

**Trotsky in Mexico:  
Toward a History of His Informal Contacts with the U.S. Government, 1937-1940**

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On 25 May 1933, Leon Trotsky wrote from his home in exile on the island of Prinkipo in Turkey to the United States Consul in Istanbul requesting "authorization to enter the United States and to remain for a period of three months" in order to conduct historical research on a book that would compare the American and Russian civil wars. To allay anxieties about admitting a committed revolutionary like him into the U.S., the 53 year old former leader of the Red Army assured the Consul that "my journey has no relation whatsoever with any political aim. I am ready to undertake the categorical obligation not to intervene, either directly or indirectly, in the internal life of the United States" during his visit.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Consul forwarded Trotsky's letter to the State Department which, on 23 June 1933, denied his request because of his political views. The U.S. Consulate in Istanbul received the formal denial on 10 July.<sup>2</sup> Given that in early July, Trotsky obtained permission to establish temporary residency in France, his disappointment over the American government's denial was probably fleeting.

From his arrival in Mexico in January 1937 until his death in August 1940, the U.S. government's 1933 refusal to admit Trotsky played a recurring role in his personal and political life. During those years, he engaged in an unceasing effort to secure admission to the U.S. Towards that end, he unsuccessfully exploited a variety of public opportunities and personal contacts. In October 1939, when the prospects of his entering the U.S. seemed slim, an invitation to testify before the Dies Committee (the U.S. Congress' Un-American Activities Committee), offered renewed hope, but in December the invitation was withdrawn. Having exhausted all possible opportunities to secure a U.S. visa and in very real fear for his life, in June 1940, Trotsky and his staff began giving U.S. consular officials in Mexico information on communists and alleged Comintern (Communist or Third International) agents in the U.S. and Mexico. Whether or not Trotsky gave this information in order to enhance his prospects of gaining admission into the U.S. or simply as a means of self-defense can not be definitively ascertained since he left no written record of his intentions. But as this essay will show, providing the U.S.

State Department with information about communist and Comintern activities in order to enhance his prospects of entering the U.S. was consistent with Trotsky's other efforts to achieve this goal.

This essay documents this heretofore unknown aspect of Trotsky's political life. In the process, it provides insight into Trotsky's political activities, motives and behavior vis-a-vis American citizens and groups actively involved in liberal and radical politics, and vis-a-vis the U.S. government. What is most intriguing about Trotsky's behavior is not simply how much effort he expended to gain admission to the U.S., but how strikingly Leninist his behavior was. In his final years, far removed from the U.S.S.R. and Bolshevik political culture, his tactical maneuvers and sectarian behavior towards American groups and citizens, and the U.S. government are vividly reminiscent of his earlier sectarian political behavior in the heat of the revolutionary struggle in Russia. Whereas the latter brought him and the Bolsheviks political victory, the former undermined his efforts by alienating those who lived in a very different political culture and who became disillusioned with his sectarian politics.

Trotsky arrived in France on July 23, 1933, and lived there for almost two years before domestic political pressures forced the French government to rescind his visa and Trotsky to establish temporary residence in Norway. In the aftermath of the August 1936 show trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev and fourteen others in Moscow, the Soviet government exerted considerable diplomatic and economic pressure on the Norwegian government to expel Trotsky from the country. Instead the Norwegian government placed the exiled revolutionary under virtual house arrest.<sup>3</sup>

The Norwegian government's action evoked an outcry in Europe and the United States. In several European countries, most notably France, Spain and Czechoslovakia, committees for the defense of Leon Trotsky came into existence. Organized by Trotsky's supporters as well as socialists and liberals who condemned the unwarranted violation of Trotsky's political rights, the committees set to work to publicize Trotsky's plight, to secure him safe asylum and to establish committees of inquiry to investigate the charges levelled against him in Moscow.<sup>4</sup>

In October 1936, six prominent Americans--John Dewey, Norman Thomas, Devere Allen, Horace Kallen, Joseph Wood Krutch and Freda Kirchwey--announced the formation of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky (hereafter referred to as ACDLT). The ACDLT's stated goals were "to help obtain for him [Trotsky] the normal rights of asylum and to aid in the formation of an International Commission of Inquiry, which shall examine all the available evidence [relevant to the charges made against him at the August 1936 Moscow trial] and make public its findings." The letter

announcing the formation of the ACDLT made it clear that “support of this appeal in no way necessarily indicates any commitment...to Trotsky’s views on politics.”<sup>6</sup>

To accomplish its goals the ACDLT pursued several strategies simultaneously. Its members wrote numerous letters to the Norwegian government protesting Trotsky’s house arrest, and worked diligently to urge Mexican President Lazaro Cardenas to give asylum to Trotsky. There appears to be considerable merit to the ACDLT’s claim that it “was instrumental in obtaining his visa for Mexico.”<sup>7</sup> To add weight to its efforts, it also sought to increase its membership. The ACDLT’s membership roll expanded rapidly. Among its members were some of America’s most prominent intellectuals, liberals, civil libertarians, former members or fellow travellers of the Communist Party who had become disillusioned, Socialist Party members, anarchists, and members of the Workers’ Party of America, the Trotskyist party. The largest and most active of the ACDLT branches was the New York committee; local committees also existed in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, San Francisco and Cleveland.<sup>8</sup>

The ACDLT’s leaders sought to portray the committee as being above partisan politics because it pursued goals which all defenders of democracy could embrace. While some members abhorred Trotsky’s politics, they joined the ACDLT because they believed that its goal was the defense of a profound democratic right. Horace Kallen eloquently conveyed this motive when he wrote that he joined because democratic liberties

are today in jeopardy almost everywhere in the world...Trotsky is an apt symbol of the necessity to make secure beyond question the right of asylum and the right to equal justice...If they can be established for the terrible Trotsky, they can hardly be denied to the anonymous, stateless multitudes who are in flight from persecution, cruelty and demoralization at the hands of anti-democratic dictatorships in the world. Leon Trotsky is the symbol of them all.<sup>9</sup>

The ACDLT was not without its critics. Its formation and decision to press for an international commission of inquiry deeply divided American liberals and leftists. In early 1937, representatives of the Soviet Union, the CPUSA and their supporters, and others charged that the ACDLT was “in political agreement with Leon Trotsky...anti-Soviet...[and] partisan while pretending to be impartial.”<sup>10</sup> This “counter campaign” had some success in that a few members resigned. One of them was Freda Kirchwey, one of the ACDLT’s founders and the editor of the *Nation*, who resigned because

The whole tone of your publicity has been pro-Trotsky and

hostile to the Soviet government. Your releases...assumed his innocence of all charges...The partisan passions of those who attack the Soviet Government and the Communist Party are, in my opinion, jointly creating a chasm so deep that world-wide popular opposition to fascism is in immediate danger...I am unwilling to continue on a committee which seems to be contributing its share to the deepening of that separation.<sup>11</sup>

Although the ACDLT appeared to have sprung from the organizers' sincere political indignation over Trotsky's plight, his supporters had been working behind the scenes to create the ACDLT and a commission of inquiry.<sup>12</sup> The opportunity afforded by the ACDLT was not lost upon the former members of the Workers' Party of America, the American Trotskyist party. At Trotsky's instigation and direction, the party dissolved itself in May 1936, and its members joined the Socialist Party of America for the express purpose of weakening that party and winning over its militant members to Trotsky's cause. During the next eighteen months, the Trotskyists worked as a fifth column within the Socialist Party.<sup>13</sup> The creation of the ACDLT and Socialist Party's prominent role on it provided the Trotskyists with a timely opportunity which they worked diligently to turn to their and Trotsky's advantage. In November 1936, the Trotskyist leaders issued a secret circular to its formally dissolved but very active local committees. Entitled "How to Set Up a Local Committee of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky," the secret circular is worth quoting at length.

1. A group of comrades and friends in any locality should make formal application to the New York office...for permission to set up a local committee...Permission will of course be granted....
3. The political-social base of the Committee is of the BROADEST KIND. 'Any responsible elements' are eligible...
- 4...At present the most important programmatic issue is asylum for Trotsky; as soon as Trotsky is safely settled in a safe haven, our work thereafter will center around the issue of securing a complete, impartial investigation of the Moscow trials; we plan to set up or to have set up organizationally independent of this committee, a Legal Commission of distinguished jurists in America; at the same time we will work for an international commission to sit as a tribunal, to take Trotsky's own testimony and hand down a verdict. BUT THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE [sic] we must concentrate on the question of asylum for Trotsky.
5. Relations of this committee with the Socialist Party are very good. The National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party

by resolution at its last meeting endorsed the committee.

[Norman] Thomas and Devere Allen, the Socialist Party delegates to the Socialist International, were among the initiators of this committee.

6. Representatives of other labor groups (I.W.W., anarchists, etc.) should be invited to participate in the local committees; but the main emphasis should be laid in the localities, on securing trade union leaders to join the committee. Wherever local liberals, trade unionists, etc. evince interest and are sufficiently important, please inform the New York office, so that such individuals will receive an invitation to join the big committee.

7. Trotsky's coming to Mexico is bitterly opposed by the Stalinists, their allies and reactionaries. Lombardo Toledano, head of the Confederacion Mejicano de Trabajadores (Mexican Federation of Labor), who has been the unofficial representative of the Stalinists in Mexico since he returned from a trip to the USSR a few months ago, calls Trotsky 'a Gestapo agent.' Virtually all liberal opinion is on Trotsky's side. In addition, the powerful oil workers and graphic arts union both of which are in Toledano's federation, have lined up with [Diego] Rivera on this question. In addition, Rivera has a small group of (independent) unions around him, numbering six thousand men or so...THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT HAS NO DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE USSR, practically no trade with it, and is therefore not subject to the terrific pressures which Norway was subjected to....NEVERTHELESS IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO SHOW PRESIDENT LAZARO CARDENAS, MEXICO CITY--THAT STRONG FORCES CAN SUPPORT TROTSKY IN HIS SEARCH FOR ASYLUM. TELEGRAMS TO CARDENAS FROM TRADE UNIONISTS, LIBERALS, ETC. ARE NEEDED IMMEDIATELY, CONGRATULATING MEXICO ON EXTENDING ASYLUM TO TROTSKY. THIS TASK IS ONE OF YOUR MAIN JOBS FOR THE NEXT WEEKS....

9. Please keep confidential the following facts: Trotsky is fairly satisfied with the conditions offered in Mexico, but is not going to apply for a Mexican visa for a while. He is first going to have it out with the Norwegian government about material it has confiscated, guarantees of safety on voyage, etc....As far as the public is concerned, all we know is that Trotsky is inquiring to Mexican officials concerning conditions for his stay, etc....

12. Wherever possible, mass meetings on this question should be held. One speaker (as [Max] Schachtman is doing in our N.Y. meeting) can speak on Trotsky's full line...such a speaker may well be the chief speaker. In addition, however, there must be two or three non-Trotskyists speakers. Wherever a big enough mass meeting warrants it, the national committee office can send a speaker (Schachtman, [James] Burnham, [Felix] Morrow, [George] Novack, [Maurice] Spector...

THIS IS THE BIGGEST THING WE HAVE EVER TACKLED; SPEED AND AUDACITY WILL CARRY US THROUGH!"

As this secret circular makes clear, Trotskyists envisioned using the ACDLT for their own purposes. Although they shared its goals of securing asylum for Trotsky and of creating an international commission of inquiry, both of which were in their and Trotsky's immediate political interests, they also sought to use the ACDLT as a means of conveying Trotsky's political views to its coalition of labor, socialist and liberal leaders in hopes of expanding their party's membership and influence. These were the same goals that they hoped to achieve when the Workers Party dissolved itself and joined the Socialist Party.<sup>15</sup> In fact, their infiltration of the Socialist Party and work on the ACDLT were parts of a single strategy--to enhance their influence in American politics.

To Trotsky and his American followers, the most pressing immediate need was to create a commission of inquiry. Trotsky was convinced that such a commission would exonerate him of the charges levelled against him in Moscow, and thereby increase his influence among leftists and workers who would become disillusioned with the USSR and the American Communist Party (CPUSA). When his comrades' behavior within the Socialist Party threatened that goal, Trotsky was quick to remind them of this fact, as he did in March 1937 when the prospect of the Trotskyists' expulsion from the party arose: "A rupture with Norman Thomas in this situation would be disagreeable and prejudicial from the point of view of the inquiry."<sup>16</sup>

In fact, both the Socialist Party and the Trotskyists sought to use the ACDLT to enhance their respective parties' influence. In their report to the National Committee of the Socialist Party, George Novack, the Secretary of the ACDLT, and Felix Morrow, the Assistant Secretary, wrote that the mass meetings organized by the ACDLT made it possible for that party "to present before great masses of workers and liberals the progressive position of the party...The Socialist party has gained profoundly in prestige and support through its aid in the campaign for asylum for Leon Trotsky."<sup>17</sup> Novack and Morrow were Trotskyists who had joined the Socialist Party on their leader's orders. As such, they believed that *their* cause had also "gained profoundly." Although the Trotskyists and members of the Socialist Party comprised a minority of the ACDLT's members, they staffed key positions on the ACDLT and were "in the literal sense, the very backbone of the American Committee."<sup>18</sup>

The Workers Party of America's decision to disband and subsume itself into the Socialist Party and the formation of the ACDLT and the Trotskyists' use of it for partisan political purposes heralded the beginning of Trotsky's 'popular front' in America. Like the Popular Front put forth by the Comintern in 1935, Trotsky's 'popular front' sought to create temporary political alliances with liberals, trade unionists, Social Democrats, and any other political group for the purpose of achieving a single, overriding goal--defeating

the main enemy. But unlike the Comintern's Popular Front, which was created for and dedicated to the goal of destroying fascism, Trotsky's 'popular front' had a more modest goal--to defend the rights and political positions of an individual. Given that the individual was Leon Trotsky, the avowed enemy of Iosif Stalin and the indefatigable critic of the Stalin's betrayal of the Russian revolution, the ACDLT, despite the protests of its executives, who were Trotskyists, quickly took the form of a *de facto* anti-Stalin and anti-Soviet 'popular front'. As we shall see, after his impressive performance before the Dewey Commission in Mexico which virtually assured that the International Commission of Inquiry would exonerate him of the charges made against him at the Moscow trials, Trotsky abandoned his 'popular front' tactics and sought to exploit personal contacts to achieve what was a serious but unrealizable goal--securing residency in, or at least temporary admission to, the United States.

The ACDLT's first goal--asylum for Trotsky--was achieved on January 9, 1937, when he arrived in Mexico. Before disembarking, Trotsky signed a notarized statement pledging "to remain obliged to respect our [Mexican] laws and to abstain from making propaganda of your [Trotsky's] political-social creed [while on Mexican] National Territory."<sup>19</sup> Two days later, Trotsky telegraphed the ACDLT and offered his full cooperation in an impartial investigation of the charges made against him in Moscow.<sup>20</sup> Trotsky attached great importance to the ACDLT's work and the establishment of an international commission of inquiry. Within a week of his arrival in Mexico, Trotsky met with several leading American Trotskyists to plan how to influence and direct "the activity of the Committee."<sup>21</sup> His supporters on the committee worked tirelessly but clandestinely to ensure that the committee's work served Trotsky's interests. They also kept Trotsky fully informed of the ACDLT's meetings and activities thereby enabling him to play an active though surreptitious role in its activities.<sup>22</sup>

Between its formation in late 1936 and March 1937, the ACDLT worked to broaden its membership and to generate popular support for its efforts. It regularly published a *News Bulletin* which reported on its work and the unfolding repression in the USSR. Trotsky contributed several articles to the *News Bulletin* in which he denied the charges made against him at the two Moscow trials (August 1936 and January 1937), denounced Stalin, and equated the NKVD (or GPU as Trotsky called it) with the Gestapo. The ACDLT also organized several public rallies, the largest of which occurred at New York City's Hippodrome on February 9, 1937. An estimated crowd of 5,000 gathered to hear speeches by ACDLT leaders, who denounced the Moscow trials and Stalin, and called for an impartial inquiry to investigate Trotsky's alleged crimes. The high point of the meeting was to have been a speech by Trotsky, but problems with the long distance

telephone lines frustrated the plan and forced Max Schactman to read Trotsky's prepared remarks.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the ACDLT's apparent success in generating public support for an international commission of inquiry, Trotsky was dissatisfied. In early March, he wrote to his supporters and condemned their political submission to the liberals on the ACDLT and warned that the liberals' dominance would "lead to a complete disaster."<sup>24</sup> In a March 1937 confidential letter "To all the comrades in the committee," "which resulted from a long talk with Comrade [Herbert] Solow," Trotsky lashed out against the "weakness of the policy of our comrades [on the committee], or better, the full absence of any policy, [which] paralyses the activity of the committee and threatens to lead it into an impasse." Trotsky's foremost criticism of his comrades' work centered on their inability to force the creation of an international commission. "We had three or four discussions with Schactman, Novack [the ACDLT's Secretary], and the other comrades, concerning the activity of the committee...[and] the necessity of creating immediately the inquiry commission. The American comrades made concrete personal suggestions for the composition of the committee. This was the aim, the real aim, the general aim, of all further work." But to Trotsky's anger and dismay, problems within the committee and "a certain dilettantism, joined by a political confusion" frustrated those plans. In the aftermath of the Hippodrome meeting, which "showed the desire of workers to help the committee," Trotsky demanded "the immediate creation of the inquiry commission by presenting to the meeting a list of the first members of the commission, and by using the meeting to stimulate and encourage the liberals in this decisive matter."

Most Trotskyists and sympathizers on the ACDLT hoped to have prominent people who were perceived as politically neutral and fair serve on the commission so as to win guarantee the appearance of the commission's impartiality and thereby win broad support. Trotsky believed that "[t]his is a purely formalistic, purely judicial, unpolitical and unMarxian conception." So convinced was he in the power of the evidence which he had at his disposal to discredit the slanderous charges levelled against him in Moscow that he viewed the commission's composition as irrelevant. "A small inquiry commission, even though composed of modest rank-and-file people (if the authorities hesitate) can accomplish some very good work. When it publishes the first collection of dispositions, documents, etc. about, say, the Copenhagen chapter, it will win an authority, attract to itself the 'nobility', and open up new possibilities."

Trotsky then gave his followers a stern lesson on the difference between liberals and Trotskyists, and how the latter should behave politically vis-a-vis the former.



I appreciate highly the participation of Mr. Dewey in the committee. I understand that he cannot act otherwise than he does. He is not for Stalin and not for Trotsky. He wants to establish the truth. But your position is different. You know the truth. Have you the right to hide it? You have the same duty as the liberals to preserve your political identity within the committee. The declaration of principles or purposes must reflect the presence of both parties to the committee....But you enter into alliance with honest liberals on their basis in order to convince public opinion of the justice of your case. You invite the Stalinists to do the same on a common basis.

Every political action, especially when based upon a bloc, begins with the delimitation from the open and perfidious enemies. Only when the arena is demarcated can we permit ourselves maneuvers, alliances, and concessions. Otherwise we betray ourselves and our genuine friends. Nothing is more dangerous in politics than to help the enemy preserve a friendly mask until the decisive moment....

We have written many things about the Marxist rules of coalition: (a) not to lose one's identity, (b) to view the ally as the possible adversary, (c) to preserve for one's self the full rights of criticism, (d) to supplement the bloc action with independent actions, (e) to be ready in favorable circumstances (Hippodrome meeting) to take the full initiative of action when allies are hesitating, etc., etc. ...The failure of our comrades [in the committee] belongs in principle to the same category as the failure of the Chinese Communists after their entrance into the Kuomintang.

Trotsky ended his blistering criticism of "the comrades in the committee" by instructing them on what needed to be accomplished immediately:

The delegation of the sub-commission to Mexico must be decided and organized in two or three days...it is necessary to establish the list of people for the commission itself...to begin the work immediately after the return and report of the delegation. At the same time we must ask all the committees throughout the world to give you their mandates for the opening of the inquiry.<sup>25</sup>

The importance which Trotsky attached to the commission of inquiry is clear from his description of what he was sure would be its findings: "the greatest historical, philosophical, and psychological book of our time will be written by the commission of inquiry."<sup>26</sup> Soon after Trotsky's intervention, and apparently independent of it, the American, English, French and Czechoslovak committees formed an Investigating

Commission to review the Moscow trials.<sup>27</sup> By the end of March, the members of a sub-commission, which would travel to Mexico to interrogate Trotsky and allow him to present evidence to dispute the charges levelled against him in Moscow, had been selected. On April 10, 1937, the Dewey Commission, as it has come to be known, began its week long hearings in Mexico.

Although the impartial John Dewey chaired the sub-commission, whether or not it was an impartial body is open to question. The sub-commission consisted of Dewey (Chairman), Carleton Beals, Otto Ruhle, Benjamin Stolberg, and Suzanne LaFollette (Secretary). Ruhle was a close personal friend of Trotsky and his participation in the proceedings was hampered by his weak command of English, the language in which the inquiry was conducted.<sup>28</sup> LaFollette was a close personal friend of Trotsky until his death. Beals, a renown Latin American specialist, resigned from the commission to protest what he claimed was a bias among the sub-commission's members in favor of Trotsky. The comment by Albert Goldman, Trotsky's attorney, to a *New York Times* reporter that "all these people had come down convinced that Trotsky was innocent" did little to reassure Beals and other skeptics of the Dewey Commission's impartiality.<sup>29</sup> Nor did the fact that Dewey, Ruhle, Stolberg and LaFollette had publicly condemned the trials as travesties of justice. One need not impugn the sub-commission members' integrity to appreciate the skeptics' arguments. Trotsky's personal graciousness toward these individuals and the members of the ACDLT, and his eloquent performance during the hearings generated for him considerable respect and sympathy.

For our purposes, the details of the hearing and subsequent compilation of the final report are of secondary interest. Based on the hearings and documents presented by Trotsky, the sub-commission found him innocent of the crimes attributed to him at the first two Moscow trials.<sup>30</sup> That verdict and the continuing repression in the USSR fueled the rising disillusionment with and antipathy toward Stalin, the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet Union. The public exoneration for which Trotsky had worked so hard had been achieved. His 'popular front' strategy had born fruit.

Such a victory opened for Trotsky two potentially important possibilities. The first was "to create a network of sympathetic workers' groups around the committee...A simple worker who becomes a member of the committee has the possibility of educating himself, of broadening his horizon, and of gaining authority in the eyes of his associates. In this way you will educate worker leaders and create very important channels for your [American Trotskyists'] political influence."<sup>31</sup> However that opportunity came to naught. The second lay in taking advantage of the vindication and respect won by him to develop numerous personal contacts among a group of active, influential and, in some cases, rich

Americans, contacts which Trotsky and his American comrades diligently exploited in his effort to gain admission into the United States.

Why did Trotsky want to enter the United States? There are several reasons. While he appreciated deeply the asylum which Mexico had offered to him in his hour of need, given his pledge not to interfere in Mexican affairs and Mexico's isolation from Europe, living out his life in Mexico was probably not an exciting prospect. Nor was the Mexican political environment friendly to Trotsky. The Mexican Communist Party (PCM), whose prominence and influence were on the rise during the Cardenas years,<sup>32</sup> and the CTM (*Confederacion de Trabajadores Mexicanos*), the country's largest and most powerful labor organization headed by Lombardo Toledano, publicly and persistently opposed Trotsky's asylum.<sup>33</sup> The Mexican Trotskyist party was very small, about thirty members, and politically impotent. Furthermore, Mexico and the USSR were the only countries which provided material support to the Popular Front government during the Spanish Civil War. Support in Mexico for the Popular Front ran high as did sympathy for the USSR. Trotsky's consistent criticisms of both undermined any potential political support for him there.

On the other hand, the political prospects for Trotsky and his movement in the United States seemed to be brightening. Although the CPUSA was large and its influence significant as a result of the leading role it played in generating support for the Spanish Popular Front and in opposing fascism, the show trials in Moscow resulted in increasing numbers of American citizens publicly criticizing the escalating repression in the USSR and in party members abandoning the CPUSA. Despite the political and financial strength of the CPUSA, the American Trotskyist organization's influence appeared to be growing. It was the largest Trotskyist party in the world.<sup>34</sup> Trotsky's strategy to disband that party and infiltrate the American Socialist Party for the expressed purpose of either taking over that party or winning its militant wing to the Trotskyist's side seemed to be working. In addition, Trotsky was almost totally dependent on the American movement for funds and personnel. During his stay in Mexico, with few exceptions, all of his personal secretaries and guards were Americans. Trotsky also received periodic financial contributions from rich American sympathizers.<sup>35</sup> Given these realities, Trotsky no doubt concluded that asylum in the United States had much to recommend it. Undoubtedly so too did his American comrades. To have their political and intellectual leader and so prominent a figure as Trotsky personally heading the party would have enhanced its appeal in certain quarters.

During the first half of 1937, Trotsky employed both his 'popular front' strategy and private efforts to enhance his political and personal image in the United States.

Towards the members of the ACDLT and the Dewey Commission, his correspondence and personal behavior were gracious, considerate and even flattering. Such impeccable behavior had its desired effect. Shortly after his arrival in Mexico, his American supporters began efforts to secure him a visa to America, although the precise nature of these efforts remains obscure.<sup>36</sup> The first documentable effort to get Trotsky admitted to the U.S. came in February 1937. Trotsky's role, if any, in this incident is unknown. At this time, there were discussions among ACDLT members about holding the commission of inquiry in the U.S. and having Trotsky testify before it. It is unclear how seriously the committee's members pursued this possibility. But on February 11, Trotsky received the following telegram from Walter Casey: "Hold everything help coming INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service]." In 1935, Roosevelt had appointed Casey to the Municipal Court of the District of Columbia. His apparent effort to use his connections to obtain a visa for Trotsky failed.<sup>37</sup>

After the Dewey Commission's departure from Mexico, Trotsky began serious private efforts to gain admission to the United States. In July 1937, Benjamin Stolberg, the labor journalist who accompanied the Dewey Commission to Mexico, visited Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins to request permission for Trotsky to visit the United States in order to undergo a comprehensive medical examination. For the past few years, Trotsky had allegedly suffered from a mysterious ailment which Stolberg described to Perkins as "inexplicable fevers." In fact, the real motive was not medical but rather to have Trotsky appear before the International Commission of Inquiry which was scheduled to convene in the U.S. in September. Much to Stolberg's surprise, Perkins agreed to his request on two conditions: that Trotsky pledge not to make public his visit and to refrain from engaging in politics, and that Secretary of State Cordell Hull approve Trotsky's entrance. Were Trotsky to violate these terms he "could never get in again." Trotsky readily agreed to the conditions: "I shall observe all conditions with absolute loyalty."<sup>38</sup> Acting on Perkins' advice, Stolberg sought to have John Dewey personally make the case to Hull, but Dewey was vacationing in Canada and was incommunicado.<sup>39</sup>

Trotsky's supporters used the time to buttress their case by having Dr. Harry Fishler, a Trotskyist living in Los Angeles, examine Trotsky and his wife, Natalia Sedova. His sympathies notwithstanding, Fishler found "no reason to be alarmed" about Trotsky's or his wife's health.<sup>40</sup>

That summer Trotsky also received an invitation from Alexander Heard of the North Carolina Political Union to lecture at the University of North Carolina, an invitation which Trotsky accepted in principle. Coming at the same time as the effort to secure a visa for medical purposes, the invitation offered created both problems and

possibilities. One of Trotsky's secretaries in Mexico, Bernard Wolf, wrote to his comrade Joseph Hansen in New York:

We are writing to ask whether this acceptance may not, in your opinion, prove prejudicial to the possibilities of eventually securing a visa to come to the States in connection with the [planned September meeting of the International Commission of] inquiry. If the PC [Political Committee] thinks it advisable to continue the negotiations with this group, we would be glad to have you enter directly into relations with Heard and his organization. Naturally, you won't enter into discussion with them as the Political Committee, but merely as Trotsky's personal friends who are acting as his representatives in the matter.<sup>41</sup>

Trotsky's American comrades quickly contacted Stolberg and Suzanne LaFollette, the Treasurer of the ACDLT, and discussed the best strategy to pursue. In early August, LaFollette wrote to Trotsky of their plan:

If the university [of North Carolina] asks the Department to admit you for the purpose of delivering a lecture, that will afford you the opportunity to ascertain the attitude of the State Department without laying yourself open to a direct refusal which would establish a most unfortunate precedent...in case the State Department refuses the request of the university, that will leave quite unprejudiced our efforts to get you in on the grounds of health...We also strongly advise against any attempt to combine the visit to Chapel Hill with an appearance before the Commission [of Inquiry] or with a permit to come here because of health. If these purposes get mixed up with that of coming for a lecture, then a possible refusal of the State Department would then mean a refusal on all grounds at once.

If the university succeeds in getting permission for you to come, then that visit would set an excellent precedent for another visit on other grounds.

I hope that your followers will understand this. I have a fear--perhaps unfounded--that their zeal may cloud their judgement in this matter.<sup>42</sup>

Later that month the State Department rejected granting Trotsky a visa to lecture on the grounds that his political views had not changed since it rejected his 1933 application.<sup>43</sup> When Dewey finally met with Hull in late October 1937, the latter's response was hardly a surprise. Hull apparently explained to Dewey that he had to reject the request because, in light of Japan's increasing military aggression in the Far East, the government had no desire to anger Stalin.<sup>44</sup>

By late 1937, Trotsky's prospects of gaining admission to the U.S. did not seem bright. Twice the State Department had rejected him, despite the efforts of persons well connected with the Roosevelt administration. By that time, popular support for Trotsky in the U.S. was waning for several reasons. The Dewey Commission and the International Inquiry Commission had exonerated Trotsky, but ironically over time that vindication weakened support for him as people's political energies shifted to more pressing and ominous events in Europe, in particular the Spanish Civil War and Nazi Germany's aggressive behavior. Having fulfilled its role, the ACDLT was virtually moribund by October 1937. In February 1938, the ACDLT voted to dissolve itself. Trotsky's disappointment and anger over this is clear from his letter to Herbert Solow of 15 October 1937:

The necessity to dissolve the [Defense] Committee after a year of work is, however, a great defeat and terrible waste of energies. Now you must begin again. It is the fate of political celibates! In any case the creation of a general defense committee against Stalinist gangsterism is now one of the most urgent tasks. The happenings in Spain are only a beginning. It is necessary timely [sic] to create cadres of political 'militias' against the murderers.<sup>45</sup>

What Trotsky referred to as "the happenings in Spain" also contributed to the erosion of popular support for him. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in the summer of 1936 reverberated throughout Europe and the Americas. Backed by Portugal and the fascist governments of Germany and Italy, General Francisco Franco and his conservative allies sought to crush the Spanish Popular Front government which received the active backing of Mexico, the USSR, the Comintern, and thousands of international volunteers. In the U.S., sympathy for anti-fascist struggle of the Popular Front government was widespread, especially among liberals and radicals. Trotsky's and his supporters' incessant campaigns against the Popular Front there angered and bewildered many of its American supporters who wondered about the wisdom of dividing the anti-Franco and anti-fascist coalition at a time when the fascist menace in Europe threatened world peace.<sup>46</sup>

Yet another factor eroded popular support for Trotsky. At about the same time that his private diplomatic efforts to enter the U.S. began, Trotsky concluded that the need for his 'popular front' strategy in the U.S. had passed. In June 1937, Trotsky advised his American comrades that the time had come to break with the Socialist Party and to re-form an independent Trotskyist party. He reasoned that several significant developments in the near future augured well for such a strategy.

- A. During this summer the Spanish Civil War must come to a denouement...
- B. The persecutions and executions in the USSR are developing at such a feverish tempo that...before the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the Stalinist regime will stand revealed before the workers to an incomparably greater extent.
- C. The Blum experiment [the Popular Front government in France] seems to be approaching its natural end, that is bankruptcy. The policy of the People's Front will receive a mortal blow.
- D. The full Commission of Inquiry will hold its final sessions in September. We can have no doubts about its conclusions, which must and will be annihilating for the Stalinist clique and the Comintern bureaucracy.

Based on "[t]he coincidence of all these factors," Trotsky argued that "we must again appear on the scene as an independent party...[n]ot later than November 7," that is the twentieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. But since the goal of becoming a fifth column within the Socialist Party had been to win over its militant wing, Trotsky urged his comrades to launch a relentless campaign against that party's moderate wing: "We must denounce them as traitors and rascals."<sup>7</sup> So fierce was the Trotskyists' political offensive that they were expelled from the party in October 1937. Such sectarian tactics angered Socialist Party members and other non-communist leftists in America and eroded support for Trotsky. Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party's leader and one of the co-founders of the ACDLT, was deeply embittered by the experience.<sup>48</sup>

Further diminishing support for Trotsky in the U.S. was his intolerance and vicious condemnation of those who did not unswervingly support him as Stalinists or agents of the GPU. One example is his attitude towards Freda Kirchwey, one of the founders of the ACDLT and editor of the *Nation*. That magazine published pieces by Louis Fischer and others which stated that the confessions of the defendants at the first two Moscow trials appeared to have been genuine and that the improbable charges therefore may have had some validity. Trotsky was understandably outraged. The *Nation* also actively supported the Spanish Republican government and the Popular Front. When Hebert Solow wrote to ask Trotsky if he would receive Kirchwey in Mexico, Trotsky responded:

I am not inclined to receive Frida Kirschwey [sic]. I cannot discuss personally with a man or woman who has doubts about my not being an ally of Hitler or the Mikado...I have the right to wonder if these people are not agents of the G.P.U., but they do not have the right to wonder if I am an agent of Germany

and Japan.<sup>49</sup>

Trotsky did not confine his invectives against Kirchwey and the *Nation* to private correspondence. In early 1938, he wrote to her that:

During the Moscow trials...[s]ome of your close collaborators, like the not unknown Louis Fischer, came out as direct literary agents of Stalin, Vyshinsky [the prosecutor at the Moscow trials], Yezhov [the head of the NKVD]...Have you demarcated yourself from the merchants of lies such as [the journalists] Walter Duranty and Louis Fischer, who...facilitated the work of Moscow's falsifiers and henchmen.<sup>50</sup>

Trotsky and his supporters on the ACDLT campaigned to force Carleton Beals, who had resigned from the Dewey Commission in protest, from the editorial board of the magazine *Modern Monthly*.<sup>51</sup> Trotsky wrote to V.F. Calverton, the editor and his supporter, that he would not submit an article to the magazine so long "as the name of Mr. Beals remains on your list" of editorial board members. In Trotsky's view, Beals was an agent of Stalinism, which was "the syphilis of the workers' movement. Anybody who chances to be a direct or indirect carrier of such a contamination should be submitted to a pitiless contamination."<sup>52</sup> As two of Trotsky's supporters noted, "The real significance of Beals' charge is that it could have one consequence: to jeopardize Trotsky's asylum in Mexico...[and] any possibility of Trotsky's ever getting asylum in this country."<sup>53</sup>

Trotsky's intolerance of all those who did not share his positions on important issues is most forcefully conveyed in his letter to the anarchist Carlo Tresca.

Against the attitude of the Nation and the New Republic,  
I totally share your indignation. The executioner is hideous,  
but more hideous is the priest in service of the executioner.  
As the agent of imperialism, Stalin's G.P.U. invokes hatred. Completely  
nauseating are the long-haired democratic preachers  
who pander to Stalin's executioners.

The struggle for the liberation of humanity is impossible  
without the simultaneous mobilization of contempt for such  
courtesans, sychophants, lackeys, bigots as the Nation and the  
New Republic.<sup>54</sup>

One can empathize with Trotsky's frustration over how others could possibly believe that the show trials in Moscow and the charges levelled against him there might have validity. But such strident characterizations only alienated his potential and former



advocates among the more genteel New York liberals and intellectuals who had worked for his defense and who might provide him with future support.

The dissolution of the ACDLT and his supporters' expulsion from the Socialist Party marked the end of Trotsky's short-lived effort at 'popular front' tactics. There was one brief effort to create a defense committee which apparently was conceived as a successor to the ACDLT, but that effort came to naught.<sup>55</sup> If Trotsky was to gain admission to the U.S., he now had to rely exclusively on private efforts.

Two events on 25 March 1938 raised Trotsky's hopes of gaining admission to the U.S. The first appeared in the form of a *New York Times* article. That day, Herbert Solow wrote to Trotsky that a *New York Times* reporter

who hates your politics but has aided the Defense Committee materially [has written an article which] will open a clear perspective to you with respect to your own medical needs ...The development...holds out real promise and you and your friends should work out definite plans at once. Initial steps should be private and cautious; questions of health and safety should be worked out carefully. The conjuncture is favorable for the moment and can become much worse before it becomes better."<sup>56</sup>

The second was President Roosevelt's comment on that day that the U.S. would continue to open its borders to those fleeing political and religious persecution. Several days later, Trotsky wrote to a supporter that:

The statement is extremely important, especially from the viewpoint of general policy. I hope that it can also be used from the personal standpoint. In any case, everything possible must now be done...Natalia [Sedova, Trotsky's wife] has required serious medical treatment for a long time...Permission to stay six months would be truly salutary...How should the question be posed? I could pose it directly and officially from here. But to incur an official rejection would be very disagreeable. What means have you there?...What must happen is that the authorities understand the situation, that is, that I do not have the slightest ulterior political motive...What we need is a change of climate for several months and good medical treatment....The overriding question of the moment is that of the visa.<sup>57</sup>

In May 1938, Suzanne LaFollette met with Adolf Berle, the Assistant Secretary of State, and requested that he grant Trotsky and his wife permission "a visa to visit the United States for a short period, say 60 days, to enter a hospital such as the Mayo Clinic or Johns Hopkins." After telling her that "the admission of Trotsky created some very

serious questions,” Berle refused. In his account of this, Berle noted that “Lombardo Toledano is theoretically visiting Russia on his European trip. Conceivably, there may be some political pressure which suggests to Trotsky that Mexico may not be too healthy for him.”<sup>58</sup>

It is worth noting here that, despite President Roosevelt’s comment, the State Department had no intention whatsoever of admitting Trotsky to the U.S. Until his death, the State Department rebuffed all efforts to secure him a visa on the basis of his revolutionary views. That they never conveyed this directly to his representatives until December 1939 meant that Trotsky’s hopes of gaining admission, however dim, remained alive.<sup>59</sup>

In July 1938, a new issue served to further diminish Trotsky’s prospects of getting a U.S. visa. That month, an American named Russell Negrete Blackwell, who fought with the International Brigades, was arrested in Spain. Blackwell was a former communist and a former Trotskyist whom the *Servicio de Investigacion Militar* (SIM, the political police of the Spanish Republican Army) charged with aiding the fascists and promoting counter-revolution. SIM officials charged that Blackwell had been Trotsky’s personal secretary and was part of a sustained counter-revolutionary campaign. Blackwell was held over for trial before a military tribunal.

In September 1938, the American Committee for the Defense of Robert Blackwell (aka Russell Negrete Blackwell) was formed in New York. That committee’s membership list was virtually identical to that of the ACDLT, and Trotskyists played active and leading roles in its campaign to get the State Department to secure Blackwell’s release, something the Department would have preferred not to do.<sup>60</sup> For this essay’s purpose, the most intriguing aspect of the Blackwell affair was Trotsky’s brief role in it. On November 8, 1938, Trotsky wrote to James B. Stewart, the American Consul General in the Federal District of Mexico, and informed him that:

I find it necessary to declare here that I have never met Mr. Blackwell. I have no connection of any kind with him.

Furthermore he was never my secretary. My friends inform me that he belongs to an American political group which is completely opposed to the Fourth International...I hope this information which I give you here and which I am ready to repeat before any authoritative body of the United States or Spain, can have some bearing on Mr. Blackwell’s case.<sup>61</sup>

Trotsky’s letter is intriguing for two reasons. This was the first letter which he written to a representative of the U.S. government since his 1933 application for a visa.

One can interpret this in one of two ways: either his compassion for the plight of Blackwell motivated him to intervene on Blackwell's behalf, or Trotsky sought to dissociate himself from a man the State Department viewed as politically undesirable in the hope of keeping his chances for entry into the U.S. alive. Given Trotsky's lack of compassion for those who opposed him and his views, which Blackwell may have done,<sup>62</sup> the former seems unlikely. Secondly, although Trotsky apparently had never met Blackwell and Blackwell was not his secretary, Trotsky's efforts to convey his total ignorance of Blackwell were disingenuous. In fact, Blackwell was responsible for establishing the Trotskyist movement and party (*Liga Comunista Internacionalista*) in Mexico.<sup>63</sup>

The timing of Trotsky's letter to Stewart, coming as it did four months after the arrest of Blackwell, is also of interest. In September 1938, two of Trotsky's acquaintances sought to help him gain admission into the U.S.. Diego Rivera with whom Trotsky was living visited the American Consulate to discuss Trotsky's and his wife's deteriorating health and their need for competent medical treatment. Nothing came of this effort.<sup>64</sup> Just prior to this, Trotsky received a letter from his friend General Pelham Glassford, the former chief of police in Washington, D.C. who led the assault on the 1932 bonus march there, and who was a member of the National Committee of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The two had discussed the feasibility of Trotsky entering the U.S. to conduct research for a comparative history of the Russian and American Civil Wars. The next day Glassford wrote to Trotsky:

I am sincerely interested in promoting unofficially some means by which it may be possible for you to take advantage of our libraries for a period of study. One factor of particular interest to me is the opportunity presented to test the liberty, freedom and tolerance which the United States professes so strongly.

However there is one matter of importance not discussed yesterday, and that is the extent to which you would expect special police protection while in the United States...I will be glad to take up the matter personally with Roger Baldwin, Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, and others whom I am sure will be greatly interested.<sup>65</sup>

The next day Trotsky wrote to Glassford and assured him that "I would live [in the U.S.] incognito," "would choose my residence in agreement with the authorities," would not participate "in the political life of the country," and "my guard would be assured by my personal friends."<sup>66</sup> With these assurances, Glassford wrote to Baldwin

seeking a visa which would enable Trotsky to live in the U.S. for “three months or more.” Glassford made it clear that Trotsky was “reluctant to make application here without some assurance that it will not be denied.” Baldwin’s discussions with the State Department and Department of Labor were fruitless. In October, he informed Glassford that the government would refuse Trotsky a visa because “the climate of the Dies Committee [the U.S. Congress’ House Un-American Activities Committee] makes a visa impossible...This does not, of course, preclude Mr. Trotsky from making an application...but by so doing he would almost certainly preclude any chance of later entry.”<sup>67</sup>

Glassford’s abortive effort appears to have been the last on the part of Trotsky’s influential friends to secure him a U.S. visa. They seem to have concluded that future efforts would be hopeless given that the State Department had thrice rejected him, that Frances Perkins, their only ally in the administration, was under heavy political pressure, that the military situation in the Far East meant that the government did not want to anger Stalin, and that the Dies’ Committee’s unfolding political witch-hunt was gaining momentum, thereby making admission of revolutionaries into the U.S. virtually impossible.

Yet precisely at this time, Trotsky’s need for greater security increased. What most concerned Trotsky was the imminent arrival in Mexico of refugees from the Spanish Civil War. On January 7, 1939, he wrote to his attorney and comrade Albert Goldman of the the imminent arrival of “1500 veterans” of the International Brigades: “I suppose that the selection of these people is done by the GPU and that agents of the GPU will form an important percentage of the 1500.”<sup>68</sup> Trotsky had reason to worry. Many of the thousands of International Brigade veterans who took refuge in Mexico perceived the sectarian, anti-Popular Front politics of Trotsky, Trotskyists and suspected Trotskyists during the Spanish Civil War as tantamount to counter-revolution and support for fascism. Blackwell was but one of many who was accused of being a Trotskyist and an agent of fascism. In addition, the influx of veterans, many of whom were communists, threatened to and ultimately did alter the political positions of the PCM and the CTM, much to the detriment of Trotsky. Although prior to 1939 both had opposed publicly Trotsky’s asylum in Mexico, their formal policy was to ignore Trotsky, to not legitimize him with undue attention. But from mid-1939, as the influence of the veterans within the PCM grew, both it and the CTM subjected Trotsky and his asylum to increasing attacks. That campaign intensified markedly after the PCM’s Extraordinary Congress in March 1940, at which the veterans helped to force the party into a more militant stance.<sup>69</sup> More broadly, the influx of refugees from the Spanish Civil War strengthened Popular Front

sentiments in Mexico and introduced into Mexican politics many of the political views and behaviors which characterized the European left's struggle against fascism. The political climate in Mexico became increasingly unfavorable to Trotsky.

Trotsky was not the only one concerned about the PCM. So too was the U.S. State Department which feared its influence and militancy, its support for the confiscation and/or nationalization of properties owned by U.S. nationals, its increasing denunciations of the U.S., its organizing efforts among Mexican nationals working in the U.S., and the alleged growth in support in Mexico for a "Soviet form of government as a solution to Mexico's economic maladjustments."<sup>70</sup> Similar concerns also fueled the Dies Committee, although the Roosevelt administration sought to distance itself from Dies. Despite the vast differences which divided Trotsky and the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government, they shared a common enemy. The signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939, the U.S. government's condemnation of that pact, and the onset of WWII raised the possibility that previous State Department concerns about not angering Stalin might diminish thereby enhancing Trotsky's efforts to gain admission. But how the situation could be turned to Trotsky's advantage remained to be seen.

The possibility of Trotsky entering the U.S. came in October 1939 from a most unlikely source--the Dies Committee, formally known as the U.S. House of Representatives Special Committee on Un-American Activities. Begun in May 1938, the Dies Committee, which was named for its chairman, Representative Martin Dies of Texas, sought to expose the role of communists in particular and subversives in general in the American labor movement and in American political life. Towards this end, it conducted congressional hearings which were the forerunner of the McCarthy hearings. On October 12th, J. B. Matthews, the Dies Committee's chief investigator, telephoned Trotsky's secretary, Joseph Hansen, and then cabled Trotsky to invite him to appear before the Committee to provide it with "a complete record of the history of Stalinism." Matthews promised Trotsky that he would arrange for visas for him and his wife, and for their protection. Joseph Hansen, Trotsky's secretary, wrote at the time that Trotsky

discussed the matter with all of his secretaries and guards. We were familiar, of course, with with the Dies Committee and its investigations. All of us agreed unanimously that it was a Marxist political duty for Comrade Trotsky to accept the invitation, since for the Fourth International it was not any different from any other parliamentary body, could be used as a tribune to explain Stalinist degeneration to the workers, and deal a stiff blow at the same time against the reactionary politics of Dies.

Later the same day, Trotsky wired Matthews the following telegram: "I accept your invitation as a political duty."<sup>71</sup>

Trotsky was under no illusions as to the Dies' Committee's purpose and role in American politics. As a regular subscriber to and reader of *The New York Times*,<sup>72</sup> Trotsky and his secretaries closely followed the committee's investigation of communist and trade union activities and organizations. Trotsky's attorney, Albert Goldman, met on several occasions with Matthews, who spoke frankly of the committee's aims. After each meeting, Goldman conveyed their conversation to Trotsky. Following a November meeting with Matthews, Goldman wrote to Trotsky that

The Committee wants to connect the Communist Party with the Stalinist government because it wants to persecute the Communist Party under a new law compelling all parties which are agents of foreign governments to register. Our objective, as I told Matthews, will be to expose the really corrupt nature of Stalinism and its corrupting influence on the labor movement. I asked him to get you a regular visitor's visa which will permit you to remain in the United States for six months.<sup>73</sup>

Over the next few weeks, Trotsky and his staff diligently prepared for Trotsky's appearance before the committee.<sup>74</sup> During November, Trotsky sought to have the Committee's hearing moved from the proposed site in Austin, Texas, which he described "as a kind of concentration camp," to Washington so as to be close to a "rich library." When Matthews refused the request, Trotsky humbly accepted the decision: "It is scarcely necessary to add that I am ready to rigidly observe the rules of a 'gentleman's agreement' that you [Goldman] might conclude with the Committee."<sup>75</sup> Trotsky was eager to appear before the Committee.

Although Trotsky's immediate entourage in Mexico supported his decision to appear before the Dies' Committee, it angered some members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the re-formed American Trotskyist party. At the October 17th meeting of the party's Political Committee, James Burnham introduced a motion "disapproving of Trotsky's acceptance, requesting him to reconsider and refuse to testify, and proposing that the SWP publicly dissociate itself from and criticize his action if he did not comply with the request." The motion was defeated.<sup>76</sup> In a letter to the Political Committee, Trotsky acknowledged that "[T]he [Dies] committee, like the whole parliament, is reactionary and pursues reactionary aims," but asked his comrades: "Why can we not

appear before this committee with the purpose of establishing the truth?...To appear if necessary on the foe's territory and to fight him with his own weapons--that is revolutionary radicalism."<sup>77</sup> Nor was opposition to Trotsky's appearance confined to the SWP's leadership. Six SWP members wrote to him of the Dies' Committee's political agenda and urged him to reconsider his decision:

...its role has been to discredit every shading of radical and liberal thought and action in the guise of ferreting out 'foreign agents', specifically those of Berlin and Moscow. Actually, as the war crisis deepens, the work of the committee has been to publicize evidence gathered or invented calculated to garner (pun intended) support for anti-labor legislation. In doing this it has earned the bitter hatred of the entire trade union movement both conservative and militant, as well as all leftist political organizations...At the conclusion of its investigations its evidence will be the basis for linking anti-labor legislation with police activities against spies. Its work will result in greatly strengthening the police power of the federal government in illegalizing strike movements....we feel you should carefully weigh your voluntary appearance...there remains the grave danger that objectively your appearance will hurt our movement rather than advance it, because your action as a voluntary one will be associated with future anti-labor legislation...and...your testimony will inevitably be distorted for red-baiting ends...<sup>78</sup>

Trotsky could have been under no illusions as to the political dangers and possible consequences of his appearing before the Dies Committee. In 1937, he had written: "I consider that my political task is, before everything else, to destroy the control which the Soviet bureaucracy has over an important section of the working class of the world."<sup>79</sup> To save the American working class from Stalinism, to destroy the CPUSA and to cripple the Comintern in the Americas, Trotsky was willing to testify for Dies, one of the avowed enemies of organized labor.

Although Trotsky had accepted Matthews' invitation in mid-October, it was not until his secretary, Joseph Hansen, visited the American Consulate in Mexico City on December 5 to inquire about Trotsky's visa that the State Department learned of Trotsky's intention to testify. A bewildered Consul Stewart cabled the State Department: "Wire instructions." Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle informed the Consulate that it should "discretely" discourage Trotsky's visa application. Hansen and the consular staff discussed the pros and cons of Trotsky's making formal application for a visa. The latter claimed that it was essential to do so, the former feared that a refusal "would bar him

from receiving such medical aid...in case of desperate illness.” Hansen inquired if Trotsky’s applying for a visa “meant that Trotsky would have to declare that he did not believe in the overthrow of the government by force. I [Robert McGregor, a consular official] explained that he could see the form for himself...Hansen said that of course the Dies Committee would get no one who was better equipped to furnish testimony on the Third International than Trotsky and so the arrangement would work to the mutual satisfaction of both parties.”<sup>80</sup> The consular staff noted that “in spite of the Consulate General’s suggestion that Mr. Trotsky might desire to apply for a visa, Mr. Hansen has carefully avoided any point blank question whether Mr. Trotsky would be considered admissible into the United States should he apply for a visa. It seems that Mr. Trotsky does not want to be put on record as having been refused a visa either directly or indirectly.”<sup>81</sup>

On December 7, Matthews attended a meeting at the State Department where Berle and other officials pointed out the political dangers of inviting Trotsky to the U.S. and noted that, if his appearance produced undesirable political consequences, Dies would be politically responsible.<sup>82</sup> Two days later, Hansen met again with the consular staff and was informed that “in 1933, although Trotsky had never filed a formal entry blank to the United States, the American Consul in Istanbul found him ‘ineligible for entry into the United States’...We find that nothing since that time has changed essentially...[a]nd that department concurs in our decision. If Trotsky were to file an application for entry into the United States, we would be forced to turn him down.”<sup>83</sup> Henceforth there could be no doubt; the U.S. government had no intention of admitting the exiled revolutionary. On December 12, 1939, Martin Dies, the committee’s chairman, withdrew the invitation to Trotsky.

Trotsky, of course, presented several reasons for his willingness to appear before the Dies Committee and publicly stated that he was “decidedly against the suppression” of any political party or organization.<sup>84</sup> But his protestations aside, the suppression of the CPUSA and Comintern activities in the U.S. would most definitely have been in Trotsky’s personal and political interests. Were he able to secure a visa to enter or reside in the U.S., the suppression of the CPUSA would have enhanced his safety there somewhat, although one must keep in mind that it probably would also have increased efforts to murder him. The suppression of the CPUSA might also have rebounded to the benefit of the Socialist Workers Party in that it would remove the Trotskyists’ most powerful adversary and rival. In short, his testimony might seriously weaken his main enemy. Trotsky was also well aware that the U.S. government had admitted two former high ranking members of the Soviet political police (Walter Krivitsky and Alexander Orlov)



who defected during the the Spanish Civil War, and that these men had testified before Congressional committees. It would not have been unreasonable for Trotsky to conclude that his testifying before the Dies Committee might produce the same effect. Unfortunately, Trotsky's thinking on these issues was never made public so such thoughts remain speculative.

In the U.S., Trotsky's decision to testify before the Dies Committee seriously undermined his already waning support. His supporters there consisted of liberals, civil libertarians, and members of the SWP, all of whom ardently opposed the Dies Committee, although the Political Committee of the latter was willing to abide by Trotsky's decision. With few exceptions, those on the ACDLT who had maintained an active correspondence with him throughout 1937-1939 never again wrote to him after his acceptance of Dies' invitation. Even within the SWP, Trotsky's willingness to testify marked the beginning of disillusionment among the faithful.<sup>85</sup>

The Mexican reaction to Trotsky's decision to appear before the Dies Committee was virulent and almost universal. The PCM was especially angry. Those attending its January 10, 1940 meeting denounced the Dies Committee as a reactionary body which served the interests of American oil companies in Mexico and condemned Trotsky's willingness to testify before it. Some charged Trotsky with collaborating with Dies. The meeting passed a resolution calling for his expulsion from Mexico.<sup>86</sup>

From the time that word of Dies' invitation to Trotsky became public, Trotsky denied allegations that during his testimony he planned to discuss Mexican political affairs.

This then was an opportunity to give testimony relating to the history of "Stalinism"; but in no case regarding the interior affairs of Latin American countries. I have never had nor do I have any documents relating to the activities of Latin American communists nor the petroleum question and I am not able to present anything regarding these matters before the Committee. I have not had nor do I have any intention to unmask the real or supposed plans of communists in Mexico.<sup>87</sup>

While such statements were designed to protect his asylum, they did little to allay anger within Mexico, especially within the PCM. At its Extraordinary Congress in March, there were renewed attacks against Trotsky and calls for his expulsion.<sup>88</sup> At a secret PCM meeting in April, allegations that the muralist Diego Rivera and "possibly Trotsky" had leaked sensitive information about the PCM to the U.S. government resulted in another

call to use “every effort to get rid of Trotsky” and a pledge to “take punitive action against the informers.”<sup>89</sup> In reaction to Dies’ charge in late April that the PCM sought the overthrow of the Mexican government, the party once again demanded “the expulsion of Trotsky and all spies and agents of Martin Dies.” Dies’ public statement on April 24, that he might again invite Trotsky to testify before his committee only fueled the PCM’s resolve “to get rid of Trotsky.”

Such was the environment when, on May 24, 1940, the muralist, communist and Spanish Civil War veteran David Alfaro Siqueiros and a group of about twenty armed men stormed Trotsky’s compound in an effort to assassinate him. The attempt failed although one of the bodyguards, Robert Sheldon Harte, was kidnapped and subsequently murdered.

In the aftermath of the attack, anxiety gripped the Trotsky compound. Diego Rivera was no less anxious for his life. Shortly after the attack, Rivera contacted the U.S. Consulate and asked for a Border Crossing Card to allow him to enter the U.S. The Consulate agreed to press his case in Washington, and within a week an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Board of Special Inquiry convened in Brownsville, Texas for the exclusive purpose of considering Rivera’s application, which was promptly approved.<sup>90</sup>

Given Rivera’s former membership in the PCM, his brief sojourn as a Trotskyist, and his generally radical, albeit often changing, political views, one might wonder why Rivera received such official courtesy. The most likely answer is that in the previous eighteen months, Rivera had publicly and secretly given information about the PCM and Mexican labor organizations both to the press and American consular officials in Mexico. The first known instance occurred in September 1938, when Rivera gave to correspondents in Mexico the names of alleged communists working in the Mexican government.<sup>91</sup> After the invitations to Trotsky and Rivera to appear before the Dies Committee became public knowledge in December 1939, Rivera, unlike Trotsky, stated that, when he testified, he would reveal “the extensive activities of Stalinist agents in Mexico and other countries in Latin America.”<sup>92</sup> At that time, Rivera gave to the international press the same list of names that he had given them in 1938.<sup>93</sup> Rivera’s attitude towards the Dies Committee differed from Trotsky’s in one other, somewhat comical, way. Rivera was insulted that he was asked to appear before the Committee in Texas and not in Washington. Rather than go to Texas, he preferred “to make a declaration in Mexico, since his testimony will be regarding Nazi and Communist activities in Mexico and not in the United States.”<sup>94</sup> Dies withdrew his invitation to Rivera to testify on the same day he withdrew Trotsky’s.

Rivera's willingness to inform the American government of Mexican affairs did not end there. From January 1940, Rivera met regularly and secretly with American consular officials and provided them with information about communist organizations and objectives in Mexico, PCM affiliations among the Spanish refugees, alleged PCM-Nazi collaboration, the internal politics of the PCM, alleged PCM and Nazi agents working in the Mexican government, communist agents working in Mexico, and "alleged financial aid given by John L. Lewis' CIO to Mexican Labor Organizations."<sup>95</sup> When the PCM leadership at its April 1940 meeting charged that Rivera was one of the "visible leaders" of "a group of agent provocateurs" who were leaking information to American officials and the press, they were not wrong.<sup>96</sup> Rivera had good reason to flee Mexico. That Rivera, before leaving Mexico, publicly called on President Roosevelt to "offer Trotsky asylum in the United States" to aid the U.S. "in combatting the Nazi-Soviet menace" only fueled the PCM's effort to expel Trotsky and "all spies and agents of Martin Dies,"<sup>97</sup> and increased the danger to Trotsky.

Whether or not Trotsky was aware of Rivera's secret meetings with American officials is unknown. The two men had not been in contact or on speaking terms for fifteen months, and each made it clear to all who would listen that neither spoke for the other.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless there were mutual friends who may have passed information about one to the other. If this were the case, Trotsky probably knew more about Rivera's activities than vice versa. One possible source of information was Leah Brenner, Rivera's secretary, who fled Mexico on June 2, 1940, the day after receiving a threatening note.<sup>99</sup> Leah was the sister of Anita Brenner, an active member of the ACDLT, the secretary of the Russell Negrete Blackwell Defense Committee, and a friend of many of Trotsky's supporters. Another possible source was Charles Curtiss, a Trotskyist and mutual friend of Rivera and Trotsky, who maintained regular correspondence with and provided material support to the exiled revolutionary.<sup>100</sup> There were undoubtedly others. But whether Trotsky knew that Rivera's special treatment by the American government resulted from his providing that government with information, however reliable, is unclear.

One thing is very clear--after the May 24th attack, Trotsky's need for secure asylum increased sharply. The threat of his being murdered had always been real. The deaths of many of his political supporters in the USSR and in Europe and of his two sons--Sergei in a Soviet labor camp, Sedov of mysterious circumstances in Paris--had not only saddened Trotsky, but heightened his sense that his life was in constant danger. Although Trotsky claimed to have been "certain there would be an attempt"<sup>101</sup> on his life before May 1940, after the bungled attempt by the Siqueiros gang, his fear of being

murdered intensified. His home in Coyoacan, the defenses of which were already formidable, was further fortified. The ongoing Mexican presidential election campaign made clear to Trotsky the uncertainty of his asylum in Mexico. The two leading candidates, Avila Camacho and Almazan, had publicly stated their intention to expel Trotsky. His days in Mexico appeared to be numbered.<sup>102</sup> If Trotsky as an individual and as the leader, theoretician and embodiment of the Fourth International were to play an active role in the direction of that movement and in revolutionary politics, he needed a secure place of asylum which permitted him close contact with his supporters. With war raging in Europe and the Far East, the only possible places of asylum were in the Americas, and of these asylum in the U.S. was the ideal. Previous efforts to gain admission, even temporary, to the U.S. had failed, and in the aftermath of the Dies' Committee affair, Trotsky's support within the U.S. had diminished sharply. What he needed was something of significant value to persuade the U.S. government to look favorably upon an application for a visa.

In this context, Trotsky's writings during his last three months and his staff's behavior during this period and after his death suggest that he pursued a dual strategy which sought to enhance the prospects of retaining his asylum in Mexico, while at the same time providing the U.S. government with information of sufficient value to enhance his prospects for a visa.

During his last three months, Trotsky set aside the biography of Stalin on which he had been working and devoted his energies almost exclusively to the investigation of the May 24th assault and its aftermath.<sup>103</sup> During this time, Trotsky wrote on two interrelated issues. The first was his claim that three Mexican publications--*Futuro*, *El Popular*, and *La Voz de Mexico*--received financial support from the GPU in exchange for which they adhered to the Stalinist line. Related to this charge was Trotsky's accusation that Lombardo Toledano, the head of the CTM, worked as a foreign agent of the Kremlin. The second issue was Trotsky's claim that the Soviet government through the GPU exercised complete control and direction of the Comintern and the communist parties of the U.S. and Mexico. What bound the two issues together was Trotsky's urgent need to expose the GPU network which he believed engineered the May 24th assault and which would try again because, as he correctly noted, "Stalin seeks my death."<sup>104</sup>

Let us first turn to Trotsky's battle with the Mexican press and Toledano. During his three and a half years in Mexico, the PCM's newspaper, *El Machete* and (after October 1938) *La Voz de Mexico*, as well as the CTM's newspaper, *El Popular*, and its magazine, *Futuro*, had published numerous, often slanderous, accusations about Trotsky's political

activities and intentions.<sup>105</sup> By mid-May 1940, Trotsky had reached the limits of his patience and challenged the publications to substantiate their accusations.<sup>106</sup>

Shortly after the May assault, *Futuro*, *El Popular*, and *La Voz de Mexico* published assertions that Trotsky himself had engineered what they called a “self assault.” Trotsky was outraged by the charge which he viewed as having two purposes: “(1) to stir up police hostility against the victim of the aggression and thus to aid the aggressors; (2) to cause, if possible, my expulsion from Mexico; that is to say, my transfer into the hands of the GPU.”<sup>107</sup> On May 27, he wrote to the Attorney General of Mexico, the Chief of Police of the Federal District and the Secretary for Internal Affairs charging that these publications received money from the Soviet government. Trotsky claimed that the “attempted assassination could only be instigated by the Kremlin; by Stalin through the agency of the GPU abroad,” that “[t]he GPU is particularly concerned with the problem of preparing public opinion for a terrorist act [and that]...This part of the job is always assigned to the the Stalinist press, Stalinist speakers, and the so-called ‘friends of the Soviet Union.’” To understand how and by whom the attack was organized, “it is essential to categorically establish that the activity of the GPU is closely intertwined with the activity of the Comintern...[I]n the Central Committee of each section of the Comintern there is placed a responsible director of the GPU for that country.” Therefore, “[t]he judicial investigation [into the May 24 assault], it seems to me, from this point of view cannot fail to examine the work of the newspapers *El Popular*, *La Voz de Mexico*, and some collaborators of *El Nacional*.”<sup>108</sup>

*El Popular* and *Futuro* immediately initiated a libel suit against Trotsky.<sup>109</sup> The evidence which he presented to the court sought to accomplish two aims: to show the interlocking network of the editorial boards of the publications, and to prove that the publications acted as agents of the Soviet government, specifically the GPU. Trotsky’s evidence in support of the former was far more convincing than that in support of the latter, which consisted of circumstantial evidence and sought to turn the charges of slander and defamation against his accusers.<sup>110</sup>

Trotsky also charged that Lombardo Toledano, the leader of the CTM and editor of *Futuro*, “took part in the moral preparation of the terrorist attack,”<sup>111</sup> and that “Toledano knew in advance of the preparations for the attempt, even if in the most general way.”<sup>112</sup> He described Toledano as a “foreign agent of the Kremlin.”<sup>113</sup> Nor did Trotsky limit his accusations to Mexico. He charged Harry Block, an American correspondent for the *Nation* who published an article about the “self-assault” in that publication, with being “an agent of the Soviet Embassy in Washington.” After characterizing the staff of the *Nation* as “an infamous reptile breed,” Trotsky went on to describe Block as

a close collaborator of Lombardo Toledano, the notorious political agent of the GPU in Mexico. Harry Block is the managing editor of *Futuro*, the foul, slanderous monthly of Lombardo Toledano...The "authority" of Harry Block is based upon the fact that he is considered the agent of the Soviet Embassy in Washington in relations with the CTM. The head of the Soviet agency in Washington is [Ambassador] Oumansky, who made his diplomatic career out of being an agent of the GPU. Consequently, Harry Block is the confidential go-between for two agents of the GPU, Oumansky and Lombardo Toledano. No wonder that Harry Block defended the dirty theory of "self-assault" in the pages of such a prostituted magazine as the *Nation*.<sup>114</sup>

At the July 2 libel hearing, Trotsky charged that *La Voz de Mexico* also received financial support from Moscow. That newspaper responded with a libel suit. Over the next month and a half, Trotsky worked tirelessly on a document which he would use to substantiate his charge, and which proved to be his last substantive work, "The Comintern and the GPU." Although Trotsky began that essay with the assertion that "This document pursues aims which are juridical and not political,"<sup>115</sup> the piece is of inestimable political value.

The document seeks not simply to prove that *La Voz de Mexico* received funds from the GPU in Moscow, but also that all communist parties and organizations sympathetic to the USSR did so. After a brief summary of his views on the reasons for the degeneration of the Soviet experiment and statements about the GPU being the organizer of the May 24th attempt on his life, Trotsky turned his attention to the role of *La Voz de Mexico* in the "moral preparation" of the assault and its editorial board's alleged foreknowledge of the attack: "The editorial board of *La Voz de Mexico* knew of the impending attempt and was preparing the public opinion of its own party and sympathizing circles."<sup>116</sup> It is not until the second half of the piece that Trotsky presents some rather compelling substantive and circumstantial evidence in support of his accusation that "*La Voz de Mexico*, *El Popular*, and *Futuro* are tools of the GPU and enjoy its economic aid."<sup>117</sup> Among the substantive evidence presented were a December 1917 Council of People's Commissars decree allocating financial aid to revolutionary organizations and sworn affidavits from three people: Benjamin Gitlow, a former leader of the CPUSA, on GPU control of the financial affairs of the Comintern; Joseph Zack, a former CPUSA activist, on financial aid given by the Comintern to Latin American communist parties; and Walter Krivitsky on the "system of the organization of the GPU

in the USSR and abroad, the relations between the GPU and the Comintern, and the terroristic activity of the GPU abroad.”<sup>118</sup>

Since the document served a specific juridical purpose, its value as a political document is open to interpretation. There was nothing new in it to the U.S. State Department,<sup>119</sup> although it might have interested the Dies Committee enough to extend an invitation to Trotsky to testify. Within Mexico, the document would have put the beleaguered PCM on the political and legal defensive, thereby possibly enhancing Trotsky’s security and the possibility that he might be allowed to stay in Mexico.<sup>120</sup>

To appreciate Trotsky’s and his staff’s perception of the political importance of his charges against the PCM and the Mexican radical press, it is worth examining their meetings with U.S. Consulate officials in the aftermath of the May 24th assault. The process began, understandably, when Trotsky and his staff cooperated with the U.S. Consulate’s investigation into the whereabouts and fate of his kidnapped bodyguard Robert Sheldon Harte, an American citizen. Trotsky’s secretaries provided the Consulate’s staff with information about the assault and Harte. In June, James McGregor of the Consulate met with Trotsky in his home and discussed Harte’s case. He met again with Trotsky on July 13th, “to learn of developments” in the investigation of the May attack. After commenting on the irony that the Arenal brothers, who participated in the May attack, could get into the U.S. “when he himself was mandatorily excluded,” Trotsky told McGregor in considerable detail of the allegations and evidence he had compiled while preparing “The Comintern and the GPU,” although he made no mention of that essay. He gave to McGregor the names of Mexican publications, political and labor leaders, and government officials allegedly associated with the PCM. He charged that one of the Comintern’s leading agents, Carlos Contreras (the alias for Vittorio Vidali), served on the PCM’s Directing Committee. He also spoke of the efforts of Narciso Bassols, the former Mexican Ambassador to France, whom he claimed was a Soviet agent, to get Trotsky deported from Mexico.<sup>121</sup>

Five days later, Charles Cornell, one of Trotsky’s secretaries, visited the Consulate and gave to George Shaw, a member of the consular staff, a “strictly confidential memo” from Trotsky which discussed the activities in Mexico of Enrique Martinez Riqui, purportedly a GPU agent in Latin America who allegedly “planned and directed” the 1940 purge the PCM. Riqui allegedly operated out of New York and “has direct contact with Moscow”.<sup>122</sup>

Given that the U.S. Consulate could do little to enhance Trotsky’s security in Mexico and that the information he gave to McGregor was of uncertain relevance to the investigation of Harte’s disappearance, one can reasonably conclude that Trotsky

provided this information to enhance his value as a source of information, while simultaneously striking a blow against alleged Soviet agents in Mexico and the U.S. whom he believed threatened his safety.

On August 22, just such an agent, Ramon Mercador, murdered Trotsky by driving an alpenstock into his skull. After the assassination, Trotsky's attorney, Albert Goldman, and members of Trotsky's staff made a series of efforts to have his ashes buried in New York, a prospect from which the State Department recoiled so sharply that they did not fully inform Goldman of the law.<sup>123</sup> On September 3, Joseph Hansen visited Robert McGregor at the American Consulate and informed him of Trotsky's three unpublished works on the Mexican press and "The Comintern and the GPU" (of which McGregor was unaware) and promised to give them to him. The next day Hansen gave McGregor these works and a secret memorandum of a conversation between a "Directing Member of the Fourth International in New York, and a prominent member, "W", of the Fourth International" which touched on a series of issues relating to Trotsky's murder.<sup>124</sup> Ten days later, Hansen gave to McGregor more documents and information found in Trotsky's desk about a number of individuals in Mexico, the U.S., and France, some of whom were suspected Soviet agents.<sup>125</sup>

It is, of course, possible to interpret Trotsky's giving information about alleged communists and Comintern agents to U.S. consular officials as an understandable effort to identify and apprehend those responsible for the May assault and Harte's murder. He had every reason to be worried for his life. Viewed in this way, he acted in self defense. No one could possibly deny Trotsky the right to defend himself. But given that much of the information that he gave to the Consulate was of uncertain relevance to the investigation of the May assault, such an explanation is incomplete. There is another and equally plausible way of viewing Trotsky's dealings with the U.S. Consulate, one consistent with his political behavior in Mexico.

From early 1937 until December 1939, Trotsky and his supporters worked diligently and persistently to secure him a visa to enter the United States. These efforts were usually done under false pretenses and with Trotsky's full knowledge. Stolberg's and LaFollette's efforts to get Trotsky a visa for medical reasons was disingenuous. According to a doctor who was a Trotskyist, neither Trotsky's nor his wife's health provided cause for alarm. Their efforts in 1937 were clearly motivated by their desire to have Trotsky appear before the full Commission of Inquiry in New York or, at a minimum, provide a precedent for later securing a resident's permit for him. LaFollette's futile plea to Berle in 1938 to grant Trotsky a visa for medical reasons was motivated by her desire to establish just such a precedent. In fact, Trotsky's health provided no reason



for alarm or special medical treatment. In March 1939, he wrote to a comrade: "Your proposition of sending an American doctor here is not advisable. Nothing is new other than the aggravation of the chronic things. The general name of my illness is 'the sixties' and I do not believe that in New York you have a specialist for this malady."<sup>126</sup> When his alleged need for medical care proved to be unpersuasive, Trotsky changed tactics and worked with General Glassford and the ACLU to gain admission to conduct historical research, the same reason that he had given in his 1933 appeal. In fact, there is no evidence that Trotsky ever seriously contemplated writing a comparative history of the Russian and American civil wars.

In late 1939, Trotsky enthusiastically accepted the Dies Committee's invitation which would have not only allowed him to help Dies suppress the CPUSA and hamstringing the Comintern in the Americas, but also promised to secure for him and his wife a six month visa. His explanations aside, his eager efforts to contribute to Dies' anti-communist and anti-labor witch-hunt irreparably damaged his credibility among his former American supporters, and suggests that he had placed his personal needs above those of the party and class that he claimed to represent. After December 1939, Trotsky had to rely on his own devices if he was to gain admission to the U.S..

In this context, Trotsky's behavior after the May assault suggests that he had adapted but not abandoned his tactics. From December 1939, he knew full well that the State Department opposed his admission to the U.S., but the official courtesy given to Rivera after the May assault may have rekindled his hopes. His writings and relations with the U.S. Consulate after May can therefore plausibly be viewed as another in a series of tactics which had dual purposes. His allegations against his enemies in Mexico put them on the defensive and offered the prospect that they would be seriously weakened and possibly outlawed. Either outcome might enhance his safety and enable him to remain in Mexico. By providing the U.S. Consulate with information about common enemies, be they Mexican communists or Soviet agents, Trotsky may well have hoped to prove his value to a government that had no desire to grant him a visa. Trapped as he was in the summer of 1940 in a dire predicament, such a strategy offered the possibility of success and few liabilities. He had nothing to lose by providing information to the U.S. government.

This essay has sought to shed light on Trotsky's heretofore unknown three and a half year effort to gain admission to the U.S. Futile though it was, he pursued it consistently using all the available means at his disposal. At times, such as his agreement to testify before the Dies Committee and his giving information to the American government, these means seemed to run counter to his political principles. Herein lay

one of the most striking features of Trotsky's behavior during his final years. His orders to have the Workers Party dissolve and join the Socialist Party, his clandestine direction of his supporters on the ACDLT, his agreement to appear before the Dies Committee, all were motivated by three overlapping goals: to convey his political views to the broadest possible audience; to enhance his personal safety; and to weaken Stalin, the GPU and the Comintern, the main enemy. In pre-revolutionary Russia, Bolsheviks and Social Democrats like Trotsky argued that participation in the Duma (the national assembly) and other tsarist organizations for the purpose of weakening the enemy and making their own positions known to a broader audience were entirely appropriate. Yet at the same time, they also sought to expose what they considered the political bankruptcy of such bodies. When Trotsky defended his decision to testify before the Dies Committee, he did so because he viewed it as no different than any other parliamentary body. He hoped to use it as a tribune to denounce Stalin, to convey his views to a wide audience, and to expose Dies' reactionary intentions. In 1937, Trotsky wrote: "I consider that there are no means that are good or bad in themselves or in connection with some suprahistorical principle. Those means that lead to...liquidating the power of man over man are good."<sup>127</sup> Lenin and Stalin would have agreed.

This is not the place to debate the morality or immorality of Leninist political ethics, but rather simply to note that until his death Trotsky's political behavior remained quintessentially Leninist. To use all available forums to further the cause and to expose and weaken the enemy was a hallmark of Leninist political tactics. Trotsky, the U.S. government and the ACDLT's members may all have shared a common enemy--Stalin--but Trotsky's unswerving adherence to his revolutionary beliefs and Leninist tactics undermined all efforts to turn that common enemy to his advantage. The American government feared his revolutionary philosophy. His American liberal supporters, for whom the means were as important as the ends, became disillusioned with his sectarian tactics and behavior as exemplified by his opposition to the Popular Front, his condemnation of those who did not share his views, and his willingness to testify before the Dies Committee. Tactics which had worked well in revolutionary Russia failed miserably in America.

Trotsky's political behavior during this period also sheds light on the dangers inherent in a vanguard political party, such as the CPSU or the American Trotskyist party. In *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson wrote of the "theory of substitution" as occurring when "the party, sect or theorist...disclose class-consciousness not as it is but as it ought to be."<sup>128</sup> Perhaps the best example of the theory of substitution was the CPSU, of which Trotsky was a member from 1917 to 1927, which viewed itself as

the vanguard of the working class. Shortly after the Russian revolution, the party's self-proclaimed role as the vanguard of the working class justified its acting in the name and against the desires of the Russian proletariat. As the alleged repository of proletarian class consciousness, it substituted itself for the working class. Trotsky's efforts to militarize labor in 1920 stand as a clear example of the theory of substitution. After his ascendancy to power in 1929 and the advent of the cult of personality, Stalin, the self-proclaimed personification of Leninism, substituted himself for the party. By the logic of substitution, Stalin had become the embodiment of what the CPSU and Soviet working class ought to have been and should have become.

If we examine Trotsky's political behavior during his campaign to secure an American visa, we can see another, less well known example of the theory of substitution by the leader of vanguard party, albeit an unsuccessful one. Examples of Trotsky substituting himself for and imposing his will on his American party include his orders in that the Workers Party disband itself and infiltrate the American Socialist Party (and then to leave it the next year), and his orders to his comrades on the ACDLT. Despite his ignorance of the norms and nuances of American political culture, he berated his comrades' very sensible advice on how to work in the ACDLT and lectured them on "Marxist rules of coalition." In fact, throughout his stay in Mexico, it was Trotsky's position on an issue, irregardless of whether or not it was politically wise or appropriate, that determined his American party's policy. The logic of substituting himself for his party led Trotsky to agree to appear before the Dies Committee. Despite his own comrades' objections and pleas that he not testify for fear of his testimony's impact on the American labor movement and his own party, Trotsky agreed to testify "as a political duty." Like Stalin, Trotsky had substituted his needs and his views for those in whose name and interests he conducted his revolutionary struggle. Given Trotsky's belief that "there are no means that are good or bad...in connection with some suprahistorical principle," his substituting his own needs and beliefs for those he purported to represent stands as evidence of the dangers inherent in a vanguard party and how staunchly Leninist he remained. What is less clear is what the "suprahistorical principle" he stood had become.

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<sup>1</sup>Trotsky to The General Consulate of the United States of America, Istanbul, May 25, 1933. The National Archives, Record Group 59 (Records of U.S. State Department; Hereafter RG 59).

<sup>2</sup>Trotsky was deemed inadmissible under the provisions of Section 3 of the Act of February 5, 1917 and of the Act of October 16, 1918 as amended by the act of June 5, 1920. The decision on Trotsky's inadmissibility was written by Robert Kelley, Division of Eastern European Affairs,

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Department of State, and is dated June 23, 1933. The telegram from the Immigration and Naturalization Service conveying the decision was dated July 10, 1933 and signed Phillips. National Archives, RG 59.

<sup>3</sup>Trotsky frequently noted that the Soviet government did not seek his formal extradition or deportation, either of which would have required a formal hearing at which the charges levelled against Trotsky at the August Moscow show trial would have to have been substantiated. But in 1940, Trotsky wrote that "The Moscow trials of 1936-37 [sic] were staged in order to obtain my deportation from Norway, i.e. actually to hand me over into the hands of the GPU." *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40* (New York, 1977), 352.

<sup>4</sup>The most thorough report on the American Committee's activities and those of committees abroad can be found in its final report entitled "Report to the Members on the Work of the American Committee for the Defense of the Leon Trotsky", March 21, 1938. The full collection of documents relating to the ACDLT and the Dewey Commission can be found in the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky and Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials ("Dewey Commission") collection in the Tamiment Library, New York University. Hereafter referred to as the ACDLT Collection.

<sup>5</sup>John Dewey was the internationally renowned educational philosopher who, in 1937, headed the sub-commission of inquiry which took testimony from Trotsky in Mexico on the veracity of the charges made against him at the Moscow trials. For more on this, see below. Norman Thomas was the leader of the American Socialist Party from 1928 until his death in 1968. Devere Allen was a leading member of the American Socialist Party, a journalist and author of numerous works on pacifism. Horace Kallen was a philosopher, educator, and author of numerous works on nationalism. Joseph Wood Krutch was a dramatic critic and essayist who in the 1930s served on the editorial board of the *Nation*. Freda Kirchwey was a writer for the *Nation* from 1919, and its editor and publisher from 1937 to 1955.

<sup>6</sup>The October 22, 1936 letter from these six announcing the formation of the ACDLT referred to it as the Provisional American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky. ACDLT Collection.

<sup>7</sup>"Report to the Members," March 21, 1938, ACDLT Collection. In fact, members of the American Committee appear to have played a key role in getting Cardenas to consider granting Trotsky asylum. Anita Brenner, an active member of the ACDLT, appears to have urged her sister Leah, Diego Rivera's personal secretary, to have Rivera speak to Cardenas and his closest advisor, General Mujica, on Trotsky's behalf.

<sup>8</sup>Defense committees also existed in Canada, Mexico, England, France, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland and Holland. These committees had the endorsement and support of the Labor and Second Internationals, and political parties such as the POUM, CNT and others. *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup>Horace Kallen to the Secretary of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, March 19, 1937, ACDLT Collection.

<sup>10</sup>George Novack to the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky members, February 4, 1937, ACDLT Collection. See also Meyer Schapiro's February 8, 1937 letter to members of the ACDLT; the February 19, 1937 issue of the *News Bulletin* of the ACDLT; and the "Report to the Members," ACDLT Collection. On the deep divisions created by the formation of the American Committee and the Dewey Commission, a sub-commission of the International Commission of Inquiry, see Sidney Hook, "Memories of the Moscow Trials," *Commentary*, 77, 3 (1984), 57-63; Sidney Hook, *Out of Step. An Unquiet Life in the Twentieth Century*. (New York, 1987), 218-247. On the Dewey Commission, see below.

<sup>11</sup>Freda Kirchwey to George Novack, February 9, 1937. Trotsky Archives, The Exile Period, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>12</sup>Trotsky appears to have first conceived of the idea of an international commission of inquiry in 1935 in relation to the arrest of his son, Sergei, in the aftermath of the Kirov assassination and accusations that the alleged Leningrad Center had attempted to send a letter to Trotsky. *Trotsky's Diary in Exile, 1935*. Translated by Elena Zarudnaya (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 129-133. The precise

role of Trotsky's supporters in the Socialist Party in getting Thomas and Allen to organize the committee remains unclear.

<sup>13</sup>On the American Trotskyists' infiltration of the Socialist Party of America and Trotsky's role in that affair, see M.S. Venkataramani, "Leon Trotsky's Adventure in American Radical Politics, 1935-7," *International Relations of Social History*, 9, 1 (1964), 1-46, esp. 6-12; Constance Ashton Meyers, *The Prophet's Army. Trotskyists in America, 1928-1941*. (Westport, CT, 1977), 123-142; James P. Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism* (New York, 1972), 216-256.

<sup>14</sup>Untitled (T5282), Trotsky Archives. Emphasis in the original. The copy of this document in the Trotsky Archives is undated and unsigned. The internal evidence suggests that it was written in November 1936, but precisely when that month is unclear. Although the Workers' Party of America had by that time merged with the Socialist Party, the internal evidence makes it clear that this secret circular was drawn up by leaders of the Workers' Party.

<sup>15</sup>Venkataramani, *passim*., esp. 6-14.

<sup>16</sup>See Trotsky's letter to James Cannon, March 9, 1937. *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)* (New York, 1978), 226.

<sup>17</sup>"Report to the National Committee of the Socialist Party USA," May 8, 1937. Trotsky Archives.

<sup>18</sup>"The main work of the Committee rests on the [Socialist] Party...Party members are the mainstay of the office, do most of the lecturing and writing...arranging mass meetings, etc." *Ibid.* Of the 136 members of the New York and Chicago committees, fourteen were Trotskyists and fourteen were Socialists. Trotskyists held the two key executive positions: George Novack was the Secretary and Felix Morrow the Assistant Secretary. Many other members of the ACDLT were political or personal friends of Trotsky (e.g. V.F. Calverton, Suzanne LaFollette, Benjamin Stolberg, and others) So adept were the Trotskyists at steering the ACDLT for their own purposes that many members of the ACDLT were simply unaware of their ulterior motives. Paul Brissenden, an ACDLT member, wrote to the editor of the *New Masses*: "I am not a Trotskyist. There are persons on the committee who, I suppose, may be so catalogued. I have not seen the evidence that the committee is being steered by Trotskyists or others..." Brissenden to Taylor, February 7, 1937, ACDLT Collection.

<sup>19</sup>According to the agreement Trotsky signed aboard the ship "Ruth" on January 9, 1937, he pledged "quedar obligado a respetar nuestras leyes y d'abstenerse de hacer propaganda de su credo politico-social en Territorio Nacional." Notarized Agreement, January 9, 1937, Trotsky Archives.

<sup>20</sup>Trotsky telegram to the ACDLT, January 11, 1937. ACDLT Collection.

<sup>21</sup>Trotsky "To all the comrades in the committee," March 17, 1937, Trotsky Archives.

<sup>22</sup>For example, see Herbert Solow letter to Trotsky in which he wrote: "I endorse a document which is...highly confidential. I have drafted it, and it will be acted on by a special sub-committee. I will show it Schachtman. Otherwise, nobody else on the Committee [ACDLT] is going to see it. After we have your corrections and Schachtman's, and after the sub-committee approves it, we...will send it out...if you have no particular use for [it], please destroy it." Apparently Trotsky did destroy it since I have been unable to find it in his archive. The letter is undated but from the context appears to have been written in January or February 1937. Solow to Trotsky, nd, Trotsky Archives. Trotsky's comrades on the ACDLT sent to him correspondence relevant to the ACDLT. See for example, Felix Morrow to Frank Trager (a member of the Socialist Party) on the importance of having a member of the SP on the sub-commission going to Mexico. April 9, 1937. Trotsky also received private correspondence between ACDLT members who were not comrades. For example, see Charles Beard to John Dewey, May 22, 1937. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>23</sup>Between December 1936 and March 1938, the ACDLT organized five mass meetings in New York. It also published six issues of its *News Bulletin* (in runs of 5,000 to 10,000) and several other publications, see "Final Report on the Work," ACDLT Collection. On the importance which Trotsky attached to the work of the ACDLT, especially its mass work, see Alice Ruhle-Gerstel, "No Verses for Trotsky. A Diary in Mexico (1937)," *Encounter*, 58, 4 \*1982), 26-41.

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<sup>24</sup>See Trotsky to George Novack, March 9, 1937, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)* (New York, 1978), 228-229.

<sup>25</sup>Trotsky "To all comrades in the committee," March 17, 1937, Trotsky Archives. Emphasis in the original. On the need for haste in putting together the inquiry commission, see also Wolf to Harold Issacs, March 17, 1937. Trotsky Archives. Solow was charged with drawing up the Model Statutes for a Commission of Inquiry. He presented his draft to the ACDLT at its March 1, 1937 meeting. See the minutes of that meeting attached to Novack's letter of March 10, 1937, ACDLT Collection.

<sup>26</sup>See Trotsky to Suzanne LaFollette, March 15, 1937. *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)*, 237-238. This letter is interesting because it suggests that Trotsky was not sure of the ability of those comrades on the ACDLT to fulfill his marching orders. In this letter to his friend LaFollette, who was treasurer of the ACDLT, he wrote of "the necessity for the immediate creation of the inquiry commission." He ended by noting that "I cannot and will not write about this matter to the committee officially...Please make whatever use of this letter you deem necessary."

<sup>27</sup>On the relations between the ACDLT, the Dewey Commission and the International Commission of Inquiry, and for the membership of the latter, see the "Final Report on the Work," ACDLT Collection.

<sup>28</sup>Alice Ruhle-Gerstel, "No Verses for Trotsky."

<sup>29</sup>The reporter was Frank Kluckhohn. Joseph Hansen wrote of Kluckhohn: "When the [Dewey] commission came down he [Kluckhohn] decided to take as objective an attitude as possible in accordance with the best newspaper tradition, that Goldman had told him on the first meeting that all these people had come down convinced that Trotsky was innocent, that Kluckhohn had considered this attitude absolutely improper and had so written in his article, that Goldman was not only a fool but had lied afterwards..." Hansen memo of March 17, 1938. Trotsky Archives.

<sup>30</sup>The stenographic report of the hearings can be found in *The Case of Leon Trotsky. Report of Hearings on the Charges Made against Him in the Moscow Trials*. (New York, 1937). The commission's findings can be found in *Not Guilty*. (New York, 1937?)

<sup>31</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)*, 274-275.

<sup>32</sup>On the fortunes of the PCM during the Cardenas years, see: Barry Carr, "Crisis in Mexican Communism: The Extraordinary Congress of the Mexican Communist Party," *Science & Society*, (Part 1) 50, 4 (Winter 1986-1987), 391-414; (Part 2), 51, 1 (Spring 1987), 43-67; Donald Herman, *The Comintern in Mexico*. (Washington, 1974), 103-146.

<sup>33</sup>In early 1937, the CTM chose not to push for Trotsky deportation. According to a CTM National Committee report on its "line of conduct" towards Trotsky, the CTM advised: "First, no importance shall be attached by the proletariat to the presence of Trotsky in Mexico, in order to prevent his stay among us from being exploited to divide the labor movement. Second. The groups associated with the CTM shall engage in no public acts for the purpose of commenting on Trotsky's stay in Mexico. Third. In no case shall Trotsky's expulsion from the country be requested, as the responsibility for his residence in Mexico has been left to the Government of Mexico. Fourth. The National Committee of the CTM will send a circular to all groups belonging to it, explaining the differences existing between our Confederation's program and Trotskyism..." As quoted in H. E. Marshburn's Political Report on Mexico, January 26, 1937. National Archives, RG 59. However, this directive was honored more in the breach than in the observance. On the mounting campaign to "get rid of Trotsky," see below.

<sup>34</sup>According to the Fourth International, in 1938 membership in Trotskyist parties adhering to the Fourth International numbered 5,485, of which 2,500 belonged to the Socialist Workers Party, the heir to the Workers Party of America. These figures are probably optimistic. *Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years (1933-40)* (New York, 1973), 289. See also, Christopher Z. Dobson and Ronald D. Tabor, *Trotskyism and the Dilemma of Socialism* (Westport, CT, 1988), 89-94.

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<sup>35</sup>For examples, see: Jan Frankel to Margaret DeSilver, April 24, 1937; Albert Goldman to Charles Cornell, April 4, 1940. The Trotsky Archives. See also, Trotsky to Charles Curtiss, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, 346.

<sup>36</sup>On July 27, 1937, Benjamin Stolberg wrote to Trotsky of his meeting with U.S. Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins at which he “asked her to grant you permission to visit Johns Hopkins....I did not expect much from her, partly because she had refused several times to grant you a permit before.” Trotsky Archive.

<sup>37</sup>Walter Casey to Trotsky, February 11, 1937. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>38</sup>Stolberg to Trotsky July 27, 1937; Trotsky to Stolberg, July 31, 1937, Trotsky Archive. Trotsky’s eagerness to secure the visa is clear from the list of questions he sent to Stolberg about various related issues, among them was : “The date of the eventual trip? It would be well to have my sojourn ...coincide with the sessions of the Full Commission.”

<sup>39</sup>In his letter to Trotsky of August 5, 1937, Stolberg wrote : “The Department of Labor end of things is arranged. Suzanne [LaFollette] tried to [secure a visa] through other channels [at the State Department] and failed.” Trotsky Archive.

<sup>40</sup>According to Fishler, Trotsky had slightly elevated blood pressure (170/95) and marked myopia, but all else was fine. Except for marked hyperopia, Natalia’s health was fine. Her blood pressure was 114/80. See his report dated September 1937 in the Trotsky Archive. On Fishler’s party membership, see his letter to James Cannon, March 6, 1940. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>41</sup>Bernard Wolf to Joseph Hansen, July 29, 1937. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>42</sup>Suzanne LaFollette to Trotsky, August 6, 1937. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>43</sup>For the 1937 correspondence between Alexander Heard and Trotsky, see the letters and telegrams dated June 15, July 20, July 28, August 9, August 13, August 20, August 26, September 2, September 30, October 6, 1937. Trotsky Archive. The legal grounds for denying the visa can be found in a letter from The Legal Advisor, Department of State, to Mr. Hackworth, of August 27, 1937. National Archives, RG 59. Specifically the Legal Advisor wrote that “the Department has evidence that Trotzky advocates the ‘overthrow by force or violence’ of governments, including the Government of the United States, as a means of establishing communism throughout the world.”

<sup>44</sup>I have been unable to find the report of Dewey’s meeting with Hull. But in a letter to Alexander Heard dated October 6, 1937, that is after LaFollette’s unsuccessful meeting with the State Department but before Dewey’s, Trotsky wrote: “In view of the situation in the Far East, the Administration...find [sic] it advisable not to ‘irritate’ the Moscow government by any favor accorded to me.” Trotsky Archive. Apparently this was the reason given to LaFollette, and one suspects to Dewey as well.

<sup>45</sup>Trotsky to Herbert Solow, October 15, 1937. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>46</sup>For a discussion of the Socialist Party’s reaction to Trotsky’s position on the Spanish Republican government, see Venkataramani, pp 25-27.

<sup>47</sup>Wolfe [Trotsky] to Burnham, Cannon, Glotzer and Weber, June 15, 1937. Trotsky Archive. The letter appears under the title “The Situation in the SP and Our Next Tasks,” in *Writings of Leon Trotsky. 1936-1937*. (New York, 1978), 334-335. In this source, the salutations read “Dear Comrades”, for the names of those to whom it was addressed see, Venkataramani, 28. Venkataramani worked from the personal papers of James P. Cannon.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 27-43, and note 3, page 43. See also, Meyers, *The Prophet’s Army*, 123-142.

<sup>49</sup>Trotsky to Solow, February 18, 1937. See also Trotsky to Solow and Schachtman, March 2, 1937. Trotsky Archive. Trotsky and his staff were equally hostile to the *New York Times* reporter Kluckhohn, whom Bernard Wolf described as a “thorough-going rascal,” whose writings were like those of “a skillful GPU agent.” Bernard Wolf to Harold Issacs, March 3, 1937; see also van Heijenoort and Wolf to Diego Rivera, March 4, 1937. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>50</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)* (New York, 1976), 266.

<sup>51</sup>See Trotsky to V. F. Calverton, October 15, 1937, and Max Eastman to Calverton, October 23, 1937. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>52</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)* (New York, 1978), 498.

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<sup>53</sup>Such was the opinion of Novack and Morrow. See "Report to the National Committee of the Socialist Party". Trotsky Archive

<sup>54</sup>Trotsky to Carlo Tresca, October 6, 1937. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>55</sup>See LaFollette to Trotsky, September 28, 1937, for the first inklings of such a committee; see Solow to Trotsky, February 27, 1938, in which he writes: "Your friends in New York are beginning some moves towards creating a defense organization. Their entire method of procedure would leave me aghast had I not learned several years ago to expect very little of anybody." On March 25, 1938, Solow wrote to Trotsky: "The Defense Committee is disbanding...An unfortunate necessity but not a disaster by any means. The vacuum will be filled at the proper moment." Trotsky Archive.

<sup>56</sup>Solow to Trotsky, March 25, 1938 Trotsky Archive. I have been unable to locate the article in question.

<sup>57</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky (Supplement 1934-40)* (New York, 1979), 767-768. It is interesting to note that in this letter to Jan Frankel Trotsky mentioned the possibility of approaching Morris Ernest, the general consul for the ACLU about this issue. Ernest earlier had tried to get Roosevelt to admit Trotsky to the U.S. after his expulsion from France. Several members of the ACDLT were members of the National Committee of the ACLU. On Trotsky's later use of the ACLU to achieve admission, see below.

<sup>58</sup>Adolf Berle to Moffat, May 27, 1938. National Archives, RG 59.

<sup>59</sup>The State Department's fear of the political consequences of admitting Trotsky extended to his wife, Natalia Sedova. In January 1941, Emil Ludwig wrote a moving letter to Roosevelt on behalf of Natalia. Emil Ludwig to President Roosevelt, January 27, 1941. Roosevelt forwarded it to the State Department which was of the opinion that "Mrs. Trotsky and her grandson should not be allowed to enter the United States. She is closely associated with a violent faction of the Communist Party [sic] and I am convinced that her entry into this country would provoke widespread controversy and, possibly, lead to violence." Breckenridge Long to Major General Edwin M. Watson, February 12, 1941. The day before, Roosevelt wrote to his wife, who had been moved by Natalia's plight to urge FDR to consider the request, that "This is another of those unfortunate cases where public opinion has to be taken into account. I have no doubt that Mrs. Trotsky is wholly non-political, but the public for another year of two could not see that fact." F.D.R. Memorandum for Mrs. Roosevelt, February 11, 1941. All this correspondence is in Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President, Official File (Box 4295). The F.D.R. Library.

<sup>60</sup>For correspondence, telegrams and documents relating to the Russell Negrete Blackwell Defense Committee and Blackwell's political history, see Anita Brenner to Comrade Olay, November 2, 1938; Anita Brenner, Secretary of the Blackwell Defense Committee, to the Editor, November 3, 1938; telegram from Olay to Blackwell Committee; November 3, 1938; telegram to Cordell Hull from the Blackwell Defense Committee, November 4, 1938; telegram from Carlo Tresca to CNT, November 2, 1938. All can be found in the Trotsky Archive. One can not help but wonder why Trotsky, who allegedly had "no connection of any kind" with Blackwell should have copies of these documents. See also the various documents relating to Russell Negrete in the National Archives, RG 59.

<sup>61</sup>Trotsky to James Stewart, November 8, 1938. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>62</sup>For a brief but insightful history of Blackwell's political biography, see Anita Brenner to Comrade Olay, November 2, 1938. Trotsky Archive. See also, "Rosario Negrete," *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, No. 3 (Juillet-Septembre 1979), 137. Blackwell left the Workers Party with the Oehlerites; in Spain, he was associated with the P.O.U.M. and Friends of Durrutti.

<sup>63</sup>Robert J. Alexander, *International Trotskyism 1929-1985. A Documented Analysis of the Movement* (Durham, NC, 1991), 607.

<sup>64</sup>Stewart to Secretary of State, September 17, 1938. National Archives, RG 84 (Mexico City Consulate Confidential Records). Prior to Rivera's visit to the Consulate, Albert Goldman, Trotsky's attorney and comrade, issued a press release in New York in which he charged that



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“the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Mexico has decided to create the necessary ‘favorable atmosphere’ for the physical liquidation of Trotsky, Diego Rivera and some of their friends...Herman Laborde, leader of the Mexican Communist Party was...to prepare a decisive blow against Trotsky and his friends...with the assistance of high officials in the Mexican Ministry of Education and by Lombardo Toledano, leader of the Mexican labor union, who...received all the necessary instructions from the G.P.U.” Albert Goldman press release, September 8, 1938. Trotsky Archive. There is no evidence to date to substantiate the claim leaving one to wonder whether or not there was such a plan or the charge sought to take advantage of the repression of Trotskyists in Spain in order to create sympathy for Trotsky thereby enhancing future overtures for a visa.

<sup>65</sup>Pelham Glassford to Trotsky, August 5, 1938. Trotsky Archive. Glassford was a close personal friend of General Douglas MacArthur and other influential people in Washington. It should be noted that other members of the ACDLT who served on the National Committee of the ACLU at the time were Margaret DeSilver (whose husband founded the ACLU), John Dos Passos, Edward Aylesworth Ross, and Norman Thomas. It is hardly likely that Thomas would have endorsed this effort.

<sup>66</sup>Trotsky to Glassford, August 6, 1938. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>67</sup>Glassford to Baldwin, August 12, 1938 Baldwin to Glassford, August 22, 1938, October 8, 1938. Glassford communicated the news to Trotsky in his letter of November 14, 1938 Trotsky Archive. It is interesting to note that Glassford and Joseph Hansen spent several evenings together at restaurants and the symphony in Mexico City.

<sup>68</sup>Trotsky to Goldman, January 7, 1939. Trotsky Archive

<sup>69</sup>An informant for the American Ambassador to Mexico, Josephus Daniels, informed him that the Spanish refugees were the driving force behind the intensification of the the anti-Trotsky campaign and the purge of the former PCM’s leadership. James Stewart to Secretary of State, March 23, 1940, April 10, 1940, National Archives, RG 84; and Daniels to Secretary of State, April 23, 1940; National Archives, RG 59. Adolf Berle to James Stewart, February 14, 1940; Robert McGregor Memorandum of Conversation with Sr. Indalcecio Prieto, September 28, 1940. National Archives, RG 84.

<sup>70</sup>On the State Department’s concerns, see Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle’s circulars to embassies and consulates in Latin America dated November 15, 1937, March 7, 1938, November 25, 1938, and December 27, 1939; William Blocker to Secretary of State, March 11 and March 21, 1940. National Archives RG 59.

<sup>71</sup>For the fullest account, see Joseph Hansen’s memo on the Dies affair dated December 14, 1940. Matthews’ telegram to Trotsky and Trotsky’s to Matthews are dated October 12, 1939. Trotsky Archive

<sup>72</sup>For a list of news publications and newspapers in Trotsky’s library, see T15764. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>73</sup>Goldman to Trotsky, November 2, 1939. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>74</sup>Trotsky was especially interested in what constituted the legal definition of an agent of a foreign government. See Hansen to Goldman, November 14, 1939. See also Goldman to Hansen, November 17, 1939. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>75</sup>Trotsky to Goldman, November 11, 1939, and November 21, 1939. On Trotsky’s impatience to appear before the Committee, see Trotsky to Goldman, November 23, 1939, Goldman to Trotsky, November 27, 1939, Goldman telegram to Trotsky, December 4, 1939, Trotsky telegram to Goldman, December 4, 1939. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>76</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1939-1940*, 434, note 106.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 110-111.

<sup>78</sup>Emphasis in the original. Samuel Galloway, Darin Herron, Richard Babb Whitten, Elsa Ruth Herron, Blacky Williams, Mary Allen to Trotsky, nd. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>79</sup>See Trotsky’s article in the January 27, 1937 issue of the ACDLT’s *News Bulletin*.

<sup>80</sup>McGregor Memo to Murphy, December 5, 1939, National Archives RG 84.

<sup>81</sup>Stewart to Secretary of State, December 9, 1939, National Archives RG 84.

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<sup>82</sup>Berle confided to his diary his anxieties about Trotsky's appearing before the Dies Committee: "Trotsky might give some information on Communist activities in the United States; but his real purpose will be to expound the theory of the World Revolution to a thumping audience and the accompaniment of headlines, Kleig lights, and everything else. He knows more about hitting the newspaper than the Dies Committee does, though they have done pretty well. Further if he is assassinated on the way to the United States by some Stalinite, we shall have troublesome times; and--horror of horrors--the Mexicans may decide they don't want him back, and then we have on our hands. I doubt if the Dies Committee will take our advice. Dies likes a headline, too." *The Diary of Adolf A. Berle, 1937-1941*. Friday, December 8, 1939, 3-4, FDR Library.

<sup>83</sup>Hansen memo, December 14, 1939. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>84</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, 132. For Trotsky's defense of his willingness to appear, see *Ibid.*, 110-111, 132-135.

<sup>85</sup>For a discussion, see Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, 154-171

<sup>86</sup>James Stewart to Secretary of State, January 11, 1940. National Archives, RG 59.

<sup>87</sup>Trotsky's statement to *Excelsior*, December 6, 1939, as found in Declaration Made by Leon Trotsky Appearing in the *Excelsior* of December 6, 1939 attached to Stewart to Secretary of State, December 8, 1939, National Archives RG 84. See also Trotsky's public statements on January 12, 1940 in which he stated that: "Upon setting foot on Mexican soil, I voluntarily pledged not to intervene in the domestic or foreign politics of this country. Anyone who maintains the contrary is deliberately lying." *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1939-40*, 138.

<sup>88</sup>James Stewart to Secretary of State, March 23, 1940. National Archives, RG 59.

<sup>89</sup>James Stewart to Secretary of State, April 23, 1940. National Archives, RG 59.

<sup>90</sup>On Rivera's May 29th request for a Border Crossing Card, see McGregor Memorandum of May 31, 1940, in which he discusses his meeting with Rivera. See also George Shaw to Secretary of State, May 31, 1940. On the convening of the INS Special Board of Inquiry, see Herndon Goforth to George Shaw, June 5, 1940, and June 6, 1940. National Archives RG 84. For press coverage of Rivera's admission, see *The Brownsville Herald*, June 4 and 5, 1940, and *The Brownsville News*, June 5, 1940. At the time he sought admission to the U.S., Rivera had a contract to paint a mural for Golden Gate International Exposition. Shaw wrote to the Exposition to inform them of Rivera's departure. Timothy Pflueger to George Shaw, June 14, 1940, National Archives RG 84.

<sup>91</sup>See Shaw Memorandum dated September 10, 1938. National Archives RG 84.

<sup>92</sup>The quote is from Stewart's memo attached to his letter to Secretary of State, December 8, 1939. National Archives RG 84. Stewart took much of his information of Rivera's pronouncement from *Excelsior*, December 8, 1939. At this time, Rivera also stated that "in case statements are made before the Dies Committee, those attributed to me must be kept separate from those of Trotsky...[for] I have nothing to do with this gentleman." Stewart to Secretary of State, December 8, 1939. National Archives RG 84.

<sup>93</sup>Rivera told the Hearst correspondent A. Constantine that he was willing to provide the Dies Committee with information on both communist and Nazi activities in Mexico. Josephus Daniels to Secretary of State, December 8, 1940. FDR Presidential Papers, Secretary's File, Box 44.

<sup>94</sup>Josephus Daniels to Secretary of State, December 8, 1939. FDR Presidential Papers, Secretary's Papers, Box 44.

<sup>95</sup>In early January 1940, Rivera provided the names of 50 alleged PCM members who held high government office. He also claimed knowledge of campaign assassinations in Mexico. Shaw to Secretary of State, January 5, 1940. On January 11, 1940, Rivera met with American Consul McGregor in Rivera's home. Stewart to Secretary of State, January 17, 1940. Rivera met with American officials on either one or two other occasions (the sources are unclear about this). Stewart to Secretary of State, February 16, 1940. National Archives RG 84. Messersmith memo dated January 26, 1940, FDR Presidential Papers, Secretary's File, Box 44. The quote in the text about CIO aid to Mexican labor organizations can be found in Messersmith. Rivera met with McGregor again on March 2, 1940. See the McGregor memo attached to Stewart to Secretary of

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State, March 4, 1940. National Archives RG 84. Although Rivera gave to American officials a considerable number of names, the State Department considered Rivera's views and information unreliable. Berle to Stewart, March 12, 1940. National Archives RG 59. For a full discussion of Rivera's role as an informant for the U.S. State Department, see my manuscript "The Strange Case of Diego Rivera and the U.S. State Department."

<sup>96</sup>See Daniels to Secretary of State, April 23 and 24, 1940. National Archives RG 59.

<sup>97</sup>Daniels to Secretary of State, April 24, 1940. National Archives RG 59.

<sup>98</sup>In a letter to Sr. Don Leandro Sanchez Salazar, the chief of police of the Federal District, dated May 31, 1940, Trotsky wrote: "I have nothing in common with the political activities of Diego Rivera. We broke our personal relations fifteen months ago" and have had "no direct or indirect contact" since then. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>99</sup>Leah Brenner Protection Case, R. Kenneth Oakley, Reporting Officer. June 2, 1940. National Archives RG 84.

<sup>100</sup>Curtiss sent to Trotsky several reports of his meetings with Rivera. In a signed statement dated August 12, 1940, Charles Curtiss wrote: "During my stay in Mexico, from July 4, 1938 to approximately July 15, 1939, I was in close association with Diego Rivera and L.D. Trotsky...I served as an intermediary between them." Trotsky Archive. What is not clear is whether Curtiss continued to serve as an intermediary after July 1939. In a report dated March 11, 1939, Curtiss wrote: "Diego stated that LDT, while fighting against the methods of Stalinism, was using them himself. Also that LDT had read his, Diego's mail, which was a typical act of the GPU, an act which revealed publicly would result in the condemnation of LDT by all workers. Diego stated that if LDT continued 'bothering' him he would make public the entire issue, which up to now he considered it his duty to keep quiet." Curtiss Report of a Meeting with Diego at 5 p.m., March 11, 1939. See also Rivera's edited version of that Report, entitled Report with Meeting with Rivera on March 11, 1939; and Curtiss' Memorandum of Diego Rivera-Curtiss Conversation of January 20, 1939. Trotsky Archive. On the material support given to Trotsky by Curtiss, see the letter from Trotsky dated August 16, 1940, in *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, 346.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>102</sup>At its July 4-6, 1940 convention, the national teachers' union, STERM, called for Trotsky's expulsion. E. W. Eaton to Secretary of State, July 16, 1940. National Archives RG 59.

<sup>103</sup>In his letter to Charles Curtiss of August 16, 1940, Trotsky wrote: "More than two and a half months of my time has been almost exclusively devoted to the investigation" of the May attack. *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939-40)*, 346.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>105</sup>For a brief survey of these accusations, see *Ibid.*, 305-315, 348-371.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.* 223-227. The original letter appeared in *Socialist Appeal*, June 15, 1940 in abbreviated form.

<sup>109</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky, (1939-40)*, 231.

<sup>110</sup>Trotsky wrote the text of this statement in Russian and then had his secretaries translate it into Spanish and in the process inserted the appropriate quotes and the appendix which lists articles in support of Trotsky's charge that *Futuro* had slandered him over the previous two and a half years. The Russian version is entitled "'Futuro', Populiar", "Vos de Mekhiko" i agenty GPU."; the Spanish version is entitled "'Futuro y los agentes de la G.P.U.". Trotsky Archive. An English translation of the Spanish version can be found in *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, 305-315. Rather than systematically build a case against all three publications, Trotsky's deposition focused on *Futuro* because "the editor of the magazine is Lombardo Toledano."

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 227. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.* 246. Emphasis in the original.

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<sup>113</sup>“*O Lombardo Toledano*,” Trotsky Archive. The piece is undated but from the context appears to have been written in late June 1940.

<sup>114</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, 292. See also *ibid.*, 312. Although attributed to Trotsky, Joseph Hansen authored the attack on Block. Joseph Hansen [On Harry Block]. Trotsky Archive.

<sup>115</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, 348.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 371. It is worth noting that Trotsky also sought to tie *Futuro* to the Nazis as well. On July 24, 1940, Joseph Hansen wrote to Albert Goldman and sent him a list of 17 companies which advertised in *Futuro*. “After the signing of the [Nazi-Soviet] pact there was a marked increase of advertising in the columns of *Futuro* from these companies. It would be very good if we had some evidence to prove that these companies are really under German domination...Dunn and Bradstreet are capable of furnishing this information.” Trotsky Archive.

<sup>118</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, 371-391; on Krivitsky, see 387-389.

<sup>119</sup>Much of the general lines of argument regarding the role of the Comintern and Soviet agencies in Latin America can be found in Berle’s communications with Latin American consulates. See note 70.

<sup>120</sup>In the aftermath of the May 24th attack, suspicions of the PCM’s role resulted in public calls for its being outlawed. Such calls compounded existing problems within the PCM. See Barry Carr, “The Extraordinary Congress.”

<sup>121</sup>McGregor’s memorandum is dated July 13, 1940 and is attached to George P. Shaw to Secretary of State, July 15, 1940, National Archives RG 84. Upon receipt, the State Department transmitted McGregor’s memo to the FBI. Of Trotsky, McGregor wrote: “Trotsky undoubtedly views himself as a most important figure rather than a simple refugee in exile. He describes Soviet policy toward Mexico as directed first of all with an eye to the United States and secondly toward him.” It is interesting to note that in Trotsky’s mail log, in which all outgoing letters were recorded, two letters were recorded as having been sent to a Stewart; one from “W” (presumably Walter O’Rourke, Trotsky’s secretary) and the other from Trotsky. Neither of them is in the Trotsky Archive. Whether or not Stewart refers to James Stewart of the U.S. Consulate’s staff is therefore impossible to ascertain. At this time, Trotsky’s staff was preparing to send his papers to Harvard University. But given the seeming completeness of the correspondence relating to the sale and shipping of the papers to Harvard, one wonders why such documents would not have been retained. One can not therefore rule out the possibility that Trotsky had communicated something to the Consulate’s staff before the May 24 assault.

<sup>122</sup>George P. Shaw to Secretary of State, July 18, 1940. National Archives RG 84. The information about Riqui was forwarded to the State Department which forwarded it to the FBI. See J. Edgar Hoover to Special Agent in Charge, New York, September 18, 1940. FBI Files.

<sup>123</sup>McGregor Memorandum for the File, August 22, 1940; National Archives RG 84. Sumner Wells to George Shaw, August 22, 1940. National Archives RG 59.

<sup>124</sup>On the September 3 meetings, see Memorandum for the File written by Robert G. McGregor, September 4, 1940; on the September 4 meeting and the Fourth International memorandum, see George P. Shaw to Secretary of State, September 4, 1940. National Archives RG 84..

<sup>125</sup>Robert G. McGregor, Memorandum of Conversation, September 14, 1940. National Archives RG 84.. Hansen visited the consulate one more time, just prior to his departure from Mexico. At that time, he asked for the name of a person in the U.S. whom he could contact if he found information relevant to Trotsky’s murder. George Shaw wrote to the State Department asking for advice and was told to have Hansen contact FBI Special Agent in Charge Sackett in New York. The State Department was wary of having Hansen deal with them directly because “these Trotskyists are in such a bitter struggle with the Stalinists and their ethics are on no higher a plane than those of the Stalinists that we don’t think it advisable to let them have direct contacts with the State Department here, as we never know when they will try to exploit a connection to their own advantage or distort interviews.” R. E. Murphy to George Shaw, September 28, 1940, National Archives RG 59; Shaw to Hansen, September 30, 1940; Hansen to Shaw, October 23, 1940. National Archives RG 84.

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<sup>126</sup>Trotsky to John Glenner, March 31, 1939. Trotsky Archives.

<sup>127</sup>*Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)*, 358. Trotsky wrote this in a letter to Wendelin Thomas in defense of Lenin's and the Bolshevik's treatment of opposition political forces such as the Mensheviks and Makhno during the revolutionary period.

<sup>128</sup>E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1963), 10.