

Evidence of Leon Trotsky's Collaboration with Germany and Japan

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Leon Trotsky



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“If an objective research project on the events of those years were to be done, free of ideological dogmas, then a great deal could change in our attitude towards those years and towards the personalities of that epoch. And so it would be a “bomb” that would cause some problems. . . .”

– Col. Viktor Alksnis, 2000.

“ . . . it is essential for historians to defend the foundation of their discipline: the supremacy of evidence. If their texts are fictions, as in some sense they are, being literary compositions, the raw material of these fictions is verifiable fact. Whether the Nazi gas ovens existed or not can be established by evidence. Because it has been so established, those who deny their existence are not writing history, whatever their narrative techniques.”

– Eric Hobsbawm, 1994, p. 57.

“ . . . we can demolish a myth only insofar as it rests on propositions which can be shown to be mistaken.”

– *ibid.*, p. 60.

This essay is an inquiry into the evidence that Leon Trotsky may have collaborated with German and/or Japanese officials, whether governmental or military, during the 1930s.

Trotsky was charged with and convicted *in absentia* of such collaboration at the three Moscow “Show,” or public, Trials of 1936, 1937 and 1938.¹ Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov² were absent defendants and central figures in all these trials. Trotsky himself proclaimed the charges false, but they were widely though not universally credited until 1956. In February of that year Nikita Khrushchev delivered his famous “Secret Speech” to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Aside from much other matter that will not concern us here Khrushchev hinted, without expressly affirming, that at least some of the defendants in these trials were punished unjustly.

In succeeding years most of the defendants, along with thousands of others, were “rehabilitated” and declared to have been innocent. Under Khrushchev’s successors between 1965 and 1985 the wave of “rehabilitations” almost ceased. Subsequently, during Mikhail Gorbachev’s tenure between 1985 and the end of the USSR in 1991, an even larger flood of “rehabilitations” took place. Later in the present essay we will discuss the essentially political, rather than juridical, nature of “rehabilitation.”

By the late 1980s almost all the defendants at all the Moscow Trials, plus the defendants in the “Tukhachevsky Affair” of May-June 1937 and a great many others had been declared to have been innocent of all charges. The chief exceptions were figures like Genrikh Yagoda and Nikolai Ezhov, two heads of the NKVD³ who were certainly responsible for massive repressions, and many of their subordinates.

Virtually alone among the non-NKVD oppositionists Trotsky and Sedov have never been “rehabilitated.” But the dismissal of charges against their codefendants and

¹ These trials are often called the “Show Trials.” Often too they are identified by the names of the one or two most famous defendants. Thus the trial of August 19-24, 1936 is often called the “Zinoviev-Kamenev Trial”; that of January 23-30, 1937, the Piatakov-Radek Trial”; that of March 2-13, 1938 the “Bukharin-Rykov” Trial. The formal names for these trials are as follows: August 1936: “The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre”; January 1937: “The Case of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre”; March 1938: “The Case of the Anti-Soviet ‘Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites.’”

² Leon Sedov died on February 16 1938, shortly before the third Moscow Trial. He continued to figure prominently in the confessions of some of the defendants, as did his father.

³ People’s Commissariat (= Ministry) of Internal Affairs, which included national security and political police functions.

the declarations that all the conspiracies were fabrications means that they too have been declared innocent in fact though not “rehabilitated” legally.

Meanwhile there is a scholarly consensus that the Moscow Trials were fabrications, the defendants all innocent victims of frame-ups, and all the conspiracies inventions either of the NKVD or of Stalin himself. This consensus is a constituent part of the model, or paradigm, of Soviet history that is dominant within Russia itself and beyond its borders. However, no significant evidence that the trials were fabricated and the confessions faked has ever been published, while the vast majority of investigative materials relating to the trials is still top-secret in Russia, unavailable even to trusted scholars.

The Soviet Archives “Speak”

During the existence of the USSR and especially since Khrushchev’s accession to power in 1953 few if any documents concerning the Moscow Trials and repressions of the late 1930s were published in the USSR or made available in the archives to researchers. Khrushchev and authorized historians and writers made a great many assertions about this period of history but never gave anyone access to any evidence about it.

Here is one example. At an historians’ conference in December 1962, after many presentations by speakers promoting the official Khrushchev position about questions of Soviet history the convener, Presidium member Piotr Pospelov, spoke the following words:

Students are asking whether Bukharin and the rest were spies for foreign governments, and what you advise us to read. I can declare that it is sufficient to study carefully the documents of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU to say that neither Bukharin, nor Rykov, of course, were spies or terrorists. (*Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie* 298).

While Pospelov’s words are literally correct, they create a false impression. In the 1938 Trial Bukharin and Rykov were not convicted of carrying out espionage *themselves*, but of being leaders in the “bloc of Rights and Trotskyites” that did engage in espionage

activities. Likewise both Bukharin and Rykov were convicted of recruiting others to engage in acts of violence against others – the best Russian translation here of the word “terror,” which means something quite different in English – but not of engaging in it themselves. So Pospelov’s words are correct *in the sense most readers will understand* – that a “spy” is someone who himself spies, and a terrorist someone who himself commits acts of violence.

But Pospelov is *incorrect* insofar as he wishes his audience to understand that their confessions and the verdict against them were wrong. Furthermore, the question was about “Bukharin and the rest” – presumably, all the other defendants in the 1938 Trial, whereas Pospelov restricted his answer to Bukharin and Rykov only.

In the passage that immediately follows the quotation above Pospelov clearly told his audience that the only materials historians should read are the official speeches made at the 22nd Congress:

“Why is it not possible to create normal conditions for working in the Central Party archive? They do not give out materials concerning the activity of the CPSU.” I have already given you the answer.

In effect Pospelov was saying: “We are not going to give you access to any primary sources.”

That situation continued until the USSR was dissolved. Thanks to documents published since the end of the USSR we can now see that some of the speeches at the 22nd Party Congress contained blatant lies about the oppositionists of the 1930s – a fact that fully explains Pospelov’s refusal to let anyone see the evidence.

As one example of the degree of falsification at the 22nd Party Congress and under Khrushchev generally we cite Aleksandr Shelepin’s⁴ quotation from a letter to Stalin by Komandarm 1st rank (= Full General, the rank just below Marshal) Iona E. Iakir, accused of collaboration with Nazi Germany. In Shelepin’s quotation from Iakir’s letter to Stalin of June 9, 1937, the text read by Shelepin is in **boldface**. The text in the original letter (published in 1994) but *omitted* by Shelepin is in *italics*.

⁴ Head of the KGB (= State Security Committee), the successor to the security and political police functions of the former NKVD.

“A series of cynical resolutions by Stalin, Kaganovich, Molotov, Malenkov and Voroshilov on the letters and declarations made by those imprisoned testifies to the cruel treatment of people, of leading comrades, who found themselves under investigation. For example when it was his turn Iakir – the former commander of a military region – appealed to Stalin in a letter in which he swore his own complete innocence.

Here is what he wrote:

*“Dear, close comrade Stalin. I dare address you in this manner because I have said everything, given everything up, and it seems to me that **I am a noble warrior, devoted to the Party, the state and the people, as I was for many years. My whole conscious life has been passed in selfless, honest work in the sight of the Party and of its leaders** – then the fall into the nightmare, into the irreparable horror of betrayal. . . . The investigation is completed. I have been formally accused of treason to the state, I have admitted my guilt, I have fully repented. I have unlimited faith in the justice and propriety of the decision of the court and the state. . . . Now **I am honest in my every word, I will die with words of love for you, the Party, and the country, with an unlimited faith in the victory of communism.**”*⁵

As Shelepin read it the letter is from an honest, loyal man protesting his innocence. In reality Iakir fully admitted his guilt.

(There is also the matter of the two ellipses. Some of Iakir’s text has been omitted even in this published version. Since Iakir confessed to treason to the state it is possible that he refers to collaboration with Germany, with Trotsky, or perhaps with other intelligence services. This is suggested in a tantalizing quotation in the case of Uritsky

⁵ Shelepin’s remarks are from his speech to the 22nd Party Congress of the CPSU, *Pravda*, October 27, 1961, p. 10, cols. 3-4. *XXII S’ezd Kommunisticheskoi Partii Sovetskogo Soiuza. 17-31 oktiabria 1961 goda. Stenograficheskii Otchet* (Moscow, 1962). II, 403. The parts Shelepin omitted, here in bold text, are in the fuller version in the “Spravka” of the Shvernik Report of 1963-4 first published in *Voenno-Istoricheskii Arkhiv* 1 (1993), p. 194, now normally cited from the volume *Reabilitatsia. Kak Eto Bylo* [“Rehabilitation. How It Happened”] vol. 2 (2003), p. 688.

which we discuss briefly later in this essay. Iakir was one of the military figures involved both with collaboration with Germany and with Trotsky.)

The falsification goes far beyond the speeches at the 22nd Congress. Archival evidence now available permits us to see that Khrushchev, then later Gorbachev, and the historians who wrote under their direction, lied consistently about the events of the Stalin years to an extent that is scarcely imaginable.

A large number of documents from formerly secret Soviet archives have been published since the end of the USSR. This is a very small proportion of what we know exists. Especially as regards the oppositions of the 1930s, the Moscow Trials, the military “purges,” and the massive repressions of 1937-38, the vast majority of the documents are still top-secret, hidden away even from privileged, official researchers. Yet no system of censorship is without its failures. Many documents have been published. Even this small number enables us to see that the contours of Soviet history in the 1930s are very different from the “official” version.

The Question of Trotsky And Collaboration With Germany and Japan

During the past decade a lot of documentary evidence has emerged from the former Soviet archives to contradict the viewpoint, canonical since at least Khrushchev’s time, that the defendants in the Moscow Trials and the “Tukhachevsky Affair” military conspiracy were innocent victims forced to make false confessions. We have written a number of works either published or in the process of publication pointing out that we now have strong evidence that the confessions were not false and Moscow Trial defendants appear to have been truthful in confessing to conspiracies against the Soviet government. That work has led us to the present study.

Hypothesis

Leon Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov were indicted but absent defendants at each of the three Moscow Trials. If the charges against and the confessions of other defendants were basically accurate, as our research has suggested so far, that has implications for the charges voiced at those trials that Trotsky was in league with fascist Germany and militarist Japan. Such considerations led us to form the hypothesis for the present study:

that a thorough search of published documents from the former Soviet archives would turn up more evidence of Trotsky's collaboration with Germany and Japan other than that given at the three Moscow Trials.

We came to adopt this hypothesis in much the same way Stephen Jay Gould describes how his colleague Peter Ward decided to test the "Alvarez hypothesis," the so-called Cretaceous-Tertiary catastrophic extinction that contradicted the hitherto widely accepted theory of the gradual dying out of so many life-forms about 60 million years ago.⁶ In the course of reading many documents from the former Soviet archives for other research projects we had identified several that appeared to provide additional evidence that Trotsky had indeed collaborated with Germany.

It seemed to us that more such documentary evidence might well be found if we actually set out to look for it. We also realized that, if no one ever set about looking for it, it would probably never be found and we would never know.

The fact that we have formed this hypothesis does not at all mean that we have predetermined the result of our research. Some hypothesis or "theory" is a necessary precondition to any inquiry. Gould reminds us of Darwin's perceptive statement made to Henry Fawcett in 1861:

How odd it is that anyone should not see that all observation must be for or against some view if it is to be of any service!⁷

The present study is a "test" in Gould's sense: "a fine example of theory" – Gould means "hypothesis" here – confirmed by data that no one ever thought of collecting before the theory itself demanded such a test.

We have also been mindful of Gould's caution that a test does not prejudice the inquiry itself:

⁶ Stephen Jay Gould. *Dinosaurs in the Haystack*. *Natural History* 101 (March 1992): 2-13. Online at <http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_dinosaurs-haystack.html> and <<http://www.sjgarchive.org/library/text/b16/p0393.htm>>.

⁷ Letter 3257 – Darwin, C. R. to Fawcett, Henry, 18 Sept [1861]. At <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-3257>>.

Please note the fundamental difference between demanding a test and guaranteeing the result. The test might just as well have failed, thus dooming the theory. Good theories invite a challenge but do not bias the outcome.

It is in principle impossible to prove a negative. If Trotsky did not collaborate with the Germans and/or Japanese there would be no evidence of his having done so. Unlike the situation with natural history, however, with human history there arises the possibility for fabricated or faked evidence. In the present essay we devote a lot of attention to this problem.

We set out to see whether we could find more evidence that Trotsky had collaborated with the Germans and Japanese. At a certain point in our research, when we had gathered a quantity of such evidence, we decided to study it and see what it amounted to. The present article is the result.

There exists a good deal of evidence concerning clandestine involvement on Trotsky's part with oppositional activities within the USSR during the 1930s quite aside from any collaboration with Germany and Japan. In addition to the testimony by defendants at the Moscow Trials, we also have archival evidence in the form of investigative interrogations to confirm such activity. To review all of it is far beyond the scope of this or any article. The present work concentrates solely on evidence of Trotsky's collaboration with German or Japanese governmental or military officials. We leave the other charges leveled against Trotsky unexamined. The charges of German and/or Japanese collaboration were the most shocking. They have always been regarded with far more skepticism.

For the most part we only cite and analyze *direct* evidence concerning Trotsky and the Germans or Japanese. This is a very narrow approach that excludes a great deal of other, corroborating evidence which tends to add credence to the direct evidence of Trotsky's guilt in collaborating with the fascists. For example, Nikolai Bukharin heard details from Karl Radek about Trotsky's negotiations and agreements with Germany and Japan. Bukharin never directly communicated with Trotsky or Sedov about this. However, there is no reason whatever to doubt that Radek did tell him about Trotsky's collaboration.

By corroborating Radek's testimony on this point – Bukharin agrees that Radek did tell him this, as Radek himself had testified, so Bukharin attests to Radek's truthfulness *here* – Bukharin also tends to indirectly corroborate what Radek said about Trotsky and what Radek claimed to have gotten at first hand, from Trotsky himself. That is, Bukharin's testimony confirms that Radek was telling the truth in one instance, and that increases the credibility of Radek's testimony on other matters, including of his contacts with Trotsky and what Trotsky communicated to him. But here we will examine only Radek's, not Bukharin's testimony. We refer the interested reader to our previous study of Bukharin (Furr and Bobrov 2007). In a few places we do cite some corroborating evidence, mainly for the sake of providing context for the direct evidence.

Objectivity And Persuasion

Political prejudice still predominates in the study of Soviet history. Conclusions that contradict the dominant paradigm are routinely dismissed as the result of bias or incompetence. Conclusions that cast doubt upon accusations against Stalin or whose implications tend to make him look either “good” or even less “evil” than the predominant paradigm holds him to have been, are called “Stalinist.” Any objective study of the evidence now available is bound to be called “Stalinist” simply because it reaches conclusions that are politically unacceptable to those who have a strong political bias, be it anticommunist generally or Trotskyist specifically.

The aim of the present study is to examine the allegations made in the USSR during the 1930s that Leon Trotsky collaborated with Germany and Japan against the USSR in the light of the evidence now available. This study is not a “prosecutor's brief” against Trotsky. It is not an attempt to prove Trotsky “guilty” of conspiring with the Germans and Japanese. Nor is it an attempt to “defend” Trotsky against such charges.

We have tried hard to do what an investigator does in the case of a crime in which he has no *parti pris* but only wishes to solve the crime. This is what historians who investigate the more distant past, or the history of countries other than the Soviet Union, do all the time.

We do wish to persuade the fair-minded, objective reader that we have carried out a competent, honest investigation. Namely: That we have done the following:

- collected all the evidence we could find supporting the contention that Trotsky collaborated with the Germans and Japanese;
- collected all the “negative” evidence – any “alibi” Trotsky or his son and chief political aide Leon Sedov may have had. We have done this chiefly by paying serious attention to Trotsky’s testimony at the Dewey Commission hearings in 1937, where he himself laid out his defense;
- studied all this evidence carefully and honestly; and
- drawn our conclusions on the basis of that evidence.

We wish to persuade the objective reader that we have reached our conclusions on the basis of evidence and its analysis and not on any other basis, such as political bias. We are NOT out to arraign or “convict” Trotsky. We remain ready to be convinced that Trotsky did not collaborate with Germany and Japan if, in the future, further evidence is disclosed indicating that those charges are false.

The Role of Appropriate Skepticism

Throughout this essay we have tried to anticipate the objections of a skeptical critic. This is no more than any careful, objective researcher should do, and exactly what both the prosecution and the defense in any criminal investigation do with the evidence and interpretation.

We have a lengthy discussion of evidence at the beginning of the essay. In the body of the essay we follow each presentation of evidence with a critical examination. In the final section subtitled “Conclusion” the reader will find a review and refutation of the objections a sharp but fair-minded critic might have.

We are aware that there is a subset of readers for whom evidence is irrelevant, for whom – to put it politely – this is not a matter of evidence but one of belief or loyalty. We discuss the arguments normally raised from this quarter in the subsection titled “Objectivity and Denial.” In any historical inquiry as in any criminal case “belief” and “loyalty” are irrelevant to the truth or falsehood of the hypothesis. By definition, a belief that is not rationally founded on evidence can’t be dispelled by a sound argument and evidence.

However, those who cannot bring themselves to question their preconceived ideas may nevertheless be provoked by those same prejudices to look especially critically at the evidence and to find weaknesses in its interpretation that might escape other readers for whom there is less at stake. This sometimes makes objections from such quarters worthy of attention. We have tried hard both to anticipate and to deal with such objections in a satisfactory manner.

Evidence

Before proceeding to cite and study the new archival documents we need to discuss the question of evidence itself. Whereas “documents” are material objects – in our case, writing on paper – “evidence” is a relational concept. We are concerned with investigating an allegation: that Trotsky conspired with German and/or Japanese officials. We aim to gather and study the evidence that suggests Trotsky acted as alleged.

There is no such thing as absolute evidence. All evidence can be faked. Any statement – a confession of guilt, a denial of guilt, a claim one has been tortured, a claim one has not been coerced in any way – may be true or false, an attempt to state the truth as the speaker (or writer) remembers it, or a deliberate lie. Documents can be forged and, in the case of Soviet history, often have been. False documents have on occasion been inserted into archives in order to be “discovered.” Or, it may be alleged that a given document was found in an archive when it was not. Photographs can be faked. Eyewitnesses can lie, and in any case eyewitnesses are so often in error that such evidence is among the least reliable kind. In principle there is no such thing as a “smoking gun” – evidence that is so clearly genuine and powerful that it cannot be denied.

The problems of identifying, gathering, studying, and drawing correct conclusions from evidence are similar in criminal investigation and in historical research. This is especially true when, as in our case, the research is to determine whether a kind of crime took place in the past. But there are important differences, and it’s vital to be clear about them.

In a criminal trial the accused has certain rights. The trial has to be finite in length, after which the accused is either convicted or acquitted for good. The defendant ought to enjoy the presumption of innocence and the benefit of any reasonable doubt. The

defendant is entitled to a qualified defender whose sole job it is to interpret all evidence in a way so as to benefit his client. Meanwhile, the judge and even the prosecution are supposed to be concerned not just about securing a conviction but also about justice. Once they are reasonably convinced that the defendant is innocent their duty is to dismiss the charges and discharge the accused even though they might be able to sway the jury to convict. These practices are intended to prevent an innocent defendant from an unjust verdict and penalty.

Historians are in quite a different situation. Dead people have no rights (or anything else) that need to be defended. Therefore the historian does not have to be concerned with any presumption of innocence, “reasonable doubt,” and so on. Unlike a legal verdict no conclusion is final. The historical inquiry need never end. It can, and will, be taken up again and again as new evidence is discovered or new interpretations of old evidence are reached. This is in fact what we are doing in the present article. We are investigating the question of whether Trotsky collaborated with German and Japanese officials in the light of new evidence, while at the same time reconsidering evidence that has long been available.

Identifying, locating, gathering, and even studying and interpreting evidence are skills that can be taught to anyone. The most difficult and rarest skill in historical research is the discipline of objectivity. In order to reach true conclusions – statements that are more truthful than other possible statements about a given question – a researcher must first question and subject to doubt any preconceived ideas she may hold about the subject under investigation. It is one’s own preconceived ideas and prejudices that are most likely to sway one into a subjective interpretation of the evidence. Therefore, the researcher must take special steps to make certain this does not happen.

This can be done. The techniques are known, and widely practiced in the physical and social sciences. They can be adapted to historical research as well. If such techniques are not practiced the historian will inevitably be seriously swayed from an objective understanding of the evidence by her own pre-existing preferences and biases. That will all but guarantee that her conclusions are false even if she is in possession of the best evidence and all the skills necessary to analyze it.

Nowhere is a devotion to objectivity more essential or less in evidence than in the field of Soviet history of the Stalin period. As it is impossible to discover the truth absent a dedication to objectivity, this article strives to be objective. Its conclusions will displease, even outrage, a good many persons who are dedicated not to objectivity and the truth but to protecting the legend of Trotsky as an honorable revolutionary or to defending the Cold War – anticommunist paradigm of Soviet history.

Of course we don't claim to have found all the relevant evidence there is. It is overwhelmingly likely that there is a great deal more such evidence, since the vast majority of primary source documents dealing with the Oppositions of the 1930s are still classified in Russia and the post-Russian states today and are inaccessible to any researchers. But what we have now is a lot. In our judgment there is more than sufficient evidence that Trotsky did indeed collaborate with Germany and Japan more or less as the Soviet government accused him in the 1930s. Why Trotsky may have done so is a question worthy of consideration. We have added some thoughts about this toward the end of this essay.

Trotsky's Telegram to the Soviet Leadership

The first document we want to present is one that illustrates both the promise and the problems of interpreting documentary evidence.

June 1937 was a time of tremendous crisis for the Soviet leadership. In April Genrikh Yagoda, Commissar (head) of the NKVD until the previous September, and Avel' Enukidze, until recently both a Central Committee member and high-ranking member of the Soviet government, had begun to confess about their important roles in plans for a *coup d'état* against the government. The month of May had begun with an internal revolt against the Spanish Republican government in which anarchists and Trotskyists participated. The Soviet leadership knew this revolt had involved some kind of collaboration between pro-Trotsky forces there and both Francoist and German – Nazi – intelligence. By the beginning of June eight military officers of the highest ranks including Mikhail Tukachevsky, one of only five Marshals of the Red Army, had been arrested and were making confessions of conspiracy with Trotsky and Trotskyists, the

Rights led by Bukharin, Yagoda and Rykov, and – most ominous of all – with Nazi Germany and Japan.

On June 2 Nikolai Bukharin suddenly reversed himself and confessed to having been one of the leaders of this same conspiracy (Furr & Bobrov). That same day Lev M. Karakhan, a leading Soviet diplomat who at one time had been closely linked to Trotsky, also confessed.⁸ Marshal Tukhachevsky and the other military leaders evidently continued to make further confessions right up until June 9. On June 11 came the trial, where they confessed once again, and then their execution. Several high-ranking Bolsheviks and Central Committee members were associated with them.

Before and during the Central Committee Plenum which took place from June 23 to 29 twenty-four of its members and fourteen candidate members were expelled for conspiracy, espionage, and treasonable activities. In February and March Bukharin, Rykov and Yagoda had been likewise expelled. Never before had there had been such wholesale expulsions from the Party's leading body.

Unquestionably, there was a great deal else that has never been made public. But these events, particularly the military conspiracy, appeared to constitute the gravest threat to the security – indeed, the continued existence – of the Soviet Union since the darkest days of the Civil War.

Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov had been convicted *in absentia* at the first Moscow Trial in August 1936.⁹ At the second Moscow Trial of January 1937 Karl Radek had explicitly identified Leon Trotsky as the leader of an important anti-Soviet conspiracy. He had specifically mentioned Spain as a place where Trotsky's adherents were dangerous and called on them to turn away from Trotsky. When the "May Days" revolt in Barcelona broke out on May 3 Radek's warning seemed prescient. For the communists, but also for many non-communists who supported the Spanish Republic, this rebellion in the rear of the Republic appeared to be the same kind of thing the Rights, Trotskyists and military figures were allegedly plotting for the USSR.

⁸ *Lubianka. Stalin i Glavnoe Upravlenie Gosbezopasnosti NKVD. 1937-1938* (M.: "Materik," 2004), No. 102, p. 225. Online at <<http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/62056/61084>>.

⁹ They were convicted of "having directly prepared and personally directed the organization in the U.S.S.R. of terroristic acts against the leaders of the C.P.S.U. and the Soviet State." *Report of Court Proceedings. The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Center*. Moscow: People's Commissariat of Justice of the U.S.S.R., 1936, p. 180.

On the eve of the June C.C. Plenum Trotsky chose to send a telegram from his Mexican exile not to Stalin or the Politburo but to the Central Executive Committee, the highest organ of the Soviet government. In it he directly challenged its members to reject Stalin's leadership and turn towards himself.

POLICY IS LEADING TO COMPLETE COLLAPSE INTERNAL AS WELL AS EXTERNAL STOP ONLY SALVATION IS RADICAL TURN TOWARD SOVIET DEMOCRACY BEGINNING WITH OPEN REVIEW OF THE LAST TRIALS STOP ALONG THIS ROAD I OFFER COMPLETE SUPPORT – TROTSKY¹⁰

A postscript to the original publication of this telegram reads as follows:

In June 1937 in Moscow, at the address of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) which was then formally the highest organ of state power in the USSR a telegram arrived from L.D. Trotsky in Mexico: [text of telegram]. Of course this telegram ended up not in the CEC but in the NKVD, whence it was directed to Stalin as a so-called “special communication.” He wrote on it the following remark: “Ugly spy.¹¹ Brazen spy of Hitler.” Stalin not only signed his name under his “sentence,” but gave it to V. Molotov, K. Voroshilov, A. Mikoian, and A. Zhdanov to sign.¹²

The late Trotskyist author Vadim Rogovin paraphrased this same article in a footnote:

Trotsky's telegram ended up not in the CEC but in the NKVD where it was translated from the English (the only way the Mexican telegraph could accept it for sending) and sent to Stalin as a so-called “special communication.” Stalin

¹⁰We have used the original English text of the telegram from a facsimile of the telegram itself in the Volkogonov Archive, Library of Congress, Washington DC. At this time international telegrams were normally sent in English; Trotsky sent it from Mexico. The comments of Stalin and his associates are not on the telegram itself but on the Russian translation provided to them along with it. The telegram was evidently first published in *Novoye Vremia* ! 50(1994)". 37. We have put this facsimile and the Russian translation with the remarks of Stalin and his associates on the internet at <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/trotsky_telegram061837.pdf>.

¹¹ *Shpionskaia rozha*, literally “spy-face”. Rogovin translates it as “mug of a spy.”

¹² L.B., “Will there be no more ‘Secrets of the Kremlin’?” *Novoe Vremia* No. 50, 1994, 37.

read the telegram and wrote on it a remark that bears witness to the fact that he had clearly lost his self-control: “Mug of a spy. Brazen spy of Hitler!” His signature beneath these words was completed with the signatures of Molotov, Voroshilov, Mikoian and Zhdanov, which expressed their agreement with Stalin’s evaluation.¹³

The anonymous author of the article in *Novoe Vremia* (see note 10 above) dismissed Trotsky’s note as a fantasy on Trotsky’s part.

How should we understand Trotsky’s proposal? Could he have possibly supposed that they would accept his help? Or that in 1937 a turn towards “Soviet democracy” was possible? One can’t call this irony; it’s more like an illusion.

(As a number of scholars have shown, a “turn towards Soviet democracy” was indeed a point of struggle in 1937).¹⁴

In his critical 1997 study of Trotsky Evgenii Piskun wrote:

This strange document bears witness to the fact that the leader of the Fourth International hoped that the USSR was going to undergo immense changes in the near future and that he would return to power again.

But he was wrong this time too. When the June Plenum of the CC had ended the Party leadership had not changed.¹⁵

Rogovin agreed that Trotsky must have believed he had a good chance of coming to power:

Trotsky was not a person given to taking senseless or impulsive steps. Despite the fact that the motives of his appeal remain unclear even today, it is natural to

¹³ Vadim Rogovin. *1937. Stalin’s Year of Terror*. Translated by Frederick S. Choate. Oak Park MI: Mehring Books, 1998, p. 487. Chapter 50: The July Plenum of the Central Committee.

¹⁴ For the major sources and a summary of them in English see Grover Furr, “Stalin and the Struggle for Democratic Reform”, Parts One and Two, *Cultural Logic* 2005.

¹⁵ Evgenii E. Piskun. *Termador v SSSR. Idei L.D. Trotskogo i sovetskaia deistvitel’nost’ 1920-1980*. Riazan’: Russkoe slovo, 1997, 73.

assume that Trotsky possessed information which showed that the true devotion to Stalin of the majority of Party and Soviet leaders was in inverse proportion to their official exclamations of this devotion, and that Stalin's position was extremely fragile and unstable. This might have been the source of Trotsky's hopes that, under conditions of the Great Terror which was tearing one member after another from the Party ranks, a consolidation of the leading figures in the country would be possible which would be aimed at overthrowing Stalin and his clique. (Rogovin 487)

Rogovin accepted unquestioningly the orthodox Trotskyist position that Trotsky was not involved in conspiracies with the Germans. This presented him a problem: How to explain Stalin's handwritten comment on Trotsky's telegram? Even Rogovin had to admit that, since the note was addressed only to his closest, most trusted associates, it appeared to prove that Stalin and the rest of them did genuinely believe Trotsky was guilty of conspiring with the Germans. All Rogovin could offer was the following formulation, which takes us to the heart of our matter:

The document, as well as many other documents of the Politburo, and even the personal correspondence of its members, show that Stalin and his "closest comrades-in-arms" expressed themselves in a conventional code which was designed to give the impression that they believed in the amalgams they were creating. Otherwise *Stalin, who hardly believed in the existence of contacts between Trotsky and Hitler*, would not have written such words in a document intended only for his most immediate circle. (Rogovin, note to p. 487; emphasis added)

We now possess additional evidence that Stalin did indeed believe that Trotsky was plotting with the Germans. Rogovin offers no evidence to the contrary. In addition we now also have evidence that Trotsky, as well as many others, actually were conspiring with Germany and Japan. The evidence concerning Trotsky is the subject of this article.

Trotsky's telegram of June 18, 1937¹⁶ will serve as an introduction both to the new evidence that has come to light since the end of the USSR and to the problems of and barriers to understanding what it means.

To our knowledge no one has bothered to put all this evidence together or to re-examine in light of this new evidence the question of Leon Trotsky's ties to Japan and Germany, ties alleged by defendants at the Moscow Trials and by the Soviet government. Why is this? We think the two very different comments by Piskun and Rogovin suggest an answer. Rather than being the subject of careful study with an eye to questioning previous knowledge, the new evidence is being marshaled in defense of old historical paradigms.

Piskun's paradigm – that Trotsky was probably preparing for some kind of *coup* against the Soviet leadership – has only rarely been heard for many years. Nevertheless, Piskun reads Trotsky's telegram through the “lenses” of that paradigm, for the text of the telegram itself suggests nothing about any *expectation* of imminent change and return to power. The most that could be said is that the text is perhaps compatible with such an expectation. But we could never deduce such an expectation from the text alone. A sober reading of Trotsky's telegram might be that it is evidence that Trotsky was *hoping* for a return to power in the USSR but nothing more.

Rogovin's interpretation is even more strained. According to Rogovin Stalin could not possibly have believed Trotsky was a German spy even though he wrote this on the telegram and only his closest associates would see it. Rogovin's paradigm demands that Stalin had invented the charge that Trotsky was collaborating with the Germans (and Japanese). If that paradigm is to be preserved, then Stalin *must* be faking here too. No objective reading of the text of Trotsky's telegram and Stalin's remarks upon it would reach Rogovin's conclusions. Furthermore, Rogovin has no evidence to support his position that Stalin invented the charges against Trotsky. He simply assumes this to be true.

¹⁶ The original telegram seems to be dated June 18, as that date, “18 JUN 1937,” is printed or stamped at the top of the last page. That appears to be the date the telegram was sent. «06.20 #S%& 1937 '.» is written in small print at the top of the first page of the telegram. That may be the date it was received and translated. Stalin's note, and the signatures of Molotov, Voroshilov, Mikoian, and Zhdanov appear on the translation of the telegram, to which the telegram itself is appended in the archive. Though the date on this translation, at the far upper left-hand corner, is not legible, it is probably June 20.

Piskun and Rogovin represent antithetical poles in interpreting both this document itself and the question of Trotsky's relationship, or lack thereof, with Germany and Japan. But charges of collaborating with the intelligence services of the major Axis powers were alleged not just against Trotsky but also against many of the defendants at the second and third public Moscow trials of January 1937 and March 1937. Elsewhere we have set forth a small part of the evidence that Oppositionists did, in fact, have some kind of clandestine political relationship, aimed at the USSR, with Germany and Japan.¹⁷

There is a great deal of such evidence concerning other Oppositionists. The present work concentrates on evidence concerning Trotsky specifically. We must look for evidence that such a relationship existed not because we are convinced *a priori* that one must have existed but because it is in principle impossible to find evidence of a negative – e.g. that such a relationship did *not* exist. If we find no evidence that the Oppositionists had such a relationship, then the only responsible conclusion would be that they did *not* have any – again, barring further evidence to the contrary that may turn up in the future. This is normal historical procedure in any investigation: only positive evidence “counts.” This does not mean, however, that any and all “positive evidence” points to one conclusion only, or is sufficient to sustain any single conclusion.

The present study does conclude that the evidence now at our disposal strongly supports the existence of collaboration between Trotsky and the Germans and Japanese. This creates a peculiar problem for us as historians since an article based upon the evidence – the present article – directly challenges the prevailing consensus on the Moscow Trials and specifically on Trotsky.

What's At Stake?

This prevailing consensus is a constituent part of the model, or paradigm, of Soviet history that is dominant within Russia itself and beyond its borders.

Trotsky and his son Sedov were accused of involvement with the German Gestapo at the 1936 Moscow Trial and of involvement with the Germans and Japanese at

¹⁷ Grover Furr and Vladimir L. Bobrov, “Nikolai Bukharin's First Statement of Confession in the Lubianka.” *Cultural Logic* 2007. This is the English translation of an article and text first published in Russian in the St. Petersburg journal *Klio* No. 36 (March 2007).

both the 1937 and 1938 Moscow Trials. Numerous witnesses at each of these trials testified that they had direct knowledge of Trotsky's (Sedov's) collaboration. These charges constituted a central feature of the trials. We will examine that testimony in this article.

The allegation that these charges are false likewise constitutes a central feature of the dominant paradigm of Soviet history during the Stalin period. Confirmation of the guilt of Nikolai Bukharin in the crimes to which he confessed guilt has already seriously undermined what we may briefly term the "anti-Stalin" paradigm of Soviet history. Confirmation of Trotsky's involvement with the Germans and Japanese would corroborate the evidence we already have that the charges were true to which the Moscow trials defendants confessed themselves guilty.

* * * * *

On the evidence we have Trotsky did in fact collaborate with the Germans and Japanese. This is consistent with the charges made against Trotsky and his son at the Moscow trials.

It is not for us to hazard a guess as to what may be the implications of this fact for Trotskyism itself. Insofar as Trotskyism is a set of political principles that are detachable from Trotsky the politician it may have few implications. Its implications may be more far-reaching for those varieties of Trotskyism that base themselves on a cult of respect for Trotsky the man and are unable to separate him from his ideas.

Trotskyism has already survived the discovery in the early 1980s that Trotsky lied to the Dewey Commission. As the recent article by Sven-Eric Holmström demonstrates Trotsky's lies about the "Hotel Bristol" affair, both to the Dewey Commission and in his journal *Bulletin of the Opposition*, are more far-reaching than had previously been proven. It will be some time before we can discern what if any influence Holmström's research will have on Trotsky's followers. In any case it is for them, not for us, to decide what those implications may be.

What Do You Mean “Evidence”?

This statement focuses our attention on a central question: What kind of evidence would we accept? Unless objective criteria are established and then rigorously adhered to, the researcher will almost certainly “find” what his historical preconceptions, his historical paradigm, tells him to look for. In doing so he will either ignore or misconstrue anything that does not fit his preconceived ideas. What a researcher agrees to *accept* as evidence, and to *exclude* as evidence, is too often a reflection of his historical paradigm. The problem of “acceptable evidence” is simply magnified in the case of a charge of secret conspiracy.

There are serious problems with any kind of evidence.

- Confessions in or out of court: They might be fabricated, for any of a number of motives, including currying favor with the prosecution or state; as evidence that one has “repented”; to shift the blame onto someone else; as a result of torture or the threat of torture, threats against one’s family, and so on.
- Incrimination by associates: These are open to the same kinds of tampering as are confessions of the accused.
- Documentary evidence: Documents can be forged. Any state has the technical means to fabricate documents that will convince anyone except, possibly, an independent scientific expert who is allowed to use destructive methods of analysis to test the chemical composition of the ink, molecular analysis of paper, etc., in order to determine whether the document is genuine. As this is virtually never permitted in the case of archival documents deemed important, skilful forgery is a powerful tool.

Documentary evidence can also be destroyed. Russian researchers have told us that Khrushchev had a great many papers – perhaps amounting to thousands of pages – removed from archives during his leadership in the USSR.¹⁸ Some documents have also been removed from the “closed” Trotsky Archive at Harvard University.¹⁹ No archive is, or can be, completely secure from such manipulation.

¹⁸ E.g. M. Yunge, R. Binner. *Kak terror stal “Bol’shim.” Sekretnyi prikaz No.00447 i tekhnologiia ego ispolneniia*. Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2003, 16.

¹⁹ This will be discussed in more detail below.

Moreover, how likely is it that agreements of espionage and conspiracy would have been written down in the first place? Anything written down at some point would surely have been hidden securely or, more likely, destroyed as soon as read. As long as such written evidence remained it would pose a terrible threat to any conspirator. We can be certain of the existence of one such conspiracy in Soviet history – that among members of the Presidium to get rid of Lavrentii Beria – because it succeeded on June 26, 1953. Yet no prior written record of that conspiracy has ever come to light, and no single, reliable account of it exists even now.

These are just examples. In general, there is no kind of evidence that cannot be forged or faked. Neither is there any kind of evidence that can, by itself, provide conclusive proof of any act.

In this essay I assume that the larger the number of individual items of evidence that are all consistent with a single interpretation the less is the chance that they, and that interpretation, are the result of some kind of “orchestration” or fabrication according to a preconceived plan. This should be especially so in the case of documents which were never intended to be public at all. When combined with evidence from documents that were never directly related to any prosecution, the likelihood of fabrication becomes very small indeed. This is similar to what is called “circumstantial evidence” in the legal system. When there is enough of it, circumstantial evidence is the most powerful evidence there is.²⁰

Such is the case, I would argue, with Trotsky’s telegram of June 18 1937. As Rogovin recognized, the most significant thing about this telegram is what Stalin wrote upon it. But Rogovin’s own conclusion lacks any convincing rationale. No one who was not already convinced that Trotsky was innocent of collaboration with Germany would ever suspect that Stalin did not believe the truth of what he wrote to an audience of his closest associates, remarks never intended to go any further. “Anything is possible” perhaps – but what is *likely*? Rogovin would have us believe that Stalin, Molotov, Mikoian and Zhdanov were “pretending” among themselves that Trotsky was working

²⁰ “Circumstantial evidence can be, and often is much more powerful than direct evidence.” – Robert Precht, a defense attorney in the World Trade Center bombing and director of the Office of Public Service at the University of Michigan Law School, quoted at <<http://www.pub.umich.edu/daily/1997/jun/06-04-97/news/news3.html>>.

with the Germans even while knowing perfectly well that it was they themselves who had made this story up. No evidence supports such a conclusion.

If the words on this telegram were the *only* evidence we had that led us to suspect the accusations against Trotsky were not fabricated – not by Stalin or to his knowledge, at least – they would be highly significant. Stalin saw all investigative materials, including huge quantities of evidence that is either still classified in Russia today or has been destroyed. However, there is much more evidence that points in this same direction.

“Fabrication” Of Confessions

In discussions such as these, where any questioning of the dominant paradigm is viewed with distrust and even horror, it is difficult to distinguish the presentation of the evidence from the act of responding to the anticipated objections to this evidence coming from that same paradigm. So below we will offer a summary rebuttal to paradigmatic objections to some of the evidence we present. The details will come later.

The “canonical view” or “dominant paradigm” of Soviet history is that all defendants in the Moscow Trials were innocent of the charges to which they confessed. But there is no “canonical view” about how the faking of those confessions might have been accomplished.

The transcripts of the three Moscow Trials have been available since the 1930s. According to the dominant paradigm of Soviet history these transcripts are dishonest and the confessions of the defendants recorded in them are fabrications.

But the term “fabrication” does not have any fixed meaning. No one has cited any evidence whatsoever that the confessions were not truthful, so no one is in a position to say anything definite. The charges against the defendants are simply declared to be “absurd” and the conclusion is drawn that the defendants must have been induced to lie by some means. “Fabrication” is a word that is broad enough in its meaning to cover any kind of falsification.

The allegation that the confessions were false, like any other assertion of fact, can and must be tested in the light of all the other available evidence. Of course this is done as a matter of course in criminal cases.

Historians are under a similar obligation to verify the veracity of confessions as well as of other evidence. We undertake to discharge this responsibility in the present essay. At the outset we were prepared to find evidence that the confessions of the defendants and/or the other evidence against them is false. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case. The evidence now available strongly tends not to disprove but to confirm the truth of the confessions and other evidence we cite here.

The Issue of Torture

In this essay we devote serious attention to the hypothesis that the defendants in the Moscow Trials and others who directly or indirectly implicate Trotsky in collaboration with Germany or Japan may have been induced to make false accusations by one means or another. Most troubling is the allegation of real or threatened torture. Specifically, we discuss the “torture” hypothesis in connection with Zinoviev, Ezhov, Uritsky, and Iakovlev (see below). We examine Col. Alksnis’ belief that the Tukhachevsky trial defendants were not tortured. At the end of the essay we devote yet another section of the essay to the subject of torture. We have a great deal of evidence that the defendants in the Moscow Trials were not tortured or otherwise threatened into making false confessions.

All interpretations of the Trial testimony, like all interpretations of any evidence, are hypotheses. “Torture” is one hypothesis. Like any hypothesis, evidence is required before it becomes a reasonable theory of explanation. In this case there is no such evidence.

We have adduced the appeals to the Soviet Supreme Court by ten Moscow Trials defendants. All of them insist that they are guilty. These documents were never intended to be made public.

Radek stated up front in the 2nd Moscow Trial (January 1937) that it was not the investigators that tormented him, but he who tormented his investigators. Bukharin said that “incriminating evidence” (*uliki*) was what induced him to begin confessing after three months of silence. Elsewhere we have cited Steven Cohen’s conclusion that Bukharin was not tortured. We see no reason to repeat Cohen’s reasoning here. Cohen is

the world's expert on Bukharin and continues to insist that he was entirely innocent while admitting that there is no evidence to support that conclusion.

In early 2006 a confession by Mikhail Frinovsky, second-in-command to Nikolai Ezhov at the NKVD, was published.²¹ In it Frinovsky admitted that Ezhov and his co-conspirators, himself included, had tortured and fabricated false charges against a great many people. But Frinovsky explicitly said that this was *not* done in the case of the March 1938 Trial of the “Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites,” the “Bukharin” trial.

In this same confession Frinovsky also explicitly states that Bukharin et al. were guilty, and that moreover he and Ezhov were part of this Rightist conspiracy too. Furthermore he states that Bukharin knew Ezhov was involved in this conspiracy and kept quiet about it at the trial, taking this secret to his death.

Frinovsky said:

The preparation of the trial of Rykov, Bukharin, Krestinsky, Yagoda and others. An active participant in investigations generally, Ezhov kept himself aloof from the preparation of this trial. Before the trial took place the face-to-face confrontations of the suspects, interrogations, and refining, in which Ezhov did not participate. He spoke for a long time with Yagoda, and that talk concerned, in the main, of assuring Yagoda that he would not be shot.

Ezhov had conversations several times with Bukharin and Rykov and also in order to calm them assured them that under no circumstances would they be shot. Ezhov had one conversation with Bulanov, and began this conversation in the presence of the investigator and myself, and finished the conversation one on one, having asked us to leave.

At that moment Bulanov had begun talking about the poisoning of Ezhov. What the conversation was about Ezhov did not say. When he asked us to enter again he said: “Behave yourself well at the trial – I will ask that you not be shot.” After the trial Ezhov always expressed regret about Bulanov. At the time of the executions Ezhov suggested shooting Bulanov first and he himself did not enter

²¹ “Spetssoobshchenie L.P. Berii I.V. Stalinu s Prilozheniem Zaiavleniia M.P. Frinovskogo. 13 apreliia 1939 g. In *Lubianka. Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKR “Smersh” 1939 - mart 1946*. Eds. V.N. Khaustov, V.P. Naumov, N.S. Plotnika. Moscow: “Materik,” 2006. No. 33, pp. 33-50. I have put the original text online at <<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/frinovskyr.html>> and an English translation (mine) at <<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/frinovskyyeng.html>>.

the building where the shootings took place. *Here Ezhov unquestionably was ruled by the necessity of covering up his own ties with the arrested leaders of the Right who were going into the public trial.* [Emphasis added – GF]

In no way did Frinovsky deny torturing and fabricating false confessions against innocent people. Rather, he contrasted the way Ezhov handled the “Bukharin” trial defendants with the way he dealt with a great many innocent victims, whom he had tortured by his “bone-breakers” so that they would sign confessions drafted by Ezhov’s NKVD men. Ezhov did not use torture against them.

To sum up: Frinovsky confessed to widespread torture, but (a) specifically exempted the defendants in the 1938 Trial; and (b) specifically stated that Bukharin was, in fact, guilty. Frinovsky’s confirmation of the guilt of Bukharin and others corroborates all the other evidence we have concerning Bukharin.

Before its publication in 2006 Frinovsky’s confession had been fraudulently quoted by historians and by the Soviet Supreme Court itself, suitably expurgated so that it seemed to prove the *innocence*, not the guilt, of the 1938 Trial defendants. This was done in the same manner as Shelepin’s dishonest quotation of Iakir’s letter, which we briefly examined above. (An article of ours on this subject is pending in Russia.)

No hypothesis is worth anything unless it is supported by evidence. There is no evidence to support the “torture” hypothesis, and a great deal of evidence against it. Therefore the “torture” hypothesis must fall.

Other Possible Hypotheses to Account for Bukharin’s Confession

Bukharin’s confessions are important for us both because they illustrate the issues involved in allegations of torture and because Bukharin explicitly implicates Trotsky. We’ll discuss his testimony about Trotsky later in the present essay. Here we are concerned with the “torture” question.

In any trial there are a number of hypotheses aside from the “torture” hypothesis that may account for a false confession of guilt by a defendant:

- The defendant’s family is threatened.
- The defendant wishes to “punish himself” to atone for past misdeeds.

- The “Rubashov” explanation made famous in Arthur Koestler’s book *Darkness At Noon* – that “the Party demands it,” the Party is history’s instrument and so history demands it, and so on.
- The defendant has been promised favored treatment by the Prosecution in return for falsely accusing others.

In Bukharin’s case there is no evidence to support any of these hypotheses.

The main reason defendants confess to crimes of which they are guilty is their belief that the prosecution has sufficient evidence to convict them of the crime(s) in question, rendering further denial useless, indeed counterproductive. A defendant decides to cooperate with the prosecution in hopes of more lenient treatment by the court – of “getting the best deal he can.” It now seems beyond doubt that this was the reason for Bukharin’s confession of guilt. At the second Moscow Trial of January 1937 four defendants – Radek, Sokol’nikov, Arnol’d and Stroilov – who appeared to have cooperated fully with the prosecution were sentenced to prison instead of execution. Two of these, Grigory Sokol’nikov and Karl Radek, were the principal defendants. This was a strong incentive for any defendant for whom further denial seemed hopeless to cooperate. Frinovsky’s statement now corroborates Bukharin’s own testimony at trial. Bukharin himself said that “the evidence” was the primary factor motivating his confessions, which began with his first one on June 2, 1937. Frinovsky testified that Ezhov promised Bukharin and others that they would not be shot as long as they did not disclose Ezhov’s own involvement with the conspiracy. Frinovsky does not claim that he actually heard Ezhov say this. But he does state that Ezhov did not organize any false confessions in this trial. Frinovsky himself stated that he knew that Bukharin was guilty. And indeed Bukharin did not mention at his trial that Ezhov was a co-conspirator.

Frinovsky also confirms Bukharin’s guilt as a conspirator known to Ezhov. This corroborates a great deal of other evidence we now possess, including some confessions of Yagoda published for the first time in 1997.

Towards the end of this essay we return to the matter of torture in a different way: to consider the allegations of torture and how they have functioned in the historiography and mythology of Trotsky’s role, the Moscow Trials, and the history of the Stalin period generally.

Why Did None of Trotsky's Supporters At The Moscow Trials Defend Trotsky?

None of Trotsky's longtime and devoted supporters among the Moscow Trial defendants defended Trotsky or their actions in supporting him. They not only pled guilty to various crimes, including working with Trotsky; they recanted their former longtime allegiance to him and condemned him in harsh terms. It may be asked: how is this to be explained other than by the fabrication of false testimony through torture or some other means?

In a criminal case we should not think it strange if co-conspirators "fall out" and denounce one another, as the longtime Trotskyists did during their testimony at the public Moscow trials. Moreover, we should also consider the trial from the viewpoint of the prosecution, the Stalin government. What was the purpose of having these public, or "Show," trials in the first place?

Like any criminal prosecution, of course, the trial was to deter further criminal (in this case, treasonous) activity and encourage those who suspected such activity to report it to authorities. But larger motives were doubtless at play as well.

The Soviets were terribly afraid that, if the USSR were seen to have been weakened by serious conspiracies at the top, some combination of enemy states would attack them. They also feared that the Western powers, led by France and the U.K., would not agree to "collective security," mutual defense treaties with the USSR against Nazi Germany. Given the political conjuncture of the mid-1930s it seems safe to assume that the trials were also aimed to demonstrate to the world that these high-level conspiracies had been nipped in the bud, that the Soviet government was still in charge, and that, therefore, Soviet security was not adversely affected.

That these fears were well founded is suggested by the facts that (a) Japan did indeed attack the USSR – twice, in 1938 and a larger assault in 1939; and (b) the Allies did refuse to make any mutual defense treaties with the USSR. Rather, they continued to push Hitler to attack the USSR. The late Alvin D. Coox, the leading expert on Soviet-Japanese relations during this time, concluded that the Japanese attack on the USSR at Lake Khasan in 1938 was directly motivated by the testimony of General Genrikh

Liushkov, who defected to Japan in July 1938 and reported that the Red Army was seriously weakened.²²

If we assume that this was the purpose of the “Show Trials” it stands to reason that the only defendants who would appear in them would be those who would attack Trotsky and say they were wrong, the USSR was right, and so on.

Why Is There No German or Japanese Evidence Of Trotsky’s Collaboration?

“Most conspiracy theorists don’t understand this. But if there really were a C.I.A. plot, no documents would exist.” (Shane 2009)²³

Instructions on concrete organization questions regarding preparation for underground conditions must be given only verbally. . . . At the very least it should have been specified that these names and addresses be given strictly orally²⁴

In the course of this essay we will show that there is a large amount of mutually-corroborative evidence of Trotsky’s German-Japanese collaboration from the Soviet side. In addition we have important evidence from German and Japanese sources of collaboration by members of the Soviet opposition including some who themselves claimed to have been working with Trotsky.

But no evidence of German or Japanese collaboration with Trotsky has been discovered outside the former USSR. There are a number of possible explanations:

- Trotsky never collaborated with the Germans or Japanese. All the Soviet evidence is fabricated.

If Trotsky did collaborate the following possibilities exist:

- Many of these archives were destroyed during the war.

²² Coox 1, 92; Coox 2, 145.

²³ Gerald Posner, “author of an anti-conspiracy account of the Kennedy assassination, on efforts to obtain C.I.A. documents relating to the assassin.”

²⁴ O. Weber. “How Not to Prepare For Underground Conditions of Revolutionary Work.” *The Communist International*. July 1, 1932, 417.

- Nobody has looked – at least, we are not aware anybody has done so and particularly in the unpublished papers of the German generals allegedly involved.
- These archives too might have been “purged.”
- There never was an archival evidence of this collaboration. In fact, conspiratorial information of this kind is typically not written down at all.

We know that the Soviet archives have been purged by Khrushchev, and perhaps by others. Even though we have had very limited experience working with other archives, we know of two cases in which archival materials have “disappeared.” In addition the vast majority of Soviet archives is not open to researchers. Given the evidence that we have discovered in the relatively few archival documents that have been published to date it seems likely that further evidence implicating Trotsky may be contained in archives that are still classified. Later in this essay we briefly discuss the “purging” of the Trotsky archive at Harvard of incriminating materials.

In countries still extant it is normal to keep intelligence archives secret indefinitely. This is certainly the case in the USA. We suggest it is logical to suspect the same thing in the case of Germany and Japan.

There is a great deal of evidence that the military commanders led by Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky did indeed collaborate with the German General Staff. But we have only indirect confirmation of this from German Archives, and a somewhat more direct confirmation in one document from the Czech Archives.

In discussing their espionage for Germany several Soviet defendants said they had dealt directly with German General Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord. Rumor, at least, of this collaboration evidently survived in Hammerstein’s family. Although to our knowledge no written record of that collaboration exists, it appears that no one has actually looked for such records.²⁵ Nor has anyone ever undertaken to survey the surviving papers of the German generals allegedly involved.

But absence of evidence is only “evidence of absence” when evidence should indeed be present. We believe that the single most likely reason is simply that no one

²⁵ Hans Magnus Enzensberger. *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn. Eine deutsche Geschichte*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2008, pp. 234; 213-215.

should expect a conspiracy like this to be documented anywhere, ever, much less “in archives.” The demands of secrecy and security require that such information be exchanged only by word of mouth.

The lack of archival or in fact of any documentary evidence of the successful conspiracy against Lavrentii Beria has already been cited. This conspiracy must have involved at least half a dozen men. Accounts of it by its participants do not agree in details except in this: it was all planned and carried out through oral communication. There is no mention of any written communication. What does exist in the archives is the outline of a speech to be delivered by Malenkov at the Presidium meeting of June 26 1953. It was at this meeting, we know, that Beria was either arrested or possibly even killed. Malenkov was certainly a party to whatever occurred. Yet Malenkov’s archive contains only an outline of his speech, according to which Beria was to be removed as head of the MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs, including the internal police force) and made Minister of the Petroleum Industry.²⁶

Alleged Lack Of Non-Soviet Evidence

As Sven-Eric Holmström discusses and as we too shall discuss more fully below, the Trotsky archives at Harvard have been purged of evidence that Trotsky supporters with privileged access to this otherwise-closed archive found embarrassing to Trotsky’s reputation. The materials purged included, at the very least, further evidence about the existence of the “Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites” and Trotsky’s correspondence with supporters within the USSR.

The late Pierre Broué, one of the world’s premier Trotskyist scholars and a person who enjoyed widespread respect from anticommunist scholars, concluded that this evidence meant little since it only demonstrated the existence of a bloc in 1932. Broué assumed that because the only evidence that was not successfully purged from the archive happened to be from 1932 that must have been the only time the “bloc” existed. That is, Broué erroneously assumed in his article that there was no bloc after 1932 because there is no evidence in Trotsky’s archive for the bloc after 1932.

²⁶ The outline of Malenkov’s speech is in *Lavrentii Beria. 1953. Stenogramma iul’skogo plenuma TsK KPSS i drugie dokumenty*. Ed. V. Naumov, IU. Sigachev. Moscow: MDF, 1999, pp. 69-70.

This ignores the fact that the archive has been purged. It is invalid to assume, as Broué did, that the “bloc” existed only in 1932 because the only evidence we have for its existence is from 1932. Had those who “purged” Trotsky’s archive done an even more thorough job we would not even have this evidence. Yet that would in no way imply that no evidence of the “bloc” ever existed. Much less would it imply that no “bloc” ever existed after 1932. “Lack of evidence” – in this case, of the existence of the bloc after 1932 – “is not evidence of lack” – that such evidence never existed and/or never did exist.

If those who “purged” the Harvard Trotsky archive of incriminating documents had been more thorough they would have also taken the certified mail receipts of Trotsky’s letters to oppositionists in the USSR and Trotsky’s and van Heijenoort’s notes about the “bloc of Rights and Trots.” Then what would we now have? We’d have the Gorbachev-era “rehabilitation” document denying that there ever was such a “bloc,” and Trotsky’s staunch denial that there ever was such a “bloc.” Plus we’d have the insistence of the Soviet Prosecutor, Vyshinsky, and the confessions of a number of Moscow Trial defendants, that there was indeed such a “bloc.”

Therefore Getty’s discovery in the Trotsky archive corroborates the testimony of the Moscow Trial defendants. It is evidence that they did not lie, since in the few instances where we can get independent evidence – as here – that evidence supports the trial defendants’ confessions. Likewise it corroborates the statements of the Prosecutor – that is, of “Stalin,” in the reductive language of anticommunist writers. Thus the testimony of the trial defendants and the Soviet prosecutor about the “bloc” and about Trotsky’s correspondence turns out to have been truthful, while Trotsky’s testimony and that of the Gorbachev-era Soviet government was false.

This is not direct evidence of any Trotsky collaboration with Germany or Japan. But it is consistent with such allegations, since it corroborates the testimony of the same witnesses on a related matter. Trotsky denied collaborating with Axis representatives just as he denied existence of the “bloc” and contact with his Soviet supporters. Therefore the lack of evidence in Trotsky’s archive of any contact with the Axis is not evidence that such evidence was never there.

We do have a little non-Soviet evidence of such collaboration. In February 1937 the Japanese Minister of War, General Hajime Sugiyama, revealed in a meeting that

Japan was in touch with oppositionists within the USSR who were providing the Japanese with military intelligence.²⁷

Other examples of non-Soviet evidence attest to the real existence of the conspiracies alleged by the Stalin government. There is the “Arao telegram,” extant at least in 1962-63 though never heard from since. We have direct testimony from the German ambassador to Czechoslovakia that Hitler knew that high-ranking military figures in the USSR were preparing a *coup d'état*. This document, in the Czech national archives, was only discovered in 1987. This document is corroborated by correspondence found in captured German archives disclosed in 1974 but not recognized until 1988.²⁸

General of the NKVD Genrikh S. Liushkov defected to the Japanese on June 13, 1938. At a press conference prepared by the Japanese he claimed that the alleged conspiracies in the USSR were faked. But privately Liushkov told the Japanese that Stalin was convinced there were real conspiracies, including the military conspiracy. He also confirmed that the conspirators existed and that they were linked with the Tukhachevsky group through Gamarnik. Liushkov confirmed that the conspirators wanted to join forces with the Japanese to inflict defeat upon the Soviet military, and that some of them had been conspiring directly with the Japanese military (Coox).

Therefore, despite frequent allegations to the contrary, we do possess evidence of the anti-Soviet conspiracies that could not have been fabricated by the Soviets. However, even if we had no non-Soviet evidence of collaboration between Soviet oppositionists and Axis representatives that would not mean that no such evidence ever existed. Much less would it mean that no such collaboration took place, for such collaboration might well not leave any evidence.

Soviet Evidence

No researcher today, no matter how anti-Soviet, dismisses Soviet evidence just because it is Soviet. Evidence from Soviet archives is routinely regarded as valid. For example, later in this essay we examine pretrial testimony of Genrikh Yagoda, Ezhov's immediate predecessor as head of the NKVD and defendant at the 1938 Moscow Trial,

²⁷ “Soviet Links Tokyo With ‘Trotskyism.’” *New York Times* March 2, 1937, p. 5.

²⁸ Our articles on these subjects are awaiting publication in Russia, but the existence of these documents has long been acknowledged by Western and Russian scholars.

and will show that it is cited unproblematically as genuine by extremely anticommunist scholars. We'll examine Yagoda's testimony below. It includes testimony about Trotsky. The present authors have published and analyzed Bukharin's first confession of June 2, 1937. This document is still top-secret in Russia. In it Bukharin directly implicates Trotsky.

Lengthy Quotations

Much of the text of this article consists of direct quotations from primary sources. We understand that this greatly increases the size of the article and does nothing for its readability.

In an article such as this one, however, we cannot possibly do without these quotations. The primary sources constitute the evidentiary basis for the analysis and conclusions. Some quotations are from sources that are very hard to obtain, such as the English versions of the Moscow Trial transcripts. Even more of them are from documents unobtainable in English. Marshal Budennyi's letter to Marshal Voroshilov is an archival document that has never been published in any language and its contents are entirely new to the scholarly world.

In the age of the Internet there is no reason why any scholar should ever cite archival or hard-to-obtain materials without making them available to the reader. We could have put the primary source quotations onto a separate file and inserted hyperlinks when appropriate, and considered doing so. Doing so, however, would force the reader either to ignore the evidence or to click back and forth between the document and its analysis. We feared such a procedure would be distracting to a careful reader and so decided against it, a decision with which the editors of *Cultural Logic* agreed.

We urge the reader to study carefully the quotations from the primary sources. Like any work of scholarship this article stands or falls on the evidence and its analysis.

A Brief Overview of The Evidence

Our aim in this article is to cite and analyze all of the evidence that directly ties Trotsky to collaboration with Germany or Japan. We follow each citation of evidence with an analysis of that evidence. No evidence is left to "speak for itself" since all

evidence may be interpreted in various ways. We have also striven to cite and study contextual and corroborative evidence, as all analysis of evidence requires.

That there is no “smoking gun,” no absolute evidence, ought to go without saying. With the exception of the eye-witness evidence all the evidence we cite is circumstantial. What gives the complex of existing evidence its power is its mutually corroborative, or reinforcing, character, the sheer quantity of it, and the fact that it comes from different sources.

Strictly speaking eye-witness evidence is not circumstantial in the same manner as other evidence. We pay special attention to the testimony of those who claim they were told by Trotsky himself of his ties with Germany and Japan. This testimony is mutually corroborative too. Here we examine the extent to which the credibility of the eye-witnesses can be verified by cross-checking some of the statements they make with other evidence at our disposal.

By definition one cannot prove a negative. Aside from verbal denials there can be no evidence that Trotsky did *not* collaborate with the Germans or Japanese. Therefore any investigation must search for evidence that he *did* collaborate. We have tried hard to find circumstantial, corroborative, or material evidence that supports the contrary hypothesis: that the confessions of all these people, whether at the Moscow Trials or otherwise, were “fabricated” and false. This would impugn the evidence that Trotsky did collaborate, and so represent “negative” evidence. But we have been unsuccessful. We feel confident in saying that, at this point at least, no such evidence has been discovered. Given the evidentiary situation the objective conclusion must be that Trotsky collaborated with the Germans and Japanese. If evidence to the contrary should surface in the future we must be ready to review and, if necessary, change this conclusion.

Trotsky Lied

The introduction to the Report of the Dewey Commission, which was convened in 1937 to examine the charges against Trotsky, itself states:

If Leon Trotsky is guilty of the acts with which he is charged, no condemnation can be too severe.

Trotsky denied working with Germany or Japan, as charged in the 1937 and 1938 Moscow Trial by several of the defendants. But we now know he lied to the very friendly Dewey Commission in 1937 about other matters far less serious.

On the basis of his research in the Trotsky papers at Houghton Library, Harvard University, J. Arch Getty pointed out in 1986 that Trotsky had been in written contact with his followers in the USSR at least in 1932.

At the time of the Moscow show trials, Trotsky denied that he had any communications with the defendants since his exile in 1929. Yet it is now clear that in 1932 he sent secret personal letters to former leading oppositionists Karl Radek, G. Sokol'nikov, E. Preobrazhensky, and others. While the contents of these letters are unknown, it seems reasonable to believe that they involved an attempt to persuade the addressees to return to opposition.²⁹

Getty went on to detail another contact Trotsky had, a clandestine communication with E.S. Gol'tsman, "a former Trotskyist and current Soviet official," documented in the same papers.

Either Trotsky himself or one of his secretaries took some pains to conceal these connections. Concerning the personal letters Getty wrote:

Unlike virtually all Trotsky's other letters (including even the most sensitive) no copies of these remain in the *Trotsky Papers*. It seems likely that they have been removed from the *Papers* at some time. Only the certified mail receipts remain. At his 1937 trial, Karl Radek testified that he had received a letter from Trotsky containing 'terrorist instructions', but we do not know whether this was the letter in question.³⁰

The noted French Trotskyist scholar Pierre Broué, who also studied these papers and acknowledged Trotsky's lies, explains them as an attempt to deny any plausibility to the "Stalinist" accusations against him at the Moscow Trials, as well as to protect any further

²⁹ J. Arch Getty, "Trotsky in Exile: The Founding of the Fourth International." *Soviet Studies* 38, 1 (January, 1986), pp. 27-28.

³⁰ Getty 34, n. 18.

Trotskyist supporters not yet uncovered in the USSR.³¹ From Trotsky's point of view this made perfect sense. Why give Stalin additional ammunition in their war with him?

But for the historian it means that Trotsky's denials, not only of the existence of the bloc, but of any charge, cannot simply be taken at face value. As Getty has pointed out elsewhere:

The point here is that Trotsky lied. . . . [H]e had good reasons to lie. But what he said was not the truth. It was not "objective." Like the Stalinists, Trotsky was from the pragmatic, utilitarian Bolshevik school that put the needs of the movement above objective truth.³²

We cite this not to "blame" Trotsky for lying. Telling falsehoods is an essential tactic of clandestine activity. To demand that political actors in life-and-death situations must "tell the truth" out of some abstract loyalty to an idealist code of conduct would be mere cant. Rather, the fact that Trotsky lied – proveably in this case, and probably in other cases where we cannot prove it – ought simply to remind us that we must set aside any denials on the part of Trotsky, or any Oppositionist.

It is to be expected that persons will lie when necessary to deflect punishment or blame from themselves. No one pays much attention to denials of guilt on the part of persons suspected of a crime. In many countries an accused person has the right to lie in his own defense, though of course at his own peril too. To any investigator and to any historian as well an accused's confession of guilt is much more significant than a claim of innocence. So Trotsky's claim of innocence means little in itself. However, Trotsky never confessed. He lied, and "got away with it," at least insofar as the Dewey Commission members and its audience were concerned.

We believe that, on the evidence, we can validly conclude that Trotsky lied about a great deal more. Specifically, we believe the evidence shows that Trotsky was guilty as charged in the Moscow Trials – that he actually did conspire with Germany and Japan. If he did so – and we believe the evidence points overwhelmingly in that direction – it is no wonder that he lied in denying it. Keeping such a thing secret would have been an

³¹ Pierre Broué, "Trotsky et le bloc des oppositions de 1932." *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* 5 (Jan-Mar 1980), 29.

³² Getty, post to H-RUSSIA list Nov. 24 1998. See <<http://tinyurl.com/getty-trotsky-lied>>.

elementary *sine qua non* of such a conspiracy. The Germany and Japanese participants, if asked about this, would also have denied it. In lying, they would have felt certain that they were being loyal to their countries and to their military oaths.

Trotsky's Archive Falsified

We also know that there has been a practice of falsifying what Trotsky did that extended to the Trotsky papers themselves. Getty has pointed out that the correspondence between Trotsky and Oppositionists in the USSR has apparently been taken out of the Trotsky Papers at Harvard at some time before they were opened to researchers in January 1980.³³ Broué and Getty both note that Trotsky secretary Jan van Heijenoort reminded Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov of his correspondence about the bloc at the time of the Dewey Commission hearings. As we noted above, Trotsky chose to lie about this. Van Heijenoort, who did not die until 1986, worked with the Trotsky Papers and was interviewed by the *New York Times* about them (*NYT* Jan. 8, 1980 p. A14). But neither there nor in his memoirs³⁴ did van Heijenoort ever reveal he had personal knowledge that Trotsky (and Sedov) had deliberately lied to the Dewey Commission.

Isaac Deutscher was also given special access to the Trotsky Papers by Trotsky's widow so he could write his famous three-volume biography of Trotsky. Deutscher did not reveal the existence of the bloc of Rights and Trotskyites nor of van Heijenoort's letter. Yet he had earlier access to the same "closed" archive that Getty studied only much later. It is logical to conclude that Deutscher saw the same evidence Getty saw and also knew that Trotsky had lied to the Dewey Commission but chose not to reveal it.

The two most likely persons to have "purged" the Trotsky archives of the correspondence with his supporters within the USSR are Deutscher and van Heijenoort. Trotsky's wife also had access. But at least one very personal letter of Trotsky's to his wife remains in the archives – something that his wife might be expected to have removed.³⁵ In any case, it is clear that van Heijenoort concealed Trotsky's contacts with his followers in the USSR. Either van Heijenoort, or Deutscher, or conceivably some

³³ Getty 34 n.18.

³⁴ Jan van Heijenoort, *With Trotsky in exile : from Prinkipo to Coyoactan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

³⁵ See the dispute recorded by Felshtinsky at <<http://lib.ru/HISTORY/FELSHTINSKY/f7.txt>>. The letter itself is at <<http://lib.ru/TROCKIJ/letter.txt>>.

other defender of Trotsky's legacy with rare privileged access has deliberately falsified his archive.

This makes one doubly curious as to exactly what was in those letters from Trotsky to the Oppositionists that have been removed and for which Getty found only the certified mail receipts. The question remains: What information in those letters to his followers in the USSR would have been so sensitive that persons loyal to Trotsky felt it necessary to remove them even while leaving sensitive *personal* materials alone? The logical answer is: sensitive *political* material. But this could not have been mere evidence that Trotsky was in contact with his followers in the USSR. *That* evidence still remains in the Archive.

As Getty says:

Sedov's address book contained the exile addresses of Trotskyists in the USSR. *Trotsky Papers* 15741. The Exile Correspondence section of the *Trotsky Papers* contains copies of such letters. (Getty-Trotsky 34 n. 16)

So those of Trotsky's followers who had access to the Trotsky Papers did not feel that this material was politically sensitive enough to remove. So what would have been? At the top of any such list would be: material that confirmed the accusations made against Trotsky at the Moscow Trials. Such evidence would have irreparably ruined Trotsky's reputation, while justifying, in the eyes of many, the repressions of the late 1930s and, therefore, Stalin. Such evidence would have threatened to cut the foundation out of Trotskyism.

The "Hotel Bristol"

Dewey Commission witnesses also testified that at least two further statements made by Moscow Trial defendants were proveably false: that of the "Hotel Bristol" and that of Piatakov's secret flight to Oslo. At the August 1936 Trial defendant E.S. Gol'tsman ("Holtzman" in the English translation) claimed that in November 1932 he had met Sedov at the Bristol Hotel in Copenhagen. Albert Goldman, Trotsky's advocate at the Dewey Commission hearings, said that the Bristol Hotel had burned down in 1917.

Now, immediately after the trial and during the trial, when the statement, which the Commissioners can check up on, was made by him, a report came from the Social-Democratic press in Denmark that there was no such hotel as the Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen; that there was at one time a hotel by the name of Hotel Bristol, but that was burned down in 1917. The guide “Baedeker” of 1917, includes the name of Hotel Bristol. That was the report of the Social-Democratic press of Denmark which went the rounds throughout the world press.

– Fifth Session

In fact this Hotel Bristol did not “burn down” in 1917 or at any other time but went out of business in 1917. The building that housed it was sold to an insurance company which converted it into offices. It is not clear why Goldman got this detail wrong, since the facts were at least as available to him in 1937 as they are to us today.

The fact that Gol’tsman identified a hotel that was no longer in existence has been widely accepted as evidence that his testimony was fabricated by the NKVD and was false in all other respects too. But a recent study by Swedish researcher Sven-Eric Holmström³⁶ has proven that in 1932 a large sign saying “Bristol” stood immediately beside the entrance to the hotel in question. The hotel’s own sign, high up on a different side of the building around the corner from the entrance, was far less visible. It would have been natural to get the impression that the hotel really was named “Bristol” after the prominent sign displayed right beside its entrance. As Holmström has demonstrated, it would have been difficult to get any other impression.

Holmström’s research also provides us with the best evidence that Gol’tsman was telling the truth. The presumption in the Moscow Trial was that Gol’tsman went to the Bristol Hotel, as he testified. If the Bristol Hotel in Copenhagen had been destroyed (or simply gone out of business) in 1917 and never rebuilt then Gol’tsman could not have gone to it in 1932. This led many to the presumption has been that Gol’tsman had been instructed – more likely, forced – to say he had gone to this hotel.

³⁶ “New Evidence Concerning the ‘Hotel Bristol’ Question in the First Moscow Trial of 1936,” *Cultural Logic* 2008. We are grateful to Mr. Holmström for allowing us to study a pre-publication version of this very important essay. In this section of our essay we are largely summarizing Holmström’s results.

Holmström convincingly demolishes this conclusion. The NKVD would never have made up the name of a hotel which had been destroyed in 1917 but *by coincidence* was also the name of a café – the café Bristol – that had a large sign adjoining the entrance to a hotel right across the street from the train station. But, as Holmström shows, it is just the kind of error Gol'tsman – indeed, anyone – could easily make.

The door of the Grand Hotel Copenhagen was right beside the sign to the Bristol “Konditori” (pastry shop), which a large sign reading “Bristol.” Holmström has obtained photographs of this corner made in 1929 and 1931 which demonstrate this fact beyond any doubt. The only obvious sign near the hotel door was this large sign. The pastry shop and hotel also had an interior connecting door, and the pastry shop was owned by the wife of the hotel's proprietor.

By 1937, when the pastry shop had moved a few doors away, the hotel had put a prominent neon sign next to the entrance that had previously been right beside the large “Bristol” sign. As Holmström's research has shown, the hotel already had a sign – but on the opposite side of the building. Until 1936, when the pastry shop moved, the large “Bristol” sign was the *only* sign anywhere near the hotel entrance, and it was right beside that entrance.

It would have been natural, perhaps even inevitable, that anyone passing by would assume that the hotel was named “Bristol.” This may have been acceptable as long as the pastry shop was adjacent to the hotel entrance. For one thing, both hotel and pastry shop were owned by the same man. For another, the pastry shop and hotel were connected by an internal passage. In fact it may well have been that Gol'tsman actually entered the pastry shop and met Trotsky there, rather than in the hotel lobby.

At or about the same time that the pastry shop moved to a larger space a few doors down from the hotel, the hotel put a neon sign right by its entrance. Why? The answer now seems obvious, thanks to Holmström's work. There was no longer *any* sign at or near the hotel entrance, and so no way of knowing where that entrance was.

Until 1931 the Grand Hotel Copenhagen was a *pension* for long-term residents. No sign was needed – the residents knew where the entrance was and the *pension* did not need to solicit customers on the street. From about 1931 to about 1936 the hotel entrance was unmarked, but immediately beside it was the large “Bristol” sign for the pastry shop,

with the pastry shop entrance a few feet away. It would matter little if a hotel client entered the pastry shop, for he could walk through the interior doorway to the hotel lobby. He might even buy a pastry and coffee! Only when the pastry shop had moved to larger quarters did the hotel require some way to indicate its entrance, and that was when the neon sign went up.

Holmström has also shown that the key Dewey Commission witnesses on the “Bristol” question, the Field couple, deliberately lied in saying that they had been to the pastry shop in 1932 and that at that time it was not adjacent to the hotel. In fact it was adjacent to the hotel in 1932, but had moved by 1937 – the time of the Dewey Commission hearings.

So Gol’tsman was telling the truth about the “Hotel Bristol.” The error he made – mistaking the name of the hotel for that of the pastry shop whose sign was right beside the hotel entrance and that shared an internal passageway with the hotel lobby – must have been made by a great many people during that time. Furthermore according to Gol’tsman’s testimony he did not stay the night at the hotel. He only met Sedov there. If he had stayed there he would have received a bill. That would have had the hotel’s name on it, and that might have served to impress upon Gol’tsman’s mind that the hotel was named “Grand Hotel,” not “Bristol.” But by Gol’tsman’s own admission at the trial he did not stay and so he never received a bill.

Like all hotel patrons during those years Gold’tsman could have used either door. He could have used the entrance to the hotel, with the large “Bristol” sign right beside it. Or he could have walked through the internal passageway between the hotel and the pastry shop and used the pastry shop door. The point is: the NKVD would never have “fabricated” such a story.

We can’t verify whether Gol’tsman met Trotsky, as he testified. But Holmström has verified that Gol’tsman told the truth about the hotel. Furthermore we know that Trotsky was in fact in touch with Gol’tsman and vice versa, as Gol’tsman claimed, since Getty turned up this information in the Trotsky Papers at Harvard. (Getty 28). The fact that Gol’tsman was telling the truth about this epistolary contact with Trotsky which can now be verified, together with Holmström’s research on the “Hotel Bristol” affair, makes it more likely that Gol’tsman really did meet with Trotsky. That is, if two statements by a

defendant (Gol'tsman) can be independently verified, it makes his other statements that cannot be independently verified more credible. By the same token it further erodes Trotsky's credibility.

Holmström has also uncovered evidence that suggests that the matter of Piatakov's alleged flight to Oslo to meet with Trotsky should be reopened. However that may be, we now know that Esther Field, Trotsky's witness before the Dewey Commission, deliberately lied about the 1932 location of the Bristol Konditorei and the Grand Hotel Copenhagen. She would surely not have done so without Trotsky's permission. Most likely she did it at his request; otherwise how would she know exactly which lies to tell? Both the Fields were close adherents of Trotsky's.

Together with the evidence uncovered by Getty and Broué that Trotsky deliberately lied at the Dewey Commission hearings about the "block of Rights and Trotskyites," we now have an established fact. It is not the testimony at the August 1936 Moscow Trial but the testimony by Trotsky and his witnesses at the 1937 Dewey Commission hearings that has been proven to be false. Furthermore, Trotsky's denial that he was involved in conspiring with the Germans and Japanese cannot be accepted as evidence. This has always been obvious to any objective student. It's to be expected that, when accused of a crime, both the innocent and the guilty will claim innocence.

The path is now cleared for us to study the evidence that does exist.

Evidence From The Three Moscow Trials

The testimony of the defendants at the three Moscow "Show" Trials is routinely dismissed as false. The defendants are said to have been threatened, or tortured, or in some other way induced to confess to absurd crimes which they could not have committed. This is all wrong.

There is no evidence worthy of the name that the defendants were threatened, or tortured, or induced to give false confessions by promises of some kind. Under Khrushchev, again under Gorbachev and, in fact, right up to this day the official stance of both Soviet and Russian regimes has been that the defendants' confessions are false. The investigative materials, all but a small fraction of which are still classified in Russia today, have been scoured for any evidence that would discredit the Trials and prove the

defendants' confessions were false. But no such evidence has been discovered. For this reason we can be reasonably confident that no such evidence exists.

In 1992 during the short-lived "glasnost" period under Eltsin the appeals to the Soviet Supreme Court of ten of Moscow Trials defendants were published in the newspaper *Izvestiia*. All the defendants in question had been sentenced to death on the basis of their own confessions and the accusations of other defendants. If they were ever going to retract their confessions and proclaim innocence this was their last chance to do so. Not one of them did. Every one of them reconfirmed his own guilt.³⁷

Dr. D.D. Pletnev, a minor defendant in the March 1938 Moscow Trial, has been the subject of numerous articles declaring him the innocent victim of a frameup and claiming that he proclaimed his innocence while in prison after the trial. But a study of all these articles and of the fragments of Pletnev's correspondence that they published shows this to be false. Pletnev never claimed innocence of the crime he was convicted of at trial. The articles are full of contradictions and dishonest statements. There is no basis to claim that Pletnev was framed.³⁸ In the case of a few of the more prominent defendants, Zinoviev and Bukharin, there is good evidence that they were *not* threatened or badly treated.

Most people who disregard the confessions of the defendants at the Moscow Trials have never studied the transcripts of these trials. They dismiss them because they have been told that the defendants' confessions were fabricated. In reality, there is no evidence that this is so. As we shall see, the evidence given in those confessions is in fact corroborated by the archival material which is the main subject of this study. And in any event the confessions of the Moscow Trials defendants must be accorded the same respect as the rest of the evidence, or as *any* evidence. It must be identified, collected, and studied. We have done this below.

A number of the defendants at the Moscow Trials testified that Trotsky was collaborating with Germany or Japan. Most of these witnesses said that they had been told of Trotsky's collaboration by others. But some of the defendants testified that they

³⁷ "Rasskaz o desiati rasstrel'iannykh" ("Story of ten who were shot"), *Izvestiia* September 2, 1992, p. 3.

³⁸ Furr and Bobrov, *Bukharin na plakhe* ("Bukharin on the block"), forthcoming.

had been told of Trotsky's collaboration personally by Trotsky, personally by Trotsky's son Leon Sedov, or in notes or letters from Trotsky or Sedov.

The status of this testimony is, therefore, more direct. In this article we will concentrate on this first-hand testimony of Trotsky's collaboration. We will not review all the indirect or second-hand evidence in detail. We will, however, say something about this evidence at the end of the article to note how it corroborates the first-hand evidence.

The August 1936 Trial: Ol'berg

In the August 1936 trial of Zinoviev, Kamenev and others the only first-hand testimony to collaboration between Trotsky and the German government concerns collaboration with German intelligence. Defendant Valentin Ol'berg claimed that he obtained from the Gestapo a Honduran passport to get into the USSR with the help of his brother Paul, a German agent. He further testified that he was given the money to buy it from the German Trotskyite organization because Sedov had told them to provide it. Getty discovered evidence in the Trotsky Archive that Trotsky had "safe contacts in Berlin, Prague, and Istanbul" (Getty 28). Insofar as German Trotskyists did exist, therefore, the contact Ol'berg alleged *could* have happened. We can't say more. The alleged contacts between Trotskyists and the Gestapo were for the joint purpose of organizing assassination attempts on Stalin and Voroshilov. There is no testimony at this trial about any Trotsky contacts with Germans or Japanese for military purposes.

Ol'berg claimed there was systematic collaboration between the Gestapo and German Trotskyists with Trotsky's consent. From Prosecutor Vyshinsky's Opening Statement:

As the investigation has established, V. Olberg arrived in the U.S.S.R. with the passport of a citizen of the Republic of Honduras obtained with the aid of the German Secret Police (Gestapo).

On this point V. Olberg, during examination in the office of the State Attorney of the U.S.S.R., testified

“. . . Sedov promised to help me to obtain a passport to return to the U.S.S.R. once more. But I succeeded in obtaining a passport with the help of my younger brother, Paul Olberg. Thanks to my connections with

the German police and their agent in Prague, V. P. Tukalevsky, I, by means of a bribe, obtained the passport of a citizen of the Republic of Honduras. The money for the passport – 13,000 Czechoslovakian kronen – I obtained from Sedov, or rather, from the Trotskyite organization on Sedov's instructions." (Vol. XXI, p. 262)

Re-examined on the question of his connection with the Gestapo, V. Olberg on July 31 of this year testified:

"Confirming also my testimony of May 9 of this year, I emphasize that my connection with the Gestapo was not at all an exception, of which one could speak as of the fall of an individual Trotskyite. It was the line of the Trotskyites in conformity with the instructions of L. Trotsky given through Sedov. The connection with the Gestapo followed the line of organizing terrorism in the U.S.S.R. against the leaders of the C.P.S.U. and the Soviet Government."

From the trial transcript:

Then, continues Olberg, I wrote a letter to Sedov in Paris telling him about the proposal made by the agent of the Gestapo, and asked him to inform me whether L. D. Trotsky would approve of an arrangement with such an agent. After some time I received a reply sanctioning my actions, that is to say, my understanding with Tukalevsky. Sedov wrote saying that the strictest secrecy was necessary, and that none of the other members of the Trotskyite organization was to be informed about this understanding. (*Pravda* August 21 1936, p. 2)

Defendant Natan Lur'e confessed that he had plotted assassinations under the leadership of Franz Weitz, a Gestapo agent. Lur'e claimed that Weitz had argued that Trotskyists and the Gestapo should work together for common ends. Lur'e never claimed that Trotsky or Sedov had themselves asked him to do this. He never claimed to have met either one of them in person at all.

Archival Evidence and The 1936 Trial: The July 29, 1936 “Closed Letter”

On July 29 1936, a few weeks before the August trial, the Politburo sent a long, secret letter to Party organizations all over the USSR. This document was published only in August 1989, during Mikhail Gorbachev’s short-lived and very partial period of “openness” (*glasnost*) that was supposed to accompany economic “reconstruction” (*perestroika*) along capitalist lines. Urging Party organizations to redouble their vigilance the “letter” contained many quotations from suspects under interrogation. Some of them ended up as defendants in the trial that took place a few weeks later, but others did not and were evidently tried separately.

From the interrogation quotations given in this letter we learn a bit more. Dreitser, later a trial defendant, said he had received a letter from Trotsky in 1934 about the need to assassinate Stalin and Voroshilov. This letter evidently said nothing about Germans or Japanese. V. Ol’berg, Frits-David, and K.B. Berman-Yurin testified to direct contact with Trotsky. Ol’berg claimed direct contact with Sedov as well. This contact too was about planning assassinations. E. Konstant, a Trotskyist, is quoted as saying that he had contacted Gestapo agent Weitz, but does not claim that Trotsky had urged him to do this.³⁹ Therefore there is no evidence in the “Closed Letter” about Trotsky’s working with the Germans.

Natan Lur’e

In 1992 Lur’e’s post-trial appeal to Mikhail Kalinin for clemency dated August 24, 1936 was published for the first time from a copy in the former Soviet archives. The appeal was a secret document and thus had no propaganda value. In it N. Lur’e emphasized the truth of his trial confession. Since this short document has not been republished since 1992 and has never been translated, we reprint the whole text here:⁴⁰

³⁹ The letter is available in English translation, with some omissions, in J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *The Road to Terror. Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, 250-256. Dreitser’s and Konstant’s remarks are translated; Berman-Yurin’s and Ol’berg’s are omitted.

⁴⁰ “Rasskaz o desiati rasstrelennykh” (“Story of ten who were shot”), *Izvestiia* September 2 1992, p. 3. The ten Moscow Trial defendants whose appeals for clemency are reprinted in this article are Kamenev, Smirnov, Zinoviev, N. Lur’e, Pyatakov, Muralov, Bukharin, Rykov, Krestinsky, and Yagoda.

To the Chairman of the CEC of the USSR Kalinin M.I.

Declaration

By sentence of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court I, Natan Lazarevich Lur'e, have been sentenced to be shot.

I have committed a most serious crime against the Soviet people. I wished, according to an assignment of Trotsky, leader of the terrorist center, to deprive the Soviet people and the whole world proletariat of the leader Stalin and other leaders of the great communist party. More than once I prepared terrorist acts against Voroshilov, Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, Kaganovich, and Zhdanov, having armed myself in order to carry out this plan.

I really did prepare to murder Voroshilov as ordered by Franz Weitz, a representative of the Gestapo. I wished to carry out these despicable murders because I had been infected by the poison of Trotskyism during the course of my long stay in Germany. I only arrived in the USSR for the first time in 1932 and therefore, ignorant of the immense successes that the party of Lenin and Stalin had carried out under the leadership of the C. C. of the AUCP(b) I, instructed by Trotskyist literature, nursed hatred towards the leaders of the party. At my trial I confessed my guilt in full and kept nothing back from Soviet power. I am a young surgeon. I am 34 years of age. I am prepared to redeem my very serious crimes with diligent work, for all the poison of Trotskyism has been completely rooted out of me.

I ask the CEC of the USSR to spare my life and grant me clemency.

Natan Lazarevich LUR'E

August 24 1936

We will return to this confession below, but note for now a few points about it. N. Lur'e repeats that he was guilty of planning assassinations of Soviet leaders. He particularly insists that he took orders from Gestapo man Weitz. His use of the word "really" (*deistvitel'no*) suggests that Lur'e wanted to emphasize that his confession to "collaboration with" or "taking leadership from" the Gestapo was not a metaphor – as though, say, they were working along similar paths; that he had taken the idea for assassinations from something Weitz had reportedly said, etc. Lur'e tried to make it as clear as possible. He actually took orders from the Gestapo.

Natan Lur'e does not claim at any time that he had been directly in touch with Trotsky or Sedov. He did not receive the assignment or sanction to engage in "terror" or to collaborate with the Nazis from them. Ol'berg had claimed to be Trotsky's "emissary" in Germany, the leader of Trotskyists in Germany and their illegal contacts with the USSR. He had met frequently with Leon Sedov. He testified that Trotsky had sent a letter to Sedov, apparently in 1932, in which Trotsky approved of Sedov's entrusting the mission of assassination to Ol'berg.

Assessing The Evidence

Certainty in historical study is basically unattainable. We never have as much evidence as we would like to have. This is true in jurisprudence and in scientific inquiry generally.

The only rational, responsible procedure is to study all the evidence we have, and arrive at a conclusion based on that evidence, or the preponderance of it. If and when there is evidence "on both sides" of a given question so that it isn't possible to objectively state where the preponderance of the evidence lies, we should state as much.

In all cases, conclusions are tentative. If and when more evidence comes to light, we must be prepared to reconsider all previous evidence and include the new evidence. If that study warrants we should be prepared to revise or even reverse our previous conclusions. This is the procedure we must follow here, as in every inquiry.

Either Natan Lur'e prepared to assassinate Voroshilov or he did not. If he did prepare to assassinate Voroshilov, either he did it on instructions from the Gestapo agent, or he did it for some other reason or under some other leadership. Once again, either he did, or he didn't.

Lur'e's appeal is consistent with the testimony given at the trial as reported in the trial transcript, which we have reviewed above. The only additional evidence or testimony we have in Lur'e's case is contained in "rehabilitation" materials. The first of these documents, chronologically speaking, is the "Zapiska" of the Shvernik Commission prepared for Khrushchev between 1962 and 1963 and, according to its Russian edition, completed "not later than February 18, 1963." Aside from repeating information

contained in the trial transcript it says little about Natan Lur'e. What it does say is not exculpatory.

For example we read the following:

The former members of the Communist Party of Germany M. Lur'e and N. Lur'e, who were condemned in the aforesaid case, had in the past shared the views of the Trotskyite opposition, *and in 1930-1931 Ol'berg, who was living in Germany, did maintain written contact with Trotsky.* Then he did arrive in the USSR under suspicious circumstances. ("Zapiska" 562; emphasis added)

Even though the Shvernik Commission was clearly instructed to find "evidence" to justify declaring the defendants innocent, in a number of cases it found evidence that contradicted this conclusion. The statement quoted above suggests that, as in other passages, those who compiled the Shvernik Report were not willing to completely suppress all evidence of suspicious activity on the part of the defendants.

The "Zapiska" reports that Stalin played a major role in outlining his theory of the role of the Trotskyist-Zinovievist bloc in planning the successful assassination of Kirov and the planned assassinations of himself, Voroshilov, and others (560). It concludes that no such bloc actually existed, but was a fabrication of the NKVD and/or Stalin. The Gorbachev-era "rehabilitation" commissions later agreed. The actual "rehabilitation" decree by the Plenum of the Soviet Supreme Court was evidently issued in June 1988.

We don't have the text of this decree, but we do have the document from the rehabilitation commission of the Politburo published in August 1989.⁴¹

This statement contains a number of interesting features, a few of which we'll consider here. For one thing, parts of it are copied verbatim, or almost so, from the Shvernik Commission's "Zapiska" of 1963, twenty-five years earlier. No one could know this in 1988, since the text of the Shvernik Report was not published until 1993-4. But the fact of the copying suggests that probably no new study was carried out in 1987-88. We note two other features of the 1989 document that are significant for our present investigation:

⁴¹ "O Tak Nazvyvaemom 'Antisovetskom Ob' edinennom Trotskistsko-Zinov'evskom Tsentre." *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 8 (1989), pp. 78-94.

1. The 1989 document concludes that no bloc or grouping of Zinovievists and Trotskyists existed.

It has been established therefore that after 1927 the former Trotskyists and Zinovievists did not carry out any organized struggle against the party, did not unite with each other either on a terrorist or any other basis, and that the case of the “United Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Center” was fabricated by the organs of the NKVD upon the direct order and with the direct participation of J.V. Stalin. (94)

We know that this is not true. Such a bloc did in fact exist, and its existence has been proven from documents in Trotsky’s own archive at Harvard University. Arch Getty put it this way in his pathbreaking book published in 1985:

Although Trotsky later denied that he had any communications with former followers in the USSR since his exile in 1929, it is clear that he did. In the first three months of 1932 he sent secret letters to former oppositionists Radek, Sokolnikov, Preobrazhenskii, and others. Although the contents of these letters are unknown, it seems reasonable to believe that they involved an attempt to persuade the addressees to return to opposition.

Sometime in October of 1932, E.S. Gol’tsman (a Soviet official and former Trotskyist) met Sedov in Berlin and gave him an internal memorandum on Soviet economic output. This memorandum was published in the *Biulleten’* the following month under the title “The Economic Situation of the Soviet Union.” It seems, though, that Gol’tsman brought Sedov something else: a proposal from Left Oppositionists in the USSR for the formation of a united opposition bloc. The proposed bloc was to include Trotskyists, Zinovievists, members of the Lominadze group, and others. The proposal came from “Kolokolnikov” – the code name of Ivan Smirnov. (Getty, *Origins* 119)

After further discussion of what Trotsky may have thought about the bloc as revealed in his Harvard papers Getty continues:

It is clear, then, that Trotsky did have a clandestine organization inside the USSR in this period and that he maintained communication with it. It is equally clear that a united oppositional bloc was formed in 1932. . . . From the available evidence, it seems that Trotsky envisioned no “terrorist” role for the bloc, although his call for a “new political revolution” to remove “the cadres, the bureaucracy” might well have been so interpreted in Moscow. There is also reason to believe that after the decapitation of the bloc through the removal of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Smirnov, and others the organization comprised mainly lower-level less prominent oppositionists: followers of Zinoviev, with whom Trotsky attempted to maintain direct contact.

It is equally probable that the NKVD knew about the bloc. Trotsky’s and Sedov’s staffs were thoroughly infiltrated, and Sedov’s closest collaborator in 1936, Mark Zborowski, is said to have been an NKVD agent. In 1936, the 1932 bloc would be interpreted by the NKVD as a terrorist plot and would form the original pretext for Ezhov’s campaign to destroy the former opposition. Smirnov, Gol’tsman, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Trotsky (in absentia) would be the defendants at the 1936 show trial, and the 1932 events would form the evidential basis for their prosecution. (Getty, *Origins* 121)

If the existence of the bloc between Zinovievists and Trotskyists from 1932 on can be demonstrated by Trotsky’s own documents and, moreover, was known as early as 1985, then we can be certain that it could have been demonstrated in 1988 with the investigative materials from the 1936 trial that were available to the Party and “rehabilitation” investigators in 1987-88. Even if, somehow, such materials were not available in Russia, the Gorbachev-era commissions could have simply concluded that the existence of such a bloc remained unproven.

And, of course, they could have referred to the research by Getty and also by famous Trotskyist scholar Pierre Broué, who had also studied the Trotsky archive at Harvard and recognized in print that the bloc really did exist, and that Trotsky, in denying this, had lied. We have shown elsewhere that both the Prosecutor’s “Protest” (= appeal) and the Decree of the Plenum of the Soviet Supreme Court in the case of Bukharin, the latter document dated June 4, 1988 and still secret, deliberately falsify one of the key

pieces of evidence they cite, and in the most serious manner.⁴² The fact that in the present case too the Gorbachev-era commission denied that such a bloc had existed is further proof that we cannot assume that the conclusions of these commissions are either honest or truthful.

2. In addition we have known since 1971 that Bukharin and his group were planning to assassinate Stalin in 1928 and 1929. Bukharin's close friend Jules Humbert-Droz, a Swiss communist active in the Comintern, broke with Bukharin over this and wrote about it in his memoir published in 1971. Writing in Switzerland and forty years after the event Humbert-Droz had no reason to lie about this. This memoir has been ignored by all Cold-War writers on Bukharin, beginning with Stephen Cohen's prize-winning biography published in 1973.⁴³

We are left with strong evidence that Nathan Lur'e's confession and appeal were genuine despite the Gorbachev-era "rehabilitation" report that declared all the defendants to have been falsely accused.

Zinoviev's Letters and Appeal

The 1989 document makes the claim that "illegal methods of pressure" (*nezakonnye mery vozdeistviia*) were used against the defendants to obtain confessions. But nowhere does it support this serious accusation with any evidence. The document also refers to "moral pressure." In 1956 Safonova, a witness for the prosecution at the 1936 trial and wife of leading Trotsky supporter I.N. Smirnov, testified that she had agreed to give false testimony for three reasons: "Moral pressure"; threats against her family; and a desire to confess "in the interests of the Party."

She (Safonova) states that during the interrogations the NKVD workers employed methods of moral pressure, demanding confessions to criminal activities (that were) supposedly essential in the interests of the party.

(Rehabilitation I, 86)

⁴² Furr and Bobrov, *Bukharin na plakhe*, forthcoming.

⁴³ Jules Humbert-Droz, *De Lénin à Staline, Dix Ans Au Service de L' Internationale Communiste 1921-31* (Neuchâtel: A la Baconnière, 1971) 379-80. For further discussion see Furr and Bobrov, "Nikolai Bukharin's First Statement of Confession in the Lubianka."

The document never discloses what exactly “moral pressure” is. Though this sentence seems to hint that defendants were asked to confess to things they never did “for the good of the Party,” this is never directly asserted. Someone who, by her own admission, gave false testimony once “for the good of the Party” may do it again. There is no way to know whether it may have been her testimony in 1956 to Khrushchev’s “rehabilitators” that was the false testimony given “for the good of the Party.”

The 1989 “rehabilitation” document itself gives the lie to the charge of torture – if that’s what “illegal methods of pressure” means. It quotes Zinoviev himself as saying that his treatment has been good.

May 6 1935. If I could only hope that sometime I might be granted to erase my guilt, if only in a small degree. In prison I am treated humanely, I receive medical treatment, etc. But I am old, I am shaken. . . . (Rehabilitation I, 90)

Strangely, given the political tendency of the “rehabilitation” document, Zinoviev is quoted as hoping that his “guilt” will be forgiven and declares that he is “no longer an enemy” (*ia bol'she ne vrag*, 89). Zinoviev is quoted in this “rehabilitation” document as having written this phrase *twice*. These documents by Zinoviev are still secret in Russia. But it seems that Zinoviev never claimed he was innocent in them, or those passages would surely have been published. Instead, Zinoviev laments his guilt in several passages, although the only published excerpts never make it clear what acts Zinoviev is proclaiming his guilt of.

Getty is the most recent – indeed at this writing, the only – scholar to have gained access to, studied, and published concerning the pre-trial evidence against the 1936 Trial defendants. Getty summarized what he found as follows:

By 23 July [1936], Kamenev was admitting membership in a counterrevolutionary center that planned terror, but he denied being one of the organizers; he implicated Zinoviev as being closer to the matter. Three days later Zinoviev was confronted by one of his followers, Karev, who directly accused him. Zinoviev asked that the interrogation be stopped because he wanted to make a statement that, in the event, amounted to a full confession of organizing

assassination and terror. Shortly thereafter, he submitted to his interrogators a 540-page manuscript he had written in prison. In “A Deserved Sentence” he wrote,

“There is no question about it . . . It is a fact. Whoever plays with the idea of ‘opposition’ to the socialist state plays with the idea of counterrevolutionary terror. . . . Before each who finds himself in my position this question stands in sharp relief. If tomorrow war comes – it stands yet a million times sharper and bigger. And for myself this question in prison for a long time is irreversibly decided. Rise from the dead! Be born again as a Bolshevik! Finish your human days conscious of your guilt before the part! Do everything in order to erase this guilt.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, we now have Zinoviev’s appeal of his death sentence, published in the same issue of *Izvestiia* as that of Natan Lur’e. In it he makes the same statement right after a renewed confession of his guilt:

I have told the proletarian court everything about the crimes I have committed against the Party and Soviet authority. They are known to the Presidium of the CEC.

I beg that you believe me, that I am no longer an enemy. . . .

Zinoviev’s insistence of his guilt and of the truth of his testimony at trial, his private communication assuring the authorities that he is being treated humanely, and Safonova’s inability – it can’t be called anything else – to lie convincingly to support the charge that the defendants had been tortured, plus the proof that the “rehabilitation” document of the defendants in the 1936 trial makes the demonstrably false statements as outlined above, are all consistent with the hypothesis that the charges and testimony at the 1936 Trial were not fabricated or obtained by torture. In this they serve to corroborate

⁴⁴ J. Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov, *Yezhov. The Rise of Stalin’s “Iron Fist.”* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 191. Zinov’ev’s 540-page confession “Zasluzhennyi prigovor” in two parts has recently been declassified as a part of Ezhov’s file. The archival identifiers of this document are the same as those cited by Getty. See <<http://www.rusarchives.ru/secret/bul5/70.shtml>>. At this writing it appears that Getty is the only scholar to mention this material.

Ol'berg's testimony concerning Trotsky's and Sedov's approving his work with Nazi intelligence.

Archival Evidence and Sedov's *Red Book*

In October 1936, after the First Moscow Trial that August, Leon Sedov published *The Red Book on the Moscow Trials* in French. We have already discussed how Trotsky lied to the Dewey Commission; we also note that Sedov failed to tell the truth in this book. In Chapter 9 he wrote:

Of course the Russian Bolshevick-Leninists didn't enter into my kind of a bloc with a single of one these groups.

And,

The Left Opposition was always an intransigent opponent of behind-the scenes combinations and agreements. For it, the question of a bloc could only consist of an open political act in full view of the masses, based on its political platform. The history of the 13-year struggle of the Left Opposition is proof of that. (Sedov Ch.9 n. 41)

We have pointed out above that Getty has shown that Trotsky both knew of and approved the bloc but lied about this to the Dewey Commission. Therefore, Sedov is lying here. Trotskyist researcher Pierre Broué recognized this too. After quoting Sedov's denial that any *bloc* existed Broué wrote:

Ce texte, écrit au lendemain du premier procès de Moscou, est en totale contradiction avec le document à l'encre sympathique de 1932 de la main de Sedov attestant l'existence du "bloc" et des pourparlers qu'il mène avec les "trotskyists" d'U.R.S.S., avec la lettre de Trotsky approuvant la constitution du "bloc" en tant qu'alliance et non fusion, avec les commentaires de Trotsky cités plus haut (95). (Broué 29)

[This text, written right after the first Moscow trial, stands in complete contradiction to the 1932 document in secret ink in Sedov's handwriting and that

attests to the existence of the “bloc” and of the negotiations he was carrying on with the “Trotskyists” in the USSR; with Trotsky’s letter approving the formation of the “bloc” as an alliance, not a unification; and with the comments of Trotsky cited above.]

But Broué’s objectivity deserts him when in the next paragraph he writes:

A quoi eût servi en 1936 de reconnaître l’existence d’un bloc éphémère en 1932?
[What would have been the point in 1936 of admitting the existence of an ephemeral bloc in 1932?]



Above: Trotsky with his son, Leon Sedov. The Swedish text in the upper left states, “A glimpse behind the curtains. No contact for many years between Trotsky and the accused.”

In truth Broué did *not* know that the bloc was “ephemeral,” or that it had existed only in 1932. To be sure, the only evidence of the bloc that remains in the Harvard Trotsky archive is from 1932. But the archive has been purged! Neither Broué nor anyone else has any way of knowing what evidence once existed or how long the bloc lasted. Evidently Broué was assuming, believing, even *hoping*, that it had been ephemeral – for the sake of Trotsky’s and Sedov’s reputations.

Sedov also wrote “The author of these lines keeps himself apart from active politics” (Foreword to the French Edition). We know

that is false too. Sedov was assiduously aiding his father’s political work long before 1936. Getty discovered materials in the Harvard Trotsky Archive indicating that while he lived in Germany Sedov helped his father maintain contact with persons passing in and out of the USSR. As Sedov had moved to Paris from Berlin just before Hitler seized power in 1933 this means his political activity dated from before that time. According to materials in the former Soviet archives Mark Zborowski, the NKVD agent who became Sedov’s confidant, reported to his handlers that Sedov had proposed in June 1936 he go

to the USSR to do illegal Trotskyist work (Zborowski refused). Zborowski was Sedov's assistant in the writing of *The Red Book*.⁴⁵

“No one lies when the truth is on his side.” That Trotsky had something to hide is the inescapable conclusion. Furthermore, Trotsky's and Sedov's deliberate lying in their attempts to refute the charges made against them at the 1936 Trial not only undermine their own credibility. They are consistent with the hypothesis that the testimony at the 1936 trial was basically accurate. The archival documents analyzed above are also consistent with this hypothesis.

The January 1937 Trial: Piatakov, Radek, Sokol'nikov, Shestov, Romm

In the January 1937 Trial defendants Piatakov, Radek, Sokol'nikov, and Shestov all testified to having been given explicit instructions by Trotsky himself concerning collaboration by either Germany or Japan. We'll briefly review that here.

Piatakov

The espionage activities of the Trotskyites on behalf of the German intelligence service were covered up in a number of cases by their connections with certain German firms.

The investigation in the present case has established that an agreement was concluded between *L. Trotsky* and certain German / 16 / firms by virtue of which these firms financed the Trotskyites from a fund formed by raising the price of goods imported into the U.S.S.R. from Germany.

On this point the accused *Pyatakov*, referring to his conversation with *Trotsky's* son, *L. L. Sedov*, now in emigration, testified:

“ . . . *Sedov* conveyed to me *Trotsky's* instructions to try and place as many orders as possible with the firms Demag and Borsig, with whose representatives *Trotsky* has connections.

⁴⁵ J. Arch Getty, “Trotsky in Exile: The Founding of the Fourth International.” *Soviet Studies* 38, 1 (January, 1986), 27; Victor Serge, “Obituary: Leon Sedov,” originally published February 21, 1938, at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1938/02/sedov.htm>>; Zborowski report, Volkogonov Archive; John Costello and Oleg Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions* (NY: Crown, 1993), 282. Tsarev, a KGB officer, obtained privileged access to Trotsky's files in former Soviet archives that have since been reclassified.

“You, added *Sedov*, will have to pay higher prices, but this money will go for our work.” (Vol. I, p. 227) (*1937 Trial* 15-16)

...

Sedov said that only one thing was required of me, namely, that I should place as many orders as possible with two German firms, Borsig and Demag, and that he, Sedov, would arrange to receive the necessary sums from them, bearing in mind that I would not be particularly exacting as to prices. If this were deciphered it was clear that the additions to prices that would be made on the Soviet orders would pass wholly or in part into Trotsky’s hands for his counter-revolutionary purposes. There the second conversation ended. (26-27)

... I recall that Trotsky said in this directive that without the necessary support from foreign states, a government of the *bloc* could neither come to power nor hold power. It was therefore a question of arriving at the necessary preliminary agreement with the most aggressive foreign states, like Germany and Japan, and that he, Trotsky, on his part had already taken the necessary steps in establishing contacts both with the Japanese and the German governments. (53)

... In connection with the international question Trotsky very emphatically insisted on the necessity of preparing diversionist cadres. He rebuked us for not engaging energetically enough in diversive, wrecking⁴⁶ and terrorist activities.

He told me that he had come to an absolutely definite agreement with the fascist German government and with the Japanese government that they would adopt a favourable attitude in the event of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite *bloc* coming to power. But, he added, it went without saying that such a favourable attitude was not due to any particular love these governments cherished for the Trotskyite-Zinovievite *bloc*. It simply proceeded from the real interests of the fascist governments and from what we had promised to do for them if we came to power. (63-64)

...

Pyatakov: Here I must first make one explanation. Trotsky again said that from this standpoint, too, from the standpoint of the negotiations he was conducting and of what he had already achieved, it was extremely important to build up an

⁴⁶ For the word “wrecking” it’s best to substitute “sabotage.” “Wrecking” is a clumsy translation that makes the original sound forced. The Russian word is !"#\$\$%&#'()&!*, from “vred” = “harm.”

active, concrete and real force. He then told me that he had conducted rather lengthy negotiations with the Vice-Chairman of the German National-Socialist Party – Hess. It is true I cannot say whether there is an agreement signed by him, or whether there is only an understanding, but Trotsky put it to me as though an agreement existed, one which it is true still had to be given definite shape by certain other persons, of whom I shall speak *in camera*. (64)

. . .

First, the German fascists promise to adopt a favourable attitude towards the Trotskyite-Zinovievite *bloc* and to support it if it comes to power, either in time of war, or before a war, should it succeed in doing so. But in return the fascists are to receive the following compensation: a general favourable attitude towards German interest and towards the German government on all questions of international policy; certain territorial concessions would have to be made, and these territorial concessions have been defined – in particular, mention was made of territorial concessions in a veiled form which were called “not resisting Ukrainian national-bourgeois forces in the event of their self-determination.”

Vyshinsky: What does that mean?

Pyatakov: It means in a veiled form what Radek spoke about here: should the Germans set up their Ukrainian government, ruling the Ukraine not through their German Governor-General but perhaps through a hetman – at any rate, should the Germans “self-determine” the Ukraine – the Trotskyist-Zinovievite *bloc* will not oppose it. Actually, this meant the beginning of the dismemberment of the Soviet Union. (64)

. . .

Vyshinsky: And what about diversive acts in case of war?

Pyatakov: That was the last point. . . . In the event of military attack the destructive forces of the Trotskyite organizations which would act within the country must be co-ordinated with the forces from without acting under the guidance of German fascism. The diversive and sabotage activity which is being conducted by the Trotskyite-Zinovievite organization within the Soviet Union must be carried out under the instructions of Trotsky, which are to be agreed upon with the German General Staff. (65)

. . .

Radek: . . . The third point that emerged from Trotsky's conversation with Pyatakov was that Germany demanded complete freedom of action for the advance of Germany to the Balkan and Danube countries. This is also a very important fact.

Vyshinsky (To Pyatakov): Did you say that? Do you confirm that?

Pyatakov: Yes. Radek is relating it very exactly. It is all quite true. (445)

Radek

Radek: This was in May 1934. In the autumn of 1934, at a diplomatic reception, a diplomatic representative of a Central European country who was known to me, sat down beside me and started a conversation. He said (speaking German): “. . . Our leaders” (he said that more explicitly) “know that Mr. Trotsky is striving for a rapprochement with Germany. Our leader wants to know, what does this idea of Mr. Trotsky's signify? Perhaps it is the idea of an émigré who sleeps badly? Who is behind these ideas?”

It was clear that I was being asked about the attitude of the *bloc*..... I told him that the realist politicians in the U.S.S.R. understand the significance of a German-Soviet rapprochement and are prepared to make the necessary concessions to achieve this rapprochement. This representative understood that since I was speaking about realist politicians it meant that there were realist politicians and unrealist politicians in the U.S.S.R.: the realist politicians were the Trotskyite-Zinovievite *bloc*. And he also understood that what I meant was: if the *bloc* comes into power it will make concessions in order to bring about a rapprochement with your government and the country which it represents. (108-109)

. . .

Radek: . . . Several months later, approximately, November 1935, at one of the regular diplomatic receptions, the military representative of that country. . .

The President: Do not mention his name or the country.

Radek: . . . approached me and began to complain about the complete change of atmosphere between the two countries. After the first few words he said that during Mr. Trotsky's time the relations between the armies of the two countries were better.

He went on to say that Trotsky had remained true to his old opinion about the need for Soviet-German friendship. After speaking in this strain for a little while longer he began to press me hard as one who had formerly pursued the Rappalo⁴⁷ line. I replied to this by uttering the same formula which I had uttered when I was first sounded, namely, that the realist politicians of the U.S.S.R. appreciate the significance of Soviet-German friendship and are prepared to make the necessary concessions in order to ensure this friendship. To this he replied that we ought at last to get together somehow and jointly discuss the details, definitely, about ways of reaching a rapprochement. (444)

...

Radek: As regards Japan, we were told she must not only be given Sakhalin oil but be guaranteed oil in the event of a war with the U.S.A. It was stated that no obstacles must be raised to the conquest of China by Japanese imperialism.

Vyshinsky: And as regards the Danube countries?

Radek: As regards the Danube and Balkan countries, Trotsky said in his letter that German fascism was expanding and we should do nothing to prevent this. The point was, of course, to sever any of our relations with Czechoslovakia which would have contributed to the defense of that country. (115-116)

...

And, finally, after receiving Trotsky's directives in 1934, I sent him the reply of the centre, and added in my own name that I agreed that the ground should be sounded, but that he should not bind himself, because the situation might change. I suggested that the negotiations should be conducted by Putna,⁴⁸ who had connections with leading Japanese and German military circles. And Trotsky replied: "We shall not bind ourselves without your knowledge, we shall make no decisions." For a whole year he was silent. And at the end of that year he confronted us with the accomplished fact of his agreement. You will understand that it was not any virtue on my part that I rebelled against this. But it is a fact for you to understand. (545)

⁴⁷ In 1922 Soviet Russia and Germany signed a treaty at Rapallo that provided for economic and especially for secret military collaboration.

⁴⁸ Corps Commander Vitovt Kazimirovich Putna was the Soviet military attaché to Great Britain when he was named by one or more defendants at the August 1936 Moscow Trial, whereupon he was recalled and arrested. In 1937 he confessed to conspiring with other military leaders and was tried and executed in what has become known as the "Tukhachevsky Affair."

And, finally, when Pyatakov returned from abroad, he casually remarked when speaking of the conversation with Trotsky that Trotsky had told him that cadres of people were being formed who had not been corrupted by the Stalin leadership. But when I read about Olberg and asked others whether they had known of the existence of Olberg, and none of them had heard about him, it became clear to me that in addition to the cadres who had passed through his school, Trotsky was organizing agents who had passed through the school of German fascism. (548)

Shestov

During my meeting with Sedov I asked him what our leader, Trotsky, thought, what were the specific tasks he placed before us Trotskyites. Sedov began by saying that it was no use sitting and whistling for fair weather; we must proceed with all forces and means at our disposal to an active policy of discrediting Stalin's leadership and Stalin's policy.

Further, Sedov said that his father held that the only correct way, a difficult one but a sure one, was forcibly to remove Stalin and the leaders of the government by means of terrorism. . . .

Seeing that I was being influenced by his words, he switched the conversation to a new subject. He asked me whether I knew any of the directors of German firms, Dehlmann in particular. I told him that I remembered such a name, that he was a director of the firm of Fröhlich-Klüpfel-Dehlmann. This firm was rendering technical assistance, under a contract, in sinking mines in the Kuzbas. Sedov advised me to get in touch with that firm and make the acquaintance of Herr Dehlmann.

I asked him why I should get in touch with him. He said that this firm was of help in sending mail to the Soviet Union. I then said: "Are you advising me to make a deal with the firm?" He said: "What's terrible about that? You must understand that if they are doing us a favour why should not we do them a favour and furnish them with certain information."

I said: "You are simply proposing that I should become a spy." He shrugged his shoulders and said: "It is absurd to use words like that. In a fight it is unreasonable to be as squeamish as that. . . . I met Smirnov about the middle of

July and he asked me bluntly: “Well, how is your mood?” I told him that I had no personal mood, but I did as our leader Trotsky taught us – stand at attention and wait for orders. . . . I detained him and ask: But Ivan Nikitich, Sedov ordered me to establish connections with the firm of Fröhlich-Klüpfel-Dehlmann . . . that was engaged in espionage and diversive work in the Kuzbas. In that case, I said, I will be a spy and a diversionist. To this he replied: Stop slinging big words like “spy” and “diversionist” about. . . . He said: What do you find terrible in enlisting German diversionists for this work? . . . He insisted that there was no other way. After this conversation I consented to establish connection with this firm. (235-236)

Romm

Romm testified that he had met with Sedov and Trotsky personally and passed five messages to and from them and Radek. We reproduce here only his account of his face-to-face meeting with Sedov.

Vyshinsky: Tell us how you received the letter from Trotsky, what commission you were given, and how you carried out that commission.

Romm: . . . In the summer of 1931, in passing through Berlin, I met Putna who offered to put me in touch with Sedov. I met Sedov and in reply to his question as to whether I was prepared, if necessary, to serve as liaison man with Radek, I consented and gave him my addresses in Paris and Geneva.

A few days before my departure for Geneva, while in Paris, I received a letter posted in Paris, containing a short note from Sedov asking me to convey a letter enclosed in the envelope to Radek. I took this letter with me to Geneva and handed it to Radek when I met him. (137-138)

Romm seems to have functioned mainly as a courier. His talks with Trotsky and Sedov touched on Trotsky’s plan for using his forces to guarantee the defeat of the USSR in a war with Germany in order to facilitate his return to power. Romm said he met with Trotsky in person in the Bois de Boulogne in Paris at the end of July 1933.

Vyshinsky: For what purpose did Trotsky meet you?

Romm: As far as I could understand, in order verbally to confirm the instructions contained in the letter I was taking to Moscow. He started the conversation with the question of creating the parallel centre. He said there was a danger in the predominance of the Zinovievites, but that the danger would be great only if the Trotskyites were not sufficiently active. He agreed with the idea of the parallel centre, but only on the imperative condition that the *bloc* with the Zinovievites was preserved and also on the condition that the parallel centre shall not be inactive but shall actively engage in gathering around itself the most stalwart cadres. Then he went on to say that not only terrorism, but sabotage activities in industry, and in the national economy in general, were assuming special significance. He said that, apparently, there was still wavering on this point, but it had to be understood that loss of life was inevitable in carrying out acts of sabotage, and that the main object was, by means of a number of sabotage operations, to undermine confidence in Stalin's Five-Year Plan, in the new technique, and in that way, to undermine confidence in the Party leadership. Emphasizing the necessity of extreme measures, Trotsky quoted the Latin proverb to the effect: "What medicine cannot heal, iron will heal, and what iron cannot heal, fire will heal." I remember that, somewhat perplexed, I suggested that this would undermine the defence capacity of the country at a time when, with the accession of Hitler to power, the danger of war, and particularly the danger of an attack on the U.S.S.R. by Germany, was becoming particularly acute. To this question I did not get a comprehensive reply, but Trotsky hinted that it was precisely the growing acuteness of the war danger that may place defeatism on the order of the day. (141-142)

Romm's meeting with Sedov in April 1934 in Paris touched on the same matter.

Sedov told me that in connection with my going to America Trotsky had asked to be informed in case there was anything interesting in the sphere of Soviet-American relations. When I asked why this was so interesting, Sedov told me: "This follows from Trotsky's line on the defeat of the U.S.S.R. Inasmuch as the date of the war of Germany and Japan against the U.S.S.R. depends to a certain

extent on the state of Soviet-American relations, this cannot fail to be of interest to Trotsky. (144)

Assessing the Evidence

Piatakov testified at length that he had personally spoken to Trotsky and received letters from him concerning the latter's agreements with both Germany and Japan. Likewise Radek said that Trotsky had discussed his, Trotsky's, agreements with both Germany and Japan in letters to him. Vladimir Romm, a Soviet journalist, testified that he had passed letters between Trotsky and Radek hidden in a book.

As we've seen, Getty said that Trotsky had sent letters to Radek, Sokol'nikov, Preobrazhensky "and others" in 1932. Evidently the Trotsky Archives at Harvard do not make it clear whether the "others" included Piatakov, nor whether Trotsky continued to send letters to his supporters in the USSR after 1932. Shestov said that he had received Trotsky's instructions through a face-to-face talk with Sedov.

Piatakov claimed Sedov had told him to order through German firms that would "kick back" funds to Trotsky. American engineer John Littlepage read this passage in the trial transcript and wrote that he found it credible. Littlepage claimed that in Berlin in 1931 he had learned of fraudulent orders for useless mining equipment being made by Russian émigrés acting for Soviet companies. He said that if Piatakov had made such orders the German companies would not have found it unusual, so Piatakov's story did not seem at all farfetched to him.⁴⁹

Archival Documents and The 1937 Trial Transcript: Sokol'nikov and Radek Concerning Trotsky's Relations With Japan and Germany

In the course of his indictment at the start of the 1937 Trial Soviet Prosecutor Andrei Vyshinskii said that in pretrial confessions Sokol'nikov had testified that a foreign diplomat had informed him of Trotsky's contact with his country:

⁴⁹ John D. Littlepage with Demaree Bess, *In Search of Soviet Gold*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1938, pp. 102-3. According to the late Prof. John N. Hazard of Columbia University Littlepage was an anticommunist but basically apolitical engineer who had no reason to lie to make the Soviet charges "look good." As a student of Soviet law Hazard stayed with the Littlepage family in Moscow in the mid-1930s. (Hazard interv. by Furr April 1981)

The accused *Sokolnikov* also admitted that, taking advantage of his position as Assistant People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, he, on *L.D. Trotsky's* instructions, carried on secret negotiations with representatives of a certain foreign state.

The accused *Sokolnikov* testified:

“At the conclusion of an official conversation held in my office, when Mr. --- and the secretary of the embassy were about to leave, Mr. --- stopped awhile.

“At that time both interpreters had already left my office. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Mr. ---, while I escorted him to the door, exchanged a few sentences with me. Mr. --- asked me: ‘Are you aware that Mr. *Trotsky* has made certain proposals to my government?’

“I replied: ‘Yes, I have been informed of this.’

“Mr. --- asked: ‘How do you appraise these proposals?’

“I replied: ‘I think the proposals are quite serious.’

“Then Mr. --- asked: ‘Is this only your personal opinion?’

“I replied: ‘No, this is also the opinion of my friends.’”

(Vol. VIII, pp. 235, 236) (*1937 Trial 9*)

To this day not one of the many volumes of the preliminary investigative materials of this, of the other two Moscow Trials, and of many other such proceedings, has ever been opened to researchers. But the investigative materials pertaining to this particular passage were published in 1989 and again in 1991 a volume on the “rehabilitation” process. Its content is important for our purposes. First, because it shows that these many volumes of preliminary investigation materials do exist (or did in 1989). Second, because this passage, quoted from those preliminary materials, show clearly that the country in question was Japan.

. . . to the file was associated a copy of notes of a talk between G. Ia. Sokol'nikov, who was at that time the vice-commissar of Foreign Affairs, with the Japanese ambassador Ota of April 13, 1935 on the question of the petroleum, fishing, and anthracite concessions on Sakhalin [Island]. At the preliminary investigation and at the trial G. Ia. Sokol'nikov confirmed the fact of this talk and

stated that after the talk he supposedly had a short conversation with Ota on the subject of L.D. Trotsky's proposals to the Japanese government. The contents of the conversation, as it is reflected in the transcript of the interrogation of G. Ia. Sokol'nikov of December 12, 1936, was as follows:

Sokol'nikov: . . . when Ota and the secretary of the embassy were about to leave, Ota stopped awhile. At that time both interpreters had already left my office. Taking advantage of this opportunity Ota, while I escorted him to the door, exchanged a few sentences with me.

Question: Please reproduce your conversation with Ota word for word, as far as possible.

Answer: Ota asked me: "Are you aware that Mr. Trotsky has made certain proposals to my government?" I replied: "Yes, I have been informed of this." Ota asked: "How do you appraise these proposals?" I replied: "I think the proposals are quite serious." Then Ota asked: "Is this only your personal opinion?" I replied: "No, this is also the opinion of my friends." On this point our conversation ended.

Question: Did Ota return to the question of contact between the bloc and the Japanese government after that?

Answer: No. This conversation with Ota took place at the very end of my negotiations with him. Shortly after that I stopped working in the NKVD and did not meet with Ota again.⁵⁰

There is no basis to conclude that Sokol'nikov was forced to fabricate this statement, and then again forced at trial to leave out the name and any indication of what country's government was in question. It's precisely these details that strongly suggest the statement was *not* a fabrication. This statement was never intended to see the light of day. The text of this part of Sokol'nikov's confession is strong corroborative evidence that both it and his testimony at the Moscow trial are truthful.

The text of Radek's similar statement at a preliminary investigation has not been published, though it is briefly summarized on p. 229 on the *Reabilitatsia* volume, right after the quotation from Sokol'nikov we've just reviewed. But a version of that text was

⁵⁰ *Reabilitatsiia. Politicheskie Protsessy 30-50-x godov.* Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Politichesoi Literatury, 2001, pp. 228-9. Originally published in *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* No. 9 (1989).

reprinted in a 2004 volume of NKVD materials sent to Stalin. It occurs in a part of the draft of Vyshinsky's opening statement at the 1937 Trial. (Lubianka B 11-12) Though expurgated to remove the names of the German figures identified in the original interrogation (which is still secret) the name of the government – Germany, in this case – was left in in the draft, while it was omitted in the Trial transcript. (1937 Trial 7-9)

In the following section:

- the passages that are *common to both versions of Vyshinsky's remarks* are in normal type.
- the passages that are *only in the Trial transcript* are in *italics*.
- those passages that are *only in the pretrial draft of Vyshinsky's remarks published in 2004, but are not in the Trial transcript*, are in **boldface**.

The most important result of this textual analysis is this: the draft version published in 2004 contains many more specific references to Germany and Japan, to German individuals, and to an outline of Trotsky's purported agreements with them.

As testified by the accused Pyatakov, L. Trotsky, in his conversation with the accused in December 1935, informed him that as a result of these negotiations he had concluded an agreement with *the said leader of the National-Socialist Party HESS* on the following terms:

“1) to guarantee a generally favourable attitude towards the German government and the necessary collaboration with it in the most important questions of an international character;

“2) to agree to territorial concessions;

“3) to permit German industrialists, in the form of concessions (or some other forms), to exploit enterprises in the U.S.S.R. which are essential as complements to German economy (iron ore, manganese, oil, gold, timber, etc., were meant);

“4) to create in the U.S.S.R. favourable conditions for the activities of German private enterprises;

“5) *in time of war to develop extensive diversive activities in enterprises of the war industry and at the front. These diversive activities are to be carried on under Trotsky's instructions, agreed upon with the German General Staff.*

These principles of the agreement, as Trotsky related, were finally elaborated and adopted during Trotsky's meeting with Hitler's deputy, Hess.

Likewise, said Trotsky, he had well-established connections with the **Japanese** government. (Vol. I, pp. 267, 268)

The nature of this agreement and the extent of the territorial concessions proposed were communicated by L. Trotsky in his letter to the accused Radek in December 1935.

. . .

On this point the accused Radek, during examination on December 4, 1936, testified:

“. . . Trotsky's assertion about his communication with the representatives of the --- government was not idle talk. I was able to convince myself of this from conversations I had had at diplomatic receptions in 1935-35 with the military attaché **German Mr. General K., the naval attaché, if I am not mistaken, Mr. B and finally** with the press-attaché of the **German** embassy, **Mr. B**, a very well informed representative of Germany.

“Both of them, in a cautious way, gave me to understand / 9 / that the --- government was in communication with Trotsky.

And further:

“I told Mr K--- that it was absolutely useless expecting any concessions from the present government, but that the **German** government could count upon receiving concessions from “the realist politicians in the U.S.S.R.,” i.e. from the bloc, when the latter came to power.” (Vol. V, pp. 119, 121)

We should note that even Vyshinsky's draft has been expurgated of some details. For example in the summary of Sokol'nikov's confession Ota's name is replaced by “O.” in this draft, while in the Trial transcript itself even this letter is omitted and we read “Mr. ---.” Hess's name *is* mentioned in the Trial transcript, presumably because Hess was an official of the Nazi Party, not a member of the German government. The Soviets insisted upon making a distinction between the policies of the Soviet *government* that wanted good relations with capitalist countries in diplomacy, trade, etc., and the policies of the Bolshevik *Party* that pursued subversive ends. It is logical that they would make a similar distinction in the case of Germany.

By analogy with Sokol'nikov's interrogation we may assume that all the names were present in the still-secret transcript of Radek's interrogation. Explicit identification of German and Japanese individuals is more frequent in the draft of Vyshinsky's remarks, yet Hess's name does get into the Trial transcript, though the word "Japan" is excised, as are the ranks and initials of the German officials and, in the last quotation, the word "Germany" itself. This appears to show considerable uncertainty within the Soviet government as to how much to reveal publicly. Perhaps they did not want to "burn their bridges" to the government and military of any of the Western countries, who after all could not be blamed for espionage since every country did it and the Soviets were doing it too.

Assessing This Evidence

As in the case of the Sokol'nikov passage, these differences between the various versions of the same testimony are hard to explain unless one assumes that the original testimony was genuine. It is simply not necessary in the slightest to create multiple levels of *fake* confessions. But *real* confessions that were obtained in many interrogations over an extended time, then edited down in several versions of the indictment, and finally edited again, we must assume, in the final draft of the Trial transcript, would leave this kind of documentary trail.

Radek's and Sokol'nikov's interrogations were still in existence in 1989 when the excerpt from it was published. We have evidence that the texts of many other interrogations, as well as other vital investigative materials, still exist but are kept top secret in Russian archives. They probably have a great deal more evidence to support the existence of the conspiracies, including those with Trotsky, Germany and Japan. Since the archives have been scoured for any evidence that could support the "rehabilitations", and thus the supposed innocence, of the defendants, it seems safe to assume that most material that is still secret is of a different, inculpatory nature.

There appear to be three kinds of documents.

- The published Trial transcript has the fewest details concerning German and Japanese collaboration by Trotsky and the Trotskyists.

- Vyshinsky's draft presentation had more such details, including some that were excised before he delivered it or, at the very least, before it was published.
- Transcripts of the defendants' actual interrogations and confessions have the most detail of all.

The relatively few such pretrial confession transcripts that have been published – Bukharin's first confession, plus Frinovsky's, Ezhov's, Yagoda's, Enukidze's, Fel'dman's, and a few by defendants at the 1936 trials like Zinov'ev and Kamenev – confirm the impression that they contain primary evidence of outstanding importance. It is highly probable that a great deal of such evidence remains extant and secret.

In a famous passage in his trial testimony Radek mocked the idea that he might have been coerced into making the statements he did, saying that it was he who had “tormented” his interrogators.

When I found myself in the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, the chief examining official realized at once why I would not talk. He said to me: “You are not a baby. Here you have fifteen people testifying against you. You cannot get out of it, and as a sensible man you cannot think of doing so. If you do not want to testify it can only be because you want to gain time and look it over more closely. Very well, study it.” **For two and a half months I tormented the examining official. The question has been raised here whether we were tormented while under investigation. I must say that it was not I who was tormented, but I who tormented the examining officials** and compelled them to perform a lot of useless work. For two and a half months I compelled the examining official, by interrogating me and by confronting me with the testimony of other accused, to open up all the cards to me, so that I could see who had confessed, who had not confessed, and what each had confessed. (1937 Trial 549; emphasis added)

We have no evidence that the testimony in these confessions was extracted by threat or force – that is, was false. Why go to the trouble of having a suspect concoct a detailed confession, naming names, and then take out those names for the sake of a trial?

By far the most likely reason for omitting the names at trial is that they were genuine in the first place. Given the absence of any evidence that these confessions were false, and given the logical progression from more detail in the secret documents to the least detail in public ones, any objective student would conclude that we should consider these confessions genuine unless and until evidence to the contrary should be discovered. But the practice among most scholars of this period of Soviet history is to do precisely the opposite. Any evidence that tends to support the theory that Trotsky or any of those accused of espionage, sabotage, conspiracy to overthrow the government or treasonable contacts with foreign governments did in fact so conspire, is routinely dismissed. The evidence itself is not evaluated.

There is never any reason to “dismiss” – to refuse to consider – any evidence. All evidence needs to be evaluated on its own merits and in conjunction with the rest of the evidence available, as we have done here. The evidence is strong that Radek testified truthfully both in his pretrial interrogations and at the trial. That means either that Trotsky was involved with Germany and Japan or, at the least, that Trotsky told Radek he was.

The March 1938 Trial: Krestinsky, Rozengol'ts, Bessonov, Rakovsky

In this trial Nikolai Krestinsky testified that in 1922 he began collaborating with the German General von Seeckt, at Trotsky's behest and for factional Trotskyist aims. Krestinsky said that the clandestine Trotskyite organization did some kind of espionage or intelligence services for the German General Staff in return for a considerable sum of money to further their factional work within the Bolshevik Party.

KRESTINSKY: I began my illegal Trotskyite activities at the end of 1921, when on Trotsky's suggestion I consented to the formation of an illegal Trotskyite organization and to my joining its centre, which was to be made up of Trotsky, Pyatakov, Serebryakov, Preobrazhensky and myself, Krestinsky. Trotsky made this proposal to me immediately after the Tenth Congress. . . . (1938 Trial 262)
A year later I committed a crime – I refer to the one I spoke about during the examination of the accused Rosengoltz – the agreement I concluded on Trotsky's instructions with General Seeckt, with the Reichswehr in his person, about

financing the Trotskyite organization in exchange for services of an espionage nature which we undertook in this connection to render the Reichswehr. . . . (262)

VYSHINSKY: Will you tell us how much money you received?

KRESTINSKY: Beginning with 1923 until 1930 we received annually 250,000 German marks in gold.

VYSHINSKY: This makes approximately two million gold marks altogether during these years?

KRESTINSKY: Yes, approximately two million gold marks. (265)

Krestinsky made a point of stressing that he had contacted von Seeckt as early as the previous year, 1921, but that his illegal, criminal contacts with von Seeckt dated only from 1922.

VYSHINSKY: Inasmuch as you are winding up the story of this period of your criminal activities, I want to get more precise information on one question. You said that in the winter of 1921-22 you evolved your calculations on the German Reichswehr.

KRESTINSKY: The plans to utilize the German Reichswehr for criminal Trotskyite purposes appeared in the spring of 1922.

VYSHINSKY: Did your Trotskyite organization maintain contact with Seeckt even before 1921?

KRESTINSKY: There was a contact with him of which I do not want to speak at an open session. It was a contact established by a member of our organization who at that time was not yet a member of our organization, and it was not a contact of a Trotskyite nature. (267-268)

. . .

VYSHINSKY: The question of money for Trotskyite purposes from the German Reichswehr – is that an official aspect or not?

KRESTINSKY: This was the secret Trotskyite aspect, a criminal thing.

VYSHINSKY: Which refers to 1921-22?

KRESTINSKY: To 1922. (269)

It is hard to see why he would have insisted upon such precision over an insubstantial matter unless he were telling the truth.

Krestinsky also claimed that he had met personally with Trotsky in Meran,⁵¹ Italy in October 1933, where Trotsky told him that collaboration with Japan was also essential.

KRESTINSKY: When I told him [Bessonov, another of the defendants – GF] that I wanted to meet Trotsky he said that there was a possibility of arranging it. At the same time I said that I would stay in Kissingen to the end of September, and that I would spend the rest of the time up to the 10th of October in Meran, and I gave him the address of the Kissingen sanatorium in which I always stopped, and also my address in Meran. . . .

Trotsky arrived in Meran around the 10th of October together with Sedov . . . Trotsky, as he told me, arrived with somebody else's French passport and he travelled by the route of which Bessonov spoke, that is to say, over the Franco-Italian border, and not through Switzerland and Germany. For Trotsky, the questions which bothered us in Moscow were irrevocably settled and he himself proceeded to expound his instructions with regard to this. He said that as since 1929 we had developed into an organization of a conspiratorial type, it was natural that the seizure of power could be consummated only by force. . . . (275-6)

Krestinsky said that Trotsky personally informed him that he was continuing to work personally with the Germans, and with the Japanese through Sokol'nikov.

He undertook to carry on the negotiations with the Germans. As for the Japanese, of whom he spoke as a force with which it was also necessary to come to terms, he said that, for the time being, it was difficult for him to establish direct connections with them, that it would be necessary to carry on conversations with them in Moscow, that it was necessary in this connection to use Sokolnikov, who was working in the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and, as it happened, was in charge of eastern affairs. And inasmuch as this conversation would be held only with an official person, and the preliminary conversation would only be

⁵¹ The city is called "Meran" in German and Russian, and "Merano" in Italian. We use "Meran" here because this is the spelling in the English translation of the 1938 Trial transcript.

in the nature of soundings, it would be sufficient to confine ourselves at first to general statements to the effect that if a government of a bloc of the opposition groups assumed power in the Soviet Union, it would display a favourable attitude towards the Japanese and take into consideration the wishes of the Japanese during the discussion and settlement of the controversies existing between the Soviet government and the Japanese government. (277-278)

Rozengol'ts testified that he had contacted von Seeckt and Chief of the German General Staff Haase in 1923 when ordered by Trotsky and for Trotskyist purposes. (Krestinsky too had confessed to meeting with von Seeckt and Haase.)

My espionage activities began as far back as 1923, when, on TROTSKY'S instructions, I handed various secret information to the Command-in-Chief of the Reichswehr, SEECKT, and to the Chief of the German General Staff, HASSE. Subsequently, direct connections with me were established by the --- Ambassador in the U.S.S.R., Mr. N, to whom I periodically gave information of an espionage character. After Mr. N's departure I continued my espionage connections with the new Ambassador, Mr. N." (Vol VI, p. 131 reverse) (9)

He insisted that this is when his conspiratorial work began – that is, that this contact was not work for the USSR, which had trade and military agreements with Weimar Germany at the time.

VYSHINSKY: . . . So you, Rosengoltz, established connections with the German intelligence service already in 1923?

ROSENGOLTZ: With Seeckt directly.

VYSHINSKY: Do you draw a line between the two?

ROSENGOLTZ: I am saying it merely for the sake of exactitude.

VYSHINSKY: So since 1923 you, accused Rosengoltz, began to supply espionage information to foreign states?

ROSENGOLTZ: That is right. (261)

Rozengol'ts' distinction here is correct. Contact with the German General Staff is not the same as contact with German intelligence, even though espionage for both would be equally illegal. Here too it is hard to imagine why Rozengol'ts would have taken the trouble to be so precise unless he were telling the truth. Liars can feign precision, but in this case there seems to be no reason to fabricate this kind of distinction.

He testified to working with both Germany and Japan on Trotsky's instructions.

In addition to instructions I received from TROTSKY through KRESTINSKY and SEDOV to carry on sabotage activities in the sphere of foreign trade with the object of rendering direct assistance to Germany and Japan, the character of my sabotage activities was also determined by instructions I received from the --- Ambassadors in the U.S.S.R., Mr. N and Mr. N, connections with whom played an important part in this matter, as I had to be guided in my work by their definite instructions.

After I had established contact with TUKHACHEVSKY and RYKOV, I informed the former through KRESTINSKY, and the latter I myself informed, of TROTSKY'S instructions regarding sabotage activities, and both approved of the work I had done.

As a result of all this, sabotage activities in foreign trade proceeded mainly along the following three lines: first – economic assistance to Germany and Japan at the expense of the U.S.S.R.; second – causing economic loss and damage to the U.S.S.R.; third – causing political damage to the U.S.S.R. (Vol. VI, p. 49) (15-16)

ROSENGOLTZ: I shall enumerate the main points. Sedov also conveyed directions from Trotsky about the organization of terrorism, stating that at that period these instructions about terrorism should have no direct practical bearing on Krestinsky and myself from motives of secrecy, since special instructions were being given on this score to the terrorist organization of Ivan Nikitich Smirnov. In 1933 directions and instructions were received with regard to sabotage in the sphere of foreign trade. As Sedov had told me that Trotsky had an agreement with certain German circles, from this standpoint sabotage was of very essential importance to Trotsky for the maintenance of his prestige and the

preservation of the agreement. The principal line in sabotage was to further the interests of Germany and Japan in the sphere of foreign trade. (246)

Rozengol'ts said that he met personally with Sedov in both 1933 and 1934.

In so far as TROTSKY had an agreement with Germany and Japan, of which I had been informed (both during the negotiations – at my meeting with Sedov in 1933; and of the agreement that had been reached – at my meeting with him in 1934), I received corresponding instructions from TROTSKY, and my sabotage activities in the sphere of foreign trade served the same purpose. (Vol. VI, p. 48) (18)

Bessonov said that he had received a letter from Trotsky in 1934, and also met Trotsky in Paris in that year.

BESSONOV: I received a short letter through Johannson, a note from Trotsky, in which he wrote about arranging a meeting with one of the Trotskyites in Germany to inform him about the events of June 30 in Germany. I was the only person who could go. At the end of July 1934 I arrived in Paris by the day train and also left by the day train. The whole talk took place in a hotel at which Johannson always stayed. Trotsky said that he knew me very well from Pyatakov's letters and from Krestinsky's accounts. (63)

Here Trotsky urged him to pressure the Germans to come to some official agreement with the Opposition, saying:

VYSHINSKY: What did you and Trotsky say about your underground Trotskyite tasks?

BESSONOV: He imposed on his followers working in the diplomatic field the task of adopting the line of sabotaging official agreements in order to stimulate the interest of the Germans in unofficial agreements with opposition groups. "They will come to us yet," said Trotsky, referring to Hess and Rosenberg. He said that we must not be squeamish in this matter, and that we might be ensured

real and important help from Hess and Rosenberg. He said we must not stop short at consenting to big cessions of territory. (63)

Khristian Rakovsky testified that in September 1934 an important Japanese official had spoken to him directly concerning an agreement with the opposition.

RAKOVSKY: . . . In September 1934 I was sent to Tokyo at the head of the Soviet Red Cross Delegation to an international conference of Red Cross Societies, which was to take place there in October. The day after I arrived in Tokyo, I was stopped in the corridor of the Japanese Red Cross building by a certain prominent public man of Japan. I can mention his name.

THE PRESIDENT: No, there is no need.

RAKOVSKY: Very well, I will name him at the session in camera. He invited me to tea. I made his acquaintance. He held a position which had some relation to my mission – I want to say, not my mission as one who belonged to the opposition, but my governmental mission. I accepted his amiable invitation. During the conversation this person (here I omit various compliments, commonplaces, flattering remarks) said that the interests of the political trend to which I belonged in the U.S.S.R. and the interests of a certain government fully coincided, and that he personally welcomed my arrival in Tokyo because it would give him the opportunity to discuss certain questions concerning both sides, . . . (289-290)

Rakovsky then said that during 1935 and the first half of 1936 he had had five communications with Naida, a Japanese agent. Naida gave him to understand that the Japanese had relations with Trotsky. Rakovsky communicated with Trotsky about this.

During the second and third meeting with the public man who headed a big public organization in Japan we established the nature of the information which I promised to supply to the agents of the Japanese intelligence service in Moscow and also the technique of transmitting this information. While still in Tokyo, I drew into this work Dr. Naida, secretary of the Red Cross Delegation, of whom I already knew that he was a member of the underground counter-revolutionary

terrorist organization. I sent Dr. Naida with my card to the public man and he arranged with him as to how and with whom Dr. Naida was to meet in Moscow; it was he who acted as liaison agent between me and the Japanese intelligence service. In Tokyo I had yet another meeting, with a third person. . . . I was introduced to this third person by the second high personage. He asked me to take coffee with him – this was after dinner; we sat down at a table and began to talk.

I shall not reproduce the whole conversation, and it is not necessary either; I shall give it to you in substance. He started the conversation by saying: “We are aware that you are a very close friend and adherent of Mr. Trotsky. I must ask you to write to him that a certain government is dissatisfied with his articles on the Chinese question and also with the behaviour of the Chinese Trotskyites. We have a right to expect a different line of conduct on the part of Mr. Trotsky. Mr. Trotsky ought to understand what is necessary for the certain government. There is no need to go into details, but it is clear that an incident provoked in China would be a desirable pretext for intervening in China.” I wrote to Trotsky about all this. . . . (293-294)

Summary: Evidence From The Moscow Trials

Of the defendants at the three public Moscow Trials nine men claimed to have heard directly from either Trotsky or his son Sedov about contacts between Trotsky and German or Japanese officials.

We noted above that many other defendants – Bukharin, for example – testified that they had heard about this at second or third hand and believed it. Bukharin said he had heard about it from Radek, whom he had every reason to believe. But if Radek had been lying Bukharin would not have known, so Bukharin’s testimony on this point is evidence at second hand.

However, indirect or “second hand” evidence is still evidence. It can be used to corroborate – or, as the case may be, to contradict and so disconfirm – other more direct evidence. Therefore we will consider it briefly at the end of our discussion.

The Moscow Trial defendants provided very strong evidence of Trotsky’s collaboration with Germany and Japan. This evidence has never been successfully impugned. But it has been *declared* false so many times – its falsity taken for granted

without evidence – that its “falsehood” is constituent of the current mainstream paradigm of Soviet history. As we discuss later in the present essay, official Soviet “rehabilitations” are political documents many of which are simply frauds but nonetheless continue to be accepted as true.

Evidence From The Former Soviet Archives

The rest of this essay could be thought of as an attempt to assess – that is, to confirm or disconfirm – some of the statements made by the defendants at the three public Moscow Trials concerning Trotsky’s alleged German-Japanese collaboration in the light of new documentary evidence from the former Soviet archives.

We have already considered some evidence from former Soviet archives:

- Trotsky’s telegram of June 18, 1937 to the Soviet government;
- published excerpts from still secret pretrial investigative materials on Sokol’nikov and Radek.

In the rest of the essay we will examine other archival evidence implicating Trotsky that has been made public since the end of the USSR in 1991 to date.

Pavliukov

In 2007 Russian researcher Aleksei Pavliukov published the fullest account to date of Nikolai Ezhov’s career.⁵² This book, and Ezhov’s career and conspiracies, are of great importance to any accurate understanding of the events of the late 1930s. For our present more limited purposes it is important because Pavliukov was accorded privileged access to certain unpublished materials relating to these conspiracies from the investigative files.

Among those materials were some dealing with the second Moscow Trial. Here is Pavliukov’s discussion of the part of a confession by Radek dated October 20, 1936 in which Radek discusses Trotsky’s relations with Germany and their significance.

Radek reported that Trotsky, who had supposedly established firm contacts with German authorities, let them know that after its coming to power the Trotskyite-

⁵² Aleksei Pavliukov, *Ezhov. Biografia*. Moscow: Zakharov, 2007.

Zinovievite bloc was ready to make significant concessions in relation to Germany. This would be expressed in profitable conditions for the export of German goods from the USSR, in a reduction of prices for Soviet goods exported to Germany, in the permission of German capital to exploit the natural riches of the country, and also in several territorial concessions. (Pavliukov 236)

This corresponds with what Radek testified during the January 1937 Moscow Trial. Had the pretrial investigation materials, which were never intended to be made public, failed to confirm the trial testimony, we would have reason to doubt that testimony and suspect some “stage-managing” at the trial. But here the opposite is the case. Therefore, it confirms his trial testimony. The existence of such confessions argues against any idea that the Trial was “stage-managed.”

In the following passage Pavliukov quotes some words of Radek’s directly.

In the event of war between Germany and the Soviet Union upon which, according to Radek’s words, Trotsky laid great hopes, “the Trotskyist commanders could even use certain individual defeats in battle as proof of the supposedly incorrect policy of the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) and in general of the senselessness and ruinous nature of the given war. They – Radek continued to fantasize – using such failures and the exhaustion of the Red Army soldiers, might even call upon them to abandon the front and turn their weapons against the government. That might give the German Army the possibility of occupying the abandoned areas and create a real threat of a crushing defeat of the whole front.” Under these conditions the conspirators, relying upon those parts of the Army commanded by the Trotskyist commanders, might obtain a real chance to carry out a seizure of power in the country. (Pavliukov 236-7)

This passage is congruent with the testimony of some of the military figures who asserted that they were in collaboration with both Trotsky and the Germans. We will examine that testimony below. It is also broadly consistent with what Piatakov testified at the January 1937 trial (see above).

Pavliukov also summarizes a confession of Radek’s in the archives and dated two days later, on December 22, 1936 that concerns Trotsky.

The ultimate completion of the story with Trotsky's sellout of his former country occurred in Radek's confession of December 22, 1936. "As it turned out," the supposed meeting between Pyatakov and Trotsky in Norway was caused by the necessity to discuss a letter that had been received the evening before from Trotsky, in which the latter set forth his plans on the questions of the activity of the Trotskyist-Zinovievist bloc on foreign matters.

This letter, according to Radek, pointed out the desirability of the seizure of power even before the start of the impending war, and for this it would be essential to activate terrorist activity against the leaders of the Soviet government. For the normalization of relations with Germany it was considered expedient to agree to permit Germany to take part in the exploitation of areas of useful ores on the territory of the USSR and to guarantee the provision of foodstuffs and fats at less than world prices. As for Japan, the letter supposedly said that it would be necessary to give it access to Sakhalin oil, and to guarantee additional access to oil in the event of war with America, and also to permit it access to the exploitation of Soviet gold-producing areas. Besides that it followed that they ought not to hinder the German seizure of the Danubian and Balkan countries and not to interfere with Japan's seizure of China.

If they did not succeed in taking power before the war this goal might be attainable, in Trotsky's opinion (in Radek's exposition), as a result of a military defeat of the USSR, for which it was essential to energetically prepare. Active sabotage activities before and during the war would, besides weakening the defensive potential of the Soviet Union, demonstrate the real strength of the Trotskyist-Zinovievist bloc and facilitate postwar negotiations with Germany, which was not of small importance, since in the event the conspirators came to power as a result of a crushing defeat of the USSR, it would not be possible to manage with the concessions of peacetime. In that case they would have to yield to the Germans obligations for the purchase of German goods for a long period of time, etc. In order that this scheme, attributed to the professional revolutionary Trotsky, would not look altogether too clumsy, Radek supplied it with arguments according to which Trotsky supposedly relied upon in developing all these defeatist plans. Afterwards, as a result of the strengthening of Germany and Japan (although at the expense of the USSR), would begin the unavoidable war between the imperialist powers, as it was supposedly set forth in Trotsky's letter,

it could be possible to go once again on the counter-offensive, since the consequences of this war would facilitate the reappearance in the world of a new revolutionary situation.

This is the message supposedly received by Radek at the end of 1935 that stimulated Pyatakov to set out as soon as he could to consult with Trotsky in person. Radek confirmed Pyatakov's confession about this meeting and filled them out with new details that Pyatakov had supposedly shared with him after his return to Moscow. It turned out that Trotsky had promised the Germans that during war between Germany and the USSR the Trotskyist commanders at the front would act according to the direct orders of the German General Staff, and after the war the new government would compensate Germany for part of its military expenses by paying with goods that were essential for its military industries.

At the same time Trotsky strove to avoid too great a dependence on Germany and Japan and was supposedly carrying on negotiations with the English and French too. As a result of the meetings that had taken place with representatives of Germany, England and France an agreement had been drafted that foresaw that, in the event the Trotskyists came to power, England and France would also not lose by it, to which Germany graciously acceded. The French were promised a benevolent regard to their attempts to obtain the return of their prerevolutionary debts to Russia and their pretensions to the metallurgical industry of the Donbas, and the English – consideration of their interests in the Caucasus.

After the war, in accordance with the plans attributed to Trotsky, there would be established in the Soviet Union the same kind of social-economic system as in the other countries of Europe and, of course, the Comintern would be disbanded. (Pavliukov 239-240)

Pavliukov and The 1937 Trial Transcript Compared

This summary of Radek's confession of December 22, 1936 is consistent with Radek's testimony at the January 1937 trial. In fact Vyshinsky read a brief quotation from this very confession in his opening statement at the trial:

For example, the accused *Radek*, confirming *Pyatakov's* testimony, testified during examination on December 22, 1936, that one of the points of the agreement reached between *Trotsky* and the representatives of the German National-Socialist Party was the obligation

“ . . . during Germany's war against the U.S.S.R. . . . to adopt a defeatist position, to intensify diversive activities, particularly in enterprises of military importance ... to act on *Trotsky's* instructions agreed upon with the German General Staff.” (Vol. V, p. 152) (*1937 Trial* 10-11)

Pavliukov's summary of Radek's confession also contains some details that did not come out at the trial. For instance, according to the published trial transcript Radek did not accuse Trotsky during the Trial of planning to accommodate the powerful imperialist countries by dissolving or banishing the Comintern. In this unpublished confession Radek stresses that “Trotskyist military commanders” would be working directly with the German general staff to take advantage of defeat in war with Germany. According to the transcript Radek said nothing about this at the trial.

The Russian language transcript is far shorter than the English version, which was evidently published later in the year, after the arrest and execution of Tukhachevsky and the other military conspirators. Putna and Primakov, both well-known Trotskyists, were under arrest at the time of the trial. Putna, military attaché to Great Britain, had been recalled and arrested on August 20, 1936. Primakov had been arrested a few days earlier. Putna is mentioned in the trial transcripts in a general manner, as a military commander who did have contact with the German general staff. Both the Russian and the English transcripts record the following passage in Radek's interrogations:

And, finally, after receiving Trotsky's directives in 1934, I sent him the reply of the centre, and added in my own name that I agreed that the ground should be sounded, but that he should not bind himself, because the situation might change. I suggested that the negotiations should be conducted by Putna, who had connections with leading Japanese and German military circles. And Trotsky replied [to me – Russian only, GF]: “We shall not bind ourselves without your knowledge, we shall make no decisions.” For a whole year he was silent. And at the end of that year he confronted us with the accomplished fact of his

agreement. You will understand that it was not any virtue on my part that I rebelled against this. But it is a fact for you to understand. (Russian transcript p. 226; English transcript p. 545)

In the English version the following passage also occurs, which is omitted altogether in the much shorter Russian version:

Radek: In 1935. But notwithstanding this, we decided to call a conference. And before this – in January, when I arrived – Vitaly Putna came to see me with some request from Tukhachevsky. I said: “This is no way for a leader [Trotsky – GF] to act. There has been no news of this man for six months. Get hold of him, dead or alive.” Putna promised. But when I received no answer from Putna, . . . (105)

Vyshinsky then reprises this passage a little later, again only in the English transcript:

Vyshinsky: Accused Radek, in your testimony you said: “In 1935 . . . we resolved to call a conference, but before this, in January, when I arrived, Vitaly Putna came to me with a request from Tukhachevsky. . . .” I want to know in what connection you mention Tukhachevsky’s name.

Radek: Tukhachevsky had been commissioned by the government with some task for which he could not find the necessary material. I alone was in possession of this material. He rang me up and asked if I had this material. I had it, and he accordingly sent Putnam, with whom he had to discharge this commission, to get this material from me. Of course, Tukhachevsky had no idea either of Putna’s role or of my criminal role. . . .

Vyshinsky: And Putna?

Radek: He was a member of the organization. . . .

Vyshinsky: Do I understand you correctly, that Putna had dealings with the members of your Trotskyite underground organization, and that your reference to Tukhachevsky was made in connection with the fact that Putna came on official business on Tukhachevsky’s orders?

Radek: I confirm that, and I say that I never had and could not have had any dealings with Tukhachevsky connected with counter-revolutionary activities,

because I knew Tukhachevsky's attitude to the Party and the government to be that of an absolutely devoted man. (146)

Assessing This Evidence

The Russian version does not mention Putna as a member of the Trotskyite organization, while the English transcript makes it clear that he was. Tukhachevsky is not even mentioned in the Russian, while in the English version Radek appears to go out of his way to declare Tukhachevsky innocent entirely. One possible explanation is that the English translation was only prepared later in 1937 after the arrests of the leading Tukhachevsky Affair defendants. The discovery of the military conspiracy was far more grave in its potential consequences than the uncovering of the continuing activities of the high-ranking Bolsheviks who testified at the January 1937 trial, serious as this was. According to this logic the shorter Russian transcript may have been prepared soon after the trial. Subsequently it was severely edited in order to give the gist of the trial testimony while not disclosing allegations against others still under investigation, including the military men. The much longer English transcript might then have been prepared later in the year, with much more detail to show the conspiratorial links to the Tukhachevsky defendants and with a view to influencing foreign opinion. The more information, the more credible the charges – so the logic of the Soviet government may have run. Such a consideration may also account for the fact that both the Russian and English transcripts of the March 1938 “Bukharin-Rykov” trial were huge, more than three times the length of the Russian version of the 1937 trial, and that the Russian transcript contained more detail than the English rather than less, as in the case of the 1937 trial transcript.

Whatever the reasons, the differences we can now discern between Radek's unpublished confessions and his testimony at the trial argue in favor of the genuineness of those confessions. Why go to all the trouble to fabricate confessions that implicate the military, and charge Trotsky with agreeing to destroy the Comintern, and then omit them at the public trial?

Of course we have no evidence that *any* of the trial testimony was “fabricated” in advance anyway. Pavliukov states and restates his skepticism concerning the materials he

quotes. But why bother to quote them all without comment or analysis if they are all lies? Pavliukov can't bring himself to take either position consistently.

Ezhov's Confessions

Pavliukov never quite brings himself to state that Ezhov was guilty. Neither does he make any overt claim that his confessions were fraudulent – the result of torture or other compulsion. But if Ezhov were in fact guilty then his confessions were, in the main at least, accurate.

Later in his book, when he discusses how Ezhov retracted all of his many detailed confessions at his trial, Pavliukov suggests that he may have done this in order to delay his execution a day or two by complicating matters. It seems that Pavliukov also could not bring himself to accept the “canonical” viewpoint that all of Ezhov's confessions were false and that he was innocent of all the crimes to which he confessed, including collaboration with the Germans. And Ezhov's execution was in fact delayed by two days, so Pavliukov's hypothesis makes sense.

We need to pause to consider the implications of Pavliukov's position. Throughout his book Pavliukov expresses skepticism about the truth of Ezhov's confessions. He does report that Ezhov confirmed all of them when he was given the indictment and all the volumes of his investigation file:

The last interrogation took place January 31 [1940] and on the very next day A.A. Esaulov, assistant chief of the Investigative section of the NKVD of the USSR reported the conclusion of the investigation. Ezhov was presented with the 12 volumes of his criminal case file for his study. He read it through and then declared that he confirmed all the confessions that he had given during the preliminary investigation and had no additions to make. (529)

Two days later Ezhov allegedly told his successor as head of the NKVD Lavrenty Beria that all of his confessions were “imagined 100%” and denied all the charges against him. Thereupon Ezhov's former “zam” (vice-commissar) at the NKVD Mikhail Frinovsky was called to testify against Ezhov. Frinovsky confirmed everything he knew about his and Ezhov's conspiracies.

Pavliukov shows no skepticism towards Frinovsky's testimony. As we have seen, one detailed confession of Frinovsky's has now been published, and it implicates Ezhov. Pavliukov opines that Ezhov retracted all his pretrial confessions simply to postpone the inevitable trial and execution, if possible (530). His only evidence for this surmise is that Ezhov was inexplicably not executed on the day of his trial, February 4, 1940, but two days later on February 6. However that may be, for our purposes the point is as follows: Pavliukov never suggests that Ezhov's retraction and statement at trial, during which he claimed he was innocent of wrongdoing, was true. Nor, interestingly, did Ezhov claim he had been tortured into making false statements.

The implications of the confessions of Ezhov, Frinovsky, and other NKVD men are enormous. They are utterly incompatible with the present "Cold War" or "anti-Stalin" paradigm of Soviet history. To take just one example: in his "Secret Speech" at the 20th Party Congress Khrushchev blamed Ezhov for repressions – but only as Stalin's tool. Yet three weeks before, on February 1 1956, Khrushchev had said at a meeting to plan his speech "Ezhov, no doubt, was an honest man, not to blame" (*RKEB* 1 308). Khrushchev seems to have realized that to accept the story of Ezhov's conspiracy was to exculpate Stalin from direct responsibility for the massive repressions. Pavliukov's acceptance of Ezhov's confessions has the same effect.

Ezhov's confessions were made in secret, never intended for publication. It appears that they were genuine. Pavliukov treats them as such. He also treats Radek's secret confessions as though they too were genuine. In Ezhov's case the accused (Ezhov) confirmed his confessions right up to the moment of trial, and then retracted them all, yet he was still convicted, evidently on two bases: (a) Frinovsky's accusations against him (there may have been other testimony against him as well); and (b) the testimony of all of his previous interrogations and confessions, plus all the other testimony given against him by others during the proceedings.

Ezhov gave many detailed confessions and confirmed them all before trial, while at the trial itself he retracted everything. Pavliukov carefully reports and summarizes Ezhov's pretrial confessions. Pavliukov also reports Ezhov's recantation at trial but does not accept it as truthful. Radek, in contrast, confessed both before trial and at trial, so

there is even less reason to question the truthfulness of Radek's confessions than there is to question Ezhov's.

Dimitrov's Diary

In 2003 the diary of Georgi Dimitrov, head of the Comintern after 1935 and close associate of Stalin's, was published. Dimitrov met frequently with Stalin and other Bolshevik leaders, and his diary contains many important passages and statements by Stalin and others. On December 16 1936 Dimitrov met in the Kremlin with Stalin and four of his closest associates, Molotov, Kaganovich, Voroshilov and Ordzhonikidze. During this meeting they received a report about an interrogation of Sokol'nikov of December 12, a few days before. Here is what Dimitrov wrote, with the phrases of special interest to our present investigation in **boldface**:

16 December 1936

– With “the Five” in the Kremlin

(Stal[in], Molot[ov], Kag[anovich], Vor[oshilov], Ordzhonikidze).

Exchange of opinions of Ch[inese] events. . . .

– On the French question: . . .

– From the investigation of Piatakov, Sokolnikov, Radek, and others:

Interrogation of Sokolnikov, 12 December 1936:

Question: **Thus, the investigation concludes that Trotsky abroad and the center of the bloc within the USSR entered into negotiations with the Hitlerite and Japanese governments with the following aims:**

First, to provoke a war by Germany and Japan against the USSR;

Second, to promote the defeat of the USSR in that war and to take advantage of that defeat to achieve the transfer of power in the USSR to [their] government bloc;

Third, on behalf of the future bloc government to guarantee territorial and economic concessions to the Hitlerite and Japanese governments.

Do you confirm this?

Reply: **Yes, I confirm it.**

Question: Do you admit that this activity by the bloc is tantamount to outright treason against the motherland?

Reply: Yes, I admit it.
(Dimitrov 42-43; emphasis added)

Analysis

This meeting can be confirmed in the schedule of visitors to Stalin's office for December 16, 1936.⁵³ The four Politburo members named by Dimitrov are recorded as entering Stalin's office at 1905 hrs, fifteen minutes before Dimitrov entered along with Manuilsky, who was a Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Comintern and head of the Soviet delegation to it, while Dimitrov himself was General Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. Dimitrov and Manuilsky stayed for fifty minutes. The two Comintern leaders were obviously there to discuss Comintern – international – matters. Sokolnikov's testimony was relevant to their concerns. Dimitrov heard this at a meeting of political leaders of the highest level, including Stalin himself. There is no indication that Stalin – he would be the only person who might be able to get away with such a thing – “staged” this meeting for Dimitrov's benefit. Dimitrov, a staunch supporter of Stalin and the Soviet Union, did not need reassurance or “shoring up.” And Dimitrov wrote this in his private diary, only recently published because of the demise of the Soviet bloc.

Therefore this entry is similar to the signatures of Stalin et al. on the Trotsky telegram six months later. It is an excellent gauge of what Stalin and top Soviet leaders believed at the time. This is significant because they had access to all the evidence, including a huge amount that is still secret.

Was Stalin “Lying”?

It is often asserted by Cold War historians that Stalin was a “liar” so that nothing he wrote should be “believed.” Therefore – this logic might go – we should not “believe” him, in this case, in the case of the Trotsky telegram, the comments he wrote on statements and confessions – ever.

But this reasoning is all wrong. There is no reason to view Stalin as a “liar” any more than any other political figure. In the course of our research over the past decade we

⁵³ “Posetiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I.V. Stalina.” *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* 4 (1995), 35.

have found *no* examples of Stalin's "lying," aside from the Katyn issue – and there is a huge political dispute about that question which we will not broach here and now. For what it is worth, Katyn was a very different situation, allegedly involving lying to foreign powers, a common practice among all governments at all times.

In any case lying is a universal human trait. Everybody lies – but nobody lies all the time. Therefore, the fact that someone lied in one case or other is not evidence that they lied at another time. There's no reason to think that Stalin was lying here to Dimitrov and Manuilsky, in his words on Trotsky's telegram, or at any other time unless there is specific evidence that he was. This is, of course, true for anyone, not just for Stalin. There is no such thing as an historical figure "who can be trusted," or one "who can never be trusted."

Finally, no evidence is to be "believed" or "disbelieved" in any case. All evidence must be analyzed carefully, including in context with other evidence.

S.M. Uritsky

Only a tiny proportion of all the investigative materials from the 1930s have been made available to researchers and only a small part of that has been published. Occasionally a privileged researcher is permitted to read and quote from some investigative files to which no one else has been given access. Normally these are researchers who promote the "official" Russian government position, which corresponds to the Khrushchev, Cold War, Gorbachev, and Trotskyist positions that all those convicted in the Moscow Trials, the Military Purges, plus many others, were completely innocent.

Such a researcher is Col. Nikolai S. Cherushev, author of a number of books arguing that no military conspiracies ever existed and, by extension, no other conspiracies could have existed either. Cherushev has been permitted to see and to quote liberally from investigative files of many military men that no one else has seen – or, at least, that no one else has published about.

One of these files is that of Komkor⁵⁴ S.M. Uritsky. In Uritsky's indictment we read the following:

In the extremely exhaustive text of the sentence by the Military Collegium in the case of S.P. Uritsky of August 1, 1938 we read:

- on the order of Gamarnik, Pyatakov, Iakir and Tukhachevsky Uritsky transmitted their letters to Sedov to be passed to Trotsky;
- was connected to the Trotskyist group of Souvarine in Paris, through which he passed espionage materials from Tukhachevsky for French intelligence. (Cherushev 1937, 179)

Analysis

We know from other evidence that these men were involved directly with Trotsky. As Gamarnik, Iakir and Tukhachevsky were also involved in military collaboration with Germany it is safe to assume that Uritsky's contact with Trotsky had something to do with at least Germany as well. However, given Cherushev's wording here we can't be sure that Uritsky did confess to direct contact with Trotsky. We can only be certain that the court found him guilty of doing so.

In a short fragment from one of Uritsky's statements to the NKVD he said that he would make a clean breast of everything. So it appears that this high-ranking military officer confessed to sending messages from Gamarnik, Piatakov, Iakir and Tukhachevsky to Trotsky via Sedov.

All Cherushev's works are devoted to the predetermined conclusion that no military conspiracy existed at all. That might explain why he has the access he does to investigative files to which no one else has been admitted: he can be trusted not to question the "canonical" viewpoint. Nevertheless Cherushev cites the following direct quotation from Uritsky's pen. On April 14, 1938 after referring to their "long-standing friendship" – a phrase not further explained – Uritsky wrote to NKVD officer Veniamin S. Agas:

⁵⁴ Corps Commander, equivalent to a two-star general in the US military. See Iurii Beremeiev, *Anatomiia Armii*. Cited at <<http://army.armor.kiev.ua/index.html>>.

I have been feeling poorly in recent days, no bladder control, bloody vomiting, unable to think, if possible let me have a day's respite, [then] summon me, I will report to you, and then I will write everything completely. I wish to turn myself into the kind of arrestee who helps the authorities, I wish to earn the mercy of Soviet authority.

As Cherushev notes, this confirms that Uritsky was ill. But it contains no accusation of torture or mistreatment. Far from being a profession of innocence it is, on the contrary, an admission of guilt.

Personal contact with Trotsky or, as here, to claim that one had such personal contact, was highly unusual. The NKVD had no need to fabricate such a detail simply in order to frame an innocent man. On the contrary: it would have made Uritsky's confession stand out from most others, perhaps leading to an interview with a Politburo member or Stalin himself. That would put things out of Ezhov's control, because the arrestee might say that his testimony had been coerced. We know that Politburo members did interview some arrestees. So we can't just assume that Uritsky's confession was coerced. It may well have been genuine, and at this time we have no reason to doubt that it was.

Ezhov's second in command Mikhail Frinovsky identified Agas as one of Ezhov's "bone-breakers," skilled in beating defendants and in fabricating convincing confessions. But this does not mean that *all* defendants were beaten into false confessions either. It ought to remind us that no individual piece of evidence can by itself be decisive, because every piece of evidence is subject to multiple possible explanations or interpretations. It is only when the whole complex of circumstantial evidence is consistent with one conclusion that that conclusion becomes highly probable.

Ia. A. Iakovlev's Confession of October 1937

Among the documents from former Soviet archives that have been recently published one of the most significant for our purposes is the lengthy interrogation of Ia. A. Iakovlev. Iakovlev had been People's Commissar for Agriculture during the collectivization period of the early 1930s. In 1937 he was a prominent member of the Central Committee. Iakovlev also held a number of other very responsible posts: head of

the agricultural section of the C.C., and first assistant to the chairman of the Party Control Commission but in reality its head since Ezhov, its formal head, was spending full time as Commissar of the NKVD. Since August 11, 1936 Iakovlev had been a member of the secretariat for the first draft of the program of the VKP(b), the Bolshevik Party.

Iakovlev was arrested on October 12, 1937. On October 15-18 he confessed that in 1923 Trotsky had asked him to be a Trotskyist “sleeper” in the Party – to go underground, cease all contact with any Trotskyists, and climb into responsible Party positions.

Trotsky had already at that time posed the question in this context, that he should have his own agents in the Party leadership at the necessary time who could pass information to him and collaborate in his seizure of power. (Lubianka B 388)

A few pages further in his interrogation-confession Iakovlev outlines how he was recruited by German intelligence in 1935 in Berlin. According to Iakovlev a German agent named Shmuke⁵⁵ recruited him into cooperation on two bases. First Shmuke told Iakovlev that he knew from Russian émigrés in Germany that Iakovlev had collaborated with the Russian Tsarist Okhrana, or secret police, towards the end of 1916 in Petrograd. Shmuke used this information to blackmail Iakovlev by threatening to expose his collaboration.

Once in the Bolshevik Party and after the Revolution a confession of collaboration, even at a vulnerable early age, would destroy one’s Party career. *Hiding* such a connection could be much worse because it suggested that such a person was completely untrustworthy and might still be some kind of clandestine agent or other. A Party member was not supposed to have any secrets – certainly not of any kind of political relevance – from the Party. Moreover, it made one vulnerable to blackmail and so an additional security risk.

Shmuke also claimed to know about Iakovlev’s participation in the Trotskyist underground from Trotsky himself. When Iakovlev pretended not to understand the German agent’s hints, Shmuke persisted:

⁵⁵ Presumably “Schmucke” in German.

At last he told me with special emphasis: “Your main leader L. TROTSKY is acting in full contact and on the basis of mutual benefit with the new Germany.” . . . Although they could inform on him to the Soviet authorities at any moment, SHMUKE said that they did not wish to do that because they were hoping to establish the same kind of contacts with me as they had with TROTSKY. . . . Faced with this fact, and realizing that the Germans were fully informed about me, I decided to agree with SHMUKE’S proposal, all the more since SHMUKE’S information about TROTSKY’S connections with Germany completely corresponded with what PIATAKOV had said to me and what TROTSKY had written. . . . Considering the matter more thoroughly, I decided that if possible I would sell my collaboration to the Germans more dearly, first of all to obtain from German intelligence corresponding possibilities for foreign connections for our organization and, in the first place, with TROTSKY, and also to increase my importance in the eyes of the German government. (Lubianka B 394-5)

Assessing Iakovlev’s Confession: Stalin’s Annotations

The following document in this volume is a copy of Stalin’s handwritten questions.

- 1) Did he know about Vareikis’ service with the Tsarist secret police (*okhranke*)?
- 2) His opinion about Mikhailov from Voronezh and his participation in the c.-r. org. [counter-revolutionary organization – GF].
- 3) His contact with Trotsky (did he see him personally in 1935 or in 1934).
- 4) How did he want to use MOPR? Whom in MOPR did he make use of? [MOPR = *Mezhdunarodne Obshchestvo Pomoshchi Revoitsioneram*, International Organization for Aid to Revolutionaries, the Soviets’ organization to give help to revolutionaries in fascist countries where communist parties were illegal and subject to severe repression. – GF]

On November 16 1937 Dimitrov noted “Resolution on the dismissals of Kirsanova and Stasova.” In Stasova’s case this meant dismissal from her post as Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee of MOPR and Chair of the Central Committee of the Soviet MOPR.

Yet neither Stasova nor Kirsanova was arrested, much less repressed. This can only mean that Stalin’s serious suspicions against them were not borne out by investigation. The investigation into their cases must have been an objective one, rather than a frameup or one that simply aimed to invent “evidence” to sustain Stalin’s suspicions. And that not only suggests that the investigations of at least some prominent Bolsheviks were carried out in a proper manner. It means that whatever his suspicions Stalin wanted to know the truth.

The lists of those who met with Stalin in his office from the early 1930s until his death have been published. We now know that Iakovlev met in Stalin’s office with members of Stalin’s groups of supporters in the Politburo on the evening of October 11, 1937.⁵⁸ Thereafter he disappears from the political record. According to one source Iakovlev was arrested the next day, October 12.⁵⁹ According to the header of the interrogation transcript, dated October 15-18, 1937 Iakovlev had already made a statement of confession on October 14.

Iakovlev had been very close to Stalin. Together with Stalin and two others⁶⁰ Iakovlev was one of the principal authors of the new 1936 Constitution. He had worked closely with Stalin on this, Stalin’s pet project. This meant that Iakovlev was one of the very highest members of the Soviet government and Bolshevik Party outside the ranks of the Politburo itself.

Stalin and his supporters wanted contested elections to the Soviet government. The Party First Secretaries opposed contested elections. Iurii Zhukov has followed the

⁵⁸ “Posetiteli kremlevskogo kabineta I.V. Stalin,” *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* 4 (1995), 66-67. A facsimile of the archival document itself may be viewed online at <<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/stalinvisitors101137.pdf>>.

⁵⁹ “Iakovlev (Epshtein) Iakov Arkad’evich. Biograficheskii Ukazatel.” Hrono.ru. At <http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/yakovlev_ya.html>. The CC Plenum Decree on the removal of Iakovlev and others from CC membership (*Lubianka B*, No. 262) is dated December 4-8 by the editors.

⁶⁰ A.I. Stetsky and B.M. Tal’.

struggle over this issue through the archival evidence. This struggle for contested elections was finally lost during the October 1937 Central Committee Plenum.⁶¹

Assessing Iakovlev's Confession: The 1938 Moscow Trial

In the note to Iakovlev's confession Stalin suggested that I. M. Vareikis had also been involved with the Tsarist secret police. Like Iakovlev (born 1896), Vareikis (born 1894) was a young man during the First World War. He had been arrested on October 10, just two days before Iakovlev. Perhaps it was Vareikis who named Iakovlev. Iakovlev did name Vareikis in his own confession.

Both Vareikis and Iakovlev were named as active underground Trotskyists by defendants in the March 1938 Moscow Trial. Defendant Grin'ko testified about Iakovlev's active role in the conspiracy. He evidently regarded Iakovlev as one of the leaders of the "terrorist" activity and suggested Iakovlev was in touch with Trotsky.⁶²

In the event of success the organization intended to set up a bourgeois Ukrainian state after the type of the fascist state.

About this character of the organization I told a prominent member of the Right and Trotskyite conspiracy, Yakovlev. In the Right and Trotskyite circles with whom I had occasion to speak, this tendency to transform our organization into a fascist type of organization undoubtedly existed. (1938 Trial 71)

By "fascist" – earlier in his testimony he had called it "national-fascist" – Grin'ko meant that the Ukrainian Nationalist organizations outside the Soviet Union had become organized in a fascist manner and under either German or Polish nationalist leadership. The fascist nature of Ukrainian nationalism during the interwar period has long been recognized.⁶³

⁶¹ For a discussion of Stalin's struggle in favor of contested elections (as stipulated in the 1936 Constitution), Stalin's final defeat, and many specific references to the research of Iurii Zhukov and others, see Grover Furr, "Stalin and the Struggle for Democratic Reform," Parts One and Two, in *Cultural Logic* 2005.

⁶² According to a "Memorial Society" source Grin'ko and the Iakovlevs were neighbors in the apartment building at number 3 Romanov pereulok (=lane) in Moscow. Piatakov too had lived next door to the Iakovlevs. See <<http://mos.memo.ru/shot-52.htm>>.

⁶³ See Alexander J. Motyl. *The Turn To The Right: The Ideological Origins And Development Of Ukrainian Nationalism, 1919-1929*. Boulder, CO / New York: East European Quarterly / Columbia

GRINKO: Gradually extending my connections with the Right and Trotskyite centre, and having ascertained who belonged to it, I at the beginning of 1934 formed an opinion of what the “Right and Trotskyite centre” was.

From a number of conversations and connections, and the tasks I received from Rykov, Bukharin, Gamarnik, Rosengoltz, Yakovlev, Antipov, Rudzutak, Yagoda, Vareikis, and a number of other persons, it became clear to me that at that time the “Right and Trotskyite center” based itself mainly on the military aid of aggressors. (76)

...

VYSHINSKY: Tell us about the terrorist activities.

GRINKO: At that period terrorist activities were one of the main weapons in the common arsenal of struggle against the Soviet power.

VYSHINSKY: From whom did you learn this?

GRINKO: From Rykov, Yakovlev, Gamarnik and Pyatakov.

...

VYSHINSKY: Where did this terrorist link emanate from?

GRINKO: From Trotsky. I learned this from Gamarnik. (77)

...

In carrying out the sabotage measures and sabotage instructions in the financing of agriculture, no little assistance was rendered by Rudzutak, who was in charge of financial affairs in the Council of People’s Commissars, and by Yakovlev.

(80)

There would seem to be little point in “coordinating” confessions at the public March 1938 trial with a confession – Iakovlev’s – that was secret and never intended to be published at all. Iakovlev’s and Grin’ko’s confessions corroborate each other.

Interrogations of Nikolai I. Vavilov

We have further evidence concerning Iakovlev from the investigative materials of Nikolai I. Vavilov, a prominent Soviet biologist who was arrested, tried and imprisoned in 1940 for his clandestine participation in an anti-Soviet conspiracy in the early 1930s.

University Press, 1980; John A. Armstrong. *Ukrainian Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.

Best known for his feud with Trofim Lysenko and as a champion of Mendelian genetics Vavilov's reputation as a scientist was high in his own day and has increased since. It was long assumed that his arrest and conviction was really a screen for repressing his scientific view. According to archival evidence released since the end of the USSR this appears not to have been the case.

Like Iakovlev, Vavilov has long since been "rehabilitated." However, that does not mean that he was not guilty or that his confessions have been refuted. In them he implicated Iakovlev.

Question: You have been arrested as an active participant of an antisoviet organization and as an agent of foreign intelligence services. Do you admit your guilt to these charges?

Answer: I admit myself guilty in that since 1930 I have been a member of an antisoviet organization of Rightists that existed in the system of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture of the USSR. I do not confess myself guilty of espionage.

Question: Bear in mind that you will not succeed in keeping your espionage activity hidden and that the investigation will interrogate you about it, but for now confess with whom you have been connected in the antisoviet work.

Answer: In antisoviet work I have been connected with the following persons: Yakovlev, former People's Commissar for Agriculture, Chernov, former People's Commissar for Agriculture, Eikhe, former People's Commissar for Agriculture, Muralov, former vice-Commissar for Agriculture, Gaister, former vice-Commissar for Agriculture. . . . (Transcript of the interrogation of the arrestee Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov of August 24 1940; Vavilov 269-70)

Vavilov made a differentiated confession. Accused of having spied for foreign intelligence services, he refused to admit it. But he did admit participating in a Rightist anti-Soviet organization within the People's Commissariat of Agriculture throughout the tenures of five commissars. The fact that Vavilov confessed to one capital charge while refusing to confess to another makes his confession appear more reliable. The most likely explanation for such a confession is the desire to tell the truth.

The commissars he names as Rightist conspirators include Iakovlev and Eikhe. Eikhe too was executed for massive illegal executions and repressions in collaboration with Ezhov.

Question: You have admitted your guilt in that from 1930 you have been a participant in an antisoviet organization of Rightists that has existed in the system of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture of the USSR.

Tell us by whom and under what circumstances you were recruited into the aforesaid organization.

Answer: I was recruited to the antisoviet organization by the former People's Commissar for Agriculture of the USSR YAKOVLEV Yakov Arkad'evich in 1930. The process of recruitment took place through my receiving, directly from YAKOVLEV, and also from him via GAISTER Aron Izrailovich – former vice-president of the agricultural academy and WOLF Moisei Mikhailovich – second vice-president of the agricultural academic – obvious orders for sabotage, which I carried out in the agricultural academy and in the Institute of Plant Development.⁶⁴

Question: It is not clear why YAKOVLEV recruited you to the antisoviet organization. What was his basis for doing this?

Answer: During the process of my carrying out YAKOVLEV's directives he became aware of my antisoviet sentiments which, at the beginning, were most clearly expressed in the high evaluation that I gave to American and Western European agricultural methods and my emphasizing their superiority in comparison with the development of agriculture in the Soviet Union. (Vavilov 271-2)

Unquestionably it was also the fact that I carried out every assignment given me by YAKOVLEV that facilitated my being drawn into the antisoviet organization.

Question: And in what form was your conversation with YAKOVLEV concerning your participation in the antisoviet organization of Rightists?

Answer: There was no direct conversation about this. I understood him by the obvious assignments of sabotage that I received from YAKOVLEV.

⁶⁴ Vavilov has long since been "rehabilitated" and this Institute, still in existence in Russia, is named in his honor.

Question: Why do you conclude that it was precisely YAKOVLEV who recruited you to the antisoviet organization of Rightists?

Answer: I conclude that because it was precisely from this period – my carrying out YAKOVLEV’s directives, that my obvious work of sabotage begins in the organization of science and in that of plant culture in the sense of justifying plant culture projects.

Question: You have confessed that you were recruited to the antisoviet organization of Rightists by YAKOVLEV and at the same time declare that you never had any direct conversation with YAKOVLEV about this organization. You are either confusing or simply do not wish to say that even before your introduction into the organization of Rightists – you were one of the ideologues and leaders of the antisoviet organization about which you are now remaining silent. (Vavilov 273-4)

In these passages Vavilov claims that he collaborated in Iakovlev’s Rightist organization without having been specifically recruited to it. This confuses his interrogator, who does not understand how Iakovlev could have been a member without having been specifically recruited to it and also how he could state that he had been recruited (*zaverbovan*) by Iakovlev and yet never have spoken with Iakovlev about the organization.

The interrogator draws the obvious conclusion from this apparently contradictory assertion by Vavilov that the accused must be hiding something. Something is missing that if added would make sense of Vavilov’s contradictory story. Vavilov gives fuller details in the following passage, stating that he and Iakovlev had a mutual understanding, and that Iakovlev spoke to him in hints and allusions rather than speaking directly of conspiracies and organizations.

Question: You confessed earlier that YAKOVLEV recruited you into the antisoviet organization, that, supposedly, he never had any direct conversations with you about this. We demand that you make your confession more precise.

Answer: I confirm the fact that I was recruited into the antisoviet organization of Rightists by YAKOVLEV Yakov Arkad’evich. However, YAKOVLEV never explicitly said that I should take part in an antisoviet

organization, and there was no special need for him to do so, since YAKOVLEV knew my antisoviet views, about which I confessed in previous interrogations, and could confidently rely on me to carry out antisoviet work. In addition I enjoyed YAKOVLEV'S particular trust, and he himself told me many times: "We know you well – we trust you, and for that reason I demand you carry out my directives without objection." To my frequent declarations about my desire to leave my leading administrative work in the Agricultural Academy YAKOVLEV answered: "We will not let you go, we need you, we understand each other." (Vavilov 278-84)

However, in the following passage Vavilov does give specific details about the sabotage of certain agricultural undertakings he was ordered to accomplish by Iakovlev.

Answer: One of the basic undertakings of sabotage carried out with my direct participation upon YAKOVLEV'S orders was the creation of a great superfluity of narrowly specialized scientific-research institutes that were of absolutely no vital importance, . . .

The next sabotage action of significance that was carried out with my direct participation upon YAKOVLEV'S order and whose consequences may still be felt today was the collapse of the provincial [*oblast'*] network of experimental pasture-farming stations, the assignment of which under conditions of socialist reconstruction and the wide variation of climate conditions and soils in our country is of great importance, . . .

Besides that I directly participated in the development of deliberately harmful plans of plant culture during the First and Second Five-Year Plans. I carried out this sabotage work according to the direct order of the former People's Commissar for Agriculture YAKOVLEV Y.A. and the former vice-presidents of the agricultural academy VOL'F M.M., GAISETER A. I. . . .

Despite this I was given a directive by YAKOVLEV, through VOL'F, of expanding the compulsory plan of area to be sown in 1937 of 150 million hectares, which, it was clear, did not correspond to the possibilities at that time. . . . (Vavilov 284-88)

Analysis of Vavilov's Confessions

These confessions of Vavilov's, at least insofar as they implicate Iakovlev, appear completely credible. There is no reason that the NKVD investigators would have wanted Vavilov to fabricate testimony against Iakovlev, who by that time had long since been executed. By 1940, when Vavilov was interrogated, Ezhov and his men too had long since been arrested, tried, and executed for fabricating false cases against a very large number of people, and Beria was now in charge of the NKVD. During Beria's tenure the cases against large numbers of people falsely accused under Ezhov were reviewed, and many of them released.

Here, as virtually everywhere in history, there is no absolute proof. But the evidence suggests that Iakovlev was not lying. Furthermore, Iakovlev's testimony is broadly consistent with the confessions of many of the Moscow Trials defendants, of the Tukhachevsky Affair defendants, and the evidence we have cited above.

According to the volume we have been citing Vavilov's interrogators claimed in a report that they had carried out 240 interrogations of Vavilov that occupied 1000 hours. Vavilov himself claimed in his own letter to Beria (NKVD head at the time) dated April 25 1942 that he had been subjected to 400 interrogations that took 1700 hours! Such time-consuming and therefore expensive investigations bespeak a genuine attempt to find out the truth. No such titanic efforts are required either to fabricate an entirely false set of confessions or to compel a middle-aged academic to fabricate them himself. Moreover, when it was all completed and Vavilov had been convicted NKVD chief Lavrentii Beria acceded to Vavilov's request for clemency. The scientist was in the process of being moved to the East ahead of the German military advance when he died on January 26 1943.

Confession of Iakovlev's Wife

In 2004 a short excerpt from just one of the interrogation-confessions of Sokolovskaia, Iakovlev's wife, was published. This corresponds exactly to the time Iakovlev himself was under interrogation.

In his own confession Iakovlev said that he had collaborated with Ian Gamarnik, head of the Political Department of the Red Army who had committed suicide on May 30,

1937 when questioned about the Tukhachevsky conspiracy. Iakovlev named his wife as a friend of Gamarnik's family. She worked in the film studio "Mosfilm." According to a report to Stalin from Ezhov of April 30 1938 Sokolovskaia headed a Trotskyist organization at her workplace that obtained weapons for a planned uprising.⁶⁵

Evidently in an attempt to save her own life she said that she knew that her husband had been doing underground Trotskyist work within the Party since 1923. She said specifically:

During the past five years Iakovlev has been undertaking active participation in the underground anti-Soviet organization that stood on Trotskyist positions. He was in an especially secret (*zakonspirirovannom*) situation, dissembling in order to strengthen himself in Party work at attempting to be promoted to the leadership of the Party. (*Lubianka 2 398-9*)

Stalin's note complains that the interrogator did not ask the right questions of Sokolovskaia:

On the first page is a handwritten annotation: "Com. Ezhov: Which Mikhailov? They didn't even ask his name and patronymic . . . what fine investigators! What's important is not Iakovlev's and Sokolovskaia's past activity but their sabotage and espionage work during the past year and the recent months of 1937. We also need to know why both of these scoundrels were going abroad almost every year. J. Stalin." (*Lubianka B 399 n.*)⁶⁶

Here as in the case of Iakovlev's interrogation – as in every single case we now have, in fact – Stalin has annotated the interrogation in such a way as to rule out any possibility that he had ordered it fabricated or faked. He appears to have been attempting to learn from the interrogation how deep the conspiracy ran. This is evidence that the interrogation was genuine. As such, it is also evidence that Iakovlev's interrogation was

⁶⁵ *Lubianka 2* No. 323 pp. 529-30. Now online <<http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/61342>>.

⁶⁶ Now at <<http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/61211>>. Stalin's remarks alone are in Vol. 18 of the new edition of Stalin's works; online at <http://grachev62.narod.ru/stalin/t18/t18_065.htm>.

not faked, and therefore that Iakovlev's confession about Shmuke and Trotsky's contacts with the Nazis is also true.

What concerned Stalin was not the history of Iakovlev's disloyalty but *recent* matters. "The past year and the recent months of 1937" had seen the Tukhachevsky conspiracy of top military leaders spying for Germany, plus allegations of widespread conspiratorial activity on the side of Germany and Japan. This too is consistent with Stalin's believing that Iakovlev's conspiracy with Germany was genuine.

Iakovlev's "Rehabilitation"

Aside from the confession we cite here none of the investigative or court materials from Iakovlev's file have ever been made public. We do have the report (*zapiska*, or "memorandum," shorter and/or less formal than a full report) recommending Iakovlev be posthumously "rehabilitated" dated December 27, 1956 and signed by Roman Rudenko, General Procuror (Prosecutor) of the USSR.⁶⁷ It declares Iakovlev innocent but without giving any evidence whatsoever that he was, in fact, innocent. It is similar to many other such published "rehabilitation" reports from the Khrushchev and Gorbachev eras. Elsewhere we have studied a number of these seemingly fraudulent "reports." According to the "rehabilitation" memorandum Iakovlev had been named by "more than 100" other defendants. All their testimony is dismissed on the grounds that these men have previously been "rehabilitated." Once they were declared "innocent" their testimony against others was simply written off as false. This is one sign of their fraudulent nature.⁶⁸

The memorandum also declares that NKVD man "Kazakevich", who had taken part in the investigation of Iakovlev, had said – evidently in 1956 – that "methods of physical pressure" were used against Iakovlev. His testimony is not available. Even his name is not certain. No name and patronymic are given. An NKVD man named Kozakevich is one of two investigators who signed the confession of Iakovlev that we have examined.

⁶⁷ *RKEB* 2 (2003) No. 30, pp. 215-216; note 41 on p. 808.

⁶⁸ Furr, *Antistalinskaia Podlost'* (Moscow: Algoritm 2007), Chapter 10, 148-175.

“Methods of physical pressure” can mean almost anything, from real torture – beatings, for example – to the “third degree,” prolonged sleeplessness, and so on. But Iakovlev confessed within a couple of days of his arrest, so there was no time for any prolonged pressure. Moreover, the fact that a suspect was subjected to some kind of “physical pressure” is not evidence of that suspect’s innocence.

Ezhov could not have known in advance whether Stalin would choose to interview Iakovlev. Iakovlev had been so close to Stalin, most recently in working on the new constitution, that it’s probable that Stalin would have interviewed him himself. We don’t know whether he actually did so because the Russian government has not released the whole investigative case. If Stalin did insist on seeing Iakovlev, and Iakovlev had been forced to falsely incriminate himself, the danger that he would inform on Ezhov to Stalin would have been far too great. For this reason it is very doubtful that Ezhov would have dared to fabricate a false case against someone as close to Stalin as Iakovlev was. As we’ve noted above, Stalin’s comments on the interrogations of Iakovlev and his wife are not consistent with any theory that Stalin was involved in “framing” Iakovlev for some reason.

We have no evidence that Iakovlev was tortured, beaten, etc. Even if we had evidence that some kind of real torture had been used against Iakovlev, it would not mean he was innocent. We’ll discuss this issue below. Nor would it explain why Iakovlev confessed at trial. We know he did so because Rudenko’s “zapiska” says he did – the full transcript of his trial has not been declassified.

Tukhachevsky and The Military Leaders

The rest of the evidence we present concerning Trotsky’s collaboration with Germany and/or Japan comes from the investigative materials connected with the so-called “Tukhachevsky Affair.” On June 11, 1937 Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, one of only five marshals of the Red Army, and seven other very high-ranking military commanders were tried and convicted of collaboration with Trotsky, other oppositionists, Germany and/or Japan to bring about the overthrow of the Stalin government, the assassination of its leading members, the facilitation of war between the USSR and its

major enemies Germany, Japan, and Poland, seizure of power, reversion to capitalism and an alliance with the Axis countries.

Budennyi's Letter to Voroshilov

One of the judges at the special military court was Marshal Semion Budennyi. On June 26, 1937 Budennyi sent a letter to Commissar for Defense Kliment Voroshilov in which he outlined his impressions of the trial and what it meant.⁶⁹

This letter has been dishonestly quoted by several Russian writers – dishonestly, because entirely out of context, as will be seen. For example, among the lines that have been quoted is this sentence:

PRIMAKOV⁷⁰ very stubbornly denied that he led a terrorist group consisting of SHMIDT, KUZ'MICHEV and others, against com. VOROSHILOV.

What has *always* been omitted are the following passages which follow immediately after the sentence above:

He denied this on the basis that, he said, TROTSKY had entrusted him, PRIMAKOV, with a more serious task – to organize an armed uprising in Leningrad, for which purpose he, PRIMAKOV, was obliged to remain strictly secret from all terrorist groups, to break his ties with all Trotskyists and Rights and at the same time to win for himself authority and the absolute trust of the Party and the Army command.

PRIMAKOV did not, however, deny that he had indeed earlier led a terrorist group and for that purpose had recommended SHMIDT to the post of commander of the mechanized corps.

In connection with this special assignment of TROTSKY'S, PRIMAKOV worked on the 25th Cavalry Division with the divisional commander ZYBIN. According to him ZYBIN was assigned to meet TROTSKY at the border once the rebels had taken over Leningrad.

⁶⁹ We – Furr and Bobrov – are preparing to publish an edition of this important letter.

⁷⁰ Vitalii Primakov was one of the eight officers tried and executed in June 1937 in the “Tukhachevsky Affair.”

By omitting these paragraphs a passage in which Primakov confessed to a somewhat different role in the same conspiracy is made to appear to be a claim of innocence that implies Primakov was “framed.” This is the same technique that we have seen employed by Shelepin in misquoting Iakir’s letter to the 22nd Party Congress in 1962.

As another passage in Budennyi’s letter reveals Tukhachevsky had testified that the German *Luftwaffe* was prepared to come to the aid of the opposition uprising in Leningrad.

Tukhachevsky received an instruction from General RUMSHTET⁷¹ that the plan for sabotaging the Red Army should take into account the most likely directions of the main blows of the German armies: one against the Ukraine – L’vov, Kiev – and the others, the seizure of Leningrad by the rebels, something that would be very beneficial to Germany as it could render help to the rebels with its rather significant air force, which ought to advertise itself as forces coming over to the rebels from the side of the Soviet forces.

We know from another archival document, Marshal Voroshilov’s address to the “Aktiv” (officers directly attached) of the Commissariat of Defense on June 9, 1937, that this information stems from Putna’s confession.⁷² It concerns what he was told by German General Erhard Milch, one of the highest ranking commanders of the German *Luftwaffe*.⁷³ Reading from an undated confession by Putna Voroshilov stated the following:

[German Air Force General] Milch directly states – I ask you to say this to Karakhan, also a spy since 1927 who carried out the negotiations on behalf of these swine – Milch directly states: “If you can capture Leningrad, the Leningrad *oblast*’, you can count on serious help from our side and, mainly, on help from our airforce, under the guise of forces that have gone over to you from the legal

⁷¹ Obviously General Gerd von Rundstedt, later a Field Marshal. See <<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rundstedt>>.

⁷² Some years ago we obtained a partial transcript of this address of Voroshilov’s from a fellow researcher in Moscow. It is now published: *Voennyi sovet pri Narodnom Komissare Oborony SSSR. 1-4 iunia 1937 g. Dokumenty i Materialy*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008, pp. 367-423. Voroshilov’s quotation from an as yet unpublished confession by Putna concerning General Milch is on pp. 384-5 of this published edition.

⁷³ See the article on Milch at <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erhard_Milch>.

government. We will give you our air forces in significant quantities with our own crews.

And, declared Milch, we will be able to render you all this help in the Leningrad area because this area has a border with Finland with which we, he said, have excellent relations.

This ties Primakov's testimony about Trotsky's role in planning an uprising in Leningrad together with the projected German role in the same uprising. A number of other defendants, both military and civilian, confessed to discussions with German generals including von Runstedt and Milch.

In a segment from an interrogation of May 21, 1937 Primakov said:

. . . The bloc of Trotskyists and Rights and the organization of the common traitorous anti-Soviet military conspiracy led to the union of all the counterrevolutionary forces within the (Workers' and Peasants') Red Army . . . This anti-Soviet political bloc and military conspiracy, personally headed by the base fascist Trotsky, . . . (Kantor, *Voyna* 374)

(It appears that Primakov calls Trotsky a "fascist" here because, according to Primakov, Trotsky had conspired with fascist Germany against the USSR.)

Budennyi also reported that the military figures were not planning to take leadership from Trotsky or the Rights indefinitely.

. . . KORK confessed that he was aware that the leaders of the military-fascist counterrevolutionary organization regarded their ties to Trotsky and the Rights as a temporary situation. TUKHACHEVSKY had spoken to KORK to the effect that the Trotskyists, Rights et al. were only temporary fellow-travelers, and when the armed *coup* had been effected he, TUKHACHEVSKY would play the role of Bonaparte. And on November 29, 1934, according to KORK's confession, TUKHACHEVSKY, in Kork's apartment, had stated this unequivocally to all those present.

Colonel Viktor Alksnis and The Transcript of the Tukhachevsky Trial

The transcript of the June 11, 1937 trial of Tukhachevsky and the seven other commanders has never been made public. Its text is still so top-secret in Russia that no researcher, no matter how trusted, is allowed to read it today. But in 1990, shortly before the end of the USSR General Viktor Alksnis, military leader, member of the Duma (Soviet Parliament), and grandson of one of the judges at this 1937 military trial, was given permission by the KGB (successor to the MVD – NKVD) to read the transcript.

Perhaps the KGB thought Alksnis would be sympathetic to the story that the military men had been framed. After all his own grandfather, Komandarm 2nd rank (= Lieutenant General) Iakov I. Alksnis had been arrested in November 1937 and then tried and executed as a conspirator in July 1938, only months after he had served as one of the judges in the military panel that judged Tukhachevsky and the rest.

Instead Alksnis, interviewed in a Russian nationalist journal in 2000 and again by researcher Vladimir L. Bobrov shortly afterwards said he was convinced by the transcript that some conspiracy had in fact taken place. From the interview in the journal *Elementy* in 2000:

My grandfather and Tukhachevsky were friends. And grandfather was on the judicial panel that judged both Tukhachevsky and Eideman. My interest in this case became even stronger after the well-known publications of [former] procuror Viktorov, who wrote that Iakov Alksnis was very active at the trial, harrassed the accused. . . .

But in the trial transcript everything was just the opposite. Grandfather only asked two or three questions during the entire trial. But the strangest thing is the behavior of the accused. Newspaper accounts [of the Gorbachev-era – GF] claim that all the defendants denied their guilt completely. But according to the transcript they fully admitted their guilt. I realize that an admission of guilt itself can be the result of torture. But in the transcript it was something else entirely: a huge amount of detail, long dialogues, accusations of one another, a mass of precision. It's simply impossible to stage-manage something like this. . . . I know nothing about the nature of the conspiracy. But of the fact that there really did exist a conspiracy within the Red Army and that Tukhachevsky participated in it I am completely convinced today.

. . .

It appears as though back there, in the 1930s, there stands some type of “canon” that might be fired at us, at our times. And then everything could turn out completely differently. And in the meantime . . . in the meantime a certain conception of those events has been created, and everything is done to sustain that conception. (Alksnis)

From a followup interview of Col. Alksnis by Vladimir L. Bobrov:

Alksnis: . . . I turned the pages of the transcript and had more questions than answers. I came away with the impression that, obviously, there had really been a conspiracy. . . . But this is what struck me: in the transcript there are parts which attest to the sincerity of what the defendants said (no matter who claims that the trial was an organized show, that they worked on the defendants specially so that they would give the necessary confessions.)

Imagine this. Let’s say, Tukhachevsky is telling about a meeting with the German military attaché in a dacha near Moscow . . . and at that moment Primakov interrupts him and says “Mikhail Nikolaevich, you are mistaken. This meeting did not take place in your office at the dacha, but was on the veranda.” I think that it would have been impossible to “direct” things such that Tukhachevsky said precisely that and that Primakov would then make a correction like that.

Bobrov: Very well. But was there anything there that made you think that the trial had been scripted and directed anyway?

Alksnis: No, it would have been impossible to script and direct a trial such as is in the transcript.

Bobrov: That is, you wish to state that, having read the transcript, you did not find in it any traces of any kind of staging?

Alksnis: Yes, yes. On top of that all of them confessed, and when they all admitted guilt in their last words, stating that they had been participants in the conspiracy and knowing that after that execution awaited them, it is just impossible to imagine that they forced them all to make such admissions and declarations.

. . .

Bobrov: What was the main point of accusation of the “conspirators”?

Alksnis: Everything was there: espionage, preparation for a military *coup*, sabotage [wrecking]. . . .

Bobrov: And what does “espionage” mean? You were talking about the meeting at the dacha. . . .

Alksnis: Yes, yes, with the German military attaché. They were talking about arranging coordination with the German military, contacts were going on with them. . . .

Bobrov: One last question. In your interview with “Elementy” you talked about some kind of “cannon” that might shoot at our own times from back in the 30s. What did you have in mind?

Alksnis: If an objective research project on the events of those years were to be done, free of ideological dogmas, then a great deal could change in our attitude towards those years and towards the personalities of that epoch. And so it would be a “bomb” that would cause some problems. . . . (Bobrov)

Assessing This Evidence

It is not surprising that the transcript of the Tukhachevsky trial is top-secret once again. As far as we can determine *no one* has been permitted to read it since Alksnis. But we do have the Budennyi letter. It is by far the most direct evidence of the testimony given at the trial that we have. Alksnis’ two accounts confirm the accuracy of Budennyi’s account of the trial. For example, Alksnis confirms that the defendants confessed to all the charges and in some detail, something that Budennyi’s letter also states.

It would be hard to overestimate the significance of Budennyi’s testimony. It is simply not credible that eight battle-hardened military men could have been forced to falsely confess at trial to such devastating charges, in such detail, and in the manner in which they did. Nor is there any evidence that they were forced to falsely confess in the first place, even before the trial.

Like the trial transcript itself the letter remains top-secret. We located it in a little-known and disorganized archive and are preparing it for publication. For Budennyi as for Col. Alksnis there is no question at all of the guilt of the generals, all of whom confessed it and gave details. This is also the case of the published commentary by General Belov,

another of the judges. Belov's letter to Voroshilov was published in 1996, presumably because he makes very few substantive remarks about the specific charges. But Belov was also convinced of the generals' guilt (Belov). We do not examine it here because Belov says nothing specifically about Trotsky and the Germans or Japanese.

Significance of the Tukhachevsky Trial Evidence

The Budennyi letter to Voroshilov and Col. Alksnis' account of his reading the transcript of the "Tukhachevsky Affair" trial together constitute one of the most important discoveries in the historiography of the Soviet Union. Thanks to them we now know as certainly as we will ever know that the military defendants in this trial were, in fact, guilty of what they confessed to.

This in itself completely dismantles the canonical interpretation of Soviet history. For example, it means that the testimony at the Third Moscow "show" trial, the March 1938 "Bukharin-Rykov" trial, was truthful insofar as it confirms the testimony given by Tukhachevsky and the other military men. It also confirms testimony about Trotsky's German and Japanese collaboration that was given by those defendants at the Second Moscow Trial of January 1937, the "Piatakov-Rykov" trial, since that is also confirmed by the Tukhachevsky trial testimony.

If we had no other evidence at all to this effect the testimony of the military figures would be very strong. And of course we do have much other evidence. All of it is consistent with what we now know of the Tukhachevsky trial testimony. For our present purposes this is the strongest possible evidence that Trotsky was indeed conspiring with the Nazi government and German military.

Dreitser

The NKVD investigators of the 1930s referred to the interlocking conspiracy cases as the "klubok," or "tangle." This metaphor referred to the fact that the various separate conspiracies were intertwined with each other, at least on the leadership level. It also serves to illustrate how the NKVD "unravelling" them. Once one minor conspiracy was discovered it led by persistent investigation to others.

Efim Dreitser, a defendant at the first Moscow Trial of 1936 and a person who claimed to be in personal contact with Trotsky, named Putna at the 1936 Trial as a Trotskyist conspirator who also had direct links to Trotsky (Dreitser had been chief of Trotsky's bodyguard during the 1920s). This was evidently just one of a number of bits of evidence that led to Putna's arrest, just as Kamenev's naming Radek, Sokol'nikov, Bukharin and others provided "threads" that led to second and third trials. Dreitser's investigation file confirms his confessions at trial and close ties to Putna and Iakir, another of the later Tukhachevsky Trial defendants. A close member of Dreitser's family and his only surviving relative has confirmed that her great-uncle Efim was indeed close to high-ranking Red Army men, including Putna, well-known as a Trotskyist, named by defendants in all three Moscow Trials, tried and executed as one of the eight military leaders in the Tukhachevsky Affair.⁷⁴

Dmitry Shmidt, a military commander who was also arrested and questioned in 1936, testified to Putna's close and conspiratorial connection with Trotsky.

In 1927 when I joined the Trotskyists I learned from DREITSER, OKHOTNIKOV and PUTNA that PUTNA was one of the members of the military center of the Trotskyist organization and was carrying out important organizational work in the Red Army. He was responsible for that work to Trotsky personally. In 1927 or 1928 PUTNA was assigned by the Revolutionary Military Council to be military attaché to Japan. At that time I had a meeting with PUTNA before his departure. He told me Trotsky used to come to his apartment to give him a whole series of instructions and tasks in connection with his going abroad.⁷⁵

So the NKVD had other evidence, perhaps a lot of it, about Putna's activities. Concerning Shmidt's testimony specifically, it's difficult to imagine what foreign instructions, other than conspiratorial ones, Trotsky might have been giving Putna in 1927, since Trotsky had long since (January 1925) resigned from his military posts.

⁷⁴ Personal communication from Svetlana M. Chervonnaya, daughter of Dreitser's niece. Ms Chervonnaya, an Americanist and skilled researcher on Cold-War history and Dreitser's only surviving relative, has been permitted to study Dreitser's investigative file.

⁷⁵ "N.6. Z protokolu dopity D.A. Shmidta vid 31 serpnia 1936 r.," in Sergiy Kokin, Oleksandr Pshennikov, "Bez stroku davnosti," *Z Arkhiviv VUChK-GPU-NKVD-KGB* No. 1-2 (4/5), 1997 (In Ukrainian).

Kantor's Four Articles⁷⁶

In 2005 Iulia Kantor, a Russian graduate student in history and journalist, published a series of articles and a book⁷⁷ on Marshal Tukhachevsky. Kantor does not investigate whether Tukhachevsky was guilty or not but, like Cherushev, takes it for granted that Tukhachevsky was the innocent victim of a frameup by Stalin. It's probably no coincidence, therefore, that like Cherushev Kantor was granted access to some documentary materials others have not been permitted to see including, in Kantor's case, some of the Tukhachevsky investigative materials. Additionally she claims that she was given permission by Tukhachevsky's family to see his investigative file – something that is strictly limited in Russian to next-of-kin and normally forbidden to all others, researchers included.

Kantor used these materials in her doctoral dissertation as well as her books and some articles. Anyone who studies only the texts of the primary sources that Kantor quotes without regard to her tendentious commentary will realize that these sources strongly support Tukhachevsky's guilt. Some of these quotations involve Tukhachevsky's allegations concerning Trotsky.

No complete interrogations of Vitovt Putna have been published. Only excerpts from them have been published; we will briefly examine them below. But according to what we have of Tukhachevsky's testimony Putna was in direct contact with Trotsky and passed on to Tukhachevsky the information that he, Trotsky, had direct contacts with the German government and General Staff. This is consistent with what we've seen of Radek's testimony both before and during the January 1937 trial.

Tukhachevsky claimed to have been in direct contact by letter with Sedov through Putna.

I inform the investigation that in 1935 Putna brought me a note from Sedov in which it said that Trotsky considers it very desirable that I establish closer ties

⁷⁶ Kantor's four articles were published in *Istoriia Gosudarstva i Prava* (2006). This legal journal is very hard to obtain outside of Russia. It is intermittently available at a Russian legal website at <http://law-news.ru/up/u11/post_1130954400.html>. The text at this site is not often available, and is completely unformatted. For the convenience of readers able to use Russian I have reformatted and republished the text of all four articles <http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/kantor_4articles_igp06.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Kantor, Iulia. *Voina i mir Mikhaila Tukhachevskogo*. Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom Ogoniok "Vremia," 2005.

with the Trotskyist commander cadres. Through Putna I orally answered with my agreement, and burned the note from Sedov. (Kantor 2006, 5; Kantor, *Voyna* 378)

Tukhachevsky also said that in 1932 he received a “directive” from Trotsky to form a conspiratorial military organization, something he had been preparing to do in any case.

Long before the creation of the antisoviet military-Trotskyist plot I grouped around myself, over the course of a number of years, men who were hostile to Soviet authority, dissatisfied with their positions as commanders, and conspired with them against the leadership of the Party and government. Therefore, when in 1932 I received a directive from Trotsky about the creation of an antisoviet organization in the army I already virtually had devoted cadres ready on whom I could rely in this work. (Kantor 2006, 5; Kantor, *Voyna* 378-9)

According to Tukhachevsky Putna had direct contact with Trotsky concerning the latter’s ties to the German government and General Staff and passed on news of this orally to Tukhachevsky.

Putna told me orally that Trotsky had set up direct contact with the German fascist government and General Staff. (Kantor 2006, 5; Kantor, *Voyna* 378-9)

Tukhachevsky said that Vladimir Romm had told him that Trotsky was relying on Hitler’s help in his struggle against Soviet power. We know from Romm’s testimony at the 1937 Trial, which we have reviewed above, that Romm claimed to have been in direct contact with Trotsky.

Romm told me that Trotsky is expecting Hitler to come to power and that he is counting on Hitler’s aid in Trotsky’s battle against Soviet authority.
(Kantor 2006, 7; Kantor, *Voyna* 381)

Tukhachevsky reiterated that he had indeed had contact with Trotsky, and also that he himself had collaborated with German intelligence, though in the following

passage he does not explicitly say that Trotsky had told him of his own German or Japanese connections.

The transcript of the interrogation of the accused Tukhachevsky of June 9, 1937: I fully confirm my confessions given during the preliminary investigation concerning my leading participation in the military-Trotskyist plot, my ties to the Germans, my past participation in antisoviet groupings. I admit my guilt in that I transmitted to German intelligence secret information and facts concerning the defense of the USSR. I also confirm my ties with Trotsky and Dombal'.

(Kantor 2006, 15; Kantor, *Voina* 406-7)

Assessing the Evidence: Kantor

Kantor received the permission of the Tukhachevsky family and the Russian government to gain access to *some* of the investigative materials for her long biography of Tukhachevsky. Though she does not admit as much it seems that she was not permitted to read everything. Specifically it appears that she was not allowed to read the transcript of the trial of Tukhachevsky and the rest. If she had read it and yet completely omitted its contents from her articles and book Kantor would be guilty not just of being guided by her own preconceived ideas, but of gross deception. She is guilty of deceiving her readers in any case, since she never tells us what she was permitted to see and what was kept from her.

Kantor takes the official position that the Marshal and all the other military figures were innocent victims of a frameup. Therefore she would surely have been given any evidence that this was so. But she is unable to cite any. This is very significant, since it suggests that no such evidence exists.

She also ignores some of the evidence that they were guilty – notably, some already well-known to researchers because it is in the Shvernik Report, which has been published (see below). The quotations from the Tukhachevsky investigation file published in Kantor's 2005 book are also contained in her four academic articles.

The passages Kantor quotes strongly support all the other evidence we have cited. We have only quoted the passages from Kantor's work that directly inculcate Trotsky with Germany. The reliability of their testimony concerning Trotsky's collaboration with

the Germans is predicated upon the truthfulness of the rest of their testimony – that is, upon their guilt. Kantor is committed to asserting the innocence of all these men rather than to investigating whether they were guilty or not. But the evidence she quotes, as opposed to her tendentious commentary on it, gives strong evidence of their guilt. This is also strong evidence that they told the truth about their collaboration with Trotsky and his with Germany.

Tukhachevsky's Confessions

In 1994 the texts of two of Tukhachevsky's confessions were published in Russia. In them Tukhachevsky repeats that Romm told him Trotsky was relying on Hitler. As we saw above Romm confessed to having been a courier between Trotsky and conspirators within the USSR.⁷⁸

. . . Romm also passed on that it was Trotsky's hope that Hitler would come to power and would support him, Trotsky, in his struggle against Soviet power.
– Main 159; *Molodaia Gvardiia* (henceforth MG) 9 (1994), 133. (Evidently the same passage as above)

Tukhachevsky repeats that he had told Kork (another of the eight defendants) that he had had contact with Trotsky and the Rights.

I told Kork that I had links both with Trotsky and the Rightists and tasked him to recruit new members in the Moscow military district. . . . (Main 160; MG 9, 134)

According to Tukhachevsky Putna, another of the eight defendants and as we have already seen a long-standing supporter of Trotsky's, admitted to him in 1933 that he was in touch with Trotsky as well as with Smirnov, a Trotskyist within the USSR. Putna later

⁷⁸ These confessions of Tukhachevsky's have been translated and published in Steven J. Main, "The Arrest and 'Testimony' of Marshal of the Soviet Union M.N. Tukhachevsky (May-June 1937)," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 10, No. 1 (March 1997), 151-195. All the passages dealing with Trotsky were published in *Molodaia Gvardiia* issues 9 or 10 of 1994. We have used Main's English text for the convenience of readers and made silent corrections in a few places where we disagreed with Main's translation, which we have compared with the originals.

received an appointment as military attaché (in 1934, as attaché to Great Britain) and so was assigned to be the contact person between Trotsky and the other conspirators.

Upon Putna's and Gorbachev's return from the Far East – I believe this was in 1933 – I spoke with each of them separately. Putna quickly admitted that he was already in contact with Trotsky and with Smirnov. I suggested to him to join the ranks of the military-Trotskyite conspiracy, telling him that I had direct links with Trotsky. Putna immediately agreed [to join]. Later, following his appointment as military attaché, he was tasked to maintain the link between Trotsky and the center of the anti-Soviet military-Trotskyite conspiracy. (Main 160; MG 9, 134)

Tukhachevsky said that in 1933 or 1934 Romm had instructions from Trotsky that the “German fascists” would help the Trotskyists, and so the military conspirators should help both the German and the Japanese General Staffs in sabotage, diversions, and assassinations against members of the Soviet government. Tukhachevsky said he passed “Trotsky's instructions” to the conspiratorial leadership, implying that he himself accepted them.

Round about this time, 1933/1934, Romm visited me in Moscow and told me that he had to pass on Trotsky's new instructions. Trotsky pointed out that it was no longer feasible to restrict our activities to simply recruiting and organizing cadres, that it was necessary to adopt a more active program, that German Fascism would render the Trotskyists assistance in their struggle with Stalin's leadership and that therefore the military conspiracy must supply the German General Staff with intelligence data, as well as working hand in glove with the Japanese General Staff, carrying out disruptive activities in the army, prepare diversions and terrorist acts against members of the government. These instructions of Trotsky I communicated to the center of our conspiracy. (Main 160-161; MG 9, 134)

In another part of this published confession Tukhachevsky asserts that he got other instructions from Trotsky via Piatakov, rather than through Romm, Putna, or directly to himself.

During the winter of 1935/1936, Pyatakov told me that Trotsky had now asked us to ensure the [future] defeat of the USSR in war, even if this meant giving the Ukraine to the Germans and the Primor'ye to the Japanese. In order to prepare the USSR's defeat, all forces, both within the USSR and outside the USSR would have to be made ready; in particular, Pyatakov stated that Trotsky would carry out a decisive struggle to plant his people in the Comintern. Pyatakov stated that such conditions would mean the restoration of capitalism in the country.

As we received Trotsky's instructions on unleashing a campaign of sabotage activity, espionage, diversionary and terrorist activity, the center of the conspiracy, which included not only me, but also Feld'man, Eideman, Kamenev, Primakov, Ubovich, Iakir and those closely associated with it, Gamarnik and Kork, issued various instructions to the members of the conspiracy, based on Trotsky's directives. (Main 163; MG 10, 257)

Tukhachevsky claims that he also received direct written instructions via Putna from Sedov, who of course was passing on Trotsky's instructions. Putna assured him that Trotsky had established direct ties to the German government and General Staff.

In the autumn of 1935, Putna came to my office and handed over a note from Sedov, in Trotsky's name, insisting that I more energetically attract Trotskyite cadres to the military conspiracy and more actively use them. I told Putna to say that this would be done. In addition, Putna told me that Trotsky had established direct links with Hitler's government and the General Staff, and that the center of the anti-Soviet military Trotskyite conspiracy should task itself to prepare defeats on those fronts where the German Army would operate.

During the winter of 1935/1936, as I have already mentioned, I had a talk with Pyatakov, during which the latter passed on another directive from Trotsky [to the effect] to ensure the unconditional defeat of the USSR in war with Hitler and Japan, as well as the break-up of the Ukraine and the Primor'ye from the

USSR. These instructions meant that it was necessary to establish ties with the Germans in order to define where they intended to deploy their armies and where necessary to prepare the defeats of the Soviet armies. (Main 166; MG 10, 261)

This passage in Tukhachevsky's published confession confirms what Budennyi reported to Voroshilov in his letter of June 26, 1937. Evidently Tukhachevsky restated this at the trial and inserted a comment that von Rundstedt must have known this information through Trotsky.

At the end of January 1936, I had to travel to London to attend the funeral of the British King. During the funeral procession, first by foot and then on the train, General Rundstedt – the head of the German government's military delegation – spoke to me. It was obvious that the German General Staff had already been informed by Trotsky. Rundstedt openly told me that the German General Staff was aware that I stood at the head of a military conspiracy in the Red Army and that he, Rundstedt, had been instructed to begin talks about mutually interesting matters. (Main 166; MG 10, 261)

A few pages later Tukhachevsky puts Trotsky's and Rundstedt's instructions together.

Taking into account Trotsky's directive to prepare for defeat on that front where the Germans would attack, as well as General Rundstedt's instruction to prepare for defeat on the Ukrainian front, I proposed to Iakir to make the German task easier by diversionary-sabotage tactics leading to the fall of the Letichev fortified region, the commandant of which was a member of the conspiracy, Sablin. (Main 185; MG 10, 264)

Assessing the Evidence: Tukhachevsky's Confessions

Only a few of Tukhachevsky's confessions have been made public. We are fortunate to have any of them at all. They were published in the early 1990s when the promise of *glasnost* ("openness") was still in the air. In 2006 one confession of Nikolai Ezhov's was published. Ezhov confirmed the existence of several groups of military

conspirators including that around Tukhachevsky. Ezhov also named some, at least, of the German military figures with whom they and he himself were jointly in touch.⁷⁹ To that extent Ezhov's and Tukhachevsky's confessions mutually confirm each other.

Frinovsky strongly confirmed the guilt of the Rightists, including Bukharin, some of whom, like Grin'ko, claimed direct conspiratorial contact with Trotsky while others, like Bukharin, claimed indirect knowledge of Trotsky's dealings with the Germans through Radek.

Other Documents of the "Tukhachevsky Affair": The "Shvernik Report"

As we have stated above, during the 22nd Party Congress in October 1961 Nikita Khrushchev and his supporters in the Soviet leadership leveled an even stronger attack against Stalin than Khrushchev's 1956 "Secret Speech" had been. After the Congress Stalin's body was removed from Lenin's tomb and a new wave of materials attacking Stalin and those closely associated with him was published. This anti-Stalin campaign – for so it may be called – ended shortly after Khrushchev was removed from office at the Central Committee meeting of October 1964 by Leonid Brezhnev and others.

In early 1962 the Presidium (formerly the Politburo, in effect Khrushchev himself) authorized a blue-ribbon commission to investigate the trials and executions of the 1930s and especially the so-called Tukhachevsky Affair.⁸⁰ This commission seems to have had total access to all the investigative and other materials concerning the repressions of the 1930s. Its purpose seems to have been to find further information for attacks on Stalin and his supporters, and justificatory materials for further "rehabilitations." In fact, it provided little exculpatory evidence but quite a bit of further evidence that the accused were guilty!

The report was issued in two parts. The *Zapiska* (memorandum) devoted mainly to the Military Purges and Tukhachevsky Affair, was issued in 1963. A further part, the *Spravka* (= information, report) is dated 1964. Neither seems to have been used by Khrushchev or given to Soviet writers to promote Khrushchev's "line."

⁷⁹ Available online at <<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/ezhovru.html>>; also now at <<http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/58654>>.

⁸⁰ There had been an earlier commission, called the "Molotov Commission."

The Shvernik Reports were both published after the end of the USSR in a mysterious journal, *Voennyi Arkhivy Rossii*, dated 1993, that never had another issue. But since that time the Reports have been published several more times and it is readily available. It's fair to say that these reports constitute the largest single published collection of excerpts and quotations from investigative materials of the 1930s repressions.

We cite here all the passages from the Shvernik Commission reports that bear directly on the specific topic of this article: Trotsky's purported collaboration with Germany and Japan. There are a great many other passages, both in these reports and elsewhere in the available investigative materials, that bear on Trotsky's involvement in the general opposition conspiracies, for example to assassinate Stalin and others. Since these allegations are not the subject of our present study we will ignore them here.

From the "Zapiska"⁸¹

On March 25 1936 Yagoda informed Stalin that Trotsky was giving directives through agents of the Gestapo to Trotskyists inside the USSR about carrying out terrorist activity, and that even in prisons Trotskyists were trying to create militant terrorist groups and that the leader of the Trotskyists in the USSR was I.N. Smirnov. (Zapiska 557)

...

The sentence of the court states that Tukhachevsky and the other defendants, "being leaders of an antisoviet military-fascist organization, have violated their military duty (oath), have betrayed their country, have established ties with military circles in Germany and with enemy of the people L. Trotsky and according to their directives have prepared the defeat of the Red Army in the event of an attack on the USSR by foreign aggressors, specifically, of fascist Germany, and with the goal of destroying the defensive capability of the USSR have engaged in espionage and sabotage in the units of the Red Army and in enterprises of military significance, and also have been preparing terrorist acts against the leaders of the AUCP(b) and the Soviet government." (605)

⁸¹ This long report has not been translated. We take it from *RKEB* 2 541-670. It is available for download at <http://perpetrator2004.narod.ru/documents/Great_Terror/Shvernik_Report.rar>. The *Spravka* alone is also available online at the Russian language Wikisource resource in nine parts at <<http://tinyurl.com/spravka>>.

From the “Spravka”:

Already at the interrogation of May 14, 1937 Primakov named his “co-conspirators” and stated about Iakir:

“The Trotskyist organization considered that Iakir was most suitable for the post of People’s Commissar [for Defense] instead of Voroshilov. . . . We considered that Iakir was the strictist example of a conspiratorial Trotskyist and admitted that he – Iakir – was personally connected with Trotsky and that it was possible that he was carrying out completely secret, independent tasks unknown to ourselves.” . . . (Spravka 676)

Continuing the “processing” of Primakov, the organs of the NKVD on May 21 1937 were able to obtain from him “hand-written confessions” that Tukhachevsky, who was connected to Trotsky, was at the head of the conspiracy. In addition in this interrogation Primakov named 40 prominent military workers as members of the military-Trotskyist conspiracy in the army.

On May 16 1937 Ezhov sent this interrogation transcript to Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich. In the accompanying letter Ezhov wrote:

“I am sending you the transcript of the interrogation of Putna V.K. of May 15 of this year. Putna confesses that in 1935 he personally gave a letter from Trotsky to Tukhachevsky with a direct invitation to take part in the Trotskyist conspiracy. After familiarizing himself with this letter Tukhachevsky assigned Putna to transmit the message that Trotsky could rely upon him. Putna names as members of the military antisoviet Trotskyist organization Primakov, Kuz’michev, Shmidt, Lapin – all of whom have been arrested; Zenek, the former commander of the Leningrad military school of tank technique, Klochko, former military attaché of the USSR to Turkey; Gorodzensky, former commander of economic supply of the Prmor’ye group, Kornel’, former worker of the Foreign Department of the OGPU [basically, a predecessor to the NKVD] and Adamovich, former chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Belorussian SSR [i.e. head of the government of the Belorussian republic].” (677)

In the indictment it is asserted that in April – May 1937 the organs of the NKVD discovered and liquidated in the city of Moscow a military-Trotskyist conspiracy, in the “center” of leadership of which were Gamarnik, Tukhachevsky, Iakir, Uborevich, Kork, Eideman and Fel’dman. The military-Trotskyist organization, which all those accused in this case were members, was formed in 1932-1933 upon the direct instructions of the German general staff and of Trotsky. It was connected with the Trotskyist center and the Bukharin-Rykov group of Rightists, was involved in sabotage, diversions, terror and was preparing the overthrow of the government and the seizure of power with the aim of restoring capitalism in the USSR. (688)

Iakir’s address at the court trial in connection with the plots of the organizers, set the line for the other defendants also to expose the machinations of Trotsky and of the fascist governments against the USSR, and in addition emphasized the role of Tukhachevsky in the conspiracy in every way. (690) Tukhachevsky was also forced to confirm . . . in court: “When in 1932 Romm brought me Trotsky’s proposal to gather the Trotskyist cadres, I agreed to do this. Therefore I consider the beginning of the organization of our military conspiracy to have been 1932.” (695)

Putna testified about Tukhachevsky’s ties with Sedov and Trotsky. Specifically, he declared during the investigation that, finding himself in London in September 1935 and learning that he was being summoned to Moscow, he reported about this to Sedov, Trotsky’s son, in Paris. From Sedov he received by special delivery a package in which were a note from Sedov to Putna and a “letter of recommendation, written and signed personally by Trotsky” for Tukhachevsky. Putna carried out Sedov’s task and during the first days of October 1935 supposedly handed Tukhachevsky Trotsky’s letter. Tukhachevsky familiarized himself with the letter and asked Putna to “transmit orally that Trotsky could count on him.”

During the investigation Tukhachevsky only mentioned Sedov’s letter that Putna had supposedly transmitted to him, and never said anything about the letter from Trotsky that Putna testified about. (695)

On May 26, 1937 Tukhachevsky wrote the following statement: “. . . I state that I admit the existence of an antisoviet military-Trotskyist conspiracy

and that I was at its head . . . the foundation of the conspiracy relates to the year 1932.”

On May 29 1937 Ezhov interrogated Tukhachevsky. As a result of this interrogation there appeared the following confessions by Tukhachevsky: “Already in 1928 I was brought into the Rightist organization by Enukidze. In 1934 I personally made contact with Bukharin. I established espionage ties with the Germans in 1925, when I used to travel to Germany for study and maneuvers. . . . On my trip to London in 1936 Putna arranged for me a meeting with Sedov. . . . I was connected in this conspiracy with Fel’dman, S.S. Kamenev, Iakir, Eideman, Enukidze, Bukharin, Karakhan, Pyatakov, I.N. Smirnov, Yagoda, Osepiyan and a number of others.” (681-2)

. . . the investigation obtained their [Tukhachevsky’s and Putna’s] “admissions” of a personal meeting with Sedov, supposedly arranged for Tukhachevsky by Putna in 1936 in a café in Paris. Meanwhile detailed information about Tukhachevsky’s stay in Paris from February 10 to 16 1936 came from Ventsov, Soviet military attaché to France, and from the organs of the NKVD, but this information contained nothing about his meeting with Sedov. In the course of the present verification Afanas’ev, a former worker of the Foreign Section of the NKVD, member of the CPSU since 1923, expatiated upon this matter:

“Between 1932 and 1938 I was continuously in illegal work abroad. I headed the illegal resident buro in Paris which mainly worked on the activities of Trotsky’s son Sedov and his circle. . . . We were up to date on the most secret conspiratorial activity of Trotsky and Sedov. Therefore when you pose me the question of whether meetings between Sedov and Tukhachevsky, Putna, and other military figures of the Soviet Union could have taken place, I can assert that that could not be true . . . the agent reports and documentary materials we obtained in the process of our work on Trotsky, Sedov, Kleman and in part on the ROVS in Paris do not confirm either directly or indirectly the accusations that were brought against the military figures of the Red Army in connection with the case of Tukhachevsky, Kork, Gamarnik, Putna, and others.” (695-696)

The language of the Shvernik Report makes it clear that its authors proceeded on the preconceived assumption that no such conspiracy existed. It was designed to provide “evidence” – likely-looking materials – for citation in further “rehabilitations.” Soviet historians and researchers, as we have seen, were not to be permitted access to the archives themselves.

In the case of Tukhachevsky’s alleged meeting with Sedov in the Paris café in 1936 the Report cites Ventsov, Soviet military attaché to France, who reported nothing about it. Ventsov-Krants had been very close to Trotsky. According to an archival document cited by Cherushev he had helped Trotsky write the book *How The Revolution Armed Itself*.⁸² The report also cites an undated “former worker of the Foreign division of the NKVD” named Afanas’ev – no first name or patronymic are given – who claimed that Soviet intelligence in France were closely following information about Sedov and Trotsky and knew nothing about any such meeting or any of the activities mentioned in the Tukhachevsky case.

It’s worth making several points here. First, the fact that Ventsov and Afanas’ev were told nothing about such a meeting cannot prove that such a meeting never took place. It only means that they claim they did not know of it. Afanas’ev’s claim that Soviet intelligence knew about “the most secret conspiratorial activities of Trotsky and Sedov,” and so knew that Sedov could not have met with Tukhachevsky, is empty for another reason. At or shortly after the time of the alleged meeting – late January or early February 1936 – Soviet intelligence man Mark Zborowski became Leon Sedov’s closest confidant. We have Zborowski’s reports back to Moscow. But Zborowski himself was not privy to all of Sedov’s secrets, and did not accompany him everywhere. Zborowski’s handwritten notes and reports are in the archives and have been published, while we do not even know Afanas’ev’s name. So the claim that Soviet intelligence knew about all Trotsky’s and Sedov’s “most secret conspiratorial activities” cannot be true.

Rudenko’s Letter to Molotov

On April 13, 1956 the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU passed a decree establishing a commission to be chaired by V.M. Molotov to study the materials

⁸² N.S. Cherushev. *1937 god. Elita Krasnoi Armii na golgofe*. Moscow: Veche, 2003 p. 208.

of the “public trials.”⁸³ The commission proved unsatisfactory to all concerned. It was sharply divided between the three men who had been closest to Stalin and others who were Khrushchev’s people. On December 10 1956 it issued a compromise report exonerating Tukhachevsky and the military men but refusing to consider rehabilitating any of the defendants in the public trials.⁸⁴ Since we know that Molotov continued to be firmly convinced of Tukhachevsky’s guilt we can assume this was, indeed, a compromise. In 1957 Molotov, Malenkov and Kaganovich were dismissed from the Presidium for attempting to have Khrushchev removed from office.

The Molotov Commission did study a lot of materials, but only some of their documents have been made public. We will quote below from a report to that commission from Rudenko, the General Prosecutor of the USSR. Rudenko was a staunch supporter of Khrushchev; it was his office that would have to issue recommendations to the Soviet Supreme Court to get convictions reversed, the legal aspect of “rehabilitation.” Rudenko’s report has not been published. It was obtained by *Krasnaia Zvezda* (“Red Star”), the military daily newspaper in Russia today as it was during Soviet times. We obtained a copy of it in 2002. Once again, we will only reproduce quotations that deal with the question of Trotsky and Germany/Japan, ignoring other aspects of this important document. Passages of special interest to us are in *italics*.

Only on May 15, almost ten months after his arrest, after confessions about the military conspiracy had been obtained from Medvedev, were confessions also obtained from Putna about his counterrevolutionary ties with Tukhachevsky. At this interrogation Putna confessed that in September 1935 he received Trotsky’s directive concerning the attraction to the Trotskyist organization of high-ranking military men. Trotsky also declared that he was aware that Tukhachevsky and S.S. Kamenev were already carrying out counterrevolutionary work in the army, and that it was essential to contact them. With this Trotsky handed a note for Tukhachevsky, in which he proposed that he unite with the Trotskyist center for

⁸³ *Reabilitatsiia. Kak Eto Bylo*. T. 2, No. 4 p. 70. Tukhachevsky was included even though his trial had not been public.

⁸⁴ *RKEB 2 204-207*; available online at <http://perpetrator2004.narod.ru/documents/kirov/Molotov_Commission_Memo.doc>.

mutual counterrevolutionary activity. In October 1935 he handed this note to Tukhachevsky, who accepted this proposal of Trotsky's.

In January 1936 *he informed Trotsky of the existence of a Trotskyist military organization and its center consisting of Primakov, Putna and Dreitser, about the connections of this organization and about recruitment.*

At his interrogation of June 2 1937 Putna had already confessed that in the spring of 1931 he had established espionage ties with the German G[eneral] S[taff] and at various times gave the Germans, through their generals Nedavmeister⁸⁵ (?), Adam, and Bokkel'berg information about the military staff of the Red army, its organizational structure and location of its forces, about armaments and the system of military readiness. It is not apparent from these interrogations precisely what information Putna transmitted.

Putna declared moreover that in 1936 at the time of his and Tukhachevsky's trip together to England Tukhachevsky compared the relationship of forces and proved to him that the defeat of the USSR in a war with Germany was inevitable. And that *he, Putna, agreed with Tukhachevsky and said to him that for the swiftest defeat of Soviet forces it was essential to act together on the side of the Trotskyist organization.* However Putna did not confess how Tukhachevsky reacted to this.

Fel'dman also confessed that from Tukhachevsky's words he was aware that he had an agreement with Pyatakov concerning a disruption in the supply of artillery, and also maintained a connection with Trotsky, from whom he was receiving directives concerning counterrevolutionary activity. From his own words Fel'dman learned that Egorov, commander of the VTSIK School was preparing a "palace coup," but Tukhachevsky said that Egorov was an indecisive person and unsuitable for this purpose. In addition this School was being moved out of the Kremlin and therefore a more realistic plan for the seizure of power – as Tukhachevsky averred – was defeat of the Red army in the future war, and an armed uprising.

But at this point Tukhachevsky declared that Putna and Primakov did not trust him politically very much, that during their trips to Moscow Primakov gave

⁸⁵ This is probably German General Oskar von Niedermayer, who worked for the Reichswehr (German military) in an intelligence capacity in Moscow in the early 1930s, having formally resigned from the military. He was a General again during World War II, was captured after the War by the Soviets, tried and sentenced to 25 years in prison, and died shortly thereafter in 1948.

the military center information but avoided conversations with Tukhachevsky on this topic. *That Primakov and Putna had private ties through their Trotskyist centers and were maintaining contact with Trotsky.* Tukhachevsky declared that he personally did not share Trotskyist views and further admitted that *in 1936 he had received a note from Sedov in which the latter in Trotsky's name proposed to proceed to join with the Trotskyist cadres in the Red army in order to prepare the seizure of power.*

At the beginning of the interrogation Tukhachevsky confessed that he had not met in person with either Trotsky or Sedov after their exile from the Soviet Union. But *at the end of the interrogation he declared that in 1932, when he was at the maneuvers in the German army, he had established a personal connection with Trotsky and had reached an agreement about carrying on Trotskyist work in the Red army.*

On that same day, May 27 1937, Tukhachevsky signed the transcript of an interrogation in which he admitted to his leading role in the military conspiracy, but these confessions differ significantly from those he had given earlier. In these confessions *Tukhachevsky said nothing about personal ties with Trotsky and affirmed that he maintained ties with Trotsky through Romm and Primakov. That it was through them that he received Trotsky's directive that it was essential to go over to terrorist methods of work,* about which Tukhachevsky had not confessed earlier.

Iakir:

In 1933 Tukhachevsky, who knew about my waverings on questions of the Party's policy in the village, and about my ties to former Trotskyists, after first feeling me out, *informed me that he was connected with Trotsky, according to whose directive he was organizing a military conspiracy and proposed that I take part in it.* I gave Tukhachevsky my agreement, after which he said to me that he was at the head of the conspiracy, that there was a military center whose staff he proposed that I join. I agreed to become part of the staff of the center. In this conversation Tukhachevsky informed me that Uborevich, with whom he had recently had a conversation on this subject, was also in the center of the military conspiracy. *Tukhachevsky spoke about a directive of Trotsky's that he had*

recently received and in which the following tasks were placed before the center of the military conspiracy:

1. The organization of a coup in Moscow, in the Ukraine, and in a number of other places in the Soviet Union with the aim of seizing power.
2. In the event that the coup d'etat was unsuccessful, *to organize the defeat of the Red army in a war with the Polish-German bloc and to organize the theater of military operations and the armies accordingly.*
3. To organize sabotage in the RKKA in both material-technical and military preparatoins.
4. *Independently of Trotsky's direct ties with the German General Staff and the fascist government, it was important for the military center to organize these ties independently.*

Analysis of Rudenko's Letter

Rudenko summarized details from some interrogations of Putna, Tukhachevsky and Iakir that have not been made public. These passages tie Trotsky to collaboration with Germany in several ways:

- Putna, the leading Trotskyist among the military men, claimed he had been in touch with Trotsky; involved in a Trotskyist military organization, and conspiring with the German General Staff.
- Tukhachevsky confirmed that Primakov and Putna were in touch with Trotsky, as he himself was, and that he and the Trotskyist cadres were working together.
- According to Iakir, Tukhachevsky had said that the military conspiracy was being organized in coordination with Trotsky and "according to his directive."
- Iakir confirmed that the military conspirators were to work for the defeat of the Red Army in a war with Germany and Poland.
- Iakir said that Trotsky had direct ties with the German General Staff.

This material suggests that there is yet more evidence in the investigation materials of the Tukhachevsky group of Trotsky's contacts with Germany.

Voroshilov's Talk at the Commissariat of Defense

From the same source we have obtained a copy of the transcript (*stenogramma*) of a talk by Commissar of Defense Voroshilov to the military personnel in the Commissariat (= Ministry) of Defense on June 9, 1937.⁸⁶ Voroshilov read out quotations from interrogations and court documents of the Tukhachevsky Affair.

Some of those quotations are not given in the transcript, or are given only partially. We will use what we have, and will only cite those quotations that deal directly with Trotsky and his alleged ties to either Germany or Japan or that confirm the information in Rudenko's report.

TRANSCRIPT

OF THE ACTIV OF THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSARIAT OF DEFENSE USSR

June 9 1937

BOTH PUTNA and all the rest of them tell about how they linked their work with the principal scoundrel and main gunman of counterrevolution in our country who was driven out of this country – Trotsky.

Here is what PUTNA says:

“ – When I found out (he was saying this to the investigator) that I was being recalled to Moscow in the last days of September 1935 *I reported about this to Sedov. (Reads PUTNA's confessions)*

They [the investigators – GF] asked him this question: “Was Trotsky's letter handed to Tukhachevsky, when and under what circumstances.”

Answer: “*Trotsky's letter was handed to Tukhachevsky. (reads).*”

What Tukhachevsky says about this. They asked him this question: “when did you establish contact with Trotsky and what directives did you receive from him.”

Answer: “I established contact with Trotsky through Romm in 1932. The latter brought him a note in 1935 too. Obviously this was not the first note.

“In 1932 . . . (reads). Further he relates what Romm said to him. “Everything that he reported I approved, then I met with him in 1933 and 1934. When in fact the antisoviet work in the army had already been developed by me there took place my second meeting with Romm in Moscow . . .” (reads).

⁸⁶ We cited a short passage from this document above in connection with the question of General Milch.

That's what Tukhachevsky says about his contacts with Trotsky and about those tasks which the latter set before him.

Here you see it's not just a question of Trotsky's assigning tasks on his own account, but *Trotsky at the same time has instructions also from the German General Staff. I have information that it is not only the German General Staff that has influence on Trotsky, but that the latter was connected to the Japanese General Staff as well, or in any case with its intelligence organs.*

Primakov answers the question what tasks were set before him and what he did: "Trotsky's basic directives . . . were known to me too from the words of Dreitser and Putna, they came down to this, that Trotsky was demanding to reestablish a military organization, to strengthen it in the army as well, making use of the sharpening of the class struggle . . . up to 1933."

. . .

Putna about his spying: "A few days later" (reads) . . . Then while conversations went on: "about the desirability of changing the system, the leadership in the USSR . . ." (reads).

That means that preparatory conversations were going on, and then further: "*Shleikher expressed his unequivocal readiness . . .*" (reads). *He brought this to Trotsky's attention through this gentleman Sedov and Sedov reports that Trotsky proposes:* (reads). (Emphasis added) (Voenniy Sovet 372-373; 384)

The testimony here generally accords with what we have seen previously, no doubt because Voroshilov drew his information from the same interrogations. The "Shleikher" named here is no doubt General Kurt von Schleicher, Chancellor of Germany from June 1932 to January 1933 and previously Minister of Defense.

Colonel L.A. Shnitman

Further evidence about contacts between the military conspirators and Trotsky keeps coming to light. In a 2009 book we read the following:

In September 1937 Ezhov sent Stalin a special communication containing an assessment of the activities of Colonel L.A. Shnitman, military attaché to Czechoslovakia. There was compromising material stating that he was aide to

Komandarm 2nd rank A.I. Kork, military attaché to Germany. In January 1937 a group of Soviet pilots who had served in Spain had been detained in France, and Shnitman was also blamed for this. During his interrogation he had also told the investigators about his “meetings” upon Tukhachevsky’s instructions in Paris with Sedov, Trotsky’s son, concerning the transmission of secret information to foreign intelligence services. (Khaustov-Samuel’son 226)

Evaluating This Evidence

As with a great many other statements in this book the authors give no citation, not even an archival source, for this information. What are we to make of this?

Both authors are extremely anticommunist and very hostile to Stalin. They reject out of hand any possibility that any of the Opposition conspiracies actually existed. Their book contains many falsifications, significant omissions, and outright lies, all in an anticommunist direction. There’s no reason to think they would ever fabricate a story of a connection between Shnitman and Sedov, or between Sedov and Tukhachevsky. Moreover, Khaustov is associated with the “Memorial” organization. He is one of a few privileged researchers who has access to many archival documents.

We may conclude, therefore, that an interrogation of Shnitman’s does exist in which he confesses to contacting Sedov on Tukhachevsky’s behalf and discussing with him passing Soviet secrets to foreign countries. Another “Memorial” society source reports that Shnitman was convicted of “espionage [and] participation in a military conspiracy in the Red Army.”⁸⁷ This is what we would expect if Shnitman did confess as Khaustov and Samuel’son affirm. Yet another source confirms that Shnitman was aide to the military attaché to Germany in 1926-1929 and again in 1934-35, was military attaché to Finland in 1929-30 and military attaché to Czechoslovakia 1936-1938.⁸⁸

The date of Ezhov’s memorandum to Stalin as given by Khaustov and Samuel’son, September 1937, is curious. There’s good evidence from other sources that Shnitman was arrested on January 14, 1938 and that his trial and execution took place on

⁸⁷ “Kommunarka. 1938. Avgust.” At <<http://www.memo.ru/memory/communarka/Chapt10.htm>>; “Spiski zhertv” <<http://lists.memo.ru/d37/f245.htm#n43>>. These are both “Memorial Society” sources.

⁸⁸ <<http://baza.vgd.ru/1/38052/>>.

August 28, 1938.⁸⁹ One would expect that an interrogation in which Shnitman made such self-incriminating disclosures must have taken place between these two dates rather than prior to Ezhov's September 1937 communication to Stalin. Surely no one who had confessed to such crimes would have been left at large for another four months. That deduction in turn implies that Khaustov and Samuel's son saw not just Ezhov's note to Stalin but at least part of Shnitman's investigative file.

The "foreign intelligence service" Sedov and, through Shnitman, Tukhachevsky were spying for is not named. But it must have been Germany. Tukhachevsky had ties with the German General Staff about which he confessed at length, as we have seen, while Shnitman had had some connection to Germany but not to any other of the great European powers.

In a book of more than 400 pages the authors devote only this single paragraph to Shnitman's case. Indeed, there is no particular reason they should have inserted this paragraph at all. The implication is that there may be more – perhaps much more – evidence of contact between Trotsky or Sedov and Germany or Japan, to say nothing of Trotsky's contacts with Soviet oppositionists.

Other Evidence From The Soviet Archives of Trotsky's Collaboration

To this point we've confined our attention to documents from the former Soviet archives containing evidence of "first-hand" contact between Trotsky and Germany or Japan. The persons whose accounts we have examined claim that they knew of Trotsky's contact with Germany or Japan either from Trotsky himself or from German or Japanese diplomats.

Although the dividing line between first- and second-hand evidence is a clear one, the evidentiary value of second-hand evidence is not necessarily less. For example we now have Nikolai Bukharin's first confession of June 2, 1937, a document still top-secret in Russia today but that turned up in an archive that was sent West sometime in the mid-1990s. We have examined this confession in detail in another study to which we refer the interested reader.

⁸⁹ O.F. Suvenirov. *Tragediia RKKA 1937-1938*. Institut Voennoi Istorii Ministerstva Oborony Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Moscow: "Terra," 1998, p. 441, No. 262.

It is significant because Bukharin confirms what we have already learned from Radek's testimony, since Bukharin's knowledge of Trotsky's collaboration with Germany came only through Radek. Radek had implicated Bukharin in pretrial statements and then again at the public January 1937 Moscow trial. Bukharin had denied what Radek said over and over again, but on June 2 1937 he reversed himself and confessed.

Why did Bukharin decide to confess? It appears that one reason may have been that Bukharin had learned of Tukhachevsky's arrest, and figured "the jig was up."⁹⁰ In his final statement at the March 1938 Moscow Trial Bukharin said that "of course, the evidence" played a determining role. That must mean evidence *recently* obtained and shown to him, which would no doubt include the evidence of the military conspirators. If Bukharin's testimony contradicted Radek's we would be forced to conclude that on the evidence one or both were wrong. Since Bukharin's statement confirms Radek's, their statements mutually corroborate, or strengthen each other.

Yagoda's Confessions 1937

There exists a good deal more such "second-hand evidence" of Trotsky's collaboration with the Germans and Japanese in recently published Soviet archival documents.

Genrikh S. Yagoda was Commissar of the NKVD (= Minister of Internal Affairs), which included the political police, from 1934 till he was dismissed in September 1936. He was arrested in early March, 1937. Subsequently he was one of the leading defendants in the third Moscow trial of March 1938.

In 1997 a number of materials from Genrikh Yagoda's investigative file were published in a very small edition of 200 copies in the provincial city of Kazan' by some researchers employed by the FSB, successor to the KGB. Since that time some of the documents published in this collection have been published elsewhere, evidently from copies held in different archives. In these interrogation transcripts Yagoda makes startling

⁹⁰ See Grover Furr and Vladimir Bobrov, "Nikolai Bukharin's 's First Statement of Confession in the Lubianka." *Cultural Logic* 2007, 17 and nn. 32 and 33. Bibliographic information of the Russian original of this article is given there.

confessions. These confessions include details of his collaboration with German intelligence.

Avel' Enukidze was a high-ranking Party official and member of the Soviet government who had been arrested earlier. Only two interrogations of Enukidze's have been published: one in a collection of Yagoda materials in 1997, another in the second of the "Lubianka-Stalin" volumes in 2004. In neither does Enukidze speak much about Trotsky. In the volume of materials devoted to Yagoda, however, we find the following remark about Enukidze, Trotsky and the Germans. We have italicized passages of special interest to our investigation.

In the first place, in 1935 the prospects of a war by a strengthened Germany against the Soviet Union were growing with each day. In that connection it was necessary to move ahead swiftly and make an agreement with them.

Enukidze told me that Trotsky abroad had established full contact with German governmental circles, and that Enukidze himself also had a line of contact with the Germans. (Genrikh Yagoda 193)

According to Yagoda, Enukidze both knew of Trotsky's "full-scale contact" with "German governmental circles," and told him that he, Enukidze, had his own such contacts.

Yagoda also testified about Lev Karakhan's ties to Trotsky and the Germans.

But I am aware that in the orientation to and conspiracies with German governmental circles both the Trotskyists and Zinovievists, on the one side, and the Rights, on the other side, had their own separate lines [of contact].

Question: How did they differ and where do you know this from?

Answer: Karakhan spoke to me about this in one of our talks with him in 1935.

The essence of these two lines in orientation to and contact with the Germans consists in the following: the Trotskyist-Zinovievist part of our center was carrying out negotiations with German governmental circles through Trotsky, who was in emigration, isolated from the Soviet Union, ignorant of the internal processes of the country and ready to give away everything just in order to overthrow Soviet power and return to Russia as soon as possible.

We, the Rights, had a different attitude. We were not supporters of a new partition of Russia, as Trotsky was doing. . . .

Karakhan's connection with the Germans had existed for a long time. And the center of the Rights used this line of contact, already established, as a real line, and offered to Karakhan to enter into official negotiations with the German governmental circles. I have already confessed that Karakhan was in Berlin after this and met there with Nadolny and Hess (or Goebbels) and, as he said to me, had already in 1936 achieved significant concessions from the Germans.

Question: What concessions?

Answer: Concessions of the servile conditions on the basis of which the agreement with Trotsky had been achieved. (Genrikh Yagoda 194-195)

Karakhan apparently claimed to have had his own ties to the Germans through Nadolny (presumably Rudolf Nadolny, German diplomat) and either Hess or Goebbels. Others of the Rights testified at the March 1938 Trial that Karakhan and Yagoda were very critical of Trotsky's dealings with the Germans, believing that Trotsky was cut off from the realities of life in the USSR and was yielding far too much to the Germans just in hopes of returning to power.

Assessing the Evidence: Yagoda's Confessions

Scholars with "impeccable" anticommunist credentials have cited these documents unproblematically. For example, Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov cite this work as a primary source, without claiming that the interrogations in it were, or even might have been, faked, obtained by compulsion, etc.⁹¹ One of the documents has also been published in a semiofficial collection of documents from the Soviet archives, a fact that further attests to their genuine nature.⁹² We may therefore conclude that the documents really do come from the Yagoda investigative file and are generally conceded to be genuine.

⁹¹ E.g. Jansen & Petrov 220 n.23, 224 n. 110, 226 n. 9, 228 n.40. Petrov is a senior researcher with the highly anticommunist organization "Memorial"; Jansen is a major anticommunist researcher of the Soviet 1930s.

⁹² The documents published as Nos. 40 and 41 in *Genrikh Yagoda* 108-136 were also published as document No. 59, pp. 135-145 in the official collection *Lubianka. Stalin i glavnoe upravlenie gosbezopasnosti NKVD 1937-1938* (Moscow: "Materik," 2004).

These documents merit a detailed analysis in and of themselves. Their contents intersect with many other materials now available such as confession statements by other individuals arrested in connection with the investigations concerning espionage and conspiracy, and the transcript of the Third Moscow trial.

At the end of each of Yagoda's confessions printed in this 1997 volume is a disclaimer, variously worded. At the end of interrogation two, Yagoda's first confession, which took place on April 26, 1937 (pp. 109-137) we read:

Information about the conspirator-employees of the NKVD is falsified. Other aforementioned statement by Yagoda are not credible.

For more information about the repression of Chekists in the middle 1930s see Palchinsky A.A. "Represii v organakh NKVD v seredine 30-kh godov," in *Political persecution in Russia: Historical and contemporary*. St.Petersburg: 1997, pp. 284-294.

At the end of the second confession, of May 4, 1937 (pp. 137-143):

Information about the conspirator-employees of the NKVD is falsified.

At the end of the third (May 13, 1937, pp. 144-167):

All information in the transcript concerning acts of terror and conspiracies are falsified.

V.M. Primakov and the other military men were fully rehabilitated in 1937. *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* No. 4 (1989), 42-73. A.I. Rykov, N.I. Bukharin and others were rehabilitated in 1988. *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* No. 5 (1989), 69-92.

B.I. Nikolaevsky (1887-1966), in 1903-1906 a Bolshevik, then a Menshevik, political émigré. Nikolaevsky refuted the reports that he received any packets from Rykov. *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* No. 5 (1938), 12. For more detail on P.P. Ol'berg and Shemelev see V.Z. Rogovin, *1937*. Moscow, 1966.

At the end of the fourth (May 19, 1937, pp. 167-184):

All information about conspiracies and acts of terror is falsified. The case of the murder of S.M. Kirov remains open to this day. A.E. Enukidze and the other persons named in the transcript were rehabilitated in the 1960s-1980s.

The fifth (May 26, 1937, pp. 185-199):

All information in the transcript concerning conspiracy and accusations of “espionage” is falsified. L.M. Karakhan and the other persons named in the transcript have been rehabilitated.

At the end of a two-page statement by Yagoda to Ezhov concerning NKVD worker Mironov (June 4, 1937, pp. 200-202):

The information in the document is not credible.

At the end of the interrogation of December 28, 1937 (pp. 202-218):

The information is not credible. Professor L.G. Levin and other doctors were later rehabilitated because there is no evidence of any crime in their activities.

The end of the “face-to-face confrontation” (*ochnaia stavka*) between Yagoda and Dr. Levin of January 4, 1938, pp. 218-223:

The information cited in the transcript is not credible.

The end of the confrontation between Yagoda and Dr. Kriuchkov of January 5, 1938, pp. 223-227:

The answers are not credible. P.P. Kriuchkov was later rehabilitated because there is no evidence of any crime in his activities.

The end of the confrontation between Yagoda and Professor D.D. Pletnev of January 5, 1938, pp. 227-230:

The answers are not credible. Professor D.D. Pletnev was later rehabilitated because there is no evidence of any crime in his activities.

The end of the confrontation between Dr. Levin, also of January 5, 1938, pp. 231-233:

The “confessions” of L.G. Levin and P.P. Kriuchkov were later refuted as not credible.

At the end of the interrogation of Yagoda held on January 10, 1938, pp. 235-239:

Yagoda’s answers are not credible.

There are similar remarks at the end of the interrogation – confession of Artuzov, of June 15, 1937 (pp. 487-499). We will consider Artuzov’s confession below.

The information given by Artuzov is not credible. Later it was all refuted in his rehabilitation.

The same kind of comments are made at the end of other interrogation – confessions which we do not consider here, such as those of Avel’ Ehlukidze and of NKVD men Bulanov, Prokof’ev, Radzivilovskii, and Trilisser.

Assessing These Documents: “Rehabilitations”

The comments cited above are of course not a critical analysis, or *any* kind of analysis, of the confessions of Yagoda’s that the volume reproduces. In fact, the book has no analysis of the assertions made in the interrogation – confessions at all.

Some of the comments allude to “rehabilitations.” Most such “rehabilitations” have not been made public, so we can’t evaluate them. However, we know a good deal about a number of “rehabilitations” of well-known figures – enough to know that they are political, not historically accurate, documents.

Specifically, we have a good deal of the material on Bukharin’s “rehabilitation.” We know that it does not prove him innocent in the slightest. On the contrary, in their decree “rehabilitating” Bukharin the Plenum of the Soviet Supreme Court falsified a key

document – Frinovsky’s confession of April 11, 1939, which was not public in February, 1988 when Bukharin’s case came before it, but has been published since. Far from proving Bukharin innocent, Frinovsky’s confession in fact shows him to have been guilty. Our essay on this subject is in press at a Russian publisher.

We also have a good deal of information about the “rehabilitation” of Professor D.D. Pletnev. Pletnev features in Yagoda’s file and in some of the documents printed here. Unlike the case of Bukharin, most of Pletnev’s file still remains secret. But we have enough to know that it did not prove him “innocent” at all.⁹³ Earlier in the present essay we pointed out that the “rehabilitation” document of Zinoviev and his codefendants contains evidence of Zinoviev’s guilt rather than his innocence.

So “rehabilitations” are not proof that the individuals “rehabilitated” were innocent, even though they are presented as though they were. Rather, they are official claims that the individuals “rehabilitated” will be *considered to be innocent*, and in future will be declared to have been “victims” of “Stalin’s crimes.” “Rehabilitations” are *political* acts, not exercises in the reconsideration of evidence. Marc Junge, a German researcher on the repressions of the 1930s and a determined proponent of the “anti-Stalin” paradigm put it this way:

In agreement with von Goudoever it may be definitively established that rehabilitation in the Soviet Union remained an act of political-administrative caprice that was determined above all by political usefulness, not by juridical correctness.⁹⁴

It appears that the “disclaimers” quoted above and attached to the end of every confession-statement in this volume are the same kind of thing. They indirectly inform the reader something like this: “We, the editors of this volume, do not claim that the

⁹³ For a detailed study of Bukharin’s and Pletnev’s “rehabilitations” proving them to be falsified and, in fact, proving both Bukharin and Pletnev guilty see Grover Furr and Vladimir Bobrov, *Bukharin na plakhe* (“Bukharin on the block”), forthcoming.

⁹⁴ “In Übereinstimmung zu von Goudoever kann abschließend festgestellt werden, daß Rehabilitierung in der Sowjetunion ein politisch-administrativer Willkürakt blieb, der vor allem von der politischen Zweckmäßigkeit der Maßnahmen bestimmt wurde, nicht aber von der strafrechtlichen Korrektheit.” *Bucharins Rehabilitierung. Historisches Gedächtnis in der Sowjetunion 1953-1991*. Berlin: BasisDruck Vlg, 1999, 266. This is discussed in more detail in Furr and Bobrov 5 ff.

contents of these confession-statements are true. We *assert* that they are ‘not trustworthy’ or ‘falsified’ but we cannot *prove* it and, in fact, have no evidence to that effect. If you want evidence, refer to the ‘rehabilitations’ of the individuals in question – which, in fact, you cannot gain access to.”

The editors of the Yagoda volume are employees of the FSB, the successor to the KGB – that is, the Russian intelligence and security service. *Not* to state that these confessions are “false” or at least “not trustworthy” would be for them to take a position contradictory to what some important Russian (and Soviet) state institutions have taken in the past. It’s not the job of the state security service to call some other state institution a liar. Whatever else it may mean this formula allows them to avoid doing so.

We can deduce something more from these brief phrases. *We may assume that if there were any other kind of evidence that the statements made in the confessions and interrogations were false, that evidence would be cited.* Since no such evidence is cited, in effect these notes constitute a kind of admission that the contents of the confessions *cannot* be shown to be false.

One could object that here too “lack of evidence is not evidence of the lack” of contradictory evidence. In reality, however, we know from the published volumes of Rehabilitation documents that during Gorbachev’s time very thorough searches of the archives were carried out with a view to finding evidence that the condemned Opposition defendants of the 1930s were falsely convicted. In the case of Yagoda, the Moscow Trials defendants, and the “Tukhachevsky Affair” no such evidence was found.

As we have noted, even some Cold-War scholars who reject the validity of the Moscow Trials on principle accept these Yagoda documents at face value and have cited them as genuine without negative comment on the veracity of their contents. Arch Getty has criticized them for using such sources, claiming that, for instance, “everybody knows” that Ezhov’s confessions were coerced and falsified by his interrogators (*Kritika*). That is simply not true. Neither Getty nor anybody else “knows” this. Evidence is not to be “believed” or “disbelieved” – much less rejected or disregarded – but considered in the context of all the other evidence. To say that Yagoda’s confession *may* be false is also to say that they *may not* be false. That is, absent any information that they

were false, there is no more basis for “disbelieving” than for “believing” them. In fact, not even the anticommunist scholars have rejected them as invalid.

If Yagoda’s confessions were the only evidence we had of oppositionists conspiring with Germany or Japan, we would still have no grounds to discard them. On the contrary: testimony that such an illegal contact existed is, while certainly not conclusive, far more compelling than any claims to the contrary. This is a principle of investigation so self-evident it is seldom discussed. In the case of a person accused of a crime, one may expect denial in any case: by an innocent person, because he is innocent; while by a guilty person because he wishes to escape the consequences of his crime. Therefore confessions of guilt are of greater interest than professions of innocence.

But Yagoda’s confessions are far from the only evidence we have that the opposition was conspiring with Germany and/or Japan. In fact they constitute just one group of a large body of evidence that suggests such conspiracy. As with any confession of guilt, the existence of this testimony is *prima facie* evidence that the confessions are true. They are confirmed by Yagoda’s appeal for clemency published in 1992, which reads as follows:

My guilt before my country is great. It is impossible to redeem it to any extent. It is hard to die. Before the whole people and Party I stand on my knees and beg you to have mercy on me and let me live.⁹⁵

Every one of the ten persons whose confessions were reproduced along with Yagoda’s insisted upon his guilt in his appeal. Bukharin wrote that his guilt was so great he “should be shot ten times over.” As we have already noted Dr. Natan Lur’e repeated his guilt:

I really did prepare the assassination of Voroshilov upon instruction from Franz Weitz, a Gestapo representative. I wished to accomplish these disgusting murders because I had been poisoned by the poison of Trotskyism during my long stay in Germany.

⁹⁵ “Rasskaz o desiati rasstrelennykh”.

No single piece of evidence is univocal, pointing towards a single conclusion only. One might perhaps *imagine* an example of an innocent person who nevertheless was persuaded to confess again and again in pretrial interrogations; to do so again at trial; to protest his innocence of certain capital crimes in vehement terms while at the same time confirming his guilt of other capital crimes; and then confessing his guilt again in his appeal. But we have to draw our historical conclusions not on imagination but evidence. There is no evidence to refute Yagoda's confessions, while they confirm and are consistent with a great deal of evidence we do have.

Conclusion

Based on the nature and amount of the evidence we have we must conclude that Leon Trotsky did indeed collaborate with the Germans and Japanese.

The evidence we have cited cannot be accounted for by any processes of fabrication:

- There is far too much of it.
- Much of it was never intended to be made public.
- It comes from different sources.
- It is all mutually corroborative. Evidence about Trotsky's German/Japanese collaboration is part of a complex of evidence about other conspiracies by other persons. Those conspiracies are well supported by evidence too. This corroborates the part of that evidence that inculcates Trotsky.
- Some of the evidence -- that of the Tukhachevsky Affair interrogation testimony and trial confessions, and Iakovlev's confession.-- is so strong that it would be sufficient to establish the fact of Trotsky's collaboration in and of itself, even if we did not have any additional archival or trial evidence.
- There is no evidence counteracting it.

During Khrushchev's time; during Gorbachev's tenure as head of the CPSU and then of the USSR; during Eltsin's time; and in fact until today, an enormous amount of effort has been devoted by the Soviet government and Party leaders and subsequently by the Russian government to find evidence in the archives that proves the Moscow Trials and Tukhachevsky Affair defendants were framed. All such searches have been fruitless.

In principle all claims to historical truth always remain subject to revision in the light of future evidence. But in this case it seems there is nowhere for future contradictory evidence to come from. Even though they are still top-secret and only a tiny number of researchers can see them, still we know that the Soviet archives have been thoroughly searched. It seems safe to surmise that no such evidence will be discovered in future. In fact just the opposite is the case: we can be confident that much in the archives is still classified because it would confirm the guilt of the defendants of the 1930s and disconfirm the “anti-Stalin” paradigm. This would be the “cannon shot,” in Col. Alksnis’s words, that would destroy the anticommunist – and, of course, the Trotskyist -- historiography of the Stalin era.

Objectivity and Denial

There is only one conclusion consistent with an objective assessment of the evidence we now have. We have drawn this conclusion here out of no animosity towards Trotsky or partisanship for Stalin. Like other people, scholars have preconceived ideas and prejudices. In the search for historical truth as in science, scholars are obliged to form an hypothesis and put it to the test – which means being ready to find evidence contradictory to their hypothesis. In this case the evidence confirms our hypothesis that Trotsky did collaborate with Germany and Japan.

We are confident that some people will reject this conclusion. Few subjects during the past century have so engaged the passions of so many men and women as has the communist movement. Within that movement surely one of the most contentious issues has and continues to be the “Stalin vs Trotsky” debate. There are few “Stalinists” around today – though that situation may be changing somewhat, especially within Russia. There are many more supporters of Trotsky. Trotskyists are passionately devoted to a heroic version of Trotsky’s life and legacy. Anticommunists and Trotskyists are both loyal to a paradigm of Soviet history and especially of the 1930s that is utterly incompatible with the conclusions we have drawn in this essay.

We predict that regardless of the evidence neither staunch anticommunists nor Trotskyists will ever accept that Trotsky did in fact collaborate with Germany and Japan. The “Cold War” paradigm of Soviet history during Stalin’s time depends upon the

construction of Stalin as an evil man who was killing innocent people and destroying the communist movement. If Trotsky and, by implication, the oppositionists who worked with him were guilty of what they were charged with and to which most, though of course not Trotsky, confessed, then this “Cold War” paradigm of Soviet history is dismantled.

Trotsky’s and Sedov’s denials cannot be taken seriously. Someone who had access to the closed Trotsky archives at Harvard purged them. No one could expect Trotsky or Sedov, or anyone who had that archival access, to be objective about Trotsky, so we can be certain that they were not.

But no one lies if the truth is on their side. It is true generally that denials of guilt are of little interest to any investigator. The guilty as well as the innocent can be expected to proclaim their innocence. And if confessions of guilt should not be automatically assumed to be truthful, the same is true of professions of innocence.

It is certain that some readers of this essay will “deny” the results of this analysis by raising one or more of the objections we will now consider.

Torture

The issue of torture is cited very often as, supposedly, an “explanation” for the confessions by all the persons whose testimony we have cited here. In fact this is a very weak explanation.

Is it possible that all the accounts by all the witnesses we have cited could have been obtained by torturing, or otherwise forcing, the witnesses to make these statements, and then carefully co-ordinating or “scripting” them? Is it possible that *all* the defendants memorized “scripted” confessions to make during the investigation, when the materials were all secret; then again at the public trial; and then again in the texts of their secret appeals for clemency to the Soviet Supreme Court – and all out of fear of “torture”?

The question of torture is an important one as it goes to the heart of our study and of historical methodology generally – namely, the question of evidence. First: it is not easy to determine whether or not a given individual was, in fact, tortured.

- It should be obvious that the mere fact that a defendant claims he was tortured does not mean that he was in fact tortured. Of course the general principle is

that no one should simply be assumed to be telling the truth, or assumed to be lying, without substantiating evidence. Falsely claiming one was tortured could be a way of explaining shameful behavior – naming others in one’s confession, for example – while preserving some self-respect or dignity. During and after the Khrushchev period it became well known that defendants could often get their convictions vacated and rights restored by claiming they had been tortured.

- We can’t conclude that an arrestee was tortured simply because an NKVD investigator later said that he was. This is true *a fortiori* if the NKVD man (or someone else) claims to know it at second hand, from someone else, rather than confessing to torturing the prisoner himself.
- We have to be skeptical of what NKVD men or other investigators wrote or testified during the Khrushchev years. During this time NKVD men were not simply threatened with serious penalties, including death, but some were actually executed on the grounds that they had beaten prisoners during the 1930s up to 1940-41, despite the fact that Khrushchev himself admitted this had been permitted by a Central Committee decision.
- Even less can we accept the “fruit of the poisoned tree” argument: “A was, apparently, tortured, and he named B and C, so ALL were, in fact, innocent.” The “fruit of the poisoned tree” logic is a judicial – legal – principle. It means that evidence obtained in an unlawful manner should not be used in court *even when that evidence discloses a crime*. It does not speak to the question of guilt or innocence, and guilt (or innocence) is what we are interested in.
- We can’t conclude that an arrestee was innocent of the crimes he was charged with, or to which he confessed, on the sole grounds that he, or someone else, claims he was tortured. First, those claims may be false. Second, the fact that someone has been tortured does not mean that they were innocent. Guilty persons can also be tortured.
- Repeated written complaints of torture, coupled with a retraction of confessions during the investigation, at trial, or both, make it likely that the prisoner’s claims are true. If and when they are also accompanied by

confessions by the torturer(s) and/or their superiors, the claims become even more credible. But we have none of these things concerning the defendants at the Moscow Trials or the Tukhachevsky Affair.

Furthermore, even if we could be reasonably assured that a defendant was tortured, that does not mean that the defendant was innocent of all crimes he was charged with. A number of defendants who claimed they were tortured made differentiated confessions, withdrawing part of their confessions on the grounds that they were false, made under duress, but *not* withdrawing other parts. This is strong evidence that the part of the confession *not* withdrawn is truthful – for otherwise, why not withdraw or deny it all?

The fact that a confession could not be used in evidence against a defendant unless it had been confirmed at trial, and that many defendants did in fact retract their confessions at trial, means that we should be hesitant to discount confessions by persons who did *not* retract their confessions at trial when they could have done so.

We can be confident – at least, until good evidence to the contrary should be discovered – that the torture of many defendants, though not of those whose statements we examine in this article, did take place because the evidence for it comes from a number of different sources. The chances that all that evidence could have been “orchestrated” – fabricated into a coherent pattern – become negligible.

For the same reason we can be confident that Trotsky did conspire with the Germans and Japanese. There is so much evidence of it, from so many different sources, and it is so consistent with other information we have, that the chances it has all been fabricated is vanishingly small.

The Charge of “Torture” As A Smokescreen

Could torture have been going on “behind the scenes” so that we have no knowledge of it? Or, should we simply assume that a defendant was tortured if he confessed to serious crimes, even if we have no evidence that he was?

To this objection the response has to be: No. We must always demand evidence. Without evidence that some event occurred it is illegitimate to conclude that it did. It is not scientific to assume that something is going on unseen and leaving no trace. If in fact

there is no material evidence that a given witness was lying, while evidence that corroborates some of his statements does exist, we must conclude that he was not lying. Likewise, absent evidence that a person was tortured it is illegitimate to assume that he was.

We have no evidence that any of the defendants in the three Moscow Trials were tortured. In the best-documented case we know as certainly as we ever can that Bukharin was NOT tortured.⁹⁶ Steven Cohen, author of the most famous and influential book about Bukharin, has concluded that Bukharin could not have been tortured.⁹⁷ Cohen is still convinced Bukharin was innocent, but has no way of explaining why he confessed. It should be obvious that guilty persons can be tortured too. “Means of physical pressure,” the usual general term (and euphemism) in the USSR at this time, could be applied to defendants to induce them to confess to what they actually had done, as well as to make false confessions of crimes they had never committed. Therefore, even if it can be proven somehow that a person actually has been tortured that does not mean he did not commit the acts he is charged with. It only means that his confession should not be used against him at trial. Therefore the issue of torture is separate from the issue of guilt or innocence.

In a court procedure evidence that a defendant has made statements because of mistreatment or threats is sufficient to have the statements thrown out. This practice is necessary to protect the rights of the defendant. It’s also necessary to guarantee that the investigators actually try to solve crimes instead of simply mistreating suspects until one of them confesses. Historians are faced with a different situation. The question of guilt or innocence is not at all the same as that of whether a defendant received a fair trial.⁹⁸

A guilty person may confess guilt whether tortured or not. A guilty person may claim innocence even if tortured, or if not tortured. Likewise, an innocent person may confess guilt if tortured, but innocent persons have been known to falsely confess guilt

⁹⁶ Furr and Bobrov, *CL* p. 10 and note.

⁹⁷ Cohen (Koen), “Bukharin na Lubianke.” *Svobodnaia Mysl’* 21 (3) 2003, p. 61.

⁹⁸ Everyone agrees that the Haymarket defendants in Chicago in 1886 did not receive a fair trial, but there is debate about whether one of them, August Spies, may have fabricated the bomb or another, Louis Lingg, may have thrown it. Likewise everyone agrees that Sacco and Vanzetti did not receive a fair trial in Massachusetts in 1921, but there is some disagreement as to whether Sacco may in fact have committed the murder for which they were executed.

without any compulsion at all. And an innocent person may persist in proclaiming her innocence under torture or absent any mistreatment.

Among the military figures Putna and Fel'dman *may* have been beaten. We do not even know that for certain. It is stated in the Shvernik Report and in the “rehabilitation” document of 1989 that draws upon it. But many of these “rehabilitation” documents are falsified. As always, there is no certain evidence.

But even if they were beaten, that has no bearing at all upon whether they were guilty or innocent. The Shvernik Report contains much evidence of their guilt. So, whether they were tortured or not, we have a lot of evidence that they were guilty. And it is guilt or innocence – what happened – rather than whether proper judicial procedure was used, that concerns us here.

The idea that not only the military men in the Tukhachevsky Affair but *all* the defendants in all the Moscow Trials could have been made to confess to false charges by torture or the threat of it, despite the lack of evidence of either torture or threat, is as absurd as any statement we are likely to face. But that fact is never going to stop those who need to believe these men were innocent from believing it.

We have no evidence that any of the other defendants in the Tukhachevsky Affair were beaten or otherwise tortured. As we have seen above in our examination of the Budienny letter we have excellent evidence that these men confessed at their private trial. We know that Khrushchev-era and Gorbachev-era “rehabilitation” commissions lied and dissembled in a vain attempt to prove the innocence of these and many other defendants, and have discussed a number of examples of this in detail in an examination of Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” of 1956.

The charge of “torture” serves the purpose of deflecting attention away from the evidence that we do have. As invoked in the historiography of the Moscow Trials and Tukhachevsky Affair it is a smokescreen, a rhetorical, propaganda device to stop us from looking squarely at the large body of evidence we have. It is an attempt to make us disregard that evidence.

Lack of German Or Japanese Evidence

The objection will be heard: “If there had really been such a conspiracy then some documentation of it would have been found in captured German or Japanese archives.” The principle “lack of evidence is not evidence of a lack” applies here. The lack of evidence in German or Japanese archives does not destroy the other evidence we do have, and which we have analyzed above. It does not mean that no conspiracy existed.

And it is not quite true either. We do have evidence from both Czech and German archives that during the period roughly from the end of 1936 through the first quarter of 1937 Hitler and the German government were awaiting a military coup against the Stalin regime. Thanks to a slip of the tongue by a Japanese military commander in a talk with Japanese journalists in early 1937 we know that Opposition figures within the USSR were sending the Japanese military information – that, is, committing espionage.⁹⁹ Genrikh Liushkov privately told the Japanese that real conspiracies existed among Soviet military leaders, even naming some of those against whom other evidence exists. We also have a great deal of other evidence concerning the defendants in the Moscow Trials and the Tukhachevsky Affair that points to the guilt of the defendants. This too is consistent with the results of our present investigation.

Lack of Documentary Proof

As we discussed earlier, Getty discovered that the Trotsky Archive at Harvard has been imperfectly purged of evidence that Trotsky was in contact with his followers in the USSR. Meanwhile Trotsky and Sedov lied in denying such contact. Suppose the purging had been more competent and that all trace of this contact had been successfully removed. Would that mean that no such contact had taken place? Of course it would not. By the same principle “lack of evidence” – in this case, of Trotsky’s clandestine contacts with his Soviet followers – would not be “evidence of a lack” of such contact. And, as this essay has demonstrated, there is no lack of such evidence.

Thanks to Getty we know that there used to be some kind of incriminating documentation of Trotsky’s activities in his own archive. Was there other such

⁹⁹ This documentation has long since been published. To examine it is far beyond the scope of the present essay. The present author discusses these documents in a forthcoming book on the Soviet Opposition and their collaboration with Germany and Japan.

documentation aside from that we know to have existed – letters to his major supporters inside the USSR? We don't know. We can't legitimately conclude that there wasn't.

It is an error in logic and method to fetishize documentary evidence. *Any* kind of evidence – including documentary evidence – can be faked. In fact it would arguably have been easier to forge documents inculcating Trotsky in the alleged collaboration with Germany and Japan than to coordinate a large number of confessions, particularly public ones, and then coordinate a number of secret, written appeals for clemency, all testifying to events that never in fact happened.

In order to conclude that, despite the evidence cited in this article, Trotsky did not collaborate with Germany and Japan one would be forced to assume that the Soviet authorities orchestrated a vast network of false confessions by many individuals over many months, all of which inculcate Trotsky of German and/or Japanese collaboration, and in a more or less consistent manner. There is no evidence that this kind of orchestration actually took place.

It is tacitly supposed that it all happened “behind the scenes,” out of sight of the public trials. Yet now that thanks to some archival documents we have a glimpse “behind the scenes” we can discern no such fabrication. On the contrary: the investigative materials we now have confirm the trial testimony.

The vast majority of the investigative materials remain top-secret in Russia today. We simply do not know what kind of evidence they may hold. Some of it is certainly documentary. We don't know whether any of it is documentary evidence of Trotsky's collaboration with Germany and Japan. Once again: “Lack of evidence is not evidence of lack.” The fact that we do not know about any evidence in the secret Soviet archives inculcating Trotsky does not mean such evidence does not exist. It only means we do not know about any.

We know that there is other documentary evidence of some of the conspiracies. The Shvernik Report discusses a telegram from a Japanese military attaché to his superior in Japan testifying to secret contact with a representative of Marshal Tukhachevsky. The Report gives the text of this telegram. Therefore it must have still existed in 1962-64 when the report was being compiled.

Yet Kantor does not even mention it in her two supposedly authoritative books on Tukhachevsky, though of course she knew of it. Kantor wanted to support the theory that Tukhachevsky and the rest were innocent, and this telegram would not have been helpful. We don't know whether the physical document still exists or not. We can be thankful that the Shvernik Report compilers transcribed and discussed it, though we don't know why they did so – it's not what Khrushchev wanted to be told.

What kind of written documentation of a clandestine conspiracy should we expect to have ever existed? Both Radek and Tukhachevsky claim that they had notes from Trotsky which they burned. It would have been foolish in the extreme for them *not* to have destroyed such incriminating evidence. The Bolsheviks were experienced in working conspiratorially. They had years of practice doing so under the Tsar. They knew better than to keep written lists of fellow conspirators, written plans, and in general anything in writing that would, if discovered by the NKVD, cause disaster to the conspiracy. “Lack of evidence is not evidence of lack” of a conspiracy.

Corroborative Evidence

There are two kinds of evidence that corroborate the direct evidence of Trotsky's collaboration with Germany and Japan. The first is the testimony of those who like Nikolai Bukharin and Genrikh Yagoda admitted to participation in a bloc or alliance with others who had first-hand knowledge of Trotsky's collaboration with Germany and/or Japan but who claimed no ties with Germany or Japan themselves.

Yagoda testified that he learned of Trotsky's direct contact with the Germans from Avel' Enukidze and Lev Karakhan. We have examined Karakhan's testimony above. Most of Enukidze's investigative file is still secret. Neither of the two interrogations of Enukidze published to date mentions his contacts with Trotsky.

Concerning Nikolai Bukharin we have much more information than about any of the other defendants in the various Soviet trials. We have discovered, edited, and published his first confession of June 2, 1937 (Furr & Bobrov). This is also the only pre-trial confession of Bukharin that we have; the Russian government continues to keep all

the others secret.¹⁰⁰ We have also discovered and have prepared for publication the falsified decree of the Gorbachev-era Soviet Supreme Court “rehabilitating” Bukharin on February 4, 1988. Neither of these documents was ever made accessible to researchers, much less published, before or during Gorbachev’s day; both are still top-secret in Russia today. The “rehabilitation” decree cites a quotation from a document that was secret in 1988 but that we have now discovered. That document is cited as evidence that Bukharin was innocent. In fact it contains evidence that Bukharin was guilty.

Bukharin’s first confession implicates Trotsky, as does his Trial testimony. Our published analysis shows that Bukharin was not tortured. Stephen Cohen, the world’s expert on Bukharin, reached the same conclusion over a decade ago. We have also examined Bukharin’s appeal of his death sentence to the Soviet Supreme Court, in which he reiterates his guilt and claims that for his crimes he should be “shot ten times over.” There is no reason whatever to doubt that Bukharin was telling the truth in his pre-trial and trial confessions and in his post-trial appeal. But Bukharin was very clear and explicit that Radek had told him more than once about Trotsky’s involvement with the Germans and Japanese.

This is corroborative evidence. Bukharin’s first confession corroborates Radek’s confession at the January 1937 Trial – Bukharin confirms what Radek said, meanwhile adding a bit more evidence. Bukharin’s first confession also corroborates the truthfulness of his own statements at his trial in March 1938. Of course the most striking corroboration is Bukharin’s two appeals after his trial, where he confirms his guilt in the strongest possible terms.

A second kind of corroborative evidence consists of evidence from persons who claimed first-hand or second-hand knowledge of Trotsky’s collaboration and who themselves were working with either Germany or Japan. According to the evidence now available three of the eight figures in the Tukhachevsky Affair – Primakov, Putna, and Tukhachevsky himself – had direct contact with both Trotsky and the Germans. The other six defendants, all officers of the highest ranks, would almost certainly have known about Trotsky’s involvement.

¹⁰⁰ We have discovered one additional confession of Bukharin’s of February 20, 1938. This confession is still secret in Russia. It does not deal with Trotsky.

Very little of the investigative and judicial (trial) materials in the three Moscow Trials, the Tukhachevsky Affair, and the broader military conspiracy, has been made public. The rest remains top-secret in Russia today, probably for the reasons Col. Alksnis suggests. Still, enough has leaked out that we have a great deal of evidence, some of it documentary, of German and Japanese collaboration by oppositionists, including military figures. We have prepared a book-length study of this evidence.

We also have a number of transcripts of interrogation-confessions of Nikolai Ezhov, head of the NKVD between September 1936 and November 1938. In the earliest one that we have, an interrogation dated April 26 1939, Ezhov testifies to his own direct collaboration with German military and intelligence figures. Ezhov stated he too was in contact with General Hammerstein.¹⁰¹ Hammerstein asked Ezhov specifically how much influence the Trotskyists had in the Bolshevik Party. The German general's interest in this subject is consistent with the considerable evidence we have seen of Trotsky's collaboration with Germany.

What kinds of corroborative evidence might be admissible in a criminal trial is a legal question. It would be decided differently according to the time of the trial and the jurisdiction or country in which the trial took place. In some jurisdictions rules of evidence in cases of conspiracy might differ from rules in other criminal cases.

In an historical study we are interested in something else: consistency. The corroborative evidence is consistent with the direct evidence. The existence of such corroborative evidence reduces even further the possibility that all the direct evidence was fabricated – a negligible possibility by itself.

Trotsky's Possible Motives

Our conclusions here are based not on any prejudice or animus for or against Trotsky but on the evidence. The late Pierre Broué, for decades a leading Trotskyist scholar, admitted on the basis of the evidence that Trotsky deliberately lied to the Dewey Commission, yet Broué did not believe that to admit this constituted criticism of Trotsky.

¹⁰¹ *Lubianka. Stalin i NKVD – NKGB – GUKR «SMERSH». 1939 – mart 1946.* Moscow: “Materik”, 2006. No. 37, 52-72. Russian original at <<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/ezhovru.html>> and at <<http://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/58654>>. English translation by Grover Furr at <<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/research/ezhov042639eng.html>>.

The present essay concludes on the basis of massive evidence that Trotsky did conspire with the Germans and Japanese. This conclusion is in itself not a criticism of Trotsky. Whether one evaluates Trotsky's collaboration in a negative light or not depends upon one's political values.

Lenin conspired with the Imperial German government and military to go through the German lines to reach Petrograd in April 1917 on the famous "sealed train." That led to the Provisional Government's accusing Lenin and the Bolsheviks of being a "German spy," an accusation which is still occasionally voiced by anticommunists.

In 1918 Lenin insisted upon signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, an agreement which gave the Germans a lot of Russian territory and ended Germany's two-front war. Lenin was called a "German agent" by some for doing this too. It is the reason that the Socialist-Revolutionary Fannie Kaplan tried to kill Lenin and other Socialist-Revolutionaries did kill Soviet diplomat Moisei Uritskii and German diplomat Wilhelm Mirbach: they wished to sabotage this "pro-German" peace in order to promote a continuation of the war. It is the reason Bukharin and other Left Communists considered arresting Lenin, Stalin, and Sverdlov at that time.¹⁰²

Trotsky had a complicated view of the USSR in the mid-30s. At times he seemed to think that it was only Stalin and a few around him who "had to go" – *ubrat*' was the vague term he famously used – in order for the Revolution to be saved. As we shall see below, his son Leon Sedov was much more specific about the need for Stalin's assassination.

Trotsky thought that the leading stratum of the Bolshevik Party, or Stalin at the very least, had to be removed from power in order for the revolution to be saved both in the USSR and in the rest of the world. Given this outlook he may have reasoned that what he was doing was similar to what Lenin had done: compromise with the capitalist powers in order to save the Revolution.

By the same token, the requirements of conspiracy would have prevented Trotsky from openly acknowledging such collaboration. The Germans and Japanese would not

¹⁰² Bukharin admitted this during the 1920s. At his trial in March 1938 Bukharin vehemently denied that this plot also encompassed the possibility of murdering Lenin, Stalin, and Sverdlov, as several former S-Rs asserted in testimony against him. Whatever his subjective intent may have been, many S-Rs were ferociously anti-Bolshevik and embraced assassination – "terror" in Russian – as a political tactic, so putting Lenin, et al. at the S-Rs' mercy would certainly leave them subject to possible murder.

have dealt with him openly. And to do so would have put anybody associated with him at great risk. Most Trotskyists and sympathizers supported the Russian Revolution and had not necessarily decided that the only road to saving world communism was to change the leadership of the USSR at any cost. Knowledge of his collaboration with Germany and Japan would surely have cost Trotsky a large proportion of his relatively few adherents.

The evidence available to us today overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that Leon Trotsky collaborated with Germany and Japan in a conspiracy to overthrow the Soviet government and the Bolshevik Party leadership around Stalin, and to meet the demands of the fascists for partitioning the USSR, exiling the Comintern, opening the front to German and Japanese invaders, and making other economic and political concessions. Historians may alter these conclusions in future if more evidence comes to light. But these are facts that cannot be wished away.

Did Trotsky Lie Again?

We have already noted that only a small number of men – nine of the defendants at the three Moscow Trials plus at least three and perhaps as many as six of the military figures – claimed that they were told of Trotsky's collaboration with Germany or Japan at first hand, either from Trotsky himself or from his son Leon Sedov. We believe that there are no grounds for dismissing this testimony.

But none of these men claimed to have personally witnessed any meetings between Trotsky (or Sedov) and German or Japanese representatives. Perhaps Trotsky was lying to them? Is it possible that Trotsky did not in fact have such contacts with the Germans and Japanese but was only claiming to have them – to raise the hopes of his followers and his own prestige among them, perhaps?

The evidence suggests this was not the case. Radek, Sokol'nikov, and Iakovlev testified that they were approached by German and Japanese officials who told them about Trotsky's collaboration with their countries. This would seem to rule out any possibility that Trotsky was simply "bragging" to enhance his reputation among his followers and within the conspiracy generally. Nor is it just their word. From his very first confession Bukharin confirmed Radek's contact with German intelligence.

Leon Sedov

Trotsky would not have conspired with either German or Japanese officials in writing. As we have discussed above, it was Bolshevik practice that such deeply secret matters should be communicated only orally. We cannot rule out the possibility that Trotsky himself could have met with German or Japanese representatives. But it seems most likely that he would have done so either chiefly or entirely through his son Leon Sedov. Sedov had the motive, means, and opportunity to be his father's main contact with German and Japanese representatives after 1929 when Trotsky left the USSR.

There is a good deal of suggestive evidence to support this hypothesis. Many of the men whose testimony about direct collaboration with Trotsky we have cited said they did so through Sedov. It was Sedov's address book containing the addresses of Trotskyists within the USSR that Getty found in the Harvard Trotsky archives (Getty-Trotsky 34 n.16). Twelve people – Gol'tsman, Ol'berg, Berman-Yurin, Piatakov, Shestov, Romm, Krestinsky, Rozengol'ts, Uritsky, Putna, Shnitman and Tukhachevsky – claimed that they were in contact with Trotsky entirely or mainly through Sedov.¹⁰³

Something about Sedov's activity can be gleaned from the reports to the NKVD made by Mark Zborowski, a Soviet agent who managed to insinuate himself into Sedov's circle and eventually became Sedov's close collaborator. Some of the NKVD Zborowski file became public after the end of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴

Zborowski was working for Sedov by February 1935. In June 1936 Sedov tried to recruit Zborowski to go to the USSR as a secret Trotskyist agent, where he would meet with other secret Trotskyists (Zborowski would not have agreed but evidently Sedov dropped the subject.)

On November 26 1936 Zborowski reported that Sedov had told he had seen Piatakov only once since leaving the USSR, in Berlin on May Day 1931 in the company of Shestov, and that Piatakov had turned away from him without speaking to him, and repeated the same thing on December 3. But in February 1937 Sedov told the

¹⁰³ Romm, Krestinsky, and Bessonov claim to have also met Trotsky personally. Some of these men also claimed contact with Trotsky by letter.

¹⁰⁴ Zborowski archive, F.31660 d. 9067 Papka No. 28. In Volkogonov Archive, Library of Congress. Some of these same documents are confirmed by John Costello and Oleg Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions* (New York: Crown, 1993). Tsarev, a former KGB man, had privileged access to KGB files for a time in the early 1990s.

correspondent of the Dutch socialist newspaper *Het Volk* that he and Trotsky had not had contact “as often” with Piatakov and Radek as they had with Zinoviev and Kamenev. He then corrected himself, saying “To be more precise, we had no contact with them.”¹⁰⁵

Thanks to Getty we know that this was a true “slip of the tongue,” an inadvertent admission of the truth. As we have seen, Getty discovered that Trotsky had indeed been in touch with Radek and other sympathizers within the USSR during the 1930s. Sedov’s slip of the tongue suggests that Piatakov had also been in touch with Trotsky, as indeed would have been logical. This slip of the tongue appears to confirm that Trotsky and/or Sedov had in fact been in touch with both Piatakov and Radek, as these two men had testified at the trial just concluded in Moscow. This corroborates their trial testimony.

From this information we can conclude that Sedov trusted and relied on Zborowski yet still kept much secret from him. Sedov sometimes – we do not know how often – went out of town, during which time Zborowski did not know what Sedov was doing. As far as we know Sedov was not shadowed or followed on these trips, while Trotsky himself seems to have been under closer observation.

Sedov’s denials of having met with Piatakov after leaving the USSR are hardly conclusive since he would have denied meeting him in any case. They are even less credible given his unguarded remark to the correspondent of *Het Volk*. In his *Red Book* on the First Moscow Trial Sedov admitted he had met with Gol’tsman and Smirnov. Trotsky evidently forgot about this because he told the Dewey Commission a few months later that he had never had any contact with Gol’tsman after leaving the USSR.¹⁰⁶ This just confirms what we already knew – that Trotsky’s and Sedov’s denials mean nothing. We repeat: this is not a “criticism” of Trotsky and Sedov. Clandestine work requires deception. It simply means that Trotsky’s and Sedov’s denials cannot be taken at face value.

On January 22 1937, the eve of the Piatakov-Radek trial, Sedov suddenly said to Zborowski: “Stalin must be killed!” and then immediately changed the subject. When Sedov said the same thing the next day Lilia Estrine, who was also present, told him:

¹⁰⁵ *Arbejderbladet* (Copenhagen) February 12, 1937, p. 5. My thanks to Sven-Eric Holmström for this citation.

¹⁰⁶ Sedov, *Red Book* Chapter 14. Sven-Eric Holmström discusses all this in detail in his pathbreaking article “New Evidence Concerning the ‘Hotel Bristol’ Question in the First Moscow Trial of 1936,” *Cultural Logic* 2008.

“Keep your mouth shut!” (*Derzhi iazyk za zubami*). A few weeks later Zborowski reported at greater length about Sedov’s approval of “terror” – in Russian, assassination – in the case of Stalin. Sedov continued in this vein for a time, suddenly breaking off only when Estrine approached.

At the same time Zborowski reported that Sedov expounded at greater length the need to kill Stalin, as “the whole regime in the USSR is held up by Stalin, and it would be enough to kill Stalin for it all to fall apart.” He went on to try to theoretically justify assassination (*terror*) as a tactic not only compatible with Marxism but at times essential to it. Sedov mused about the character necessary for an assassin – one “always ready to die,” “for whom death must be a daily reality.”¹⁰⁷

We do not know whether Sedov was reflecting his father’s view here, but it seems likely. Sedov had no political organization or goals independent of his father’s, whose primary and, we must assume, on very sensitive issues, sole political confidant he was.

(Lilia Estrine, later Mrs. David Dallin, was clearly a central figure in Sedov’s activities and therefore in Trotsky’s as well. The sharp rebuke to Sedov quoted here may suggest that she knew more about his activities than Zborowski did. Immediately after Sedov’s death on February 16 1938 Zborowski reported that Lilia Estrine knew of various archives, one of which she had hidden and about which Zborowski had never been told anything. Estrine-Dallin remained on good terms with Zborowski until 1955. At that time he told her of his activities as an NKVD agent, whereupon she broke with him entirely.¹⁰⁸ Estrine remained loyal to Trotsky all her life. Getty has proven that Trotsky’s secretary Jan van Heijenoort knew about Trotsky’s clandestine contacts but never revealed anything of what he knew. Lilia Estrine-Dallin did the same.)

By July 1937, a few months later, Sedov had become completely demoralized. According to Zborowski Sedov was now a drunkard, sometimes drinking all day, dragging Zborowski with him to bars at night. On his son’s birthday Sedov dragged Zborowski around to bars in Montparnasse from 6 to 11 p.m. rather than return home

¹⁰⁷ As Costello & Tsarev note on p. 283 and n. 45, p. 469, this report bears the handwritten date “11.II.1938.” But this does not appear to be in Zborowski’s handwriting. The remarks about “three weeks later” suggest that the date should be February 11, 1937, three weeks after Sedov’s similar remarks on January 22 and 23, 1937.

¹⁰⁸ See “Testimony of Mrs. Lilia Dallin, New York N.Y.” *Scope of Soviet Activity in the United States . . . March 2, 1956. Part 5.* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), 136-150.

where Estrine was waiting for him. Zborowski reported that when he and Sedov parted for the evening the latter visited a brothel before returning home. Sedov said that he had abandoned all faith in the Revolution in 1927 (Trotsky had been arrested in November 1927 and quickly expelled from the Bolshevik Party) and now “he did not believe in anything any longer.” He told Zborowski that women and gambling were his only pleasures. On one occasion he showed Zborowski “a solid roll of thousand-frank notes.” At roughly 25 francs to the U.S. dollar and in the middle of the Great Depression, this represented a large amount of money to be carrying around on one’s person. Zborowski reported that Sedov had enjoyed the casinos at Monte Carlo and that his “dream” was to return.

The chronological sequence of the alterations Zborowski noted in Sedov’s habits and attitude towards political work may be significant. When Zborowski met him Sedov was energetic and determined. His reaction to the First Moscow Trial of August 1936 was to immediately write the combative *Red Book* with which Zborowski helped him.

Sedov’s outburst and then longer discussion of assassination coincide with the Piatakov-Radek Trial of January 1937. This was allegedly the “parallel center,” the secondary leadership for Trotsky’s conspirators within the USSR. Khristian Rakovsky, whom Trotsky considered perhaps his oldest and most loyal follower, was also named at this trial (Rakovsky was a defendant in the Third Moscow Trial of March 1938).¹⁰⁹ If, as the evidence tends to support, these charges were more or less accurate the January 1937 trial would have been a huge blow, the destruction of the main leadership of Trotsky’s movement in the USSR. The stress occasioned by such a setback might explain Sedov’s outburst about the need to assassinate Stalin and his slip of the tongue to *Het Volk*. There is much evidence to suggest that in early 1937 Hitler was expecting a pro-German military *coup* in the USSR.¹¹⁰ Powerful military figures would have represented the best chance of overthrowing the Soviet regime and bringing Trotsky back.

¹⁰⁹ Rakovsky was named at the trial by defendant Drobnis on January 25, 1937. See *1937 Trial* p. 207. One authoritative source states that he was arrested on January 27, 1937. See the online biographical source at <<http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/rakovski.html>>. From K.A. Zalesski, *Imperiia Stalina. Biograficheskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Moscow: Veche, 2000). Evidently Drobnis had not named him during pretrial interrogations.

¹¹⁰ See Grover Furr, “New Light On Old Stories About Marshal Tukhachevskii: Some Documents Reconsidered.” *Russian History / Histoire Russe* 13, 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1986) 293-308; at

The “Tukhachevsky Affair” military men were tried and executed in June 1937. We have studied their confessions of collaboration with Trotsky above. It may have been the destruction of this last and best opportunity to return to the USSR that impelled Trotsky to send the telegram we studied at the beginning of this article. Shortly after this, in July 1937 Zborowski noted Sedov’s descent into drunkenness, gambling, and womanizing, and his declaration to Zborowski that all was lost. Such behavior is consistent with the hypothesis that Sedov’s behavior reflected the final collapse of his and his father’s hopes. Zborowski, who worked very closely with Sedov, had not reported any such behavior at any earlier date.¹¹¹

Deciding On The Basis of the Evidence

Given the evidence available today there is only one objective conclusion: our hypothesis has been confirmed. On the evidence we are forced to conclude that Leon Trotsky did collaborate with Germans and Japanese officials to help him return to power in the Soviet Union. As we have seen, there is no basis to disregard this or to regard the evidence we have reviewed in this paper as faked, obtained by torture, or is fraudulent in any other respect.

Deciding according to the evidence demands that we accept the permanently contingent nature of our conclusion. Any objective assessment of the evidence for this, or any other historical conclusion, must always be provisional. If and when new evidence is produced we must be prepared to adjust or even to abandon this conclusion if warranted by that new evidence. Historical study knows no such thing as “certainty.”

By the same token the evidence compels us to conclude that Trotsky did conspire with the Hitler and Japanese militarist regimes to help him overthrow the Soviet government and Communist Party leaders in order to regain power in the Soviet Union.

<<http://chss.montclair.edu/english/furr/tukh.html>>. Since this was published more compelling evidence has been discovered. We are preparing an article on this subject.

¹¹¹ Trotsky’s followers long believed that the NKVD caused Sedov’s death on February 16, 1938 in a Paris clinic where he had undergone an appendectomy. But Zborowski’s reports, confirmed by Costello and Tsarev and seconded by the memoirs of Pavel Sudoplatov who later oversaw the planning of Trotsky’s assassination, all suggest that the NKVD had nothing to do with Sedov’s death (Costello 283-4; Sudoplatov 95-6).

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