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## Lights and shadows in George Orwell's Homage to Catalonia

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# Lights and Shadows in George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*

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Despite its misleading title, Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* is almost certainly the most sold and most read book about the Spanish Civil War. It is a vivid and well-written account of some fragments of the war by an acute witness. It presents an invaluable account of the experiences of a militiaman on the Aragón front. In sentence after sentence, Orwell graphically recreated the fear, the cold and, above all, the squalor of the trenches, the excrement and the lice. Here are just two examples: 'We were near the front line now, near enough to smell the characteristic smell of war—in my experience a smell of excrement and decaying food'. And: 'The scenery was stupendous, if you could forget that every mountain-top was occupied by troops and was therefore littered with tin cans and crusted with dung'.<sup>1</sup> He bemoaned the lack of training and decent weaponry: 'You cannot possibly conceive what a rabble

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1 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1938]), pp. 14, 19, 23, 31, 79–82 (squalor), 18, 29–30 (cold). Most references provided here, which will be given in the main text in future, are to this so-called 'uniform edition'.

we looked. [...] It seemed dreadful that the defenders of the Republic should be this mob of ragged children carrying worn-out rifles which they did not know how to use' (*Homage to Catalonia*, 18, 33–35). A biographer of Josep Rovira, commander of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division in which Orwell served, wrote of him that 'amb el seu tranc entre ensonyat i distant, es manifestava tot seguit en ell un afany d'observar, com un infant encuriós' ('with his character somewhere between sleepy and distant, his desire to observe like a curious child quickly became evident').<sup>2</sup> Orwell's vivid observations of agricultural backwardness—the primitive, pre-medieval tools, harrows made of flint inserted in wood—, his evocations of the sights and sounds of the countryside are worthy of a great travel book and invaluable for the historian (*Homage to Catalonia*, 83–84). Regarding his repeated comment about decaying food, he made a frank clarification: 'There was frightful wastage of food, especially bread. From my barrack-room alone a basketful of bread was thrown away at every meal—a disgraceful thing when the civilian population was short of it' (*Homage to Catalonia*, 6, 15). If Orwell's POUM (*Partido Obrero de*

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2 Josep Pané, 'George Orwell, soldat de Rovira', in Josep Coll & Josep Pané, *Josep Rovira: una vida al servei de Catalunya i del socialisme* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1978), 129; my translation.

Unificación Marxista) unit could really afford to waste food, it must have been a rarity among the Republican forces.<sup>3</sup>

Orwell's eye-witness testimony guarantees the inclusion of *Homage to Catalonia* in any list of important books on the war. However, it would certainly not be there as a reliable analysis of the broader politics of the war and particularly of its international determinants. In his book, Orwell combined a wealth of superb personal observation and a devastating critique of the distortions and falsehoods of the press. However, its political analysis and predictions are deeply flawed by his acceptance of the partisan views of anarchist and POUM comrades as well as by ignorance of the wider context. At best, the book is a misleading contribution to the central debate over whether the priority of the Spanish Republic should have been revolution or a conventional war effort against Franco and his Axis allies.

Herbert Matthews, the great *New York Times* correspondent, summed up the issues years after the publication of *Homage to Catalonia*:

The book did more to blacken the Loyalist cause than any work written by enemies of the Second Republic—a result that Orwell did not intend, as some things he wrote later proved. In *Homage*, Orwell was writing in white heat about a confused, unimportant, and obscure incident in a war

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3 See Bill Alexander, 'George Orwell and Spain', in *Inside the Myth: Orwell. Views from the Left*, ed. Christopher Norris (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), 95–98. ***[Please give the full page references of Bill Alexander's article.]***

he did not understand. All he saw from January to May 1937, was a little stretch of the ‘phony front’ at Huesca, and a bloody clash between Communists and Anarchists in Barcelona. He had volunteered in London through the leftist Independent Labour Party, which had links with the Spanish POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista). This was a dissident, very Marxist, not treacherous, but somewhat subversive revolutionary group that was proving dangerous to the Republican government.

Matthews, who regarded Orwell as a ‘very brave, decent, and fair-minded man’ went on to say: ‘I should think that very few people have read the bits and pieces—essays, reviews, letters—that Orwell wrote about Spain in later years. They show a far better understanding of events than he had when he was in Spain’.<sup>4</sup> Matthews was certainly right and yet the book’s influence on perceptions of the Spanish Civil War is massive.<sup>5</sup> For instance, Robert Stradling declared that ‘[t]he two “analytical” chapters of *Homage* are justly

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4 Herbert L. Matthews, *A World in Revolution: A Newspaperman’s Memoir* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 43–44.

5 See Raymond Carr, ‘Orwell and the Spanish Civil War’, in *The World of George Orwell*, ed. Miriam Gross (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 70. ***[Please give the full page references of Raymond Carr’s article.]***

famed as a seminal political treatise of the twentieth century'.<sup>6</sup> Orwell himself wrote: 'The most striking thing about the Spanish war books, at any rate those written in English, is their shocking dullness and badness. But what is more significant is that almost all of them, right-wing or left-wing, are written from a political angle, by cocksure partisans telling you what to think'.<sup>7</sup> *Homage to Catalonia* is neither dull nor bad, but it is certainly written from a political angle, by a cocksure partisan telling the reader what to think.

Numerous distinguished readers were prepared to go along with **what Orwell** told them. They included several who knew little about the Spanish Civil War such as Lionel Trilling, Noam Chomsky, Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson.<sup>8</sup> One who had been in Spain and, having later become fiercely anti-Communist, embraced Orwell's writings was Arthur Koestler. Nevertheless, Koestler's relations with Orwell were based on mutual

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6 Robert Stradling, 'The Spies Who Loved Them: The Blairs in Barcelona, 1937', *Intelligence and National Security*, 25:5 (2010), 638–55 (p. 639).

7 George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell (1920–1950)*, ed. **Sonia Orwell & Ian Angus**, 4 vols (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), I, *An Age Like This, 1920–1940*, 501. ***[If this piece by Orwell is longer than 1 page, please give its full page references.]***

8 Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 85–86, 118–19. **See also** Robert A. Stradling, *History and Legend: Writing the International Brigades* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2003), 49–50.

loathing of the Soviet Union rather than on any similar consideration of events in Spain.<sup>9</sup> The widespread admiration for *Homage to Catalonia* is all the more striking given that the book is limited entirely to the time and place of Orwell's presence in Spain. He clearly knew nothing of the origins of the war, of the long-standing political conflicts between left-wing groups in Barcelona, and even less of the issues underlying the relations between the Republican government, in Valencia at the time, and the various forces in Catalonia. As Robert Stradling commented: 'as a study of the history of the Spanish Civil War, *Homage to Catalonia* is of questionable value. Not only did its author fail to carry out basic research, he was not qualified to perform it in the first place'.<sup>10</sup> Orwell himself acknowledged the deficiencies of his overview of the politics of the time near the end of *Homage to Catalonia* when he wrote:

In case I have not said this somewhere earlier in the book I will say it now: beware of my partisanship, my mistakes of fact, and the distortion

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9 David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 250–56, 346–47.

10 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 and Wishart, 1984), 108–09. ***[Please give the full page references of Robert Stradling's article. Also, are the italics in the original or is it your emphasis?]***

inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events. And beware of exactly the same things when you read any other book on this period of the Spanish war. (*Homage to Catalonia*, 247)

There are other reasons for questioning some of what Orwell wrote. There are encounters that he describes in detail which he could have done accurately only if he spoke fluent Spanish. The fact that there is little reason to believe that this was the case necessarily throws doubt on his honesty. He admitted that his Spanish was ‘villainous’ and that **fact** is likely given that he did not know the language when he arrived and spent virtually all of his time in the company of other English-speakers. The ILP liaison man in Barcelona **of the Independent Labour Party (ILP)**, John McNair, implausibly recalled that Orwell ‘spoke fair Castilian and sufficient French to understand a good deal of Catalan’. It is rare for French ears, let alone English ones, to understand spoken Catalan. The captain of Orwell’s unit, Benjamin Lewinski, told the official biographer, Michael Shelden, that the French-speaking Orwell quickly picked up enough Catalan to communicate with his comrades.<sup>11</sup> However, Orwell himself wrote of his early days:

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1991), 280; John McNair, *Spanish Diary*, ed., with a commentary, by Don Bateman (Manchester: Greater Manchester ILP, n.d.), 14.



All this time I was having the usual struggles with the Spanish language. Apart from myself there was only one Englishman at the barracks, and nobody even among the officers spoke a word of French. Things were not made easier for me by the fact that when my companions spoke to one another they generally spoke in Catalan.

*(Homage to Catalonia, 199)*

Even if McNair's and Lewinski's memories of Orwell speaking Catalan were accurate, it can only have been of a level that permitted simple conversations but hardly enough to explain how Orwell was able, as he claims in the book, to have complex conversations, with Spanish officials during his efforts to secure the release from jail of his friend Georges Kopp, and even, when wounded and semi-conscious, to have understood, *as he claims*, the comment of a Spanish comrade: 'I heard a Spaniard behind me say that the bullet had gone clean through my neck' *(Homage to Catalonia, 199)*.<sup>12</sup> Oddly, the one Catalan word he could have been expected to know—'La Generalitat', the Catalan government, is always rendered *by him* as the 'Generalite'. It is notable too that in the collected letters, reviews and essays of Orwell, there is no mention of *his* having any pre-war acquaintance with *the* Spanish *language* or of ever reading a book in Spanish about the war or anything else.

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<sup>12</sup> The issue of Orwell's linguistic competence is taken up by Stradling, 'Orwell and the Spanish Civil War', 107–08.

His precise and perfectly justified denunciations of the absurdities of the Communist and bourgeois press do not counter his misunderstandings of the general situation. He claimed that the fact that the persecution of the POUM took place at all meant that the Republican government was ‘virtually under Communist control’. Yet, a few pages further on, he admits that ‘most of the members of the Spanish Government have disclaimed all belief in the charges against the POUM. Recently the cabinet decided by five to two in favour of releasing anti-Fascist political prisoners; the two dissentients being the Communist ministers’. He acknowledged that Indalecio Prieto, the Minister of National Defence, Manuel Irujo, the Minister of Justice, Julián Zugazagoitia, the Minister of the Interior, among others, had dismissed the idea that the POUM leadership was guilty of espionage (*Homage to Catalonia*, 183, 186–89).

Despite that admission, in a text riddled with contradictions, he went on to make an unfounded prediction about what would happen if the Republic won the war:

As for the newspaper talk about this being a ‘war for democracy’, it was plain eyewash. No one in his senses supposed that there was any hope of democracy, even as we understand it in England or France, in a country so divided and exhausted as Spain would be when the war was over. It would have to be a dictatorship, and it was clear that the chance of a

working-class dictatorship had passed. That meant that the general movement would be in the direction of some kind of Fascism.

A few pages after that egregious error, he writes:

I may say that I now think much more highly of the Negrin Government than I did when it came into office. It has kept up the difficult fight with splendid courage, and it has shown more political tolerance than anyone expected. But I still believe that—unless Spain splits up, with unpredictable consequences—the tendency of the post-war Government is bound to be Fascistic.

*(Homage to Catalonia, 193–95)*

After damning the Spanish Republic as an incipient Stalinist dictatorship, in late 1938 or very early 1939, **Orwell** praised the fact that democratic norms had been maintained: ‘In Government Spain both the forms and the spirit of democracy have survived to an extent that no one would have foreseen; it would even be true to say that during the first year of the war they were developing’.<sup>13</sup>

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13 George Orwell, ‘Caesarian Section in Spain’, *The Highway* (March 1939). It is stated in the journal that the article was written before the fall of Catalonia. Reprinted in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison, **20 vols** (London: Secker & Warburg, **1998–2001**), XI, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, 332–35.

In August 1952, Herbert Matthews wrote to the exiled Spanish Republican Prime Minister, Dr Juan Negrín, to ask about his relationship with Orwell. While preparing an article about the publication in the USA of *Homage to Catalonia*, Matthews had learned that Negrín had been introduced to Orwell by a mutual friend, the Spanish Socialist journalist and historian Antonio Ramos Oliveira. Having been press officer in the Republican Embassy of Pablo Azcárate, Ramos Oliveira had remained in England until 1950 during which time he had become friends with Orwell. Ramos Oliveira told Matthews that Orwell had hit it off with Negrín and that, after Negrín had explained the broader issues to him, Orwell ‘felt differently about his experiences and understood better the position of the Communists’. Matthews then wrote to Negrín to request more information.<sup>14</sup> Negrín replied two weeks later,

As far as I can recollect, I first met Orwell sometime after August or September 1940. He was presented to me as an editorialist of the *Observer*, and I was told that he had been in Spain during our war. I did

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14 See Matthews to Negrín, 22 August 1952, Fondo Documental Archivo Fundación Juan Negrín, FJN carpeta 93-41A- n° 320. **Negrín’s reply to Matthews and his earlier replies also quoted from here, are preserved in the same Archive. *[Insert this information? Is this the case?]*** See also the preface by Ángel Viñas, in Antonio Ramos Oliveira, *Controversia sobre España: tres ensayos sobre la Guerra Civil*, introducción de Manuela Escobar, prólogo de Ángel Viñas (Sevilla: Editorial Renacimiento, 2015), 7–17.

not catch that he had been not as a reporter or writer but as volunteer in a fighting unit, and I believe I was not aware of that circumstance till I read his book on Catalonia, months after his death. Since we got acquainted, we met several times, and I venture to say that a reciprocal current of esteem, sympathy and even friendship was established.

Over the course of their conversations, Orwell bombarded Negrín with questions about the wider issues of the Civil War that had been ignored in *Homage to Catalonia*. Negrín explained to him: ‘our foreign policy, specially our relations with Russia, having to take into account that the U.R.S.S. was the only great power supporting us internationally, and prepared to provide us, on the basis of cash payment (we never demanded it graciously [without appropriate payment] from anyone) with the necessary weapons; and domestic policy’. He also outlined the problems and difficulties arising from ‘the motley conglomerate of incompatible parties, labour unions and dissident groups and also the frequently self-appointed, largely unconstitutional, local and regional “governments” ’ with which he had to deal. Negrín concluded that Orwell was ‘idealistic and “*weltfremd*” [unwordly]. However, the fact that Orwell did not tell Negrín about his links to the POUM suggests a degree of dishonesty on Orwell’s part.

Negrín wrote to Matthews that, if he had read Orwell’s book at the time of their conversations,

it could have been [up to] me[,] the more inquisitive party, to clarify some of the events he exposes [i.e. describes], and to try to settle, through friendly discussion in [sic] how far the interpretation of the facts he witnessed was the accurate one. After reading his book, I have not changed my opinion about Orwell: a decent and righteous gentleman, biased by a too rigid, puritanical frame [i.e. stance], gifted with a candour bordering [on] naïveté, highly critical [of] but blindly credulous towards [i.e. regarding] the religious partnership [i.e. community] in which he acts and moves; morbidly individualistic (an Englishman!) but submitting lazily and without self-discerning [i.e. self-discernment] to the inspiration [i.e. influence] of the gregarious community in which he voluntarily and instinctively anchors himself, and so supremely honest and self-denying that he would not hesitate to change his mind once he perceives [it] to be wrong. [...] [H]e came to the chaotic front [at] Aragon, under the tutorship [i.e. guidance] of a group, [...] [who were] certainly controlled by elements very allergic not only to Stalinism—this was more frequent [sic] than not a pure pretext—but to anything that meant [exercising] a united and supreme direction of [i.e. control over] the struggle under a common discipline. Putting that together with the previously mentioned ‘astigmatic’ factors [at work] one gets more than enough to justify [i.e.

understand the reasons for] the distorted image in Orwell's mind of the happenings of 1937 in Barcelona.<sup>15</sup>

The perceived honesty of Orwell's book has been one of the pillars of its success along, of course, with its anti-Communist stance. However, the veracity of some incidents in the book has been questioned. Moreover, not long after the publication of the book, Orwell himself was throwing doubt on some of the things that he had written. On 20 December 1938, in a letter to Frank Jellinek, he wrote about *Homage to Catalonia*: 'I have no doubt I have made a lot of mistakes and misleading statements, but I have tried to indicate all through that the subject is very complicated and that I am extremely fallible as well as biased'. He also confessed to Jellinek:

Actually I've given a more sympathetic account of the POUM 'line' than I actually felt, because I always told them they were wrong and refused to join the party. But I had to put it as sympathetically as possible, because it has had no hearing in the capitalist press and nothing but libels in the left-wing press. Actually, considering the way things have

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15 Negrín to Matthews, 5 September 1952, Fondo Documental Archivo Fundación Juan Negrín, FJN carpeta 93-41A- n° 270. Negrín's English is particularly defective here. To assist the reader some words or phrases have been inserted in square brackets into the passage quoted to clarify the meaning. Herbert L. Matthews commented on this letter both in *A World in Revolution*, 43–45, and also in his *Half of Spain Died. A Reappraisal of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 231.

gone in Spain, I think there was something in what they said, though no doubt their way of saying it was tiresome and provocative in the extreme.<sup>16</sup>

There is something irresponsible about the 'fair-play' spirit behind Orwell's decision to tone down the extent to which the POUM line was damaging to the Republic. This is all the more notable given that Orwell admitted that, prior to the Barcelona events, he

had actually come round to the Communist line on the need for the war effort to be given priority and was trying to transfer from the POUM to the International Brigades. And of course I wanted to go to Madrid. [...] For the present, of course, one had to stay in the line, but I told everyone that when we went on leave I should, if possible, exchange into the International Column, which meant putting myself under Communist control. Various people tried to dissuade me, but no one attempted to interfere. It is fair to say that there was very little heresy-hunting in the POUM, perhaps not enough, considering their special circumstances; short of being a pro-Fascist no one was penalized for holding the wrong political opinions. I spent much of my time in the militia in bitterly

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16 Letter reprinted in *Orwell, Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, ed. Davison, 254–56.



criticizing the POUM 'line', but I never got into trouble for it. (*Homage to Catalonia*, 74)<sup>17</sup>

Orwell's ILP commander, Bob Edwards, commented precisely on this: 'he repeatedly asserted his intention to leave the International Militia and join the Communist-controlled International Column on the Madrid front. During this period most of the volunteers wanted to be fighting at Madrid because big battles were being fought there'. Moreover, Edwards took a rather cynical view thereof, believing that Orwell was 'allowing his needs as a writer to override his duty as a soldier. [...] and I told him so in rather forthright terms, calling him at one period after a heated debate "a bloody scribbler" with no actual experience of the working-class struggle other than as a journalist observer'.<sup>18</sup>

Initially, Orwell wrote, 'I had only joined the POUM militia rather than any other because I happened to arrive in Barcelona with ILP papers' (*Homage to Catalonia*, 48). His acceptance by the POUM, was made possible largely because of his literary celebrity, although the book presents him as an anonymous volunteer. Believing that he needed credentials from a left-

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17 See also Orwell's letter to his wife, 5 April 1937, and another by his wife to her brother, 1 May 1937, in Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937-1939*, ed. Davison, 15-16, 23.

18 Bob Edwards, 'Introduction', in George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London: Folio Society, 1970), 000-000 (p. 8). *[Please insert full page references of Edwards' Introduction.]*

wing party to get into Spain, he asked John Strachey to introduce him to Harry Pollitt, the secretary-general of the **Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB)**. Pollitt, ‘after questioning me evidently decided that I was politically unreliable and refused to help me’.<sup>19</sup> It is probable that Pollitt was repelled by what he perceived as Orwell’s Etonian snobbery. So Orwell turned to the Independent Labour Party and was given letters of introduction to John McNair, the party’s man in Barcelona. Initially, McNair, a working-class Tynesider, was as put off by Orwell’s Etonian accent as Harry Pollitt had been. However, the letters from Fenner Brockway and H. N. Brailsford alerted McNair to the fact that he was talking to the author of *Burmese Days* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1934) and *Down and Out in Paris and London* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1933), which he had read and enjoyed. He quickly saw Orwell’s propaganda value and agreed to take him immediately to the POUM militia base at Barcelona’s Lenin barracks.<sup>20</sup> The recruitment

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19 Orwell, ‘Notes on the Spanish Militias’, in Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Davison, XI, 135–45.

20 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), 208–10; Shelden, *Orwell*, 274–79; McNair, *Spanish Diary*, ed. Bateman, 13–15; Richard Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors: The British in the Spanish Civil War and the Struggle against Fascism* (London: Aurum Press, 2012), 183–85.

of such a famous author was quickly used as a recruitment device by the POUM's English bulletin, *The Spanish Revolution*.<sup>21</sup>

The same reasons behind Pollitt's rejection and McNair's initial hostility ensured that Orwell was not popular among his fellow British militiamen who were acutely aware of his 'cut-glass Eton accent'. It may have been different with the Spaniards although he later recalled being called a fascist by volunteers who resented his efforts to impose discipline. His comrade Stafford Cottman suggested that Orwell sneered at what he considered to be the political naivety of other volunteers. East Londoner Frank Frankford said he disliked the 'supercilious bastard' on sight:

He really didn't like the workers [...] It was his attitude in discussions that I didn't like, his attitude towards the working class. Two or three of us said that he was on the wrong side, he should be on the other side [...] I rather think he fancied himself as another Bernard Shaw [...]. There was no depth to his socialism at all'.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, Orwell wrote that, when he went on leave to Barcelona on 25 April: 'I sought out a Communist friend, attached to the Spanish Medical

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21 See 'British Author with the Militia', *The Spanish Revolution*, II:2, 3 February 1937, p. 2. ***[If this article is more than 1 page long, please provide its full page references.]***

22 Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors*, 187. Orwell responded to Frankford's criticism of the POUM, see Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937-1939*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Davison, XI, 82-85.

Aid, and explained my case to him. He seemed very anxious to recruit me and asked me, if possible, to persuade some of the other ILP Englishmen to come with me' (*Homage to Catalonia*, 124). The friend was Hugh O'Donnell the CPGB's man in charge of vigilance of the POUM. After first discussing the issue with McNair, two days later Orwell approached a senior British Communist in Barcelona, Wally Tapsell, who had been ordered to keep an eye on the ILP members. Tapsell sent Harry Pollitt a report on those involved in the POUM in which he also outlined his meeting with Orwell and his reasons for wanting to join the International Brigades: "The leading personality and most respected man in the contingent at present is Eric Blair. This man is a Novelist and has written some books on proletarian life in England. He has little political understanding and [quoting Orwell] "He is not interested in party politics, and came to Spain as an Anti-"Fascist to fight Fascism". As a result of his experiences however, he has grown to dislike the POUM and is now awaiting his discharge from the POUM militia".<sup>23</sup>

Orwell would shortly change his mind about joining the International Brigades because of what he saw in Barcelona during the events of May 1937. What he did not see was that the Spanish Republic was fighting not only Franco and his armies but also the military and economic might of Mussolini and Hitler in a context of Anglo-French hostility. Besieged from outside, the

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23 Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors*, 188; Alexander, 'George Orwell and Spain', 92–93.

Republic had massive internal problems unknown in Franco's brutally militarized zone. The collapse of the bourgeois state in the first days of the war saw the rapid emergence of revolutionary organs of parallel power. A massive popular collectivization of agriculture and industry took place. While exhilarating to participants and observers such as George Orwell, the great collectivist experiments of the autumn of 1936 did little to create a war machine. Socialist leaders like Indalecio Prieto and Juan Negrín were convinced that a conventional state, with central control of the economy and the institutional instruments of mass mobilization, was essential if there was to be an efficacious war effort. The Communists and the Soviet advisers agreed. Not only was this common sense but the playing down of the revolutionary activities of the anarchists and the anti-Stalinist POUM was necessary to reassure the bourgeois democracies with which the Soviet Union (and the Spanish Republican government) sought understanding. The May events in Barcelona witnessed by Orwell were provoked by the need to remove obstacles to the efficient conduct of the war. Despite incorporating the working-class militias into the regular forces and dismantling the collectives, Negrín's government still did not achieve victory—not because its policies were wrong but because of the international forces arrayed against the Republic.

Thus, in *Homage to Catalonia*, and its cinematic version, Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* (1995), a secondary episode dwarfs the wider issues

of the war and presents a perverse explanation of the reasons for **the** Republican defeat. With the Spanish Republic abandoned by the Western Powers and opposed by Franco, Hitler and Mussolini, only the Soviet Union came to its aid. Of course, Stalin did not do so out of any idealism or sentiment. The case was rather that, threatened by expansionist Germany, he was hoping like his Czarist predecessors to limit the threat by seeking an encircling alliance with France. He feared rightly that, if Franco won the war with the help of Hitler, France would crumble. Accordingly, **Stalin** set out to give sufficient aid to the Republic to keep it alive while preventing the revolutionary elements from justifying the conservative decision-makers in London in supporting the Axis in an anti-Bolshevik crusade. Without Russian arms and the International Brigades, Madrid would probably have fallen in November 1936, and Franco **would have** been victorious months before the anarchists and Trotskyists of Barcelona became an issue.

The underlying assumption of both the book and the film that it was the Stalinist repression that led to Franco's victory was later powerfully demolished by Orwell himself in his 1942 essay, 'Looking Back on the Spanish War':

The hatred which the Spanish Republic excited in millionaires, dukes, cardinals, play-boys, Blimps and what not would in itself be enough to show one how the land lay. In essence it was a class war. If it had been won, the cause of the common people everywhere would have been

strengthened. It was lost, and the dividend-drawers all over the world rubbed their hands. That was the real issue; all else was froth on its surface. [...] The outcome of the Spanish war was settled in London, Paris, Rome, Berlin—at any rate not in Spain. After the summer of 1937 those with eyes in their heads realised that the Government could not win the war unless there was some profound change in the international set-up. [...] The Trotskyist thesis that the war could have been won if the revolution had not been sabotaged was probably false. To nationalise factories, demolish churches, and issue revolutionary manifestos would not have made the armies more efficient. The Fascists won because they were the stronger; they had modern arms and the others hadn't. No political strategy could offset that.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that, even before the 1942 essay, indeed by the time that the book *itself* was published, Orwell had significantly modified the opinions expressed therein. However, when he died in January 1950, the initial print-run of 1,500 copies of *Homage to Catalonia* had still not sold out. According

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24 Orwell, 'Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War', written in 1942, was first published in a truncated form in *New Road* (June 1943). **[Is this a magazine? Please clarify.] YES, a magazine. See Peter Davison, editor, *Orwell in Spain* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 343–64; for the publication history, pp. 343–44; and for the quotation, pp. 357–58. [Please clarify. Are you referring here to the book by Davison published by Penguin in 2001? If so, a full reference will need to be given here.] YES & YES.**

to Peter Davison, the meticulous editor of **Orwell's** papers, Orwell had entertained hopes of there being a revised second edition. The first step towards a corrected text was taken in the summer of 1938 in his correspondence with Yvonne Davet, the translator of the French edition, eventually published with the corrections in 1955. As Davison explains, before he died Orwell both 'left notes for his Literary Executor indicating what he wanted changed' and also sent an annotated copy of the book to Roger Senhouse, a **director** of his **p**ublishers, Secker & Warburg. 'Senhouse, unfortunately, disregarded Orwell's requests and the Uniform Edition merely reprinted the 1938 text (with additional errors). The most obvious of these **[errors]** was the removal of Chapters V and XI from the body of the book, transferring them as appendixes to the end of the book, where Orwell considered it was more appropriate to place historical and political discussion of what otherwise was a personal account of his experiences'. These **requested** amendments did not appear until the edition prepared by Davison **himself** in 1986. The changes made there, in line with Orwell's notes—the relocation of the two chapters and the correction of several small factual errors, such as the confusion between the pro-Franco Civil Guards and the Republican Assault Guards—do little to bring the text into line with the views expressed in many letters and articles written after the book was completed. The **false** impression is left that the fiercely anti-Communist Orwell of the Cold War was happy to leave *Homage to Catalonia* largely as



it was despite knowing that his book's interpretation of the position of the Spanish Republic was mistaken.<sup>25</sup>

It was to Orwell's credit that, in 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', he could reach a conclusion that reflects his conversations in London with Dr Negrín. In 1937, his interpretative views were based on ignorance. An illustrative example is provided by his numerous references in *Homage to Catalonia* to Lérida, 'the chief stronghold of the POUM' where, after he was wounded, he was hospitalized and later, when seeking his discharge papers, he spent some time virtually as a tourist (*Homage to Catalonia*, 173, 202–05, 218). What he does not mention is that Lérida suffered horrific atrocities at the hands of both the local POUM and the anarchist columns from Barcelona. Uncontrolled terror was the norm for a brief period with dozens of civilians, army officers, Civil Guards, priests and novices shot. As the columns of

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25 Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Davison, XI, 133–35; Davison, *Orwell in Spain*, 28–30. Davison's revised edition appears in *Orwell in Spain*, 31–215. *[Please clarify this source – see our query above in FN 24. Your meaning is not clear. Is Davison's work, 'Orwell in Spain', not a book about Orwell written by Davison, but a collection of Orwell's works edited by Davison, and including the revised version of 'Homage to Catalonia'? We are left very uncertain of your meaning here.]* *Facing Unpleasant Facts* contains all of Orwell's occasional writings between 1937 and 1939. *Orwell in Spain* contains all of his writings on Spain, including the revised edition of *Homage to Catalonia*. They go as far as 1949 but do not include 'Inside the Whale'.

anarchists from Barcelona passed through the province of L rida *en route* to Arag n in the early months of the war, they executed anyone considered to be a fascist, which meant clergy and practising Catholics, landowners and merchants. Individual terrorism in L rida became collective terrorism when the POUM cooperated with the **Confederaci n Nacional de Trabajo (CNT)** and **the Uni n General de Trabajadores (UGT)** to create a Committee of Public Safety which did little to prevent either the burning of the majority of the city's churches or a wave of assassinations. The POUM commissar of public order, Josep Rod s Bley, collaborated with members of the **Federaci n Anarquista Ib rica (FAI)** in imposing a wave of criminality on the city. By the end of October, more than 250 people had been murdered.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere in

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26 See Frederic Escofet, *Al servei de Catalunya i de la Rep blica*, 2 vols (Paris: Edicions Catalanes, 1973), II, 376; Jaume Barrull Pelegr , *Viol ncia popular i just cia revolucion ria: el Tribunal Popular de Lleida (1936–1937)* (Lleida: Edicions de l'Univ. de Lleida, 1995), 19–33; *Viol ncia pol tica i ruptura social a Espanya 1936–1945*, coord. Jaume Barrull Pelegr  & Conxita Mir Curc  (Lleida: Edicions de l'Univ. de Lleida, 1994), 67–79 **[This is a collection of essays/chapters by various authors. Please confirm that you are referring to Chapter 3 which is: Jaume Barrull, 'El primer Tribunal Popular de Lleida, 1936', which has these same page references? This information needs to be added to clarify your reference.] YES**; Josep M. Sol  i Sabat  & Joan Villarroya i Font, *La repressi  a la rera guarda de Catalunya (1936–1939)*, 2 vols (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1989), I, 87–88, II, 467–84 **[NB. you originally gave this bibliographical information in full in a later FN. We have transferred the full reference here at its first mention and abbreviated subsequent references to it]**; Antonio Montero Moreno,

the province, the POUM takeover saw harvests left to rot and factories abandoned. Those who pointed out that the economy had to be organized were denounced as reactionaries. The POUM committee seemed most concerned with leading the good life in the requisitioned homes of the wealthy.<sup>27</sup>

Before the Barcelona events of May 1937 came to a head, social and political tensions had been mounting for some months. When Orwell arrived in Barcelona in late December 1936, the Generalitat was already clawing back its powers from the revolutionary groups who were responsible for economic chaos and many atrocities. Nevertheless, he was thrilled by what

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*Historia de la persecuci3n religiosa en Espa1a 1936–1939* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1961), 369–73 **[NB. you originally gave this bibliographical information in full in a later FN. We have transferred the full reference here at its first mention and abbreviated subsequent references to it]**; Joan Pons Garlandí, *Un republicà enmig de faistes*, a cura de Josep Poca Gaya, pròleg d’Heribert Barrera (Barcelona: Ediciones 62, 2008), 80–83, 89 **[NB. you originally gave this full bibliographical information in a later FN. We have transferred the full reference here at its first mention and abbreviated subsequent references to it]**; Francesc Viadiu i Vendrell, *Delegat d’Ordre Pùblic a ‘Lleida la roja’* (Barcelona: Rafael Dalmau, 1979), 29–40, 83–98.

27 Tomàs Pàmies & Teresa Pàmies, *Testament a Praga* (Barcelona: Edicions Destino, 1971), 128–31, 135–39; Solé i Sabaté & Villarroya i Font, *La repressió a la reraguarda de Catalunya*, II, 447–49.

he saw of the remnants of the upheaval of July 1936. He recorded his reaction in one of his most celebrated passages:

It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workmen. Every shop and café had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black. [...] And it was the aspect of the crowds that was the queerest thing of all. In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist. Except for a small number of women and foreigners there were no 'well-dressed' people at all. Practically everyone wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls, or some variant of the militia uniform. All this was queer and moving. There was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for. (*Homage to Catalonia, 2*)

Orwell's statement that no one dressed other than in workers' clothes was a wild exaggeration. For instance, newsreel coverage of the funeral of

Buenaventura Durruti on 22 November 1936 revealed that, among the tens of thousands of attendees, bare-headed men were in a minority and the majority were wearing jackets, ties and hats.<sup>28</sup> Now, in January 1937, he did not notice the extent to which the Generalitat was in conflict with the anarchists and the POUM, nor was he aware of the scale of gratuitous violence that had accompanied the social revolution. In contrast, the Austrian sociologist Franz Borkenau, having in August 1936 seen revolutionary Barcelona, in September noted in his diary: ‘Compared to August the town is empty and quiet; the revolutionary fever is withering.’ [...] In August it was dangerous to wear a hat: nobody minded doing so now’.<sup>29</sup>

Borkeu’s book was reviewed ecstatically by Orwell in July 1937 just as he was starting to write *Homage to Catalonia*, and he referred to it as ‘by a long way the ablest book that has yet appeared on the Spanish war’.<sup>30</sup> In fact, numerous sources confirm Borkeu’s account and suggest that

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28 The CNT-FAI Sindicato Único de Espectáculos Públicos produced a ten-minute film that can be seen at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1k4HzLpuF-0>> [*insert your date of last access*]. See the spoken introduction by Julián Casanova to the DVD collection *La Guerra filmada* (Madrid: Filmoteca Española, 2009).

29 Franz Borkeu, *The Spanish Cockpit* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937), 169, 174–76.

30 For Orwell’s review of Borkeu, see *Time and Tide*, 31 July 1937. On Borkeu’s time in Spain, see Jan Kurzke & Kate Mangan, ‘The Good Comrade’ (unpublished ms, Jan Kurzke Papers, Archives of the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam), 272–73, 303–07.

Orwell's account of the revolutionary atmosphere in January 1937 had an element of wishful thinking. What he saw of its absence in the late spring he blamed on the Generalitat and the Communists (*Homage to Catalonia*, 51–53). In fact, not all workers believed in the revolution. Indeed, the unions had been flooded by new members seeking merely to obscure their prior political views or simply to have access to collective kitchens, housing or hospital treatment or to get exemption from military service. CNT membership rose from approximately 175,000 members before the war to nearly one million. There were those who took advantage of the new situation to work less and take higher wages. The Generalitat had agreed to pay wages for days lost because of the revolution. However, what was meant as a temporary measure became permanent, and a number of factory councils continued to receive money for producing nothing. The pleas of union officials for more work and sacrifice were frequently ignored. It became common for utility bills not to be paid. On the streets, class distinctions were returning. In response to apathy and absenteeism, CNT leaders became more sympathetic to state control.<sup>31</sup>

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31 Albert Pérez Baró, *Treinta meses de colectivismo en Cataluña (1936–1939)* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1974), 45–47; Michael Seidman, *Workers against Work: Labour in Paris and Barcelona during the Popular Fronts* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991), 160–71; Stradling, *History and Legend*, 57–61 [*Please complete this page range.*]; Michael Seidman, 'The Unorwellian Barcelona', *European History Quarterly*, 20:2 (1990), 163–80.

The growing tension that Orwell encountered when he revisited Barcelona in April 1937 was not the consequence of Communist malevolence but had been dramatically exacerbated by the economic and social distress caused by the war. By December 1936, the population of Catalonia had been **augmented** by the arrival of 300,000 refugees. This constituted 10% of the population of the entire region and probably nearer 40% of the population of Barcelona itself. After the Republican defeat at Málaga in February 1937, the numbers soared even more. The strain of housing and feeding the new arrivals had embittered existing conflicts. Until December 1936, during which time the CNT had controlled the supply ministry, the anarchist solution had been to requisition food for which artificially low prices were imposed. This provoked shortages and inflation as farmers resisted by hoarding stocks and selling on the black market. In mid December, the Catalan Communist party the **PSUC** (Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya) which had **been** strongly supported by the rural and urban middle class, took over the supply portfolio and implemented a more market-based approach. This infuriated the anarchists but did not solve the problem. Catalonia also needed to import food but lacked the foreign exchange to buy it. There were bread riots in Barcelona, as well **as** armed clashes for control of food stores between the CNT-FAI and the PSUC.<sup>32</sup> The Catalan President

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32 **See** Josep María Bricall, *Política econòmica de la Generalitat (1936–1939): evolució i formes de la producció industrial* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1970), 93–104; Helen Graham, *The*

Lluís Companys was already on a collision course with the CNT. Determined to put an end to anarchist excesses, he had already re-established conventional police forces in October.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in the interests of the war effort, Companys was anxious to establish central control of industry.

Companys' stance on all these issues was strongly supported by the PSUC which, in the last months of 1936 was already campaigning for the removal of the POUM from the Catalan government. Like Companys, the PSUC leadership believed that the POUM's call for a revolutionary workers' front with the CNT was undermining the war effort. In addition, the POUM was a target of the Communists precisely because of views which while not strictly Trotskyist could easily be presented as such. On 12 December, the PSUC's secretary-general, Joan Comorera, had set off a cabinet crisis by calling for the removal of the POUM leader Andreu Nin from his post as Minister of Justice in the Generalitat. Comorera declared that the POUM, with its outspoken public criticisms of the trial and execution of the old Bolsheviks Kamenev and Zinoviev, was attacking the Republic's only

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*Spanish Republic at War 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2002), 254–56; Pelai Pagès i Blanch, *Cataluña en guerra y en revolución 1936–1939* (Sevilla: Ediciones Espuela de Plata, 2007), 189–94.

<sup>33</sup> Josep Antoni Pozo González, *La Catalunya antifeixista: el govern Tarradellas enfront de la crisi política i el conflicte social (setembre de 1936–abril de 1937)* (Barcelona: Edicions Dau, 2012), 153–72; François Godicheau, *La Guerre d'Espagne: république et révolution en Catalogne (1936–1939)* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), 138–45.



powerful ally, the Soviet Union, and thus was effectively guilty of treachery.<sup>34</sup> The Russian Consul General in Barcelona, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, told Companys that continued Soviet aid required that obstacles to a unified war effort be removed. With arms deliveries imminent and a food crisis looming, Companys agreed and Nin was removed in the cabinet re-shuffle of 16 December.<sup>35</sup> Companys put Comorera in charge of supply as the first step towards a return to the free market. It was only a matter of time before outright conflict would break out between the CNT committees and the POUM on the one hand and Companys's own party, the left-liberal Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, and the PSUC on the other.<sup>36</sup>

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34 Miquel Caminal, *Joan Comorera*, 2 vols (Barcelona: Editorial Empúries, 1984), II, *Guerra i revolució (1936–1939)*, 62–72.

35 See Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 411 (on the basis of an interview with Miguel Serra Pàmies of the PSUC leadership). See also David, T. Cattell, *Communism and the Spanish Civil War* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1955), 109; Rudolf Rocker, *Extranjeros en España*, trad. Helmut Rüdiger (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imán, 1938), 91.

36 On the social origins of the conflict in Barcelona, see Helen Graham, ‘“Against the State”: A Genealogy of the Barcelona May Days (1937)’, *European History Quarterly*, 29:4 (1999), 485–542.

Encouraged by Antonov-Ovseenko, the PSUC denounced the POUM as ‘fascist spies’ and ‘Trotskyist agents’ and called for its extermination.<sup>37</sup> However, hostility to the anti-Stalinist leftists was not just about Russian paranoia. There was a growing conviction among Republicans, Socialists, Communists and numerous foreign observers that the Catalan anarchists were not fully committed to the war effort. Elements of the CNT were importing and hoarding weapons in Barcelona against the day when they could make their revolution.<sup>38</sup> In mid March, several hundred anarchists who had opposed the militarization of the militias abandoned the front at Gelsa (Zaragoza) and took their weapons to the Catalan capital. Inspired by the extremist Catalan separatist Jaume Badius Mir, they opposed the CNT leadership’s participation in the central government and aimed to create a revolutionary vanguard. On 17 March, they formed the group known as ‘the Friends of Durruti’ and within a matter of weeks had recruited five thousand CNT members. Even the anarchist Minister of Justice, Juan García Oliver, considered Badius to be **out of his mind**. Orwell blithely presents the group

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37 See Ángel Viñas, *El escudo de la República: el oro de España, la apuesta soviética y los hechos de mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2007), 488–93; Russian intelligence reports reproduced in *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, ed. Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck & Grigory Sevostianov (New Haven: Yale U. P., 2001), 131–33, 178–84.

38 See Josep Sánchez Cervelló, *¿Por qué hemos sido derrotados? Las divergencias republicanas y otras cuestiones* (Barcelona: Flor del Viento, 2006), 119–32.

as tiny and as ‘bitterly hostile’ to the POUM despite the fact that the new organization had been warmly welcomed by Andreu Nin.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, after the fall of Málaga, the Russians, and particularly the newly arrived Comintern delegate, ‘Boris Stepanov’, believed that there had been sabotage and treachery. Inevitably, this put the spotlight on the local ‘Trotskyists’, the POUM.

In using their influence to insist that ‘experiments in industry and especially among the peasantry’ be abandoned, the Russians were echoing a very real home-grown social opposition to POUM and CNT policies especially among the smallholders who supported the PSUC. Given the POUM’s subversive criticisms of the Republic’s war effort, and their militia’s deployment on a less important front, it was almost inevitable that their units were starved of arms. Orwell and others complained that POUM units had to make do with tattered uniforms, bad equipment and inadequate supplies of food and ammunition. However, such complaints were repeated on far more active fronts than the one Orwell knew, and were the

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39 See Agustín Guillamón, *The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939*, trans. Paul Sharkey (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996), 22–45, 57–58; Agustín Guillamón, *Barricadas en Barcelona. La CNT de la victoria de julio de 1936 a la necesaria derrota de mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Ediciones Espartaco Internacional, 2007), 139–48; Juan García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos: el anarcosindicalismo —en la calle, —en el Comité de Milicias, —en el gobierno, —en el exilio* (Barcelona: Ruedo Ibérico, 1978), 420, 443. See Orwell, on the Friends of Durruti, *Homage to Catalonia*, 163, 166, 181.

consequence of actual shortages rather than political discrimination. Moreover, he commented approvingly that in Barcelona ‘the workers had weapons in their hands, and at this stage they refrained from giving them up. (Even a year later it was computed that the Anarcho-Syndicalists in Catalonia possessed 30,000 rifles.)’ He later admitted that, after the May events, ‘[h]uge seizures of arms were being made from C.N.T. strongholds, though I have no doubt a good many escaped seizure’ (*Homage to Catalonia*, 51, 154). Orwell made the sweeping accusation in August 1937 that ‘a government which sends boys of fifteen to the front with rifles forty years old and keeps the biggest men and the newest weapons in the rear is manifestly more afraid of the revolution than of the fascists’. A similar view was expressed by Ricardo Sanz, leader of the Durruti Column after November 1936.<sup>40</sup> However, Diego Abad de Santillán, a leading anarchist intellectual and CNT Minister of the Economy in the Generalitat wrote in 1940 that, to the fury of Buenaventura Durruti himself, the revolutionary groups had 60,000 rifles in Barcelona, twice the number in the hands of the columns on

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40 See George Orwell, ‘Eye-witness in Barcelona’, *Controversy* (August 1937), reprinted in *Orwell in Spain*, 234–41 (p. 238) *[Please clarify this source – see our query above]*; Ricardo Sanz, *Los que fuimos a Madrid: Columna Durruti 26 División* (Toulouse: Imprimerie Dulaurier, 1969), 151. See also Stradling, *History and Legend*, 59–60.

the Aragón front. They refused either to give them up or to go to the front themselves to fight.<sup>41</sup>

Inevitably, given his lowly position in a POUM militia, Orwell was not seeing the bigger picture in terms of food supplies, the war effort and the international situation. In *Homage to Catalonia* he makes a number of naïve and, for subsequent readers, misleading comments. In particular, while only too ready to criticize the PSUC, he has a particularly rosy-eyed view of the anarchists in general that prevents him from seeing the damaging consequences of the actions of militant groups such as the Friends of Durruti. He seems unaware that a substantial part of the CNT leadership, having accepted participation in the Republican government in November 1936, was ever more inclined to accept the need for the prioritization of the war effort. Nevertheless, he presents resistance to the loss of revolutionary power as the majority view of anarchists and POUMistas at rank-and-file level, especially in Barcelona.

Orwell denigrates the Generalitat's efforts to claw back its powers from the revolutionary unions without seeing them in the context of the international reaction. Even less does he see them in the context of the economic and social dislocation imposed by the war. In parallel with the

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41 Diego Abad de Santillán, *Por que perdimos la guerra: una contribución a la historia de la tragedia española*, 2ª ed. (Madrid: G. del Toro, 1975), 90–91, 179–80; Bolloren, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*, 865–66.

conflict over food shortages and collectivization, other violence was generated as the forces of order tried to restrain the roughly seven hundred ‘control and security teams’ known as *Patrulles de Control* that had been created in the early days of the war. Under the leadership of the FAI zealot, Aurelio Fernández Sánchez, their armed members were manned by a mixture of militants committed to the elimination of the old bourgeois order and some recently released common criminals. In the main, they acted arbitrarily, searching and often looting houses, arresting people denounced as right wing and often killing them. As a result, by early August 1936, they had committed many crimes and over five hundred civilians had been murdered in Barcelona.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps unaware of this, Orwell saw the patrols as a

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42 See García Oliver, *El eco de los pasos*, 181–82, 209–12, 231–33; Abad de Santillán, *Por que perdimos la guerra*, 80–81, 93; Pons Garlandí, *Un republicà enmig de faistes*, ed. Poca Gaya, 145; Francisco Lacruz, *El alzamiento, la revolución y el terror en Barcelona* (Barcelona: Librería Aysel, 1943), 118–21, 130–31; Solé i Sabaté & Villarroya i Font, *La repressió a la reraguarda de Catalunya*, I, 94–100; Gregorio Rodríguez Fernández, *El hábito y la cruz: religiosas asesinadas en la guerra civil española* (Madrid: EDIBESA, 2006), 298–311; Gutiérrez Latorre, *La República del crimen*, 36–37, 44–47 **[You have not cited this work previously. Is it: Francisco Gutiérrez Latorre, *La República del crimen: Cataluña, prisionera 1936–1939* (Barcelona: Editorial Mare Nostrum, 1989)?]**; Joan Villarroya i Font, *Revolució i guerra civil a Badalona 1936–1939* (Badalona: Mascaró de Proa, 1986), 33–38; Josep M. Cuyàs Tolosa, *Diari de guerra: Badalona, 1936–1939*, 2 vols (Badalona: Museu de Badalona, 2006), I, 144, 206, 249 & II, 12–14, 37–38, 57, 82, 353; Solé & Villarroya, *La repressió a la reraguarda de Catalunya*, I, 8, 72–78 **[NB. You have already cited this same**

significant revolutionary achievement: ‘Along with the collectivization of industry and transport there was an attempt to set up the rough beginnings of a workers’ government by means of local committees, workers’ patrols to replace the old pro-capitalist police forces, workers’ militias based on the trade unions, and so forth’ (*Homage to Catalonia*, 51, 57). After more than thirty members of the National Republican Guard (ex-Civil Guard) were killed, at the beginning of March, the Generalitat dissolved the CNT-controlled defence committee and assumed the power to dissolve all local police and militia committees. The Assault Guards and National Republican Guards were merged into a single Catalan police corps whose officers were not permitted membership of any political party or trade union. Ten days later, the central Republican government ordered all worker organizations, committees, patrols and individual workers to hand over their weapons. The

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*work above – see lines 4-5 of this footnote. Combine these references into one?];* Toni Orensanz, *L’Òmnibus de la mort: Parada Falset* (Badalona: Ara Llibres, 2008), 135–40, 266–69; Pons Garlandí, *Un republicà enmig de faistes*, ed. Poca Gaya, 88–92 [*NB. You have already cited this same work above – see lines 1-2 of this footnote. Combine?];* Jordi Piqué i Padró, *La crisi de la reraguarda: revolució i guerra civil a Tarragona (1936–1939)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 1998), 147–54; Isidre Cunill, *Los sicarios de la retaguardia (1936–1939). ‘In odium fidei’: la veritat del genocidio contra el clero en Catalunya* (Barcelona: Styria, 2010), 111–24.

process was supervised by the Minister of the Interior in the Generalitat, Artemi Aiguader of the Esquerra.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, along the French border, there were increasingly bloody clashes between the border police, the Carabineros, and CNT committees over control of customs posts that they had held since July 1936. Orwell describes this in utterly erroneous terms in a long section criticizing the determination of both the central government and the Generalitat to dismantle the revolution:

At Puigcerdà, on the French frontier, a band of Carabineros were sent to seize the Customs Office, previously controlled by Anarchists and Antonio Martín, a well-known Anarchist, was killed.

*(Homage to Catalonia, 000)*

Far from being the admirable revolutionary implied by Orwell, Antonio Martín Escudero, known as ‘el Cojo de Málaga’ was an FAI activist and smuggler who controlled the area of the French-Catalan Pyrenean frontier known as La Cerdanya. There, he and other elements of the FAI carried out

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<sup>43</sup> See Sánchez Cervelló, *¿Por qué hemos sido derrotados?*, 115–17; Ferran Gallego, *Barcelona, mayo de 1937: la crisis del antifascismo en Cataluña* (Barcelona: Debate, 2007), 340–49; Solé i Sabaté & Villarroya i Font, *La repressió a la rera guarda de Catalunya*, I, 108–09; Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War*, 261–62; Pierre Broué & Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, trans. Tony White (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 281–82.



acts of banditry, atrocities against the clergy and the systematic extortion of those who wanted to cross into France. Many were murdered after giving up their valuables. These frontier patrols also facilitated the smuggling of property stolen by the FAI patrols in Barcelona, sometimes for private benefit, sometimes for arms purchases.<sup>44</sup> At the end of April, matters came to a head in La Cerdanya. Control of the frontier was of considerable importance to the FAI leadership both for the unfettered export of stolen or requisitioned valuables and for the import of arms for use, not at the front but in the rearguard. Martín imposed levies on small towns in La Cerdanya and their mayors were determined to put an end to his reign of terror. Finally, in April, they began to get some support from Artemi Aiguader. Informed from Barcelona that forces were gathering against him at the small town of Bellver, Martín led a substantial militia assault on the town. However, the townspeople repelled the attackers and, in the shooting, Martín and some of his men were killed.<sup>45</sup> The incident was discussed in some

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44 See Pons Garlandí, *Un republicà enmig de faistes*, ed. Poca Gaya, 68–70, 86–89, 95; Solé i Sabaté & Villarroya i Font, *La repressió a la reraguarda de Catalunya*, I, 79–81; Rodríguez Fernández, *El hábito y la cruz*, 298–311; Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España 1936–1939*, 526–29.

45 See Joan Pons i Porta & Josep Maria Solé i Sabaté, *Anarquía y República a la Cerdanya (1936–1939): el ‘Cojo de Málaga’ i els fets de Bellver* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 1991), 33–46, 133–41, 154–76; Pons Garlandí, *Un republicà enmig de faistes*, ed. Poca Gaya, 86–89, 150–54; Carles Gerhard, *Comissari de la Generalitat a*

anarchist circles in terms that turned the bandit chieftain Martín into a martyr, not killed in Bellver by the town's defenders but murdered in Puigcerdà by forces of the Generalitat. This is presumably the basis of Orwell's **false** version.<sup>46</sup>

While Orwell was in Aragón, in Barcelona social tension was intensifying as a result of rationing, shortages, inflation, speculation and the growth of a black market. There were violent mass demonstrations by women against rising food and fuel prices. Tension was heightened from mid March when, in response to the Generalitat's dissolution of the Patrulles and its demand that all workers' organizations surrender their arms, the CNT withdrew from the Generalitat. One of the many consequent clashes saw, on 25 April, the assassination of Roldán Cortada, a member of the PSUC and secretary to Rafael Vidiella, Minister for Labour in the Generalitat. The level of hostilities persuaded the Generalitat to prohibit the traditional May Day

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*Montserrat (1936–1939)* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1982), 490–91; Manuel Benavides, *Guerra y revolución en Cataluña* (México D.F.: Ediciones Roca, 1978), 344, 351–62, 371.

46 **See** Pons i Porta & Solé i Sabaté, *Anarquía y República a la Cerdanya*, 142–54; José Peirats, *La CNT en la revolución española*, 2<sup>a</sup> ed., 3 vols (Paris: Ediciones Ruedo Ibérico, 1971), II, 138; César M. Lorenzo, *Los anarquistas españoles y el poder* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1972), 90, 215; Grandizo Munis, *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria (España 1930–1939)* (México D.F.: Editorial Lucha Obrera, 1948), 298.

rallies which was inevitably perceived as a provocation by the CNT rank-and-file.

In early May, the crisis exploded. The immediate catalyst was the raid on the CNT-controlled central telephone exchange in Barcelona ordered on 3 May by Aiguader and carried out by the belligerent police commissioner Eusebio Rodríguez Salas. Aiguader was following the instructions of Companys who had been humiliated to learn that a CNT operator had interrupted a telephone call by President Azaña. Clearly the State needed control of the main communication system. However, deteriorating conditions and police heavy-handedness over the previous three months, led to the outbreak of street-fighting: a small-scale civil war within the civil war. Companys underestimated the scale of CNT resistance to his efforts to reassert state power. Barricades went up in the centre of Barcelona. Supported by the POUM, elements of the CNT, especially the Friends of Durruti, confronted the forces of the Generalitat and the PSUC.<sup>47</sup>

The fighting exposed the central dilemma of the CNT. The anarchists could win in Barcelona and other Catalan cities only at the cost of bloodshed

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<sup>47</sup> See Caminal, *Joan Comorera*, 120 **[NB. This is a 2 volume work. Are you still referring to Volume II?] ACTUALLY IT IS A 3 VOLUME WORK (1984-1985). ALL THE REFERENCES ARE TO VOLUMEN II**; Gallego, *Barcelona, mayo de 1937*, 379, 413, 430–49; Viñas, *El escudo de la República*, 494–95; Benavides, *Guerra y revolución en Cataluña*, 370–75.

which would effectively lose the war for the Republic. They would have to recall their troops from Aragón and then fight both the central Republican government and the Francoists. Accordingly, with the approval of the anarchist ministers, the government in Valencia provided the decisive police reinforcements on 7 May, which finally decided the outcome. It did so only in return for the Generalitat's surrendering autonomous control of the Army of Catalonia and responsibility for public order. Several hundred members of the CNT and the POUM were arrested, although the need to get the war industries working again limited the scale of the repression. All this was happening as the Basque Country was falling to Franco.

The POUM was now exposed to Communist hostility. Andreu Nin and the rest of the POUM leadership had far exceeded the CNT in the militancy of their revolutionary pronouncements during the crisis. In victory, the Communists were anything but magnanimous. They would settle for nothing less than the complete destruction of the POUM. Orwell noted that 'there was a peculiar evil feeling in the air—an atmosphere of suspicion, fear, uncertainty and veiled hatred' (*Homage to Catalonia*, 209). Nin was murdered by a small squad of NKVD (*Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*) agents.<sup>48</sup> Immediately the fighting in Barcelona was over, the Communists demanded that the Prime Minister Francisco Largo Caballero

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48 Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: HarperCollins, 2012), 411—14.

dissolve the POUM and arrest its leadership. When Largo refused, he was forced to resign and he was replaced by Dr Juan Negrín. Henceforth, the remaining revolutionary achievements of the initial stages of the struggle were steadily dismantled. The war effort would follow the direction dictated by the Republicans and moderate Socialists who had taken over the key ministries in the government.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Orwell knew little of any of this neither during his time on the Aragón front nor during his brief sojourn in Barcelona. When he returned to England, he was exhausted. The American novelist John Dos Passos, who bumped into him in his hotel lobby as he was about to leave the Catalan capital, portrayed Orwell in his fictionalized account, as ‘a gangling Englishman with his arm in a sling. He was wearing a threadbare uniform. A squashed overseas cap on the side of his head nestled in abundant wavy black hair. His long face with deep lines in the cheeks, was distinguished by a pair of exceptionally fine dark eyes. They had a farsighted look, like a seaman’s eyes’.<sup>49</sup> Eighteen years later, in his factual account, Dos Passos wrote in almost identical terms: ‘His face had a sick drawn look. I suppose he was already suffering from the tuberculosis that later killed him. He seemed inexpressibly weary. We didn’t talk very long but I can remember the sense of assuagement, of relief from strain I felt at

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49 John Dos Passos, *Century’s Ebb: The Thirteenth Chronicle* (Boston: Gambit, 1975), 94–96, 98.

last to be talking to an honest man'.<sup>50</sup>

Orwell and his wife Eileen O'Shaughnessey left Barcelona in a hurry, believing that they were being pursued by the Republican security police although no explicit evidence of this has come to light. It is certainly the case that his celebrity together with his service with the POUM militia had attracted the attention of the NKVD. He was under surveillance by David Crook, an International Brigader who had arrived in Barcelona at the beginning of May. While convalescing in Madrid, after being wounded at the Battle of Jarama, Crook had been approached in March 1937 by the French Communist journalist Georges Soria. He was then vetted by the NKVD resident Lev Lazarevich Nikolsky (alias 'Alexander Mikhailovich Orlov') and Naum Markovich Belkin (alias 'Alexander Belyaev) the NKVD liaison/adviser to the Republican police and security agencies. ~~Crook was then taught surveillance techniques, allegedly by Ramón Mercader, the subsequent assassin of Trotsky in Mexico:~~ 'After reporting to the K.G.B., it was suggested that I [Crook] masquerade as a journalist. My real work was to spy on people whom the Stalinists called Trotskyists—including George Orwell'. To get close to them, he was ordered to stay at the Continental Hotel on the east side of the Ramblas, Barcelona's main boulevard. The Continental Hotel was the hangout of those Britons in Spain who were

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50 John Dos Passos, *The Theme Is Freedom* (New York: Dodd & Mead, 1956), 145.

associated with the Independent Labour Party. They included the ILP's official representative, John McNair, George Orwell, his wife Eileen Blair, and their friend, the Belgian engineer, Major Georges Kopp, portly and middle-aged.<sup>51</sup>

It has been claimed that Crook was taught surveillance techniques by Ramon Mercader, the subsequent assassin of Trotsky in Mexico.<sup>52</sup> However, other sources suggest that, at the time, Mercader was serving in a front-line unit.<sup>53</sup> In any case, it is highly unlikely that the twenty-three year-old Mercader would be in a position to train Crook. He had himself been recruited for the NKVD only in late 1936 or early 1937 by Naum Eitingon, the head of the agency's station in Barcelona. Eitingon, who used the alias Leonid Kotov, later masterminded the assassination of Trotsky. Mercader was not sent to

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51 See Boris Volodarsky, *Stalin's Agent: The Life and Death of Alexander Orlov* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2015), 216, 494; David Crook, *Hampstead Heath To Tian An Men: Autobiography*, <www.davidcrook.net> (Copyright © Crook Family 1991), 3–4, 89–90, 97–98 **[Insert the date of your last access to this website.]** The implausible claim about Mercader is from Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), 213. However, other sources suggest that, at the time, Mercader was serving in a front-line unit (see Luis Mercader & Germán Sánchez, *Ramón Mercader mi hermano: cincuenta años después* [Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1990], 46; Volodarsky, *Stalin's Agent*, 227).

<sup>52</sup> The implausible claim about Mercader was made by Mary-Kay Wilmers, *The Eitingons: A Twentieth-Century Story* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009) pp. 274-275.

<sup>53</sup> Luis Mercader & Germán Sánchez, *Ramón Mercader mi hermano. Cincuenta años después* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1990) p. 46; Volodarsky, *Stalin's Agent*, p. 227.

Moscow for his own training until the summer of 1937.<sup>54</sup> What is more likely is that Mercader and Crook simply met in Barcelona while undergoing preliminary training in surveillance techniques. One of Orwell's biographer's suggested that Mercader helped Crook learn Spanish.<sup>55</sup>

Crook took his orders from Eitingon's NKVD station and later admitted that Orwell and the other Independent Labour Party members were 'of special interest'. He became a familiar face at the ILP office in Barcelona and, during lunch breaks, would take files and have them photographed in the Soviet consulate, the NKVD station headquarters before returning the originals to the ILP office. In consequence, copies of the key files from the office were in the hands of his Russian handlers.<sup>56</sup>

A Spanish police report on Orwell and Eileen, possibly the work of Crook, was found in the archives of the Tribunal for Espionage and High Treason which had been created in June 1937 in order to regularize the policing and justice functions of the state.<sup>57</sup> Dated 13 July 1937, and written in extremely

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<sup>54</sup> Volodarsky, *Stalin's Agent*, pp. 361-2.

<sup>55</sup> Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Little, Brown, 2003) p. 213.

<sup>56</sup> According to Boris Volodarsky, 'Soviet Intelligence Services in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', unpublished PH.D thesis, London School of Economics,, 2010, p. 267, the much bigger operation to penetrate the POUM in spring 1937 was personally supervised by the NKVD resident Alexander Orlov and did not involve Eitingon. TNA: HW 15/10.

<sup>57</sup> See Javier Cervera Gil, *Contra el enemigo de la República—desde la ley: detener, juzgar y encarcelar en guerra* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2015), 175–76.



poor Spanish, the report declared that **Orwell and his wife** were 'liaison agents' between the ILP and the POUM. It appears to have been based on the letters and papers seized when the police searched Orwell's belongings left at the Maurín sanatorium on the outskirts of Barcelona where he had convalesced after being wounded and also in **the** Hotel Continental where his wife was staying.<sup>58</sup> The material seized during the search was later in the possession of David Crook when his 'arrest' was staged to give him credibility with POUM prisoners on whom he was actually spying. There are references to the material in a report on Crook in which he alleged that Eileen had an intimate relationship with Kopp ('Eileen Blair stand in intimen Beziehungen zu Kopp').<sup>59</sup> The file on the Blairs in the Moscow archives contains an inventory of the material taken.<sup>60</sup> When Eileen told her husband about the searches, during which their passports and cheque-book had fortunately not been found, he went into hiding on the streets of Barcelona with McNair and

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58 See Robert Low, 'Archives Show How Orwell's 1937 Held More Terrors than His 1984', *The Observer*, 5 November 1989. The document is reproduced in **Orwell**, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Davison, XI, 30–31. On the searches **made of Orwell's belongings**, see **Orwell**, *Homage to Catalonia*, 225–26, 239–40.

59 See file on David Crook in RGASPI (Russian State Archive of Social and Political History) Moscow, Files on International Brigades, 545/6/120, pp. 79–95. On the faked arrest, see Crook, *Hampstead Heath To Tian An Men: Autobiography*, 101.

60 Moscow Files on International Brigades, 545/6/107, pp. 22–23.

a young comrade called Stafford Cottman. The Republican security services were arresting militants and sympathizers of the party. During this period, Orwell undertook some delayed tourism and visited the church of the Sagrada Familia which he denounced as ‘one of the most hideous buildings in the world’. On 23 June 1937 [?], he, Eileen, McNair and Cottman boarded a train in Barcelona heading for the French border at Portbou. All four managed to get to France, reaching the frontier before any police list of foreign Trotskyist suspects.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the report in the Moscow files denouncing Orwell as a Trotskyist is dated 13 July 1937, three weeks after he reached France.<sup>62</sup>

Having safely crossed the frontier, Orwell and Eileen remained in the French fishing port of Banyuls to relax after the traumatic experiences of Barcelona. In the final pages of *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell wrote about the three days spent there. He and his wife ‘thought, talked, dreamed incessantly of Spain’. Although bitter about what he had seen, Orwell claimed to feel neither disillusionment nor cynicism:

It sounds like lunacy, but the thing that both of us wanted was to be back in Spain. [...] Curiously enough, the whole experience has left me with not less but more belief in the decency of human beings. And I hope the

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61 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 240–44; McNair, *Spanish Diary*, ed. Bateman, 24–27.

62 Moscow Files on International Brigades, 545/6/107, pp. 24–25.

account I have given is not too misleading. I believe that on such an issue as this no one is or can be completely truthful. It is difficult to be certain about anything except what you have seen with your own eyes and, consciously or unconsciously, everyone writes as a partisan. (*Homage to Catalonia*, 246–47)

There was never a sense that Orwell entirely abandoned his commitment to the Spanish Republic. Back in London, in July 1937, he wrote: ‘the International Brigade is in some sense fighting for all of us—a thin line of suffering and often ill-armed human beings standing between barbarism and at least comparative decency’.<sup>63</sup> On 27 April 1938, two days after *Homage to Catalonia* was published, he wrote to Cyril Connolly: ‘The game’s up, I’m afraid. I wish I were there. The ghastly thing is that if the war is lost, it will simply lead to an intensification of the policy that caused the Spanish Government to be let down, and before we know where we are we shall be in the middle of another war to save democracy’.<sup>64</sup>

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63 See Orwell, review of *The Spanish Cockpit* by Franz Borckenau and *Volunteer in Spain* by John Sommerfield, *Time and Tide*, 31 July 1937; reprinted in Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Davison, XI, 51–52.

64 Reprinted in Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Davison, XI, 145–46.

For all Orwell's commitment to revolution and democracy, there was evidence in some of his writing of disturbing prejudice. An example is his comment on seeing in the dining room of his hotel 'some families of well-to-do Spaniards who looked like Fascist sympathizers' (*Homage to Catalonia*, 143). Apart from ignorance of the importance placed by Spaniards of all classes on dressing as well as possible in public, **this comment** suggested that he was unaware that anyone even remotely suspected of being a fascist had been 'dealt with' by the Patrullas de Control. It also begged the question of what a fascist sympathizer looks like. Three months after his departure from Spain, Orwell received a letter from Nancy Cunard. She was writing on behalf of the *Left Review* to seek the reactions of writers to the Spanish conflict. Their responses were eventually published in December 1937 by Lawrence and Wishart as the pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*. In it, five wrote in favour of Franco, twelve were neutral and 127 declared in favour of the Republic. In a vitriolic reply to Nancy Cunard, Orwell demanded that she 'stop sending me this bloody rubbish' and stated: 'I am not one of your fashionable pansies like Auden and Spender'. He ended with a gratuitous reference to Nancy Cunard's family wealth:

no doubt you know something about the inner history of the war and have deliberately joined in the defence of 'democracy' (i.e. capitalism) racket in

order to aid in crushing the Spanish working class and thus indirectly defend your dirty little dividends.<sup>65</sup>

More sweepingly offensive was his comment:

Tens of thousands of individuals came to fight, but the tens of millions behind them remained apathetic. During the first year of the war the entire British public is thought to have subscribed to various ‘aid Spain’ funds about a quarter of a million pounds—probably less than half of what they spend in a single week on going to the pictures.

*(Homage to Catalonia, 72)*

He clearly knew nothing of the sacrifices being made by British workers and the unemployed to send food, medical supplies and ambulances to Spain or of the hospitality shown to the Basque children.<sup>66</sup> In many ways, money, food, ambulances, medical aid and the reception of Basque refugee children, humanitarian aid from the British public came nearer to two million pounds. In relative terms this remains one of the largest popular charitable sums raised in British history, with most of the money coming in small donations

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65 Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, ed. Davison, 66–68.

66 Hywel Francis, *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2012), 119–32; Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Aid Spain Movement in Britain 1936–39* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), 198–274; Alexander, ‘George Orwell and Spain’, 101.

from individuals and local organizations. Despite the depth of the depression, ordinary people did what they could to aid the Spanish Republic.<sup>67</sup>

Although Orwell may be accused of dishonesty and culpable ignorance in what he wrote, one accusation that is difficult to sustain is that in Spain Orwell was working for British intelligence. Robert Stradling commented: **It** may be noticed that exactly those elements of his (notional) CV which fitted Blair for leadership in the International Brigade equally qualified him for recruitment by the British Secret Services.<sup>68</sup> Those elements were an Eton education and service in the colonial police in Burma. However, the speculation rests largely on the statement by Peter Davison that a third party had told him that a British member of the SIM (~~Servicio de Inteligencia~~

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67 Emily Mason, 'Save Spain: British Support for the Spanish Republic within Civil Society in Britain, 1936–1939', PhD thesis (University of Essex, 2015), *passim* and pp. 1, 165; Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, 216; Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1991), 137–65; Linda Palfreeman, *¡Salud! British Volunteers in the Republican Medical Service during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Brighton/Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 6–7 and *passim*; Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1997), 93–113; Brian Shelmerdine, *British Representations of the Spanish Civil War* (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 2006), 149–51.

68 Stradling, 'The Spies **Who Loved Them**', 641, n. 12, 655; **Orwell**, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, ed. Davison, 36. **[Delete the reference to Davison here; transfer this reference into a separate footnote?]**

**Investigación Militar)** ‘whilst engaged in censoring letters in Spain for the SIM had read a number of Orwell’s letters. These, he said, were written in different colours and it was believed that Orwell was surreptitiously sending information to England that laid him open to charges of espionage’.<sup>69</sup> Any information that Orwell, believed to be a Trotskyist, was sending home would naturally seem suspect to Communist censors. The speculation is dismissed by Davison. The question might **rather** be asked if there was any link between Orwell’s **letters written in different** coloured pencils in Spain and his collaboration in 1949 with the semi-secret Foreign Office Information Research Department. For the IRD he compiled a list of prominent intellectuals whom he considered to be pro-Soviet fellow-travellers, a list containing some anti-Semitic and anti-homosexual comments.<sup>70</sup>

There are many reasons for suggesting that *Homage to Catalonia* should not be seen as the definitive interpretation of **the** Republican defeat in the Spanish Civil War. Alongside many examples of ignorance and error, there are also some significant omissions. Orwell seemed to have little awareness of, or even concern **about**, the savage Francoist repression. In a June 1938

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69 ***Separate footnote needed. Is this quotation from Orwell, Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939, in The Complete Works of George Orwell, ed. Davison, XI, 36?***

70 ***See The New York Times*, 29 July 1998; *The Guardian*, 10 July 2003; and Timothy Garton-Ash, ‘Orwell’s List’, *New York Review of Books*, 25 September 2003.**

review, he dismissed *Franco's Rule: Back to the Middle Ages*, a work issued anonymously in that year, as

simply an enormous list of atrocities committed in all the territories that Franco has over-run. There are long lists of people who have been shot, and such statements as that 23,000 were massacred in the province of Granada, etc., etc. Now, I do not say that these stories are untrue; obviously I have no means of judging, and at a guess I would say that some are true and some are not. And yet there is something that makes one very uneasy about the appearance of books of this kind. There is no doubt that atrocities happen, though when a war is over it is generally impossible to establish more than a few isolated cases. In the first few weeks of war, especially in a civil war, there are bound to be massacres of non-combatants, arson, looting and probably raping. If these things happen it is right that they should be recorded and denounced, but I am not so sure about the motives of people who are so enthralled by the subject that they will compile whole books of atrocity-stories.<sup>71</sup>

But the anonymous volume, *Franco's Rule: Back to the Middle Ages* (with a preface by 'S. R.'), was published by the pro-Communist publishers United Editorial Ltd, London, not because of any prurient motives. Nor did it consist

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<sup>71</sup> Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Davison, XI, 165–67.



of ‘simply an enormous list of atrocities’. Rather it was a collection of eye-witness accounts that have subsequently been validated by local research.

In a similar vein, in a review of Nancy Johnstone’s memoir *Hotel in Flight* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939) in December 1939, Orwell asked the frivolous question: ‘Did the mass of the Spanish people really feel that even the atrocious sufferings of the later part of the war were preferable to surrender—or did they continue to fight at least partly because the whole of left-wing opinion from Moscow to New York was driving them on?’<sup>72</sup> Just as he denigrated the British workers who gave money they could barely afford to support the Spanish Republic, here Orwell denigrated the millions of Spaniards who fought on in defence of the Republic that had given them so much.

For many thousands of people, *Homage to Catalonia* is the only book on the Spanish Civil War that they will ever read. So, it is not a question of demeaning Orwell but rather of raising awareness that the views expressed in his book are often wrong because they are based on insufficient information and prior prejudice. Orwell’s book gives the impression that the key events of the Spanish Civil War took place on the Aragón front and in

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72 Orwell, *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Davison, XI, 415–16.

Barcelona during the May days of 1937. As for the importance of the Aragón front, Orwell himself gave the game away:

And still nothing happened, nothing ever looked like happening. ‘When are we going to attack? Why don’t we attack?’ were the questions you heard night and day from Spaniard and Englishman alike.

*(Homage to Catalonia, 77)*

This was a view repeated by another volunteer on the Aragón front, John Cornford, who complained about boredom and inactivity in what he described as ‘a quiet sector of a quiet front’.<sup>73</sup>

The biggest weakness of *Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia* is the underlying notion that the crushing of revolution was behind the eventual defeat of the Spanish Republic. Orwell’s book, and even more so Loach’s film, make it too easy to forget that the Spanish Republic was defeated by Franco, Hitler, Mussolini, and the self-interest and pusillanimity of the British, French and American governments. That is not to forget that the rich eye-witness observations of Orwell’s book are immensely valuable as an historical source. The problem is rather that his judgements facilitated its later use as part of a Cold War narrative. His ignorance of the wider picture while in Spain was eminently forgivable, but less so was the omniscient tone of his book. Even

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<sup>73</sup> *John Cornford: A Memoir*, ed. Pat Sloan (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), 183, 195–209, 245.

less so was his apparent readiness to permit a later edition to be published without taking into account his various writings between 1937 and 1942 in which he acknowledged the need for a unified war effort in Spain. It is as if the Orwell of *Animal Farm*, 1984,<sup>74</sup> and of the notorious list he drew up of suspect fellow-travellers, thought that he might as well let *Homage to Catalonia* stand as another nail in the Communist coffin, despite the book's distortion of the Spanish situation.\*

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74 See George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1945), and his *1984* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949).

\* Disclosure Statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.