

The Case of Leon Trotsky

A Review of the Dewey Sub-Commission's Hearing in Mexico City

Last April, in a crowded little room in a suburb of Mexico City, Leon Trotsky made a promise to the Preliminary Commission of Inquiry which may have seemed unusual, over-ambitious, and, indeed, incapable of fulfillment.

Professor Charles A. Beard (though he indicated that Vyshinsky's puppet-shows were on the same level as the trials of the Inquisition), had stated that it was impossible for Trotsky to "prove a negative by positive evidence," and declared that the burden of proof still rested upon Stalin and not Trotsky.

Trotsky, however, promised "direct and, moreover, quite positive proof of the 'negative fact'"; he pledged not only to raise a reasonable doubt but to establish his innocence beyond the shadow of a doubt, and, by the same token, to prove Stalin guilty of the basest and most bloody frame-up in history. The task which he assumed was not simply a defensive one, a refutation of the charges against him, but vigorously offensive: he undertook to brand his accusers for all time as falsifiers and murderers, the assassins of revolutionaries and the grave-diggers of the Russian Revolution.

Verbatim Report

The verbatim report of the Mexican hearings has now been published (*The Case of Leon Trotsky*, Harpers) and it is possible for all to weigh Trotsky's promises against the actual proofs presented.

The investigation has not yet drawn to a close; the Commission of Inquiry is still in session, collating the work of the Mexican, Parisian and New York sub-commissions, examining the wealth of new evidence which has come to light, and on this basis will pronounce its verdict.

Nevertheless, these 600 pages of the record, incomplete though they may be, contain such a bulk of persuasive juridical evidence, furnish such weighty political and psychological analysis, offer such complete historical documentation, that hesitations and suspended judgements are now bereft of the slightest foundation. Trotsky has here already proved his case to the hilt, and turned the charges into a terrible indictment of his accusers.

Documentation

Exclusive of Trotsky's oral testimony, the documentary evidence submitted to the Commission was of two chief types: (a) a category of purely legal documents, refuting the few charges of a specific and factual character, those which alleged certain conspirative meetings and correspondence; (b) a political category of historical materials bearing on Trotsky's record in the revolutionary movement, his relations with the various defendants and with Lenin, his attitude over years and decades on the subjects of terrorism, fascism, sabotage and industry, war, etc. (The latter materials, to be sure, are also of basic legal importance, since Vyshinsky made definite allegations regarding Trotsky's writings and activities.)

Never, from a purely legal point of view, has a refutation been so completely and relentlessly established in a case of like nature and magnitude. It would almost seem as if Vyshinsky, in the few charges which he dared to fill with some small amount of precision, deliberately resorted only to the most absurd and easily

refutable fabrications. Actually, of course, Moscow's brazen disregard for consistency and elementary fact is due both to the impossibility of falsifying Trotsky's activities and conditions of life, regulated and recorded as they are down to the most minute detail, and to a careless cynicism born of bureaucratic impunity.

Physically Impossible

The documentation, as indicated by the extracts in the report, is complete in every important case: literally hundreds of documents and affidavits demonstrate the physical impossibility of Trotsky's alleged meeting with Romm in Paris, or with Holtzman, Olberg, David and Berman-Yurin in Copenhagen, of Sedov's alleged presence in Copenhagen, of Pyatakov's alleged flight to Oslo and meeting with Trotsky. Straight down the line, every factual charge of any importance is crushed to bits.

What, then, is left of the whole flimsy framework of falsehoods? If confessions, of and by themselves, do not constitute conclusive proof (and none other than Vyshinsky has so affirmed, in a standard Soviet handbook on criminal procedure), then Stalin's whole case must stand or fall with the evidence which Vyshinsky submitted.

Of what did this "substantiating evidence" consist? A calling-card with two letters scribbled on it (significance unexplained), a passport proving that Olberg entered Russia as a Honduran citizen, an alleged letter from a "Japanese diplomat" (not introduced into the court record), a German telephone directory.... and nothing more! Beyond this—only references to "conspiratorial letters" from Trotsky, and falsified and distorted "quotations" from Trotsky's writings, which any literate person can look up and refute.

The Role of Confessions

It is clear why Vyshinsky had to extract from Pyatakov, Romm and others trumped-up stories about meetings with Trotsky and Sedov at which they received their "directives": otherwise the attempt to implicate Trotsky, backed up by not one iota of material proof, would have been too patently absurd to stand the light of day. Vyshinsky, despite the preliminary investigations reports allegedly filling dozens upon dozens of volumes, could present not one trace of material documentary evidence. From a juridical standpoint, therefore, his case hangs by the slenderest of threads to those few depositions which attempt, however half-heartedly, to name names, give places and dates. The hundreds of documents submitted by Trotsky refute every attempt to establish a concrete link between him and the "conspirators." Thus, even when viewed purely legally, the frame-up is crystal-clear.

With Trotsky and Sedov's innocence, the bloody proceedings are hopelessly compromised. Trotsky was pictured as the master-mind, the prime-mover of the "plot" in whose hands the others were but passive puppets; Trotsky's name appears on almost every page of the Court record, usually several times. If Zinoviev, Kamenev, Pyatakov, Radek and the others were forced to utter such monstrous lies about their "master," can anyone then place the slightest credence in any part

of their "confessions"? Emphatically no! And precisely by that token Trotsky's legal argument and case take on added import.

"The absence of proofs," Trotsky repeated tirelessly before the Commission, "is the most terrible proof against Stalin." Trotsky's voluminous proofs not only demonstrate the innocence of the chief defendants, but fling the crimes back in Stalin's face. Not only are Trotsky's hands clean, but Stalin's are stained with the blood of hundreds of innocent victims. That is the full significance of Trotsky's legal case.

Provides Political Understanding

Although public opinion has been increasingly skeptical since the extension of the blood-purge to the Red Generals the question of Stalin's motivation, the why of the trials and persecutions, has been the stumbling-block for considerable sections of bewildered liberal thought. The political documentation in the record, besides exposing the absurdity of the charges of terrorism, sabotage, alliance with Hitler and the Mikado, etc., furnishes indispensable keys to the understanding of the trials, reveals their roots in the political exigencies of the Stalinist bureaucracy and relates them to events within the Soviet Union and throughout the world.

In lengthy testimony, the salient facts of Trotsky's biography are set forth, showing how devotion and loyalty to the working-class movement run like a red thread through his career.

The categorical facts of Trotsky's life throw the lie in the face of his accusers, the most vociferous of whom served in the October Revolution.... on the other side of the barricades.

The Capitulators

Vyshinsky faced another knotty psychological problem: to explain away the repeated capitulations of all the known defendants, their grovelling and abject bootlicking, their fiery denunciations of the arch-demon Trotsky and the bitter attacks which the Oppositionists have launched for long years against the renegades from their ranks. For him there is a simple explanation: "camouflage."

Trotsky's analysis of the history of the capitulations, his ample quotations from the contemptuous articles of the Opposition press since 1927 on the "traitors" and "scoundrels" and "deserters" as well as from the miserable writing of the capitulators themselves, make it crystal-clear that, as he says, "It is a historical and political law that the relationship between the Oppositionists and the capitulators was all these years more bitter than the relationship between the Oppositionists and the Stalinists."

On Sabotage

Concerning the charge of sabotage, Trotsky introduces extracts from his writings which analyzed the bureaucratic setting of industrial tempos and warned of the ruinous outcome of dizzy speeds, making it compellingly clear that the "saboteurs" are scapegoats selected to conceal the industrial crisis which now exists in the economy of the Soviet Union. Lengthy documents acquired from the Danish engineer, Winfeld-Hansen, who occupied a high technical post in Russia, bear out Trotsky's predictions

strikingly and attest to the industrial impasse to which the bureaucracy's frantic drive for records has led.

On Terrorism

In relation to terrorism, the record contains long excerpts from Trotsky's writings since the turn of the century, revealing a consistent advocacy of mass propaganda as against the futile and self-defeating violence of desperate individuals. The social roots of the new terrorist tendencies amongst the younger Soviet generation are analyzed and located in the new social stratification and concentration of privilege.

Regarding the charge of alliance with Hitler and the Mikado, there are introduced Trotsky's published writings, in which a consistent anti-Fascist line is maintained, a class-struggle strategy of combating fascism systematically developed, and the hopeless position of Germany and Japan in the coming war laid forth. Finally, the true political nature of the trials is exposed by a fully documented analysis of the way in which Stalin's charges against the Opposition shifted with the winds of Russia's political alliances and the changing needs of the bureaucracy.

A Great Speech

By itself, Trotsky's 136-page concluding speech is a brilliant historical document. Here all the threads are brought together; the factual material summed up in a running argument; the political core and background of the trials ruthlessly brought to light,

the record, aims and techniques of Stalin's Thermidorian imposition conclusively exposed and explained. The materials in this speech, plus his fascinating explanations of revolutionary problems, perspectives, strategy and tactics, make of the entire volume an indispensable primer for every revolutionist. The lesson which Trotsky drives home page after page, and which is itself the most crushing condemnation of the accusations and the whole bloody Stalinist regime, is the necessity of firm, patient, and principled education of the masses, as opposed to all sorts of desperate adventures, impatient maneuvers and alliances with the enemy class.

In the era of the People's Front betrayal, Trotsky's teaching, brought out by his testimony and by his still more eloquent life, of undeviating loyalty to and reliance upon the class strength of the proletariat assumes added significance and timeliness; and this record, which systematically expounds the real nature of the revolutionary spirit and program, will go far toward rejuvenating that spirit and inspiring it with new hope.

The American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky is to be congratulated for providing a special paper-bound edition of this big book at a sales price of two dollars. That means that we can put it into the hand of every comrade—to whom it can serve as a handbook of the revolutionary movement in all its phases—and systematically distribute it to every radical worker and intellectual in the country.

ERWIN WOLF IN SPANISH DUNGEON

(Continued from page 1)

telephoned, insisting on seeing Wolf once more and giving him what he called urgent mail that had arrived. Meeting in a cafe, Tioli declared that he had forgotten the mail but would go to his room and bring it back. He did not return, and in his stead appeared the police, now controlled by the G.P.U., who arrested Wolf on the spot. His present whereabouts are unknown.

Konrad Knudsen reports from Oslo the information that a Norwegian worker who traveled through the Soviet Union last summer as a tourist, was cross-examined by the G.P.U. concerning Erwin Wolf and his wife. A friend of Knudsen from whom the Appeal has just heard, writes that he fears that the G.P.U. plans to ship Wolf secretly out of the country and to the Soviet Union, where he is doomed to fall victim either to a hideous frame-up or a murder in the dark of the night—the fate that has befallen so many already.

With the memory of Andres Nin's fate still so fresh in the minds of all, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that Erwin Wolf's life depends upon the most immediate and vigorous protest to the Spanish Government, and a demand for his immediate release. We appeal to all groups and individuals to send cablegrams immediately to the Valencia regime.

Erwin Wolf's life must be saved.

DULLEA TO RUN IN SPITE OF CLARITYTES

CLEVELAND, Ohio—The Socialist mayoralty campaign, with Robert Dullea as candidate, is being waged in vigorous fashion despite all sabotaging efforts of the right wing.

The last act of the La Guardia Socialists was to announce to the press that they had withdrawn their support from Dullea. Previously the Clarity-right wing combine had moved for no independent political action and had had been decisively defeated by the membership.

When Frank Stern, Campaign Manager, and Esther Levine, Administrative Secretary, returned to Cleveland from the Y.P.S.L. convention, they found that a new lock had been placed on the door of the party office by Bob Parker, Clarity leader, in a desperate attempt to knife the campaign for Dullea. Comrade Stern, supported by a majority of the county committee, immediately rented new quarters from which to continue the campaign. The new headquarters are at 737 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland.

At a general membership meeting, a score of members of the Yugoslav Federation, many of whom had never attended a Socialist Party meeting, were brought down by the Claritytes to vote the left wing down. A roll call vote disclosed that at least two people present were not members of the party!