

Reply to Mike Jones

Sven-Eric Holmström

At first I was happy when *Cultural Logic* notified me that I had received a critical response to my article about the “Bristol affair”¹ but I soon became disappointed. It is no secret that Trotsky’s followers have a very hard time accepting any facts that might make their hero look bad, and Mike Jones’ article is no exception. His comments are neither constructive nor objective, and show that he obviously has not read my article carefully. I am, however, grateful to *Cultural Logic* for letting me reply since I can also correct some unintentional errors in my own essay.

I wrote this essay not with the purpose of “discrediting the supporters of Trotsky, the opponents of the Moscow Trials and Trotsky himself.” I wrote it in order to uncover all relevant facts around the “Hotel Bristol affair.”

Mike Jones takes great pains to argue that the members of the Dewey Commission were not “political supporters” of Trotsky. That is a “straw man.” I do not claim they were. It is irrelevant to my article.

Jones protests I do not “believe” Alexander Orlov but that I “believe” D.N. Pritt and [Prosecutor Andrei Y.] Vyshinsky. Jones is in error. First, I do not “believe” Pritt, Vyshinsky, or any source. No honest researcher “believes” his sources. Secondly, in their book *Deadly Illusions*, which is devoted to Orlov, John Costello and Oleg Tsarev proved that Orlov lied many times. J. Arch Getty, the famous historian of the Soviet Union during Stalin’s time, explicitly criticizes the use of Orlov as a source.²

Ad hominem insults, such as Jones’ calling Martin Nielsen, editor of *Arbejderbladet*, a “Stalinist hack,” have no place in historical research. Such language says a good deal about the person who employs it but nothing at all about the person so attacked.

¹ Editor’s Note: See Sven-Eric Holmström, “New Evidence Concerning the ‘Hotel Bristol’ Question in the First Moscow Trial of 1936,” *Cultural Logic*, 2008. For Mike Jones’ criticism of Holmstrom’s original essay, see “Some Comments on Sven-Eric Holmström’s ‘New Evidence’ Concerning the Hotel Bristol in the First Moscow Trial of 1936,” *Cultural Logic*, 2011.

² J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, Cambridge MA 1985, pp. 211-212.

Jones contends that Steen Bille Larsen in his book *Mod strømmen* stated that the drawing, in *Arbejderbladet* of the doorway connecting the Konditori Bristol with the lobby of the Grand Hotel Copenhagen, which I include in my article, is incorrect. Bille Larsen also reproduces in his book a photo that he claims was presented to the Dewey Commission and supposedly represents the correct relationship between Grand Hotel and Konditori Bristol. But if we compare the photo from Bille Larsen's book, shown in Figure 1 with the street directory part of *Kraks Vejviser* from late 1936 shown in Figure 2, it is clear that this photo is taken either in late 1936 or in early 1937, and *not* in 1932.

Figure 1. The photo presented to the Dewey Commission.



Source: Steen Bille Larsen, *Mod strømmen*, Copenhagen 1986, p. 191.

At 1) we have the entrance to Grand Hotel; at 2) a sign “Frisør” (Danish for “Barber”); at 3) a sign “Radio” and at 4) “Konditori Bristol.” “Frisør” is most certainly “Gertman-Poulsen A Barber.” Likewise “Radio” is most certainly a photo shop named “Nica Photo.” Both were located at Vesterbrogade 9A. Neither appears in any of the previous street directories 1932-1936. These facts represent further evidence that there was, in 1937, no agreement about the physical connection in 1932 between the Konditori Bristol and the hotel lobby.

Figure 2. The residents at Vesterbrogade 9A and 9B in late 1936. Note the location of the barber shop and the photo shop which appears on the photo presented to the Dewey Commission.



Source: *Kraks Vejviser, del I: Adressebog for Danmark 1937*, Copenhagen 1936, p. 640.

It is also further evidence of the sloppy work of the Dewey Commission. The Commission certainly could have, and should have, established this fact in 1937 by asking the hotel proprietor what the connection had been in 1932. In this, as in other instances, the Commission failed to do what it ought to have done.

Jones also adduces a still different description of the interior connection between the café and the hotel.³ But it is not important for my article. Even if there had been no interior connection at all between the café and the hotel, a person who had used the hotel entrance, which was situated directly beside the large sign saying “Bristol,” could certainly have made an error four years later and misremembered “Bristol” as the name of the hotel.

Whether there was a Trotskyist group in Denmark in 1932 or not has not been established. Might not supporters of the Soviet Union have called the students who had invited Trotsky to speak in Copenhagen “Trotskyists”? But in any case it is irrelevant. The issue is whether it was possible for a person to remember the large

³ Jones attributes this information to Arne Munch Petersen (whom he also, pointlessly, calls a “Stalinist hack”) and his pamphlet *Fra Retssalen i Moskva*, Copenhagen 1937, and refers to page 190. That is an error since Munch Petersen’s pamphlet is only 24 pages long. Jones has confused it with Bille Larsen’s book where this claim appears on page 190. However, in the articles in the Syndicalist paper *Arbejdet* referred to by Bille Larsen nothing is said about any steel door on the fifth floor. Bille Larsen claims that one of the articles in *Arbejdet* stated that in a new English edition of the 1936 trial transcript the passage of “Hotel Bristol” has been omitted. In reality what is stated in the article is that the omission appears in the English language version of the 1936 trial transcript (that is the first edition) – and even this statement is not true!

“Bristol” sign right next to the entrance to the hotel and then, four years later, misremember the name of the hotel as “Bristol.” I contend that this was possible. It is futile to deny that this could happen.

Jones agrees that Esther Field’s testimony concerning the physical relationship between the café and the hotel in 1932 “could be questionable.” The photograph and entries from *Kraks Vejviser* reproduced in my article, proves that Field’s testimony was false. Everybody can see the difference between a café and a car exhibition hall.

Jones claims that the proprietor of the restaurant “Den Gamle Braeddehytte,” William Thies, was also the proprietor of “Bristol” and not Axel Andresen. But this only shows that he is unable to understand the street directory. Below I reproduce again a clip of late 1932 in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The residents at Vesterbrogade 9A and 9B in late 1932.

9A (= Reventlowsg. 2,4,6)
 (Direktør Axel Andresen)
 Grand Hotel København § C.3600
 s Den gamle Braeddehytte v.W.Thies
 § C.1827 & C.1847 & C.13496
 Bristol Konditori § C.1632
 s Thies Wm. Restauratør § C.1827
 9B (84 - E.1,100,000 - G.445,000)
 s Løwener V. Gross. Fm. § C.7885
 Automobiles Citroën Akts., Udstil-
 lingslokale § C.2106 & C.2107
 s Tafdrup Julius Gross. Fm. § C.677
 s Tafdrup Julius Gross. § V.7009
 Lord & Thomas Akts. Reklame-
 bureau § C.15908
 s Wivel Carl-Bilert Gross. § V.8297
 Gandil Louis Ejendomsstift. §
 Eva 2900
 Amby P Arkitekt
 s Seligmann & Messerschmidt Læder
 en gros § C.1462

Source: *Kraks Vejviser, del I: Adressebog for Danmark 1933*, Copenhagen 1932, p. 604.

Thies is listed below Bristol *not* because he was the proprietor of Bristol but because he had his private residence at Vesterbrogade 9A. Mike Jones has misread these entries from *Kraks Vejviser*. He has also ignored the testimony of Vikelsø Jensen which was presented to the Dewey Commission. Evidence from the trade directory part of *Kraks Vejviser* clearly shows that the proprietor of Grand Hotel, Axel Andresen, was also the proprietor of Bristol and that William Thies was the proprietor of Den Gamle Braeddehytte. This can be shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. The proprietors of Bristol and Den Gamle Bræddehytte as shown in the trade directory of *Kraks Vejviser* of 1933 (the image is a montage of pp. 2972 and 3250).

Bonnén E Borgerg. 50 ☒
 Bristol Konditori, A. Andresen Vesterbrog.
 9 A ☒ ☒ Cent. 1632
 Bryggens Konditori v. Poul Andersen Isa-
 fjordsg. 9 ☒ ☒ Am. 3321
 Brønnum Vald. Tordenskjoldsg. 1 ☒ ☒ Cent.
 365 & 9688
 Sørensen S Bagsværd Hovedg. 130 Bag-
 sværd ☒ Bagsværd 10 & Bagsværd 96
 Thies Wm. (Den Gamle Bræddehytte) Vester-
 brog. 9 A ☒ ☒ Cent. 1827, 1847 & 13496
 Thoft Thora Smalleg. 4 ☒ ☒ Cent. 9545
 Thomas Marie (Hartmann) Sommerstedg. 2
 ☒ ☒ V 8494

Source: *Kraks Vejviser, del II: Handelskalender for Danmark 1933*, Copenhagen 1932, pp. 2972 and 3250.

At this point I would like to correct the first of two errors in my own essay. On page 12 describing the Dewey Commission's description of Vikelsø Jensen's affidavit, the latter's statement that the proprietor of the café was married to the proprietor of the hotel was accidentally omitted.⁴ The complete correct passage should read like this:

(e) . . . Jensen refers to a ground plan of the Bristol Confectionery and the Grand Hotel which appeared in *Arbejderbladet* (organ of the Communist Party, Copenhagen) on January 29, 1937, and which, he says, entirely misrepresents the relation between the two. He states that the entrance to the Confectionery was not immediately beside the newspaper kiosk shown between that entrance and the entrance to the hotel, but farther to the right, so that in order to reach the Confectionery it was necessary to go through shops at the right which were to be seen from the street. **The two enterprises, he says, were conducted entirely separately, although the proprietor of the Confectionery was the wife of the proprietor of the hotel. There was at that time a door connecting the lobby of the hotel with the service-rooms of the Confectionery; but it was chiefly used by the personnel of the hotel, and only rarely by the guests. According to the Hotel Inspector, he says, a normal person could never confuse the two concerns, and therefore no "Hotel Bristol" could result from such a confusion. In 1936, he states, the Confectionery was moved one house to the right, making room for three shops.** (*Ibid.*, S II, Annex 6)³⁹ [Emphasis added]

⁴ *Not Guilty*, New York 1972, p. 92.

The omitted passage is not relevant to the question at hand, though it may explain why there was a door connecting the café with the lobby of the hotel.

Jones attempts to argue that no one could possibly mistake the name of the hotel as “Bristol” despite the fact that in the 1929 photograph reproduced in my article the only visible sign next to the hotel entrance is the large “Bristol” sign. This line of argument is futile.

Jones defends Trotsky’s lying to the Dewey Commission on the grounds that it was his duty to lie. But Trotsky’s reasons for lying are irrelevant. The point is that Trotsky lied many times to the Dewey Commission though he promised to tell the truth.

Trotsky deliberately lied to the Dewey Commission about *at least* the following important matters:

- The existence of the Bloc of Rights, Trotskyists, and other oppositionists formed in 1932;
- His letter to Radek in February-March 1932;
- His passing a message to I.N. Smirnov through Yuri Gaven;
- Trotsky’s claim that he had irrevocably cut ties to the “capitulators,” when we know that he did not; and about his support for the use of “terror” – assassination – against Stalin and other Soviet leaders.

Trotsky claimed that he had nothing to hide and that the Dewey Commission was free to see all his archives. This too was a lie, as Pierre Broué and others discovered when they found evidence of the falsehoods listed above in that archive.

If the Dewey Commission had known that these claims – at a minimum – made by the defendants at the first two Moscow Trials were true – that is, that in these cases the defendants and the prosecution at the trials were telling the truth and Trotsky was lying – would the Commission have found Trotsky “not guilty”? Almost certainly not.

What we can know for sure is that the fact that Trotsky deliberately lied to the Dewey Commission *at least* about the matters listed above invalidates the Dewey Commission’s findings.

That is true even if we set aside the failures of the Dewey Commission to verify some important fact-claims, such as the relative position of the hotel and the café, and the Commission's extreme naïveté – to put it mildly – in accepting Trotsky's testimony at face value.

Jones is in error in claiming that “Oslo Airport was closed in the winter of 1935.” In reality Trotsky testified, and submitted evidence to the effect, that no “foreign airplane” had landed at Kjeller Airdrome in December 1935.

At the January 1937 Moscow Trial Prosecutor Vyshinsky explicitly asked Piatakov whether he knew the name of the airport “near Oslo” where, according to Piatakov, he had landed in December 1935, and then asked Piatakov if he had ever heard of “a place called Kjeller or Kjellere?” To both those questions Piatakov answered in the negative.

This means that Piatakov might have flown in on a Norwegian airplane; or on a military airplane; or to another airdrome (there were at least two others near Oslo). Or he could have landed at a lake or a fiord. Or, Piatakov might have been partly lying, and have flown to Norway at some other time and in some other manner. Or, Piatakov might have been completely lying and never have flown to Norway at all.

In short, we don't know. What we do know is that Trotsky was successful in getting the Dewey Commission to make the unwarranted assumption that if Piatakov had not flown into Kjeller Airdrome on a foreign airplane in December 1935, then he never met Trotsky in Norway at all. This is an obvious fault in logic, one of many by the Dewey Commission.

In a similar manner Trotsky was successful in getting the Dewey Commission to make the unwarranted and illogical assumption that if Sedov did not meet Gol'tsman in Copenhagen, then Gol'tsman did not meet Trotsky there.

At this point I would like to correct the second error in my own essay. On page 29 we have the following passage: “Therefore in denying any such communication between himself and Gol'tsman since 1927, Trotsky was lying.”

In fact Trotsky did admit in a letter to the Dewey Commission dated June 29, 1937, that he had had indirect communication with Gol'tsman through Sedov.⁵

⁵ *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, New York 1937, p. 592. My sincere thanks to Mr. Ken McLeod for making me aware of this.

Evidently when appearing in front of the Dewey Commission Trotsky “forgot” that Sedov had admitted contact with Gol’tsman in his “Red Book” about the 1936 trial.

Trotsky and the Dewey Commission both made the elementary error of assuming that if a defendant lied some of the time, he must be lying all the time. This is either disingenuous – in plain language, a deliberate deception – or very naïve.

But I did not make this error. I never assumed that because Trotsky demonstrably lied about certain things therefore he must have been lying about everything.

The Dewey Commission did make that assumption, a great many times, in *Not Guilty*. It was convenient for Trotsky that they did so. This is one reason why it is accurate to describe the Dewey Commission as uncritical of Trotsky.

Jones claims, without citing any evidence that Trotsky struggled with the Norwegian language and only “picked up enough Norwegian to express fairly simple sentences to his police guards.” He ignores the fact that according to Askvig Trotsky spoke Norwegian fluently and correctly. That is hardly the same thing as “struggling.” Askvig’s account is not the only evidence we have of Trotsky mastering the Norwegian language. For example, we also have the account of his housekeeper in Hurum after he had been placed under house arrest there from August 1936. The housekeeper stated that Trotsky spoke the language well.⁶ In March 1935 Trotsky himself counted on learning Norwegian rather quickly at least enough to read a newspaper.⁷ In view of the witness testimony that Trotsky did speak Norwegian, and of the fact that Trotsky lied to the Dewey Commission many times about more important matters, it is reasonable to conclude that Trotsky was lying here as well.

Jones states that Isaac Deutscher was critical of Trotsky on many points. Although that is true, it is irrelevant to the subject of my essay, the “Hotel Bristol” issue. I contend that anyone who reads Deutscher’s biography of Trotsky, especially the final volume, *The Prophet Outcast*, can find a great many passages that give clear evidence of the fact that Deutscher greatly admired Trotsky.

Jones gives some evidence that arrestees were tortured and otherwise maltreated in the Soviet Union during the years 1937 and 1938. This is another “straw

⁶ Laila Strand, “Jeg var Trotskys husholderske,” *Drammens Tidende Buskeruds Blad*, January 12, 1985, p. 5.

⁷ *Trotsky’s Diary in Exile 1935*, Cambridge MA and London 1976, p. 108.

man.” No one disputes it. But there is no evidence that Moscow Trial defendants were tortured.

In private documents only published during the last years of the Gorbachev regime, Zinoviev stated that he was “well treated” while in prison. Steven Cohen, the world authority on Bukharin, concluded in 2003 that Bukharin was not tortured.

Jones appears to assume that since many defendants were tortured or maltreated, therefore every defendant was. This is illogical. It is not true either in the Soviet Union during the 1930s or anywhere, at any time.

Jones claims that “NKVD agents . . . fabricated Goltsman’s statement.” This story originated with Alexander Orlov. We refer the reader to our remarks about Orlov above.

Orlov lied a great deal. Evidence that Orlov lied in this instance is that he did not notice that the café immediately adjacent to the hotel entrance was named “Bristol.” Had he done so, he would not have had to invent the story about NKVD agents mistaking a hotel in Oslo for one in Copenhagen.

Jones claims that I have “ignored the real evidence published in recent years from the NKVD archives.” This is false. Jones does not identify any such evidence that is at all relevant to the “Hotel Bristol” affair.

Ironically, it is Jones who has, in his own words, “ignored the real evidence” – evidence from the Trotsky Archive at Harvard, and discoveries made there during the 1980s by famed Trotskyist historian Pierre Broué, and by well-known historian J. Arch Getty. Over 30 years ago these historians made the bombshell discovery that Trotsky deliberately lied about many important conspiratorial matters.

Trotsky did not lie only to the Dewey Commission, or even principally to them. Trotsky lied to his own followers, those who were avid readers of his *Bulletin of the Opposition*. Trotsky lied to those who most trusted him.

Whether he was right or wrong to do so then is not relevant here. But there is no excuse for anyone, Trotskyist or otherwise, to ignore Trotsky’s lies today.

Finally, it is worth repeating that Trotsky’s many deliberate lies about important matters to the Dewey Commission invalidate the Dewey Commission’s finding of “not guilty.”

It is long past time that all those who are devoted to establishing historical truth recognize the fact that the Dewey Commission was a brilliant Public Relations

triumph for Trotsky but that its conclusions are rendered invalid by the evidence from Trotsky's own archive that he lied in his testimony to it.