



¡NO PASARÁN!

International Brigade Memorial Trust ● 3-2020 ● £5

Fact or fiction?

Ken Loach's
Land and
Freedom
25 years on



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to our

Friends

of 2019/2020



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Andrew Wiard



SPEAKING: Jeremy Corbyn was invited to lay a wreath on behalf of the IBMT at this year's commemoration event.

Corbyn praises 'incredible sense of solidarity'

The IBMT held a socially distanced commemoration on Saturday 4 July at London's International Brigade memorial, which saw the Labour MP for Islington North, Jeremy Corbyn, lay a wreath on behalf of the Trust.

The commemoration began with Megan Dobney, Secretary of the IBMT, providing introductions and noting the importance of marking the annual event in some way. IBMT President Marlene Sidaway then spoke on the importance of keeping the memory of the struggle against fascism alive and the consequences if it were forgotten. She underscored her point with a poem from her late partner, International Brigade volunteer David Marshall.

Marlene then called upon the former Labour leader to say a few words on the history of popular solidarity that the International Brigades represent. This is what he said: *Thank you very much for coming along today and thank you very much to all those at the International Brigade Memorial Trust for ensuring this event takes place every year. I consider it an honour to be invited here to lay a wreath in memory of those that fought in the International Brigades and those that laid down their lives.*

As many of you know, my mum and dad met in support of the Spanish Civil War, in support of the Republican cause in Spain.

And I was brought up in that tradition of understanding the heroism of those people that went to Spain at great cost to themselves and great danger, many of whom never returned.

So it was entirely appropriate that in 1985 the Greater London Council should help with establishing this beautiful memorial here on the South Bank.

And in a time when statues and memorials are being discussed all over the world I can think of nothing more appropriate for the history of this country than to be able to say that this is part of our history – that incredible sense of solidarity with people around the world struggling for their peace, their justice and their freedom.

There are poems that are on the side of this memorial, from the great poets of the earlier part of our history, Shelley and Byron and others, who stood up for liberty in many parts of the world.

I want to conclude by saying this. First of all, a message to our comrades in Spain for all that they endured during the 40 years of Franco's oppression – muchísimas gracias por su

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

Remembering in a time of lockdown



IBMT Film Coordinator Marshall Mateer has compiled a gallery of photographs and messages from members and supporters documenting how they marked the 4 July International Brigade annual commemoration from home this year.

The gallery features reflections on this year's commemoration and past ones, from contributors across Britain and the world. It is available to view on the IBMT's Flickr page: [flic.kr/s/aHsmPe6zz3](https://www.flickr.com/photos/ibmt/)

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

solidaridad, muchísimas gracias por su lucha contra el fascismo en España y el contra el fascismo en todo el mundo.

Let us remember what they did, remember the lives they laid down, and also the point Marlene Sidaway was making, that the fight against fascism in Spain, had it been supported by governments in this country and in other countries, maybe Franco would not have succeeded. Maybe the Condor Legion, which were experimenting with bombardment in Gernika and other places, would not have had their chance to bomb civilians all over Europe in the Second World War. The history of the fight against fascism never ever goes away.

Today the world is dominated by two things – the coronavirus crisis and the solidarity of Black Lives Matter around the world. In both of

those we're examining our own history. In Black Lives Matter we're examining the colonial history, the oppression that this country imposed on many others through slavery. Let's reconfigure the way we teach history, the history of ordinary people's struggle for their liberty and their justice. That's what Black Lives Matter is about.

I'm full of optimism for the future because of that sense of understanding and solidarity and education that is growing all over the world. Thank you very much comrades. Muchísimas gracias a todos.

The IBMT has produced a 16-minute film of the proceedings of 4 July in Jubilee Gardens. It also features a pre-recorded performance of 'Jarama Valley' by Na-Mara. The film can be viewed on the IBMT's YouTube channel: [youtu.be/ZNRnDMfcrQQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZNRnDMfcrQQ).

Annual General Meeting in Southampton postponed

Due to ongoing coronavirus concerns and official social distancing restrictions, the IBMT Executive Committee has decided to postpone this year's Annual General Meeting, which was scheduled to take place in Southampton on 10 October.

Instead, a shortened meeting will be held on 20 March next year, coinciding with the Trust's annual Len Crome Memorial Conference in Edinburgh.

The postponement decision

was reached late in August, with Trustees agreeing that members' health and safety had to be prioritised. It was also felt that many people would be deterred from travelling and taking part in the AGM and associated events while fears about the virus persisted.

The IBMT constitution states that the AGM 'shall be held in the month of October of each year or as near as practicable'.

The Executive Committee

decided that a meeting this October would not be practicable, not least because it would likely be 'incurate' – in other words with not enough members present to be able to take decisions. The IBMT's constitution requires a quorum of one twenty-fifth of the membership – roughly 40 people.

As a consequence of the Executive Committee's decision, elections for Executive Committee members have also been

postponed, and the four members who were due to step down in October – Alex Gordon, Jonathan Havard, John Haywood and Tosh McDonald – will remain in office until the rescheduled AGM.

Meanwhile, the No Pasarán Raffle draw, which would have been part of the AGM's weekend of events in Southampton, will still proceed on 10 October, but at a time and venue to be announced. The names of winners will be posted on the IBMT website.



Christopher Farman (1937-2020)

Writer and IBMT activist Chris Farman died on 29 May 2020 in Horton General Hospital, Banbury at the age of 83, after being taken ill with Covid-19.

A committed supporter of the IBMT, Chris helped to establish the Oxford International Brigade Memorial Committee (OIBMC) in 2014. As part of this small group of activists, he played a key role in campaigning and fundraising for a

◀ Speaking in 2015 at the launch of his book 'No Other Way', a history of Spanish Civil War volunteers from Oxfordshire.

memorial to the 31 men and women from Oxfordshire who volunteered to fight fascism in Spain. The memorial was unveiled at St Clement's, Oxford, in 2017.

He was also the co-author, along with local historians Valery Rose and Liz Woolley, of 'No Other Way: Oxfordshire and the Spanish Civil War 1936-39', which was published in 2015.

More recently Chris produced the script for the 'Comrades Come Rally' event in March which saw actors and musicians gather in Oxford to perform songs and read letters, poems and memoirs of Spanish Civil War volunteers. His

friends and comrades will remember Chris for a boundless enthusiasm for history, political debate and activism.

Paying his tributes, Colin Carritt of the IBMT-affiliated OIBMC said Chris was 'a mainstay of our successful campaign to erect a memorial to the Oxfordshire International Brigade volunteers.' He added: 'The campaign was long and sometimes difficult but Chris never lost his enthusiasm, his sense of humour and above all, his commitment to the idea. As a journalist and historian he was invaluable to those of us on the committee whose recall of detail and historical accuracy was not always what it might have been.'



The International Brigade Memorial Trust keeps alive the memory and spirit of the men and women who volunteered to fight fascism and defend democracy in Spain from 1936 to 1939.

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Reassessing the military strength of the Brigades

Following his study of the People's Army of Republican Spain, which received a positive review in the last issue of *iNo Pasarán!*, Alexander Clifford's new book, 'Fighting for Spain', is published this August.

While much has been written about the political, social and cultural significance of the Brigades, less has been said about their performance as front-line troops. It is this military history, according to the author, that 'Fighting for Spain' focuses on in detail through documents and vivid illustrations.

Clifford, who is a Newcastle-based IBMT member, looks at the foundation and recruitment of the International Brigades, as well as their training, discipline and motivation. Using Soviet and Comintern documents, the reports of a US military attaché, journalists' accounts, and of course the writings of the volunteers themselves, the book tells the story of the brigades as combat units, tracing the course of each major battle in which they fought and showing the drastic changes they underwent as the war progressed.

Little more than an untrained polyglot militia in 1936, by 1937 many International units had become tried and tested shock troops. However, repeated maulings during the war's bloodiest battles saw the Brigades reduced to a shadow of their former selves by 1938 and the introduction of Spanish conscripts to fill their ranks damaged cohesion and combat effectiveness.

This new book is likely to be welcomed by International Brigade historians and enthusiasts.

► Alex Clifford at a launch for his first book, 'The People's Army in the Spanish Civil War', published earlier this year by Pen & Sword.

Richard Baxell, former IBMT Chair and historian of the British Battalion, believes it's an excellent addition to the literature: 'Accessible and well written, backed up with useful maps and images, it includes a wealth of information on the formation and composition of the Brigades and their role during the war.'

While many historians have picked up on reports of demoralisation and desertion, what is most remarkable is that the majority of volunteers kept on fighting right up to their withdrawal in September 1938, demonstrating valour and a spirit of sacrifice on a par with the finest troops in the People's Army. Clifford challenges recent dismissals of the International Brigades' military impact and counters claims they were primarily a propaganda tool through a close study of their battlefield contribution.



'Fighting for Spain: The International Brigades in the Civil War, 1936-1939' is published by Pen & Sword this year.



A WREATH FOR TOMMY MOORE:

On 3 June IBMT activists Stuart Walsh, Barrie Eckford (left) and Paul Ward (right) laid a wreath on a memorial to Thomas Moore, a volunteer from Manchester who was killed at Teruel in 1938. Eckford 're-discovered' the memorial to Moore in Moston Cemetery, Manchester by chance in 2019.

Giles Tremlett A history of all the International Brigades

Best-selling author Giles Tremlett tells historian Richard Baxell about his forthcoming book, which offers a rare and comprehensive account of the International Brigades from a global perspective.

What led you to write another book on the International Brigades? Why do you think they are still relevant and important?

I have been interested in the International Brigades for longer than I can remember, and in 1996 worked as a volunteer when the survivors came to Madrid for the last major reunion. As a journalist based in Spain, I had also been meeting them on and off for almost three decades.

I was especially glad to have one of the last survivors – the Mexican-Spaniard Virgilio Fernández del Real, who had been an 18-year-old anaesthetist – stay with me not long before he died, aged 100, last year. Virgilio still wore the Brigades’ triangular symbol on his beret, and was much in demand on his visits to Spain, where he travelled around explaining the Brigades’ history to those Spaniards fascinated by the foreign volunteers who came to defend, and die for, the Republic.

As a historian, however, I found the existing overarching histories of the International Brigades disappointing. There are splendid volumes on Brigaders from individual countries, like your ‘Unlikely Warriors’ on the British, Remi Skoutelsky’s study of the French, Peter Carroll’s book on the Americans and Michael Petrou’s on the Canadians (and other books on everyone from Croatians and Cypriots to the Chinese volunteers), but no lengthy global history of the Brigades has been written in English since 1982. That was R Dan Richardson’s ‘Comintern Army’ which, just by its title, suggests a particular slant – and relied on relatively scant archival resources.

The Brigaders’ importance is multiple, and not just because they fought (usually well, but not always) and died. To many people, they remain an example of ideological selflessness

at a time when only our elder generations have a memory of the sacrifice involved in defeating fascism.

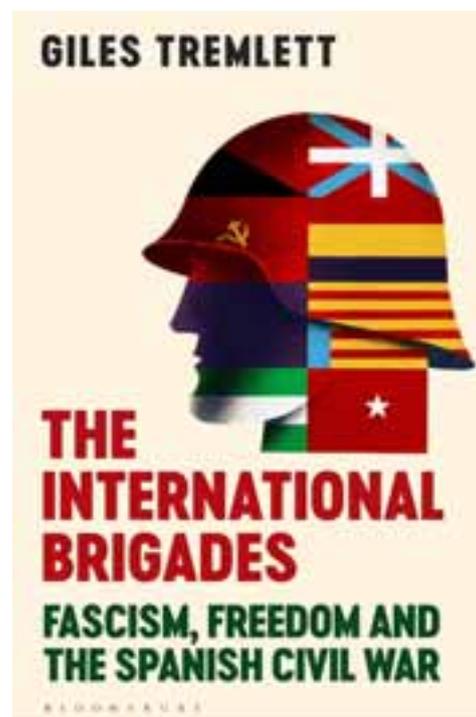
They also have a fascinating, and important, after-life (post-Spanish Civil War) as everything from spies and partisan leaders to elected politicians, union leaders, members of communist bloc governments and as both the purged and the purgers in Iron Curtain countries. Finally, they live on in literature – from Hemingway’s ‘For Whom the Bell Tolls’

‘I found the existing overarching histories of the International Brigades disappointing. No lengthy global history of the Brigades has been written in English since 1982.’

to German writer Peter Weiss’s major work, ‘The Aesthetics of Resistance’.

Memorials now exist all across the world, but perhaps the most poignant is on the Norwegian island of Utoya – where right-wing gunman Anders Breivik massacred 69 young socialists in 2011. Two days earlier they had unveiled a plaque to four young Norwegian socialists who had joined the Brigade and died in Spain.

Perhaps the most novel thing about this book is the source material that I have been able to use in order to add depth, detail and breadth to an otherwise patchy story. The (vast) section of the International Brigades’ own archive that was conserved in Moscow by the Comintern became available online a



Tremlett’s new book is published by Bloomsbury in October this year.

decade ago. I have been very fortunate, in this respect, since no other global history has had such a wealth of source material. I have also visited a dozen other archives, from Poland to California, and cajoled acquaintances into translating memoirs written in other languages, some of which are truly excellent, including those of Red Army advisors. I can read the romance languages, but Finnish, Russian, German, Bulgarian and Danish – to mention just a few from the Tower of Babel of sources – are beyond me. A lot of groundwork is also being done in Spain, often by volunteers who find and publish archive material or who – like the wonderful Isabel Esteve – set about translating the entire archive of contemporary (if ‘official’) East German memoirs stored at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin.

Unlike other historians, I am not heavily invested in the issue of whether the Brigades were ‘good’ or ‘bad’ – which is how the debate is framed here in Spain and in much of central and eastern Europe. An army of 35,000 men, in any case, is unlikely to be populated

entirely by saints. My hope is that younger readers will notice that the Brigaders – unfashionably for their time – believed in many of the issues that are important to them today, including race, colonialism or women’s rights. Communism has a lot to do with that, and only the most senior communists (some of whom, admittedly, were in Spain) understood the nature of the horrors that Stalin was perpetrating in their name.

I am not interested in whitewashing bad behaviour, however, or pretending that all Brigaders always stuck to those values. They did not. What I am interested in, however, is showing how the Brigades fitted into the wider currents of anti-fascism and to the disintegrating politics of the 1930s. These are incredibly complex and make our times seem like an ocean of peace, despite the manoeuvring of American presidents, British prime ministers or the new authoritarians of Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Finally, I think it is important to highlight the variety of nationalities in the Brigades (much more than the 52 usually cited – I

count more than 80, if we look at the world map as it is today, including places like Pakistan, India, Indonesia or Ethiopia) and the role of the Spaniards who eventually became a majority. In our globalised times, it seems less remarkable that people of such different origins would work together on a common project of any kind, but at the time it was truly unique.

How do Spaniards feel about the International Brigades today? Is there any sense that the focus on the Brigades and the internationalisation of the war detracts from it being seen as an overwhelmingly Spanish experience?

Unfortunately, knowledge of the International Brigades is still poor – and the old divisions remain. Some unquestioningly think Brigaders were all heroes, others think the opposite. This book is being published simultaneously in Spanish (by the Debate publishing house), and my hope is that it will help people reach more considered opinions and base debate on facts rather than

preconceptions. I would like Spaniards, especially, to understand that while this was, first and foremost, their war it was also part of something much larger and global.

What have you learnt from writing this book? Has it led you to re-evaluate any assumptions that you or the wider population have held?

I realised when I started this book that I did not have a clear answer to the basic question: ‘Who were the Brigaders?’ My simplistic image was of a group of uniformly altruistic heroes. The answer is, of course, far more complex than that, and in the end I have settled for a hierarchy of definitions, which makes it easier to think about them. Firstly, the Brigaders were anti-fascists – that is how they saw themselves and framed their mission. Secondly, they were volunteer soldiers in the Republican Army, who followed the orders given by the rightful government of Spain (and were subject to its military code of discipline), which had emerged in response to a military coup against a democratically-elected government. Thirdly, they were largely organised and recruited by the Comintern, without which they would not have existed.

I also think the bulk of the Brigaders fit two other, often overlapping, categories which I call ‘the devout’ (politically, especially the most convinced communists) and ‘the displaced’ (since so many were exiles, migrants or from migrant families).

This has been a long but immensely satisfying task. A previous historian of the International Brigades, Michael Jackson, called them the ‘kind of mystery where no-one really knows the answers to the naïve questions posed’. My aim is to take readers closer to those answers, and to ensure the Brigades have a global history that reflects both their significance in Spain and their considerable impact beyond it. My work is done. I am now more interested in seeing how others respond to it. I expect, and desire, lively debate.

Giles Tremlett is the author of several books on Spain and Spanish history, including ‘Ghosts of Spain’ and ‘Isabella of Castile’. He has also worked as a Spain correspondent for The Guardian and The Economist and his work has appeared in a variety of Spanish newspapers.

◀ Giles Tremlett (left) with Richard Baxell at the IBMT’s Len Crome Memorial Conference in Manchester in 2017.



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of the volunteers who fought
fascism in Spain from 1936-1939

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LOOKING BACK AT LAND AND FREEDOM

A masterpiece of cinema, but a travesty of history?

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the premiere of *Land and Freedom*. Ken Loach's award-winning film is the best-known screen portrayal of British volunteers who went to Spain to fight fascism. Yet it remains a controversial work, lauded for its cinematic brilliance but criticised by many for its narrow historical focus.

GUNS: The dramatic climax of *Land and Freedom* sees the protagonists, a POUM militia squad, disarmed by the Spanish Republican Army.



Mixed verdicts on Loach's masterpiece

Ask anyone to name a film about the Spanish Civil War and the chances are they'll mention *Land and Freedom*, Ken Loach's critically acclaimed film. Written by Jim Allen and premiered in 1995, it tells the story of David Carr (played by Ian Hart), an unemployed worker and communist from Liverpool who decides to travel to Spain to fight Franco's fascist-backed rebellion against the Spanish Republic.

Though intending to join the International Brigades, once in Spain Carr by chance ends up enlisting with the militia of the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), a relatively small, quasi-Trotskyist party which is deeply hostile to Stalin's Soviet Union. About 40 volunteers from Britain and Ireland, mainly members of the Independent Labour Party, fought in the POUM militia – compared with some 2,500 who existed with the International Brigades.

Through a series of fictional events and an interwoven love story with Blanca (Rosana Pastor) on the Aragón front and in Barcelona, Loach's film narrates how the Republican authorities incorporated the revolutionary militias within its army. When this was resisted in violent street clashes in Barcelona in May 1937, the POUM was outlawed, its general secretary, Andreu Nin, murdered and other leaders arrested. Disillusioned, Carr ends up ripping up his Communist Party card.

Few deny that *Land and Freedom* is a brilliantly directed and powerfully acted film, and one moreover that captures some of the enthusiasm and commitment to solidarity felt by all the international volunteers who travelled to Spain.

At the 1995 Cannes Film Festival the film was nominated for the Palme d'Or and won the International and Ecumenical Jury prizes. Philip French in *The Observer* described it at the time as 'a visceral, emotional and intellectual experience, and among the finest films of the decade'.

But, in spite of its undoubted qualities, is Ken Loach's depiction of the war in Spain historically and politically misleading?

The answer would be a resounding 'yes' from those veterans of the International Brigades who saw the film. Most were outraged that Loach had chosen to make a film about a marginal episode in the Spanish Civil War, one that focuses on an internal squabble on the Republican side rather than the central conflict between the Republic and Franco's army and his fascist allies.

IBMT Chair **JIM JUMP** looks at differing responses to an iconic yet contentious film.

They were angry too with the portrayal of the International Brigades as Stalinist stooges and with the underlying message – one that has been demolished by historians who have studied the archival evidence – that the Soviet Union was intent on a communist take-over of Spain. In this, the film echoes George Orwell's Spanish Civil War memoir 'Homage to Catalonia'.

Though in tune with Cold War 'red menace' propaganda, Orwell's analysis can leave his readers blaming Stalin for Franco's victory. This flies in the face of the historical record. Stalin's motives in helping Spain's constitutional government and its war effort stemmed from his justifiable fears that a fascist victory would strengthen Hitler's hand in Europe.

The decisive factors in the Republic's defeat were the overwhelming military backing for the rebels from Hitler and Mussolini, coupled with the refusal of Britain and France to help the Republic. As leading Spanish Civil War historian Paul Preston puts it: 'Stalin has a lot to answer for, but not for Franco's victory.' And at least one contemporary reviewer similarly condemned Loach's film on historical grounds. Writing in the London *Evening Standard*, Martha Gellhorn, the great American newspaper correspondent during the Spanish Civil War, said the film was 'filled with absurdities' and 'misinforms a new audience about the terrible heroic two-and-a-half years when the people of the Spanish Republic and the International Brigades fought alone against united Fascism.'

The POUM she dismisses as a 'small political party' who felt they were 'the only true believers, the pure in heart. It was a fervid cult, irrelevant to the great drama of the war.' In street fighting early in the war POUMistas helped save Barcelona for the Republic, but never fought again 'apart from a skirmish or two'.

Still today, *Land and Freedom* arouses controversy. For the IBMT the film is both a boon and a burden. It tasks us with correcting its historical inaccuracies, especially concerning the International Brigades. In one notorious scene an American International Brigade officer in polished jackboots orders his troops to open fire on militiamen and women. But, distortions such as these aside, at the same time it's

undeniably true that the film is an important gateway – much like Orwell's memoir – for many people to begin taking an interest in the Spanish Civil War.

Ken Loach himself always speaks very positively of the volunteers who went to Spain. They were 'the flower of their generation' he regularly insists.

In June 2016, he attended an IBMT-sponsored fundraising screening of *Land and Freedom* in Oxford. During the panel discussion afterwards, the director was asked whether he would plan anything different for the film now. He answered by saying that he would have given more emphasis to the role of Britain and France in undermining the Republic through 'non-intervention' and would have highlighted the pro-fascist sentiment of the British establishment.

Was this perhaps an acknowledgement that the film, certainly for audiences ignorant of the wider context of the war in Spain, leaves the

'Distortions aside, the film is an important gateway for many people to begin taking an interest in the Spanish Civil War.'

false impression that the Soviet Union and the communists in general, were to blame for the Republic's defeat?

Whatever the answer, on this 25th anniversary of the release of *Land and Freedom*, let us celebrate Ken Loach's genius as a film-maker and welcome the spotlight that his film shines on the anti-fascist war in Spain. But at the same time we should continue hoping that one day a film will be made that tells the story of the courage and sacrifice at Madrid, Jarama, Brunete, Teruel, Belchite and the Ebro and does justice to the volunteers who took part in that epic fight against fascism.

Ken Loach in Spain on the set of
Land and Freedom.



Necessary lessons for the left from the Republic's infighting

Renowned socialist filmmaker **KEN LOACH** writes an exclusive piece for the IBMT reflecting on his film after 25 years. While defending his portrayal of the Spanish Civil War, he also stresses the importance of honouring the international volunteers as well as learning from history.

The volunteers from across the world who went to Spain in the 1930s to fight fascism and defend the Republic will always remain in our collective memory for their courage and simple class loyalty. They were the flower of their generation.

They saw people like themselves, from ordinary working class backgrounds, who had achieved a measure of political power democratically and were determined to use it to make life better for everyone. That meant structural changes in society, and questioning who owned and controlled the land and the major industries. Then they saw those hopes being attacked by a fascist elite, led by General Franco, and backed by the military, the Church and the old establishment. The ruling class would not hand over its power without a fight. Then, as now, democracy was only acceptable to them if it produced the result they wanted.

Germany and Italy intervened to support the fascists. Russia and Mexico backed the Republicans and Russia sold them arms. Britain, France and the US stayed silent in public, but gave discreet support to Franco. In that febrile atmosphere, the courage and political commitment of the volunteers is all the more remarkable.

There are so many stories to be told about Spain's civil war. In 1994, Jim Allen, the writer, Rebecca O'Brien, the producer, and I had the privilege to make a film, *Land and Freedom*, that told just one such story. It is the struggle for leadership between different factions on the Republican side. This disastrous conflict revealed necessary lessons for the left that we have to re-learn time after time.

Various political groups and factions came together to fight Franco, all with their

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own traditions, perspectives and tactics – a familiar pattern for those experienced in the politics of the left. Social democrats, communists, anarchists, revolutionary socialists and citizens with no prior political allegiance would all play their part. Inevitably there was a struggle for the leadership.

This conflict at the heart of the Republican forces seemed to Jim and me the story that had to be told. It raised questions that are always central to issues that socialists and radical movements face. This conflict was expressed in many ways: how to organise militarily, how to transform a citizens' militia into an efficient army, what political changes to implement where the left held power, and how would these decisions affect the Republicans' capacity to win the war?

To us, the starting point of the story was critical. Jim suggested that our main character should be a working class man from the industrial north of England, who goes to Spain at the outset of the war, before the International Brigades were fully organised. He would join the POUM, the revolutionary socialist group, small in number but significant in its political position. That would take us into the heart of

‘Do we win the war by implementing a revolutionary programme or do we put the revolution on hold and concentrate solely on the war effort?’

the conflict over the question of leadership.

The central question confronting the militia was this: do we win the war by implementing a revolutionary programme, taking ownership of industries and collectivising the land to transform society in the interests of the working class? Or do we put the revolution on hold and concentrate solely on the war effort? Dramatically, we

put this dilemma in a scene where a village had been liberated by the militia, and the inhabitants and the militia men and women hammer out the pros and cons of this issue. Trade unionists from the area, politically active in real life, joined the cast to clarify and sharpen this argument. Their passion was electrifying. The words were mainly as written by Jim, but the scene had an element of improvisation. The decision was to collectivise – but strong arguments were put on both sides.

As the war developed, the citizens' militias were transformed into a more traditional army, with the hierarchy of rank that it involved. It was a reorganisation led by the Communist Party. More conflicts arose, the role of women for example. Were they front-line fighters, as in the militias, or doing traditional women's work like cooking? We met a woman in the market in Barcelona who had fought in the war and who was still furious that she had been denied the chance to shoot fascists.

That was typical of our experiences. At the outset we were told no one would speak about the war, it was too painful. But once people started to talk, the floodgates opened. The anger, the outrage, the bitterness at what had been lost and the ensuing brutal oppression by Franco's government were very close to the surface.

Then the other part of the story, the split on the left became violent, the militia were disbanded, the POUM was named an enemy of the Spanish people and declared illegal. Its senior members were arrested and Andreu Nin, its leader, murdered. The *Daily Worker* declared the POUM to be Franco's fifth column. Remember, these were the years of the Moscow Trials and the removal by Stalin of many of the Bolsheviks who had led the October Revolution. Sadly, the two sides turned their rifles on each other in Barcelona in May 1937.

Our part of the story ends with the company of militia fighting, and losing an engagement with fascist troops. The militia are then confronted by a detachment of the newly formed Republican Army, communist led, which disarms the militia fighters at gunpoint and the captain in charge is arrested.

The scene was based on the experiences of Juan Rocabert, a veteran who had fought with the POUM, had lived his life in exile in France, and had only recently returned to Spain. As the events of the day unfolded, he stood silently watching, and the tears rolled down his face.

There will be many interpretations of these events, and they will be fiercely contested. Motives will be challenged, consequences evaluated and memories will be at odds with each other. But the big questions are always with us and we have to confront them day by day in our present struggles:

- How do we win the socialist revolution?
- When do we lay aside our revolutionary programme and when can it be the engine of our success?
- When, if ever, should one struggle be made subordinate to another?
- How do we develop class consciousness?
- What is the role for socialists who see the need for revolutionary change?
- What are the essential tasks of political leadership?

Before we answer these questions, we must know what happened in Spain. But even before we do that, we must pay tribute to the brave and principled young men and women, some of whom did not return, who left the safety of their homes to fight for the people of Spain.



The film follows the relationship between British international volunteer David Carr (Ian Hart) and POUM militia member Blanca (Rosana Pastor).

Little resemblance to history – or my own experience

International Brigader **JOHN DUNLOP** penned this critical review of *Land and Freedom* after seeing the film in 1995.

Land and Freedom is the title of the film which opened the Edinburgh International Film Festival on 13 August 1995, more than half a century after the events it purports to describe. Land and freedom were certainly what the war was really about.

But what was the film about? It was really about boy meets girl in an exotic location (for the boy and most of the viewers); they fall in love, have temper-tantrums, make it up again



and then the girl dies tragically in an unreal situation, all told by the boy's granddaughter 58 years later in flashbacks from her grandpa's letters home, with reams of photographs of him and his comrades.

As one who was there at the time of the supposed events depicted I can certify that it bore little resemblance to the realities of those days and the filmmakers made little attempt to get even the small details right. In Spain in 1937 Doc Marten boots had never been heard of, far less seen, yet they were there on the feet of the actors in the film. Blue jeans? Don't be silly! What about all those large photographs of the English boy and his comrades supposed to have been sent home by him? Photographers were few and far between especially in the supposed locations of the film.

Back to clothing – in reality our trousers were baggy khaki coloured denim or woollen, caught in at the ankles by buttons or a knitted woollen band to keep the dust from going up inside the trouser-leg. The woollen ones which flopped over my boots were my first trousers, with a short military-style woollen jacket. I was lucky to get a pair of boots to fit me – and I lost them after I was wounded. Thereafter I wore *alpargatas*, open canvas sandals with plaited grass soles held on by tapes round the ankles. The men in the villages also wore *alpargatas*, with baggy trousers made of hard-wearing black corduroy.

Some of us had khaki dispatch rider type denims caught in below the knee. John Black, second in command of the XV Brigade's Anti-Tank Battery wore them with British Army puttees wound from his boots to his knees – the only man in Spain to do so. That was how his body was recognised after he was blown up by a shell.

Now for the story line. At the time the young Liverpool communist left to go to Spain, we went in groups and not on our own. These groups were organised by the Communist Party

and one of the group carried an introduction to the French Communist Party, who arranged for their transport and accommodation through France and over the border into Spain. By November 1936 all volunteers crossing the frontier were taken to a huge fort at Figueras from where they went in larger groups by train to Albacete, where they were documented and received into the International Brigades.

So the naïve depiction of how the young Liverpool Communist Party member was persuaded by complete strangers to join the POUM militia was a virtual impossibility. In any case no enthusiastic young communist of those days would have been taken in in such a way. Whoever thought up that story line displays a singular lack of knowledge of the communists of those days.

Now here let it be said that when the International Brigade Association was told that a film was to be made by Ken Loach about the war in Spain they offered their services, but the offer was rejected. So the makers of the film bear full responsibility for all the wild inaccuracies and anachronisms that the film depicts. One wonders why the offer was refused.

Let it also be made clear that the Spanish Communist Party took the realist view that the war was not about achieving a communist state in Spain but about the defence of the democratic constitution established in 1931.

This was a left-liberal constitution which contained provisions for much needed land

‘The Spanish Communist Party took the realist view that the war was about the defence of the democratic constitution.’

reform and universal education that preceding governments had failed to implement. In this aim they were supported by the international communist movement as expressed by the formation of the International Brigades. To attempt a workers' revolution at a time when

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international opposition to communism was at its height would have been suicidal.

Communists regarded the war as one against international fascism, against three fascist dictators whose declared aim was the destruction of Western liberal democratic institutions and the creation of new empires. Italy, in spite of being a member of the League of Nations, was already engaged in wars of imperial conquest in Africa. I spent the last few days in France in the company of three Italians home on leave from the war in Africa who had arrived in their home village in the north of Italy to hear of the war in Spain and had promptly crossed the frontier into France to join the International Brigades.

In Germany democratic institutions had been destroyed by Hitler, whose declared aim was to spread Nazi power through Europe and recover all Germany's imperial possessions lost to it after the Great War of 1914-18. The Italian dictator Mussolini was trying to recreate the ancient Roman Empire and to this end the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis had been created along with the Japanese war lords who were waging a war of conquest against China.

In furtherance of these aims Hitler and Mussolini had formed an alliance with the



► John Dunlop's Spanish Communist Party membership card. Born in 1915 in Winnipeg, Canada, Dunlop was an accountant living in Edinburgh when he travelled to Spain in May 1937 to join the International Brigades. He suffered a shrapnel wound during the Battle of Brunete in July of that year and, with the machine-gun company of the British Battalion, saw action at Fuentes de Ebro in October 1937, Teruel early in 1938 and the Battle of the Ebro from July to September 1938. He died in 2006.

Photo: National Library of Scotland

◀ John Dunlop (right) pictured at a Spanish Civil War memorial service with International Brigaders James Maley (left) and Steve Fullarton in Glasgow, October 2003.

Photo: Glasgow Live

► Scene from Land and Freedom depicting a village assembly where peasants debate whether to collectivise their lands.

revolting Spanish generals and were supplying them not only with arms and planes but also pilots and combat troops, without anything being done to effectively stop them by the Western democracies that were next on the list for destruction.

There is considerable controversy over what indeed the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista – Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification) were up to in Spain. From their own literature it is clear that they considered the communist attitude a betrayal of their aim of world revolution. At that time the anti-Franco forces in Catalonia were not unified under the central command of the government but were composed of the volunteer anarchist or POUM militias, each acting as they saw fit. The government, with the support of the communists, was determined to create a unified command. This was opposed by the anarchists and the POUM.

George Orwell in his ‘Homage to Catalonia’ portrays the POUM as the innocent victims of the struggle between the anarchists and the communists. The action taken by the Republican government on 3 May 1937 in occupying the telephone exchange in Barcelona was the flashpoint. The reaction to this by the anarchists, who had taken control of the exchange at the time of Franco’s rebellion,

was what sparked the fighting. The government responded by attacking all the buildings controlled by the militias and confiscating their arms.

The crux of the difference between the three groups was the call of the communists for full support for the Republican government in its fight against the fascists and the calls by the POUM and some of the anarchists for a workers’ revolution. Strangely, ever since the publication of Orwell’s book in 1938 the POUM have been portrayed as the ‘goodies’ in this fight and this has coloured all reports of the war since then.

But for a participant looking back, it is significant that on the very day, 26 April 1937, that Nazi German planes manned by German pilots launched the fiercely destructive raids on Gernika, the POUM withdrew their forces from the front line in Aragón on the flank of the Carlos Marx Division, leaving a gaping hole in the Republic’s defences.

At the time these events were going on in Catalonia, the British Battalion, with other units of the International Brigades, had been holding a defensive position on the banks of the Jarama river just south of Madrid. Our lines were only half a mile from the Madrid-Valencia highway

and were established at the end of a furious battle in February in which we lost two-thirds of our men, killed, captured or wounded defending this vital road against constant fascist attacks. Not surprisingly we in the International Brigades had little sympathy with the attitude of the POUM.

By the middle of May 1937 when I crossed the Pyrenees into Spain the POUM had been suppressed and their and the anarchist militias were being enrolled in the ranks of the Republican Army. The fortress of Figueras was packed with them when I arrived there. They had given up their firearms but were still armed with huge knives.

We got on fine with them, being greeted as brothers and later, when Spanish troops were being taken into the International Brigades, we had some of these anarchists in the machine-gun company of the British Battalion.

So much for the historical accuracy of Ken Loach’s film. I can think of at least six real heroes, four of them Scots, known to me personally about whom he could have made a better film. One wonders why he did not do so while there are still some of us around to give him the details. As far as the viewers of the film were concerned, most of them had hardly heard of the war in Spain and cared even less about it. The film did little to enlighten them.



Your local International Brigade memorial group

Several independent locally-based International Brigade memorial groups have sprung up around the country in recent years. The IBMT welcomes this development and supports their work.

Local groups that join the IBMT gain extra benefits. They receive additional copies of *iNo Pasarán!*; they can buy IBMT merchandise at discount prices for resale; their details are published in this magazine so that members in their area can contact them; they enjoy all the rights of IBMT membership; they receive priority support and advice from the Trust.

To join, local groups pay an annual membership fee of £30. Download the application form from the 'Membership' page of our website (www.international-brigades.org.uk) or phone 020 7253 8748 to request a membership affiliation form.

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International Brigade Memorial Trust

www.international-brigades.org.uk

CYPRIOT VOLUNTEERS



Inspired by the struggle for national independence

Historian **PAUL PHILLIPOU** details the backgrounds and contribution of the Cypriot members of the International Brigades.

Cypriot volunteers in the International Brigades served predominantly in the British Battalion and the American Abraham Lincoln Battalion. Based on materials found in the main archives, around 57 Cypriots served in the International Brigades. Two Hellenic volunteers, brothers Costas and Hercules Avgherinos, the children of refugees from Constantinople, both of whom served in the British Battalion, have generally been placed within the Cypriot contingent, thus taking the total to 59.

Cypriot volunteer recruitment was centred around two geographic locations, London and New York, both important Cypriot diaspora migration points. Significant Cypriot emigration to Britain occurred in the 1920s and early 1930s – a response to global economic depression and contingent economic and political circumstances in Cyprus. In Britain, Cypriot migrants settled in and around St Pancras, Camden, and the West End of London where jobs were to be found in the hotel, catering and tailoring industries.

Greek emigration to the US began tentatively in

the 1880s and 1890s. A community of 18,000 at the turn of the 19th century reached half a million by 1940. It is more than understandable that in the US, Cypriot immigrants found a place within the well established Greek community.

Twenty-seven volunteers have been identified as residing in Britain prior to their passage to Spain, 22 in the US and four in Canada, of whom three – Toula Ioannou, Maria Nicolaou, and Eleni Nikiphorou – served as nurses in Spain. The political situation in Cyprus, especially in regard to the difficulties faced by the Communist Party of Cyprus at that time, meant that direct volunteering and/or travel from Cyprus was very difficult. Had it not been so, it is worth suggesting that the size of the Cypriot volunteer contingent in Spain might have been much higher.

All members of the Cypriot contingent were Greek-Cypriots. No evidence of Turkish-Cypriot involvement has as yet come to light. This is perhaps a reflection of the then size of the Turkish-Cypriot community in Cyprus, Britain, and the US.



COMRADES: Many Cypriot volunteers served in the British Battalion. Some are pictured here in Spain saluting with raised fists.

what emerged as the largest and most important radical current in Greek America'. Spartacus operated a club close to the 'Greek tavern scene of Eighth Avenue' and the fur and garment districts of New York, which maintained heavily unionised Greek employment. *Empros*, its communist newspaper, ran from 1923 to 1938.

Volunteers in the English-speaking units of the International Brigades were in almost all cases politically active or politicised individuals – the adventurer or dilettante, whilst not unknown, was a rare beast.

There is clear evidence of the involvement of many of the Cypriot volunteers in the National Unemployed Workers' Movement of the 1930s in Britain. Nicholas Vasiliou, for example, interviewed by the Imperial War Museum, testified to his radicalisation by the Hunger Marches of 1932 and 1934. Similar evidence exists to confirm Cypriot activity within the US labour movement and the great unemployed marches of the 1930s, especially those of 1933 and 1934 when US unemployment ran at over 20 per cent.

The London-based volunteers Antonis Theodoulou, Michael Economides and Ezekias Papaioannou have all testified to their involvement in pro-Republican rallies and in demonstrations against the British Union of Fascists prior to volunteering.

Cypriot volunteer motivation also included resistance to an imperialism experienced first-hand; specifically, it included a linkage between the struggle against fascism and the achievement of 'national independence' for Cyprus. Britain in the 1930s was still very much an imperial power, one that had held Cyprus as a protectorate/colony since 1878 and one whose governance in the 1930s became increasingly despotic. International Brigader Michael Economides, writing in the



Michael Economides (1910-1996) became a political commissar in the British Battalion.

Volunteer for Liberty in 1938, drew heavily on the Cypriot colonial experience under British rule: 'The fight of the Spanish people for the defence of their democratic liberties and their national independence is at the same time the struggle of all the oppressed colonial peoples and oppressed national minorities.'

'Volunteers were in almost all cases politically active or politicised individuals.'

Thirty-eight Cypriot volunteers were either wounded or killed in Spain, a casualty rate of 68 per cent. About a third of the total were killed. Both these figures were significantly higher than the equivalent rates for the British Battalion, for which casualty rates were around 50 and 25 per cent respectively.

On 21 September 1938, Juan Negrín, the Spanish Prime Minister, announced the withdrawal of the International Brigades. British Empire citizens, amongst them many Cypriots, were camped at Ripoll in the Pyrenees before repatriation to Britain. Other volunteers crossed over to France, where they were initially interned.

Not all Cypriot volunteer repatriation went smoothly. For example, the British consul in Spain was determined that Nicholas Vasiliou be sent to Cyprus. Intervention by the International Brigades Commission in Paris secured his return to Britain. Evanthis Nicolaidis, on the other hand, was prevented by the British consulate in France from travelling to Cyprus.

Most surviving US-based Cypriots found little difficulty returning to New York. However, in common with the other American volunteers their difficulties began in the decades after the Spanish Civil War as a result of increasing anti-communist attitudes within the American state apparatus.

In 480 BC, 1,400 Spartans, Thebans, and Thespians defended the pass at Thermopylae against an invading Persian army. The Cypriots who travelled to Spain held the passes of that country against reaction and fascism. The Persian army were victorious at Thermopylae – and Franco captured Madrid on 28 March 1939. Ultimately, Xerxes's second invasion of Greece was defeated. Fascism too was defeated in Europe.

Paul Phillipou is the author of 'Spanish Thermopylae: Cypriot volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39'.

This is not to say that there may not have been Turkish-Cypriot volunteers within the small Turkish volunteer contingent.

The UK-based Cypriot volunteers were in the main active members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, operating within a 'Cypriot section' and producing their own Greek-language propaganda. Several, including Yiacoumis Georgiou, had been members of the Communist Party of Cyprus. Key to the political and social development of the UK-based Cypriot volunteers was the Cypriot Political & Cultural Club in London's Soho district. At least eight Cypriot volunteers gave the club as their contact address in their International Brigades records. This *kafenía* operated as a cultural and political workers' centre, from which communist literature, activity and ideas disseminated among the Cypriot community.

The US-based Cypriot volunteers were politically active in the CPUSA and in Pankypriaki, the main Cypriot cultural organisation in the US during the 1930s. A number of the Cypriot volunteers, including Georgios Pantazis, Antonis Thomas, Jacobos Koumoullis, Jimis Joannou, Panayiotis Katsaronas, Vasilis Pattikis and Christos Christodoulou, were part of the Pankypriaki leadership.

Cypriots in the US also came within the orbit and influence of the political and cultural organisations of the substantial Greek-American community, including Spartacus, which, as Dan Georgakas and Paul Buhle have argued, was 'the organizing hub of

Ultra-left critics under fire



'Two Pamphlets from the Spanish Civil War' edited by Tom Sibley (Manifesto, 2019).

The civil war in Spain finished 81 years ago with the defeat of the democratically elected Republican government. The Spanish people's heroic fight on behalf of their government lasted for almost three years, itself a miracle given the overwhelming odds that were ranged against them.

It is unfortunate that the main purveyor of information about the war to any kind of mass audience should be George Orwell, whose novel 'Homage to Catalonia' has become almost the last word about what happened in Spain. And in his Boris Johnson style of journalism, he constantly berated the Soviet Union for denying arms to Republican Spain without bothering to check the evidence to the contrary. And, in the book, Orwell lied when he professed support for POUM's revolutionary strategy while admitting less than a year after its publication that he had always opposed it.

The portrayal of the war by Orwell and other ultra-left critics is the subject of this new pamphlet published by Manifesto Press.

Tom Sibley gives an excellent overview of the situation in Spain at the time of the war and a very interesting appraisal of Orwell and his route to Spain. Unlike the 2,500 volunteers who left these shores to join the Communist International-created International Brigades and were motivated by a deep hatred of fascism, Orwell's main intention in going to Spain was to write a book.

Rejected by the International Brigade as 'unreliable', he joined a Trotskyist-influenced POUM militia at the instigation of the British Independent Labour Party. The POUM militia was centered at a particularly quiet front and saw little action.

John Cornford, the communist intellectual and poet who was killed in Spain on his 21st birthday, was also for a while involved with

the POUM militia but left to join the International Brigade because of POUM inactivity.

For Orwell, and other left critics of the Spanish government, the main task was to carry through a socialist revolution irrespective of the ongoing situation. For the communists, socialists and Republicans the most important immediate objective was the defeat of General Franco. Only then would it be possible to build a progressive new society.

As the war progressed it became increasingly apparent that in order to defeat Franco it was necessary to create a unified and centralised military command, thus disbanding the plethora of militias operating under their own volition. Production also needed to be organised in order that people in Republican areas could be fed.

JR Campbell, then editor of the *Daily Worker*, published a mass pamphlet on the subject in March 1937, 'Spain's Left Critics'. Campbell takes to task those who want to divert the fight against fascism and overthrow the Republican government in order to start a revolution. He argues that such a move would be welcomed by Franco and would hasten the downfall of the government. In addition, he defends the actions of the USSR, which was the only European country to help Spain.

In spite of a non-intervention agreement which denied the Spanish Republic the right to buy arms, Italy and Germany tested their latest military equipment on that country and aided Franco in every way they could.

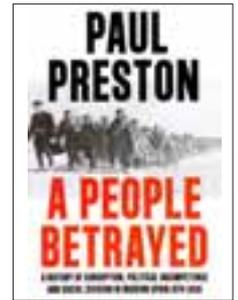
'Spain's Left Critics' is reproduced in the pamphlet as is a later article written by Bill Alexander, who was for a time the commander of the British Battalion of the International Brigade. Alexander's piece, 'George Orwell and Spain', first appeared in 'Inside the Myth', published by Lawrence and Wishart in 1984. Alexander later reproduced the chapter as a pamphlet of the same name.

Not only does this pamphlet contain a wealth of information but it also looks at issues of strategy that have a resonance today, perhaps with different connotations, which are still being discussed by the left.

JR Campbell, Bill Alexander and Tom Sibley show in meticulous detail that not only was it necessary in Spain to build a broad alliance but that it had to be defended against some of its left critics. Had the 'leftist' critics succeeded, fascism in Spain would have triumphed three years before it did.

MIKE SQUIRES

'A People Betrayed: A History of Corruption, Political Incompetence and Social Division in Modern Spain 1874-2014' by Paul Preston (William Collins, 2020).



In March 2006, Spanish police raided a number of homes and offices belonging to Jesús Gil, the mayor of Marbella, and to Juan Antonio Roca, head of town planning. The police seized cash amounting to some 2.4 billion euros, much of it casually stuffed into bin-liners, plus staggering quantities of valuables: 'boxes of jewellery, several luxury cars, 245 valuable paintings including one by Miró hanging in a bathroom, a helicopter, a pavilion full of hunting trophies in the form of stuffed elephants, zebras, giraffes and leopards and a stable of more than 100 thoroughbred horses.' On this occasion the culprits went to jail, but it is just one of many examples of the astounding levels of corruption to have dogged Spain for centuries, laid out starkly in Paul Preston's new history of the country, 'A People Betrayed'.

Preston is, of course, the world's foremost authority on contemporary Spanish history and this study – running to 565 pages with a further 134 of references – draws on some 50 years of research. Fortunately, his elegant and engaging narrative style makes it eminently readable, enjoyable even, despite the subject matter. While the book follows a traditional chronological structure, it concentrates on a number of themes; as the author explains, 'it is the central thesis of this book that the violence, corruption and incompetence of the political class have betrayed the population.' Spain is hardly unique in this, of course, and Preston is quick to discount the popular caricatures and stereotypes of Spain and its people, the so called 'black legend'. Nevertheless, it is striking how brazen the venality and sleaze appear to be. As Preston argues, public service in Spain has always been a route to private profit for some, and it should perhaps come as no surprise, therefore, that many people view it as an unsurprising, normal part of politics.

'A People Betrayed' begins in 1874, with the demise of Spain's first republic and the foundations of the 19th century electoral stitch-up known as the *turno pacífico*, when 'politics became an exclusive minuet danced by a small privileged minority'. Subsequent chapters discuss Spain's loss of empire in 1898, the 'tragic week' of 1909 and the country's missed opportunities during the First World War. All are typically thorough, though it is the chapters on Primo de Rivera's dictatorship from 1923 to 1930 which many will find particularly interesting. Preston recounts how, ushered in on the spirit of

No happy ending in this history of Spain



◀ 'El Generalísimo' by Antonio Cañavate. Published by the Council for the Defence of Madrid, 1937.

'regenerationism' that pledged to make Spain great again, Primo's regime instead sank to shocking levels of incompetence and corruption. Monopolies were given to friends and cronies in banking, petroleum, telecommunications, even rodent eradication. Meanwhile four million pesetas were 'donated' by the populace to pay for the dictator's family home.

As the descriptions of the dictator's outrageous corruption and excesses are laid out, it gradually dawns that perhaps 20th century Spain is not the only issue on the author's mind. History often tells us as much about the present as the past, as the arguments currently raging over statues and memorialisation amply demonstrate. The author's descriptions of Primo de Rivera's boastful, thin-skinned demeanour and his pathetic yarns of macho womanising are strongly reminiscent of a more recent vainglorious blowhard. This parallel is made explicit when Preston notes how the dictator's tendency to put out triumphalist announcements resonates in Trump's midnight Twitter tirades. Perhaps Primo's swift fall from power – with the country in chaos, blaming those around him for his personal and political failings – will find another contemporary echo.

IBMT readers will no doubt be on familiar ground when the author turns to the second Spanish Republic, the military coup and civil war. However, there is plenty of new material here and, as ever, it's elegantly done, explaining clearly how

the fledgling democratic government faced myriad problems and bitter foes, all at a time of global economic meltdown. Returning to the theme of corruption, Preston reveals how the unscrupulous Mallorcan multi-millionaire Juan March, 'the sultan of Spain', utterly perverted the 1933 elections. The ensuing government was so notoriously corrupt that a roulette-fixing scandal directly involving the Prime Minister Alejandro Lerroux provided the Spanish language with a new term for the black market: *el estraperlo*.

'Spain was bedevilled by a level of corruption that involved virtually every institution in the country.'

As the author states, it's obvious that the Republican army was militarily outclassed during the civil war; hardly surprising, given the colossal assistance provided by Mussolini and Hitler. However, Preston reiterates the view of many Brigaders (and many others) that the British and French policy of non-intervention played a significant part in the Republicans' defeat. As Preston argues: 'More than the losses on the battlefield, the greatest defeat was Munich.'

While corruption, blunders and war profiteering were hardly unknown within the

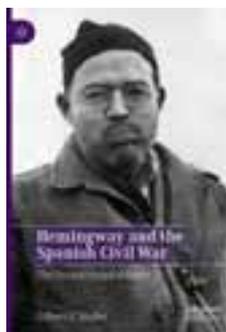
Republican camp, Preston remains sympathetic to the government's plight, particularly to the efforts of the 'brilliant' Juan Negrín (whatever can it be that the author finds to admire in the larger-than-life, liberal, gourmet, university professor?). However, it will come as a surprise to no one that within Franco's zone, hatred, incompetence and profit ruled. As Franco himself admitted in 1942: '...our crusade is the only struggle in which the rich who took part in the war emerged richer.' Once again Juan March's money played its part, funding not just Captain Bebb's infamous *Dragon Rapide*, but as much as 10 per cent of the cost of the *Nacionales*' war effort. Naturally, March was amply rewarded during Franco's 'kleptocratic state' which followed. This state-sanctioned corruption was, Preston argues, utterly deliberate. Franco 'turned a blind eye to venality', because it gave him leverage and kept people loyal. Meanwhile the dictator, who clearly drew no distinction between himself and the country, built up a huge personal fortune, including property, cash, and multiple investments. His family all gorged from the same trough and the avarice of his wife, Doña Carmen, was legendary; Preston recounts how Madrid jewellers shut up shop in panic when they saw her coming.

Unfortunately, there is no happy ending to this tale. Preston maintains that, despite the return to democracy in 1977: 'Forty years of brainwashing guaranteed that Francoist attitudes would survive for decades'. Incompetence and scandal also persisted: 'Spain was bedevilled by a level of corruption that involved virtually every institution in the country.' To this day, political and financial scandals feature regularly in the Spanish media, embroiling politicians of all colours and even the royal family. Sadly the author doesn't seem optimistic that this will end any time soon; he titles the final chapter, 'the triumph of corruption and incompetence.'

The observant among you will notice that the book's cover bears an image taken by the acclaimed Hungarian photographer, Endre Friedmann, better known as Robert Capa. It shows a long line of defeated Spanish Republican soldiers being marched off, not to freedom, nor even safety, but to be incarcerated in grim internment – dare I say concentration – camps in the south of France. Surrounded by barbed wire on three sides and the sea on the other, lacking basic food and shelter, thousands of the Spanish refugees perished. A people betrayed indeed.

RICHARD BAXELL

A unique witness to cataclysmic events



'Hemingway and the Spanish Civil War: The Distant Sound of Battle' by Gilbert H Muller (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Ernest Hemingway is perhaps one of the best-known literary icons in the Western canon, with a highly acclaimed and relatively non-partisan body of work. Consider that both Barack Obama and John McCain have listed 'For Whom the Bell Tolls', his fictional account of the Spanish Civil War from the perspective of an American volunteer, as their favourite novel.

This mainstream view of Hemingway is in fact a sanitised one, which honours the strength of his writing but empties it of its political content and context. That is the implicit argument of Gilbert Muller's new political biography: that the Spanish Civil War was integral to Hemingway's political

growth and as 'a unique witness to cataclysmic events' he embraced 'radical political action and discourse in defense of the [Spanish] Republic against the forces of Fascism'.

Muller's narrative flows in a seamless chronology that benefits from what is clearly a close familiarity with biographical sources. The book occasionally takes long excursions into Hemingway's private life: his life in Key West, Florida, his rocky relationship with his second wife Pauline Pfeiffer, his various personal (and sometimes political) grudges with other authors and editors and his collaboration and eventual romance with journalist and anti-fascist activist Martha Gellhorn (essentially the deuteragonist of the book). It's these sections which often reveal Hemingway's deep flaws as a man, though Muller rarely dwells on them.

Hemingway's decision to go to Spain during the civil war was almost inevitable. Spain had been close to Hemingway's heart since the beginning of his literary career and he made regular pilgrimages to the country in the 1920s. He developed an obsession with bullfighting, which he expressed in his 1926 modernist novel 'The Sun Also Rises'. He had even witnessed first

hand the early days of the Republic while visiting Spain in the spring and summer of 1931.

Thus Hemingway was already paying close attention when news of the fascist rebellion reached him in his Key West home during the summer of 1936. He was prepared to leave for Spain in that first week but was significantly delayed by a troublesome manuscript. By mid-December he was wiring money to the Republic for the purchase of ambulances and had paid for the passage of two American volunteers to join the International Brigades.

When inspected through such a close biographical lens, Hemingway's initial motivations for going to Spain seem less than noble: 'to exorcize his demons, he needed a new woman, a fresh calling, a big book', as Muller bluntly puts it. But he also reassures us that by December of 1936 Hemingway's political commitments had come to the fore, in no small part due to Gellhorn's influence, 'to combat Fascism and aid the Second Republic'.

Hemingway had always been politically chaotic: 'an anarchist or libertarian by temperament and supreme artist by inclination', Muller offers. Although in September 1935 he had written a powerful pro-worker piece for the communist-affiliated *New Masses*, in this period he was generally aloof from political ideologies, seeing the global political allegiances of the 1930s – capitalism, fascism and communism – to be 'anathema'.

He entered Spain in March 1937, left in May and returned that September. He would visit



FRONT LINE: (From left) XV International Brigade chief of operations Malcolm Dunbar, American journalist Herbert Matthews, Ernest Hemingway and General Enrique Lister. Photographed by Robert Capa at the Battle of Teruel in December 1937.

Photo: International Center of Photography

Spain twice more during the civil war: in April 1938 and briefly in November 1938 where he was a witness to the final days of the Battle of the Ebro.

During his trips to Spain he covered the civil war in dispatches for the North American Newspaper Alliance (NANA). One of the recurring themes of Muller's narrative is the constant friction between Hemingway and his NANA handlers. Sometimes they reprimanded him for writing his reports in a style that was too impressionistic or experimental. Often they were offended by his unapologetic anti-fascism, as they worried about the sensibilities of pro-Franco newspaper advertisers.

It was in a besieged Madrid where Hemingway truly immersed himself in the revolutionary politics and culture of the Spanish Republic. His suite at the Hotel Florida became, according to another American correspondent, '[a] meeting place for a strange assortment of characters... Dutch photographers, American airmen, German refugees, English ambulance drivers, Spanish picadors and Communists of every breed and nationality'. His lesser-known play titled 'The Fifth Column' was written in this time, as fascist shells rained down around the hotel in daily bombardments.

Muller builds a strong case that Hemingway's political commitments hardened while in Spain. An important moment in that process was his collaboration with the Dutch communist film-maker Joris Ivens on *The Spanish Earth*. The documentary was to 'reveal the true face of the Spanish Civil War' and was intended to pressure international audiences to hold their governments to account for not supporting the Spanish Republic. Hemingway put skin in the game, contributing around \$4,000 of his own money to fund the project. Muller suggests that Ivens's interest in artistic experimentalism and modernism made Hemingway more open to his communist ideas.

The progress of Hemingway's political journey is marked by Muller in numerous moments. When roped in as a contributor to a new, supposedly progressive magazine called *Ken* in early 1938, Hemingway clashed with editor Arnold Gingrich over the magazine's refusal to take an avowedly anti-fascist and pro-Republican stance when covering Spain.

Similarly, Hemingway's split with his long-time friend John Dos Passos is given as an indication of the writer accepting the importance of committing to a side. When Dos Passos implied Hemingway was a blind proponent of Soviet activities in Spain, Hemingway aggressively rebuked his old friend: 'Dos's hatred of the Communists... blinds him to the reality of the situation'. To Hemingway this was a position



Hemingway with Dutch film-maker Joris Ivens during the filming of *The Spanish Earth* in early 1937.

that ultimately let the fascists off the hook.

In a 1935 letter to the Soviet critic and translator Ivan Kashkin, Hemingway had criticised those 'newly converted communists' of his generation and declared that in contrast he believed in 'the absolute minimum of government'. But Spain had served as 'a source of moral and ideological clarity'. By March 1942 he was criticising an old friend, Gustav Regler, for his lapsed communism, arguing that only the Soviet

'It was in a besieged Madrid where Hemingway truly immersed himself in the revolutionary politics and culture of the Spanish Republic.'

Union had a chance at defeating Nazi Germany. This, according to Muller, was 'a pragmatic conviction concerning Communists that had first occupied his mind during the Spanish Civil War'.

Nevertheless, that earlier shade of detachment and affected cynicism was detected by some of Hemingway's left-wing critics when 'For Whom the Bell Tolls' appeared in 1940. Muller draws our attention to an open letter from four Lincoln Battalion veterans published in the

Daily Worker, accusing Hemingway of a 'mutilation' of the Republican cause in his book. One of the veterans, Milt Wolff, addressed a letter directly to Hemingway, denouncing his experience as that of a mere 'tourist' in Spain.

Despite this acrimony he was still invited as a guest of honour to a Lincoln Battalion reunion in 1947. Unable to attend, he instead sent in a tape declaring that he was proud to be 'in the company of premature anti-Fascists'. It is one of the weaknesses of Muller's book that the relationship between Hemingway and the International Brigades, particularly the Lincoln Battalion, is not explored further.

Some readers might not entirely be convinced that Muller proves his hypothesis: that Hemingway's cultural output in this period was a 'coherent political project', one that 'reveal[ed] an engaged, visionary artist who anticipated the world to come'. For, although Muller presents a highly attentive account of Hemingway's personal and political arc during the civil war years, by the book's conclusion we are still left with a man whose anti-fascist politics were still more inchoate and instinctive than 'coherent'.

A conclusion that is more consistent with the evidence presented would refer to a world-weary writer and adventurer shedding his deep cynicism to fight for a truly worthy cause. There is a parallel to be drawn with the final thoughts of Robert Jordan, Hemingway's American volunteer, who lies bleeding out in the conclusion of 'For Whom the Bell Tolls': 'I hope I have done some good... I have tried to with what talent I had... The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for.'

AJMAL WAQIF

Memories of a trip from Cuba cut short

IBMT Trustee **PAULINE FRASER** recalls the friendship between the Cuban International Brigade volunteers and their English-speaking comrades and regrets a reunion that could not take place.

Dr Victor Pina Tabío's letter in *iNo Pasarán!* 1-2020 linked the 'heroic example of internationalism shown by those fighters for the Spanish Republic' with the internationalism of the Cuban people today. Reading it reminded me of the warm friendship that grew up between Cuban volunteers and other Internationals, both while fighting together in Spain and at reunions many years later.

British, Irish and North American Brigaders met Cuban counterparts in Spain, as they were comrades together in the 15th Brigade. Carl Geiser, of the Lincolns, author of 'Prisoners of the Good Fight', mentioned his friendship with Cuban Brigader Evelio Aneiros Subirats. Carl gave Evelio a copy of his book, with a written dedication, at one of the reunions in Spain following Franco's death.

Cuban trade unions showed solidarity with the National Union of Mineworkers during the great British miners' strike of 1984-85. Brigader Chris Smith and his partner Joan Brown visited Cuba at this time and made links with some of the Brigaders, striking up a particular friendship with Evelio.

Joan Brown was happily reunited with Evelio and his fellow Brigader, Luis Pedraza Barrio, at the 65th anniversary commemoration of the International Brigades in Madrid in October 2001, where I first met them.

Con Fraser, my mother, and I, visited Evelio and Luis while in Cuba for a week in February 2002. Luis seemed quite frail, but Evelio gave an impression of health and vigour, welcoming us into his home and singing revolutionary songs from Spain and Cuba. In the photo below he proudly carries the rifle from his time fighting in the Cuban revolutionary war.

Evelio insisted on giving me his copy of 'Prisoners of the Good Fight', re-dedicating it to Con and myself

with the words: 'With the very best wishes for staying in good health for eternity. Always maintain a revolutionary and anti-fascist position.' He also gave me a copy of 'Cuba en España' by Alberto Alfonso Bello and Juan Pérez Díaz, which has been very useful in writing and speaking about the Cuban Brigaders.

Joan Brown urged the IBMT to invite Evelio to the Jubilee Gardens memorial meeting in July 2002 and I wrote on behalf of the Trust to the Cuban Consulate, requesting 'two sets of forms to have letters of invitation made out so that Evelio and a companion could come to Britain for the meeting'.

But Marlene Sidaway wrote to Joan on 4 June to tell her that the IBMT Executive Committee had decided 'not to officially support the project, as they felt it would create a dangerous precedent.' This meant that no financial assistance would be forthcoming. However, Marlene continued: 'Jack [Jones] has indicated to me that he would be delighted to welcome Evelio as a guest [at the forthcoming AGM in Manchester].'

Marlene also enclosed a personal cheque and wished Joan 'every success with the fundraising'. Two days later, Joan wrote to me, enclosing a copy of Marlene's letter, stating that: 'If it has to be independent of the IBMT it will be important to have a sponsor, maybe Cuba Solidarity? Anyway time will be of the essence for this year.'

On 9 June, I received a letter from Evelio in which he expressed his delight at reading the report of our visit to him published in the magazine of the AABI (the Spanish International Brigades memorial group), but very concerned that he had heard nothing more about the arrangements to bring him to the UK.

Oscar de los Reyes, Counsellor at the Cuban Embassy in the UK, wrote to me on 1 July 2002: 'You

must certainly be wondering why your letters of request for invitation forms to have comrade Evelio Aneiros joining your annual commemoration had not been answered.'

Apologising for the delay, he explained that the Cuban authorities needed to find out about comrade Aneiros's health and if he was up to making the trip. 'The entire process normally takes at least three to four months', he explained and urged us 'to pursue this matter... for next year.' He asked me to write to the Cuban Ambassador 'describing your interest in having comrade Aneiros - if hopefully we still have him with us - or another Cuban veteran of the Brigades travelling over as your guest.' This was the first hint I had that Evelio might not be well enough to travel. Judging from Evelio's own letter, I would never have guessed there was a problem.

At the end of July Joan told me she had so far raised £180 towards Evelio's fare, was going to Chile on 7 August but 'would be home on 4 September, so if it's all systems go I can stick into cash raising.'

Just two days after Joan had left for Chile, I received bad news in an email from Denis Dooley of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign: 'Poor Evelio has died. The news although both shocking and sad is not a great surprise. I was with him just a couple of weeks ago and he didn't seem too good. However, he was determined to make the trip to England... he was indomitable as he always was, a true revolutionary hero in every sense of the word! Today I was going to ring you with good tidings, and they were that only yesterday I was with Dave Rix, the general secretary of ASLEF, who agreed to pay Evelio's air fare to the UK.'

I still have the application forms from the Cuban Embassy, which would have allowed Evelio to travel to Britain, never completed or returned.

◀ Luis Pedraza Barrio pictured in his home with Con Fraser in February 2002.

▶ Evelio Aneiros Subirats displaying his rifle from the Cuban revolution.

▼ Evelio with IBMT supporter Joan Brown.



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Football scarf: In the colours of the Spanish Republic. Says ¡No pasarán! on one side, International Brigade Memorial Trust on the other. £12.99 plus £4.99 p&p.



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Brooch in colours of the Spanish Republic: Bespoke perspex laser-cut brooch designed for the IBMT in art deco style. 6cms x 4.5cms. £9.99 plus £3.99 p&p.



Three-pointed star International Brigade brooch: Bespoke perspex laser-cut brooch designed for the IBMT. 4.5cms x 6cms. £8.99 plus £3.99 p&p.



Earrings in colours of the Spanish Republic: Bespoke perspex laser-cut earrings designed for the IBMT in art deco style. 3cms x 2.25cms. £8.99 plus £3.99 p&p.



Anti-fascist women t-shirt: T-shirt featuring names of British nurses who served in Spain. Made for the IBMT by t-shirt specialists Philosophy Football from ethically sourced cotton. 'International Brigade Memorial Trust' on sleeve. Available in **XXL** (size 18); **XL** (size 16); **L** (size 14); **M** (size 12). £19.99 plus £4.99 p&p.



British Battalion t-shirt: In red or grey and made for the IBMT by t-shirt specialists Philosophy Football from ethically sourced cotton. British Battalion banner on front and 'International Brigade Memorial Trust' on sleeve. Available in: **S** (36inch/90cms chest); **M** (40inch/100cms); **L** (44inch/110cms); **XL** (48inch/120cms). £19.99 plus £4.99 p&p.



15th International Brigade t-shirt: With flag of 15th International Brigade, which included British, Irish, American, Canadian and Commonwealth volunteers. 'International Brigade Memorial Trust' on sleeve. Available in **S, M, L** and **XL** (see British Battalion t-shirt for size details). £19.99 plus £4.99 p&p.



International Brigade flag: Replica of the flag of the mainly English-speaking 15th International Brigade, which included the British Battalion. Based on the flag of the Spanish Republic. 150cms x 87cms. £10.99 plus £3.99 p&p.



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