

A soldier returns - letter from an American fighter in the Durruti Column



A letter from an American trade unionist and member of the revolutionary union the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) about his experiences as a fighter in the [Spanish Civil War and Revolution of 1936-9](#) in the International section of the anarchist Durruti Column.

The following letter was published in the paper of the American IWW's paper, One Big Union Monthly in 1937.

Original introduction

The One Big Union Monthly and the Industrial Workers of the World are heart and soul for the success of the anti-fascist fight going on in Spain but we see no reason why we should stick our heads in the sand and pretend not to be aware of the capitalist class element within the Spanish United Front government that is trying to rob the Spanish revolutionary unionists of victory.

No matter what our opinion may be as to the wisdom of the syndicalists' policy of co-operation with political government, the information and arguments contained in this letter from a rank and file fighter in the cause of working class freedom, and in other articles appearing in this magazine, cannot but be valuable reminders that there are still working class enemies among those who favour "democracy" as opposed to fascism - Editor.

A soldier returns

Marseilles, France

Fellow Worker:-

Received your letter the other day in Barcelona. I typed three pages in reply but could not smuggle it out of the country, so I tore it up.

I am out of Spain. The reasons are numerous. I was not wanted by the government as I was in the Durruti International Shock Battalion. The government sabotaged us since we were formed in May and made it impossible for us to stay at the front. No tobacco unless you had

money. All of the time I was in the militia I received no money. I had to beg money for postage stamps, etc. I was sent back from the front slightly shell-shocked and put in a hospital in Barcelona. when we registered at the hospital I told them I was from the Durruti International Battalion and they wouldn't register me. In fact they told me to go and ask my friends for money for a place to sleep. I explained to them that I was from Canada and had no friends in Barcelona, then they tried to make me a prisoner in the hospital. I called them all the lousy -- I could think of. Anyway, I ran away from the hospital one day to the English section of the CNT-FAI and the people there insisted that I see the British consul for a permit to leave Spain, which I did, though I hated to leave.

Spain is a wonderful country. At present it reminds me of the stories I have read of the O.G.P.U. [secret police] in Russia. The jails of loyalist Spain are full of volunteers who have more than a single-track mind. I know one of them from Toronto, a member of the L.R.W.P. I wonder if they will bump him off. The Stalinists do not hesitate to kill any of those who do not blindly accept Stalin as a second Christ. One of the refugees who came over with me from Spain was a member of the O.G.P.U. in Spain, which, by the way, is controlled by Russia. Every volunteer in the Communist International Brigade is considered a potential enemy of Stalin. He is checked and double-checked, every damn one. If he utters a word other than commy phrases he is taken "for a ride." This chap (ex- O.G.P.U.) is like all the other commies coming out of Spain, absolutely anti-Stalin and anti-communist. He skipped the country by flashing his O.G.P.U. badge on the trains etc.

I believe that the I.W.W. has lost some members here, as I doubt if they would keep quiet at the front in view of what is taking place.

It was only through sabotage that the government succeeded in disbanding the International Battalion of Anarchists. Four of our bunch died of starvation in one day. Our arms were rotten, even though the Valencia government has plenty of arms and planes. They know enough not to give arms to the thousands of anarchists on the Aragon front. We could have driven the fascists out of Huesca and Saragossa had we had the aid of the aviation. But the Anarchists form collectives where ever they advance, and these comrades would rather let Franco have those cities than the CNT-FAI.

Fenner Brockway, prominent labour leader in England, exposed the way the communists were treating those boys (volunteers) in the International Brigade. They will not let any of them come back unless they are racketeers of the Sam Scarlett type who will say anything they are told as long as the pork chops are coming in.

The CNT-FAI seems to have lost all the power they had in the army. There is a good fort on the top of a hill overlooking Barcelona which the anarchists captured from the fascists. When I left for the front it was still in the hands of the FAI but when I came back the communists had it. The workers of Spain are against the communists, but the latter don't care. They are making a play for the support of the bourgeoisie and other racketeers. As far as the industries are concerned the CNT has a lot of power, far more than any other organization.

Well, Fellow Worker, one day has elapsed since I wrote the above. Last night I had a head ache and I had to postpone finishing the letter. I am eating good since coming to France.

I believe the British consul is going to send me to England or to Canada. If I wasn't such a wreck I would ship on a British ship for Spain. Wages are double on the Spanish run, and

ships are tied up because of a shortage of men. I have been on English ships and none of the crew would speak English.

I met two more men from the International Brigade this morning. They say many Canadians are in prison in Spain.

With best wished for the I.W.W.,

I remain Bill Wood

from One Big Union Monthly, September 1937.

This text taken and slightly edited for spelling by libcom from the Revolt collection. Originally from the bulletin of the [Kate Sharpley Library](#).