

positions. By their very nature they were beyond recall into the revolutionary struggle; But the APCF realised that the economic struggle still remained the focal point for class-political activity. Unlike the Socialist Party of Great Britain the APCF did not fall into the cretinism of viewing the daily struggle as independent of and separate from the political. It believed that it was in the economic struggle that the working class forged its political consciousness: "by such training, they must pass to the ATTACK and destroy the coercive power of the ruling class". (p.17)

We might quarrel with the sophistication of the arguments which the APCF used to demonstrate the validity of the notion of decadence and its consequences but the fact that it was struggling for clarity on the question is proof of its revolutionary credentials.

The APCF had taken in lessons of the working class's struggle. Rejecting parliament and trade unions it recognised that the proletariat had itself created organisational forms appropriate to the era of revolution these were "all-in Soviets and Councils of Action". It was within these forms that the working class was to develop its consciousness and become a class which was self-reliant, a class for itself.

These elements of clarity which are found in the programme of the APCF came together in the years of war and emerged as a full-blown opposition to the imperialist slaughter of 1939-45. It should be noted that this opposition, which was not



pacifist, was as strong after Russia entered the bloody battle. What was true in 1914 was also the case in 1939: revolutionary credentials were gauged by the extent to which an organisation opposed inter-imperialist war. In 1914 Lenin's stand was a beacon in an otherwise dark world. The war had to be opposed; it had to be turned into a class civil war because the proletariat had nothing to gain from inter imperialist struggle.

The APCF issued its call to Anti-Parliamentarians in 1940, in the midst of war. This was a time when many thousands of working class militants had been seduced into defending one of two positions: either they defended democracy against fascism or they sided with Russia which had not then entered the war (it had signed a "non-aggression" pact with Germany). The APCF was not fooled by either of these positions. It recognised that both were anti-working class.

Despite the fact that the APCF had been the victim of profound confusion during the Spanish Civil War (see below) it was able to draw itself back from the brink of reaction and adopt a revolutionary stance. It rejected the idea that the war against German fascism was a question of defending the lesser-evil of democracy against fascism nor was it a question of looking for guidance to the so-called Socialist Fatherland of Russia. In 1942, after Russia had entered the war, the APCF took up a stand which puts it on the side which Lenin had defended in 1914. The anti-parliamentarians called for,

"victory over Hitlerism and Mikadoism - by the German and Japanese workers, and the simultaneous overthrow of all Allied Imperialists by the workers in Britain and America. We also wish to see the re-institution of the Workers's Soviets in Russia and the demolition of the Stalinist bureaucracy. In a word, we fight for the destruction of ALL imperialism by the Proletarian World Revolution." (p.51)

Isn't this in the same spirit of Lenin when he had written,

"Transform the present imperialist war into a civil war - is the only correct proletarian slogan . . . However difficult such a transformation may appear at any given time Socialists will never relinquish systematic persistent, undeviating, preparatory work in this direction, since war has become a fact."

Make no mistake, to take a stand against the war in the 1940s was no easy matter. Not only had revolutionaries to cope with ideological struggle for clarity, the forces of the British state it had also to face up to the major threat posed by the agents of Stalinism. Among these was the Communist (sic) Party. After Russia entered the war the CP branded all those who refused to fight fascism as enemies who not only had to be attacked in print but also had to be named and if possible executed.

The APCF was neither intimidated nor fooled. Its ability to come out against the war despite worldwide campaigns waged by Stalinists and Trotskyists is a sign of the Federation's revolutionary worth. Opposition to the siren calls of these two anti-working class currents was based upon an emergent critique of Russia which characterised it as a form of state capitalism. This capitalist formation was born from the ruins of the Revolution

and built upon the lives of tens of thousands of workers:

"The defeat of the proletariat in Germany in 1919 and 1923 was instrumental in abandoning the idea of World Revolution, and the Russian Dictatorship of the Proletariat was supplanted by Dictatorship of the Communist Bureaucracy." (p.19)

Once again we might take issue with some of the arguments used to show the capitalist nature of Russia (the APCF drew much of its theoretical programme from the work of Paul Mattick). But as with the broad notion of decadence so with the notion of state capitalist Russia: the APCF had grasped the fundamental lesson that the working class no longer held any power in Russia and that irrespective what Trotskyists said the fact of the eradication of private capital was not in itself an indication of a working class economic structure. This pernicious lie which was and continues to be propagated by leftists was a major ideological weapon used by the Soviet bourgeoisie's ideologues to dupe the working class.

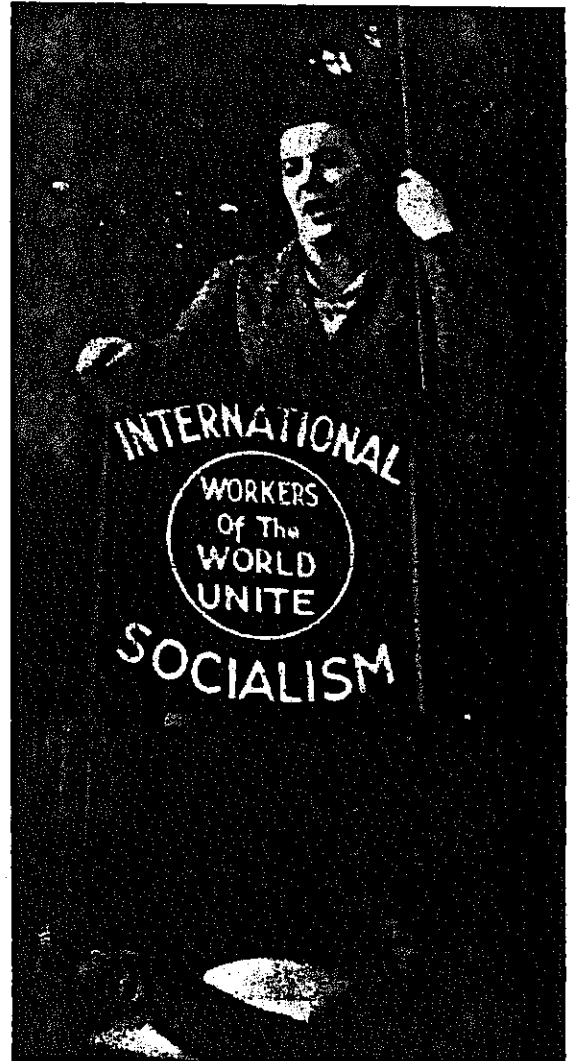
Overall, these positions of the APCF are not minor. They locate it firmly within the revolutionary tradition. It was one of a very small number of groups which kept the banner of communism flying in the dark days of the 1930s.

It was of course subject to a variety of weaknesses both in their practice and in their theory. It was an error for the organisation to see itself as a blend of the best of marxism and anarchism. The fact that the APCF in part grew out of the Glasgow Anarchist Group helps explain why it attempted to square this particular circle. The very fact that the anarchist elements were able to unite with others in the light of the lessons of the struggle in Russia (APCF was formed 1923) indicates how far they ceased to be in thrall to the individualist philosophy of anarchism. The APCF allied itself with the marxist Workers' Communist Party of Germany. Some revolutionaries now argue that the KAPD was anarcho syndicalist and that it failed to recognise the absolute need for the revolutionary party. This is a confusion and/or a lie (see Bulletin 9 pp.33-41). Like the KAPD the APCF did not reject the need for a distinct revolutionary organisation:

"Against the intellectual resources and material organisation of the bourgeoisie we must erect an organisation which cannot spring up overnight, because of the nature of things, but which must be created by the struggle of years and decades. We must bring consciousness to the class struggle. We must build the party, the only means of bringing that consciousness." (p.69)

There is, however, no doubt that the anarchistic tone of the organisation played a major part in leading the APCF towards the defence of reaction during the Spanish Civil War. The anti-parliamentarians were not the only revolutionaries to be duped by capital during this imperialist struggle. The way they were fooled does point to particular confusions. In their introduction to the APCF's Spanish Civil War texts WILDCAT editors write that "it is said that such was the domination of the anarchist elements established in the APCF at this time that the marxist members were at one stage banned from speaking for the group on its public platform". (p.28) Unfortunately we are not told who "said" this nor are we directed to

Ethel MacDonald - a leading Glasgow Anti-Parliamentarian.



Ethel MacDonald addressing a Sunday meeting in Hyde Park, July 1938.

material which might enlighten us. Not very useful editorial work. If this hearsay is in fact accurate then it is well worth documenting not only to highlight the confusions of the APCF but also to clarify any opposition which might have stood out against the anarchistic strands. However, irrespective of this particular editorial weakness it remains clear that the APCF was profoundly confused by the war in Spain. It was unable to take up a consistently critical stance to the republicanism and reformism which sided with and was the heart of the anti-fascist side of the struggle. Like thousands of others and like many communists the APCF was totally (or was it?) lost in the face of the mass militancy in Spain, militancy which was harnessed to imperialist ends. The anti-parliamentarians supported the completely reactionary CNT-FAI and at the same time fell into the trap of calling on the British state to "drop its policy of non-intervention". (p.29) The fact that it did not, unlike the Communist Parties, manage to mobilise thousands to fight in Spain does not wipe away this major weakness. The anti-fascist stance which swept through the

working class in 1936 was important in helping mobilise the proletariat for the slaughter of the 1940s.

But as we have seen the debacle of Spain did not destroy the organisation. It did learn lessons. It did fight against the threat of falling into reformism. There were moments when it seemed as if the organisation might relapse into reactionary stance (see for example p.43 and the ambiguity of arguments being put forward on Russia by a member). Indeed, a case could be made out for the APCF's commitment to openness in discussion might be taken as an inherent weakness. This is not to say that openness is by definition a weakness. It is not, a fact which the CBG has argued at some length in previous Bulletins. But the point is to whom do you address this openness. At an organisational level it must be within the one milieu that is, the revolutionary movement. The degeneration which undermined the political fractions of the working class in the 1920s-30s made recognition of this movement very difficult. There is a "feeling" (admittedly a very imprecise critical point) when reading the APCF's call for openness that it is directing itself to reactionary organisations. This, given the context of degen-

eration, should hardly surprise us. It remains an impossible question to answer whether the call for openness in the 1940s would have resulted in a moment of class collaboration, as it had in 1936, if there had been, as expected, a wave of class militancy over Europe. Unlike 1918 the end of the war was not followed by a revolutionary surge. A Labour Government was elected in Britain. Once again the politics of reformism swept over the working class. The post war period got underway and slowly built towards the economic "miracle" of full employment and "consumerism". In this process revolutionaries found themselves isolated. A tradition was destroyed and many revolutionaries succumbed to the ideology of reformism, most notably in the context of the APCF is the sad degeneration of Guy Aldred. Nonetheless, this decline should not be allowed to obscure an important moment in the proletariat's history. All those who would now aspire to take up the revolutionary banner should acquaint themselves with their history. Read this pamphlet.

Flett

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NOTE:

We have intentionally avoided here writing an extended critical piece on the editorial work of WILDCAT. This is because we think the reprinting of the APCF texts are of paramount importance for the reasons we state in the introduction to this review. Criticisms could be aimed at the editorial work of WILDCAT: there is a peculiarly un-historical approach to the growth of Council Communism, a tendency to project the notion backwards and forwards with little regard for the formative context of the specific notion; but a lot of regard for picking and choosing ones political progenitors. There is no simple moral ground upon which we can decide to stand from which we can disown all others who do not match up to our demands. Proletarian history is a complex process of development which encompasses a variety of stances which hold within them any number of starting points. Thus to isolate in an artificial manner what they deem to be Council Communist WILDCAT rupture the reality of the working class's history. The worst example of this approach is seen in its treatment of Bolshevism.

WILDCAT seem to be unable to surmount the anti-Bolshevik stance which was to be found in the politics of Mattick, Ruhle et al in the 1930s. This stance does not see the Bolsheviks as a reactionary group in the '30s but as part of capital from its inception. Hence the "Bolshevik Revolution" was from the very beginning said to be a capitalist one. WILDCAT's reluctance to accept the proletarian credentials of the Bolshevik Party would seem to stem from this Council Communist approach. For example no mention is made of the definitive stance taken by Lenin in 1914 against the War. And again, it seems significant the way WILDCAT go for a simplistic analysis of the way party and class developed in Russia: "The example of Russia shows what happens when revolutionary leadership passes into the hands of a political party". (p.60) WILDCAT should pay closer attention to the texts which they themselves have reprinted and give up its mealy-mouthed approach to the Bolshevik Party and what it calls its "bloody dictatorship". (p.59) Bourgeois history tells lies, don't compound the problem by taking these into the communist movement.

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Blast From The Past

Workers of the World Unite.

SOLIDARITY

You have nothing to lose but your chains:
 You have a world to win. (Marx)

To Anti-parliamentarians

For many years the left communist groups have been spoken of as Anti-Parliamentarians due to their opposition to parliamentary activity. We, as a matter of fact, have the title A.P.C.F. During the reformist era of capitalism this title although long-winded was quite correct. It differentiated us from the parliamentary socialists in the labour movement.

During the upswing period of capitalism, when it was developing and expanding, it was possible to grant concessions to the working class because of the increase in productivity and the resultant increase in profits. These reforms however, were seldom granted without much struggle. There were victories and defeats in both wings of the movement.

The present period of capitalist decline is one in which no concessions are possible for the working class. Further, we have definitely left the era of democracy, the era of free competition. This democracy which served the conflicting interests of small capitalists during the developing stage, is now no longer compatible. Monopoly capitalism in a period of permanent crisis and war finds dictatorship and terror the only means to ensure it a tranquil proletariat. The abolition of the right to strike and its "fifth column" activity - despite the fact that it has completely captured the official Trade Union and Labour Party organisation - demonstrates this excellently.

Democracy, Parliamentarism and the Parliamentary organisation become obsolete and cannot be tolerated. Britain follows Germany in putting forward only one candidate for election. Fascism is being introduced with the aid of the Labour Party which is completely incapable of taking an independent working class position.

This development renders the controversy of the parliamentarians in the movement with the left communist groups obsolete. The name anti-parliamentary therefore is historically outdated and should be discarded. In its place the better title council communism should be used as

it designates as a name the major principle difference between the old and new labour movement. This difference on the role that organisation plays in the class struggle and in the revolution is of increasing importance, while the question of parliamentary activity is of very much decreasing importance.

In contradistinction to the old form of party organisation, universally common to the parliamentary politicians in the old labour movement, the new labour movement holds that the workers' committees, the soviets, the workers' councils of action, are the real fighting organisations of the working class.

Therefore let us pass the name A.P.C.F. into the keeping of history.

Let all similar groups likewise discard their sectarian labels and unite under a common banner. Co-ordination is becoming a vital necessity to make the best use of our combined resources. Meantime, with group autonomy, let us all adopt, say, the name The Council Communists, so that under this banner the scattered revolutionary groups can gather together as groups of council communists capable of aiding the workers in the struggle. When a lead is necessary, giving a lead; where criticism is necessary, giving criticism. But all the time remembering that this is a class struggle and the class needs of the workers transcend all.

The banner of revolutionary non-compromise is the banner of the successful social revolution.

To this banner we recall the old Anti-Parliamentarians, whose experience of the past and whose comradeship is now so necessary. To this banner we call the youth who suffer the effects of capitalist war.

Now is the time to build the shock troops of the coming socialist revolution.

Pending the final show-down with capitalism there will arise many issues on which all revolutionaries, irrespective of section, SHOULD agree. For such objects we ought to put our party loyalty second to class loyalty which all profess; in order to attain the maximum possible striking power. To do otherwise, as is all too common, is a dereliction of class duty.

(September-October 1940)

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