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## **Legitimacy by Proxy: searching for a usable past through the International Brigades in Spain's post-Franco democracy, 1975-2015**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 23 October 2011 marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the official creation of the International Brigades. To commemorate the 35,000 volunteers from over fifty countries who flocked to fight in the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish Friends of the International Brigade, alongside representatives of the Madrid Complutense University, unveiled a monument outside one of the University's main buildings before a crowd of 400 people.<sup>1</sup> The site holds a special significance because here in November and December 1936 the Brigades helped beat off a Francoist attack on the capital that threatened a rapid defeat for the Second Republic.<sup>2</sup> In June 2013, however, a Madrid court ruled that the monument should be demolished. The decision came after a series of cases launched by an enraged Spanish citizen who alleged that the University authorities had failed to obtain permission to erect the monument. He further argued there was nothing to celebrate about Brigades set up and run by history's largest genocidal killer: Joseph Stalin.<sup>3</sup>

The dispute forms just one episode in a series of conflicts that have placed the International Brigades at the centre of Spain's memory battles since Franco's death in November 1975. For the left, the Brigades offered an opportunity to forge a collective memory of the Brigaders as volunteers for liberty and to escape the accusation of Stalinism. By contrast, the right, which in good measure had emerged out of Francoist

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<sup>1</sup> El País, 3/11/2011.

<sup>2</sup> On the role of German and Italian volunteers in the early defence of Madrid, see: Gustav Regler, *The Owl of Minerva. The Autobiography of Gustav Regler*, London, 1959, 271-299.

<sup>3</sup> The Guardian, 5/06/2013.

circles, proved eager to demonstrate its democratic virtue by pointing to the heinous nature of others and by portraying the Brigades as creatures of Stalin and the firm enemies of liberty.<sup>4</sup>

To appreciate the role of the IBs in Spain's memory wars we need to understand the domestic political context which shaped the struggle between left and right for political space in the period after Franco's death in 1975. This period bore witness to a hazardous transition to democracy with key milestones such as the electoral law of March 1977. This favoured larger parties and took the ground from under the more than 100 parties in existence in Spain. A conservative party, the Alianza Popular, emerged in October 1976 and would eventually become one of Spain's main governing parties. It was rebranded as the Popular Party (PP) in 1989. A centre party emerged too, the UCD, in 1977.<sup>5</sup> Other decisive moments included the first post-Franco general election on 15 June 1977 and the passing of a constitution on 31 October 1978.<sup>6</sup> These changes paved the way for the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) to hold power between 1982-1996 and 2004-2011. While the PP formed the administration from 1996-2004 and from 2011 to the present [2015].

In relation to the International Brigades, however, the most crucial point in the transition came in April 1977 with the legalisation of the Communist Party (PCE). For decades the Franco regime had portrayed the PCE as a pawn of the Soviet Union. Partly to overcome this problem, and to gain legal status, the PCE stressed its ties

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<sup>4</sup> On the origins of the modern right in Francoism, see: Richard Gunther, Giacomo Sani and Goldie Shabad, *Spain after Franco. The Making of a Competitive Party System*, Berkeley, 1988, 79.

<sup>5</sup> Gunther, Giacomo and Shabad, *Spain After Franco*, 78-115.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Preston, *The Triumph of Democracy in Spain*, London, 1986, 91-139.

with the Eurocommunist parties of western Europe while condemning the USSR and its eastern protégés.<sup>7</sup> As shown below, it also invoked the memory of British and Italian Brigaders as defenders of democracy against fascism in the Civil War while exploiting the political and symbolic capital of Brigaders to eke out political space. To maintain its credibility, however, the PCE maintained former Brigaders who had become prominent in eastern Europe at a discrete distance.

The left also found that it could use the Brigades as a proxy to celebrate Spaniards who had fought in the Civil War as fighters for democracy. This helped the PCE win legitimacy at a time when discussing the conflict had become taboo because of a pervasive sense in Spanish society that both sides in the conflict had pushed the country into the abyss and had left nothing worth remembering. Over time, however, left politics shifted from a focus on ideology towards a stress on identity politics and ethical issues.<sup>8</sup> In this climate, commemoration of the IBs moved from celebrating living Brigaders as resisters to Fascism towards memorial work for deceased Brigaders remembered as victims of Fascism. This mirrored a profound shift in Spanish memory politics and the rise of activists exhuming the bodies of Spaniards murdered by the Francoists. Accordingly, the IBs gained their prominence not from being proxies for Spaniards but by claiming a similar status to Spanish victims of Francoism.

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<sup>7</sup> Eusebio Mujal-León, *Communism and Political Change in Spain*, Blomington, 1983, 83-89.

<sup>8</sup> On the broad move across the European left away from class politics and ideology and towards identity politics, see: Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*, Oxford, 2002, 472-490.

This shows we need to understand the role of the IBs in the context of the battle in Spain for identity and a useable past. Studying the Brigades through these prisms breaks new ground both in terms of scholarship on efforts in Spain to come to terms with its recent past and the literature on the IBs.<sup>9</sup> To date, this second body of literature has focused either upon the experiences of national contingents of volunteers or the memory of the IBs in their home countries. Equally, historians have explored the place of the volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, rather than the role of the memory of the Brigades in Spain.<sup>10</sup>

### **(1) 1975- June 1977 The Symbolic Power of International Brigade Veterans as Agents of Democracy**

From the death of Francisco Franco on 20 November 1975 until the legalisation of the PCE on 9 April 1977, Spanish society lived through seventeen interminable months of fear and hope. Hope blossomed from the success of the anti-Francoist opposition and the workers' movement in breaking the hegemony of the regime; fear sprang from the anti-Francoist opposition's relative weakness that made it incapable of sweeping away the old Francoist guard and imposing democracy. Equally, however, astute representatives of the old regime recognised that although they enjoyed the support of the forces of law and order, the demands for change had grown irresistible. As a result, Spanish politics became caught in an 'equilibrium of weakness'.<sup>11</sup> The inability

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<sup>9</sup> On Spain's more recent memory wars, see: Paloma Aguilar, *Memoria y olvido de la guerra civil española*, Madrid, 1996; Francisco Sevillano Calero, 'La construcción de la memoria y el olvido en la España democrática.' *Ayer*, 52, (2003), 297-319.

<sup>10</sup> Examples include Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939*, Abersychan, 2007. Manuel Requena y Matilde Eiroa, et al, *Al lado del gobierno republicano: los brigadistas de la Europa del Este en la Guerra civil española*, Cuenca 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, 'Entre la pulga y el león: la Transición sangrienta', *Tiempo de Historia*, 72 (1980), 110-121.

of either the regime or the opposition to impose their views was accompanied by a growth both in terrorist violence and police repression. This combination of factors made the transition to democracy a delicate and shaky process.<sup>12</sup> Between 1975 and the elections of June 1977, the IBs would play a crucial role as an international agent pressing for democratisation.

For left-wing Spanish movements, and particularly the PCE, the challenge lay in gaining legal status and to do this they needed to demonstrate their commitment to peaceful and democratic methods. In turn, this required the PCE to show that it rejected Stalinism.<sup>13</sup> In this context, opposition organisations sought to bolster their strength by cultivating support in other European countries. The tactic proved particularly effective because the Francoist authorities had been attempting for some time to negotiate Spain's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC). Aware of this, the anti-Francoist opposition asked its western European sister movements, and particularly those Socialist parties in office, to continue insisting that Spain could not enter the ECC until a full democratic system was in place.<sup>14</sup>

Historians have shown the significant role played by the German Social Democrats in bolstering the Spanish Socialist Party in the transition to democracy.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, between 1964 and 1987 the Social Democrats were led by Willy Brandt who had spent the period between February and June 1937 in Spain, working as journalist for

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<sup>12</sup> Important studies include: José María Maravall, *La política de la transición*, Madrid, 1982; and Pilar Ortuño Anaya, *Los socialistas europeos y la transición española*, Madrid, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Preston, *The Last Stalinist. The Life of Santiago Carrillo*, London, 2014, 311.

<sup>14</sup> Juan Carlos Pereira, 'El factor internacional en la Transición española: la influencia del contexto internacional y el papel de las potencias centrales', *Studia Historica. Historia Contemporánea*, 22 (2004), 185-224.

<sup>15</sup> Antonio Muñoz Sánchez, *El amigo alemán. El SPD y el PSOE de la dictadura a la democracia*, Madrid, 2012

the youth wing of the Norwegian Labour Party and maintaining contacts with German exiles and fellow members of the SPD splinter group the SAP. Brandt, however, had never joined the International Brigades.<sup>16</sup>

Less well known is the pivotal role played by IB veterans from the UK, the US and Italy in helping the Spanish opposition, and particularly the PCE, in its struggle. In this process veterans from the German Democratic Republic and other countries were conspicuous by their absence from the Spanish public sphere. An important part of the explanation for this lies in the adoption of Euro-Communism by the PCE under its leader Santiago Carrillo.<sup>17</sup> Eurocommunism brought together Communist parties in western Europe, and particularly those in France, Italy and Spain, under the banner of pluralism, rights and a strong denunciation of Stalinism. Carrillo stood out for his particularly vehement criticisms of the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup> Unsurprisingly, Carrillo's tactics led to tensions with Moscow. In early November 1977, for instance, the Soviet authorities prevented Carrillo from speaking at a set of commemorations in Moscow marking the anniversary of the 1917 revolution. The Soviets were still stinging from his book *Eurocommunism and the State* which had strongly criticised Soviet dictatorship.<sup>19</sup>

Given Carrillo's tactics in the transition, the governors of the German Democratic Republic, who had constructed a cult of the International Brigades, had an extremely

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<sup>16</sup> Walther L. Bernecker, 'Willy Brandt y la guerra civil española', *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, 29, septiembre-octubre, (1982), 7-25

<sup>17</sup> Carrillo's tract on Euro-Communism was translated into English by the Nan Green, the widow of an IB member, George Green, killed in 1938. Green later played a prominent role in British IB organisations. Santiago Carrillo, *Eurocommunism and the State*, London, 1977. On Nan Green see Paul Preston, *Doves of War*, London, 2002. Prominent East German leaders did, on occasion, commemorate IB heroes in Spain. *ABC*, 5 and 6/10/1988.

<sup>18</sup> An overview in Gino Bianco, 'Socialdemocracia y eurocomunismo', *Nueva Sociedad*, 35 marzo-abril 1978, 137-158 and the dossier (special issue) in *Historia del Presente*, 18-II (2011).

<sup>19</sup> *El País*, 4/11/1977.

low profile in Spain.<sup>20</sup> British and Italian veterans of the IBs, however, were invoked as symbols of the defence of democracy against fascism that was claimed to have sat at the heart of the Spanish Civil War.<sup>21</sup> This reading of the past, and the prominent political positions some veterans occupied in the 1970s, gave them real weight in the battle to build a new pluralist democratic system.

Jack Jones played a leading role in forging a relationship between the British labour movement and the anti-Francoist opposition in Spain. An IB veteran, Jones held the posts of Secretary General of the Transport and General Workers' Union and chairman of the Trade Union Congress International Committee. These two offices, alongside his close relationship with leaders of the governing Labour Party, gave him powerful influence and he would exploit his authority as a veteran in the anti-Fascist conflict to strengthen the long-suppressed Spanish Socialist and Communist-leaning opposition. An example of this came on 29 September 1975 at the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool. Two days earlier, the Franco regime had executed five activists from the armed movements of ETA (a Basque movement for independence) and the FRAP (the Revolutionary Patriotic Anti-Fascist Front). Both Jones and the Labour Foreign Secretary (and future Prime Minister) James Callaghan condemned the executions and signalled that the British government would do all it could to back those searching for peaceful reform in Spain.<sup>22</sup> Six weeks later, Franco died and expectations grew in Spain that political change was on its way. In an effort to strengthen the movement for change, in February 1975 Jones organised the first international congress to raise the profile of Spain's clandestine unions and opposition

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<sup>20</sup> On the cult of the IBs in the German Democratic Republic, see: Alan Krammer, 'The Cult of the Spanish Civil War in East Germany', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39, 4, (2004), pp. 531-560.

<sup>21</sup> Dolores Ibaruri, *They Shall Not Pass. The Autobiography of La Passionaria*, No Place, 1976, 236.

<sup>22</sup> Jim Callaghan, *Challenges and Opportunities for British Foreign Policy*, London, 1975, 15.

movement. Alongside the Welsh IB veteran Will Paynter, Jones hosted a meeting with fourteen Spanish opposition figures including Marcelino Camacho, the leader of the country's largest trade union, Comisiones Obreras.<sup>23</sup>

To maintain the pressure, the Spanish socialist trade union, the UGT, invited Jones and a TUC delegation to visit Spain in November 1976. When Jones arrived in the country he became the first IB veteran to return to Spain in an official capacity since the end of the Civil War. During his stay, Jones made it clear that he had come with a clear political objective in mind. Speaking to a Spanish journalist he noted that he had been told that his delegation's visit could help with the restoration of democracy and he was pleased to be able to help.<sup>24</sup> This goes some way towards explaining why Jones and a delegation from the British Trade Unions Congress (TUC) met with Nicolás Redondo, leader of the UGT, Felipe González, head of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and with Marcelino Camacho. He also held talks with members of the Basque nationalist union, the STV, and representatives of the Christian Socialist trade union the USO. The delegation also linked the struggle to consolidate democracy with the anti-Fascist battles of the Civil War through a visit to Gandesa, a small town in Catalonia which had sat at the site of the most intense fighting during the Battle of the Ebro. Significantly, Gandesa in the Republican imagination represented the heroism of the IBs and was where Jack Jones had fought and received a shot to the shoulder and shrapnel to the right arm.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> La Vanguardia, 14/02/1976.

<sup>24</sup> El País, 8/06/1976.

<sup>25</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, Harmondsworth, 1977, 840-844, 871. Richard Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors. The British in the Spanish Civil War and the Struggle against Fascism*, London, 2012, 332-334.

Pietro Nenni, cofounder and political commissar of the Italian Garibaldi Brigade and Luigi Longo, a commissar and later inspector general in the Brigades who participated in the defence of Madrid, stand out as the two most important Italian IB veterans who battled to strengthen the left-wing opposition after Franco's death. Both held important political posts: Nenni was the secretary general of the Italian Socialist Party and Longo held office as secretary general of the Italian Communist Party. In December 1975, a short time after Franco's death, Pietro Nenni set up the Italy-Spain Committee whose first demand was an amnesty for all political prisoners and exiles.<sup>26</sup> Composed of representatives from across the Italian political spectrum, from Communists to Christian Democrats, the Committee went on to offer solid support to the anti-Francoist opposition between 1975 and 1977.<sup>27</sup> The Italians' tactics matched the strategy followed by Carrillo perfectly: to work with moderates across the Spanish political spectrum to ensure a negotiated transition to democracy. As well as inviting the PCE to Rome, the Italians also hosted Joaquín Ruiz Jiménez of the Christian Democrats, Rafael Calvo Serer of the Independents and Txiki Benegas of the PSOE.<sup>28</sup>

The Italians, and Longo in particular, made an important contribution to one of the key moments of the transition to democracy: the legalisation of the Communist Party in April 1977. The PCE formed the largest of the anti-Francoist parties, but Franco's first successors proved wary of legalising the long-vilified party. This context allows us to understand the importance of the reception organised by Longo in Rome in December 1975 to mark the eightieth birthday of Dolores Ibárruri. As well as holding the presidency of the PCE, Ibárruri shone out as a symbol of the Brigades. In this regard her fame stemmed most of all from her moving speech given at the often-cited

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<sup>26</sup> La Vanguardia, 20/12/1975.

<sup>27</sup> El País, 28/01/1977.

<sup>28</sup> Santiago Carillo, Memorias, Barcelona, 2006, 760-773.

farewell to the IBs in 1938. In words that have gone down in posterity she told Brigaders ‘[Y]ou are legend. You are the heroic example of the solidarity and the universality of democracy. We will not forget you, and, when the olive tree of peace puts forth its leaves, entwined with the laurels of the Spanish Republic’s victory, come back! Come back to us and here you will find a homeland’.<sup>29</sup> Reviled by the right, in December 1975 the Italians gave her both political space as well as an aura of authority and legitimacy that in good measure revolved around her claim that the Brigades had defended democracy. The Italians also helped enhance the reputation of Santiago Carrillo, general secretary of the PCE, who in addition to attending the reception in Rome held meetings with leading lights within Italian politics. These included the general secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Enrico Berlinguer, a protégé of IB veteran Palmiro Togliatti, as well as Pietro Nenni and the former president of Italy, Giuseppe Sagarat.<sup>30</sup>

Nenni’s meetings reflected the decisive role the Italian Socialists played in the transition process. Between 24 and 26 February 1976, shortly after the event organised by Jack Jones in London, the Italy-Spain Committee held a series of meetings that helped strengthen the Spanish opposition. A Spanish Delegation, made up of the main opposition leaders (such as Felipe González and Santiago Carrillo) travelled to Italy and met with the heads of all the major Italian democratic parties. The Spaniards also held talks with officials from the Italian National Trade Union Federation, with the presidents of both chambers of the Italian parliament and with the under-secretary of Foreign Affairs. After three days of meetings in cities such as

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<sup>29</sup> Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Cable ‘Spanish Communist Party Leader Carrillo paid visit to Rome’: From US Embassy in Rome to Secretary State. 2/011976 (Wikileaks) [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1976ROME00061\\_b.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1976ROME00061_b.html) [accessed on 24/03/2015]

Rome, Naples and Turin, the Italy-Spain Committee issued a statement demanding democracy in Spain and pledging to mobilise in support of the Spanish opposition.<sup>31</sup>

One month later, Nenni made a personal visit to the Spanish embassy in Rome, appealing once more for an amnesty for political prisoners.<sup>32</sup>

Nenni's most significant act came in Madrid in December 1976 when he attended the Spanish Socialist Party's 27th Conference. At this point, the PSOE was still an illegal organisation, even if in practice the authorities turned a blind eye to many of its activities. In this uncertain context, the PSOE held its first conference in Spain for four decades. Making the most of the opportunity, the Socialist International supported the conference by sending some of Europe's outstanding Social Democrat leaders including Willy Brandt and François Mitterrand. But the IB veteran Pietro Nenni made the biggest impact. Following on from Jack Jones, Nenni was only the second IB veteran to set foot officially in Spain after the Civil War. As he declared, he had come to Madrid to help those pressing for democracy as much 'as he could'.<sup>33</sup>

Nenni also revealed his sensitivity to charges being levelled by the right that IB veterans were seeking to rekindle the flames of the Spanish Civil War. As he stated in an interview, 'I am aware that Spanish public opinion is fearful that internal conflict can lead to a civil war.'<sup>34</sup> He was referring to the 'Pact of Silence'. This formed an unwritten agreement between the political elite not to use the traumatic Civil War past for political purposes.

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<sup>31</sup> Cable 'Rome meeting of Spanish opposition': From US Embassy in Rome to Secretary State. 10/03/1976 (Wikileaks) [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1976ROME03946\\_b.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1976ROME03946_b.html) [accessed on 24/03/2015]; ABC (a right-wing Spanish newspaper), 27/02/1976.

<sup>32</sup> ABC, 27/03/1976.

<sup>33</sup> La Vanguardia, 3/12/1976.

<sup>34</sup> La Vanguardia, 3/12/1976.

The Franco regime sowed the seeds of the ‘Pact of Silence’ through its unceasing refrain that the Spanish population could be divided into ‘true’ and ‘anti-Spaniards’. From the 1950s a group of dissidents within the regime such as the Catholic Joaquín Ruiz Giménez railed against the Francoist line and argued that those from the defeated side in the Civil War also formed part of the nation. In the 1960s, Ruiz Giménez founded the influential journal *Cuadernos para el Diálogo* which brought together thinkers from across the political spectrum and called for reconciliation, amnesty and pity for the defeated.<sup>35</sup> Foresighted members of the Franco regime also began to appreciate the advantages of a more inclusive approach that could reduce class conflict and open the way for limited political reform. The Minister of Information and Tourism, Manuel Fraga, for instance, in 1964 took a lead in promoting a propaganda campaign around the theme of ‘twenty-five years of peace’ in which his acolytes claimed the regime had brought security and economic development to all Spaniards, including those from the defeated side in the Civil War.<sup>36</sup> In this environment, figures from the left such as the socialist Juan-Simeón Vidarte published memoirs which argued all Spaniards had been equally guilty for the violence of the Civil War.<sup>37</sup> Right wingers such as José María Gil Robles also published memoirs arguing that the intransigence that led to the Civil War should never be repeated.<sup>38</sup> For its part, from 1956 the Communist Party had abandoned its commitment to winning power by force and instead promoted a policy of national reconciliation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> On Ruiz Giménez and *Cuadernos para el Diálogo*, see: Javier Muñoz Soro, *Cuadernos para el diálogo, 1963-1976: una historia cultural del segundo franquismo*, Madrid, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> A taste of the celebration in: *La Vanguardia*, 25/08/1964.

<sup>37</sup> Juan-Simeón Vidarte, *Todos fuimos culpables*, México D.F., 1973.

<sup>38</sup> José María Gil Robles, *No fue posible la paz*, Esplugues de Llobregat, 1968.

<sup>39</sup> Carme Molinero, ‘La política de reconciliación nacional. Su contenido durante el franquismo, su lectura en la Transición’, *Ayer* (2007), 201-225.

Spanish society as a whole began to take up the ideas of equal guilt, that civil war should be avoided at all costs and that Spaniards should bury their differences by forgetting the past. For reformists in the regime these developments offered the opportunity to foster a more open political system while for the centre and left, whose representatives came to believe they could not win a majority against conservative groups, this discourse facilitated negotiations and pacts with reformist Francoists.<sup>40</sup> These developments, however, made it extremely difficult to talk about the Republican past which in collective memory had become the embodiment of the intransigent partisanship that needed to be avoided if another civil war was to be averted.<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, the negotiation and compromise that lay behind the transition meant that citizens could not discuss the repression and violence carried out by the Franco regime. This Pact of Silence became most tangible through the October 1977 Amnesty Law which, in Article Two, precluded any prosecution for crimes committed during the dictatorship by Francoist officials.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, if anyone dared to demand justice for those killed by the dictatorship, the army could step in and stifle democracy.<sup>43</sup>

Significantly, the mistrust of the Civil War past inherent within the Pact of Silence gave the right scope to launch ferocious attacks on the IB veterans campaigning for democracy. In November 1976, for instance, the journalist José Javaloyes argued:

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<sup>40</sup> Carme Molinero, 'La transición y la "renuncia" a la recuperación de la "memoria democrática"' *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 11, 1, (2010) 33-52, 37.

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance: *El País*, 5/08/1976.

<sup>42</sup> Molinero, 'La transición', 46.

<sup>43</sup> Francisco Espinosa Maestre, *Shoot the Messenger?: Spanish Democracy and the Crimes of Francoism: From the Pact of Silence to the Trial of Baltasar Garzón*, Sussex, 2013.

‘At this time of hope and healing what we need least of all is for people to come from abroad, once more, to shoot with all their strength from the sometimes bloody opening of the wound. More than any of the others, Mr Jones has proved to be the least welcome and least acceptable of all the meddlers’<sup>44</sup>

Jack Jones also stood accused of ‘going for a sentimental stroll’ in Gandesa to ‘recover the strength of his resentment’.<sup>45</sup> While Pietro Nenni, after his visit to the Spanish embassy in Rome, earned scorn for trying to win a war that he had lost on the battlefield four decades earlier.<sup>46</sup>

The spectre of Stalinism provided another line of attack on the IB veterans. The right, for instance, accused the ageing Brigaders of seeking to open the ‘dramatic wounds of the Chekas’.<sup>47</sup> The term Cheka, in this context, referred to secret prisons belonging to centre and left-wing political movements in the Republican zone during the Civil War. Francoists argued that the Chekas, and the murders carried out by their operatives, revealed the Soviet influence over the Republican zone: partly because the violence was seen as symptomatic of Soviet influence but also because the Francoists argued the Chekas were controlled by the Soviet secret police (after whom the Chekas were named). Even conservative-liberals shared this view. José María Ruiz Gallardón, a critic of the Franco regime, attacked Nenni as ‘a former militia fighter in the

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<sup>44</sup> ABC, 20/11/1976.

<sup>45</sup> ABC, 20/11/1976.

<sup>46</sup> ABC, 27/03/1976.

<sup>47</sup> ABC, 27/02/1976.

infamous International Brigades that spilled so much blood forty years ago'.<sup>48</sup> In short, IB veterans helped the PCE gain political space after Franco's death and accordingly contributed to the legalisation of the party in April 1977. Their energy would also give the left added momentum in the democratic politics that followed the elections of June 1977.

## **(2) IBs as a Proxy for the Defenders and Enemies of Democracy (June 1977-1988)**

1977 witnessed momentous changes that would bring the role of the IB veterans as agents of democracy to an end and from June would see them become more important in memorial politics. From February 1977 the PSOE could operate legally and from April of the same year the PCE enjoyed the same freedom. In June the first elections were held. The left was the heir to the memory of anti-Fascism that had helped build democracies in Western Europe after the Second World War and celebrated those who resisted or fallen victim to fascism.<sup>49</sup> For the Spanish left, however, the problem was that its identity lay in the Republican democracy of the 1930s, but the 'Pact of Silence' that came into full swing with the consolidation of democracy prevented it from invoking that past. Needing to build Republican memory, the left found in the International Brigades a proxy through which it could reclaim the history of Republican fighters.

We can see this process at work during the first visit to Spain of IB veterans after the 1977 elections. In September, a group of US veterans, who had fought in the

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<sup>48</sup> ABC, 10/12/1976.

<sup>49</sup> Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation. Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965*, Cambridge 2000, 214-218.

Abraham Lincoln Brigade, visited Madrid. Revealingly, the PCE leaders who received them declared that the purpose of the meeting was to ‘convert the solidarity shown by the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War into help for today's Spain’.<sup>50</sup> A year later, on 24 July 1978, in Gandesa (Tarragona) the Association of Republican Pilots held the first mass rally that celebrated Republican memory in Spain. The rally was baptized as the ‘First Act of National Reconciliation’ and included the inauguration of a memorial to all those who had died in Spain: from whichever side. Importantly, in this first act of ‘national reconciliation’ attended by Spanish Republicans and Francoist fighters, the organisers bestowed a place of honour upon the International Brigades.<sup>51</sup> Tellingly, in successive ceremonies over the following years, Spanish Republican fighters went unmentioned and, with an air of embarrassment hanging over the conflict between Spaniards, the International Brigades instead took centre stage in Republican memory.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, in a context in which Spain was seeking entry into the European Economic Community, the International Brigades made it easier for the left to link itself with the struggle in Spain for democracy and to present itself as part of the European anti-fascist movement. In 1986, for instance, the mayor of Barcelona took up an invitation extended by his counterpart in Vienna, Helmut Zilk, a veteran of the IBs. Together they opened a museum and an exhibition on the 1,700 Austrian Brigaders who fought in Spain.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, in 1990 prominent European anti-Fascist figures including Willy Brandt, Simone Weil, and Elie Wiesel pressed for the commemoration of Jewish volunteers in the IBs. They worked in collaboration with

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<sup>50</sup> ABC, 15/09/1977.

<sup>51</sup> La Vanguardia, 22/07/1978.

<sup>52</sup> El País, 12/05/1979; La Vanguardia, 12/05/1979; La Vanguardia, 4/09/1983; La Vanguardia, 23/10/1986.

<sup>53</sup> La Vanguardia, 4/09/1986.

the Belgian Association of Jewish Resisters and the Friends of Mauthausen. Their work brought dividends in 1990 when the mayor of Barcelona unveiled a monument commemorating the Jewish volunteers.<sup>54</sup>

The International Brigades also offered a usable past for Spanish left leaders at the grassroots. More safely positioned out of the limelight of Spanish national politics, these leaders found it easier than their more senior colleagues to venture into controversial areas. This made it possible for civil associations or leftist regional governments to take the initiative in commemorating the Brigades. The council in Madrid, for example, unveiled a monument in 1981 at the Fuencarral cemetery in honour of the dozens of Brigaders buried there. Opened with a homily to the Brigades, it would become one of the most important sites of Republican memory in Spain.<sup>55</sup> In Catalonia too the IBs became celebrated in ways that linked Spaniards to European anti-Fascism.<sup>56</sup> In May 1980, the president of the Catalanian regional government received a number of British and Spanish pilots who had fought for the Republic.<sup>57</sup> This was followed in 1983 by an official reception organised by the Catalanian government and Barcelona city council for IB veterans after their annual commemoration at Gandesa.<sup>58</sup> These events echoed similar commemorations in places across Spain where the IBs had fought.

At the national level, by contrast, memory of the war proved much more contentious with a stern silence remaining in place on the difficult civil war past. In 1986, the

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<sup>54</sup> La Vanguardia, 26/03/1990.

<sup>55</sup> ABC, 16/02/1980; ABC, 21/01/1981; ABC, 27/06/1981.

<sup>56</sup> An overview of European anti-fascism in Geoff Eley, 'Legacies of Antifascism: constructing democracy in postwar Europe', *New German Critique*, 67, Winter 1996, 73-100.

<sup>57</sup> La Vanguardia, 3/05/1980.

<sup>58</sup> La Vanguardia, 4/09/1983; La Vanguardia, 8/10/1983.

fiftieth anniversary of the start of the conflict, the prime minister, Socialist Felipe González, stated that ‘the Spanish Civil War is not an event to commemorate’.<sup>59</sup> That same year, however, several initiatives emerged from below that commemorated the beginning of the war. Importantly, these placed the International Brigades at the heart of the Republican Memory. On 20 October 1986, for instance, a group of associations and political groups organized a mass tribute with thousands of people paying homage to the International Brigades in Madrid.<sup>60</sup> Two days later, in Gandesa, an applauding crowd welcomed 800 IB veterans. The next day the former volunteers were received in Barcelona, a strong-hold of the left in the Civil War, at an official reception by the city’s mayor, the socialist Pasqual Maragall, and president of the Catalanian government, the Catalanian nationalist Jordi Pujol.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, in a ceremony to mark the unveiling of a monument in Barcelona in 1988, the Brigades proved useful to local leaders in the on-going and delicate negotiation of memory in Spain. The U.S. Spanish Civil War Historical Society and the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade had helped finance a twelve-metre-high sculpture representing David and Goliath. The two organisations had attracted donations from famous personalities such as Woody Allen, Gregory Peck, Norman Mailer and Allan Ginsberg. At the unveiling mayor Maragall measured his words, carefully declaring:

Some might think this is a partisan event and that there were two sides in the conflict. But sometimes we must speak the truth, if only from time to time. And the truth is that these people came to Spain purely and simply because they loved liberty, our liberty and that of the world. David has won and

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<sup>59</sup> El País, 19/07/1986.

<sup>60</sup> ABC, 20/10/1986; El País, 20/10/1986.

<sup>61</sup> La Vanguardia, 22, 23 and 24/10/1986.

Goliath has fallen to the ground. Give Goliath a helping hand. Now that we have won liberty, we should be generous with those from the other side.<sup>62</sup>

As we can see, the left feared building a public memory of the Republic and in this context the IBs allowed it to celebrate its own identity while maintaining a prudent tone. One month earlier, for instance, at the annual homage to the IBs in Gandesa, 50,000 people had gathered in a sea of Republican flags. But the organiser of the event had been careful to praise the dead from both sides and went on to unveil a plaque bearing the inscription: ‘in homage to the victims of the Civil War’.<sup>63</sup> Despite this caution, overall the left had managed to break the old narrative of the dictatorship about the Civil War through the International Brigades and, at the same time, had established the framework for memory of the war in a new democratic context.

In this context, the hard-line right proved particularly aggressive in its attacks on the International Brigades. Joaquim Buxó, an important politician in Barcelona and an ambassador to Austria during the Franco dictatorship, for instance, sent a hostile letter to the right-wing newspaper ABC. His missive came just after the legalisation of the PCE during the Easter break of 1977 and warned that ‘[P]erhaps they will tell us that we should not give in to fury this Easter and that it is better to reflect, pray, pardon...and forget. Forget what? Things like the death squads, Paracuellos [the site of the massacre of thousands of rightists in the Civil War], the International Brigades recruited from sectarian scum and the back streets in order to slow down our victory.’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> La Vanguardia, 29/10/1988.

<sup>63</sup> La Vanguardia, 14/03/1988.

<sup>64</sup> ABC, 15/04/1977.

The extreme right also resorted to other arguments first seen in the Civil War: the old myth of the IBs as goons and blood-hungry criminals sent by Stalin to install 'red terror' in Spain. In 1979 Jaime Campmany, a right-wing journalist, described the left as 'seemingly enlightened, ferocious and extremist fanatics...[who] would brook no compromise... [who] had bombed Guernica and opened Chekas [secret prisons and torture chambers], who [the IBs] carried out a bloody slaughter only to be awarded medals and praised on their return to their countries.'<sup>65</sup> In other cases, rightists took refuge in the argument made by Francoists in the 1960s that 'we were all guilty' and that it is best to forget and look to the future. From this perspective, tributes to the International Brigades re-opened the wounds of the past and this led to the charge that the left was seeking to unleash a new civil war. For instance, on 20 May 1984, the right-wing newspaper ABC gave the following headline to a story on a series of tributes to the IBs in Madrid: 'Once again the Spectre of Civil War'.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, the only way to preserve democracy in Spain was respecting the 'Pact of Silence'. In summary, between 1977 and 1989 the IBs provided a crucial means of negotiating the Pact of Silence and legitimising the left and its claims to an anti-fascist and democratic identity. This very claim, however, grated with rightists who had constructed their own anti-totalitarian identity by chiding the left, and the communists in particular.

### **(3) 1989-1995 The Left's Crisis of Identity**

The attacks from the right on the International Brigades continued until 1988. Between 1989 and 1995, however, the IBs all but disappeared from public debate.

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<sup>65</sup> ABC, 27/11/1979.

<sup>66</sup> ABC, 20/05/1984.

The Spanish left abruptly gave up using the International Brigades as an identity symbol and as a proxy for memory of the Republic and its values. The IBs moved from the centre of the Spanish left's identity and memory of the war and became a fringe element. The change can be explained by the crisis being faced by the left. From the 1960s the rise of identity politics in the form of black, gay and women's rights began to influence the left. Alongside this, human rights culture began to grow and develop in tandem with a belief, informed by the success of psycho-analysis, in the need to come to terms with traumatic and hidden pasts. A series of truth and reconciliation committees around the world would provide expression to these trends.<sup>67</sup>

The shock caused by the collapse of Soviet control over Eastern Europe in 1989 was decisive in bringing about further change in the left. In Spain, the Communist Party had proved more resilient than in other parts of Western Europe. In countries such as the UK, Khrushchev's revelations in 1956 helped bring about a steady decline in support. In Spain, however, the Communist Party had flourished in opposition to Franco by pursuing its policy of 'national reconciliation'. But the new metanarrative of the 'end of ideology' that followed the 1989 debacle came as a particularly harsh blow to the Spanish Communists.

The ground was also moving below the feet of the socialist left. For this group, the collapse of Soviet control over Eastern Europe broadly overlapped with the Socialist-piloted entry of the country into the European Economic Community in 1986. Once Spain had joined the Common Market, the PSOE increasingly waved the banner of

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<sup>67</sup> On these trends, see: Jay Winter, 'The Generation of Memory: reflections on the "memory boom" in contemporary historical studies', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 27/3, 2000, 363-397.

'modernity', represented by Europe and economic development. From this perspective, the past, and the Spanish Civil War, came to be regarded as a burden which was better discarded. In place of the past, a new left identity was reconstructed around the notion of 'progress' with modernization conceived as a non-ideological project. In this context, the memory of the war as an ideological struggle ceased to serve a useful purpose and the IBs no longer fitted the narrative of the Spanish left. Over time, however, the left would turn towards the politics of memory and identity to find a new voice which demanded justice for Spain's victims of Francoism.

From the early 1990s we can perceive this emerging trend that would bloom in the new millennium; a trend favoured by the 'death' of ideology, the consolidation of democracy, and the acute awareness that the Civil War veterans needed to be commemorated and given dignity before they died. We can see how these developments came together in the work of the Irish volunteer Bob Doyle. Crucially, Doyle anticipated the move by the left away from making a useable past through the celebration of heroes who defended democracy. Instead, his work marks the transition towards remembering and giving dignity to victims of 'Fascism'.<sup>68</sup> In the early 1990s, Doyle, and the French veteran François Mazou, had located a grave at Morata de Tajuña to the south of Madrid. Here the remains of 5,000 Republican war dead had been dumped in a rubbish pit at the edge of a cemetery. As a further insult, a plaque at the cemetery dedicated the site to 'the victory of 1939'. Doyle was certainly deeply shocked at the obliteration of Republican memory and went on to found a commemorative association to campaign for a dignified memorial. With the help of international backers, including former British Prime Minister Edward Heath and the

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<sup>68</sup> On the use of victimhood, see: Jo Labanyi, 'Historias de víctimas: la memoria histórica y el testimonio en la España contemporánea.' in *Iberoamericana*, 6, 24, 2006, 87-98.

Irish Prime Minister Dick Spring, Doyle's campaign led to a new and more dignified plaque being inscribed on 8 October 1994.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, in the period between 1989-1996, the IBs were less used as symbols of European anti-fascism and were developing into symbols of the victims of Francoism within the parameters of Spanish rather than European memory. This move would gather steam in the new millennium.

#### **(4) 1996-May 2015 Embracing Spanish Memory**

The commemoration of victimhood and the campaign for dignity would pick up speed in the late 1990s. Shifts in domestic Spanish politics gave added impetus to the change. By 1996, the electoral fortunes of the governing socialist party had fallen into sharp decline. In particular, a number of corruption cases had damaged the party's standing.<sup>70</sup> The loss of morale the scandals triggered among supporters of the Socialists became apparent in the general election campaign of early 1996 which saw the PSOE trailing in the polls.<sup>71</sup> With their backs against the wall, the Socialists adopted a much more aggressive attitude towards the emboldened right.<sup>72</sup> We can see this with the approaching sixtieth anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War. The Socialist national leadership now proved much more prepared to confront the past than ten years earlier. Accordingly, on 19 January 1996 the Socialist government of Felipe González granted the surviving 600 veterans of the Brigades Spanish nationality (with the proviso that they surrendered their existing nationality).<sup>73</sup> In the on-going election campaign, the Socialists went on to claim the right would condemn Spain to return to its backward past symbolised by Francoism. Despite spreading this

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<sup>69</sup> Bob Doyle, *Brigadista: An Irishman's Fight Against Fascism*, Dublin, 2006, Locations 2363-2465.

<sup>70</sup> For examples of corruption, see: *El País*, 29/08/1997 and 26/02/2013.

<sup>71</sup> *El País*, 19/02/1996.

<sup>72</sup> On the aggressive 1996 election video produced by the Socialists see *El País*, 19/02/1996.

<sup>73</sup> Granting of nationality in *El País*, 20/01/1996.

message of fear, on 3 March 1996 the conservative Popular Party emerged as the largest group in the Spanish parliament with fifteen more seats than the Socialists.<sup>74</sup>

After its first defeat in elections to the right, the Socialists also moved to re-build lost legitimacy by taking a far more central role in commemorating and honouring the IBs. Importantly, they did so in ways that pitted the Socialists, and the Brigades, against what could be portrayed as the intolerant right. Speaking in November 1996, for instance, the party leader, Felipe González, welcomed a party of visiting Brigaders with a speech declaring that they had arrived in a 'tolerant, democratic society'.<sup>75</sup> He spoke at a time when the governing Popular Party, in a seeming blast from the past, was refusing to meet the 370 visiting Brigaders at the Spanish parliament.<sup>76</sup>

The left continued to foster this more broadly ethical and less overtly ideological position. The socialist mayor of Barcelona, for instance, in November 1996 portrayed the International Brigades as the world's first peace-keeping army.<sup>77</sup> His words came just when Spain was beginning to become involved in peace missions across the world in an attempt to force its Francoist-shaped but gradually evolving armed forces to defend human rights.<sup>78</sup> In this sense, the International Brigades were held to represent the modernisation of Spain that the right had frustrated for so many years.

For the right, increasingly secure in power, such efforts to present Brigaders as humanitarians proved too bitter a pill to swallow and once more sought to portray

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<sup>74</sup> El País, 4/03/1996.

<sup>75</sup> La Vanguardia, 8/11/1996.

<sup>76</sup> La Vanguardia, 7/11/1996.

<sup>77</sup> La Vanguardia, 11/11/1996; El Periódico, 11/11/1996.

<sup>78</sup> Ironically, the Spanish government began to carry out forensic examinations of those killed in Kosovo while thousands of Spaniards killed by Francoists remained in anonymous mass graves. See: El País, 21/01/2000.

itself as democratic and anti-totalitarian.<sup>79</sup> Crucially, the interpretation of the Civil War also lay at stake for the right. In 1998, for instance, the right-wing writer César Vidal, incensed by the 1996 commemorations of the Brigades, published a book which did a brisk trade. In Vidal's well received interpretation, Stalin created the Brigades to serve Soviet interests and his officials recruited ignorant and deceived volunteers who blindly followed Moscow's orders.<sup>80</sup>

As the right began to assert what was essentially the old Francoist interpretation more forcefully, from around the year 2000 the left sidestepped the right's charges and continued its move away from ideology and towards a more ethical standpoint. The focus also shifted from international to domestic considerations as the left started to highlight the victims of Francoism in Spain. Three major factors came together that helped produce this change: television documentaries began to expose the horrific and long-silenced violence carried out behind Francoist lines, a flood of novels aimed at a much more highly educated society and dealing with the legacy of the repression filled the shelves of bookshops while a new generation of activists inspired by human rights work in Latin America began to exhume the bodies of Franco's victims.<sup>81</sup> Protagonists in all three movements were at pains to argue that they did not want to relive the conflicts of the past and divide Spaniards but rather to reclaim the dignity of the victims of Francoism who had been condemned to oblivion during the transition to democracy. In this sense, documentaries which dealt with kidnapped children, novels that explored the political and social subordination of women and the

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<sup>79</sup> La Vanguardia, 11/11/1996.

<sup>80</sup> ABC, 18/12/1998, 31/12/1998.

<sup>81</sup> On TV documentaries, see: Gina Herrmann, 'Documentary's Labours of Law: The Television Journalism of Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 9, 2 (2008) 2, 193-212. Novels include Javier Cercas, *Soldados de Salamina*, Barcelona, 2001 and Dulce Chacón, *La voz dormida*, Madrid, 2006. On the exhumations, see: Emilio Silva/Santiago Macías, *Las fosas de Franco. Los republicanos que el dictador dejó en la cuentas*, Madrid, 2009.

exhumation of people who perished before rebel and Francoist firing squads stressed victimhood and the need for families to reclaim their loved ones over the ideological background of the ‘victims’ and the conflicts in which they perished or suffered. In 2002, for instance, Emilio Silva of the newly founded Spanish Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory called for justice for the thousands of families whose stories of suffering had been silenced not just by Francoism but by their own sacrifice to build a stable democracy after the dictator’s death.<sup>82</sup>

These developments changed the way in which the International Brigades were represented. No longer acting as a proxy for Spaniards, and encumbered by their reputation as ideological heroes, the International Brigades now gained most of their currency from the extent to which they could be portrayed within the ethical confines of the Spanish memory struggle. The right responded forcefully. The hard-right columnist Alfonso Ussía, for instance, fired off an opinion piece in November 2002 complaining about the exhumations and accompanying condemnations of the Francoist right. He linked his complaints directly to the International Brigades and detailed the story of his grandfather who, he claimed, had been shot by communists and anarchists with the coup de grace being administered by a blond Brigader. He also claimed the same Brigader finished off a young child.<sup>83</sup>

In 2004, the Socialists returned to power under José Luis Zapatero, the grandson of a left activist shot by the Francoists. Under pressure from memory and human rights associations, and seeking to appeal to a left-wing audience, his government drafted

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<sup>82</sup> El País, 15/12/2002.

<sup>83</sup> ABC, 1/01/2002.

between 2006 and 2007 the popularly known law of historical memory.<sup>84</sup> Importantly, the act linked the struggle for justice for the victims of Francoism with justice for veterans of the IBs. By doing this it brought the issues of historical interpretation, public space and exhumations and justice for the dead to the fore. In terms of history, an editorial in the newspaper ABC in July 2006 restated the right's case clearly: it is one thing to ask for justice for the victims of Francoism and quite another to impose a misleading historical interpretation.<sup>85</sup> This broadside heralded further protests that came in 2007 when the enacted law granted citizenship to IB veterans, without the need to renounce their existing citizenship, in recognition of their defence of democracy. In response, the right launched a full-scale assault on what it denounced as the embodiment of an historical myth. Instead of being volunteers for liberty, as the left which granted the veterans citizenship claimed, rightists charged that Brigaders had suffered imprisonment in Spain at the hands of their Stalinist comrades and had endured cruel purges for which no recompense had ever been granted. Those that remained at liberty used their weapons to slaughter Spaniards.<sup>86</sup>

The battle for public space also intensified as the Socialist government proposed the withdrawal of Francoist monuments which glorified violence. The right complained that across Spain a host of monuments existed for the left, including many to the Brigades, which were not threatened by the law. For some commentators such as historian Santos Juliá this carried the whiff of the totalitarian imposition of memory.<sup>87</sup> The left, however, redoubled its efforts to move away from ideological issues and found strength in ethical issues and particularly the exhumation of Franco's victims.

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<sup>84</sup> On the law see Nadia Haji, 'Post-transitional justice in Spain: passing the historic memory law.' *The Journal of Politics and Society* 25, 1, 2014, 83-100.

<sup>85</sup> ABC, 29/07/2006.

<sup>86</sup> ABC, 6/10/2008.

<sup>87</sup> ABC, 25/07/2006.

This shift brought the IB veterans and associations a new role. As early as November 1996, the Catalanian president Jordi Pujol had compared the deaths of Brigaders with the fate of Luis Companys, the president of Catalonia in the Civil War, infamously handed over in 1940 to the Spanish authorities while in exile in France and executed by the Francoists. In their visit of November 1996, IB veterans had also assembled before the Fossar de la Piedra, the well known site of the mass grave for Republicans murdered in Barcelona by the Franco regime.<sup>88</sup> Currently forming a memorial site that features both monuments to Companys and members of the IBs, it symbolises the way memories of the IBs and the victims of Francoism are becoming merged.<sup>89</sup>

Increasingly in the present day, the left seeks to promote the Brigades within the human rights discourse of the search for justice. The Spanish Friends of the International Brigades, for instance, harbours plans to exhume the remains of Brigaders in Barcelona and give them a dignified burial.<sup>90</sup> A similar project began in March 2014 in Lopera, where the famous British Brigader Ralph Fox died. The exhumation was carried out with funding from the Andalusian department charged specifically with honouring the memory of the victims of Francoism.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the International Brigade Memorial Trust (IBMT) increasingly identifies itself with victimhood and the struggle for memory and dignity in Spain. Speaking in 2014 the IBMT secretary, Jim Jump, declared that the hostility endured by relatives of those murdered by the Francoist showed that the IBMT needs ‘to

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<sup>88</sup> La Vanguardia, 11/11/1996.

<sup>89</sup> [www.brigadasinternacionales.org/index.php?option=comcontent&view=article&id=308&Itemid=89](http://www.brigadasinternacionales.org/index.php?option=comcontent&view=article&id=308&Itemid=89). [accessed on 31/12/2013].

<sup>90</sup> [http://www.brigadasinternacionales.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=523:home\\_naje-a-los-brigadistas-cubanos&catid=42:cronicas&Itemid=62](http://www.brigadasinternacionales.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=523:home_naje-a-los-brigadistas-cubanos&catid=42:cronicas&Itemid=62) Accessed 20/03/2015.

<sup>91</sup> Diario de Jaén, 21/05/2014.

challenge any rewriting of history, whether in Spain or anywhere else, that denigrates the opponents and victims of fascism'.<sup>92</sup>

This tendency finds full expression in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive in New York. Founded in 1979 by U.S. International Brigade veterans who had served in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the organisation defines itself as an 'educational non-profit dedicated to promoting social activism and the defence of human rights'. It also declares itself inspired by the U.S. volunteers who enlisted with the IBs. On the 9 May 2015, the organisation presented Emilio Silva of the Spanish Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory with the \$100,000 ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism which links the legacy of the Brigades with contemporary causes. The press release announcing the award specifically praised Silva's organisation for 'breaking the wall of silence' that had surrounded the victims of Francoism.<sup>93</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The historiography of the IBs has steered clear of the role of the Brigades and veterans in Spain and Spanish politics since the death of Franco. By studying this role, however, we learn that that the Brigades played a significant part in Spanish politics and society in this period. We gain an appreciation, for instance, of the contributions of veterans such as Jack Jones in opening up political space for the left in the struggle to legalise and legitimise opposition parties following Franco's death.

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<sup>92</sup> IBMT Newsletter, 37/2/2014, p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> Press release 2/01/2015. Available at [http://www.alba-valb.org/archive/back-issues/Press%20release\\_ARMH%20Jan%202015.pdf](http://www.alba-valb.org/archive/back-issues/Press%20release_ARMH%20Jan%202015.pdf). [accessed on 13/03/2015].

Perhaps most importantly, the IBs also provided a means of bestowing dignity by proxy upon the Republican cause and its supporters. The Brigades made a further difference when the left suffered a profound crisis in the wake of the decline of ideology and then the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this context, the IBs formed part of the gradual efforts to gain a new voice and mission through the turn from the celebration of armed resistance to fascism to the politics of victimhood, justice and memory. In a new context, IB memorial associations no longer provided a proxy for Spaniards but found a fresh purpose in the movements in Spain campaigning for justice and dignity for those murdered by Francoists. By adopting the language of human rights the left has also sidestepped some of the more aggressive rhetoric of a right emboldened by a number of electoral victories. Accordingly, the history of the impact of the IBs on Spain since 1975 provides a telling example both of how foreign volunteers become important within their host societies and the way in which this impact far exceeds the duration of the original conflict.

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