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MEN OF THE MACKENZIE-PAPINEAU BATTALION:
A CASE STUDY OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN THE
SPANISH CIVIL WAR

by

Randy Ervin

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Carleton University

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"The Men of the MacKenzie-Papineau
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Involvement of the International
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Civil War"

submitted by RANDY GIBBS ERVIN, B.A., in
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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the 1200 Canadians who volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War as part of the International Brigades. It is not a descriptive military history of the military unit they formed there: the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. The thesis deals with problems of a more analytical nature, probing into their motivations for volunteering and the effects that the Spanish experience had on them. Moreover, two chapters have been devoted to providing a general profile of the volunteers as well as describing how they reached Spain. A wide variety of source material was utilized in this project. It includes 52 taped interviews of the surviving veterans, unpublished documents from the Archives of External Affairs and memoirs from the National Archives.

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Fighting For Democracy!

—by Avrom

From the Toronto Daily Clarion, May 20, 1937.

PREFACE AND NOTE ON SOURCES

While a great deal has been written on the subject of the Spanish Civil War and more particularly about the International Brigades, very little has appeared about Canadian participation in the conflict. Essential reading for any student interested in the wider perspectives of this struggle is Hugh Thomas' definitive work, The Spanish Civil War (London: Eyre Spottesswood, 1961) which deals exhaustively with the complex problems of that conflict. Those interested specifically in the background of the Spanish domestic crisis should consult either Franz Borkenau's The Spanish Cockpit (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1963) or The Spanish Labyrinth (London: Cambridge University Press, 1964) by Gerald Brennan.

On the question of Soviet involvement in Spain, D.T. Cattell has produced two excellent specialized studies, Communism and the Spanish Civil War (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965) and Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957) which remain the best sources on this aspect of the subject. In these works, Cattell clearly places the International Brigades within the context of Soviet foreign policy; that is, he has shown them to be one of the elements which were utilized to fulfill the objectives of the Soviet Union at that time.

Other works which may be of passing interest and

which mention the Brigades include: Civil War in Spain (New York: Putnam, 1962) by Robert Payne, The Struggle for Madrid (New York: Paine, Eitman, 1958) by Robert Colodny, The Spanish Civil War: Domestic Crisis or International Conspiracy? (Boston: Heath and Co., 1967) by Gabriel Jackson, Spain and the Great Powers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962) by Dante A. Puzzo, Spanish Testament (London: V. Gollancz, 1937) by Arthur Koestler, and Homage to Catalonia (London: Secker and Warburg, 1952) by George Orwell.

On the narrower subject of the International Brigades themselves, two books are important. Verle Johnston's short but excellent work, The Legions of Babel (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), remains perhaps the most accurate and unbiased account of both the military and political influences of the Brigades in Spain. In contrast, the other book on the topic, The International Brigades in Spain, 1936-39 (London: Heinemann, 1965) by Vincent Brome, suffers from many factual errors.

There are also a number of works which deal specifically with the English-speaking volunteers in the International Brigades.¹ On the American men, several partisan

¹The English-speaking Brigade was the XVth. In this military unit, the Americans, English and Canadians all had battalions.

books have been written by participants.² They include The Lincoln Battalion (New York: Random House, 1939) by Erwin Rolfe and more recently, a study produced by Arthur Landis entitled The Abraham Lincoln Brigade (New York: Citadel Press, 1968). The usefulness of these works, however, is limited. Both are prone to deliberate omissions and tend to obscure the relationship of the Comintern and the Soviet Union to the Brigades. Even the role of the American Communist Party is to some extent downplayed. Furthermore, both authors have a tendency to romanticize and idealize the exploits of the men in Spain - depicting them as almost legendary figures.

Other more recent studies of the American battalion are Cecil Ebys' rather critical account entitled Between the Bullet and the Lie (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969) and a more sympathetic work by Robert Rosenstone entitled Crusade of the Left (New York: Pegasus, 1969). The official history of the British battalion in Spain is William Rusts' Britons in Spain (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1939). All of these studies are descriptive and narrative in their treatment of the subject. They primarily stress the military history of the volunteers, although Rosenstone does make

²I have included a survey of the works on the American battalion because of the fact that there were many Canadians in that unit, just as there were many Americans in the Canadian battalion. Homogeneity was not a characteristic either of the XVth Brigade, of which these units were a part, or of the International Brigades in general.

some effort to analyze the motivations, feelings and ideological orientation of those involved.

A number of American veterans have also written personal memoirs of their experiences in Spain. By far the most interesting and useful is Alvah Bessie's Men in Battle (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1939) which is a classic description of an intellectual in the ranks. Another work entitled American Commissar (New York: Chilton, 1966) by Sandor Voros, is a more critical version of the Spanish adventure. Interestingly enough, this account has been attacked by a number of other American veterans, but this is probably because Voros left the Communist Party, rather than any grave mis-statement of fact.

Other memoirs include The Volunteers (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1953) by Steve Nelson, which is a rather prejudiced work and must be used with some care since it was compiled by someone else with the author's notes.³ Finally, John Gates, in his book The Story of an American Communist (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1958), has included a large chapter on his experiences in Spain. In this treatment, he too has remained quite sympathetic toward the volunteers, even though he left the Party in 1956.

The only book which has been published on the

³Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left (New York: Pegasus, 1969), p. 378.

Canadian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War is Victor Hoar's The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969). This work shares many inadequacies of the studies on the American men which have preceded it. By and large, it is a descriptive military history of the Canadian battalion and as such, only briefly probes into problems of a more analytical nature. The author makes no attempt to provide a detailed treatment of motivations of the volunteers. Hoar does identify some of the main factors that determined their responses; that is, anti-Fascism, the effects of the economic depression in Canada, and the desire for adventure. His rather general discussion, however, tends to raise more questions than it answers. Why, for example, have most of the men expressed their motives in absolute terms, indicating that the war in Spain was a struggle between the evils of Fascism and the fundamental goodness of democracy and freedom? Does this reflect some degree of political immaturity on their part or does it mean that the issues were crystal clear to them? How genuine were these motives? Is it possible that the men may have been influenced by hindsight in expressing these reasons for going? Finally, just how important was the reality of being unemployed for the potential volunteer? Was it a necessary precondition for volunteering?

Hoar also fails to analyze just what influence the Spanish experience has had on the various Canadian participants. He makes few if any references to disenchantment or demoralization among the veterans and, as a consequence,

makes no effort to determine why some of them may have reached this state of mind. Moreover, the author neglects the possibility that "political conversions" could have occurred among the men - the likelihood that some of them may have joined the Communist Party because of their experiences in Spain. Hoar's general approach to the subject reveals that he is very sympathetic toward the surviving veterans of the battalion. Consequently, he tends to romanticize their participation in the Spanish Civil War as if it had been some sort of "crusade" to save all of humanity. In short, the author deals with the topic from a rather narrow perspective which probably is the result of being too close to his sources.

The major aim of this study then, is to explore some of the problems that were disregarded in Hoar's work.⁴ First of all, an effort has been made to discuss in detail why the volunteers went to Spain. The second objective has been to determine what effects this adventure had on them. In this sense, there was not only the problem of discovering

⁴This paper has primarily focused on the Canadian volunteers in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, even though for the first several months of its existence, the unit was commanded and dominated almost exclusively by Americans. The ascendancy of this group, however, was gradually reduced as the battalion saw action and the bulk of the Canadians arrived in Spain. Indeed, the high casualty rates among both officers and rank and file made this quite a natural development. In this study then, the Americans will only be mentioned for purposes of comparison with the Canadian volunteers. No detailed discussion of the American group will be undertaken for, as has been shown, numerous studies have already been published about them.

which veterans became disillusioned and why, but of comparing their reactions to the experiences of various European and American Communists who reached a similar state of mind. Conversely, it was necessary to deal with the problem of politicization; that is, to determine how many of the men became active members of the Communist Party as a result of their ordeal in Spain. Some attempt also was made to discover why the volunteers who were already "politically conscious" were even further radicalized. In addition, a chapter has been devoted to establishing the general characteristics of the Canadian group, including their ethnic composition, points of origin and political affiliations. Finally, some new information has been provided about how the men were recruited by the Communist Party and how they eventually reached Spain. Since the military history of the Canadian battalion has already been written, no descriptions of the military campaigns of the war will be included in this paper.

The source material utilized in the project includes most of the evidence that was available to Victor Hoar, as well as some new facts that have just come to light. These sources include the following:

- (1) The Mac Reynolds Archives - A collection of taped interviews with fifty-two surviving members of the battalion made in 1965. These tapes are presently deposited

in the Program Archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Toronto. The quality of this material varies greatly. Many of the men who were interviewed were often very vague or inarticulate in their discussions of their experiences, while others had amazingly good powers of recall. But at any rate, the tapes proved to be a most valuable source of the recent attitudes of the volunteers toward their adventure thirty-five years ago.

- (2) The Edward C. Smith Papers - This is a collection of letters, memoirs, biographical data, as well as the rosters of the battalion, that was assembled by Victor Hoar from the papers of the late Edward C. Smith, commander of the Canadian battalion, and has been deposited in the Public Archives of Ottawa. Most of the material was collected by a special historical commission which was set up under the auspices of the Veterans of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, an organization formed by a number of the veterans at the end of the War in Spain.
- (3) The Correspondence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police with the Department of External

Affairs concerning the Canadian volunteers- These documents have just recently been released to the public from the Archives of External Affairs and include new and more detailed information regarding the processes of recruitment and the organization of the Communist "underground railway" that shuttled men to Spain.

- (4) Various Communist publications that were contemporary to the Spanish Civil War - These include the Toronto Daily Clarion, the official organ of the Communist Party of Canada at this time; Volunteer for Liberty, the newspaper of the XVth Brigade of which the Canadians were part; and the Book of the XVth Brigade, the official history of the volunteers in Spain.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE MEN OF THE
MACKENZIE-PAPINEAU BATTALION

Politically, by far the largest proportion of the volunteers were Communists. All of them, with very few exceptions were class conscious. They represented broad sections of the Canadian population. Students and intellectuals yes, but by far the majority from among the workers and farmers. Their educational level conformed to the standards of the day. Their ethnic origin basically represents the varied nationalities which make up Canada's population.⁵

- Bill Beeching, veteran and editor
of Communist Viewpoint

The International Brigades and more specifically the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion must be considered as elements of Soviet aid to the Spanish Republic, not unlike the Soviet technical advisors and military equipment that were also provided after October 1936. All of this aid represented direct Soviet intervention in the Spanish conflict in order to satisfy the main objectives of Soviet foreign policy at this time. The goals were essentially to maintain the security of the Soviet Union and to contain the spread of Fascism.

The Soviets viewed the Spanish war as an ideal opportunity to pursue these objectives. Stalin, in particular, hoped to use the Spanish crisis to implement the doctrine of collective security which had been previously enunciated by the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov, during the Italian invasion

⁵Bill Beeching, "Book Reviews: The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion by Victor Hoar and Mac Reynolds", Communist Viewpoint, I, No. 3 (July-August 1969), p. 60.

of Ethiopia and the German occupation of the Rhineland.⁶ By this doctrine, a threat to the peace and security of any nation is viewed as a threat to every other nation. The German and Italian aggression in Spain represented a threat to the security of the USSR, but it was an even greater threat to the interests of France and Britain in the Mediterranean. Consequently, Stalin thought that he could influence the Western Powers, and especially France, to take an active interest in their own security. France, after all, had been the leading proponent of collective security during the nineteen twenties and Léon Blum's Popular Front government was known to be sympathetic to the Spanish Republic. Furthermore, the vast majority of Socialists and workers in France opposed the French government's non-intervention policy. Finally, the Soviets were confident that they could force Blum to abandon his neutrality if only to prevent Communist domination of the Republican government because of exclusive Soviet aid. Stalin hoped that Soviet intervention in Spain would prevent a quick victory by Franco and his German and Italian allies, thereby giving the slower-acting democracies an opportunity to see the seriousness of the threat. What he could not foresee, however, was that Britain and France would stubbornly adhere to the policy of non-intervention, despite the increasing evidence of its violation. At any rate, the

⁶D.T. Cattell, Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 34.

Soviets hoped to bring about a coalition between the USSR and the Western Powers to collectively thwart German and Italian aggression and the spread of Fascism.

It has also been suggested that Stalin may have wanted to engage Hitler in a war of attrition in order to delay his aggression to the east. Stalin's low opinion of the capabilities and revolutionary instincts of the Western masses are well known.⁷ Consequently, he had to rely on the goodwill of the Western statesmen toward the Soviet Union and on their steadfastness against Fascism, which were broken reeds, to say the least. From the beginning then, he may have viewed the Spanish affair as merely a tactic to delay Nazi aggression against himself. The Soviets were well aware of Hitler's ambitions in Eastern Europe, particularly concerning Czechoslovakia. Thus, by keeping Germany involved in Western Europe, Moscow may have hoped to prevent Hitler from realizing these objectives and directly threatening the borders of the USSR. Stalin also may have hoped to undermine the aura of invincibility which the Fascist dictators required to maintain the allegiance of their followers by inflicting military defeats upon them in Spain. Litvinov, in a speech in June 1938, alluded to this factor indicating that "because of their internal weaknesses and insufficient resources the present aggressors require rapid military successes".⁸ Therefore, it

⁷Ibid., p. 35.

⁸J. Degras, Documents of Soviet Foreign Policy (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 293.

does seem plausible that the Soviet leaders saw a good opportunity in the Spanish crisis to initiate a battle of attrition or delay. All that was required was to provide just enough technical and military assistance to maintain the Loyalist resistance against the Nationalists. This, however, while explaining Soviet motives, still leaves us the question as to why the International Brigades and in particular the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion must be considered as a part of this aid to the Republic.

Throughout the Spanish war, the International Brigade and its Canadian Contingent represented what was essentially a Soviet military force. The Brigade was organized and recruited through the Communist International which, since its inception in 1919, had merely been a tool of Soviet foreign policy. This was most clearly demonstrated at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern held in Moscow in 1935. At this Congress, the United Front program was officially adopted by the Communist International. This tactic, however, was to be more than just another means, if not a delayed means, whereby the Communist parties could gain power. It was implied that the United Front would come to the aid of the Soviet Union if it were attacked.

If the commencement of a counter-revolutionary war forces the Soviet Union to set the workers and peasants' Red Army in motion for the defense of socialism, the Communists will call upon all toilers to work, with all means at their disposal and at any price for the victory of the Red Army over the armies of the Imperialists.⁹

⁹United States. House of Representatives. Committee on Un-American Activities, The Strategy and Tactics of World Communism; The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, 84th Congress, 2nd session (1956), p. 366.

Thus, one of the main purposes of the Comintern's program was to defend the "socialist fatherland", even at the risk of jeopardizing what had been the International's main goal in 1919, that of unleashing world revolution.

The Comintern had been directed to the task of recruiting the Brigades because of the lack of well-trained manpower on the Loyalist side. As the Spanish conflict reduced itself to a stalemate in the early months of 1937, more and more regular Italian troops were being thrown into Spain to help Franco achieve a quick victory. By April 1937, Mussolini had four divisions and two brigades, about 70,000 men, fighting for Franco against a Republican army largely made up of irregular militia - militia which had repeatedly demonstrated its inability to effectively resist attacks carried out by professional foreign soldiers.¹⁰ Stalin, however, was unwilling to commit regular Soviet troops to fight in the Spanish conflict. Soviet Russia at this time was still in the midst of a massive collectivization and industrialization program that had been undertaken after 1928 and much more important, during these years, the great purge was raging inside the USSR. Thus, domestic upheaval and unrest, largely stimulated by the actions of the Soviet government, precluded any massive transport of Soviet units to Spain. Had thousands of "volunteers" been sent,

¹⁰United States. Department of State, Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945. Series D, Vol. III, "Germany and the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939" (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 247.

they would have been in a position to escape the consequences of the purges and may have then promptly defected. As a result, only a few carefully selected military instructors and advisors were allowed to go to Spain, although Stalin did send five or six hundred foreign exiles then residing in Moscow.¹¹ To make up the deficiency, the Soviet leadership instructed the Comintern to organize the International Brigades.

On the Canadian scene, it was the Communist Party itself as the chief representative of the Comintern which assumed primary responsibility for the organization of a volunteer force to fight in Spain. Indeed, the Canadian volunteers who made up the unit that was eventually created (the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion) actively took part in most of the military campaigns that were undertaken by the Republicans in their struggle with General Franco and the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War.¹² Even though there is a paucity of

¹¹Cattell, Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War, p. 83.

¹²The first Canadians who reached Spain in January and February of 1937 were incorporated into the American Abraham Lincoln Battalion which itself was part of the XVth International Brigade. It was in this unit that the volunteers participated in the defensive battles south-west of Madrid during the early months of 1937 and, during the early summer of that year, in the offensives launched to relieve the Nationalist pressure against the Capital. In May 1937, a Canadian battalion called the Mackenzie-Papineau was formed, a unit which subsequently took part in the Republican offensive in Aragon in the late summer of 1937, as well as in the defense of Teruel in early 1938. This unit was also intimately involved in the debacle in the spring of that year when Republican Spain was split in two parts by a massive Nationalist offensive. Finally, the Canadian volunteers actively participated in the Ebro offensive in the summer of 1938, a final attempt by the Republicans to recover the territories they had lost in the spring.

For a more detailed survey of the military history of the battalion, see Victor Hoar, The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969).

evidence on the salient characteristics of this group, it is possible to provide a profile of them. But several inferences implicit in such a portrait must be made clear from the outset. It has been assumed that the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) was interested in recruiting only a certain type of volunteer who would conform to the rigid set of criteria established by Party organizers. Secondly, it must be noted that the CPC had been officially declared illegal in 1931 by the Canadian government and as a result, recruitment was largely undertaken by front organizations. Hence, Communist domination of the recruitment processes may not have been explicit to every individual who volunteered for Spain.

The vast majority of the Canadian volunteers were and had been active members of the Communist Party of Canada and as Communists, had responded to the vigorous campaign of recruitment which had been initiated by the Communist International and its agencies in 1936. It is difficult to determine exactly what proportion of the Canadians were Party members, since information of this nature was apparently concealed in an attempt by Communist organizers to emphasize the broad popular front image of the volunteers. Indeed, in the card file that was maintained by the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, this information was provided for only eighteen out of the 693 volunteers whose names were kept on record.¹³ Yet,

¹³This card file is now deposited in the Public Archives as part of the Edward Cecil Smith Papers (hereafter, ECS). According to Communist sources, 1283 men went to Spain from Canada. Tim Buck, interview with the CBC, Toronto, June 1965.

it is possible to arrive at a general figure which probably is reasonably accurate in this regard. John Gates, a former political commissar of the XVth Brigade, has indicated in his memoirs that between 75 to 80 percent of the American volunteers were Communists.¹⁴ Robert Rosenstone, in his study of the volunteers, cites estimates ranging from 25 percent to 80 percent; while Earl Browder, the secretary of the American Communist Party during the nineteen thirties, has indicated 60 percent as the appropriate figure.¹⁵ It seems clear, however, that the proportion of Party members among the Canadians was even higher than these American estimates. In general, the Canadian volunteers were made up of working class people - men who had been intimately involved for a number of years in the labour struggles organized by the Communists in Canada. The Americans were not as homogeneous. They were representative of a broader cross-section of people including students, workers, writers, teachers, actors and lawyers; many of whom were not Party members.¹⁶ In contrast, there were few intellectuals in the ranks of the Canadians, who by and large represented a more militant proletariat.

In commenting on the Canadian volunteers who were in the

¹⁴ John Gates, The Story of an American Communist, p. 93.

¹⁵ Robert Rosenstone, "The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade", Journal of American History, LIV (September 1967), 335. For Browder figure, see Arthur Landis, The Lincoln Brigade (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), 606.

¹⁶ Robert Rosenstone, in his book on the American volunteers, has compiled detailed information about the ages, occupations, points of origin and ethnic composition of this group. See Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp. 367-372.

battalion, one American officer isolated three distinct nationalities.¹⁷ He mentioned a large Anglo-Saxon group from British Columbia composed of seamen and lumber workers, a contingent of Ukrainians from the Western Prairies, and the Finnish elements from Northern Ontario. In reality, the ethnic breakdown of the Canadian men was much more complex.

ETHNIC ORIGIN OF 545 CANADIANS IN THE MACKENZIE-
PAPINEAU BATTALION¹⁸

British	258	Yugoslavs	16
Finns	57	Bulgarians	14
Ukrainians	39	Germans	9
Hungarians	33	Lithuanians	8
Poles	32	Swedes	7
French Canadians	24	Danes	6
Czechs	18	Rumanians	5
Great Russians	17	Norwegians	4

It is difficult to determine precise figures as to the origins of all 693 men in the card index, as often only their names are provided. But, if the rather dubious method of using

¹⁷Irving Weissman, interview with the CBC, New York, November 1965.

¹⁸These figures have been tabulated from information provided in the card file of the volunteers now deposited in the Public Archives as part of the Edward Cecil Smith Papers. A number of other nationalities were also represented in this breakdown, including three Swiss, two Italians, two Dutchmen and one volunteer from each of the following countries: Austria, Greece, Spain and Belgium. All of the totals are the result of having added the numbers of volunteers who were listed as immigrants with those who were naturalized citizens. Individuals who had obvious Anglo-Saxon names have been included in the British total (including those listed as English, Irish, Scottish and Canadians).

this information is employed to determine their nationality, it is possible to get some idea about the size of the main groupings. Thus, both British and Eastern Europeans each made up approximately 37 percent of the total, while 10 percent of the men were of Finnish extraction.

It also may be noted that many of the volunteers were only recent immigrants to Canada. Of the total sample, 287 or 41 percent of the men were designated in this category, with the majority of them originating from Eastern Europe (50.8 percent).¹⁹ From the beginning of its recruitment campaign, the Canadian Communist Party made strenuous efforts to reduce this imbalance among the volunteers. Indeed, according to Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) sources, the Party was particularly interested in enlisting men of "United Empire Loyalist ancestry" from each important centre throughout the country.²⁰ This preference, however, had no effect on the overall composition of the battalion. The flow of large groups of immigrant volunteers to Spain continued, as numbers of Finns, Poles and Russians applied for passports to their respective consulates.^{20a}

¹⁹These figures concerning the number of immigrants probably were much higher. As has been indicated, often only the names of the volunteers were included in the card index. Thus, 133 men in this category whose names were of foreign origin, were not considered in these calculations because it was impossible to determine whether they were immigrants or not from only this information.

²⁰Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January-December 1937". (Letter from G.L. Jennings, Deputy Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to the Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, February 1, 1937).

^{20a}Ibid.

Another salient feature of the Canadian group was the apparent absence of large numbers of French Canadians within the ranks. The major explanation for this relates to the militant opposition of the Catholic hierarchy in Quebec to the Republican cause in Spain. Another factor was the relative weakness of the Communist Party in that province. Outside of the city of Montreal, it did not possess the necessary organizational channels to undertake even a modest programme of recruitment.

According to the evidence available, there also seems to have been very few Jewish volunteers among the Canadians. In the card index, only two men were listed as being of Jewish origin, although, if the rather tenuous procedure of using names is again employed to establish nationality, this figure increases to ten. It is also significant that, of the fifty-two men who were interviewed in 1964-1965, only four Canadians indicated that they were in this category. Most of the Jewish volunteers in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion were in the American group. In Robert Rosenstone's opinion, approximately 30 percent of the entire American contingent were of Jewish background.^{20b}

The volunteers came from a wide variety of points within Canada. In general, they tended to originate from the larger metropolitan centres, with Vancouver and Toronto together providing 49.1 percent of the volunteers. Indeed, the largest

^{20b} Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p. 370.

single group of the men came from the West Coast, from among the ranks of the unemployed and transient relief camp workers, many of whom had drifted to the far West in search of work or simply to escape the rigorous winter climate in other parts of the country. The smaller communities of northern Ontario including Port Arthur, Sudbury, Timmins and Kirkland Lake also provided a large number of men in proportion to their population density (14.3 percent of the volunteers, including many Finns, came from this region). Finally, the ethnic communities of the Prairies supplied a good number of the Internationals (approximately 22.9 percent). In contrast, only very few of them came from points outside of Montreal - from the more rural communities of Quebec - or from the Maritimes.

POINTS OF ORIGIN OF 518 VOLUNTEERS IN THE MACKENZIE-PAPINEAU BATTALION^{20c}

ONTARIO		ALBERTA	
Toronto	118	Edmonton	14
Port Arthur	52	Calgary	10
Hamilton	15	Lethbridge	9
Windsor	15	Drumheller	5
Sudbury	11	Taber	3
Timmins	10	Blairmore	2
Kirkland Lake	3		<u>43</u>
	<u>225</u>		
BRITISH COLUMBIA		SASKATCHEWAN	
Vancouver	126	Regina	10
		Sioux Lookout	2
			<u>12</u>
MANITOBA		NOVA SCOTIA	
Winnipeg	58		1
QUEBEC		NEW BRUNSWICK	
Montreal	50		1
Val d'Or	3		
	<u>53</u>		

^{20c}In addition, there were a number of towns and cities which each sent one volunteer. They were as follows: in Ontario - Port Colbourne, Fort William, Coxville, Waterloo, Guelph, Kenora, Delphi, Malton, Welland and Hearst; in British Columbia - Victoria, Nanaimo, New Westminster and Comox; in Quebec - Rimouski; in Alberta - Coleman and East Coule; in Saskatchewan - Weekes, Vanguard and Saskatoon.

In sum, national diversity was one of the main characteristics of the volunteers. Besides the large immigrant and ethnic groups from Canada, the battalion was made up of a number of young Americans who initially dominated it. This diversity, however, did not extend to their political affiliations. The majority of the volunteers from both Canada and the United States were Communist Party members - a fact which is not surprising in view of the dominant role of the North American parties in the formation of this military unit. It was the ethnic multiformity, however, that was stressed in the contemporary Communist press. For example, an article in the XVth Brigade newspaper, Volunteer for Liberty, indicated the following about the Canadians in the American Lincoln battalion:

Good fighters every one, French Canadians, English Canadians, Slavic Canadians, industrial workers and unemployed youths: men of all professions joined the Lincoln Battalion and fought side by side with their American brothers, side by side with the whole Spanish people against the mercenaries and dupes of Franco and International Fascism.^{20d}

Yet, this group of Canadians only reflected the wider national diversity of the International Brigades themselves. Indeed, it seemed as if Spain in the nineteen thirties was a magnet that

^{20d} "Canadians in Spain", Volunteer for Liberty, II, No. 8, (1938), p. 4.

This leitmotif was common in the Communist writings on all of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Periodicals such as the Communist International and International Press Correspondence had numerous articles stressing the "broad diversity" of the Internationals. See for example, Mario Nicoletti, "The Victorious Action of the International Brigades in Defense of Madrid", Inprecor, XVI (November 28, 1936), p. 1072; and Francisco Leone, "The International Brigades Yesterday and Today", Communist International, XIV (June 1937), p. 1072.

attracted Communists and their fellow travellers the world over. It has been estimated that between October 1936 and September 1938, some 35,000 volunteers, possibly a quarter of them French, but altogether representing fifty-three nationalities, joined the International Brigades.^{20e} Writing thirty years later, Tim Buck, the former secretary of the Communist Party of Canada, indicated that such a response was quite natural. In his view, the issues had been perfectly clear to the volunteers at that time. The war in Spain was simply a struggle between the "barbarism of Fascism" and the "forces of World Democracy" supported by the Soviet Union. The volunteers merely went to Spain because of their over-riding abhorrence of this menace which seemed to threaten the whole world. As Buck wrote in 1966 on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Canadian battalion:

The MacPaps [Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion] were the true representatives of Canadian democracy in Spain. History has shown that they were in fact the advance guard of the victorious army that the government did send over eventually to help defeat the Fascist attempt to enslave mankind. Thousands of Canadian democrats recognized the true character of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion at that time.^{20f}

Such an interpretation, of course, raises several questions. Were the reasons the men volunteered as apparent as has been

^{20e} Verle Johnston, Legions of Babel (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. 88.

^{20f} Tim Buck, "Soldiers of Democracy", Marxist Quarterly, XVIII (August 1966), 30.

suggested? Was the simple abhorrence of Fascism enough to impel them to go to Spain? In order to resolve these problems, it is necessary to examine the motives of the volunteers in some detail.

CHAPTER 2

THE MOTIVES OF THE VOLUNTEERS

Propaganda which paints friends entirely white and enemies black only persuades those who are already convinced.²¹

In general, the reasons cited by the surviving members of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion for volunteering for Spain fall into three distinct categories. A significant number of the veterans indicated that they were motivated purely by anti-Fascism, while another large group rated the effects of the economic depression in Canada as being equally important in their decision as the international developments in the nineteen thirties. Finally, there was a small segment of survivors who apparently volunteered simply for adventure or to escape the realities of the depression.

Within the category of the "purists", one group responded that they had been motivated only out of a desire to stop the spread of Fascism. They affirmed that, at that time, the Iberian peninsula seemed to be the logical place where the Fascist dictators could be contained. In other words, their decision to volunteer was related to the events which unfolded in Spain in 1936. As Alex Melnychenko, a former political commissar in the Brigades, wrote in 1965:

On July 18, 1936 the Spanish Fascists headed by General Franco launched an uprising against the Spanish democratic republic with the aim of eventually establishing a Fascist dictatorship on

²¹Richard Crossman, ed., The God That Failed (New York: Bantam, 1965), p. 227.

Spanish soil. Fascist Germany and Italy gave their Spanish counterparts full aid. The struggle of the Spanish people to defend their Republic gained the support of democratic forces throughout the world. When I learned that an International Brigade of volunteers was being organized, I felt my place was there ... where the decisive battle for social justice was being fought. I began to seek information and contacts with the aim of going to Spain. I learned that a number of volunteers had already left Toronto and other cities. I decided to go to Spain.²²

One veteran, who had been a C.P. (Communist Party) member in Kirkland Lake, was also disturbed by the military coup against the Republican government in Spain which he described as a simple "question of democracy being upset by Fascism".²³ He too apparently volunteered out of anti-Fascist feelings, although the fact that he was of Jewish origin was also probably a factor. Since he was forty-one at the time, he viewed Spain as the last opportunity that he would have to become actively involved in the struggle against this "evil". Certainly then, in his case, there was none of the ephemeral idealism of youth. He was what could be described in Communist parlance as a "hardened comrade", for he had been involved for a number of years in Party activities in Canada, as well

²²Alexander Melnychenko memoir in ECS.

²³Interview #18 with the CBC, Winnipeg, August 1965. Some of the interviews have been coded in the text so as not to embarrass or associate the veterans with any past political activities which they now may feel to be compromising. A complete list of the names of all the veterans interviewed will be found in the bibliography. The key to the code is in my possession.

as in his native Denmark. In this regard, his experience was not unusual.

Typical of the American volunteers was twenty-three year old Saul Wellman, the son of a Jewish immigrant family which had come from Russia to the United States in 1907.²⁴ Wellman was brought up in a pro-labour and socialistic atmosphere, so that very early he became involved in various protest demonstrations and agitation for the unemployed. Indeed, it was for this activity that he was expelled from the high school he was attending. In 1931, he joined the Communist Party of the United States and was active in organizing truck drivers in New York City. Early in 1937, however, Wellman too was aroused by the events in Spain. As he wrote in 1952:

The conscience of the democratic world was aroused. Great support and sympathy developed among many liberal and democratic groups in the United States. The war was discussed in my Young Communist League club where we concluded that the cause of Spanish democracy was the cause of all progressive humanity. If Hitler and Mussolini could be stopped in Spain, it would be the first time since 1933 that active resistance was being mounted against their plans for world domination. There could be little doubt about the Fascist intent.²⁵

Subsequently, Wellman left his post as an official in the union he organized. He was to serve some twenty months in

²⁴Saul Wellman, "A Memoir of the Thirties", cited in Victor Hoar, comp., The Great Depression: Essays and Memoirs from Canada and the United States (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969) p. 156.

²⁵Ibid.

Spain and became political commissar of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.

Among the Canadian veterans, the secretary of a Communist front organization in Alberta, an official of the Communist-dominated Relief Project Workers Union in Calgary, and a C.P. labour organizer in Winnipeg, all cited the purity of their anti-Fascist motives.²⁶ This was also reaffirmed by three Americans, all of whom had been political commissars in the Canadian battalion and Party labour organizers in the United States.²⁷

The evidence clearly suggests then, that a segment of the volunteers who were motivated in this way, were closely connected with the Communist Party in Canada and the United States as officials in lower positions of the organizational hierarchy. Hence, even though they did not admit it, perhaps they were also influenced by a desire to conform to the current "Party line". Spain represented a unique opportunity for this group to put these Party directives into practice - an opportunity for them to engage openly in the struggle against the new menace of Fascism

²⁶ Interview #52 with the CBC, Winnipeg, August 1965.
Interview #7 with the CBC, Edmonton, August 1965.
Interview #2 with the CBC, Winnipeg, August 1965.
Others in this category included Interview #50 and #47. Both of these men were C.P. organizers in Moose Jaw and Toronto respectively.

²⁷ Interview #20 with the CBC, New York, November 1965.
Interview #8 with the CBC, New York, November 1965.
Interview #29 with the CBC, New York, November 1965.

which had been so clearly identified and defined by George Dimitrov at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in 1935.²⁸ Indeed, it was in the spirit of the Seventh Congress that the Popular Front government in Spain had been established. Thus, many of these men probably felt that it was their duty as Communists to help defend this government against the obvious attempt by the Fascist powers to aid Franco in overthrowing it. It was also clear that the Soviet Union, the "socialist fatherland", was vitally interested in maintaining the Spanish Republic, and this may have been an added incentive for them.

The consequences of this new support for the struggle against Fascism probably was also a factor which increased the ardour of these Party members for the Spanish cause. The moderate stance displayed by the Communist parties in Canada and particularly the United States, attracted more fellow travellers and new "sympathizers" than any other time in the short history of their endeavours. Both parties found themselves in tune with the desires of significant sections of their populations - including many individuals who were willing to contribute money for the salvation of the Spanish Republic. Furthermore, the popularity of the movement was reaffirmed by the widespread response of many

²⁸See George Dimitrov, The United Front (Lawrence and Wishart, 1938), pp. 90-91.

volunteers to the Party recruitment processes.²⁹ Indeed, the only problem was the selection and screening of men with the "proper attitudes". Thus, this evidence of mass support could only encourage and heighten the zeal of the more "experienced" Party cadres for the new struggle that was developing in Spain. As Bill Beeching, a C.P. member who was an officer of a front organization in Regina, indicated:

... we were particularly thrilled because our movement had been against Fascism from its very inception and Spain represented the victory of the political idea of the United Front where broad sections of people were drawn together in a political alliance for a more united program of reform and the preservation of democracy.³⁰

Unfortunately, however, such enthusiasm tended to dissipate all too rapidly when such a period of "stabilization" ended - when the Party was forced to shift its orientation to fit ever-changing "objective conditions".

Another group within the "purists" indicated that their hatred of Fascism had been conditioned by their experiences before they immigrated to Canada. All of these men were employed, so that the depression in Canada had no apparent influence on their motivations.

²⁹This was affirmed by one of the Party functionaries who was involved with recruitment on the West Coast. Tom McEwan, interview with the CBC, Vancouver, September 1965.

Indeed, such a response seems to have been even more apparent in the United States. In 1937, the American embassy in Madrid, in a dispatch to the Secretary of State, claimed to have received "countless unsolicited letters from men seeking to enlist" in the International Brigades. The United States Government: The Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, Vol. 1, 1937 (Washington, 1954), 232.

³⁰Bill Beeching, interview with the CBC, Regina, August 1965.

Art Siven, a Finnish Jew from Port Arthur, indicated that the Spanish events took on an added significance for him because of the knowledge of what had occurred in his homeland in 1918.³¹ He compared General Mannerheim's attack on the "legal government" of Finland at that time, with General Franco's coup against the Republican government in Spain in 1936. Siven had no desire to see the "progressive elements" of Spain crushed as they had been in Finland during his youth. He too was disturbed about the open German and Italian aid to Franco and decided to take direct action by volunteering to fight in Spain. But, it seems clear that Siven was not intimately connected with Communist circles in Canada, for he apparently experienced some difficulty in making the proper contacts to secure his passage. At any rate, it is not possible to determine whether his experience was typical of the majority of the Finnish immigrant volunteers.

Hans Ibing, a German immigrant who came to Canada in 1930, was even more immediately influenced by the events that were happening in his homeland.³² Evidently, he originally came to Canada because of his complete disenchantment with developments in Weimar Germany, and found employment as a labourer in Winnipeg. When the war in Spain broke out, however, he saw it as an opportunity to join in the

³¹Art Siven, interview with the CBC, Winnipeg, August 1965.

³²Hans Ibing, interview with the CBC, Toronto, July 1965.

struggle against the same type of regime that had established itself in his own country. He made the following comments about his decision:

I think mainly it was a feeling ... that ... it was something worthwhile if you believed in democracy and the way things were in Germany you know ... as a German I felt bad about what was happening there even though it was before the War.³³

This veteran's outlook was probably similar to many of the other German-Canadians, whose anti-Nazism was the essential element motivating them.

Finally, the experience of Mike Olynky was typical of many of the Slavic immigrants who went to Spain.³⁴ He had been born in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire as it had existed before World War I. After that struggle, however, the region in which Olynky resided was annexed by Rumania as part of the post-War settlement. In 1929, he immigrated to Canada in order to escape the "political oppression" which he had suffered in Rumania as well as the unfavourable economic conditions in that country. Although he did not indicate his political affiliation, his family was radically left-wing. He claimed that seven of his brothers had fought in the Red Army during the Civil War that had raged throughout most of Russia after 1917. When the Spanish Civil War began in the summer of 1936, Olynky was working for a lumber contractor in a

³³Ibid.

³⁴Mike Olynky, interview with the CBC, Toronto, August 1964.

small town in northern Ontario. He did not make the decision to go to Spain, however, until the summer of 1937. Although he vaguely mentioned that he was sympathetic to the trade union movement, he emphasized that his response had been influenced by the oppression that he had experienced in his homeland rather than by any "fixed political ideas". Thus, he viewed the suppression of Ukrainian nationality rights in Rumania as "Fascism" and saw his opportunity to struggle against this same "evil" in Spain.

The general background of several of the other Ukrainian veterans closely conformed to this pattern. They all served with the Red Army during the Civil War in Russia and subsequently immigrated to Canada.³⁵ They reaffirmed as well, that the Fascists in Spain represented the same kind of people who had oppressed them in their homelands before the Revolution. Consequently, they had made the decision to involve themselves personally in that struggle.

The essential component then, in the motivations of this group of immigrant volunteers seems to have hinged on their identification of the injustice and tyranny they had experienced in their own countries, with events that were taking place in Spain. The underlying assumption of such a response was their somewhat oversimplified belief that Fascism was a world-wide recurring phenomenon; that the

³⁵Walter Gowricki, interview with the CBC, Winnipeg, August 1965.

John Malko memoir in ECS.

John Firmin memoir in ECS.

semi-dictatorships in Finland, Rumania and the Ukrainian hetmanate were similar to the regimes in Germany, Italy and Nationalist Spain. It is clear, of course, that such analogies were the most valid in the cases of the German volunteers, whose countrymen were actively involved in the foreign intervention on the Nationalist side. At that time, it was not possible for them to see Franco as anything but a carbon copy of his "allies". Hence, they were probably afraid that the same type of regime that had been established in Germany would be transplanted in Spain.

Though similarly motivated by "anti-Fascism", another sub-group of volunteers was strongly influenced by factors that can only be described as personal. Often, a man's family background had a decisive effect on him, particularly if he was young. As a former C.P. member from Saskatchewan stressed:

In my home I grew up on politics. It was a continuous discussion of ... the names of Lenin and Stalin and others of the Russian Revolution and previous revolutions and subsequent revolutions were always mentioned. I wouldn't say that this was something unusual in our home. If anyone was to go out West even today, amongst the farmers you would find that per capita, they possibly spend more on newspapers and books than anyone else in Canada outside of the college element.³⁶

Spain was a lively topic of discussion in this individual's home, with sympathies obviously being with the Republicans. In such an atmosphere, it was quite natural for a youth of

³⁶Interview #3 with the CBC, Toronto, June 1964.

twenty to come to the obvious conclusion that his duty was to volunteer to fight on the Loyalist side, even though he apparently had a good deal of difficulty getting permission from the Party provincial committee for this action.

Jules Paivio, a Finnish-Canadian from Sudbury, also seems to have been influenced by more personal factors. Although he stressed that he was motivated out of a fear of Fascism taking over Spain, he qualified it.

Perhaps it wasn't as deep as I would like it to be. It was partly a dissatisfaction with a lack of real purpose and this being an opportunity for a real purpose in life ... I didn't expect to come back when I made the decision but it seemed worthwhile and if anything, ... if it ended there, it would be a worthwhile thing I had done.³⁷

Despite the fact that his father was the editor of a "left wing" literary weekly, Paivio denied that this had any effect on his decision. In retrospect, however, he felt that his father was proud of him for taking such an action. Furthermore, he was only nineteen at the time and was probably susceptible to parental influence.

Indeed, in rare cases, such personal factors could provide the only reason for a man to volunteer. One Ukrainian immigrant who was interviewed cited the desire for vengeance

³⁷ Jules Paivio, interview with the CBC, Toronto, July 1965.

Victor Himmelfarb, a pharmacist in Toronto, was another volunteer in this category.

as being his only consideration.³⁸ His father had been executed by the Germans during World War I and he saw Spain as an opportunity to retaliate. Unfortunately, however, when he arrived at the front, the only Germans he came into contact with were his fellow comrades in the Thaelmann Battalion. Other volunteers simply went to Spain to escape domineering wives or mothers. In the Archives of External Affairs, there are several instances of frantic women writing to various department heads. The usual claim was that Communist recruiters had, "under force and duplicity", enticed their loved ones overseas.³⁹ There were very few men, however, who were willing to face all the dangers of war in order to escape domestic problems.

The largest group of volunteers included those men whose motivations were influenced by the effects of the economic depression in Canada as well as the standard abhorrence of "Fascism" cited by the "purists".

The economic realities of the nineteen thirties are, of course, well known. Due to the problems of unemployment and general dissatisfaction with the status quo, there was an intense radicalization of many groups within Canadian

³⁸Interview #13 with the CBC, Winnipeg, August 1965.

³⁹Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January-December 1937". (Letter from Office of Commissioner of Royal Canadian Mounted Police to Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, September 25, 1937)

Canada. Department of External Affairs. "Assistance for E.C. Wood in Spain, February 1938, May 1939". (291-N, Letter from Mrs. W. Wood to Hon. Ian MacKenzie, Minister of Defence, Ottawa, February 23, 1938).

society at this time. Perhaps the most disaffected were the single unemployed men, who were not only unable to get any form of relief from the government, but were forced into Unemployed Relief Camps operated by the Department of National Defence.⁴⁰ Conditions in these camps were far from ideal. As Victor Hoar has written:

The camps were often located in magnificent scenery, but scenery was no substitute for work with wages. The relief camp workers loathed the 20¢ a day pay, the unappetizing meals, the obvious make-work which neither exercised them nor trained them or challenged them. Many men worked off their 20¢ in the first half hour and then idled for the remainder of the long day. Boredom led to despair. The workers came to feel that they might very well spend years in such camps. They would never find work, never be self-supporting, never have families.⁴¹

During the first years of the decade, the Communist Party of Canada was quite successful in organizing these men and channeling their dissatisfaction toward the goal of broadening the Party's base of support in the country. It is clear that the Communist programme appealed to the relief camp workers because of the radical long-term goals and objectives embodied in it, rather than for any moderation or restraint. These revolutionary goals of the Party were clearly set out in the constitution of the Workers' Unity League of Canada, the principal instrument used by the Party to organize the camp

⁴⁰These camps were operated from October 1932 until June 1936.

⁴¹Victor Hoar, The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, p.28.

workers:

To organize the Canadian workers into powerful revolutionary industrial unions, created on the axis of the widest rank and file control; to fight for the defense and improvement of the conditions of the working class, mobilizing and organizing Canadian Workers for the final overthrow of capitalism and for the establishment of a Revolutionary Workers' government.⁴²

Indeed, by 1935, the Party representative at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern could optimistically report that the Canadian party had "led and stimulated great hunger marches and local actions of the unemployed, including the seizure of trains".⁴³ Moreover, the Party and the Y.C.L. (Young Communist League) had been engaged in "action against the militarized relief camps, the latter having had great political repercussions". It was in this manner then, that many of the Spanish volunteers became actively involved in Communist activities. As militant unemployed workers, they participated in various phases of these struggles, the most notable being the 'On to Ottawa Trek' in 1935. The background

⁴²Canada. Department of Labour, Annual Report, 1931, "Labour Organization in Canada", p. 164. This is a comprehensive study published by the Federal Government, listing the various types of labour organizations that existed in Canada and describing their activities.

⁴³Canada. Department of Labour, Annual Report, 1935, "Labour Organizations in Canada", p. 137. The C.P. representative from Canada was alluding to the 'On to Ottawa Trek' when he mentioned "hunger marches" and the "seizure of trains". This had been a march on Ottawa by three thousand Relief Camp Workers organized by the C.P., to protest the conditions in the Relief Camps. The workers, however, had no need to commandeer trains to get to their destination. For the most part, they were allowed on the trains by "sympathetic" railway workers. The Trek was halted in Regina on Dominion Day 1935 by the RCMP and, after some violent rioting, the workers were dispersed.

of Hugh MacGregor, a volunteer from British Columbia, was typical of this group of men.

Hugh MacGregor was born in Ayr, Scotland in the year 1911. His father was a dyer by occupation. Hugh received his education in Scotland. He left school and went to work in a bakery. In 1929, he came to Canada to find employment. His first job was working for a farmer in Dalhousie Junction, just outside of Carleton, New Brunswick. He worked there for two years until 1931, then beat his way by freight to Vancouver, British Columbia. He worked on odd jobs with extra gangs and in the relief camps. [He] took an active part in the relief camp general walkout in '32 and '34 and participated in the 'On to Ottawa Trek' in '35. Hugh was not a member of any political party. He was an active member of the project workers union of Vancouver. He was an active anti-Fascist, being the main reason why he left Canada the following year of '37. During the previous year Hugh had been kicked around from camp to camp and was becoming bitter as well as educated. In the spring of '37 he beat his way to the city of Toronto and from there to Spain.⁴⁴

The motivations of this segment of the volunteers seem to have been closely related to the "oppression" they had experienced in Canada. As Ronald Liversedge, a veteran from British Columbia, has indicated:

I would say that about a thousand men that were the real core of the unemployed organizations were glad to get out of the camps to go to Spain because it gave them a real opportunity to actually fight against the people - the same kind of people who they

⁴⁴Hugh MacGregor memoir in ECS. For other examples, see Robert Martineau memoir, Pete Nielson memoir in ECS.

thought were responsible for their condition and who were oppressing them in Canada.⁴⁵

Most of the men viewed the conservative ruling groups in Canada in the same light as they did Hitler and Mussolini. Fascism was an international phenomenon that was a threat not only to Spain but the entire world as well. Time and time again during the struggle, the Canadian volunteers stressed this theme in their correspondence home. A letter published by the Toronto Daily Clarion in June 1937 illustrates this well:

We realize that the workers of Canada are fighting their enemies at home, enemies who would subject them to intolerable conditions, are helping to defeat international Fascism, just as we are doing here.

It is the few "big shots" in Canada who would like the same conditions to prevail in Canada as the Fascist powers would like to prevail in their own countries and in Spain. The workers of Canada and in Spain are fighting our common enemy: international Fascism.⁴⁶

Thus, Fascism in Canada was represented not only by Emile Arcand's blue shirts in Quebec, but also by the traditional "big interests" which controlled the economic life of the country. These forces were not only supposedly hoping for a Franco victory but were actively aiding the Fascists in Spain. So, as the reasoning ran, if the rebels won in Spain, the right would be strengthened throughout the

⁴⁵Ron Liversedge, interview with the CBC, Cowichan Lake, British Columbia, September 1965.

⁴⁶Toronto Daily Clarion, June 15, 1937, p. 4.

world, and the Canadian capitalists would redouble their efforts to destroy the trade union movement. Hence, these men went to Spain not only out of a desire to strike back at their former oppressors, but literally to uphold workers' rights in Canada as well. This inability on the part of the volunteers to differentiate between the ideology of the conservative business elements in Canada and that of the European dictators is a clear example of the inflexibility of their views - of the rigid division of the world into the forces of good and evil.

Yet, in many cases the additional factor of dissatisfaction and frustration that such potential volunteers developed cannot be ignored, for it was a vital element in any decision made to go to Spain. Most of the veterans emphasized the fact that they were unemployed, "disgusted" with conditions in Canada, or had little to lose by taking such an action.⁴⁷ One Edmonton man admitted that he probably would not have participated in left-wing activities if he had been gainfully employed. It was his economic plight that made him "look for something different" - an alternative solution to his problems.⁴⁸ Indeed, such an involvement, in most cases, was a necessary precondition for volunteering.

⁴⁷Nick Elenduke, interview with the CBC, Winnipeg, August 1965.

John McGrandle, interview with the CBC, Edmonton, August 1965.

William Matthews, interview with the CBC, Toronto, July 1965.

⁴⁸Interview #34 with the CBC, Edmonton, August 1965.

There is no doubt that the Communist recruiting programme was directed at and most successful with unemployed single men in Canada. For this purpose, the Party was able to utilize the same organizations that had been created to satisfy the demands of this group for work with wages or relief. In Vancouver, for example, the address of the Single Unemployed Association was actually used as a recruiting center.⁴⁹ Consequently, there seems to have been a close connection between the membership of these various organizations and those who later volunteered to fight in the Spanish war. This seems to have been particularly true of the men from British Columbia. One Vancouver men described the volunteers from the coast as a "close-knit family" that had been actively involved for a number of years with the Single Unemployed Association in Vancouver, as well as spending a good deal of time in the relief camps.⁵⁰ This observation is probably valid, for as an official in the cadres department of the International Brigades, this veteran had access to most of the passports of the Canadian men, and thus was in a unique position to make such a judgement.

⁴⁹Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265565, "Complaint of RCMP re passports fraudulently obtained, February 1937-August 1938". (Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Vancouver, February 18, 1938)

Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265565, "Complaint of RCMP re passports fraudulently obtained, February 1937-August 1938". (Letter from Office of Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police to Undersecretary for External Affairs, Ottawa, March 15, 1938).

⁵⁰Ronald Liversedge, interview with the CBC.

While most of the Canadian volunteers were of working class background, there were a small number of intellectuals who found their way into the ranks of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, not only as a result of the general economic crisis, but as a matter of "conscience" as well.⁵¹ Characteristic of this type of volunteer was Lionel Edwards, an Albertan of middle class background, who was to become one of a select group of Canadian officers in Spain. Edwards spent two years at the University of Alberta. His education, however, was abruptly ended by the depression.⁵² After 1929, like many other transients who rode freight trains all across Western Canada, he worked at a variety of jobs, including logging and goldmining. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, he was unemployed and in rather desperate straits. As a result, his motivations for going to Spain were strongly influenced by the depression.

If one were asked why did you go,
possibly it would be hard to answer
it all in toto but a major motivation
must be ascribed to the tragic and al-
most unbelievable conditions that

⁵¹Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p. 104.
There were, however, many more among the Americans. For, as has already been shown, the conflict attracted large numbers of students as well as a good representation of writers and professional people from the United States. Perhaps one of the best known of the American writers was Alvah Bessie. Bessie was one of the few who went to Spain to attempt to shed his "middle class bourgeois" mentality and achieve "self-integration" by fighting against oppression. Alvah Bessie, Men in Battle (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1939), pp. 181-182.

⁵²"Lieutenant Lionel Edwards, a Canadian officer", Volunteer for Liberty, II, No. 33 (1938), p. 5.

existed in Canada at that time. Whenever young men and women had no hope, no job, no future and with the realization of the remote possibility of getting out of it, the temptation to get into the Spanish arena was tremendously powerful and attractive. On the other hand, it would only be fair and honest to say that young men are attracted by adventure, a certain romanticism, if I may say, and if one puts all these things together you come out with more or less the answer. To say that one was horrified and frustrated by the depression is also to say quickly that one wanted to do something about it. One was frustrated at the social system existing in such a magnificent country which could permit such a state of affairs in the human condition and the knowledge that Fascism in Spain backed by Hitler and Mussolini were in effect defending and extending the implications of such a social system made it more necessary to go out and try to do something about it.⁵³

Like many of his more inarticulate comrades, Edwards clearly identified the Fascist threat to Spain with his experiences in Canada. Implicit in such a view is the familiar division of the world into the forces of Fascism and democracy - good and evil. It seems then, that extreme opinions were held even by the "intellectuals" among the Canadian volunteers. Since Edwards represented only one of a few such cases available in the whole sample, there is no way of discovering how widespread such a view was among the other volunteers of this group.

⁵³Lionel Edwards, interview with the CBC, Vancouver, September 1965.

Another "intellectual" from Montreal had an experience which probably was not characteristic of this group as a whole, but it is still interesting because it illustrates how a confluence of events could cause an individual to make the decision to go to Spain.⁵⁴ This individual volunteered not only as a result of his dissatisfaction with his job - a feeling which derived from the knowledge that his employers were discriminating against him because of his Jewish background - but also as a result of his recent "conversion" to Communism. He had met and had been greatly influenced by another Russian Jew named Louis Kohn, who was a prominent official in a Communist front organization called "The Friends of the Soviet Union". By the time the Spanish Civil War began in 1936 then, he was well-equipped to interpret world events from this new-found perspective. The blatant anti-semitism of the Fascist powers made it even more natural that his sympathies should lie with the Republic. But, the catalyst that crystallized his resolve to volunteer was hearing Dr. Norman Bethune speak at a public rally sponsored by the Party in Montreal. This was not unusual. Many of the other veterans mentioned that they had been partly influenced by such publicity campaigns.⁵⁵ Indeed, in some instances, a

⁵⁴Interview #43 with the CBC, Toronto, July 1965. He was the assistant manager of a department store. Milton Cohen, a pharmacist from Winnipeg, also seems to fit into this group of "intellectuals".

⁵⁵Joe Schoen, interview with the CBC, Winnipeg, August 1965.

Mike Haydyk, interview with the CBC.
Mike Olynky, interview with the CBC.

man's decision resembled that of a sinner at a Baptist revival meeting. But, instead of proudly marching up to the podium to proclaim that they made their "decision for Christ" like a new convert, the potential volunteers quietly slipped away and discreetly made contact with Party recruiters in more secluded haunts.

Thus, the motivations of such "intellectuals" encompassed a wide range of factors and influences, including many of the components that have already been discussed. But, perhaps such complexity is a closer reflection of the reality. It illustrates the various influences that were acting on each potential volunteer.

A third category of volunteers included those who indicated that the usual motive of anti-Fascism was not important in their decision to go to Spain. Indeed, they volunteered either to escape the economic dislocations of the depression or merely for adventure.

One Lethbridge man claimed that he had responded without any political feeling whatsoever.⁵⁶ He went simply to escape the unfavourable economic climate in Canada. He was unemployed and had heard that the conditions and pay for the volunteers in Spain were reasonable.

Another veteran from Kitchener indicated that he had gone to Spain for somewhat similar motives, for he too was

⁵⁶Interview #11 with the CBC, Regina, August 1965.

"out of a job" and had spent some time in the relief camps.⁵⁷ But, he also seems to have been an adventurer of sorts. As a youth, he had been involved in the Mexican Revolution in 1929, fighting as a mercenary with the government forces against the insurgents. All wars, of course, attract a certain number of adventurers, and the Spanish conflict was no exception. It is clear from the evidence, however, that there were very few among the Canadian volunteers.

On balance, the overwhelming majority of the volunteers cited anti-Fascism as being the essential component in their motivations, but there were other influences as well. The realities of the economic depression had a decisive effect on the majority of the men who went to Spain. Their responses were directly related to what they had experienced in Canada - not only by the fact that they were unemployed and unable to get relief, but also by the "repression" they suffered in their attempts to improve the situation. Moreover, certain other peripheral factors, such as the simple desire for adventure or other more personal reasons cannot be overlooked. Indeed, even in the cases of those volunteers who indicated that they were motivated only out of anti-Fascism, there were other factors to consider. Many of the individuals were lower Party officials, whose responses were in part influenced by a desire to conform to the current "Party line". Others were immigrants, whose reactions were

⁵⁷Interview #17 with the CBC, Kitchener, August 1964.

conditioned by the oppression they had suffered in their homelands before they arrived in Canada.

But, this is not to say that there was no idealism or spirit of self-sacrifice in the motivations of these different groups. After all, one did not have to be a Communist Party member in the nineteen thirties to recognize that Fascism had become a threat to world stability.

During the early twenties, the pattern had been established in Italy, when Benito Mussolini dispensed with parliamentary democracy and organized a semi-totalitarian state, on the tenets of his own philosophy. Nationalism and militarism were the main characteristics of his style, and it seemed to the outside world at that time that he had revitalized his country. Soon, other nations followed this pattern. One by one, the states of Eastern Europe did away with parliamentary institutions that had never found fertile soil on which to prosper. They too turned to strong men and the military for leadership and protection. Hungary, Poland, Lithuania and Bulgaria were first and, with the onset of the depression, Greece, Yugoslavia, Rumania and Austria followed with dictatorships of their own.

But the most decisive in this chain of events was the rise to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany. By 1935, reports out of that country described a brutal regime of pogroms, purges and book burnings. Indeed, if many Westerners were appalled by the domestic barbarism displayed by the Third Reich, they were alarmed by the measures that Hitler

was taking to re-establish Germany as a great power. His active program of rearmament, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, followed in the wake of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, while the remilitarization of the Rhineland came after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The events that occurred in the Iberian peninsula in 1936 seemed to be a portent of things to come. Spain appeared to be the next target of Fascist aggression, and many thought that this was where the dictators could be met and contained.

Indeed, the Spanish conflict captured the imagination of many non-Communist moderates, who volunteered simply for these reasons. Typical of such an individual was Alexander McClure, a native of Montreal, who was killed at Fuentes de Ebro in 1937. His motives were highlighted by a letter written by his father to the Minister of External Affairs in 1938:

He was no adventurer, he was a graduate from the University of New Zealand in Engineering. His ideals were of the most lofty and unselfish and he simply could not stand the sufferings of others without trying to do something about them. I think you will understand something of his character when I mention that a memorial service was held for him in this city [Montreal] and a fund is being raised all over New Zealand called the Alexander McClure Memorial Fund for the women and children of Spain.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265550, "Death in Spain of A. McClure, June 1938-November 1938". (Letter written by J. McClure to Department of Trade and Commerce on the subject of his son's death in Spain, July 30, 1938).

Such examples of "pure idealism" were very rare among the volunteers.⁵⁹ As has been shown, the responses of the majority of the Canadians in terms of anti-Fascism, were in part modified by a whole range of other influences. In fact, to say that anti-Fascism was the only factor involved, as has been set forth in the Communist Party line on the subject, is to greatly oversimplify the problem.

Interestingly enough, the veterans themselves, in one form or another, expressed their motivations in absolute terms. The world was rigidly divided into the forces of international Fascism and the forces of Democracy and Freedom. Spain represented the battleground on which the decisive struggle between these two forces was to be resolved.

One explanation for such reactions could be attributed to the political immaturity of the volunteers. After all, most of them had very little formal education and in many cases were not very articulate. As working class people, they were often incapable of expressing themselves in anything other than absolute terms. Such an argument, however, is clearly superficial, for it does not explain why the more articulate, including some of the "intellectuals", also spoke in these terms.

Most of the volunteers who went to Spain were only

⁵⁹Robert Rosenstone has shown that the Popular Front appeal by the Communist Party in the United States attracted many such people. Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp. 72-74.

recent recruits to the ranks of the Communist Party of Canada, rather than people who had been active in the movement since its inception in the early nineteen twenties. They were men whose involvement was conditioned by the economic dislocations of the depression. They became involved in the Party because, as one volunteer simply put it, "They had our problems at heart, they knew what we were up against".⁶⁰ The Communist Party at that time was the only political group in Canada willing to organize the unemployed single men and seek redress for their grievances. The remainder of the volunteers, including immigrants and a few liberal intellectuals, became involved with the Communist Party largely because of the active struggle against Fascism that had been undertaken by the Comintern in Spain.

But, most of these men were largely unfamiliar with the intellectual underpinnings of their ideas. As working class people and as recent "converts", they had no knowledge of the subtleties of Marxism - of dialectical materialism or Marx's theory of history. Probably, some had not even read Lenin. Indeed, few could fathom anything more profound than the Toronto Daily Clarion. Thus, the majority of them were activists rather than ideologues and, as activists, they could identify with the cause of the Spanish Republic at that time because of their experiences with "Fascism" in Canada or in their homelands. In every individual's mind,

⁶⁰Ed Shirley, interview with the CBC, Vancouver, September 1965.

Spain became the arena where the conflict with this "evil" was to be resolved. All that remained for the potential volunteer was to get to this battleground - a problem which was not insurmountable, for the Communist Party of Canada had created a very efficient "underground railway" specifically for this purpose.

Labor Day—1937!

The bayonets of Spanish unionists have halted the assaults of international fascism. In their hands has been entrusted the torch of democracy. They pledge to keep it alight or perish. Ours is the obligation to help them.

From the Toronto Daily Clarion, September 4, 1937.

CHAPTER 3

THE COMMUNIST PARTY NETWORK IN CANADA

I beg to advise that paymaster-lieutenant Commander Delage, Quebec division, Royal Canadian Naval Volunteers Reserve, reported by telephone last night that a doubtful character with headquarters in a Chinese laundry in Quebec City was enlisting young men for the Spanish army and providing each one with a passport.⁶¹

- Excerpt from "Letter to O.D. Skelton from Commander, Naval Reserve, January 8, 1937".

In several of the studies which have been written on the North American volunteers, there has been an attempt to disregard or to ignore some of the realities concerning the recruitment of men for Spain.⁶² It has been usual for authors of these works to downplay the role of the Communist Party in this enterprise by pleading lack of information about its activities. The following chapter will focus on some of the questions which hitherto have been neglected. For instance, what was the nature of the organizational structure used by the Canadian Communist Party? How was the recruitment campaign financed? Finally, what was the relationship between the Canadian and American parties in this endeavour?

⁶¹Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January 1937-December 1937. (Letter from Naval Reserve Commander, Quebec Division, to O.D. Skelton, January 8, 1937).

⁶²See Arthur Landis, The Abraham Lincoln Brigade, p. 14.
Victor Hoar, The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, p. 38.

The organizational structure used by the Communist Party of Canada for the recruitment of the volunteers was of necessity highly decentralized and secret.⁶³ It seems that for the most part, control over the initial phases of the recruitment process was in the hands of the local section organizers of the Party. These individuals were regional functionaries, usually connected in some manner with the provincial apparatus of the Party. For example, Tom McEwan, a member of the Central Committee of the C.P. and provincial secretary of the Party in British Columbia, was in charge of organizing the recruitment on the West Coast, while Fred Rose, the provincial organizer of the Party in Montreal, had similar responsibilities for the province of Quebec.⁶⁴ In every region and major centre in Canada, local offices were established which were the initial induction points for the men interested in going to Spain.

⁶³Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January 1937-December 1937. (Memorandum from RCMP to Skelton re: Volunteers recruited by the Communist Party for service in Spain, January 20, 1937).

All arrangements respecting transportation and names of recruits were kept strictly secret. Furthermore, the "cloak and dagger" nature of the whole operation was further enhanced by the fact that the volunteers travelled in small, clandestine groups.

⁶⁴Tom McEwan, interview with the CBC. McEwan was a charter member of the Canadian Communist Party, having joined at its inception in 1922.

Direct evidence for Fred Rose's participation is found in the following documents:

Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January 1937-December 1937". (Letter from Office of Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police to Undersecretary of State, Ottawa, February 10, 1937).

Ibid., (Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Re: Recruiting of volunteers for Spain by the C.P., Montreal, January 18, 1937).

The main activities of these establishments were to screen volunteers, so as to prevent any "undesirable elements" from getting to the Spanish conflict, that is, to prevent any "opportunists" or "proto-Fascists" from infiltrating the ranks of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. This screening invoked several different procedures. Men who were married or had any strong family ties were discouraged from volunteering, while unmarried individuals who had some military experience and were in reasonably good physical condition were obviously preferred.⁶⁵ But, this was on the condition that the potential volunteer demonstrated the right political views and background. Thus, it was necessary for him to have previously participated in some "progressive" organization such as the "Friends of the Soviet Union". Furthermore, the individual in question also had to submit the names of three or four people who would recommend him and vouch for the correctness of his views.⁶⁶ Clearly then, for the most part, only well-trusted and proven men were allowed to go to Spain. Such elaborate procedures made it difficult for them not to realize the realities of Communist control if they were from outside the Party.

⁶⁵Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January 1937-December 1937". (Memorandum from RCMP to Skelton Re: Volunteers recruited by Communist Party for service in Spain, Ottawa, January 20, 1937).

⁶⁶See the testimony of R. Berube, a volunteer who was used by the RCMP to discover the precise nature of the recruitment processes.

Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January 1937-December 1937". (Statement of Mr. Joseph Robert Berube, Montreal, November 19, 1937)

Another problem for the Party organizers at the local level was that of obtaining passports for the volunteers. Generally, these were not men of any social distinction. As has already been indicated, many of them were unemployed and penniless. Consequently, they were not in any position to obtain "reputable" vouchers in their applications for passports. Thus, the Party often had to "arrange" to have prominent individuals recommend the volunteers. Such procedures violated the passport regulations, which stipulated that it was necessary for vouchers to have known the men for some time. These sorts of irregularities were the subject of a great deal of correspondence between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Department of External Affairs yet, in the end, little was ever done about them.⁶⁷

From the regional offices, the volunteers were provided with transportation to Toronto, where a central bureau had been established to co-ordinate their journey to Spain. In charge of this office was Paul Phillips, a member of the Politburo of the C.P. of Canada, who had been prominent in organizing immigrant groups throughout the country.⁶⁸ He was joined by Peter Hunter, who had been attending university in Moscow when the war broke out. Hunter

⁶⁷There are a number of documents related to this problem, all contained in general file 265565 entitled "Complaints of RCMP re: passports fraudulently obtained, February 1937-August 1938".

⁶⁸Victor Hoar, The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, p. 40. Many of the volunteers remembered Phillips when they described the mechanics of their journey to Spain.

apparently had been ordered back to Canada by the Party, and served for a brief time as secretary of the Young Communist League for Southern Ontario, before he took up his duties. At this point, the volunteers were given clothing and money, as well as a cover story to disguise the real nature of their journey. The screening processes were continued and intensified to expose any Trotskyites or RCMP agents who might have been endeavouring to get to Spain. There is evidence, however, that would suggest that one such police agent did succeed in infiltrating the ranks, only to be killed during the Retreats in the spring of 1938.⁶⁹

To facilitate the flow of volunteers, the Communists also created two travel agencies to buy large blocks of tickets from various steamship companies.⁷⁰ Jack Cowan, a Party organizer connected with the Friends of the Soviet Union, was in charge of an agency in Toronto while Michael Gorden operated a similar organization in Winnipeg. In these establishments, effective methods were developed to enable immigrants (particularly of Slavic origin) to go to Spain.

⁶⁹Perry Hilton, interview with the CBC, Vancouver, September 1965. Hilton apparently came to this conclusion about a former comrade when he returned to Canada and was approached by RCMP authorities, asking what happened to their agent.

⁷⁰Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265565, "Complaints of RCMP re: passports fraudulently obtained, February 1937-August 1938". (Letter from Office of Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police to Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, November 26, 1937).

Ibid., (Letter from Office of Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police to Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, December 2, 1937).

Ordinarily, foreign-born people would not be allowed to go overseas because of their ineligibility for Canadian passports. Consequently, it was necessary for the Party recruiters to obtain visas for them from the various East European consulates - otherwise, they would not be permitted to land on French soil. After the men arrived in France, however, instead of going to their homelands as they were authorized to do, they went to Spain to join the Loyalist army. These travel agencies also made the arrangements for the return of the volunteers repatriated in late 1938 and early 1939.⁷¹

From Toronto, the volunteers took one of the two main routes to Spain. They either went through the seaports of Montreal or New York to France. After arriving in Paris, the Canadians continued to be shunted along this "underground railway", on foot over the Pyrenees or by ship to the Republican ports on the Mediterranean.

This extensive recruiting organization was financed primarily from two sources. Much of the money had been collected through the various front organizations created by the Party. The National Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy was one of the most important of these organizations, and was very active in soliciting aid for the Republican cause

⁷¹Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265550, "British practices re: inquiries re: British subjects in Spain, Repatriation of Canadian volunteers from Spain, November 1937-March 1939". (Letter from Department of Mines and Resources to Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, July 20, 1938).

in the early months of the Spanish war. By the end of 1936, it had become the highest body in a hierarchy of regional and local aid committees that had been established in the major cities across Canada, to gather contributions of money, clothing and relief for the Spanish Republic. Sam Carr, the organizational secretary of the C.P., in an article in Inprecor (International Press Correspondence), commented on the composition of these committees:

The campaign for assistance to the heroic fighters on the front ranks of the people's front against Fascism is carried through in Canada by United Committees in aid of Spanish democracy. These committees are widely representative and include official delegates of the trade unions, the church and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the Communist Party, as well as other progressive bodies.⁷²

The participation of the moderate socialists in these organizations, however, did not persist for any length of time. Perhaps they realized the true nature of the committees - in which the widely publicized humanitarian purposes were in fact subordinated to rather more narrow goals that had been formulated by the Party. As Graham Spry, the CCF representative, has commented:

I must not forget my brief tenure as vice-chairman along with Tim Buck, of the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. There I endured the agonies of working with Communists who were subject, at any moment, to sudden reversals of policy dictated from half a

⁷²Sam Carr, "Canada Helps Spanish Democracy", Inprecor, XVI, (November 21, 1936), 1380.

world away. And I dealt there as well with entirely parochial personalities whose problem was neither Spain nor Democracy but their own state of mind.⁷³

Despite the lack of full and consistent collaboration by the Canadian socialists, these campaigns for assistance were quite successful, as evidenced by the support the organizations received at the various rallies and demonstrations they sponsored. At one such function held in Toronto in the fall of 1936, over 7,500 people attended and contributed \$4,000 to the cause.⁷⁴

In May 1937, a new organization was created called the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.⁷⁵ This group had no part in the recruitment processes of the Party, although at the end of the Spanish conflict, it took an active interest in the repatriation of the volunteers. The Friends were primarily concerned with the men already in Spain and launched campaigns to provide relief and medical supplies to the "MacPaps". They also actively campaigned against the Canadian government's adherence to the non-intervention agreement and the legislation which had been proposed to restrict Canadian participation in the Spanish

⁷³Graham Spry, "The CCF Party in its Formative Years", cited in Victor Hoar, comp., The Great Depression: Essays and Memoirs from Canada and the United States, p. 220.

⁷⁴Sam Carr, "Canada Helps Spanish Democracy", 1380.

⁷⁵The announcement of its formation was in the Toronto Daily Clarion, May 20, 1937. Thereafter, various appeals were regularly published in the Clarion for aid to the volunteers in Spain.

Civil War. During the House of Commons debate on the Foreign Enlistment Act,⁷⁶ Mr. Lapointe, the Minister for External Affairs, was flooded with hundreds of protest telegrams from various Communist organizations, such as the League Against War and the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, indicating their displeasure with government policies.⁷⁷

Although a portion of the monies collected by these organizations was spent for the benevolent purposes for which they were established, some of these funds undoubtedly were utilized to finance the recruitment. Indeed, this has been substantiated by J.B. Salsberg who, as a member of the Politburo of the Party at this time, was in a position to know where the money came from.⁷⁸ The Party had no desire to dip into its own coffers to finance the organization of a volunteer force; certainly not when money could be obtained easily from the numerous sympathizers who supported the campaigns of the front organizations. Communist control over the entire structure was so well camouflaged that the membership of these organizations probably never realized that they were in fact financing the recruitment of the battalion.

⁷⁶The Foreign Enlistment Act was introduced in the House of Commons in February 1937 and was passed on April 10. The third section of the act made it a punishable offence for Canadian citizens to join the armed forces of any state at war. Subsequent sections made it an offence to give passage or aid to any person going overseas to fight in such a war. This bill was directed against the participation of the Canadian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. See Hoar, The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, pp. 103-106.

⁷⁷Canada. House of Commons Debates, Vol.I, 1937, p.1296.

⁷⁸J.B. Salsberg, interview with the CBC, Toronto, July 1965.

This arrangement was very profitable for the Canadian Communists. With very little expenditure of their own meagre resources, they could reap all the credit that was to be obtained by sending volunteers to Spain.

The second major source of money for the recruitment of volunteers in Canada was provided by the American Communist Party.⁷⁹ The aid was extended during the first months of 1937, at the beginning of Canadian efforts to undertake an active programme of recruitment, and may also explain, in part, the persistence of American influence in the Canadian battalion throughout the Spanish conflict.

The American party, as the larger and more prestigious organization, possessed the resources to undertake such assistance. Through the familiar system of front organizations, the CPA (Communist Party of America) was even more successful than its Canadian counterpart in obtaining support for the cause. Sandor Voros, a former political officer of the American battalion, has asserted that the monies collected for Spanish aid went directly into Party coffers:

⁷⁹This has been substantiated by a number of different sources including both Tim Buck and J.B. Salsberg, as well as the RCMP correspondence with the Department of External Affairs. In this regard, see: Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January 1937-December 1937". (Memorandum from RCMP to Skelton re: Volunteers recruited by the Communist Party for service in Spain, Ottawa, January 20, 1937).

Ibid., (Report of Royal Canadian Mounted Police re: Recruiting of Volunteers for Spain by the C.P., Montreal, January 18, 1937).

Less than a cent out of every dollar, not a full one percent of the monies collected for Spanish Aid, had been turned over by the Party for that purpose. Pressed hard at a subsequent congressional investigation to account for the expenditure of these funds, the Party, with its usual lying ingenuity first denied having received anything but a small insufficient sum, then claimed it had actually devoted seventeen percent to the purpose for which it had been raised. Then came the joker. The Party did not dare to assert that even the small percentage had been expended in cash. The seventeen percent had been computed at the alleged value of the used clothing sent to Spain, an allegation which in no way explained what the Party did with the cash contributions amounting to millions of dollars.⁸⁰

Although Voros is prejudiced against the Communist Party, since he subsequently left it upon his return from Spain, much of what he indicates does have an air of plausibility about it. After all, in his position as commissar of the historical division of the XVth Brigade, he had access to wide and varied sources of information. Thus, he may have known a great deal about the nature of Party financial endeavours during this period. His assertions then, may explain the American party's ability to finance not only its own recruitment program, but the campaign in Canada as well.

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the relationship between the two parties and the co-ordination of their efforts were on a very intimate basis.

⁸⁰ Sandor Voros, American Commissar (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1961), p. 364.

According to sources of information available to the RCMP, the directive from the Comintern in Moscow, requesting that military aid be sent to Spain, was conveyed to Sam Carr, a prominent Canadian Party leader, at a plenum of the Communist Party of the United States in December 1936 or early January 1937.⁸¹ There were other such meetings between the leadership of the two parties, concerning the problems of synchronizing the recruitment of the volunteers, and it seems that the Canadian Communist Party, at least in the initial stages, was forced to submit to the "guidance" of its American counterpart on these matters.

Sometime in late January 1937, Roy Davis, a prominent member of the Young Communist League in Canada, journeyed to New York and met with Earl Browder, the General Secretary of the CPA, as well as Jack King and Gil Green, prominent C.P. functionaries in the United States. During

⁸¹Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265557, "Enlistment in Canada of men for Spain, January 1937-December 1937". (Memorandum from the RCMP to Skelton re: Volunteers recruited by the Communist Party for service in Spain, Ottawa, February 1, 1937.)

Verle Johnston has indicated that the initial decision to form the International Brigades had been made in late September or early October 1936. The Italian and particularly the French Communist Parties soon after began to undertake the recruitment of volunteers "on a vast scale". Since this directive was not received by the American Communist Party until late December 1936, the instructions to each of the Communist parties, authorizing them to undertake recruitment, must have been sent out at different times. This also may explain why the American and Canadian volunteers were, as a group, the last to appear on the scene in Spain. The first organized contingent left New York on the S.S. Normandie on December 26, 1936 and arrived in Spain by way of France in early January. See Verle Johnston, Legions of Babel, p. 36.

the battalion's exploits, of course, seem rather inconsequential, in view of the subsequent fate of the Spanish Republic. But what of its human survivors? What have been the effects of the Spanish experience on the volunteers themselves?

CHAPTER 4

DISILLUSIONMENT

It is hard to lose the affections and respect of so many friends whose bravery and devotion I admire. Nevertheless, I am getting off the train. It will have to be a flying jump and no doubt the passengers in the compartments behind will shoot at me as they clatter by. I had thought the train was bound for a fertile place in the sun, but I have found that it is rushing toward the Arctic north where it will be buried beneath vast drifts of snow and be forever silent.⁸⁴

The effects of the Spanish Civil War on the Canadian volunteers were twofold. Some of the men were disillusioned by their ordeal, while others were politicized, either in the narrow sense of joining the Communist Party or in the wider sense of having had their ideological perceptions of the world reaffirmed and strengthened. It is difficult to determine the exact sizes of these various groups. Of the fifty-two men interviewed in 1965, there were nine instances of disillusionment (17 percent). None of the men actually was politicized in the first sense, while twenty-two of them (42.3 percent) demonstrated attitudes that showed their political views were not only reinforced by their experience, but tended to become even more extreme. In the remainder of cases (21), there was not enough evidence for classification.

The figures for the demoralized elements, however, may have been higher. Some of the interviews were set up

⁸⁴Ralph Bates, "Disaster in Finland", New Republic, C (December 13, 1939), 221.

under the auspices of the Canadian Communist Party. Hence, many of the men may have still been connected with that organization, and, as a result, there may have been an inordinate number of politicized volunteers included in the sample. Others simply may not have desired to reveal evidence of disenchantment for personal reasons, or for fear it would reflect upon the record of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in Spain. Also not considered, have been the "silent minority" who, for one reason or another, refused to come forth to be interviewed (there were nine men in this category).

There were various types of disillusionment among the Canadian volunteers. At different times during the Spanish war, a number of the men deserted from the ranks of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. But, there were other individuals who became disenchanted without such a drastic response. Various semi-Trotskyites were embittered by the policies which had been implemented in the name of the Popular Front by the Communists. In addition, many Party members were disillusioned by the domestic and foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Finally, other veterans cited reasons that had no relation to such ideological beliefs. The illusions of some of the non-Party volunteers were smashed when they discovered the extent to which Communists controlled the International Brigades. Other men were disaffected because of the American domination of the battalion or demoralized because of the discrimination they have suffered as a result of having participated in the Spanish

war.

The degree of disillusionment among these groups varied considerably. The most demoralized probably were the Party members, whose faith in the Soviet Union had been the core of their beliefs. In contrast, the shock was not as great for either the non-Party men, who did not really possess any rigid ideology to begin with, or the "ideological bedfellows", who had merely to fall back on their convictions about the Soviet perversion of socialism. This was also the case for men in the other two categories, for ideological questions had no part in causing their state of mind.

The most obvious indication of demoralization during the conflict relates to the question of desertions from the ranks of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. The Canadian battalion, like any other military unit in war, had its share of men who fled the rigours of trench life and combat. But, this was not unusual in view of the fact that the Internationals were for the most part underequipped, often unfed and frequently kept in the lines for long periods of time. Throughout most of the Spanish conflict, the problem of desertions and demoralization were to plague the leadership of the Brigades. Extreme measures such as execution, however, seem to have been used only on rare occasions.⁸⁵ For the most part, such offenders were merely imprisoned or assigned to "labour battalions". Indeed, during the summer of 1937, one Canadian officer in the

⁸⁵See Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp. 373-375.

American battalion complained that more severe punishment would have to be implemented if the morale of the Brigades were to be maintained.

I for one am not satisfied that deserters from our ranks should have gotten off so easily. I also think that there are in the rear a number of mouthy individuals with no qualifications to make any contribution to the strengthening of the Rearguard or any benefit to the I.B. [International Brigades]. But this is based on second-hand information. If the true anti-Fascists of the rear are of the same conviction I would suggest that these people be cleaned out before they do much harm.⁸⁶

Such desertions seem to have occurred in large groups, usually during periods when the Loyalist forces were suffering major military setbacks at the front.

After the military debacle on the Jarama front in late February 1937, the British government was forced to take action to assist a number of British subjects, including Canadians, who had deserted from their units.⁸⁷ A number of these men had sought the protection of the British Consuls in Valencia and elsewhere, thereby confronting these authorities with an interesting dilemma. Although legally they could not harbour a deserter from the Spanish Army, if they gave him up, there was a strong possibility that he might be shot. The United States government was presented

⁸⁶Pete Nielson memoir in ECS.

⁸⁷Great Britain. Foreign Office, Correspondence, "Evacuation from Valencia of British subjects who have deserted from International Brigades", W4193/1/41, February 28, 1937.

with a similar problem. As early as February 24, 1937, a little more than a week after the Lincoln Battalion went into action, the American consul in Valencia reported that a deserter wished help in returning to the United States. Two weeks later, five more Americans appeared, asking for similar aid. Asylum and assistance, however, were denied them.⁸⁸

Edward Knoblaugh, an American correspondent, encountered two such deserters, one Canadian and the other Irish.⁸⁹ These men claimed that they had enlisted in the Loyalist army on a Spanish consular agent's promise of 'good pay' for services as "railroad engineers". But after several weeks in Albacete, they had been given rifles and ordered into front line duty. Since they had destroyed their British passports upon entering Spain, on the promise that they would be supplied with Spanish passports "at any time they desired to leave", they no longer had the legal means to leave the country and avoid military service. Consequently, they had altered the dates on their railroad passes and had been able to get to Valencia, where they immediately sought the protection at the British Consulate. There they remained for four days until a British destroyer arrived in port to evacuate them. Both these men indicated that "hundreds" of

⁸⁸The United States Government, The Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, Vol. I, 1937 (Washington, 1954), p. 495.

⁸⁹Edward Knoblaugh, Correspondent in Spain (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937), pp. 226-227.

Internationals wanted to leave Spain, but could not because they had destroyed their passports. Although the experience of these two men in escaping from Spain was probably typical of many other deserters, much of their testimony should be discounted as merely an attempt to justify their own actions.⁹⁰

Another rash of desertions occurred in early November 1937 after the fierce fighting at Fuentes de Ebro, in which the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion was involved. Once again, many of the men sought protection from the British or American authorities in Spain. The British Consul in Barcelona issued an emergency certificate to enable at least one Canadian deserter to leave Spain.⁹¹ Moreover, the American Vice-Consul at Valencia sent a wire to the Secretary of State, indicating that three more Americans had sought refuge at the consulate.⁹²

⁹⁰Most of the volunteers who went to Spain knew that the Comintern had organized and recruited them. It was this agency that confiscated some of their passports when they entered Spain. The volunteers did not destroy their own passports. Indeed, this passport problem was of great concern to the RCMP which feared that they might be utilized for subversive activity.

⁹¹Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 265565, "Complaints of RCMP re: passports fraudulently obtained, February 1937-August 1938". (Letter from Office of Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to the Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, November 23, 1937.) This individual was listed as a deserter in the card file maintained by the Party in Canada.

⁹²The United States Government, The Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers, Vol. I, 1937 (Washington, 1954), pp. 556-557.

Finally, during April 1938, after Franco launched the offensive that was to cut Republican Spain into two parts, a number of Canadian as well as other Internationals simply fled to the nearest frontiers, as their units were dispersed and routed by the Nationalists. There is evidence that only one Canadian deserter went directly to the British authorities to seek protection.⁹³ A young man from Virden, Manitoba, arrived at Gibraltar on April 5, from where he was subsequently repatriated back to Canada.

The majority of the Canadian deserters found their way out of Spain by their own means. As one disgruntled volunteer wrote upon his return to Canada:

My stay in Albacete was longer than I intended it to be but I was thrown in a lot with some Englishmen. They were what the good comrades would call "demoralized" elements. In reality, there were a few of the men who were wise to it all and were trying to get back home. People may argue that the men could leave anytime as there was nothing to stop them; but the Third International proved to be an adequate stumbling block in our paths. Many men stowed away on ships, others made their way to the border and made the recrossing of the mountains again. They were called

⁹³Canada. Department of External Affairs, File 291-K, "Assistance for W.H. Angell in Spain, April 1938-January 1939". (Telegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, London, April 26, 1938).

Several of the Canadians captured by the Nationalists at this time were also "demoralized". One young man, in an interview with a correspondent, indicated that "all the volunteers wanted to leave Spain". Moreover, he said that they were kept at the front without relief because the Spanish feared they would desert; therefore, they were closely watched. Vancouver Sun, April 4, 1938.

deserters. Why was it necessary for a man to desert? They had come as volunteers, served a reasonable time but were not permitted to leave.⁹⁴

Many of the volunteers originally had been promised only six months enlistment when they had been recruited. The officials of the Brigades had at first thought that such a length of service would be adequate, but it was soon realized that this was no way to get the maximum use out of their manpower, and the promised rotation never went into effect.⁹⁵ The first official statement in this regard was published in the Volunteer for Liberty on November 1, 1937, while the first public announcement to the men was not made until the XVth Brigade was at Teruel.⁹⁶ Still, it must have been obvious to the volunteers that this was to be the practice, for apart from the badly wounded and the chosen few who were sent back for "propaganda purposes", no one was allowed to leave Spain. Most of the troops probably accepted this policy, although others may have been demoralized by the prospect of an unlimited stay in Spain, and simply decided to leave when the opportunity presented itself.

It is impossible to determine exactly what proportion of the volunteers in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion deserted. Twenty-three men were listed in this category in

⁹⁴Robert Hamilton memoir in ECS.

⁹⁵John Gates, The Story of an American Communist, p. 55.

⁹⁶Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p. 304.

the battalion record kept by commissar Frank Rodgers up to October 1938.⁹⁷ Yet, the accuracy of this figure may be questionable. It was common for men during the struggle to "desert" back to the front from hospitals and rear areas when they heard about the holocaust of the Retreats. Many of these Internationals were then killed, captured or executed in the second phase of these battles without anyone knowing of their actions.

Perhaps a more accurate figure can be obtained from the card file kept in Canada by the Communist Party.⁹⁸ According to this source, twenty-one Canadians, or 3 percent of the 693 men kept on record, deserted. This compares closely to the figures cited for the American volunteers.⁹⁹ Yet, while the majority of the Canadian volunteers preferred to remain silent about their experiences, a number of American men were so embittered that they willingly, even eagerly, recounted their adventures in print or testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee in the United States.¹⁰⁰

Other men became disillusioned without openly

⁹⁷Records of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion to October 1938 in ECS.

⁹⁸Card file of the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in ECS.

⁹⁹Cecil Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969), p. 266.

¹⁰⁰See Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, pp. 301-304. Eby, Between the Bullet and the Lie, pp. 268-269. New York Times, April 5, 1938.

demonstrating it, as the deserters had. One such group of volunteers was demoralized because of Communist control over the International Brigades.

Robert Hamilton, a volunteer from Winnipeg, apparently reached this state of mind because of several factors. It seems that as a medical worker, he was attached to the Anglo-Saxon company of the Eighty-Sixth Brigade on the Cordoba front. According to Hamilton, the Canadians who were members of this company received very little in the way of material comforts or aid that had been sent from Canada. Instead, it went to the larger body of men in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion who were up north.

Usually every three or four days, we would get an English or American Party Worker or the Clarion and we would read where so much cigarettes and tobacco and comforts had been shipped to the boys defending democracy. They used to call us that, but I guess there must have been a mistake and they forgot there was a full company of Anglo-Saxons in the south. Maybe it was all going to the MacPaps and Lincoln Washingtons and British boys up north.¹⁰¹

The lack of "comforts", however, was only one factor that caused such bitterness and sarcasm among these men. John Gates, who was political commissar of the unit at that time, has commented that such demoralization was due to the fact that this particular group of volunteers was isolated from the main body of their compatriots in the XVth Brigade.¹⁰² Yet, in Hamilton's case, there seems to have been an added element.

¹⁰¹Robert Hamilton memoir in ECS.

¹⁰²John Gates, The Story of an American Communist, p. 50.

As a non-Party person in the Brigades, he resented the dominance of Communists in their ranks. In particular, he directed his hostility toward the role the political commissar played in the various units of the International Brigades.

There was never any such thing as voting in a political commissar. The only thing he functioned well in was political education. He did not care about his men. To the world in general these men were supposed to be civilians but to us who knew better they were officers and the worst type of officer. They would take on military responsibilities that they knew nothing about, responsibilities that would cost many men their lives.¹⁰³

Hugh Garner, a Canadian volunteer from Toronto, had a similar experience. As a Communist sympathizer on his way to Spain in 1937, he wrote the following glowing account about the "crusade" upon which he had just embarked:

I see fear on some of the boys' faces but they try not to show it, so they laugh and sing and kid each other about death. I believe most of us are nervous but we will not turn back because the future of Spain means the future of the world. It means the future of happy children and strong healthy workers of mothers who will laugh while their husbands go to work, secure in the knowledge that they will come home safe and sound and that there will be no starvation ahead and no wars to take their boys away.¹⁰⁴

Such idealism soon evaporated after Garner arrived in Spain and joined the Lincoln Battalion at Jarama. When interviewed in 1965, he emphasized how the International Brigades were

¹⁰³Robert Hamilton memoir in ECS.

¹⁰⁴Hugh Garner, cited in Edward Cecil Smith, "The MacPaps", unpublished fragment in ECS.

completely dominated by Communist Party members. Moreover, he showed a particularly hostile attitude toward the Brigade leadership, whom he described as all "political appointees" and "Party functionaries" who were unsuitable for military command. Upon his return to Canada, he was also critical of the way the Canadian Communist Party utilized what the volunteers had done in Spain for their own ends.

When we got here, the Communists had an annual banquet. They paraded us up and on stage and clapped. The phony speeches were just garbage. I felt like an idiot up there when I thought about all the guys buried in Spain.¹⁰⁵

Garner himself had a rather dubious record in Spain. He was unable to adjust to the discipline of the military unit to which he was attached and made some disparaging remarks about the leadership. Consequently, he was sent to a labour battalion as an "incorrigible element". Soon after, he deserted and went to Madrid, where he joined an Anarchist military unit. After a week or so, he returned and was jailed. In view of this treatment then, Garner's hostile attitude is perhaps understandable. Like many other men, he came to Spain full of idealism, much of which subsequently disappeared when he discovered the true realities that existed there - the realities of Communist control and the need for discipline in the International Brigades, all of which necessarily was geared toward winning the war against the Nationalists.

But such a discovery was not uncommon among the

¹⁰⁵Cited from Alex Cramer, "The Loneliest Veterans", Weekend Magazine, (November 7, 1970), 10.

volunteers in Spain. Indeed, Stephen Spender, the well-known British poet and briefly a Communist Party member, has written about a similar case:

In the International Brigades personal tragedies arose from the domination of the Communists. One of these comes to my mind. When I visited the front near Madrid, I met an English public school boy, L_____, aged eighteen. L_____ told me that he had come to Spain in the belief that the Brigade was as liberal as the Republic itself. He had lost faith in the Republican cause on finding that the Brigade was dominated by Communists with whom he had no sympathy. When I questioned him, it was obvious that he had never thought about Communism before he came to Spain.¹⁰⁶

Among the Canadians, however, there were probably very few individuals who were disenchanted in this manner. Most of the men in the battalion were Communist Party members.

Yet, among the Party members themselves, there were other factors that caused disillusionment. Henry Scott Beattie, a Toronto volunteer, was embittered and frustrated by the willingness of his comrades to sacrifice the goals of the social revolution in order to win the struggle against Franco. In a letter published in the Canadian Forum, he wrote a bitter diatribe against the policies of the Communists in Spain.

Despite the censorship, rumours reached us too, that our Party leaders were supporting the government in depriving anarchist peasants of their land co-operatives, turning the farms back into state or even private capital. Then after May, there was talk of a joint attack by our Party and Caballero's own troops upon rural workers' parties in Barcelona.

¹⁰⁶Richard Crossman, ed., The God That Failed, pp. 225-226.

Officially we were told that "Trotskyites" had tried a coup for Franco there; but the unofficial story was that the POUM (semi-Trotskyite) and the anarchists had been attacked, their leaders assassinated or jailed and hundreds killed in the streets, in a forcible restoration of factories from worker control into private capital again.¹⁰⁷

It was as a result of this "betrayal of the revolution" then, that Beattie subsequently left the Communist Party upon his return.

The experience of a young American volunteer is perhaps more typical of this group. It seems that even before he had been recruited, he had developed and maintained contacts with people who were involved with the Trotskyite faction in the United States.¹⁰⁸ When he arrived in Spain, this young man underwent an intense period of internal conflict. As a result of his previous experiences, he had realized the contradictions inherent in the Communist movement. He knew about the lack of free discussion and the rigid discipline, so he resolved to keep his "mouth shut and ears open". Moreover, he was appalled by what he called the "complete betrayal of revolutionary Marxism by Stalinism". Yet, he was thrilled by the "energetic and heroic role" of the Communist youth of the world. In the course of the

¹⁰⁷H.S. Beattie, "Spain, Another View", Canadian Forum, XVIII (April 1938), 454-455.

The charges made by this volunteer did not go unanswered. Several other veterans wrote letters discounting his claims about conditions in Spain. See H.S. Abrams, "The International Brigades", Canadian Forum, XIV (August 1939), 157-158; L.K. Ryan, "Spain, Another View", Canadian Forum, XVIII (May 1938), 54-55.

¹⁰⁸M.L. Ernst and D. Loth, Report on the American Communist (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), p. 71.

struggle between "reason" and "emotion", he was left confused and bewildered. Consequently, it was not until he returned to the United States that he left the Communist Party.

There were few such "Trotskyites" in the ranks of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. The measures used by the Communist Party to screen the volunteers prevented any large numbers of them from getting to Spain.

Another very small group of men resented the American domination of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion that was so clearly evident during the first months in Spain. One Vancouver volunteer was particularly embittered by the actions of many of the Party functionaries from the United States, who insisted that they be appointed as officers even though they lacked the military experience that many of their Canadian comrades had gained after several months in combat.¹⁰⁹ They demanded such appointments simply because they held high positions in the Party back in the United States. The veteran in question claimed that this was the reason he had become disillusioned and had left the Communist Party upon his return to Canada. Indeed, one of the American officers in retrospect, openly indicated that he and his compatriots "betrayed an enormous amount of chauvinism" toward the Canadians and did not consider the possibility that they needed to be represented in the leadership of the battalion.¹¹⁰ But how widespread such anti-American feelings were among

¹⁰⁹Interview #41 with the CBC, Vancouver, September 1965.

¹¹⁰Irving Weissman, interview with the CBC, New York, November 1965.

the Canadians, cannot be determined. Some men may have been angered at the secondary position to which they had been relegated in the battalion, but it certainly was not an important enough factor to cause widespread demoralization in the ranks.¹¹¹ In fact, as time went on, this problem ceased to be an issue of contention. The casualty rates among the American officers was so high, that as the war continued, Canadians found themselves thrust into positions of command largely by default.

The major reason usually cited for disillusionment among foreign Communists in the late thirties relates to the domestic and foreign policies that had been undertaken by the "fatherland of socialism", the Soviet Union.

During the course of the conflict in Spain, Stalin and his new police chief, Yezhov, had conducted a mass purge among the top political and military leadership in the USSR - a purge which was widely publicized in the Western press and which raised some doubts in the minds of fellow travellers and foreign Communists alike as to the "efficacy" of socialism. Indeed, to intellectuals such as Arthur Koestler, these events crystallized their resolve to break with the Communist movement for good.¹¹²

It is not possible to discover the full extent to which the knowledge of the Stalinist purges influenced the

¹¹¹Another Vancouver man, Ronald Liversedge, was angered because of the opposition of the American command toward the proposal to name the third English-speaking battalion after two Canadians, William Lyon Mackenzie and Louis Joseph Papineau.

¹¹²Richard Crossman, ed., The God That Failed, p. 61.

Canadian volunteers in Spain. There is evidence, however, in the case of a volunteer named Jack Lawson, that this knowledge was important in his eventual decision to break with the Communist Party. This veteran had a background typical of the Canadian group which volunteered to fight in Spain.

Jack was born in Scotland and immigrated to Canada in 1920 and took up residence in the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. He there became a member of the Inland Boatman's Union and was former editor of the Union's publication. During the difficult years, '29, '30, Jack became an active member of the Canadian Communist Party and later a responsible authority of the Party in his city. He was a member of the Project Workers Union, an organization formed to protect the interests of unemployed people. He actively participated in the Relief Camp Workers Strike in '35 and was arrested on charges of inciting to riot. After spending 72 days in prison awaiting trial and sentence, he was sentenced to one year suspended sentence, and on the completion of this one year to leave the country. However, Jack didn't leave the country until the month of May 1937 and it was not on the demand of the judiciary body that he left, but because he knew that the rights of men were at stake in Spain. He was determined to do his utmost to help the Spanish people. And as a worker, his utmost was to become a volunteer of the International Brigades.¹¹³

During his service in Spain, Lawson underwent a transformation of sorts. He related how, while on leave in Madrid, he had by chance met a woman journalist who had been with Anna Louise Strong in China.¹¹⁴ Before coming to Spain, this woman had been posted to Moscow for four years. Consequently, she was able to provide him with a personal, detailed account of the

¹¹³ Jack Lawson memoir in ECS.

¹¹⁴ Jack Lawson, interview with the CBC, Vancouver, September 1965.

purges that Stalin had been carrying out there. These "horror" stories according to Lawson, had a good deal of influence on him, in part contributing to the rather "mixed" attitude that he had toward his Spanish "adventures" upon his return to Canada.

On the one hand, we were subjected to all kinds of Communist propaganda you know and of course anyone who was only just a whisker away from the Communist line was either a Fascist or Trotskyite ... whichever it had to be. So that when I came back to Canada from Spain, I held sort of a mixed attitude. As far as I was concerned there was no doubt in my mind that the Fascists had to be stopped because they were out to destroy the trade union movement ... But at the same time, I wasn't prepared to accept the Communist line because I figured it was too narrow.¹¹⁵

Yet, Lawson's experience seems to be the exception rather than the rule among the Canadian volunteers. The majority of the men did not possess such intimate sources. Their only channels of information about the outside world were rigidly controlled by the Communist organizers of the Brigades. Consequently, they were only given the standard Party interpretation of the purges in the Soviet Union, an interpretation most of them readily accepted without question. As John Gates later wrote:

I found no reason to question the public confessions of the top Bolshevik leaders like Bukharin and Radek. They had been known as dissidents for years. Their personal ambitions, I thought, had led them to the final step of counter-revolution. It seemed incredible to me that men of their status would confess

¹¹⁵Ibid.

grave crimes unless they had committed them. I could not conceive of myself ever confessing to crimes of which I was not guilty. The possibility of Stalin coercing them into false confessions we refused even to consider. Could such vileness be perpetrated by the man who was doing more than anyone in the whole world to help democracy in Spain?¹¹⁶

Whatever doubts the volunteers may have had were subordinated to their deep admiration of the Soviet Union because of its avowed and open support of the Spanish Republic. To many of the men in Spain, Stalin seemed like a God-like figure who was incapable of doing wrong. Moreover, the Soviet Union appeared as the new socialist utopia - a rallying point for the forces of good in the world. The reality was quite different.

In terms of foreign policy, the Soviets had repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice the interests of "world revolution" whenever they clashed with the strategic goals of the Russian state. The Soviet involvement in Spain was no exception. Indeed, at least one Canadian volunteer became disillusioned in part because of the actions taken by the USSR during the Spanish Civil War. He indicated:

Even the Russians didn't help us the way they could have. They were playing politics too. Old Stalin was so paranoid it wasn't even funny and when he could have probably helped us - when Dr. Negrin got on the air after a serious [Fascist air] raid and broadcast to the world, that the Spanish planes were going to bomb the airfields of the Italians - all hell broke loose. Stalin said no. That will be spreading the war. They didn't want to spread it.¹¹⁷

This phenomenon was never so clearly displayed as in the fall of 1939 when Soviet diplomats concluded a non-

¹¹⁶ John Gates, The Story of an American Communist, p.55.

¹¹⁷ Interview #27 with the CBC, Victoria, September 1965.

aggression pact with Nazi Germany. For sympathizers like Louis Fischer, Gustav Regler and Andre Malraux, who had continued to approve of the Soviet policy of aiding Republican Spain while deploring domestic developments in the USSR, this was to be their point of departure from Communism.¹¹⁸

The spirit of this agreement was flagrantly in opposition to everything the men of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion had fought for in Spain. The thought of having to dissociate themselves from the cause of anti-Fascism in order to follow the vagaries of the Party line must have been too much for some of them. In effect, to remain within the Communist Party, they would have to accommodate themselves with the same "evil" which a short time before they had thought would enslave mankind. Ralph Bates, an English novelist and a former commissar in the Brigades, expressed the bewilderment and bitterness that some of the volunteers must have felt when he wrote:

Communists often wonder why they are now accused of treachery. I will tell them. It was the collective security and the Popular Front policies that actually revealed vast bodies of liberalism and anti-Fascism. It was the anti-Fascist campaign of the Communist parties and those who were willing to work with them which created the mood which Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier must need now to utilize in their resistance to

¹¹⁸Richard Crossman, ed., The God That Failed, p. 119.
D. Aaron, Writers of the Left (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1958), pp. 282, 296.

Germany, whatever their real reasons for that opposition. In effect, the Communists pointed at Hitler and said, 'There is your enemy, fight him'. Now they declare, 'This is an imperialist war, turn against your own government'. That is why I, and so many others resent the change and cannot believe in the honesty of it.¹¹⁹

One Canadian veteran who had spent over nineteen months in Spain began to have similar doubts after he discovered that, contrary to what was being published in the Party press, the Soviet Union was unwilling to accept any of the refugees of the Spanish conflict. He felt particularly angry about this because many of his German, Italian and Polish comrades were confined in French concentration camps without any hope of repatriation after two years of struggle against Fascism.¹²⁰ The Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in 1939 caused him to reach the same conclusions as Ralph Bates. It was the catalyst that hardened his resolve to take his leave of the Party. As he indicated:

After protracted negotiations with England and France, Stalin suddenly reversed himself and signed a pact with Hitler. The blow was numbing. It is true that the pact bore the innocuous label 'Non-Aggression' but the timing was so staggering since it gave Hitler a psychological triumph at exactly the right moment. It secured his economic rear and left him free to launch his attack on Poland. These things our fellow traveller saw clearly. What,

¹¹⁹Ralph Bates, "Disaster in Finland", New Republic, C (December 13, 1939), 222.

¹²⁰"Ex-fellow Traveller", "Dialectical Contortionism", Canadian Forum, XIX (October 1939), 214.

he wondered, had happened to the theory of the Popular Front so ardently advocated by Moscow?¹²¹

He had discovered like many others, that the "fatherland of socialism" was quite capable of taking part in the "bourgeois-fascist" game of power politics.

An American volunteer was so disillusioned with the actions of the Soviet Union, and so angry at the open endorsement of its foreign policy by the Communist-dominated Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB), that he attempted to organize a rival group.¹²² He discovered, however, that although some of the men were bitter about the pro-Fascist stand of the VALB, they refused to do anything to oppose it. They preferred not to become involved and in doing so, avoid the publicity that a confrontation with the Communist organization would bring. A similar attitude probably existed among some of the Canadian veterans, who quietly left the Communist Party in Canada, seeking to forget their Spanish experience and to begin their lives anew.¹²³

Undoubtedly, such an about-face on the part of the Soviet Union made even the most disciplined Party member pause

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²M.L. Ernst and D. Loth, Report on the American Communist, p. 101.

¹²³The segment of the volunteers that were interviewed did not reflect the existence of this group of the men. Consequently, it is only possible to present a rather sketchy idea of their attitudes and numbers.

for an instant.¹²⁴ But, such hesitation was conveniently forgotten when the Soviet Union was itself attacked by the Nazis in 1941. With the shift in Party line engendered by these developments, anyone who fought in Spain was in a sense "rehabilitated". Spain was now considered to have been the first battleground on which the "holy crusade" against Fascism had been fought. The men who had taken part in this struggle were recognized as individuals who had been in the vanguard of the forces which eventually defeated this "evil". The infamous "unholy alliance" was largely ignored by the Communists in the wake of World War II. Still, some former volunteers with the benefit of hindsight, have attempted to justify the Pact. As one Montreal veteran wrote in 1969:

When the Hitler-Stalin pact shocked a world that still hadn't grasped what was really going on, I was not at all surprised. The right wing parties of Britain and France had been for so long trying to set up the Soviets as patsies for the Nazis to destroy that it was not surprising that Stalin should, at the eleventh hour, trump their ace. It was rough, tough Real-politik all right. But how else could

¹²⁴In the first weeks of September, the Canadian Communist Party seemed willing to support the Canadian government in the new conflict with Hitler. For example, on September 9, 1939, an article was published in the Clarion indicating that Edward Cecil Smith, a staff writer for that newspaper and former commander of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, had offered the services of that unit to the Minister of National Defence for the new conflict. A few weeks later, however, the new line was formally established when the Soviet Union invaded Eastern Poland. The conflict was now referred to as an "imperialist war", fought for the benefit of the "war profiteers" in Canada. See Toronto Daily Clarion, August 26, 1939, September 9, 1939, September 23, 1939, September 30, 1939.

Stalin buy two years of respite in
order to prepare for the inevitable
showdown with Hitler?¹²⁵

This volunteer's only concern was that the Finnish-Soviet conflict would jeopardize the eventual alliance which was to develop between the USSR and the Western powers. His justification is a familiar one. It hinges on the assumption that despite the 1939 agreement, the outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and Germany was inevitable. Consequently, Stalin, as a result of the Pact, was able to gain two years in which to prepare for this conflict. At that time, the issues were not as clear to the Soviet leaders as this view suggests. It is well-known that Stalin and other leaders of the Politburo went to extraordinary lengths in an attempt to stave off the German attack which, when it did come, caught them largely unawares and unprepared.¹²⁶

With other volunteers, disillusionment seems to have been connected with what they have experienced since they returned to Canada. The case of Jack Hoshoooley, a veteran from Kitchener, is perhaps most representative of this group of the volunteers. Upon his return in 1939, he wrote the following memoir about his decision to go to Spain.

¹²⁵Hazen Sise, "The Thirties: A Very Personal Memoir", cited in Victor Hoar, comp., The Great Depression, p. 209.

¹²⁶None of the volunteers who was interviewed even related this problem to their Spanish experience. The obvious conclusion then, is that they either accepted this justification or refused to reveal their true feelings about it. Perhaps some of them felt that what the volunteers accomplished in Spain should be divorced from such questions.

I did not belong to any Communist organization before going to Spain but was always a sympathizer. It all started in 1933 when I was laid off work in a hot factory for the reason of my talking strike.

Then in the spring of '35 we had a strike in one of our foundries and of course, I went on the picket line.

In June my mother and brother went on the 'On to Ottawa Trek' but I could not go because of my wife who was not quite in agreement with all this at the time. My family in this town [Kitchener] were painted Reds, Communists and so on. I was also. Then, of course, I could not get a job at all. So it went on until the Spanish war began. By this time, I was pretty well acquainted with the world situation through reading the Clarion and other workers' literature.

In January or February of '37 I saw that as a believer of democracy and workers' rights my duty was to help the Spanish people struggle for their rights.¹²⁷

When interviewed in 1965, however, Hoshoooley presented quite a different explanation of his motives:

Reasons, I don't know ... I mean ... varied reasons. Oh, I imagine there was a bit of adventure, a bit of everything at that particular time. I don't know if you are familiar with the times or not [nineteen thirties] but at that particular time, there was a lot of - what can you call it? - political nonsense or something. It was just coming into real strength.¹²⁸

Hoshoooley indicated that he had a great deal of difficulty in readjusting after he arrived back in Canada, largely because of the hindrances and persecution he suffered as a

¹²⁷ Jack Hoshoooley memoir in ECS.

¹²⁸ Jack Hoshoooley, interview with the CBC, Kitchener, Ontario, August 1964.

result of having participated in the Spanish Civil War. In particular, he was disturbed at the actions of the VALB in the United States for putting "people on the spot as a result of having reunions and things of that nature" and causing them to lose their jobs.¹²⁹ Perhaps his "transformation" had been in part related to such a personal experience.

Thus, disillusionment and disaffection among the volunteers were caused by a wide variety of factors. During the Spanish conflict, the morale of the men of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion was never as high as some Communist apologists have claimed. Under the circumstances, this was not surprising. The volunteers were constantly plagued by inept military leadership, as well as tremendous disparities in war material. Demoralization under these conditions was quite natural and during periods when the Spanish Republic was suffering setbacks at the front, such as in October 1937 or April 1938, many Canadian volunteers simply demonstrated their disillusionment by secretly slipping out of Spain by whatever means at their disposal. Not all the disillusioned volunteers, however, deserted. For some non-Communist volunteers, the realities of Communist control were the decisive elements in their "transformation". Among the Trotskyites, disillusionment was related to ideological questions, that is, the feeling that the social revolution in Spain had been sacrificed for the war effort. The purges in the USSR and in particular, the Nazi-Soviet Pact were the

¹²⁹Ibid.

most traumatic for the Party members. In fact, this group was probably the most disenchanted of all, since these events destroyed the illusions that were central to their beliefs about the "fatherland of socialism". Finally, other men underwent a change in attitude largely because of the hindrances they suffered on their return to Canada from Spain. To have fought in the Spanish Civil War against the wishes of the Canadian government was a stigma that often could prevent an individual from obtaining employment.

CHAPTER 5

POLITICIZATION

In Liverpool, British correspondents questioned us about Spain. It was painful for us to answer their questions. One correspondent asked me: 'What did you fight for in Spain?' I answered him: 'For our freedom and yours and perhaps also for Gibraltar'. He didn't ask me any more questions.¹³⁰

- A "politicized" volunteer on the journey home, 1939.

If some Canadians became disillusioned in Spain, others were politicized in either of two ways. A few of the men who had no rigid political beliefs before they fought in the conflict, became actively sympathetic to the Communist cause as a result of their experiences and joined the Party. More commonly, however, the Communist volunteers were even further radicalized; that is, they maintained their views, despite all the influences which could have disillusioned them, and in the immediate period after the war, became more militant than ever.

There are several instances of adventurers and soldiers of fortune who were greatly influenced by the "uniqueness" of the Spanish conflict and, as a result, were converted to Communism. Such evidence must be treated with care, for it has been largely provided by sources openly sympathetic to the Communist Parties of Canada and the United States.

¹³⁰ Alex Melnychenko memoir in ECS.

Perhaps the most publicized example of such a case in the Communist press was that of an American, Frank Lord, who was depicted as the classic soldier of fortune.¹³¹ Lord had run away from school in Texas in 1916 to join the Texas infantry on the Mexican border. Less than a year later, he enlisted with the Royal Canadian flying corps and served with it in France until he was shot down two days before the armistice. In 1918, he fought with the White Army in Russia against the Bolsheviks. He then served through two revolutions in Mexico and one in Central America. His experiences as a flyer in the Spanish conflict, however, changed his whole outlook as he "learned about Fascism and Democracy". In an article in the Toronto Daily Clarion, he described his "emotional transformation":

I had believed America sympathetic to ideals of democracy but way over in Paris it already seemed as though the U.S. had sold out to Fascism and France.

I was puzzled but not disturbed, for deep in my being a new blood was pulsing, a misty veil had parted. I had seen and experienced new things besides which threats of imprisonment or snubs of friends paled. I had seen patriotism stark naked, stripped of all banners as embodied in men and women fighting and dying for their country. All this I had seen, I who had never quite felt the surge of patriotism.¹³²

Lord's experience cannot be substantiated by any non-

¹³¹Toronto Daily Clarion, August 18, 1937, p.4.

¹³²Toronto Daily Clarion, August 18, 1937, p.4. Lord's transformation was also alluded to in Arthur Landis, The Abraham Lincoln Brigade, p. 126.

Communist sources. Nor is there any concrete evidence that he actually joined the Communist Party. Yet, in view of the publicity he received in the Party press, and his involvement in various fund-raising tours, he probably, at the very least, had become a "sympathizer" who had accepted the Communist view of the world.¹³³

One of the American commissars of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion mentioned another volunteer, Jim Hill, as also having been politicized.¹³⁴ Hill had a rather different background than the rest of the Americans in the Brigades. He was from Oklahoma and had been a non-commissioned officer in the United States Army. Like Lord, he was an adventurer who sought to escape the economic dislocations of the depression. He too, discovered what the real issues of the war were and as a consequence, became involved in Party activities in Spain. In the end, however, his struggle to overcome his "political illiteracy" came to naught, for he was killed at the Battle of Brunete in the summer of 1937.

Among the Canadians, there is evidence of a similar "transformation". Tom McEwan, a Party organizer in British Columbia during the Spanish conflict, indicated that another soldier of fortune, George Edgar, joined the Communist Party while he was in Spain.¹³⁵ Edgar, at fifty-five, was perhaps

¹³³See Toronto Daily Clarion, October 16, 1937, p.1.

¹³⁴Irving Weissman, interview with the CBC.

¹³⁵Tom McEwan, interview with the CBC.

one of the oldest of the volunteers, serving for eighteen months with the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.¹³⁶

Overall, there does not seem to have been large numbers of men politicized in the rather narrow sense of joining the Party. Those "conversions" that did occur probably were much more frequent among the American volunteers than among their Canadian counterparts. This was because there were simply larger numbers of non-Party people among the Americans. The majority of the Canadians were already members of the Communist Party.

Many more volunteers managed to survive the Spanish war with their ideological convictions intact. As one veteran wrote:

On April 6 we left the place Spain for the French border. We found the friends of the MacPaps [Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion] waiting for us with open arms, food, cigarettes, etc. We left Spain in rags and full of lice. They did everything possible for us. From there we went to Le Havre where we were cared for until everything was ready for us to come to Canada. Now I want to go on continuing the fight against Fascism on Canadian soil.¹³⁷

¹³⁶Toronto Daily Star, February 3, 1939, p.2. Such politicization was not confined only to the ranks of the adventurers. See Robert Rosenstone, Crusade of the Left, p. 274. Rosenstone has mentioned several instances of American volunteers who, beyond a general distaste for Hitler and his cohorts, were also quite hazy in their political views and as a result of their Spanish experiences they too came to see the world through red-tinged glasses. There is, however, no evidence of similar cases among the Canadian volunteers.

¹³⁷Memoir of Anthony Mangotic; also see Memoir of Walter Dent, Memoir of Bill Baily, Memoir of Bill Brennan, Memoir of Bill Kardash, all in ECS.

The Spanish experience not only reinforced some of their beliefs, but tended to make a number of men of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion more radical and pro-Communist than ever. In their view, the Communists, both native and foreign alike, had been the most vigorous group prosecuting the war.¹³⁸ They had been responsible for creating the best military units in Spain, such as the Fifth Regiment and the International Brigades. In contrast, the Trotskyite (POUM) and Anarchist Parties were condemned for sabotaging the war effort.¹³⁹ The men stressed that these groups represented a fifth column that had collaborated with the Fascists against the Republicans.

But, an even more important factor in their increased radicalization was the actions and policies taken by the Western powers in reaction to the threat posed by Hitler and Mussolini.¹⁴⁰ The non-intervention agreement, the collapse of the Popular Front in France, the remilitarization of the Rhineland with French acquiescence, the German occupation of Austria and finally, the sell-out at Munich

¹³⁸A number of veterans reaffirmed such attitudes in 1965. They were as follows: Bill Beeching, Lawrence Cane, Lionel Edwards, William Kardash, Mike Olynky, Marvin Penn, and Milton Cohen.

¹³⁹The following veterans held such opinions: Walter Dent, Nick Elenduke, Hans Ibing, Fred Kostyk, Joe Schoen, Mischa Strogoff.

¹⁴⁰Such attitudes were reflected particularly in the statements published in the Toronto Daily Clarion of volunteers who returned to Canada in the last months of 1938 and early months of 1939. For example, see Toronto Daily Clarion, April 20, 1938; February 16, 1939; July 17, 1937; and May 23, 1938.

Furthermore, many of the volunteers mentioned this when they were interviewed in 1965 (Terry Cunningham, J. Kokuna, Walter Gowricki, Mike Haydyk, Len Norris, Frank Roden, Art Siven, Irving Weissman).

all tended to confirm the dim view they had always taken of the "bourgeois democracies". As one Canadian volunteer bitterly commented:

Well, let's put it this way, when I came back, I think I was so upset at the actions of Leon Blum who to me represented the political democratic government of France that I must confess ... I carried a sort of hatred of those who professed a similar philosophy because it was so obvious that they had made it impossible for the Spaniards to fight, quite apart from the Internationals. While Germany was sending all the requirements, both military and otherwise, one country above all, France, because of its geographical position made it impossible for the war to be properly prosecuted.¹⁴¹

Such opinions were commonly held among many of the volunteers. Indeed, their rather oversimplified "two camp" view of the world seemed to have been further reinforced by events. By not aiding the Republic, the governments of Chamberlain and Daladier were in fact "providing direct aid to the Fascist interventionists". Consequently, the Western powers were clearly in the Fascist camp along with Hitler and Mussolini. At the same time, the belief held by the volunteers that the Soviet Union was a powerful bulwark against Fascism was also reaffirmed. The USSR had been the only great power who, in the interests of "collective security", had provided military assistance to the Spanish Republic. Hence, many of the veterans viewed the Soviet Union as the one nation in the world that was interested in resisting Fascism. Indeed,

¹⁴¹Ross Russell, interview with the CBC.

some of them have continued to maintain such an attitude, even during times when this was no longer a reflection of the true realities.¹⁴² The illusions which were fed and nourished in the crucible that was the Spanish Civil War often persisted long after the conflict had ended.

¹⁴²In the interregnum between the outbreak of the war in 1939 and the German attack on the Soviet Union, there are several instances of volunteers attempting to justify the pro-Fascist neutrality that the USSR had embraced at that time. In this regard, the "betrayals" of the Western powers at Munich and elsewhere continued to be most frequently mentioned. See articles by Edward Cecil Smith and George Edgar in the Canadian Tribune, January 20, 1940 and January 25, 1941.

CONCLUSIONS

Anti-Fascism was the common denominator that impelled the majority of the volunteers of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion to go to Spain. Yet, in most cases such a response was influenced by other factors. The economic depression in Canada, the feeling of having had some previous experience with "Fascism" as well as the desire to conform to the current "Party line" were important for each of the different groups that made up the Canadian men. Indeed, the uncompromising and extreme nature of their motives was related to the fact that they were clearly activists rather than ideologues. The issues seemed self-evident to the volunteers. Was the march of the Fascist dictators to be stopped in Spain or was it going to be allowed to continue? Yet, if this was the nature of the idealism that influenced the men, could it sustain them throughout the terrible struggle in which they found themselves? For the most part, those who had been intimately involved in Party endeavours in Canada, survived with their views intact. Perhaps their background in the Communist movement cushioned them against the realities they found in Spain. At any rate, they were willing to submit to the same measure of discipline as they had in the various labour struggles which they were involved with in Canada. In contrast, non-Party members without similar backgrounds resented the Communist control over the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion that they found when they arrived in Spain. Some no doubt became so "demoralized" that they fled

from the ranks. Most of the desertions, however, like in any war, were related to the military defeats that had been inflicted on the Republican Army.

The major effect of the Spanish experience was that it tended to polarize the opinions and convictions of the Canadian volunteers. In the immediate period after the conflict, a large group of the men were even further radicalized by their adventure. While they were embittered by the policy of appeasement which had been followed by the Western powers, their belief in the Soviet Union and Communism had been reaffirmed as a result of the prominent role the Soviets played in aiding the Spanish Republic. Indeed, the faith of a number of Canadian veterans was not even shaken by the Non-aggression Pact that Stalin concluded with Hitler in August 1939 - an agreement which seemed to betray everything they had fought for in Spain.

Other volunteers were disillusioned by such a clear demonstration of "power politics" on the part of the one nation they had believed was somehow "above" such tactics. Consequently, they formed part of the mass exodus from the Party in the period after 1939, joining the ranks of their comrades who had reached this state of mind earlier for various other reasons - ranging from semi-Trotskyism to anti-Americanism. These latest "refugees from Communism" were clearly the most disillusioned of all the volunteers, for their assumptions about the USSR had been central to their ideological beliefs.

After the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the orientation of the Canadian Communist Party naturally changed. The conflict that had begun in 1939 ceased to be an "imperialist war" and was transformed into a struggle for freedom and democracy. Those veterans still connected with the Party once again threw themselves into the battle against Hitler and Mussolini. Some joined the Canadian armed services with this end in mind. In their view, the Soviet Union was once again an active bulwark against Fascism - a position which they consider it to have maintained up until the present time. Indeed, the entire Spanish episode has been glorified and elevated in the Communist press to the point where it has passed beyond the realm of history into legend. The volunteers have been depicted as heroes larger than life - as figures embodying the highest sense of "working class internationalism".¹⁴³

In effect, what has occurred is a perversion of the original ideals that impelled the men to go to Spain. Ironically, those veterans who have dissociated themselves from the Communist movement for one reason or another, have remained closer to the spirit of the cause that so many of

¹⁴³ According to the current Communist Party line, the volunteers have become "perpetual anti-Fascists" willing to continue their struggles against the same "evils" as they had fought in Spain; that is, against the rise of neo-Fascism wherever it may appear, whether in the Pentagon or on Parliament Hill. For examples see: Jack Bjoze, "Report of Executive Secretary", Volunteer for Liberty, New York: Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, November 1946, 2; Paul Verner, "Remember the Lessons of History", World Marxist Review, IX (September 1960), 43.

their comrades died for in Spain. They did not betray these lofty motives in order to conform to the vagaries of the "Party line" as some have continued to do since 1939. Yet, in the end, it makes little difference. For these men, the cause that captured their imaginations over thirty years ago no longer has any meaning. Since their return to Canada, some of the volunteers have suffered a great deal as a result of their participation and consequently are very bitter. Others have achieved a measure of respectability and would rather forget about the adventures of their youth. But, thirty-five years before, the prospect of volunteering for such a cause was both romantic and exciting for many young Canadians. The reality, however, was to be far deadlier than any of them could ever have imagined.

Solidarity!

By Avrom

From the Toronto Daily Clarion, April 12, 1937.

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