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# BILLBOARDS FOR THE LEFT

## Leon Trotsky's Exile and Mexican Muralism

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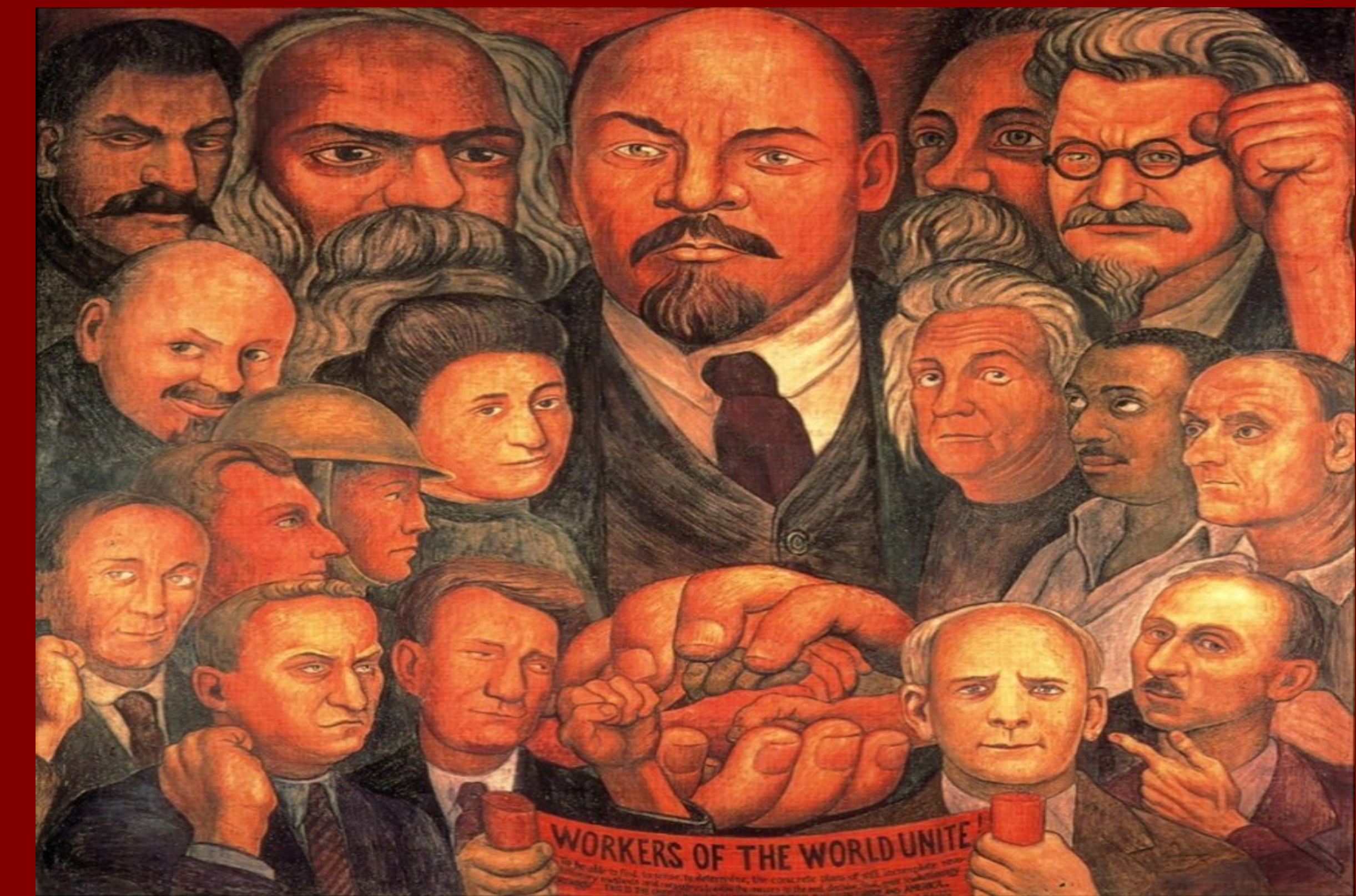
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### ARGUMENT

Leon Trotsky's exile in Mexico in the 1930s significantly changed the political voices of both David Siqueiros and Diego Rivera. His presence also influenced both artists to make changes to their artistic styles.

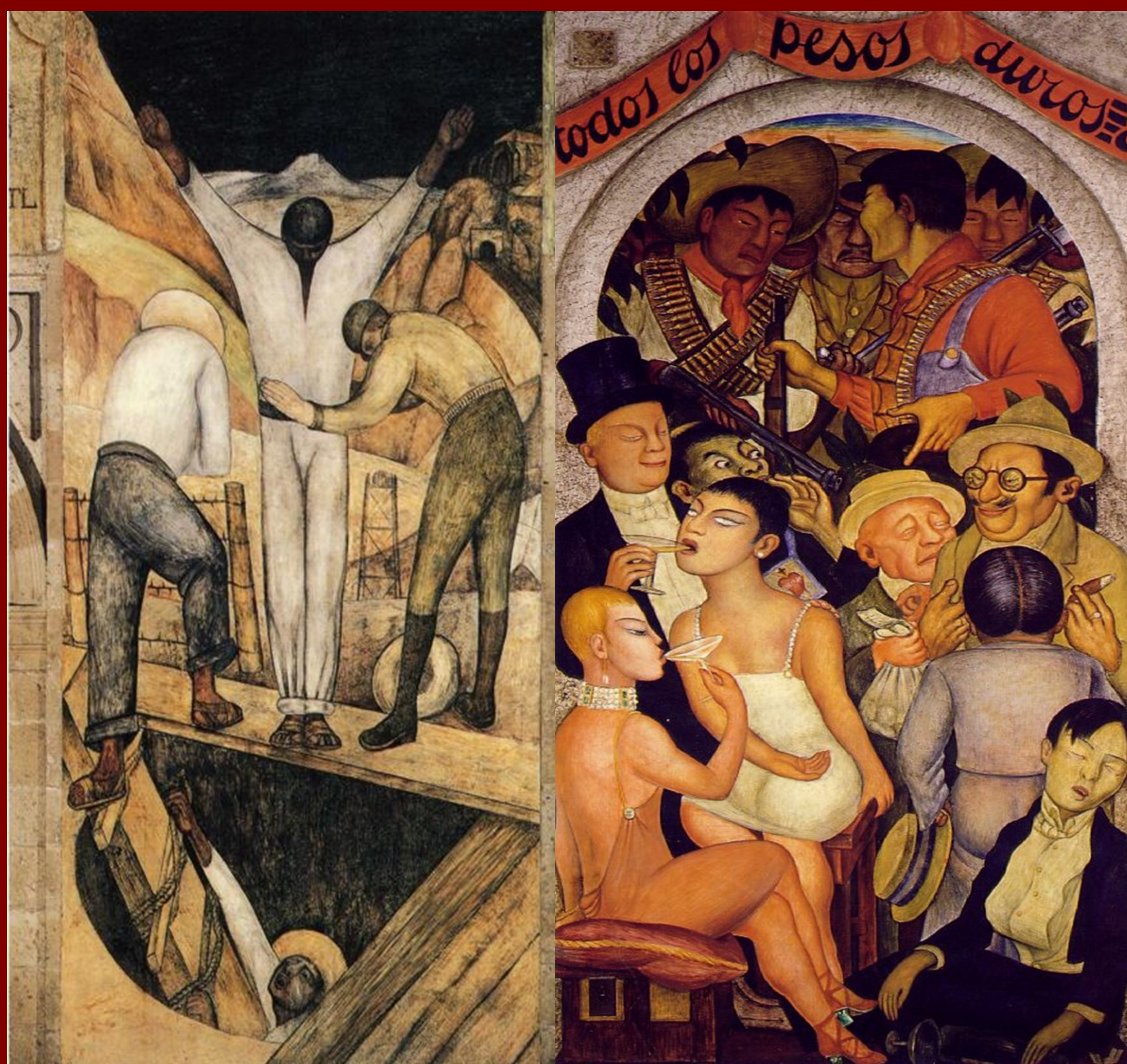
### THE SEARCH FOR MEXICAN IDENTITY

- The 1920s marked the end of the Mexican revolution and shifting political tides deemed it necessary to determine Mexico's identity in relation to the rest of the world.<sup>1</sup>
- In 1921 Vasconcelos was established as the Secretary of Education and he named Diego Rivera as the National Artist, placed with the task of establishing a national identity through public art.<sup>2</sup>
- Mexican Muralism began as a response to this call for national identity in a way to get the message out to the public.
- Communist party's call for economic equality of the proletariat influenced a strong pocket of working class people in Mexico including some artists, like *los Tres Grandes*.<sup>3</sup>
- Diego Rivera identified as a Trotskyite and David Alfaro Siqueiros identified as a Stalinist. This led to contention between the artists.<sup>3</sup>



### LEON TROTSKY AND HIS EXILE<sup>4</sup>

- Leon Trotsky became one of the principle revolutionaries of the Communist Party, but frequently butted heads with Joseph Stalin.
- In 1937 Trotsky was exiled from the USSR and entered Mexico with the help of Diego Rivera. Rivera and Frida Kahlo hosted Trotsky for part of his time in Mexico.
- In May 1940 Siqueiros led a failed assassination attempt on Trotsky. Ramón Mercader successfully assassinated Trotsky in August 1940.



### SIQUIEROS-RIVERA DEBATES

- In August of 1935 Rivera and Siqueiros publicly debated at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City.<sup>2</sup>
- The two very publicly disagreed on their political beliefs and how each interpreted both the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Tecnicos, Pintores, y Escultores*.
- Both artists garnered support from the public. An example of this is Marion Greenwood's public demonstration of her allegiance to Rivera when she challenged Siqueiros during the debate for not practicing what he preached.<sup>5</sup>
- Siqueiros attacked Rivera for his lack of clarity in comparison to the other artists' of the time and also attacked him for becoming the voice of the Mexican government.<sup>5</sup>
- While these debates drove Siqueiros to take more action on his political opinions and become more verbose in his artwork,<sup>6</sup> the debates drove Rivera to become more obvious in the messages of his artwork, but drove him into media silence.<sup>2</sup>

### CITATIONS

- Leaving the Mine and Fighters of the Revolution and Civilian Debauchers*, La Secretaría de Educación Pública, Diego Rivera, 1923. (Bottom Left) *Birth of Fascism*, Sala de Arte Publica Siqueiros, Mexico, David Alfaro Siqueiros, 1936. (Top Middle) *Portrait of America*, The New Worker's School, New York City, Diego Rivera, 1933. (Top Right) *Portrait of the Bourgeoisie*, Electrical Workers' Union Building, Mexico City, David Alfaro Siqueiros, 1939. (Middle Right)
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  2. Hamill, Pete, and Diego Rivera. Diego Rivera. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999.
  3. Poppino, ROLLIE E. International Communism in Latin America: A History of the Movement, 1917-1963. Free Press of Glencoe, 1964.
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  5. Salus, Carol. Out of Context: American Artists Abroad. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004.
  6. Stein, Philip. Siqueiros: His Life and Works. International Publishers Company, 1994.