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Trotsky in Tijuana

By Dan La Botz

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TROTSKY IN TIJUANA



Cover by Jesse Kreuzer

DAN LA BOTZ

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While this is a counterfactual historical novel inspired by the lives of real people, all of the characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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Preface

Whenever people discovered that I had lived with Leon Trotsky for several years in Tijuana from about 1941 to 1953, I was asked many questions. Sometimes friends or neighbors who knew me well asked me about my experience as his bodyguard or as a player in the Mexican baseball leagues. At other times it was newspaper reporters, writers, or historians who wanted to know about Trotsky and his life. There was, for a while, great interest in the fact that Joseph McCarthy had called Trotsky to testify before his committee.

As with all celebrities, there had been rumors and stories about Trotsky, some true and some false. Some people were interested in the details of his private life and wanted to know if he really had had an affair with the comedienne Rachel Silberstein. Others wanted to know if that affair was why his wife Natalia Sedova left him after all of their years together. Some had heard about Dr. Bergman's psychoanalysis of the world-famous revolutionary and wondered if Trotsky had suffered some sort of nervous breakdown. Some wanted to know about his secretary Mark Zborowski, known as Étienne, who several people alleged had murdered Trotsky's son, the same Zborowski also worked with Margaret Mead, with whom he was rumored to have had an affair.

Others, with more political interests, wanted to know Trotsky's view of World War II, or his thoughts on the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and China, or his attitude toward the Cold War. Some wanted to know about his political organization, the Fourth International. Of course everyone wanted to know if I thought that Trotsky died of natural causes, so remarkably on the same day as Joseph Stalin, or if he might have been murdered and, if so, who might have done it. And some wanted to know if I thought that Stalin

might have been poisoned and who could have killed him. So, after spending years responding to such questions, I decided to answer all of them once and for all.

After working as a secretary and bodyguard for Trotsky for over a decade, I later became the president of the Machinists Union at a shipyard in San Diego, California, and then spent a few years as a TV repairman in Chula Vista. Then, in my forties, I went off to study fiction writing at the University of Iowa and subsequently became a novelist. Some of you may know my book simply titled *Danny*.

What I have written here is both a novelized memoir and a fictionalized biographical account of Trotsky's years in Tijuana. While what follows is fiction, it is based on my intimate contact with Trotsky and those in his world; the events described here actually happened and many of the conversations here are practically verbatim. I am uniquely situated to write what is a true account of Trotsky in those years in Tijuana and I can state sincerely that this novel is also history and that this fiction is also truth.

Leon Trotsky was to me a father figure and, as the reader will discover, I felt the ambivalence toward him that most sons feel toward their fathers. As boys, we think of our fathers as strong and always right, and then later we discover that they can be weak and are sometimes wrong. When we mature, we still love them, but also see them as people like ourselves, as the fathers that we have in turn become.

I dedicate this book to my wife Rocío and to our children Juan and María who live in a brave, new world so different from the one I grew up in. It too seems to be a world with revolutionary possibilities, though not of the sort that we had dreamt of.

-- Ralph Bucek, Chula Vista, California, 1961

Other Books by Dan LaBotz

- *Le nouveau populisme américain : Résistances et alternatives face à Trump*. Paris: Syllepse, May 2018
- *The Nicaraguan Revolution: What Went Wrong?* Leiden: Brill, 2016; Haymarket 2018.
- *A Vision from the Heartland: Socialism for the 21st Century*. Cincinnati: Buckeye Socialist Press, 2010.
- *César Chávez and La Causa*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.
- *Made in Indonesia: Indonesian Workers Since Suharto*. Boston: South End Press, 2001.
- *Democracy in Mexico: Peasant Rebellion and Political Reform*. Boston: South End Press, 1995.
- *Mask of Democracy: Labor Suppression in Mexico Today*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
- *The Troublemaker's Handbook: How to Fight Back Where your Work and Win!* Detroit: Labor Notes, 1991.
- *Edward L. Doheny: Petroleum, Power & Politics in the U.S. & Mexico*. New York: Praeger, 1991.
- *Rank and File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union*. New York: Verso, 1990.
- *The Crisis of Mexican Labor*. New York: Praeger, 1988.

About the Author



I have written a dozen books of history and politics, but this is my first novel that draws both on history and on my own personal experience.

I was born in Chicago in 1945 but from the age of 11 grew up in Imperial Beach, California, which sits on the shore of the Pacific Ocean and shares a border with Tijuana. My interest in Mexico dates from my first encounter at that time, going with grandfather to Tijuana to get haircuts, buy gasoline, soda pop, tortillas, and meat. I went to junior high school in the border town of San Ysidro and to Mar Vista High School in Imperial Beach with fellow students some of whom crossed the border from Tijuana every morning.

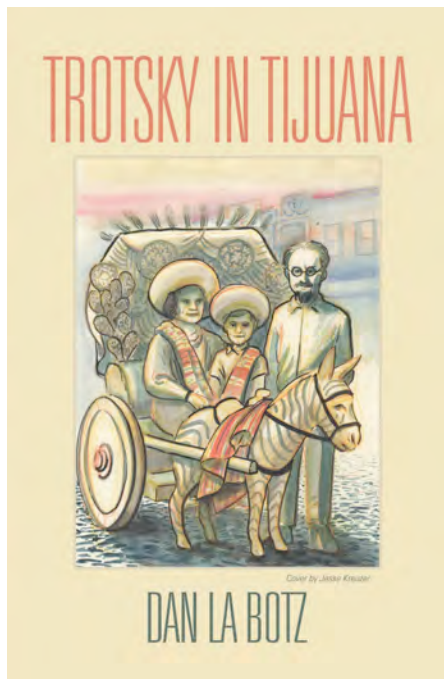
After studying at Southwestern Community College and graduating from San Diego State College in 1968, I was for three years a graduate student in Literature at the University of California at San Diego studying with Frederick Jameson

and auditing classes with Herbert Marcuse. In 1969, I joined the International Socialists and read Max Shachtman and Hal Draper, both former Trotskyists, whose ideas greatly influenced my views. During the late 1960s, I became an anti-war activist and in the 1970s a labor union activist and for a while a community organizer in a Spanish-speaking community in Chicago.

Later in the 1990s, after returning to graduate school in History, I received a Fulbright Fellowship for my doctoral dissertation “‘Slackers’: American War Resisters and Communists in Mexico, 1917-1927” (University of Cincinnati, 1998.) While doing research for my dissertation, I lived in the Coyoacán neighborhood of Mexico City, not far from the fortress-home of Leon Trotsky and the Blue House of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, both of which had been turned into museums. For twenty years, from 1994 to 2014, I edited the union publication *Mexican Labor News and Analysis*. Over the years I wrote several books about Mexico’s labor and social movements, as well as books on other topics. I am an editor of *New Politics: An Independent Socialist Journal*.

This novel is an attempt to understand and come to grips with Leon Trotsky and his legacy.

I now live in Brooklyn, New York with my wife Sherry Baron. We have three wonderful sons and three fantastic granddaughters.



What if Trotsky had not died in August 1940? Would he succeed in building his revolutionary Fourth International? Would he ally with his old friend Serge? Would he have another affair like his affair with Frida? Would his wife Natalia stand by him? Might he try Freudian analysis? Would Stalin still kill him? Would a Trotskyist try to kill Stalin?

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