

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PROLETARIAN MILIEU on the CHENIER affair

In September of last year, the French Section of the International Communist Current published in their press, 'Revolution Internationale', the following statement:

"The Section of the ICC in France has decided on the exclusion of an individual who signs his name Chenier (previously Lopez). The behaviour of this element within the ICC along with his previous trajectory in LO, PCI, OU, CPAO, indicates that it is a question of suspicious behaviour and his presence in a revolutionary political organisation constitutes a danger to it."

This statement forms part of a Resolution of the Executive Commission of 'Revolution Internationale' (the French Section of the ICC) of 23-9-81 and was preceded by the explanation

"The events which have agitated the organisation these past months, their precipitation during the summer, the methods used, and denouement in the present situation and the role played by Chenier leads us to think seriously that elements alien to the organisation and its problems have played an important role in the present situation."

This resolution in its turn followed on from a resolution by the International Secretariat of the ICC of 19-9-81 which said

"The IS draws the attention of the Secretariat of the Executive Commission of the section in France to the nature of the actions of Chenier.

- (a) a systematic attitude tending to awaken, maintain and animate dissention among the members of the ICC and creating suspicion and demoralisation among the comrades in regard to the organisation
- (b) an equivocal attitude pretending to carry on the debate while at the same time (August-September) circulating outside the organisation in a secret way a text denigrating it and calling for the formation of a new organisation

These implications, along with the fact that in recent years Chenier was at the basis of convulsions and dissentions in all the different organisations he went through (Lutte Ouvriere; PCI; Union Ouvriere; CPAO) indicate the idea that it is a question of an element who is, at least, suspicious and whose behaviour is such as to constitute a danger to a revolutionary organisation."

The denunciation was then published in the press of the ICC without the slightest attempt being made to either put forward any evidence in support of such an astonishing statement or to justify this statement to the rest of the organisation, let alone the proletarian movement.

Comrades, let us be clear about what this statement says. It singles out an individual militant and declares him to be a danger to the revolutionary milieu in terms which clearly imply he is believed to be a police provocateur. To make sure that the message is heard by all, phone calls were subsequently made throughout the proletarian milieu stating openly that he was a police spy, and this was stated once again at a Public Meeting in Paris.

Subsequently a member of the Secretariat of World Revolution (British Section of the ICC), in late 1981, made a presentation to the London Section of WR (since circulated within WR) in which he amplified the 'reasoning' behind the statement. The key passages said

Finally, we want to report some of the discussion that lies behind the IS resolution of 19-9-81, concerning the recommendation to exclude Chenier. In the 1930's, entire sections in France and in Belgium of certain Trotskyist organisations were destroyed by the work of the police and/or state security functionaries. The method used was not repression, but infiltration. It consisted of turning members against each other; of issuing counter-reports of discussions; partial circulations of texts; innuendoes and lies subtly dropped here and there. The method has been long-established (try Victor Serge's work recently re-published under the title of 'All You Need to Know About State Repression' and the writings in French of Veragan on the destruction of the Trotskyists in the 30's) and is combined with other, more overt forms. In the ICC recently, there have been several disturbing occurrences

- in Paris, within the last 8 months, eight houses containing at least half the membership of the section (including addresses not generally known) have been broken into. Nothing has been stolen in any of these raids.
- there have been police enquiries at two of our regular meeting places in France: one of them was closed to us after such a visit.
- there have been police enquiries at our Paris box number, and the inexplicable delays to the delivery of letters and texts.

There is no doubt within the section that it has been under state surveillance.

Internally, the activities of Chenier have been re-assed.

- his political history: he has been expelled from every group which, to our knowledge, he has been a member of
- each expulsion was accompanied by the exodus, not only of Chenier, but of numbers of comrades, in some cases whole sections
- his political trajectory is 'weird' to say the least: from Trotskyism to Bordigism, back to Trotskyism, to the fringes of Levertarianism, to the ICC. It's not consistent with any political trajectory we've seen before.
- his method of operating within the ICC is dubious, to say the least. It includes; threatening to 'expose' the ICC to the 'milieu' (police) for certain alleged illegal activities; claiming to hold a discussion, while circulating texts outside calling for the destruction of the organisation; sending of texts to addresses in Paris not normally known to those outside the IS; the urging of 'private and secret' meetings.

"This behaviour on the part of Chenier has not gone unnoticed in the revolutionary milieu. A member of FOR gave us a guarded, verbal warning against his activities, which was not taken up at the time. The PIC apparently published a denunciation of him for his activities within the CPAO. We are trying to contact the rest of the milieu (the PCI) for the reasons and circumstances surrounding his expulsions.

Bearing all this in mind, there is a strong suspicion against Chenier. There is no fundamental proof either way, and probably never will be. No one is 100% convinced but most members in RI at least, feel there are grave grounds for disquiet. It would be foolish to believe that the ICC is any more immune from state infiltration than other organisations of the past - statistically speaking (in terms of our length of existence, size and international spread) we are long overdue for such a visit. In themselves, the actions of Chenier constitute a danger to revolutionary organisations. When added to other factors, it was felt necessary to draw the attention of the milieu to his past history.

We stress to comrades: we are not imputing any knowledge of any of this to other members of the tendency. Nor is it a question of attempting to 'discredit' Chenier for reasons internal to the ICC. The broader implications of our suspicions are serious within and of themselves. As the RI secretariat resolution says, our own weaknesses - hostility and personalisation of debate, refusal to maintain organisational discipline; an attitude of 'anything goes' within the organisation - are the most fertile soil for the penetration of both bourgeois ideology, and possibly of the bourgeoisie's representatives."

Comrades of the proletarian milieu, there can be no equivocation about the purpose of all this, the intent behind these statements. It is a conscious, deliberate and sustained attempt to destroy the comrade totally - to ensure that he can never again function within the proletarian milieu. And comrades, we are not children playing games, we know that such accusations put more than a comrade's political life at stake. There are elements in the proletarian movement, and many, many, in the leftist movement who won't stop at mere words when dealing with a police spy. This is the most serious and grave allegation that can be made in our movement. No matter what happens now, the action is irrevocable. The comrade will never be able to disprove such an accusation even if it was to be withdrawn tomorrow.

But let us look at the allegations themselves. They are as follows.

1. That the comrade had a tortuous political history from "Trotyskism to Bordigism, back to Trotskyism, to the fringes of Libertarianism, to the ICC".

Comrades, we can only be astonished when this is presented as unique and suspicious. The revolutionary movement is full of comrades with an erratic political trajectory. The ICC itself has had comrades who have moved from Zionism to Trotskyism to left Communism, comrades who oscillate between the IWW and the CWO . . . the list is endless. It could be no other way. Our movement is young and emerged from an empty wasteland. Its birth was painful and tortuous. We stumbled around blindly with only sparks of light to guide us and the stumbling has not yet finished. All of us who have been militants in the proletarian movement over the past

ten years carry with us, to a greater or lesser extent, the marks of this painful process in our personal history. Chenier's is neither unique nor suspicious.

- 2 That in addition to his "weird trajectory" he was "at the basis of convulsion and dissensions in all the different organisations he went through (Lutte Ouvriere; PCI; Union Ouvriere; CPAO)", that he was "expelled" from all these organisations and "expulsion was accompanied by the exodus, not only of Chenier, but of numbers of comrades, in some cases whole sections".

Firstly, we think there is a qualitative difference between expulsion and splits from bourgeois organisations than from proletarian ones. We reject utterly any attempt to amalgamate the two (but apparently the ICC are no longer concerned with the difference). No comrade can ever be criticised for his exit from a leftist organisation. As for his history within the proletarian movement before he joined the ICC, the fact of expulsions themselves tells us nothing. Who among us has not been involved in splits and expulsions? Given what we have already said about the painful struggle for clarity of the past decade and a half, how could it be otherwise? And taking comrades with him? Comrades, a militant splitting from an organisation on clear political grounds is obliged to attempt that. What we are presented with here is evidence of how hard and confused the struggle has been (and continues to be) to give birth to the organised political expression of the proletariat. The worst interpretation that can be put on this behaviour is that Chenier is a comrade who finds the disciplined demands of organised political life difficult. It's grotesque, a product of paranoia or worse, to suggest that we should consider such behaviour evidence of state infiltration.

- 3 Clear evidence of state surveillance of the French section over the past 8 months.

We cannot see that this is either unexpected or evidence of infiltration, let alone evidence of the guilt of one particular comrade. The ICC is a revolutionary organisation and police interest in it is inevitable. It's not the first time and it won't be the last - for anyone!

- 4 His behaviour within the ICC. We are told "his method of operating within the ICC is dubious, to say the least. It includes; "threatening to 'expose' the ICC to the 'milieu' (police) for certain alleged illegal activities; claiming to hold a discussion, while circulating texts to addresses in Paris not normally known to those outside the IS; the urging of 'private and secret' meetings".

All of this behaviour was during the time the comrade was formulating a profound unhappiness and disquiet about the politics and practice of the ICC. As for the threatened exposure of illegal activities, we cannot say too much because we have not seen the relevant letter and know only what we have heard unofficially. As far as we know the comrade was concerned at the security implications of militants taking drugs, and on at least one occasion doing so openly at a public intervention. We cannot disagree that habitual illegal practices by militants constitutes a security hazard. Resolutions passed by the central organs of the ICC itself have already stated that. If the comrade threatened the ICC with exposure to the proletarian milieu then we can only condemn that, but we reject it as evidence pointing to the comrade as a police agent, for this is what the statement expressly says by following the word 'milieu' with (police) in an attempt to imply that the latter was the true intention behind any such 'exposure' to the milieu suggested by Chenier. So far as we know the involvement of 'police' in such an exposure exists solely in the minds of the ICC. As for the other

dubious practices - "secret texts" etc - how we view them and whether or not we have criticisms of such behaviour depends on where one stood in the debates which were taking place inside the ICC about the existence and operation of tendencies at that time, and about the ICC's ability or inability to allow real internal debate. Whether or not we have criticisms of the comrades behaviour, none of it points to the activities of a police spy. Comrades who were involved should ask themselves if these allegations have made these debates easier or harder.

However, even outside the period when the comrade's trajectory was taking him outside the ICC, we are told that he had "a systematic attitude tending to awaken, maintain and animate dissention among the members of the ICC and creating suspicion and demoralisation among the comrades in regard to the organisation". Chenier's many contributions to the internal press are available to all comrades inside the ICC who can judge for themselves whether they are evidence of a systematic attempt to destroy the organisation or the work of a serious, committed militant of independent mind who took the ICC's commitment to debate seriously. However, the point here is not to look at Chenier's contributions to the life of the ICC in order to decide whether or not he was a perfect militant, or whether or not his contributions were fruitful or troublesome, but to decide whether they justify the allegations which have been publically made about him. For us, the answer is clear. We cannot believe that anyone of sane mind could accept the "evidence", and WE CALL UPON ALL COMRADES WITHIN THE PROLETARIAN MILIEU TO UTTERLY AND PUBLICALLY REJECT THE BEHAVIOUR AND ACCUSATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT BY THE ICC.

Let us be clear here. What is on trial before the whole revolutionary milieu is not one militant, but the ICC itself. The revolutionary movement is tiny and fragile and the ICC constitutes an enormous weight within it. Everything the ICC struggled to achieve on the question of the need for a centralised, international party, on the questions of sectarianism and monolithism stands in danger of being wiped out, of being revealed as hot air, a front, a fake. This stomach-turning, unspeakable action has brought the spectre of Stalinism back into the heart of the proletarian movement. The ICC asks us to remember that the destruction of revolutionary groups in the 30's was often achieved by the bourgeois, not by repression, but by infiltration. We would remind comrades that the same result was often achieved by the Stalinists precisely by false accusations of infiltration and of police agents. Trotsky, the Left Opposition and many others were all victims of this vicious technique. Many comrades lost their lives as a result. The stench of the 30's is unmistakable in this present accusation.

Chenier has been accused not out of concern for the safety of the milieu, but to destroy and obliterate debate. His "crime" was to take the ICC seriously when it said it rejected monolithism and sectarianism and insisted that the health and vitality of a communist organisation could come only from the fullest debate and confrontation of ideas involving all the militants of the organisation. Comrades, what has happened to the ICC that its central organs will stop at nothing to suppress opposition?

These events, sickening and stunning, though they might be, have not arrived out of the blue. Increasingly, we have seen the debates of the ICC crippled, polarised and crushed by a conception of centralisation which saw the central organs as the unique repository of clarity and, as ideological policemen guarding the sacred tablets. From there, it was a short step for the central organs to embark upon a course of substituting themselves for the organisation as a whole. But this is not the place to draw out such a critique, but the consequences of this process must by now be clear to all - central organs which demand blind obedience, who can only tolerate token debate, who characterise criticisms of themselves

as attacks on the ICC, who are so terrified of differences they will literally stop at nothing to destroy them. The Chenier affair is only the logical conclusion of this process.

Comrades, all of this is intolerable to us, as it should be to the whole proletarian milieu. We cannot and will not stand by silent while this attempted assassination goes ahead, and we, by this letter, call on all militants of the proletarian milieu to unite in condemnation of this disgusting action of the ICC.

Former militants of the International Communist Current

postscript. Since the above Open Letter was written we have seen the I.C.C. continue its campaign of vilification and self-justification in the Chenier Affair - an affair which has, for them, been successful in that it has succeeded in its primary task, that of driving the militant Chenier out of politics completely in despair. However they obviously feel the need to try to con the rest of the milieu still into believing that they acted properly, to delude their readership into believing in the pristine purity of the I.C.C.

In particular in International Review 28 there is an article by one JA which sets itself this specific task. The article can only be taken as a joke, a sick black joke - unconscious on the part of the author but a joke none the less.

How else can one take the following except as a joke:

"When the ICC published in its press a 'warning' against Chenier's activities we were only doing our duty towards the political milieu. Some interpreted what we wrote as being a more positive denunciation: they were wrong."

As our Open Letter clearly shows the central organs of the ICC were quite explicit about what they wanted their own membership and the milieu to believe about Chenier and this is said once again AS EXPLICITLY in the text of JA as indeed it is again in Internationalism 32. Only a cretin or someone totally unfamiliar with the English language would believe that the sleight of hand perpetrated by the use of the 'no formal proof' ploy is anything other than a blatant accusation.

How else but as a joke can we regard the statement:

"still less have we descended to inventing stories about security."

So far the I.C.C. for all its vaunted 'masses of evidence' have produced NOT ONE IOTA of evidence to the proletarian milieu as the CWO in their investigation have already CLEARLY demonstrated.

How else but as a joke, and a sick one at that, can we regard the statement:

"if we wanted to resort to manoeuvre we would have acted like Chenier: through plots, never saying anything openly."

The WR EC Sec presentation quoted in our letter given by WREC Sec secretary KT which came completely out of the blue to every section of WR, about which no section had had ANY advance notice did not come out of the fertile mind of KT. He didnt dream it up. This presentation came as a direct result of a process of manoeuvring in which KT and his then bedfellow JA played a prominent part and in which the membership of WR at least outwith the confines of the select group of schemers had no say at all, no knowledge whatsoever. And of course this is the same JA who some weeks earlier when asked at a meeting of the WR Secretariat DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE WHATSOEVER of the basis

for the central organs of the ICC section in Frances' excluding the Lille section of RI, Chenier included, from some of the normal responsibilities of a section of the ICC. Whatever conspiring Chenier may have done he was certainly not alone. The plotting of the centre faction of the ICC to silence the tendency and destroy Chenier far outstrips anything I have heard about the tendency. (1)

But of course we are used to such 'jokes' from JA and her associates for we have seen others such as raiding peoples homes and calling the actions of the victims to defend themselves terror tactics: or claiming that the taking of one typewriter from among three as well as a few archives which were to be photocopied and returned which was said to the ICC was an attempt to silence the ICC. Jokes abound in JA's company.

How else then except as black humour are we to take JA's absurd pronouncements slanders, innuendo and pleas to be taken seriously, literally and unblemished. However one conceives the actions of Chenier or of the other members of the tendency one inescapable fact stands out: It was the actions of such as JA and the other plotters in Paris and London which destroyed the British section of the ICC. When JA has the effrontery to say:

"...those who work deliberately to destroy revolutionary organisations on behalf of the state and its appendage would not act differently from the way Chenier did".

Comrades we need only replace Chenier with JA and her colleagues to make the same point. Or rather the idiocy of both points. (2)

- (1) It should be noted that the writer here was not a member of the tendency nor was he a member of the cabal.
- (2) There is a great deal of material on the machinations within the ICC in 1981 and the fragments so far published are at best bits produced to substantiate one side or the other. Aberdeen has in its possession practically all the texts, letters etc. To publish it is impossible but the milieu should contact us if it seeks further clarification on the whole sorry business from the material itself.