

<https://npa31.org/spip.php?article6122>



Marxism

**“They are intent on demeaning  
and misrepresenting Trotsky  
himself because his ideas are  
still very relevant”**

- IV Online magazine - 2019 - IV533 - June 2019 -  
Publication date: Wednesday 19 June 2019

---

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

---

**Mexico City is a place that reverberates with history. The cradle of the “Mexica” civilization is a melting pot of cultures and testimony to unique events in the history of the 20th century. The irregular landscape of houses, the result of the devastation caused by successive earthquakes, houses an immense city with suburbs where 20 million people live. It was the refuge of some of the greatest writers, painters and poets of the last century. A place of welcome for thousands of republicans who fled from fascism after the Spanish civil war. And also, the only country on the “planet without a visa” that had the courage to accept Leon Trotsky's request for asylum.**

That “midnight in the century”, in the words of Victor Serge, which was the 1930s and 1940s, saw Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Malcolm Lowry, Andre Breton, Tina Modotti and Trotsky living in Mexico City. President Lázaro Cárdenas made of that time and place a singular meeting point of some of the finest minds of the time. And among all of them, Trotsky stood out, one of the last giants of the 20th century, assassinated by order of Stalin in his own house in the neighbourhood of Coyoacán.

In that same place, we met up a few weeks ago with Esteban Volkov, “Sieva”, the grandson of Trotsky, son of Zina Bronstein and Platon Volkov. At 94, he is one of the last living people who lived with Trotsky and suffered the last years of his tragic destiny and that of his family. Esteban retains an enviable lucidity despite his advanced age. This meeting would not have been possible without the kind efforts of José Luis Hernández Ayala and Danny Laird, whom I thank with all my heart for allowing me to arrange it.

**A few weeks ago, you promoted an international manifesto against the falsehoods contained in the Netflix series about your grandfather's life. Why do you think that 80 years after his assassination, people are still trying to tarnish Trotsky's image, in this case the Russian government of Vladimir Putin, owner of the channel that produced and issued it?**

The Trotsky that emerges in that series is a mess, using a Mexican word, a “marihuanada”. Aleksander Kott and Konstantin Statsky (directors of the series) have shown a character that is millions of light years away from who my grandfather was. He was not at all as bland and mediocre a character as they paint there.

I remember him as a revolutionary dedicated entirely to the struggle for socialism. He was attentive, cordial, always ready to teach the young comrades Marxist ideology; he created a very warm and welcoming atmosphere around himself. He had a great sense of humour.

There is no doubt that the fact that they try to revile Leon Trotsky is a sign that his ideas are still very valid and for that reason they distort history. It is well known that one of the ways to dominate the exploited masses is to destroy and assassinate their leaders and discredit ideological weapons, such as Marxism. Marxism has been buried, I do not know how many times by bourgeois ideologists, but every time it resurfaces and emerges from the grave with more life.

The proof of what happens with this series is that Trotsky's ideas still weigh heavily. These two directors, Kott and Statsky, filmed my grandfather's murder in a gross and absurd way. Few events have been so perfectly settled after investigation by the Mexican government of the time as the assassination. A few days after the murder a reconstruction of the crime took place in the garden of this house where the renowned detective Jesús Vázquez, one of the chiefs of the secret police, played the role of Trotsky sitting in a chair and Mercader/Jackson personally

shows him with a rolled up newspaper how he hit him from behind in the head I really cannot understand how Netflix can lend itself to this kind of “fake history”.

The curious thing is that after the murder, one of Dzhugashvili's (Stalin's) greatest obsessions was to present the murder as a hand-to-hand fight between Trotsky and a discouraged supporter, disappointed with his leader. At that time, the Russian ambassador to Mexico, Konstantin Umansky had the assignment, the “mission impossible”, of bribing the Mexican government to accept Stalin's version that the murder had been the result of a quarrel. Obviously, Umansky did not succeed in fulfilling Stalin's wishes because the Mexican government did not agree to be corrupted and impose that version. The strange thing is that Umansky was dismissed from his position as Ambassador in Mexico and sent to a second order embassy in Central America, to Costa Rica, where he never arrived because on January 25, 1945, the military plane that was taking him from Mexico City strangely exploded, killing poor Umansky with all his family and colleagues.

But it turns out that these two directors, Kott and Statsky, unbeaten champions of historical falsification, revive the version that Stalin wanted to impose and present the murder as a situation of a struggle between Trotsky and his murderer and also add a few other absurd things. What we all ask is how a company like Netflix lends itself to divulge this totally falsified story. Today we are in an era of “fake news” and now we also have “fake history”. But not everything has been bad. This series has brought many visitors to the Leon Trotsky House-Museum (laughs).

**The figure of Trotsky has been the subject of much historical controversy and multiple interpretations. He was a figure embodying many qualities that made him qualify as one of the “giants” of the 20th century. He was a great revolutionary politician, an exceptional writer, a great journalist, scholar and expert in art and culture and also one of the main political leaders of the Russian Revolution and the organizer of the Red Army who, after reaching the top, suffered persecution, exile and finally murder. What do you think was the most outstanding quality of your grandfather so that, 80 years after his murder, he remains an icon and a political reference within the world's left?**

What stands out most about Trotsky was his certainty and his absolute confidence in the socialist future of humanity. There is no doubt that he is one of the great Marxist theorists. He was the one who best analysed and studied the illegitimate bureaucratic regime led by Joe Stalin.

Today we see the analogy and dynamics of all revolutions. After advance and triumph comes setbacks and retreat. In the French Revolution this was “Thermidor”. And in the Russian Revolution this was much bloodier and devastating.

Many times, I am asked, what would have happened if Trotsky had stayed in power instead of Stalin? It is a question that Trotsky himself once answered: “With the army behind me I could have taken power in a few hours. But that would have betrayed the Revolution as much as Stalin. Only instead of a bureaucratic dictatorship a military-bureaucratic dictatorship would have been established.”

We also know that Trotsky considered his last stage as the most important in his life. When already in exile he tried to create a new revolutionary vanguard with the foundation of the Fourth International, after the debacle and the destruction of the Second and Third Internationals. But very soon he suffered the first attack, on May 24, 1940, which he miraculously survived, thanks to Natalia Sedova, who quickly threw him under the bed and cornered him, protecting him with her own body in the darkest corner of the room.

But Trotsky knew perfectly well that they had only given him a small respite and that in a short time another attack would come. The question was where and how his murder would come. And so it was that when the final attack occurred, he was standing in the doorway to the dining room from his office and, his face bloodied and with broken

teeth, he approached Natalia pointing to the murderer, who had been immobilized by one of the guards, and he said "Jackson", indicating that that's where it came from.

The young comrades were criticized a lot for not taking enough precautions and perhaps they could have extended the life of grandfather a little while being more vigilant. But invariably the Russian state and the GPU with Stalin behind it would have ended up murdering grandfather.

And what hastened his murder indisputably was that at that time he began to write the biography of Stalin. At the request of an American publisher and given the precariousness and the shortcomings in which the family lived; those royalty payments could not be disregarded. But he did not have much interest in writing that biography since his main interest was to finish with Lenin's, of which he had already finished the part referring to his youth. There is no doubt that the writing of Stalin's biography hastened his murder. One of the guards, who had entered a month before May 24, Robert Sheldon Harte, continually asked my grandfather's secretary how the biography was going, to immediately transmit the information to the Kremlin.

**The political movement that identifies with "Trotskyism" is quite divided. It is no novelty and certainly the difficult origins of the Fourth International have influenced this situation, since it was created at a time of ebb of the revolutionary wave and was doubly persecuted by both the capitalist countries and Stalinism. There are currents that identify with this tradition that have reached considerable relevance in European countries and in Latin America. Do you think that, the construction of a mass revolutionary International remains an essential objective, as your grandfather thought?**

According to the American Trotskyist Joe Hansen, one of the last phrases of Leon Trotsky was "I am sure of the triumph of the Fourth International." That task is still pending of course ... And yes, to have some influence and weight today we must participate in the movements that are in struggle and not lock ourselves in an office and make very brilliant Marxist analyses, as many groups do, to comfort themselves. Participation in the real fight is very important.

PS:

*If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.*