

# ¡Alerta Antifascista!

## War and Revolution in Spain

On the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1936 General Franco and his troops led fascists, monarchists, landowners, capitalists and clerics in a coup against the “left-wing” bourgeois-capitalist government in Spain. In many parts of the country workers took up arms, resisting and often defeating Franco’s troops and their supporters. The Spanish Civil War had begun.

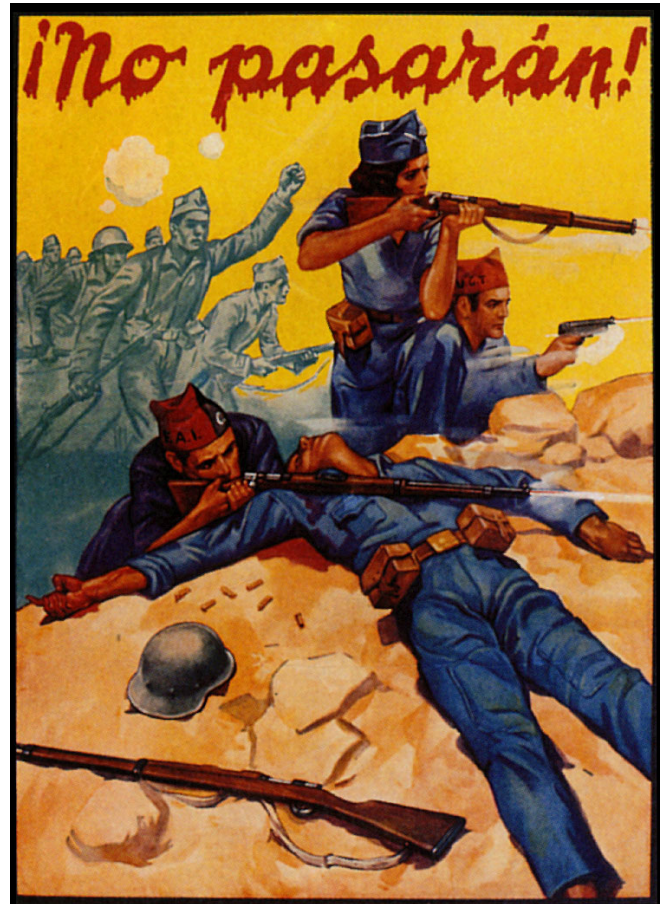
The fight against the Francoists also marked the start of a social revolution. Spain had a long history of socialist and anarchist agitation and many workers sought not only to protect the status quo, but the emancipation of the working classes (be it in factory syndicates or agrarian communes). Many women, such as those organising in the anarchist group *Mujeres Libres*, defied patriarchal conventions as they organised and fought for their own and their comrades’ liberation. However, they were faced with fierce resistance as sexism was anything but restricted to Francoists, but also vividly expressed by many who called themselves anarchists or communists.

## Anti-fascist solidarity

Internationally the anti-fascists were virtually isolated while Franco got immediate support from fascist Italy and Germany. For the latter, Spain was a practical laboratory for their war machinery (brutally demonstrated by the systematic aerial bombardment of the Basque town of Guernica).

Faced with the inaction of their ‘democratic’ governments, many people showed practical solidarity with the anti-fascists, determined to prevent Spain from becoming the next place, after Italy and Germany, where fascism was to be victorious. There was a wide array of support activities such as the Co-Operative Party led initiative to send an ambulance to Spain from Nottingham. Many people decided to go to Spain themselves, either to take up arms or to support the war from behind the frontlines.

In the early stages of the war, many of those who went to fight joined one of the militias; not necessarily being entirely au fait with the specific politics of the group. Most volunteers’ motivation was to fight fascism and they knew little or nothing about the complicated political relations between the various anti-fascist fractions. A famous example is George Orwell, an Independent Labour Party member who fought with the POUM, a revolutionary Marxist militia. He wrote in hindsight that if he would have gone to Spain with no political affiliations he probably would have joined the International Column, and if



he had understood the situation better he would have joined the Anarchists.

## The rise of Stalinism

As the only states supporting the anti-fascist struggle were Mexico and the USSR, Stalinism gained more and more support in Spain with every shipment of weapons that arrived. With the rise of Stalinist influence began the rollback of the revolution in all areas of society. This was noticeable not least at the front, where the egalitarian militia system (notable for its lack of senior ranks and a strict policy of equal wages) was first incorporated in, and then suppressed by, an authoritarian army structure. A by-product of this ‘militarization of the war’ was that the de facto Stalinist controlled International Brigades became the units in which most of the international volunteers were organised regardless of their political backgrounds.

The swelling conflict between Stalinists and revolutionaries escalated to murders and fierce street fighting, notably in Barcelona. The Stalinists prevailed in the power struggle. Brutal purges took place and the remaining revolutionary structures were crushed. Stalinism also re-established gender hierarchies as the *Mujeres Libres* were persecuted in a nasty backlash of patriarchal rule. The war continued into 1939, but was no longer a revolutionary struggle, turning instead to a defence of bourgeois capitalist democracy.



The  
Sparrows' Nest &

People's Histories  
The International Brigades in Spain

## Legacy and remembrance

Why the fascists were victorious in 1939, strengthening fascism all over Europe, has long and bitterly been debated, especially among the various fractions of the (radical) left. Undoubtedly one decisive factor was the inaction of 'democracies' like the UK, who did not want to see that the war in Spain had only been the prologue for the terrors to come.

Those people joining the anti-fascist struggle in Spain should be remembered for their personal bravery and their exemplary active solidarity.



We despise the Stalinist system into which the International Brigades were incorporated. Stalinism meant that revolutionary workers were being dragged by their natural enemies – police thugs – to the Stalinist torture chambers and/or in front of firing squads.

However we include in our remembrance and commemoration those individuals who went to Spain dedicating themselves to defeat fascism and ended up fighting in the International Brigades.

## History repeated?

The events in Spain of the late 1930s still inspire and cause fierce clashes. They are inspirational because they give all of us, despite different and often contradicting political beliefs, something on which we can project our revolutionary aspirations and fantasies, particularly in a period when revolution seems more unattainable than ever. Fierce clashes about the memories of war and revolution normally take place amongst those on the left. But apparently we are not alone in feeling strongly about the issues; provincial Tory councillors do as well.

It would be funny, if it were not so sad, that one of Kay Cutts' first actions after taking over the County Council was to replace the explanatory plaque at the memorial for the Nottinghamshire volunteers in the International Brigades with vague drivel. It was an obvious attempt to brush over this aspect of Nottinghamshire history, giving the casual passer-by the impression that the wall-mounted plaques are generic monuments to people who died in one of Britain's many wars.

In a bizarre way, Cutts' actions parallel those of the Stalinist machinery in 1936-1939. The revolution was not only suppressed by brute force but also by Stalinist parties and papers who busied themselves across the world rewriting and re-branding the events as they unfolded. The Tories' action can be seen in this tradition, rewriting history and re-branding it with a new and more convenient plaque.

Whilst Jon Collins, Cutts' counterpart at the Labour-run City Council, has no problems with historical anti-fascism and is happy for the Council House to host an exhibition about the Spanish Civil War, his record on current anti-fascist struggles is less commendable. Collins' disgraceful attempts to stop protests when EDL thugs roamed through the streets of Nottingham fit into a pattern of official inaction towards fascism which can be traced back to the UK government's position towards anti-fascists in Spain. The British state was happy to see Franco seize power, not least as a fascist state was better for business than the revolutionary alternative. This ignoble tradition is something Collins is more than happy to conform to and so he opposed anti-fascist action in favour of Christmas shopping and Bratwurst munching.

The British state is no more an ally of anti-fascists today than it was 74 years ago. The struggle against fascism remains one we must all fight. The need to resist the likes of the BNP or EDL in our own communities is clear, as is the need for solidarity with those faced by more professional and more murderous fascists in Germany, Russia, Italy and indeed Spain. Now as then our tasks are clear...

**¡NO PASARAN!  
FOR THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION**



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People's Histreh  
Nottingham & Notts Radical History Group

## Further Reading

All titles available at **The Sparrows' Nest**

Alexander, Bill: *British Volunteers for Liberty*; Lawrence & Wishart  
Barrot, Jean: *Fascism Antifascism*; Unpopular Books  
Beevor, Anthony: *The Spanish Civil War*; Orbis Press Agency  
Brown, George: *Greater Manchester Men who Fought in Spain*; Greater Manchester International Brigade Memorial Committee  
CNT: *What is the CNT?*; Spanish Information Network  
Christie, Stuart: *We, the Anarchists!*; AK Press  
Conlon, Eddie: *The Spanish Civil War (Anarchism in Action)*; Workers Solidarity Movement  
Guillamon, Augustine: *The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939*; AK Press  
Iron Column: *A day mournful and overcast*

Key, Anna, ed.: *Salvador Puig Antich and the MIL (Movimiento Ibérico de Liberación)*; Kate Sharpley Library  
Leval, G.: *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution*; Freedom Press  
Orwell, George: *Homage to Catalonia*; Penguin  
Peirats, Jose: *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*; The Meltzer Press  
Richards, Vernon: *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution 1936-1939*; Freedom Press  
Rocker, Rudolf: *The Tragedy of Spain*; ASP  
Souchy, Peirats, Bolloten, Goldman: *The May Days (Barcelona 1937)*; Freedom Press  
Thomas, Hugh: *The Spanish Civil War*; Pelican Books  
Willis, Liz: *Women in the Spanish Revolution*; First published by Solidarity



## The Sparrows' Nest

### A centre for anarchist culture and education!

The Sparrows' Nest is a library and archive of anarchist materials located in St. Ann's. It contains thousands of books and papers from around the world, some of the most significant historical archives of anarchist materials in Britain, going back to the 1930s in some cases, as well as other materials in a variety of media of interest to anarchists and socialists alike.

Our aim is to make it easy for people in Nottingham and beyond to explore the theory, history and practice of anarchism in a friendly, comfortable environment (even with a cup of tea in our sunny garden, where some of the sparrows in question live!). Choose from introductory and specialist texts, art and graphic novels, fanzines and newspapers, materials internal to anarchist and other libertarian organisations, and periodicals in languages from English to Basque!

The Nest also prioritises collecting materials relating to the radical past of Nottingham and the surrounding region (campaign materials, papers, posters, photos, banners, badges and stickers, and several local activists' personal archives). We are serious about preserving this material properly and making it available for future use by activists and researchers. So if you are thinking of freeing up some space by throwing out evidence of your radical past: STOP! Please consider entrusting us with it.

For info and opening times:

<http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk>

Email us if you would like to be on our mailing list:  
[info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk](mailto:info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk) 07913720136

## People's Histreh

Nottingham & Notts Radical History Group



### "TO THE CASTLE!"

We are a group of people with different political backgrounds, joined by a strong disinterest for the history of 'great leaders', kings, queens, 'heroic' generals, etc.

We are interested in that which has been called 'history from below', 'grassroots history' or 'social history' and as Nottingham and Nottinghamshire have a turbulent history of socioeconomic transformation, disturbance and conflict, there is a lot to be unearthed.

We can offer interested people an open forum for all who want to ask and/or develop questions and discuss answers about the history of e.g. social struggles or labour disputes in Nottingham and the Shire.

So far we have been working on Chartism, the Reform Riots and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fight against the poll tax. People's interests also include the local history of slavery, the General Strike of 1926 and the Miners' Strike.

Aside from organising events and producing materials, we gather people's stories of past struggles and strive to gather as much material as possible and make it publicly accessible.

If you are interested in coming to a meeting or what material we have produced so far you can get in touch by email:

[peopleshistreh@riseup.net](mailto:peopleshistreh@riseup.net)



## Events commemorating War and Revolution in Spain

Several groups have organised a series of events in July 2010 commemorating the anti-fascists' fight against General Franco's coup in the Spanish Civil War.

**RE-DEDICATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES MEMORIAL:** **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July** sees the re-dedication of the International Brigades' memorial to the 26 Nottinghamshire people who fought against fascism. It takes place at County Hall, Trent Bridge, West Bridgford, 10.30am to 12.00pm. This event is being put on by the Nottingham Trades Council. They invite you to attend and bring your banners!

**EXHIBITION AND TALKS AT THE SPARROWS' NEST:** On **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July** the Anarchist Federation's Nottingham group invites you to 'Civil War and Revolution: Anarchism in Spain', 1.00pm to 6.00pm at The Sparrows' Nest – Anarchist Library and Archive, St. Ann's. The event is an exhibition on Anarchism in Spain. It explores the role of the anarchists in the civil war and the social revolution, in particular the CNT-IWA, and features talks by members of the Solidarity Federation (the IWA's British section): 'Spain, 1936-39' at 2.00pm and 'The CNT today', at 4.00pm. If possible contact us ([info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk](mailto:info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk) or 07913720136) to let us know how many are coming and to find out how to find us.



**EXHIBITION: Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup>, to Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> July:** the Nottingham leg of the International Brigades' Memorial Trust Exhibition: "¡Antifascista!" At the Council House, Market Square. This event is also organised by the Nottingham Trades Council.

**SPECIAL CINEMA EVENT:** On **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July at 2.15pm** Ken Loach's epic on the Spanish Civil War and social revolution 'Land and Freedom' will be shown at the Broadway Cinema. Loach's dramatisation, inspired by Orwell's 'Homage to Catalonia' (even though with far less emphasis on rats and excrement) convinces with its authentic atmosphere. Regrettably Loach added a predictable and superfluous heterosexual love story. However 'Land and Freedom' remains one of his best works (for more information regarding the up to 700 international volunteers in the POUM militia see <http://libcom.org/history/international-volunteers-poum-militias>). The showing is sponsored by The Sparrows' Nest and Nottingham's 'Peoples' Histreh' group. It is dedicated to those who fought fascism in Spain united by the cry "¡NO PASARAN!" ("They shall not pass!"). Advance tickets are only £5. Please send an SAE and cheque made payable to the 'Sparrows' Nest' directly and send it to the following address (and you could also email to let us know it's coming): The Sparrows' Nest, c/o Box AF, Sumac Centre, 245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham. NG7 6HX.