

# SIQUEIROS

## His Life and Works

By PHILIP STEIN

### Chapter 13 Leon Trotsky

I have never denied and I don't deny now that, objectively, my participation in the assault on the house of Trotsky on May 24, 1940, was subject to the authority of the law, that it constituted a transgression of the law and for this transgression I spent long periods in jail, more than three years in exile, the loss of large sums deposited for bail, and an offensive defamation of character on an international scale.<sup>1</sup>

At about the time Siqueiros arrived in Spain, Trotsky arrived in Mexico. President Cárdenas, through the intervention of Frida Kahlo and her husband, Diego Rivera, had granted Trotsky political asylum when he was being pressured to leave Norway and found it difficult to find another haven. A friendly reception awaited him when his ship docked at Tampico on January 9, 1937; Frida Kahlo and a few North-American Trotskyites were on hand to welcome him, and then, escorted by Kahlo, he travelled to Mexico City on the presidential train that the government had provided in his honor. At a small stop just outside the city the train came to a halt and Diego Rivera joined the escort.

Rivera brought Trotsky to his "Blue House" in Coyoacan, on the southern outskirts of Mexico City, where he remained for two years before moving to the ill-fated house on Calle Viena in the same suburb. It was in the Blue House that Trotsky wrote the Draft Program for the Fourth International. On September 3, 1938, 21 delegates, representing the small number of Trotsky followers around the world, met in France and adopted that program. The Blue House in Coyoacan thus became the seat of the Fourth International.<sup>2</sup>

Cárdenas was an astute and politically liberal politician, but he exhibited a certain naiveté concerning the storms swirling around Trotsky; not only had he granted him political asylum, but he made him a guest of the country. For this particular guest the government

had to provide around the clock police protection. Despite Trotsky's warm reception from the government, the Riveras and North American followers, his presence was actively opposed by the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) led by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, and the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM).<sup>3</sup>

When Trotsky's quest for refuge ended in Mexico, shock waves reverberated through the fighting forces in Spain, with the Mexican volunteers feeling their greatest impact. Mexico had enjoyed the highest esteem in Spain for its unqualified support of the Loyalist cause, but it had now shaken the confidence of the powerful Communist forces fighting the war. The Trotskyites' Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) had been notoriously unreliable, both in bearing their share of the fighting and supporting the Popular Front. In May 1937, five months after Trotsky arrived in Mexico, the POUM, conspiring with the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI), attempted a counter-revolutionary coup against the government of Spain in the midst of the desperate struggle. Showing little interest in lighting the fascists, the forces of the Anarcho-Trotskyite alliance abandoned their positions at the front and moved their men and arms back to Barcelona, knifing the government in the back.

Willing to resort to any method that would eliminate the influence of the Communists, they were not above collaborating with the fascist agents operating within Barcelona. A message sent to Hitler on May 11, 1937, by the German ambassador to Spain told how Franco's agents operating in Barcelona had collaborated with the Anarcho-Trotskyite alliance and brought about the street fighting that cost the Spanish people 860 dead and 2,600 wounded (Siqueiros's figures), and the disruption of the government's war effort, before the Trotskyites were crushed.<sup>4</sup> All of this had rebounded especially hard on the Mexican volunteers, for Trotsky – now sheltered in Mexico – was considered the mastermind behind the anarchists' activities. Siqueiros and his compatriots became butts for abusive remarks. At Communist meetings and rallies for the support of the war effort, aid from Mexico was ignored, while other countries providing less were lauded. These events in May in Barcelona gave Siqueiros great concern, and he began to discuss the problem of Trotsky in Mexico with the Mexicans in Spain.

As Siqueiros understood it, Trotsky was enjoying the protection of the Mexican government and under that protection was directing operations against the Soviet Union and its aid to the Spanish

Republic. Siqueiros and a handful of the Mexican volunteers, toughened by the fighting they were experiencing, saw no reason not to agree that – at any cost – the "headquarters" of Trotsky in Mexico would have to be shut down. It was a pledge they made to everyone in Spain, and a steady stream of cables began to reach Cárdenas from Spain, protesting Trotsky's presence in Mexico.

Once Siqueiros was back home, his thoughts were on whether it was in his power to dislodge Trotsky from Mexico. Cárdenas refused to discuss the matter with him, and the innumerable telegrams of protest were to no avail.

But, with the war in Spain now ended for Siqueiros, he was filled with an overflowing desire to paint. He had to prepare an exhibition of new works for the Matisse Gallery and finish painting the mural for the electricians' union, so he laid aside any pressing thoughts he might have had about the Trotsky "problem."

A year passed since Siqueiros's return from Spain, and Trotsky's house was still guarded by a squad of Mexican police outside: inside, Trotsky was surrounded by heavily armed foreign bodyguards, and continued to issue directives to his followers.

In April 1940, when the electricians' union mural was nearing completion, Siqueiros, unknown to the PCM, began planning an action against Trotsky, sharing the secret with two members of the mural team. It was at this time that he made a quick trip to Hostotipaquillo, a village in the mining region of Jalisco, where he recruited two miners of old acquaintance to join in his plans. He would deliberately create an uproar that would force Cárdenas to consider the expulsion of Trotsky from Mexico.

With Hitler's army poised on the Russian border ready to strike, Siqueiros felt the need to mount an act of protest. To stop Trotsky from using Mexican soil as a base for his attacks on the Soviet Union would be a way of doing his bit to help save the first land of socialism, of keeping the promise he had made in Spain after the Trotskyite treachery in Barcelona.<sup>5</sup>

Siqueiros continued to appeal to Cárdenas to resolve the problem in a peaceful manner, but Cárdenas refused to discuss the matter with his old friend, instead presenting each Mexican veteran of the Spanish War with a 500-peso award for their sacrifice in Spain. Siqueiros later recalled:

Naturally my 500 pesos served more than ever to over-

whelm General Cárdenas with telegrams, now not asking but in fact summoning him to close what I called "the counterrevolutionary headquarters of Trotsky in Mexico," but without the slightest success in this respect.<sup>6</sup>

Now his assault on the headquarters of the Fourth International would attempt to force shutting it down and thus putting an end to Trotsky's base in Mexico. The object of the attack was threefold: to cause the greatest commotion by firing their guns; to show that the Mexican government could not guarantee Trotsky's safety in Mexico; and to abscond with certain documents from the archives.

We knew the violent death of Trotsky or any of his bodyguards would not impede the development of Trotskyism as an international current, but rather would be counterproductive, since its practice had already been established with the slogan, "against Stalin all alliances and measures are good." So from the beginning it was agreed to avoid all bloodshed and if we were not successful in carrying off the documents, above all, documentary proof about the amounts he and his representatives received from the ultra-reactionary newspapers of the United States, especially the Hearst chain, the scandal that our act would produce would constitute an element of great force in obliging the government of Cárdenas to eliminate Trotsky's headquarters in Mexico.<sup>7</sup>

Siqueiros believed this would work because Cárdenas was moving toward greater support of socialism and the Soviet Union in its time of trial.

To maintain secrecy, Siqueiros divided his small army of 25 into small groups, each unknown to the other. Near midnight on May 23, Siqueiros met with the group he would lead in an apartment on Calle de Cuba in the downtown area of Mexico City, while elsewhere at various locations the others were meeting. Siqueiros had not until that night revealed the true nature of their mission. They had been told that their job was to raid an Almazanista center to capture arms. (Juan Andrew Almazán was the reactionary presidential candidate in the approaching elections. Incidentally, his new publicity director was Diego Rivera. Idiosyncratic Rivera had broken with Trotsky, and had joined the Almazán campaign.)

At the midnight meeting on Calle de Cuba the conspirators

donned their raiding costumes. Antonio Pujol was dressed as an army lieutenant; Nestor Sánchez Hernández and two others were attired in borrowed police uniforms. Siqueiros had left to issue the final instructions to the other groups; when he returned at 2 a.m., now May 24th, he was dressed as an army major, wearing eyeglasses and a false mustache. The last-minute instructions were that great care was to be taken in overpowering the police so as not to alert those inside the house. Once the police guard had been neutralized, gaining admittance through the powerfully locked entrance would be no problem. For, as Siqueiros explained while they were driving, one of Trotsky's guards had been "bought off."<sup>8</sup>

When the car reached Coyoacán in the early morning hours, 15 minutes from the center of the city, it was parked on the next street parallel to Calle Viena. Siqueiros checked his watch, then gave the order to proceed. As they rounded the corner they saw two policemen guarding the big doors of the Trotsky house. A short distance away was the corner guardhouse, where three policemen were asleep. It was shortly before 4 a.m. As Siqueiros and his lead team moved forward, the other groups appeared out of the darkness but remained out of sight of the police.

Three figures in uniform approached the police standing guard, who at first thought that superiors were making the rounds, checking up. "Lieutenant" Pujol, accompanied by two of his "police," greeted the guards at the entrance and inquired as to how things were going. As he waited for a response Pujol watched their eyes catching sight of two figures entering the guardhouse. It was then that he ordered the dumbfounded guards to raise their hands. "Major" Siqueiros, inside the guardhouse, had awakened the three policemen and ordered them to dress. The five policemen were then tied up, and with a "*Viva Almazán, muchachos!*" to add confusion, Siqueiros left them guarded by one attacker.<sup>9</sup>

Trotsky's house was opened from the inside, and the raiders moved in and took control. The room containing the archive was locked and left untouched, while a continuous round of shots was fired creating bedlam. Trotsky lay hidden under his bed shielded by his wife, Natalya. It was over in a matter of minutes. Some two hundred shots were fired, and the attackers raced off in Trotsky's two autos. Robert Sheldon Harte, Trotsky's guard on duty, was driving one.

This act of political violence left a path strewn with adverse

effects that for Siqueiros, not to mention the others, resulted in months of hiding, jail, and years of exile. The documents that Siqueiros had hoped to find had not been searched for in the confusion, and Trotsky was not expelled from Mexico for being the source of troublesome political controversy. Three months later, in an attack unrelated to Siqueiros and his small army, Trotsky was brutally murdered.

For a little more than a week after the raid, Siqueiros was able to continue painting. However, he was not completely unnoticed, for Trotsky himself suggested Siqueiros's name in a statement he gave to the police seven days after the assault.<sup>10</sup> The newspapers mentioned Diego Rivera's name because of his break with Trotsky some thirteen months earlier and his support for Almazán. Fearful of being dragged into the case, Rivera hurriedly packed his bags and left for New York.

But by a crazy twist of fate, General Leandro A. Sánchez Salazar, chief of the Secret Service of the Mexican police and in charge of solving the Trotsky case, happened to be standing at a bar having a whiskey within earshot of some streetcar conductors who were imbibing beer laced with tequila. He heard them proclaim that police were involved in the Trotsky attack, for had not their friend, a police officer they named, lent out three police uniforms to an unnamed person just prior to the raid?<sup>11</sup>

That was it; the case was as good as solved. With little trouble, the police officer responsible for the loan of the uniforms was tracked down, and one by one the conspirators were brought in. Nestor Sánchez Hernández, 23, revealed all the details and named Siqueiros as the leader. When Luis Mateo Martínez, a 26-year-old rural schoolteacher and Communist Party member, was arrested, the word went out that a break in the case was near, and Siqueiros went into hiding.

One month after the attack, Robert Sheldon Harte's body was discovered buried in the dirt floor of a kitchen in a small farmhouse near Coyoacán. The house had been used by the raiders, but Harte's true allegiance and death have never been cleared up.

Siqueiros's decision to flee was a desperate one. The notoriety of remaining at large, he thought, would be to his advantage. But there was no escape from the immediate threat to his freedom. Although eventually the court would acquit him of the charges of homicide, attempted homicide, use of firearms, criminal conspiracy and usurpation of official functions, the price he would pay for his

political adventurism was a dear one.

On June 23 the Communist Party issued an official declaration which stated in part:

With the object of avoiding confusion and of making clear its own political attitude, the Mexican Communist Party hereby states most categorically that not one of the participants in said attack is a member of that Party; that all of them are uncontrollable elements and provocateurs; that an act such as that carried out at Trotsky's house is entirely contrary to the genuine ideas of the workers' battle and has nothing to do with us.<sup>12</sup>

The FBI, in its files, commented:

Dionisio Encina, President of the Communist Party of Mexico, stated that the CP had no part in the attack on Trotsky in which Siqueiros appeared to be guilty, and further, Siqueiros had never represented the CP of Mexico."

The U.S. government, through its various agencies – Military Intelligence, the State Department, the FBI (whose file on Siqueiros is more than 50,000 pages), the Immigration Service, the CIA, and Navy Intelligence – had through most of Siqueiros's life been surveilling his every move, and with the Trotsky affair the flow of information about him multiplied considerably. Their documents indicate that information was gathered from an army of volunteer informers, from mail openings, wiretaps and raids on organization files, and from the print media. The FBI files contain 163 variations of the name José David Alfaro Siqueiros. Three months after the Trotsky attack, a U.S. State Department document marked "secret" curiously labeled Siqueiros "a German agent in Mexico."<sup>14</sup> U.S. Army Intelligence sent a copy of this report to the FBI:

On March 5, 1939, Alfaro Siqueiros was the speaker at a meeting held by the Syndicate of Teachers in the Palace of Fine Arts for the returned Mexicans who had volunteered in Spain. Siqueiros was said to be one of the oldest communists in Mexico, one of the founders of the "Machete," CP newspaper, and one of the first Mexicans to volunteer to fight in Spain. On April 5, 1939, Siqueiros and other CP leaders were arrested and ordered imprisoned for stoning the offices of the

newspapers "Excelsior" and "El Universal," following the expulsion of Spanish leaders. In October 1940, Siqueiros was arrested for complicity in the assault upon the house of Trotsky and the murder of Robert Sheldon Harte, released on bond April 28, 1941, and he departed that date for Havana, Cuba. On approximately June 16, 1941, Siqueiros was admitted to Chile."

Army Intelligence could tell the FBI no more than the world already knew. One informer, "name deleted," advised the FBI "that in 1940 he was introduced to Louis (sic) Arenal Bastor and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who were implicated in the first attack on Trotsky in Mexico in May 1940. These introductions were made under fictitious names by (name deleted).<sup>16</sup>

The files of the FBI and other U.S. agencies were being stuffed with every scrap of information and report of Siqueiros's activities at this time. Informers, their names protected, supplied innocuous information that the U.S. government avidly collected. "Deleted names" reported to the FBI:

Mexican police were watching the west coast port of Manzanillo for the purpose of intercepting David Alfaro Siqueiros, Stalinist agent charged with having been one of the gunmen in the Trotsky affair... Dependable persons who were acquainted with Siqueiros reported his presence in New York.<sup>17</sup>

The jumble of information the FBI collected noted the "fact" that Siqueiros was "in the Red Army in Spain in 1937," and included irrelevant information about him in FBI file 65-29162, captioned "Jacques Marnard Van Dendreschd" (their rendering of the name of Trotsky's real assassin). The U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence gathered confused information on the subject. "Name deleted" reported that Siqueiros was "a leading PCM member and a leader of the 'Vigilante Committee' which assassinated Leon Trotsky."<sup>18</sup>

U.S. Army Intelligence collected the information that "one Arenal, a student and associate of Siqueiros, and Siqueiros were 'fanatic Stalin communists' and were involved in above incident [the assault of Trotsky's house] as well as in Trotsky's murder in August, 1941" [sic].<sup>19</sup> Also in the FBI file was the false information that it was Luis Arenal "to whom Trotsky's death had been attributed."



In the search for Siqueiros, the U.S. State Department included his name on its lists of "Persons Suspected of Belligerent, Subversive, or Other Activities Inimical to the Interests of the United States," and disseminated the information that "Alfaro Siqueiros of Mexico City obtained two passports, one under the name of Alfonso Rojax and one under the name of Miguel González. He stated he was born in Guadalajara. It was known that he was a communist and a saboteur."<sup>20</sup>

### **Hostotipaquillo**

After searching Cuernavaca, less than an hour's drive south of Coyoacán. General Sánchez Salazar turned his attention to Guadalajara, far to the northwest. He had received reports that Angélica, carrying two valises, had boarded a train in Mexico City bound for Guadalajara. Agents he dispatched to Guadalajara verified the fact that on Thursday, June 2, ten days after the assault against Trotsky, Siqueiros had passed through Guadalajara on his way to Hostotipaquillo, to the north and west.

Recessed in the foothills of the western slope of the Sierra Madres, Hostotipaquillo was surrounded by the mines of the state of Jalisco and was all too familiar to Siqueiros. General Salazar knew he would have a difficult time, for Siqueiros would be hidden and protected by the union miners he had organized 15 years earlier. His arrival in Hosto – as the townspeople called it – was known to only three persons: the mayor, the municipal secretary, and the chief of the armed Agrarian Guard. Later an old miner shared in the secret.

Angélica left her young daughter in her mother's care and joined Siqueiros. Both remained hidden, even from the inhabitants who held him in high esteem.

They wore simple peasant clothes, and Siqueiros grew a long drooping mustache, cut his long curly hair short and let the sun burn his complexion dark. Through the months they lived in two different homes: that of the municipal secretary and – away from town – in an old miner's house. In the mountains there were several safe sleeping spots, and the two would often ride there on horses, where Siqueiros would paint landscapes in settings which under less sorry conditions would have been idyllic. Angélica, attired in her peasant dress, slipped undetected into Mexico City several times. She would cautiously visit her daughter, but her more important mission was to post articles written by Siqueiros, usually critical of the government,

to newspapers and magazines. General Salazar was aware that the Mexico City postmarks were to throw him off the trail and was not impressed.

When the murder of Trotsky took place on August 20, Salazar dropped this hot pursuit of Siqueiros, who had already been in hiding for three months. But once the murder case was closed, Salazar doggedly resumed the search that was beginning to obsess him. On September 25 he left for Guadalajara, vowing not to return until Siqueiros was captured.<sup>21</sup> One of Salazar's agents, a good Catholic, feigned a need for confession and tricked the local priest into leaking to him the information that Siqueiros was indeed in the vicinity, that he would sometimes sleep in the mayor's house and other times at the municipal secretary's.<sup>22</sup> Salazar was sure that he was on the right trail when Chucho, Siqueiros's brother, dressed as a woman, was followed to Hosto. It did not take long for word to reach Siqueiros that Hosto was crawling with Mexico City secret police. Angélica was on one of her trips to the capital, and Siqueiros faded into the mountains.

Salazar, in disguise and acting the role of a politician from Mexico City, went to see the mayor, who saw through his disguise immediately and told him so. The mayor further tantalized the general by telling him that yes, he did see Siqueiros, that he was ill, and that he went into the mountains where it was good for his health.<sup>23</sup>

After thirteen days in Hosto, Salazar was frustrated to the point of exasperation. He was on the verge of admitting failure and requested permission to return. But one of his agents brought in a sick miner from Cinco Minas, a mining village not far from Hosto. Cristóbal Rodríguez Castillo had years before worked with Siqueiros, organizing the miners' union. Now suffering from silicosis and with a large family to care for, he was easy prey and fell victim to Salazar's devious twist of the screw. Salazar told him:

I can't conceive that you think more of your friendship for Siqueiros than of your liberty, and above all, of the well-being of your family. I have in my possession statements and undeniable proof that you have given protection to the painter who you know is a fugitive. If you refuse to tell me what you know about the whereabouts of Siqueiros, I am very sorry, I shall have to bring you to Mexico City. On you depends your future luck.<sup>24</sup>

Cristóbal Rodríguez Castillo told General Salazar a long story

about how he had helped Siqueiros recruit miners for the Trotsky raid and about all the artist's movements from the time he arrived in Hosto four months earlier. It was midnight when Rodriguez Castillo fell silent. But the last detail for which Salazar had been waiting patiently had not been divulged: Where, at this very moment, could Siqueiros be found? With resignation, Rodriguez Castillo gave the answer: a small ranch named San Blasito on the outskirts of the village of Magueyito, about 20 miles away, over very difficult terrain.<sup>25</sup>

Three days earlier, Siqueiros had been forced to flee the house of Hosto's municipal secretary. As he left by the window, troops were approaching; unable to reach his horse, he fled on foot into the brush. It was fortunate for him that at that moment Angélica was in Mexico City, for it took three agonizing days on foot to reach his hideaway at the San Blasito ranch.

Forced to find his own way, without a guide, avoiding the road and for those three days without any food, he groped over the rough ground, slept in caves, and fled from nests of coral snakes. Exhausted, he arrived at the outskirts of Magueyito. At a roadside hut where food was sold beneath a burning sun, he replenished his strength with frijoles, tortillas and water, only to hear from the proprietor that soldiers were all about looking for a dangerous criminal.

Furtively he left the hut and made his way between huge boulders up the mountain to a secret cave. The small ranch of San Blasito now lay below him. The poor Ibarra family had rented Siqueiros and Angélica a room, but they did not know about the secret cave in the mountains above the ranch. Nor did the family have knowledge of just who it was they had taken in as boarders. They thought David and Angélica were eloping lovers – Marcarío Sierra and Doña Eusebita – hiding from Doña Eusebita's family. This also served to explain why Siqueiros was heavily armed.

It was a hot dank night, and the mosquitos drove Siqueiros from the cave, forcing him to move to higher ground. Earlier a heavy shower had left the ground wet, and Siqueiros fell into a deep sleep in a puddle of water.<sup>26</sup>

"Surrender, you son-of-a-bitch!" was the shout that rudely awoke him at dawn. His hands were bound behind him, and they marched him off with a rope around his neck. He was filled with fear and trepidation. Were they taking him to some lonely spot in the mountain to be executed? The "law of flight," he knew, was often used by the police and the army, and he was sure that at any moment he would be

shot from behind as he "ran to escape."

He began reviewing the events of his life, but even as he was wondering how death would come, shots rang in the distance. The police brutally flung him to the ground, bloodying his face as it smashed against the rocks. Moments later he was helped to his feet, the blood wiped from his face, and a cigarette placed between his lips. They apologized for handling him so roughly and explained that they were returning by circuitous route to avoid any possible confrontation with miners who might attempt to rescue him. And, as they further explained, the President had ordered that he be brought back alive and unhurt at all costs. The shots that had rung out, it was discovered, were not from miners but from a lost battalion of soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

After marching for an hour over rugged terrain they arrived at the spot on the road where they were to meet General Salazar. Captured at the same time was Marcos Orozco, Siqueiros's bodyguard and guide. He had arrived by himself from Hostotipaquillo and was captured before he could make contact with his chief. A caravan of cars arrived in short order, and General Salazar stepped out of one to face his quarry. They met on common ground as veterans of the Mexican Revolution. Salazar's first words were an order that Siqueiros be untied immediately. Then in a most amiable manner he began to reminisce with his prisoner about the Revolution. And the officer who had commanded the soldiers in the manhunt conveyed to Siqueiros the best regards of his chief, Colonel Jesus Ochoa Chávez, who was too ill to be present but wished to be remembered as an old comrade of the Revolution.

Before the small army set off for Hostotipaquillo, General Salazar ordered the police agents and soldiers to form ranks. The 60-70 men stood at attention and listened to the general's short speech eulogizing Siqueiros; though he would have to pay for his offense, he was a veteran of the Revolution and a great painter to the glory of the country; he added that Siqueiros was not to be treated as their prisoner but as their chief.<sup>28</sup>

The procession back to Hosto turned into a parade of celebration for the prisoner. Word quickly spread that he had been captured, and his entrance into town was greeted with cheers of "Viva Siqueiros." Miners and their families rushed out with flowers and fruits to greet the revered benefactor who had led them in the struggle to improve their life. A farewell banquet was hastily arranged by the mayor. Siqueiros recalled it all as he reminisced in prison to a reporter in

later years. His face swollen and scratched, he was seated at the center of the table, General Salazar to his right and the officer of the Eighth Battalion to his left. Everyone was toasted; Siqueiros as the guest of honor; the President of the Republic; the police agent Pancho Figueroa Arceo, who as luck would have it had captured Siqueiros on October 4, the "Day of Pancho," his own saint's day.

At 5 o'clock that day General Salazar was ready to say good-bye to Hostotipaquillo. In custody besides Siqueiros and Marcos Orozco were a handful of people, including two women. All were accused of aiding and concealing the fugitive.

When General Salazar's victorious army reached Zitácuaro, 61 miles west of Mexico City on the following day, General Nunez, the chief of the Mexico City police, and at least a hundred reporters were already on hand. Once in the custody of the Mexico City Police, Siqueiros was again answering the questions of the press.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Argument in Court**

After 4½ months in hiding, Siqueiros was behind bars in Mexico City for 6 months before he was brought to trial. He spoke in his own defense and was acquitted of the most serious charges: homicide, attempted homicide, criminal conspiracy and the use of firearms. Lesser charges of trespassing and breaking-and-entering were pending, but he was eligible for release on bail.

Siqueiros defended himself with a long exposition that included a detailed explanation of Trotsky's political significance in Mexico, and how he had influenced events both at home and abroad. Contrary to all legal practice for political refugees in Mexico, Trotsky had established a tribune in Coyoacán, which "contradictorily" had been granted him by "Mexico's most progressive President." For Siqueiros, political reasons made the attack on Trotsky's house not only possible but inevitable, a necessity.

The bourgeoisie of Mexico and of the world, who had despised the Trotsky of the Russian Revolution, now

extended a fraternal hand to Trotsky the anti-Stalinist, "to the greatest enemy of our greatest enemy" [who] with an ample baggage of sophistry, supports the local and world counter-revolutionary struggle.<sup>30</sup>

Siqueiros explained how he saw Trotsky as a serious disruptive force, interfering in internal Mexican politics with his opposition to

the Popular Front at the time of its formative stages around Cárdenas. Siqueiros also expressed great disappointment that Mexico's organized masses, submissive to Cárdenas, their new "patriarchal *caudillo*," lacked any strong opposition to Trotsky's operating from Mexican soil. In Spain, he said, he had received news that there had been some opposition to granting Trotsky's asylum, but "in the form that seemed more like the mournful cry of a deer making filial demands than the exigency and combative will of the popular, proletarian, and revolutionary masses." Other voices from Mexico had told him of the "Maderista suicide of Cárdenas" and of his "strange mixture of romantic and popularist chief."<sup>31</sup>

The Communist Party, too, shrank from any opposition to Cárdenas' actions. "They considered that anything that would endanger or break the unity of the progressive forces of Cárdenism was contrary to their position." This did not mean that the vanguard forces, the proletarian class, should with their silence become subordinated. But the labor movement was capitulating "before the neo-progressive bourgeoisie that governs the country,"<sup>32</sup> and the revolutionary proletarian movement was giving up its political independence and leaving the road of the Popular Front.

Siqueiros told the court of the failure of Spain's Republican government to declare a "state of war," and how this had left a fertile area for the "espionage, sabotage, treason and provocation of Trotskyism, – the most effective nucleus for the demagogy of Franco's Fifth Column in the Loyalist zone." Fifth Columnists "in the shadow of the government of the Popular Front," moved freely within the political, labor, agrarian and military organizations. Siqueiros told how the Republican authorities had taken "thirteen months to discover that the political party of Trotskyism in Spain (POUM) engaged in espionage, sabotage and provocation as a dependency of the headquarters of the so-called Nationalist Army."<sup>33</sup> He spoke to the court about the tragedy of Barcelona, far to the rear of the Republican front, of the POUM-engineered uprising and its disastrous results.

An armed uprising directed BY THEM, in complicity with all the ambushers of the rear, with all the disguised, anarchist rabble, with all those whiners demanding capitulation, with the bourgeois wanting peace at any price – and in their treason [the Trotskyites] using *the trick of the "transformation of the Civil War into proletarian revolution," over the*

*"conciliators of the Popular Front."* An uprising that cost the Spanish people 850 lives and 2600 wounded. In the end it was the masterpiece of *our refugee* of Coyoacán, of the *"poor persecuted politician,"* romantically isolated in Mexico by President Cárdenas. (Emphasis in original.)<sup>34</sup>

In Mexico, Siqueiros said, Cárdenas was moving toward "the concept of the *Neutral Government*" and a demagogic Trotskyism reinforced this attitude daily, applying it even to the police and the diplomatic corps. Though Cárdenas had moved forward with radical social reforms, reactionaries and counter-revolutionaries were waiting in the wings preparing their counter-offensive. This "was a panorama," Siqueiros told the court, "very similar to that of the Spanish Republic in the period before the hand of reaction struck its blow."<sup>35</sup>

Siqueiros instructed the court on the meaning and consequences of having tolerated the political activities of Trotsky in Mexico:

The fact is that the greatest of the dissemblers of the Revolution... managed in a brief period to transform the tribune given to him by President Cárdenas into the headquarters of national and international counter-revolutionary politics, protected day and night on the outside by the pistols, rifles and bayonets of ten members of the Mexican police, and on the inside by the arms of ten foreign gunmen. It was a political center with secretaries and typewriters, with daily connections ... to the city outside and ... to lands abroad, with free means of transit through the United States. Naturally, all of this within view and with the approval of the Minister of Government of Mexico."

Siqueiros prepared for the court a thorough examination of Mexico's political life, which he held responsible for his commission of the act for which he was being tried. He argued that the forces that should be struggling for the Revolution in Mexico were disarming themselves by placing everything in the hands of Cárdenas, "the good patriarch." For the Mexican Revolution to survive, a popular front was needed, but after three and a half years "of the most friendly regime," no such front had materialized, for the party of Cárdenas, the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM), was now "in the hands of *sub-caudillos* of the new-rich class.

He told the court that he had requested special leave from the war in Spain so that he might return to Mexico to see Cárdenas and explain to him the problems that Trotsky was causing. "I wanted to point to the fatal error of granting Trotsky a refuge in Mexico and to present documents of the work that this renegade had brought to the fore in Spain." In his best diplomatic manner, Siqueiros met with Cárdenas. "I wrote a forty-page report which I personally gave to him."<sup>37</sup>

Of his return to Spain, he told how he despaired over the fatal course of the war and over the fact that his visit to Cárdenas had not produced results.

Trotskyism ... in the course of this war ... had the means to qualify as the most appalling demagogic arm of counter-revolution in every country. This I saw and experienced in the very ranks of the units under my command. Its daily hypocritical alliances with the saboteurs, provocateurs, defeatists, deserters, and capitulators of the Fifth Column of Franco within the ranks of the Republicans.<sup>58</sup>

The fact that the progressive government of his country, which had given such support to the Spanish people, "could shelter on its territory nothing less than the headquarters that conceives, organizes and executes these inequities covered with a Tartuffian cloak of supposed Marxist orthodoxy," brought him, he told the court, into sharp conflict with the Cárdenas government. His experience with Trotskyite subversion was firsthand: "the principal target attacked by such traitors was the Spanish Communist Party." Spain's defeat, he pointed out, was caused not only by the betrayal of the Loyalist cause by the "great democracies" and by the errors of the Republican government in waging the war, but also by the ambushes of the "so-called Marxist-Leninists of the international band of *provocateurs* directed by Leon Trotsky from his headquarters in Coyoacán, Mexico."<sup>39</sup>

He then painted a broad panorama of the reactionary climate he found in Mexico after his return from Spain. Fascist parties were reviving and counter-revolutionaries from Porfirioistas to Callistas were

petulantly strutting about everywhere, including inside the entire official apparatus. And, in the land of the government



which expresses solidarity with the [Spanish] Republic, the Spanish Falange ostentatiously and with impunity functions with absolute freedom, exhibiting their fascist uniforms and emblems in the cafes.<sup>40</sup>

In the revived activity of the right-wing extremists – Golden Shirts, Sinarquistas, and the anti-communist Revolutionary Party – he saw a serious threat to eliminate the Revolution. With this "common anti-Stalinist front of reaction ... Trotsky, the maestro and leader of his Fourth International, performed his special task" – to destroy Cárdenism and the Revolution.<sup>41</sup>

Trotsky was not personally against Cárdenas, but only against the "proletarian-popular" and "bourgeois-progressive" concentration that formed Cárdenism, "while articulating all the time in high and low theory against the tactic of the Popular Front – his pickaxe blows not against the arch but against the columns." Trotsky's

simplicistic and perfidious theory of proletarian revolution at all costs, is for present-day Mexico, as it was for Republican Spain, more than stupidity; it is a precise, demagogic, reactionary, accomplishment. Stupid of Trotsky? Doubtless a cretin, Trotsky? No, intelligent! The very intelligent work of a counter-revolutionary provocateur.<sup>42</sup>

Siqueiros explained how Trotsky maintained that he was not interfering in the internal politics of Mexico, but was only attacking GPU agents who, according to Trotsky, were the main support of the Cárdenas government and thus the "*only victims*" of his attacks. Attacks, argued Siqueiros, that "originated in a species of high politics situated in the stratosphere of the Revolution, not on the ordinary political surface of everyone else." For Trotsky the politician, to join with fascists in attacking what he wished to attack, meant nothing.<sup>43</sup>

At this point Siqueiros cited Trotsky's willingness to appear as a friendly witness before the notorious Dies Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, which at the time was carrying on an inquisition against U.S. progressives. When the Dies Committee turned its attention to Cárdenas and his reforms, especially the nationalizing of the oil industry, Trotsky agreed to talk to the committee about "Stalinism," but his trip did not materialize. It was of little importance to Trotsky that he joined with an arch-reactionary

such as Dies; he defended himself with the claim that his program was different.<sup>44</sup>

In Spain, Trotsky – in the name of the Proletarian Revolution at all costs, "a stupid and pharisaical doctrine" – had caused opposition to the Popular Front that resulted in the Republican coalition being "shot in the back by Francoism and international Fascism." In Mexico he was equally disruptive.<sup>45</sup>

Nor did the fact that Trotsky was now dead diminish his lingering work. "Trotsky is surely dead but the putrefaction of the politics of his perverted madness spitefully lives on. His work, carried on by proselytes and disciples, was "still making the bourgeoisie of Mexico and the entire world applaud furiously his words of the 'true Revolution and the true Marxism-Leninism.'"<sup>46</sup>

Hardly a desperate self-defense. Siqueiros's concern was more with explaining the significance of Trotsky's refuge in Mexico and how his own appeals to Cárdenas and the Communist Party to act decisively with regard to Trotsky had failed. Thus had he arrived at the decision that Trotsky's refuge would have to be exposed as a headquarters.

I considered that as a Mexican revolutionary there would be no greater honor for me than to contribute to an act that helped expose the treason of a political center of espionage and provocation that was seriously contrary to the national independence of Mexico, the Mexican Revolution – that counted me among its soldiers and militants from the year 1911 – and of the international struggle for the cause of Socialism.<sup>47</sup>

The day before Siqueiros was to be set free on bail, Secret Service agents appeared at his cell and escorted him out through a back door to the street. There the warden was waiting for him; they were old friends, both had been captains in the Revolution. Two limousines were waiting, and Siqueiros was directed to enter one, in which he found the attorney general of Mexico seated. The warden got in too, and they drove off, followed by the second car, carrying police agents.

Attorney General José Aguilar y Maya told Siqueiros where he was being taken – President Manuel Ávila Camacho wished to speak to him and his liberty would depend on the outcome of the conversation. The conspicuous gaudiness of the President's new

private mansion appalled Siqueiros's aesthetic sensibilities and filled him with a feeling of foreboding. At its entrance he was received by the chief of the Presidential Guard; alone, and with the greatest deference, he was escorted to the President.

A very friendly and personal greeting extended to him by the President further perplexed him. But then Ávila Camacho began to speak of his experience with Siqueiros in the Revolution. During a tremendous storm at the time of the Battle of Guadalajara, then-Lieutenant Camacho, the army paymaster, was stranded and all the soldiers refused him shelter in the hut in which they were quartered. But Siqueiros had grabbed Camacho by the arm and offered him his straw mat to sleep on. It was that night, when they slept together, that President Camacho now recalled to Siqueiros, who had not known that the individual to whom he had offered shelter was now the President.

Camacho then told Siqueiros that he was going to have his liberty, but only under the condition – and this for his own safety – that he leave the country immediately. The President told him that he had information there was a plot to kill him, and he did not want anything like that to happen during his term of office. Siqueiros then made the plea that since the court had cleared him of all serious charges, rightfully he should be permitted to remain free on bail in the country. But Camacho was insistent; he assured Siqueiros that in time his bail of 10,000 pesos would be returned, and that in Chile, where he would be given asylum, the Mexican ambassador, Octavio Reyes Espindola, would help him obtain a wall on which to paint a mural.<sup>48</sup> There was no recourse; Siqueiros had to accept the condition. The expulsion he had sought for Trotsky now fell on himself.

For the two weeks that it took the government to work out the plan and the details of his departure, Siqueiros and Angélica lived in a flat hidden away from the press and others. It was at this time that Siqueiros painted a portrait of Simon Bolivar, who was greatly admired by Camacho. He wished to present it to the President; just before he left the country, Siqueiros gave the painting to his brother Chucho to deliver, but Chucho, always in dire financial straits, instead sold it to the President's brother, Maximino. Camacho never knew that Siqueiros had painted it for him; nor did Maximino.<sup>49</sup>

## Notes

1. Siqueiros, *Me Llamaban*, p. 369.

2. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 419.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 357.
4. Dolores Ibárruri, *They Shall Not Pass* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 282.
5. Siqueiros, *Me Llamaban*, p. 364.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 365.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 366.
8. Leandro A. Sánchez Salazar, *Así Asesinaron a Trotski* (Mexico, D. F., Populibros "La Prensa," 1955), p. 65.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
12. *La Voz de México*, June 23, 1940; see also *Excelsior*, September 20, 1953, p. 2, col: 3.
13. FBI Correlation Summary, p. 128.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 6, 58, 151, 29.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 15, 16.
21. Salazar, p. 214.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
26. Siqueiros, *Me Llamaban*, p. 373.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 376.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
30. Siqueiros, *El Asalto a la Casa de León Trotsky*. Siqueiros archive, p. 2.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
48. Siqueiros, *Me Llamaban*, p. 380.
49. Interview with Angélica Siqueiros.

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