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# Trotsky Assassinated Again

Monday 1 August 2011, by [WEISSMAN Susan](#) (Date first published: 1 July 1996).

IN THE MOTHER of all factional struggles within the Soviet elite, during the “glasnost” of the 1980s, none other than Boris Yeltsin recruited the memory of Leon Trotsky in his anti-privilege campaign against corrupt party apparatchiks. Gorbachev, the wiser, neutralized Trotsky and undercut the left by relegating the Old Man to the museum of the revolution, while allowing it to be understood that Trotsky was an “administrator” (code word for Stalinist), “super-industrialist” (read: super-Stalinist).

Was it too much to hope that a new biography from within the former Soviet Union might once and for all sweep away the dunghill of slander that surrounded Trotsky’s name? Apparently so.

General Dmitri Antonovich Volkogonov, given sole access to the KGB (Soviet secret police) archive, produced three successive biographies on Stalin, Lenin and Trotsky — marking also his own political journey from Stalinist to Yeltsinist (a continuity noted by Sam Farber in the accompanying review essay).\*

In Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary Volkogonov to his credit dispels the persistent myth that Trotsky opposed the revolution of 1917 along with Stalin, a fabrication Volkogonov himself had previously affirmed. He also admits that the Moscow Trials were rigged, that the charges were concocted, and that the whole effort was directed against Trotsky.

Yet Volkogonov places the blame for the Stalin purges on Trotsky himself! It’s Trotsky’s fault Stalin killed tens of millions, because Trotsky wrote *The Revolution Betrayed*, and even before its publication Stalin had a copy of the draft manuscript (which Victor Serge was to translate) thanks to the efficacious agent Marc Zborowsky.

Volkogonov concludes that the manuscript convinced Stalin that Trotsky represented a real danger, inflicting ideological blows, and Stalin therefore had “to liquidate the potential soil for Trotskyism in the country.” (371)

Adding insult to injury, Volkogonov maintains that it was Trotsky’s own doing that allowed Stalin to come to power, and pushed Stalin toward “revolutionary tempos.” (486) All this despite the fact that Stalin’s mass murders were in pursuit of “socialism in one country,” exactly the opposite of Trotsky’s “utopian” concept of world revolution.

Volkogonov served his rulers from Brezhnev to Yeltsin, in the words of Felix Kreisel, as a court historian, “a bejewelled courtier of the ruling elite who specializes in serving up the historical myths required and requested by his masters.” (“Comments on Volkogonov Upon his Death,” H-Net Russian History, 7 December 1995)

Nevertheless, I break ranks with other angry reviewers and recommend reading Volkogonov’s book as an important first from within the Soviet elite, using inaccessible intelligence sources, with this proviso: Be certain that you have sufficient stomach and stamina.

**Susan Weissman**

\* The main attraction and principal source for Volkogonov's Trotsky biography, the secret KGB archive, largely confirms that Isaac Deutscher and Pierre Broue, Trotsky's biographers, got the story mostly right without the help of the Soviet secret police archive. It is disappointing that the archives shed no new light on the assassination of Trotsky's son Leon Sedov. In discussing Trotsky's assassination Volkogonov relies too heavily on either the KVD archive or such dubious sources as the Healyite book "The Gelfand Case." There are fascinating tidbits, such as purported correspondence between Victor Serge and Leon Sedov in which Serge commented that "The Revolution Betrayed" is of poor literary quality, but the authenticity of this is unconfirmed.

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\* From Against the Current (ATC) 63, July-August 1996.