaign of vilification reached a crescendo in January 1977, when Mandel, George Novack, Tariq Ali and Pierre Lambert joined forces at the notorious London meeting in defense of Hansen, which the ICFI aptly dubbed “The Platform of Shame.”

A statement issued by the International Committee at the time declared, “Those acquainted with the history of the struggle against revisionism will find difficulty in suppressing a spontaneous desire to retch at the temerity of the organizers who defend the criminal activities of the GPU and their accomplices under the banner of a bogus ‘workers democracy’... the exposure of Stalin’s crimes and complicity of the revisionists in the cover-up of these crimes is central to this preparation of a new cadre of revolutionaries. Those who oppose this task in whatever form are serving the interests of counterrevolutionary Stalinism. We have been warned.”

The campaign begun by the ICFI on *Security and the Fourth International* culminated in the charge that SWP leader Joseph Hansen had deliberately covered up for and protected Stalinist GPU agents. Within a few years, Hansen’s heirs in the SWP leadership would explicitly and publicly vindicate this charge in practice, as they joined forces with the GPU agent Zborowski to prevent him from being compelled to testify about his crimes against the Trotskyist movement.



The International Committee supported a lawsuit brought against the US government and the SWP by a member, Alan Gelfand, who had been expelled from the SWP for raising questions about the role of Sylvia Franklin and Joseph Hansen and demanding that the SWP leadership respond to the documents published by the ICFI. Gelfand charged in his lawsuit that his civil rights had been violated by government agents within the SWP leadership who engineered his expulsion in order to silence him and protect their controlling position in the party.

As part of the lawsuit, Gelfand's attorneys were able to question various witnesses at sworn depositions. SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes, who had complained about the Workers League's "harassment" of Franklin, was questioned about the SWP's attitude to GPU agents:

Q: How do you know that the Workers League has harassed Sylvia Caldwell [Franklin]?

A: I know this movement sent agents to try to get to speak to her—under false pretenses. They tried to get her picture taken, with her hair up, out of her house, and they tried to embarrass her by publishing it in the paper. She is a person who has not been involved in our movement for 30 years or more. She has a right to a normal, private life, as an American citizen, without harassment. She has a right to her privacy. She has no right to have her neighbors and her husband, who have nothing to do with the socialist movement, harassed. Even the fact that she was a member, is her personal right, to not divulge this to the people. It is that type of thing.

Q: Would your opinion change if she was a GPU agent?

A: Even they have the right to individual rights.

Q: Is it your job to protect GPU agents?

A: It is my job to protect the rights of American citizens by fighting and by working through the movement and defending the rights of our party, when they come under attack.

Q: Are the rights of your party coming under attack when investigations are conducted, within the confines of the law, into the activities of the GPU within your movement?

A: When individuals are harassed by organizations whose sole purpose is to harass them, their rights are affected. You referred to Mr. Zborowski earlier. He is a person who stated, under oath, associations with agencies alien to our movement. Even Mr. Zborowski has the same rights as any other citizen in this country" (*The Gelfand Case*, Labor Publications, pp. 421-22).

The SWP's defense of the murderer Zborowski took an even more explicit form after Gelfand, on February 18, 1982, served a subpoena on the GPU agent at his Manzanita Avenue home in San Francisco, to compel him to give sworn testimony at deposition. Attorneys for the SWP, who were themselves party members, sought a "protective order" from the court to stop the deposition from going forward. Gelfand successfully defeated the motion.

On April 15, 1982, Zborowski appeared for his deposition at a San Francisco law office accompanied by his attorney. When questioned by Gelfand's attorneys, Zborowski refused to answer any questions, claiming that to do so would tend to incriminate him and violate his right to privacy. Subsequently, Gelfand's lawyers brought a motion to compel Zborowski to testify. The SWP's attorneys collaborated with Zborowski, drafting court papers for him to use in resisting Gelfand's motion to compel his testimony.

Both US Magistrate J. Steele Langford and US District Judge Mariana R. Pfaelzer upheld Zborowski's refusal to testify, stating that otherwise he might be compelled to reveal the identity of agents within the SWP in violation of the just enacted Intelligence Identities Protection Act of 1982. Thus the SWP helped block the last opportunity the Trotskyist movement would have to compel Zborowski to divulge what he knew about the murder apparatus that martyred its leaders.

This incident revealed the direct connection between the murderous conspiracies of the GPU in the 1930s and the present-day leadership of the

SWP. The anti-Trotskyist spy apparatus of the GPU, in which Zborowski played such an important part, was in large part taken over by the intelligence agencies of US imperialism during the late 1940s and 1950s. After the end of World War II and the end of wartime cooperation between the Soviet bureaucracy and American imperialism, the position of the GPU agents operating inside the United States changed. During the war, the United States government did not object to the sabotage carried out by the Stalinists against the Trotskyist movement. After all, the US government had sent the entire leadership of the Trotskyist movement to jail on charges of sedition. However, with the onset of the cold war and the bourgeoisie's fear that its "atom secrets" were being stolen by the Soviet Union, Washington decided to put the screws on GPU activities in the United States.

The most important GPU spymasters were arrested and their espionage rings were broken up. The lower level operatives were usually given the choice of collaborating with the FBI or going to jail or facing even more dreadful punishment. One of the aims of the Rosenberg frame-up and executions was to convince GPU operatives that they would be well-advised to collaborate. Thus, while the most prominent GPU controllers, such as Zborowski and his cohorts Soble and Soblen, were neutralized with criminal prosecutions and imprisonment, their agents, particularly Joseph Hansen, fell under the jurisdiction of new controllers from the FBI and CIA.

The decision by the capitalist courts to protect the old GPU spy from a subpoena—under terms of a law drafted to protect the identities of US intelligence agents!—serves as a concrete demonstration of the direct collaboration between imperialism and the Stalinist murder machine.

Zborowski was allowed to live out his days with the prestige of an important research position in an upper class section of San Francisco. His benefactors protected him even in his death, as his funeral was allowed to remain private while the capitalist press held up the announcement of his death almost two weeks. This was a man to whom both Stalinism and imperialism gave thanks.

In large part, the crimes of the Stalinist GPU and its agents against the international working class remain concealed and covered up. Gorbachev and the other heirs to Stalin's murder machine have the evidence. Nothing exposes the political cynicism of Gorbachev's glasnost more than the fact that the anti-Trotsky files of the GPU-KGB remain closed to this day. The names and methods of those who worked to destroy the international Marxist opposition to Stalinism have still not been exposed.

#### Notes:

1. Sylvia Franklin (née Callen), who used the name Caldwell as an SWP member, was the principal secretarial worker in the SWP national office from 1938 to 1947. She left the SWP in 1947 after the party leadership was informed of her covert activities. In 1950 the former editor of the *Daily Worker* and GPU operative Louis Budenz publicly exposed Franklin's role as an anti-Trotskyist spy in his book, *Men Without Faces*. Franklin turned over to the GPU minutes of the SWP's leading committees, copies of correspondence with Trotsky and with other leaders of the Fourth International, records of party finances and personal gossip. She regularly waited a few blocks from the SWP national office to visit the apartment of a GPU accomplice, Lucy Booker, and type reports for Soble, Soblen, and her other GPU controllers.

In 1954, Franklin was called before a federal grand jury to testify on GPU operations in the United States. She claimed loss of memory dozens of times. Four years later, she was called before another grand jury, and her memory had improved. She confessed to working as an agent for the Stalinist police inside the Trotskyist movement, confirming every detail of the account given by Budenz. Jack Soble also testified about Franklin's spy activities, which he monitored as a GPU controller for several years. Franklin's grand jury confession was sealed for 25 years, only made public in 1983 as result of the lawsuit filed by Alan Gelfand against the

government takeover of the Socialist Workers Party.

2. In his 1937 open letter, "It Is High Time to Launch a World Offensive against Stalinism," Trotsky issued a call to arms against the GPU terror:

"It is necessary to institute in all labor organizations a regime of rigid mistrust of everyone directly or indirectly connected with the Stalinist apparatus. One must always expect any kind of perfidy on the part of the agents of the Comintern who are the spineless tools of the GPU.

"We must tirelessly gather printed material, documents, testimonials of witnesses concerning the criminal work of the GPU-Comintern. We must periodically publish in the press rigorously substantiated conclusions drawn from these materials" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1937-38*, p. 33).

3. The Workers League and the International Committee ignored the Zborowskis' warning, but the revisionist groups all took it to heart. Not one of these opportunist and fundamentally anti-Trotskyist organizations has ever published the photograph, nor did any of them report that the man who organized the assassination of Trotsky's son had been located. None has yet reported or commented on his death.

4. The first incriminating document was an August 31, 1940 memorandum by Consul Robert E. McGregor, an intelligence officer at the US Embassy in Mexico City, reporting that Hansen had visited the embassy and revealed to the American government that he had been approached by the GPU in 1938 to spy on the Trotskyist movement. Hansen said that he had met with a GPU agent known only as "John" for a period of several months in New York City. Hansen later confirmed that he had met with the GPU, but claimed this was done at Trotsky's suggestion, to gather information, although there is no record of this in Trotsky's writings, and all surviving SWP leaders of that period denied knowledge of it. Hansen had to resort to the fantastic claim that he had communicated with Trotsky about his GPU contact using invisible ink. Given the conditions of the time, following the murders of Erwin Wolf, Ignace Reiss, Leon Sedov and Rudolf Klement, it is unthinkable that Trotsky would have authorized one of his secretaries to have meetings with the agency which was carrying out Stalin's death warrants.

5. Later the reason for Hansen's defense of Franklin came to light: the same former GPU official, Budenz, who had unmasked Sylvia Franklin, had privately accused Hansen of being a GPU operative as well. While Budenz had described Franklin's spy role in his book, he did not publish his charges against Hansen. This was no doubt connected to the fact that Budenz himself had become an FBI stool pigeon, and the FBI was grooming Hansen for his eventual role as the principal leader of the SWP.

6. In 1976, following the first publication of documents by the International Committee, Hansen circulated a statement of support for himself which was signed by revisionists from throughout the world. The SWP published the document, declaring it an authoritative "verdict" that the charges against Hansen and Sylvia Franklin were a frame-up. It later emerged that most of those who had signed Hansen's "verdict" had never studied any of the evidence uncovered by the ICFI, and that those who circulated the statement of support were not even aware who had drafted it.

*The publications of Security and the Fourth International can be obtained from Mehring Books.*



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**