

**"TRUTH
IS ON
THE MARCH"**

By JOHN DEWEY

**REPORT AND REMARKS
ON THE
TROTSKY HEARINGS IN MEXICO**

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**American Committee for the
Defense of Leon Trotsky
22 East 17th St., N.Y.C.**

This report and speech, delivered at a mass meeting held under the auspices of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky at the Mecca Temple in New York City on May 9, 1937, is reprinted by permission of the Commission of Inquiry.

"TRUTH IS ON THE MARCH"

By John Dewey

As Chairman of the sub-Commission of Inquiry which went to Mexico City to procure the testimony of Mr. Trotsky regarding the charges on which he was convicted in the Moscow trials, I have the honor of presenting its report to the full Commission:

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REPORT TO THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE CHARGES MADE AGAINST LEON TROTSKY AT THE MOSCOW TRIALS

"Your sub-commission which was empowered to go to Mexico and take Leon Trotsky's testimony on the charges made against him in the Moscow trials, has completed its task and now submits its report.

"1. FUNCTION—Your sub-commission was in Mexico neither as prosecutor nor as judge. We did not regard Mr. Trotsky as defendant or accused. Nor did he so regard himself. Indeed, so to regard him was impossible, since in the Moscow trials he was never indicted—only convicted. Therefore we were in Mexico solely as an investigating body, to take Mr. Trotsky's testimony on the accusations made against him in the confessions of the Moscow defendants; to accept such documents as he had to submit in his own defense; and to report to the full commission on the basis of this evidence our decision whether or not Mr. Trotsky has a case warranting further investigation.

"2. SCOPE — The scope and content of our inquiry was necessarily determined by the proceedings in the Moscow trials. According to the prosecutor, Mr. Vyshinsky, the testimony was of two kinds: 'First there is the historical connection which confirms the theses of the indictment on the basis of the Trotskyites' past activity. We have also in mind the testimony of the accused which in itself represents enormous importance as proof.' Equally important with the testimony of the defendants are Mr. Vyshinsky's final pleas, in which he went beyond the accusations to rewrite the history of the Russian Revolution and Mr. Trotsky's part in it. He also edited to suit his purposes Mr. Trotsky's writings both before and since the Revolution. Impartiality in this case does not of course require the abandonment by the Commission of its knowledge of the simple facts of history.

"Accordingly our inquiry fell into three categories:

"a) The biography of Mr. Trotsky, with special reference to his relations with the defendants in the Moscow trials;

"b) Factual material relating to the decisive accusations against him;

"c) His theoretical and historical writings as they bear upon the credibility of the accusations, the testimony, the confessions, and the summations in the two Moscow trials.

"3. THE HEARINGS — Your sub-commission held thirteen hearings from April 10 to April 17, 1937—twelve of three hours each and a final one of five hours.

"In order not to embarrass the Mexican Government by requesting the added police protection which public hearings in Mexico City would have required, we held the sessions in the large hall of Diego Rivera's house at Coyoacan, where Mr. Trotsky lives. This arrangement limited the audience to about fifty people, almost half of whom were correspondents representing the Mexican and foreign press.

"4. THE EVIDENCE — In addition to Mr. Trotsky's oral testimony, the evidence introduced consisted of such material as the following:

"a) Documents purporting to refute the testimony given in the Moscow trials concerning his alleged conspiratorial contacts with the defendants. This material includes affidavits of witnesses concerning Mr. Trotsky's activities, his

movements, and his visitors at the periods when he was alleged to have had personal contact with Holtzman, Berman-Yurin, David, Romm, and Piatakov. It includes letters written to him at Prinkipo by friends in Berlin, advising him against engaging Olberg as a secretary. It includes a photostat of the passport of his son, Leon Sedov, purporting to show that Sedov could not have been in Copenhagen at the time when Holtzman was supposed to have been conducted by him to Mr. Trotsky; and that Sedov did go to Paris to meet his parents immediately after their sojourn in Copenhagen. It also includes the telegram sent by Natalia Sedov-Trotsky to the French Foreign Minister, M. Herriot, requesting that her son be granted a visa, and the telegram of the French Foreign Office to its Berlin representative, authorizing it. It includes a statement by the head of the airport at Oslo that no foreign airplane landed there during December, 1935, the month of Piatakov's alleged flight.

"b) Citations from Mr. Trotsky's writings bearing upon his attitude, past and present, towards the defendants in the Moscow trials; also on such subjects as individual terror, fascism, the proletarian revolution, the Soviet Union, the Soviet bureaucracy, and the Communist International. Citations of letters and articles revealing the nature of his relations with Lenin both before and after the October Revolution. Also passages from the works of Lenin, Stalin, Radek and others concerning Leon Trotsky's role in the revolution, the civil war, and the various party struggles during the period which followed.

"c) Letters and other writings showing the methods and the nature of Mr. Trotsky's communications with his sympathizers in the Soviet Union since his exile.

"Such, in brief, is the nature of the documentary evidence submitted to us. Mr. Trotsky also placed at our disposal his archives in Mexico, and offered to reveal to the Commission, whenever it shall so request, the location of his European archives and to give it access to them. Naturally, during our brief stay in Mexico we had time to examine very little of this material. We have therefore authorized one of our members, Otto Ruehle, who resides in Mexico City, to continue this work and to supply to the Commission certified copies or translations of such documents as exist there and as in his judgment or that of any other commissioner, are pertinent to our further inquiry. Your European sub-commissions will

have the task of examining Mr. Trotsky's European archives. Altogether Mr. Trotsky's archives consist of many thousand documents.

"5. MR. TROTSKY AS WITNESS — It is an established rule even in legally constituted courts that the bearing of the witness may be taken into account in weighing the value of his testimony. We are guided by the same principle in reporting our impression of Mr. Trotsky's attitude and bearing. Throughout the hearings he seemed eager to cooperate with the Commission in its efforts to ascertain the truth about all phases of his life and his political and literary activity. He answered readily and with every appearance of helpfulness and candor all questions put to him by the counsel for the sub-commission and by its members.

"6. THE CASE OF MR. BEALS — Your sub-commission reports with regret the resignation before the hearings were concluded, of one of its members, Mr. Carleton Beals. Toward the close of the hearing on the afternoon of April 16, Mr. Beals put to Mr. Trotsky a provocative question based on alleged information which the Commission could not check and place on the record. After the hearing our counsel, Mr. John Finerty, advised the Commission that questions based on private information were highly improper, would be sufficient cause for mistrial in any ordinary court; and that he could not continue as counsel if they were to be permitted in future. Mr. Beals then angrily declared that either he or Mr. Finerty must leave the Commission. Still, he promised to attend a conference that evening to discuss the matter. But although we waited for him until midnight he did not come. The next morning, before the opening of the session, Mrs. Beals brought us his resignation, in which he charged that the Commission was not conducting a serious inquiry. He also made the astonishing statement that the session had been completed, although the cross-examination by the commissioners was only half finished and he had himself stated that he had "hundreds more questions" to ask. In view of the fact that Mr. Beals later gave to the press a series of statements which were widely published and in which he impugned the integrity of the other commissioners and made false accusations against us, we think it necessary to put before you the following facts:

"a) From the first Mr. Beals held himself almost completely aloof from the Commission. Shortly after the hearings opened he moved from his hotel, and evaded our request for his new address. He was constantly with people who were known to be against the purposes of the Commission, and at no time gave his full attention to its work, as did the rest of us. We made every effort to secure his full cooperation. Obviously we failed.

"b) At no time before his resignation did Mr. Beals intimate to the other members of the sub-commission that he was dissatisfied with the attitude of any one of us or with the conduct of the hearings. As a member of the Commission he was under obligation to express frankly and honestly in private conference any dissatisfaction he may have felt instead of springing it in public without warning. In this obligation he failed.

"c) At no time either during the hearings or in our private conferences did any commissioner ever object to any question put to the witness by Mr. Beals. Even the improper question which precipitated Mr. Beals' resignation still remains in the record.

"Much as we regret the resignation of Mr. Beals, it does not disturb us. The Commission is investigating a great historic controversy. Powerful interests are engaged in attempting to disrupt it and sabotage its work. More efforts of this kind may be expected.

"7. RECOMMENDATIONS — Your sub-commission submits the verbatim report of its proceedings, together with the documents submitted in evidence. This record convinces us that Mr. Trotsky has established a case amply warranting further investigation. Therefore we recommend that the work of this commission proceed to its conclusion."

JOHN DEWEY, *Chairman*
OTTO RUEHLE
BENJAMIN STOLBERG
SUZANNE LAFOLLETTE, *Secretary*

REMARKS BY JOHN DEWEY

The report just read is the preliminary report of the Preliminary Commission. The work of investigation is only begun. Various lines of inquiry have been opened which must be pursued until all available facts are disclosed. Final judgment must be reserved until the different lines of investigation have been carried through to the end. (1) The large number of affidavits about matters of fact which are in our possession must be checked at their source. (2) The public record of Trotsky found in his extensive list of writings and speeches must be further examined in its relation to the charges made against him; also the examination of his correspondence and archives which is already begun must be continued. (3) The officially published reports of the Moscow trials must be examined even more minutely than they have been.

But as the preliminary report which I have read declares, the sub-commission unhesitatingly affirms that the results already obtained fully justify continuation of the investigation. In all three of the lines mentioned, a case has been made out which amply justifies the Commission in continuing its work.

The only three matters of fact upon which there was a show of independent objective evidence have been subjected to grave doubt as Mr. Finerty has just clearly proved. The public record of Trotsky extending over a long period of years stands in striking contrast to the charges upon which he was convicted of plotting terrorism, assassination, industrial sabotage, wholesale wrecking, and selling out the U.S.S.R. to Hitler, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan. The official reports of the Moscow trials show the absence of cross-examination upon every vital point as well as many gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions.

We do not make these statements in order to declare the case closed but in order to give the reasons for going on with our investigation. We do not ask you to take our word on any

one of these points. Not only will our findings be published, but also the full verbatim report of the proceedings together with full documentary reproductions and references. All fair-minded persons will be in a position to judge for themselves.

Since the Preliminary Commission has never claimed to act as judge or jury but only as an investigating body, I cannot refrain from asking why such vigorous and prolonged efforts were made to prevent the formation of the Committee having for its purpose the securing of political asylum for Trotsky and the hearing of what he had to present in reference to the charges upon which he was convicted in Moscow without a hearing. After this Committee was formed, why were such strong efforts made to break it up? Why was the formation of a Commission of Inquiry so strenuously opposed? Why were not those who were most sure of Trotsky's guilt the first to urge its formation? Why, after the Commission had been formed, were determined efforts made, even in advance, to discredit its work by attacking the integrity of its members? Why did those who were committed to believe in the guilt of Trotsky decline to attend the meetings to which they were invited with full rights of cross-examination? Why did they, from Ambassador Troyanovsky down, do their best to create the impression that the hearings were a farce? When did it become a farce in the United States to give a hearing to a man who had been convicted without a hearing?

In short, why was there a systematic and organized effort made to prevent the investigation which is now successfully taking place? What fears animated those who tried to prevent it and who, when they were not successful, are still doing all they can to discredit the inquiry? What are they afraid of?

It is not for us who speak to you this evening to answer these questions. This is the business of those who have conducted and who are still conducting a campaign of hostile misrepresentation. It is they, not we, who are on trial before the civilized world, for everyone puts himself on the defensive who tries to prevent and obstruct free inquiry, declaring that the case is closed when only one side has been presented. It would be impossible to find a grosser exhibition of colossal nerve than is seen in the impudent proclamation that only those who are convinced of Trotsky's guilt are impartial and that everyone is partial who declines to pronounce judgment until both sides have been heard.

There are many liberals, free from partisan commitments, who are supporting the Defense Committee and the Commission of Inquiry. There are, however, other liberals who have been, to say the least, luke-warm about the inquiry. They take the stand that in any case the U.S.S.R. is the one workers' republic in the whole world; the one successful attempt of all history to build a Socialist society. Even though not themselves Communist, they want the experiment which is going on in Russia to have a fair chance. They do not want its course made harder than it is. I can understand this attitude. It has been and is my own. But there is something more than this at work to move genuine liberals to become indifferent and even opposed to an inquiry into the truth of the charges upon which Trotsky was convicted.

As far as I can make out, the reason they take the attitude which they have assumed is that they believe that Trotsky's theories and policies are mistaken and that, in contrast, those which are controlling the U.S.S.R. are correct. Many of the liberals to whom I am referring are honest in this attitude. Hence they deserve a consideration which cannot be claimed by those blind and bitter partisans who stoop to any means to prevent knowledge of the truth from being brought to light. Nevertheless, while these persons are honest in their intentions, they suffer from the intellectual and moral confusion that is the great weakness of professed liberals. For Trotsky was not convicted upon charges of theoretical and political opposition to the regime which exists in the Soviet Union. He was convicted upon certain definite charges whose truth or falsity is a matter of objective fact.

Leon Trotsky's record of opposition to the present rulers of the Soviet Union is public, beyond dispute. For a long series of years, he has been an open and often bitter foe of the present regime, claiming that it is a bureaucracy engaged in betraying the revolution of 1917. His position on this point is displayed in hundreds of articles and scores of books and pamphlets. The correctness or incorrectness of his position in this respect is in no way the matter at issue for it is not that upon which he was convicted. He was convicted, in his absence, upon charges of conspiring to effect the assassination of all the leaders of the Communist Party and the Government of the Soviet Union; of plotting with the enemies of the country for betraying it to them both before and during a projected war; of planning to dismember the Soviet Union by

making over to Germany and Japan important territories, huge concessions of mines, forests and trade privileges. He was convicted of doing all of these things in order, according to the official records, to destroy socialism and restore capitalism and all for the contemptible object that he and his followers might come to political power.

These are the charges upon which Leon Trotsky was convicted. These are the matters upon which he demanded his hearing. These are the matters the Commission of Inquiry has been investigating and is going to investigate until the end.

In the cases of Tom Mooney in San Francisco and Sacco-Vanzetti in Boston, we got used to hearing reactionaries say that these men were dangerous nuisances anyway, so that it was better to put them out of the way whether or not they were guilty of the things for which they were tried. I never thought I would live to see the day when professed liberals would resort to a similar argument. I am confident that it is not too late to appeal to some, at least, of these liberals, to join the hundreds of other liberals in the inquiry which is attempting to get at facts fairly and squarely. To hold Trotsky guilty of the specific charges upon which he was convicted because of his well-known opposition to the present rulers of the U.S.S.R. is not fair or square. It is even less so because his public record is that of unswerving, constant appeal for support of the Socialist revolution and the Socialist U.S.S.R. When confusion of two entirely different matters is manifested by professed liberals, it marks an intellectual shirking that is close to intellectual dishonesty. More than that, it is treachery to the very cause of liberalism. For if liberalism means anything, it means complete and courageous devotion to freedom of inquiry.

Now I want to digress from my written speech to mention a recent article on the Radek-Piatakov trials which appeared in "The New Republic" as a book review by one of its editors. Referring to the testimony of Radek and Piatakov, Malcom Cowley said: "On these points, I think we might suspend our judgment"; and then he proceeded to accept as proved the guilt of other defendants. But Radek himself said at the trials: "All the testimony of the other accused rests upon our testimony" (his and Piatakov's). This statement is published in the official verbatim report. That is to say: the guilt of the other defendants rests upon the testimony of the two Mr. Cowley suspends judgment upon!

The intellectual level of American liberalism has fallen pretty low if it can accept this as an example of logical reasoning. Has it fallen so low? I don't think it has.

The Commission of Inquiry, I repeat, is not trying to discover who is right and who is wrong in their political ideas and policies, the "Trotskyites" or their opponents. It is engaged in trying to get at the truth as to the specific charges upon which Trotsky was convicted in the Moscow trials. This work is one of evidence and objective fact, not of weighing theories against each other. Either Leon Trotsky is guilty of plotting wholesale assassination, systematic wreckage with destruction of life and property; of treason of the basest sort in conspiring with political and economic enemies of the U.S.S.R. in order to destroy Socialism; or he is innocent. If he is guilty, no condemnation can be too severe. If he is innocent, there is no way in which the existing regime in Soviet Russia can be acquitted of deliberate, systematic persecution and falsification. These are unpleasant alternatives for those to face who are sympathetic with the efforts to build a Socialist State in Russia. The easier and lazier course is to avoid facing the alternatives. But unwillingness to face the unpleasant is the standing weakness of liberals. They are only too likely to be brave when affairs are going smoothly and then to shirk when unpleasant conditions demand decision and action. I cannot believe that a single genuine liberal would, if he once faced the alternatives, hold that persecution and falsification are a sound basis upon which to build an enduring Socialist society.

A little over two weeks ago, when the investigation in Mexico was only just concluded, when the sub-commission had made no report, Ambassador Troyanovsky met the National Press Club in Washington. He informed the newspapermen that the hearings in Mexico were a "flop," that the members of the Commission were prejudiced in favor of Trotsky and had only one aim: "to rehabilitate him." I might inquire if the Ambassador thought our hearings were a put-up job, why such pressure was brought to bear upon members of the Defense Committee and of the Commission of Inquiry to induce them to resign? Perhaps, however, it is more to the point that he continued the effort to confuse and mislead public opinion by quoting from Trotsky a statement of the latter's vigorous opposition to the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union—a passage that could be multiplied many times over

from Mr. Trotsky's public statements. I am not surprised that Ambassador Troyanovsky should thus attempt to becloud the issue. It seems to be part of his official job. I am surprised when liberals permit their eyes to be blinded by the smoke-screens so deliberately emitted.

Toward the close of his speech, Ambassador Troyanovsky, who by the way, was invited along with the Communist Party of the U. S., to send a representative to the hearings in Mexico City, uttered the following words: "I wish all of you not to be too cautious and too skeptical in recognition of the contemporary situation." Since the "contemporary situation" to which he devoted his speech was the case of Mr. Trotsky he thereby virtually invited the American public to be incautious and credulous in accepting his and Moscow's version of events. It is natural that Ambassador Troyanovsky should feel that way about the attitude he would like the American public to take. This is his great and perhaps his only hope. I am rather surprised that he should expose his hand so openly. For while we are not all from Missouri, most American citizens are close enough to its border to want to be shown when elementary human decency, justice and historic truth are at stake. We are here tonight to state that we propose to be just as "cautious and skeptical" in obtaining and weighing evidence as all searchers and fighters for truth have the right to expect and demand us to be.

We, members of the Defense Committee and of the Inquiry alike, do not suppose for a moment that we are alone in holding that friendship for truth comes before friendship for individuals and factions. We do not for a moment imagine that we possess a monopoly of will for truth. Consequently we feel confident that, as the investigation continues and more and more truth comes to light, countless others will be inspired to join actively in its pursuit. We are committed to one end and one end only: discovery of the truth as far as that is humanly possible. Lines are being drawn between devotion to justice and adherence to a faction, between fair play and a love of darkness that is reactionary in effect no matter what banner it flaunts.

It is in the name of justice and truth as the end that we ask for your support. We go on in confidence that we shall have it. As Zola said in the Dreyfus case: "Truth is on the march and nothing will stop it."

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