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International Volunteers in the POUM Militias

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PLUTTINO, VINCENZO, Italian, Maximalist. Enters Modelo 23.7.37, freed 10.2.38.; not known if fighter (Pagès p.392).

SCHURING, GERRIT, RSAP.

SITING, JOAN, KPO, (not known if fighter) (Pagès p.391) imprisoned in Modelo 22.7.37, expelled 22.8.37.

SITING, EVA, KPO.

WIERING, THEO, RSAP.

IBRSU and Trotskyists with other units:

BAUMGARDT, WILHELM, SAP, Political Commissar, Thälmann Battalion (Buschak p.236)

BORNSTEIN, MYCECZYSLAW, Polish Trotskyist, fought with CNT, worked in factory, died in Auschwitz in 1942

BRAUNER KARL, Solidaridad Internacional: prisoner in Cuartel Carlos Mrx; KPO; fought with CNT (Buschak p.236).

HANS, DAVID FREUND (MOULIN) German Jew; went to Spain in September 1936, in Madrid assisted in German language broadcasts with Paul and Clara Thalmann; on Guadarrama front where Galan threatened to have him shot for Trotskyist propaganda; early 1937 he went to Barcelona.

GALANTY, ERNST, KPO, fights with CNT as no POUM going to front (Buschak p.236).

KIELSO AAGE, Danish Trotskyist, in Durruti column for two months and then the International Brigades until March 1937; on Madrid and Cordoba fronts. See 'A Danish Trotskyist in the Spanish Civil War', first published in Hug! N°17, 1977, later translated by Mike Jones. According to Revolutionary History vol 7, no 4, p242 'went to Spain and joined the POUM'.

MERTIN, MAX, SAP in Thälmann Battalion. (Buschak p.236)

TRUDE, SAP member, nurse, captured by fascists; with Germans on Zaragoza front, killed, in International group of Durruti column (LB 5.11.36).

Up to 700 foreigners fought with the 10.000 or so militia organised by the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM) between July 1936 and June 1937¹. They were from at least 28 different countries; French, Italian and, above all German fighters being the most numerous².

From a military point of view, these volunteers played a far less significant role in the Civil War than those of the International Brigades, not only because they were far fewer in number, but also they spent most of their time away from where the most important fighting took place. However, the POUM's foreign volunteers have attracted attention both because of George Orwell's well-known description of life on the Aragon front, where most of them were stationed, *Homage to Catalonia* and more recently due to Ken Loach's award-winning film *Land and Freedom*³. While the military contribution of these volunteers was inevitably limited by the POUM's own isolation, their experience as witnesses to the unfolding political drama in the Republican zone and, in some

¹ W. Buschak, *Das Londoner Büro. Europäische Linksozialisten in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Amsterdam 1985) p.236. Former POUM militia officer, Albert Masó, estimated that there were around 400 such volunteers, Letter 20.11.97.

² There is evidence in diverse sources of there having been volunteers from Algeria (as French citizens), Albania, Argentina, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Holland, France, Italy, Ireland, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Switzerland and the USA, see Appendix. Given the presence of relatively important parties with fraternal links with the POUM in Norway and Sweden, it would seem reasonable that there were also volunteers from these countries.

³ Given the relatively minor part played by these volunteers and the ephemeral and fragmented nature of the majority of the parties and groupings which supported the POUM internationally, more or less none of which have survived, any attempt to gather material on them is particularly difficult. This paper is based primarily on sources available in English, Catalan and Spanish and has to be seen as the first step towards a more thorough investigation. I am indebted to Reinner Tosstorff for providing me with the material in German cited and to Christian Krombacher for his help in translating it.

cases, as direct victims of that drama gives more significance to their role.

The POUM had been formed in September 1935, out of the unification of the dissident communist Workers and Peasants Bloc, which provided over 90% of its membership, and the Trotskyist Communist Left. On the eve of the war it was the principal workers political party in Catalonia, where the majority of its 6,000 members were based and where it controlled a trade union federation of 50,000 members. It also contained in its ranks many founder members of the Communist Party, including the two most competent marxist thinkers in Spain at this time, Andreu Nin and Joaquin Maurín. Like all workers organisations its membership grew rapidly during the first months of the war, reaching 30,000 by the end of 1936. Other organisations grew quicker however, especially the POUM's principal rival, the newly formed communist Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (PSUC)⁴.

Once the military had risen up, the workers organisations hurriedly organised their own militias to fight the rebels often on the basis of their pre-war para-military and defence groups. The POUM's "Action Groups", which would play a central role in the party's militia, had been used to defend party activities and occasionally to break up those of the Right. These groups mainly consisted of members of the party's youth organisation, the Juventud Comunista Ibérica (JCI). The Action Groups were generally not armed, although some of their members occasionally carried pistols. They were led by one of the party's most able organisers, Josep Rovira⁵.

⁴ On the history of the POUM see, R. Tosstorff, *Die POUM im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg 1936–1939* (Frankfurt 1987) and A. Durgan, *B.O.C. 1930–1936. El Bloque Obrero y Campesino* (Barcelona 1996).

⁵ Rovira joined the BOC in 1933, from the left nationalist group Estat Català-Partit Proletari. He was a membership of the BOC/POUM Executive Committee from 1934 on. See Durgan, *BOC...* and J. Coll and J. Pané *Josep Rovira. Una vida al servei de Catalunya i del socialisme* (Barcelona 1978)

Etchebéhère speaks of a BOLIVIAN with the POUM on Madrid front.

ROMANIANS: Fernández p.212 speaks of "Romanian doctor" (Aug/Sept 1936); (The Spanish Civil War. The view.. p177): "2 Romanian brothers", one of whom Political Commissar, 'very anti-Trotskyist', later ends up in Stalinist unit. McNair in *New Leader* 12.2.37. speaks of 2 Rumanians, doctor and captain.

Brea/Low p.95: 2 women : 1 French and 1 Swiss (Thalmann ??) (militiawoman)

p.114, Arab boy; Belgian miner.

p.191 Simone, could be partner of Michel Collinet (see Alba/Swartz p.125)

Foreigners connected with POUM: it is not clear if they were in the militia:

BUSHGENS, JOSEPH, RSAP.

BRANDEL, KUNO 1907–1983; expelled from KPD over Brandler case; went to Spain from France, returns to France joins KPO; see *The Spanish Civil War. The view...*p.334 re: sabotage trial; not clear if fought with militia.

DURBAN, RICHARD, 'non-party', in *Preventario Judicial de Colell, Girona*, according to POUM's *Solidaridad Internacional*; not known if fighter; according to Pagès p.389 participated in *Modelo* hunger strike.

HEERE, JAN, RSAP.

LAU, TAGE, Danish Trotskyist. *Revolutionary History*, vol7, no4, p242.; according to the Danish magazine *Hug!* N°17, 1977, he worked in the POUM office and did not go the front.

LICHTENSTEIN, HERZ, 21 year-old student, SAP (not known if fighter) (Pagès p.391) imprisoned in *Modelo* July-Sept 1937

MAIER, PAUL, referred to in *Solidaridad Internacional*: SAP, in *Preventario Judicial de Colell, Girona*, not known if fighter; also see Pagès p.390.

WILTON, MIKE, ILP, Brockway p8 reports that still at front, 7.7.37.

WINKLER, ROSA, LIC, Italian Maximalist.

WISNER (MINA) doctor at front (La Batalla 11.8.36.); has resided long time in France and Belgium, specialist in head wounds and work accidents, only resided three months in Barcelona; article in La Nueva Era July 1936; Hungarian, comrade of Bela Kun (Swartz/Alba p.125).

WOLF, HERBERT, SAP leader; arrived November 1936, member of Secretariado Extranjero del POUM; co-editor of Spanish Revolution (English) (Mühlen p.65);

(La Batalla 20.3.37): in attack 17 March; sent some months ago from Paris; in "German section" of POUM; (La Batalla 23.3.37), (The Spanish Civil War. The view...p. 119): died in attack on Manicomio.

WINGATE, SYBIL, McNair p.16: goes with ILP contingent (she was already in Barcelona) as nurse.

ZANON GRIMM, LUIGI (LUIS) in Spanish Bolshevik Leninist group, in POUM militia, translator for La Batalla and Ediciones Marxistas, never a provocateur or Stalinist agent as claimed at time; imprisoned for 24 hours for giving out BL leaflet at FJR meeting in 2/37; (The Spanish Civil War. The view... p.305) arrested in 1938; tortured and false confession extracted from him; (p241), later retracts testimony; still in prison when POUM leaders escape.

ZECCHINI, BRUNO, LIC, Bordigist, exiled in France.

ZIMBAL, MARGARITA ("PUTZ"), German Jew, joined Sitges POUM, went to Mallorca with POUM militia; killed on Huesca front (La Batalla 23.10.36); Brea/Low pp.175-179, 19 years old when killed.

ZUCKER, WOLF, SAP, killed (Mühlen p.65)

Plus...

Orwell p.117, speaks of AMERICAN doctor who had been at front.

The first POUM column of a thousand fighters left Barcelona for Aragon, along with units organised by the CNT and PSUC, on 24 July. Over the next two months, more recruits joined this initial column and another two were organised. By the end of the summer the POUM forces on the Aragon front numbered some 3,000 out of a total of 25,000 militia. By June 1937, the 29th Division, as the POUM militia had become, claimed to have 6,000 men at the front and another 2,000 in reserve. The POUM also organised a Battalion in Madrid, which fought on the central front and had two more fighting around Teruel, from Valencia and Castellón respectively. Battalions from Catalonia and the Levante region were also sent by the POUM to the Central zone during the height of the assault on Madrid by Franco's troops in November 1936. Thus, if the party's own figures are to be accepted, it had control of nine to ten thousand troops during the first year of the war⁶.

Due to the party's predominance in Catalonia, the bulk of its fighters were dispatched to the nearby Aragon front, where they took part in the conquest of a series of villages and positions around Huesca and to the north east of Zaragoza. By October 1936, the Aragon front had stabilised and the troops stationed there were mainly involved in minor raids and diversionary actions until the offensive on Huesca in June 1937. The failure of the militia to launch an offensive on either Huesca or Zaragoza was due to their lack of suitable arms. As far as the POUM and CNT were concerned, their militias were deliberately denied such arms by the Republican authorities for political reasons.

The POUM militia was initially organised into columns of about 1,000 fighters, which were subdivided into centurias or banderas of 80 to 100, these in turn being sub-divided into sections of around twenty. Both the centurias and the sections were initially organ-

⁶ La Batalla 22.11.37 and G. Orwell Homage to Catalonia (Harmondsworth 1975) p.156; L. Trotsky (ed. P. Broué) La revolución española (Barcelona 1977) Vol. II, p.392.

ised on the basis of the origin of the militia, from certain towns or districts of Barcelona. In theory, the POUM militia had its own artillery, machine gunners, sappers, cavalry and so on, but lack of equipment meant that most of these specialised sections amounted to little. In fact, the severe shortage of arms and ammunition seriously limited the POUM's ability to put more men at the front. Its troops on the Aragon front were armed with the same Mauser rifles as the regular army and a few dozen machine guns and mortars. Most of these arms had been taken from the barracks of the Army's 4th Division in Barcelona in July and new weapons would not begin to appear at the front until late spring 1937. There were two fairly ineffective batteries of field guns in operation under their control round Huesca by the end of 1936. The only other weapons available were rudimentary hand bombs. According to Orwell, the militia was lacking in more or less every form of basic equipment necessary for a modern army: binoculars, telescopes, periscopes, maps, range-finders, lanterns, electric torches, lights, wire cutters, gun oil or armourer's tools. Moreover, unlike other militia, the POUM's had few military experts in its ranks⁷. Another sympathetic observer claimed that the Lenin Division still only had 4% of the proportion of automatic weapons that Regular (Popular) Army units had⁸. Training was of the most rudimentary kind and prior to going to the front consisted mainly of drill⁹.

⁷ Letter from A. Masó, 11.12.97; J. Coll and J. Pané Josep Rovira... pp.91-92, 95-96; "Three months on the Huesca Front", *The Spanish Civil War. The view from the Left*. (Revolutionary History Vol.4, Nos. 1/2, London 1992) p. 287; Orwell, *Homage*.. pp. 13, 35-36; According to KPO sources, by October 1936, the POUM had signed up 50,000 volunteers but could not send them to the front through lack of arms, cited in P. Von zur Mühlen *Spanien war ihre Hoffnung. Die deutsche Linke im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg 1936 bis 1939* (Bonn 1983) p. 62; *La Batalla* 22.10.36, 2.12.36, 15.1.37, 7.3.37, 21.4.37; *Artillería Roja* 23.1.37.

⁸ W. Krehm, *Spain: Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (League for a Revolutionary Workers Party, Toronto 1937) p.17.

⁹ Orwell, *Homage*... pp. 13, 35-36.

under instructions of POUM (Buschak p.235). Commissar in 29th Division; represents German speakers in Militia; arrested 20.8.37.; trial for High Treason, prosecutor asked for 6 years (see *Solidaridad Internacional Paris*); sentenced 14.12.38; 20.12.38 to State Prison.;; see letter from Thalheimer & Brandler in *Frente Proletario* 1/38; escapes to Sweden in 1939; (Pagès p.390).

"TANKY", ILP

TELMAN, with LIC, Trotskyist, German.

THALMANN, PAUL Swiss Trotskyist; leaves front after militarization, Spring 37.

THOMAS, HARRY, ILP, from Carreglefn, Wales; volunteered in Liverpool; wounded in night attack 4/37.

THOMPSON, DOUGLAS, ILP, wounded in night attack 4/37

TRAVERSO MARIO, LIC, Italian anarchist, dramatist.

TRENCH, PADDY, Irish, member of Marxist Group. *Revolutionary History* vol6; nos 2-3, summer 1996, pp6-7.

TROBO QUINDOS, DANIEL 29 yrs old killed during action 15/9/36, member of JCF from Le Havre (*La Batalla* 24.9.36.)

VALLARDE, LIC, French Trotskyist, PCI member, after October 1936 joins International Brigades and killed at front April-May 1937.

WAUVERMANS, PIERRE, Belgian, Trotskyist, with LIC.

WEBB, HARRY, ILP

WEITKUSS/WIELKUZ, GUSTAV, Swiss, took part in attack on Manicomio in 3/37, great bravery withdraws pair of dead comrades before retreating; enters Modelo 21.8.37; member of *Centuria Espartacus*, Pagès p.390: in *Modelo* whole war.

WEITZ, LUCIEN French.

"WERNER" SAP member killed in June 1937 (*Mühlen* p.65), from N. Böhmen

WILLIAMS, BOB, ILP; married to Spanish woman; Welsh; broken ankle during enemy shelling; with Orwell when went to front; at Sanatorium Maurín (Orwell p.190)

RITCHIE, JOHN, ILP; Brockway p8 reports that still at front, 7.7.37.

ROMANELLI DUILLIO, with LIC, Bordigist, exiled in France.

RUSSO, ENRICO (CANDIANI), Bordigist, Commander of LIC; Capitain, on General Staff of Italian Army in 1st World War (La Batalla 16.9.36), old friend of Nin, Andrade and Gorkin, industrial engineer ; exiled in France; exile since 1926 in Brussels on CC of Bordigist faction., leader of minority in favour of intervention in Spanish Civil War ; also military advisor to Rovira and Arquer.

SALVINI, CRISTOFANO (TOSCA), LIC, Trotskyist

SAN JOSÉ, JOSEPH, member of JCF from Le Havre, 17 years old, killed during action 15/9/36, (La Batalla 24.9.36.)

“SEBASTIAN” Rumanian mentioned by Cornford (Penguin collection p.123)

SEDRAN, DOMENICO (ADOLFO CARLINI), LIC, Trotskyist; born 1905, 1922 left Italy, joined PCI in 1925 in exile; deported to Belgium in 1928, shortly after expelled from PCI as a Trotskyist; went to Spain when war begins, functions as Munis’s right hand man; still in prison when PO leaders escape (see The Spanish Civil War. The view...)

“SEPP” SAP member killed in June (Mühlen p.65), from Munich.

SERINI, BRUNO, Italian journalist, with LIC, party membership unknown; wounded at Siétamo, 1.8.36.

SERVIVAT, member of POI, mentioned letter in La Batalla 18.8.36. “Los Bolcheviques Leninistas...”

SMILIE, BOB, ILP; dies in prison; wounded in Ermita raid (Orwell p.94); McNair p.10: goes with father as representative of ILP; pp19-22 on his death.

“A. SCH.” In Shock Battalion, probably in SAP.

STEINHOFF, ERNST, German (Buschak p.237), Shock Battalion ?

SWARTZ, WALTER, 1907–1986, a tailor from Berlin, joins SPD youth in 1926, left in 1930 and joined KPO; went to Spain 1932 unemployed; joined POUM in Gracia; founds international office

The POUM would pride itself on its early adoption of its own revolutionary form of “militarisation”. An insistence on discipline and efficiency was combined with egalitarian forms of organisation. There were no visible differences between ranks, no saluting and no differentials in pay¹⁰. However, officers were not elected by the militiamen but appointed by the party leadership, most of them being trusted party men or foreign volunteers with military experience. Political commissars were also chosen by the party Executive Committee at battalion and divisional level and had the equivalent rank to the officers they worked alongside. The commissars main task was to “maintain the political, moral and physical well-being of the troops” as well as to countersign military orders. In fact, rank and file participation inside the POUM militia was not that great. There was a certain amount of general political discussion but how much depended on unit to unit¹¹. Only in the sections or companies were the equivalent of corporals sometimes elected as were political committees and delegates which served basically as a means of liaising with other units. The party also made periodic attempts to organise political meetings and recruit non-party militiamen. Discipline was maintained through the militia’s political commitment rather than blind obedience and officers had to depend on their own strength of personality and prestige to get themselves obeyed¹².

At first around 80% of the POUM militia were party members, above all from the JCI, but later the party made a conscious effort to avoid so many of its militants going to the front and, like other organisations, tried to recruit non-party troops. By June 1937,

¹⁰ R. Fernández Jurado, *Memòries d’un militant obrer (1930–1942)*, (Barcelona 1987) pp.175, 211; Orwell *Homage...* p.29.

¹¹ A KPO militiaman described the level of political life in the POUM units at the front as generally “low”, “Three months on the Huesca Front”, *The Spanish Civil War...* p.288.

¹² G. Orwell “Notes on the Spanish Militias”, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London 1968) Vol.I, pp 318–320.

one source claims that only 20% were party members, albeit, along with the most trusted international volunteers, they predominated among the shock troops, machine gun, artillery and mortar sections, the officers and commissars¹³.

From very early on in the war, the POUM argued in favour of a joint command, a unified revolutionary army and the end of the organisation of units on the basis of different political factions. It advocated the conscription of all 18 to 30 year olds, but this would only be of workers as a measure of “revolutionary hygiene”. Bourgeois elements would be mobilised for fortification and other non-combative tasks. This “Revolutionary Army of the Proletariat” would have to be under the control of the workers organisations. Only those professional officers who had “offered their services to the proletariat” during the events of July 1936 would be accepted in positions of command. The model for this new army was the Red Army under Trotsky and his writings on the question were circulated among party militants. The POUM thus favoured maintaining the revolutionary spirit of the militias and opposed the formation of the orthodox Popular Army which they saw as “bourgeois” and central to the assault being launched on the revolution by the Popular Front¹⁴. Unable, because of its relative weakness, to avoid the formation of this regular army, the POUM advocated the organisation of soldiers’ committees inside its ranks in an attempt to control its officers and political orientation.

¹³ According to one former POUM militia officer, Carmel Rosa, party members made up 50% of the militia, Interview 27.9.87; Political Commissar Josep Pané gave a figure of 80%, Coll and Pané p.114; in December 1936, the leadership of the JCI decided to make a concerted effort to end the “suicidal policy” of sending its best militants to the front and recruit militia from outside the party as the FAI and PSUC had done, Boletín Interior de la Juventud Comunista Iberica, no. 1, 15.12.36; “Three months...” p. 288; La Batalla 21.4.37.

¹⁴ POUM Military Conference, Lerida, 17–19 January 1937, ibid 23.1.37, 24.1.37; Prologue to: S. Gusev, El trabajo político en el Ejército Rojo, (Barcelona 1937); E. Granell, El ejército y la revolución (Barcelona 1937).

MONDEN, RICHARD, German, had been in Hotel Falcon (Pagès p.391), imprisoned in Modelo 22.7.37, expelled 19.8.37.; (Buschak p.237) in militia.

MORINI, GIUSEPPE, with LIC, party membership unknown.

MOYLE, DOUGLAS, ILP, takes part in raid on Ermita (Orwell p.94)

NATHAN, ADRIANO Italian, ‘Chief of Staff of Lenin Division, military expert and revolutionary militant who had fought in Italy against fascism’ killed in June 1937 offensive (Juventud Obrera 12.7.37); (also mentioned in Proceso.. p.499).

O’HARA, PATRICK, ILP; first aid (Orwell p.91)

ONDIK, VICTOR, Czech, Trotskyist, with LIC.

ORWELL, GEORGE (Eric Blair); ILP, corporal; wounded by sniper 20.5.37.; see McNair pp13-15.

PACE, RENATTO, with LIC, Bordigist, exiled in France.

PARKER, BUCK, ILP corporal, wounded during advance 4/37 ; “Thomas” Parker wounded during digging trenches for new line, closer to fascists (Orwell p.81).

PASQUE, RENÉ, Belgian, Trotskyist, with LIC: in September killed by shell.

PERET, BENJAMIN, French surrealist poet, at Sigüenza and takes part in the defence of Madrid (La Batalla 1.7.77); POUM 28.8.36 announces has joined POUM militia on Madrid front; (also see Alba/Swartz pp.297–298).

PICEDI, RENZO, Italian, Maximalist, in LIC, died first combats Teruel (Pizedi ?) (La Batalla 20.10.36).

“PIERO” with LIC, Bordigist, fights 19 July.

PI LEONE, MARIO death ((La Batalla 11.11.36).

PRICEMAN an den VERF, MARC, German (Buschak p.237)

REITHER/REITER (REUTER), HANS German. Commander of Rovira Shock Battalion; (Coll p.118) antifascist refugee, leads section of machine gunners; November 36 in attack on Loma Verde; (p.119, Fenández p.227) commander of Shock Bat; (F. P.209) mentions in attack on Quincena

mita; “Centuria Extranjera I under a Pole” (Mülhen p.62); at Mount Pocero (Buschak p.236)

LIONELLO, EMILIO (GIACCHETTA), with LIC Bordigist, exiled in France; accused of being OVRA agent (Proceso.. p.475)

LOUBIER EMMANUEL, LIC, French, Trotskyist; Molinierist, after October 1936 joins IBs and killed at front April-May 1937.

LUZZATO ANTEO, Italian, Maximalist, with LIC.

“O.M.” German, probably SAP, Political Commissar of Shock Battalion (Frente Proletario 1/38)

MARTINI, FRANCESCO, Italian, Maximalist, with LIC.

McNEIL, HUGH, ILP

MAGALLONES RIVERO, MANUEL, refugee in Spain since 1934, worked in Lerida, joined POUM militia and went to front 29/7/36, wounded 21/9/36; in Columna Pedrola; Trotskyist, arrested 27.3.37, documents withdrawn 27.5.37.

MAGREVITI, PLACIDIO, with LIC, Trotskyist; La Batalla 16.9.36 refers to Mangreride.

MAIZAN, FRANZ Austrian, former member of Schutzbund in 1934, dies 12.11.36. fighting at Manicomio

MARTIN, W B ILP drives ambulance to Aragon from Britain in September 1936, when arrives joins militia and put in charge of artillery section of 60 men; as he had been an artillery man in the First World War.

MEYER, PAUL, ex SPD, founder of SAP in 1931, arrested May 1933 sent to concentration camp, Dachau, freed carries on with illegal work, summer 1936 Gestapo looking for him again, escapes to Switzerland, then Paris, goes to Spain, on Aragon front in the Shock Battalion; arrested on high treason, arrested 8/37 (see Frente Proletario 1/38); 32 years old when arrested.

MILANO, PIERO, with LIC; Italian, Trotskyist, member of POI ; “MILANO” Italian Cornford mentions p.124.

MILICO member of POI, see letter La Batalla 18.8.36. “Los Bolcheviques Leninistas camino de Zaragoza, se dirigen a su partido”.

Foreign Volunteers

Many of the foreign volunteers who fought in the POUM’s ranks during the war were members of parties affiliated to the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity (IBRSU), usually known as the “London Bureau”. This had first been organised in 1933 by left socialist and dissident communist groups critical of both the Second and Third Internationals and hostile to the Trotskyist proposal to found a “Fourth International”. The IBRSU sought to be the first step towards an international regrouping of revolutionary socialists and had supporters in at least 16 different countries. Most of these were very small parties, the main exceptions, apart from the POUM, being the British Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the German Sozialistische Arbeiter Partei (SAP). The London Bureau also included the Italian Maximalist Socialist Party, the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (RSAP), the Swedish (ex-communist) Socialist Party and the German Opposition Communist Party (KPO)¹⁵. The origins of these groups were diverse. For instance, the SAP had been formed after the SPD expelled its left wing in 1931. The Maximalists had broken with the Italian Socialist Party in the early twenties and the ILP with the British Labour Party in 1932. Of the communist groups, the Swedish Communist Party had abandoned the Comintern in 1932 and the KPO had been founded in 1928 as supporters of the “Right Opposition”. The Dutch RSAP had been formed in 1935 on the basis of the former Trotskyist RSP and the left socialist OSP. Apart from those affiliated to the IBRSU, many other marxist groupings, whose shared common ground was their rejection of Stalinism, gravitated towards the POUM during the war. For instance, Marcel Pivert’s Revolutionary Left faction in the SFIO also had close links with Nin and Maurin’s party, as would a variety of semi-Trotskyist groups.

¹⁵ Durgan, pp. 362–363, 388–389.

Once the war started, the POUM appealed to the IBRSU for support. The Bureau's Secretary, ILP leader Fenner Brockway, issued a letter to all affiliated parties at the beginning of August 1936 stressing the importance of events in Spain and the role of the POUM and called for the setting up of an International Aid Fund to support their Spanish comrades¹⁶. Money supposedly for non-military aid, was raised by the supporters of the IBRSU. For instance, the ILP sent an ambulance over to the POUM in September 1936. Direct military support was less openly organised but by the end of the summer there was a steady trickle of volunteers reaching Barcelona. The KPO, SAP and the Maximalists organised their exiled members, particularly those with military experience, to join the POUM militias. The SAP also organised medical personnel and metal workers to work in the Republic's rapidly organised war industry and by October 1936, it had sent 30 such volunteers¹⁷. The largest number of foreign volunteers from the same political group in the POUM militia were probably those from the KPO, which also sent skilled metal workers to help with the setting up of the arms industry¹⁸.

Prior to the war, there were a few foreign militants active in the POUM, mostly German and Italian exiles. The most prominent was Walter Schwarz, a tailor and member of the KPO, who had come to Barcelona in 1932 and later became one of the POUM's local leaders in the Gracia district of the city. After the election victory of the Popular Front in February 1936, more refugees made their way to Spain and those with similar political ideas got in touch with the POUM in Barcelona. Various foreign revolutionaries fought with the POUM on 19 July in the streets of Barcelona. Apart from Schwarz and other KPO members who had joined him, there were also several Italian and French Trotskyists who took part in the fighting alongside the POUM. Two Germans and a French Trotsky-

¹⁶ La Batalla 8.8.36.; F. Brockway, *Inside the Left* (London 1942) p.219; J. McNair, *Spanish Diary* (Manchester n.d.) p.8.

¹⁷ Tosstorff, pp.293-294.

¹⁸ Buschak, p.237.

KUPINSKY/I, WOLF, ("MILTON, HARRY"), American RWL, in ILP contingent; Pagès p.388: in Modelo, 30 years old, 13.8.37. released after pressure from US consulate (also see Proceso p.48-49).

"KURT" SAP member killed in June (Mühlen p.65), from Berlin
LADMIRALL, GASTÓN, Sena Socialist Youth/Revolutionary left SFIO; arrived in July 19, (Juvenbtud Obrera 26.10.36); in prison in Barcelona; condemned to death for high treason, saved after protest of Socialist International and French consul; according to Pagès p.388: he was 26 year old student, when arrested he was first held in the checa in calle Corcega; on 30.8.37 he was sent to Modelo, tried.

LAFARGUE, (JUAN) JEAN-CLAUDE, in LIC, journalist from Pairs (La Batalla 16.9.36), party membership unknown; wounded 15.9.36 (La Batalla 24.9.36)

LANDSMANN, present from front at the Second Regional Congress of POUM in Valencia: agrees with Portela; makes veiled criticism of Nin's criticism of Popular Front, and of too much criticism by POUM of USSR, (El Comunista 30.1.37).

LAUNOJ, PIERRE, Belgian, Trotskyist, with LIC.

LAURENS, ROGER 21 years old when killed during in action 15/9/36, member of JCF from Le Havre (La Batalla 24.9.36.)

LEMENS (The Spanish Civil War. The view... p.254): Belgian Socialist Youth, in October 1936 wounded, returns to Belgium.

LENZ, HERBERT, German Trotskyist, expelled from JCI after factional work on Huesca front; (see Revolutionary History, Summer 88. From "Stalinism in Spain" testimony of "HL" p43) accused of participation in May events while a member of Shock Battalion on Aragon front.

LEVY, YVES (Alba/Swartz p.238) fought with CNT and POUM

LEVIN, LOUIS, from Brooklyn, N.Y. Doctor with 29th Div., 33 years old in 1936, (Thanks to Jim Carmody for this information).

LEVINSKI, (LEWINSKI) BENJAMIN Polish Jew, Captain, (Orwell p22-23) about 25 years old, Acubierre front, (p.82) in raid on Er-

de Salas, Chimillas; letter 8 months in Army (i.e from October/ November 36), started by commanding a company, then a battalion finally a regiment; 'nonchalant bravery' (Orwell); becomes Major when militarisation imposed; as soon as Rovira and the general staff began to talk of need to have a structured army; called to Valencia on 15 June on grounds would be transferred to new department as skills as engineer needed; arrested; meanwhile back home sentenced to 15 years in absence for "making explosives for a foreign power"; Solidaridad Internacional, Paris, announces release, but very weak, mistreated in prison; arrested 20.6.37., no judge ordered his arrest, released 7 Dec (38 ?), no explanation, in Puerta de Angel checa, interrogated 27 times, 35 hours by Russians, on hunger strike in Hotel Falcon; used all methods in Checa of Vallmajor; offered him position of Lieutenant Colonel if signed statement saying POUM leaders were spies and joined CP; refuses so put in coal hole, full of big rats, 12 without food or water, everyday tell him going to shoot him; Orwell and wife visit him in prison, kept in conditions of great squalor, (ground floor of a shop), 100 prisoners in '20 square foot room'...p.249 interrogated by 2 NKVD agents one Russian and one Belgium, try to get sign documents incriminating POUM leadership, also statement that McNair was agent of British Intelligence services, said would be shot if did not sign in 24 hours; gets letter out arrives at ILP office, this saves Kopp's life; in jail 18 months, released 12/38; , June 1940 wounded and captured by Germans in France; escapes from Military hospital and joins resistance, in Marseilles links with British naval intelligence, flown out by British in Sept 1943 as Gestapo after him; dies in 1951 in Scotland; Orwell p.200 on history.

KNUD KJELSO, AAGE, Danish Trotskyist, abandoned front after militarization in April 1937 (Mühlen p.64); see 'KIELSO' AAGE in IB at end of Appendix.

KRAUS, ERWIN, SAP, killed (Mühlen p.65).

ist were among the party's dead¹⁹. Most of these militants joined the POUM's first column when it set out for Aragon a few days later.

In Madrid, the POUM's rapidly organised Motorised Column of some 100 fighters and a few vehicles was commanded by the Argentinean Hipolyte Etchebéhère. He had been expelled from the Argentinean Communist Party in 1925, and was now a member of the French marxist group *Que Faire?* Etchebéhère led his poorly armed group of militiamen in a number of bloody clashes with the fascists before being killed on 16 August on the Atienza front north of the capital. He was to be the POUM militia's first international martyr²⁰.

Meanwhile, in Barcelona the increasing number of foreigners who were turning up at the POUM offices to offer their solidarity had to be organised. This task was first assigned to the Italian dissident Trotskyist, "Fosco" (Nicola di Bartolomeo) and one immediate result of his work was establishment of the International Unified Committee of Antifascist Refugees. The vast majority of the foreigners who came over to help went directly into the militia²¹, the rest were used to produce the party's foreign language bulletins and radio broadcasts. As a result, there was soon regular propaganda being put out by the POUM in English, French, German and Italian.

The first serious attempt by the POUM to organise a separate contingent of international volunteers would not involve the IBRSU but the Trotskyists and the Italian Bordigists. The international Trotskyist movement had finally broken with the POUM after this party had signed the Popular Front pact in January 1936. Once the war broke out, however, Trotsky himself attempted to

¹⁹ La Batalla, 18.8.36; one of these was the SAP member, Paul Frey, Tosstorff, p.292.

²⁰ La Batalla, 18.8.36; El Combatiente Rojo 24.8.36.

²¹ El proceso del P.O.U.M. Documentos Judiciales y Policiales (Barcelona 1989) p.188.

re-establish relations with the POUM, especially once it became clear that the party was prepared to pressurise the Catalan authorities to grant him political asylum in Barcelona. This brief thawing of relations led in early August 1936 to the Trotskyists' (Bolshevik-Leninists) official representative in Barcelona, Jean Rous, establishing an agreement of co-operation with the POUM which included participation in the party's militias²². The Trotskyist volunteers were joined by a group of exiled Italian Bordigists and Maximalists who had also arrived from France. Among them was a former Italian army Captain who had fought in the First World War, Enrico Russo, who was leader of the Bordigist faction in France. Following negotiations between Russo, Fosco and the POUM, the Lenin International Column (LIC) was formed on 15 August. Commanded by Russo, the LIC at first consisted of 50 volunteers, 21 of them Italians, the rest being from 13 other countries. It claimed to be the first exclusively international unit to be organised in the Republican zone²³. The LIC also included in its ranks some of the few foreign intellectuals who fought with the POUM, for instance, the Italian dramatist and anarchist, Mario Traverso, the Frenchman Benjamin Peret, who was also on the Madrid front, and the Cuban Juan Brea who were both surrealist poets and Trotskyists. The best known intellectual to join the POUM militia was the British writer Eric Blair (George Orwell), but he did not arrive in Spain until late 1936.

On 30 August, the LIC left for the Aragon front and was immediately thrown into the assault on the Huesca-Barbastro road at Casetas de Quincena where its second-in-command, the young

²² "Los acontecimientos de España y la organización (Nota de información del P.O.I., Octubre 1936)", Trotsky, pp.378-379.

²³ La Batalla 30.8.36, 16.9.36; J. Brea and M. Low, Red Spanish Notebook (San Francisco 1979) pp.69-72, 108-114; A. Guillamón, Documentación histórica del trotskismo español (Madrid 1996) pp.17-20 and "Los bordiguistas en la guerra civil española" Balance, Barcelona, November 1993; Domenico Sedran, "Carlini in Spain", The Spanish Civil War... pp.253-264.

wrote a biography of Henk Sneevliet, leader of the RSAP. His nom de guerre was Max Perthus.

HEIDENREICH, KARL, KPO (The Spanish Civil War. The view... p.283): born 1901, a painter, ex Spatakusbund, member of Workers and Soldiers Council in Munich, joins KPD; joins KPO in 1929, jailed when Hitler came to power, upon release in 1934 went to France, outbreak of Civil War crosses into Spain, fought in Rovira Shock Battalion, mutilated by bomb; arrested in 1937, escapes to France in 1939 and from there to USA; (Pagès p390): Estonia-French, tied in 29.11.37., transferred to state prison; (Proceso p.327): accused of being Gestapo agent; mentioned in POUM's Solidaridad Internacional as in Prison del Estado.

HENSCHKE, GERHARD, German (Buschak p.237)

HIDDLESTONE, REG, ILP, wounded in night attack 4/37 (Orwell p.97)

HUBER named commander of Shock Battalion (Mühlen p.63)

HUNTER, PHILIP, ILP; leg injury 4/37

"JOAN, MAX" German Political Commissar, infiltrated into Bolsheivk-Leninists, GPU agent, , maybe Lothar Marx, played role of Gestapo agent (The Spanish Civil War. The view... p220).

JONES, URIAH, ILP, served until early 1938; after the disbanding of the POUM militia and failing in his attempt to contact IBs, joined PSUC unit (H. Francis, Miners Against Fascism. Wales and the Spanish Civil War London 1984, p175).

JUSTESSEN, ILP

KOPP, GEORGES. Belgian, born 1902; (Coll i Pané p143), member of Belgian SP, 'fat, engineer, a bit theatrical, wore military uniform with commander's epaulettes'; had been officer in Belgian army; during military service; at outbreak of Civil War he was still a commissioned Reserve Officer, helps organise gun-running in Western Europe for Republic, after non-intervention signed leaves Belgium to escape intelligence services, arrives in Barcelona and volunteers for POUM militia; at first with Pedrola Column, fought at Casetas, Huesca , Manicomio, Velad(?)o de Zuera, Alcubierre, Ermita

months, in May 37 wounded, remained in Spain at least up to 24 Aug 37, nothing known about him after that.

FIENGA, BERNADINO, LIC, Bordigist, doctor exiled in France.

FRANKFORD, FRANK, ILP

FUSERO, GIUSEPPE (MARIO); Italaian Maximalist, with the LIC.

GABASSI, ANTONIO (BASSI GIGI) Bordigist, in LIC.

GASTON (The Spanish Civil War. The view... P254): Algerian and had fought in the First World War.

GERNSHEIMER, GEORG, according to POUM's Solidaridad Internacional in Concentration Camp at Segorber, (mentioned Pagès p.389). According to Thalmann,

KPO member, deserted International Brigades and fought with Durruti Column before joining POUM in March 1937.

GERVASINI, VIRGINIA (SONIA), with LIC, Italian, Trotskyist.

GIRILI, PAOLO Italian, commands Joaquin Maurín Column on Albacete/Arajuez front (La Batalla 20.10.36)

GROSS, GEORGE, ILP

GUARNERI, GIUSEPPE (Lino/Pino) Italian, Trotskyist, arrived Barcelona March 1936, takes part in street fighting in July; in LIC, member of POI, see letter in La Batalla 18.8.36. "Los Bolcheviques Leninistas camino de Zaragoza, se dirigen a su partido" written 4.8.36 and speaks of Trotskyists' involvement 19 July fighting in Barcelona and how joined the Grossi column.

GUIDO, LIONELLO, Italian, Trotskyist, arrived in Barcelona March 1936, takes part in street fighting in July, in LIC, member of POI; see letter in La Batalla 18.8.36. "Los Bolcheviques Leninistas camino de Zaragoza, se dirigen a su partido".

HABLE, RUDOLF, SAP, report IBRSU Youth 8.1.37. says killed (La Batalla 13.1.37); (Mühlen p.65)

HALM, WISNER (La Batalla 21.3.37) Divisional Political Commissar; "WISNER" Officer Lenin Division (Proceso p.499).

HART, PIETER VAN'T (1910–1975) RSAP, in the Rovira Shock Battalion. During WW II he was in the Dutch resistance. He also

French Trotskyist Robert Fauconnet, was killed. The international column was subsequently took part in the heavy fighting round Huesca. The other international volunteers who were already on the Aragon front had participated in most of the major actions the POUM militias were involved in during August. For instance the KPO group had taken part in the seizing of the village of Leciñena and the attack on Perdiguera²⁴. Some of these international fighters would now integrate into the LIC, as would new volunteers who arrived during the coming weeks.

During these early weeks, it was often fairly arbitrary which militia foreign volunteers joined and they sometimes enlisted in whichever units they first came across. One example was the young English poet and communist John Cornford, who joined the POUM militia at the front in mid-August and he took part in the abortive attack on Perdiguera at the end of August. Politically uncomfortable with the POUM, Cornford later joined the International Brigades and was killed near Madrid on 28 December 1936²⁵. Among the POUM militia killed in the fighting around Huesca in September were three young French communists who had enlisted in the LIC²⁶. There were also IBRSU affiliates who joined other militias because there were no POUM units ready to leave for the front when they had arrived in Barcelona. There were members of both the KPO and the Maximalists in the CNT militia, including some who had chosen the anarchist units in order to carry out political work²⁷.

Having spent five weeks at the front, in early October the LIC returned to Barcelona on leave. This coincided with the Republican Government issuing its Militarisation Decree. As a consequence, at

²⁴ Letter from W. Schwarz to the KPO 30.8.36, cited in Mühlen p.62.

²⁵ F. Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit* (University of Michigan, 1974) p.105; V. Cunningham (ed.) *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War of Verse* (Harmondsworth 1980) pp. 117–127.

²⁶ La Batalla, 24.9.36.

²⁷ Buschak, p.236.

an assembly of LIC members on 11 October the majority decided to abandon the front if the militarisation decree was applied in the POUM militia. The minority, led by Fosco, advocated staying in the POUM units at all costs. After guarantees from the POUM leadership that the decree would not apply to Catalonia they returned to the front. The day following their return, the POUM press published the government decree and 24 members of the LIC, headed by Russo, which included all the Bordigists and some of the Trotskyists, immediately asked to be withdrawn. The Bordigists later returned to France, while the Trotskyists stayed to work politically in the rearguard or joined other militias, principally the CNT's. The rest of the LIC, Maximalists, dissident Trotskyists and others remained at the front with the POUM militia. The ignominious end of the LIC coincided with the breaking of the tentative relations that the official Trotskyist movement had established with the POUM. This rupture had its origins in the Trotskyists' fierce criticism of the party's participation in the Generalitat government and the expulsion of the Bolshevik-Leninists from the party's offices in Barcelona for factional work. Members of dissident Trotskyist groups, such as the French Parti Communiste International, of which Fosco was a sympathiser, and the US Revolutionary Workers League, along with members of the official sections in Holland and Belgium which disagreed with their international leadership's hostility to the POUM, continued to participate in the party's militias. The debacle of the LIC also coincided with the decline of Fosco's influence in the POUM's international department. In October, the SAP leader Max Diamant arrived in Barcelona and set about putting IBRSU members in positions of responsibility in the POUM's international apparatus. The following month Fosco was replaced as co-ordinator of this work by the former Austrian com-

ETCHEBÉHÈRE, LUIS HIPOLITO, Argentinian, in *Que Faire ?*, commander of Madrid POUM Motorised Column, killed at Atienza, 16 August 36

ETCHEBÉHÈRE, MIKA, French, member of *Que Hacer?* on Madrid front (see Swartz pp.285–286); Company commander (Captain); on General Staff of 35 Brigada Mixta; end of war hides for a few months then makes way to France; her book, *Mi guerra...*, first published in 1976 in French.

EDWARDS, BOB, ILP; driver of ILP ambulance 9/36; representative of party National Administrative Council for Lancashire region; life-long pacifist but radicalised by rise of fascism; convinced only armed struggle will stop fascism in Spain. Returns to Britain to raise contingent (more bibliographical details, i.e. as MP, in Thwaites). Made Captain by POUM despite his lack of military experience, had been named honorary lieutenant in Red Army during visit to USSR in 1926. He returned to Britain in March 1937 for ILP Conference, because of British anti-volunteer policy he couldn't return to Spain, McNair p22f.

ERICH, SAP member killed in June (Mühlen p.65), had come illegally from Germany.

FALCONNET, ROBERT de, LIC, French Trotskyist, member of POI; fought with POUM 19 July in Barcelona, went with 1st POUM column to Aragon front, had been deserter from French army; (see letter in *La Batalla* 18.8.36. "Los Bolcheviques Leninistas camino de Zaragoza, se dirigen a su partido"); killed 1 September, aged 22, on Huesca front in operation to open important road, attack on Manicomio; buried on 7 September; the POUM did not let the flag of Fourth International to be put on his coffin at his funeral in Barcelona (Guillamon, *Documentación..* p.54); also see *La Voz Leninist* 23.8.37.

FANCELLI, PIETRO, born 5.5.07 Città di Castello, Perugia; Italian Maximalist, in LIC. (*The Spanish Civil War. The view...* pp265-267): 25 Aug left Barcelona for front, fought in POUM militia for 9

BREA, JUAN Cuban, surrealist poet, Trotskyist in LIC.

BRIONES, JOSÉ, Peruvian, doctor (G. Gino Baumann, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos en al guerra civil española*, San José 1997 p226)

BRUNARD, MARIUS, PCF member in POUM militia, late July (J. Delperrie de Bayac, *Las Brigadas Internacionales Madrid* 1978, p43.)

BUTTONSHAW, HARVEY; Australian 'ILP supporter' A. Inglis p6; (Thwaites says American, name Archie); in ILP contingent.

CHAMBERS, BILL, ILP, corporal, killed after transferring to another unit 8/37, Orwell p104.

CLARA (Thalman ?), Brea p.144: Swiss woman on Aragon front

CLINTON, ARTHUR, ILP; wounded in shoulder during shelling 3/37; Orwell p.71: wounded by stray bullet; according to *La Batalla* 20.3.37: wounded in attack on manicomio; in Sanatorio Maurín , Orwell p.190.

COLAY, VICENTE, from New York City, member of the American Socialist party, arrived in Spain Nov/Dec 1936 and joined POUM militia in Barcelona, (Thanks to Jim Carmody for this information).

COLES, TOM , ILP, Bristol

COMBRINK, HARRY. (1913-..) Dutch, fought in Rovira Shock Battalion.

COOK, according to Gorkin (*El proceso...* p.188) fought at front.

COTTMAN, STAFFORD, ILP contingent, but YCL when joins, (turned down by CP as too young ?), according to Thwaites applied to join IB and ILP contingent at same time, and as ILP quicker joins their contingent; in hospital with suspected TB, Sanatorio Maurín (Orwell p.190). Escapes with Orwell.

DONOVAN (PADDY) JOHN; ILP, sergeant., died Lon 1971.

DORAN , CHARLES, ILP

DRIESTON, THEO VAN. Laison officer between RSAP and the POUM

unist leader Kurt Landau, who was politically much closer to the POUM²⁸.

Revolution and Military Organisation at the Front

By the end of October, the front around Huesca had become stationary, the militias having secured nearly all the main strategic positions to the north, east and south of the city. Only a lack of suitable arms prevented them from taking Huesca itself which was still poorly defended. Throughout the autumn of 1936, foreign volunteers continued to join the POUM units on the Aragon front. These were mainly political refugees and some, although by no means all, from parties affiliated to the IBRSU. By November, both the SAP and Maximalists had their own "distinct military units" in the militia²⁹ The majority of these volunteers received two weeks rudimentary training in Barcelona, which consisted mainly of drill, before being sent to the front. In some cases, especially of those with military experience, they were sent directly. Initially, it seems, the POUM had welcomed most international volunteers with open arms but this soon changed and their political background was investigated if they did not present the necessary documents from sympathetic parties.

In the few actions which took place in the following months, foreign volunteers played a leading role. One example being an attack in November on the strategically important manicomio (mental hospital) just outside Huesca, which was still held by fascist troops and had been the scene of fierce fighting in the previous

²⁸ *ibid.* p.235; H. Schafranek, "Kurt Landau", *The Spanish Civil War...* p.61; N. Di Bartolomo "The Activity of the Bolshevik-Leninists in Spain and its Lessons", *ibid.* p.237.

²⁹ *Mühlen* p.62; Schafranek, p.61.

months. Among the dead was Franz Maizan a former member of the Austrian socialist militia, the *Schutzbund*³⁰.

This lull in the fighting allowed the POUM militia to embark on a process of reorganisation. This had already started in the form of a self-imposed “militarisation” after the failed attack on *Perdiguera* in August. The arrival of Josep Rovira at the front on 9 August and his appointment on 19 September as overall Commander of the three POUM columns, would lead to important changes in the militia’s internal organisation. Rovira set about re-structuring the militia along more disciplined and “military” lines, making full use of the very limited resources available to him. Battalions and companies now began to replace the *centurias* or *banderas* and the three columns became the Lenin Division³¹. International volunteers with military experience were central to this reorganisation and increasingly held positions of responsibility. Specialist units made up nearly exclusively of foreigners were also organised, such as the Erich Moehsam machine gun detachment which was set up by German volunteers in November³². In fact, the Germans, who made up over half the foreigners in the POUM militia, played a central role in its organisation. Orwell stated that “from a military point of view” the “several hundred refugee Germans serving with the POUM”, were “on quite a different level from the rest of the militia — indeed, they were (along with the International Brigades) more like soldiers than anyone I saw in Spain”. The Germans sense of discipline was also praised by the POUM military leaders³³.

There were now several foreign officers leading the party’s militia. One was Georges Kopp, a member of the Belgian Socialist Party, an engineer and reserve officer in the Belgian army. He arrived at the front in early November on the run from his own country where he was wanted by the police for having organised gun run-

³⁰ *La Batalla*, 20.11.36.

³¹ Coll pp. 97–100, 109.

³² *La Batalla*, 15.11.36.

³³ Orwell, *Homage...* p.74; Coll, p.119.

BELFIORE, GILDO wounded 15.9.36 (*La Batalla* 24.9.36)

BENCI, ESTRUSCO, Italian Maximalist, in LIC.

BERENGUER (The Spanish Civil War. The view... p.254): Algerian, captured by fascists during fighting around *Casetas*.

BERGMANN, THEODOR; KPO.

BOBILOFF, GREGOR Swiss, report by IBRSU youth 8.1.37. says killed (*La Batalla* 13.1.37)

BOGONI, GIUSEPPE (MARTINI), Italian Maximalist, LIC; Secretary of PSIM Youth (*La Batalla* 16.9.36.

BOLZE, WALDEMAR, KPO, in *Montjuich, Solidaridad Internacional (Comité de Ayuda del POUM, Paris, 1/39 ?)*. (See article by him in *The Spanish Civil War. The view...*p.336); dies in Germany 14.12.51. (*Pagès* p.390); on recruitment (*Mühlen* p.62) Sept. 36; worked in Aviation Industry (*Mühlen* p.65)

BOMILCAR BESOUCHET, Roberto Alberto, Brazilian. Ex-lieutenant of Brazilian Army from which he was expelled in 1935 after participating in the communist rising of 1935; joined the Trotskyists and fought with the POUM (thanks to Jorge Chrtsian Fernández for this information). According to former Pcdob member and IB volunteer Apolônio de Carvalho, in *Vale la Pena Sonhar (Edtions Rosco 1999)*, Besouchet was murdered in prison by the Stalinists after taking part in the street fighting in Barcelona in May 1937. (In am indebted to Nixon Viera Malveira, researcher at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, for this information).

BRAITHWAITE (Branthwaite), JOHN, ILP

BRAMATI, MARIO (MONZA), LIC, party membership unknown.

BRAÜNING, KARL, 1886–1962 SPD 1906, later USPD, Spark and KPD, worked in clandestinity for KPO before going to France, escaped GPU prison in Spain with Bolze, on arriving in France rejoined SPD, he went to USA in 1941 (*Pagès* p.390); on recruitment *Mühlen* p.62 Sept. 36; in *Air Industry* *ibid* p.65; mentioned in *Solidaridad Internacional*; KPO, in *Preventario Judicial de Colell, Girona*; (also see *The Spanish Civil War. The view...* p.344).

The fate of the vast majority of the former international volunteers in the POUM militia is unknown. Many would have shared the destiny of their International Brigades counterparts in the concentration camps, the resistance or in the allied armed forces. Georges Kopp, for example, after leaving Spain joined the French army. In June 1940 he was wounded and captured by the Germans but escaped from the Military Hospital and joined the Resistance. In Marseilles he worked for British Naval Intelligence before being evacuated in September 1943 with the Gestapo hot on his trail. Those identified as “Trotskyists”, as happened to various POUM militants, had to face the extra indignity of being persecuted in the prisons and camps of Vichy France and Nazi Germany not just by the authorities but by the Communists still convinced they were “fascist spies”.

Conference on the International Brigades organised by the University of Lausanne, 19–20 December 1997.

Appendix

The following is a list of known foreigners who formed part of the POUM militias.

All the information regarding ILP, unless otherwise stated, is from Thwaites ; on the composition of the LIC, see Guillaumon in note 24 in text.

AGNEW, JOHN, ILP

ALCAÑIZ, Cuban involved in attack around Quicena (Fernández Jurado p212)

ALVAREZ, KURT (Coll i Pané, p.111), German, officer, organised (Oct. 36) companies of sappers and made plan of fortifications of column.

AUL, HERBET, (Pagès p.392) in POUM militia, in Modelo 6.7.37; then to hospital, expelled from Spain: 2.9.37.

BASTOS, ARTURO Portuguese (La Batalla 20.9.36.)

ning for the Republic. He was later sentenced to 15 years in prison in his absence for having “made explosives for a foreign power”. He had joined the POUM militia by chance because it proved simpler than joining the International Brigades. Unlike other militia commanders, Kopp wore a uniform with epaulets. He commanded a centuria of 80 men before later being appointed Battalion commander and proved to be one of the POUM militia’s most daring and efficient officers³⁴.

Of the other foreign officers, the German Kurt “Alvarez”, helped organise a company of sappers in October and drew up a plan of fortifications for the Lenin Division³⁵. An Italian, Paolo Girili, was one of the commanders of the Joaquin Maurín Column which went from Catalonia to fight on the Central front in October³⁶. Another Italian, Adriano Nathan, was military advisor to the General Staff of the Lenin Division³⁷. The young Polish Jew, “Benjamin” Levinski was a captain of a centuria which included international volunteers. The POUM militia took advantage of any limited experience that its volunteers had, so when former First World War gunner W.B. Martin arrived in September with the ILP ambulance, he was put in charge of sixty artillerymen. Walter Schwarz was one of several international volunteers who were appointed Political Commissars, as was another German militant, Wisner Halm, who held the important post of Divisional Commissar³⁸.

Another German antifascist refugee who played an important role was Hans Reither. A former member of the French Foreign Legion, Reither, unlike most of the international volunteers in positions of responsibility, does not seem to have been particularly close to the POUM politically but was promoted mainly for his

³⁴ D. Bateman, “Georges Kopp and the POUM Militia”, *The Spanish Civil War...* pp.242–252.

³⁵ Coll, p.119.

³⁶ La Batalla, 20.10.36.

³⁷ Juventud Obrera, 12.7.37.

³⁸ La Batalla, 21.3.37.

military and leadership qualities³⁹. He distinguished himself during the fighting round Huesca in September and October and was subsequently given the command of the newly organised Shock Battalion. This unit was organised during November, after Rovira had concluded that the failed assault on the manicomio showed the need for some form of elite unit. It was recruited from among the most trustworthy party members and, above all, the most reliable foreign fighters, preferably with military experience. The nucleus of the new unit came from the Centuria Spartacus which included some thirty international volunteers. Over the coming months it was built up to Battalion strength and eventually consisted of around four hundred men of which two thirds were foreigners, the Germans, once more, being particularly prominent. These foreign volunteers were expected to be members of the POUM or of parties affiliated to the IBRSU. The Shock Battalion was given special training, the best arms available and its own dark green uniform. Rovira's aim was to use the new unit as the vanguard in raids and assaults on heavily defended sectors of the enemy lines. Its members also were paraded at "official ceremonies" and guarded the party's headquarters in Barcelona. George Orwell was later to comment on the Shock troops as by far the best in the militia⁴⁰.

One of the symbols of the revolution in Spain was the participation, albeit often overplayed, of women at the front. There were various foreign women in the POUM militia early on, as both the Austrian journalist Franz Borkenau and the Cuban Trotskyist Juan Brea would testify⁴¹. Most of these seem to have worked as nurses but some also fought. This was the case, for instance, of the nineteen-year-old German Jew Margarita Zimbal ("Puz"),

³⁹ Mühlen, pp. 64–65; letter from A. Masó, 20.11.97.

⁴⁰ Fernández Jurado, pp. 209–210, 227, 234; Coll, pp. 115–120; Mühlen, p. 63; Buschak, p. 237; Orwell, *Homage...* p. 74.

⁴¹ Borkenau, p. 73; Brea and Low, p. 98, 144, 175; Low describes how a French militiawoman, Simone had parachuted into Catalonia, *ibid.*, 191–2.

in October, following pressure from the Socialist International and apparently the direct intervention of Leon Blum⁷⁸.

The most notorious case was that of Georges Kopp, Major in the 29th Division and one of its most outstanding commanders. Kopp had been recalled to Valencia on 15 June to be transferred to engineering work. He was arrested on 20 June without any judge's order and was held in various chekas. According to Kopp himself, while in one of these secret prisons, he was interrogated 27 times in 35 hours by a Russian and a Belgian agent and offered the position of Lieutenant Colonel if he agreed to sign a document denouncing the POUM leaders and McNair as spies and to join the Communist Party. As he refused, he was placed in a rat-infested coal cellar with twelve other prisoners. At one stage in his imprisonment he was visited by the Orwells who would testify to the appalling conditions in which he and 100 others were kept — a 20 square foot room on the ground floor of a former shop. Kopp was released, with no explanation, on 7 December 1938 with his health irreparably damaged⁷⁹.

As the war drew to a close, many POUM members were still in jail. Among those who managed to escape at the last minute, abandoned by the prison guards, were several of the party's foreign collaborators, including former German militiamen Karl Heidenreich, Walter Schwarz, Kuno Brandel, Karl Bräuning and Wlademar Bolze and the Italian Trotskyists Luigi Zanon and Domenico Sedran (Carlini). Heidenreich escaped to France and later made his way to the USA. Schwarz eventually arrived in Sweden. Bräuning reached the USA in 1941 and Bolze escaped internment in France and survived in clandestinity. He returned to Germany in 1949⁸⁰.

⁷⁸ Pagès, p. 388; *Solidaridad Internacional...*

⁷⁹ Orwell, *Homage...* pp. 199, 207–212; Bateman "Georges Kopp..."; Brockway p. 2; *Solidaridad Internacional...*

⁸⁰ S. Mangan, "Spanish Militants Describe Their Escape", *The Spanish Civil War...* p. 305; A. Thalheimer, "Notes on a stay..." *ibid.* p. 283; Pagès, p. 390.

Hitler came to power. Upon his release in 1934, he had made his way to France and then to Spain when the Civil War broke out. Here he had formed part of the POUM's Shock Battalion and had been seriously wounded. On 18 November 1937, having got no reply to their letter to the Ministry of Justice regarding their case, 13 foreigners, imprisoned in Barcelona accused of espionage, declared themselves on hunger strike. These prisoners were mostly German and included Schwarz and Heidenreich and the former Swiss POUM militiaman Paul Wielkuz, who had shown great bravery during the abortive assault on the manicomio of Huesca in March that year. As part of the growing international campaign in solidarity with these prisoners, the KPO leaders August Thalheimer and Heinrich Brandler wrote to President Negrín, in November 1937, protesting specifically about Walter Schwarz's imprisonment after an article published in *Rundschau* about his arrest accused him of possessing fascist codes and literature. Schwarz was eventually sentenced for High Treason in December 1938. Heidenreich would later be described as a "Gestapo agent" during the POUM leadership trial in November 1938⁷⁶. Another case involving KPO members, was that of former militiamen Kuno Brandel, Karl Bräuning and Waldemar Bolze who had been sent to work in an aircraft factory in Sabadell where they were later arrested, along with all the other foreign workers in the factory, accused of sabotage⁷⁷.

Among the other international volunteers arrested was the American Wolf Kupinski, but he was released in August after the intervention of the US Consulate. The French volunteer Ladmirall, who had been arrested in May 1937, was brought to trial before the special Anti-Espionage Tribunal but then was suddenly released

⁷⁶ Pagès, p.390; A. Thalheimer and H. Brandler to Negrín 20.11.37, *Frente Proletario* January 1938; *Solidaridad Internacional...*; A. Thalheimer, "Notes on a Stay in Catalonia" *The Spanish Civil War...* p.283; *El proceso...* p.327.

⁷⁷ W. Bolze, "Where are the real saboteurs?" *The Spanish Civil War...*, pp.334, 336; *Solidaridad Internacional...*; Mülhen, p.65.

who had joined the JCI. After forming part of the POUM column which took part in the abortive invasion of Mallorca, Zimbal was killed on the Huesca front in October 1936⁴². The Italian Trotskyist Virginia Gervasini fought with the POUM on the barricades in Barcelona on 19 July and later went to the front with the Lenin International Column.

The most important of these women fighters would be Mika Etchebéhère, wife of the first commander of the POUM's Motorised Column in Madrid, Hipolyte Etchebéhère. Once the latter had been killed, Mika had joined as a combatant and was soon promoted to commander (Captain) of the Second Company of the party's Lenin Battalion. Unlike their comrades in Aragon, there was no respite for the POUM's meagre forces on the Madrid front which were decimated prior to being absorbed into the Popular Army at the beginning of 1937. Mika Etchebéhère first showed her qualities as a commander when she managed to lead the remnants of her troops out of Sigüenza cathedral after being besieged for ten days. Her company, the majority of whom were peasants from the POUM pre-war stronghold of Llerena in Extremadura, was then moved to the Madrid front where it fought with valour in the Pozuelo sector, sustaining once more heavy losses. By December, the Second Company had been reduced to sixty fighters. The remaining POUM militia Company on the central front, the First, was subsequently "destroyed" at Pinar de Húmera in early January 1937. The remnants of this Company, along with the survivors of Etchebéhère's, became the Fourth Company in Cipriano Mera's 38th Mixed Brigade and after heavy losses in a attack on the Cerro de Aguila in February, only eighty combatants were left of the original POUM column in the central zone. Etchebéhère herself was incorporated onto the Brigade General Staff⁴³.

⁴² *Juventud Comunista*, 29.10.36.

⁴³ M. Etchebéhère, *Mi guerra de España*, (Barcelona 1976); *La Batalla* 3.11.36, 15.11.36, 26.11.36, 1.12.36, 4.12.36, 12.12.36, 15.1.37, 19.2.36; *La Antorcha* 1.5.37;

Despite the growing number of members of parties affiliated to the IBRSU in the POUM militia's ranks, most of its organisations were too weak to offer the type of support and manpower that the Communist movement mustered. The London Bureau did not even officially establish a Secretariat in Barcelona until December 1936. The main task of the Secretariat was to put out information about the situation in Spain, look after volunteers and collaborate with the POUM's international department⁴⁴. The POUM believed that events in Spain would provide the axis for the re-organisation of the world revolutionary movement. However, the IBRSU, which it was hoped would become the centre of this regroupment, proved to be both organisationally and politically incapable of even beginning to fulfil this role. The two largest Bureau affiliated parties other than the POUM, the SAP and ILP, sent very limited support in terms of manpower. The SAP sent small numbers of volunteers since the summer, the largest single group being of 24 volunteers in January 1937. Eight SAP members are known to have been killed at the front during the first year of the war⁴⁵.

The ILP did not begin to organise volunteers until November 1936. Their experiences are relatively well documented and are probably representative of other groups of foreigners who fought with the POUM. The idea of sending volunteers had arisen after the return of the future Labour MP Bob Edwards in late October 1936, after he had gone with the ambulance sent by the ILP for the POUM militia. The decision to intervene was taken by the ILP leadership in November and twenty five volunteers left Britain on 8 January. There had been five times this number of volunteers but the party had decided only to send unmarried men. Only a few of these men had military experience, others in street fighting against the British Union of Fascists. Most were ILP members but

J. Rous, "Spain 1936-1939: the Murdered Revolution", *The Spanish Civil War...* p.361.

⁴⁴ Buschak pp.234-235.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.237; Mühlhen p.65.

POUM⁷¹. The IBRSU and other marxist groupings organised an international campaign in solidarity with the POUM prisoners which probably saved their leaders from a similar fate to Nin's. The International Bureau also sent several delegations to Spain to visit the party's prisoners and try to secure their release, the first headed by its General Secretary, Fenner Brockway. This delegation met with 30 thirty foreign prisoners, including Landau, who had been interrogated by police agents of their own nationality, presumably communists. Brockway drew up a list of 50 foreign socialists imprisoned in Barcelona, mostly Germans, but also French, Italians and Dutch⁷². In August, another delegation arrived including the ILP MP James Maxton, the French socialist A. Weil-Curiel and others⁷³. A third delegation in November headed by another ILP MP, John McGovern and Professor Felicien Challye of the Sorbonne visited anti-fascist prisoners in Barcelona's Modelo Prison, where they found American, Austrian, Belgian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, and Swiss left-wingers. These foreigners subsequently took part in the protest organised by anti-fascist prisoners in the Modelo at the end of 1937⁷⁴.

While some SAP members joined the International Brigades, there were at least five known cases of its militants being arrested and two disappeared altogether⁷⁵. Various members of the KPO were also arrested. By July 1937, six of its militants were being held in the Modelo Prison, including Walter Schwarz and Karl Heidenreich, accused of high treason. Heidenreich, a former member of the Spartacus League and the Munich Workers and Soldiers Council in 1918, had passed over from the Communist Party to the KPO in 1929 and was subsequently jailed when

⁷¹ *Juventud Obrera* 30.11.37.

⁷² F. Brockway, *Spanish Diary* (London, 1937); *El proceso...* pp. 41-42; Pagès, p.387.

⁷³ Thwaites, p.58.

⁷⁴ Pagès, p.387.

⁷⁵ Mühlhen, p.65.

and also held the rank of Major in the 97th Mixed Brigade in the Army of Levante⁶⁸.

Those who made their way back to their own countries to avoid being arrested as spies, or even “deserters”, did so often in precarious conditions as the discharge papers issued to them at the front were not recognised in the rear. Marcel Pivert’s faction in France played a central role in helping these militants escape. Most of the British managed to make their way home after the intervention of the ILP’s representatives. The ILP leader John McNair arrived in Barcelona on 18 June with money and documents to organise the evacuation of the ILP contingent and was promptly arrested as a “POUM agent” but was released when he had proven his identity. He then hid with Orwell and another British volunteer Staff Cottman, before they managed to leave the country. Most of the rest of the contingent returned to Britain over the next six months. A few transferred to the International Brigades⁶⁹. Meanwhile in Britain, the Communist Party press accused both the ILP and POUM of being agents of fascism and published two interviews with former contingent member Frank Frankford claiming he had witnessed fraternisation at the front with the fascists, that Kopp was receiving his orders from Huesca and that the Francoists even supplied the POUM with arms⁷⁰.

By November 1937, there were claimed to be 15,000 anti-fascist prisoners in the Republic’s jails, about 1,000 of them from the

⁶⁸ Mühlen, p.65; Buschak, p.236.

⁶⁹ Thwaites, p.54–55; McNair, pp.24–27; the police report on Orwell and his wife, which describes them as “Trotskyists” is reproduced in *El proceso...* p.75. In October 1937, there were five ILP members listed as members of the International Brigades, Thwaites p.54; B. Alexander, *British Volunteer for Liberty* (London 1982) p.108, says there were four ILPers in the British Brigade.

⁷⁰ *Daily Worker* 14.6.37, 16.6.37; *The Volunteer for Liberty* 13.9.37; G. Soria, *Trotskyism in the Service of Franco* (London 1938) pp.40–42; fifteen ILP combatants reply to Frankford in *New Leader* 24.9.37; many years later Frankford would deny that there was any contact between the POUM and the fascists, Thwaites, p.61, fn144.

there were also a few communists, who had gone with the ILP’s contingent because it was quicker than getting into the International Brigades. This small group was seen as the vanguard of a larger force that would be sent later. The day after the contingent left, the British government announced that it would prosecute anyone going to fight in Spain and it seems the ILP did not try and recruit any more volunteers⁴⁶.

After being helped across France by members of Pivert’s faction of the French Socialist Party, they were issued papers by the POUM in Perpignan. On arriving in Barcelona they had two weeks of very basic training, which included no drill in the use of arms for a group the majority of which had been too young to have fought in the last war or had never served in the regular army because of the traditional pacifism of the ILP. During training they were joined by Bob Smillie, grandson of the well-known Scottish socialist Robert Smillie, who had been in Barcelona working as one of the ILP representatives. Once at the front, an Australian, Harvey Buttonshaw, US Revolutionary Workers League member Wolf Kupinski, George Orwell, and a Welsh ILPer, Bob Williams also joined the contingent. Orwell had arrived some weeks beforehand with papers recommending him from the ILP. These 30 or so men would now form the POUM’s English-speaking contingent as part of the centuria commanded by Georges Kopp. Orwell was elected political delegate of the section and later, after Edwards had returned to Britain in March, its acting commander.

The ILP contingent arrived at the front when it was at its quietest and unlike most of the other international volunteers with the POUM would see very little fighting, sustaining only eight wounded. One ILP member would later be killed fighting with the International Brigades. The British contingent was at

⁴⁶ P. Thwaites, “The Independent Labour Party Contingent in the Spanish Civil War”, *Imperial War Museum Review* No. 2, (London 1987) pp.50–61; *La Batalla* 13.1.37, 20.1.37, 21.1.37; *Combat* 21.1.37; *Spanish Revolution* 3.2.37.

first stationed in the Acubierre mountains to the south of Huesca. The complete inactivity and precarious conditions on this front, because of the lack of both equipment and basic military expertise, are well documented by Orwell⁴⁷. In February, they were moved to outside Huesca where all the POUM troops had been concentrated. Although this front proved equally quiet most of the time they were there, conditions, from a military point of view improved. Bayonets and steel helmets were now available for all combatants and the contingent would be involved in some limited action.

Both the POUM and CNT press continued to blame the passivity on the Aragon front on the deliberate refusal by the Government to send arms and demanded an offensive be launched. The communists in turn blamed the passivity on the militias' lack of organisation and, ominously, began to circulate stories about fraternisation between the POUM troops and the fascists. The fact that the communist PSUC also had its militias inactive on the same front was overlooked. The commanders of the POUM militia continued to take advantage of the stagnation to strengthen its organisation and defence works. More attempts were made to improve the troops' training, for instance in the use of machine guns and in signalling, but, according to Orwell, this was not too successful due to the lack of sleep⁴⁸. A German volunteer who was in the trenches round Huesca between April and June 1937 gives a far more favourable description of the state of the militias' defences and equipment than Orwell. According to this account, the city was now surrounded by modern fortifications and the POUM trenches in "good condition", the closest about 300 metres from the first buildings. However, like others who went to the front, he insisted on the impossibility of launching a serious assault on Huesca without more and better arms and the militia as being "too few to resist a really concentrated enemy offensive". His own Battalion had only six light machine

⁴⁷ Orwell, *Homage..* pp.38–45.

⁴⁸ Orwell, "Notes..." p.323.

had helped the POUM, including Kurt Landau, disappeared after being arrested by communist-controlled police units. During the trial of the POUM leadership these foreign militants would be slandered, without any evidence against them being produced, in an attempt to implicate the party in a supposed international fascist spy ring⁶⁶.

The fate of the international militia was mixed. Many of those who had held political responsibility or were leading members of the various left socialist and dissident communist groups that supported the POUM were arrested or fled the country to avoid this eventuality. On the Madrid front Mika Etchebéhère was arrested for being 'hostile to the Republic', but soon released when the commander of her Division Commander, Cipriano Mera intervened in her favour⁶⁷. However, the repression exercised against the Lenin Division's international volunteers was by no means systematic. Some of the German volunteers who had not played a leading political role were integrated into the International Brigades. In the case of the SAP members this was less problematic given their support for the recently-signed German Popular Front agreement, although some did return to France and a few were imprisoned. In fact, there were already SAP members in the International Brigades, including the Political Commissar of the Thalmann Battalion, Wilhelm Baumgardt. This acceptance by the International Brigades of former volunteers from the POUM militia seems to have extended to the less politically involved officers. The most notable case was that of Hans Reither, who fought with the International Brigades

⁶⁶ *El proceso...* p.438; Katia Landau, p. 43; P. Pagès, *La Presó Model de Barcelona* (Barcelona 1996) p.386.

⁶⁷ C. Mera *Guerra, Exilio y carcel. Memorias de un anarcosindicalista* (Paris 1976) pp133-134; soon after her release, according to Mera, Etchebéhère left the division to work with the anarchist women's organisation, *Mujeres Libres*. When the war finished she escaped to France after remaining in hiding for a few months.

his men's "courage and outstanding conduct". Among the international volunteers killed were several SAP members and the 29th Division's Italian military advisor, Adriano Nathan⁶³.

The POUM was made illegal, accused of collaborating with the enemy, on 16 June. Its leaders were arrested and in Andreu Nin's case murdered. The party's offices and newspapers were closed down. At the front, in the days following the failed Huesca offensive, the 29th Division was withdrawn to the rear and disbanded⁶⁴. Members of the Shock Battalion were nearly involved in an armed clash with troops from the PSUC-led 27th Division when these came to take over the POUM Division's Supply Depot at Belillas⁶⁵. Several of the Division's officers were arrested, including Rovira whose trial for high treason would be cut short by the ending of the war. However, before his detention Rovira had managed to secure from his superiors the recognition of the Popular Army commissions issued to the Lenin Division's officers and most of them, along with their troops, were eventually reintegrated in other units, mainly those commanded by CNT members who were sympathetic to the POUM's plight. Others were not so fortunate. Several former POUM militia died in suspicious circumstances after being conscripted into communist units.

The situation of the foreigners connected to the POUM was more precarious, especially those who were refugees from fascist countries. In the rearguard the witch hunt against the party was particularly virulent when it came to foreigners, all good candidates to be accused of being fascist spies as far as the communists were concerned. Several foreign revolutionaries who

⁶³ Coll pp.176–198; Fernández Jurado, p.238; Orwell, "Notes ..." p. 328, and *Homage...* pp.100–101, 191; "Three months..." p.296; A. Suárez, *El proceso contra el POUM* (Paris 1974) p.91; Mühlen, p.65; *Juventud Obrera* 12.7.37; Katia Landau, p.43.

⁶⁴ *La Batalla* 14.8.37, 20.11.37, 27.11.37; *Juventud Obrera* 3rd week of July 1937, 2nd week of August 1937; Suárez p.93; Coll pp.203–212.

⁶⁵ Fernández Jurado, p.244; Coll, pp.110, 206; Suárez, p.94.

guns and four heavy ones "at the best of times" and "only the skilful placing of (these guns) prevented the enemy taking advantage of the unavoidable gaps in our trenches". What all eyewitnesses emphasise was the high morale of the militia despite many of its components having been in the lines for months without leave⁴⁹.

Despite the general inactivity on the Huesca front, the Shock Battalion was involved in a number of incursions. For instance, in early January, in a joint operation with CNT troops, the Battalion took the ridge above the village of Apies and the neighbouring village of Lierta⁵⁰. On the 23 January the Shock Battalion was ordered by the General Staff to attack Vivel del Rio, as part of a combined operation involving CNT and PSUC militia units. Both the anarchists and POUM achieved their objectives, but accused the PSUC of having "sabotaged" the offensive by not attacking⁵¹. Such accusations would become common in coming months.

On 17 March, as part of a co-ordinated attack with other militia, the Shock Battalion launched yet another assault on the beleaguered manicomio. The attack was initially successful and important positions were conquered around the building and fifty or so Civil Guards reported killed. Like previous attacks, this latest failure was blamed on other units not taking positions on the POUM militia's flanks. According to Orwell, the covering attack was sabotaged by a regular army officer of doubtful loyalty who had given the alarm by throwing a hand bomb. He was subsequently shot by his men. A KPO militant, who took part in the assault, put the failure down to the non-appearance of the promised air cover. Pinned down and without support, the Shock Battalion was forced to withdraw. British, Dutch, German, Italian and Moroccan volunteers were reported to be among the Battalion's 25 dead and 65 wounded. The dead included the secretary of the POUM's German

⁴⁹ "Three months..." pp. 284–289, 294–5.

⁵⁰ *La Batalla* 13.1.37.

⁵¹ *La Batalla* 2.3.37.

language section, SAP member Herbert Wolf. A political rally and military parade by the Battalion at the funeral of those killed in the action was addressed by representatives of different foreign parties and the Divisional Commissar, Wisner Halm⁵².

In April, a similar assault by the Shock Battalion was launched on the Loma Verde, a ridge held by the fascists to the north of the city. Once more there were casualties among the international fighters⁵³. Meanwhile to the east of Huesca, the Lenin Division had advanced its fortifications by one kilometre thus facilitating harassment of fascist positions. One of these raids, on the fascist lines at the Ermita Salas, is graphically described by Orwell. The attack, which can be considered typical of the actions being carried out at this time around Huesca, involved about 100 POUM militia, including 15 from the British contingent and 70 from the Shock Battalion and aimed to obtain arms and other material and constituted a minor success⁵⁴.

The POUM militia was finally integrated into the Popular Army as the 29th Division in late April 1937. The party had opposed the creation of this “bourgeois” army but had no intention of abandoning the front and its commanders even hoped that they would now receive the precious arms and munitions they had been so long denied. Inside the POUM units little changed and the equality and politicisation that had characterised them since the start remained the case. The former militia officers, now commissioned with official ranks in the new army, supposedly handed over their extra wages to the party. The Swiss revolutionary, Paul Thalman claimed that differences in rank and pay did begin to appear in the

⁵² La Batalla 18.3.37, 19.3.37, 20.3.37, 21.3.37, 23.3.37, 29.4.37.; Frente Proletario January 1938; Orwell, *Homage..* p.74; “Three months...”, *The Spanish Civil War...*, p.296.

⁵³ Fernández Jurado, pp. 233–234.

⁵⁴ Kopp would commend in particular the courage of the British combatants, Kopp letter 16.4.37. McNair, p.20f; Coll pp.145–147; Orwell, *Homage...* pp. 82–94; La Batalla 13.4.37, 14.4.37, 15.4.37, 24.4.37.

pose 30,000 troops, including the XII International Brigade, aeroplanes and artillery were brought from the Central Zone to take part in the attack. The former militia, that had been entrenched around the city for nine months, could now compare its own pathetic lack of equipment with the mainly communist-led troops from the Centre.

The offensive was launched on 12 June with the intention of cutting the Jaca road to the west of Huesca and thus isolating the city. The brunt of the fighting was taken by the troops brought up from the Central zone and the anarchist 28th Division. The 29th Division was given the task of making diversionary attacks on the fascist positions to the north of the city. They were accompanied by 800 well-armed Assault Guards, ostensibly as a reserve force but in the circumstances believed by the POUM to have a policing function. On 15 June troops from the 29th Division attempted to take the Loma Verde, but lack of covering support led to a precipitated withdrawal. On the morning of 16 June, the very day the POUM was declared illegal in the rearguard, two Battalions from the 29th Division’s 129th Brigade assaulted the enemy position on the Loma de los Mártires a small ridge on the outskirts of the city. Having taken the position, the 1,000 or so POUM troops soon found themselves pinned down by cross fire from machine guns on ridges to their immediate right and left which other Republican units had failed to take. To the west of the city, yet another major assault on the Jaca road had also failed leaving the fascists free to concentrate their fire power – artillery and planes – on the only position that had fallen into Republican hands, the Loma de los Mártires. The air and artillery cover which the 29th Division had been promised was not forthcoming and the Assault Guards were too inexperienced to offer any practical help. After two days, the POUM troops were ordered to withdraw, having suffered continued bombardment and repelled repeated assaults by fascist troops and tanks. About half of the POUM troops involved were lost in the action and Rovira was initially commended by the High Command for

the idea of enlisting in the International Brigades. There were also some German volunteers among the headquarter's normal guard, who also had a limited role in the fighting⁶⁰.

The claim that the POUM had "deserted" the front as one more example of its treachery was now propagated by the communists and was widely believed both inside and outside of Spain, thus preparing the ground for the subsequent illegalisation of the party and the disbanding of the 29th Division. The campaign against the POUM and the more radical anarchists became even more intense. In the aftermath of the May events, there were numerous arrests, including of foreign revolutionaries, especially those of Italian and German origin. One of those arrested was Paul Gaston Admirall, a member of the Revolutionary Left faction in the SFIO, who had arrived in Barcelona in July 1936 and had joined the POUM militia⁶¹. A worse fate befell Bob Smillie, on his way to Britain to take part in a solidarity campaign organised by the ILP Youth. Smillie was detained at the French border accused of "carrying arms" – a dud hand-bomb was found among the various souvenirs he had with him. He was subsequently imprisoned in Valencia where he was officially reported to have died on 13 June of appendicitis. The POUM and ILP accused the authorities of not giving him the necessary treatment. Smillie was the first foreigner associated with the POUM to become a mortal victim of the Stalinist repression⁶².

Until June, the Huesca front continued to remain largely inactive. The new Republican government, which had been formed after the May events and was even more sympathetic to the anti-revolutionary line of the communists and moderate Socialists, decided to launch the long-awaited offensive on the city. For this pur-

⁶⁰ Orwell, *Homage...* p.124, 132; one of the German volunteers involved was the Trotskyist Herbert Lenz, Katia Landau, "Stalinism in Spain" *Revolutionary History* Vol.1, No.2, (London, Summer 1988) p. 43.

⁶¹ *Solidaridad Internacional Paris* n.d. (January 1939); *Juventud Obrera* 26.10.37.

⁶² *ILP NAC Circular* 19.6.37; *Juventud Obrera* 12.7.37; McNair, pp.19–22

Lenin Division at this time. As a result some of the few Trotskyists left in the POUM militia now abandoned its ranks⁵⁵.

The more moderate political orientation of some the affiliates of the IBRSU caused problems of a different nature for the POUM. In particular, the Spanish party clashed with the SAP over its decision to sign the German Popular Front pact in early 1937, which the Spanish party described as "one of the saddest and most shameful documents in the history of the German workers movement". One result of the SAP position and what was described as its "move towards Stalinism", was that its youth organisation was expelled from the IBRSU Youth Bureau. The main opposition to the SAP position inside the Youth Bureau, which had been based in Barcelona since the previous November, came from the JCI and the Italian Maximalists. The POUM Youth now supported a left split in the SAP the *Neuer Weg* group against the German party's official representatives in Barcelona Max Diamant and Willy Brandt. Similar tensions were experienced with the KPO whose leadership supported the outcome of the Moscow trials, which had been fiercely denounced by the POUM. In fact both the KPO and SAP tried to persuade the POUM leadership not to criticise the trials or the Soviet government. The experience of the Spanish war would lead the KPO to adopt clearer anti-Stalinist positions⁵⁶.

Counter-revolution and Repression.

By the spring of 1937, the question of the attitude of the parties affiliated to the IBRSU to Stalinism had become central to their own political future. The slanders and attacks against the POUM

⁵⁵ This was the case of Thalmann himself and the Danish Trotskyist Aage Knud Kjelso, *Mühlen* p. 64; others, for example the German Herbert Lenz remained in the Lenin Division.

⁵⁶ *La Batalla* 28.4.37; *Juventud Comunista* 3.6.37; *Juventud Obrera* 30.11.37.; Schafranek, p.63; P. Broué, "The International Oppositions in the Comintern" (ISSG, Amsterdam 1992) pp. 20–21.

as “Trotsky-fascists” in the communist press, both in Spain and abroad, had reached new levels of hysteria. These attacks did not spare the militia who were accused of fraternising with the enemy. Thus it was understandable in this context the dissatisfaction of the POUM with its supposed allies such as the SAP. At the front it is not known how many SAP members opted for the opposition against their own party, but there is no evidence of any rupture between them and the Division leadership. The only militant in Spain of any importance known to have supported *Neuer Weg* was the SAP Youth representative, Peter Blachstein⁵⁷. The Stalinist slanders and the situation in the rearguard, where the revolution was increasingly under attack, caused much disquiet at the front, although the divisions that could be seen in the rear never reached the same level of intensity.

When news of the fighting that broke out in Barcelona on 3 May between the government forces and the CNT and the POUM reached the front it caused great anger in the ranks of the former militia. The communist version of events was that part of, if not all, the POUM militia “abandoned” its positions and headed off for Barcelona only to be stopped outside Lerida by loyal troops. Such accusations were used later in the prosecution in the trial of Rovira and subsequently repeated by some historians⁵⁸. That any significant number of POUM fighters left the trenches is refuted by all the eyewitness accounts of what happened on the Huesca front during the May events.

⁵⁷ I am indebted to Reinner Tosstorff for this information.

⁵⁸ *El proceso ...* p.76; even in an otherwise thoroughly researched contemporary history of the CNT, the communist version of events is repeated, J. Casanova, *De la calle al frente* (Barcelona 1996) pp.222–223; Casanova bases his accusations on the unsigned document of the Asesor Jurídico, appointed by the communist General Pozas, which was repeated in the memoirs of PCE leader Dolores Ibarruri, D. Ibaruri, *They Shall Not Pass* (New York 1976) p.286; for a detailed critique of this version, see B. Bolloten, *La Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid 1989) pp. 691–2.

According to 29th Division Commissar, Josep Pané, once the news reached the front Rovira called together the brigade commanders and commissars to discuss the situation. Some favoured sending an expedition to Barcelona, others a commission to discuss with the nearby CNT forces what should be done. Rovira opposed the sending of any troops to the rear as he knew it would be used against the POUM. Instead Rovira accompanied by a “strong escort” of members of the Shock Battalion, who were already resting behind the lines, set out for Binéfar to investigate. On the way, they were joined in Sietamo by “several hundred” troops from a Battalion of the CNT-led 28th Division. While the anarchist troops were persuaded by their commanders to wait in Binéfar, Rovira, the leader of the anarchist battalion, Máximo Franco and the 28th Division’s Commander García Vivanco met with Colonel Alfonso Reyes, PSUC member and commander of the air forces for the sector, and Joaquim Vilà, the Catalan Government’s Commissar for Internal Security in Lerida. An agreement was reached, published in the local press, that the 28th Division troops would return to the front and in exchange all government forces would be withdrawn from outside CNT and POUM headquarters⁵⁹.

The POUM’s international volunteers played only a small role in these events. Apart from the handful of Shock Battalion members who accompanied Rovira to Binéfar, members of the ILP contingent were in Barcelona during the fighting, having been sent back on leave on 25 April and some of them, including Orwell, covered the party headquarters from the roof of the theatre on the other side of the street. The experience of being caught up in the May events, would lead Orwell and some of the other British volunteers to drop

⁵⁹ Coll, pp.163–173; J. Barull, *El Bloc Obrer i Camperol* (Lleida 1919–1937) (Lerida 1990) p.112; *El proceso....* pp.494–6, 503–4, 511, 519; a KPO member who was eyewitness to events described how despite their fury at what was happening in the rear, revolutionary discipline was maintained; “Three months on the Huesca Front”, *The Spanish Civil War...* p. 289.