

THE INSURRECTION IN BARCELONA (Some Preliminary Remarks)

The news we have here of the most recent events is not only incomplete but is intentionally distorted. Under those conditions, the conclusions we formulate can have only a hypothetical and provisional character.

It seems that the insurrection was "spontaneous" in character, that is, it broke out unexpected by the leaders, including those of the POUM. This fact alone shows what an abyss had been dug between the anarchist and POUM leaders, on the one side, and the working masses on the other. The conception propagated by Nin that "the proletariat can take power through peaceful means" has been proven absolutely false. We know nothing, or almost nothing, of the real position of the POUM at the time of the insurrection. But we do not believe in miracles. The position of the leaders of the POUM at the decisive moment must have been a simple continuation of their position during all the preceding period. More exactly, it is precisely in a decisive moment that the inconsistency of left centrism must be revealed in the most striking and tragic fashion. Such was, for example, the fate of Martov in the events of 1905 and 1917.

Even in our own ranks, there is often found a false idea of Martov as a representative of left centrism. In his criticisms of the Kerensky-Tseretelli-Dan regime, Martov came close to the Bolsheviks. In radicalism of criticism and largeness of perspective, Martov greatly surpassed the editors of "La Batalla." But in the depths of his consciousness he always hoped to convince his adversaries and not to oppose the proletariat to the class enemy. That is why, at the moment when the workers passed over to action, Martov, frightened by the harshness of the struggle, jumped aside to play the role, not of a leader of revolutionary action, but of an advocate for the defeated masses. Fortunately, at the left of Martov there was a revolutionary party that knew what it wanted.

The situation in Spain is very different. The leadership of the POUM appeared to the masses up to yesterday to be the expression of the most resolute tendency. The working-class vanguard, at least in Catalonia, took the POUM literature very seriously. But just at the moment when the masses prepared to materialize this criticism by action, they found themselves practically decapitated. Was it otherwise at the time of the last insurrection? I fear not.

Or was the miracle perhaps produced in spite of everything, and did the pressure of the masses impose on Nin a Bolshevik position? That would indeed be magnificent, and we would rejoice here at the possibility of common work with Nin on the basis of new historic experiences. But until new word comes, we do not have the last reason to change our estimate of the official policies of the POUM.

What does the armistice in Barcelona, of which the cables speak, mean: the defeat of the insurgents, determined above all by the inconsistency of the leadership, or the direct capitulation of the leaders, frightened by the pressure of the masses? We do not know as yet. For the moment the struggle seems to be continuing outside Barcelona. Is a new resumption of the offensive in Barcelona possible? Will not the regression on the part of the Stalinist-reformist scum give a new impetus to the action of the masses? We refrain from predicting here for lack of accurate information. Criticism of the leadership in any case retains its decisive importance, whatever may be the immediate course of events. In spite of ~~the mistakes~~ the mistakes and weaknesses of the insurrection, we remain before the outside world indissolubly bound to the defeated workers. But this does not mean sparing the leadership, hiding its inconsistency, and keeping silent about its mistakes under the pretext of

a purely sentimental solidarity.

It seems very probable that this impressive experience will provoke a split in the POUM. The elements that excluded the Trotskyists and fraternized with the Brandlerist and S.A.P. leaders -- the cast-off rubbish of Stalinism -- will definitely betray the revolution by seeking the mercy and then the favor of the Moscow bureaucracy. On the other hand, the revolutionary elements must understand that there is no intermediary between the Fourth International and betrayal. To facilitate and accelerate this political differentiation, our criticisms should be frank, open and even implacable. In the first place, all our comrades must understand the inconsistency of the policy of passive indulgence ~~sanctioned~~ sanctioned by our friends Victor Serge, Sneevliet, Vereecken and others. We must know how to draw from great events all the conclusions necessary to prepare the future.

The analogy with the events of July, 1917, is too evident for us to dwell on it. What must be emphasized is above all the differences. The POUM still remains a Catalan organization. Its leaders prevented in its time entry into the Socialist party, covering their fundamental opportunism with a sterile intransigence. It is to be hoped, however, that the events in Catalonia will produce fissures and splits in the ranks of the Socialist party and the U.G.T. In this case it would be fatal to be confined within the cadres of the POUM, which moreover will be much reduced in the weeks to come. It is necessary to turn towards the anarchist masses in Catalonia, towards the Socialist and Communist masses elsewhere. It is necessary to try to make up for lost time. A cell of five revolutionists in the Socialist party or in the official army is much more important than a group of ten or twenty workers separated from the masses. It is not a question of preserving the old external forms, but of creating new points of support for the future.

If the defeat is severe (and we cannot measure its severity from here), it is far from being definitive. New elements in Spain itself or in France can determine a new revolutionary upswing.

It is certainly very difficult to predict, especially from afar, when and how the Spanish October will come. Nobody can, in any case, affirm in advance that the revolutionary force of the admirable Iberian proletariat is exhausted. But to prepare for October, the revolutionary vanguard must be forewarned against everything that is ambiguous, confused, and equivocal in the upper layer of the proletariat, nationally and internationally. He who does not have courage to oppose the Fourth International to the Second and the Third will never have the courage to lead the workers in the decisive combats. He who remains connected with the Brandlerists, the S.A.P. people, the Maxtons, the Fenner Brockways, can only betray the proletariat on the very eve of the combat or during the combat. The Iberian workers should be made to understand now that the Fourth International means the scientific program of the social revolution, confidence in the masses, mistrust of the centrists of every stamp, and the will to lead the struggle to the very end.

Lund

May 12, 1937

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Not to be published
Only for members of the organization

TO ALL ORGANIZATIONS ADHERING
TO THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

THE TEST OF IDEAS AND OF INDIVIDUALS
THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF THE
SPANISH REVOLUTION

The Spanish revolution has in the eyes of advanced workers enormous significance, not only as an historical event of primary importance, but also as a school of revolutionary strategy. Ideas and individuals are being submitted to an exceptionally important, one may say an infallible, test. It is an obligation for every serious Marxist to study not only the events of the revolution, but also the political positions which are taken in our own ranks by various groups and isolated militants with regard to the Spanish events.

Com. Ver and Com. Sneevliet

In this letter I would like to dwell on a particular case but one that is instructive in the highest degree: to examine the position of Com. Ver, one of the directing militants of our Belgian section. Ver GAVE THE REPORT ON THE Spanish question at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Social Revolutionary Party held at the end of June this year. The record of his report, published in the internal Bulletin of the Belgian section for June-July, is extremely short, perhaps 25 lines at most, but it gives nevertheless a clear enough picture of Com. Ver's mistakes, mistakes that are as dangerous for our Belgian section as for the whole International.

Com. Sneevliet, head of the Dutch R.S.A.P., has been in complete solidarity, as is known, with the policy of the P.O.U.M. and has thus shown clearly to what extent he has become separated from revolutionary Marxism. Com. Ver's case is somewhat different. Ver is more cautious. His arguments, in the past as well as now, are mingled with reservations: "on the one hand", "on the other hand". He occupies with regard to the P.O.U.M. a "critical" position, borrowing numerous arguments from our common arsenal. But fundamentally his centrist position is much more likely to bring confusion into our ranks than the position of Com. Sneevliet. For this reason it is necessary to submit the conceptions of Ver to careful criticism.

Optimistic fatalism, a feature of centrism.

Ver gave his report before the crushing of the P.O.U.M. and before the vile assassination of its head by the agents of Stalin in Spain (Antonov-Ovseenko and others). We will defend the memory of Nin and his companions implacably against the blanders of the scoundrels in Moscow and elsewhere. But the tragic fate of Nin cannot change our political estimates, dictated by the historical interests of the proletariat and not by sentimental considerations.

For a long time Com. Ver has been completely mistaken in his evaluation of the P.O.U.M., thinking that under the pressure of events this party would, so to speak, evolve "automatically" toward the left and

that our policy in Spain would be limited to a "critical" support of the POUM. Events have absolutely disproved this fatalistic and optimistic prognosis, extremely characteristic of Centrist, but by no means Marxist, thinking. It is enough to recall here that this same fatalistic optimism imbued the whole policy of the POUM, whose direction had adapted itself to the anarchist leaders, in the hope that they would enter automatically the path of the proletarian revolution, just as Ver had adapted himself to the leaders of the POUM. All these expectations were completely destroyed: events hurled the anarchist leaders, as well as the leaders of the POUM, not to the left but to the right. Instead of openly recognizing the falseness of his policy, Ver tries to pass over surreptitiously to a new position, distinguished from that of the day before only by an even greater confusion.

Characterization of the POUM

"In distinction to the C.N.T. and the F.A.I., which have existed for dozens of years" - so Ver begins his report - "the POUM is recent, heterogeneous, its left wing is weak." This description represents a radical condemnation not only of the position of Sneevliet, but also of Ver's own previous position. For where is the promised evolution toward the left? At the same time this characterization of the POUM is purposefully vague. The "left wing is weak". The word "left" means nothing in this context. Is he referring to the Marxist fraction of the POUM or to the left centrist fraction? Ver intentionally refrains from answering this question. We will answer for him: no Marxist fraction of any consequence, since the exclusion of the "Trotskyites", has existed in the POUM. But even the left fraction of the centrists is weak. On this point Ver is right. But this means only that after six years of experience in the revolution the policy of the POUM is determined by the right centrists. Such is the unvarnished ~~crystal~~ truth.

Com. Ver "criticizes" the POUM

Now let us hear how Ver criticizes the POUM:

"Mistakes of the POUM: rallying to the People's Front at the time of the elections. They repaired this error on the 19th of July by armed struggle. Another mistake: participation in the government and the dissolution of the committee. But after they had come out of the government a clarification took place in the POUM."

All this reminds one, at first glance, of Marxist criticism. Actually, Ver uses sterilized fragments of Marxist criticism not to unveil but on the contrary to mask the opportunist tactics of the POUM and his own. Above all one is struck by the fact that for our critic it is a question of isolated "mistakes" on the part of the POUM and not of a Marxist appraisal of their whole policy. There can be "mistakes" in any organization. Marx made mistakes, Lenin made mistakes, also the Bolshevik party as a whole. But these mistakes were corrected in time, thanks to the accuracy of the fundamental line. For the POUM it is a question not of isolated "mistakes" but of a fundamental line which is non-revolutionary, centrist, that is to say essentially opportunist. In other words, for a revolutionary party "mistakes" are the exception; for the POUM the exception is a few isolated correct steps.

The 19th of July 1936

Ver reminds us that on the 19th of July 1936 the POUM par-

ticipated in the armed struggle. Of course! Only a counter-revolutionary organization would have been able not to participate in this struggle, which comprised the whole proletariat: none of us, obviously, has so qualified the POUM. But how could participation in the struggle of the masses, who in those days imposed their policy on both the anarchists and the socialists as well as the POUMists, "repair the error" of participation in the People's Front? Perhaps the POUM changed the fundamental direction of its policy? Not at all! The struggle of the 19th of July, in spite of the real victory of the workers, ended in the ambiguity of dual power only because no organization had the necessary clear-headedness and courage to carry the struggle through to the end. The participation of the POUM in the People's Front was not a fortuitous "mistake" but the infallible sign of its opportunist character. In the July days only the external situation had changed, but not the centrist character of the party. The POUM adapted itself to the electoral mechanism of the People's Front. The zigzag of centrism to the left completed its zigzag to the right, but in no way repairs it. And during its zigzag to the left the POUM held wholly intact its hybrid position and precisely in doing this prepared the catastrophe of the future.

The participation in the government

"The other mistake" - says Ver - "was the participation in the government and the dissolution of the committees." Where could this "other mistake" have come from, if participation in the July insurrection had "repaired" the previous false policy? Actually, participation in the government was a new zigzag that sprang from the centrist nature of the party. Com. Sneevliet has written that he "understands" this participation. Alas, this ambiguous formula shows only that Sneevliet does not understand the laws of the class struggle in the epoch of the revolution. The July days of 1936, when the Catalonian proletariat, with correct leadership, could, without additional efforts or sacrifices, have seized power and opened the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat throughout Spain, ended, largely through the fault of the POUM, in a regime between the proletariat (committees) and the bourgeoisie, represented by its lackeys (Stalinist, Anarchist and Socialist leaders). The interest of the workers was to do away with the equivocal and dangerous situation as rapidly as possible, by handing over all power to the committees, that is to the Spanish soviets. The task of the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was to do away with the committees in the name of "unity of power." The participation of Min in the government was a corporate part of the plan of the bourgeoisie, directed against the proletariat. If Sneevliet "understands" such a thing, so much the worse for him. Ver is more cautious: he speaks of the participation in the government as the "other mistake." Not bad, this "mistake" which consisted in directly supporting the government of the bourgeoisie against the workers' committees!

"But" - Ver hastens to break the point of his criticism - "after they had come out of the government a clarification took place in the POUM." This is an obvious untruth, which Ver himself has refuted in his characterization of the POUM, already quoted, as a heterogeneous party in which the left is weak. In what then does this "clarification" consist, after which even the left centrists constitute a feeble minority in the party? Or perhaps by "clarification" we should understand ... the exclusion of the Bolshevik-Leninists?

The Criticism of the International Secretariat

Ver goes even farther in defending the case of centrism. After

enumerating the "mistakes" of the PCUM, he immediately goes on to enumerate, in the interest of symmetry, the "mistakes" of the International Secretariat. Let us bring in once again the literal quotation.

"Mistakes of the I.S.: ten days after the 19th of July, they had no position in Paris. They did not understand the importance of the events. They did not attend the Brussels conference; they applied too literally the Paris resolution. They should have profitted by this occasion to push the PCUM toward a revolutionary policy: They cut themselves off from him by the publication of Trotsky's letter."

One cannot believe one's own eyes in reading this accumulation of "accusations"! Naturally, the I.S. may have been guilty of certain practical negligences and even of certain political mistakes. But to place these on the same level as the opportunistic policy of the PCUM is to take onto oneself the inappropriate role of arbiter between a party which is hostile to us and our own international organization. Com. Ver reveals here, not for the first time, a dispiriting lack of sense of proportion. However, let us examine his accusations more closely;

"Ten days" after the 19th of July the I.S. had no position! Admitting that this is correct, what was the reason for it? Lack of information? Excessive caution? Ver does not explain. Of course, it is better to have a "position" immediately. But on one condition: that it should be correct. The I.S. is the supreme administrative institution. It had to be very cautious in taking a political position, the more so as it was not immediately directing and could not direct the struggle in Spain. But if "ten days after" the I.S. had no position, one year after the 19th of July Com. Ver occupies a wholly false position. This is incomparably worse.

The Brussels conference

It was necessary, you see, to take part once again in the pitiful and paltry conference of centrists in Brussels, in order "to push the PCUM toward a revolutionary policy. The PCUM should have been influenced by the Paris resolution, closed in Brussels, a year ago, at the revolutionary first time that we had encountered the leaders of the PCUM! As if for six years we had not attempted to "push" them onto the road of revolutionary policy! We used every method and every path: abundant correspondence, sending of delegates, organizational connection, numerous articles and entire pamphlets, finally, public criticism. Nevertheless, instead of adopting a Marxist policy, the leaders of the PCUM, frightened by the inexorable requirements of the revolution, definitely adopted the line of centrism. For Ver, all this is evidently a slip of no importance. That would have had enormous importance, it seems, is...the centrist conference in Brussels, where Ver, before one or two PCUM leaders, would have given a speech that at best would have repeated what had been said and written hundreds of times before the conference. This time again Com. Ver rounds out the centrist with the sectarian.

For the sectarian the supreme moment of existence is that in which he exhibits himself at the thousand and first conference!

Trotsky's letter

Finally, the last accusation: the publication of Trotsky's letter. The letter, as far as I know, was not designed for publication. But one must really have lost the last shreds of political insight to see in the

publication of this letter an important determining factor in our relations with the POUM. The letter described the participation in the bloc with the bourgeoisie as a betrayal of the proletariat. Is this right or wrong? We have never suspected the purity of Nin's intentions. But the political evaluation of his participation in the People's Front as an act of betrayal was absolutely correct. How, however, could the publication of this letter "cut us off" from Nin? Even before the publication of the letter we were sufficiently cut off from him, and not by accident; his whole policy went in the opposite direction from ours. It was not for some whim that Nin broke with us three years before the publication of Trotsky's letter. Or does Ver mean perhaps that after the elections Nin was evolving toward us and that the publication of the letter stopped this evolution? Ver's words can have no other meaning, admitting that they have even a shadow of meaning. Actually, as we know, Nin and his friends continued to think that their participation in the People's Front and after wards in the government was correct, and they demanded even the renewal of this participation. There too it was a question not of a "mistake" but of an entire political line. Finally, if one admits even that the POUM understood the "mistake" of having participated in the People's Front, how could the publication of the letter, containing a sharp analysis of this mistake, prevent the evolution of the POUM? Is Ver trying to say (if he is trying to say anything!) that Nin was so offended by the letter that he decided to return to his previous incorrect position? But such an opinion is too insulting to Nin who was guided by political ideas, and not by considerations of petty personal self-conceit.

Such are the "mistakes" of the I.S. which Ver puts on the same level as the centrist policies of the POUM. In this he shows only that himself occupies an intermediary position between Marxism and centrism.

The preparation for the May days (1937)

Ver then proceeds to the events of May of this year.

"It can be maintained," he says - "that the POUM was expecting them and was arming. The scope of the events took the party unawares. But any party would have been taken unawares."

Every sentence a mistake, moreover not an accidental mistake but the product of a false political line. The events of May could be "foreseen" and prepared for in only one way: by declaring an implacable struggle against the governments of Catalonia and Spain; by refusing all political collaboration with them; by opposing their own party to all other parties, that is to their directing centers, particularly and above all to the leadership of the CNT (trade unions). Not allowing the masses for one instant to confuse the revolutionary leaders with the lackeys of the bourgeoisie! An uncompromising policy of this kind, with, of course, active participation in the military struggle and in the revolutionary movements of the masses, would have assured to the POUM an unshakable authority among all the workers, above all among the anarchists who constitute the great majority of the Catalonian proletariat. Instead of that, the POUM demanded the reentrance of its leaders into the counter-revolutionary government and at the same time asserted in every issue of "La Batalla" that the workers could take power without a fight. It was even with this goal that the POUM launched the infantile project of a special congress to be convoked by the bourgeois government in order to...hand over the power to the workers and peasants. This is precisely why the POUM was taken unawares and why the events

of May were for it only another stage on the road to catastrophe. "But" - cries Ver - "any party would have been taken unawares." This unbelievable sentence shows once again that Ver does not know the difference between a centrist and a Marxist party. One can, of course, recognize that a real mass insurrection goes beyond, to a greater or less degree, any revolutionary party. But the difference lies precisely in the degree: here too quantity changes into quality. A centrist party is carried away by events and is drowned in them, whereas a revolutionary party in the final show-down dominates them and assures the victory.

"Defensive and not offensive"

"On the 4th and 5th of May" - Ver continues - "its policy (of the POUM) was correct: defensive and not offensive. To march on to the taking of power would have been adventurism in the contingencies of the moment. The great mistake of the POUM was that it threw out illusions during the retreat and passed off the defeat as a victory."

You see with what apothecary's precision Ver weighs and balances the "correct" actions and the "mistakes" of the POUM. However, his whole argument is nothing but error. Who said - and where? - that to go on in May to the taking of power was adventurism? This was not, above all, the opinion of the POUM itself. The day before it was still assuring the workers that, if they only wanted to, they would take power without a fight. The workers "wanted to." Wherein is the adventurism? The element of vile provocation on the part of the Stalinists is, from the point of view which interests us here, of secondary importance. All the reports after the events show that with a leadership with any seriousness and confidence in itself the victory of the May insurrection would have been assured. In this sense the POUM was right when it said that the workers could take power if they "wanted to." It forgot only to add: unfortunately you have no revolutionary leadership. The POUM could not lead the Catalan proletariat to the revolutionary offensive because --and only because-- all its previous policy had rendered it incapable of such initiative.

"The July days" of 1917 and
"the May days" of 1937

At this point Com. Ver can, however, retort: "But even the Bolsheviks in July 1917 did not decide to seize power and limited themselves to the defensive, leading the masses out of the line of fire with as few victims as possible. Why then was this policy not suitable for the POUM?" Let us examine this argument. Comrades Sneevliet and Ver are very fond of reminding us that Spain "is not Russia", that it is impossible to apply "Russian" methods there, etc. Abstract homilies of this kind make no serious impression. Well or badly, we have endeavored during the past six years to analyze the concrete conditions of the Spanish revolution. Even at the beginning we warned that one must not expect a rapid ~~zaxthx~~ rhythm in the development of events, in the manner of Russia in 1917. On the contrary, we used the analogy of the great French revolution, which, begun, in 1789, passed through a series of stages before attaining, in 1793, its culmination. But it is precisely because we are not at all inclined to schematize historic events that we do not consider it possible to transport the tactics of the Bolsheviks in July 1917 in Petersburg to the events of May 1937 in Catalonia. "Spain is not Russia." The differentiating features are too obvious.

The armed demonstration of the Petersburg proletariat broke out four months after the beginning of the revolution, three months after the Bolshevik party had launched a truly Bolshevik program (Lenin's April theses). The overwhelming mass of the population of the gigantic country was only just beginning to emerge from the illusions of February. At the front was an army of twelve million men who were only then being touched by the first rumours about the Bolsheviks. In these conditions the isolated insurrection of the Petersburg proletariat would have led inevitably to their being crushed. It was necessary to gain time. It was these circumstances that determined the tactic of the Bolsheviks.

In Spain the events of May took place not after four months, but after six years of revolution. The masses of the whole country have had a gigantic experience. A long time ago they lost the illusions of 1931, as well as the warmed-up illusions of the People's Front. Again and again they have shown to every part of the country that they were ready to go through to the end. If the Catalonian proletariat had seized power in May 1937 - as it had really seized it in July 1936 - they would have found support throughout all of Spain. The bourgeois-Stalinist reaction would not even have found two regiments with which to crush the Catalonian workers. In the territory occupied by Franco not only the workers but also the peasants would have turned toward the Catalonian proletariat, would have isolated the Fascist army and brought ~~about its irreparable disintegration~~. It is doubtful whether in these conditions any foreign government would have risked throwing its regiments onto the burning soil of Spain. Intervention would ~~inevitably~~ come materially impossible, or at least extremely dangerous.

Naturally, in every insurrection there is an element of uncertainty and risk. But all the subsequent march of events has proved that even in the case of death the situation of the Spanish proletariat would have been incomparably more favorable than now, to say nothing of the fact that the revolutionary party would have assured its future.

But on what does Ver base his categorical statement that the taking over of power in Catalonia would have been, in the contingencies of the moment, "adventurism"? On absolutely nothing, unless...on the desire to justify the impotence of centrism and at the same time his own policy, which was and remains only the left shadow of centrism.

Ver defends the exclusion of the Bolshevik-Leninists

The concluding lines of the record are on the level of the whole report: "they say that there is no democracy in the POUM; but if the Bordigists wanted to enter our party we would undoubtedly accept, though without fraction rights." Who says this? A lawyer for centrism or a revolutionary who numbers himself among the Bolshevik-Leninists? It is hard to tell. Ver is fully satisfied with the democracy of the POUM. The opportunists exclude the revolutionaries from their party. Ver says: the opportunists are right because the naughty revolutionaries build fractions. Let us recall once more what Ver said of the Poun at the beginning: it is a "recent, heterogeneous party, its left wing is weak." From this heterogeneous party, in its essence, composed entirely of fractions and sub-fractions, the POUM excludes not the avowed reformists, nor the petty-bourgeois Catalonian nationalists, nor, of course, the centrists, but only the Bolshevik-Leninists. This should be clear. Nevertheless, the "Bolshevik-Leninist" Ver approves of the reactionary regressions of the centrists. He is preoccupied, you see, by the juridical question of the rights of fractions, and not by the political

question of their program and tactics. In the eyes of a Marxist the revolutionary fraction inside a centrist party is a positive fact; the sectarian or opportunist fraction in the revolutionary party is a negative fact. That Ver should reduce the question to the simple right of fractions to exist, shows only that he has completely wiped out the line of demarcation between centrism and Marxism. Here is what a true Marxist would say: "They say that there is no democracy in the PCUM. This is not true. Democracy does exist there - for the right-wingers, for the centrists, for the confusionists, but not for the Bolshevik-Leninists." In other words, the extent of democracy in the PCUM is determined by the real content of its centrist policy, radically hostile to revolutionary Marxism.

Unpardonable sally

But Ver does not stop even there. In the interest of the defense of the PCUM he resorts to a direct calumny (there is no other word for it!) against our comrades in Catalonia. "The B.-L. section of Barcelona" - he says - "was made up of careerists and adventurers." One cannot believe one's own eyes! Who is saying this? A social democrat? A Stalinist? A bourgeois enemy? No, it is said by a responsible militant in our Belgian section. This is what it means to cling to mistakes uncovered by the whole march of events! Tomorrow the agents of the GPU in Barcelona, if the Belgian Bulletin falls into their hands, will say: "By Ver's own confession the B.-L. are careerists and adventurers. They must be done away with accordingly!" I think that it is the duty of all our sections to declare that we reject with indignation this inadmissible sally of Com. Ver and that with all our international authority we support our young Barcelonian organization. I will add here: as is shown by their programmatic call of the 19th of July of this year, our comrades in Barcelona understand the tasks of the revolution with incomparably greater depth and seriousness than Ver. The real "mistake" of the International Secretariat consists rather in that up to the present time it has not condemned Ver's statement and has not insisted on its condemnation by our Belgian section.

Once more we must help Com. Ver
to return to the correct line.

We have not the slightest intention of aggravating disagreements. We have encountered Com. Ver in various conditions and at different stages of the development of the Belgian section and of the international organization. All of us have learned to appreciate the devotion of Com. Ver to the cause of the working class, his energy, his eagerness to give all his strength disinterestedly to this cause. Young workers should learn this from Com. Ver. But as for his political position, unfortunately, it is most often several yards to the right or to the left of the Marxist line, which, however, does not incline Com. Ver to indulgence for those who remain on this line. In the past we have had to struggle above all against the sectarian tendencies of Com. Ver, which have caused no little harm to the Belgian section. But even then it has no secret for us that sectarianism is only a bud from which can always bloom the full flower of opportunism. We have now before us an exceptionally striking confirmation of this law of political botany. Com. Ver has given proof of sectarianism in questions of secondary importance or in formal questions of organization, only to arrive at opportunism in a political question of gigantic historical importance.

The internal life of the Fourth International is founded on the

principles of democracy. Com. Ver makes very wide, at times even anarchist, use of this democracy. Nevertheless, the advantage of the democratic regime consists in that the overwhelming majority, relying on experience and on comradely discussion, can formulate freely its authoritative opinion and can at the right moment call back to order a minority that has become engaged in a dangerous path. This is the best service that one can render at the present moment to our Belgian, and at the same time to our Dutch sections.

—Crux

August 24, 1937.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE
SPANISH SITUATION -- A Concise Summary

1) The difference between Negrin and Franco is the difference between rotten bourgeois democracy and fascism.

2) Everywhere and always, where and when revolutionary workers are not powerful enough immediately to overthrow the bourgeois regime, they defend from fascism even the rotten bourgeois democracy, and especially do they defend their own positions inside bourgeois democracy.

3) The workers defend bourgeois democracy, however, not by methods of bourgeois democracy (People's Front, electoral blocs, government coalitions, etc.) but by their own methods: that is, by the methods of revolutionary class struggle. Thus by participating in the military struggle against fascism, they continue to defend at the same time their own organizations, their rights and their interests from the bourgeois democratic government.

4) Bourgeois democracy decomposes together with capitalism which engendered it. The very possibility of fascist insurrection against bourgeois democracy is a sign that its days are numbered. Thus the "regeneration" of bourgeois democracy cannot be a program of the proletariat. The defence of bourgeois democracy against fascism is only a tactical episode submitted to our line: to overthrow bourgeois democracy and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.

5) A coalition with the bourgeoisie under the name of People's Front; participation in the government of People's Front; political support to such a government; the renunciation of independent agitation and organization for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois government can, in the best case, only prolong the death agony of bourgeois democracy and the more easily prepare the triumph of fascism. Not only the policy of the Stalinists and the Socialists, the direct lackeys of the counter-revolution, but the policy of the leaders of the CNT, POUM as well, were and remain pernicious from the point of view of proletarian interests.

6) But if it is true, - and it is true - that the government of Negrin-Stalin, like the government of France, are both watch-dogs of capitalism; if it is true that the politics of Negrin-Stalin must lead inevitably to the triumph of fascism, it is nevertheless absolutely false to conclude that in the struggle between the armies of Negrin-Stalin and of Franco, the proletariat should take a neutral position. The Spanish, as the world proletariat, is interested; (a) in the military crushing of Franco (b) in a policy during the civil war that is capable of preparing for the earliest overthrow of the government of Negrin-Stalin.

7) One can object to this: during a war between two bourgeois states, the revolutionary proletariat, independent of the political regime in its country, must take the position of: "The defeat of our own government is the lesser evil." Is this rule not applicable also to the civil war in which two bourgeois governments are fighting one against the other? It is not applicable. In a war between two bour-

geois states, the purpose is one of imperialist conquest, and not a struggle between democracy and fascism. In the Spanish civil war, the question involves: democracy or fascism.

For the capitalist class the difference between democracy and fascism is not decisive. It uses for its own purpose democracy or fascism, depending upon circumstances. But for the petty-bourgeois agents of capitalism - the leaders of the Social-Democracy, the Stalinists and the Anarchists - democracy signifies the source of their existence and influence: fascism signifies for them debacle and extermination. The revolutionary proletariat should not put both fighting camps in the same bag: it must use their fight for its own interests. It can be successful not by the politics of neutrality but by dealing military blows to the foe number one: fascism.

8) Franco is an obvious, immediate and deadly foe, hated by the majority of the workers and peasants. Negrin, Stalin, Caballero and Company are less obvious, more camouflaged foes who still lead millions of workers and peasants. With Franco the only possible fight is a physical one; with Negrin a physical fight is at present impossible because the revolutionary elements are in a minority and the physical fight, which is inevitable, should be prepared for politically. The most important means for this political preparation is to denounce and unmask the bad conduct of the war by the government and to explain to the masses that the reason for this bad conduct is the servility of the government to the interests of capital.

9) It can be objected, that the two imperialist camps (Italy and Germany on one side and England, France and the USSR on the other) conduct their struggle on the Iberian peninsula and that the war in Spain is only an "episode" of this struggle. In the sense of a historical possibility, it is true. But it is impermissible to identify a historical possibility with the actual, concrete course of the civil war today. The intervention of the imperialist countries has indisputably great influence upon the developments of the events in Spain. But until today it has not changed the fundamental character of these events as of a struggle between the camp of the Spanish bourgeois democracy and the camp of Spanish fascism.

10) If the war will continue on the same basis, the political difference between the two camps can be reduced to zero. But it is only a possibility. Until today it is not a fact. It is necessary thus to use the situation as it is. The situation can change also in another direction: under the influence of the military blows from Franco, the Negrin government can be forced to make more concessions to the workers, as Kerensky in August 1917 under the blow from Kornilov. We will use also these concessions for better preparation of the overthrow of Negrin.

11) If Caballero, for example, would be capable of initiating a struggle against Negrin, as it was hoped by many, we would take the most active part in this struggle without accepting any political responsibility for Caballero. On the contrary, we would accuse him of a lack of revolutionary program and of the necessary resoluteness in the fight. But Caballero cowardly flew abroad from his own army, the UGT, from the anarchist workers, the CNT, who had pushed him on the road of struggle. The flight of this vaudeville hero dispels many

illusions, creates more elbow-room for the genuine revolutionists and gives the possibility during the military struggle against Franco to mobilize the masses politically against Negrin.

12) Let's take an example: two ships with armaments and munitions start from Franco or from the U.S.: one for Franco and the other for Negrin. What should be the attitude of the workers? To sabotage the transport of both? Or only for Franco? We are not neutral. We will let the ship with the munitions for Negrin Government pass. We have no illusions: from these bullets, only 9 of every 10 would go against the fascists, at least one against our comrades. But out of those marked for Franco ten out of every ten will go against our comrades. We are not neutral. We do not let the ship with the munitions for Franco pass. Of course, if there began an armed insurrection in Spain, we would try to direct the ship with the munitions into the hands of the rebellious workers. But when we are not that strong, we choose the lesser evil.

13) Will we, as a revolutionary party, mobilize new volunteers for Negrin? That would be to send them into the hands of the GPU. ~~Can~~ Collect money for the Negrin government? Absurd! We will collect money for our own comrades in Spain. If we send comrades across, it will be conspiratively, for our own movement.

14) Our attitude toward such committees as the North American Committee for Spanish Democracy, towards meetings, trade union actions, etc.? We will defend the idea that the trade unions should collect not for the government but for the Spanish trade unions, for the workers' organizations. If anyone objects that the Spanish trade union leaders are connected with the government and that it is thus impermissible to send them money, we will answer by pointing to a simple example: during the miners' strike in Great Britain in 1926--we sent money to the miners' trade-union, the leaders of which were closely connected with the British government. Strike committees can be reformists; they can betray; they have connections with the bosses. But we can't avoid them as long as the workers are not capable of changing them. And thus we send them the money, with the risk that they will betray the workers. We warn the workers of this, and when it occurs, we say, "You see, your leaders have betrayed you."

15) The Salemme resolution says:
"The Cannon-Schachtman-Goldman line of "preferring a loyalist victory" is identical with the approach of the Stalinists. This open degeneration into the swamp of 'lesser evil' People's Front politics explodes the pretence that material aid does not involve political support.Workers who refuse to surrender their arms, that is, refuse to give the government military or material aid, are shot by the government's Stalinist Cheka."

Yes, we know that our comrades are shot by the government's cheka, but to what conclusion does the Salemme group come? Do they propose desertion from the loyalist army, or a military insurrection? If desertion, where to? Surely not into the camp of Franco. If the government mobilizes the workers and peasants, what does refusal to give it military aid signify? It can only signify desertion, or insurrection. Or do they mean a general strike? A general strike, especially during a war, can only be with the aim of overthrowing the government, can only be an introduction to an insurrection. I agree fully that if we can call the people to insurrection, we must do so. But

can we do it? I would like to know how numerous are the Saleme regiments in Spain; if its resolution was written for Spain and not for the political satisfaction of the author. If we ask the soldier not to fight, then we must ask the worker (who by working the munitions factory gives "material aid" to the loyalist government) not to work. But if, as is the case, we are not strong enough now to seize power, we must in a military manner fight against Franco in the material conditions determined by the relationship of forces, while at the same time politically we prepare for the insurrection against Negrin.

16) Their resolution further states:

"Revolutionary workers must not become defenders of a bourgeois government; they can defend only a workers' government. On the other hand, they must become revolutionary defeatists only in an imperialist clash. The class interests of the proletariat in the Spanish civil war demand that revolutionists not only avoid, but also struggle against all programs calling for revolutionary defeatism or defensism."

But the war against fascism is not only a defence of the Negrin government. We have our workers' organizations. In Spain, especially in Catalonia, there is socialized property, collectivized farms. The Negrin government is against that but so far it must tolerate it. We must defend these conquests against Franco.

17) The Saleme resolution says:

"In no case must revolutionists raise slogans calling for sabotage of the military struggle against Franco, to do this would be to slip into the position of revolutionary defeatism."

This announcement speaks for itself. These "revolutionists" are so revolutionary that they feel condemned by their own position and proclaim that they will not call for "sabotage of the military struggle against Franco." Is this assurance not a bit...humiliating for these "revolutionists"? ~~Why?~~ Not less interesting is the fact that the authors speak only against "sabotage" of the Republican army. Do they stand for the sabotage of the Franco army? Are the authors for sabotage in the Fascist army? Why do they keep silent? This "omission" is very characteristic for the whole position of the group under the cover of vehement expressions and terribly radical formulas, they try to conceal the lack of confidence in themselves. That is not surprising. The school of purely formal intransigence is condemned at every step to close its eyes to reality, and when a pupil of such a school accidentally opens his eyes, he becomes an opportunist. We now have such a striking example in Belgium with comrade Ver.

18) The Saleme resolution further states:

"The Social-Democrats who criminally preferred the victory of Hindenburg to that of Hitler, and got both, or the Stalinists who preferred Roosevelt to Landon, are no more politically degenerate than the Cannons to Schachtmans who prefer the victory of the Negrins over the Francos and Schachtmans who prefer the victory of the Negrins over the Francos and will get either Negrin military dictatorship or a Negrin-Franco truce."

The civil war between Negrin-Franco does not signify the same thing as the electoral competition of Hindenburg-Hitler. If Hindenburg had entered into an open military fight against Hitler, then Hindenburg would have been a "lesser evil". We do not choose the

the "greater evil", we choose the "lesser evil". But Hindenburg was not the "lesser evil" -- he did not go into open warfare against Hitler; the Social Democrats hoped for that -- that was stupid -- but that was not the case. But here we do have a war of the Social Democrats against Fascism. To have supported Hindenburg against Hitler meant to give up political independence. Here too we do not support Negrin politically. If we would have a member in the Cortes, he would vote against the military budget of Negrin. We charge Negrin with the political responsibility for the conduct of the war. But at the same time we must repulse the fascist hordes until the moment when we ourselves can take into our hands the conduct of the war. To affirm that to fight together with the Negrin forces against Franco is the same as to vote for Hindenburg against Hitler is an expression, I am sorry to say, of a sort of so-called "parliamentary cretinism." The war against fascism can't be resolved by parliamentary means because fascism is an army of reaction that can be crushed only by force. That's why we were against the policy of the Social Democrats in Germany -- the pure parliamentary combination with Hindenburg against Hitler. We called for the creation of workers' militias, etc. But here we do have a fight against fascism. It is true that the general staff of the "democratic" army is capable of tomorrow making a truce with Franco. But it is not a fact today. And we can't overlook the real events. Tactically we must use the war of the republicans against the fascists for the purpose of a strategic aim: the overthrow of the capitalist regime.

19) The Salonne resolution states:

"Cannon and Schachtman say in the Plenum Report, July 30: "Whoever would, for example, refuse to "support" the government in the war against the Fascists by such material aid as fighting in the Loyalist Army, would be criminally remiss in his elementary proletarian duty." (our emphasis). We ask Cannon-Schachtman: Were the revolutionary workers of Catalonia who fought against the encroachments of bourgeois military discipline; - who fought against the encroachments of bourgeois military - were they remiss when they refused to give arms, that is material aid, to the bourgeois Loyalist army?... Were they acting then as agents of the 5th ~~XXXXXX~~ column, as Burnham accused us of acting when we refused to give military aid to the Popular Front?"

Everything here is put in the same bag. The Catalonian workers fought against the government on May 3-7. Not consciously but instinctively they fought for power, which could give them the possibility the better to continue the war against Franco. But they tried this without the necessary revolutionary leadership and they were defeated. Now they are ten times weaker than before the May events. The workers now ask: What should we do now, not in the Bronx or Manhattan but in Spain? Try to overthrow Negrin by insurrection? But we are too weak, we are now disarmed. The Salonne group will answer us with our own words: You must prepare the masses politically for the future overthrow of the Negrin government. Good. But this requires time. And meanwhile Franco is approaching. Should we not try to crush him?

The slogan "Neither victory nor defeat" or "We are neither defencists or defeatists" is false from a principle point of view and pernicious politically. It is devoid of every agitational value. Imagine a revolutionist standing between two camps of civil war, with a banner: Neither victory nor defeat. This is a slogan for a club of Pdx Pontius Pilates, not for a revolutionary party. We are for the defence of the workers'

organizations and the conquests of the revolution from Franco. We are "defensists". The "defeatists" are Negrin-Stalin and Company. We participate in the struggle against Franco as the best soldiers and at the same time, in the interests of the victory over fascism, we agitate for the social revolution and we prepare for the overthrow of the defeatist government of Negrin. Only such an attitude can give us an approach to the masses.

Sept. 14, 1937

CRUX

Stenographer's note:

This is a stenographic account of the answers Comrade Crux delivered in English to a series of questions put to him by American comrades regarding the Spanish situation. In view of the fact that Comrade Crux does not have a free command of the English language, it is very likely that there are "rough edges" and that it lacks the precision of expression that would be the case had it been spoken or written in Russian.

R.S.