CBS's "60 Minutes" interviews Nora Volkow, head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse and great-granddaughter of Leon Trotsky

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In an unusual and noteworthy television interview, Dr. Nora Volkow appeared on the April 29 edition of the "60 Minutes" television program to discuss not only her work as the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), but also her family background as the great-granddaughter of the co-leader of the Russian Revolution and founder of the Fourth International, Leon Trotsky.

Dr. Volkow, who has headed NIDA since 2003, has become renowned for her work on the chemical basis of drug addiction, and her insistence that addiction is a medical problem and not the result of a character flaw. She has worked for several decades on this issue, focusing attention on the need for medical intervention and research toward a deeper understanding and possible cure for the condition that harms so many millions worldwide.

The last part of the segment on "60 Minutes", consisting of about one-third of the 15-minute profile of Dr. Volkow, dealt with her family and her childhood in Mexico, where she was born in 1955, in the same house where her great-grandfather was assassinated by a Stalinist agent on August 20, 1940. Veteran television journalist Morley Safer refers to Trotsky as a man "who still stalks world history."

Dr. Volkow, shown with her father Esteban Volkov, a retired chemist now 86 years old, and her three sisters—Veronica, a writer, Patricia, a medical doctor, and Natalia, a government statistician—speaks of her family's history and growing up in the house where Trotsky was killed. Expelled from the Soviet Union in 1929 for his uncompromising struggle against the nationalist and reactionary Stalinist bureaucracy, Trotsky had been hounded from country to country, until finally finding asylum in Mexico in 1937.

Nearly every member of his immediate family, as Esteban Volkov explains to "60 Minutes", was killed or driven to their deaths by the Stalin regime. Esteban's mother Zinaida, Nora Volkow's grandmother, was driven to suicide in the early 1930s. His father perished in a Stalinist concentration camp. His aunt died of tuberculosis in 1928 and both uncles, Leon Sedov and Sergei Sedov, lost their lives at the hands of Stalin's murder machine. Esteban came to Mexico with his grandparents as a boy of 13. He was targeted in the attempted assassination of Trotsky in May 1940, and an eyewitness when Trotsky was murdered three months later.

The television interview includes many shots of the house, now Casa Museo Leon Trotsky (Leon Trotsky House Museum), including the grave of Trotsky in the courtyard, with its hammer and sickle symbol of the revolutionary proletariat. Also shown is the room where the assassination took place, which has been left as it was on that day.

The "60 Minutes" profile also includes some important historical footage, including a brief excerpt of Trotsky speaking as part of an interview, footage of Trotsky and his wife Natalia with Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, and Trotsky in the hospital as doctors worked in vain to save his life.

The four sisters are clearly deeply affected by their family history, and aware of its historical significance. Natalia Volkov explains at one point in the interview, "We all have this sense of public service, social consciousness, responsibility toward not only yourself

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as individual, but for your society."

The entire interview may be viewed here.

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