

**Shaping the Inheritance of the Spanish Civil War
on the British Left, 1939-1945**

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Table of contents

Abstract	p.4
Declaration	p.5
Copyright statement	p.5
Acknowledgements	p.6
Introduction	p.7
Terminology, sources and methods	p.10
Structure of the thesis	p.14
Chapter One	
The Lost War	p.16
1.1 The place of 'Spain' in British politics	p.17
1.2 Viewing 'Spain' through external perspectives	p.21
1.3 The dispersal, 1939	p.26
Conclusion	p.31
Chapter Two	
Adjustments to the Lost War	p.33
2.1 The Communist Party and the International Brigaders: debt of honour	p.34
2.2 Labour's response: 'The Spanish agitation had become history'	p.43
2.3 Decline in public and political discourse	p.48
2.4 The political parties: three Spanish threads	p.53
2.5 The personal price of the lost war	p.59
Conclusion	p.67

Chapter Three

The lessons of ‘Spain’: Tom Wintringham, guerrilla fighting, and the British war effort p.69

3.1 Wintringham’s opportunity, 1937-1940 p.71

3.2 ‘The British Left’s best-known military expert’ p.75

3.3 Platform for influence p.79

3.4 Defending Britain, 1940-41 p.82

3.5 India, 1942 p.94

3.6 European liberation, 1941-1944 p.98

Conclusion p.104

Chapter Four

The political and humanitarian response of Clement Attlee p.105

4.1 Attlee and policy on Spain p.107

4.2 Attlee and the Spanish Republican diaspora p.113

4.3 The signal was Greece p.119

Conclusion p.125

Conclusion p.127

Bibliography p.133

49,910 words

Abstract

Complexities and divisions over British left-wing responses to the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939 have been well-documented and much studied. This thesis takes forward perspectives from that debate to the aftermath of the Spanish war. It explores the impact of 'Spain', and responses to the defeat, by political parties, individuals, and other groups. It sets these within the framework of disjunctions in British politics between 1939 and 1941, and a decline in political and public discourse on Spain during the Second World War. It finds evidence of the dislocation of lives after the Civil War, but also a determined endeavour to apply the 'lessons' to promote the British war effort, illustrated in the case of Tom Wintringham. The Labour leader, Clement Attlee, emerges as demonstrating personal solicitude for Republican exiles, accompanied by a limited commitment to challenge the Franco regime. The thesis is based on archival sources for the British labour movement, left-wing political parties, and supporters of the Spanish Republic.

Responses to the Spanish Civil War were complicated by conflict between the Communist Party, and the leadership of the Labour Party and trade union movement. The defeat of the Republic in spring 1939, and the new urgency of the threat from Germany, changed the calculus. This gave importance to the shaping of early political responses to the end of the Spanish war by the Communist and Labour parties in 1939 and 1940. It was followed by a series of calls on the memory of 'Spain' by these parties, and by Common Wealth from 1942. The continuing threads of 'Spain' in British wartime politics included a diversity of adjustments to the defeat of the Republic by individual International Brigaders, nurses, and other supporters. This was accompanied by fresh responses to the Spanish war. Tom Wintringham secured influence in developing a model of guerrilla warfare for the defence of Britain in 1940-41, drawing on Spanish political and military experience. He was unable to achieve a corresponding impact in proposals for defending India in 1942, or for European liberation after 1941. Clement Attlee, translated from opposition leader to War Cabinet minister in 1940, developed his own nuanced personal and political response to the inheritance of 'Spain'. Attlee demonstrated a strong personal and humanitarian commitment to aid Spanish Republican exiles. He subordinated residual loyalty to the Spanish Republic to support Churchill's policy of conciliating Franco, but pressed a more open view in War Cabinet debates. In late 1944, the signal for left-wing Labour dissent on Coalition government policy was Greece, not Spain. Responses to the defeat in Spain after early 1939 reflected both the diverse character of preceding political engagement during the Civil War, and the new political priorities of the Second World War. They can be characterized as representing a normalization of the experience of the Spanish war. The importance of these developments from 1939 to 1945 has previously been overlooked.

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Introduction

A personal memory from November 1975 is a poster from the Cambridge University Hispanic Society advertising a disco: 'Come and celebrate Franco's death', it said.¹ Decades after the end of the Spanish Civil War, this signalled the fierce hostility to the Spanish dictatorship amongst a younger generation. In the 1960s and 1970s a recrudescence of interest in the Spanish Civil War in Britain was evident.² It was reflected in a growing body of oral testimony from the surviving volunteers and new memorials to individual International Brigaders. The Spanish Civil War was represented on the British left as an exemplary fight against European fascism, to be acknowledged and celebrated. One historian suggested in the late 1990s that 'In ways both explicit and implicit, "Spain" [has] served as a "text" that gave an illumination to the shape and densities of my own experiences'.³ In this case, the writer was referring to the impact of 'Spain' in shaping his participation in Nicaraguan solidarity work during the 1980s.

The potency of the history and memory of the Spanish Civil War for later generations served to highlight questions about the experience of the defeat of the Spanish Second Republic in the immediate aftermath. A number of studies of 'Britain and the Spanish Civil War' have addressed the period of the war, from July 1936 to March 1939, with a central focus on the support of the political left for the Republic.⁴ Passionate commitments to 'Spain' on the British left before 1939 contrasted, though, with its small place in writings about British left-wing politics during the Second World War. The early political and personal residue of the Spanish war appeared generally to have been occluded in the historiography. This seemed to be an enigma. One explanation for a contemporary shift of attention from the experience of 'Spain' was the opening of the Second World War, within six months of the defeat of the Republic, but this did not appear sufficient cause.

¹ Franco died on Friday 20 November 1975.

² Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961): this was the first authoritative historical study to be published in any language, and has remained continuously in print.

³ James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.viii.

⁴ Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), provides a very useful synthesis and bibliography.

The Spanish war has been the subject of thousands of accounts in Britain. The history of the Spanish Civil War has been described as written mainly by sympathizers with the Republic, and '[with] "Spain", the alleged dress-rehearsal for the Second World War, [presented as] a cause, a microcosm of all the grand narratives of mid-century ideological struggle'.⁵ Consistent with this, a variety of constructs have been placed on the meaning of the Spanish war, and projected into wider political and ideological debates on the left. In one acerbic view, a liberal myth about the Spanish war is 'now so hegemonic that remorse over Franco's victory is part of the guilt-complex of the western intellectual, a stock-in-trade of a whole ethical culture'.⁶ In 1941, George Orwell had offered an early critique, in asserting the limits of working class solidarity with Spain in the late 1930s. He claimed that subscriptions to 'various "aid Spain" funds [amounted to] about one percent of what [was] spent during the same period in betting on football and horse-races'.⁷ This polemical contribution hinted at the fierce contest which unfolded over the record and memory of the Spanish Civil War. On the left, disunity and divisiveness had characterized discourse and actions during the war itself.⁸ In the aftermath, there was not a single or homogeneous view about the impact of 'Spain', but a range of sometimes discordant voices, and a variety of responses.

Accompanying this complexity, the changing place of Spain in geopolitics after 1939 tended to influence the historiography. Two major accounts, by David Dunthorn and Richard Wigg, chart the strategy and tactics of the British government in working to maintain Franco's neutrality, and discourage German intervention in Spain.⁹ Spanish neutrality was promoted partly by selective supply of oil, food, and other goods. The weakness of Britain's position in 1940 and 1941 gave way to wider political and military options after 1942, but the policy did not change. On the left, there was little open advocacy of Allied military intervention in Spain. These positions contributed to neglect of Spain in wartime Britain, and side-lining of the recent experience of the

⁵ Ruth MacKay, 'The Good Fight and Good History: The Spanish Civil War', *History Workshop Journal*, 70, 1 (2010), 199-206 (p.199).

⁶ Robert Stradling, 'Orwell and the Spanish Civil War: A Historical Critique', in *Inside the Myth: Orwell: Views from the Left*, ed. Christopher Norris (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 103-25 (p.118).

⁷ *The Complete Works of George Orwell, Volume 13: All Propaganda Is Lies, 1941-1942*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), p.38, letter to *Partisan Review*, 23 September 1941.

⁸ Division between the Communist Party and Independent Labour Party (ILP) was reflected in differing political alignments in Spain. An ILP volunteer contingent served with the Partido Obrero Unificación Marxista (POUM) militia, rather than with the International Brigade.

⁹ David J. Dunthorn, *Britain and the Spanish Anti-Franco Opposition, 1940-1950* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), and Richard Wigg, *Churchill and Spain: The Survival of the Franco Regime, 1940-45* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Spanish war. This was compounded by political and military developments in the final phase of the Second World War.

The failure of the Allies to topple Franco in later 1944 or 1945, and post-war political accommodation, have been attributed to emerging imperatives of the Cold War. The two principal studies, by Qasim Ahmad and Jill Edwards, make a persuasive case.¹⁰ A quiescent and Western-aligned Franco regime was viewed as preferable to reasserting the claims of Spanish democracy, with the political uncertainties this would precipitate. The impact of the Cold War was echoed by a recent writer on the British International Brigaders, who described 'the period that followed the Second World War up to 1960 [as the] "The Lost War" in terms of [the] British literature'.¹¹ This was taken to refer to the negative impact of Cold War political and ideological debates in Britain on 'the production of literary, academic and autobiographical work on the civil war'.¹² This writer's conceptualization is the more striking in excluding the years of the Second World War altogether. The politics of the Cold War tended to throw a retrospective shadow over the earlier years.

Disarray amongst opponents of Franco after the defeat in Spain may also have played an important part in limiting enquiry. Tom Buchanan describes these forces as becoming 'unduly backward looking [and] redolent with the heroism of the Spanish Civil War, but also with division and defeat'.¹³ A sense of hopelessness marked the anti-Franco opposition in Britain by the late 1940s. With the end of the Spanish war, a process of coming to terms with the defeat might have been anticipated. But the late stages of solidarity with the Republic during winter 1938-39, and spring 1939, had already suggested disruption of the discipline, and constraints, of the fight for the Republic since 1936. Political and personal perspectives changed during the final stages of the struggle. On the political front, Tom Buchanan describes the first unofficial strike action in support of the Republic in London in January and February 1939, as, correspondingly, 'Spain's fate was less and less central to the attention of the leaders

¹⁰ Qasim Ahmad, *Britain, Franco Spain and the Cold War, 1945-1950* (New York: Garland, 1992), and Jill Edwards, *Anglo-American Relations and the Franco Question, 1945-1955* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

¹¹ Natalie Ann Suart, 'The Memory of the Spanish Civil War and the Families of British International Brigaders' (PhD thesis, De Montfort University, 2001), p.35. She characterizes four stages in development of the literature of the International Brigades, as 1936-39, 1945-60, 1960-75, and after Franco's death in 1975.

¹² Suart, 'Memory', p.44.

¹³ Tom Buchanan, 'Receding Triumph: British Opposition to the Franco Regime, 1945-59', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12, 2 (2001), 163-84 (p.176).

of British labour'.¹⁴ As defeat approached, rank-and-file trade unionists under Communist leadership asserted themselves, and took direct action. On the other hand, Michael Richards, referring to Republican Spain itself, identifies feelings of anger, guilt, and shame by 1939, with people 'increasingly [taking] refuge within their own private selves'.¹⁵ Writing about the British International Brigaders, Richard Baxell describes a similar disillusionment, with a feeling of freedom on the part of some Brigaders 'to voice complaints that had been suppressed in Spain'.¹⁶ This dissolution of patterns of political and personal behaviour since 1936, with organizational and personal responses directed into different channels, may itself have contributed to neglect of the years 1939 to 1945.

This is the setting within which the thesis explores evidence of the patterns of political and personal commitment to 'Spain' between 1939 and 1945. It identifies multiple threads of a continuing presence, expressed in a wide range of political forms. The thesis juxtaposes positive endeavours to apply the 'lessons' of the Spanish Civil War, with reservation and ambiguity in continuing to engage with the 'lost war'. An overarching theme is the degree to which the history and memory of 'Spain' remained contentious, with the capacity to generate political turbulence.

Terminology, sources and methods

The focus of the thesis is exploration of the residual impacts of the Spanish Civil War in left-wing politics from 1939 to 1945. In this sense, the terminology 'Spain' is used to denote interpretations and responses to the experience of the Spanish war on the left, shaped by the character of the preceding engagement between 1936 and 1939. A four-fold definition of the 'British left' has been adopted: firstly, the Communist Party of Great Britain; secondly, the Labour Party and the trade unions; thirdly, members and supporters of other left-wing parties, organisations, and campaigns; and, fourthly, other advocates and supporters of the left, including writers and publishers. The term 'left and liberal opinion' is also used in the thesis. This refers to the broader range of

¹⁴ Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.107.

¹⁵ Michael Richards, 'Egos and Ideals in the Spanish Civil War', *History Workshop Journal*, 58, 1 (2004), 340-8 (p.341).

¹⁶ Richard Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors: The Extraordinary Story of the Britons Who Fought in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Aurum Press, paperback edition 2014, first publ. 2012), p.405.

political and intellectual support the Spanish Republic, including, for example, some members of the Liberal Party, and the editorial positions of newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *News Chronicle*.

The thesis draws on British public archives and English language documents. These archives can be grouped under five headings. The first was material relating to individual British International Brigaders, the International Brigade Association, and other volunteers in Spain. The principal sources were the International Brigade Memorial Archive at the Marx Memorial Library, London, and the Spain Archive at the Working Class Movement Library, Salford. A transcript of an interview with International Brigader, John Peet, was made available at the Tameside Local Studies and Archive Centre, Ashton-under-Lyne.

Secondly, the archives of three political parties were consulted. These were the Labour Party and the Communist Party archives at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, and the Common Wealth Archive, at the East Sussex Record Office, The Keep, Brighton.

Thirdly, for political and humanitarian support for the Spanish Republic, three London-based archives were consulted. These were the TUC Library Collections at London Metropolitan University, the records of the London Co-operative Society at the Bishopsgate Institute, and the Quaker Archive at the Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London.

Fourthly, the Tom Wintringham Papers, at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, provided the principal primary source for Chapter Three. The personal diaries of the Labour politician, Hugh Dalton, were also consulted at the London School of Economics (Hugh Dalton Papers).

Fifthly, Cabinet papers from the National Archives, Kew, were the main primary source for Chapter Four. The files consulted relate to Clement Attlee's interventions on Spanish affairs during his membership of the War Cabinet after May 1940. This material included correspondence describing Attlee's personal role in interceding for

individual exiled Spanish Republicans, which appears not to have been previously published.

From the research, the particular importance of two types of contemporary printed material, newsletters, and pamphlets and short books, became clear. Both provided information and insights not available from other sources. During the Second World War, limited news from Spain, censorship of newspapers, and paper and print shortages, contributed to a decline in reporting of Spanish affairs in Britain. From the research it was clear that these two forms of publishing filled some of the gap. For the left, these newsletters and pamphlets had a key place in communicating information and ideas, and promoting debate.

The first of these, newsletters from non-mainstream publishers, provide a distinct source for study of left-wing politics during the Second World War. With content obtained through specialized channels, and distribution through political organisations, they provided a wide range of news and commentary from Spain after 1939. Three successive regular publications were published by United Editorial Limited, edited by Charles Duff. The first, *The War in Spain*, ceased publication with a final edition on 25 March 1939. It was replaced by *Voice of Spain*, described on the masthead as 'A Weekly Summary of Facts and Comment'. Its first edition was published on 8 April 1939, with the last on 14 June 1941. It was succeeded by *Spanish News Letter* from 21 June 1941, described as 'Published weekly or as justified by events', usually consisting of four or six typed sides of foolscap paper. These publications each drew on Spanish Republican exiles and other unofficial sources. They offered news and comment on current events in Spain, and on relevant political, diplomatic, military and economic developments. An insight into the distribution of the *Spanish New Letter* was given in a letter to Peter Kerrigan at the International Brigade Association. It stated that 'six copies a week of this [are provided] for [your] distribution', with an additional personal copy: '[if you] haven't time to read it, or can think of someone else who would like it instead of you, would you let us know?'.¹⁷ This is suggestive of the informality in directing communications within left-wing networks in wartime. It also signals the potential

¹⁷ Marx Memorial Library (MML), International Brigade Memorial Archive (IBMA), box 37, item E/12, undated letter from Charles Duff. Kerrigan, who had served as commissar with the British Battalion in Spain, was active in the International Brigade Association.

research value of the published material, confirming that it was shared by key political figures, and was likely to reflect their thinking. These newsletters have been one source for this study.

The second category of publications, pamphlets and short books, provided an important vehicle for commentary on Spain and Franco. During the Second World War, the tradition of political pamphlets was revived. They have been described as ‘a major source for the political history of the period’, both enabling arguments to be developed, and made accessible to large readerships.¹⁸ In 1943, George Orwell wrote that ‘pamphleteering has revived upon an enormous scale since 1935’, and described the importance of pamphlets in the face of dwindling ‘channels of free expression’.¹⁹ Another observer, writing in autumn 1940, said that ‘Our times are [...] propitious for pamphlets or very short books’.²⁰ The same writer commended the new Gollancz imprint ‘Victory Books’, whose first publication had been *Guilty Men* by ‘Cato’. He described Victory Books as having a ‘strong left-wing bias’ but ‘[standing] out favourably for their vigour, their outspoken views, and the ground they cover’.²¹ The Gollancz imprint published Charles Duff’s, *A Key to Victory: Spain*, later in 1940.²² Pamphlets provided a number of advantages for the left. They could be written and produced quickly to respond to events.²³ They were issued by a multiplicity of publishers and other organisations. Such pamphlets and short books have been another important source for this thesis.

In addition to these two categories of publications, attention should be drawn to the value of life histories and the testimony of survivors of the Spanish Civil War. In Chapter Two, a number of individuals’ accounts describe processes of adjustment to the defeat in Spain on their return to Britain. In particular, a written account of Molly Murphy’s service as a nurse in Spain gives sharp insight into the personal price she

¹⁸ Richard Croucher, *Engineers at War* (London: Merlin, 1982), p.391.

¹⁹ *The Complete Works of George Orwell, Volume 14: Keeping Our Little Corner Clean, 1941-1942*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), pp.301-2, from ‘Review of Pamphlet Literature’, *New Statesman and Nation*, 9 January 1943.

²⁰ George Soloveytkhik, ‘War Booklets and Pamphlets’, *International Affairs Review Supplement* (publ. by Royal Institute of International Affairs), 19, 2 (1940), 101-4 (p.101)

²¹ Soloveytkhik, ‘War Booklets’, pp.101-2.

²² Charles Duff, *A Key to Victory: Spain* (London: Gollancz/Victory Books, 1940).

²³ Soloveytkhik, ‘War Booklets’, p.101.

paid, and the reverberations of the experience.²⁴ Another account, the oral testimony of International Brigader, John Peet, includes his reflection on the limited impact of the Spanish struggle for most people in Britain.²⁵ The use of such testimony in this thesis has been balanced against that of other primary sources, including records of political parties, and official and personal papers.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter One suggests dual perspectives within which to frame responses to 'Spain' after 1939. These are identified as ruptures in the continuity of British politics in 1939 and 1940, and the impact of external viewpoints in the interpretation of 'Spain' during the Civil War. The chapter concludes by exploring the early 'dispersal' of the Spanish solidarity movement during 1939 and 1940. Three lines of enquiry are developed then successively in Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

Chapter Two brings together evidence of the political and organizational, and personal, responses to the end of the Spanish Civil War. It begins by tracing the early reactions to the defeat in Spain by the Communist and Labour parties. These took contrasting forms, with the Communist Party seeking political credit in a claim to 'own' the memory of the Spanish war, and the Labour Party working to distance itself from that memory. The significance of a progressive decline in political and public discourse about 'Spain' is explored. The discussion continues by highlighting ways in which the Labour, Communist, and Common Wealth parties called on the inheritance of the Spanish war during the Second World War. This is followed by an investigation of the consequences of the defeat in Spain for individuals who had supported the Republic, or were otherwise directly affected. This first line of enquiry sets out to establish the inheritance of 'Spain' as in the character of a collage of diverse elements.

Chapter Three explores concrete attempts to apply the experience of the Spanish Civil War to the British war effort. It takes as its focus one highly-publicised aspect of

²⁴ Labour History and Archive Study Centre (LHASC), Communist Party Archive, CP/IND/MURP/01/02, typescript titled *'Nurse Molly': An Autobiography*. Later edited and published as *Molly Murphy: Suffragette and Socialist*, ed. Ralph Darlington (Salford: Salford University/Institute of Social Research, 1998).

²⁵ Tameside Local Studies and Archive Centre (TLSAC), Manchester Studies, GB131.I103/188, transcript of interview with John Peet.

the warfare in Spain. The defence of the Spanish Republic had combined espousal of an anti-fascist political mobilization, with advocacy of guerrilla warfare. Tom Wintringham, briefly a commander of the British Battalion of the XV International Brigade, subsequently exercised an influence in Britain which drew on this experience. David Fernbach, in an article published in 1982, characterizes this as the development by Wintringham of a 'socialist defence strategy'.²⁶ The thesis investigates how the political and military aspects of guerrilla warfare in Spain were represented by Wintringham as a key to the British war effort in the Second World War. It explores his interventions in relation to the defence of Britain in 1940-41, and India in 1942, and to strategy for the liberation of occupied Europe after 1941. The enquiry investigates how he secured a voice to promote these ideas, and the impact of his association with the cause of 'Spain', and the opposition he encountered.

Chapter Four addresses a political aspect of the transition from the Spanish Civil War to the Second World War, in the nuanced role played by Clement Attlee. As the Labour Party leader, he and parliamentary colleagues moved from opposition into government in May 1940. Until 1939, Attlee's leadership of the party had been influenced by the insistent presence of 'Spain' in left politics, and the divisions which resulted. By 1940 he was free of many of these pressures. The character of his previous engagement with 'Spain' is assessed in relation to his actions after 1940. This draws on archival evidence of his contributions to policy on Spain in the War Cabinet from 1940 to 1945, and the use of his ministerial position to provide practical help for individual Spanish Republicans in exile.

²⁶ David Fernbach, 'Tom Wintringham and Socialist Defence Strategy', *History Workshop Journal*, 14, 1 (1982), 63-90.

Chapter One

The Lost War

The Spanish Civil War was a war lost by democrats, and experienced as a devastating defeat for left-wing supporters of the Spanish Republic. It ended in spring 1939 with comprehensive military defeat and renewed flows of refugees out of Spain. The consequences of the defeat were felt principally by the Spanish people, but the political aftermath was experienced in more diffuse ways. The impact of the 'lost war' continued to reverberate in British left politics during the Second World War.

The writer Arturo Barea, as a participant in the Spanish Civil War and an exile in Britain, represented a bridge between these two experiences. The volumes of his autobiographical trilogy, *The Forging of a Rebel*, were published successively in Britain as *The Forge* in 1941, *The Track* in 1943, and *The Clash* in 1946. In the introduction to *The Track*, Barea wrote that, as one of the Spanish generation at the core of the Civil War, he sought 'to illuminate to this country the dark psychological and social undercurrents of the Spanish War and its aftermath'.²⁷ In the introduction to the 1972 edition of the trilogy, Helen Grant adds that 'When he finished the rough draft of *The Forge* he began to have doubts as to whether people would want to hear about anything Spanish'.²⁸

These two observations highlight a pair of questions. Firstly, Barea, as a Spanish Republican in exile, offered contemporary insight into a sense of burden and confusion felt after the Spanish war. His observation of the 'psychological and social undercurrents' from the Spanish war is suggestive of a deep continuing impact after 1939. Written from exile, this comment can be read as relating to Britain as much as to Spain, since news from Spain was sparse. Secondly, writing in 1940 or 1941, Barea had expressed concern that Spain was simply no longer of interest to others. This was a perspective dating from the unfolding of the wider European war, whose scale and range was expanding to overwhelm that of the preceding Spanish Civil War. On the British left, interest in 'Spain' did endure. Some individuals sought quite explicitly to

²⁷ Arturo Barea, *The Track*, trans. Ilsa Barea (London: Faber, 1943), p.3.

²⁸ Arturo Barea, *The Forging of a Rebel*, trans. Ilsa Barea (London: Davis-Poynter, 1972, first publ. 1946), p.8.

'move on' from the lost war, and to substitute participation in the anti-fascist fight against Germany after September 1939. This was understandable as an escape from the burden of feelings that Franco had secured an unjust victory over the Republic, or from the more personal costs of the Spanish war. It was, however, one aspect of a more complex picture. Whilst some people sought to distance themselves from the experience of 'Spain' after spring 1939, for others the Second World War acted as a catalyst to shape fresh responses.

This chapter explores the political framework within which responses to the Spanish war were shaped after 1939. I argue that there were two principal dimensions. The first of these was developments in Conservative, Labour, and Communist politics after 1931, each contributing to defining the place of 'Spain' in British left politics. Patterns established in the early and mid-1930s were broken in 1939 and 1940, strongly shaping the subsequent responses to the Spanish Civil War. The second dimension, it is suggested, was that experience and interpretations of the Spanish war were influenced decisively by external perspectives. These are identified as the British government's appeasement policy, British trade and investment in Spain, and the left's international anti-fascist mobilization. The chapter closes with a characterization of the 'dispersal' of work for Spanish solidarity in 1939. It is argued that this was largely contingent on political and military events, but with other contributory factors.

1.1 The place of 'Spain' in British politics

Responses to 'Spain' after September 1939 were developed within the distinct dynamics of the politics of the Second World War. The degree of continuity in British politics after 1939 and 1940 became a subject of historiographical debate in the 1960s and 1970s. Angus Calder's view is that 'the effect of the war was not to sweep society on to a new course, but to hasten its progress along the old grooves.'²⁹

Notwithstanding this debate about the extent of underlying political and social change, the reversal of the political pattern of the mid and late 1930s proved decisive in framing the political impact of 'Spain' during the Second World War. The experience

²⁹ Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1992, first publ. 1969), p.17. A principal exponent of this view was Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975).

of the Spanish Civil War came under renewed scrutiny as three underlying political factors changed: the collapse of the Conservative hegemony established in the 1930s, Labour joining the Churchill Coalition government, and the Communist Party shifting to oppose the war with Germany.

The first of these changes, the end of Conservative Party political and electoral hegemony, was a striking and sudden reversal. The demise of the Labour government in August 1931, the formation of Ramsay MacDonald's Conservative-dominated National government, and the general election in October 1931, had established its domination during the decade. The marginalization of the Liberal Party allowed the Conservative Party to unify the non-Labour electorate, characterized as 'the immense reserve strength of the Conservative Party in inter-war Britain'.³⁰ The sweeping victory of the Conservative-dominated National government at the subsequent general election in 1935 confirmed this picture. Susan Pedersen describes the Baldwin and Chamberlain governments after 1935 as identifying Conservatism with 'international as well as class conciliation [...]and] promising that Britain's global security, imperial strength, and moral standing would be *enhanced* [emphasis in original] through appeasement'.³¹ In her view, this approach was intended to secure a political middle ground. The British policy of non-intervention in Spain was consistent with this. The failure of these promises in the military disaster of May-June 1940 generated a correspondingly furious reaction. Ross McKibbin writes that in spring 1940 the end of the 'Conservative political and ideological supremacy [...] [was] extraordinarily sudden'.³² As late as spring 1940, a widespread expectation continued that the Conservative Party would win any early general election.³³ As Britain's military position faced collapse in Western Europe, the political balance shifted sharply against the Conservative Party after spring 1940.

³⁰ Andrew Thorpe, 'The 1929 General Election and the Second Labour Government', in John Shepherd, Jonathan Davis and Chris Wrigley (eds.) *Britain's Second Labour Government, 1929-31: A Re-appraisal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 16-36 (p.17).

³¹ Susan Pedersen, review of Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England, 1914-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), in *Twentieth Century British History*, 21, 4 (2010), 560-64 (p.564).

³² Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People*, p.117.

³³ London School of Economics (LSE), Hugh Dalton Papers, Dalton Diary, 1/22/67, 8 May 1940. Dalton judged that in the 'very remote possibility' that Chamberlain had called a general election at that date, 'the Old man would win hands down and we should be wiped further out than in 1931'.

The second of the three factors, Chamberlain's resignation and replacement by Churchill on 10 May 1940, changed the political calculus. Labour ministers entered the new Coalition government. In the face of the Conservative hegemony, the Labour Party had been weak in Parliament during the preceding decade. A report of the Labour Party Campaign Committee in November 1938 had described considerable recovery in the party's local government vote in 1933-4 after the setback in 1931-2, but added that 'nothing much has happened since'.³⁴ Some commentators thought this standstill was 'essentially unalterable', partly the result of poverty and demoralization, but principally because self-contained lives based on family and home resulted in relative indifference to wider political questions.³⁵ In a House of Commons of six hundred and fifteen, the Labour totals were fifty-two and one hundred and fifty four M.P.s respectively in the elections of 1931 and 1935, rendering the Parliamentary Labour Party a small minority.³⁶ Disillusion with the possibilities of parliamentary opposition encouraged displacement of Labour and left-wing activists to non-parliamentary politics. This had influenced the shape and dynamics of politics in the 1930s, including the base of support of campaigns for the Spanish Republic.

In Labour politics, 'Spain' had proved to be a divisive issue, and a source of confusion during the early stages of the Franco revolt in 1936. Large numbers of Labour Party members and trade unionists gave active support to the Republic after 1936, but two internal factors had continued to create difficulty throughout the Spanish Civil War. One was that many Catholics, who constituted an important minority presence in local Labour politics, did not support the Republic. The second factor was a strong strain of anti-Communism in the labour movement, complicating the prospects of joint working with Communists on Spanish solidarity.³⁷ As a result, a study of Birmingham Labour politics found that 'Spain' was not a 'revitalising' factor in party activism, but tended instead to be 'internally divisive and unproductive'.³⁸ The end of the Spanish Civil War

³⁴ Quoted in Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson and Nick Tiratsoo, *'England Arise!': The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.10.

³⁵ Fielding et al, *England Arise*, p.13.

³⁶ The 1931 total of 52 M.P.s included three Independent Labour Party and three unendorsed Labour candidates elected; the 1935 total of 154 excluded four ILP candidates elected, the ILP having been disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932.

³⁷ Buchanan, *British Labour Movement*, provides a full exploration of these issues.

³⁸ P. D. Drake, 'Labour and Spain: British Labour's Response to the Spanish Civil War with Particular Reference to the Labour Movement in Birmingham' (MLitt thesis, Birmingham University, 1977), p.167.

appeared to resolve these divisions. Labour joined the Coalition government a year later.

The third change affected the Communist Party, which had strengthened its political position in the late 1930s. Following the Comintern's Seventh Congress, in July and August 1935, the British party had adopted the policy of the 'Popular Front', intended to unify anti-fascist forces.³⁹ The party revived the policy from the 1920s of seeking affiliation to the Labour Party. It stood only two candidates in the general election of October 1935, securing the election of William Gallacher in West Fife, but otherwise supporting Labour candidates. The key impact of the Communist Party's change of strategy, though, had been seen in extra-parliamentary politics. The growth in membership may have been 'a rise associated with increasing working-class militancy', as much as 'Spain'.⁴⁰ But the timing of the Franco revolt in July 1936 did prove significant for the Communist Party. 'Spain' provided a *casus belli* for opposition to the National government's foreign policy, and a platform for promotion of the Popular Front. In the late summer of 1936, the Communist Party led support for the Republic and sent volunteers to Spain.⁴¹ The party's influence was amplified in intellectual and middle class circles. The Left Book Club played an important part, with many proponents of Popular Front politics amongst its writers.⁴² Communist politics in the late 1930s offered young activists, in particular, 'a life of meaning and significance', with 'a deep sense of belonging and emotional attachment'.⁴³ This appeared to bring its reward, as party membership increased from around 6,500, to 17,750, between 1935 and 1939.⁴⁴

In 1939, this Popular Front line of political development was abruptly interrupted. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August 1939 resulted in a volte face by the Communist

³⁹ Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935-1941* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p.12.

⁴⁰ Willie Thompson and Sandy Hobbs, 'British Communists on the War, 1939-1941'. *Oral History*, 16, 2 (1988), 23-33 (pp.23 and 25).

⁴¹ Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors*, p.62. The first proposal for an 'International Brigade of volunteers' was at the Politburo in Moscow in August 1936.

⁴² John Lewis, *The Left Book Club: An Historical Record* (London: Gollancz, 1970). After one year the Club membership reached 44,800 in May 1937 (p.33). A book on the Spanish war was published in December 1936: Harry Gannes and Theodore Repard, *Spain in Revolt: A History of the Civil War in Spain in 1936 and a Study of Its Social, Political and Economic Causes* (London: Gollancz, 1936).

⁴³ Thomas Linehan, *Communism in Britain, 1920-39: From the Cradle to the Grave* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.61.

⁴⁴ Thompson and Hobbs, 'British Communists', p.23.

Party, to oppose the war with Germany which followed. This 'vividly demonstrated the central conundrum of how the party's historical mission [in Britain] [...] was forever entangled in the interest of the Soviet Union'.⁴⁵ It inaugurated a period of some marginalization of the party on the left. This ended with the political re-alignment after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, when the Communist Party shifted to full support of the Churchill Coalition government. Between October 1939 and June 1941, though, the party confronted the political inheritance of the Spanish war in a newly-hostile political environment.

These strategic developments, affecting the Conservative, Labour, and Communist parties respectively, provide the framework within which to locate the place of 'Spain' in British politics after 1939 and 1940. For the left, too, the end of the Civil War relieved pressures within the Spanish solidarity movement. Promoting support for the Spanish Republic principally as a component of the campaign for a Popular Front was problematic. From a study of North East England, Lewis Mates argues a convincing case that it had the effect of compromising prospects of more direct action in support of the Republic.⁴⁶ The recruitment of volunteers for Spain had a detrimental effect on other campaigns. A regional study of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement suggests that it is 'surely indisputable' that recruitment of its activists for the British Battalion of the International Brigade diluted the effectiveness of unemployment campaigns after 1936.⁴⁷ Mobilization for 'Spain' came at a price, always vulnerable to the pressures of competing political demands, and subject always to internal divisions on the left. The defeat in Spain, and political shifts in Britain in 1939 and 1940, cut through these difficulties.

1.2 Viewing 'Spain' through external perspectives

Contemporaries saw the Spanish Civil War as a mixture of bloody civil war, and a polarized contest of external strategic interests. There was a significant degree of ignorance about Spanish conditions, since the country had been relatively marginalized

⁴⁵ John Callaghan and Ben Harker, *British Communism: A Documentary History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.146.

⁴⁶ Lewis H. Mates, *The Spanish Civil War and The British Left: Political Activism and The Popular Front* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007).

⁴⁷ Don Watson, *No Justice Without a Struggle: The NUWM in the North East of England, 1920-1940* (London: Merlin, 2014), pp. 188 and 192.

from the main flows of early twentieth century European political and economic development. Whilst there had been some modern industrial development and urbanization, in the Basque region and Catalonia, a high proportion of Spain's population remained rural and engaged in agriculture.⁴⁸ By 1936, the picture was one of a striking complexity of uneven development, and of political forms.⁴⁹ These factors contributed to a sense of distance in the interpretation of events from outside Spain, and influenced 'the mental framework within which British politicians and journalists looked at the Spanish Civil War'.⁵⁰ The conflict was viewed to a large degree as a contest of external interests. This defined major axes of debate on the left during the Spanish war, and contributed to shaping responses after Franco's victory. On the left, three main external perspectives shaped understanding of 'Spain' after 1936.

The first of these perspectives was the conviction that defence of Spanish democracy was subordinated to other political and military considerations by the British government. Enrique Moradiellos writes that there was 'an essential analogy and a historic synchronicity between the crisis that led to the Spanish conflagration and the general European crisis of the 1930s', and that the British and French governments always subordinated the 'Spanish Problem' to appeasement.⁵¹ On the left, it was argued that this approach neglected the potentially damaging strategic consequences of a Franco victory. This found some Conservative support during the later stages of the Civil War. In December 1938, for instance, Churchill wrote that Britain could live on friendly terms with the Spanish Republic, to bring 'a strategic security for British Imperial Communications through the Mediterranean'.⁵² Acquiescence to a Franco victory was presented as another damaging aspect of appeasement. Spain was represented from different standpoints, by the British government, its opponents on the right, and by the left, as a stage on which the wider European strategic crisis was being played out.

⁴⁸ Julián Casanova and Carlos Gil Andrés, *Twentieth-Century Spain: A History* (online: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.25: Spain had been included '[in] Europe's march towards modernity [...] albeit towards the rear of the column'.

⁴⁹ Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.1-21.

⁵⁰ Tom Buchanan, 'A Far Away Country of Which We Know Nothing? Perceptions of Spain and its Civil War in Britain, 1931-1939', *Twentieth Century British History*, 4, 1 (1993), 1-24 (p.1).

⁵¹ Enrique Moradiellos, 'The International Dimensions of the Spanish Civil War', in *The Origins of the Second World War: An International Perspective*, ed. by Frank McDonough (London: Continuum, 2011), 311-26 (p.311).

⁵² Quoted in Duff, *Key to Victory*, p.102, from the *Daily Telegraph*, 30 December 1938.

This perspective continued to inform debate during the Second World War. In 1940, the Churchill Coalition government acknowledged the value of the neutrality of Franco's Spain in the changed circumstances of the fall of France. Left-wing commentators continued to identify a military threat to British interests from the Franco regime, but most did not repudiate government policy. Writing in 1942, Tom Wintringham warned of the danger Spain represented to the British position, specifically the threat to Gibraltar from Spanish Morocco. He explained, however, that 'It is no part of [my] purpose [...] to suggest changes in policy', to support a military challenge to Franco.⁵³ This duality, with residual critique of the Franco regime combined with unwillingness to promote military intervention, reflected the overriding priorities of British war strategy. Generally speaking, perceptions of British political and military interests dictated judgements about Spanish policy, on the political left as much as in government.

The second of these external perspectives was that the policy of the Baldwin and Chamberlain governments was compromised by British business interests. An estimated forty percent of foreign investment in Spain was British on the eve of the Civil War.⁵⁴ Spain was seen as 'a sort of Franco-British *condominium* [emphasis in original]', with Britain sharing in the exercise of political and economic control.⁵⁵ Jill Edwards describes two Conservative M.P.s, Captain A. M. Ramsay and Henry Guest, directors of British-owned Spanish mining companies, as 'rabidly pro-Nazi', and adds that the wider 'Government connection with Anglo-Spanish trade or investment was much in evidence'.⁵⁶ In 1936, Sir Auckland Geddes, chair of Rio Tinto, gave voice to right-wing concerns about Spain. He described future investments as threatened by 'ceaseless political unrest based on the expectation of [...] a coming socialist revolution'.⁵⁷ By 1930-31, Rio Tinto's investment in the mines had already ceased, as sales and ore prices fell with the loss of international markets, accompanied by a

⁵³ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA), King's College London, Tom Wintringham Papers, file 6/9, document 79, typescript of booklet, 'March of Time: Inside Fascist Spain', dated 3 June (1942).

⁵⁴ Brian Shelmerdine, *British Representations of the Spanish Civil War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p.46.

⁵⁵ MML, IBMA, box 15, item 10, pamphlet by unidentified author, *Axis Plans in the Mediterranean* (London: London General Press, 1939), p.22.

⁵⁶ Edwards, *The British Government*, p.98.

⁵⁷ Shelmerdine, *British Representations*, p.46. Rio Tinto was one of the largest British investors in Spain, with major mining interests in Southern Spain.

decline in the copper content of the ore.⁵⁸ The company was also being challenged by an increase in labour militancy in response to low wages.⁵⁹ In effect, Geddes sought to attribute the company's decline in profitability to political factors in Spain, and to suggest a case for intervention. Jill Edwards argues, however, that the British government gave 'rather less emphasis than has sometimes been suggested [to economic questions]', viewed as secondary to other political considerations.⁶⁰ She says that on an 'economic view', British opinion had tilted in the Republic's favour by 1938, but that this did not dictate policy.⁶¹

During the Second World War, the position of the left changed, resulting in little more than a subterranean discourse around the Franco regime and capitalism. In spring 1944, for example, the Allies reached a settlement with Franco for limited Spanish wolfram exports to Germany. This prompted a report in the *Spanish News Letter*:

As might be expected, the City of London reacted well to the agreement which, it is thought, can prepare the way for profitable business [...]. There was persistent demand for Prior Lien Bonds of Barcelona Traction, Light and Power, which moved £49 to £52 to £56 [...] The City's hope is that Anglo-Spanish trade will bring to Spain the sterling required for the payment of arrears of British interest to British clients.⁶²

This was notably restrained language for a publication of the Spanish Republican diaspora, resisting any suggestion of a call for a boycott of trade. It was consistent, though, with the politics of the wartime Soviet alliance with Britain and the United States. After 1941, Communist and left-wing criticism of capitalism in Western Europe was blunted in the interest of unity in the war effort. In 1942, Harry Pollitt wrote that the war required that everything 'be seen in the military context [and] subordinated to carrying through the successful struggle against Hitler'.⁶³ For the left, critique of Anglo-Spanish trading relations was moderated, as Spain took its place in this play of external interests.

⁵⁸ Charles Harvey, *The Rio Tinto Company: An Economic History of a Leading International Mining Concern, 1873-1954* (Penzance: Alison Hodge, 1981), pp.252, and 261-2.

⁵⁹ Harvey, *Rio Tinto*, p.259.

⁶⁰ Edwards, *British Government*, p.64.

⁶¹ Edwards, *British Government*, p.100.

⁶² MML, IBMA, box 9, *Spanish News Letter* (No.152), 13 May 1944. Barcelona Traction accounted for more than 10% of all British investment in Spain in 1936.

⁶³ Quoted in Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p.304, from *World News and Views*, 1 August 1942.

The third external perspective of the Spanish war was of a different character. The left located the Spanish Civil War as one theatre in an international struggle against fascism. Treatment of 'Spain' in these terms is illuminated by comparison with the China solidarity campaign of the late 1930s.⁶⁴ John Saville volunteered with the Union of Democratic Control in 1937, and remarks that they were 'constantly being asked for lecturers and increasingly [the] subject was China and the Japanese aggression'. He suggests that political support for China at this time has subsequently been somewhat overlooked by historians, 'because of the dominating issue of the Spanish Civil War and the growing menace of fascism in Europe'.⁶⁵ The campaigns of Spanish and China solidarity demonstrated clear parallels, though, in embodying 'the inclusiveness of the Popular Front', and having close institutional links with the Communist Party.⁶⁶ Arthur Clegg, a leading figure in China solidarity, later published a study entitled *Aid China*, with the subtitle, 'Memoir of a Forgotten Campaign'.⁶⁷ The title identifies the comparison with the 'Aid Spain' movement, but acknowledges the precedence of the Spanish war in historical memory. The contemporary imagery and language of solidarity with Spain and China were strikingly similar.

Differences between the distinct struggles were elided. Harry Adams, London Divisional Secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, made the case for boycott of Japanese silk products in the *Daily Worker* in February 1939. Under the headline 'Your Silk Makes – BULLETS', he wrote 'China needs help. But our efforts for China are puny compared with the service China is rendering for us. In spite of difficulties, the Chinese people are united and determined to resist the invader'.⁶⁸ In describing a united resistance to the Japanese, he shrouded the complexities of Chinese politics, with the impact of division between Kuomintang and Communists, and ambiguity of the Soviet attitude to the Chinese Communists. The words were reminiscent of the simplified representation of the Spanish Republic, and the language was an echo of 'Spain'. Both countries were identified as having a practical and moral claim for support from the labour movement and the left. An article in *Tribune* on July

⁶⁴ Tom Buchanan, "'Shanghai-Madrid Axis?': Comparing British Responses to the Conflicts in Spain and China, 1936-39', *Contemporary European History*, 21,4 (2012), 533-552.

⁶⁵ John Saville, *Memoirs from The Left* (London: Merlin, 2003), p.27. John Saville, later a prominent labour historian, was a London member of the Communist Party at this time.

⁶⁶ Tom Buchanan, *East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.67 and 69-70.

⁶⁷ Arthur Clegg, *Aid China: 1937-1949: A Memoir of a Forgotten Campaign* (Beijing: New World Press, 1989).

⁶⁸ *Daily Worker*, 28 February 1939, p.2.

1938 declared the need 'to fight Capitalism, Imperialism and Fascism on every front; to make resolutions of support for Spain and China living realities in action'.⁶⁹ This tended to weaken appreciation of the individual character of the conflicts, by imposing an external perspective.

The end of the Spanish Civil War tested the continuing relevance of 'Spain' in the face of other priorities. In December 1939, the weekly bulletin of the All London Aid Spain Council, an affiliate of the National Joint Council for Spanish Relief, reported the decision to change the organisation's name. It was to become the London Council for Anti-Fascist Aid: 'The new name emphasises the wider scope of our work, but does not of course signify the end of our work for our Spanish comrades in this country, in France and in Spain, which must go on in an intensified form.'⁷⁰ But evidence of decline in the salience of 'Spain' followed during the Second World War. The London Trade Council's decision in late 1942 to close a 'Spanish Flag Day Deposit Account' containing £57, and dispose of it by paying 'half to Russia and the other half to aid China', was symbolic of the new alignment in the politics of international solidarity.⁷¹ The London Co-operative Society manifested a similar shift in focus. Reports for each quarterly meeting of the Society included an 'Education Section', listing classes offered for members, and the subjects covered. After 1939 these included Russia, China and India, and many political and historical topics, but there was no class on Spain.⁷² Applying external perspectives to the interpretation of the Spanish Civil War contributed to early marginalization of the experience after 1939, and eased the assertion of new priorities.

1.3 The dispersal, 1939

Central Europe became the epicentre of the European crisis in the month that the Spanish Republic collapsed. The German occupation of Prague and dismemberment of

⁶⁹ Quoted in Laura Beers, *Red Ellen: The Life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist* (London: Harvard, 2016), p.353, from *Tribune*, 8 July 1938.

⁷⁰ MML, IBMA, box 2, item A/23, 'Weekly Bulletin from the All London Aid Spain Council', 4 December 1939.

⁷¹ London Metropolitan University (LMU), TUC Library Collections, London Trades Council, Minute Book Volumes, 18, Nov 1939-May 1943, Executive Committee, 26 November 1942, minute 11.

⁷² Bishopsgate Institute, London Co-operative Society Ltd, reports of quarterly meetings (temporary reference I 196, at February 2015).

Czechoslovakia in March 1939 changed political and political opinion in Britain.⁷³ It was no longer possible to believe that war with Hitler could be avoided. In the understated words of *War in Spain*, 'The tragic events of the last week in Central Europe have distracted attention from Spain'.⁷⁴ The place of 'Spain' diminished starkly in British politics after spring 1939, reflected in a process of dispersal of solidarity and relief activities during the middle months of the year.

The collapse of the Spanish Republic, and the humanitarian crisis, evoked powerful emotions. These were both reflected in the experience of John Peet, an International Brigader who had entered Spain in late August or early September 1937. He returned to London in December 1938. In later oral testimony he described anger at the complacency of the time:

In the organised Labour movement on the whole, people did want to know and they listened, but among the public at large, there was a moderate amount of interest [...] But they would say, oh no there isn't going to be a war. Mr. Chamberlain had seen to that and so on and that made people who had come back from Spain, extremely cross that people's minds seem to be closed totally.⁷⁵

This contrasted with experience he described of raising funds for former Brigaders and their families as a member of the 'International Brigade Convoy'. A programme of visits and public meetings was organized through England, Scotland and Wales, not all directed to left-wing audiences. Peet described a meeting at Ventnor, Isle of Wight, in January or February 1939, chaired by the local vicar:

After going to [Evensong] in his church, he had appealed to the congregation to come along to the meeting and in fact the entire congregation [...] had [...] come to the meeting. It was an enormously successful meeting and we collected a quite astonishing amount of money.⁷⁶

Even within left-wing and liberal circles, political responses to the call for support for the Republic had been variable. In early 1939, however, the impulse to support the welfare of the volunteers secured a wide resonance.

⁷³ Andrew David Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015, first publ. 2011), pp.211-2. The shift was registered in Parliament, press, and Gallup polling data.

⁷⁴ MML, IBMA, box 17, *The War in Spain* (No. 62), 25 March 1939.

⁷⁵ TLSAC, John Peet transcript.

⁷⁶ TLSAC, John Peet transcript.

The labour movement organized significant humanitarian efforts. By January, 'the TUC was playing a central role in a swathe of projects [...] [including] the newly-official Glasgow and Edinburgh food ships and the very respectable miners' and engineers' funds. All had been effectively depoliticised'.⁷⁷ The nature of the 'dispersal' at the end of the Spanish Civil War reflected, in part, the character of the preceding mobilization. The impending end of the Spanish war had the effect of simplifying the politics. Communist claims for primacy in support for the Republic since 1937, both in the military contribution of the Soviet Union, and by British Communist volunteers, lost some of their significance. In early 1939, the supersession of 'Spain' by other European political developments was accompanied by a final humanitarian response.

Alongside the insistent priorities of Spanish relief, these months also represented a late flowering of the association of the politics of the Popular Front and Spanish solidarity. This was reflected in the experience of the Liberal M.P. for North Cumberland, Wilfrid Roberts. The Liberal Party had played a very limited part in support for the Spanish Republic, but Roberts had been a consistent and determined advocate both of the Republic and the Popular Front. He was Secretary of the National Joint Council for Spanish Relief. In February 1939, he backed proposals for a Popular Front in the so-called 'Cripps Memorandum', promoting Labour Party electoral collaboration with the Liberal, Communist and Independent Labour parties. Support for Spain and the Popular Front were combined at a Trafalgar Square protest on 26 February. Roberts was present under a banner proclaiming, 'Liberals demand co-operation. Sign the petition here'.⁷⁸ The *Manchester Guardian* also described him, in January 1939, as giving 'energetic assistance to candidates of all parties in opposition to the Government at recent by-elections'.⁷⁹

Roberts applied great energies to work for Spanish relief. As Republican resistance collapsed, he made repeated interventions in the House of Commons on Spain, with six separate speeches during February alone.⁸⁰ In March he was the co-founder, with Eleanor Rathbone M.P., of a new committee for 'intellectual refugees', subsequently

⁷⁷ Buchanan, *British Labour Movement*, p.136.

⁷⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 27 February 1939, p.5. The 'petition' was to support the Cripps proposals.

⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 24 January 1939, p.3.

⁸⁰ Speeches on 1, 6, 15, 20, 27 and 28 February 1939, at HC Deb, 1-28 February 1939, vols.343-4.

constituted as the British Committee for Refugees from Spain. Roberts became the Honorary Secretary.⁸¹ He did not sustain this intense level of commitment. After September 1939 his position changed. In a letter to supporters of the National Joint Council, in late 1939, Roberts wrote: 'Now that we are at war my committee have felt it necessary to cut down our expenditure in every possible way [...] For myself, I must soon spend my energies in other directions'.⁸² Even a prominent parliamentary supporter of the Spanish Republic felt compelled to shift personal and political priorities with the start of the war with Germany.

Constraints on Spanish solidarity work emerged in a different form, with resistance from leaders of the labour movement to support for Spanish refugees. In May 1939, William Gillies, the International Secretary of the Labour Party, responded to a correspondent with words of little hope for highly vulnerable refugees currently in France:

I am sorry that I did not reply to your letter of March 17, enclosing list [sic] of German and Austrian volunteers to Spain who are in Perpignan. This is a matter on which you should communicate, or get your friends in Paris to communicate, with Schevenels. We have several hundreds of these refugees already on our hands in this country – they were seamen who were stranded here.⁸³

The delay in the reply is, perhaps, testimony to Gillies' intent to distance the Labour Party from commitment to evacuation of foreign nationals from France as refugees.⁸⁴ Gillies recognized that the British government would not give direct aid to refugees in Britain, and in these circumstances was hesitant to intervene. Support was to be a matter for voluntary action by local trade unionists, illustrated in a report in the *Daily Worker* in April 1939, under the headline 'Victims of Franco In Welsh Jail'. This reported five Spanish seamen imprisoned in Cardiff. They had been arrested on landing from their ship, which had docked from Valencia on 18 April. With the Home Office insisting on repatriation, they were given leave to remain only because 'The South

⁸¹ Quaker Archives London (QAL), Friends Service Council (FSC) Spain Committee, 8 March 1939, minute 631.

⁸² LMU, TUC Library Collections, Spain 1939-1949, DP243 (TUC), undated letter from after 3 September 1939. He volunteered for military service in 1939, and in 1941 became parliamentary private secretary to the Liberal leader and Secretary of State for Air, Sir Archibald Sinclair.

⁸³ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, William Gillies Papers, LP/ID/WG/SPA/587, letter from Gillies to W. Sander, 10 May 1939. Schevenels was Secretary General of the International Federation of Trade Unions.

⁸⁴ There were an estimated 275,000 Republican refugees interned in France by February 1939.

Wales Miners' Federation is prepared to be responsible for the men, and have indicated to the delegates that they will guarantee their maintenance'.⁸⁵

Delegation of responsibility for refugees to local trade unionists was evident in a TUC circular urging trades councils to find jobs for Spanish seamen stranded in Britain. It was suggested that such help could follow where local labour markets were favourable, and where 'British labour would not be displaced'. The circular identified one hundred and twenty-three known seamen and dependants, with concentrations including twenty-six in Belfast, nineteen in West Hartlepool, and fifteen in Cardiff.⁸⁶ A report to the Trades Union Congress at Bridlington in September 1939 acknowledged the financial responsibility accepted for such seamen, with thanks recorded to the National Union of Seamen and trades councils for assistance.⁸⁷ The number of these refugee seamen was low, but the response to the needs of even small numbers was carefully calibrated, and limited.

By late 1939, there were growing difficulties in meeting the material needs of other Spanish refugees in Britain. In October, the secretary of the All London Aid Spain Council, wrote to supporters:

I hesitate to approach you again at a time like this, knowing full well the difficulties with which every one is faced [but there are] over 1,000 Basque children, besides 400 adult Spanish refugees for whom we must provide. Great pressure is being brought on the National Joint Committee by the British Government for their immediate return to Spain, and in the absence of the necessary finances to support them here, the Committee will be unable to resist this pressure.⁸⁸

The letter asked for help with new offers 'of hospitality or of adoption for the children and the adult refugees', saying that 'if you know of anyone who could help in this direction, you would be doing a most valuable service by approaching them and asking them to assist'. Support for refugees was dependent on volunteer contributions, with no government funding, and under pressure in the face of other wartime priorities.

⁸⁵ *Daily Worker*, 29 April 1939, p.4.

⁸⁶ LMU, TUC Library Collections, Spain 1939-1949, DP243 (TUC), circular No.41 (1939-40), 'Spanish Seamen', from Victor Tewson, Assistant Secretary, to secretaries of relevant Trades Councils, undated.

⁸⁷ LMU, TUC Library Collections, *Report of Proceedings at the 71st Annual Trades Union Congress*, Bridlington, 4-5 September 1939, paragraph 202, 'Support for Spain', p.214.

⁸⁸ MML, IBMA, box 2, item A/9, letter to supporters from John Wilton, Secretary, All London Aid Spain Council, 6 October 1939.

Finally, the most direct manifestation of the 'dispersal' in 1939 was cessation of relief operations in Spain. The records of the Friends Service Council chart the process of the Quakers' withdrawal from work in Spain. A meeting of the Spain Committee in May 1939 recorded that it was 'the united feeling that the right attitude at present should be one of an open mind and friendly understanding towards the Spanish situation [and] that we do not entirely "close the door" on further possibilities of relief and constructive work'.⁸⁹ In July, the Friends Service Council anticipated reduction in the personnel of the London office from September.⁹⁰ Relief work in Spain was contracting quickly, partly as a result of increasing difficulties with the Spanish authorities. A year later, in July 1940, the decision was taken to subsume the Spain Committee, 'for the time being', within a wider Europe Committee to cover the affairs of numerous field committees for different countries.⁹¹ The successive Franco victory, war with Germany, and fall of France, at first undermined, and then ended, the scope for direct relief work in Spain.

Conclusion

The political pattern of the late 1930s was sharply disrupted in 1939 and 1940. The resulting shifts in the positions of the Labour and Communist parties created the framework for the development of responses to the inheritance of 'Spain'. The Spanish Civil War had been interpreted through a series of externally-imposed perspectives between 1936 and 1939, and this was to continue to influence the way that 'Spain' was viewed after 1939. Whilst there was an inevitability in the dispersal of Spanish solidarity activity after spring 1939, this was accompanied by emerging calls on the record and memory of the Spanish war. This was symbolized by the establishment of the International Brigade Association in March 1939. Its purpose was to support those who had fought, and their dependants, but for the Communist Party it also had a more directly political intent. In the words of an account in the *Daily Worker*, 'It is the practical experience of [...] unity and of its fighting value that can be contributed by [the] International Brigade Association to the life of Britain'.⁹² This made plain that an

⁸⁹ QAL, FSC Spain Committee, 18 July 1939, minute 696.

⁹⁰ QAL, FSC Spain Committee, 18 July 1939, minute 696.

⁹¹ QAL, FSC Spain Committee, 11 July 1940, minute 741.

⁹² *Daily Worker*, 4 March 1939, p.4.

active process of shaping the inheritance of 'Spain' was underway even before Madrid had fallen.

Chapter Two

Adjustments to The Lost War

This chapter investigates the diverse character of continuing engagement with ‘Spain’ after the war was lost in 1939. It identifies a range of organizational and personal adjustments to the defeat, framed by decline in political and public discourse. From 1939 to 1945, the political parties of the left made successive calls on the inheritance of ‘Spain’, for instrumental political purposes. This contrasted with the responses of veterans of the Spanish war and supporters of the Spanish Republic. These individuals made adjustments of all kinds, often in response to trauma and personal loss. In this wide variety of forms, the Spanish Civil War continued as a presence in left-wing politics and lives after 1939.

The first section of the chapter explores the significance of Communist Party-led memorialization and elegy for the International Brigaders. It identifies this process as serving particularly important purposes for the party in 1939 and 1940. The second section explores the Labour Party’s response to the end of the Spanish war. It suggests that the party leadership worked hard in mid-1939 to contain the potential for ‘Spain’ to disrupt internal party affairs. The third section considers the decline in public and political discourse about Spain during the Second World War. It suggests that limited knowledge of international affairs, absence and censorship of news from Spain, and divisions amongst members of the Spanish diaspora, each played a part. These factors combined to support a marginalization of Spain in debate on the left. The fourth section of the chapter explores examples of the call on ‘Spain’ respectively by the Labour, Communist, and Common Wealth parties: the case of Hugh Dalton, in 1940-41, as Labour Minister for Economic Warfare, responsible for the Special Operations Executive; the Communist Party’s promotion of the Anglo-Soviet alliance in 1941-43; and, the Common Wealth Party’s by-election campaigns from 1942. The fifth section enquires into personal experiences of adjustment to the end of the Spanish war. It investigates the difficulties encountered by International Brigaders and nurses who had served in Spain, and by their political supporters and dependants in Britain.

2.1 The Communist Party and the International Brigaders: debt of honour

By winter 1938-39, the leadership of the Communist Party viewed the closing chapter of the Spanish Civil War in increasingly instrumental terms. The party sought to build credit for its role in defending the Republic, and to support the survivors of the fight. One important manifestation of this was to promote the concept of a 'debt of honour', owed to the International Brigaders. This focus was unsurprising given that more than fifty per cent of the British International Brigaders killed had been party members. Writing in 1944, a leading party figure asserted that 'There [had been] nothing in British working-class history to equal the job our Party did or the contribution its members made on Spain from 1936 to 1939'.⁹³ In the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War the party sought credit for the contribution of its members in Spain. But the claim of a 'debt of honour' reflected a response to the wider reverberations of the Spanish war.

In 1938-39, the party led a highly dramatized memorialization of the International Brigaders, continuing thereafter to promote the memory of the volunteers. A series of National Memorial Meetings for members of the International Brigade was held from September 1938 to January 1939, to inaugurate the National Memorial Fund for dependants of Brigaders.⁹⁴ The meetings attracted large attendances and presented major public spectacles. This terminology of a national memorial fund made a clear statement that those who had fought for the Spanish Republic had a claim on national recognition. The meetings took on 'a mournful, liturgical character as the names of working-class heroes were slowly chanted'.⁹⁵ These highly ritualistic and emotionally charged events offered solace, raised funds, and re-asserted the politics of the Spanish cause. An attendance of seven thousand people was reported for the Welsh Memorial Meeting at Mountain Ash on 7 December 1938.⁹⁶ The *Daily Worker* quoted a figure of eight thousand for the London meeting at the Empress Hall on 8 January 1939; under the heading 'Britain Pays Homage to 543 Sons Killed in Spain', the report described the

⁹³ Peter Kerrigan, *The Communist Party* (London: CPGB, 1944), p.9.

⁹⁴ Working Class Movement Library (WCML), Salford, Spain Archive, box 16, 'Anniversaries and Memorials', programmes for five meetings.

⁹⁵ Hopkins, *Heart of the Fire*, p.361.

⁹⁶ Hywel Francis, *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), p.249.

International Brigaders marching into the Empress Hall: 'All were now in civilian clothes, but from their faces even as they marched, were the signs of the determination [and] the sufferings which had created that determination in Spain'.⁹⁷ This was the language of powerful drama and emotion.

The increasing threat of European war stimulated remembrance of the First World War, and this memorialization of the International Brigaders matched a changing public mood. A study by Mark Connelly identifies this development:

As the shadow of international problems loomed larger in the late thirties ex-servicemen seemed to grow in stature. Suddenly their own special Armistice Day gatherings took on a greater significance; the nation seemed to need their peculiar qualities once more.⁹⁸

The Communist Party framed the claim of a 'debt of honour' due to the International Brigaders. Charlotte Haldane, Secretary of the National Memorial Fund, wrote in April 1939, that people would need no 'explanation as to what the British Battalion did in Spain and its effect in upholding the honour of our country'.⁹⁹ The call on public memory of the International Brigaders' contribution, of honour gained and debt due, was reflected in a printed flyer published in the following month. It declared that the Fund 'has enabled British democracy to meet in part the great debt we owe to the men who went from this country to serve in the ranks of the British Battalion of the International Brigade in Spain'.¹⁰⁰ This was a conscious echo of remembrance of the First World War.

A 'Debt of Honour week' was held in July 1939, with a determinedly instrumental purpose, since more funds were needed for survivors and dependants. Meetings were held across Britain. Financial support had ebbed in the face of growing preoccupation with other international developments. This decline had been reported regularly in the *Daily Worker* in early 1939, including in an editorial in March, titled 'We Do Not forget', describing 'contributions to the Wounded and Dependants' Aid Fund for the

⁹⁷ *Daily Worker*, 9 January 1939, p.1.

⁹⁸ Mark Connelly, *The Great War, Memory and Ritual: Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916-1939* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), p.204.

⁹⁹ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, LP/SCW/8/12, letter from Charlotte Haldane to J.S. Middleton, General Secretary of the Labour Party, 29 April 1939.

¹⁰⁰ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, LP/SCW/8/12, text in printed flyer, 16 May 1939.

Battalion [as having] fallen considerably during recent weeks'.¹⁰¹ Under the heading 'Easter Blow For Disabled Brigaders', the *Daily Worker* reported a few weeks later that '[the Dependants' Fund] had to commence this week [...] by informing all single disabled men that due to lack of income, their allowances would have to be reduced'.¹⁰² 'Debt of Honour week' called on supporters to demonstrate a continuing practical solidarity.

Memorialization and elegy were consciously dramatized by the Communist Party to engage party members. The concept of a 'Red Funeral' was already established within the party's 'narrative of mourning and remembrance, bringing 'meaning, ritual [and] symbolism' to mark the deaths of party members.¹⁰³ Tom Buchanan describes the range of events of remembrance for the International Brigade as 'increasingly planned and choreographed to create the maximum emotional impact'. He observes that whilst historians such as Bill Alexander and Richard Baxell have 'steered clear of such personal and emotive territory [...] the contemporary reporting of the British Battalion in the *Daily Worker* was drenched in emotion'.¹⁰⁴ Harry Pollitt wrote a potent epitaph to the British International Brigaders in July 1939:

[Spain] is the last resting place, the everlasting homeland of five hundred and forty-three British comrades. Madrid-Jarama-Brunette-Belchite-the Ebro-these are indissolubly linked with Glasgow-Manchester-Newcastle-Cardiff-Sheffield-Birmingham-London-Dublin. [...]. It is hard to write without tears as one thinks of all these splendid comrades, some well known, some known only to their own families and friends, but all of them served and died in the greatest of all causes. Let us never forget them, or the debt of honour we owe to every member of the British Battalion and their families.¹⁰⁵

The object of this language was to rally and unify the party's membership. One specific intention was to respond to the personal and psychological needs of surviving Brigaders, and the families, dependants and friends of those who had died in Spain. A recent study of war memory and commemoration describes the damaging effect of

¹⁰¹ *Daily Worker*, 9 March 1939, p.3.

¹⁰² *Daily Worker*, 6 April 1939, p.4.

¹⁰³ Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, p.185.

¹⁰⁴ Tom Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), pp.123 and 136.

¹⁰⁵ LHASC, Communist Party Archive, CP/IND/POLL/06/01, 'Draft Article on the Third Anniversary of the fascist invasion of Spain', July 1939.

‘dichotomies and polarizations [...] between an emphasis either on politics or on death and suffering’, and adds:

The politics of war memory and commemoration *always* [emphasis in original] has to engage with mourning and with attempts to make good the psychological and physical damage of war; and whenever people undertake the tasks of mourning and reparation, a politics is *always* at work.¹⁰⁶

Robert Stradling describes ‘The collective memory [seeking] to place upon these veterans [...] a heroically transcendental status’.¹⁰⁷ This is the voice of a sceptic, but it is testament to the effectiveness of the early memorialization of the International Brigaders.

The defeat of the Spanish Republic in 1939 created a particularly complex inheritance for the Communist Party, and memorialization enabled the party to respond to three main pressures. Firstly, the party anticipated the potential for demoralization amongst members after its unprecedented mobilization to defend the Republic. Secondly, it faced the urgent practical needs of surviving International Brigaders and the dependants of the deceased, wounded and disabled. Thirdly, it sought to use the experience of the Spanish Civil War and the contribution of the International Brigade to promote a Popular Front politics in which the party could play a central role. These three strands were combined in the process of memorialization, more powerful precisely because Britain faced the imminent threat of war against Germany. Elegy to the heroism and sacrifice of the Brigaders in Spain spoke to qualities soon to be called upon again. In particular, the International Brigaders’ experience in the bloody defence of the Spanish Republic warned of the character of the threat to the surviving European democracies.

In 1939, the Communist Party sought to reinvigorate the cause of the Popular Front, representing the International Brigaders as a contemporary expression of Britain’s democratic and radical tradition. Harry Pollitt’s notes for a speech at an International Brigade Convoy rally in early 1939 made this clear:

¹⁰⁶ Timothy Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper (eds.), *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures, and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.9.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Stradling, *Wales and the Spanish Civil War: The Dragon’s Dearest Cause?* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.7.

We here represent [the] Britain of [the] Chartists – of those [who] fought [to] win [the] right [to] vote, strike and speak freely. [The] Britain of 543 men [of the British] Battalion [of the] I.B. [who] died in Spain so that we live in peace.¹⁰⁸

Similarly, Lillian Urmston, who served as a nurse in Spain, though not a member of the Communist Party, claimed to be a descendant of the fourteenth-century rebel, Jack Cade. She wrote ‘The more I read about him [...] the more proud I am. In a small way [...] I tried to carry on his tradition [in Spain]’.¹⁰⁹ The Communist Party placed the fight for the Spanish Republic in the line of struggles for the suffrage, for rights at work, and for liberty of speech. This spoke to the left-wing and liberal consensus that the Republic had represented the recognizable values of a western European, secular, parliamentary democracy, in contrast to the reactionary roots of the Franco regime.

The political claim to the inheritance of ‘Spain’ left open questions of adjustment by party members in the aftermath. Buchanan described many former volunteers as set on course for ‘a lifetime’s political engagement’, but others were:

disillusioned by alleged military incompetence and political manipulation, or embittered at a perceived lack of concern for their welfare [and] for the families and friends of the volunteers, [but] meanwhile, pride and admiration might well jostle with private fears, frustrations and resentments.¹¹⁰

Buchanan observes that the great majority of Brigaders and their families maintained the confidence that they had not ‘sacrificed in vain’, bound by the reassurance of common values and loyalties which shaped their responses. He quotes from the first official history of the British Battalion, *Britons in Spain*, written by William Rust for the Communist Party and published in January 1939. It contained a full chapter of extracts of letters from British volunteers to their families and friends and was reproduced as evidence of a ‘beautiful story of human hope, sacrifice and endeavour’.¹¹¹ Nan Green, a Communist Party member, and Secretary of the International Brigade Association, wrote later that ‘The cause of Spain, though somewhat eclipsed by the events of the [Second World War], remained bright and *untarnished* [emphasis in original], and the

¹⁰⁸ LHASC, Communist Party Archive, CP/IND/POLL/06/01, Pollitt speech notes, undated.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by Hopkins, *Heart of the Fire*, p.104.

¹¹⁰ Buchanan, *Impact*, p.123.

¹¹¹ Buchanan, *Impact*, p.123.

Spanish struggle was never forgotten'.¹¹² This was the determined assertion of the importance of the cause, presented as a consolation.

In the early months of 1939 the International Brigaders were still returning to Britain, experiencing difficulties on the journey, and differences in reception. The return of members of the British Battalion at Victoria station on 7 December 1938 was a major political and public spectacle. Thousands of people were present, including Clement Attlee, and other leaders of the labour movement.¹¹³ Later arrivals had a contrasting experience. On 27 January 1939, the Canadian Brigaders returned after their attempts to join in the final defence of Barcelona and long passport delays:

Silently, in darkness, without ceremony, what is left of the Canadian Battalion of the International Brigade came ashore at Newhaven at 4 o'clock yesterday morning. Behind a barrier, overshadowed by a big policeman, only two Canadian reporters and myself silently gave them the Popular Front salute. It met with a quick, smiling response. But I wish those thousands who crowded the London streets for the return of the British Battalion had been there to roar them such a welcome as they deserved.¹¹⁴

The contrast drawn here, between the arrivals at Victoria station on 7 December and at Newhaven on 27 January, was suggestive of the wider experience of the return. A first and almost ecstatic public celebration of the International Brigaders was succeeded by memorialization directed into different channels. Many of the legacies of 'Spain' were contained within the internal routines of the party's life.

Welsh Communists considered the creation of a public memorial to the Brigaders. Robert Stradling claims stagnation in the local organisation and fundraising by the International Brigade Association in South Wales after August 1939, saying that the endeavour to provide a memorial was unsuccessful.¹¹⁵ This is misleading. It was agreed after the entry of the Soviet Union into the war as an ally that a memorial would be established in the form of a dedicated bed or ward in a Stalingrad hospital. This would be in place of a physical memorial in Wales. A 'Memorial To The Welshmen Who

¹¹² Nan Green, *A Chronicle of Small Beer: The Memoirs of Nan Green* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004), p.131. Nan Green was Secretary of the IBA, 1943-50, and widow of George Green, an International Brigader.

¹¹³ Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors*, pp.397-9.

¹¹⁴ *Daily Worker*, 28 January 1939, p.4, report by Walter Holmes: 'Canadian Brigaders in England, They Wanted To Go Back To Fight Again'.

¹¹⁵ Stradling, *Wales*, pp. 161-2.

Died in Spain Fund' was established, £250 was raised, and a cheque sent to the Joint Committee for Soviet Aid in August 1944.¹¹⁶ The Soviet military struggle against fascism, in particular, was viewed by Communists and other left-wing opinion as a direct extension of the fight inaugurated in Spain in 1936. After 1941, it was characteristic that a form of memorial to the International Brigaders should be an act of solidarity with the people of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷

The legacies of 'Spain' for Communists extended beyond the public and political realm, with continuing individual calls for support of volunteers and their families. When the son of a deceased International Brigader, J. S. Williams, was offered a university place at Aberystwyth in 1944, the Secretary of the Welsh Committee of the Communist Party wrote to the International Brigade Association:

Scholarship grants are extremely small and an appeal is being made to assist. We shall certainly do all we can in Wales to raise the minimum of £50 [but would it be possible for the IBA] to give a grant to-wards [sic] the fund for this purpose. It is difficult to imagine the sacrifices which the mother has made during these past years to enable her son to start on his educational career, and we feel the least we can do is to pay this tribute to the memory of his father by assisting his son in this small way.¹¹⁸

The case of Jack Brent demonstrated exercise of continuing responsibility towards a disabled veteran. Brent had been terribly wounded in Spain, and during the Second World War regularly visited the family home of fellow Communists. In 1951, the twelve year old son of the family wrote a school essay on the subject of 'My Favourite Hero':

My favourite hero was a man whose name was Jack Brent. He was a real living man. I have met him lots of times. It was in the year 1937 that he went to fight and was badly wounded in his back and legs. His wounds didn't heal up. In 1944 we were living in Suffolk with our friends the Cromes. Jack Brent used to come and stay with us very often. By this time he had had one of his legs taken off and the other one could not walk with [...] We always had great fun with Jack.

¹¹⁶ MML, IBMA, box D-3, correspondence including item F/13, letter to Nan Green, as Secretary, IBA, from T.E. Nicholas, dated 22 August 1944, confirming despatch of the cheque.

¹¹⁷ The overwhelming majority of memorials date from the 1990s and after. An exception is a Welsh national memorial plaque dedicated at the Miners' Library in Swansea in January 1976, evidently a second act of memorialization to follow that in 1944.

¹¹⁸ MML, IBMA, box D-3, item F/15, letter from Idris Cox, 6 September 1944.

Last week he died but I will always remember [him] as a Hero with great courage'.¹¹⁹

Mutual support in various forms, within Communist 'communities of the faithful', reinforced shared political allegiance in responding to the consequences of the defeat in Spain.¹²⁰

The Communist Party's declaration of support for the Soviet invasion of Finland, in November 1939, illustrated the pressures placed on the legacy of 'Spain' in a more directly political register. In early 1940, the Trades Union Congress responded to the invasion by circulating a funding appeal for aid to Finland to Labour parties, trades unions and co-operatives. This provoked a sharp response from the secretary of the International Brigade Association (IBA):

It is quite certain that Brigaders can have a strong influence in organisations of which they are members. They should point out that the T.U.C. refused help of any kind to our Dependants' Aid Committee and that it never ran any similar campaign on Spain, which was far closer to the sympathies of the people than is the question of Finland.¹²¹

The text continues by dissociating the IBA from the volunteers serving in Finland, attacking the comparison made with the International Brigaders, and saying that 'no self-respecting Brigader [would want] to tolerate his name being dragged in the mud'. This was a defensive claim for the reputation of the International Brigaders, and the cause of 'Spain', in the face of the party's political isolation after autumn 1939.

During 1940, there was an insistent claim that support for the Spanish Republic was the distinct inheritance of the Communist Party. Sam Wild, former commander of the British Battalion, wrote to Clement Attlee in February 1940, attacking Labour's leaders. The letter described former members of the International Brigades as continuing to participate in the fight against fascism, and in the British labour movement. It contrasted this activism with Attlee's collaboration with the Chamberlain

¹¹⁹ MML, IBMA, box 45, item B/35, letter to Christian Maxwell from Elsa Elliott, enclosing her son Brett's story, 17 February 1952. The Cromes were the family of Len Crome, a Communist who served as a doctor in Spain from December 1936, and with the Royal Army Medical Corps from 1942.

¹²⁰ Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn, *Communists and British Society, 1920-1991* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2007), 'The communist party itself was nothing if not a community' (p.56).

¹²¹ MML, IBMA, box 40, file item A/11, letter to district secretaries, 1 March 1940.

government. The name of Attlee, they said, could no longer be associated with the International Brigade.¹²² This was a partisan claim of the inheritance of 'Spain' by the Communist Party, reflecting the party's isolation on the British left.

The Communist Party's isolation placed a heavy burden on party members who were veterans of Spain. Thomas Jones, a Communist from North Wales, was the last British prisoner of war from the International Brigade to be released. He arrived in London on 1 April 1940 after a major campaign for his liberty. Jones had suffered serious injuries in action, been held in harrowing conditions, and was lucky to survive. The Communist Party's single M.P., William Gallacher, wrote to him:

You come back to Britain at war, not a war of liberation such as that in which you were engaged when you were taken prisoner, but an open imperialist war. You will find it necessary to line up with all the anti-war forces which are developing inside the working class movement to struggle against this war. The struggle against fascism begins at home with the struggle against the National Government which, by its action over Spain and in a thousand other ways, made the development of fascist power possible.

But I hope that you will utilise the first part of your return home to take a complete rest, and give yourself an opportunity to get fighting fit when you throw yourself into the fray once again.¹²³

The lack of personal warmth, and call for an early return to political work, are arresting in the light of Jones's traumatic experiences. 'Spain' was presented as one episode in a litany of failures of the Chamberlain government. The letter strikes a note of factionalism, retreat to the confines of the party, and assertion of new political priorities. The Communist Party had recruited vigorously from amongst its members to fight in Spain, and it made assertive demands on members who returned.¹²⁴

For Communists the personal and emotional costs of service in Spain, and the difficulties of the return to Britain, were compounded by the party's opposition to the war against Nazi Germany after September 1939. This policy provoked some

¹²² WCML, Spain Archive, box 11, letter from Wild to Attlee, 28 February 1940. A company of the British Battalion was named the 'Major Attlee Company' following a visit by Attlee in 1937, and this presumably is alluded to here.

¹²³ MML, IBMA, box 50/Jo (Thomas Jones), item Jo/7, letter from William Gallacher, M.P., to Thomas Jones, 28 March 1940.

¹²⁴ Francis, *Miners*, p.167: 'Many of those who left for Spain after the early euphoria were predominantly loyal Communist Party members who were usually "asked" to go'.

resignations and withdrawals by International Brigaders.¹²⁵ It had the effect of reinforcing the demands made by the party on the remaining membership. It placed a personal barrier between many Communist Brigaders, and former left and liberal allies and supporters of the Republic. It gave no allowance for individuals to recover from the trauma of war and defeat in Spain. The Communist Party's promoted the case for a 'debt of honour' in highly-dramatized and emotional terms, to serve a variety of purposes. In the party's call on 'Spain', the interests of the former International Brigaders competed with other political priorities.

2.2 Labour's response: 'The Spanish agitation had become history'

The Labour Party and trade unions shared the challenge of adjusting to the defeat of the Spanish Republic, and of their own history in the struggle. At the Labour Party Conference in Southport in June 1939 the chairman asked delegates to mark their respect for the dead British International Brigaders, some of whom had been Labour Party members. Delegates rose and stood in silence: 'The Spanish agitation – its idealism, its conflicts and its politics – had become history'.¹²⁶ This characterization simplified a more complex, continuing presence of 'Spain' in Labour politics. The leadership of the party sought to resolve previous divisions with a retrospective burnish of the party's contribution during the Spanish war.

The end of the war in Spain marked the resolution of some internal divisions, in two main respects. Firstly, from 1936 to 1939 there had been sharp divides over the merits of the Spanish Republican cause within the Labour Party and trade unions.¹²⁷ A study of the Spanish Civil War and the labour movement in Liverpool describes 'Spain [as] a fundamentally more complex issue for Labour leaders than they either desired or fully understood'.¹²⁸ The bitterness of the divide was reflected in a speech by Charles Jarman, National Organiser of the National Union of Seamen and prospective parliamentary candidate for Birmingham Yardley, at the 1939 Labour Conference. He contrasted the direct involvement of British seamen in the Spanish conflict with the

¹²⁵ Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors*, pp.405-10.

¹²⁶ P. D. Drake, 'Labour and Spain', pp.72-73.

¹²⁷ Buchanan, *British Labour Movement*. This provides a comprehensive account.

¹²⁸ Richard Ryan, "'Much More Must Be Done to Save the Spanish Republic': The Liverpool Labour Movement and the Spanish Civil War", *North West Labour History*, 38 (2013-4), 32-37 (p.32). This study identifies high levels of dissent from support for the Republic from Catholic Labour voters and trade unionists.

political role of the left in supporting the Republic, saying that the seamen had rendered 'something more than lip service to the cause of Spanish democracy'.¹²⁹ These were angry words, but they represented a postscript to recent divisions. By this date the 'Spain' was losing the capacity to divide the party. Since 1936-37 British Labour and trade union representatives in the Labour and Socialist International and the International Federation of Trade Unions had supported measures to de-politicise relief efforts, and to provide 'realistic' practical help.¹³⁰ This had already contributed to bridging divisions over support for the Republic. By spring 1939, 'British labour's internationalism was at last presented with a situation which it could fully control', with the 'familiar complications' of dealing with the consequences of Nazi and fascist control in Europe, including support for refugees and survivors.¹³¹ Internal divisions were replaced by the expression of unifying democratic and humanitarian impulses.

A second internal division for the party had related to rearmament. After struggling initially to respond to Franco's revolt, the Labour leadership had shifted to a broadly pro-Republican view as early as summer 1937.¹³² This influenced internal Labour debate about re-armament. At a meeting of Kings Norton Ward Labour Party in Birmingham in June 1937, a discussion about the 'relevance of pacifism to contemporary political issues' had prompted Mrs. Sargent Florence to describe the phrase, 'Defend Spanish Democracy', as one used by 'today's militarists and war-minded profiteers'.¹³³ Sargent Florence was a committed pacifist on ethical grounds, but during the early 1930s Labour Party opposition to war had run wider. A conference resolution in 1933 pledged the party to support taking no future part in war. After 1935, and the failure of the League of Nations to impose sanctions on Italy over the invasion of Abyssinia, this pacifist sentiment eroded. The Spanish Civil War strongly reinforced the change. Sargent Florence's own district party, the Birmingham Labour Party, passed a resolution in 1937 expressing 'grave concern' at government proposals 'to prevent the enlistment of British volunteers for the International Column to fight in the case [sic] of International Democracy'. It called on the Labour Party 'to

¹²⁹ Drake, 'Labour and Spain', p.21. Nationalist attacks had been responsible for the deaths of 35 British merchant seamen and the serious injury of nearly 50 more, between July 1936 and June 1938.

¹³⁰ Laurence Brown, 'The Great Betrayal? European Socialists and Humanitarian Relief During the Spanish Civil War', *Labour History Review*, 67, 1 (2002), 83-99 (p.90).

¹³¹ Buchanan, *British Labour Movement*, p.221.

¹³² Shelmerdine, *British Representations*, p.5 and p.152. The shift was in accord with an evident change in the public mood by 1937.

¹³³ Drake, 'Labour and Spain', p.206. Mrs. Sargent Florence was a member of a prominent pacifist family.

demand the immediate withdrawal of the arms ban and expose the pro-Fascist policy of non-intervention'.¹³⁴ Labour's support for the armed defence of democracy in Spain contributed decisively to ending the internal party divide over pacifism and rearmament. The historiographical consensus has been that in the face of the German and Italian threat, 'Bevin and Dalton pulled Labour away from pacifism', but the Spanish war was a critical contributor.¹³⁵

At the beginning of 1939, 'Spain' retained the capacity to disrupt Labour Party politics. The breadth of support for the Aid Spain campaign since 1936 had exposed Labour to continuing pressure to give more support to the Spanish Republic, and to oppose the policy of 'non-intervention'.¹³⁶ Before the stark resolution offered by Republican defeat in spring 1939, Attlee had attempted to meet this challenge by close personal identification with the Spanish cause. During a visit to Spain in December 1937 he held a well-publicised meeting with British International Brigaders. On his return, at a rally in the Albert Hall, 'His simple opening sentence: "Recently I went to Spain", was the signal for an outbreak of tremendous cheering'.¹³⁷ In the first months of 1939, the Labour Party leadership faced a threat of further destabilization as the final battles were fought in Spain. The approaching end of the Spanish war had not concluded the agitation for a Popular Front, to which the party leadership was unremittingly hostile. In January 1939, Stafford Cripps set out renewed proposals for a Popular Front in the so-called 'Cripps Memorandum', supporting electoral collaboration with the Liberal, Communist and Independent Labour parties. He was duly expelled from the party on 25 January. On the same evening Cripps addressed a very large 'Arms for Spain' rally at the Queen's Hall.¹³⁸ This was the evidence that 'Spain', and its association with the politics of the Popular Front, represented a continuing risk to the unity of the party.

¹³⁴ Quoted in Rhiannon Vickers, *Labour and the World (Volume 1): The Evolution of Labour's Foreign Policy, 1900-51* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.124.

¹³⁵ Stephen Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party in the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p.32. Bevin was the leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union and a powerful influence throughout the 1930s. Dalton was Chair of the Labour Party in 1936-7, at the critical point in Labour's early and confused response to the Franco revolt, and Labour's foreign affairs spokesperson.

¹³⁶ The non-intervention agreement of August 1936 was the initiative of France and Britain to prevent the flow of arms to Spain. Germany, Italy and Soviet Union were amongst the subscribers, but flouted its provisions as principal suppliers of arms to the belligerents. The agreement was widely reviled by the left in Britain, viewed as allowing the British government to claim the moral high ground, whilst in practice condoning aggression by Germany and Italy.

¹³⁷ Drake, 'Labour and Spain', p.46, quoting the *Daily Herald*, 20 December 1937.

¹³⁸ Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, digital print 2008), pp.170-3.

Attlee, and other Labour leaders, responded with words of resolute support for the Spanish Republic and its defenders. In effect, they also claimed the inheritance of 'Spain'. Diplomatic recognition of the Franco regime by the Chamberlain government in February 1939 provoked nationwide protests, and a demonstration was organised by the London Labour Party and London Trades Council on 26 February. This presented the Labour leadership with a platform, but also illustrated the pressure on the Labour leadership. A report in the *News Chronicle* on 27 February 1939 said that 'One of the biggest demonstrations ever known at Trafalgar Square unanimously passed a resolution last night condemning the Government's decision to recognise Franco'. This proclaimed 'as the culminating treachery the present vulgar and undignified scramble on the part of the Government to curry favour with the assassin of Spanish democracy in the interest of British capitalism'. The report went on to say that Herbert Morrison's voice was drowned in protest by shouts of 'We want Cripps!'. As Attlee and Morrison took a taxi to present the resolution to the Prime Minister, 'Hundreds ran down Whitehall to Downing St.'¹³⁹ This illustrated the continuing volatility of 'Spain' as an issue in Labour politics. On this occasion Attlee and Morrison were able to remain at the head of public protest. The Trafalgar Square protest reflected a process of adjustment to the end of the Spanish Civil War.

There was some evidence of weakening support for the Spanish Republic. In contrast to previous Spanish solidarity meetings, fewer than forty people turned up to a public meeting in Birmingham to protest against recognition of Franco.¹⁴⁰ The parliamentary correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* reported the statement on recognition given by Chamberlain in the House of Commons on 27 February: the statement 'was heard with more coolness than one might have expected in view of the hot interest with which the Opposition has supported the Republican cause'.¹⁴¹ This reinforced the impression that the London demonstration was intended to help to manage the swirling emotions within the party around the impending defeat of the Republic. In early 1939, active political solidarity with the Republic in Britain was increasingly being deflected to provision of humanitarian responses, to provide food and medical supplies for growing numbers of Spanish refugees in Catalonia and Southern France.

¹³⁹ *News Chronicle*, 27 February 1939, with London Trades Council papers, at LMU, TUC Library Collections.

¹⁴⁰ Drake, 'Labour and Spain', p.253.

¹⁴¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 February 1939, p.11.

Dramatizing the honour of the defenders of the Spanish cause served further purposes for Labour in 1939. A year earlier, in spring 1938, Hugh Dalton had written a diary entry about the threat of European war during a return voyage from Australasia: "Will IT begin before I come back?" IT is the NEXT WAR, not some little War in a Corner, - China, Abyssinia and Spain'.¹⁴² This sense of 'Spain' as a distraction had passed by spring and summer 1939. Recollection of 'Spain' could serve as a rallying point for resistance to Nazi aggression elsewhere in Europe. By mid-1939, an unguarded retrospective acknowledgement was given to those who had fought in Spain. In a Labour Party circular promoting the National Memorial Fund, Attlee recalled his most recent visit to Spain in December 1938:

Since that time victory has gone to the side of the tyrants and the Spanish people have passed under the rule of dictatorship [...] [but] in the meantime, there is a debt of honour which the British Labour Movement must help to meet. [...] I cannot do better than take this opportunity of asking my comrades throughout the Party to give their assistance to this good and necessary cause.¹⁴³

Attlee shared with Communists the evocation of a 'debt of honour', aligning Labour and Communist parties on the common ground of respect for the sacrifice shown in defence of the Spanish Republic. This contributed to neutralizing the Communist Party's distinct claims as advocates and supporters of Spanish democracy. On the eve of the Second World War, Attlee's words also implied a moral claim for recognition of the defenders of the Spanish Republic as opponents of the dictators.

After 1939, 'Spain' was reduced to a vestigial place in the internal affairs of the Labour Party, but did not entirely disappear. In November 1941, the Secretary of the Epsom Divisional Labour Party wrote to the national party's General Secretary, J. S. Middleton, about the cost of the party's maintenance of Basque children living in Banstead in Surrey. The Epsom party were no longer able to provide the necessary funding. The letter continues: 'What we feel is, now that the international situation has changed and we are fighting the ideological war that Eden wanted to avoid, perhaps the

¹⁴² Ben Pimlott, *Hugh Dalton* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.253.

¹⁴³ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, William Gillies Papers, circular to Divisional and Local Labour Parties, June 1939, LP/SCW/8/21.

Government would help them'.¹⁴⁴ The entry of the Soviet Union to the war, and reference to the political divide between the left and the Conservatives, are invoked in the lobby for practical help. This is the measure of the degree to which 'Spain' had receded from the political forefront. The principal inheritance of the Spanish war, for this local Labour Party, was contributing to the costs of care for refugee children.

2.3 Decline in public and political discourse

The end of the Spanish Civil War, followed quickly by the opening of the Second World War, was accompanied by a decline in intellectual curiosity about 'Spain'. In 1943, George Orwell wrote to his publisher about possible reprints of a number of his books:

'Homage to Catalonia' I think ought [to] be reprinted some time, but I don't know whether the present is quite the moment. It is about the Spanish Civil War, and people probably don't want that dragged up now. On the other hand if Spain comes into the war I suppose it would for a while be possible to sell anything which seemed informative about Spanish internal affairs, if one could get it through the press in time.¹⁴⁵

Gerald Brenan wrote a first major study of the background to the Spanish Civil War, *Spanish Labyrinth*, also published in 1943. In the later judgement of Eric Hobsbawm, 'For obvious reasons the first edition, published during the Second World War, attracted little notice'.¹⁴⁶ This decline in intellectual engagement was influenced by the competing political and military developments of the global war. But the low level of public and political discourse about 'Spain' also owed a great deal to three other factors: limited knowledge of international affairs; lack of reporting on Spain; and, marginalization of the Republican exiles in Britain.

¹⁴⁴ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, International Department, Countries and Organisations, Spain 1936-46, letter dated 17 November 1941. Almost 4,000 Basque children were evacuated to Britain in April 1937 with costs of maintenance and care met from non-government sources. Most children were repatriated to Spain in 1937-38, and many others in 1939, but 410 remained in 1945 (Buchanan, *Spanish Civil War*, 1997, p.115.)

¹⁴⁵ *The Complete Works of George Orwell, Volume 15: Two Wasted Years, 1943*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), pp.18-9, letter to Penguin Books, 8 March 1943. *Homage to Catalonia* had been first published in 1937 in a small print run.

¹⁴⁶ Gerald Brenan, *Spanish Labyrinth: An Account of the Social and Political Background of the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943). The quotation is from Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life* (London: Abacus, 2003, first published 2002), p.429.

The first of these, the generally low level of knowledge of international affairs, was evident in different settings. A Royal Tank Corps officer, having organised a discussion circle in his unit in 1941, reportedly found ‘Men who were vague about the whereabouts of Poland (this is no exaggeration), who did not know the difference between Dominion and Colonial status, who had never heard of the Low Countries’.¹⁴⁷ Patience Darton’s description of experience speaking for the International Brigade Association in 1943 was striking: ‘I did notice when I was doing ordinary trade union Branch meetings that a lot of young comrades have not really heard of Spain. They do not know the date of the war or who started it.’¹⁴⁸ Darton’s reference to ‘young comrades’ is important. For young shopfloor workers in 1943, the Spanish Civil War could evoke no direct memories. Beyond the simple absence of knowledge, lay a wider issue and a possible parallel with views of France in 1940. Nicholas Atkin suggests that the defeat of France ‘intensified a mistrust of all things foreign’.¹⁴⁹ After June 1940, distinctions between Vichy France and the emergent Free France were of little interest to many people in Britain, whose focus was mainly with domestic preoccupations.

The second factor, as a significant constraint in discourse about ‘Spain’, was the combined impact of limited access to news and information from Franco’s Spain, censorship, and paper and print shortages. This reinforced the underlying low level of public engagement. In late 1943, George Orwell wrote a review of E. Allison Peers’ *Spain in Eclipse, 1937-1943*, published in the *Observer*. In his review, titled ‘Hidden Spain’, Orwell described the author, who was Professor of Spanish at Liverpool University and a leading academic authority on Spain, as ‘mildly and regretfully pro-Franco’.¹⁵⁰ In the book, Peers wrote that since 1940:

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual History of the British Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.222. The quotation is from a report published in 1941.

¹⁴⁸ MML, IBMA, box 37, item C/2, ‘Report on National Conference – Private Session’, with added margin note ‘? April 4th 1943’. Darton was a nurse in Spain, and an active Communist and member of the International Brigade Association after 1939.

¹⁴⁹ Nicholas Atkin, *The Forgotten French: Exiles in the British Isles, 1940-44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.66.

¹⁵⁰ *The Complete Works of George Orwell, Volume 16: I Have Tried To Tell the Truth, 1943-1944*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), p.8. in the *Observer*, 28 November 1943.

the history of Spain has been crowded out of our minds by matters of such grave import affecting us so much more closely [but] throughout these years of eclipse, I have, by various means, been able to keep in touch with the country, and, to a great extent, to surmount the obstacles of inaccessibility and censorship.¹⁵¹

His long-established professional position, and political orientation, allowed Peers the privilege of maintaining some personal contacts, presumably with the direct sanction of the Spanish and British authorities. Otherwise, reports of Spain in newspapers and other publications were very limited during the Second World War.

Reporting was subject to censorship, which was rarely well-documented. The edition of *Tribune* for 28 June 1940, though, contained a blank page, with the exception of the words: 'Owing to circumstances over which we have no control, and about which more will be heard we are UNABLE TO PRINT the Military Correspondent's [Wintringham's] article this week'. This was followed in the edition of 5 July 1940 with comment 'by the Editor', under the headline 'Ourselves And The Censor'.¹⁵² The offending article, 'The Second Battle for Spain', had argued that Franco must guarantee Spanish neutrality, or face invasion. The article had also demanded the resignation of Chamberlain and Halifax, since 'The Spanish Republicans have never forgotten Mr. Chamberlain's action during the Spanish War'. It suggested that their removal from office would reduce resistance in Spain to British invading forces. The censor objected to the political content of the article, though the ban was rescinded on appeal, enabling *Tribune* to print the full story the following week. Censorship was an impediment to reporting on Spain.

Paper shortages resulted in newspapers and other publications printing with reduced numbers of pages, and with restricted news coverage. In 1941, *New Propellor*, the newsletter of the Engineering and Allied Trades Shop Stewards National Council, printed a statement describing unprecedented pressure on space and the inability to cover various industrial stories from the preceding month.¹⁵³ However, in May 1943, under the headline 'Workers Stop War Material for Franco', *New Propellor* reported a

¹⁵¹ E. Allison Peers, *Spain in Eclipse, 1937-1943: A Sequel to The Spanish Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1945, first publ. 1943), page v.

¹⁵² *Tribune*, 28 June and 5 July 1940, at LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 6/5.

¹⁵³ *New Propellor*, February 1941, Vol. 6, No. 2. The newsletter was founded in 1935 by Communist-dominated shop stewards of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in the aircraft industry.

story from an unidentified location: ‘Prompt action by shop stewards representing 20,000 Standard Telephone workers successfully checked the shipment to General Franco – still the pampered child of Anglo-American appeasement – of a consignment of vital war materials required, it is believed, to complete priority jobs in this country.’ Crates had been found in early April, labelled ‘Madrid – Under licence’. A protest had been lodged and the shipment returned to stores. With support from shopfloor workers, the shop stewards’ action was evidently effective in stopping the shipment. The story ended with a call for ‘Watchfulness by British arms workers’ to stop arms to Franco.¹⁵⁴ This appears to have been the sole such report in *New Propellor*.

The third factor in influencing decline in discourse about ‘Spain’ in Britain was, perhaps, decisive. Division amongst members of the Spanish Republican diaspora, and their political marginalization, had a damaging impact. In London, Spanish Republicans found themselves part of a much larger body of political exiles from Nazi-occupied Europe. They were amongst the few national groups not granted status as a government-in-exile.¹⁵⁵ The case of Juan Negrin, the last Prime Minister of the Republic, illustrated this weakness. He arrived from France on 24 June 1940 on a temporary visa, and remained under threat of removal. His ascent to the premiership in 1937 had been marked by divisions within his own Spanish Socialist Party, and in exile he was a politically isolated and controversial figure.¹⁵⁶ Conflict with the competing Republican leadership in Mexico, over his exclusive claim to ‘republican legality in exile’, was exacerbated by his remoteness from Mexico, whilst his political activity in Britain was circumscribed.¹⁵⁷ These difficulties were reinforced by the policy of the British government towards Spanish opposition groups in exile. In broad terms, this was to express preference for a future constitutional monarchy, or parliamentary republic, but not at the expense of ‘stability’. This led the British government to oppose any support for the Spanish Communist Party, or ‘cooperation with the internal guerrilla resistance to Franco’, or

¹⁵⁴ *New Propellor*, May 1943, Vol. 8, No. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Denis Smyth, ‘The Politics of Asylum, Juan Negrin and the British Government in 1940’, in Richard Langhorne (ed.), *Diplomacy and Intelligence During the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.126-7.

¹⁵⁶ Negrin had supported centralization of powers of the Republican government to fight the war more effectively and manage the Republic’s diplomatic effort to secure international support. He collaborated closely with Communists in government. In the complex politics of the Republic, and in the face of the defeat in 1939, all the leading figures attracted controversy in the years of exile.

¹⁵⁷ Dunthorn, *Anti-Franco Opposition*, p.14.

the Basque and Catalan nationalists.¹⁵⁸ This undermined the possibility of developing a united voice for Republican political forces in Britain.

Divisions amongst Republicans facilitated a re-casting of the position of the Communist Party. In 1943, Peter Kerrigan spoke about 'all sorts of difficulties' in sustaining support for the Spanish cause. He argued for reaching out to former International Brigaders, no matter 'how widely their opinions may diverge from a party point of view'.¹⁵⁹ This call for support beyond the Communist Party can be read as a measure of the weakness of the Spanish Republican position in Britain. There is another interpretation. The following year, in a debate about the need to unify Republicans in exile, Kerrigan opposed this proposition. He said that 'the Spanish people should set up the government they want'.¹⁶⁰ This was disingenuous. In the face of the exigencies of the European war by 1944, the cause of the Spanish Republic was a low priority for the Communist Party. Kerrigan's openness to the form of a post-Franco regime reflects this position. The party's claim to the political inheritance of 'Spain', reflected through the activity of the International Brigade Association, was subordinate to other priorities.

The British government dealt a blow to the lobby for restoration of the Spanish Republic when Churchill made a controversial parliamentary statement on Spain, on 24 May 1944. This offered conditional support to the Franco regime. The response of the National Council of Labour (NCL) to the statement was, perhaps, equally disturbing for proponents of the Republic:

[The NCL] dissociates itself from the 'kindly words' of the Prime Minister regarding the Spanish Government, and 'expresses the fervent hope that the heroism of the Spanish Republicans will soon be rewarded by a great act of democratic self-liberation which will establish Spain as a peace-loving member of the community of free peoples'.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Dunthorn, *Anti-Franco Opposition*, p.4.

¹⁵⁹ MML, IBMA, box 37, item C/2, 'Report on National Conference – Private Session', International Brigade Association, April 1943.

¹⁶⁰ MML, box 37, item C/6a, 'International Brigade Meeting', 13 February 1944.

¹⁶¹ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, International Department, Spain 1936-46, National Council of Labour 'Declaration on Spain', 28 June 1944. The NCL brought together representatives of the Labour Party National Executive Committee, the TUC General Council, and Labour M.P.s.

This gave no recognition to the continuing brutal suppression of opposition to the Franco regime in Spain. It united the Communist and Labour parties in standing back from a commitment to direct intervention to restore Spanish democracy. They opposed Franco, but were not prepared to will the means. This position was eased by the weakness and division of exile Republican political forces. The emerging shape of a post-war European settlement was a potent influence by 1944. Soviet predominance in central and eastern Europe would be balanced by Britain taking a leading role in western Europe and the Mediterranean. A quiescent Spain would serve the interests of both powers, and would not disturb the emerging geo-political balance.¹⁶²

Communists, and others on the left, moderated expressions of support for active opposition to Franco. In 1943, *New Propellor* printed an article surveying the European resistance to fascism: 'From Oslo to the Pyrenees, from the Baltic to the Balkans. From the islands of the Aegean to the French Mediterranean shore, real international fighting unity is being forged in the unbending struggle of Europe's underground against Fascism'.¹⁶³ The article cites the Netherlands, France, Norway, and Italy as scenes of resistance. Spain is absent, notwithstanding armed resistance to Franco's regime by Republican guerrillas through these years. Excluding Spain from a survey of European resistance to fascism suggests a form of self-censorship. This was not a comfortable position after the years of moral enthusiasm and fervour of the Spanish Civil War. In a pamphlet titled *Spain: The Moral Touchstone of Europe*, Charles Duff wrote in 1944 that the Conservative Party interest lay in stemming the move to socialism in Spain.¹⁶⁴ This over-simplified the case. By 1944, support for the restoration of a Spanish Republic was sharply constrained by British and Soviet policy. Spanish Republicans in exile were in no position to counter this pressure.

2.4 The political parties: three Spanish threads

In the aftermath of the defeat of the Spanish Republic, and to the accompaniment of widening global war, the narrative of 'Spain' still had some potency in left-wing politics.

¹⁶² Edwards, *Anglo-American Relations*, and Ahmad, *Cold War*, explore this issue fully.

¹⁶³ *New Propellor*, June 1943, Vol. 8, No. 6.

¹⁶⁴ Charles Duff, *Spain: The Moral Touchstone of Europe* (London: Gollancz, 1944).

After 1940, resonances of the Spanish Civil War served the Labour, Communist, and Common Wealth parties in different ways.

In the case of the Labour Party, some members were now ministers. Hugh Dalton served as Minister for Economic Warfare from May 1940 to February 1942, the only senior Labour minister with a portfolio bringing direct responsibility for international affairs. From summer 1940, this included responsibility for the Special Operations Executive (SOE). This brought him into direct contact with Spanish affairs, specifically concerns about meeting the danger of any German intervention in Spain to seize Gibraltar.¹⁶⁵ Burrige writes that for the Labour Party, 'British war strategy, in the first instance, owed little to political considerations, being largely dictated by German military success'.¹⁶⁶ This appears to have been true in framing Dalton's response to the political and military emergency of 1940. Dalton, an ebullient personality, was prepared to consider wide options in the face of the threat. He was keen to explore unconventional approaches for subversive operations in Europe, including Spain. He described his reactions to a discussion about irregular warfare at a meeting held at the Foreign Office in 1940:

I object to putting everything under the D[irector] [of] M[ilitary] I[n]telligence]. What we have in mind is not a military job at all. It concerns Trade Unionists, Socialists, etc., the making of chaos and revolution – no more suitable for soldiers than fouling at football or throwing when bowling at cricket.¹⁶⁷

Dalton did not identify Spain as the source, but his words appear to allude to the early stages of the Spanish Civil War and the role played by left-wing Republican militia. In late 1940, Dalton demonstrated a similar outlook in meeting 'G.S. Lea', a former volunteer in Spain:

¹⁶⁵ Denis Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival: British Policy and Franco's Spain, 1940-41* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.244.

¹⁶⁶ T. D. Burrige, *British Labour and Hitler's War* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), p.167.

¹⁶⁷ LSE, Hugh Dalton Papers, Dalton Diary, 1/23/1, 1 July 1940.

He makes a most favourable impression: active and vigorous, both mentally and physically, with very quick responses, no respect for authority as such, very tough, and having got pretty full value out of a very varied and adventurous life [and] fought on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. He has now been in our Army for some months and I think [that] this has done him a great deal of good.¹⁶⁸

The diary entry goes on to refer to Lea's varied language skills, including speaking some Catalan, implying that he would be well-equipped for a role in irregular warfare in Spain. These accounts describe a personal call on experience of 'Spain' by Dalton, but they appear to have been impromptu responses to the military emergency. As a minister, Dalton had shifted from this position by early 1941.

Dalton distanced himself from perception of loyalty to the Spanish Republic, consistent with official scepticism about the value of deploying Spanish Republican exiles in military roles. Minutes of a chiefs of staff discussion in February 1941, on 'Preparatory Measures for Spain', recorded the need to recruit 'up to forty [British] Army personnel for irregular warfare' to train Spaniards in Britain. It went on to raise political concerns:

The Committee [...] stressed their opinion that it was undesirable that Spaniards of the wrong political type should be trained in this country for action in Spain. [...] [T]he Spaniards now under training had been chosen subject to Foreign Office approval and [...] the Special Operations Executive would ensure that there would be no contact with anyone of strong political tendencies.¹⁶⁹

Dalton reflected this position in his own denial of political support for the Republic. In a diary entry, also from February 1941, recording a conversation with a Tory M.P. recently returned from a visit to Madrid, Dalton described 'there [as being] a faint suspicion, still, of my playing with the Spanish Reds. I endeavour to remove it'. In the same entry, describing a meeting with the Vice-Governor of Gibraltar, General Mason-Macfarlane, Dalton reinforced the theme:

¹⁶⁸ LSE, Hugh Dalton Papers, Dalton Diary, 1/23/89, 7 November 1940. In the event there was no role for Lea in Spain, with Dalton later recording that 'Mr. G. S. Lea is a problem child' (Dalton Diary, 1/24/38, 13 February 1941).

¹⁶⁹ Extract from COS (41) 39 meeting, 3 February 1941, quoted by David Stafford, *Britain and European Resistance, 1940-1945: A Survey of the Special Operations Executive, With Documents* (London: Macmillan, 1983 reprint with alterations, first publ. 1980), p.55. The Spaniards, around thirty in number by December 1940, were training at Arisaig in the Scottish Highlands. Their identities and origins are unclear.

I worked hard to remove the lingering suspicion that we want to do independent operations, or that we are in touch with the Reds out there [...] I say that [...] I always refused to take part in Parliamentary debates on Spain during the Civil War, that I have never met Negrin.¹⁷⁰

Although Dalton had been ambivalent about the left's support for the Republic during the late 1930s, the vigour of this repudiation is striking. After a brief willingness to explore the possibilities of Spanish experience of irregular warfare, in the special circumstances of 1940, he gave no further encouragement during the remainder of his tenure as Minister for Economic Warfare until 1942. Dalton had been prepared to evoke 'Spain' in 1940, but subsequently rejected the inheritance.

For the Communist Party, 'Spain' retained currency for the purpose of promoting the Anglo-Soviet alliance. The German strike against the Soviet Union in June 1941 was followed by the Anglo-Soviet Agreement in July. The Communist Party supported a series of public rallies to associate the International Brigade with promoting the Anglo-Soviet alliance. An event billed as 'The International Brigade Association Salutes the Allied Armies' was held at the Cambridge Theatre in London on Saturday, 20 September 1941. There were displays of the British Battalion banner, with music and poetry. Amongst speakers were Sam Wild and Lt-Col. Hans Kahle, former commander of the Thaelmann Battalion of the XI Brigade, both Communists. Wilfrid Roberts, Liberal M.P. and Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, Labour M.P., two of the principal supporters of the Spanish Republic in the House of Commons, were also listed to speak.¹⁷¹ This was an echo of Communist-led solidarity meetings during the Spanish Civil War. It clearly identified the Soviet struggle with the defence of the Spanish Republic. It called on the spirit of 'Spain', recognized as a preceding phase in the anti-fascist war.

The Communist Party drew on the Spanish Civil War in electoral politics. With the first real prospects of Allied military victory in 1942-43, independent and left-wing candidates contested parliamentary by-elections, securing high votes and some victories against government candidates standing under the terms of the by-election

¹⁷⁰ LSE, Hugh Dalton Papers, Dalton Diary, 1/241/50, 26 February 1941.

¹⁷¹ MML, IBMA, box 30, item B/6, copy of programme.

truce.¹⁷² The Churchill government, and the by-election truce, were supported by the Communist Party after June 1941. These dissenting by-election votes represented challenges to the conduct of the war, and support for major measures of postwar reconstruction.¹⁷³ They were an embarrassment to the Communist Party. In the Birmingham Aston by-election in June 1943 the Conservative candidate, not opposed by the Labour or Liberal parties, was actively supported by the Communists. In an attempt to meet criticism of the party's position a pamphlet was published which argued that 'everybody to-day recognises the truth of our slogan: "Save Britain by arms for Spain". Our present slogan of "National unity for the defeat of Fascism" is equally correct'.¹⁷⁴ This retrospective claim from the Spanish war, in the language of adopting 'correct' political positions, was directed to the party's own supporters. The call on 'Spain' was an expedient in encouraging Communist supporters to cast a by-election vote for a Conservative candidate.

The creation of the Common Wealth Party in 1942, incorporating the 1941 Committee and Forward March, provided a vehicle for electoral expression of left-wing opinion previously suppressed by the constraints of Coalition unity.¹⁷⁵ Common Wealth sought to combine a left-wing political programme with promoting a fresh moral perspective on the practice of democratic politics. It drew active support from local Labour parties in by-elections, stimulated by frustration with the compromises of participation in the Conservative-dominated Coalition government and the electoral truce.¹⁷⁶ In a mirror image of the Communist Party's use of the memory of the Spanish Civil War in the 1943 Aston by-election, Common Wealth invoked 'Spain' to win support for by-election votes against the government.

The defenders of the Spanish Republic had an important place in some Common Wealth election campaigns. The Common Wealth 'election team' included Billy Day, a veteran of the British Battalion.¹⁷⁷ The experiences of candidates in Spain were given high profile. In the Rusholme by-election in Manchester in July 1944 a Common

¹⁷² From September 1939 parliamentary by-elections in Conservative, Labour or Liberal-held seats were not contested by the other two parties.

¹⁷³ Addison, *The Road to 1945*, and Calder, *The People's War*, argue that political opinion had shifted decisively to the left in 1940, but that by-elections only later became an important platform for dissent.

¹⁷⁴ *Thirteen Questions & Answers on the Aston By-election*, unidentified author (London: CPGB, 1943).

¹⁷⁵ A. L. R. Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party 1942-1945' (DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1967), Vol. I, p.59.

¹⁷⁶ Brooke, *Labour's War*, pp.66-69.

¹⁷⁷ Calder, 'Common Wealth', Vol. I, p.142.

Wealth election flyer for the local candidate identified prominent party figures as participants in the Spanish war:

Tom WINTRINGHAM of Common Wealth, was in Spain as Commander of the British Battalion of the International Brigade... [and] John LOVERSEED, Common Wealth M.P. [victor of the Eddisbury by-election in 1943] and Battle of Britain Pilot, was fighting in the air in Spain.¹⁷⁸

In the earlier North Midlothian by-election, contested by Wintringham for Common Wealth in February 1943, an election flyer included a message of support from Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, a prominent Republican supporter. He wrote that 'In joining the International Brigade you helped to save the honour of Great Britain. You are fighting for a much greater cause, a cause more vital to every elector, than when Gladstone thrilled Midlothian many years ago'.¹⁷⁹ Wintringham's own papers relating to the by-election include a typescript of quotations from Morley's *Life of Gladstone*.¹⁸⁰ Identifying the Midlothian campaign of 1878-80 with his candidacy was to claim the mantle of Gladstone's liberal internationalism for the recent fight in Spain. The Spanish Civil War, like the Bulgarian massacres, was being invoked to signal a failure of British policy, and to rally liberal opinion.

Within the Common Wealth Party, the moral claim of 'Spain' and the politics of the Popular Front from the late 1930's, was not without challenge. Richard Acland, a former Liberal M.P. and leading figure in Common Wealth, urged a new way in politics. He asserted in 1943 that 'In recent years the advocacy of Socialism in this country has lost the moral enthusiasm and fervour which it had even thirty years ago.' Yet 'moral enthusiasm and fervour' had appeared to capture precisely the character of the British left in support of the Spanish Republic and the politics of the Popular Front after 1936. Acland condemned this record, saying 'there is no such thing as co-operation with a Communist [...] [and there is] no common language', and describing the Communist Party's 'sad follies of the last two years'.¹⁸¹ This reflected deep political conflicts

¹⁷⁸ East Sussex Records Office (ESRO), The Keep, Brighton, University of Sussex Special Collections, Common Wealth Archive, SxMs9/1/1/4/6/1, document 4/151.

¹⁷⁹ ESRO, Common Wealth Archive, SxMs9/1/1/4/6/1, document 4/122. Sir Peter Chalmers, secretary of the Zoological Society of London until 1935, lived in Malaga during the early stages of the Spanish War. Gladstone's Midlothian campaign took as inspiration the British government failure to challenge Ottoman massacres in Bulgaria, but provided a platform to promote the Liberal Party's programme.

¹⁸⁰ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 3/2/1.

¹⁸¹ Richard Acland, *What Will It Be Like In The New Britain* (London: Gollancz, 1943), pp.21 and 158.

between the leading figures in *Common Wealth*.¹⁸² The call on 'Spain' by Wintringham, a former Communist, was contested ground.

2.5 The personal price of the lost war

With the defeat of the Spanish Republic, those from Britain who had given the most to the struggle presented some of the characteristics of a diaspora. For the International Brigaders, and some others, this had involved involuntary physical departures from Spain. For other political activists, it was experienced perhaps as a sense of exile from the cause, as the 'Aid Spain' movement dissolved. After the Spanish war, many Republican supporters faced denial of the value of their fight, and personal discrimination, with their experience of 'Spain' rendered as problematic. Kenneth Watkins writes that 'The Spanish Civil War was a mirror into which men gazed and had cast back at them not a picture of reality but the image of the hopes and fears of their generation'.¹⁸³ The pain of the defeat in Spain owed something to this. The apparent failure of the anti-fascist and Popular Front campaigns of the late 1930s, of which 'Spain' had been a central part, brought feelings of dislocation. Those who had returned from Spain, their families and children, and British supporters, faced sharp personal adjustments to life after 'Spain'.

A discordant note of suspicion and hostility sounded for many returnees. The writer, Gerald Brenan, had been resident in Southern Spain from 1919 until his forced return to Britain in 1936. When he joined the Home Guard in June 1940, he was subject to police surveillance. Brenan described being interviewed by police at Marlborough as late as 1942 or 1943. He attributed this to perception of his Spanish connections: 'Was I, I wondered [being] regarded as a "premature anti-fascist" [because of support for Republican Spain]'. He had no history of Communist Party membership, or party sympathies, but he did have 'a public record of being on the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War'.¹⁸⁴ No other action appears to have been taken, but the signal was clear. Previous association with 'Spain' identified Brenan as a security risk. Richard

¹⁸² Conflicts in *Common Wealth* during 1943 between proponents of contrasting materialist and idealist or moralist conceptions of politics are described in Calder, 'Common Wealth', Vol. I, p.205. Wintringham was strongly associated with the former, and Acland with the latter.

¹⁸³ Kenneth W Watkins, *Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion* (London: Nelson, 1963), p.13.

¹⁸⁴ Gerald Brenan, *Personal Record, 1920-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp.333-4.

Baxell describes other aggressive reactions to returning International Brigaders.¹⁸⁵ Maurice Levine, of Manchester, wrote about the experience of returning to his workplace: 'In 1940 I left the Co-op after a certain amount of hostility. I was one of only two left-wingers and I was the only Jew working there. The fact that I had been in the Spanish Civil War didn't go down well with some of the employees'.¹⁸⁶ When he volunteered to fight in Spain, Charles Armitage was described as having left behind 'a successful boot and shoe repair business on Shaw Road [in Oldham], and an Austin car', and when he returned, 'local people called him a "mercenary", and asked how much money he had brought home'.¹⁸⁷ In the cases of Levine and Armitage, hostility appeared respectively to carry connotations of anti-Semitism and disloyalty to class. These were uncomfortable returns.

On their return, some of the International Brigaders were deeply traumatized. Philip Harker had volunteered for Spain after several years as Lancashire organiser for the National Union of Unemployed Workers, based in Bolton. He was an assumed Communist Party member, or fellow traveller, characterized as 'the ubiquitous Philip Harker'.¹⁸⁸ It is clear that he deserted in Spain after surviving combat. A Communist Party member in Bolton wrote a later account, saying that Harker returned to Bolton in 1938 or 1939:

He left soon afterwards and I have never seen him again. Next I heard of him was he had a, 'roll your pennies', stall on Blackpool South Shore. He apparently married a girl from the fair and travelled the country. I saw a Press report that Harker had got one or three months in prison for fraud, I can't remember which.¹⁸⁹

It appears that Harker's political and personal life was profoundly dislocated as a consequence of his service in Spain. The case of 'D. McGrath', a former Communist Party member, serving as a private in the non-combatant corps, was reported in the *Manchester Guardian* in August 1942. He had been sentenced to a prison term by court

¹⁸⁵ Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors*, pp.400 and 402-4.

¹⁸⁶ Maurice Levine, *Cheetham to Cordova: A Manchester Man of the Thirties* (privately published, 1984), p.49, accessed at WCML, Spain Archive, box 9.

¹⁸⁷ WCML, Spain Archive, box 20, EVT/SPAIN/3/9/5 (Charles Armitage), from text for 'Oldham Men Who Fought in Spain 1936-1938 Exhibition', held at Oldham Local Interest Centre, 29 January-24 May 1986.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Howarth, 'Public Assistance and Means Testing in Bolton, 1929-1936' (MPhil thesis, University of Manchester, 1994), p.118.

¹⁸⁹ WCML, Spain Archive, box 22, EVT/SPAIN/3/9/72 (Philip Harker), letter by Bob Davies to Edmund Frow, 30 December 1975.

martial for disobeying orders. His appeal was upheld, to allow him to join the register of conscientious objectors. In a statement for the hearing he had said ‘that he served with the International Brigade in Spain and resolved in consequence of what he saw there that “he would never be partner to inflicting such suffering on any human being”’.¹⁹⁰ These cases offer stark examples of the life-changing impact of surviving the fighting in Spain.

Some International Brigaders sought to continue to fight in the British armed forces, and there were well-documented cases of discrimination. The *Manchester Guardian* reported in July 1939 that Geoffrey Mander, Liberal M.P. for East Wolverhampton, had asked Sir Victor Warrender, Financial Secretary at the War Office, about any direction by the War Office relating to the ‘undesirability of accepting as recruits [for the Regular or Territorial Army] persons who had served in the International Brigade in Spain’. Mander said that this was well-known to be the case. The minister denied the assertion, describing ‘the right to inquire into character’ and to require a reference. Ellen Wilkinson M.P. intervened to say that this was ‘a slur [...] cast [...] on a body of heroic and fine citizens of this country’.¹⁹¹ During the Second World War, it appeared that ‘increasing numbers of former Brigaders did manage to enlist’, but the response to former fighters in Spain was inconsistent, and ‘many felt that the treatment they received was extremely arbitrary’.¹⁹²

As a political leader, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Harry Pollitt, faced his own pressures of adjustment after the defeat in Spain. He shared in many ways the experience of International Brigaders and their families. After spring 1939, he was drawn immediately into fresh fields of activity: ‘Little time was allowed the International Brigaders before they were swallowed by the ever open maw of the working class movement’.¹⁹³ Bill Alexander’s description of a simple resolution amongst Communist volunteers, to come home to Britain to continue ‘the democratic and anti-fascist struggle’, matched Pollitt’s own determined behaviour.¹⁹⁴ During the

¹⁹⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 12 August 1942, p.6.

¹⁹¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 July 1939, p.3.

¹⁹² Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors*, pp.434 and 436.

¹⁹³ WCML, Spain Archive, box 11, from undated and unpublished biography of Sam Wild, ‘No Other Way’: Major Sam Wild, 1908-1983, by B. H. Phillips.

¹⁹⁴ Bill Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty: Spain 1936-39* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1982) p.16.

Second World War, Pollitt subjected himself to a 'gruelling schedule'.¹⁹⁵ Pollitt had absorbed intense personal and emotional pressures. He had visited Spain five times between February 1937 and August 1938, remembered warmly for gifts, messages, and acts of solidarity with the British Battalion.¹⁹⁶ A study of the memory of the families of British International Brigaders remarks on 'the tremendous amount of time [Pollitt] spent dealing with all enquiries by relatives'.¹⁹⁷ He 'had the task of dealing with those left bereaved or unsettled by the rumours that moved so much more quickly than official information'.¹⁹⁸ Pollitt lived with the emotions surrounding the failure to save the Spanish Republic. In 1939, Pollitt explained his initial support for the war against Germany by describing 'the strong personal feelings which had been aroused by what I had witnessed in Spain, and the responsibility I felt I had to the sacrifice made by the British Battalion of the International Brigade'.¹⁹⁹ In effect this was an apology for political error, justified by the emotional pull of 'Spain'. Pollitt's response to the end of the Spanish war was to suppress these feelings, and to re-dedicate himself to political struggle.

The soldiers of the International Brigade were not the only Britons to see direct service in Spain. Women served as nurses in the frontline. Self-narratives were developed in response to what they had witnessed, to relate the meaning of their Spanish experience to their future lives.²⁰⁰ One case was the nurse, Penny Phelps, who worked at a first aid post during the Second World War, and later became a social worker for disabled young people. She claimed that her experience in Spain was a defining moment in her life: 'I have become used to picking up children who may be injured but I shall never forget that first horrendous experience'.²⁰¹ Other nurses were wounded or ill after service in Spain, and 'in certain cases, the exhaustion was as much mental as physical'.²⁰² One searing account of the price paid by a woman applying practical nursing skills in Spain is from Molly Murphy. Her autobiography described the intense pressures and her emotional responses to nursing in Madrid in the first half of

¹⁹⁵ Kevin Morgan, *Harry Pollitt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, first publ. 1993), p.131.

¹⁹⁶ Morgan, *Pollitt*, p.97.

¹⁹⁷ Suart, 'Memory', p.174.

¹⁹⁸ Morgan, *Pollitt*, p.97.

¹⁹⁹ Morgan, *Pollitt*, p.96.

²⁰⁰ Roseanna Webster, 'A Spanish Housewife is Your Next Door Neighbour: British Women and the Spanish Civil War', *Gender and History*, 27, 2 (2015), 397-416 (pp.406-7).

²⁰¹ Penelope Fyvel (Penny Phelps), *English Penny*, (Arthur H. Stockwell: Ilfracombe, Devon, 1992), pp.28-9.

²⁰² Angela Jackson, *British Women and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.163.

1937: 'I was at the end of my tether and completely exhausted'. On her return to England she was offered the chance to recuperate with a friend, and 'in the quietness of her home and under her tender care I stayed for two months and at last recovered my health and strength'.²⁰³ The memoir is silent about the next two years, but this was not the end of her story.

In September 1939, Murphy became a sister in charge of a mobile medical unit for early intervention on the scene of air raids in the borough of St. Pancras. She described working around Kentish Town in 1940-42, where 'all incidents were alike in kind if not in degree', including 'freak effects of blast, buried men, women and children, wonderful escapes, horrible mutilations'. She continued:

The worst 'incident' I can recall and the sight of which haunts me at times and sometimes mixes in my dreams with incidents of the Spanish war, was an occasion when not far from St. Pancras Station, a land mine hit a large block of flats fair and square. We were there on duty for nearly thirty-six hours [...] In those hours I saw injuries and death inflicted by blast as ghastly as anything I had seen in all the months on the battlefields of Spain.²⁰⁴

In early 1942 Murphy's health broke down and, despite later improvements in her health, she was marked for life by this breakdown. She stopped nursing, and later experienced 'deep depression'. This was another life-changing impact of the Spanish war amongst the diaspora.

The disruption of lives extended beyond the women and men who had served in Spain, to the families and children of volunteers. Young lives were often deeply effected by the dislocation of families. Nan Green left behind her two children to go to Spain, with their father already serving with the International Brigade.²⁰⁵ In both parents' absences, her daughter and son were sent to boarding school at Summerhill in Suffolk, with fees paid by another Communist Party supporter. In making the decision Green was quoted as saying, 'We are thinking of the children of Europe', a striking assertion of the claims of children in war zones at the expense of a family life with her own children.²⁰⁶ She

²⁰³ LHASC, Communist Party Archive, CP/IND/MURP/01/02, *Nurse Molly*, pp.139, 142. Molly Murphy was the wife of J.T. Murphy, a prominent member of the Communist Party until 1932.

²⁰⁴ LHASC, Communist Party Archive, CP/IND/MURP/01/02, *Nurse Molly*, p.146.

²⁰⁵ George Green was killed in September 1938.

²⁰⁶ Webster, 'Spanish Housewife', p.401.

later acknowledged the difficulties this absence created in the relationship with her son, Martin.²⁰⁷ Piers Anthony Jacob was the son of Quaker relief workers, Alfred and Norma Jacob. He was left in the care of his grandparents. He later said that for the family 'there was a cost, for all of us'.²⁰⁸ He described emotional difficulties as a child, saying that the relationship with his mother was only recovered later. In a further twist, the Jacobs' returned to Barcelona in June 1939 to undertake postwar relief work for the Friends Service Council, this time taking their children. The family were expelled to the United States by the Spanish authorities in July 1940.²⁰⁹ Speaking of the International Brigade, Hywel Francis says that 'official' histories have neglected the underlying costs to families, and the 'anxieties, bitterness, heroism' of the women left behind.²¹⁰ This has been true for other women and children of the 'Spain' diaspora.

Solidarity action for the Republic had engaged thousands of women and men in Britain.²¹¹ Empathy, identification, and affinity with mothers and children in Spain inspired many British women to contribute to solidarity work. Roseanna Webster describes 'activists' allusions to the "wonderful" response and the "feeling" of these campaigns' and suggests that 'affective ties were connecting a network of Republican sympathisers'.²¹² Angela Jackson writes from the record of oral testimony of women about feelings for the continuation of help for Spain after the Republic's defeat in March 1939: 'Their overriding concerns [were] most commonly for people in the newly occupied territories in Spain, for the thousands of Spanish refugees in France, and for the refugees who were living in Britain'.²¹³ A famine appeal published in Britain at the end of the First World War captured in precisely similar terms the humanitarian claims made for Spanish relief: 'Another helpless child is DEAD – another and another while you read. Think of your responsibility – it is within your power to save such

²⁰⁷ Green, *Chronicle*, pp.69-70.

²⁰⁸ Jackson, *British Women*, p.164.

²⁰⁹ Quaker Archives London, Friends Service Council (FSC) (Spain), minutes of FSC Spain Committee, 11 July 1940.

²¹⁰ Hywel Francis, 'Say Nothing and Leave in the Middle of the Night: The Spanish Civil War Re-visited', *History Workshop Journal*, 32, 1 (1991), 69-76 (pp.72-73).

²¹¹ Shelmerdine, *British Representations*, p.149. By 1938 the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief was acting as umbrella organisation for 180 bodies and was involved in some way with 850 other local, regional and national groups.

²¹² Webster, 'Spanish Housewife', p.411.

²¹³ Jackson, *British Women*, p.161.

lives'.²¹⁴ The depth of feelings of responsibility and care by women, and the mutual strength found in undertaking the work, cannot disguise the burdens inherited.

The case of Ellen Wilkinson stands as one exemplar.²¹⁵ Visiting Madrid in April 1937, Wilkinson had been deeply affected by the sight of civilian deaths by shellfire in the vicinity of her delegation. After a further visit to Spain in December 1937 she wrote about the hunger faced by children in Spain: 'The big dark eyes of the children were fixed with a terrible anxiety on the arms of the helpers as they went deeper and deeper to get at the dwindling supply [of food]. I shared their anxiety'.²¹⁶ Webster says that Wilkinson 'accounted for her urge to engage with the conflict in Spain by her "anxiety" for the children, ascribing a maternalistic quality to her actions'.²¹⁷ One of Wilkinson's biographers suggests that when Barcelona fell in January 1939, 'she nearly broke down'.²¹⁸ Only weeks later, a report in the *Manchester Guardian* described Eleanor Rathbone and Wilkinson facing a wrenching personal experience in London:

Carrying the remnants of their possessions, nearly 200 Spanish Republican leaders and their families arrived at Victoria Station, London, last night...It was a bewildered crowd that stepped out of the boat train. [They] were taken to the Grosvenor Hotel for 'sorting out.' [Eleanor Rathbone and Ellen Wilkinson] were among those who helped make the refugees comfortable.²¹⁹

This direct work with refugees was combined with a weight of political responsibility, and the constraints of her role as a Labour politician. By this date, she was in no position to render effective further political support for the Spanish people.

For Wilkinson, there was a brutal denouement at the Labour Party conference in June 1939. As a member of the National Executive Committee, she was asked to move the official resolution on continuing support for the Republic. In effect, this offered only

²¹⁴ Tom Watson, "'The Free-Masonry of Sorrow?': English National Identities and the Memorialization of the Great War in Britain, 1919-1931', *History and Memory*, 20, 1 (2008), 89-120 (p.94), from an advertisement for the Save the Children Fund, *The Times*, 12 November 1920.

²¹⁵ Ellen Wilkinson was Labour M.P. for Jarrow. She had visited the Asturias region following the brutally repressed miners' rising in 1934, was a founding member of Spanish Medical Aid in 1936 and the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief in January 1937.

²¹⁶ Ellen Wilkinson, 'The Children Are Spain's Future', in *We Saw in Spain* (London: Labour Party, 1937). Wilkinson had been a member of a visiting Labour party delegation with party leader Clement Attlee and Philip Noel-Baker.

²¹⁷ Webster, 'Spanish Housewife', p.400.

²¹⁸ Betty D. Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson, 1891-1947* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p.170. No source is attributed for the claim.

²¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 April 1939, p.12. Eleanor Rathbone was independent M.P. for the Combined English Universities.

words of consolation: 'The cause of Spain was not lost...She said that a curtain of silence had fallen over Spain. The Government wanted them to forget Spain altogether and believe that the struggle was over. But the struggle was not over'.²²⁰ She was placed in a difficult position when the resolution was subject to an amendment. This deplored Labour's failure to give effective aid to the Republic in 1936-39, and challenged the misdirection of previous campaign efforts towards fundraising, at the expense of direct political action. The amendment was defeated. But there can be little doubt that it had reflected her own view. She is likely to have felt acutely uncomfortable opposing the amendment. An episode from February 1940 provided further evidence of Wilkinson's continuing anguish and anger. In a parliamentary discussion about the rescue of German airmen from the sea, Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, spoke about applying 'ordinary instincts of humanity'. This prompted support from a Conservative M.P.: 'Is [he] not aware that it is repugnant to every seaman that they should not do their utmost to rescue anyone from the water?'. Ellen Wilkinson intervened: 'If that is the view of the Admiralty, why was it not put into operation with regard to the drowning Spanish refugees?'.²²¹ The language expresses high emotion, and a continuing preoccupation with the trauma of the Spanish war.

From this date there is no further record of Wilkinson's engagement with Spanish affairs, or any personal reflection on the impact of 'Spain' on her physical, emotional or psychological well-being. From May 1940, until her early death in 1947, she faced insistent new demands, as a junior minister in the Coalition government and, subsequently, as a member of Attlee's Labour Cabinet. Wilkinson's experience in Spanish solidarity from 1936 to 1939 had a parallel in that of Leah Manning, a Labour Party colleague. She had played a distinguished role as organiser of the evacuation of Basque children from Bilbao in 1937. After the Second World War, Manning sought to continue contact with children who had returned to Spain, and visited the country once as an M.P. in the late 1940s. She was denied visas for further visits. In her autobiography, published in 1970, she recorded that 'Except for poignant memories the Spanish chapter is closed for me'.²²² Manning's words may have been an echo of Wilkinson's feelings after 1940. For Wilkinson, the pressures of office and ill-health

²²⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, 31 May 1939, p.12.

²²¹ HC Deb, 14 February 1940, vol. 357, cols. 739-40.

²²² Leah Manning, *A Life for Education: An Autobiography* (London: Gollancz, 1970), p.140. Manning was briefly Labour M.P. for East Islington in 1931, and for Epping, 1945-50, and had a long career as an educationalist.

were likely to have reinforced other barriers to any continuation of Spanish solidarity work.²²³

Finding a new direction in politics, and moving on from 'Spain', was the shared experience of many on the left. People were changed by the Spanish Civil War in ways that profoundly shaped their lives. The personal price of 'Spain' drove some individuals away from politics, and resulted in refusal or inability to participate in the British war effort after September 1939. In contrast, others experienced the Spanish war as a political awakening, or as the prompt to renewed resolution to oppose fascism. This was captured in the words of Norma Jacob, a humanitarian worker in Spain:

I went into that war as a pacifist, and I've never been as good a pacifist since because Barcelona was heavily bombed, usually on Sunday mornings [...] You'd go up on the roof and you'd watch the bombers coming in and the defending fighters going out to get them. Its not possible to wish, you know, that they'd miss [...] I'm not as good a pacifist, since then, as I had been.²²⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has identified ways in which the Communist and Labour parties 'managed' the political complexities of the early transition from the defeat in Spain. The two parties went on to define the place of 'Spain' in Second World War politics to serve their differing purposes, joined by the Common Wealth Party from 1942. This dynamic was reinforced by the consequences of decline in discourse about Spain in the circumstances of wartime Britain. At the same time, a 'diaspora' of Britons, some involuntarily departed from Spain, and all facing the defeat of the cause, framed personal and political responses to their lost war.

There is relatively widespread public understanding that veterans of the Spanish war were discriminated against on their return to Britain, and that experience in Spain was often spurned in official quarters. There is good evidence for both propositions. But there has been surprisingly limited investigation of the physical, emotional and psychological consequences of the defeat of the Spanish Republic for its individual

²²³ Wilkinson's later reflections on the experience of 'Spain' are unknown. Her personal papers were destroyed after her death in 1947.

²²⁴ Farah Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief Work in the Spanish Civil War* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p.183.

supporters, with the exception, perhaps, of the International Brigaders. For others, there was no corresponding voice. This is understandable, since other contributions were inevitably more diffuse, and may often have had less profound effects on individuals and families. It remains striking, nonetheless, that relatively little has been known about these processes of political and personal adjustment in the immediate aftermath of the Spanish war.

The adjustment to defeat in Spain included assertion of the experience of 'Spain' as relevant to fighting the Second World War. Tom Wintringham, a political activist since the 1920s, made a distinct contribution which was rooted in political and military insights from the Spanish Civil War.

Chapter Three

The lessons of 'Spain': Tom Wintringham, guerrilla fighting, and the British war effort

The idea of learning from the Spanish Civil War to inform the defence of Britain attracted wide political and public attention in 1938 and 1939. The Spanish conflict was viewed as a precursor of the character of future war.²²⁵ Advances in Republican Spain on air raid precautions and military medicine, for example, came to be widely recognized during the early stages of the Second World War.²²⁶ This chapter explores a political and public discourse about new ways of fighting drawn from the political and military lessons of guerrilla warfare in Spain. It investigates how the experience of the Spanish Republic's volunteer militia was interpreted as relevant to wartime Britain. It identifies the development of a concept of 'people's war', drawing on representations of the political and military experience of the Spanish war.

The chapter takes as its focus the role played by Tom Wintringham. He was an active member of the Communist Party from its formation, until 1938. By the opening of the Second World War he had established an independent position as a left-wing thinker on military questions. He was a key figure in the Common Wealth Party from 1942. The chapter investigates his personal endeavour to promote concepts of militia defence and people's war. His contribution was controversial at the time and remains so. The chapter explores how Wintringham developed and applied ideas shaped by his perceptions of the Spanish war from 1936 to 1939. It identifies his call on 'Spain' in three political and military phases of the Second World War: the home defence of Britain against Germany in 1940 and 1941; the defence of India against Japan in 1942; and the proposals for a Second Front in Western Europe from 1941 to 1944.

²²⁵ D. Deacon, *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p.81.

²²⁶ For air raid precautions, see J.B.S. Haldane 'A.R.P. and a People's Government', in *Labour Monthly*, 23, 1 (1941), 21-26 (p.22): 'If it was possible for the people of Spain, a poor country, to make bomb-proof shelters in war, it was vastly easier to construct them in peace-time in a rich country such as Britain'. Buchanan, *Spanish Civil War*, p.190, says that 'Pioneering work on blood transfusions and the treatment of war wounds now received the wider audience they deserved'.

The first section of the chapter explores the political and military circumstances of Britain in 1940. It considers how these factors created the scope for Wintringham to secure a strong voice and influence to promote and apply his ideas. It explores Wintringham's association of Britain's history of volunteer militia defence with the role played by citizens in defending the Spanish Republic. It introduces his conceptualization of this mobilization as an anti-fascist people's war.

The second section looks at Wintringham's thinking on military questions before 1936, and what he learnt from the Spanish war. It identifies how the experience of Spain changed Wintringham's understanding of military questions and equipped him to become central to a discourse about the character of modern warfare. It explores David Fernbach's assertion that 'Spain proved a crucial turning-point for Tom [...and] it began a five-year period in which he was to apply his mind overwhelmingly to military questions'.²²⁷

The third section explores Wintringham's ability to contribute as a writer and journalist to public discourse about home defence from 1939 to 1941. It suggests that his practical influence in Home Guard training flowed from access to public platforms for his ideas, and that his regular contributions to the *Daily Mirror* and *Picture Post* were particularly significant.

The fourth section investigates the place of Spanish experience in Wintringham's ideas for Britain's home defence, taking as the focus militia forces and guerrilla warfare techniques. It investigates the degree to which his popular writings and contribution to Home Guard training drew on the direct lineage of the fighting in the Spanish Civil War. It explores Wintringham's representation of the danger of German landings of paratroops across Britain, and the role of village defence in Southern England, and their relationship to Spanish experience.

The fifth section investigates Wintringham's endeavours to secure a military appointment to help in the defence of India in 1942. It looks specifically at his proposal to create an 'Indian Home Guard'. It explores the tensions which arose in seeking to

²²⁷ Fernbach, 'Wintringham', p.71.

apply lessons of the Spanish Civil War in the context of imperial India. It identifies both direct resistance from British officials, and obstacles resulting from the increasing strength of the Indian independence movement.

In the sixth section, the place of 'Spain' is explored in Wintringham's contribution to debate about a Second Front in Europe from 1941. This section explores the relationship between his concept of a continent-wide European people's war, and the focus on landing large-scale conventional armies in France. It examines the apparent paradox that Wintringham did not propose to extend this campaign of liberation to Spain. He propagated a concept of people's war which drew on his experience of the Spanish Civil War, and developed it for application elsewhere in Western Europe.

3.1 Wintringham's opportunity, 1937-1940

Tom Wintringham gained some influence in military circles after this return from Spain in 1937, but the political disruption of 1940 crystallized his opportunity. The historian Christopher Hill published his essay *The English Revolution* in 1940, to mark the tercentenary of the events of 1640.²²⁸ It was described later as 'a no-holds-barred assertion of the revolutionary nature of England between 1640 and 1660'.²²⁹ He claimed subsequently that it was 'the work of an angry young man who expected to die in the war', but its language of revolution carried a wider resonance.²³⁰ Hill's text contained clear allusion to current events. He described Winstanley's aspiration to 'a society which ordinary people would think worth defending with all their might because it was *their* society'.²³¹ One reviewer explicitly suggested the need 'to use the revolutionary lessons of 1640' to meet the circumstances of 1940.²³² This perspective framed the scope for Wintringham's intervention.

The acute military threat to Britain in 1940 was accompanied by a sense of political release. For some veterans of Spain there was an echo of the political and social upheaval triggered by the Franco revolt in 1936. In early 1941, George Orwell, a

²²⁸ Christopher Hill (ed.), *The English Revolution, 1640: Three Essays* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1940).

²²⁹ Obituary, *Guardian*, 26 February 2003.

²³⁰ Robin Briggs, 'Hill (John Edward) Christopher (1912-2003)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, online edn. January 2006, accessed 1 November 2016).

²³¹ Hill, *English Revolution*, pp.81-82.

²³² Douglas Garman, 'The English Revolution, 1640', in *Labour Monthly*, 22, 12 (1940), 651-53 (p.653).

witness to the early months of the Spanish Civil War, wrote that 'last summer a revolutionary situation existed in England, though there was no-one to take advantage of it'.²³³ This fleeting and inchoate sense of political possibility was also captured in later oral testimony by a trainee at the Osterley Training School for the Home Guard. Norman MacKenzie, a young Londoner who joined the Home Guard at its inception, made a direct connection with 'Spain': 'If the Government had made peace that summer we would have rebelled; abortive, no doubt, but we would have tried. We saw ourselves as the heirs of Spain'.²³⁴ But in 1940, the fight to defend democracy in Spain in the late 1930s was lent a sense of retrospective legitimacy, accompanied by a public sense of political discontinuity. Harold Laski remarked that the weeks after Dunkirk evoked possibilities not seen later in the war, and that the 'dramatic compulsion of war' in 1940 removed citizens from 'many of their normal habits'.²³⁵ He described the war as responsible for psychological changes which were 'revolutionary in their profundity', and which 'induced an experimental temper, a familiarity with the need of sudden adaptation, upon which too much emphasis can hardly be laid'.²³⁶ This did not describe a revolutionary politics, but did suggest a conviction amongst left-wing intellectuals and publicists in the possibilities of influencing government action. Prospects opened for a more dispassionate exploration of the experience of 'Spain'.

Wintringham's opportunity came after May 1940, when the failed Norway campaign acted as catalyst for Chamberlain's resignation. The new government faced the strategic crisis resulting from the unfolding disaster in France to the background of a rebellious and threatening public mood, and was far from politically secure. In the changed circumstances it was possible to discern a channelling of public opinion towards a high patriotism and defiance of Germany. This was expressed in the radio broadcasts of Churchill and J. B. Priestley.²³⁷ Both voiced a determination to fight on following the defeat in France, in strikingly contrasting form and language, and from sharply different political and class backgrounds. The popular press contributed to

²³³ *The Complete Works of George Orwell, Volume 12: A Patriot After All, 1940-1941*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), p.352, from 'London Letter', dated 3 January 1941, in *Partisan Review*, March-April 1941.

²³⁴ Hugh Purcell, *The Last English Revolutionary: Tom Wintringham, 1898-1949* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004), p.186, quoting Norman MacKenzie in a personal communication with the author in 2004. MacKenzie had joined the Communist Party in 1939 or early 1940.

²³⁵ Harold J. Laski, *Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1943), p.166. Laski was a leading left-wing Labour activist and intellectual.

²³⁶ Laski, *Reflections*, pp.145-46.

²³⁷ J. B. Priestley was a writer and commentator of left-wing outlook, whose 'Postscript' broadcasts secured very large radio audiences in 1940.

‘constructing a vision of shared sacrifice and indomitable spirit’.²³⁸ Orwell described a sense of national unity and political resolution achieved in 1940 as a moment ‘like the awakening of a giant.’²³⁹ Wintringham was well-prepared to take advantage of this change, but the changed temper was not wholly new in 1940.

Wintringham had returned from Spain in 1937 at a pivotal moment in the progress of British rearmament. Leslie Hore-Belisha, newly-appointed Secretary of State for War, was ready to look to people ‘capable of initiating, progressive reforms in the modernisation of the army, men who would be able to assess the full value of new weapons, the influence of air power, and profit by the lessons of modern war as it was being waged at that time in Spain’.²⁴⁰ A shared recognition of recent experience in Spain created some common ground between Wintringham, and ministers and senior army officers. Specifically, Wintringham also identified an association between the British volunteer military tradition and the experience of Republican Spain. In 1930, Basil Liddell Hart had described the history of Britain’s regular army, kept small due ‘partly [to] a constitutional distrust of the army’, as complemented by the men of the general population.²⁴¹ Wintringham had engaged with this historical perspective in his book, *How To Reform The Army*, in April 1939:

[The] army of free men available for service at a few hours notice is part of the tradition of the people of these islands, going back over a thousand years, from the ‘fryd’ and ‘wapentake’ through the ‘posse comitus’ and the assizes of arms, to the militia of Queen Elizabeth or the volunteers of the last century.²⁴²

This provided an echo, from a different culture, of the militia action he had encountered in Spain in 1936 and 1937. It anticipated the mobilization of volunteers as an expression of active and participatory patriotism in 1940.

Other thinkers on the British left during the late 1930s sought to locate the politics of the Popular Front in a radical tradition of democratic struggle. Miles Taylor argues that during the Popular Front period the left sought to identify the ‘people’ rather than the

²³⁸ Adrian Bingham, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), p.42.

²³⁹ George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (London: Penguin, 1968, first publ. 1941), p.50.

²⁴⁰ R. J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London: Collins, 1960), p.50.

²⁴¹ B. H. Liddell-Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Cassell, 1970, first publ. 1930), p.57.

²⁴² Tom Wintringham, ‘How to Reform the Army’, in *Fact*, No.25, April 1939, p.75.

'masses' as main actors, and that this resulted in a 'fusion between patriotism and democracy [as] a principal feature of some of the Marxist history published at the end of the 1930s'.²⁴³ Taylor highlights Thomas A. Jackson's *Trials of British Freedom: Being Some Studies in the History of the Fight for Democratic Freedom in Britain*, published in 1940. The book made the case that the real patriotic tradition in Britain was 'the tradition of militant, self-reliant resistance to opposition and unremitting endeavour to liberation'.²⁴⁴ These words might have implied a strand in the history of modern Spain, as much as Britain. The ideas provided an intellectual foundation for Wintringham's espousal of militia defence and guerrilla warfare.

Wintringham identified the political character of guerrilla warfare by adopting the term 'people's war'. Used widely in his journalism and writing by 1940, the concept remained sufficiently broad to encompass a range of interpretations. In his study of Britain in wartime, *The People's War*, Angus Calder explains the choice of the book's title: 'Tom Wintringham, inspirer of the Home Guard, called it a "People's War", and whoever originated it, this was the phrase that stuck'.²⁴⁵ In Calder's sense, the people's war had two specific connotations. The first was that the British people 'were called into a participation which was wider, deeper and longer' than previous wars, and, the second, 'that the war could promote a revolution in British society'.²⁴⁶ In mid-1940, a Ministry of Information official also used the term, intending to assert the importance of public involvement in the war effort: 'The keynote of [government propaganda] is that it is a People's War'.²⁴⁷ In the *Daily Mirror*, in May 1940, Wintringham wrote that 'If the Germans land we should make it a people's war'.²⁴⁸ He was able to appropriate this wide usage of the term for his own purposes.

For Wintringham, the underlying principle of the people's war was large numbers of citizens volunteering as home defence fighters in the cause of an international anti-fascist struggle. In June 1940, in a partial reversion to the position before October 1939, the Communist Party adopted the policy of calling for a 'People's Government'

²⁴³ Miles Taylor, 'Patriotism, History and the Left in Twentieth Century Britain', *Historical Journal*, 33, 4 (1990), 971-987 (p.982).

²⁴⁴ Taylor, 'Patriotism', p.983. Jackson was a Communist Party member and journalist.

²⁴⁵ Calder, *People's War*, p.138.

²⁴⁶ Calder, *People's War*, p.17.

²⁴⁷ Quoted from The National Archives, as INF 1/527, in Marion Yass, *This Is Your War: Home Front Propaganda in the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1983), p.28.

²⁴⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 28 May 1940, p.6.

and, if necessary, a 'People's War', to secure a 'People's Peace'.²⁴⁹ Writing in May, the Communist and International Brigader, Bill Alexander, described a mobilization which would draw on the inheritance of the Spanish war:

Our experience in Spain gives us the answer. In the working class are men for every job – the working class, given the urge and the enthusiasm, shown the direction, can storm the world. [...]. We could produce the leaders to carry out any job put to us in Spain, and to-day we can produce the men to defend the people of Britain.²⁵⁰

Alexander's call on 'Spain', and his assertion of the capacity of working class people, matched Wintringham's own views on the requirements of a British people's war. This required political unity on the left, brought a little closer by the Communist Party's change of position. Describing the conservatism of 'the "gentlemen" who used to be the ruling class of this country', Wintringham observed that the 'previous policy was clearly wrecked during May-June 1940, and for the three months following the defeat of France they lost their grip'.²⁵¹ This cleared the ground for Wintringham to exercise significant military influence in Britain, within the perspective of a people's war.

3.2 'British Left's best known military expert'

Wintringham's military thinking from the early 1930s was an essential foundation for his contribution in the Second World War. It was developed whilst he was a member of the Communist Party. In October 1935 Wintringham joined the *Daily Worker*, writing under his own name, as 'Our Military Correspondent'. His party membership since 1920 had included a substantial record of full-time work for the party, and a spell of imprisonment for political activity in 1925. He was expelled from the party in 1938 because of his extra-marital relationship with a non-party member, but his military thinking continued to be strongly related to a Marxist political analysis.²⁵² By the mid-1930s, Wintringham had a claim to be the 'British Left's best known military expert'.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, p.172.

²⁵⁰ *Volunteer for Liberty*, 8 May 1940, 'Leaders All', pp.24-5. *Volunteers for Liberty* was the newsletter of the International Brigade Association.

²⁵¹ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 3/1/2, typescript, 'Notes on British Politics', 23 May 1941.

²⁵² His expulsion, reported in the *Daily Worker* on 7 July 1938, was 'not a reflection of the services of W. H. Wintringham in Spain' (quoted in Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p.161). Wintringham's personal politics remained closely aligned to those of the Communist Party in 1938 and 1939.

²⁵³ Fernbach, 'Wintringham', p.67.

Wintringham was an exponent of the power of defence. In an article in 1933, 'Modern Weapons and Revolution', Wintringham wrote about the technical limitations of the use of aircraft in combatting urban insurgency.²⁵⁴ In his first book, *The Coming World War*, published in 1935, Wintringham developed a 'cool-headed appraisal of the possibilities of national defence', including the capacity for air defence and air raid precautions.²⁵⁵ This advanced beyond the 1920s consensus on the potentially devastating consequences of aerial bombardment, and was rooted in a theoretical appreciation that popular military mobilization could check fascism. It was consistent with the Popular Front strategy adopted in the same year. Direct experience and study of the Spanish war refined his understanding of modern warfare, and his conviction of the power of defence.

Wintringham served in Spain from August 1936 to October 1937. Apart from a very brief period of command of the British Battalion in February 1937, he contributed to weapons preparation, training, and staff work. From this experience he developed an approach to military practice which bridged political commitment and effective field tactics, crystallizing three key ideas. Firstly, he argued that ordinary people make very capable soldiers when they are effectively organized and have high morale. In *English Captain*, published in March 1939, he wrote that 'a half-organized, untrained militia cannot stand up to a modern army for long', but 'that modern war demands a type of army that feels free; an army in which the corporals, sergeants, and lieutenants in particular are men skilled in an art and carrying their skill into practice, not drilled "robots" obeying mechanically the rule-book, the blue-print, and the boss'.²⁵⁶ Secondly, he believed that trained infantry could meet the challenge of tanks and aircraft if they were confident and flexible in maintaining open formation in the field and prepared to fight behind enemy lines. Reflecting on the battle of Brunete, a Republican failure, contrasted with Guadalajara, 'the very different result seems to show that aeroplanes can exert their maximum effort against mechanized and motorized units, while being relatively ineffective against infantry scattered in tiny groups and keeping well to cover'.²⁵⁷ Thirdly, he argued that modern conditions of battle required devolution of

²⁵⁴ T. H. Wintringham, 'Modern Weapons and Revolution', *Labour Monthly*, 15, 1 (1933), 46-52 (p.52).

²⁵⁵ Fernbach, 'Wintringham', p.69.

²⁵⁶ Tom Wintringham, *English Captain* (London: Faber, 1939), pp.276-7.

²⁵⁷ Wintringham, *English Captain*, p.241.

responsibility for command in the field, allowing the exercise of initiative in tactical decision-taking by junior officers.

Wintringham gave a central place to practical training for combat, drawing on his command of the International Brigade training school at Pozorrubio, from June-August 1937. There he used the technique of training in small units of six to eight men, each man taking command in turn, and each learning a specialism, then taught to the others. This directly foreshadowed training with the Home Guard in Britain in 1940, and 'was close to the guerrilla warfare with which Wintringham would later be identified'.²⁵⁸ He had formulated clear views about modern warfare. As he was to write in 1940, in *New Ways of War*, 'I believe that there is no officer in the British Army who has had, within the past ten years, a year or more of hard campaigning against modern arms and modern tactics, against tanks and planes'.²⁵⁹ Wintringham's military writing and thinking of the mid-decade was now leavened by his experience in Spain.

Wintringham's return to Britain in 1937 coincided with the peak of influence of Basil Liddell Hart, serving at the time as unofficial advisor to Hore-Belisha, and as military correspondent of *The Times*. Brian Bond, in an authoritative and sympathetic study, describes Liddell Hart as 'a tireless advocate of independent judgement in the pursuit of truth'.²⁶⁰ There was some convergence of military thinking between Wintringham and Liddell Hart by this time. The latter has been criticized for over-rating the effectiveness of defence in modern warfare.²⁶¹ His views had been elaborated in *Europe in Arms*, published in 1937:

Despite the apparent advantage that mechanization has brought to the offensive, its reinforcement of the defensive may prove greater still [...] [and] so great is the power of the defensive nowadays that a small reinforcement may suffice to establish a deadlock.²⁶²

These views were very close to Wintringham's own. Three years later, Wintringham published *Deadlock War*, the title itself appearing to associate him with Liddell Hart's thinking. The two men also communicated directly. In April 1939, Wintringham had

²⁵⁸ Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p.150.

²⁵⁹ Tom Wintringham, *New Ways of War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1940), p.11.

²⁶⁰ Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of His Military Thought* (London: Cassell, 1977), p.3.

²⁶¹ Robert O'Neill, 'Liddell Hart Unveiled', in *Twentieth Century British History*, 1, 1 (1990), 101-13 (p.108).

²⁶² Quoted in Bond, *Liddell Hart*, p.97, from B. H. Liddell Hart, *Europe in Arms* (London: Faber, 1937), pp.296-97.

sent Liddell Hart a 'Memorandum on Second Line Infantry'.²⁶³ This connection with Liddell Hart placed Wintringham close to the centre of debate about British defence in the late 1930s.

Wintringham's military writing found audiences beyond the political left, lent authority by his direct experience military lessons of the Spanish war. His pamphlet, *How to Reform the Army*, was read by professional soldiers. Purcell suggests that Wintringham was consulted about his ideas at the War Office in mid-1939, by Sir Ronald Adam, Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir John Brown, Deputy Adjutant-General, and Augustus Thorne, Commander of the Brigade of Guards.²⁶⁴ On the eve of the collapse of France, in April 1940, one of Britain's most senior soldiers, General Wavell, commander in the Middle East, read Wintringham's newly-published *Deadlock War*. This is revealing itself, as an expression of the seriousness with which Wintringham's writings were being taken. Wavell wrote:

It is quite well written, and I was interested in it; but it is about two-thirds political propaganda and only about one-third a military treatise. He never hesitates to distort facts to suit his arguments [...] As to the [...] contention that we require more freedom of initiative and more individual tactics, I am very largely with him. [But] Wintringham's experiences in the Spanish war [...] with a special type of man, the volunteers for the International Brigade, cannot be applied 'in toto' to a mass army.²⁶⁵

Wavell's criticism that much of the book is 'political propaganda' reflects the perspective of a senior military officer responding to a proponent of guerrilla warfare. By definition guerrilla warfare in Spain had been intensely political, since it was rooted in the willingness of the civilian population to fight to defend their home territory and the Spanish Republic. It was striking, nonetheless, that Wavell gave a clear acknowledgement of the motivation and military skills of the International Brigade in Spain. Wavell's interest was a powerful reflection of Wintringham's influence in professional discourse about defence by 1940.

²⁶³ Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p.172.

²⁶⁴ Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, pp.171-2. Purcell gives no source; Fernbach makes a similar unattributed assertion.

²⁶⁵ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 6/3, Wavell, at General Headquarters, Middle East, Egypt, to 'Pinker' (unidentified), 29 April 1940.

3.3 Platform for influence

Wintringham promoted his tactical military doctrines through some of the principal channels for left-wing journalism and writing in wartime Britain. Film and radio during the Second World War have been described as mainly promoting ‘the ethos of patriotic populism and national unity [...] [rather than] serious discussion of the war’.²⁶⁶ This was also true of some of the content of newspapers, but radical journalism set out to be more ambitious. Its reach extended beyond left-wing and liberal publications, to daily newspapers and mainstream weekly publications. Wintringham found wide audiences for his political and military thinking by contributing to a range of publications. Three of his principal outlets were *Tribune*, the *Daily Mirror*, and *Picture Post*. This platform was essential to his impact in 1940.

Wintringham was a regular contributor on political and military questions to the leading left-wing Labour weekly, *Tribune*. To the accompaniment of the German breakthrough in France, *Tribune* published an influential article by Wintringham titled ‘Now Arm the People’.²⁶⁷ In August 1940, George Strauss, M.P., its co-founder and owner, wrote to Wintringham commending his writing: ‘The articles are absolutely first class, extremely interesting, and very readable. We feel your contributions are one of the chief mainstays of the paper’.²⁶⁸ Raymond Postgate, the editor, wrote a eulogy to Wintringham in *Tribune* on 9 August, as ‘the foremost military expert in the world’. Postgate went on: ‘He is not a pundit: he does not work through the usual channels. His education of his fellow citizens has been carried out strictly democratically and by writings addressed to the public’.²⁶⁹ Wintringham was a skilled and professional writer, attuned to addressing left-wing readers after his years of political activism, and his service in Spain.

Wintringham’s place in the public discourse about defence went beyond *Tribune*. The role of armed volunteers in home defence, for instance, was addressed in a first leader in *The Times* on 28 May.²⁷⁰ Wintringham’s proposals in *Tribune* were more directly

²⁶⁶ Geoffrey G. Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.303.

²⁶⁷ *Tribune*, 17 May 1940, at LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 6/5.

²⁶⁸ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 6/4, Strauss to Wintringham, 20 August 1940.

²⁶⁹ Quoted at Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p.181.

²⁷⁰ *The Times*, 28 May 1940, p.7.

echoed elsewhere. The Liberal M.P. Tom Horabin published an article titled 'Arm the People Now!' in the *News Chronicle* on 15 June, accompanied by a photograph from Spain, captioned 'They did it in Barcelona'.²⁷¹ Wintringham's perspectives, drawing on the experience of the Spanish war, found a growing interest and readership. Wintringham was appointed the Military Correspondent of the *Daily Mirror* on 20 May 1940. The *Daily Mirror* took an independent editorial line, in tune with a wartime spirit of egalitarianism.²⁷² In March 1941, Postgate wrote to Wintringham complaining of the latter's willingness to contribute signed articles to the *Daily Mirror*, remarking on the 'singularity and infirmity of policy' of the paper.²⁷³ For Wintringham there was no conflict. He had secured a wider readership and had urgent messages to communicate. The *Daily Mirror* had ridiculed the British government's Spanish non-intervention policy as early as December 1936.²⁷⁴ Wintringham found the *Daily Mirror*, with a daily circulation of nearly two million copies, a very effective vehicle for his journalism.

Writing in the *Daily Mirror* gave Wintringham the scope to call on the experience of 'Spain'. Sonya Rose, in her study of wartime national identity and citizenship, argues 'that heroic, populist, and utopian constructions of national identity and citizenship dominated public and political culture'.²⁷⁵ This was a platform for the success of the wartime *Daily Mirror*. Its columnist, Cassandra (William Neil Connor), has been described as 'able to articulate for [its] working-class audience a persuasive form of [a] "temperate masculinity" [combining] elements of inter-war anti-heroism with traditional soldierly qualities'.²⁷⁶ This elided the distinction between military and civilian experience, to recognize that 'the civilian is no longer behind the front', and that civilians had an equal responsibility to be physically fit to fulfil their responsibilities.²⁷⁷ It was consistent with many representations of the character of the Spanish war and of the Republican militia during the late 1930s. This made it possible for Wintringham to

²⁷¹ Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.39. Horabin was a strong proponent of Popular Front politics.

²⁷² Martin Pugh, 'The *Daily Mirror* and the Revival of Labour 1935-1945', *Twentieth Century British History*, 9, 3 (1998), 420-38 (p.426).

²⁷³ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 6/4, Postgate to Wintringham, 17 March 1941.

²⁷⁴ Pugh, 'Daily Mirror', p.429.

²⁷⁵ Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.24-25.

²⁷⁶ Bingham, *Tabloid Century*, p.41.

²⁷⁷ Sonya O. Rose, "Temperate Heroes: Concepts of Masculinity in Second World War Britain", in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 177-95 (p.185).

identify Spanish experience with Britain's predicament, for a popular readership, in 1940.

Wintringham joined *Picture Post* as a staff writer in 1939. The magazine had been launched in 1938 by Sir Edward Hulton, a public figure with conservative personal politics but a progressive outlook.²⁷⁸ In *Picture Post*, Hulton brought together contemporary politics and new print technology to project strong images of popular themes.²⁷⁹ The combination of his accessible writing, with arresting photography, extended the reach of Wintringham's ideas in 1940. *Picture Post* sold up to 1,350,000 copies weekly in wartime, with as many as five million readers a week, and with a readership weighted heavily towards the more politically conscious middle classes and skilled workers.²⁸⁰ George Orwell captured the potency of the new medium:

If one wishes to name a particular moment, one can say that the old distinction between Right and Left broke down when *Picture Post* was first published [in 1938]. What are the politics of *Picture Post*? Or of *Cavalcade*, or Priestley's broadcasts, or the leading articles in the *Evening Standard*? None of the old classifications fit them.²⁸¹

This matched Wintringham's purpose, to reach out to a large, non-partisan readership. His contributions to *Picture Post* in 1940 built on a powerful conjunction of factors, including the change of political temper, and interest in exploring the lessons of the Spanish war for Britain. Susan Sontag describes 'The Spanish Civil War [as] the first war to be witnessed ("covered") in the modern sense [...] by a corps of professional photographers at the lines of military engagement and in the towns under bombardment, whose work was immediately seen in newspapers and magazines'.²⁸² The photojournalism of *Picture Post* enabled Wintringham to evoke 'Spain' as he articulated a vision for the defence of Britain.

Wintringham's prolific writing in 1940, and his influence, extended beyond this journalism. In April, his book *Deadlock War* was published. This was followed by *New*

²⁷⁸ Hulton stood unsuccessfully as a Conservative candidate in the 1929 general election.

²⁷⁹ Lecture by Nicholas Wright, 'From *Workers' Weekly* to *Picture Post*', given at the Marx Memorial Library, 3 December 2015.

²⁸⁰ Field, *British Working Class*, p.227.

²⁸¹ Orwell, *Lion and Unicorn*, p.95. *Cavalcade* was a British news magazine.

²⁸² Susan Sontag, 'Looking at War: Photography's View of Devastation and Death', from the *New Yorker* in 1998, quoted in Deacon, *British News Media*, p.155.

Ways of War, published in August as a Penguin Special. It sold 75,000 copies in the first few months, and was reprinted twice in 1940, in August and December. The book explained the potential of guerrilla warfare if the Germans landed in Britain following the defeat of France. It described specific techniques for stopping tanks, protection against dive-bombing, scouting, and so on. Drawing explicitly on Spanish experience, Wintringham wrote that home defence would depend 'not so much as to the methods that the Germans employ as to the methods by which we can resist them'.²⁸³ In identifying military effectiveness with 'advancing the cause of the people on the home front', he included 'a political programme of immediate demands'.²⁸⁴ An effective defence would be built on the political commitment and morale of citizens as volunteer fighters. Wintringham used his journalism and writing to make this case. In *Picture Post*, on 21 September 1940, Wintringham described the Osterley Training School for the Home Guard as the result of the positive response of readers to previous articles. He wrote: 'Osterley was a PICTURE POST idea'.²⁸⁵ He combined promoting discourse about home defence, with working to achieve a practical impact.

3.4 Defending Britain, 1940 and 1941

Wintringham found support in official circles in 1940 for a 'democratic guerrilla defence', locating the Home Guard within a British volunteer militia tradition. He drew on the lessons of the Spanish militia and the International Brigades, adapting experience from the Spanish Civil War to match British circumstances. His proposals for the militia defence of Britain centred on the potential of an armed people, committed to the defence of their homeland, when faced with superior conventional forces. Wintringham's vision of a popular mobilization, drawing on experience of 'Spain', provoked political opposition. During summer 1940, this opposition was muted in the face of the national emergency.

Wintringham was a powerful public voice for a propaganda 'call to arms'. In the *Daily Mirror*, on the second full day of the Dunkirk evacuation, on 28 May, he wrote an article entitled 'My Proposals for Him...And You':

²⁸³ Wintringham, *New Ways*, p.9.

²⁸⁴ Fernbach, 'Wintringham', p.76.

²⁸⁵ *Picture Post*, 21 September 1940, p.10.

We can do this: that means you, reader, as well as the trained soldier and the man in training. [...] If the Germans land we should make it a people's war. [...] We have soldiers. They will do most of the job. But in order to do the job quickly, completely, with as little loss as possible, we must become as far as possible – AN AROUSED PEOPLE, AN ANGRY PEOPLE, AN ARMED PEOPLE!²⁸⁶

The sense of the Spanish war is strong here. The language and intent is similar to that of the contemporaneous *New Ways of War*: 'A battalion that I commanded helped to hold the last road into Madrid. It consisted of men and boys no different from you who read these lines. Many of them had received only ten days' training [...] That is [...] the spirit of the People's War'.²⁸⁷ But the 'presence' of the Spanish Civil War in the *Daily Mirror* article was crystallized most precisely, perhaps, by his declaration: 'And women always join in such a war. You can't stop them'. This is an echo of the participation of women in the Spanish militias in 1936. Lisa Margaret Lines wrote that 'In the early days of the civil war, women joined in storming the barracks to obtain weapons. Having armed themselves, women built barricades and participated in street fighting that put down the Nationalist uprising in many areas'.²⁸⁸ Wintringham was consciously invoking graphic images of militia women, familiar to British audiences from the Spanish Civil War. In his own response to the emergency, J. B. Priestley, spoke of 'a citizen's war', and the necessity 'to bring into existence a new network of voluntary associations such as the Home Guard [...] [which] are a new type, what might be called the organized militant citizen'.²⁸⁹ This language struck a rather different tone. It was suggestive, though, of scope to bring together elements of Spanish and British experience and traditions.

In August 1936, Wintringham had been one of the first proponents of the creation of the International Brigades. This followed his witness to the struggles of Republican militias faced with Franco's regular forces. From this experience he sought to resolve the central problem of a balance between 'democracy and discipline, [and] direct

²⁸⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 28 May 1940, p.6. The title of the article alluded to General Edmund Ironside, appointed Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces the previous day. His plans included heavy reliance on static defence lines inland, away from more lightly-defended coasts.

²⁸⁷ Wintringham, *New Ways*, p.75.

²⁸⁸ Lisa Margaret Lines, *Milicianas: Women in Combat in the Spanish Civil War* (Plymouth: Lexington, 2012, first publ. 2011), p.49.

²⁸⁹ Quoted in Stephen Cullen, *Home Guard Socialism: A Vision of a People's Army* (Warwick: Allotment Hut Booklets, 2006), p.69, from H. Agar, *Britain Alone: June 1940-June 1941* (London: Bodley Head, 1972), p.79.

action and organization', describing this as the creation of 'an army of free men'.²⁹⁰ In his book, *English Captain*, Wintringham re-printed the text of two lectures he had given in Spain in January 1937. The lectures chart the development of the war in Spain from July 1936, and suggest the need to teach the Spaniards how to fight the war.

Describing the defence of Madrid at University City, Wintringham comments that 'You have to be lively and imaginative in that sort of fighting [...] and it just suited our Spaniards'. He went on:

We have to show the Spanish militia what a real army looks like, how it marches, how it defends, and how it attacks. They will learn from us, and when they have learnt what we can teach them they will beat Franco.²⁹¹

Wintringham was not alone in articulating the possibilities of combining Spanish and British military qualities, and characteristics, in the interest of home defence.

At the end of 1940, George Orwell also described bridging Spanish and British experience. Orwell formulated a view of the Home Guard as 'a democratic guerrilla force, like a more orderly version of the early Spanish government militias'.²⁹² He made the case to 'arm the people', saying that it was 'demonstrated by the Spanish war [...] that the advantages of arming the population outweigh the danger of putting weapons into the wrong hands'. He described the value of hand grenades for urban fighting, citing the example of Spain. He spoke of armed men driven out of stone buildings by grenades or sticks of dynamite: 'Hundreds of thousands of men in England are accustomed to using hand grenades and would be only too ready to instruct others'.²⁹³ Wintringham concurred with Orwell's view. He identified the importance of the many British men in mid-life in 1940 who had served in the British Army in the First World War. Wintringham believed that, by virtue of their military training, a 'surprisingly high percentage' of such men 'were well-prepared for use of rifles'.²⁹⁴ This might appear to invert the presumption that training in guerrilla warfare entailed bringing military skills and techniques from Spain to apply amongst uninitiated British volunteers. It

²⁹⁰ Fernbach, 'Wintringham', pp.69-70.

²⁹¹ Wintringham, *English Captain*, pp.137-38.

²⁹² Orwell *Complete Works*, Vol.12, p.310, from 'Home Guard and You', *Tribune*, 20 December 1940.

²⁹³ Orwell *Complete Works*, Vol.12, pp.192-93, letter to the editor of *Time and Tide*, 22 June 1940.

²⁹⁴ Wintringham, *English Captain*, p.111.

emphasizes the combination of different elements in Wintringham's model of guerrilla warfare for home defence in 1940.

The Home Guard Training School at Osterley in west London demonstrated the blending of traditions. The Osterley school aimed to bring professional training in guerrilla warfare to Home Guard volunteers. It was founded in July 1940 through the private initiative and funding of Edward Hulton, with Wintringham at its head. From mid-July to mid-September, trainee numbers rose to 250 per week, including some regular soldiers. The school's Spanish war lineage was demonstrated clearly in the personnel appointed and the promotion of guerrilla war tactics. Full-time instructors included the former International Brigader, Bert 'Yank' Levy, teaching knife-fighting and 'other unorthodox skills', and 'three Spanish refugee miners teaching the use of explosives against tanks'.²⁹⁵ Other instructors included Stanley White, recruited from the Boy Scouts to teach scouting, and artist Roland Penrose, to teach camouflage. Wintringham featured activities at Osterley in a number of *Picture Post* stories, with striking echoes of training in Spain for the British Battalion. In *English Captain*, Wintringham described working with Wilfred Macartney, who had experience of British Army service, to bring realism into battle training in Spain in 1937:

We used large wooden rattles to simulate machine-gun fire, made men scatter and lie still at unexpected moments at the sound of imaginary aircraft, fumbled our way across country in very open order in the dark [...] Macartney and I tried to get the ideas of cover, approach from the flanks, cross-fire, and accurate fire control into the heads of our section and group leaders.²⁹⁶

The same quality of improvisation in training was captured graphically in *Picture Post* in 1940. In *New Ways of War*, illustrations of techniques for taking cover, cross-fire, and patrolling in open country, reflected this description of battle training in Spain.²⁹⁷ Wintringham promoted ideas which brought together elements of the culture the regular army, with external influences which drew principally on experience in Spain.

In the War Office, intense suspicions remained of the political loyalty and allegiances of supporters of the Spanish Republic. This was reflected in obstacles to International

²⁹⁵ Fernbach, 'Wintringham', p.74.

²⁹⁶ Wintringham, *English Captain*, p.110. Macartney was Wintringham's immediate predecessor as commander of the British Battalion.

²⁹⁷ Wintringham, *New Ways*, pp. 98-105.

Brigaders joining the British army.²⁹⁸ The unconventional character of the school gave rise to challenge. The school was threatened with closure but it survived, and it was formally recognized in summer 1940.²⁹⁹ Continuing anxieties about the political impact of Wintringham contributed to the War Office closing the Osterley operation from October 1940. Training for the Home Guard was transferred to a new location in Surrey, with Wintringham cast in the revised role of 'lecturer and adviser'.³⁰⁰ Charles Graves, in an officially sanctioned account of the Home Guard, remarked that 'Unfortunately, some of Osterley's sponsors, notably Tom Wintringham, seemed inclined to make a political issue of their admirable exercise, and the War Office could scarcely be expected to approve of it in its entirety'.³⁰¹ This reveals the ambivalence with which Wintringham's contribution at Osterley was viewed. Wintringham's independent application of Spanish experience found only a provisional acceptance in the extremity of summer 1940.

At the height of the invasion threat, Wintringham identified the Home Guard directly with the Spanish militia. In *Picture Post*, in September 1940, he spoke about the trainees at Osterley:

[T]hey would be hearing of the experience, hard bought with lives and wounds, won by an army very like their own. [...] I could not help thinking how alike these two armies were: the Home Guard of Britain and the Militia of Republican Spain. Superficially alike in mixture of uniforms and half-uniforms, in shortage of weapons and ammunition, in hasty and incomplete organization and in lack of modern training, they seemed to me more fundamentally alike in their serious eagerness to learn, their resolve to meet and defeat all the difficulties in their way, their certainty that despite shortage of time and gear they could fight and fight effectively.³⁰²

Wintringham's association of the Spanish militia with the Home Guard disguised an apparent paradox. His tactical doctrine for British defence against invasion took inspiration from experience in Spain, but diverged from it in significant respects.

²⁹⁸ Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors*, pp.418-22.

²⁹⁹ Wintringham's article in *Picture Post* on 21 September 1940, 'The Home Guard Can Fight', charted the failed attempt to close the school, recording that 'The school's work has now been recognised by the War Office' (p.9).

³⁰⁰ Summerfield and Peniston-Bird, *Home Defence*, p.42. The position of the Osterley Training School had been likely to change: 'A private military training school teaching armed warfare could not, any more than a private army, be tolerated by the state. To survive, such a school needed War Office approval'. The replacement school was established at 'Denbies', a large private house near Dorking.

³⁰¹ Charles Graves, *The Home Guard of Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1943), pp.184-5.

³⁰² *Picture Post*, 21 September 1940, p.11.

Wintringham gave a central place to protection against German parachutists, suggesting that the militia had been able to neutralize their threat in Spain. No parachute units had been used operationally by the Germans during the Spanish Civil War. The German army had very few trained paratroops before 1939.³⁰³ In a major *Picture Post* feature, on 15 June 1940, entitled 'Against Invasion', Wintringham wrote about the 'The Lessons of Spain'. He claimed that parachutists were not used in Spain 'for [the] very good reason [...] [that] everyone who could get arms carried arms'.³⁰⁴ This article included a half-page photograph of German parachutists, captioned: 'Methods of Invasion. No. 1: The Parachute-Jumpers':

The faces of men who have trained for years in scientific destruction. They were not used in Spain. Why? Because everywhere throughout Republican Spain everyone who could get arms carried arms. 'Such a people can tackle parachutists before breakfast'.³⁰⁵

Wintringham dramatized the ability of armed militia to defend against parachutists. The capture of Fort Eben-Emael in Belgium on 10 May 1940, when a small numbers of German paratroops landed within the fortress perimeter, was given much publicity in Britain. Wintringham's description of the limits of the potential of parachutists was designed to build the morale of defenders. But it was also consistent with promoting maximum mobilization of the Home Guard. Writing in the *Daily Mirror* in late May, Wintringham declared that 'real defence always means attacking [...] [and not] holding passively a line or a town or a house'. He characterized the main activity of 'real defence' against invasion as four-fold: to capture parachutists, intercept Nazis landed from planes, to cover potential landing places, and to catch soldiers from ships.³⁰⁶ Landings from the sea were most likely in Southern England, but German parachutists could land anywhere. The portrayal of a widespread threat of parachute landings was intended to support the case for a national mobilization of the Home Guard.

³⁰³ Basil H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (London: Cassell, 1970) p.72. The Germans began training of parachute troops in 1936, but their first significant operational use was during the German campaigns in Western Europe in April and May 1940. They had a total force of only 4,500 trained paratroops by 1940.

³⁰⁴ *Picture Post*, 15 June 1940, p.17.

³⁰⁵ *Picture Post*, 15 June 1940, p.9.

³⁰⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 28 May 1940, p.6.

By mid-1940, a 'fear of unconventional, politicised warfare' took hold in British government and military circles, with attribution of the success of the the recent German assault in Western Europe to parachutists, 'Fifth Columnists', and saboteurs.³⁰⁷ The identification of a threat from parachute troops found a willing official audience. A number of characteristics of the Spanish war now appeared relevant to Britain. The role of the Republican militias, the performance of the International Brigades, and a belief that in Spain saboteurs and spies had been everywhere behind the lines, placed the Civil War in a new pattern, assumed to characterize 'modern irregular warfare'.³⁰⁸ The *Picture Post* feature from 15 June, 'Against Invasion', contained fifteen pages by Wintringham on 'The Lessons of Spain'. In contrast, five pages were given to writers on the lessons of four other recent European campaigns.³⁰⁹ Experience of the Spanish war was represented as a better model for the defence of Britain than the failed conventional military campaigns in Europe in 1939 and 1940.

Wintringham's influence was confirmed when the War Office purchased the rights to the text of a second *Picture Post* article, 'Arm the Citizens!'. One hundred thousand copies were re-printed for distribution to Home Guard units in July. The focus of his article was practical training, including guidance on taking cover, how to fire a rifle, and using obstacles. Unlike the feature 'Against Invasion', this contained a sole, striking reference to Spain. Recognizing the performance of the International Brigade in 1937, experiencing fifty percent casualties but surrendering only 800-900 yards of ground, he wrote:

They had lost almost all their 20-year-old, semi-derelict machine guns; they had been scattered by tanks and reformed; but they were still in position as a fighting unit, covering the last road into Madrid, despite the continued pressure of an enemy four times greater in man power and 20 times greater in fire power.³¹⁰

This was a remarkable invocation of the bravery and fighting resolution of the International Brigades. Its sanction by the War Office reflected the change in political mood, and the military emergency in mid-1940. In the immediate aftermath of the fall

³⁰⁷ Cullen, *Home Guard Socialism*, p.8.

³⁰⁸ Cullen, *Home Guard Socialism*, p.11.

³⁰⁹ These were 'The Lessons of Flanders' (by J. L. Hodgson, war correspondent in Belgium), of 'Finland' (John Langdon-Davies), 'Poland' (William Forrest, war correspondent with the *News Chronicle*), and 'Norway' (Commander Edgar P. Young, RN.).

³¹⁰ *Picture Post*, 29 June 1940, pp.9-21.

of France, the War Office was prepared to license a retrospective legitimization of the fight of the International Brigades.

George Orwell was a politically-friendly critic of Wintringham's advocacy of the lessons of Spain. He was a sergeant in the Home Guard company in St. John's Wood, London. Above all, Wintringham and Orwell had both served in Spain for the first half of 1937. Orwell shared Wintringham's political and military perspective on home defence, characterized as 'Home Guard socialism', and rooted in a 'left-wing analysis of the military and political significance of the Home Guard'.³¹¹ Writing in early 1941, Orwell expressed some doubts about Wintringham's call on Spanish precedent in guerrilla warfare. In a review of Hugh Slater's book *Home Guard for Victory!*, Orwell acknowledged the contribution of Wintringham and Slater to Home Guard training, but offered the criticism that 'Parts of [the book] are rather elementary, others speculative or over-optimistic, and as a whole the book relies too much on the experience of the Spanish War'.³¹² Orwell's reference can be read as a critique of Wintringham's representation of guerrilla warfare in Spain, notwithstanding that Orwell had a positive view of the Spanish militia.³¹³ After the initial upsurge of violence, the war in Spain had been fought mainly on conventional fronts, with guerrilla warfare marginal to the outcome. As a former member of the militia, Orwell 'remained surprisingly objective' in his assessment of the character of the Spanish Civil War.³¹⁴ He recognized Wintringham's purpose in promoting the importance of guerrilla warfare. Orwell wrote in 1941 that '[The] teaching [at Osterley] was purely military, but with its insistence on guerrilla methods it had revolutionary implications which were perfectly well grasped by many of the men who listened to it'.³¹⁵ In 1943, he added that 'The training schools started by Tom Wintringham and others in the summer of 1940 did invaluable work in spreading an understanding of the nature of

³¹¹ Cullen, *Home Guard Socialism*, p.16. There were a number of left wing figures in the Home Guard, and Wintringham's efforts are placed in this wider context by S. P. MacKenzie, *The Home Guard: A Military and Political History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), particularly in chapter 5, 'A People's Militia? 1940-1', 68-86.

³¹² *Orwell Complete Works, Vol. 12*, p.440, from *Horizon*, March 1941. Hugh Slater had fought in Spain. He was one of six instructors at Osterley, including Wintringham, profiled in the *Picture Post* article, 'The Home Guard Can Fight', 21 September 1940, p.17.

³¹³ Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980). Crick describes Orwell's 'humility, fine simplicity and courage' in serving with the militia (p.211). He quotes Orwell in a letter to Cyril Connolly in June 1937: 'I have seen wonderful things and at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before' (p. 214).

³¹⁴ D.J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2003), p.239.

³¹⁵ *Orwell Complete Works, Vol. 12*, p.551, from 'London Letter, 17 August 1941', in *Partisan Review*, November-December 1941.

total war and an imaginative attitude towards military problems'.³¹⁶ Wintringham advocated training for guerrilla warfare within a clear political context, and reinforced the association of 'Spain' with British home defence.

Wintringham expounded guerrilla warfare techniques relevant to the defence of both urban and rural areas. His biographer refers to 'street fighting, [as] another important form of modern warfare learned in Spain and taught at Osterley'.³¹⁷ Wintringham viewed working class men in cities and towns as a strong component of resistance to German invaders. In May 1940, he wrote in the *Daily Mirror* about the importance of drawing on the resources of large industrial workplaces, including night shifts in factories able to provide large numbers of reinforcements at short notice against air landings, and 'miners and quarrymen [as] the best men to handle explosives for demolition or anti-tank work'.³¹⁸ But the same article evoked a different vision of the streets to be contested. It proclaimed, that 'Each village can be a fortress', and spoke about adapting ditches as trenches with slots for gun. This image of a village, and the defence potential of a rural landscape, was a recurrent and preoccupying presence in Wintringham's journalism and writing in 1940.

Wintringham's 'fortress villages' served a variety of roles. First, they provided a model environment for training in guerrilla warfare techniques. A *Picture Post* story in September 1940, headed 'How to Smash the Blitzkrieg!: A Lesson in Village Defence', was accompanied by a full-page photograph of instructors and trainees around a model layout of 'a typical village'.³¹⁹ The small village consisted of a ribbon development along a main street, a stream running parallel, and a single junction with a secondary road at the centre of the village. The ground plan of this generic small village provided useful terrain for training exercises. Second, villages as foci of resistance suggested comparison with 'Spain'. The idea of the village was freighted with other meanings. The village as a 'fortress', within a unified local population, was an image of the aftermath of some of the savage conflicts of rural Spain. Concentrated land ownership in the hands of the wealthy, and exploitation of landless labourers, had resulted in widespread

³¹⁶ Orwell *Complete Works*, Vol. 15, pp.93-4, from *The Observer*, 9 May 1943, 'THREE YEARS OF HOME GUARD: Unique Symbol of Stability'.

³¹⁷ Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p.194.

³¹⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 28 May 1940, p.6.

³¹⁹ *Picture Post*, 21 September 1940, p.11.

'agrarian unrest and the demand for the take-over of the estates'.³²⁰ In 1936, villages loyal to the Republic had often become poles of resistance to the advance of Franco's army.

Third, Wintringham's promotion of 'fortress villages' spoke to the priorities of 1940. Any realistic prospect of the Germans landing a significant seaborne invasion force would depend on short sea crossings from France or the Low Countries. In June, in *Picture Post*, Wintringham wrote 'We must make the roads and villages and towns of Britain, the meadows and the downs, difficult for the Germans to fight across'.³²¹ The threats were characterized as the 'odd parachutists', some soldiers landed from the air, or 'even [...] tanks rolling up from a port'.³²² The last image is geographically precise in the context of 1940, clearly evoking the coast and downs of Kent and Sussex. The representation of the village had a further resonance. It signalled association with a strand in British home propaganda. This was the landscape and home of people extolled as presenting an exemplar of 'the best in Britain', and the antithesis of Nazi values: 'Whoever thinks of Britain [sic] instinctively visualises the green British countryside, with its winding lanes, hedgerows of shrubs and wild flowers [...] and its villages'.³²³ Wintringham embraced 'traditional' rural villages in Southern England as prospective theatres of resistance, gaining credence for his ideas by identifying with a strand in government propaganda.

Wintringham's thinking on home defence gained credence by evocation of 'Spain', signaling continuity of an anti-fascist struggle since 1936. The Spanish war was viewed as the opening chapter. The defence of the Spanish Republic exemplified resistance to fascism built on Popular Front politics and the role of armed volunteer militia. These lessons of 'Spain' should be applied in Britain. Wintringham's endeavour to promote the militia defence of Britain in these terms was viewed as provocative in many quarters. The polarized political alignments of the Spanish Civil War remained a potent presence in 1940. Whilst 'Spain' had been a totemic issue for the British left, there had been a parallel political and ideological mobilization of Conservative and other right-

³²⁰ Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War, 1936-1939* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), p.513.

³²¹ *Picture Post*, 15 June 1940, p.18.

³²² *Picture Post*, 15 June 1940, p.11.

³²³ David Welch, *Persuading the People: British Propaganda in World War Two* (London: British Library, 2016), p.102.

wing forces in support of Franco.³²⁴ Applying the lessons of the Spanish war was contested territory, and Wintringham was the subject of attack from political opponents on both the political right and the left.

The political import of promoting militia defence was well understood by Wintringham, and by his political opponents. From the right, a letter of complaint was provoked by Wintringham's feature on the Home Guard in *Picture Post* on 21 September 1940:

I am just about fed up with you and your publicity stunts. [...] This is modern warfare, not a game of cops and robbers. And we have a highly developed war industry. Yet you make a virtue out of what was a necessity to the crude Spanish Reds. You think you're so clever, why take a leaf out of one of the illiterate manuals of Marxist hooligans? You would be better advised to copy closer the methods of the gallant gentlemen who won the Spanish Civil War.³²⁵

The language makes clear that the letter came from a supporter of Franco. The correspondent, 'F. X. Coppinger', gave a Liverpool address, and the surname had Irish associations. Support for Franco from the Catholic hierarchy in Britain was strong.³²⁶ Catholic backing for Franco in the British labour movement has also been well-documented.³²⁷ It was perhaps unsurprising that this re-opening of the controversies of the Spanish Civil War should have its origin in Liverpool with its large Catholic population.³²⁸ But Wintringham's view of the progressive political potential of the Home Guard was also attacked on the left. During mid-1940, the Communist Party argued that the German invasion threat was exaggerated, in the interest of promoting Churchill's war leadership. A party member wrote in July 1940 that a people's militia was not possible in the circumstances of the current war, and that developing the fighting capacity of the Home Guard was 'helping the ruling class'.³²⁹ These attacks from right and left were marginalized in 1940. Instead, Wintringham's calls on 'Spain', in his interventions to promote home defence, found a widespread official and public acceptance.

³²⁴ Buchanan, *Spanish Civil War*, pp.88-90.

³²⁵ *Picture Post*, 12 October 1940, p.3.

³²⁶ Buchanan, *Spanish Civil War*, p.180.

³²⁷ See, for example, Buchanan, *British Labour Movement*, pp.167-95.

³²⁸ Ryan, 'Liverpool Labour Movement', p.33. In local elections in November 1938, Labour had lost all seats gained in the city since 1931, to the accompaniment of controversy about aid for Spain. Aid appeals for the Spanish Republic had been suspended in strong Catholic wards.

³²⁹ Quoted in MacKenzie, *Home Guard*, p.69, from *Volunteers for Liberty*, 7 July 1940.

Wintringham resigned from the Home Guard in June 1941, but during the second half of the year he visited army divisions across Britain to lecture on the 'new ways of war'. The inheritance of the Spanish war remained evident. First, the successor training school in Surrey continued to use the skills of some of the instructors from Osterley, including former International Brigader 'Yank' Levy. Second, during 1941 Wintringham's ideas for home defence were elaborated in two books published in other authors' names. Wintringham contributed to Bert 'Yank' Levy's *Guerrilla Warfare* and F. O. Miksche's *Blitzkrieg*.³³⁰ In the latter book, Miksche argued that Britain would be different to Poland or France, if faced with the threat of occupation of territory following 'deep infiltration' by enemy spearheads. In contrast to experience in those countries, the Home Guard would be available and motivated to defend Britain in depth. It would adapt fighting techniques developed in Spain to meet German invasion forces with a 'web defence' and 'islands of resistance'. A network of mutually-supporting strong points would be defended against tanks and infantry, preventing the disarray and collapse experienced in France. But after spring 1941, the invasion threat to Britain had moderated as the bulk of Germany's army and air force deployed for the war against the Soviet Union, launched on 22 June. Wintringham's intense engagement in promoting Britain's home defence ended in late 1941.

In September 1941, David Astor of the *Observer* wrote to Wintringham to solicit an article 'on the subject of "Modern Guerrillas" [...] [to] stir the imagination of our government circles (who read this sheet) without frightening them unduly'.³³¹ The suggestion that Wintringham's advice on irregular warfare would be acceptable, if presented in a politically neutral context, reflected political and strategic developments after mid-1941. The generic terminology of 'Modern Guerrillas' implied a range of international experience of guerrilla warfare. It suggested placing the experience of the Spanish Civil War alongside that of more recent theatres of conflict. The recent British campaign in Abyssinia, from February to June 1941, had deployed 'irregular' forces against the Italians. Above all, in autumn 1941, the most potent images of the 'modern guerrilla' might be drawn from the Soviet defence against German invasion. The

³³⁰ F. O. Miksche, *Blitzkrieg* (London: Faber, 1941) and Bert 'Yank' Levy, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Special, 1941). Both men had served in Spain and drew strongly on Wintringham's ideas and contributions.

³³¹ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 6/9/38-59, Astor to Wintringham, 16 September 1941.

lessons of 'Spain' faced competition from these more recent military campaigns by later 1941.

3.5 India, 1942

Wintringham made a further claim to military influence by seeking a role in India in March 1942. The Japanese attack in the Pacific and South East Asia, in December 1941, had left India facing imminent danger of invasion by early 1942. He proposed the organization of a guerrilla defence, drawing on the lessons of 'Spain'. In May 1942, offering his services for the defence of Australia, also threatened by Japan, Wintringham wrote to the Australian Minister of External Affairs, Dr H. V. Evatt, saying that 'After being stalled for the hell of a time I'm eager to get going'.³³² Wintringham failed to secure a military appointment in India. The episode exposed the limits of his influence by 1942, and the barriers to the application of European experience of guerrilla warfare to the defence of colonial India.

In early 1942 Sir Stafford Cripps, a member of the War Cabinet from February, had suggested that Wintringham go to India to 'report on the possibilities of guerrilla fighting'.³³³ Cripps, formerly ambassador in Moscow, had returned to British politics at a point of crisis in Churchill's leadership, and was viewed briefly as a prospective successor as Prime Minister. This suggested the emergence of an important political sponsor for Wintringham. Cripps had shared the intense engagement in support for the Spanish Republic, and recognized the value of Wintringham's knowledge of guerrilla war from Spain. If this appeared to contain great promise for Wintringham, in the event it proved otherwise. Cripps was in India from 22 March to 11 April 1942, preoccupied with the so-called 'Cripps Mission'.³³⁴ Unknown to Wintringham, in February 1942 Wavell, who was now commanding in India, had already secured the appointment of Orde Wingate to develop guerrilla operations in Burma.³³⁵ The cabinet

³³² LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 2/10, Wintringham to Evatt, 19 May 1942. Nothing came of Wintringham's offer to aid Australian defence.

³³³ Quoted by Purcell, *English Revolutionary*, p.202 (attributed to Wintringham Papers, file 28 – 'Large Black Suitcase': this pre-dated subsequent cataloguing of the papers at King's College London).

³³⁴ Cripps was charged by the War Cabinet with securing maximum Indian support for the war effort and a consensus amongst Indian parties on the form of post-war Indian self-rule. The so-called 'Cripps Mission' failed to achieve an agreement.

³³⁵ Wavell become commander-in-chief in India in June 1941. Wingate went on to lead long range penetration columns operating behind Japanese lines in Burma, 1942-44.

minister's lobby for Wintringham was trumped by the military commander's request for Wingate.

In ignorance of this development, Wintringham set out his proposals in a letter to General W. H. Lockhart at the India Office in March 1942. Amongst main points, Wintringham put forward names of people with whom he would work in India, describing a list of seven as 'my own gang' and giving their qualifications: five were former International Brigaders.³³⁶ He also suggested that Wingate should recommend instructors and other officers from his recent experience of irregular warfare against the Italians in Abyssinia. Wintringham's letter makes both evident and implied calls on the inheritance of 'Spain', the former represented by his claims for the qualifications of former International Brigaders. His proposed call on officers with successful recent experience of the campaign in Abyssinia implies a parallel with the claim made for earlier Spanish experience. In Abyssinia, Orde Wingate's 'Gideon Force' of local troops and irregulars had fought a successful campaign in wild country against superior numbers of Italian troops. This had echoes of the composition and fighting experience of the International Brigade.

Wintringham encountered a complex and tense political environment in India in 1942. He wrote that 'The immediate formation of an Indian H[ome] G[uard] would permit training to be begun for guerrilla warfare, and would give to Indians immediate work to be done for their own defence'.³³⁷ But this concept of India's 'own defence' was problematic. The British faced the threat of Japanese invasion alongside a growing independence movement, led principally by the Congress Party. In early 1942, local militias were emerging independently as expressions of communal identities and fears:

Everywhere a new militarism, and the protection of militias and clubs, was becoming commonplace. The link to wartime conditions was explicit. 'In view of the grave world situation and its possible repercussions on India', noted the Muslim League Working Committee, 'every community is organising its volunteer organisations for the defence of its life and property'.³³⁸

³³⁶ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 2/10, Wintringham to Lockhart, 16 March 1942.

³³⁷ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 2/10, note 'Guerrilla Warfare in India', March 1942.

³³⁸ Yasmin Khan, *The Raj at War: A People's History of India's Second World War* (London: Bodley Head, 2015), pp.136-7.

Yasmin Khan describes the creation of 'Home Leagues and Civil Defence Units [which] mirrored and mimicked those formed by the Raj [drawing] on many of the same technical vocabularies and ideas as the military'.³³⁹ These militia were intended to wield influence in shaping India's political and constitutional future. The development of contending local militias was a challenge to Wintringham's conception of an 'Indian Home Guard' on the British model.

Wintringham's view of India was framed through the perspective of late 1930s anti-fascist politics in Europe. Jawaharlal Nehru was a key figure for Wintringham and others on the British left during the late 1930s. Nehru had told the *Manchester Guardian* in 1938 that 'Indian opinion is entirely anti-fascist', and that a free India would unhesitatingly throw itself behind the democracies in a war with fascism.³⁴⁰ Nicholas Owen argues that this was out of step with a growing body of Indian political opinion by the end of 1938, and that 'Sympathy with fascism was actually growing among the communal parties [and] there was little support for the Spanish republicans'.³⁴¹ By 1941 and 1942 wide divergences within Indian politics were accompanied by a growing distance between Nehru and former Labour and Communist political allies in Britain. Although an ally of Stafford Cripps in support of the Spanish Republic in the late 1930s, Nehru played a central role in the rejection of Cripps's terms for Indian self-rule in April 1942. Old loyalties and unity between opponents of British imperialism came under acute pressure. Indian politicians were suspicious about anticipated post-war British 'plans for imperial reconstruction', and an endeavour to maintain India under British control.³⁴² Nicholas Owen argues that the British left and liberals were vulnerable to co-option by the British government in support of ostensibly progressive developments in India which were opposed by the independence movement. Signalling independence of left-wing British political figures contributed to Nehru securing his position within the leadership of Congress. The growing independence agitation, the rift between Congress and the Muslim League, and local militia mobilizations, were not the conditions in which to promote an all-India 'Home Guard'.

³³⁹ Khan, *Raj*, p.138.

³⁴⁰ Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.247. Jawaharlal Nehru was a leader of the Indian National Congress and well-connected in British left political circles in the 1930s.

³⁴¹ Owen, *British Left*, p.249.

³⁴² Owen, *British Left*, p.5.

In these unpromising circumstances, Wintringham engaged the support of H. N. Brailsford as an advocate. Brailsford wrote to Nehru to support Wintringham's appointment to a role in India:

Dear Jawaharlal, I am sure you already know as much about Tom Wintringham by repute as you need know. His work in Spain in the International Brigade speaks louder than any testimonial. [...] I need say nothing about his military talent. His writings reveal a powerful and flexible mind. But perhaps there is one useful word I can say from my observation of him. I have seen him in three backgrounds – Moscow, Valencia, London. If ever during his work in India, a conflict should arise between his duty to the Indian masses and his inherited instincts as an Englishman, you may trust him to follow his duty as an international Socialist. In short, you may trust him completely.³⁴³

This approach to Nehru, and lobbying on Wintringham's behalf by Indian labour and student organizations, may have crystallized official opposition: 'The officials of the *raj* feared a united front of Indian nationalists and their British friends speaking the language of modernity more than a solely Indian movement which could be depicted as alien, hostile and regressive'.³⁴⁴ Wintringham's left-wing pedigree, and Brailsford's advocacy, could only have stimulated these concerns. If British officials and military officers in New Delhi were wary of Wintringham, the proponents of Indian independence may also have resisted proposals for an 'Indian Home Guard'. There is no record of a response from Nehru to Brailsford's intervention in the archive of Wintringham's papers. By this date Nehru was an unlikely interlocutor in Wintringham's cause. The intimacies of pre-war anti-fascist international politics, and support for the Spanish Republic, had been superseded. The divergent claims of Britain's war against the Axis powers, and the anti-colonialism of the Indian independence movement, left Wintringham without sponsors.

The lobby for Wintringham was unsuccessful, and the rejection of his bid for an appointment was confirmed in a letter dated 18 May 1942.³⁴⁵ This timing may have been significant. In the words of an official account, 'May and June 1942 [had] seemed likely to be the critical months for India. [...] Fortunately, the danger to India never developed [...] [and] when the monsoon broke in the middle of May, the critical

³⁴³ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 2/10, Brailsford to Nehru, 10 May 1942. Brailsford was a left-wing journalist with wide international interests and connections.

³⁴⁴ Owen, *British Left*, p.14.

³⁴⁵ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 2/10, Lockhart to Wintringham, 18 May 1942.

period had passed.³⁴⁶ As the Japanese invasion threat receded, the British military authorities may have felt renewed confidence to decline Wintringham's offer.

In August 1942, Wintringham described a conception of people's war in Asia drawing on Spanish antecedents. In a reflection on his earlier proposal for Indian defence, he wrote:

Every available fact of more than five years fighting, if we include the Spanish and Chinese campaigns, show that the tactical and technical methods which I group together under the heading of People's War are considerably superior to those of the Imperial way of fighting [...]. If the terrible choice existed between defending India with regular troops amid a hostile or passive population and defending India without regular troops by means of 'private armies' comparable to the Spanish militia and Fifth Regiment of 1936, that latter would stand more chance of success.³⁴⁷

He acknowledged the 'private armies', the communally-based and religious-aligned militia which had emerged during 1942, as potentially effective proponents of guerrilla warfare. In doing so, he recognized now that their political motivations were not anti-fascist, but pro-independence. Wintringham's failure to secure an appointment in India had been dictated partly by official resistance. It had also reflected the divergence of politics of India from those framed by the concept of the popular front in Spain and Britain, as the independence movement gained ground.

3.6 European liberation, 1941-1944

After December 1941, it became possible to envisage the freeing of Nazi-occupied Europe, as the United States entered the war, and the German offensive stalled outside Moscow. Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States began to plan for the defeat of Germany. For Wintringham this opened up the prospect of a continent wide anti-fascist people's war. He conceptualized a European resistance and liberation struggle as an 'International Civil War', embracing a 'passionate identification with the

³⁴⁶ CAB 44/326, 'Outline Narrative of Events in India Command (May 1942-15 November 1943)', Historical Section (India).

³⁴⁷ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file, 6/4, typescript article for *Tribune* dated '10 August' (1942), titled 'Why Not Fight the Japanese?' The Fifth Regiment was an elite volunteer unit of the Spanish Republic in 1936-37.

Resistance Movements'.³⁴⁸ Wintringham viewed this as in direct succession to the struggle in Spain. He wrote in March 1941, that:

Spain woke me up. Politically I rediscovered democracy, realising the enormous potentialities in a real alliance of workers and other classes. [...]. I came out of Spain believing [...] in a more radical democracy, and in revolution of some sort as necessary to give the ordinary people a chance to beat Fascism. Marxism makes sense to me, but the 'Party Line' doesn't.³⁴⁹

During 1941 and 1942, Wintringham charted an independent path in debate about the timing and character of a Second Front in Europe, combining political and military perspectives.³⁵⁰

Wintringham argued that the liberation of occupied Europe would require a combination of conventional and irregular warfare. In August 1940, in the early aftermath of the fall of France, Gollancz had published a short book with the evocative title *100,000,000 Allies – If We Choose*, written by Richard Crossman and Kingsley Martin. In making the argument for Britain to support mass revolt, this quoted the case of Spain:

One hundred million peoples suffer under the tyranny of the Nazi war lords. We can make them, or at least the bravest of them, our allies if we pledge this country to the cause of European revolution and build here in Britain an organisation through which the revolution can be brought about. [In the case of Spain] in spite of daily executions, General Franco has been unable to exterminate the revolutionary elements [...] There are thousands of dynamiter-miners in the Asturias, of Catalan and Basque nationalists, and of revolutionary workers and peasants all over Spain.³⁵¹

Wintringham also made the case for an early and widespread Western European rising against the Nazis, drawing on the example of Spain. Wintringham sought to identify the relevance of internal resistance to Franco since 1939 to occupied Europe.

³⁴⁸ Calder, 'Common Wealth', Vol. I, p.205.

³⁴⁹ Hopkins, *Heart of the Fire*, p.319. The quotation from Wintringham, from an unpublished document dated 22 May 1941, is from David Fernbach's entry on Wintringham in Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography* (Clifton, New Jersey: A. M. Kelley, 1972).

³⁵⁰ The Second Front described the proposed landing of Anglo-American forces in continental Europe to relieve pressure on the Soviet Union and the Eastern Front. The landings finally took place in Normandy on 6 June 1944, with significant armoured forces landed in the first hours, and with overwhelming air superiority.

³⁵¹ 'Scipio', *100,000,000 Allies – If We Choose* (London: Gollancz/Victory Books, 1940), p.34-5.

The memory of the battles of the Spanish war, with volunteer militia facing stronger conventional forces, remained potent. In his *Daily Mirror* column, 'Tom Wintringham on the War', Wintringham characterized Spain as one of 'the parts of Europe where guerrilla forces are active and dangerous': 'Perhaps it is in poor tortured Spain that the next volcano of revolt will break through'. Wintringham drew a parallel with the Peninsular War, and the inability of Napoleon to defeat Spanish guerrillas working with small numbers of regular British and allied troops to drain his strength: 'Bands of daring men hid in the hills, and struck from those hills to worry and wear out his forces'.³⁵² In the early 1940s, this armed resistance by Spanish Republicans was on a more modest scale than Wintringham represented, and often co-existed with criminal activity in isolated rural areas experiencing 'social segregation and acute poverty'.³⁵³ Wintringham was projecting an image of continuing guerrilla resistance in Spain, and calling on the memory of 'Spain', to suggest the potential for guerrilla warfare in the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe.

Wintringham's evocation of 'Spain', as an exemplar of the potential for anti-Nazi resistance, should not be confused with making Spain a theatre for the struggle. From summer 1940, the British chiefs of staff developed plans for military action in Spain to counter a direct threat to Gibraltar by the Germans, to include irregular warfare in collaboration with Republican resisters.³⁵⁴ Neither they, nor Wintringham, supported a pro-active British military intervention in Spain. The British government strategy was to seek to 'manage' Franco's neutrality in the interest of the Allies.³⁵⁵ At first sight, Wintringham's concurrence might appear surprising. During the early and mid years of the Second World War, however, he explicitly spoke about a people's war conducted by the 'people of Europe'. In this conception, Spain was a secondary theatre, with Nazi-occupied Western Europe, and particularly France, the primary focus for military operations.

³⁵² *Daily Mirror*, 14 November 1941, at LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 6/7.

³⁵³ Jorge Marco, *Guerrilleros and Neighbours in Arms: Identities and Cultures of Anti-Fascist Resistance in Spain* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2017, first publ. in Spanish, 2012), p.176.

³⁵⁴ In August 1940 Operation GOLDEN EYE was devised to promote local Spanish resistance in the event of German invasion. As the war widened in 1941 and 1942, more ambitious plans to check any German entry to Spain were developed.

³⁵⁵ Dunthorn, *Anti-Franco Opposition*, pp.28-9.

Wintringham defined the place of people's war in Europe in *The Politics of Victory*, published in June 1941. He spoke about the need for the unity of left-wing and anti-fascist political forces, and the potential for 'victory by democracy' across the continent.³⁵⁶ He developed these ideas further. He addressed political and military aspects of the European war in his book *People's War*, published in August 1942, conceptualizing people's war as distinct from 'German and Japanese blitzkrieg' and its conventional British response, which he described as 'imperial war'. He identified the distinguishing feature of international people's war as 'operations combining guerrilla forces behind enemy lines with a blitzkrieg striking force'.³⁵⁷ In proposing the place of conventional forces alongside guerrilla warfare, Wintringham reflected concerns about Allied plans for a Second Front.

Wintringham shared the strong reservations of Churchill and Liddell Hart about a conventional military attack in Northern France before 1944.³⁵⁸ The weight and timing of the proposed assault was the subject of conflict between the British and United States governments and chiefs of staff, whilst the Soviets continued to urge early action. In the month of publication of *People's War*, the risks of amphibious assault on the French coast were illustrated by the failure of the Dieppe Raid.³⁵⁹ Wintringham wrote in *People's War* that:

A Second Front can only be established if it is thought of and organized as part of a People's War of liberation by the population of Europe against fascism; if it is thought of as an old-style military expedition it will fail.³⁶⁰

As momentum gathered in planning for an Anglo-American invasion of Europe, Wintringham argued for the complementary place of resistance by the populations of occupied countries. In summer 1942, it was still not clear that Britain and the United States would have the capability to mount a successful direct assault on France. At this juncture, Wintringham argued that the Second Front should not be restricted to conventional military forces. After Britain in 1940-41, and India in 1942, this was a

³⁵⁶ Tom Wintringham, *The Politics of Victory* (London: Routledge, 1941), p.77.

³⁵⁷ Tom Wintringham, *People's War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942), p.47.

³⁵⁸ Fernbach, 'Wintringham', p.84.

³⁵⁹ A raiding force of over 6,000 troops landed at Dieppe on 19 August 1942, most of whom were killed, injured or captured. The operation demonstrated that any Second Front landings would require fuller preparation and much stronger forces.

³⁶⁰ Wintringham, *People's War*, p.61.

third intervention, asserting the importance of guerrilla warfare as expression of a political and military strategy for liberation.

Wintringham's position was undercut at the Anglo-American conference held at Casablanca in December 1942 and January 1943. Churchill and Roosevelt agreed that, without excluding the possibility of a major Cross Channel operation in 1943, plans would be made to land large Allied forces in Northern France in 1944.³⁶¹ This was a challenge to the credibility of Wintringham's case for promoting popular uprisings. Firstly, the decision to invade France by spring 1944 created a broad political unity in Britain. Churchill and the Conservatives, the Labour Party, and Communists supported the decision. There remained some proponents of invasion in 1943, but this dissent was marginalized. The case for widespread popular uprisings in Europe, articulated on the left from 1940, was superseded. Large-scale landings in France became a realistic prospect. A firm commitment, and the timetable, had been agreed with the Soviets. Secondly, Wintringham's case for the importance of combining guerrilla warfare with conventional invasion was not self-evident to Allied political leaders and military planners. It would be essential for the success of a large-scale amphibious landing in France to 'manage' guerrilla action in Northern France on the eve of the invasion, including accommodating the military requirements of deception and intelligence gathering.³⁶² Once large forces were landed the Anglo-Americans did not want to compete for direction of military operations with guerrilla armies led by independent nationalists or Communists.³⁶³ The political and military calculus changed after winter 1942-43.

In March 1943, Tom Hopkinson, editor of *Picture Post*, wrote to Wintringham rejecting a draft article on the Second Front. This appears likely to have been in objection to Wintringham's advocacy of a political and military strategy including European uprisings and guerrilla warfare. The letter from Hopkinson is quite blunt: 'I am sorry, but this article is not at all what I want. I don't agree with it, and I couldn't print it if I did'.³⁶⁴ Wintringham, he says, had written on the politics of the Second Front policy and not

³⁶¹ A meeting of Churchill and senior British and United States military commanders in Algiers in May 1943 agreed a target date of 1 May 1944 for Operation OVERLORD.

³⁶² M.R.D. Foot, *SOE in France: An Account of the Work of the British Special Operations Executive in France, 1940-1944* (London: HMSO, 1966, second impression with amendments, 1968), pp.350-1.

³⁶³ Foot, *SOE*, p.359.

³⁶⁴ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file, 6/2, Hopkinson to Wintringham, 12 March 1943.

the 'principles of strategy'. Hopkinson suggests that in his view the latter might include 'What are the factors involved in [military commanders] making their decisions?' Hopkinson was seeking a professional appreciation of the command issues arising from the planned large-scale amphibious assault in Northern France in 1944. Wintringham's alternative perspective was not found acceptable by mainstream progressive opinion by early 1943.

The postscript to Wintringham's search to apply the lessons of 'Spain' after 1942 was represented by Italy. Wintringham believed that the collapse of fascist Italy in July 1943 presented a radical change in prospects for European politics and society. He wrote: 'This [...] is the beginning of the European Revolution [which] is bound to spread [...]. [We must] help the peoples of Europe find their freedom'.³⁶⁵ These words, from Wintringham's pamphlet *Italy and Revolution* published by Common Wealth in August 1943, were from the interlude between the fall of the Mussolini regime in July, and the German occupation in September. A powerful partisan resistance movement was emerging in Northern Italy. This promised a war of liberation and the prospect of a progressive post-war politics. In 1936 the exiled Italian anti-fascist, Carlo Rosselli, had made a speech in Barcelona titled 'Today in Spain, Tomorrow in Italy'.³⁶⁶ He had argued that the Spanish Civil War must become a European-wide fight against fascism and Nazism. The resistance movement in Italy, growing to tens of thousands of partisans after September 1943, was a fulfilment of Wintringham's and Rosselli's hopes. By 1943 and 1944 Spain appeared to be rendered marginal by the sweep of events elsewhere in Europe, including Italy.

The widening sphere of the Allied armies in Europe opened up a new politics of liberation and reconstruction in Western Europe after 1943. The Italian campaign was followed by the invasion of France and the advance into the Low Countries and Germany in 1944-45. Greece was liberated in October 1944. In a draft document prepared for Common Wealth in early 1944, entitled 'International Situation',

³⁶⁵ ESRO, Common Wealth Archive, SxMs9/1/1/4/5/6, pamphlet by Tom Wintringham, *Italy and Revolution*, published by Common Wealth, London Regional Council, as London Regional Pamphlet, No. 1, August 1943.

³⁶⁶ Claudio Pavone, trans. by Peter Levy and ed. by Stanislao Pugliese, *A Civil War: A History of the Italian Resistance* (London: Verso, 2013; first publ. 1991), introduction, p.xvi. The speech was given on Radio Barcelona, on 13 November 1936. Carlo Rosselli founded the 'Justice and Liberty' movement in 1929, which played an important part in partisan resistance in Italy during 1943-45.

Wintringham gave an account of emerging political developments in Europe.³⁶⁷ It contained no reference to Spain. The focus was on the more immediate prospects of constituting new governments in liberated countries, drawing on the left-wing elements of resistance movements. In 1944, Allied victories stimulated conviction amongst some Spanish Republicans in the potential of a popular rising in Spain, promoted by a guerrilla invasion. However, no significant military threat to Franco's rule emerged, and Spain remained unliberated in 1944 and 1945.

Conclusion

A recent writer offers the criticism that 'Wintringham's vision of a grenade-throwing nation-in-arms was militarily archaic'.³⁶⁸ This over-simplifies his contribution, and misunderstands his purpose. Wintringham secured significant influence in political and military circles by 1940, to the accompaniment of increasingly warm references to the Republican fight in the Spanish Civil War.³⁶⁹ His military thinking was greatly influenced by Spanish experience from 1936 to 1939, enabling him to build on previous expertise. His role as a writer and journalist gave him a powerful platform. Wintringham played an exceptional role in promoting guerrilla warfare techniques, refracting insights from the Spanish war in proposals for the defence of Britain and India. He represented experience of guerrilla warfare in Spain as a key for the liberation of occupied Europe.

Wintringham celebrated the contributions of the volunteers of the International Brigade and local militias in defending the Republic. His essential insight was that the political will and morale of guerrilla fighters could be decisive faced with superior conventional forces. Wintringham did not directly seek to transmute guerrilla warfare techniques from Spain to Britain, or to other theatres of war. Instead, Wintringham used powerful images of the militia role in Spain to represent the generic potential of politically-motivated volunteer fighters in 'people's war'. The nuances of his approach were sometimes misinterpreted. This was true also of the experience of another prominent supporter of the Spanish Republic, Clement Attlee.

³⁶⁷ LHCMA, Wintringham Papers, file 3/3/3, undated typescript from early 1944.

³⁶⁸ Daniel Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle, 1937-1941* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), p.396.

³⁶⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963*, Vol. VI, 1935-1942, ed. by Robert Rhodes James (London: Chelsea House, 1974), 6231-6238 (p.6236). Churchill's 'finest hour' speech to the House of Commons on 18 June 1940 paid tribute to the 'brave men of Barcelona'.

Chapter Four

The political and humanitarian response of Clement Attlee

The Spanish Civil War had been a significant influence on Clement Attlee's leadership of the Labour Party in the late 1930s. A year after the final military defeat of the Spanish Republic, Attlee led Labour into Churchill's Coalition government in May 1940. Attlee's translation from Leader of the Opposition, to War Cabinet minister and later Deputy Prime Minister, presented him with the challenge of integrating his experience of 'Spain' with the requirements of support for government policy, which was to conciliate Franco. The strong impact of 'Spain' on Attlee from 1936 continued during the Second World War.

Clement Attlee's engagement with the legacy of 'Spain' in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War has been disguised. His laconic and under-stated character, and absence of personal revelation in letters and memoirs, have served to camouflage feelings and thinking. One biographer has described Attlee as using the 'tactic of delaying and dissembling' on Labour's policy during the Spanish Civil War.³⁷⁰ Searching for compromise positions to secure party unity, he appeared free of strong individual feelings or commitments. A recent biographer has characterized Attlee as viewing his leadership generally as being 'to carry out the party's wishes [...] and] to speak for [emphasis in original] the agreed policy or strategy'.³⁷¹ In the historiography, Attlee's part in the response of the British labour movement to the Spanish war has often been overshadowed by others, particularly by Hugh Dalton and Herbert Morrison in Parliament, and by Ernest Bevin and Walter Citrine in the trade union movement.³⁷² This has been compounded by the general focus in studies of Attlee's career of the

³⁷⁰ Trevor Burridge, *Clement Attlee: A Political Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1985), p.124.

³⁷¹ Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds, *Attlee: A Life in Politics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012, first publ. 2010), p.2.

³⁷² Buchanan, *British Labour Movement*, pp.14 and 227-8. Citrine was General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress from 1926 to 1946. A recent biographer of Attlee has characterized 'The problem [as] not so much what Attlee did as what he did not do' during the late 1930s, alluding to the view that Attlee saw his role as party leader as seeking consensus, and not taking distinctive policy positions (Thomas-Symonds, *Attlee*, p.80).

period in government after May 1940, with a failure '[to] give the preceding decade the attention it merits'.³⁷³

This chapter will argue that experience of 'Spain' from 1936 was an important factor in positive responses by Attlee on Spanish questions during the Second World War. Some of his actions as a member of the War Cabinet from May 1940 have been obscured by his own reserve, but Attlee responded to the defeat of the Spanish Republic in two ways. Firstly, after joining the War Cabinet, he demonstrated an apparent political passivity on policy towards Spain, and accommodated himself to Franco's neutrality during the Second World War. By 1944-45, however, he supported discussion of a challenge to the future of the Franco regime. Secondly, Attlee accompanied his work in government with remaining closely involved in helping individual Republicans in exile. His contribution to debate about Britain's relationship with Franco and humanitarian response to Spanish Republican exiles were both stimulated by his experience during the Civil War.

Attlee progressively strengthened his position and influence within the Coalition government after 1940. His 'apprenticeship' as a War Cabinet minister coincided both with Churchill's early political ascendancy, and with severe constraints on British strategy imposed by the fall of France. Britain was directly exposed to the threat of invasion, and 'both Britain and Spain, in their respective situations, lived very near the margin of international existence and extinction in the period 1940-1'.³⁷⁴ This rendered nugatory any significant debate about policy on Spain. After 1942 these factors changed. Attlee's rise in influence coincided with improvement in the Allied military position and growing scope for a change in policy on Spain.

The first section of this chapter explores the roots of Attlee's response to Spanish policy, drawing mainly on secondary sources. It explores its relationship to pressures to secure his leadership and maintain the unity of the Labour Party. It discusses the low priority accorded in wartime by Attlee to policy on Spain, compared to that for Germany and Central Europe. It identifies Attlee's disposition to treat restoration of

³⁷³ John Swift, *Labour in Crisis: Clement Attlee and the Labour Party in Opposition, 1931-40* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.2.

³⁷⁴ Smyth, *Diplomacy and Strategy*, p.244.

Spanish democracy as a matter for resolution by the Spanish people themselves. Lastly, this first section investigates Attlee's outlook in the light of wider left-wing and liberal opinion on Spain by 1944-45.

The second section juxtaposes these positions with the record of Attlee's humanitarian response to the plight of Spanish Republican exiles during the Second World War. His ability to act was sometimes constrained by political and diplomatic factors, most notably in relation to Juan Negrin. The case of Tomas Serantes, at risk of his life when Attlee intervened on his behalf, highlights a positive outcome. This section argues that fulfillment of a personal sense of responsibility to help Republican exiles was an important inheritance of 'Spain' for Attlee.

The third section returns to a specific contribution by Attlee to War Cabinet discussion of policy towards Spain in late 1944. The concurrent conflict in the Labour Party over policy on Greece is explored. The upsurge of protest against British policy in Greece created great disturbance in the Labour Party by December 1944. In contrast, Attlee made a nuanced contribution to War Cabinet policy on Spain, designed partly to contain the potential for conflict within the Labour Party.

4.1 Attlee and policy on Spain

Labour ministers in the Coalition government had long expressed antipathy to Franco, and might have been expected to refuse to sanction any endorsement of the regime. In spring 1944, it was an apparent paradox that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary could openly thank Franco's Spain for her services to the Allies and advocate future friendship. Speaking in the House of Commons on 24 May, Churchill said that 'I am here today speaking kindly words about Spain [...] [and hope that] she will be a strong influence for the peace of the Mediterranean after the war'.³⁷⁵ Eden, as Foreign Secretary, was reported to have spoken of the desire for 'very friendly relations' with Spain at a meeting with Franco's ambassador in London on 6 April 1944.³⁷⁶ One explanation of these interventions lies in the timing. The statements were made on the eve of the invasion of Normandy, with the ulterior purpose of maintaining the

³⁷⁵ HC Deb, 24 May 1944, vol. 400, col. 771.

³⁷⁶ Dunthorn, *Anti-Franco Opposition*, p.29.

quiescence of Spain. More significantly, they reflected two underlying features of the Coalition's foreign policy. One was the exercise of a personal diplomacy by Churchill, sometimes aided by Eden. The second was that Labour ministers framed their own priorities on foreign policy questions, with policy on Spain marginalized, and Clement Attlee as the decisive influence.

Attlee's attitude towards Spain in the late 1930s, and as a War Cabinet minister from 1940, has been misunderstood. Expression of support for the Republican cause between 1936 and 1939, most notably in his visit to Spain in December 1937, has appeared at odds with a later reputation for lacking any appetite to challenge Franco.³⁷⁷ His most recent biographer, John Bew, offers an interpretation:

In the mists of the battles of Spain, Attlee had found both clarity and a cause. He had also saved his leadership. Two years earlier, the *Literary Digest* had pictured Attlee in suburban Stanmore in his slippers. Now Attlee returned to England as a hero of the International Brigades.³⁷⁸

This lacks nuance, over-emphasizing an instrumentality in Attlee's response to 'Spain'. Attlee was strongly affected by his visit to Republican Spain as the leader of a Labour Party delegation. The same author comments that in Barcelona he 'saw the aftermath of an air raid in which thirty people had been killed in a café', and that visiting volunteers and children at a school close to the frontline in Madrid, 'he was moved to tears by their plight'.³⁷⁹ At times he was carried along by the emotions of the cause. In 1940, Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, remarked that Attlee was greatly animated by discussion of 'any Spanish topic', and whilst 'otherwise a dormouse, becomes like a rabid rabbit'.³⁸⁰ Attlee had strong reactions to the human costs of the Spanish Civil War. These feelings informed his response during the Second World War.

At the same time, 'Spain' did play a role in securing Attlee's early leadership of the Labour Party. His response to 'Spain' helped to strengthen his position as party leader.

³⁷⁷ Enrique Moradiellos, 'The Potsdam Conference and the Spanish Problem', *Contemporary European History*, 10, 1 (2001), 73-90. On the eve of Attlee's premiership, the author says that Labour shared a 'remarkable consensus' with the Conservatives on conciliating Franco (p.75).

³⁷⁸ John Bew, *Citizen Clem: A Biography of Attlee* (London: Quercus, 2016), p.217.

³⁷⁹ Bew, *Citizen Clem*, p.203.

³⁸⁰ *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, O.M., 1938-1945*, ed. David Dilks (London: Cassell, 1971), p.334, 1 November 1940.

The success of this endeavour is reflected, perhaps, in his characterization by Brian Shelmerdine as ‘the only leading figure of the mainstream Labour movement who seemed to recognise rank-and-file attitudes to Spain’.³⁸¹ He faced the impact of the opening of the Spanish Civil War during the first year of his leadership. Attlee had been elected Labour Party leader in November 1935, in a contest against two more senior party figures, Herbert Morrison and Arthur Greenwood, advantaged by his capable performance in opposition as deputy leader to Lansbury during the 1931-35 parliament. The Franco revolt in July 1936, followed by divisive debate over Spain at the Labour Party Conference in October 1936, placed early pressures on his leadership. Attlee responded to the Spanish Civil War essentially as a political question, both from the perspective of its place in the growing political crisis in Europe, and in order to preserve the unity of the Labour Party. Whilst his public commitment to the Republican cause after 1936 drew on strong emotions, it also reflected a wider political judgement. A different test of Attlee’s commitment to ‘Spain’ followed with membership of the War Cabinet from May 1940.

As a senior minister Attlee moved into a position to exercise a direct influence on foreign policy, more particularly so after being formally designated Deputy Prime Minister in February 1942. In an important study, Trevor Burridge suggests that ‘Churchill’s influence [in foreign policy] was greatest between 1940 and 1943, when the military exigencies mattered more than politics’, with Attlee gaining ground in the later war years.³⁸² Burridge argues that Attlee’s principal policy priority throughout was Germany. A more recent study, sharing this judgment, observes that from 1943 Attlee chaired all War Cabinet sub-committees dealing with post-war international policy.³⁸³ It has been argued persuasively that in the later war years, ‘Labour ministers were confident in their power and determined to shape the peace’.³⁸⁴ This view has sometimes included the interpretation that Labour was preoccupied with domestic and reconstruction policy. Foreign policy and the future of Germany and European security were also central concerns.

³⁸¹ Shelmerdine, *British Representations*, p.151.

³⁸² Burridge, *Attlee*, p.159.

³⁸³ Vickers, *Labour and the World*, pp.149-50.

³⁸⁴ Dan Todman, review of Robert Crowcroft, *Attlee’s War: World War II and the Making of a Labour Leader* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), in *Twentieth Century British History*, 26, 1 (2015), 161-63 (p.163). Ernest Bevin, as another Labour member of the War Cabinet, was influential on international questions.

Policy on Spain was marginalized for Attlee and Labour ministers in the face of these other foreign policy and defence priorities. Attlee's views on Spanish policy were reflected in a correspondence with William Gillies, International Secretary of the Labour Party, in August 1943. The executive of the Spanish Socialist Party in Mexico had asked for support from the Labour Party to oppose any proposal for restoration of the Spanish monarchy.³⁸⁵ Attlee's advice to Gillies demonstrated his coolness about any intervention in Spanish affairs:

In our view the form of Government to be adopted by Spain is a matter for the Spanish people themselves [...] From the information that reaches me I should judge that most of the Spanish people are pretty sick of Franco, but there is no agreement as to what regime should replace him.³⁸⁶

The timing of this statement was striking, with North West Africa under Allied control since the German surrender in Tunisia in May, and the Sicily landings in July foreshadowing the invasion of Italy. For the first time since 1939-40 a pro-active Allied intervention was a realistic military option in Spain. At precisely this juncture Attlee rejected the notion. He expressed a willingness in principle to accept the return of the monarchy, which 'might have its advantages rather by providing a referee between the contending factions'. Attlee ended by suggesting that it 'is really much the wisest that we should let the matter alone at the present time [and that] there is little use in getting ourselves mixed up in the quarrels of rival émigré groups'. Jill Edwards describes the attitude of Attlee as 'sympathetic but dismissive'.³⁸⁷ The letter confirmed the low priority accorded by Attlee personally to Spain by 1943.

The episode revealed Attlee's disregard of the complexities of Spanish politics. His willingness to advocate a monarchical restoration, on the grounds that the monarchy might provide 'a referee' between contending factions, showed little awareness of the modern history of the Spanish monarchy. The pre-1931 monarchy had been widely discredited by its inability to secure functioning governments or reform in the face of economic, social and regional discontent. The monarchy's recourse to facilitating the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera between 1923 and 1930 had proved disastrous,

³⁸⁵ By 1943 Spanish Republicans and monarchists were positioning themselves as potential successors to Franco, presuming that Allied victory would bring down the regime.

³⁸⁶ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, International Department, Spain 1936-46, Attlee to William Gillies, 6 August 1943.

³⁸⁷ Edwards, *Anglo-American Relations*, p.30.

resulting in the abdication of Alfonso XIII.³⁸⁸ Spanish monarchists included supporters of an absolutist, 'traditional' monarchist politics, and did not necessarily envisage 'a *democratic* [emphasis in original] challenge to the Franco regime'.³⁸⁹ The return of the monarchy was not the hope of exiled Spanish socialists in Mexico, reflected in their 'fervent appeal to the Labour Party to use its influence in preventing a fresh iniquity against Spanish Democracy'.³⁹⁰ Attlee was not prepared to engage with these questions in the face of other priorities.

Attlee and other Labour ministers were not inattentive to the potency of the call of 'Spain', though their priorities in foreign policy lay elsewhere. Preoccupation with the global war, and active planning for the military campaigns to defeat Germany and Japan, were very evident amongst ministers by 1943. BurrIDGE argues that, with the exception of policy on Germany, 'Labour's official attitude to international affairs generally in the last years of the war tended to become more and more open-ended'.³⁹¹ Labour ministers were prepared to be flexible in the positions they adopted on foreign policy questions. He suggests that such pragmatism remained 'couched in the emotive language of pre-war years', not to intentionally mislead, but simply because 'the leadership still thought in such terms'.³⁹² This speaks strongly to the case of Spain. The powerful impact of the Spanish Civil War reinforced a tendency to continue to speak strongly for the claims of Spanish democracy. Labour ministers stood back from promoting direct intervention, whilst sounding a note of continuing hostility to Franco.

Attlee could feel some assurance that 'Spain' was no longer the active and divisive cause it had been from 1936 to 1939. Churchill's statement about Spain on 24 May 1944 prompted predictable criticism from the left, but not full condemnation. The formal response on behalf of the Labour Party and the trade unions came from the National Council of Labour in June 1944. Its statement dissociated Labour from the 'kindly words' of the Prime Minister about the Franco regime, expressing the hope that 'the heroism of the Spanish Republicans [would] soon be rewarded by a great act of

³⁸⁸ Dunthorn, *Anti-Franco Opposition*, p.19.

³⁸⁹ Dunthorn, *Anti-Franco Opposition*, p.23.

³⁹⁰ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, International Department, Spain 1936-46, letter from the Spanish Socialist Party PSOE in Mexico, marked 'posted 5 July 1943', to the 'British Labour Party'.

³⁹¹ BurrIDGE, *British Labour*, p.107.

³⁹² BurrIDGE, *British Labour*, p.108.

democratic self-liberation'.³⁹³ This was a remarkably moderate statement. Most strikingly, it distanced the British labour movement from actively working for Franco's downfall in the face of the improved political and military position of the Allies in 1944. It echoed a Communist Party view from a few months earlier, also neglecting the question of the means, that 'the Spanish people should set up the government they want'.³⁹⁴ By this date, Attlee was under no sustained pressure to promote action against Franco.

There was resonance amongst wider British left-wing and liberal opinion in this language of distancing from further struggle to depose Franco. In July 1944, the Union of Democratic Control published a pamphlet in response to Churchill's speech in May. It spoke about the danger of arousing suspicion of lack of sincerity 'in defence of democratic principles', and of the risk of alienating the sympathy 'of the mass of the Spanish people who are irrevocably opposed to Franco and the Falange'.³⁹⁵ This emphasis on the importance of maintaining a political and morality integrity in opposition to Franco was not to be accompanied by commitment to direct intervention to secure a Spanish democracy. Consistent with this the pamphlet described continuing large-scale passive resistance in Spain, and 'guerrilla war [...] without interruption' in the mountains across Spain.³⁹⁶ In this perspective the Spanish people would bring down Franco by internal struggle, with the political and moral support of democrats outside Spain. This view was reflected in the words, 'WE OWE A DEBT OF HONOUR TO THE PEOPLE OF SPAIN'.³⁹⁷ This struck a valedictory note, just a month after the Allied landings in Normandy and the liberation of Rome. Attlee, and other Labour ministers, making judgements about priorities in foreign policy, neglected the claims of Spanish democracy. In doing so they reflected other left-wing and liberal opinion by the middle and later years of the Second World War.

As a War Cabinet minister, and leader of the Labour Party, Attlee navigated with caution in discussion of policy on Spain. He demonstrated some evidence of the

³⁹³ LHASC, Labour Party Archive, NCL 'Declaration on Spain', 28 June 1944.

³⁹⁴ MML, IBMA, box 37, item C/6a, 'International Brigade Meeting', Peter Kerrigan, 13 February 1944.

³⁹⁵ Union of Democratic Control (UDC), *Franco's 'Neutrality' and British Policy* (London: UDC, 1944), p.8. The UDC had been formed in 1914 to oppose future 'secret diplomacy' and secure public scrutiny of foreign policy formulation. It was an independent organisation with broadly left-wing and liberal support.

³⁹⁶ UDC, *Franco's 'Neutrality'*, p.10.

³⁹⁷ UDC, *Franco's 'Neutrality'*, p.16.

emotions he had earlier expressed about 'Spain', but from 1940 he was principally driven by considerations of loyalty to the Coalition government. His personal judgement was that policy on Spain should be a low priority. Attlee differed little from Churchill in the latter's statement, in May 1944, that 'Internal political problems are a matter for the Spaniards themselves'.³⁹⁸

4.2 Attlee and the Spanish Republican diaspora

The limits of Clement Attlee's engagement with policy for Spain after 1940 marked a contrast with his humanitarian response to individuals in exile. During the Second World War, Attlee gave significant time to communications with Spanish Republicans in London, and in responding to calls for his personal intervention on behalf of members of the Republican diaspora. On the eve of Attlee joining the government, Batista i Roca of the Catalan Delegation in London wrote to him in warm terms: 'I should like to thank you and the Labour Party very much for your humanitarian attitude. [...] You know that I am always at your disposal any time you want further information on conditions in Catalonia or Spain'.³⁹⁹ Attlee used his ministerial position to continue to give aid to exiles under threat.

Attlee's involvement with the case of Juan Negrin, in exile in England from June 1940, demonstrates the constraints of this role. Attlee had a political friendship with Negrin, last Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic, who had hosted the visit of the Labour Party delegation to Republican Spain in 1937. This association was reflected in a letter from Negrin to Attlee in September 1942: 'I would like very much to see you as soon as possible and have a talk on certain matters which cannot be discussed in writing. I suggest lunching together here, in my flat, (15, Grosvenor Square)'.⁴⁰⁰ This reveals a degree of social familiarity. On this occasion Attlee sought advice from Eden and, on his suggestion, postponed the meeting. Residual political support and friendship with Negrin were constrained by the political and military pressures generated by the

³⁹⁸ HC Deb, 24 May 1944 vol. 400, col. 771.

³⁹⁹ The National Archives, CAB 118/81, Deputy Prime Minister, Spain, 'Correspondence relating to exiled Spanish Republicans, 1940-1944', Batista i Roca to Attlee, 1 May 1940.

⁴⁰⁰ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Negrin to Attlee, 2 September 1942.

European war.⁴⁰¹ Two other episodes, in 1940 and 1944 respectively, illustrated this more fully.

In the first, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, solicited Attlee's personal intervention to help secure Negrin's departure from Britain in 1940.⁴⁰² He wrote to Attlee on 8 July 1940:

You will remember that after the discussion in Cabinet on 2 July about the arrival in this country of some of the Spanish Republican leaders, it was decided that we should consider together what steps could be taken to induce them to leave England voluntarily as soon as possible.⁴⁰³

The reference to Republican leaders was erroneous, since only Negrin was in England. The suggestion of a 'voluntary' departure, rather than expulsion, was clearly intended to avoid the perception of appeasement of Franco. Attlee was viewed as being able to bring personal influence to bear on Negrin, and a meeting took place on 9 July. After the meeting, Negrin wrote to Attlee conceding that he would leave, but asserting 'in a most friendly spirit', that 'the decision taken [is] not only morally wrong and unfair, but what is much more [...] [it is] a tremendous political mistake of far-reaching consequences'.⁴⁰⁴ Attlee was presumably embarrassed by these words. When the role Attlee had played became known in official circles, his Labour ministerial colleague Hugh Dalton protested at his involvement.⁴⁰⁵ This demonstrated the exposure of Attlee's position. In the event Negrin stayed in England.

A second meeting with Negrin took place on 8 November 1940, generating further pressure on Attlee. This time he was not present himself. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and Halifax, attempted unsuccessfully to secure Negrin's agreement to a 'voluntary' departure from Britain. Details of the meeting leaked. The Labour M.P., William Dobbie, put a question about the meeting in the House of Commons to R. A. Butler, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. The meeting was

⁴⁰¹ The impending invasion of French North West Africa, with potential implications for Spanish neutrality, may have created sensitivity about meeting with Negrin.

⁴⁰² The originator of the proposal to remove Negrin was Sir Samuel Hoare, British ambassador in Madrid. In his view Negrin's removal would demonstrate Britain's willingness to compromise in support of the continuing neutrality of the Franco regime. This was bound to inflame passions on the left, since Hoare had been a principal supporter of Chamberlain and appeasement.

⁴⁰³ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Halifax to Attlee, 8 July 1940.

⁴⁰⁴ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Negrin to Attlee, 10 July 1940.

⁴⁰⁵ Smyth, 'The Politics of Asylum', p.129.

reported in the *Daily Herald* on 15 November, and in *The Week* on 20 November 1940.⁴⁰⁶ The latter report was excoriating. A paragraph headed 'Mr. Attlee's little job' alluded to his earlier July intervention: 'The man chosen for this somewhat unsavoury job was Mr. Attlee – the same who only three years ago was saluting the International Brigade as it fought under Dr. Negrin's Government in Spain'.⁴⁰⁷ Only weeks before this publicity, Attlee had written to Halifax, in October 1940, challenging the argument for removing Negrin, saying that the only reason Spain would not enter the war would be her own constraints of war-weariness and economic plight. He concluded: 'I think we must realise that the active forces to be mobilised against Hitlerism must be those people who are devoted to the ideals for which we stand, and must, therefore, include a stronger Left Wing element'.⁴⁰⁸ Attlee struck a note of defiance, or perhaps of conscience, following the compromise he had made in lobbying Negrin in July. It gave the appearance of Attlee struggling to find a balance in the role of loyal War Cabinet minister, and friend of the Spanish Republic.

Negrin remained in England, and in 1944 the Allied victories in continental Europe created a further test for Labour ministers, resulting in the second episode. This was the reverse of the issue in 1940, as Negrin sought permission now to leave England for France. The request gave rise to discussion by the War Cabinet, since Negrin's presence in France was seen as potentially sensitive. Exiled Republicans were seeking to increase direct pressure on the Franco regime from France, some by armed incursions across the Pyrenees. In Negrin's case, isolated in London from other Spanish Republican politicians in exile, he sought to establish a political base, with others, in newly-liberated Paris.⁴⁰⁹ He had been promised a French visa. The War Cabinet minute records that 'The Home Secretary and Minister for Home Security [Morrison] was, on the whole, disposed to approve Dr. Negrin's application while [Eden, the Foreign Secretary] was against granting it'.⁴¹⁰ In the discussion which followed, Negrin was described as 'a responsible and moderate politician'. A

⁴⁰⁶ Smyth, 'The Politics of Asylum', p.142.

⁴⁰⁷ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans': cyclostyled copy of *The Week*, 20 November 1940, 'printed and published by Claud Cockburn'.

⁴⁰⁸ Smyth, 'The Politics of Asylum', p.133.

⁴⁰⁹ Negrin was eventually able to travel to France, where the Spanish Republican government-in-exile was formally constituted in 1946.

⁴¹⁰ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', copy of War Cabinet Meeting 171 Conclusions, 18 December 1944, minute 5, 'Travel Facilities: Exit Permit Application by Dr. Negrin'.

compromise was found in an agreement to issue an exit permit on the specific condition that:

he [made] use of the facilities for cross-Channel travel by boat which it was hoped to bring into operation in the early part of 1945, and which would not be confined to persons travelling on urgent business of national importance.⁴¹¹

It is striking that by December 1944 the question of Negrin's departure for France could have remained controversial. The decision had the effect of delaying Negrin's departure by many weeks. The determination to restrict Negrin in effect to the status of a private citizen, though he remained formally Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic, suggested an extreme caution. By this date there could be no serious threat from any adverse reaction by the Franco regime. The War Cabinet decision represented a compromise between ministers, but it also affirmed the low status of Negrin's claims.

Attlee's engagement with members of the Spanish Republican diaspora ranged wider than managing the politically-charged and complex relationship with Negrin in London. He also demonstrated a vigorous concern with the welfare of individual Republican exiles. In a telegram on 13 March 1943, Indalecio Prieto, leader of the Spanish Socialist Party in exile in Mexico City, asked Attlee to intercede on behalf of a party member, Tomas Serantes.⁴¹² Attlee's response illustrates a remarkable depth of commitment to humanitarian response, freed from the constraints of wider politics.

Attlee devoted time and energy to the case, using the influence of his position. Serantes was under arrest after jumping ship at Trinidad, en route to Spain under enforced repatriation. He had been deported after trying to enter the United States without a visa, intending to volunteer for either the US or British merchant marine. Attlee intervened immediately through the Colonial Secretary, who cabled the Governor of Trinidad. The cable suggested that Serantes might be afforded temporary leave to remain in Trinidad, whilst grant of permit for re-entry to Mexico was obtained. As an alternative, it suggested he might be admitted to serve in the merchant navy, though this 'has presumably been considered and rejected on security

⁴¹¹ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', War Cabinet Meeting 171 Conclusions, 18 December 1944, minute 5.

⁴¹² CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Prieto to Attlee, 13 March 1943.

grounds'.⁴¹³ A second telegram to Attlee from Prieto expressed his joy and gratitude for Attlee's intervention.⁴¹⁴ Serantes remained in temporary custody. In June, Attlee was asked by Prieto if he could arrange for someone in Trinidad to meet Serantes to hear expression of concerns about continuing detention. Serantes had evidently been able to communicate his anxieties to Mexico City. Since Attlee had no personal contacts on the island, he instructed his private office to write to the Governor: '[Attlee] wonders whether the Governor could be informed and requested to find out what is troubling Serantes'.⁴¹⁵ This suggests great solicitude on Attlee's part. Serantes was subsequently interviewed by an official, and simply reasserted his wish to leave for Mexico. Attlee persevered and secured the transfer of funds from Prieto for the cost of air fare and incidentals.⁴¹⁶ Serantes finally left for Mexico by air on 2 November 1943.

This case is significant for the action Attlee took, and for the powerful and emotional response it evoked. Following the repatriation of Serantes, Attlee received a letter and enclosures from Mexico City in December 1943. The enclosures were several sheets of paper containing 209 signatures, organized in columns, on seven sides of paper. The letter was from writers affiliated to the Spanish Socialist Party and its trade union confederation. They commended Attlee's help:

[We] celebrated [at] a simple luncheon the rescue of Tomas Serantes and wish to express to you our deep gratitude because due to your personal intervention it was possible to avoid that [sic] our comrade and dear friend was reembarked [sic] in Trinidad for Spain where a sure death awaited him because he defended, when it was Spain's turn, ideals similar to those England defends with abnegation and sacrifice.⁴¹⁷

This is a powerful statement of acknowledgement. The image of the gathering to celebrate their comrade's survival, with the dignity of sharing a 'simple luncheon' in a place of distant exile, is equally powerful. Attlee's receipt of this communication may have stimulated recall of the emotions he had felt for the cause of the Republic during

⁴¹³ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Colonial Secretary to Governor of Trinidad, 14 March 1943.

⁴¹⁴ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Prieto to Attlee, dated 16 March 1943.

⁴¹⁵ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', memorandum from private office of Deputy Prime Minister to the Colonial Office, 11 June 1943.

⁴¹⁶ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Attlee to Prieto, 14 August 1944.

⁴¹⁷ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', note and enclosures from PSOE and UGT writers in Mexico City, to Attlee, 5 December 1943.

the Civil War, but his response is not recorded. Attlee's action was also hidden from public view.

Attlee acted for other Spanish Republican exiles, often for prominent figures. He did so as leader of the Labour Party or in a personal capacity. His lobby for Luis Alava illuminated the character of some of these cases, and of Attlee's interventions. In this case he wrote to Eden, making plain his personal interest and loyalties:

I am sending you herewith a letter received from Senor de Lizaso of the Basque Delegation whom I know well. I do not know whether it will be possible for anything to be done on behalf of Luis Alava. I do not think that I know him personally, but I am very fond of the Basques.⁴¹⁸

It emerged that Alava had been condemned to death. Prompted by Attlee, the Foreign Office sent a telegram to the Madrid embassy, asking for advice on action which could be taken on his behalf, and describing the death sentence as resulting from 'democratic activities and because he has provided the democratic intelligence services with information'.⁴¹⁹ The ambassador, Hoare, replied almost a month later. He reported from an informant that Alava had been executed, 'about 10 or 15 days ago', adding 'that [Alava] was tried on a variety of charges including separatist activities, but was sentenced to death for either taking personal part in, or aiding and abetting, murders, arson and pillage'.⁴²⁰ In his original request to Eden, Attlee had revealed his personal sense of loyalty to the Basques. The delay in Hoare's reply, which disregarded the claim from the Foreign Office that Alava was a British intelligence source, and suggested instead that Alava was guilty of a catalogue of criminal offences, demonstrated perhaps a different prejudice. In this case, Attlee's personal intervention had secured a response, but he had been unable to exercise any significant leverage, at the cost of Alava's life.

The place of Attlee at the nexus of Labour Party and Spanish Republican communications exposed him to repeated and anguished appeals to intercede for individuals' lives. Largo Caballero was reported to Attlee as in German custody in

⁴¹⁸ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Attlee to Eden, 6 May 1943.

⁴¹⁹ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Foreign Office to British embassy in Madrid, 8 May 1943.

⁴²⁰ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Hoare to Foreign Office, 4 June 1943.

November 1940 and again in November 1942, but these reports proved false.⁴²¹ Writing to the International Secretary of the Labour Party, William Gillies, in February 1944, Attlee was able to confirm that 'It is now definitely established that he was taken away by the Germans and is now in Oranienburg Concentration Camp'.⁴²² A succession of these reports, and personal requests for help, served as a constant backcloth to Attlee's onerous responsibilities as a member of the War Cabinet. In using his ministerial influence in these attempts to save lives, Attlee was engaging both politically and emotionally. This was an important aspect of the personal inheritance of 'Spain' for Attlee, and a pressure to which he continued to respond through the Second World War.

4.3 The signal was Greece⁴²³

Attlee continued to be engaged with the question of Franco's rule in Spain, but in late 1944 the Labour Party was engulfed in conflict over another foreign policy issue in Southern Europe. Controversy within the Labour Party over British policy towards liberated Greece threatened to destabilize the Coalition government. This was remarkable in at least two aspects. First, it was at odds with the record of broad consensus on foreign policy questions between Coalition ministers of different parties since 1940. Second, the burgeoning crisis over Greece threw into sharp relief a concurrent question of government policy towards Spain. In comparison the debate on Spain in late 1944 was modest. The Greek imbroglio and Labour responses provide a postscript to the decline in salience of 'Spain'.

For many on the left, government policy towards both Greece and Spain in late 1944 represented unacceptable compromises. In Greece, there was no assurance that the British military presence after October 1944 would help secure democratic government by majority popular vote. For Spain, the liberation of France in summer 1944 made toppling the Franco regime a practical military option, but there was no

⁴²¹ CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Luis Araquistain to Attlee, 13 November 1940, and Attlee to Eden, 18 November 1942. Caballero was Prime Minister of Spain, 1936-37.

⁴²² CAB 118/81, 'Spanish Republicans', Attlee to Gillies, 2 February 1944. The report was correct.

⁴²³ The sub-heading alludes to Jim Fyrt, *The Signal Was Spain: The Aid Spain Movement in Britain 1936-39* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986): 'why [was] a war in a country which very few Britons had then visited [...] such a political catalyst? Why did it arouse so much emotion and stir so many people' (p.24). This suggests a parallel with the impact of Greece in 1944-45.

evidence of any planned intervention. As Allied troops fought north and east from the landings in Normandy in June, and Provence in August, two countervailing factors dominated. The first was that a large zone west of the Rhone and south of the Loire was left mainly to the control of local resistance forces, heralding an interlude before de Gaulle was able to reassert central authority in early 1945.⁴²⁴ Hugh Dalton recorded a diary entry in September 1944 saying that 'France is very apprehensive of the activities of Spanish Reds who are now crossing [the Spanish] frontier from France, and is trying to get us to take steps to restrain them'.⁴²⁵ This identified the threat of independent military incursions against Franco.⁴²⁶ The second factor, Churchill's direct intervention, was to play a decisive role in checking any serious challenge to the Franco regime.⁴²⁷ This was a reassertion of Churchill's personal commitment to political compromise with Franco, clearly expressed in his earlier statement to Parliament in May 1944. The perception of a convergence of conservative policies on Greece and Spain was the background to a political crisis. The main signal proved to be Greece, with Spain providing an echo.

The shooting of unarmed protesters in Greece in December 1944 was the catalyst. The Communist-led National Liberation Movement (EAM) and its military wing were the most powerful elements in Greek politics after the liberation, and their opposition to the restoration of a conservative monarchical government generated increasing tension. At a large left-wing demonstration organised by EAM in Athens on 3 December, Greek police killed a number of people and injured many more. The violence was widely interpreted on the left, internationally, as resulting from British complicity with the police. It was also viewed as a declaration of intent to interfere in Greece's internal affairs, in furtherance of Churchill's proclaimed commitment to the monarchy. Further disorder followed in Athens.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁴ H. R. Kedward, *In Search of the Maquis: Rural Resistance in Southern France, 1942-1944* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, paperback edition 1994; first publ. 1993), pp.213-4. By August 1944 resistance forces in the south-west had liberated the departments of Basses-Pyrenees and Hautes-Garonne, bordering Spain.

⁴²⁵ Ben Pimlott (ed.), *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940-45* (London: Jonathan Cape/LSE, 1986), entry for Sunday 3 September 1944.

⁴²⁶ Marco, *Guerrilleros*. Exiled Spanish Republicans active in the French resistance were organized in Spanish units (p.11). A first major incursion across Pyrenees took place in September 1944, with larger scale crossings in November, including a force of around 4,000 on 17 November 1944 (p.43).

⁴²⁷ Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, pp.143-86.

⁴²⁸ Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, third edition), pp.131-34.

This unfolding crisis over Greece was accompanied by some recollection of lack of support for Spanish democracy after 1936. Questions about policy reached beyond left-wing politicians and activists, with evidence from Mass-Observation showing widespread public misgivings about Greece in late 1944. People were also said to be drawing parallels with 'Spain in the 1930s', with the idea that Britain was supporting 'the near-Fascists everywhere' being raised repeatedly.⁴²⁹ This association by the public between Greece and Spain was the backcloth to the political crisis. The focus of public concern was Greece, but 'Spain' was considered to offer a parallel. Notwithstanding this, the political crisis which unfolded over Greece in 1944 proved to be of a wholly different character and scale to debate over Spain. Policy towards the two countries was contested in quite different political spheres.

The Greek crisis demonstrated the powerful impact of a foreign policy issue in Labour Party politics. Andrew Thorpe suggests that, in this respect, 'little, if anything, had changed since the later 1930s'.⁴³⁰ This makes a clear, implied comparison with the Spanish Civil War. Questions over the Athens shootings in the Commons on 5 December 1944 involved half-a-dozen Labour M.P.s, the Communist William Gallacher, Common Wealth's Richard Acland, and the independent M.P., Tom Driberg. This cross-party alliance was similar in character to that of the parliamentary supporters of the Spanish Republic during the Civil War. The political reverberations of Greece also went wider within the Labour Party:

But this was not only, or even mainly, a revolt within the [Parliamentary Labour Party]. Constituency Labour parties fell over themselves to pass resolutions attacking British policy [...] No other issue in the whole of the war period – not even the Beveridge Report – aroused so much spontaneous feeling in so many Labour parties so quickly.⁴³¹

The reference to arousal of 'spontaneous feeling' is redolent of responses on the left to the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s. In late December 1944, in a characteristically dry observation, Attlee described 'our people [as] in a rather

⁴²⁹ Andrew Thorpe, 'In a Rather Emotional State? The Labour Party and British Intervention in Greece, 1944-45', *English Historical Review* 121, 493 (2006), 1075-1105 (p.1094).

⁴³⁰ Thorpe, 'Emotional State', p.1105.

⁴³¹ Thorpe, 'Emotional State', p.1079.

emotional state [over Greece]'.⁴³² The reality was different. This was a striking eruption of a foreign policy question at the heart of Labour politics.

The Labour Party Conference, from 11 to 15 December, became the main platform for protest. In an echo of the controversy over Spain and non-intervention in the late 1930s, 'The British government's intervention over the Communists in Greece [...] made the 1944 annual conference a fractious one for the leadership'.⁴³³

Notwithstanding this, the leadership faced down the challenge. The conference passed an anodyne motion of support for the restoration of Greek democracy. Labour's parliamentary and trade union leaders were able to overcome minority left-wing dissent within the party.

The surge of anger over Greece in December 1944 flowed from two underlying issues, which could have applied equally in the case of Spain. Firstly, British policy in Greece became a symbolic or representative issue, reflecting the deep distrust of Churchill's post-war ambitions for European political reconstruction. It was influenced by the earlier episode of the compromises made with Badoglio and former fascists to establish an Italian government after the fall of Mussolini in July 1943. Secondly, Greek Communists had gained political influence by the strength of their contribution to the resistance. Some Labour activists considered that it was not legitimate to deny them their place in a post-war government. In the same way, Spanish Republicans had the claim of democratic legitimacy. By 1944 Labour ministers were viewed on the left as passive in the face of Churchill's lead, particularly in the field of international policy. Greece had proved the trigger for expression of the resulting tensions.

There was a clear contrast between the tumult over Greece, and the limits of party debate about policy towards Spain. Whilst criticism of Franco was registered in a number of resolutions passed by constituency Labour parties in later 1944, Spain had been marginalized in mainstream political debate.⁴³⁴ In effect the question of Franco's regime was put aside, as the Coalition government focused on the exigencies of the

⁴³² Quoted in Brooke, *Labour's War*, p.71, letter from Attlee to Labour peer Lord Addison, 19 December 1944. The phrase was taken for the title of Thorpe's article.

⁴³³ Brooke, *Labour's War*, p.264.

⁴³⁴ Thorpe, 'Emotional State', p.1085. There were resolutions from the Birmingham, Greenwich, Pontypridd and Southampton Labour parties.

war effort and developing policy towards Germany.⁴³⁵ In late 1944, when policy towards Spain was addressed, it was by ministers within the confines of the War Cabinet, prompted by the prospect of the defeat of Germany.

Attlee intervened with a memorandum entitled 'Policy Towards Spain', dated 4 November 1944. He suggested that it was time to review the relationship with Franco's regime, saying that 'There is not one of our Allies who would not wish to see this regime destroyed and we are running into the danger of being considered to be Franco's sole external support'. Attlee signalled the desirability of a change of government in Spain, and of strengthening the British challenge to Franco with the aim of contributing to restoring democracy. He felt that there were limits to the scope for direct intervention:

I am aware that it is unlikely that a democratic Government could be established with general support owing to the deep divisions among the Spanish people. I do not think that in view of Spanish xenophobia that it is possible to take overt action to change the situation, but short of this there is much that can be done.⁴³⁶

In an apparent contradiction, he added the sharp demand that 'We should use whatever methods are available to assist in bringing about [the regime's] downfall', including economic sanctions. This was an important intervention by Attlee, but the variation and uncertainty of tone of the note is very evident. This may have reflected the multiple purposes it served.

By late 1944 the liberation of France required a review of Britain's wartime policy of neutrality towards Spain. Attlee may have anticipated the imminent danger of pre-emptive statements by Churchill, with potential to compromise Labour ministers, and to cause political disruption in the Labour Party. The note may also have fulfilled a sense of obligation, after personal commitments made by Attlee to support the Spanish Republic from 1937 to 1939. Paul Preston describes a 'British rhetoric of hostility behind which lay an innocuous policy of non-intervention' against Franco

⁴³⁵ Burrige, *British Labour*, p.124. He describes the German question as 'almost an obsession', saying that this 'circumscribed the debate on the wider problem of Europe's future'.

⁴³⁶ The National Archives, PREM 8/106, 'Policy Towards Spain', Lord President and Deputy Prime Minister, WP (44) 622, 4 November 1944.

during the 1940s.⁴³⁷ This argument has some justice in describing the outcome of policy, but does not allow for the seriousness of purpose which guided Attlee's contribution to discussion of policy towards Spain.

A 'rhetoric of hostility' to Franco served three main purposes for Attlee. First, it could draw out Conservative ministers to give support to the Franco regime, helping to differentiate Labour's position as the end of the Coalition approached. Attlee achieved this purpose when Lord Selborne, the Conservative Minister of Economic Warfare, replied in terms recognizable from right-wing responses to the Spanish Republic during the Civil War itself. Quoting some of the words of Attlee's note, Selborne said:

Whatever we may think of the 'incompetence, corruption and oppression' of the Franco regime, there is plenty of evidence that they are less than under the regime it displaced, and also that the Franco atrocities are fewer and less horrible than those that preceded them.⁴³⁸

Second, Attlee tried to shift the ground to the case for economic sanctions, as a means to challenge Franco without commitment to direct political or military intervention. In his memorandum, he wrote that 'We should, especially in the economic field, work with the United States and France to deny facilities to the present regime.' Discussing the terms of a British government approach to Franco later in November 1944, the case for economic pressure was raised at a meeting of the War Cabinet. This led the Chancellor to point out the constraint 'that Spain was at the moment one of our best customers', and signalling resistance to meeting the costs of any such policy.⁴³⁹ Third, Attlee attributed a lack of confidence in restoration of a democratic Spain to internal divisions, and 'Spanish xenophobia' in the event of external intervention. This echoes racial stereotyping in a speech by Attlee in the House of Commons two months later, about the Greek crisis: 'When you are dealing with people like the Greeks, who are rather temperamental perhaps [...] you should never try to judge them exactly on our own basis'.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁷ Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p.523.

⁴³⁸ PREM 8/106, memorandum by Minister for Economic Warfare, WP (44) 651, 15 November 1944.

⁴³⁹ PREM 8/106, minute of meeting 157 (27 November 1944), 'Spain', from 'Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions', not included in bound minute book at WM (44). The Chancellor of the Exchequer was Sir John Anderson, a Conservative-aligned independent MP.

⁴⁴⁰ HC Deb, 18 January 1945, vol. 407, col. 491.

Attlee's purpose by late 1944 was to contain any damaging impact of 'Spain' on the Labour Party's internal affairs. The crisis over Greece had been imposed on Labour's leaders by events in Athens, but Attlee intervened proactively to challenge policy on Spain within government. Differentiating Labour's political judgement of Franco from that of the Conservatives, proposing economic sanctions, and invoking the character of the Spanish people as an obstacle to direct intervention, each served his purpose. The timing was important. On the eve of Allied victory in Europe, political challenges to the hegemony of the Labour Party, from the Communist and Common Wealth parties, had dissipated.⁴⁴¹ On Greece, the principal challenge to government policy came from the Labour left in Parliament and the wider party.⁴⁴² Debate about policy on Greece and Spain had become to some extent questions of internal party management. Once the immediate crisis of political authority and public order had passed in Greece, by January 1945, the issue largely disappeared from political and public attention in Britain. In the case of Spain, without the focus of direct British involvement on the ground, Attlee was able to contain the issue without major dissent in the Labour Party.

Conclusion

The place of 'Spain' in Attlee's political career and personal life after spring 1939 has been under-stated. The Spanish Civil War, and support for the Republic, had played an important part in his leadership of the Labour Party in the late 1930s. Focus on his support, as a minister, for a policy of compromise towards the Franco regime has distorted a wider picture. He continued to exercise a responsibility to help individual Spanish Republicans in exile during the Second World War. This was a strong personal commitment. But Attlee's apparent quiescence in support for a policy of sustaining a minimum level of political engagement with the Franco regime also disguises the fuller role he played in policy debate in government, particularly in 1943-44.

Attlee's contribution to debate on policy towards Spain struck varying notes, but showed a determination to explore the options, and to consider radical choices. The denouement to War Cabinet discussion about Spain in November 1944 was a letter to

⁴⁴¹ Communist Party membership had peaked between 1942-44, and Common Wealth was divided over the issue of relations with the Labour Party. Both parties made little impact in the July 1945 general election.

⁴⁴² Thorpe, 'Emotional State', pp. 1103-4. Communist Party pressure on Greece was secondary to that from the Labour left, reflecting acknowledgement by the British party of other Soviet priorities in Europe.

Franco, finally approved on 18 December 1944, with 'the contents of [the letter][...] left to the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister to decide'.⁴⁴³ It made no proposals for substantial change in Anglo-Spanish relations, and Attlee's sharp observations about the Franco regime in his original memorandum had no place. The episode illuminates, though, an important aspect of Attlee's behaviour. Attlee was ready to compromise on public policy towards the Franco regime, but not from lack of resolution to pursue the arguments within government. Richard Wigg describes Attlee in late 1944 as offering fresh thinking, and being 'sober, realistic and well ahead of the Labour party's rhetoric on Spain'.⁴⁴⁴ Attlee, criticized by some left-wingers for accommodating Franco, placed himself in the middle ground of Labour opinion on Spain during the Second World War. Whilst he opposed the Franco regime as a matter of conscience, he acknowledged more pressing political priorities in Europe.

⁴⁴³ Dunthorn, *Anti-Franco Opposition*, p.31.

⁴⁴⁴ Wigg, *Churchill and Spain*, p.180.

Conclusion

An episode from the end of the Second World War can serve as a pointer to my conclusions. Defenders of the Republic had been honoured during the Civil War from 1936 to 1939, and the spirit of 'Spain' evoked between 1939 and 1945.

Notwithstanding, two hundred and twenty-six Spanish nationals were interned in England between 1944 and 1946, eventually at Chorley in Lancashire. They were Spanish Republican exiles who had been imprisoned or directed into forced labour by the Nazis in France. In 1944, rather than being liberated, they were detained by Allied troops, and transferred to Britain. After a local outcry in Lancashire, and intense political lobbying of Labour ministers after August 1945, they were released in mid-1946. Richard Cleminson identifies these Spaniards as the victims of neglect and discrimination, but their release as demonstrating 'how "Spain" still fired the imagination and material solidarity of some sectors of the British left beyond the end of the civil war into the 1940s'.⁴⁴⁵ The political focus on 'Spain' dissipated after 1939, but the experience of Spanish war had a continuing strong resonance.

In a large number of studies and memoirs, the role of the British left during the Spanish Civil War has been painted in primary colours. The Spanish war has been simplified as a political and moral crusade, in which the wrong side lost. In the words of Ruth MacKay, 'defying the adage that history is dictated by winners, [this history] was written by sympathizers with the losers'.⁴⁴⁶ It is a paradox that the writers of this history have often appeared inattentive to potentially illuminating aspects of the immediate aftermath of the war. These might be able to throw a useful retrospective light on the character of the left's engagement with 'Spain' in the late 1930s. The limits of exploration of the impact of 'Spain' from 1939 to 1945 appear the more surprising in the light of the intense emotions engaged in earlier support for the Republic. This was the starting point of my interest in developing the thesis.

Thinking about how to locate 'Spain' in the politics of Britain in the Second World War originally suggested a dual perspective. On the one hand, the scale, range, and technologies of the Spanish Civil War were overwhelmed by strategic developments

⁴⁴⁵ Richard Cleminson, 'Spanish Anti-Fascist "Prisoners of War" in Lancashire, 1944-46', *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, 22, 3 (2009), 163-183 (pp.163-4).

⁴⁴⁶ MacKay, 'Good Fight', p.199.

after 1939. The lessons of Spain were likely to have been rendered nugatory by the global war which followed. In one measure of the 'vast dimensions' of the Second World War, it is thought that around sixty million people were killed.⁴⁴⁷ The comparable figure of deaths in the Spanish war is generally accepted as around half a million people. On the other hand, there was some clear evidence of the active suppression of the experience of 'Spain' in Britain after 1939. This was the story of many International Brigaders, and other supporters of the Republic, whose contribution to the cause of 'Spain' was widely repudiated, in political, military, and social circles. The thesis makes clear, though, that these two perspectives neglect the degree to which organizations and individuals, in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, had agency in moulding left-wing political values and actions.

The thesis has characterized a three-fold continuing presence of 'Spain' in British left politics. First, 'Spain' proved to be a device for positioning the political parties. The parties of the left were able to represent their contributions to defending Spanish democracy, and fighting fascism, as anticipating the Second World War. It enabled the Communist and Labour parties to advertise their early repudiation of the foreign policy of the National governments of Baldwin and Chamberlain. It symbolized these parties' claims to political and electoral support as opponents of pre-war appeasement. Second, processes of recovery and support unfolded, both collective and individual, in response to the searing experiences of the Spanish war. This included help for veterans, and others who had been affected in Britain, and a humanitarian response to the needs of Spanish Republicans. Third, leading figures of the left sought to apply the 'lessons' of the Spanish Civil War to British wartime strategy. In their different ways, in the political and military spheres, this was true of Clement Attlee and Tom Wintringham.

These developments were shaped by the exigencies of Britain's wartime politics. At the opening of the Second World War, ministers, officials, and military officers registered a significant hostility to the left-wing political associations of 'Spain'. In the crisis of 1940, this changed temporarily. In mid-1940, the government and military authorities gave Tom Wintringham license to train the Home Guard in response to

⁴⁴⁷ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.894 and 920.

the immediate threat of invasion. This conditional endorsement was quickly withdrawn. In contrast, resistance to the recruitment of Spanish veterans to the British armed forces, for example, appears to have weakened by the mid-years of the war. Driven by overriding wartime priorities, the government began to take steps to normalize the experience of 'Spain'. This process was little influenced by the left, whose weakness and division had been evident during the Spanish Civil War. A variety of instrumental left-wing responses to 'Spain' reflected disparate and competing perspectives, and changing political alignments and opportunities.

The shaping of these responses to 'Spain' during the Second World War has been relatively neglected, both by contrast with debate after 1945 about the continuation of the Franco regime, and in histories of wartime Britain. This has resulted, perhaps, from the diffuse character of the responses, and the multiplicity of agents shaping the inheritance of 'Spain'. It is striking that the later flowering of interest in the Spanish Civil War, from the 1960s, generally focused on the International Brigaders. This was understandable, reflecting their personal courage and political commitment, and the drama of the experience, but it had the effect of obscuring a wider picture.

This suggests two possibilities for further exploration. First, enquiry into individual life histories in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War could yield fresh perspectives. Writing about Mass Observation diarists during the Second World War, James Hinton speaks of 'the power of discourse to shape experience', and of 'integrating the study of the subjectivities of ordinary people into the history of social and cultural change'.⁴⁴⁸ The 'biographical turn' in historical studies, and the focus on microhistory, reflect this growing interest in placing life histories at the centre of historical scholarship. Some of the principal actors in Spanish solidarity during the Civil War, including Clement Attlee, Harry Pollitt, and Ellen Wilkinson, did not write or preserve personal diaries. Individual accounts by International Brigaders have generally contained limited reflection on the subsequent impact on their personal and political lives. Angela Jackson's use of oral history in studies of the experience of British women is one

⁴⁴⁸ James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass-Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.204-5.

important recent contribution.⁴⁴⁹ But there is space for further exploration of the lives of supporters of the Spanish Republic in Britain. Such enquiries might investigate how the special intensity of commitment to ‘Spain’, and bitterness of defeat, affected later personal and political trajectories.

A second area of future enquiry might be to complement the national political and organizational focus of this thesis with regional and local studies. The account by Mates of the interaction of the politics of the Spanish Civil War and the Popular Front in North East England, for example, is one important regional study about the years 1936 to 1939.⁴⁵⁰ He investigates the North East as a region in which the Communist Party was relatively weak. This contrasted with Raphael Samuel’s characterization of a ‘totalizing political culture’, in some mining areas in Scotland and South Wales, and large cities like London or Glasgow.⁴⁵¹ In his regional study, Mates argues that there was a damaging subordination of the interests of Spanish solidarity to the politics of the Popular Front. Exploring other responses to ‘Spain’ at a regional and local level after 1939 might provide a valuable complement to the national focus of this thesis. The Aid Spain movement was widely geographically spread, and not restricted to the most politically militant areas in Britain. Amongst its thousands of active supporters was a high proportion of women, and significant numbers of liberal and left activists who were not aligned to individual parties. Some local groups continued after 1939. In the case of the Republican internees at Chorley in 1945-46, for example, a critical account was published in a pamphlet by the Morecambe and District Spanish Aid Committee in August 1945.⁴⁵² This is suggestive of the potential to generate more nuanced appreciations of the residual impact of ‘Spain’.

Exploring the place of ‘Spain’ between 1939 and 1945 can bring new perspectives to debate about British relations with the Franco regime after the Second World War. The absence of a British challenge to Franco after 1945, a source of anger and surprise to many supporters of the Republic, may have been partly anticipated by developments

⁴⁴⁹ A recent biographical study is Angela Jackson, *For Us It Was Heaven: The Passion, Grief and Fortitude of Patience Darton – From the Spanish Civil War to Mao’s China* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012). Jackson also includes brief accounts of the lives of women in the aftermath of the Spanish war in *British Women*, pp.160-207.

⁴⁵⁰ Mates, *Political Activism and Popular Front*.

⁴⁵¹ Catherine Feely, ‘From Dialectics to Dancing: Reading, Writing and the Experience of Everyday Life in the Diaries of Frank P. Forster’, *History Workshop Journal*, 69, 1 (2010), 90-110 (pp.103-4). The article is a contrasting exploration of Chester Communist Party, with around fifteen members in the late 1930s.

⁴⁵² Cleminson, ‘Spanish Anti-Fascists’, p.167.

since 1939. Strategic political and military changes wrought during the Second World War had already demonstrated a weakening power of 'Spain' to engage attention. In the immediate post-war period, new arguments were engaged about the meaning of the Spanish conflict in the Cold War era.⁴⁵³ The cautious approach of the Attlee government to the Franco regime was framed as resulting from the emerging imperatives of the Cold War, as was the Coalition government's policy towards Greece in late 1944. As this thesis has shown, Attlee's experience of the vicissitudes of the Civil War and the Second World War, extending together over more than a decade, made for a more complex picture.

For Attlee, policy on Spain remained subordinate throughout to wider considerations of foreign policy priorities, and to his conduct of the leadership of the Labour Party. His willingness to reach compromises within the Labour Party on 'Spain' may partly have stemmed from perception of the damage caused by failure of Spanish Republicans to make their own compromises in the interest of unity. Political division had weakened the struggle against Franco and the military rebels from the beginning. Attlee was well aware, during the Second World War, of continuing internecine conflict between exiled Republican leaders. His reservations about the prospects for restoring Spanish democracy may have owed much to his own experience during the whole period from 1936 to 1945. Attlee's behaviour was not that of a politician seeking to forget the inheritance of 'Spain', as was evident in his humane solicitude as a War Cabinet minister for individual Republicans whose lives were endangered. Attlee's case is testament to the complexities and ambiguities of the inheritance of 'Spain' in one political life during the Second World War.

This thesis has shown that responses to 'Spain' shaped from 1939 to 1945 were important in their own terms. In a multiplicity of ways, experience and memory of the Spanish war infiltrated British politics and individual lives during the Second World War. In the aftermath of defeat in Spain, mingled expressions of grief, and pride in the sacrifice, were accompanied by endeavours to apply the political and military 'lessons' of the struggle. This was, in effect, a process of normalization of the experience of the

⁴⁵³ Paul Corthorn, 'Cold War Politics in Britain and the Contested Legacy of the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, 44, 4 (2014), 678-702.

Civil War. Preoccupation with the debate over survival of the Franco regime after 1945 has obscured the importance of this period.

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