

## 2025 Summer School Lecture 5 Part 1

# How the GPU murdered Leon Sedov and other Trotskyists

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*The following lecture was delivered by Tom Peters, a leader of the Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand), at the Socialist Equality Party (US) International Summer School, held between August 2-9, 2025. It is the first part of a two-part lecture on how the GPU murdered Trotsky. To accompany this and upcoming lectures, the WSWs is publishing “How the GPU Murdered Trotsky,” published in 1981, which contains documents from the first year of the Security and Fourth International investigation.*

The following lecture and the second part, which comrade Andrea will deliver tomorrow, will review how the Trotskyist movement was infiltrated by a network of Stalinist agents of the GPU-NKVD, who organised the murders of leading figures, including Trotsky’s son Leon Sedov, and ultimately Trotsky himself.

As the previous lectures discussed, during the 1930s the Stalinist bureaucracy adopted a policy of exterminating the Left Opposition and anyone suspected of sympathising with Trotsky, both within the Soviet Union and internationally. By the end of the decade virtually the entire generation of Bolsheviks who had led the October Revolution were murdered or imprisoned.

The Moscow show trials held between 1936 and 1938 explicitly identified Trotsky and his son Sedov as the main targets of the bureaucracy which had usurped power from the working class.

The Stalinist press relentlessly smeared Trotsky as a fascist, in order to justify the violent persecution of Left Oppositionists. Immense resources were dedicated to this campaign of terror.

During the civil war in Spain, thousands of revolutionaries were killed by Stalinist agents, which brought about the victory of fascism. In 1936, the GPU in Spain recruited Ramón Mercader, who would carry out the murder of Trotsky in August 1940.

Stalin initially believed that exiling Trotsky from the Soviet Union in 1929 would render his adversary isolated and politically harmless. He would later regard this as his greatest mistake.

Trotsky spent his first four years of exile on the island of Prinkipo in Turkey, where he wrote his autobiography *My Life* and the *History of the Russian Revolution*, and produced his analysis of the unfolding political crisis in Germany.

As David North has explained, Trotsky sought “to alert the German working class to the danger posed by Nazism, and his exposure of the disastrous policies pursued by the German Communist Party under the direction of Stalin. Confined to an island 1,600 kilometers from Berlin, Trotsky understood with unequaled prescience both the inevitable consequences of Stalin’s policies and what had to be done to prevent the victory of the Nazis.”<sup>[1]</sup>

In July 1933, Trotsky moved to France where he had been granted asylum. His political work now centred on the fight to build the Fourth International, after the Communist International defended the bankrupt

policies which had led to the historic defeat of the German working class.

Amid escalating class struggles and a deepening crisis of bourgeois rule in France, the government viewed Trotsky as a political threat and he was subjected to continual police surveillance. The authorities barred him from living in Paris. He moved from town to town, incognito, to avoid both fascists and Stalinists. The French government cancelled his residence permit in April 1934, but Trotsky was unable to leave for another year because no country would accept him. He finally moved to Norway in mid-1935, at the same time as French imperialism was strengthening its diplomatic relations with Stalin.

Trotsky spent the next year and a half in Norway, where he wrote *The Revolution Betrayed*. The Social Democratic government, which had offered him asylum, quickly caved in to economic pressure from Moscow. After the conclusion of the first Moscow trial in August 1936, the Norwegian government placed Trotsky under house arrest and ordered him to stop writing and speaking about political events in *any* country.

When Trotsky refused, he was subjected to even harsher treatment, his two secretaries were deported and he was sent to a small isolated house under police guard. His articles replying to Stalin’s charges were confiscated by the Norwegian censors. Trotsky warned the Norwegian government that their outrageous treatment of him was “the first act of surrender to Nazism in your own country” and he prophetically declared that they would all soon be driven into exile by the fascists.<sup>[2]</sup>

Trotsky was forced to leave Norway in December 1936. He wrote at the time:

When I look back today on this period of internment, I must say that never, anywhere, in the course of my entire life—and I have lived through many things—was I persecuted with as much miserable cynicism as I was by the Norwegian “Socialist” government. For four months these ministers, dripping with democratic hypocrisy, gripped me in a stranglehold to prevent me from protesting the greatest crime history may ever know.<sup>[3]</sup>

He was granted asylum by the Mexican government. It was in Mexico that, in April 1937, Trotsky gave evidence to the Dewey Commission—established by the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky to respond to the Stalinists’ charges in the Moscow Trials—which delivered its devastating verdict exposing the trials as a colossal fraud.

Throughout all of this, Trotsky’s supporters and family members in the Soviet Union and Europe were being arrested, sent into exile, driven to suicide and in some cases murdered.

## Trotsky's attitude to security

The International Left Opposition faced grave security threats from the Stalinists, as well as the fascists and the police and intelligence agents of the so-called “democratic” imperialist countries. As Trotsky wrote in 1938, “In the Stalinist Mafia, [imperialism] has a ready-made international agency for the systematic extermination of revolutionists.”<sup>[4]</sup>

Two of the earliest Stalinist *agents provocateur* were the Lithuanian-born Sobolevicius brothers, Jack Soble and Dr. Robert Soblen. They joined the Left Opposition in Germany in the early 1930s and went by the names Adolf Senin and Roman Well. They played an immensely disruptive role, working to inflame factional divisions and to politically disorient the young and inexperienced movement.

By 1932 Well, who played a leading role in the Leipzig organization, was emphasising the “successes” of the Stalinists and implying that the Left Opposition’s differences with Stalin were simply misunderstandings.<sup>[5]</sup> As Trotsky wrote, Well became “a defense lawyer for Stalin”: he supported the purges of the bureaucracy, and called into question the right of the Left Opposition to exist.<sup>[6]</sup>

Ten days before Hitler took power, Senin and Well openly deserted to the Stalinist camp and “published a falsified edition of the newspaper *Permanent Revolution* declaring that the German Left Opposition was breaking with Trotsky. The Stalinist falsification was then spread and enthusiastically taken up by Stalinist newspapers.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Drawing the lessons of this experience, Trotsky pointed to the vast resources of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the “exceptional temptations” they offered to semi-revolutionary intellectuals who were most interested in positions and money—things they could not obtain from the impoverished and persecuted Left Opposition. Trotsky wrote:

In the Comintern, in the GPU, in each national section there is a special apparatus for the disintegration of the Left Opposition, composed for the most part of deserters of the Opposition or of Stalinist agents, who give themselves out as Oppositionists. If the German comrades take the necessary trouble, they will surely discover the connections of such agents, which lead from Well and Graef [another Oppositionist who became a hardline Stalinist], to [Comintern Secretary Dmitri] Manuïlski and [OGPU chairman Vyacheslav] Menschinski. ... It stands to reason that no agent can destroy an 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 disintegrations, as also of direct corruption. We must be attentive and watch out!<sup>[8]</sup>

## Stalinist agent Mark Zborowski, a.k.a. Etienne

After the Nazis had come to power in Germany, the centre of the Left Opposition in Europe moved to Paris, with Trotsky’s son Leon Sedov playing a leading role. Sedov oversaw the editing and publication of the Russian *Bulletin of the Opposition*. He was Trotsky’s closest political collaborator.

The GPU’s task was to report on the activities of the Opposition, to disrupt its work towards the founding of the Fourth International, and to

destroy the leadership of the movement.

The most important Stalinist agent inside the Left Opposition was Mark Zborowski, who was known among the Trotskyists as Etienne.

Zborowski was born in a Jewish family in Russia in 1908 and lived in Poland as a youth before moving to France in the early 1930s. In February 1956, he told a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee investigating Soviet activities that he was recruited by the GPU in 1932 or 1933. It is not clear exactly when or how he joined the Trotskyist movement in Paris, but by 1935 he had become Leon Sedov’s closest confidant and collaborator.

The ICFI later noted that Zborowski did not appear to be politically motivated: “There is nothing to indicate that he was a diehard Stalinist or an ideological opponent of Trotskyism. He did it for the money. Which made him more detached, and all the more deadly.”<sup>[9]</sup>

Zborowski worked very closely with Lola Estrine, whose real name was Lola Dallin, who had moved from Berlin to Paris in 1933. She was employed as a secretary in the Institute of Social History run by the Menshevik Boris Nikolaevsky, where she met Sedov and soon declared herself a Trotskyist and started work on the *Bulletin of the Opposition*. As we will see, Dallin would intervene again and again to defend Zborowski against accusations that he was an agent.

According to Elizabeth Poretsky, the widow of GPU defector Ignace Reiss,

It was not long before Etienne had become a member of the group’s central committee, with access to all confidential meetings and information; indeed, Sedov made him his deputy at meetings he himself could not attend. Etienne soon knew all the clandestine addresses and had access to all the letters received by the group, including Trotsky’s instructions to the party.<sup>[10]</sup>

From the beginning, a number of French and European Trotskyists were suspicious of Zborowski. Poretsky writes that Zborowski “claimed he had left Poland to avoid being kidnapped by the NKVD, and [Pierre] Naville, who took an instant personal dislike to him, wanted to have this story checked, but was overruled by the group.”

Naville would seek to hide information from Zborowski, especially the location of confidential meetings, because he suspected that the details would be passed on to the GPU. Naville also raised questions about Zborowski’s source of income and the fact that he was able to live in a relatively high-end apartment building.

Sedov, however, developed a close friendship with Etienne-Zborowski and defended him against the accusations. “I have to stand up for Etienne,” he told Poretsky. “They don’t like him and they don’t trust him, but I know how devoted he is to me and to the old man. He would do anything for us and for the organization.”<sup>[11]</sup>

Zborowski was evidently a well-trained agent with a “knack for dissimulation.” He readily expressed agreement with Sedov on political questions and, as Isaac Deutscher writes, he “knew Russian and had an intimate feeling for Soviet affairs—this enabled him to render Trotsky many small services and to gain [Leon Sedov’s] confidence.”<sup>[12]</sup> The Left Opposition was always short of Russian-speakers, who were essential for the production of the *Bulletin*.

Sedov wrote to Trotsky in August 1937 that “Etienne deserves absolute trust in all matters.”<sup>[13]</sup> This attitude was to have fatal consequences.

In November 1936, a portion of Trotsky’s archive was stolen from the Nikolaevsky Institute. This immediately cast suspicion on Zborowski, since he and Lola Dallin, along with Sedov, Trotsky’s secretary Jean van Heijenoort, and the institute’s director were the only people who knew about their location. But Sedov dismissed out of hand any suggestion that Etienne was involved.

have contempt for their milieu. They hate Stalin. And, at the same time, they endlessly toil on and on.

## The murders of Erwin Wolf and Ignace Reiss

Then in July 1937 the GPU arrested Erwin Wolf in Spain, after which he was murdered. The 34 year old had been Trotsky's secretary in Norway and he volunteered to travel to Spain amid the Civil War to provide assistance to the small Trotskyist group there.

Wolf was the son of a Czechoslovakian merchant family who abandoned his bourgeois upbringing and devoted himself to building the Fourth International. Trotsky described him as "a man of absolute integrity and generosity." After being expelled from Norway along with Trotsky, Wolf was then expelled from Denmark and spent some time in England before going to Spain. He had been one of Trotsky's important collaborators, particularly in exposing the Moscow Trials. "For this reason," Trotsky noted, "he was especially hated by the GPU."<sup>[14]</sup>

The Belgian socialist Georges Vereeken noted that "as soon as the [International Secretariat of the Fourth International] had made its decision [to send Wolf to Spain], the GPU was tipped off by Etienne Zborowski, for as Sedov's 'closest collaborator,' he was present at the IS and knew everything."<sup>[15]</sup>

Soon afterwards, on September 4, the GPU's hired assassins gunned down Ignace Reiss in Switzerland. A senior Soviet spy in Europe, Reiss made the decision to defect following the Moscow Trials, and amid a growing purge within the GPU itself. He believed that, like so many others with a revolutionary record, he would be killed if he ever went back to Moscow.

Reiss sent a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party on July 17 denouncing the mass murder of Bolsheviks and declaring his allegiance to the Fourth International.

"He who now keeps quiet becomes Stalin's accomplice, betrays the working class, betrays socialism," he wrote. "The working class must defeat Stalin and Stalinism so that the USSR and the international workers' movement do not succumb to fascism and counter-revolution."<sup>[16]</sup>

Reiss was betrayed by a friend, the GPU agent Gertrude Schildbach, who lured him to a location in Lausanne. There he was gunned down by a gang of White Russian emigres linked to the Society for the Repatriation of Russian Emigres, which was essentially a recruitment office for the GPU.

These anti-communist supporters of the Tsarist regime, who had fled Russia following the Revolution and who had a murderous hatred of Bolshevism, became the allies and hired gangsters of the Stalinist regime.

Reiss was killed the day before he was scheduled to meet with Sedov and Hendricus Sneevliet, secretary of the Dutch Workers Revolutionary Socialist Party, in the French city of Rheims. Reiss had made contact with Sneevliet some weeks earlier, but Sneevliet delayed putting Reiss in touch with the Paris centre because he suspected Zborowski was an agent.

The Swiss police made a number of arrests, including Schildbach and Renata Steiner, and a White Guard member named Smirensky. "Altogether no less than twenty people took part in organizing the murder of Reiss," Vadim Rogovin wrote, most of whom escaped arrest, including the chief organizer Sergei Efron and four members of the Soviet trade mission in Paris, who fled to the USSR.<sup>[17]</sup>

Trotsky underlined the significance of Reiss's defection and his courageous embrace of the Fourth International, writing:

We may assume with certainty that in the ranks of the bureaucracy there are quite a number who feel as Reiss did. They

The death of Reiss contained a tragic lesson for the Trotskyist movement, which had failed to establish contact with him in time and to advise him on how to keep safe. Trotsky wrote that instead of sending a private letter to Moscow, Reiss should have announced his defection publicly and turned himself in to the French police for his own safety. "The sole serious defense against the hired murderers of Stalin is complete publicity," he said.<sup>[18]</sup>

On November 2, 1937, Trotsky published an "open letter to all workers' organisations" titled, "It Is High Time to Launch a World Offensive Against Stalinism." Drawing conclusions from the murders of Reiss and Wolf, and the mass murder campaign in Spain, Trotsky called for the systematic exposure of Stalin's crimes internationally:

It is necessary to institute in all labor organizations a regime of rigid mistrust of everyone directly or indirectly connected with the Stalinist apparatus. ... It is urgent to create special commissions which would follow the maneuvers, intrigues and crimes of the Stalinists, warn the labor organizations of danger in store, and elaborate the best methods of parrying and resisting the Moscow gangsters. It is necessary to publish appropriate literature and collect funds for its publication. In each country a book should be issued, exposing completely the respective section of the Comintern.<sup>[19]</sup>

## The murder of Leon Sedov

In February 1938, the GPU struck again, this time murdering Trotsky's son. Zborowski was instrumental in this operation, which the GPU spent years preparing.

The police investigation into the murder of Reiss revealed that the same gang which killed Reiss had been spying on Leon Sedov since 1935. Renata Steiner occupied an apartment adjacent to Sedov's in Paris and had followed him when he went on a brief holiday.

In January 1937, the gang attempted to murder Sedov in the town of Mulhouse. Trotsky explained: "Under cover of the name of my Swiss attorney, who is occupied with a suit over the slanders of the Comintern, the conspirators repeatedly urged Leon Sedov by telegraph and telephone to come to Mulhouse for a conference." Illness prevented Sedov from keeping the appointment, thus saving him from certain death, for the time being.<sup>[20]</sup>

The police also found that the same gang had stolen Trotsky's archives from the Institute of Social History. The investigation did not reveal that the killers were acting on information supplied to the GPU by Zborowski, but the spy must have sensed that there was a real danger of exposure. Sedov was alarmed that the GPU were so well-informed about his movements, just as they had been about Reiss's.<sup>[21]</sup>

Sedov was a prime target of Stalin, second in importance only to Trotsky himself. As Trotsky explained in a moving tribute titled "Son, Friend, Fighter," Sedov had thrown himself into the work of the Left Opposition in 1923 and they had worked closely together during Trotsky's exile. At the same time he played a leading role in the International Secretariat of the Left Opposition and as its Russian representative and the editor of the *Bulletin of the Opposition*.

Ignace Reiss reported that it was said often in the headquarters of the

GPU in Lubyanka, “The Old Man wouldn’t find it so easy without [Sedov].” Trotsky confirmed that this was the truth.

He wrote that without his son’s assistance, “first in Turkey, later in Berlin and finally in Paris, not one of my works during the past ten years would have been possible. This applies especially to *The History of the Russian Revolution*. ... My son’s name should rightfully be placed next to mine on almost all my books written since 1928.”<sup>[22]</sup>

When Trotsky was virtually placed under house arrest and deprived of contact with the outside world by the Norwegian government in 1936, Sedov took up the task of exposing the first Moscow Trial in the *Red Book*. Trotsky hailed this as a “priceless gift” which demonstrated that his son was “not only an independent but an outstanding figure.”

It must be remembered that all of Sedov’s work was conducted under extraordinarily difficult conditions, including material poverty; the constant threat posed by the GPU; and the relentless persecution of Trotsky’s family. Sedov’s half-sister Zinaida had been driven to suicide in 1933; her son Seva went to live with Sedov and his companion Jeanne Martin.

Sedov’s younger brother Sergei, an engineer and scientist not involved in politics, was arrested in the Soviet Union in March 1935 and executed by the GPU two years later at the age of 29. That was followed by the murders of Wolf and Reiss.

As Trotsky noted, “‘Stalinism’ was for [Leon Sedov] not an abstract political concept but a series of moral blows and spiritual wounds.”<sup>[23]</sup>

The murder of Sedov was carried out in the following way: Trotsky’s son, who had been in good health, suddenly became ill with what was thought to be appendicitis but later was revealed to be intestinal inflammation.

[On February 8] Zborowski and Lola [Dallin] 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. [Dallin’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 [on February 14].<sup>[24]</sup>

After the ambulance had taken Sedov to the clinic, Zborowski informed the GPU. Zborowski and Dallin refused to tell anyone else about Sedov’s whereabouts, apart from his partner Jeanne Martin, thus preventing any of the French Trotskyists from visiting him.

The murder of Leon Sedov—at just 31 years old—was facilitated by two individuals whom he regarded as his most trusted friends and comrades. Trotsky, in his tribute to Sedov, praised his son’s “revolutionary instinct, which enabled him, without any hesitation, to distinguish the genuine from the false, the substance from the veneer.”<sup>[25]</sup> But the tragic reality is that, when it came to Zborowski, Sedov placed far too much faith in his instincts and dismissed the warnings that might have saved his life.

Trotsky suspected that his son had been poisoned, noting in a letter to the investigating judge that this was a method the GPU had perfected. He also noted that Sedov’s rapid deterioration after the apparent recovery could have been caused by interference following his surgery. The physicians had been optimistic about Sedov’s recovery and he had been left unsupervised for a long period.

Trotsky asked:

[If] there was inadequate supervision, then does not the conclusion force itself automatically that his enemies, who never lost sight of Sedov, could have utilised this favourable situation for their criminal ends? ... The GPU could not fail to have its agents in

a Russian clinic in Paris or among circles closest to it.<sup>[26]</sup>

In a second letter to the judge, Trotsky pointed to the strange circumstance that Mr. Thalheimer, his son’s surgeon, was refusing to speak about the case, citing “professional secrecy.” Meanwhile Dr. Zhirmunsky, the director of the clinic, was considered by police to be a “Bolshevik sympathizer,” i.e. a supporter of the Stalin regime.

Trotsky criticised the superficial police investigation, which did not probe any of these issues, and accused them of not wanting to uncover the truth. This was bound up with the French government’s desire to preserve diplomatic relations with Moscow.<sup>[27]</sup>

The response of Zborowski, however, was diametrically opposed. Presenting himself as Sedov’s closest friend, he dismissed any suggestion of foul play and supported the theory that Sedov had died of natural causes.

Much later, in the mid-1950s, after Zborowski had been exposed to the US authorities as an agent, he told Ignace Reiss’s widow Elisabeth Poretsky that the day Sedov died was “the happiest day of my life.”<sup>[28]</sup> He said this was because he believed his work as a spy was now concluded—which was a lie.

With Sedov out of the way, Zborowski was elevated to the position of “Trotsky’s most important correspondent in Europe.”<sup>[29]</sup> He informed the GPU about all the activities of the Fourth International, including its communications with defectors from the Soviet Union. Zborowski took over Sedov’s work as the editor of the Russian *Bulletin* and as the official delegate for the Russian section at the founding congress of the Fourth International in September 1938.

## The murder of Rudolf Klement

Zborowski was implicated in yet another murder in Paris. On July 13, 1938, Rudolf Klement, another of Trotsky’s secretaries, suddenly disappeared. In September, his headless and mutilated body was recovered from the River Seine. He was the sixth of Trotsky’s secretaries to be murdered by the Stalinists.

According to Deutscher, Klement had written to Trotsky in November 1937 warning that his son’s life was in great danger from the GPU network in Paris. He strongly urged that Sedov should join Trotsky in Mexico.<sup>[30]</sup> Prior to Klement’s disappearance, he had begun investigating the murders of Left Oppositionists, and it is suspected that he was gathering material to expose Zborowski.<sup>[31]</sup>

On July 8, just a few days before Klement disappeared, his briefcase was stolen on the metro. It is likely that the GPU found something in his papers that required Klement to be silenced.

The murder of Klement, following so soon after Sedov’s murder, again fuelled the suspicions about Zborowski. Both the Dutch socialist Henk Sneevliet and the writer and revolutionary Victor Serge now openly accused Zborowski of being an agent.

Zborowski wrote a letter to Trotsky asking his advice about how to respond to the accusations. On December 2 Trotsky recommended establishing a commission to investigate the accusation and clear Zborowski’s name.<sup>[32]</sup>

It does not appear that any such investigation was held. With Sedov killed, Zborowski had lost his main defender in the Paris organisation (apart from Lola Dallin). To deflect attention, Zborowski and Dallin sent letters to Trotsky which insinuated that Serge was a Stalinist agent.<sup>[33]</sup>

At the same time, the GPU was considering whether Zborowski should relocate to Mexico to help infiltrate Trotsky’s household. Trotsky,

however, apparently did not respond when Zborowski wrote to him suggesting such a move.<sup>[34]</sup>

### Alexander Orlov's letters to Trotsky

Then, at the end of 1938, Trotsky received an anonymous letter explicitly warning him about Zborowski. The author, who claimed to have family connections to the GPU, informed Trotsky of an agent who had been close to Trotsky's son in Paris. The letter named the agent only as "Mark" but gave such a precise description of him that it was unmistakably Zborowski.

The anonymous correspondent was the high-ranking Soviet NKVD official Alexander Orlov, who had defected to the United States. He informed Trotsky that the agent provocateur was "literally the shadow of L. Sedov ... [he] wormed himself into the complete confidence of your son and knew as much about the activities of your organization as Sedov himself."

The letter noted that "Mark" had no revolutionary background and, despite being a Jew, had been a member of the Society for the Repatriation of Russian Emigres in the early 1930s, a fact that was known to members of the Paris Left Opposition. This was the same organisation of former Tsarist officers which had been involved in the murders of Reiss and Sedov.

Orlov warned that "now the assassination of Trotsky was on the agenda and that Moscow would try to plant assassins with the help of this agent provocateur or through agents provocateurs from Spain under the guise of Spanish Trotskyites."

He urged Trotsky to have his trusted comrades in Paris check on Mark's history "and to see whom he meets. There is no doubt that before long your comrades will see him meet officers from the Soviet Embassy."<sup>[35]</sup>

Trotsky took the warning seriously. He wrote to leading members of the Socialist Workers Party in the US calling for a commission to be established "in absolute secrecy" for the task of "shadowing" Etienne. "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."<sup>[36]</sup>

Trotsky also tried to establish direct contact with the letter writer. He arranged for a notice to be placed in the *Socialist Appeal*, the SWP's newspaper in New York. The notice urged the writer—who went by the codename "Stein"—to go to the newspaper's editorial office and speak with Comrade Martin, probably a pseudonym for SWP leader James P. Cannon.

In 1955, Orlov told a Congressional hearing that he decided not to meet Martin because he did not trust him, and he feared a provocation of some kind. Orlov later tried to telephone Trotsky in Mexico, but Trotsky did not answer because it would have required him to go out of the house at night, and he did not know the identity of the caller.

Then, in May 1939, Trotsky received another anonymous letter, also from Orlov, which he regarded as "incomparably more trustworthy" than the first letter. Trotsky also mentioned to Cannon that he "never received any communication about the results of the investigation" into Zborowski, which he had asked for five months earlier.<sup>[37]</sup>

The second Orlov letter included new information indicating that Lola Dallin was also an agent of the GPU. It warned that she was going to visit Trotsky in order to poison him.

Lola Dallin did in fact visit Trotsky in Mexico in the summer of 1939 and he showed her both the letters. In her 1956 testimony to a congressional hearing on Soviet activities in the US, she stated:

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."<sup>[38]</sup>

According to Dallin, Trotsky became convinced following their discussion that the accusations against her and Zborowski were a "hoax." Upon her return to France, she immediately informed Zborowski about her discussion, and Zborowski told his GPU handlers that the "Old Man did not believe the denunciation and feels that the letter is a GPU provocation."<sup>[39]</sup>

Rogovin notes that Orlov had much more information about the GPU's operations that he could have revealed if contact had been established. "In 1937 he had directed the surveillance of contacts between Trotskyists in Paris and Spain." Orlov had participated in numerous crimes, including the kidnapping and murder of Andres Nin—leader of the POUM, the Spanish organisation which expressed solidarity with Trotsky—before he turned against Stalin.

Nor is the following supposition lacking in foundation: if Orlov had been able to establish systematic contact with Trotsky, then the assassination in Coyoacan would have been prevented. For Orlov had met in Spain with Mercader's mother, and had recruited Mercader himself, who was sent along with other Spanish agents by the [GPU] Center to Mexico.<sup>[40]</sup>

It remains unclear what steps, if any, were taken to investigate Zborowski following Trotsky's instructions.

In 1975 the ICFI posed the question to the Socialist Workers Party: what became of the investigation commission? "Was [Joseph] Hansen on this commission? What were its findings? Will the report now be published?"<sup>[41]</sup>

There was no response to these questions. As other lectures will review, there is abundant evidence, uncovered by the ICFI, that Hansen, who was Trotsky's secretary in Coyoacan, was an agent of the GPU before Trotsky's assassination, and afterwards became an FBI informant.

Significantly, the first Orlov letter was only published in full in 1975, as part of the ICFI's investigation, Security and the Fourth International. The SWP never released the contents of the second letter which identified Lola Dallin as an agent (according to her own 1956 testimony).

Despite the warnings from Orlov and from Trotskyists in Europe, leading SWP member George Novack worked with Lola Dallin to help Zborowski escape wartime Europe and relocate to the United States, where he continued his work spying for the GPU on the Trotskyist movement.

Just one point in conclusion. In an extraordinary article in 1940, Joseph Hansen implied that nothing could have been done to prevent Trotsky's murder. He portrayed Trotsky as someone who "could not endure" security measures and did not consider Stalinist spies to be particularly dangerous. Trotsky "preferred to trust his friends rather than to suspect them," Hansen wrote. "Mutual suspicion in his eyes was a disintegrating force much worse than the inclusion of a spy in the organization, since such suspicions are useless anyway in uncovering a highly skilled provocateur."<sup>[42]</sup>

This is a complete falsification of Trotsky's attitude. As we have seen, Trotsky took security extremely seriously, and made significant efforts to

uncover GPU agents within the Fourth International. Zborowski would have been exposed if the well-grounded suspicions about him had been properly investigated. Zborowski was protected by other Stalinist agents within the Trotskyist movement; by the French police who refused to properly investigate the murderous activities of the GPU; and by the mistakes and naiveté of Sedov and other Trotskyists.

The true identities of Zborowski and other agents—including SWP leader James P. Cannon’s secretary Sylvia Franklin—were concealed for decades by the SWP and by the Pabloite movement internationally. This is because the exposure of Stalin’s crimes and the counter-revolutionary activities of the bureaucracy cut across the Pabloites’ political agenda, which was to destroy the Fourth International as an independent movement by liquidating it into the various Stalinist and petty bourgeois parties and regimes.

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