

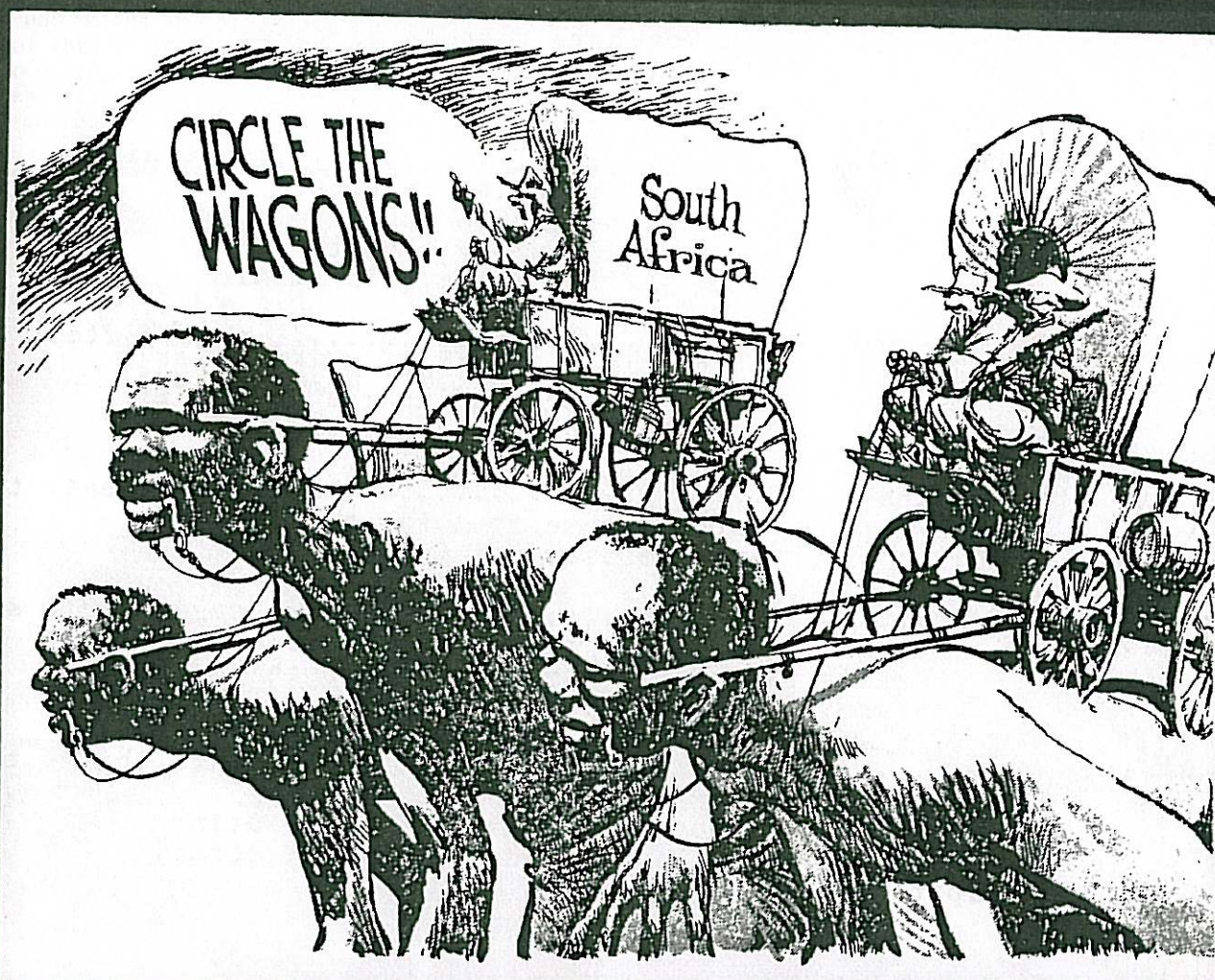
Communist

Bulletin

No. 11

Winter 86-87

50p



South Africa in Crisis

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- * **BILAN** on the War in Spain
- * **Correspondence** with India • Sth. America • The Fraction
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"Voices from the Spanish Civil War" is really
a collection of 'Echoes of Defeat', demonstrating
how workers were mobilised in defence of democracy
and capitalism.

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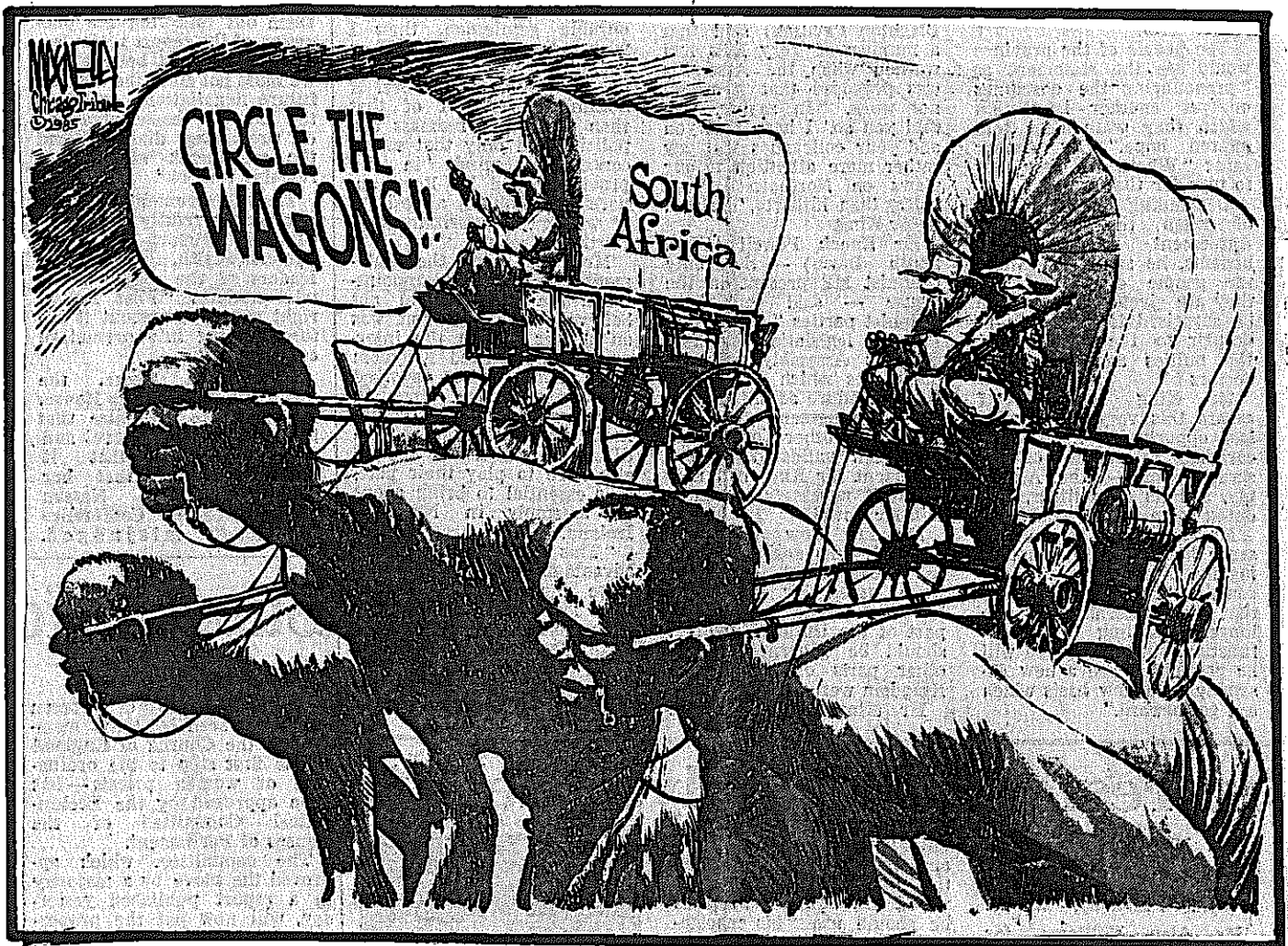
**New
Address**



South Africa in Crisis

The origins of the murderous racism which dominates the politics of South Africa lie in the 18th and 19th centuries; in the peculiar evolution of the Cape. We do not intend to give here a detailed examination here of this growth. Suffice it to say that like all countries South Africa has evolved according to two capitalist imperatives: the general ones of the world market and the particular ones of the area.

Boers stood up to these two problems, and eventually succumbed to the greater power of British imperialism moulded in them a vision of themselves as a "chosen people". They saw themselves as being charged with the task of keeping the heathen at bay and at the same time of bearing the persecutions heaped upon them by the British state. During the Boer War British capital systematically organised the murder



The South African Racist State Enters the Laager.

The latter being constrained by the former. Racism is a commonly found feature of capitalist society. In South Africa it assumed the proportions we see today as a result of the way in which the white Boer community developed. This hard-faced group of Calvinists confronted not only indigenous black populations in the Cape, it also faced the hostile forces of British capitalism. The way in which the

of tens of thousands of Boers. Unlike, however, the indigenous groupings which had been subjugated by British force the Boers, after their defeat did not find themselves wholly outside the sources of power in South African capitalism. They lived within and defended the capitalist nexus. They were property owners and farmers. Thus, although they were defeated in the Boer War they, nonetheless,

continued to be of some economic and political importance. Boer capitalism was not destroyed nor did the British state want it to be. Capitalists of Britain simply demanded that their priorities take precedence in Africa: this meant the extension of political boundaries, abolition of "autonomous" Boer areas, defence of British mercantile, industrial and strategic interests. The heightening tensions which preceded the outbreak of World War I meant that it could be no other way. The Boers could have their "place in the sun" or perhaps more accurately a seat in the shade so long as Britain's interests were not threatened.

It was within this context that the extreme racism of the Boers developed. However, the "shade" allotted to them by British capital soon became a sunny spot for Boer capitalists who were not slow in accepting the benefits of protection of British imperialism. When the Boers achieved parliamentary power after World War 2 the way was open for Boer capitalism to give its racism a nation-wide formal structure. Racism was institutionalised as apartheid. Today the bourgeoisies of South Africa and the countries of the Western bloc face not only the problems of deepening economic crisis but also those which are a specific product of South Africa's racist history. These same forces which moulded the consciousness of racist whites have also helped to determine the shape of class struggle in the area. The evolution of class struggle is witness to the specifics of South Africa's history.

The white Boer bourgeoisie has consciously manipulated racism to keep workers apart. In this and in a number of other ways, particularly the dangers

South African connection

South Africa's main customers and suppliers (1984)

	Exports to SA	Imports from SA
United States	£971 million (15.7)	£601 million (8.4)
Japan	£800 million (12.9)	£559 million (7.7)
West Germany	£978 million (15.9)	£279 million (3.9)
United Kingdom	£780 million (11.1)	£403 million (4.3)
Switzerland	£110 million (1.8)	£479 million (6.8)

Figures in brackets show percentage of South Africa's total trade.
Source: South African Government monthly trade statistics.

UK major exports to South Africa (1984)

Chemicals	£202 million
Industrial machinery	£178 million
Road vehicles	£139 million
Office machines and computers	£97 million

UK major imports from South Africa (1984)

Metal ore and scrap	£253 million
Veg and fruit	£117 million
Textiles	£47 million

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics

inherent in such a policy, South Africa resembles the situation found in Northern Ireland. Black workers have been excluded from the democratic process; state terror and physical repression are the normal ways of policing the black proletariat. At the same time white workers have been given a relatively privileged position within the exploitative process. By and large they are much better paid, better housed and have a "say" in the political process. Thus, unlike the black proletariat whites have been socialised into the capitalist process; ideology as well as material advantages play a role

in determining the way in which white workers relate to the capitalist state. They have "faith" in the capitalist system, that is the racist mix which gives them positive advantages over their black counterparts. This gives the state a degree of strength. It can rely upon white workers to rally to its call when threatened by demands of blacks. In this it resembles the way in which sections of the protestant working class of Northern Ireland defend the sectarian struggles of the Ascendancy. But like Northern Ireland this strength is undermined by an inherent brittleness. The South African bourgeoisie has few ideological weapons it can use against the black working class. In other words it lacks the flexibility which is so important in the liberal democracies. This brittleness did not become fully apparent until the onset of the economic crisis. Through the years of expansion blacks could be thrown "crumbs" from the racist table. But economic crisis has cut off this option. The full barbarism of the state is now the only way that lies open to the white bourgeoisie. The more it is forced to deal with the consequences of the crisis the more it will have to rely upon extending terror, repression and murder of the black working class.

Just as it was 80 years ago today South Africa is of economic and strategic importance. It is a country rich in raw materials important in the industrial, military and monetary worlds of capitalism: 80 percent of the West's uranium is mined there; as is 50 per cent of the world's gold; apart from this South Africa is a major supplier of chrome and manganese. Strategically it occupies a geographical position of extreme importance in control and surveillance of both the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic. For the West to lose control of this area is unimaginable to the bourgeoisie. This in part helps explain why in the years since 1945 investment flowed into South Africa. Of course it was also made particularly attractive by the high rate of exploitation of the black working class. The vast repressive apparatus of the state made it a particularly attractive "opportunity" for capital. At this moment in time the "liberal" bourgeoisie of the West is up in arms (morally not militarily) at this state of terror and racism. They are demanding that sanctions be invoked against the regime. But let us not be fooled, the area is too important for any sanctions to be imposed which would threaten the economic and strategic security of the area. The problem facing the bourgeoisies outside South Africa is how best to achieve "reform", how best to restore stability internally without threatening the West's interests. For historical reasons the Boer dominated state has become highly inflexible, incapable of heading off class struggle by implementing substantial reforms of its racist institutions. Naturally, western capitalists who have no ideological allegiance to apartheid see this inflexibility as a real threat to economic and strategic interests. This is why the sanctions campaign has gained some force over the past year. But they are caught in a cleft-stick. They dare not undermine the economy of South Africa but at the same time they are faced with the problem of regaining stability in the country.

Sanctions have been applied to South Africa but only ones which will have limited economic impact. The real impact of the call for and implementation of sanctions is felt at an ideological level. the demand for sanctions directly undermines proletarian consciousness by specifying the ills of South Africa as being the problems generated by a small group of white racists. This hides the fact that the eradication of apartheid in the country, something which is possible within capitalism, will not mean the

abolition of poverty, terror, exploitation and war. These are not peculiar to South African racism. They might find particularly brutal expression in South Africa but they are the general conditions of capitalist life in the 20th century. The only way of freeing the world from the horrors of the system is an all-out attack upon it. It cannot be "humanised". The lies of the liberal bourgeoisie and also those who would help build a black "socialist" state are directly attacking the development of class consciousness. Both sides are enemies of the black and white working class, no more and no less than is the Boer state.

As materialists we recognise that the racism of South Africa is embedded in not only the ideological institutions of the country but also in the way that the division of labour has unfolded. There is not only a hierarchy of capitalists there is the further division of white and black workers. But this is not to say that there is not also an indigenous black bourgeoisie which lives off the brutal exploitation implemented by the state. This black bourgeoisie, however, fits into South African capitalism as part of the state's 'separate development' policy. This state practice is founded upon the policy of keeping the black working class as far as is possible outside the main urban centres and at the

it is. Black bourgeois terror groups such as the Ambutho, the A Team, Amosomzi Fathers, Mbhokoto, Pakhatis and the Green Berets are now accepted parts of the bourgeois apparatus of South Africa. They have been allotted the role of policing the shanty towns. In June of 1986 the extent of this role was seen in the battles at Crossroads near Capetown. The white recognised that the best way of attacking the workers in Crossroads was to employ the services of the black terror groups. By using them the state could claim to the world at large that the struggles in the country were nothing but "tribal" wars and nothing to do with white society: blacks are instinctively "tribalist" and lack the finer instincts of civilized white society, this was the message they wished to get across, a message which fitted well with their racist ideology. At the same time by using the Fathers in Crossroads the state strengthened an informal police force. In exchange for helping drive 70,000 workers from Crossroads the Fathers were given "aid" and knew that at the end of the day their authority was backed up by the white state.

The second string in the white bourgeoisie's bow in its racist division of labour is the tactic of keeping black workers as mobile as possible. The intention of this policy is to prevent the emergence of a

LEF

Steve Bell



same time keeping it as unstable and fragmented as possible. The former policy has led to the creation of massive townships on the outskirts of towns. These are shanty towns of corrugated iron and cardboard. Capitalism will turn a profit wherever it can and where better than in the midst of this poverty. The labourers housed in these towns are exploited on the one hand by white commercial and industrial capital and on the other by a local black bourgeoisie. This black bourgeoisie's "gold mine" is based on a gangster-landlordism organised around "vigilante" groups which police the shanty towns. These black bourgeois groups exist as informal parts of the South African state. In 1983 black workers in the Ciskei organised a bus boycott. The white police force could not break it directly; it was decided that it would be more prudent and useful if the black bourgeoisie destroyed the workers' struggle. Being like bourgeoisies all over the world the black one in the Ciskei had no hesitation in using terror to beat the workers into submission.

The white racist state is more than happy about this state of affairs. The more it can sow the seeds of confusion among the black working class the happier

stable working class capable of germinating a consciousness and organisation in opposition to the ends of Boer capitalism. Basically the racist state says, don't let the blacks settle in urban centres, keep them moving. This fine texturing of racist ideology and practice is designed to eradicate the possibility of mass class struggle. Part of this texturing is the notion of "homelands", mythical creations of white ideologues drawn from the historical experience of the Boers. In the early 19th century the colonialist -farming Boers pushed north from the Cape at one and the same time hoping to escape the hated British and find new farmland. Inevitably, this meant clashing with the territorial imperatives of Bantu speaking peoples which inhabited areas north of the Fish River. These Bantu groups had originally come from much farther north and over many years had moved south, clashing with other blacks, taking their land and moving on (contrary to myth promulgated by some leftist separatist groups Africa, before the arrival of white capitalism was not one large happy family, a paradise of black brotherhood). The Bantu did not originate in the Cape. The Boers turned this historical fact to their ideological advantage: the real "homelands" of the Bantu were not at the heart-



English/UPI-Reuters
Apartheid police prepare to attack black squatters at Crossroads, near Cape Town.

State Terror - a brittle Means of Social Control.

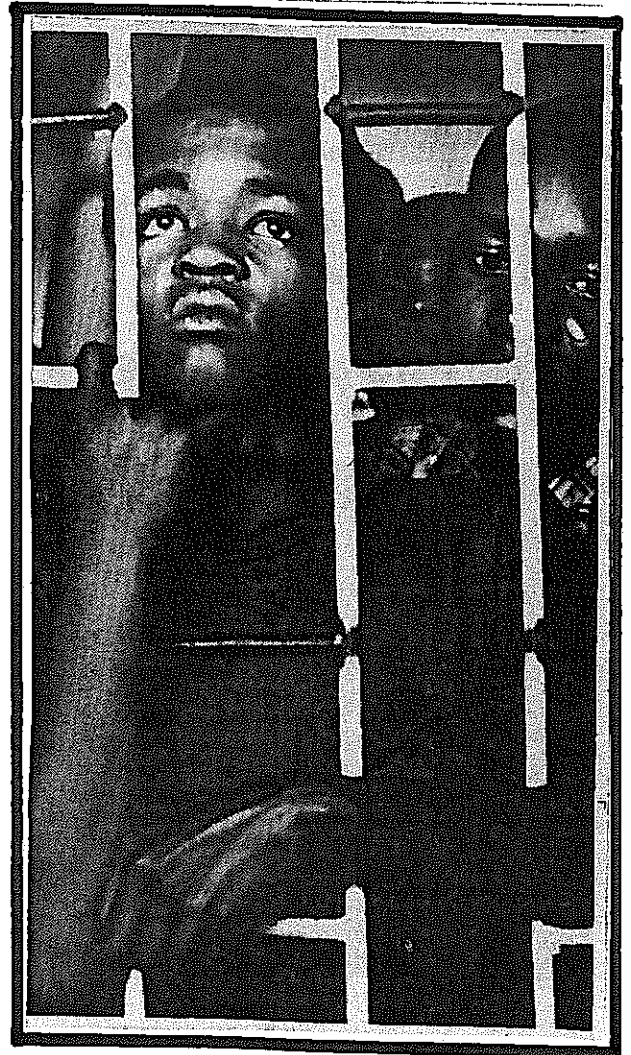
lands of South African capital but farther north, where the "tribes" originated. Needless to say this notion of homelands has only a superficial resemblance to the real dynamics of indigenous African development. But it is a useful tool in the ideological armoury of the bourgeoisie.

However, no matter how the bourgeoisie deploys its ideological weapons it cannot eradicate the root cause of its problems ie. the capitalist nature of social relations. With the deepening of the economic crisis the ideological and the material basis of white racism is being seriously challenged. The balmy days of post-war growth are long past. Growth in the South African economy began to slow down in the 1970s. In the present decade it has been assailed by a multitude of economic problems: high inflation rates, exacerbated by the massive size of the military apparatus; catastrophic domestic growth; a balance of payments problem of huge proportions; the price of gold has collapsed undermining at a stroke one of the central planks of the country's economy. Reflecting this decline the Rand has fallen in value in international markets. Austerity, a nice way of saying increase the rate of exploitation of the working class, is now a central part of the state's policy forcing the standard of living of black workers right back to the very edge of subsistence.

This programme of austerity underpins the rising tide of social unrest. The bourgeoisie has attempted to head off this unrest by moving it into the arena of "democratic" change. Trade unions remain underground movements just so long as the state could rely

upon open repression to attack workers. With the increase in struggle unions were legalised in 1979. For long enough they had trying to win their place in the sun; desperate to become part of a reformed capitalism. The Black Allied Workers' union showed its colours when in march of 1972 it declared in the pages of the Rand Daily Mail. "the black unions are not limited to achieving physical and material benefits such as good working relations, increased wages, social fringe benefits etc. Our concern and priority is a formation of a people and the development of a sense of responsibility in them." The South African state, however, hobbled by its ideological baggage has been constantly harassing the unions at a time when their membership has exploded from a negligible base of a decade ago: an estimated 300,000 in UJWSA dominated by Buthelezi's Inkatha organisation to the ANC's Congress of South African Trade Unions. The fact that black unions were not legalised until 1979 has played into the hands of the capitalist system as a whole if not the Boer one in particular to the extent that their radicalism continues to act as a cover for their political reality. The huge waves of class struggle which have swept through South Africa, not only the riots and the necklacing but also the strike movements such as the protest at the murder of workers at the Kinross mine in September 1986 are all threatened by the ideology of black reformism.

The ANC's nationalism has always been a threat to workers and today it is a growing one. The Angolan and Mozambique working class in 1975 and the Zimbabwean in 1979 learned quickly just what could be expected from such a black bourgeois movement: strikes



Thousands still in Camps.

were outlawed and austerity was imposed. Rather than improving in these areas the lot of the working class has actually worsened partially due to the situation in South Africa. The pressure of the economic crisis has forced the white state to extend its hold over the southern part of Africa. Open war rages as the South African state the economies of the front line states into its sphere of influence. Almost all lines of communication that don't lead through the Cape have either been smashed or are under attack. Thus Zambia, Lesotho and Botswana are subject to direct attack by South African forces and the only rail line not damaged since 1980 is the one running south to the ports of Durban, Port Elizabeth, East London and Capetown. The landlocked

countries cannot use the Indian Ocean ports, thus Mozambique has lost 33 per cent of its foreign currency earnings and Zimbabwe's trade through Mozambique has fallen from 53.9 per cent to 5 per cent. Of 6 Mozambique rail lines only one has not been smashed by South African backed MNR rebels. Malawi has, as a consequence its rail network and Zimbabwe its preferred route to Maputo. In Angola the Benguela railway line linking Zambia and Zaire with Lobito has been closed by the South African backed UNITA. In this way South Africa controls the movement of traffic in the southern part of the continent. Despite the front line states forming the Southern African Development Coordination Conference no effective challenge to

Wildcat

Moralising Counter - Racism Is Not Enough.

The black working class is heroically defending itself against the terror campaigns of the white bourgeoisie. This is the starting point for class conscious developments in South Africa. As communists we must, however, beware of falling into ideological traps set by bourgeois society. The working class faces enough traps set by liberal, nationalist and leftist elements without having to negotiate those set by communists albeit inadvertently. Central to the struggle in South Africa is the question of racism. To rise above the categories of capitalist domination revolutionaries must be aware of the need to continually use the language of marxism. Clearly, there is little chance of communists being duped by the racism of white South Africa. But racism is a Janus faced monster. Being caught in a black-centred racism is no answer for communists.

The importance of this has not, unfortunately, seemed to get through to WILDCAT. This proletarian organisation has fallen into the trap of moving from (1) the recognition of racism in South Africa, not a difficult thing to see, (2) having solidarity with the black working class; from these two points WILDCAT move forward to the conclusion that the solution to racist capitalism of South Africa is a matter for the "black working class". And as a corollary of this they add that, "No doubt a lot of white workers would be killed by a revolution in South Africa. It serves them right." (WILDCAT no.9)

This is good moral outrage which berates the white working class for the way in which it has been able to benefit from its racism. Moral outrage can compliment a class analysis but it can never replace it. Unfortunately the comrades of WILDCAT have gone for the easy option and in the process have abandoned a revolutionary stance. The answer to racism and capitalism in South Africa is "All power to the working class" not black, white or any other colour. Class power, the building of socialism is dependent upon large socio-economic divisions not those of colour. There can be no victory for black workers in South Africa independent of class activity in the rest of the world. Of course, the comrades might believe that "socialism in one black country" is possible. But this has nothing to do with the communist movement it is a position which finds its natural home in bourgeois leftism.

WILDCAT might argue that the white working class has too much to lose in a post-apartheid society to even contemplate giving up the acquisitions of racism. In the event this might well be true, white workers could stay in thrall to the ideology and material benefits of racism. But this does not absolve communists from defending the common class position of both black and white workers. To do otherwise is to accept the divisions of capitalism. And once this has been done where does it stop? Women workers are lower down the division of labour ladder than men, so should we demand "all power to women workers"? Alternatively it could be all power to the Catholic working class in Ireland. The list of possibilities is as long as the capitalist division of labour and as various as our moral outrage will allow. This combination is not a very useful guide in revolutionary activity.

The central contribution which revolutionary groups can make in the struggle of the working class is retaining and disseminating its clarity on the essence of capitalist relations. The moment that we begin to utilise the categories of capitalism then in that moment we begin to lose our revolutionary identity. Racism, sexism etc. all find material expression within the working class. And at any moment in time we can identify sections of the working class who benefit from these divisions. But a class analysis starts from the point at which we recognise them as all being subsumed within larger exploitative relations.

Let's not mince words, the racist approach at present being peddled within WILDCAT threatens to undermine its revolutionary existence. By calling for all power to the black working class it is making it more difficult for workers to achieve clarity on the nature of capitalism. As events in Spain in 1936 clearly showed there is no half-way house for communists. Clear, unambiguous and total opposition to the siren calls of capitalist ideology is the only answer we have to the bourgeoisie. If this is not maintained then proletarian groups move from being a moment in the solution to capitalist misery to becoming part of the problem. If the comrades of WILDCAT continue to defend racism then they not only betray black workers but the global working class.

South Africa's hegemony is presented by them. South Africa's policy has crippled economy after economy and cost thousands of lives. With the added threat of South Africa repatriating "guest" workers front line states are further threatened with economic and social disruption. The area is witness to the barbarism inherent in capitalism in crisis: refugees by their tens of thousand are forced to survive the best they can; thousands have died in the incessant wars; thousands have died of famine.

This throttling grip that South Africa has on the whole southern continent is just what the USA does not want to lose. But it has the major problem of what to do next. The South African state's room for manoeuvre is severely limited. When the state did what was obviously in its best interests and moved to change its policies its backwoods elements rebelled. Pig Botha's claim in January 1985 that powersharing was on the cards and a "black president is in our future" was a testing of the waters. But the violent reaction of much of the National Party's support brought about a hurried about-face witnessed most eloquently in the run-around given to the so-called Eminent Persons Group. What the USA wants is not in accord with the narrow vision of the hard-faced racists in the National Party. When union leaders were rounded up along with "community" leaders earlier in the summer of 1986 Washington was appalled. The "moderate" but "radicalised" Bishop Tutu gave voice to the fears felt by those who did not share the particular concerns of the apartheid system: "I'm worried about what might take place because they've taken away the leadership of our community which means that the community could degenerate into a disorderly mob". Eminent Person and former premier of Australia Fraser concluded that Mandela was the only hope for western interests. And indeed the Afrikaner Broederbund, the shaowy society which includes most of the South African elite, met the ANC in June '86 for discussions about the future of South African capital. This meeting, which followed upon the ANC's talks with the governments of the USA and the UK, expresses one of the central dilemmas of the state in the South: how to retain control, be a viable part of the western bloc and at the same time maintain its racist system. Herein is found the brittleness of the regime.

There is little that Botha can do about this brittleness. The historical legacy of racism is a system which at this moment lacks the highly flexible institutions found in the liberal democracies. Indeed this inflexibility is reflected in the splits within the bourgeoisie. The rise of the neo-nazi AWB is a consequence of the National Party's attempts to concede some of the demands being made by black and white capitalist elements. But in the act of doing this the National Party has run up against the opposition of its own power base. As soon as Botha's regime tried to modify its racism so it began to destroy itself. At the end of the day it must rely upon its old apartheid system. If it will continue to rely upon its ability to call up the racism of white workers and petty bourgeois and hope that it can ride out the storms of the present period. At the same time it will keep testing the waters of liberalisation but the chances are that these will almost certainly be too hot.

As for the black working class, its fight continues. It is assailed from all sides: on the left it faces the dangers of reformist struggle and on the right stands the racist bourgeoisie. Its militancy, both in the townships and the factory, is the starting point for any future transcendence of these reactionary forces. Without immediate struggle it can go nowhere. Whether any revolutionary political fractuon has emerged from the struggles going on we cannot say. In recent months we have been heartened to discover the emergence of proletarian political groups in India and South America where we previously knew of none. Such events are possible in South Africa itself or among those exiled from the racist regime. As revolutionaries we must be keenly aware of these possibilities and be able to respond positively to them if and when they happen. Without the presence of revolutionaries in South Africa the class' struggle will be stymied. It will reach the limits of its own militancy and become cannon fodder for all reactionary elements, both black and white.

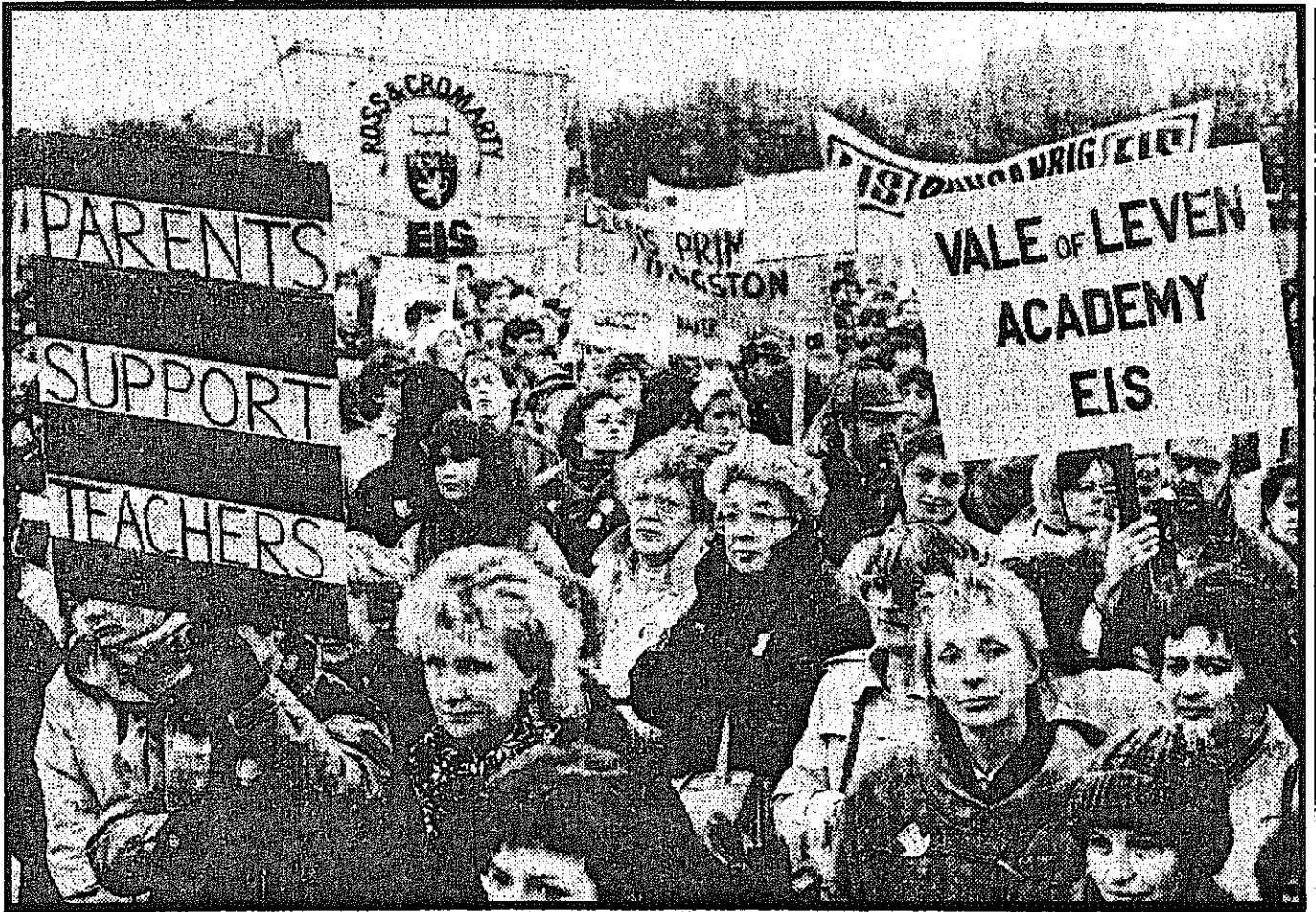
G.M.

**BACK
ISSUES»»»**

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Teachers

Back to the Chalkface?



Teachers Face Up to the Reality of Capitalist Austerity.

The teachers dispute has now dragged on for two years. As we pointed out in Bulletin Nine, the teachers are a marginalised group within the working class, hamstrung by their ambiguous role as both workers and administrators of capitalist discipline. Their essentially individualistic working conditions - alone in the classroom - further makes them prey to bourgeois ideology. Nevertheless the current dispute indicates how the crisis is forcing even this group to defend their working class interests. The two-year struggle has seen them gain militancy rather than, as government and unions hoped, become demoralised.

Recent moves by the State reflect the general tendency of state control today. The general atmosphere of social insecurity is now being codified in the new teaching contracts being created. As Bulletin Nine pointed out, the notion that Scotland and England/Wales have separate and independent systems of education has always been

a myth and this has become clearer as both areas drew up 'separate' but identical new contracts. An 'independent' committee of enquiry was set up in Scotland first to head off the widespread militancy there. This 'Main' Committee duly produced a report which called for an increased working week (up by 7.7%), hugely increased headmaster patronage (to veto appointments, determine salaries), an end to job security, an increased use of temporary staff (with the scrapping of the old agreement whereby such staff were made permanent after one years work), increased class sizes, and a limitation of future industrial action - only strikes would be permitted henceforth and even the legitimacy of these should be queried. This last item is, of course, directed against the fact that teachers have been able to screw state plans for restructuring education for the demands of the crisis by Work To Rules, refusal to do Curriculum Development and exam boycotts. Teachers have been showing for some time that the strike is often not the most effective weapon in workers' armoury.

The 'Main' Committee, then, with its 'secret and independent' deliberations, rather cleverly came up with an identical package to that being offered to English and Welsh teachers. The pay awards included in the package were trumpeted as being huge. And so they were - for headmasters. For teachers the news was all bad. As Bulletin Nine pointed out, there is an elaborate pay structure scale to divide and isolate teachers within schools, as well as between Secondary and Primary sectors. Thus a Secondary teacher at the top of his/her scale will receive 13.5% over 18 months (taking into account the increase in hours of 7.7%, this means a 5.8% increase.) A Primary teacher on point 3 on the scale will receive 7.3% (in real terms a pay cut of 0.4%). Furthermore headmaster patronage will reward some 'good' (ie.cooperative) teachers by some £1600 to £2000 more than their colleagues on the same pay scale. And the gap between the highest paid ordinary Secondary teacher and his/her Primary counterpart will increase to £400.

The State's strategy is clear. Patronage is further increased by the use of temporary staff. Already, widespread use is made of such workers. Their position is such that their employment can be ended without any notice being given, they are not paid for holidays or even for interval breaks or lunch hours. The new package ensures that teachers will become permanently 'temporary', a clear attempt to discipline a sizeable part of the workforce whose very livelihood will depend on continuing headmaster approval.

Funding for this package is to come from massive school closures. Already pupils are being bussed from school to school in search of subjects (one school doesn't teach biology, one doesn't teach German - and so on.), so that pupils have to make cross town visits to get such instruction and then are bussed back again for the rest of their timetables! School closures will greatly increase this process: working class education, already a caricature of real education, is about to get even worse.

Reaction in Scotland to 'Main' was immediate. Union field officers raced round schools gauging reaction. In school after school they were given short shrift. It was clearly time for the State to bail the unions out - which it duly did. The Scottish Office declared that it would stage the payment of the wage 'increases' and the unions were thus immediately able to start a campaign of protest. Thus Scottish teachers found themselves being dragooned into protecting a package that they originally wanted to reject. Once again the unions were trying their old trick of exhausting militancy through phoney battles. Union goons visited schools and appeared on the media warning teachers that they couldn't afford to reject 'Main'. In England and Wales a similar scenario was being played out with the six different unions having secret meetings together and with employers in a desperate attempt to impose the package. As we write there is a news blackout descending on these meetings but their outcome is clear.

Isolated by unions, secondary and primary sectors, and by the actions of the unions, teachers are going to be hammered. The process is not unique to Britain - Paris recently saw huge teacher and student demonstrations against similar state attempts to restructure education. Everywhere the Capitalist state is responding to the crisis by increasing social discipline. A cowed and subservient teaching workforce is but one element of that process. However, the signs are there that although the unions and the government will succeed in imposing a vicious settlement this time, teacher militancy, even though limited, is here to stay. Sizeable numbers of teachers have realised during two years of bitter struggle against the state that their role is fundamentally that of worker. The shattering of carefully nurtured illusions is both a blow for the state and a hopeful sign that schoolkids may after all learn something positive from their teachers.

G.M.

TRANSLATE?

The C.B.G. desperately needs the services of translators.

We would like to make our material available to non-speakers of English, we would like to be able to have some of the material being produced by fractions of the proletarian movement in other languages accessible to us and, in our attempts to learn from the experience of the revolutionary movement of the past, we would very much like to be able to have much of the material that exists in French German, Dutch and especially Russian translated into English.

If any reader feels he can help us in this task we would urge them to contact us at our group address.

Correspondence

oooo with India

One of the most encouraging trends of the past few years has been the emergence of proletarian fractions groping towards communist positions in areas of the world hammered by capitalist exploitation outwith the capitalist metropolises. During the past eighteen months we have been contacted by and have written to three groups which have emerged in India, Lal Pataka who have evolved in the direction of Battaglia Comunista and the CWO and two groups in Faridabad - though we are as yet

unaware of the relationship between the two. One of these, Communist Internationalist, contacted us in late 1985 and we wrote at length to them earlier this year. They subsequently sent us a leaflet which they had handed out among textile workers in Faridabad and an introduction to the leaflet.

Our letter, their leaflet and introduction are printed below.

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In response to your letter, we want to take as a starting point the last point raised in your letter, where you say;

"--- the constitution and strengthening world-wide of revolutionary minorities is a vital necessity . . ."

We think this is the crux of the matter which separates us from the ICC, for the question is HOW is this to be achieved. This is the crucial question facing revolutionaries today - how do we organise ourselves and our work TODAY so that - 1) we can maximise our present strength for taking up our current interventionary tasks in the life of the class, and 2) lay the basis for the process of regroupments from which the party of the future will emerge?

The history of the revolutionary milieu, and of the ICC in particular, over the past ten years has demonstrated very clearly that no convincing political answer to these questions has yet emerged. As you point out in your letter, and as we have repeated frequently in the Bulletins, revolutionaries today, despite a period of rising class struggle, are numerically tiny and isolated from the proletariat in a manner which is historically unprecedented. The original programmatic and organisational gains which were concretised by the foundation of the ICC (and to a lesser extent, the CWO) have not been built upon. The entire revolutionary milieu has not only failed to grow in size and influence, but has instead, been wracked and divided by extreme and vicious sectarianism. The organisations which have managed to survive the past decade have done so at the expense of never-ending splits and self-imposed isolation from other revolutionary fractions. Today, there exists NO systematic attempt at joint work and intervention, and there is no regular, permanent, shared forum for debate and the confrontation of positions and analyses. Our own group, and that of WILDCAT, are the only two organisations which have made any attempt at such joint interventions, and the only ones to have actually succeeded in this during the year-long British miners strike. Our publication is the only one which regularly publishes contributions from other communist fractions. In this situation then, when revolutionaries won't work or discuss together, how are we to achieve the "world-wide strengthening of revolutionary minorities" that you call for?

The starting point - an unswerving commitment to a centralised organisation which can undertake the leading role in the struggles of the class and the revolutionary process - is probably shared by most of the elements which

currently make up the revolutionary milieu. But the question remains - what do we mean by "leading role" and how do we build a centralism which will reflect and facilitate that? This is precisely the issue which formed the crux of the debate between Lenin and Luxemburg, and it is the continuation of this debate which lies at the heart of our differences with the ICC. Summing it up as simply and briefly as we can - Lenin's starting view that the proletariat was capable of only a limited form of consciousness - a trade union consciousness - led directly to an understanding of the party's role as that of a military-type General Staff: the brain and organiser of the proletariat. Thus the task of centralisation was to promote a "unity of action", a tightly disciplined organisation, dominated by the central organs, who in their turn, were seen as the brain and organiser of the party. Lenin openly equates the discipline of the factory with the discipline of the party. In this view, clarity, for the proletariat, was a product of the cogitations of the party, and for the party, clarity was a product of the cogitations of the central committee. Thus centralisation was seen as a device for implementing the will of the centre. X (We realise, of course, that the need for brevity in this letter has meant simplifying the argument to an almost absurd extent, but we will enclose copies of articles and texts from past Bulletins which provide much fuller and more developed analysis.)

Luxemburg and Gorter, and their comrades in the German Left, rejected this for a much more advanced vision of the dialectical inter-relationship of the party, class and consciousness. For them, consciousness is fundamentally a product of the class's own activity, and the party plays a leading role within that by picking up and politically transcending the momentary advances of the class. The organisation of the class and its activity is fundamentally self-organisation. The ability of the party to act as a General staff is supplanted by its ability to point the way forward by the clarity of its programmes and slogans. And this clarity is seen as a product of the WHOLE and not of a part. Therefore the function of centralisation is to allow the active participation of all in the development of clarity and to make the party accessible to, and responsive to, the life and advances of the class.

In this debate, we stand squarely with the comrades of the German Left. The ICC, on the other hand, have developed a practice which is far more monolithic and sectarian than anything which prevailed in the Bolshevik party until the mid twenties.

We want to state very clearly, that our rejection of monolithic centralism is NOT based on a "fear of organised, centralised work" as you suggest in your letter. On the contrary, both our political theory as developed in many texts in past Bulletins, and our political practice in the internal and external work of the CBG over the past five years, is inseparable from "centralised, organised work". If that were not the case, then we would certainly have suffered programmatic degeneration and organisational fragmentation after our splits from the ICC, and been unable to maintain the regular and systematic intervention which we have achieved in the revolutionary milieu and in the struggles of our class.

A rejection of monolithism is NOT a rejection of centralism. What is vital to our work as revolutionaries is programmatic clarity and, therefore, what is vital to our organisational form is that it facilitates the process of clarification which underlies that programmatic clarity. That does not come from the central committee but from the widest possible debate and confrontation of positions, within the party, within the revolutionary milieu, and within the class. It requires the party to be a living part of the class, and not a sectarian defender of sterile dogma. Monolithism presents an insuperable barrier to this process. It destroys debate inside the organisation, and thus leaves it without the tools to understand and, therefore, to lead, the struggles of the class: it isolates the organisation

from other political fractions and thus leaves it unable to undertake the process of regroupment which will produce the party of the future.

The CBG insists that this rejection of monolithism is not just a question of will, or attitude or rhetoric, but of organisation. A correct understanding of the relationship of party, class and consciousness has organisational consequences and it is these consequences that we have attempted to develop in the pages of the Bulletin, and which divides us from the ICC. We will enclose copies of the relevant texts and will therefore only touch very briefly here on the political lessons we have drawn since our splits from the ICC.

1) The Taking up of Positions.

We have argued many times before that it is crucial for revolutionaries to understand the consequences of our profound isolation from the class and its influence. We are incredibly tiny and weak in an historically unprecedented fashion and are thus prey to the danger of the most arbitrary and inconsequential positions coming to dominate our political lives. Unlike revolutionaries of the past, we completely lack that rigorous testing of our positions that comes from being immersed in, and a daily part of, the life and struggles of the class. Therefore, we argue that there is a need for very great caution in the programmatic incorporation of positions into the identity of an organisation. The class lines contained in the Platform are, of course, the unyielding foundation. Outwith those, positions springing from more secondary or conjunctural issues should only be programmatically incorporated when the needs of action demand unity. In this case, although comrades must accept the discipline of unified action, they must remain free to express their divergences, both internally and externally. Where positions do not give rise to immediate action - like economic analyses, the subterranean maturation of consciousness, the theory of the Left in Opposition etc - the debate should be pursued without the hindrance of an organisational position being adopted.

We reject absolutely your suggestion that this amounts to "avoiding decisions on fundamental questions". If you do not accept this we would like you to point out the "fundamental questions" we have avoided and why you think that an organisational position is demanded on them. Of course, it is quite right that decisions are unavoidable when an organisation must act, but it is quite unacceptable that decisions are taken simply to win internal arguments and to crush dissenters. There could be no clearer illustration of how monolithism uses the adoption of positions, not as a method of clarification, but as a disciplinary device, than the current series of events which have led to the latest splits within the ICC. Here we see the question of "centrism", an unreal issue for everyone else in the revolutionary milieu, come to dominate the ICC's life and eventually become an organisational position capable of causing splits, not on its own merits, but as a device to crush debate and dissent on an earlier and more profound debate - that of class consciousness.

2) Political Divergences.

The debates and divergences within an organisation must be seen as a healthy part of political life and allowed the widest possible expression. As a matter of course they must be reflected regularly and systematically in the public press and public meetings of the organisation. This does NOT happen in either the ICC or the CWO, despite their formal commitment to open debate.

3) Tendencies. When divergences crystallise into the emergence of organised tendencies, this must be understood as an inevitable and healthy part of the life of the organisation, and they must be allowed the means to function - separate meetings, joint texts etc. They must be allowed the widest possible platform for their contributions, with more or less automatic

space in the public press. Also, as a matter of course, tendencies MUST be given voice within the central organs.

4) Central Organs.

Central organs are not ideological policemen nor the source and repository of clarity. Their role within internal debates is not to "take up positions" on behalf of the organisation as a whole, but to give a political direction to the life and debates of the organisation in a manner which gives genuine expression to the organisation as a whole. As far as the outside world is concerned, by and large, central organs are charged with speaking as the voice of the organisation. This shouldn't be seen as simply presenting a united front, but of clearly expressing the life and debates of the organisation. Obviously, the demands of rapid intervention frequently require that concrete positions are decided upon more or less instantly, and that is clearly the task of the central organs. But as with everything else, it is not something that they do in isolation. They do it as part and parcel of the process of giving voice and shape to the concerns of the organisation as a whole. The fact that the central organs have publically spoken does not fix that as a permanent position of the organisation.

5) Sectarianism.

The rejection of monolithism also means the rejection of sectarianism. Each fraction must recognise outside its own borders, the existence of a revolutionary milieu with a shared community of political interests. This recognition must carry practical consequences - for us, it means - regular and systematic attempts at joint work and intervention; open exchange of publications and ~~xxx~~ mutual servicing of bookshops; an open invitation to use the pages of the Bulletin for debate; and a continuous effort to find a regular public forum for the confrontation of the different elements of the revolutionary milieu.

What is at stake here, is a commitment to the process of regroupment and to the building of the party which will be required in the revolutionary upheavals of the future. The question to be confronted is - how does a party emerge? (We have devoted a lengthy article on the emergence of the Bolsheviks in the forthcoming issue of the Bulletin.) We reject the simplistic position defended by the ICC and the CWO/Battaglia that the party will ~~emerge~~ be the product of the "victory" of one specific fraction, successfully winning the arguments and "conquering" the rest, and that therefore, our revolutionary responsibility can be discharged by the sectarian defence of our narrow self-interest. On the contrary, we think that examination of the last revolutionary wave, demonstrates that the party will be synthesised from within the revolutionary milieu as a whole, crystallised round positions which cannot yet be foreseen. Therefore, our commitment is to the process of clarification within the whole milieu, to open and fraternal debate and to a political responsibility which stretches wider than the health of our own fraction.

Comrades, we hope that we have demonstrated that our political differences with the ICC are profound and not to be dismissed in terms of the ... "decision on this or that particular position should have been taken after this instead of that amount of discussion." You are quite correct that that would not be the basis for a split. You are also correct that the particular form the ICC's monolithism took - the emergence of an unscrupulous "Holy Family" - is also not the basis for a split. A healthy organisation founded upon a proper political framework should have no difficulty surviving the squalid manoeuvring of cliques. The ICC's problem is that its political and organisational theory and practice is based upon a fundamental and irreversible monolithism. The splits of 1981 (documented in detail in the Bulletin) and the documentation produced by the latest split of the External Tendency demonstrates overwhelmingly that debate has become impossible inside the ICC. Political debate and divergences are seen as

treachery, to be driven out by any means available. As a consequence, the ICC can never hope to take up its responsibilities within the process of regroupment, and has cut itself off from the necessary process of clarification required to understand the movement of the class struggle. The end result is organisational fragmentation and clear evidence of programmatic degeneration, particularly on the question of class consciousness. The ICC has become a sect, dedicated to the defence of crumbling dogma.

Comrades, we hope you will want to pursue this debate further, and we extend an open invitation to use the pages of the Bulletin as a public forum for the discussion. We would also be happy to publish any contributions from you on other issues, particularly coverage of the class struggle in your area.

With communist greetings,

Enclosed:

Another Look at the Organisational Question - A lengthy examination of organisation and the Bolshevik Party from Bulletin 2.

Organisation. Discussion text from Bulletin 3.

Correspondence on Organisation from Bulletin 4.

Letter from LLM (a comrade from Hong Kong) on the question of class consciousness, the role of the party and organisation, plus or reply.

from Communist Internationalist.

The relentless deepening of world capitalist crisis pushes the bourgeoisie the world over to resort to increasingly generalised and brutal attacks on the living and working conditions of the working class. The Indian economy as a part, a weak part, of the world capitalist system is experiencing the contradictions of capitalism in a more magnified and brutal form. And the Indian bourgeoisie, like the world bourgeoisie, has been talking 'realism' and openly asking for blood or sacrifices.

The proletariat, particularly in the metropolises, has been vigorously responding to these attacks, as shown by the waves of struggles since 1983 and conformed by massive recent strike movements in Finland, Norway and Belgium. In this regard the Indian proletariat, disorientated and demoralised by the unions and by the suppression of the state during the struggles of '77-'80', has been slow to

respond. But since the end of '85, when 30,000 transport workers in Delhi went on wildcat strike, the scene has been changing slowly but surely and the working class struggles are witnessing a clear resurgence. Since the end of last year millions of workers in teaching, health and power sectors, in coal, newspaper and textile industries, government employees in several provinces have gone on strike at one time or another. The strike by 20,000 textile workers in Delhi is thus part of a class-wide movement, and is situated in a massive discontent in all sections of the class. This strike thus, whatever its outcome constitutes a step of the class towards coming out of demoralisation to mount a determined and massive resistance against the attacks of the bourgeoisie. When the class is taking up the fight against capital it is the task of revolutionaries to put before the class lessons and orientations derived from its past struggles.

This leaflet is a modest effort in this direction.

Leaflet distributed in Hindi by Communist Internationalist among the striking textile workers (20,000) in Delhi and other areas.

Workers, comrades.

Today the capitalist class is attacking us. The bourgeoisie is throwing workers out of factories - in Delhi, Faridabad, at Gaziabad, at all other places workers are being retrenched. The demon of retrenchment is rising up before the workers-employees of government enterprises. The wages and benefits of workers are being cut and work loads increased in the name of productivity. The living and working conditions of workers are being worsened. In all parts of India, in fact throughout the world, the bourgeoisie is mounting brutal attacks on the workers - workers are being made to pay for the crisis. We cannot accept it, we must not accept it. If we don't respond to these attacks, if we don't struggle, the attacks on us and our exploitation will increase day by day and only increasing misery will be in store for us. We must struggle against these attacks. Many workers are already struggling against them. Since last year workers throughout the world - in England, France, Belgium etc. are continuing to go on strike. For some time now workers in different parts of India have again started responding to these attacks. And in our midst the textile workers of Delhi have taken up the challenge thrown down by Capital. All workers must struggle in self-defence.

In the past, in the period 1977-81 and even before that, workers, including textile workers, have fought heroic struggles. But because of their isolation in individual factories, sectors or areas, the bourgeoisie succeeded in suppressing them. Today we must not let these stratagems of the bourgeoisie succeed. To make their struggles more effective, textile workers, all workers, in struggle must spread the struggles to other workers and call on them to struggle now also. All workers under attack must link up with the striking textile workers. All workers must struggle together, now.

How can we link up our struggles? To struggle together, struggling workers must go to the gates of other factories in massive numbers and call upon other workers to come out on strike immediately. We must hold joint meetings and develop demands common to all workers. We cannot win without struggling together. But who is stopping struggling together, united? Who is sabotaging our struggles? The Unions! Recently when D.T.C. workers went on a wildcat strike the unions sabotaged their struggle and manoeuvred them back to work. When textile workers in Bombay and jute workers in Calcutta went on strike, instead of allowing the struggle to spread to other factories, the unions made the workers go away to their villages and later killed the strike. Similarly the British miners were on strike against retrenchment for one and a half years where the unions sabotaged the efforts of the striking miners to link up with striking dock workers, car workers and railway workers. Today, when the workers of all factories are under attack, the unions don't let them get together and say that this is a problem on one factory or one industry only. All unions sabotage the struggle. All workers know this from their own experiences.

We cannot trust the unions. We cannot allow them to stop our struggles. Don't let them isolate the struggles. Take control of your struggle in your own hands. Organise your factory committees and massive flying pickets to the gate of other factories. Only by unifying our forces will the bourgeoisie back off.

Unity, out of union fetters, autonomous unity of the working class is our only weapon.

COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALIST
POST BOX NO 25, NIT Faridabad 121001 India.

oooo with Sth. America

More recently two groups in South America, 'Emancipación Obrera' (Workers Emancipation) and 'Militancia Clasista Revolucionaria' (Revolutionary Class Militant) from Argentina and Uruguay wrote and sent copies of their "International Proposal" through various routes to revolutionary fractions

throughout the world. They have subsequently published, in Spanish, a magazine with the first replies they received to this and their own comments on the replies and have sent us copies of their publications. We print below their "International Proposal" and the CBG's reply to it.

"INTERNATIONAL PROPOSAL"

TO THE PARTISANS OF THE WORLD PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

On February 22 and 23 1986, a group of militants from certain countries (especially Argentina and Uruguay) met in Uruguay to discuss the present world situation and the tasks of the revolutionary proletariat.

There was a general agreement between them that in the face of the world-wide attacks of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat and the present state of weakness, dispersion and isolation of the small revolutionary class forces, it is necessary to work together to reverse this situation in combatting the sectarianism and nationalism which is implicit in certain conceptions of international work. In an attempt to change this situation, the comrades present put forward the following ideas and propositions.

SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS AND FUNDAMENTALS

It might seem strange that here, some groups and a small number of militants, who are certainly generally unknown, suddenly launch an appeal, a proposition to all those who throughout the world uphold with greater or lesser strength, with greater or lesser clarity, the flag of proletarian internationalism, of the world proletarian revolution.

But it's not just "here" or "all of a sudden" that once again the anguished cry of revolutionary minorities is raised, trying to break the chains imposed by capital, helplessly witnessing the terrifying blows which the bourgeoisie inflicts on the proletariat and themselves. Whether in periods of rising class struggle or the most violent moments of counter-revolution, these revolutionary minorities discover, one by one, the meaning of isolation, the weakness of their small forces. A weakness which is not only numerical but fundamentally political, since it is impossible to resolve locally or nationally the problems with which revolutionaries are presently posed.

We are convinced that in different places groups are arising which don't identify with the traditional left (Stalinist, Trotskyist and their

different varieties), with politics aimed at helping the bourgeoisie to solve its problems, with the position of changing the state form of bourgeois domination or supporting its wars, but who instead try to elaborate a distinctive politics calling for the autonomy of the working class against the bourgeoisie and the struggle to destroy its domination and its state without preliminary (democratic) phases or stages. And we know what it means to swim against the current, without being able to count on any help, without the immediate possibility of reappropriating the historical experience of the revolutionary proletariat, without fundamental theoretical-political texts, and in a dangerous atmosphere of repression.

If, for some, certain definitions or positions are "ABC" which we don't write or talk about sufficiently clearly, for each of us to be able to describe the struggle requires a long process of struggles, of ruptures, of fear and uncertainties.

In the schools here they teach us a saying of a famous man of the last century: "ideas cannot be killed." However, we have learnt that one kills those who have certain ideas (or positions) and that the dominant class can over a long period prevent the reappropriation, the awareness of, the link with and the development of experience, of ideas and positions which the revolutionary proletariat lives and builds up in different parts of the world. Thus, paradoxically, it took a monstrous repression (with a subsequent state of exile) and the (Falklands) war to make known here the existence of diverse radical currents and groups throughout the world. To make known - and that still little enough - the experience of Germany and elsewhere after World War One. To get to know other positions in the Spanish Civil War, which were neither Francoist nor Republican. And there is another history closer to us (which we hardly know at all).

Departing from this we have had confirmation that groups currently exist which don't belong to the 'traditional' political currents, many of

whom we didn't know before, and others of whom we don't know when and how they broke with capital and its fractions, but which express to different degrees different moments of rupture with the politics of capital.

But if today we are aware that they exist, this doesn't mean that the present situation of isolation and of weakness has changed. On the contrary, we don't even hear enough about what's going on, not only in far away countries, but not even in a nearby city or in a neighbouring quarter. And this shouldn't be understood as a curiosity or as a journalistic question: in Argentina for example, there are continually days when several million workers are in struggle without there being any coordination between them, so they sometimes don't even know that there is a struggle which is going on everywhere. And if this is the case for relatively massive movements, it's even worse with the contact and the awareness of the existence of avant-gardes appearing during these struggles or under their influence.

And we are convinced that in the countries we live in, as elsewhere in the world, groups of workers and militants are being thrown up, trying to break with the politics of conciliation, of subordination to the bourgeoisie, but which, in the absence of an international reference, and with the strong presence of the bourgeoisie in the workers' movement, end up being absorbed by some fraction of capital or simply disintegrating, disappearing.

Few are those who manage to survive the first blows, and those who do so have an uncertain perspective or political isolation ahead of them. Having surmounted different stages and having to double back, they find themselves in an impasse, starting from scratch on new subjects. Something which is transformed into a daily reality, a helplessness which saps those limited forces which already have been politically and economically hammered. Isn't there an alternative to this? Must the preparation of a revolutionary internationalist politics, or at least an attempt at it, proceed step by step, group by group, city by city, nation by nation, generation by generation? Does each one have to go through the same stages, confront the same problems, receive the same blows, decipher the same letters, elaborate the same words, in order after some time and a long hard road, having become strong and "party-like", to join up with ones "equals", or, in their absence, to "spread" to other nations?

We don't believe that this is the only option. We don't even believe that this can lead to anything positive.

On the contrary, we think that the only alternative we must work towards is the international one. Just as it's a mystification to talk about a communist society as long as there still exists even one capitalist country, the same goes for talking about internationalism if it is only conceived of as solidarity with workers' struggles throughout the world or as pompous phrases now and again against war, militarism or imperialism.

For us, proletarian internationalism has a different meaning, and implies making the effort to go beyond general solidarity, since the international dimensions of the proletarian revolution demand the interaction and unification of efforts to work out a unique strategy at the world level and its political corollary in the tasks confronting us in the different zones and countries.

Naturally this can't be resolved through voluntarism or from one day to the next. It will not be the fruit of a long, prolonged "educational" or "scientific" work such as was conceived by

the Second International (and not only it), through an "accumulation of forces" ("winning militants one by one" and "elaborating THE theory" and structuring THE leadership which will be recognised when its time comes) for a far distant future confrontation, whereas every day we see the resistance and the struggle of the proletariat against capital (which in reality, for these "political currents", must be controlled, covered, isolated in such a way that they are adapted for the incessant "task" of supporting some fraction of the bourgeoisie against another, supposedly worse one).

If the party of the working class is not one of these political groups calling itself such in one or more countries, if one can't agree with "the party for the working class" and the call for "the working class organised as a class, in other words as a party", this is not a simple game of words. If we reject the social-democratic ideas (Stalinists, Trotskyists etc) of the party as an apparatus (intellectuals, workers, etc) carrying the truth, which voluntarily constitutes itself within one nation and awaits recognition from the uncultivated masses, and the international as a federation of parties (or a party which spreads to other nations), this implies a break with these conceptions and practices which are totally opposed to proletarian internationalism and which in fact are just a way of manifesting and defending nationalist ideas.

Among the latter, the most evident is that which conceives of the development of its own group (or their own groups) as a local or national question, with the aim of developing a decisive force for later on, which dedicates itself to making contacts with other groups in other countries in order to absorb them or generally expose them through discussions and declarations.

The international contacts are considered as "private property", with a bilateral practice predominating, something which can include periods of 'getting together' over so many years, finally coming together in the "United Nations" of "Revolutionaries." The practice of the Second International is a good example of this. We consider that this path can only lead to new frustrations and new mystifications, which is why it is necessary to struggle against all the interests, conceptions and the sectarianism which produce and reproduce the divisions created by the bourgeoisie in the defence of its internal markets, of its states, of "its" proletarians, in other words, of the surplus value it extracts.

ON CERTAIN ACCUSATIONS

We don't know if the above is sufficient to present this proposition and justify it, or if it requires greater development. However, we believe it necessary to add precisions regarding certain accusations.

To be sure, many will ask themselves: "With whom, to what point and how does one place oneself within a proletarian internationalist perspective? How to determine this? Who is to do so?" It's evident that nobody would think of working with, or even making a leaflet with someone in the enemy camp. Regarding the class enemy there can be neither conciliation nor entrism. But not everybody is an enemy. It cannot be denied that among the groups and persons not belonging to the latter there is often intolerance, static visions and sectarianism. There is a practice of divergence, a dispute over "customers" in common, a nationalism and a "defence of ones own back garden" disguised as intransigence.

We cannot escape this problem in an international proposition. It's natural that nobody would think of working in a common perspective with a group of the Fourth International or with a third world Maoist. But if the character of the enemy class is evident in certain cases, in others it's much more subtle, which makes it difficult to draw up a line of demarcation, all the more so when we are seeking to take a step forward in the present situation of weakness, isolation and dispersion.

We believe that it is impossible to elaborate an ensemble of "programmatic" points, which would only be the proof of opportunism, unless they are so worked out and profound that perhaps only the group itself could agree, if at all.

One shouldn't pretend either that groups and isolated individuals in each country of the world can ripen in the same way as in other zones or that we can take this or that definition which, as widespread as it may be in certain places, is not the product of a shared history, of which as we have already pointed out, little or nothing is known in other zones.

Conversely, the almost one year long strike of the British miners didn't give rise to any serious attempt at coordinating a common response of the different groups and militants scattered across the globe, something which points not only to a weakness and a hesitation, but to sectarianism, to conceptions of the class struggle and of the party like those of social democracy. And in the face of the Iran-Iraq war? And of South Africa and Bolivia and elsewhere where the proletariat in struggle has received the hardest blows? What reply, however minimal, has been attempted at the international level?

How to resolve this? How are the criteria for our recognition to be decided in order that from the outset the proposition to overcome the present situation isn't still-born (either being ambiguous enough to lead to a free for all, or else being so strict that the only ones 'admitted' are already working together?).

For us, the criteria for our recognition is in practice. And that's what the second part of the Proposition deals with, even if the latter, no more than anything else, can evade the essential, unique "guarantee": the struggle.

INTERNATIONAL PROPOSITION

With the objective of:

- contributing to the modification of the present state of weakness of the tiny revolutionary and class forces scattered throughout the world, in order to raise its possibilities of action in the class struggle;
- consolidating and enlarging today's sporadic comings together, in the perspective of organising and centralising a proletarian internationalist tendency which exists today, with all its limits and errors, we propose the following:

1) A coordinated response in the face of certain attacks of capital (eg. on the question of the British miners, of the workers of South Africa, Iran-Iraq, etc): joint leaflets and campaigns, political information, moments of practical relations and orientations affecting the world proletariat.

2) International Information:

- a) about workers' struggles, in order to make propaganda as much as possible on the most important struggles taking place in each region or country in order to spread their echo and to reinforce the reality of proletarian internationalism and proletarian fraternity;
- b) about different political groups, not only

participants in the proposal, but also enemies, since this is a necessary element for the political struggle against them;

c) about historical experience, texts and documents produced in the long struggle of the proletariat against capital and all exploitation.

3) Theoretical-political polemic with a view towards taking up joint positions and as a contribution to the development of revolutionary politics.

For those who not only agree on a whole series of points but are in agreement on praxis, and who put forward all the points of this proposition, in particular point 1 (common action), it is vital to organise the discussion. And solely for those, we propose two things:

4) The international organisation of correspondence, implying the creation of a fluid network of exchange and of communication, which should be one of the material bases of point 7.

5) An International Review, which should not be conceived of as an ensemble of the political positions of the different groups brought together under a "collective" cover. On the contrary, it should be an instrument to consolidate the realised common activity, to propagate and argue shared positions and, to be sure, to develop the necessary public discussion on the vital questions concerning the tasks of the moment, the proposed activity and the "open" themes, given a common agreement on the necessity to include them.

6) To the degree that there is the necessary agreement, to stimulate the participation of other groups in the press and vice versa and the spreading of texts of intervening groups.

7) Move towards creating a common "internal" discussion: in other words, not limit oneself to the "official and public" polemic between groups, but also the discussion of communists in the face of "open" problems.

All the activities and all the decisions which the participating groups take will be through general agreement, in other words, unanimously.

TO WHOM DO WE MAKE THIS PROPOSITION?

1. Anyone in the world waging struggle against the attacks of capital, against all imperialist or inter-bourgeois wars, against all bourgeois states (regardless of shade or colour) with the aim of the working class imposing its dictatorship against the bourgeoisie, its social system and all forms of exploitation.

2. All those who don't support any fraction of the bourgeoisie against another, but who struggle against them all. Those who don't defend inter-classist fronts, neither adhering to nor participating in them.

3. Those who practically accept that "the workers have no country," this fundamental phrase which doesn't just say that the workers can't defend what they don't have, but that they "can" and "must" intervene in the struggles and tasks posed in the different countries of the world, despite the fact that, from the bourgeois point of view, this would be considered as an interference and against "the right of nations to self-determination." A right which is called for each time the revolutionary proletariat or its avant garde reinforces its international links in the face of its class enemy, a right which is trampled on each time it comes to putting down and massacring revolutionary movements.

4. Precisely for this reason, those who fight against the politics of "defence of the national economy", of economic recovery, of "sacrifices to resolve crises", to those who don't swallow the

policies of expansion of their own bourgeoisie even when the latter is economically, politically or militarily attacked; to those who always struggle against the entire bourgeoisie, both local and foreign.

5. To those who combat the forces and the ideologies which set out to chain the proletarians to the economy and to the politics of the nation state, disarming them under the pretext of "realism" and the "lesser evil".

6. To those who don't propose to "recuperate" or "reconquer" the unions. On the contrary, to those who characterise the latter as instruments and institutions of the bourgeoisie and of its state. In no way can the unions defend to the end the immediate interests of the proletariat. In no way can they serve the revolutionary interests of the proletariat.

7. Those who agree that one of the tasks on this terrain is to battle to the end against the political line of class collaboration supported by the unions, and who contribute to making the rupture of the class from the unions irreversible.

8. To those who do all they can to contribute to reinforcing all the attempts at unification of the proletariat, in order to confront capital, even partially, all the attempts at extension, generalisation and deepening of the struggles of resistance against capital.

9. To those who defend the struggles against all varieties of capitalist repression, whether those exercised by the official (state) military forces of law and order, or that of its civilian colleagues of the left and right of capital. To those who, as best they can, collaborate with groups who suffer the blows of repression.

10. To those avant gardes who, in the struggle against the bourgeoisie and its state, pitilessly combat those who limit themselves to criticising one of the forms which the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie takes on (the most violent, military one in fact) and defend democracy or struggle for its development.

11. In this sense, in the face of the bourgeoisie's false alternative of fascism/anti-fascism, to those who denounce the bourgeois class character of anti-fascist fronts and of democracy, and pose the necessity of struggling for the destruction of the bourgeois state, in whatever form it presents itself, with the objective of abolishing the system of wage labour and the world-wide elimination of class society and all forms of exploitation.

12. To those for whom proletarian internationalism implies, first of all, the struggle against one's own bourgeoisie, revolutionary defeatism in case of any war which is not the class war of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and for the world proletarian revolution.

13. To those who, with whatever different theorisations on the party, agree on the fact that they are international from birth onwards, or they are nothing.

14. Finally, to those who, in accordance with their strength and their situation have defined their tasks against the bourgeoisie, oriented towards two fundamental aspects:

- a) push the development of the class autonomy of the proletariat;
- b) contribute to the construction and development of the politics of proletarian internationalism and the world party.

In other words, whereas the means, the tasks and priorities can be adapted in different ways depending on a given situation, all of this must be in relation to one sole perspective: the constitution of the working class as a world-wide force for

the destruction of the capitalist system.

FINAL CLARIFICATION

We believe that the above formulations can and should be improved, corrected, completed. We aren't going to defend every last dot and comma of this Proposition, but its general sense.

In the first discussions we have had on the present situation and on how to begin to change it, there have been comrades who have expressed a certain pessimism on the reception it will receive and on the possibilities of its realisation. We believe that in the face of the terrible blows which the bourgeoisie delivers against a proletariat searching, sometimes desperately, to resolve its problems, in the face of the possibility (and the realities) of inter-bourgeois war, in the face of massacres of the workers, of children and the old, which are repeated in different parts of the world, and in the face of the ever-growing mountain of tasks imposed on revolutionaries at present, the politics of the sect, of greediness, of "leaving things till later" and the implicit or explicit defence of the present "status quo" don't match up.

The recognition of the present situation should be translated through a political initiative capable of recuperating the lost ground and of overcoming grave weaknesses. In this sense, the common engagement must be the struggle for a radical change in the international relations between revolutionaries. In other words, going beyond a simple exchange of positions (sometimes not even that) to a joint taking of positions in the face of the attack of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat, to an indispensable coordination orienting the reflection and the debate on questions which consolidate the common perspective.

Among the objections which could be raised in relation to the viability of this proposition, are ones on how to concretise it.

Here we find in point 5, if one agrees with it at all, the means for studying how to organise its realisation. We don't pretend to give a reply here to each question and problem, but to manifest an engagement to struggle for its concretisation.

It is evident that the rapid execution of certain things requires physical meetings. We don't believe that this is absolutely necessary, that is to say, at present it seems to us to be very difficult to achieve, at least for those of us who live in this part of the world.

At present, we don't see the conditions allowing for the organisation of a really international meeting: a trip abroad is (economically) forbidden to us. A trip of 8,000km, the equivalent of more than 15 months wages (more than 20 if we take the minimum defined by the government). That's why we believe that to begin with the relations and discussions, at least between the non-Europeans and the Europeans, should be through correspondence. This will take more time and make the task more difficult, but it's not impossible, far from it (a letter from Europe, for example, if there isn't a strike, takes 15 to 20 days).

Security conditions (those who have confidence in legality are not only childish but a danger for revolutionaries) also pose obstacles, but they can and will be resolved.

Language also creates inconveniences. For our part, and up till now, the only one we have been able to write in Spanish. Some of us can read Italian, Portuguese, and English with difficulty. With a bit of imagination, someone might manage to understand a little French, but there is nothing to be done with German. The other languages

"don't exist." Taking this into account, what's in Castilian won't have the same circulation and rapidity as the other languages in the established order.

To conclude, the initiative which we are presenting has been put forward in its fundamentals. Those who show an interest or agree with it, will receive a part entitled "More On Organisation". In other words, how we see its realisation and concretisation.

We guarantee that all those who write to us will get a copy of all the replies received. The future organisation of the correspondence, discussions, etc, will be with those who agree and will depend on the way they agree among themselves.

For those who agree with the spirit of the proposition, we will ask them to spread it and to give us details (if possible with their address) of groups which have received this convocation. Uruguay, February 1986.



The Proletariat in South America has to Face the Most
Barbaric of Capitalist Regimes.

The comrades of 'Workers Emancipation' and MCR are, understandably, given the nature of repression in South America, conscious of their security. Comrades not directly in touch with them can contact them via the CBG who offer to pass on any letter for them.

Box C.B.G.
 boomtown books
 167 King Street
 ABERDEEN
 United Kingdom.

Comrades,

It was very encouraging to read your "International Proposal" reprinted in the ICC's International Review 46. The appearance of two revolutionary fractions in countries with a relatively high degree of repression of the working class validates, if any validation is necessary, the international nature of proletarian struggle and the extent to which this struggle generates political expressions. Your appearance on the political scene can only help to strengthen the weak but growing revolutionary movement. Welcome.

Something about ourselves. The Communist Bulletin Group is the product of a series of splits which tore the International Communist Current apart in 1980-81. The details of this split, which are hotly contested between ourselves and the ICC can be found in the pages of our magazine the Communist Bulletin. Over the past five years we have tried to keep dialogue open between ourselves and the ICC; unfortunately this has proven to be next to impossible. Rather than addressing political issues the ICC has resorted to lies and misinformation. No doubt you will be given the ICC's side of the story. We would ask that you beware rejecting our political existence on the basis of false information.

All this must appear to you as yet another sign of the sectarianism which besets the proletarian movement. The irony for us is that we would agree. Our political existence is constituted around the notion that the revolutionary movement is tearing itself apart as a result of sectarianism. Revolutionaries pay lip-service to anti-sectarianism. But it seldom goes farther than this. For example, those who defend Lenin and Bordiga's ideas on the role of the party refuse to work with those who do not, and vice-versa. We recognise that real differences exist and that they are significant. However, the dogmatic reiteration of positions and the subsequent refusal to engage in cooperation is not the way forward to the resolution of sectarian problems. Resolution comes through constant dialogue, both theoretical and practical. Communists interest in proletarian revolution overrides these differences. Our revolutionary movement is so small that it cannot afford to keep injuring itself with self-inflicted sectarianism.

Since our emergence in 1981 we have tried to show the nature of today's revolutionary movement and to pinpoint the historical reasons for the movement's weaknesses. At the same time we have consistently tried to encourage organisations to engage in joint activities over specific issues eg. the Falklands/Malvinas War. Unfortunately the sectarianism of the movement has by and large meant that we have met with little success.

You will understand why we are so pleased to see the appearance of a revolutionary current in South America which is very much aware of the need for constant and honest dialogue among proletarian groups.

By and large we are in agreement with your suggestions. However, do not underestimate the difficulties involved in realising the cooperation you desire. Proletarian groups will not easily give up their 'Glorious Isolation'. Your suggestion for the setting up of an international review is to be applauded. Such a review could become the focal point for extending struggles and producing a unified international movement. But at the moment we do not think it is possible. What is possible, and is an essential step towards unification, is work such as joint interventions, joint leaflets and the general exchange of information on struggles throughout the world. Theoretical dialogue is also a necessary component of activity and at the same time groups should open the pages of their magazines to

the views of others who might or might not be opposed to particular political positions. This type of activity must not be taken with the intention of one group annihilating others. This is not healthy scenario for progress. Progress towards the production of a unified movement comes from clarification and where possible, the resolution of problems. But this side of the revolution we cannot expect all differences to be resolved. But this is not a weakness of the movement. Absolute certainty and absolute agreement on everything only appears now in sectarian groups.

This is not to say that definitive answers do not exist. They do. The Communist Bulletin Group, like the ICC, the Communist Workers Organisation, Bttaglia Comunista etc. draws its clarity from the revolutionary analyses of the German and Italian Left Communists of the last revolutionary wave 1914-1920s. The theoretical critique of the Left Communists established, using revolutionary marxism, that capitalism had demonstrably entered the era of decadence with the onset of world war. Certain things follow from this. That the era of reform was passed and that all social democratic and trade union organisations necessarily defended the capitalist system. This is a definitive lesson as is the necessity for the working class to defend itself in revolutionary action by building a soviet structure. Another lesson which separates revolutionaries from others is on the nature of Russia. Russia, the Eastern Bloc, China, all so-called socialist regimes are merely expressions of state capitalism. ie. capitalism in its decadent phase, and as such must be resolutely condemned by communists. They can have no part in defending such regimes.

On the other hand there are questions such as the detailed reasons for the economic crisis of capitalism, the particulars of the period of transition from capitalism to socialism and the role of the party in extending class consciousness which do not have as yet definitive resolutions. Undoubtedly all are serious, especially that of the role of the party. But we believe that it is possible for differences to be encompassed in one organisation. Once revolutionaries begin to realise this the way is open to producing an international review which will presage the emergence of a truly international movement.

It is not clear from your text how far you draw your politics from revolutionary marxism and the work of the German and Italian Left Communists. Clearly many of your concerns parallel those of the Communist Bulletin Group. Here we can only give you a sense of our politics. Hopefully this letter will reach you OK, we have sent it via contact with a number of groups hoping that one will reach you. The proof of this will be your follow up and response. Please therefore acknowledge receipt of this letter to the address above and if you feel secure give us a contact address to send future correspondence to. We will send on copies of our Communist Bulletin which will give you a clearer view of our politics.

Finally we apologise for this letter not being in your native language. Unfortunately we have no one in our organisation who speaks it.

The Communist Bulletin Group.

28th October 1986

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oooo with The Fraction

In Bulletin 10 we published our letter to those ex-comrades of the ICC who had formed the "External Fraction of the ICC." as well as a report of a public meeting held by them in London which we attended. Our letter encouraged them to address the questions of monolithism and sectarianism which underlay their expulsion from the ICC and sought to persuade them to:

"contact other groups in the milieu and publically debate with them....also attempting to maintain a militant relationship with the ICC."

In our report of their public meeting we declared that:

"we welcome whole-heartedly the appearance of the EF and extend whatever support we can to

their efforts to slough off the crushing weight of the ICC's monolithic and sectarian practices."

In conclusion we hoped that:

"..the comrades will respond positively and fraternally."

In Internationalist Perspective 3 there appeared an article entitled "The Revolutionary Milieu and "Internationalist Perspective". The text was an extreme disappointment showing that the EFICC have still a long way to go before the mists of their own sectarian experience will be cleared from their eyes so as to allow them to play a constructive role in the development of the proletarian milieu. We print below our response to the above article.

#####

Dear Comrades,

In the first two issues of Internationalist Perspective you addressed yourselves to the rest of the proletarian milieu and sought to engage the milieu in fraternal discussions with you. Issue three of your publication admirably demonstrates not only the nature of the milieu by dint of the response you got but also your own inadequacies by dint of the response you make therein to those who wrote to you.

First of all let us look at who actually replied to you. One organisation and two individuals. Thats all! Of the latter, one, in Holland, has just ceased publication of his periodical and the other, a close comrade of the CBG in Hong Kong wrote not only a long letter to you but wrote at equal length to both Wildcat and the CBG on a similar theme, the necessity for continued dialogue between the three organisations, the development of common discussion and common work as an essential preparation for the eventual regroupment of proletarian forces. Your rendering of this correspondence in IC 3 in a bare nine lines is nothing short of disgraceful since you make no attempt to deal with any of the contents of LLM's letter.

The organisation which responded was, of course the Communist Bulletin Group. The bulk of our letter to you failed to evoke any response from you. Certainly not in the page of the IC nor by means of any letter from yourselves to the CBG.

Comrades, we must ask the question: just how serious are you when you declare your desire to engage in discussion with the milieu if the ONLY two substantial responses you got are treated in such a manner?

But lets look at who DIDNT reply to you. Who? Why, EVERYBODY ELSE!

Certainly this shows, once again, the deeply sectarian nature of the vast bulk of the existing proletarian milieu. No matter what their stance on all the issues raised by you as necessitating discussion no other organisation, from the PCI to Wildcat (and that must span the entire spectrum) saw fit to engage you in political discussion about the political questions you

identified as desperately needing analysed.

Surely this highlights precisely what we wrote to you, that sectarianism is by no means dependent upon substitutionism, that it pervades the entire milieu and that if you do not confront it openly and frontally as the key issue which divides us you will merely join the ranks of those who sustain and perpetuate it.

This leads us to the ICC, the one organisation you did write about at length, but who also did not respond to you but whose comments on you in their International Review are responded to by you in the rest of the IC article. Their text was the usual melange of lies, slander and downright dishonesty - we have come to expect from the this thoroughly corrupt organisation but your response utterly failed to differentiate between the fact that different political positions can coexist within a single organisation, even a degenerating one like the ICC, and the organisational norms of a sectarian monolith that cannot tolerate dissent, whatever its statutes say.

Your entire text attempts, in a patently unsuccessful manner to substantiate the notion that it was the political differences between the majority and minority which created the Fraction. But, notwithstanding any programmatic move by the ICC in the political direction you outline, this, in itself, would not preclude you being members of the ICC. It is not the ICC's new positions, or the Fractions positions - or even the CBG's positions on the questions of 'centrism', 'lesser evil' etc etc which prevent us all being in the same political organisation, since, by and large, we share the same class lines and communist platform, but the organisational norms of the ICC.

We all have experience of being recalcitrant members of a decaying organisation, the CWO, ICC et alia but as the ICC itself - and those comrades within the Fraction itself - have trumpeted long enough, this, in itself, doesnt condemn a proletarian organisation to the nether reaches of Dante's Inferno. Indeed the Fraction, if they had not been thrown out, would, presumably, still be in the

ICC today.

It is precisely the organisational monolithism of the ICC which produced you. Certainly a strong case can be made for the theoretical degeneration of the ICC but organisational decay into sectarian monolithism isn't an automatic response to theoretical degeneracy. We have no wish to labour this point here for we would merely be repeating what we wrote to you in our last letter. It is a matter for regret that your text in IC3 completely fails to come to grips with the reality of your own genesis. Indeed you are at pains there to differentiate the events of 1981 and 1985 in a desperate attempt to avoid drawing conclusions which would undoubtedly hasten your own self-clarification. But this attempt utterly fails.

Let us, however, merely restate, in your own words (from IC 2) the array of techniques used by the ICC against you.:

First of all when minority opinions appeared:

"It was decreed that there were 'good comrades' with minority positions who had a chance of being saved and 'bas ones' who, by their behaviour, their hesitations, could only drag the ICC into the hell...."

Then followed:

"..a dirty trick: the assimilation of comrades with minority positions to suspicious elements, manoeuvrists, potential saboteurs of the organisation."

Why did they do this?

" to sow fear, to try to terrorise and paralyse the militants with low insinuation."

The attempt by the minority to organise a collective response was then met by:

"- the prohibiting of meetings between minority comrades."

" - numerous attempts at division and demoralisation of comrades with minority positions under the pretext that they were not all in agreement and therefore could not meet."

As you say:

"But the worst was yet to come."

On the formal constitution of the tendency:

" The majority characterised the tendency as 'having no basis for existence'."

But wait a minute. Isn't this precisely the table of contents of the 1981 splits. Nowhere here is the political content of the disputed positions of any relevance - either in 1985 or in 1981 where the political positions of the various splitters, in the various different splits were pretty varied themselves. For example (and it is only one example of many), the ICC. IS letter of 16th Sept 1981 had as some of the "serious example of organisational confusion"....

"- question(ing) of the centralised and unified nature of the organisation.

- the use of an unacceptable tone and even insults in certain correspondence

- premature formation of a "tendency" on an imprecise basis."

Later the letter said:

"...at the present stage of the development of the discussion any organisational separation would be proof of total irresponsibility on the part of whoever took the initiative."

and:

" An organised form of disagreement (a tendency) can only be based on a position and coherent (original emphasis) orientation and not on a heterogeneous collection of points of opposition and recrimination as is the case of the comrades today who speak of forming a tendency."

KT in his infamous presentation to the WR section in London lambasted the tendency for:

" - holding secret meetings...circulating secret texts"

just as the IS in the above letter talked of:

"..underground activity within the organisation."

of comrades:

" failing to attend..section meetings or commission meetings."

as well as the:

"secret and private circulation of documents and political letters which the 'tendency' has continually done in the recent period."

This was, as you know followed by the "strong suspicions" about Chenier which to this day have never been backed up and the equally infamous IS resolution of 19.9.81 which, together with other, more underhand methods, attempted to label him a police spy.

As for trying to split the minority into goodies and baddies this is how the Huddersfield comrades in 1981 sussed this approach out:

" It is very interesting in this context, that the Sec's response to the various rejections of the resolution was aimed primarily at the Birmingham comrades. You see the logic of this? We are now beyond the pale, so are Aberdeen. They haven't said as much but we are virtually expelled!.....(there follows a description of items and events substantiating this) "....but the Birmingham comrades - well their position is a wavering one. They haven't "gone over to the other side" yet! Perhaps they can be nobbled, brought back into the fold, neutralised."

As for the baddies like Aberdeen:

" They can only try to disrupt its (the organisation) mode of functioning"

said the WR Secretariat in a letter to Aberdeen. The net effect on comrades of this attempt to divide, bewilder and terrorise was reflected in a letter by the Huddersfield comrades when they said:

" The Sec has entered the bunker, Torquemada is let loose and I am mortal. In a contest between the brick wall and my head there is only one winner."

Comrades, the events of 1985 are in almost every respect a carbon copy of those of 1981 in all the essential organisational details.

Only in one respect is there any difference. You lambast us for not going to the Extraordinary Congress which we said would merely be a ritual sniffing out of evil, an exercise in denunciation, not discussion. Amazingly you compare this to your own attendance at the ICC Congress but describe it such as to validate precisely our conception of what the ICC uses these events for. You went, found it set up as a show trial, refused to recant and were ceremoniously shown the door. We didn't, because we knew, even in 1981, that this was what was on the programme. Rather than lambast us it is we who should be saying to you - 'Why didn't you learn even this lesson from 1981?'

Once they manoeuvred you out, of course, just as in 1981, the press is filled with protestations that you should have stayed in etc. etc.



Worse, you attempt to introduce the events of 1981 (on page 18) by bringing up five points which you hope will demonstrate how unlike 1985 it was. You preface these with the statement

" But the bulk of the blame for the events in 1981 is on the minority."

What this has to do with the question posed escapes us. We are not here apportioning 'blame' but trying to understand two political events. For every verbal and physical calumny perpetrated by one side in 1981 it would be all too easy to detail another equally heinous from another. The fact, for example, that the CBG, in trying for five years, to raise the discussion of 1981 from the

depths into which the ICC was happy to drown it, has restrained itself from similarly truckling in the mire for unsavoury episodes to waylay the ICC with doesn't mean we couldn't dredge them up if we had wanted to. But, unlike the ICC we didn't, and do not want to obscure the political lessons of that experience by the ritual exchange of insults, or the desperate attempt to apportion 'blame'.

But as for your five points. Number one:

- While the members of the Fraction fought for their positions in the ICC for two years, writing numerous texts, attending congresses, using every possibility for discussion that was still available, no such efforts were made by the splitters of 1981 and certainly not by those who would form the CBG.

The events of 1981 blew up very quickly and accelerated even more quickly throughout the summer and autumn of that year. Certainly we would accept that all the opportunities weren't utilised but certainly all the Aberdeen comrades of the ICC who are now in the

The Fraction Attempts to

Ride Two Horses at Once

CBG wrote letter after letter after text which we circulated to the best of our ability throughout the whole of the organisation - to the chagrin of the central organs it must be said, who were most upset at their 'regular' channels being circumvented. Further the decision to exclude us was taken far earlier in 1981 when we refused to accept the central organs' actions vis a vis the previous wave of resignations. We left IN ORDER THAT we could attempt to clarify the issues raised by the events of 1981 since it was manifestly impossible in the witchhunt atmosphere of the ICC to clarify the issues there. It could be argued that the continued myopia of the Fraction is a direct result of having stayed in the ICC until the last moment.

Point Two:

- Many aspects of the ICC's programmatic degeneration in 1985 (the search for immediate influence, the tendency to substitutionism, the blurring of the class nature of rank-and-file unionism, etc) were precisely points that were defended by Chenier and other splitters in 1981.

What on earth has this to do with the CBG? Even within the Tendency in 1981 Chenier was a lone voice on most questions and the basis for the CBG splitting - even for those members who were in the Tendency was in no way whatsoever anything to do with questions of substitutionism, rank-and-file unionism etc. Here you merely parrot the ICC myth that the Tendency was the 'Chenier Tendency'. But in any case this has nothing at all to do with the comrades who later formed the CBG either in terms of why we left the ICC or in terms of where we stand now. This comment is therefore totally irrelevant.

Point Three

- The minority of 1981 was not met with the barrage of disciplinary measures like the prohibition of minority meetings that we faced in 1984-85.

As we have shown above this is simply not true, especially with regard to the prohibition of minority meetings. For it was precisely in 1981 that the ICC elaborated their theory that the formation of tendencies should be a decision not of the minority comrades themselves but of the organisational hierarchy as well as demanding that the minority could not hold fraction meetings without allowing others to attend and participate. Surely comrades such as Marlowe et alia who were in W.R. at the time cannot have forgotten this.

Point Four.

- While we fully prepared for the ICC Congress in order to convince our ICC comrades of our positions or at least of the necessity of real debate, the comrades who split in 1981 simply refused to come to the extraordinary conference that was called to thrash out the issues. They left without even attempting to clarify what the dividing issues were.

We have dealt with this point above. To recap it seems to us that we learned the lesson in 1981 when we wrote to the WRSec in October 1981:

"..we are, in the present climate, not hopeful that it will be anything other than a programmed, prepared 'smelling out of evil'"

Subsequent events and statements from the ICC's central organs such as:

"At some point we have to draw out the implications and take the consequences.....we can't 'prohibit' all sorts of aberrations. But we can't allow them, once manifest, to remain within the organisation."

rapidly firmed up that opinion. We saw no advantage in acting as stooges in the ICC's 'whipping in of the membership'. International Review reports of the Congress at which the Fraction were excluded show that once again the ICC laid on such a show. Only this time the stooges went along and were pilloried.

Point Five

- While we left in a responsible manner, returning all money, stocks, etc to the ICC those who left in 1981 used deceit to appropriate ICC material. Some of those who later formed the CBG made matters even worse by threatening to call the police against ICC members that recuperated the stolen material.

Finally therefore remains the hoary old myth of theft.

For the past several years we have tried to understand the continued blindness of the ICC on this question. Was it solely due to pure malice that, despite numerous proofs to the contrary, we were still being unjustly attacked for theft, deceit and all the other crap. We had thought, some of us, that the blame could firmly be laid at the door of those vindictive English speaking members of the ICC who must be consciously failing to put our point across to the bulk of the membership who did not speak English. But your article is written by Sander, who is bilingual, and with whom we have corresponded on this question in the past.

So, for the record, here we go again.

Some members of the CBG in leaving the ICC did absolutely nothing and made a point of returning all spare copies, back issue etc they had in their possession. Others, living predominantly at the other end of the country from London REPEATEDLY asked the ICC to make arrangements for the collection of the stacks and stacks of material they had: amounts far in excess of what Carriers or the Post Office would accept - to no avail. One comrade in Edinburgh, about to move house a few years later, finally told the ICC that if they didn't make arrangements it was going in the bucket. An ICC emissary duly appeared and took the material away.

Repeatedly, year in, year out, we have offered to give the ICC their material back - to no avail. At the time of the split every effort was made on our part to get back to the ICC what material we could reasonably send them. Ingram, for example, who has constantly been lambasted as the real baddie, had in his possession in 1981 the sole translation of an ICC pamphlet. When, after having left the organisation, the ICC telephoned him asking for it back, he sent it by return of post, first class. So much for the deceitful Aberdeen comrades stealing the material of the ICC. We still have attics bulging with back copies of WR, IR and pamphlets. Ingram still has stacks of duplicating stencils and masses of tubes of duplicating ink he would be only too happy to have the ICC take back since they clutter his already overcrowded home. How then can these actions be regarded as 'deceitful', how then has this anything to do with 'appropriating material'?

We said this when we first formally constituted the Communist Bulletin Group in Bulletin Four when we said:

"We have repeatedly made our position clear about the division of material left in our possession following the split. We were, and are happy to return all back issues of mags, papers and pamphlets plus all the other extant material. We don't have any hardware like typewriters etc. which belongs (or belonged) to the ICC. And for political reasons which we are prepared to defend, we're not prepared to

return our copies of internal bulletins, nor to pay the arrears of dues owing at the split.'

That was said in 1984.

As to the threats to call the police if the ICC appeared, axe in hand, and bust the doors down as they had done in London and Manchester: let us first of all, once again lay the ghost that by dint of such actions the ICC sought to "recuperate the stolen material". They didn't. By threatening flat mates of ex-members with violence, by openly and unequivocally taking hostage material not belonging to splitters, but to other occupants of the flats, by smashing down doors and ripping out telephones, the ICC consciously sought to terrorise not only their ex-members, but those they lived with also



It was against such acts that some of those who later joined the CBG acted. They warned that if such acts were perpetrated again the police would be called in to protect those attacked. As those comrades said at the time:

"We do not make such a threat lightly. We can think of no more serious act...nor one as repugnant to us. But be warned. In order to protect ourselves and our dependants we will have no qualms about doing so."

This was an attempt therefore to prevent the repetition of such assaults. They were not repeated, the threat worked.

As an organisation the CBG has already in Bulletin 5 stated this organisation's position on this affair-

"Threatening to involve the bourgeois in the affairs of a revolutionary organisation, no matter what the circumstances, is behaviour totally alien to revolutionary practice. Any individuals actually carrying out such a threat immediately place themselves outside of the revolutionary movement, and will be dealt with on that basis."

In Bulletin Six, after pointing to some of the actions, unacceptable in a communist organisation, perpetrated by the ICC in 1981 we amplified what we had said in Bulletin Five:

"We do not at the same time excuse the actions of some comrades who are now members

of the CBG who threatened a proletarian organisation with the intervention of the state - this mistake has been recognised and such actions unconditionally repudiated by the CBG. Let the ICC do the same now, give up the lie and acknowledge past and present mistakes."

It is clear then that you have completely failed to understand the identity of the ICC in 1981 with 1985, obfuscating this identity of thought and action, despite everyone else in the proletarian movement from Wildcat, through the CBG to the ICC itself having told you this at your Public Meeting in London, with the fact that the political positions which brought forth the ICC's organisational Stalinism in 1985 was different from that in

Not the Stance From Which

Revolutionary Clarity Emerges.

1981. That the ICC was sectarian and monolithic in 1981 just as in 1985 cannot be open to doubt, whatever the 'rules' were. The 'rules' and 'statutes' notwithstanding we see the same contempt for its own membership, the same sterile monolithic stalinism pervading every page of the ICC's press on the question of the Fraction.

The tragedy of your Fraction is not to see this and to respond in the exact same vein as the ICC when fraternal overtures are made to you by the ONLY proletarian fraction yet to respond to your offer at all; to tread the same path of sectarianism (albeit at a muted pace) as the ICC, mimicking the very organisational practices you have now spent four issues of your publication castigating: the very sorts of activity you left the ICC over, How ironic!

We can only hope that the maturity demanded by independent political existence will, as with the CBG, force you to examine your political genesis, the political heritage of sectarianism you still carry, so that you will discard it so as to allow fraternal relations with such as the CBG and the political discussion you proclaim so necessary to take place.

Ingram

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We reprint below an article which first appeared in BILAN 34, August-September 1936**. It was written in the very first days of the war in Spain. At a moment when maximum confusion was being sown among the working class and its political expressions. For over a period of fifteen years the working class had suffered a series of catastrophic defeats; defeat in Russia, Germany, Italy and the rest of Europe; economic crisis had set in with resulting attacks on the conditions of workers. These defeats had a disintegrating effect upon the revolutionary movement. At the same time as the proletariat was being physically decimated its revolutionary political expressions were thrown into confusion and disarray. Spain 1936 confronted revolutionaries with new problems and old ones in a new guise.

To use a cliché, BILAN's contribution to the debates of 1936 shines like a beacon in an otherwise dark night of political reaction. There are weaknesses in the analysis put forward. We do not think for example, that the idea of "centrism" as used by BILAN is at all useful. Before the outbreak of World War I and the struggles for revolutionary clarity which found expression in the Russian Revolution the notion of centrism had some force in coming to terms with a dying social democracy. By 1936 the battle-lines had been sufficiently defined to make the notion redundant.

We would also argue that BILAN's instrumentalist view of the Popular Front was misconceived. For us the Popular Front Government was not simply a tool which the bourgeoisie picked up to use at will against the working class. Rather we would say that it was an organic growth within the capitalist body politic, representing particular imperialist interests. As such it presented a programme which differed from that defended by Franco.

These are important criticisms. Today the ICC defends both the notion of centrism and an instrumentalist analysis of the bourgeois state. The former it uses as a cover for its dishonest sectarian work and the latter for its infamous and hilarious notion of the left in opposition. Thus the mistakes of BILAN haunt the revolutionary movement of today. The ICC, however, is not BILAN. Of greater importance in 1936 was clarity on the overall question of inter-imperialist war in Spain and the stance to be adopted by revolutionaries. With this historical perspective the deficiencies of Bilan are lessened. Not ignored but recognised for what they were.

War, imperialism and the rise of fascism, these were among the major questions which revolutionaries had to address in 1936. Bilan showed that the events in Spain were not what they seemed. In stark contrast and total opposition to the views which were being defended by the Comintern and its satellite communist parties Bilan demonstrated that the war in Spain was an inter-imperialist struggle. At the same time they showed that central to this struggle was manipulation of the working class by the ideology of anti-fascism. Bilan recognised that this and the war in Spain were merely parts in a larger global movement towards world war and the realisation of the necessary antagonisms of capitalism. In Spain the working class was not fighting on its own terrain anymore than it was in the murder of 1914-18:

"The fact that a world war has not yet broken out does not mean that the Spanish and international proletariat has not already been mobilised for this purpose of butchery itself under the imperialist slogan of fascism and anti-fascism."

Bilan saw that the Popular Front Government was seen to be the out and out enemy of the working class. It was an enemy which had penetrated to the heart of the proletariat. Bilan did not deny that the class had taken the initiative in the very early days of the struggle they did recognise that this had very quickly been overtaken by the forces of reaction. This ability to first see the presence of class initiatives and also the move into decline and defeat testifies to the clear-sightedness of Bilan. At a time when many militants and revolutionaries were succumbing to the siren calls of anti-fascist ideology they could write:

"The Popular Front in Spain, as was the case in other countries, has in the course of events shown itself to be not an instrument of the workers but a powerful weapon of the bourgeoisie in its efforts to smash the working class."

Without this recognition revolutionaries had no hope of combating the forces of imperialism.

Another point on which the comrades of Bilan had great clarity was on the question of the "socialization" of industry. One of the abiding myths propagated by anarchists and libertarians is that the Spanish saw the implementation of revolutionary measures on a massive scale. Land and industries were appropriated they say and could have formed the backbone of a revolutionary society if only Franco had been defeated and the "authoritarian" communists carried along. In other words the political philosophy of anarchism or anarch-syndicalism was basically sound. It just did not get a fair chance. Bilan mercilessly denounces such conceptions as anti-working class. Anarchism denies the need for a direct onslaught on the bourgeois state. This ignores the problem of political power and by so doing disarms the proletariat and leads it into the camp of capitalism.

"To socialize an enterprise while leaving the state apparatus intact, is a link in the chain which ties the proletariat to its class enemy . . . As for the much-vaunted social conquests, they are nothing but a mesh tying the workers to the bourgeoisie."

Just as thousands were sacrificed under the banner of the Comintern's frontism so also thousands more die thinking that the lies of anarchism were to be the salvation of the working class. Without a direct assault on the capitalist state and the building of a central proletarian political power revolution is lost.

Today it can be easy to take the lessons of 1936 for granted. The hard fought for clarity found in Bilan is a *sine qua non* of activity for revolutionaries today. It should not, however, be forgotten that not only were thousands of workers marched off

to die in the war so also were many revolutionaries fooled into thinking that the situation demanded either their participation or concessions be made to the particular need to oppose fascism. Bilan itself was torn by splits over how to intervene in the war. Similar confusion was to be found among the ranks of those revolutionaries who drew their political analysis from that formulated by the German Left Communist tradition. Confusion on the problem of Spain was to be found across the spectrum of revolutionary positions. Clarity was not easily achieved in 1936. This makes the contribution made by Bilan so important. We ignore the dangers they identified at our peril. Leftism, anarchism and libertarianism still stalk the working class. Each

reactionary force hoping that it can capture and tame the proletariat. Each one the enemy of the working class. Bilan's work should not be forgotten or ignored.

**Reprinted in 1976, along with other material, by the ICC in INTERNATIONAL REVIEW 6. It is this translation which we have used. We would also recommend reading INTERNATIONAL REVIEW 7 for more material on Bilan.

Flett



The Spanish War was a
Rehearsal for W.W.II.

BILAN on the War in Spain

AGAINST THE IMPERIALIST FRONT AND MASSACRE OF THE SPANISH WORKERS - FOR THE CLASS FRONT OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIAT!

The simple general assertion that in Spain today there is a bloody struggle in progress between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, far from helping to take up a political position favourable to the defence and ultimate victory of the proletariat, could actually lead to the most terrible disaster and massacre of the workers. In order to arrive at a positive assessment it is first of all necessary to see whether the masses have been fighting on their own class terrain, and thus whether they are in a position to move forward, to develop the capacity to drive back the attacks of their class enemies.

At the moment there are several explanations of the political situation. Let us deal first with the one put forward by the Popular Front, to which the centrists have given a 'theoretical' gloss. According to them 'the dissidents, the rebels, the fascists' are fighting a life or death struggle against the 'legal government

which is defending bread and freedom'. The duty of the proletariat is thus to defend the government which represents the progressive bourgeoisie against the forces of feudalism. Once the workers have helped it to defeat these feudal elements, they can then advance to the next stage of the struggle: the fight for socialism. In our last issue we showed that while Spanish capitalism was incapable of achieving the same kind of social organization as exists in other European countries, nevertheless, it is the bourgeoisie which is in power in Spain, and only the proletariat and it alone is capable of overhauling Spain's economic and political structures.

The Popular Front in Spain, as was the case in other countries, has in the course of events shown itself to be not an instrument of the workers but a powerful weapon of the bourgeoisie in its effort to smash the working class. We only have to recall that it was under the Popular Front government that the Right was able to organize its activity in a methodical way; thus the Right was given all the room it needed to prepare its plots and conspiracies (though this

more theatrical side of its activities was actually the least important). More significant than this was the fact that the actions of the Popular Front government have led to the demoralization of the peasant masses and to a profound hostility on the part of the workers, who once again had been moving towards another big wave of

Owing to this vehement and powerful response of the proletariat, capitalism felt that it had to abandon its original plan of a uniform, frontal attack. In the face of the insurgent workers who were developing a powerful class consciousness, the bourgeoisie saw that the only way it could save itself and win out was to give the Popular Front



Anarchist Militiaman and Family by Augusti Centelles (1936).

Workers Were Mobilised for the Defence of Capitalism in Every Shade of Uniform.

strikes like those of 1931-2 that were crushed by the terror carried out by a left-wing government, by a crew very similar to today's Popular Front government.

Right from the beginning of the present situation the Popular Front adopted a policy of compromise with the Right, as can be seen by the setting up of the Barrios government. Hence there is nothing surprising in the fact that Franco did not arrest Azaña right at the beginning, even though he could have done so without any problem. The point is that the whole situation was very uncertain and, although the capitalists opted for a frontal attack in every town, they were unsure as to whether their extreme right wing would be able to immediately win a complete victory. Because of this the arrest of Azaña was put off, and it was really the subsequent actions of the Popular Front which gave the capitalist offensive its greatest chance of succeeding.

First in Barcelona and then in other working class centres, the right wing attack was met by a popular uprising which, because it took place on a class basis and came into conflict with the capitalist state machine, could have very quickly led to the disintegration of the army: as the events of the uprising unfolded on the streets, the class struggle broke out in the regiments and the soldiers rebelled against their officers. At this point the proletariat was moving directly towards an intense political armament, which could only have resulted in an offensive directed against the capitalist class and towards the communist revolution.

the task of directing the political action of the workers. The arming of the masses was tolerated only so that it could be strictly contained within the limits of a 'united command' with a specifically capitalist political orientation. Today Caballero is in the process of perfecting this instrument from the technical point of view. At the beginning the workers were poorly armed in material terms but well armed politically; after this, however, the workers were laden with sophisticated arms but they were no longer fighting on their own instinctive class basis: they had been gradually shifted onto the opposite terrain, the terrain of the capitalist class.

Rapidly in Madrid, less easily in the Asturias, and after an even more complicated process in Barcelona, the Popular Front was able to achieve its aims and today the masses find themselves trapped by a logic that maintains the capitalist state machine is inviolate, that it must be allowed to function as freely as possible so that the Right can be defeated, since the crushing of the 'rebels' is the supreme duty of the hour.

The proletariat has laid down its own class weapons and has consented to a compromise with its enemy through the medium of the Popular Front. In the place of a class line-up (the only one which could have put Franco's regiments out of joint and restored confidence in the peasants who had been terrorized by the Right) a new line-up has emerged, a specifically capitalist one, and the Union Sacrée has been achieved. Now the imperialist carnage can set town

against town, region against region in Spain, and by extension, state against state in the struggle between the two democratic and fascist blocs.

The fact that a world war has not yet broken out does not mean the Spanish and international proletariat has not already been mobilized for the purpose of butchering itself under the imperialist slogans of fascism and anti-fascism.

After the Italian and German experience, it is extremely depressing to see politically developed workers, basing their analysis on the fact that the Spanish workers are armed, come to the conclusion that, even though the Popular Front is leading these armies and in the absence of a total change in the situation, the conditions exist for the victory of the working class. No, Azaña and Caballero are worthy brothers of the Italian and German socialists whom they have ably emulated - in an extremely difficult situation they have succeeded in

struggle. In such an extreme situation the forces of collaboration also resort to extreme methods. If in the course of a social conflagration like the one that took place in Barcelona, the workers are pushed not towards attacking the capitalist state, but towards defending it, then it is class collaboration and not class struggle which has won the day. Class struggle does not develop through a series of material conquests which leave the enemy's apparatus of power untouched, but through the outbreak of genuinely proletarian actions. To socialize an enterprise while leaving the state apparatus intact, is a link in the chain which ties the proletariat to its class enemy, both on the home front and on the imperialist front of struggle between fascism and anti-fascism, whereas the outbreak of a strike based on the simplest class demand and even in a 'socialized' industry can be a moment in the eventual triumph of the Spanish and international proletariat.



Millions Died in Spain
to Save Capitalism.

betraying the workers. They have allowed the workers to keep their arms only because they are being used in a class struggle which is not that of the proletariat against Spanish and international capital, but that of capital against the working class of Spain and the whole world - a struggle that has taken the form of an imperialist war.

In Barcelona reality is hidden behind a façade. Because the bourgeoisie has temporarily withdrawn from the political scene, and because certain enterprises are being run without bosses, some people have come to the conclusion that bourgeois political power no longer exists. But if it didn't really exist then we would have seen another power arise: the power of the proletariat. And here the tragic answer provided by the reality of events is cruel. All the existing political formations, even the most extreme (the CNT), openly proclaim that there can be no question of attacking the capitalist state machine - for even headed by Companys it can be 'of use' to the working class. Our position on this question is absolutely clear: there are two principles opposing each other here, two classes, two realities. It is a question of either collaboration and treason, or

It is just as impossible to identify the proletariat with the bourgeoisie as it is to identify the present territorial front, the armies of the Union Sacrée, with a class line-up and a class army. The difference between the two is fundamental and is not a question of detail. At the moment there is an apparent contradiction between the details and essentials, between the ardour, the sacrifices, the heroism of the workers enrolled in the armies of the Popular Front and the historic political function of the latter. Like Lenin in April 1917, we have to go to the heart of the problem and it is here that the only real political differentiation can be made. The capitalist attack can only be answered on a proletarian basis. Those who ignore this central problem are deliberately placing themselves on the other side of the barricades. As for the much-vaunted social conquests, they are nothing but a mesh tying the workers to the bourgeoisie.

... In the present situation in which the proletariat is caught between two capitalist forces, the proletariat can only go forward by following the path that leads to insurrection. It is impossible for the armies of Catalonia, Madrid, or the Asturias to



Workers Defend Democracy Believing they Defend the Revolution.

evolve in a positive direction: a brutal, unequivocal break with them is the only course open to the class. The essential precondition for the salvation of the Spanish working class is the re-establishment of class frontiers in opposition to the present territorial divisions. Above all in Catalonia, where the energy of the proletariat is still powerful, it is necessary to channel this energy towards class struggle. It is necessary to foil the plans of the capitalists, which consist in crushing the peasant masses with naked terror while using political corruption to seduce the industrial masses into joining the ranks of Spanish and international capital. NO to the Union Sacrée, at any stage of the struggle, at any moment of the battle! It may be that this step in the imperialist war may not immediately lead to a world-wide conflagration. In that case unless there is a total change in the situation, the present conflict in Spain will end in a victory for the Right, because the Right has the role of massacring the workers in their thousands, of installing a regime of total terror like the ones that exterminated the Italian and German proletariat. The Left, the Popular Front, has a different capitalist function: its role is to make a bed for the reactionaries, a bloody bed in which thousands of Spanish workers and workers of other countries have already lain.

The working class has only one bastion: its own class struggle. It cannot be victorious when it is imprisoned in the bastion of the enemy and that is what the present military fronts represent for the class. The heroic defenders of Irún were condemned in advance.

They had been led onto the capitalist terrain by the Popular Front which succeeded in obliterating their own class terrain and in so doing made them a prey for the armies of Franco.

Armed struggle as part of an imperialist front is the grave of the proletariat. The only response of the proletariat is an armed struggle on its own class terrain. Instead of competing for the conquest of towns and regions, the class must mount an attack on the state machine. This is the only way to disintegrate the regiments of the Right; the only way of foiling the plans of Spanish and international capital. Otherwise, with or without the French proposals about non-intervention, with or without the Co-ordination Committee composed of fascists, democrats, and centrists (all the important countries are represented on it), capital will have its bloody triumph and the arms merchants of France, Britain, Germany, Italy and the Soviet State itself will deliver the goods to the two general staffs - Franco's and Caballero's - so that they can finish off the massacre of the Spanish workers and peasants.

In all countries, whether the bourgeoisie is for or against neutrality, for or against sending arms to Franco or the government, the workers must respond with their own class demonstrations, with strikes against the legal shipment of arms, with struggles against each imperialism. Only in this way can they express their solidarity with the cause of the Spanish proletariat.

(Bilan, no.34, August-September 1936)

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ECHOES OF DEFEAT'

Voices from the Spanish Civil War. edited. I. MacDougall.

[illegible]

The fact that this reactionary political force grew within the working class and at one time was an accurate expression of the proletariat's political ends helps explain why it continued to have a hold over it.

Voices from the Spanish Civil War is a celebration of this massive ideological and physical defeat. The book records the recollections and thoughts of Scots who went to fight in Spain on the side of the Republican Government. The men and the woman who give us their eye-witness accounts of the struggle against Franco's troops are typical of those who volunteered to fight in Spain. They mostly come from the working class, attracted to the war against fascism through membership of or loose allegiance to the politics of the Comintern or left social democracy. The majority of the men and women who fought in Spain had a nominal commitment and emotional attachment to the cause of the working class. Their militancy and their class aspirations were forged in the desperate struggles of the nineteen twenties and thirties. They tried to stem the tide of capital's attack on the working class:

"I was a housepainter but in the 1920s and '30s conditions were bad as far as unemployment was concerned. You had to get out there was no work . . . ye just chased around getting jobs and naturally you became interested in politics." (p.107)

"I became interested in politics before I came out of the army because of things that had happened . . . I thought that a person was simply unemployed because he didn't want to work. But I changed my opinion because I tried for ten months to get a job and didn't succeed. . . I knew there was something wrong with the system." (p.89)

"After the strike in the mines of 1921 I realised clearly with the beating the miners got at that time, the struggle that had developed, the setback generally in the working class movement by the Tories driving against the workers at that time, that we had to do something about the situation." (p.33)



The First International Brigaders
Reach Barcelona in 1936.

Irrespective that the European working class had suffered a massive defeat by the early 1920s militants continued to be produced by the class struggle. Individually and collectively workers still battled against the campaigns of the bourgeoisie. Tragicly but understandably militants from these struggles drew their political vision from that promulgated by the Comintern and communist parties. When the war erupted in Spain in 1936 these men and women were ripe to be plucked and used by the Soviet Union for its own particular ends. Capitalist Russia siezed the opportunity to direct these workers and use them to achieve its foreign policy aims.

Hitler came to power in 1933. Russia recognised the threat that this posed. The economic crisis which was ravaging capitalism was more and more forcing bourgeoisies to look to war as the solution to their ills. For particular historical reasons Germany led the way in formulating and implementing the imperialist drive to war. Russia presented a great prize for Hitler to win for German capitalism. The soviet bourgeoisie responded by changing its foreign policy. It looked to forming alliances with social democratic

parties and liberal elements in France and Britain. Frontism was the order of the day. Communist parties were instructed to work with "progressive" forces in the democratic states of Europe. The rallying call was ANTI-FASCISM. Not surprisingly given the obvious anti-working class nature of fascism many militants were drawn to this banner of reaction. Workers with good class instincts were well aware that fascism posed a real threat to the proletariat. But they were almost wholly ignorant of the threat posed by Russia's stance. They did not see that Russia was simply playing its part in an inter-imperialist struggle.

Thousands of workers succumbed to the demands of this anti-fascist frontism. On the one hand they saw it as a legitimate strategy for halting the spread of fascism; on the other by stopping this menace they helped secure the borders of the "proletariat's homeland". They were correct, by fighting in Spain they were defending Russia but not the proletariat.

Russia was determined that the powers of France and Britain should rally against the spread of fascism in Europe. Consequently revolutionary rhetoric was out of the question. Russia was to be trusted, this was the message that its bourgeoisie wanted to get across. As it happened Britain and France did not rally to the side of the Soviet Union. This was not because it was a genuine proletarian power but because the two liberal capitalist states were unable to conceptualise the nature of state capitalism and also recognised that Russia was a competitor in the world market. This opposition from the liberal democracies played into the ideological hands of the Soviet Union. Militants could see that Britain and France were opposed to socialism and that rather than help the "socialist homeland" they would aid the spread of fascism. Thus the ideology which was draining the strength of workers was reinforced.

To justify its frontist positions the capitalists of Russia deployed the categories of marxism. Dimitroff and others constructed a theory using the notion of stages to fool the working class. Basically this reduced to the notion that fascism was such a general threat in Europe that a stage of collaboration with liberal elements was required to destroy it before a further stage of socialist change might be approached. As well as this the ideologues of soviet capital said that Spain was so backward that it could not be expected to move directly towards socialism without first going through a period of liberal republicanism. Using the formal categories of marxism the capitalists of Russia tied the proletariat to its cause. Needless to say the frontist theory has only a passing resemblance to Marx's and Engels' theory of stages in history. Their theory was founded upon the large historical distinctions of modes of production and not the minutia of political forms. But regardless of this the bourgeoisie's policy gave a gloss to its foreign policy strong enough to help fool workers. Militants went to die in Spain to defend democracy and legal regimes. This was their avowed intention

"I saw the war as part and parcel of the general offensive by the Fascist powers against working class rights and liberties all over the world, including our own country." (p.21)

"We didn't go to Spain to usher in socialism or communism or anything like that. We went to Spain to continue the fight for the freedom of a people to put a cross on a ballot paper and elect its kind of government." (p.260)

"I was there on the simple task of saving, or trying to save the Spanish Republic - a Democratic elected government." (p.87)

By and large those who went to fight in Spain were not entrenched party bureaucrats. More often than not they were drawn from the mass base which made up the communist parties of Europe. They were class militants who had been syphoned off from the class struggle by the imperialist ideology of Russia. Hacks like Harry Pollit became the ideologues for Russian capital, the recruiting majors for capitalist slaughter. When Pollit said,

"The people in Spain are not fighting to establish soviets, or the proletarian dictatorship. Only downright lying scoundrels, or misguided self-styled 'Lefts' declare that they are - and both to combine to help the aims of the fascist rebels."

he was not only articulating the ideas of a capitalist power he was leading the struggle to destroy any remaining critical consciousness in those who were prepared to die in Spain. The ideologues were largely successful in this. Fighters in the International Brigades were not able to direct themselves to the problem of the development of class consciousness in the Spanish war. Rather than using the language of revolutionary class struggle they sank into that of bourgeois legalism and constitutionalism. As one Scotch Brigader put it, Spain was,

"not a Revolution, it wasn't a Civil War. it was a war of intervention by Hitler. Mussolini, moors. It was what you could call the Grand Rehearsal." (p.55)

In the midst of imperialist war these volunteers came nowhere near to the revolutionary positions adopted by militants during the carnage of 1914-18. In the earlier period revolutionaries had argued that in the era of imperialism, the age of capitalist decadence, war was the inevitable outcome of the social process. Consequently, it was no longer possible side with any capitalist powers in their struggles. When war broke out in 1914 the touchstone of revolutionary politics was, where do you stand, for the imperialist war or

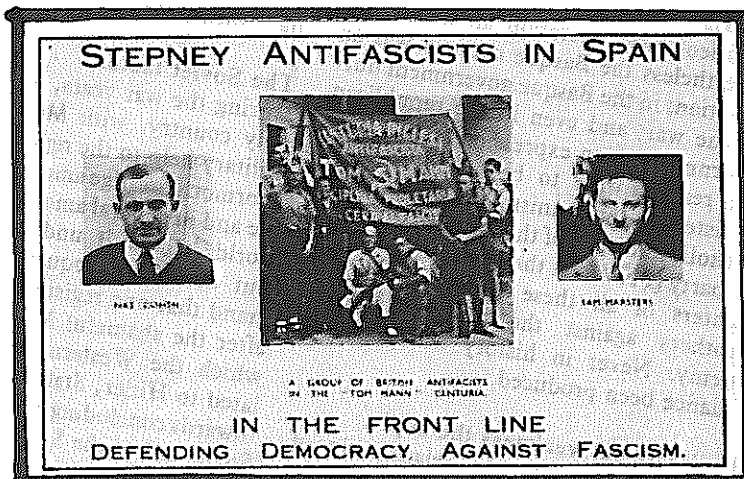
for the class civil war? This question separated revolutionaries from the defenders of capital. Downturn, degeneration and defeat undermined this clarity. A fact which was only too apparent in the Spanish war. Russia deployed nationalist and particularist arguments. The world, it told its working class cannon fodder, was made up of good and bad capitalists. The Germans were bad and simply wanted to start a war. Completely lost in the plethora lies put out by Russia was an internationalist perspective and the notion of historical decadence. Thus it is that those who tell us of their experiences in Spain see the struggle as being against a bad capitalism and the actions of Germany being a "rehearsal" for its larger goals. It can't be denied that Germany used the outbreak of Franco's rebellion as an opportunity to test out its military and political strategies. But to recognise this is not to see German fascism as bad capitalism and to see the actions of 1936 as a war of "intervention". This is the language of those who defended their respective capitalisms in 1914. The war was an inter-imperialist struggle with Russia and Germany as the main protagonists. Other European powers were involved but in a more negative sense. Britain, and to a lesser extent France, were concerned to contain the power of both Germany and Russia. The latter could be cut back to size by refusing to side with it and former it was hoped would be satisfied by the gains made in the Spanish war. International Brigaders had been so effectively disarmed by the Comintern that they were unable to see the way in which the different interests were organising themselves to draw as much as possible from the bloody struggle. Brigaders thought in legalistic and moralistic terms:

"I was disgusted at the fact that the other democratic governments in Europe were not doing anything at all to help the legal government in Spain . . . I felt very strongly that if they (Germany & Italy) were allowed to continue their attack upon the people of Spain it wouldn't be so very long before the rest of Europe was engulfed in war . . . provoked and began by the German and Italian governments." (p.117)

"In Europe the British and French governments began to show signs of operating an Appeasement policy, which I regarded as a treacherous policy." (p.195)

"Those who did wrong things were the governments of the day. They did not give to the Spanish Republican Government the aid that they were entitled to under International Law." (p.19)

International Law is not a category employed by revolutionaries. It is a mystification used to hide the inherent antagonisms in the capitalist system: those which exist between capitalist and those between the working class and capital. At the time at which the Russian bourgeoisie was encouraging Brigaders to prattle on about legality and justice it was setting up its "show trials", enforcing a semi-militarisation of labour and murdering hundreds of thousands of workers into collectivisation and industrialisation policies. Yes British and French capital is and was treacherous but this is the nature of the beast not the special prerogative of particular powers. Just as the liberal powers were guilty of treachery so also was the Soviet Union. Its treachery was more vicious and more sustained because of the way it used the guise of being a proletarian force to march the working class off to war.



British Workers are Mobilised.

Not surprisingly when war broke out in 1939 Brigaders found, to their satisfaction, vindication of their actions in Spain:

"Spain was defeated. So we went o war in 1939. I went through the Second World War doing exactly the same job I went to Spain to do. There was absolutely no difference at all. It was an anti-fascist war. Both were anti-fascist wars."(p.181)

Yes, there was no difference. The Brigader is correct. Both wars were inter-imperialist; both wars required thousands, millions of workers to march off to their deaths. But this is not how the volunteers saw, or see it. For them the Second World War was the product of militaristic Germany. They did not see that war would have occurred irrespective of whether Hitler was defeated in 1936. The scenario would certainly have been different but the nature of capitalist antagonisms would have inevitably meant war. For the Brigaders to believe that Hitler caused the Second World War they might just as well accept the idiocy that the man who shot the Grand Duke at Sarajevo caused the war of 1914-18.

But militants by 1939 had been effectively destroyed. The central points of revolutionary consciousness were lost to them. The anti-fascist cause so carefully nurtured since 1933 by Russia was invaluable in mobilising workers for the greater slaughter of 1939. There was momentary confusion when Russia signed a Non-Aggression Pact with Germany. But this was quickly overcome when the invasion of Russia happened.

Russia demanded that workers join their own respective capitals to defeat the fascist menace. They had nowhere else to go. Spain had prepared the ground. Continuing slaughter was the outcome.

Voices from the Spanish Civil War is a useful book. It is not, however, what its editor and its contributors think it is. Far from being the sound of clear class elements confronting capital the voices are the echoes of defeat. Good class militants were destroyed by the emergence of Russian orientated leftism. The hard won clarity achieved by the Left Communists- on the nature of reformism, trade unions, parliamentary politics and capitalist decadence- this was lost to the thousands who died in Spain. Over fifty years after the outbreak of the war in Spain the thief in the night is still there. Waiting to "steal" the consciousness of the working class. Leftist ideology remains a potent force. Any wavering in the face of this ideology, by either the proletariat or its political expressions will inevitably mean defeat for the working class, a defeat which could make that of 1936-45 look like very small beer.

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Flett

