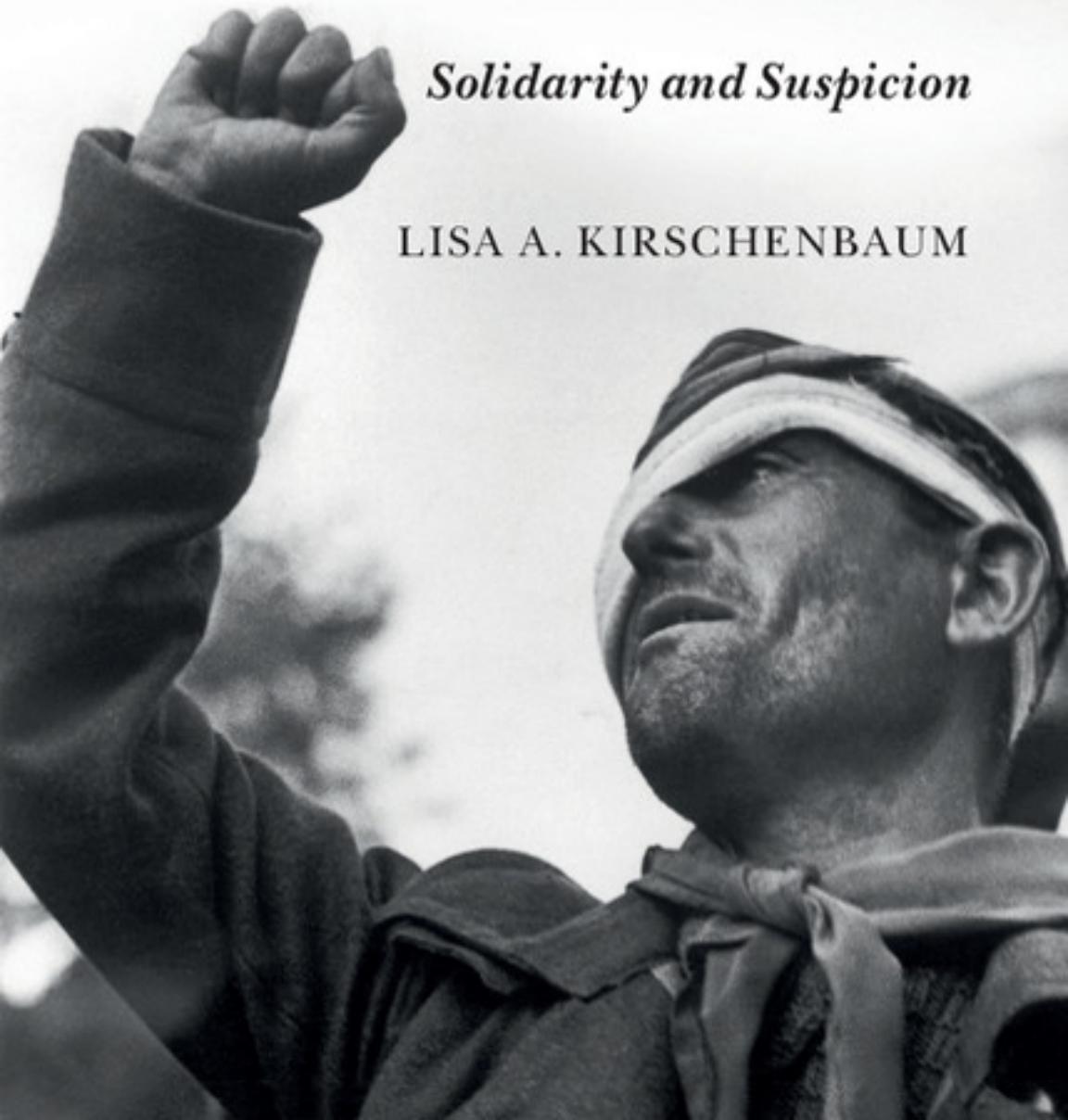
International Communism and the Spanish Civil War

Solidarity and Suspicion

LISA A. KIRSCHENBAUM



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International Communism and the Spanish Civil War provides an intimate picture of international communism in the Stalin era. Exploring the transnational exchanges that occurred in Soviet-structured spaces – from clandestine schools for training international revolutionaries in Moscow to the International Brigades in Spain – the book uncovers complex webs of interaction, at once personal and political, that linked international communists to one another and to the Soviet Union.

The Spanish civil war, which coincided with the great purges in the Soviet Union, stands at the center of this grassroots history. For many international communists, the war came to define both their life histories and political commitments. In telling their individual stories, the book calls attention to a central paradox of Stalinism – the simultaneous celebration and suspicion of transnational interactions – and illuminates the appeal of a cause that promised solidarity even as it practiced terror.

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For John

Contents

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A Note on Transliteration and Translation

In the text and notes, I use the Library of Congress system of transliteration, except in the case of well-known names, such as Ehrenburg. Where the sources transliterated Spanish or English names into Cyrillic, I tried to restore the original language's spelling conventions. Where I was unable to confirm the original spelling, I included a direct transliteration of the Cyrillic in the notes. All translations are my own, except where noted.

Introduction

Being Communist

In a letter marked "urgent" sent in 1937 to Mikhail Kalinin, the nominal head of the Soviet state, Spanish communist Adela Rivera Sánchez told an intimate story of war. A party member since 1930, Rivera Sánchez wrote that she had recently arrived in the Soviet Union from Asturias with three small children, the youngest of whom was two. Because the Spanish party required her "immediate return to work in Spain," she wrote that she was planning "to leave my three children in the Soviet Union and return as soon as possible."[1] Such a decision was not uncommon among international communists, who viewed the Soviet Union as a safe haven for their children.[2] What complicated her return – and the reason for her appeal to Kalinin – was that she was two-and-a-half-months pregnant. The "situation in Spain and the conditions of my work," she explained, "do not permit me to have another child at this time (I am 26 and this is my sixth child)." Thus she asked Kalinin to intervene on her behalf and permit her to have an immediate abortion, "so that I can return to my country and take an active part in the struggle of the Spanish people."[3]

Rivera Sánchez needed special dispensation to terminate her pregnancy because abortion had been prohibited in the Soviet Union in June 1936. (The

[1] "Predsedateliu VTsIK Tov. Kalininu," Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 531, op. 1, d. 186, l. 3. Her name appears in Cyrillic as Adela Rovira Sanches.

[2] Mariia Minina-Svetlanova, "Two Motherlands Are Mine, and I Hold Both Dear in My Heart: Upbringing and Education in the Ivanovo Interdom," *Russian Studies in History* 48, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 75; Huang Jian, "A Chinese Student in the USSR," in Glennys Young, ed., *The Communist Experience in the Twentieth Century: A Global History through Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 264–9; Immaculada Colomina Limonero, *Dos patrias, tres mil destinos: Vida y exilo de los niños de la Guerra de España refugiados en la Unión Soviética* (Madrid: Ediciones Cinca, 2010); A. V. Elpat'evskii, *Ispanskaia emigratsiia v SSSR: Istorigrafiia i istochniki, popytka interpretatsii* (Tver: Izdatel'stvo "GERS," 2002), 13–37.

[3] RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 186, l. 3.

Spanish Republic never fully decriminalized abortion.[4]) The Soviet legislation justified the abortion ban as a means of combating "a frivolous attitude toward the family and family responsibility."[5] Rivera Sánchez, however, presented her reasons as anything but frivolous. Rather, she invoked earlier revolutionary norms that called on exemplary communists to subordinate the satisfactions of family life to the needs of the revolution, while also underscoring the fact that she already had five children.[6] In response to her request, she received a note instructing her to report on 13 December 1937 to the Secretariat of the President of the Central Executive Committee to "discuss your matter."[7] The archive contains no information regarding the outcome of that meeting.

Rivera Sánchez's request allows us to see how, for the most committed, international communism was not only a political movement; it was also a way of life. Her appeal dramatizes the personal sacrifices that communists made for the cause. It also suggests how a "good" communist might understand and enact the connection between her political duty and her personal life – indeed she might not consider herself to be making a sacrifice at all as she left her children thousands of miles from home and petitioned to end her pregnancy in order to participate in "the struggle of the Spanish people." Her determination to join the struggle in Spain demanded the perhaps temporary abandonment of her maternal role. At the same time, her individual circumstances encouraged her to challenge, however implicitly, the Stalinist sanctification of the family. Thus her story – and others like it told in this book – illustrates the ways in which communist commitments shaped personal lives and personal relationships influenced political understandings.

Focusing on the everyday lives of international communists, this book offers a grassroots history of international communism. Transnational interactions among communists occurred, as Rivera Sánchez's story illustrates, in the context of norms and institutions largely established by the Soviet party. But although such interactions were unequal, they were also messy, unpredictable, emotionally charged, and ultimately productive. This book thus explores the transnational exchanges that occurred in Soviet-structured spaces – from clandestine schools for training international revolutionaries in Moscow to the International Brigades in Spain – as a means of tracing the everyday practices of being communist. It analyzes the appeal of communism, specifically Soviet

[4] Richard Cleminson, "Beyond Tradition and 'Modernity': The Cultural and Sexual Politics of Spanish Anarchism," in Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi, eds., *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 121–2.

[5] Cited in Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 331.

[6] Jeffrey Brooks, "Revolutionary Lives: Public Identities in *Pravda* during the 1920s," in Stephen White, ed., *New Directions in Soviet History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 34; Elizabeth A Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 47.

[7] RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 186, l. 5.

communism for those outside of the Soviet Union, by taking it seriously not only as a revolutionary political creed but also as a way of understanding (and remaking) both the world and the self, the self in the world.

International Communism and Individual Lives

When the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd in October 1917, they aimed not only, or even primarily, to remake the Russian empire and the Russian people. They intended to shake the world: to spark a global transformation of political and human relations. This Bolshevik sense of world historical mission took the institutional form of the Third or Communist International (Comintern), founded in Moscow in 1919 as the headquarters of world revolution.[8] Even now, from the vantage of our thoroughly globalized world, the breadth of the Comintern's revolutionary ambition is impressive; by 1935, it operated on six continents and had sixty-five member parties. Working in well over a dozen languages, Comintern agents and functionaries collected information and issued directives on topics as diverse as strike activity, the agrarian question, women's activism, youth mobilization, regional party organizations, the labor press, clandestine operations, the celebration of communist holidays, and the training of new cadres – to provide only a very partial list.[9] The Comintern, in short, can be understood as an enormous fact-finding and policy-making operation run out of Moscow, structured largely by the shifting needs and interests of the Soviet leadership.

Thus histories of international communism are often organized around the important question of the extent to which "central authorities in Moscow" controlled "national communist parties."[10] The so-called traditionalists in this debate focus on local parties' subservience to Moscow. In this vein, some

[8] "Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World," *Communist International*, no. 1 (May 1919): 5–10. There is a vast literature on the institutional history of the Comintern. See for example, Aleksandr Vatlin, *Komintern: idei, resheniia, sud'by* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009); Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan, and Matthew Worley, eds., *Bolshevism, Stalinism, and the Comintern: Perspectives on Stalinization, 1917–53* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Carlos Díaz, *Tercera Internacional (Comunista): De la Revolución Rusa a la dictadura de Franco* (Madrid: Fundación Emmanuel Mounier, 2003); A. O. Chubarin, ed., *Istoriia kommunisticheskogo internatsionala, 1919–1943: Dokumental'nye ocherki* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002); Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, eds., *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Pierre Broué, *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste: 1919–1943* (Paris: Fayard, 1997); Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); E. H. Carr, *The Twilight of the Comintern* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement from Comintern to Cominform*, trans. Brian Pearce and Francis MacDonagh (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

[9] An inventory of the Comintern archive was available at http://www.comintern-online.com/ (accessed 11 April 2013).

[10] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, xx.

scholars of the British party emphasize the degree to which study at the International Lenin School, the Comintern's most prestigious institution devoted to training foreign communists, forged strong bonds between British communists and the Soviet regime – in some cases ties so close that British communists became Soviet spies.[11] So-called revisionists, by contrast, emphasize the social histories of local parties and the dynamism and at least partial autonomy of the communist grassroots.[12] From this perspective another study of British students at the Lenin School emphasizes the "limited and ephemeral" influence of the school and the "resilience" of "prior cultural formations" even in the face of "intense conditioning."[13]

Recent transnational and cultural studies of international communism have complicated this traditionalist-revisionist dichotomy. In an essay collection on *Bolshevism, Stalinism, and the Comintern,* editors Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan, and Matthew Worley propose expanding the "centre-periphery debate" via transnational comparisons of the extent to which the Soviets controlled a range of national parties.[14] Brigitte Studer and Heiko Haumann's multilingual collection on Stalinist subjects emphasizes that Soviet control was as much cultural and subjective as political.[15] In his contribution to a collection of essays on British communists, Kevin Morgan emphasizes the variety of communists' relationships with Moscow. He suggests that exploring the diversity and idiosyncrasy of communist biographies – paying attention to "personal centres" rather than institutional ones – offers a "possible route out of the recent impasse of the centre-periphery dichotomy" and what he calls the "fixation" on questions of control.[16]

[11] John McIlroy et al., "Forging the Faithful: The British at the International Lenin School," *Labour History Review* 68, no. 1 (April 2003): 99, 113; see also Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 18; Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov, eds., *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xviii; John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "A Peripheral Vision: Communist Historiography in Britain," *American Communist History* 4, no. 2 (2005): 125–57.

[12] Fraser M. Orttanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States from the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 4; Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at its Grassroots, 1928–35* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 296, 287.

[13] Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, "Stalin's Sausage Machine: British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926–1937," *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 4 (2002): 330, 328–9.

[14] Norman LaPorte, Kevin Morgan, and Matthew Worley, "Introduction: Stalinization and Communist Historiography," in *Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern*, 1–21.

[15] Brigitte Studer and Heiko Haumann, "Introduction," in Studer and Haumann, eds., *Stalinistische Subjekte: Indivduum und System in der Sowjetunion und der Komintern, 1929–1953* (Zurich: Chronos, 2006), 39–64.

[16] Kevin Morgan, "Parts of People and Communist Lives," in John McIlroy, Kevin Morgan, and Alan Campbell, eds., *Party People, Communist Lives: Explorations in Biography* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2001), 23, 24.

Drawing on the cultural and biographical strands of this recent work, this book focuses on the everyday work of creating a transnational revolutionary network. Looking at sites of transnational exchange it emphasizes the complex webs of interaction, at once personal and political, that linked international communists not only to Moscow but also to one another. Part I (Chapters 1–2) focuses on Americans and Spaniards who studied and worked in Moscow in the 1930s and introduces several individuals whose trajectories I follow throughout the book. Places like the International Lenin School functioned as points of connection between center and periphery, sites of everyday interactions among communists, both international and Soviet. As they interacted in institutions structured by the "center," mobile communists from the "periphery" lived and made international communism, although never just as they pleased.

Part II (Chapters 3–5) follows to Spain a number of Lenin School alumni and others who worked or studied in the Soviet Union and explores the transnational contacts central to the experiences of so many who participated in the International Brigades. Initiated in Moscow and managed on a day-to-day basis largely by Western European communists, many of whom were trained in the Soviet Union, the International Brigades brought about thirty-five thousand volunteers to Spain: It constituted the largest and most ambitious, although ultimately unsuccessful, international operation orchestrated by the Comintern. I pay particular attention to the American volunteers in Spain (widely known as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade), who included large numbers of foreign-born or first-generation Americans and were thus a notably transnational and multilingual contingent.

Part III (Chapters 6–7) tracks the personal and institutional connections among those who participated in the Spanish war through World War II and the early years of the cold war. I focus on both Spanish exiles in the Soviet Union, who saw the Soviet war against Germany as an extension of "our war," and on American communists, who unlike many of their European comrades, had no later story of local resistance to Nazism to overshadow or compete with the (often mythologized) memory of the Spanish war. The book concludes with a discussion of the impact of the cold war and of de-Stalinization on international communists' connections to one another and the cause.

The Spanish Civil War and the Culture of International Communism

The conflict that came to be known as the Spanish civil war began as a military coup on 17–18 July 1936. Deeply rooted in the social, economic, and political upheavals that shook Spain in the early twentieth century and that in 1931 gave rise to the Spanish Republic, the insurgency aimed to halt change and to overturn Republican reforms that challenged the traditional authority of large landowners, the Catholic Church, and the army.[17] Initiated by

[17] For introductions to very different assessments of the origins of the war, see Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War, A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005),

soldiers in Spain's Army of Africa, the coup achieved rapid success in the Protectorate of Morocco. However, on the peninsula supporters of the Popular Front government that had been elected in February 1936 offered strong, if not always well-coordinated, resistance. Thus "despite the support of many officers, the uprising in Spain" was "largely unsuccessful," taking control of only about one-third of the country.[18] The situation initially seemed to favor the Republic.

What turned the attempted coup into a civil war and an international cause célèbre on the left was the provision of German and Italian military aid to the rebels. By the end of July, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler were dispatching weapons, planes, and troops to Spain. In August 1936 German and Italian planes ferried General Francisco Franco and some fourteen thousand Spanish and Moroccan troops across the Straits of Gibraltar to Spain. On the mainland the Army of Africa launched a ruthless campaign through western Andalusia and Extremadura to Madrid, employing the tactics that colonial officers had developed as a response to guerrilla warfare in the Rif: "sporadic, mobile warfare, executed on a number of fronts" coupled with "systematic ethnic cleansing as a means of ensuring order."[19] Ultimately, Italy contributed more than seventy thousand troops, and both Germany and Italy sent hundreds of artillery pieces, tanks, planes, and pilots, including the infamous German Condor Legion responsible for the April 1937 destruction of Guernica.[20] In August 1936, the French government, hoping to undercut aid to the insurgents, proposed a ban on all intervention in Spain that won the support of Britain and the Soviet Union, as well as of Italy and Germany, even as the latter two violated it.[21] Thus as the rebels built their forces, the nonintervention agreement denied arms to the Republic.

1–19, and Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5–81. Graham argues that the Republic's "failure was a quite specific one: It proved unable to prevent sectors of the officer corps from making a coup" and that it was the insurgents' "original act of violence" that "killed off the possibility of other forms of peaceful political evolution" (18); Payne argues that "political violence was initiated primarily by the left" (45) and that the insurgents acted only "when they judged that it literally would be more dangerous not to rebel than to rebel" (68).

[18] Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 271. See also María Rosa de Madariaga, "The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War: A Reconsideration," *European History Quarterly* 22 (1992): 67, 78.

[19] Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 290–1, and more generally 286–96; Madariaga, "Intervention," 80; Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).

[20] Michael Alpert, "The Clash of Spanish Armies: Contrasting Ways of War in Spain, 1936–1939," *War in History* 6, no. 3 (July 1999): 331–51; Robert H. Whealey, *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1989), 44–51; Brian R. Sullivan, "Fascist Italy's Military Involvement in the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Military History* 59, no. 4 (October 1995): 697–727.

[21] Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 40–64; Enrique Moradiellos, "The Allies and the Spanish Civil War," in Sebastian

Airlifted across the strait, the brutally effective Army of Africa saved the insurgency from defeat, while the arrival of German and Italian bombers and tanks firmly linked it to fascism and Nazism, not least of all in the Soviet media. Less than two weeks after the rebellion began, *Izvestiia* carried reports of German and Italian military aid to the rebels and, like Comintern propaganda, characterized the struggle in Spain as a link in the chain of international fascist aggression. A photo that ran in *Pravda* of a downed rebel airplane with a swastika on its tail made the connection between German fascism and the war in Spain unmistakable.[22] By contrast, the Soviet press emphasized that the Loyalist cause was the "cause of all advanced and progressive humanity" (*delo vsego peredovogo i progressivnogo chelovechestva*), as Stalin declared in a telegram to the Spanish communist leader José Díaz that appeared in the 16 October 1936 issue of *Pravda*.

From the beginning, this image of the Soviet Union as committed to defending democracy against fascism was both pervasive and contested. Soviet antifascism galvanized many international volunteers, but others saw it as a smokescreen. Among the earliest and certainly best-known critics of Soviet propaganda and actions in Spain was George Orwell, who in *Homage to Catalonia* documented his military service in Spain as a member of a militia affiliated with the POUM (Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista), an anti-Stalinist Marxist party. For Orwell, vociferous Soviet antifascism effectively obscured the fact that the "whole Comintern policy is now subordinated (excusably, considering the world situation) to the defense of the USSR." Concerned only about ensuring their own security via cooperation with France, the Soviets, he argued, were more interested in quashing the revolution in Spain than in winning the war.[23] On the other side, the rebels represented communists – Francoist shorthand for all who supported the Republic – as irredeemable infidels, foreign agents of Moscow against whom it was reasonable and necessary to employ "Nationalist" Moroccan troops and German bombs.[24]

The opening of the Soviet archives after 1991 has done little to resolve or substantially reframe debates on the sincerity of Soviet antifascism. Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov, the editors of *Spain Betrayed*, a collection of Soviet military and Comintern documents published in English translation in 2001, argue that the newly accessible materials verify the "duplicitous maneuvers of the Soviet Union in the Spanish Republic."[25] Particularly controversial is their claim that the archives demonstrate that the

Balfour and Paul Preston, eds., *Spain and the Great Powers in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1999), 105–7.

[22] On early coverage in *Izvestiia* of German and Italian intervention see David E. Allen, "The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1952), 431. "Samolet fashistskikh miatezhnikov," *Pravda,* 29 August 1936; Mikhail Kol'tsov, "Germanskaia pomoshch' ispanskim miatezhnikam," *Pravda,* 31 August 1936.

[23] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938; reprint, San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1980), 56.

[24] Balfour, *Deadly Embrace*, 286.

[25] Radosh et al., *Spain Betrayed*, xxii.

real Soviet mission was not to save the Republic or combat fascism but rather "to 'Sovietize' Spain and to turn it into what would have been one of the first 'People's Republics,' with a Stalinist-style economy, army, and political structure."[26] From their perspective, the documents indisputably debunk the "compelling legend" that the Soviet effort to stop fascism in Spain constituted "one of the noblest and most selfless undertakings of the international communist movement."[27] They thus raise what historian Tony Judt called "the most delicate question" of whether "the International Brigades and their supporters were duped." Judt for one was ready to agree that the international volunteers "*were* duped," dismissing the communist rhetoric of antifascism and defense of democracy as a "fairy tale."[28]

For other historians, however, the claim that the newly opened archives clearly and incontrovertibly demolish the supposed "legend" of the Spanish civil war is itself a fairy tale. Historian Peter Carroll, best known for his work on the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, argues that two recent document collections including *Spain Betrayed* willfully misuse historical evidence to replace the "honorable legend of the Lincoln Brigade" with "the myths of the Moscow archives."[29] Helen Graham, a prominent British historian of the war, characterizes *Spain Betrayed* as an exemplar of "the new historical McCarthyism."[30] She finds "nothing" in the documents presented to sustain the editors' assumption that "all Soviet actions in Spain were designed to achieve" – and in fact did achieve – "total control of the Republican government and army."[31] To make their case, she argues, the editors left "entirely out of account the broader picture of Republican Spain at war."[32] Historians attending to the "broader historical context" often understand the Soviets as opportunistic – but not necessarily insincere – antifascists: Providing military aid to the Republic served Soviet efforts to prevent "German aggression from turning eastward."[33] Historian Daniel Kowalsky notes that for its part the Republic accepted the Soviet aid only "grudgingly," recognizing that "Communist participation and assistance,

[26] Ibid., xxiii. See also Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 137–8.

[27] Radosh et al., *Spain Betrayed*, xvi.

[28] Emphasis in original. Tony Judt, "Rehearsal for Evil," *New Republic* 225, no. 11 (10 September 2001): 33, 34.

[29] Carroll also reviews Klehr et al., *The Secret World of American Communism*; Peter Carroll, "The Myth of the Moscow Archives," *Science and Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 337, 338.

[30] Helen Graham, "Spain Betrayed? The New Historical McCarthyism," *Science and Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 364–9.

[31] Ibid., 366. Judt makes a similar point, "Rehearsal," 32.

[32] Graham, "Spain Betrayed?" 367.

[33] Ibid., 367, 365. See for example Ángel Viñas, *La soledad de la República: El abandono de los democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006), 282–3; Geoffrey Roberts, "Soviet Foreign Policy and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939," in Christain Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, eds., *Spain in an International Context, 1936–1959* (New York; Berghahn, 1999), 81–103.

which could not reasonably be refused, was as likely to doom the Loyalist cause as save it," by "completing its alienation from the West."[34] He also emphasizes that Soviet control of "events on the ground in Spain was always severely limited."[35] From this perspective, the argument that the Soviets were working effectively to transform Spain into a "people's democracy" on the (later) East European model seems at best "questionable."[36]

If the war in Spain is no longer, as Christopher Hitchens claimed in 2001, "probably the one argument from the age of twentieth-century ideology that is still alive," its historiography remains polarized, a high-stakes "take no prisoners" affair.[37] Thus it is worth emphasizing that this book puts the Spanish civil war at the center of a history of international communism in order to understand the importance of Spain as a personal and political point of reference for individual communists, not to argue that the Republic was dominated by communists.[38] The emphasis here is less on high politics than on understanding the meanings and political and emotional appeal of communism for individuals. Indeed the book does not intervene directly in the polemics over alleged Soviet manipulation or control of the Spanish Popular Front government and the international volunteers.[39] It does not assess Soviet motives or track the impacts of Soviet military and political intervention.[40]

[34] Daniel Kowalsky, "The Soviet Union and the International Brigades, 1936–1939," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 19 (2006): 681, 682.

[35] Ibid., 703.

[36] Mike Gonzalez, "Review of *Spain Betrayed*," *European Legacy* 8, no. 5 (October 2003): 666. See also Ruth MacKay, "History on the Line: The Good Fight and Good History in the Spanish Civil War," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 70 (2010): 203.

[37] Christopher Hitchens, "Who Lost Spain?" *Wilson Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 106–7; Ichiro Takayoshi, "The Wages of War: Liberal Gullibility, Soviet Intervention, and the End of the Popular Front," *Representations* 115, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 106. See also George Esenwein, "The Persistence of Politics: The Impact of the Cold War on Anglo-American Writings on the Spanish Civil War," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies: Hispanic Studies and Researches on Spain, Portugal and Latin America* 91, no. 1–2 (2014): 115–35.

[38] The case for Soviet domination is made by Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Viñas, *Soledad*, challenges this interpretation. Daniel Kowalsky emphasizes the limits of communist control, "Operation X: Soviet Russia and the Spanish Civil War," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies: Hispanic Studies and Researches on Spain, Portugal and Latin America* 91, no. 1–2 (2014): 174.

[39] On Spanish relations with the Comintern and Soviet Union, see Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrondo, *Queridos camaradas: La Internacional Comunista y España, 1919–1939* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1999); M.T. Meshcheriakov, *Ispanskaia respublika i Komintern: Natsional'no-revoliutsionnaia voina ispanskogo naroda i politika kommunisticheskogo internatsionala, 1936–1939 gg.* (Moscow: Mysl', 1981); Denis Smyth, "'We Are with You': Solidarity and Self-Interest in Soviet Policy towards Republican Spain," in Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, eds., *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain, 1936–1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 53–86.

[40] On Soviet intervention, see Kowalsky, "Operation X," 159–78; Ángel Viñas, *El escudo de la República: El oro de España, la apuesta soviética y los hechos de mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2007); Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* [electronic resource]

Nor does it raise the "delicate question" of whether the volunteers were duped.[41]

The book links international communism to the Spanish civil war because so many communists reported, then and later, that in Spain they lived their ideals more intensely, passionately, and fully than they had anywhere else. Even for those who eventually left the party, the Spanish civil war often remained a defining moment of their own life stories and personal networks – something that they often separated (or tried to separate) from the larger Stalinist context. Thus the focus is on Spain as a critical, but not isolated, moment in the history of international communism and international communist lives.

To get at the role of Spain in communists' life histories and communist culture, the book sets the International Brigades in the context of the understandings, experiences, and identities that communists brought with them to Spain. It begins in Moscow with an examination of everyday life at the Lenin School and in the offices of the English-language *Moscow News*. In both places, remarkably transnational groups of communists worked to define and live lives of Bolshevik "virtue," not only in politics but also in the realms of gender and

(New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kodo1/index.html (accessed 6 November 2014); Iurii E. Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X": Sovetskaia voennaia pomoshch' respublikanskoi Ispanii (1936–1939)* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2000); Pierre, Broué, *Staline et la révolution: le cas espagnol* (Paris: Fayard, 1993); Juan García Durán, "La intervención soviética en la guerra civil," *Historia 16*, no. 103 (November 1984): 11–22; David Cattell, *Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

[41] For an introduction to the contentious historiography see George Esenwein, "Freedom Fighters or Comintern Soldiers? Writing about the 'Good Fight' during the Spanish Civil War," *Civil Wars* 12, no. 1–2 (March-June 2010): 156–66. Many accounts focus on particular national contingents: Michael Petrou, *Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008); Peter Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); John Gerassi, *The Premature Anti-Fascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (New York: Praeger 1986); Cecil Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Rhinehart, 1969); Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936–1939* (London: Routledge 2004); James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1998); R. A. Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1999); Hywel Francis, *Miners against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Lawrence & Wishart 1984); Rémi Skoutelsky, *L'espoir guidait leurs pas: les volontaires française dans les Brigades internationales, 1936–1939* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1998). On the brigades as a whole, see Manuel Requena Gallego, ed., *Las Brigadas Internacionales* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2004); Ricardo de la Cierva, *Brigadas Internacionales, 1936–1996: La verdadera historia: Mentira histórica y error de Estado* (Madrid: Editorial Fénix, 1997); Michael Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society 1994); Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press 1982); Verle Johnston, *Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967).

sexuality. Chapter 1 focuses on the Lenin School, where students were supposed to live according to strict rules mandating political and personal discipline. However, as records of their disputes and disciplinary violations reveal, students did not always live according to the rules – or agree on a single consistent "Bolshevik" norm. In Chapter 2 attention turns to the *Moscow News*, a newspaper controlled by the Soviet party and geared toward raising the political consciousness of English-speaking workers in the Soviet Union. Focusing on how international communists managed the mismatch between what they had imagined the Soviet Union to be and what they experienced, the chapter emphasizes their emotional responses, their sense of themselves in the Soviet Union, and their sense of participating in an international cause.

The three chapters centered on the Spanish civil war analyze how experiences in Spain reinforced or reconfigured understandings of the cause and the communist self. These chapters draw on letters home and the volunteers' wartime cultural productions – poems, songs, and holiday celebrations – as well as later memoirs and official Comintern documents. Chapter 3 examines whether and how participants understood the abstraction "international solidarity" to operate on the ground in Spain. Although the volunteers often represented the immediately salient fact of linguistic diversity as offering powerful evidence of international solidarity and the world historical significance of their cause, commissars' reports documented serious problems, including low morale, desertion, drunkenness, and strained relations between the volunteers and Spanish troops assigned to the International Brigades.

Chapter 4 focuses on wartime cultural exchanges. The war in Spain generated models of communist behavior as well as symbols and narratives of the "good fight" against fascism that circulated internationally, reinvigorating and redefining revolutionary idealism and resonating with communists within and beyond the Soviet Union. At the same time, Soviet and Stalinist cultural products and practices – films, political education, the hunt for Trotskyites – shaped everyday life in Spain.

Chapter 5 returns to the question of Bolshevik "virtue" raised in Part I, exploring volunteers' relationships with their wives and one another. Drawing on intimate stories of communists in love and war, the chapter traces the connections between political convictions and individual responses to the wartime disruption of personal life and traditional gender roles.

The final part tracks the experiences of international communists as World War II eclipsed the Revolution as the Soviet state's central legitimizing myth and as wartime antifascism gave way to cold war anti-Americanism. Chapter 6 investigates the echoes of the Spanish civil war in Soviet coverage of World War II and in the wartime experiences of Spanish exiles in the Soviet Union and of American veterans of the Spanish war. It argues that the war in Spain remained a vital element of the Stalinist cultural landscape, shaping representations and understandings of the Great Fatherland War that ultimately overshadowed it. Chapter 7 analyzes the early cold war as a turn against internationalism and

border crossers, a cultural shift illustrated by the prominence of Spanish war veterans among the victims of the spy mania that gripped governments on both sides of the iron curtain.

Solidarity and Suspicion

Placing the years 1936–9 – the years of the Spanish civil war and of the Stalinist terror – at the heart of a history of international communism calls attention to a central paradox of Stalinism: the simultaneous celebration and suspicion of transnational interactions. This paradoxical combination is visible in the lives of students at Comintern schools, where the curriculum encouraged identification with Soviet life while the rules prohibited casual contacts with Soviet citizens. It emerged with particularly clarity in the Soviet media during the Spanish civil war, which covered the heroic antifascist struggle alongside stories that explained setbacks in Spain as the work of the same agents of a worldwide "Trotskyite-fascist" conspiracy that threatened the Soviet Union and justified the purges. A similar blend of ecstatic and conspiratorial thinking is visible in contemporary letters home from Spain, which combined paeans to international solidarity with denunciations of Trotskyite enemies.

In retrospective accounts, solidarity often trumped suspicion, as communists forgot, effaced, minimized, or excused the denunciations and purges that had accompanied expressions of international solidarity. Such omissions and evasions are often taken as evidence of communist duplicity and self-deception. The "legend" of the noble and selfless cause may also, however, suggest the depth and persistence of communist commitments. Here the issue is less one of accuracy than identity. In the wake of public revelations of Stalin's crimes, communists and former communists alike sought means of distancing themselves from Stalinism while continuing to express pride in their actions as communists – and especially their service in Spain. Thus rather than attempting to debunk or substantiate the legend of the noble and selfless cause, the book seeks to locate its sources in communist life histories and everyday practices. It tells the often intimate stories of individual communists as a means of illuminating the daily, situated work of interpreting and applying norms of communist behavior, of making communism a way of life that might outlast political affiliations.

PART I

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISTS AND THE SOVIET UNION, 1930–1936

1

Learning to Be Bolshevik

In 1926, a first class of seventy students entered the International Lenin School in Moscow. The following September, British communist J. T. Murphy provided a rare contemporary public description of the clandestine school. It was, according to Murphy, a "direct sequel" to the resolutions of the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924 that called on each national party to become a "genuine Bolshevik party" – "revolutionary, Marxist in nature, working undeviatingly towards its goal."[1] Conceptualized as the "highest Marxist educational institution for qualified Party workers," the Lenin School aimed to achieve the "bolshevisation of the Communist Parties in the capitalist countries" by turning international communists into Bolsheviks.[2]

The school's program, as Murphy emphasized, was quite "ambitious" and intensive. The syllabus changed over time, but generally emphasized political economy, philosophy, history, and strategies of organizational and party work.[3] By 1930 the school also provided students with instruction in underground work, including the use of safe houses, aliases, codes, "secret ink,"

[1] J. T. Murphy, "The First Year of the Lenin School," *Communist International,* 30 September 1927, 267; "Theses on Tactics, Adopted by the Fifth Congress, July 1924," in Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 232. See also Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, eds., *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 202.

[2] Murphy, "First Year," 267.

[3] Ibid.; "Ob"iasnitel'naia zapiska k planu uchebnoi i partiino-vospitatel'noi raboty MLSh," 1933–4, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 531, op. 1, d. 41, ll. 21–60b; "Plan uchebnoi i part. vospitatel'noi raboty MLSh," 1933–4, ibid., d. 43, l. 85; "Ob"iasnitel'naia zapiska k planu uchebnoi i partino-vospitatel'noi raboty MLSh," 1934–5, ibid., ll. 89–100; "Programma po istorii mezhdunarodnogo rabochego dvizheniia i Kominterna," 7 May 1937, ibid., d. 118, ll. 50–69; Harry Wicks, *Keeping My Head: The Memoirs of a British Bolshevik* (London: Socialist Platform, 1992), 88–91.

and a variety of print technologies.[4] Students attended lectures and undertook many independent research projects on which they reported back to their groups during regular discussion sections. During the summer, they engaged in "practical" work, visiting Soviet factories, collective farms, and construction sites where they met with workers, made speeches, and wrote articles for the communist press in their home countries.[5] In 1936 and perhaps earlier, some of the male students participated in two weeks of military training during the summer, during which they learned jiu-jitsu, map reading, and the basics of shooting and street fighting.[6]

The Lenin School also represented an ambitious exercise in institution building. Although it was not, as Murphy claimed, a wholly unprecedented "attempt to draw together leading cadres of the working class parties of the world," its purview was broader and its program more prestigious than that of two earlier schools, both founded in 1921: the Communist University of Toilers of the East (KUTV) and the Communist University of National Minorities of the West (KUMNZ).[7] By the mid-1920s, KUTV had recruited African, Asian, and African American students. KUMNZ initially taught Lithuanian, Jewish, Latvian, Polish, German, Romanian, Estonian, and Finnish students in their native languages.[8] In 1926, the Lenin School's first class of seventy included students from twenty-two countries, and the curriculum was taught in three languages: German, French, and English. By the 1931–2 academic year, the school attracted about six hundred students from more than fifty countries.[9]

[4] "Skhema: Programmy po izucheniiu opyta podpol'nom raboty," 1930, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 167–76.

[5] "Otchet o rabote komissii po priemu novykh studentov," [1930], RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 14–230b; "Otchet o letnei praktike," July–August 1931, ibid., d. 33, ll-29–44; "Dokladnaia zapiska o rabote sektora 'D' v vostochnoi sibiri," 28 August 1934, ibid., d. 166, ll. 19–22.

[6] Resolutions on work in the camp, June 1936, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 136, ll. 10–24; "Taktika ulichnogo boia po opytu revoliutsionnykh vosstanii," ibid., d. 254, ll. 152–9; on military training see also Klehr et al., *Secret World,* 202–4. On military training at KUTV, see "Uchebnyi plan Sektora A," 1931–2, RGASPI, f. 532, op. 1, d. 101, ll. 1, 5–50b.

[7] Murphy, "First Year," 267. On the school's prestige see Wicks, *Keeping,* 84.

[8] Murphy, "First Year," 267, 268. On other schools see Woodford McClellan, "Africans and Black Americans in the Comintern Schools, 1925–1934," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 26, no. 2 (1993): 372; Irina Filatova, "Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923–1937," *Paedagogica historica* 35, no. 1 (1999): 42–6; E. V. Panin, "Kommunisticheskii Universitet Natsional'nykh Men'shinstv Zapada imeni Iu. Iu. Markhlevskogo," *Platonovskie chteniia: XVI Vserossiiskaia konferentsiia molodykh istorikov* (Samara: Izdatel'stvo "Samarskii universitet," 2010),177–8.

[9] "Ob"iasnitel'naia zapiska o sostave studentov, prokhodiashchikh uchebu v MLSh," 27 November 1933, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 47, l. 46; Brigette Studer, *Un parti sous influence: Le Parti communiste suisse, une section du Komintern, 1931 à 1939* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1994), 234; Julia Köstenberger puts the number of countries at twenty-three, "Die Internationale Leninschule (1926–1936)," in Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat, eds., *Biographisches Handbuch zu Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale: Ein deutsche-russisches Forschungsprojekt* (Berlin: Academie Verlag, 2007),290; Alexander V. Pantsov and Daria A.

Admissions criteria required that they be able to study in one of seven languages: German, French, English, Spanish, Chinese, Hungarian, or Russian.[10] The students themselves spoke perhaps a dozen additional languages, including Italian, Czech, Polish, Greek, Bulgarian, Romanian, Finnish, and Korean.[11] All told, between 1926 and 1938 the school graduated roughly three thousand students from fifty-nine countries.[12] Thus the Lenin School, along with other schools organized by the Comintern, not only trained students but also provided officials with experience meeting the challenges of incorporating diverse, multilingual, multinational cadres into disciplined, unified, bolshevized institutions.

The process of bolshevization that inspired the founding of the Lenin School was directed by officials in Moscow, but often coincided with the interests and identities of international communists for whom the Russian revolutionaries provided powerful and appealing role models.[13] Defining bolshevization as "a trend towards Russian dominance of the Comintern," historians Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew emphasize that Bolshevik ideological "intransigence," however constraining, was often welcomed because it effectively "tapped into a rich vein of 'leftist' communist culture common to all national parties."[14] Moreover, Soviet efforts to control national parties were nothing new. The "Theses on the Conditions for Admission" to the Comintern, which was promulgated in 1920, directed member parties to remake themselves in the Bolshevik image: "organized in the most centralized way possible and governed by iron discipline."[15] Implicit in this directive was the requirement that international communists themselves become more like Bolsheviks – reliable, unsentimental, uncompromising. Many international communists embraced

Spichak, "New Light from the Russian Archives: Chinese Stalinists and Trotskyists at the International Lenin School in Moscow, 1926–1938," *Twentieth Century China* 33, no. 2 (April 2008):31–3.

[10] "Instruktsiia ob usloviiakh priema v Mezhdunarodnuiu Leninskuiu Shkolu," 31 March 1930, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 18, l. 13.

[11] "Svedeniia o natsional'nom sostave sektorov v1931–1932 uch. godu," 15 February 1933, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 47, ll. 22–20b.

[12] Köstenberger, "Internationale," 287; Barry McLoughlin, "Proletarian Academics or Party Functionaries? Irish Communists at the International Lenin School," *Saothar* 22 (1997): 64.

[13] Tim Rees, "Deviation and Discipline: Anti-Trotskyism, Bolshevization, and the Spanish Communist Party, 1924–34," *Historical Research* 82, no. 215 (February 2009): 132–3, 155; Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: New Press, 2002), 140, 201–2; Joni Krekola, "The Finnish Sector at the International Lenin School," in Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen, and Andrew Flinn, eds., *Agents of the Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 296.

[14] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 42–3.

[15] "Theses on the Conditions for Admission," in John Riddell, ed., *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991), vol. 2, 769; McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 46.

this sort of transformation, attracted to the idea, as Spanish communist Manuel Tagüeña Lacorte recalled in his 1978 memoir, of reaching "utopia" by the road of "organization and discipline."[16]

The announcement at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928 that a "Third Period" in the crisis of capitalism had opened – a phase that would be characterized by "gigantic class battles" and a worldwide resurgence of revolutionary activity – marked an intensification of bolshevization and of its appeal.[17] Hopeful that their own parties stood on the verge of "armed uprising," many international communists embraced Bolshevik methodology with renewed urgency.[18] Historians generally understand the ultra-leftist Third Period line, with its slogan of "class against class" and attacks on social democrats as "social fascists," as "disastrous" for communist parties. The line arguably facilitated the Nazis' rise to power and resulted everywhere in declining party membership, declines that were reversed only with the introduction of the Popular Front at the Comintern's Seventh Congress in 1935.[19] Yet however unwise as a means of attracting new members, and however ineffective on the ground, the radical line, as historian Tim Rees points out, effectively "united communists around the renewal of their special revolutionary mission and helped define their political identity"[20]

Even where its prescriptions proved impractical or counterproductive and generated some measure of local resistance, the Third Period line – and its consequences, such as arrests – often confirmed communists' belief in the power and correctness of Bolshevik predictions and practices.[21] Thus in April 1931, an American party circular analyzing recent events in light of Comintern categories interpreted "the rising wave of militancy on the part of the unemployed and long suffering masses" along with the "vicious attacks against the working class" by capitalist governments and "their allies, the fascists and social fascists" as "unmistakable signs" of imminent revolutionary upheaval. Party leaders warned that each local district must be "prepared *now*" for

[16] Quoted in Rees, "Deviation," 136.

[17] "Thesis on the International Situation and the Tasks of the Communist International, Adopted by the Sixth Congress, 29 August 1928," in McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 235.

[18] "Rech' tov. Dolores," *XIII Plenum IKKI: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Partizdat, 1934), 531.

[19] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 81; William J. Chase, *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 13–14; Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement from Comintern to Cominform: Part One, The Crisis of the Communist International*, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 159–66.

[20] Tim Rees, "The 'Good Bolsheviks': The Spanish Communist Party and the Third Period," in Matthew Worley, ed., *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 183. See also John Manley, "Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class against Class' in Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1928–1935," *Labour/Le Travail* 56 (Fall 2005): 23–8.

[21] Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 35–6.

"raids upon its officers and leading functionaries" that would necessitate the American party's transformation into a clandestine revolutionary organization.[22] From this perspective, learning to be Bolshevik appeared imperative and desirable. The Bolsheviks, after all, offered a tested path to what appeared to be successful revolution.

The Lenin School provided international communists an opportunity to learn Bolshevik methods. Because Moscow controlled the terms of that education, studies of the school often situate it within the broader debate on the relationship between the Comintern and its member parties. When assessing the extent of Moscow's control over national sections, historians have raised the critical questions of how effectively the school created bolshevized cadres and how much influence those cadres had on their home parties.[23] In this chapter, I shift the perspective, approaching the school not as an agent of the center working to mold communists from the periphery, but as a point of connection between center and periphery, a site of everyday interactions among communists, both international and Soviet. Such interactions were necessarily unequal, because the Comintern built the structure and set the rules. Nonetheless, as students and teachers entered those structures and attempted to live by those rules, they became to some degree co-constructors of the school.[24] Thus rather than focusing on the school's long-term impact on individuals or member parties, the chapter examines the relationships that constituted its everyday life.

Becoming Bolshevik required adhering to rigid norms of everyday behavior that made little distinction between the political and the personal. Students came to the school for a variety of reasons, but once there all were expected to obey clearly specified "rules of conspiracy" that limited students' contacts with outsiders and of personal comportment – to be disciplined, sober, chaste

[22] Emphasis in original."To All District Organizers," 1 December 1931, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2264, l. 95. See also "How to Act under Arrest and Police Terrorism," April 1931, ibid., d. 2268, ll. 24–8.

[23] For an extended debate on these matters see Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, "Stalin's Sausage Machine: British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926–37," *Twentieth Century British History* 13, no. 4 (2002): 327–55; John McIlroy et al., "Forging the Faithful: The British at the Lenin School," *Labour History Review* 68, no. 1 (April 2003): 99–128; Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, "British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926–37: A Reaffirmation of Methods, Results, and Conclusions," *Twentieth Century British History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 77–107; Alan Campbell et al., "The International Lenin School: A Response to Cohen and Morgan," *Twentieth Century British History* 15, no. 1 (2004): 51–76; Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, "The International Lenin School: A Final Comment," *Twentieth Century British History* 18, no. 1 (March 2007): 129–33. Other studies focus on education and indoctrination: McLoughlin, "Proletarian Academics," 63–79; Filatova, "Indoctrination."

[24] Yves Cohen, "La co-construction de la personne et de la bureaucratie: Aspects de la subjectivé de Staline et des cadres soviétiques (années 30)," in Brigitte Studer and Heiko Haumann, eds., *Stalinistische Subjekte: Individuum und System in der Sowjetunion und der Komintern, 1929–1953* (Zurich: Chronos, 2006), 175–96.

Bolsheviks. Disciplinary investigations reveal that students did not always meet these standards – or agree on a single consistent "communist" norm. A dispute over "white chauvinism" in the American sector illustrates how the communist commitment to racial equality clashed with concerns about maintaining respectable white womanhood and Soviet strictures against political "fractions." Accusations of political weakness were sometimes verified with evidence of an ostensibly personal nature such as drunkenness. Even those students who did not internalize Bolshevik norms understood that they entailed the equation of personal and political purity – or personal and political deviance.

Examining how Bolshevik values were taught, contested, violated, and (mis)understood at the school, this chapter provides a view of international communism at its grassroots. Although the school was conceived as a tool of the Soviet party, offering "indoctrination not education,"[25] it can also be understood as a site of complicated and perhaps unanticipated transnational interactions. Such an approach to the school allows us to assess Murphy's claim, which on its face may seem like sheer propaganda or wishful thinking, that indoctrination was not always unidirectional: that "much has been learned by everybody – teachers and students alike."[26] In exchanges with one another and their Soviet comrades, international communists learned and, to some extent, shaped Stalinist norms and practices.

Building an Institution for Raising Bolsheviks

Despite dramatic changes in the Comintern line occurring between the Lenin School's founding in 1926 and its demise in 1938, the school's primary mission remained remarkably stable. In 1930, teachers who were preparing a history of the school underscored that, in establishing it, the Fifth Comintern Congress had been responding to the then current "stabilization of capitalism" and had thus ignored the "practical side of things" that acquired new importance in the revolutionary Third Period.[27] Still, if the methods established in the earlier period had to be rejected as too "theoretical," the goal was very much the same: to "reveal the inner life of each student . . . to bolshevize each individual comrade."[28] In 1930 Lev Khonanovich Segal', a teacher of economics, characterized the school as "the only institution, the only place, where western European comrades are taken out of their daily routine for a long period and are placed in laboratory conditions, where it is possible to identify their deficiencies, in the sense of various remnants" of non-Bolshevik ways of thinking

[25] McIlroy et al., "Forging," 100.
[26] Murphy, "First Year," 269.
[27] "Stenogramma zasedaniia po voprosu o podgotovke raboty po istorii sozdaniia i razvitiia mezhdunarodnoi leninskoi shkoly," 6 March 1930, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 20, l. 60b.
[28] "Soveshchanie po podgotovke i razrabotke materialov po istorii MLSh," 27 March 1930, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 20, l. 35.

and acting.[29] As the school's director Klavdiia Ivanovna Kirsanova asserted, the students left as "different people."[30] In 1936, in the wake of yet another shift in the Comintern line, this time toward the antifascist Popular Front, the school remained committed to "raising Bolsheviks."[31] Those who worked there still described it as a unique and transformative environment where "the remains of arrogance and national narrow-mindedness melt away" as communists from the "advanced capitalist countries of the West" and the "semi-colonial countries of the East" lived, worked, and struggled side by side.[32]

The "conditions of admission" that Lenin School authorities sent to national parties in 1930 suggest that they had a clear vision of the sort of raw material on which they could work this transformation. First and foremost, they wanted workers, especially in heavy industry, who had been active party members "NO LESS THAN 3 YEARS." For nonworkers, the requirement was at least five years of party membership. The conditions admitted no potential conflict between the demand that candidates for admission be workers and that they be "capable of theoretical work," "oriented to current politics," and "certainly literate." If the school's examination commission determined that a potential student lacked adequate preparation, he or she would be sent home at the home party's expense. Likewise, students had to be healthy and were subject to "medical inspection" on arrival. A detailed list of suspect behaviors precluding enrollment included voluntarily taking up arms against the Red Army; serving in the police or militia of a "bourgeois government;" and exhibiting "insufficient revolutionary restraint" when arrested by, for example, betraying comrades or showing "cowardice" at trial. Party members who had engaged in active "fractional struggle" with the Comintern or their own party's leaders could be admitted only after demonstrating that they "stood with the Comintern line"for a minimum of three years.[33] Committed to raising Bolsheviks, the school required that member parties send their most active, politically reliable, theoretically oriented, and healthy cadres.

The conditions for admission also offer a clear sense of the school's atmosphere – serious, rigorous, and austere, not to say ascetic. Students received dormitory housing, food, and bedding, but not "clothing, footwear, or underwear;" they also were given a "stipend sufficient for minimal needs" such as buying books. The school offered a small allowance to dependent wives and children, who remained at home, but recommended that member parties send single, childless comrades. In any case, family members were prohibited from visiting students during the course of their studies, and students were not

[29] Ibid., l. 40b.
[30] Ibid., l. 30.
[31] "Stenogrammy torzhestvennykh zasedanii v MLSh," December 1936, RGASPI, f. 531 op. 1 d. 92, l. 17.
[32] Ibid., l. 18.
[33] Emphasis in original."Instruktsiia ob usloviiakh priema," l. 13; Studer, *Parti,* 235.On the exam and medical inspection, see Wicks, *Keeping,* 73, 85.

allowed to leave the school during the academic year.[34] A draft version of the conditions for admission offered the "conspiratorial character" of the school as the rationale for these restrictions.[35] In 1935, current students took a dimmer view, likening the school to a prison.[36]

Despite the clear instructions, less than ideal candidates often arrived in Moscow. In response, the school's administrators frequently reiterated but rarely loosened their requirements and repeatedly complained that national parties failed to comply with them. The British party in particular acquired a reputation for using the school as a "dumping ground" for problem comrades, but it was hardly alone.[37] Reviewing the poor crop of students sent in 1932, the school authorities complained that the Italian, Romanian, Latvian, Estonian, French, and American contingents reflected party leaders' "insufficiently careful selection of students, in the sense of party consistency, political and educational preparedness, health conditions, [and] ability to return" to their country of origin. Instructions for choosing students for the coming year reminded national party leaders that they "under no circumstances" should send candidates who had participated in "fractions or groups opposed to the Comintern line" – the three-year probationary period apparently having been eliminated – or those who were physically ill.[38] Such reminders notwithstanding, the admissions committee rejected almost 10 percent of the students who arrived for the 1935–6 school year, primarily because they were judged politically "doubtful" or "suspicious." The school warned member parties that they had to fully document the political reliability of their candidates along with their ability to return to their own countries after completing the course of study.[39]

Difficulties meeting the admissions requirements stemmed in part from their rigidity and specificity. The standards set in 1932 for the Spanish party's allotment of five graduate students were typical. The school expected qualified candidates to demonstrate "political firmness" and sound "theoretical preparation;" have a minimum of five years of party experience, including two years working at a regional party school, with no history of involvement in fractional struggle; "suffer from no illness that would prevent their study (tuberculosis,

[34] "Instruktsiia ob usloviiakh priema," l. 14; Studer, *Parti,* 236.

[35] "Instruktsiia ob usloviiakh priema," l. 12.

[36] "Protokol'naia zapis' o soveshchanii kollektiva sektora 'D' s amerikanskoi delegatsiei 7 kongressa Kominterna o rabote MLSh," May 1935, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 165, l. 15.

[37] Cohen and Morgan, "British Students," 336. McIlroy et al. take issue with this characterization, "Forging," 106. "Stenogramma: Soveshchaniia po voprosu o uchebnom plane MLSh na 1934 g.," 23 December 1933, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 43, l. 2; "Report of Work – Sector D," [1933?], ibid., d. 167, l. 43.

[38] "Postanovlenie politkomissii po dokladu MLSh ob itogakh komplektovaniia shkoly v 1932–1933 uchebnom godu," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 41, l. 19.

[39] "Instruktsii, predlozheniia i razverstka po priema v MLSh," 13 May 1936, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 103, l. 31.

venereal diseases);" be prepared to spend two years in Moscow without their families; and "know French well enough to follow the course."[40] The Spanish party also received specific instructions regarding its contingent of forty students in the basic course: it was to include at least three Catalans, three to four Basques, two to three Asturian miners, a minimum of six women, and six Young Communists, who had been members for at least six months. Lists of students from the 1932–3 school year provide no information on nationality, but suggest that these goals were not met with regard to miners, women, or Young Communists.[41]

The American party found it difficult to meet similar demands that it send minimum numbers of African American and female students. Noting that in August 1931 the party had fewer than one thousand African American members (approximately 7 percent of the total membership), most of whom had been in the party for less than a year, and unwilling to send "out all our developed Negro comrades," the party leaders identified eleven candidates, most of whom in some way violated Comintern guidelines.[42] Mack Coad (aka Jim Wright), whom the party characterized as "our best southern organizer both capable and reliable," was nonetheless a "special case," "very poor at reading and writing" and nursing a "physical ailment" that was "neither contagious nor dangerous" – "traces" of gonorrhea. Although party leaders judged William Odell Nowell, a Ford worker for ten years, to have "many bourgeois ideas in his head from previous education" and to be lacking in "initiative," they decided that "his earnestness, loyalty, and desire to be with the Party will enable him to overcome these weaknesses in school." Other African American candidates had been in the party less than six months or had taken positions opposed to the Central Committee. Still, party leaders noted that the "weakest element is among the women comrades." They could not locate a "single Negro woman" to send to the Lenin School in 1931 and deemed only a handful of white women to be "strong." The American cohort also lacked participants in "our strike struggles," as the local "Districts refused to leave a single comrade go."[43]

Competing pressures on national parties also worked against the school's efforts to enforce admissions standards. Facing both the wrath of Moscow when they failed to show sufficient evidence of revolutionary organization and outcries from local leaders who hated to lose their most effective organizers,

[40] "Au C. C. du P.C. Espagne," [1932], RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 183, l. 5.

[41] "Instructions concernant l'admission a l'ecole [sic] Leniniste Internationale," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 183, l. 1; "Spisok studenov MLSh KP Isp," ibid., d. 185, ll. 47–9; "Spisok studentov komsomol'tsev Leninskoi shkolu s 1930–1937 gg.," ibid., d. 230, l. 103.

[42] Letter to Clarence Hathaway, 19 August 1931, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2225, l. 71. Harvey Klehr, *Communist Cadre: The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 57.

[43] Letter to Hathaway. On Coad see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 40–2.

national leaders might be tempted to preserve their best people for work at home. Such concerns may explain why, for example, the British party, which was allotted twenty-two places in the incoming class of 1935–6, sent only six students. Indeed at least ten parties, notably the Polish, German, and Chinese, substantially underfulfilled their norms that year.[44] As noted earlier, local district leaders in the United States managed to veto plans to send strike organizers to Moscow. American party leaders in New York apparently shared the locals' concerns, bemoaning the loss of cadres, particularly Russian Americans, who overstayed leaves in the Soviet Union to work or study. Their plan to stem the tide of emigration with an "ideological campaign inside the Party . . . on the necessity of Communists remaining for the struggle in the United States" suggests that they may have resented sending a dozen or more comrades each fall to the Lenin School for terms ranging from nine months to two or three years.[45] Yet unlike their British comrades, the Americans sent their quota of students, although not necessarily with great enthusiasm.[46] For example in 1930, the party selected Steve Nelson (born Stjepan Mesaroš), a Croatian American organizer in the coalfields, for the Lenin School; however, "problems in southern Illinois" prevented his departure. When he finally left for Moscow a year later, the local district leaders complained bitterly.[47] That the Comintern often recruited students from legal parties to work as international operatives added to national leaders' incentives to keep them home. Neither the American leadership nor local organizers were likely to have been pleased when, after completing a year of study, Nelson undertook courier missions to Germany, Switzerland, and China, returning to the anthracite only in late 1933.[48]

Additionally, the composition of communist parties and the hostility of the states in which they operated complicated the school's recruitment efforts. The fact that the American party was a "party of immigrants"[49]– coupled with the

[44] Cohen and Morgan, "British Students," 336; McLoughlin, "Proletarian Academics," 74; "Svedeniia o prieme studentov 1935–1936 uch. goda," 5 October 1935, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 84, l. 9. The British party left only two places unfilled in the 1931–2 school year, "Statistika priema studentov 1931–32 uch. goda," ibid., d. 38, l. 1, ch. 1; "Stenogrammy zasedanii v MLSh o podgotovke rabote o MLSh 1930," ibid., d. 21, l. 8.

[45] "Memorandum to Comrade Browder from Comrade Weinstone," 24 June 1931, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2268, l. 74. Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at its Grassroots, 1928–35* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 68. For a case of overstaying a leave see RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 1646, ll. 15–19. On terms of study at the school see McLoughlin, "Proletarian Academics," 64; Pantsov and Spichak, "New Light," 32.

[46] "Svedeniia o prieme studentov 1935–1936 ," l. 9; "Statistika priema studentov 1931–32," ch. 1.

[47] Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson, American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 126; Philadelphia District to Secretariat, Central Committee, 12 September 1931, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2272, l. 43.

[48] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 132–56; Will Paynter, *My Generation* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), 55–9.

[49] Klehr, *Communist Cadre,* 35.

U.S. government's unwillingness to renew the passports of immigrants who had traveled, often illegally, to Moscow – meant that some American communists found themselves stranded in the Soviet Union. (Before the establishment of formal diplomatic ties in 1933, the United States did not issue passports good for travel to the Soviet Union.[50])For example, in November 1931 the American party confronted the "serious problem" of two Chinese and two Japanese students who were unable to return to the United States after completing their courses of study. William Randolph, the American party's representative in Moscow, informed leaders in New York that he could arrange passage for the Japanese students to Berlin "provided you can arrange to get them to the States from there." Although they decided that the students "cannot be used anywhere else except in the United States," the Soviet authorities offered no assistance and planned to place them in a factory "if a method is not found for their return."[51] The problem of reentry into the United States was especially acute in the case of Russian-born communists, the largest foreign-born contingent in the American party.[52] The most reliable solution open to the American party – sending only American-born comrades to Moscow – would have dramatically reduced the pool of candidates for the school.[53]

Repatriation also posed a problem for students who faced arrest or prison on their return. Ignoring such concerns, the Spanish party sent comrades needing safe haven to the school – and the school admitted them. Thus among the new arrivals in 1931 was Jesús Hernández, described in his school evaluation as a "former pistolero" (gunman), who was sent by the Spanish party to Moscow as a means of evading a threatened thirty-year prison term for the murder of two "social-fascists."[54] The brutal repression that followed the so-called Asturian October, a 1934 uprising in Spain's northern coal-mining region, brought some two hundred Spaniards to the Soviet Union, many of whom were socialists and anarchists.[55] Many of the communists ended up at the Lenin School. Indeed

[50] Loy W. Henderson, *A Question of Trust: The Origins of US-Soviet Diplomatic Relations: The Memoirs of Loy W. Henderson* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 369.

[51] Wm. Randolph to Secretariat, Communist Party U.S.A., 11 November 1931, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2225, l. 89.

[52] Klehr, *Communist Cadre,* 27; K. E. Heikkinen to Secretariat, CP USA, 12 May 1931 (two letters), RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2225, ll. 40, 41.

[53] A list of American students from 1930 includes twenty "American-born" party members and sixteen "foreign-born" (one Russian, one Italian, and fourteen Jews, who were likely born in the Russian Empire), RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 168, l. 17.

[54] "Spisok studentov MLSh KP Isp," l. 45; Fernando Hernández Sánchez, "Jesús Hernández, pistolero, ministro, espía y renegado," *Historia 16,* no. 368 (2006): 81; Ángel Ruiz Ayúcar, *El partido comunista: Treinta y siete años de clandestinidad* (Madrid: Liberia Editorial San Martín, 1976), 367.

[55] On the uprising and its aftermath see Helen Graham, *Socialism and War: The Spanish Socialist Party in Power and Crisis, 1936–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16–19. On the repression in Asturias, see Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 252–6. On emigration see

most of the sixty-four Spaniards whose biographies were prepared for the school in 1935 had participated in the 1934 uprising, many fighting on the barricades. One, Francisco Cordero Bazaga, was described as "arrested and exiled." Another, Ángel Vega, had, on orders of the party organization, killed a "provocateur" and thus needed to flee the country.[56] In these sorts of cases, the party – and the Spanish party was hardly unique – could not guarantee that the students would be able to return home after completing their studies. Much to the chagrin of the school's director, many students remained in the dormitories eight months or longer after their courses ended.[57]

Such complaints suggest the director's frustration with the school's dependence on both member parties and the Comintern. Whatever pressure they might, as representatives of the center, bring to bear on national parties, administrators and teachers ultimately had to operate the school and attempt to fulfill Comintern directives with the students they were sent. Indeed the arrival of unqualified students – or at least complaints about unqualified students – can be considered a fundamental, if unintentional, feature of the school: It necessarily functioned without sufficient numbers of ideal candidates. At the same time, the school had to cope with Comintern demands that, like the dispatch of students, were largely beyond its control. While the general mission of raising Bolsheviks remained constant, changes in the Comintern line – and in the Soviet Union more broadly – transformed both the national composition of the student body and students' concerns and needs.

The arrival of exiles from Spain illustrates the degree to which the composition of the school shifted over time as Comintern leaders reassessed the world revolutionary situation and got caught up in the vicious contemporary battles between Josef Stalin and his opponents for dominance within the Soviet party.[58] In the first years of its existence (1926–30), more than a third of the Lenin School's 903 students came from Czechoslovakia (138), Germany (106 students), and Poland (85).[59] Logistics – the relative ease of reaching

A. V. Elpat'evskii, *Ispanskaia emigratsiia v SSSR: Istoriografiia i istochniki, popytka interpretatsii* (Tver: Izdatel'stvo "GERS," 2002), 22–37; Margarita Nelken, "Un héroe español del ejército rojo: Santiago de Paúl Nelken," Archivo de Margarita Nelken, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Legajo 3245; Gabriel Jackson, *Juan Negrín: Spanish Republican War Leader* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 54; Paulina Abramson and Adelina Abramson, *Mosaico Roto* (Madrid: Compañía Literaria, 1994), 94–7; Mikhail Kol'tsov, *Ispanskii dnevnik* (Moscow: Grifon, 2005), 131.

[56] "Biograficheskie dannye o sostave sektora 'L' za 1935 g.," 1 June 1935, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 184, ll. 36–47; quotations, 39, 40. Both were accepted as students, "Spisok studentov MLSh KP Isp," l. 51. For a similar example see Krekola, "Finnish Sector," 300.

[57] Hernández (as Juan Ventura) apparently returned on a Paraguayan passport, "Dopolnitel'nye dannye," 2 August 1932, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 183, l. 13. Director of the Lenin School Kirsanova to com. Manuil'skii, 28 February 1936, ibid., d. 112, l. 6.

[58] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 54.

[59] "Svedeniia o studentakh po stranam v 1926–1930 uch. god.," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 47, l. 17.

Moscow from Prague, Berlin, or Warsaw – may account for the predominance of students from these parties. However, it is not surprising that the large, legal Czechoslovak and German parties, which were relatively successful at the polls (winning between 11 and 13 percent of the vote), attracted Soviet attention.[60] The pro-Soviet Polish party was illegal in this period, but nonetheless won parliamentary seats, polling as high as 10 percent.[61]

Between 1926 and 1930, large numbers of students also came from China (65), England (57), and the United States (52). Here the appeal for the Comintern was less the parties' electoral successes than their presumed importance to revolutionary struggles in the colonies and the West. In the case of China, the Comintern's assessment of the revolutionary situation was closely connected to concurrent disputes in the Soviet party between Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin (the Comintern's leader) on one side and the United Opposition of Lev Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, and Grigorii Zinoviev (the Comintern's former leader) on the other.[62] The Nationalists' violent repression of their erstwhile Chinese communist allies in 1927 became evidence of the need, as the 1928 "Theses on the Revolutionary Movements in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries" emphasized, to make "every effort to create a cadre of party functionaries from the ranks of the working class itself." Largely co-opting the policy advocated by the defeated Trotsky, the theses called for training communists to undertake "the immediate practical task of preparing for and carrying through armed insurrection" in China.[63] The Lenin School, one of a number of institutions in the Soviet Union that trained Chinese cadres for this task, added a Chinese-language section to meet the new demand.[64]

The British and American parties were likewise, as Stalin declared in 1929, "among those very few Communist parties of the world that are entrusted by history with tasks of decisive importance from the point of view of the revolutionary movement."[65] Moreover, the American party, which included Chinese, Japanese, and African Americans, appealed to Comintern officials as

[60] Vít Hloušek and Lubomír Kopeček, *Origin, Ideology, and Transformation of Political Parties: East-Central and Western Europe Compared* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 51, 50. McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 110; Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 79.

[61] Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, "Who Voted Communist? Reconsidering the Social Bases of Radicalism in Interwar Poland," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 88; Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1917–1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 67–8.

[62] Bruce Elleman, *Moscow and the Emergence of Communist Power in China: The Nanchang Rising and the Birth of the Red Army* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 72–3, 100, 122–3; McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 54–5.

[63] "Theses on the Revolutionary Movements in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries, Adopted by the Sixth Congress, 1 September 1928," in McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 236, 237.

[64] Pantsov and Spichak, "New Light," 29.

[65] Quoted in Manley, "Moscow Rules?" 15.

a potential strategic asset in anticolonial struggles.[66] (Before the school added a Chinese-language course in 1928, Chinese students studied in English.[67]) By contrast, in these same years, the small, fragmented, underground Spanish Communist Party sent a total of only eleven students to the Lenin School, including the party's future secretary-general José Díaz.[68]

The Comintern's proclamation at its Sixth Congress in 1928 that circumstances were once again ripe for proletarian revolution, coupled with the founding of the Republic in 1931, raised Spain's revolutionary profile in Moscow. In the 1931–2 academic year, the number of Spanish students arriving at the Lenin School jumped from 3 (of a total of 349) in the 1929–30 academic year to 30 (of 633), among them the former pistolero Hernández.[69] In June 1935, just two months before the Seventh Comintern Congress ratified another shift in the Comintern line, this time in favor of the antifascist Popular Front, the Spanish party sent the largest single national contingent, 70 students, many of whom had participated in the uprising in Asturias, of a total entering class of 313.[70]

As the national composition of the student body shifted, Lenin School administrators continued to struggle with the complexities of building an international institution for raising Bolsheviks. The "language difficulty" that Murphy highlighted as a feature of the school's first year remained a problem ten years later. Although Russian language was often included in the curriculum, the process of bolshevization usually took place through translators, who frequently were in short supply and sometimes lacked the necessary technical vocabulary.[71] Some groups, such as the Spaniards, were particularly poorly served, as the school's practice of corresponding with the Spanish party in

[66] Josephine Fowler, *Japanese and Chinese Immigrant Activists: Organizing in American and International Communist Movements, 1919–1933* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 2–3, 105; Jonathan Derrick, *Africa's "Agitators": Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 121; Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 45–51.

[67] Pantsov and Spichak, "New Light," 34.

[68] "Svedeniia o studentakh po stranam v 1926–1930," l. 17.On the situation of the Spanish party in this period, see Rees, "Deviation," 138–44. Díaz questionnaire, Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista Española (AHPCE), Dirigentes PCE, Sig. 8/2.1.

[69] "Sostav studentov mezhd. Leninsk. skholy za 1929/30 g," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 22, l. 14, ch. 1; "Statistika priema studentov 1931–32," ch. 1. Tim Rees, "Living Up to Lenin: Leadership Culture and the Spanish Communist Party, 1920–1939," *History* 97, no. 326 (April 2012): 237. On the new importance of Spain within the Comintern, see Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 29.

[70] "Svedeniia o prieme studentov 1935–36," l. 9.

[71] "Otchet o letnei praktike," ll. 7, 42; "Struktura sektora 'A' KUTV programmy, uchebnye plany," RGASPI, f. 532, op. 1, d. 101, l. 1; "Resolution on Practical Work of Sector 'D,' 1934," 3 November 1934, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 166, l. 9; "Soveshchanie v Uchebnom Otdele," 22 March 1937, ibid., d. 118, l. 6; Pantsov and Spichak, "New Light," 33, 37, 39; Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 129; Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an*

French suggests.[72] As more and more Spanish speakers filled the Lenin School's classrooms and the number of party members purged from the Comintern apparatus began to mount after 1933, the school's staff, which included only a relatively small number of Spanish-speaking teachers and translators, was stretched thin.[73]

By 1937, the school was swept up into the atmosphere of denunciation and terror that decimated the Comintern in the late 1930s. Stalin and the NKVD viewed the Comintern and its associated institutions as a nest of terrorists, Trotskyites, and spies masked as members of fraternal parties.[74] In these conditions, pedagogical deficiencies that hindered the Lenin School's efforts to meet central directives became dangerous political problems. Thus at a meeting in March 1937 teachers blamed both themselves and the lack of translations (especially Spanish and German) of essential texts for their students' incorrect understandings of Trotskyism, among other critical issues.[75] As a solution, teachers proposed that new students immediately take up the study of Stalin's speeches.[76] In late 1937, at the height of the purges, such problems were "solved" with the dismissal of the school's director Kirsanova, the arrests of at least twenty-eight teachers, and the preemptive firing of some thirty more. By then, the school had only 111 students, 62 of whom had completed their course and were awaiting repatriation, and 32 graduate students.[77] Nonetheless, the arrests and firings left the school hopelessly shorthanded. Hardest hit was the South American sector, which emerged from the purge without a single Spanish-speaking teacher, without any translators, and without Spanish-language materials.[78]

In addition to disrupting instruction, the purge undermined the school as a cohesive community. In early December 1937, the acting director reported that a group of German students, who had finished their studies but still lived

Afro-American Communist (Chicago: Liberator, 1978), 160. The Finnish Sector was unique in having courses taught primarily by native Finns. Krekola, "Finnish Sector," 295.

72 RGASPI, f. 531, op 1, d. 183.

73 "Pis'ma MLSh v TsK i MK VKP(b) o studentakh i kadrakh MLSh," 1934, RGASPI f. 531, op. 1, d. 51, ll. 5–6, 20, 36; "Rabota otdela Kadrov Mezhdunarodnoi Leninskoi Shkoli," ibid., d. 53, l. 23; "Apparat Uchebnogo Otdela," [1937], ibid., d. 124, l. 29; ibid., d. 45 (Statistical information on teachers, 1933–34); "Stenogramma obshchego sobraniia kollektiva MLSh po chistke partii," 1 October 1933, ibid., op. 2, d. 22, l. 29.

74 Chase, *Enemies*, 7–9, 263–4; McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 145–6.

75 "Soveshchanie v Uchebnom Otdele," 22 March 1937, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 118, ll. 6, 9.

76 RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 118, l. 26 (Pedagogical materials).

77 "Protokol obshchego sobraniia studentov Leninskoi Shkoly," 22–23 November 1937, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 120, ll. 1–14; Acting Director of the Lenin School Chervenkov to Deputy Director of the TsK VKP(b) Department of Agitation and Propaganda, com. Rubenshtein, 2 December 1937, ibid., d. 125, ll. 86–87; "Spisok na uvolennykh sotrudnikov Leninskoi Shkoly s 9/XII-37-g," ibid., d. 124, l. 68; On Kirsanova, see Branko Lazitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern: New, Revised, and Expanded Edition* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 216–17.

78 Acting Director of the Lenin School Chervenkov," l. 86.

in a dormitory at 14 Gogolovskii Boulevard that also housed families of those arrested by the NKVD, had engaged in "blatant" but unspecified violations of the school's conspiratorial rules. Transgressions also occurred among students living in the dormitory at 51 Herzen Street, where they came into contact with a number of Chinese comrades excluded from the party, including one "clearly suspicious type."[79] Although the students' motives and the nature of the disturbances remain obscure, the memo conveys a sense of the school's inability to control its students, indeed to control its affairs at all. A few weeks later, the school's cadres department reported that well-known teachers, who had been dismissed from the school but continued to live alongside students in the school's dormitories, created an "intolerable situation" and had an "undesirable impact" on students.[80] Again, the picture is necessarily fuzzy. The head of the cadres department was hardly likely to raise the issue of students' potential sympathy for their former – perhaps beloved – teachers or the question of students' own fears, disillusionment, or bewilderment. Nonetheless the report hints at the degree to which raising Bolsheviks had depended on or engendered shared understandings among student and teachers – understandings stressed if not destroyed by the terror. The deputy director grimly predicted a much reduced enrollment for the coming school year, and the acting director wondered what to do with the belongings of former students who had been arrested. In spring 1938, the school was formally "liquidated"[81]

Student Life: Secrets, Solidarity, and Suspicion

When students entered the Lenin School they entered a new, clandestine, and predominantly male world. Each chose an alias, and in theory students knew one another only by their assumed names.[82] Whether or not students

[79] Ibid., l. 88.

[80] Lenin School Department of Cadres to Com. Shvartsman, 20 December 1937, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 124, l. 71.

[81] Deputy Director of the Lenin School Bogomolov to IKKI, 14 May 1938, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 138, l. 110; Vladimirov to Cadres Department, ibid., l. 115; Acting Director of the Lenin School Chervenkov," l. 88.

[82] "Instruktsii po provedeniiu konspiratsii v M.L.Sh," [1930], RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 18, l. 39; "Pravila Konspiratsii," [1933], ibid., d. 52, l. 37; "Prikazy Direktsii MLSh," ibid., d. 142, l. 22. Records for the American and Spanish sectors and work on other sectors suggest that Arvo Tuominen's claim that the student body was "about equally divided" between men and women, although perhaps true of the Finnish or Scandinavian sectors, does not hold for the school as a whole. In 1930, 87.3 percent of students were male. A schedule of student allotments for 1932–3 noted a specific quota of women only for the American party, which was allocated a total of forty-five places, including fifteen blacks and four women. Arvo Tuominen, *The Bells of the Kremlin: An Experience in Communism*, trans. Lily Leino (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983), 81; "Studentcheskii sostav M.L.Sh. priema 1930 goda," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 2, d. 18, l. 44; "Razverstka studentov MLSh na 32/33 uch. god," ibid., op. 1 d. 47, l. 58.

understood their aliases in terms of the "rebirth"[83] of a revolutionary self, adopting the pseudonym, like the review by the examination commission and the medical inspection, initiated the student into the school. The fact that students generally reverted to their real names when they returned home may have reinforced the sense of the school as a place apart. Moreover, in coming to Moscow, students agreed to cut themselves off from their former selves. Students might tell family members that they were leaving for the Soviet Union, but they were not to mention the Lenin School. Particularly after 1930 school authorities strictly enforced rules of conspiracy and largely barred communication between students and their friends and families.[84] Some, like Nelson, managed to evade the restriction on spouses accompanying students to Moscow; his wife Margaret found employment with the Comintern that "alternated between clerical work and activities cloaked with a certain sensitivity." Still, given the strict visiting rules at the Hotel Lux where she was housed, spending the night together, he recalled, "would have been easier to arrange at an exclusive girls' school."[85]

While in Moscow, students were required to hide their affiliation with the Lenin School and to obey rigid limits on their social contacts and activities. The 1934 "rules of conspiracy" that students affirmed in writing required them to exercise extreme caution with acquaintances, "especially women" with whom they entered into "intimate relations" – a regulation that underscores the degree to which, for all the efforts to recruit women, the Lenin School remained an overwhelmingly male environment. To prevent the unwitting revelation of secrets, students were required to report their friends' addresses and "data on their social situation" to the cadres department. Students were further instructed to "avoid meeting with foreigners" – presumably those not associated with the school – and to avoid locations frequented by émigrés and foreign tourists. A list of off-limits hotels and restaurants was helpfully appended. When going to the movies, the theater, museums, or other public places students had to try to blend in, refraining from wearing foreign clothing that might attract attention, from speaking loudly in their native languages, and from starting conversations.[86]

Long after they returned home, many former students continued to respect the security measures that protected the secret world of the school. Relatively few later described the school or their experiences there in detail.[87] For the

[83] Cohen and Morgan are skeptical that the names were meaningful, "Stalin's Sausage," 332; McIlroy et al. less so, "Forging," 107.

[84] McLoughlin, "Proletarian Academics," 70. Studer, *Parti,* 236; "Pravila Konspiratsii," [1933], l. 38.

[85] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 130. Margaret Yeager [Eger] personnel file, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261 d. 5293, ll. 1–3. For other exceptions, see Harry Pollitt to the Administration, 22 September 1933, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 169, l. 5.

[86] "Pravila Konspiratsii," [1933], ll. 38–40.

[87] McIlroy et al., "Forging," 125 n. 13; Studer, *Parti,* 236.

historian, the pledge of secrecy complicates efforts to get at students' perspectives on the school. Autobiographies prepared by those seeking admission to evening classes and memoirs offer only a fragmentary sense of students' experiences. At the same time, the reticence of former students suggests the interpretive potential of approaching the school as a close and closed community, a place where not only new individuals but also new relationships were forged.

Although the relatively small number of contemporary autobiographies and memoirs do not allow the reconstruction of a "typical" school experience, they offer a suggestive complement to the institutional sources, which include student voices primarily in the act of criticism and self-criticism, privileging moments of suspicion. The "correct" application of self-criticism, as André Marty, a member of the Comintern's executive committee, explained to French students in 1933, required comrades "to give up ideas of 'tolerance' and to forget about group loyalties."[88] By contrast, the memoirs suggest how, at least for some students, personal connections shaped the life of the school – or memories of the life of the school – and created a sense of becoming not only a genuine Bolshevik but also a vital participant in an international movement.[89] Of course, such a sense of solidarity did not rule out suspicion and self-criticism, and indeed it often united students against perceived enemies. The "deviation hunting" that Fred Douglas, a graduate student from Edinburgh, remembered as being "carried to the point of dementia," relied on, perhaps perverted, a perceived need to defend the international cause and community of communists to which students felt connected.[90]

The autobiographies of foreigners resident in Moscow who applied individually for admission to evening classes at the Lenin School constitute one of the few contemporary sources offering a view, albeit a formulaic one clearly tailored to a specific audience, of the hopes and understandings that potential students brought to the school. As noted earlier, urgent individual considerations such as escaping a long prison term might determine who ended up on national parties' lists of candidates. However, because the school was shrouded in secrecy and because students were prohibited from discussing it, little contemporary evidence documents their motivations and expectations.

[88] Berthold Unfried, "Foreign Communists and the Mechanisms of Soviet Cadre Formation in the USSR," in Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott, eds., *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 183.

[89] In addition to the memoirs discussed later, see Tuominen, *Bells of the Kremlin;* Wicks, *Keeping;* Heinz Hoffmann, *Mannheim-Madrid-Moskau* (Berlin: Militärverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1981); Zhang Guotao, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party, 1928–1938: Volume Two of the Autobiography of Chang Kuo-t'ao* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1972); Afanasii G. Krymov, *Istoriko-memuarnyie zapiski kitaiskogo revoliutsionera* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989). For additional memoirs that contain brief mentions of the school see McIlroy et al., "Forging," 125 n. 13.

[90] Quoted in McIlroy et al., "Forging," 109.

Retrospective sources suggest that most did not actively seek admission – they were not supposed to know about the school – but went, as Nelson recalled in his 1981 memoir, "because the National Office chose me to go."[91] How resident foreigners learned of the "secret" school remains unclear, but the school's files include a number of their applications.

For those who decided on their own to apply, and perhaps also for those who were chosen, part of the school's appeal seems to have been its emphasis on joining a transnational community of revolutionaries. In his 1933 application for evening classes at the Lenin School, Jacob Axelbaum presented himself as already a very international communist. An immigrant and an inveterate border crosser, Axelbaum was born in Bobruisk (Belorussia) in 1899 and emigrated to the United States in 1909 with his mother and brothers. He joined the American party in 1925 and visited the Soviet Union in 1928. From there he went to Germany, where he worked for the German party, and then to France, where in 1929 he distributed "contraband literature" to the French army of occupation on the Rhine and studied at the University of Strasbourg.[92] In 1930 Axelbaum returned to the United States, where he worked as an automobile mechanic and became the "unit organizer" of a party cell in the Bronx.[93]

Axelbaum returned to the Soviet Union in 1931, apparently for economic reasons. With the West mired in depression, jobs in the Soviet Union had tremendous appeal. In 1931, the Soviet hiring agency in New York reported that the announcement of 40,000 jobs for skilled foreign technicians and engineers brought 100,000 applications in just eight months.[94] Axelbaum accepted an invitation from the Grain Trust to work as a mechanic on a state farm. By 1933, he was working as a "chief executive" (*otvetstvennogo ispolnitelia*) at Metrostroi, managing foreign Metro workers – quite a promotion for an auto mechanic from the Bronx.[95] Yet Axelbaum was something of an anomaly. In 1932, there were approximately 42,000 foreign workers in Soviet industry, only about 1,464 of whom, including Axelbaum, were card-carrying communists.[96] No doubt fewer still had worked in the American, French, and German parties. The autobiography and questionnaire he submitted to the school suggests that

[91] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 93. See also Haywood, *Black Bolshevik,* 148; Wicks, *Keeping,* 73.

[92] "Avtobiografiia," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 242, ll. 73–4.

[93] "Questionnaire," 21 September 1933, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 242, l. 78.

[94] Andrea Graziosi, "Foreign Workers in Soviet Russia, 1920–40: Their Experience and Their Legacy," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 33 (Spring 1988): 41. Sergei Zhuravlev, "American Victims of the Stalin Purges, 1930s," in *Stalinistische Subjekte,* 399; Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 6. Ruth Kennell and Milly Bennett, "American Immigrants in Russia," *American Mercury* 25, no. 100 (April 1932): 463–4.

[95] "Avtobiografiia," l. 74; "Kharakteristika," 23 August 1933, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 242, l. 72.

[96] Andrea Graziosi, "'Visitors from Other Times': Foreign Workers in the Prewar *Piatletki*," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 29, no. 2 (April–June 1988): 162; "Avtobiografiia," l. 75.

Axelbaum viewed political education not only as a means of advancement at work but also as vital to a vision of himself as a professional international revolutionary – a vision supported by his ability to speak English, German "quite well," French "enough so that I can be understood," and "Jewish – very good."[97]

Whereas Axelbaum presented himself as a participant in an international struggle, seventeen-year-old Morris Rosenblatt, another applicant for evening classes, underscored the powerful draw of the Soviet Union as the place to become a real and effective revolutionary. In his autobiography Rosenblatt explained that his father, a Russian immigrant to the United States, had been blacklisted in 1929 after serving as his trade union's delegate to a meeting in the Soviet Union. Unable to find employment, the father arranged in early 1932 "to come to the Soviet Union to work."[98] More intriguing than the father's decision to escape unemployment by leaving for the Soviet Union is the son's decision, despite his "poor knowledge of Russian," to join him. Less than a semester away from graduating high school, Rosenblatt might have found a way to stay in the United States. But whereas his father was not a party member, he was a Young Communist League (YCL) activist, proud of organizing a Pioneer troop in Passaic, New Jersey. In the Soviet Union, he found work at the Stalin Auto Plant as a mechanic, transferred his YCL membership to the Komsomol, and was applying to study at the Lenin School. Hoping to return to the United States "in a few years," he believed he could "be of greater use to the Young Communist League and the revolutionary movement if I were to return with an advanced political education."[99] That his father was able to solve his "difficulties" only in the Soviet Union may have persuaded the young Rosenblatt of both the dangers of reformism at home and the necessity of learning Bolshevik methods of revolution and bringing them back to the United States. (Axelbaum's and Rosenblatt's fates after their applications to the Lenin School are unclear. I have found no evidence that either returned to the United States. Like many foreign workers who remained after 1934, they may have fallen victim to the purges.[100])

Rosenblatt's case highlights the overlap of personal and political commitments and ties in bringing students to the school – a dynamic also visible in retrospective accounts. In his autobiography, Rosenblatt scarcely distinguished between family and party loyalty. Both encouraged him to emigrate to the Soviet Union; although if his father had found work in the United States, he was unlikely to have left – or to have attended the Lenin School. Personal

[97] "Questionnaire," l. 76.
[98] "Autobiography," nd, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 246, l. 104.
[99] "Application," nd, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 246, l. 103.
[100] Graziosi, "Visitors," 162; Tzouliadis, *Forsaken*.Their names do not appear in the database "Zhertvy politicheskogo terrora v SSSR" maintained by Memorial, http://lists.memo.ru/index1.htm (accessed 6 November 2014).

ties might also influence the selection of cadres by their national parties. Thus in his memoir Nelson guessed that it "was probably Rudy Baker" (Randolph Blum) – an old friend with shared roots in Philadelphia's Croatian community, who also happened to be an alumnus of the school and the party's current organizational secretary – "who suggested I attend the Lenin School."[101] An invitation to attend the prestigious school, delivered, as Harry Haywood's was, in an intimate setting over vodka, offered a potentially powerful means of conflating and cementing personal and party relationships.[102]

In his 1978 memoir, Haywood (born Haywood Hall; he adopted his school pseudonym as a permanent name) described his experiences at KUTV and the Lenin School in the late 1920s in terms more personal than institutional or ideological. Still proud of his Stalinism – "history," he believed, had largely proven Stalin "correct"[103] – Haywood structured his remembrances of the school around brief renderings of the people he met there, both true believers and eventual renegades, who linked him to struggles of world historical importance. Typical of Haywood's approach is the account of the course on Leninism and the history of the Soviet party, which he deemed "perhaps our most interesting and stimulating course." To describe the course and its importance, Haywood described its teacher, the historian Isaak Izrailevich Mints, "a young Ukrainian Jew, a soft-spoken and mild-mannered little man," who had participated in the civil war. Particularly memorable was the lesson on "Bolshevik agrarian policy during the Civil War," during which Mints "told us of his involvement in the settling of the question of land redistribution in a Ukrainian district."[104] Haywood similarly recalled fellow students in terms of their past and future contributions to (or deviations from) the revolution.

Haywood's biographical sketches create the impression that the shared school experience generated long-lasting, transnational bonds among Bolsheviks. The story of Haywood's bond with his "special friend" among the British students, his roommate Dave (Douglas) Springhall, "Springy," illustrates his approach. The narrative begins with the gossipy recollection that Springhall was "popular with everybody, particularly among the women on the technical staff." However, Haywood quickly moves from his own memories of Springhall to a dry summary of his political biography: "After leaving the Lenin School, [Springhall] returned to England where he rose rapidly in Party leadership. He also fought in Spain as a member of the Fifteenth International Brigade and was wounded at Jarama."[105] Haywood further recounts Springhall's conviction during World War II for spying, his postwar sojourn to China,

[101] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 28, 51, 125 (quotation). On Baker see Klehr et al., *Secret World,* 83–95, 119–21.
[102] Haywood, *Black Bolshevik,* 188, 200.
[103] Ibid., 184.
[104] Ibid., 209.
[105] Ibid., 202–3.

and his death in a Moscow hospital.[106] Both Springhall and Haywood served in Spain, and their paths may have crossed again there. Yet Haywood does not mention such a meeting or any detail of his relationship with Springhall that might explain why he considered him a "special friend."[107] Attending the school together was apparently enough to link them irrevocably to the cause and to one another.

Steve Nelson's 1981 memoir takes a rather more critical view of Stalin and the party – which he left in 1957 – than Haywood's, but shares its emphasis on the long-term importance of the personal connections made at the Lenin School. For Nelson, as for Haywood, the most memorable lessons involved listening "to men and women who had participated in these revolutionary movements," including "a man past eighty who had been a drummer boy in the Paris Commune of 1871."[108] Nelson, too, had fond memories of his roommates, with whom he recalled passing "many an evening sprawled on our beds exchanging stories and arguing politics." The roommates came from across the English-speaking world – an Indian who had escaped a British prison, a "working-class intellectual" from Australia, "some Scottish and Cockney" comrades. Looking back, Nelson averred, "I learned as much from them as I did from my classes."[109] Housing international comrades four or eight to a room, the school authorities created, consciously or not, an atmosphere that, as Nelson remembered with perhaps a degree of nostalgia, "really made me feel part of a movement in which solidarity on a global scale was more than an abstraction." The power and concreteness of that solidarity may have been particularly clear in retrospect. Nelson concluded the story of his roommates with the observation, "I met some of them again on the battlefields of Spain," where he saw some of his school friends die.[110]

The school's structure – its polyglot students and teachers, its insistence on the need for conspiracy – made international revolutionary solidarity a lived political and emotional reality. While the school fostered a sense of participation in a global network, it also reminded students that they belonged to an embattled minority. The school's regime of conspiracy was not merely a practical response to the fact that comrades returning from Moscow faced potential

[106] Haywood makes some errors in this biography, *Black Bolshevik,* 203. McIlroy et al., "Forging," 113; Nigel West, "Dave Springhall," *Mask: MI5's Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (London: Routledge, 2005), 219–27; "Douglas Springhall Dies," *New York Times,* 8 September 1943.

[107] Haywood, *Black Bolshevik,* 467–89; Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936–1939* (London: Routledge, 2004), 88.

[108] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 129. On Nelson's decision to leave the party, see ibid., 380–98. On meeting eyewitnesses to revolution, see also "Dokladnaia zapiska o rabote sektora 'D' v vostochnoi sibiri," l. 14; "Otchet o provedennoi praktike s gruppoi sektora 'L,'" 6 March 1935, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 184, l. 31.

[109] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 130.

[110] Ibid., 130–1.

repression at home: It was a central feature of the school's institutional culture. Nelson conveyed the jittery mood in his account of the one incident that "troubled" his recollections of the school – the frantic revision of the curriculum on the eve of the new term to excise material related to Trotsky's role in 1917 that had suddenly become "counterrevolutionary."[111] The mimeograph machines humming through the night impressed the lesson that truths learned and friends made might, without warning, turn out to be false.

White Chauvinism: Race, Gender, and Trotskyism

The clandestine lives of the American students who entered the Lenin school in fall 1931 got off to a rather inauspicious start. Conflict began soon after they steamed out of New York harbor bound for London on the first leg of their journey to Moscow. Nelson remembered that the party's leaders had instructed the group to limit contact across racial lines during the trip in order to remain "inconspicuous" – a directive, he noted, that "pretty well ostracized" the black comrades. Indeed several students who "felt we had to bend a little or we would be letting our comrades down" apparently engaged in interracial socializing on board the ship.[112] Precisely what sort of socializing occurred, what steps some white comrades had taken to prevent it – and whether those steps constituted "white chauvinism" – became the subject of a lengthy investigation that began with self-critical discussions on the ship. It culminated in a three-day session of self-criticism held in December 1931, a session important enough to draw party leader Earl Browder, then visiting Moscow, to the Lenin School for the proceedings.

In March 1932, the Communist Party of the United States officially resolved the issue, which it characterized as an "extremely serious situation" among the American students enrolled in the Comintern's International Lenin School in Moscow. An early draft of the resolution described the students as having become divided into "two main warring groups, with the principal dividing line the white versus the Negro."[113] The final resolution depicted the problem less dramatically as a "politically unhealthy atmosphere developing among the American group of the ILS as a result of concrete manifestations of the remnants of white chauvinism."[114] The resolution defined "white chauvinism" as a "weapon" wielded by the American bourgeoisie "to isolate the Negro masses from the white workers" through "propaganda of white superiority and Jim Crowism," and it declared "OUR FIGHT AGAINST INCREASED

[111] Ibid., 131, 132.
[112] Ibid., 126.
[113] "Draft Resolution on the Situation which Developed in the American Lander Group of the I. L. S.," 25 January 1932, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2602, l. 60.
[114] "Resolution of the Situation in the American Lander Group of the I.L.S.," 11 March 1932, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2602, l. 44.

BOURGEOIS OPPRESSION OF THE NEGRO MASSES" to be the "MOST IMPORTANT TASK of the American Party and above all the first duty of white comrades."[115]

From this perspective, the problems in the school were ones of political understanding and practice. The "situation," according to the party resolution, stemmed from the failure of white comrades "to understand the whole political importance of cleansing themselves first of all from all the traces of this arrogance toward the Negroes . . . that stinks of the disgusting atmosphere of the old slave market."[116] More specifically, the final resolution traced the origins of the conflict to the "mechanical application of certain necessary" but unspecified "conspirative [sic] directives" designed to allow the students to blend in on the ship to London.[117] Thus a lack of political understanding led to a clumsy effort at maintaining party discipline and secrecy. After outlining errors made not only by the white students, but also by school officials and black students, the resolution concluded that through a process of "Bolshevik self-criticism" the "divergencies [sic] in the American group of the ILS, are definitely liquidated."[118] The "situation" appeared to be neatly and definitively resolved.

However, the transcripts of the investigations and self-criticism sessions in Moscow offer a more complicated picture of both the dispute itself and the sometimes tense relationships among students and teachers at the school. The actual conspiratorial directive, which went unmentioned in the final resolution, was, as reported during the course of the investigation in Moscow, that "the girls [*devushki*] among our comrades weren't to communicate with the Negro comrades, so as not to attract too much attention."[119] (Approximately three women students sailed for London aboard the *Majestic* in late summer 1931; all were white. The group also included about six African American men and seven white men.[120]) Although the transcripts clearly suggest the gendered dimensions of the "white chauvinism" debate, neither the investigators in Moscow nor party authorities in New York seemed to have noticed that the "necessary" ban on "conspicuous" interracial socializing between black men and white women might help account for the sharpness of the conflict, because it both interfered

[115] Emphasis in original. Ibid., ll. 44–5.
[116] Ibid., l. 45.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., l. 47.
[119] "Protokol: Sobraniia amerikanskoi lendergruppy ot 19 IX-31 g.," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 2, d. 56, ll. 19, 4. The archive does not include the English (original?) of this protocol. The 1931 cohort traveled in two separate ships. Comrade Dennis who traveled on the second ship reported receving the same instruction "that the white girls should not speak to the Negro comrades," "American Landergroup Meeting, December 24, 1931," ibid., d. 56a, l. 91.
[120] Estimates based on lists of the overall cohort, internal evidence from the various meetings, and Nelson's memoir. "Spisok studentov," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 106, l. 71; Letter to Hathaway, l. 71; Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 125.

with and suggested the illegitimacy of interracial male-female relationships. The rule not only directly contradicted the party's commitment to extending "black-white unity . . . into the sphere of personal relations," but also effectively perpetuated "the disenfranchisement of blacks" and "the marginalization of women."[121]

The rule proved particularly toxic because the student group included an interracial married couple, William Odell Nowell (known at the school as Cooper), an African American auto worker from Detroit, and his Ukrainian American wife Pearl Demery (Paign). Testifying in Moscow, Nowell emphasized that he felt "a strong undercurrent throughout the trip, that is, of tense feeling. It apparently centered around the relations between myself and Paign, who happens to be my wife. We were completely isolated from the group. I noticed *concealed* chauvinism on the part of a large number of comrades in the group."[122] Leonard Patterson (Terry) an African American shipyard worker from Baltimore, drew attention to the fears of miscegenation implicit in the instruction. Recalling suggestions that Nowell and Demery not walk together in London, he observed, "Some of the white comrades, jealous, still having this prejudice in them, hate to see a Negro comrade married to a white comrade. Is this an isolated case? No."[123]

The most public incident of alleged racism occurred in the ship's dance hall. Enjoined from dancing with the white women, two black men apparently began dancing together.[124] Rose Riley (one of the few students always referred to by her school name rather than her real name, Rose Cohen or Clark) motioned for them to leave the dance floor. Because, as a number of both white and black students testified, there had been no sign of discrimination on the part of the ship's staff or other passengers, her action was deemed a "mechanical" application of the rule and thus a manifestation of white chauvinism.[125] Riley

[121] On "unity," see Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 36, 47; Baldwin, *Beyond*,67.

[122] Emphasis in original. "Meeting of Special Commission to Investigate Situation in American Lander-Group, held Nov. 14, 1931," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 2, d. 56, l. 56; Angela D. Dillard, *Faith in the City: Preaching Radical Social Change in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 56. *Hearings before a Special Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Seventy-fifth Congress, Third Session*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938), 1334.

[123] "Meeting of Special Commission," l. 162.

[124] The dancers are variously identified as Jacoby (Dzhakobi) and Shoemaker (Shumaker) and Brown (Braun) and White (Uait) ("Protokol," ll. 3, 8). On the basis of internal evidence, Shoemaker appears to be the school name of Charles H. White, a member of the Young Communist League, who later became a witness against the party in House Un-American Activities Committee hearings. Thomas Sakmyster, *Red Conspirator: J. Peters and the American Communist Underground* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 34. Jacoby appears to be "Brown" (no first name given), who was listed among "our oldest [black] comrades" in a letter describing the students to be sent to the school (Letter to Hathaway).

[125] "Protokol," ll. 2, 8, 10, 16, 27.

explained her behavior as a response to the sex, not the race, of the dancers: "It was just a matter of seeing two boys dance together. . . . Even at the Party affairs, we told the boys to split up."[126] Another student contested this explanation of her motives – but not the larger point that "boys" should be "split up."[127]

In the final resolution, there is no indication of the gender anxieties visible in the transcripts of the meetings in Moscow. Comrade Cooper (Nowell) appears in a draft version of the resolution not in the context of the difficulty, indeed the possible "white chauvinism," of applying a ban on interracial socializing in a group that included an interracial married couple, but as an example of a comrade "insufficiently armed against the influence of Negro bourgeois nationalism."[128] Likewise, there is no indication of Riley's appeal to ostensibly acceptable homophobia. Instead the resolution castigates a mistaken (and genderless) "barring of Negro comrades from the dance floors by some white comrades."[129] By ignoring the connections between racial and sexual liberation, both school officials and party leaders in New York implicitly endorsed stereotypes of dangerous black male sexuality and (white) female purity. Indeed they seemed to view such endorsement as unproblematic, never considering how the personal relationships among the students on the ship – most notably the presence of an interracial married couple – shaped and exacerbated the "political" conflict that they sought to resolve. Yet it seems clear that the "political" debate was hardly separable from the deeply personal and painful effects of the "conspiratorial" ban on interracial socializing.

The transcripts also illustrate how the failure of the school's Soviet leadership to understand the dynamics of race relations in the United States – or, perhaps more accurately, their dogged insistence on fitting American problems into Soviet categories – could undermine their efforts to promote both the Comintern line and the racial equality that they themselves set as the "most important task" of the U.S. party.[130] After the publication in late October 1931 of Stalin's letter to the editor of the historical journal *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia,* concerns about Trotskyism became an increasingly visible part of the discussions of white chauvinism. An attack on Trotskyite falsifications of history, Stalin's letter set off a far-reaching – and, historian John Barber argues, largely unintended – "campaign against ideological unorthodoxy" that brought Soviet intellectual life to a virtual standstill.[131] The controversy hit the

[126] "Meeting of Special Commission," l. 149. See also "Protokol," ll. 5, 9

[127] "Protokol," l. 16.

[128] "Draft Resolution on the Situation which Developed in the American Landergroup of the I.L.S," 3 February 1932, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 2602, l. 81.

[129] "Resolution of the situation," l. 45. In his 1981 memoir, Nelson recalled that one of the black men asked a white woman to dance. The testimony in Moscow does not support this version. Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 126.

[130] Naison, *Communists in Harlem,*16–18; Letter to Hathaway; L. Pokrowsky to Comrade Randolph, 13 March 1930, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d.869, l. 27.

[131] John Barber, "Stalin's Letter to the Editors of *Proletarskaya Revoliutsiya*," *Soviet Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 1976): 23 (quotation), 22.

American section of the school particularly hard because Haywood's fondly remembered professor Mints (or Mintz), who taught the English-language seminar on Leninism at the school, was among the contributors to the official *History of the Communist Party* in which Stalin had detected "a number of errors."[132]

The fevered unmasking, criticism, self-criticism, firing, and in some cases expulsion from the party of "Trotskyite falsifiers" reached a climax in December 1931 just as the Lenin students were undertaking three days of intensive self-criticism.[133] At the Institute of Red Professors' tenth anniversary celebration in December, Stalin's right-hand man Lazar' Kaganovich openly charged Mints with taking a Trotskyite approach to history.[134] At the Lenin School, as noted earlier, the students frantically revised the curriculum on the eve of the new term to excise material related to Trotsky's role in 1917. Not surprisingly perhaps, rooting out Trotskyism also became part of the white chauvinism investigation. The perceived necessity of linking the issue of white chauvinism to this prominent Soviet campaign emerges most poignantly in Mack Coad's only recorded intervention in the December meeting. The African American steel worker from Birmingham, whom the American party had characterized as "our best southern organizer" but "very poor at reading and writing," confessed that "Stalin's letter is a hard language, but I can understand a few words in it. I never knew there was anything like it in the world. I am scuffling over it."[135]

The speeches at the meeting illustrate how the Soviet directive that the American party fight "remnants of white chauvinism" interacted with the equally insistent Soviet directive to root out factions and Trotskyites. Although more politically sophisticated than Coad, the school officials also seemed to struggle with how to connect the letter and its concerns about Trotskyism to the matter at hand. In his questioning of Nowell in November, Dmitrii Matveevich Evtushenko, a school official, attempted to develop a connection between Nowell's "disagreement with the instructions of the C[entral] C[ommittee] in America regarding the trip" and his alleged political "differences with the policy of the CC of the Party" on the Negro question that in turn appeared "similar to the opposition which was inside" the Soviet party.[136] Evtushenko appeared unable to grasp the meaning of the "*concealed* chauvinism" – more a feeling of isolation than concrete political acts – that Nowell emphasized existed on the ship and seemed to view the charge of white chauvinism as merely a clever means of deflecting (perhaps legitimate)

[132] Ibid., 21, 22; Elaine MacKinnon, "Writing History for Stalin: Isaak Izrailevich Mints and the *Istoriia grazhdanskoi voiny*," *Kritika* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 14. "Spisok: Studentov II kursa i prepodovatelei M.L.K," 5 March 1928, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 13, l. 5.

[133] Barber, "Stalin's Letter," 22–3.

[134] MacKinnon, "Writing History," 16.

[135] "American Landergroup Meeting, December 24, 1931," l. 65.

[136] "Meeting of Special Commission," ll. 65, 67, 68.

charges of factionalism and Trotskyism.[137] Likewise, Mints, questioning Arthur Murphy (Jacobs), an African American steelworker from Pennsylvania, could not or would not distinguish Murphy's complaints about white chauvinism on the ship from a general political opposition – framed as opposition to "white chauvinism" – that constituted some sort of "propagandistic" effort on the part of black students to "isolate themselves from the whites."[138] Unable to understand how attitudes or words might be offensive and painful, the Soviet teachers and administrators took the black students' complaints about the behavior of their white comrades as a form of fractional politics.

The American students, both black and white, by and large rejected or perhaps did not understand the effort to connect the campaigns against Trotskyism and white chauvinism. At the December session, a white student emphasized that "if the Negro comrades isolated themselves [from the white comrades], we are the cause, we gave them the basis for their isolation," and regretted that "if you speak or are sociable with a Negro comrade you are [seen as] the leader of the Negro comrades and you have groupings with them."[139] Patterson made the firmest and clearest objection to understanding the black students' concerns through the lens of factionalism, asserting that "If the comrades try to connect this question with the Trotsky question, I don't think there is any comparison."[140]

The American party's final resolution echoed Patterson's objections, chiding the "ILS leadership" for formulations such as those suggested by Evtushenko and Mints that "tried to create a certain balance" between the "manifestations of remnants of white chauvinism" on the part of some white comrades and the political errors of some black comrades exercising their "political right" to condemn such behavior.[141] In short, the Americans managed to define the collective complaints of black comrades – even when they (mistakenly, in the party's view) charged Soviet comrades with white chauvinism – as something other than the organization of a "fraction," the primary way in which the Soviets understood such complaints. Instead, they were asserting their legitimate rights to be treated as equal members of the communist community.

Clearly the American students and the American party leaders in New York were learning and applying Stalinist categories. But neither the debate within the school nor the final resolution revealed a straightforward or unidirectional process of indoctrination. Although all could agree that excising the remnants of "white chauvinism" in personal relations was a "political duty," Stalin's letter made "Trotskyism" the preferred framework for understanding the issue

[137] Ibid., ll. 61, 62.
[138] Ibid., l. 140.
[139] "American Landergroup Meeting, December 24, 1931," ll. 106, 107.
[140] "Meeting of Special Commission," l. 159.
[141] "Resolution of the Situation," l. 46; "Meeting of Special Commission," l. 166.

of white chauvinism.[142] However, the letter offered few guidelines as to how to proceed. At a moment when "practically every established authority was being subjected to violent criticism,"[143] the representatives of the "center" struggled to construct, let alone inculcate, a monolithic "Stalinist" approach to the American party's problems. Not only students – the ostensible objects of indoctrination – but also their teachers found it difficult to fit U.S. race relations, especially as they played out in personal and intimate relations among communists, into Soviet and specifically Stalinist categories. Fifty years later, Nelson summed up the incident as a "conflict of Party discipline vs. the Negro question in America."[144] In contrast to the party's resolution, he characterized the conflict as at once political and emotionally charged, and as never really resolved. If the "divergencies" were liquidated, the difficulty of building a communist community and establishing and enforcing communist norms of behavior in personal relationships remained.

"Not a School of Monks": Political Health and Bolshevik Norms

A February 1933 report on the Lenin School's American sector makes it clear that white chauvinism had not been the only "difficulty" faced the previous year: The "school also had to struggle against" drunkenness, antisemitism, and social democratic "deviations on questions of socialist construction."[145] The equation of the seemingly incommensurate issues of drunkenness and social democratic "deviations" reflected the long-standing communist practice of establishing and enforcing normative codes that defined ostensibly private behaviors as politically meaningful. Drunkenness, no less than an incorrect attitude toward black or Jewish comrades or socialist construction, carried serious political implications, because it demonstrated an un-Bolshevik lack of discipline and often led to breaches of conspiracy.[146]

The Soviet conflation of personal and political unreliability often "perplexed" and discomfited foreign communists, for whom, as historian Berthold Unfried emphasizes, the practice "seemed to violate Western notions of individuality and ignore the boundaries between private and public domains."[147] In his 1972 memoir *My Generation*, Welsh communist Will Paynter's primary recollection of the school was of an incident that suggested precisely the strangeness, even – at least in retrospect – the absurdity, of finding political meaning in apparently innocent, apolitical behavior. He recounted that a

[142] On interracial socializing as a "political duty," see Naison, *Communists in Harlem,* 47.
[143] Barber, "Stalin's Letter," 40.
[144] Nelson does not mention the Browder meeting, *American Radical,* 126.
[145] "Otchet o nabore studentov sektora 'D,'" 15 February 1933, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 164, l. 3.
[146] "Stenogramma obshchego sobraniia kollektiva MLSh po chistke partii," ll. 46–47; "Prikaz," June 1934, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 53, l. 58.
[147] Unfried, "Foreign," 175.

simple "frolic"– a boisterous "booze up" with two roommates that involved "bawling rude parodies on some of the current popular songs" – resulted in "a special party meeting the following morning of the English-speaking group, where we were condemned and classified as 'petty bourgeois degenerates.'"[148] Indeed not only Westerners were perplexed by the linkage of political and personal behavior. A Chinese comrade, who observed the director of the Lenin School's "self-criticism" in 1929, remembered that "in the course of her hour-long confession [Kirsanova] even made mention of her private life during her younger days, which astonished foreign Communist Party members."[149] The necessity of scrutinizing a communist's personal behavior in order to assess political "health" constituted a central lesson of the Lenin School.

Although the general tendency to blur the borders of public and private life may have astonished foreign communists, it was the school's rigid, abstinent code of conduct that, as Paynter's story suggests, often became the flashpoint in conflicts between students and administrators. Nelson, who, unlike Paynter, seems to have complied with the rules, remembered that "some students rebelled against the strict discipline and regimentation, but," he insisted, "only a handful."[150] In his 1935 address to incoming students, Marty sought to preempt any possible tensions by emphasizing that the school's rules allowed and encouraged students to enjoy themselves in healthy communist ways. Assuring the students that the school was not a "school of monks," Marty urged them to "absolutely mix in all the life of the Soviet country and follow it" by reading the English-language *Moscow Daily News* and participating in "winter and summer sports as much as possible." He also called on students to emulate the wholesome habits of Soviet youth and "go to the theaters and the pictures." He recommended that students see the film *Chapaev* (1934) about the legendary Russian civil war commander Vasilii Chapaev, not in order to model themselves on the swashbuckling hero, but rather to learn from the political commissar portrayed in the film – the disciplined, authoritative embodiment of party consciousness.[151]

When violations of Bolshevik norms of behavior occurred, the school addressed them with tools borrowed from the Soviet party: criticism and self-criticism and the related production of "characterizations" or evaluations (*kharakteristiki*).[152] Hence a drunken spree resulted in an impromptu meeting called to label the offenders "petty bourgeois degenerates." The case of Jack Larkin (probably a school alias) offers a fuller illustration of the process of self-criticism. In June 1932, Larkin sent an eight-page letter to the

[148] Paynter, *My Generation,* 54.
[149] Zhang, *The Rise of the Chinese Communist Party,* 98; Wicks, *Keeping,* 94.
[150] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 129.
[151] "The Main tasks of Students in Party Schools: Scheme of the speech of Comrade Marty," 8 October 1935, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 72, ll. 110b, 20.
[152] Unfried, "Foreign," 180–1. On "characterizations," see Krekola, "Finnish," 296–9.

Anglo-American Sector Bureau that defended his remark, made in a speech before the sector, to the effect that "in every American City where there is a Party Unit, the Party is run by a bunch of Jewish Comrades who think they own the Party." The remark, he argued, constituted a legitimate, if inelegant, protest against "Petty Bourgeois Jewish Chauvinism."[153] Less than a week later, after the sector meeting that heard his case, Larkin was contrite, confessing that "I came to the conclusions that were wrong, anti-Communist, and anti-Semetic [sic]." He now understood that in such cases a comrade had to "fully realize the seriousness of my mistakes and repudiate them."[154] Such criticism and self-criticism constituted a crucial feature of periodic and, until the terror of 1936–8, nonlethal purge (*chistka*) proceedings designed to rid the Soviet party of "unworthy elements." The process was, according to Unfried, "more an educational measure than a tool of political repression."[155]

By the mid-1930s, however, the balance in the Soviet party began to shift from education to repression. Responding to the December 1934 murder of Leningrad party boss Sergei Kirov, the Soviet party and the Comintern began in early 1935 an intense "vigilance campaign against 'Trotskyites.'" Officially blamed on a treasonous conspiracy linked to the exiled Trotsky, as well as to Zinovev and Kamenev, who were duly arrested, the murder fed "mounting suspicion of foreigners, spy mania, and xenophobia."[156] Ironically, the stepped-up vigilance coincided with the Comintern's adoption of a more moderate line, the "united front against fascism" that called for an end to sectarian attacks on "social fascism" in favor of "unity of action" among "all sections of the working class, irrespective of what organization they belong to"[157] – except, of course, Trotskyite organizations. The Comintern's new flexibility succeeded in sparking the growth of communist parties in many places; however, these very successes ended up stoking fears that spies and Trotskyites were increasingly infiltrating national parties and making their way to Moscow disguised as political émigrés or students.[158]

Anxiety ran high at the Lenin School, where the class entering in 1935 included students who only a year or two earlier had been social democrats or anarchists. Addressing a meeting of Lenin School teachers in December 1935, Italian communist and member of the Comintern's executive committee Palmiro Togliatti (aka Ercoli) emphasized the success of the Popular Front line

[153] I have been unable to identify Larkin's real name. Jack Larkin to Sector Buro, 15 June 1932, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 2, d. 56v, ll. 20, 21.

[154] Jack Larkin to Sector Buro, 21 June 1932, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 2, d. 56v, l. 23.

[155] Unfried, "Foreign," 177, 186.

[156] Chase, *Enemies,* 5, 37–8; Matthew Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[157] Chase, *Enemies,* 5; "Resolution on Fascism, Working-Class Unity, and the Tasks of the Comintern, Adopted by the Seventh Congress, 20 August 1935," in McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 243.

[158] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern,* 121.

in France, where the party had rapidly grown from about 40,000 to almost 100,000 members. However, he warned the gathered teachers, impressive as this growth appeared, most of these new party members were not yet "real communists." The teachers, therefore, had to be alert for signs of Trotskyism among their students, and carefully train the new cadres in the "foundations of our politics, of our tactics, and, especially the fight against Trotskyism."[159] He located the greatest dangers among the "young people" from France, Spain, Belgium, and the "Latin countries in general, where there are strong remnants of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism."[160] Although neither the Italian nor Belgian parties sent large numbers of students to the school in 1935, the French and Spanish parties overfilled their enrollment allotments, sending, respectively, thirty-two and seventy students.[161] Given the national composition of the student body, Lenin School teachers had their work cut out for them.

Yet even as Togliatti emphasized the dangers, he remained unwilling to assume that the school was honeycombed with Trotskyites, insisting that the means of combating Trotskyism among international communists necessarily differed from those employed in the Soviet party. Togliatti proposed that, rather than simply condemning Trotskyism, teachers explain the dangers it posed in specific countries. The students, he reminded their teachers, "come from capitalist countries, social democratic parties, they are ideologically weak."[162] Moreover, Togliatti argued, Trotskyism was more dangerous inside the Soviet Union, where "the question of Trotskyism . . . is a question of struggle against counterrevolution," than in the students' home countries, where it was a "question of the correct policy of the united front."[163] Here Togliatti ignored the danger to the Soviet Union – perhaps far-fetched but frequently invoked – of foreign Trotskyites hidden in Moscow.

In his speech to the students, Marty similarly underscored the necessity of fighting against "enemies" and "deviations" while advocating gentle, pedagogical correction. He asked the students, "So when a comrade makes a mistake, should we say to him 'you are an opportunist,' or should we show him what his mistake consists of without wounding him? . . . It is necessary to eliminate mistakes from the minds of comrades but without sticking a label on them."[164] To become real Bolsheviks, to develop a "Communist mentality," required training, not punishment.[165]

[159] "Stenogramma," 13 December 1935, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1 d. 72, ll. 21, 22. Togliatti's figure of 40,000 members in 1934 squares with that of M. Adereth, *The French Communist Party: A Critical History (1920–1984)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 291. McDermott and Agnew provide a figure of 87,000 for 1935, *Comintern,* 137

[160] "Stenogramma," 13 December 1935, l. 26.

[161] RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 84, l. 9.

[162] "Stenogramma," 13 December 1935, l. 31, 61.

[163] Ibid., l. 27.

[164] "Main tasks of Students," l. 170b.

[165] Ibid., l. 110b.

By contrast, the teachers gathered in December 1935, while agreeing that they needed to tailor their struggle with Trotskyism to each particular national group, suggested that they saw a greater Trotskyite menace than did Togliatti or Marty. To Togliatti's question of the sorts of "Trotskyite arguments" they heard among the students, teachers responded with specific examples, such as the American Trotskyites' contention that "in the Soviet Union there is a dictatorship of the party at the head of which stands Stalin," an argument that proved difficult to combat even when teachers took into account "national peculiarities."[166] In answer to Togliatti's question about whether students "valued Stalin enough," teachers again provided concrete evidence of apparently dangerous misunderstandings, including one student's quip that the posters of Stalin in workers' clubs reminded him of the "advertisement of [President Paul von] Hindenburg in Germany."[167] The most alarming language came from Kirsanova, who concluded the teachers' session with the unsubtle reminder that Kirov's murder had proved that Trotskyites are capable of anything and that "we need vigilance" because they may be "masked."[168]

Reports compiled by the Lenin School's cadres department in 1936 found evidence of Trotskyite influence throughout the school, in large part because the compilers employed an extremely broad and vague definition of Trotskyism. Organized by national sector, the summaries documented classroom exchanges, overheard conversations, articles in wall newspapers, and letters that allegedly demonstrated Trotskyite attitudes and activities. Seemingly any "incorrect" statement or action could be labeled "Trotskyite." Thus Spanish, Danish, and German students, who were puzzled by claims that Trotsky had played no positive role in the revolution or civil war, along with British students, who were "surprised" that it had taken so long to exclude Trotsky from the party, appeared equally suspicious. Some students made the mistake of comparing Trotsky and Stalin, for example, a student in the Scandinavian sector who granted that "Stalin is a great man, he's done a lot for the workers," but who also believed "we cannot say that Trotsky did nothing . . . Trotsky was a great man after Lenin."[169]

Many of the reports' examples of "Trotskyism" documented not opposition views, but rather ignorance of Bolshevik norms of vigilance and toughness. Some students appeared potentially dangerous because they had no understanding of the matter that so preoccupied their Soviet comrades. Thus the report suggested something ominous in the fact that when the examination commission posed questions about Trotskyism to students in the French sector they answered, "I don't know" or "There aren't any Trotskyites in our region." Also problematic were students who had some understanding of Trotskyism, but saw no real danger in it. A Scandinavian student, sounding very much like

[166] "Stenogramma," 13 December 1935, l. 23, 55.
[167] Ibid., ll. 32,49–50.
[168] Ibid., l. 64.
[169] "O Trotskizme," [1936], RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 51, 52.

Togliatti, affirmed that although Trotskyism in the Soviet Union "is a counter-revolutionary movement" in "capitalist countries" it is merely an "opposition within the workers' movement." The lack of Bolshevik toughness was particularly clear in the case of a French student who admitted that the Trotskyites "are politically and theoretically stronger than us, and we just avoid discussions with them." The report also found evidence of Trotskyite influence in comments critical of Bolshevik discipline, such as a Greek Young Communist's complaint that there was "no difference between the school and prison in a capitalist country."[170]

Like the surveillance reports, the characterizations of forty-eight Spanish students, apparently prepared near the end of the 1935–6 academic year, suggest that "Trotskyism" functioned, despite Marty's injunction, more as a label than a precise diagnosis. The characterizations were essentially collages of set phrases – "incomplete political formation," "anarchist and social democratic remnants," "a healthy comrade" – and rarely included evidence that supported the choice of a particular label.[171] "Trotskyite" was one of a number of general political descriptors that could be attributed to the students – perhaps the most damning – but one employed sparingly. Only three of the forty-eight students manifested Trotskyite "remnants" or "ties."[172]

Such assessments were usually prepared by the teachers in conjunction with the student party organizers.[173] In this case, the evaluators appeared to understand the seriousness of the charge of "Trotskyism" and the importance of identifying it, but seemed unwilling or unable to define it precisely or condemn it strongly in the Spanish context. Telling a more cryptic story than the transcripts of the white chauvinism dispute, the evaluations from the Spanish sector likewise hint at the complexity and difficulty of political indoctrination. The evaluations tended to offset even the most negative statements with some redeeming feature, often the assertion that a comrade was politically "healthy." Apparently still committed to pedagogical correction, evaluators wrote off only the most undisciplined and disruptive students. The characterization of Gonzalo López, a thirty-three-year-old metalworker who had been a party member since 1922, illustrates how a series of epithets might be integrated into an ultimately sympathetic evaluation: "Strong resistance to discipline and in constant disagreement with the rules and work norms of the Sector. Little political firmness, with Trotskyite remnants . . . contributed to fomenting indiscipline and bad relations with the leadership of the Sector. We believe that, despite everything, he is an honest and healthy element."[174] "Health" in

[170] Ibid., ll. 52, 53.
[171] "Cándido ALVAREZ," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 184, l. 94.
[172] "Kharakteristiki na slushat. ispan.sektora MLSh, 1934–1935 g.g.," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 184, ll. 93, 94, 96.
[173] Krekola, "Finnish Sector," 297; Wicks, *Keeping*, 123.
[174] "GONZALEZ," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 184, l. 94; "Spisok studentov MLSh KP Isp," l. 52; "Destacados comunistas asturianos," http://elcieluporasaltu.blogspot.com/2008/10/destacados-comunistas-asturianos.html (accessed 6 November 2014).

this and other cases was compatible with breaches of discipline, undisciplined work habits, and even "political weakness." More a disposition than a behavior, "health" correlated with honesty and loyalty to the party that evaluators suggested would allow comrades to overcome or compensate for even serious faults.[175]

Although they obscured the meanings that evaluators attributed to political labels, the characterizations offer a relatively sharp picture of their understandings of appropriately Bolshevik personal behavior. A December 1934 memo on the need to strengthen conspiracy had noted that students "routinely" stayed out until three or four o'clock and sometimes six or seven o'clock in the morning. When asked "where they were that they're getting home so late," they answered, "I was walking around the city and got lost" or "I spent the night with my girlfriend."[176] Traces of such escapades made their way into characterizations as "errors" in conspiracy connected to "relations with women," frequent drinking, a "scandal," and lost school passes.[177]

In condemning such behavior, the evaluations drew on a clear vision of Bolshevik masculine toughness. Abstentious and ascetic, the ideal student was not a monk, but a healthy revolutionary. A true Bolshevik demonstrated neither a "liberal" squeamishness that put friendships before party loyalty nor an "excessive modesty" that made a comrade "weak in the face of his supposed superiors." When a woman embraced such norms, she might be criticized as excessively "brusque."[178] However, few such comrades existed. Only four of the forty-eight Spanish students evaluated in 1936 were women. The one deemed "brusque," Luisa Pérez, a twenty-four-year old domestic worker who had been a Young Communist for five years and had recently joined the party, was the only one judged to have a "high level" of political development.[179]

By the end of 1936, most of these students had returned to Spain. In April 1936, the first group of eleven Spaniards, including Pérez, prepared to leave Moscow. Perhaps in response to the February 1936 election of the Popular Front government in Spain, a "special decision" of the Comintern's executive committee sent them home before the end of the term.[180] In the wake of the July 1936 coup that launched the Spanish civil war and the first of the great show trials in August that marked the ratcheting up of terror and xenophobia

[175] "Kharakteristiki," ll. 88, 90, 91, 95 ("good disposition"), 96.

[176] "Nasha zadacha usilit' konspiratsii i podniat' revoliutsionuiu biditel'nost," 12 December 1934, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 52, l. 58.

[177] "Kharakteristiki," ll. 97, 96, 92, 94. Similar behavior appeared in characterizations of students in the American sector, "Dokladnaia zapiska o rabote sektora 'D' v vostochnoi siberi," ll. 21–2.

[178] "Kharakteristiki," ll. 89, 90, 97, 96 (weak), 98 (brusque).

[179] "Spisok studenov MLSh KP Isp," l. 49; "CARMEN," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 184, l. 98. In the Russian version she was described as using "command methods" (*metody komandovaniia*), "Karmen," ibid., d. 185, l. 30.

[180] "OO GUGB [Special Sections of the Main Directorate of State Security] NKVD," 13 April 1936, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 112, l. 7.

in the Soviet Union, nearly all the remaining students in the Spanish sector left the school.[181] This exodus was followed in 1937 by the departure of most of the students from legal parties. Thus few students from Spain or other western democracies remained to witness or fall victim to the terror.[182]

As the frontline of the international struggle shifted to Madrid, many who had been associated with the Lenin School made their way to Spain. Of the approximately three thousand students who graduated from the school between 1926 and 1936, perhaps several hundred participated in the Spanish civil war. A contemporary accounting of Spanish party members and Young Communists who had attended the Lenin School listed a total of 148 students.[183] Some, like José Díaz, the leader of the Spanish party, and Jesús Hernández, who became minister of public instruction in 1936, were among the most prominent communists in Spain. Others, such as Juan José Manso, who was elected as a parliamentary deputy from Asturias in 1936, and Laureano Argüelles, a teacher and wartime mayor killed by the Francoists, played important local roles.[184] After the formation of the International Brigades in September 1936, a dozen or more current students from a number of national sectors made their way from Moscow to Madrid to join the war effort.[185] Large numbers of Lenin School alumni likewise went to Spain, often serving as political commissars. The American party sent both Nelson and Haywood as commissars in 1937. Dozens of others, notably Springhall and Paynter, served as commissars or, like Mack Coad, as regular troops.[186] Togliatti and Marty, who had both been involved in the life of the school, also served in Spain, the former as the Comintern's representative in the Spanish party, the latter as commander of the International Brigades.

Although the number of students and alumni who contributed to the war effort in Spain pales beside the tens of thousands of primarily communist volunteers who joined the International Brigades, the school nonetheless provided crucial organizing experience and a shared frame of reference for communists in Spain. In assembling the International Brigades, national parties and the Comintern drew on a decade of experience vetting candidates and transporting them, often illegally, to Moscow and on the lessons learned in organizing a multilingual, multinational institution. Political commissars and rank-and-file

[181] "Spisok studentov MLSh KP Isp," ll. 48–53. Chase, *Enemies,* 146–7.

[182] McLoughlin, "Proletarian Academics," 65; "Sektor 'D,'" 1936, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 106, l. 4; "Spisok studentov komsomol'tsev," ll. 98–106; Unfried, "Foreign," 188.

[183] "Spisok studentov MLSh KP Isp," ll. 44–53.

[184] "Destacados comunistas asturianos"; Valentín Brugos, et al., *Los comunistas en Asturias (1920–1982)* (Gijón: Ediciones TREA, 1996), 76.

[185] "Spisok studentov LSh, sluzhivshikh na voennoi sluzhbe," RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 106, l. 157; "Zav. Otdelom kadrov IKKI," 16 February 1937, ibid., d. 134, l. 1. I have found no evidence to substantiate Tuominen's claim that "all male students should leave for the front," *Bells,* 87.

[186] On British alumni in Spain, see McIlroy et al., "Forging," 121–4.

comrades brought an awareness of Bolshevik norms and of the need for discipline, vigilance, and perhaps a "'healthy' hatred of Trotskyism."[187] On the battlefields of Spain, communists already linked by connections to one another and the school, might feel, even more profoundly than in Moscow, a sense of global solidarity.

[187] "Kharakteristiki," l. 96.

2

Imagining, Seeing, Feeling the Revolution

Almost thirty years after her first visit to the Soviet Union in 1933, Spanish communist Dolores Ibárruri remembered viewing Moscow "with her heart" and seeing it as the "most marvellous city in the world."[1] As a delegate to the Comintern's Thirteenth Plenum, Ibárruri followed a carefully managed itinerary of meetings and excursions and witnessed a parade in Red Square during which, as she wrote her Spanish comrades, she felt herself reborn (*resucita*).[2] She was apparently sheltered from the realities – severe shortages of food and housing, not to mention of "luxuries" such as soap and shoes – that made 1933 "the worst year of the decade" in the Soviet Union.[3] But even if she noticed the ubiquitous queues that gave public form to shortages, they apparently had no impact on what she remembered seeing "with her heart": "socialism being constructed" and the Soviet people "marching toward Communism." She saw, she suggested in retrospect, the city of the future, not the city before her eyes. In her speech to the plenum, she emphasized her own identification with that future as she set before the delegates a "vivid picture of the Spanish revolution" or, what amounted to virtually the same thing, the "armed uprising [that] could erupt at any moment."[4]

Ibárruri was hardly the only foreign visitor to the Soviet Union to see (or remember seeing) what she was predisposed to see. This tendency can be understood in terms of a more general process of "suspending disbelief" that historian

[1] Dolores Ibárruri, *They Shall Not Pass: The Autobiography of La Pasionaria* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 128.

[2] As quoted in Juan Avilés Farré, *Pasionaria: La mujer y el mito* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2005), 78.

[3] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41, 97.

[4] "Rech' tov. Dolores," *XIII Plenum IKKI: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Partizdat, 1934), 525, 531.

Stephen Kotkin argues was vital to Stalinism. He characterizes workers in Magnitogorsk as living a "dual reality: observational truth based on experience, and a higher revolutionary truth based partly on experience and ultimately on theory."[5] To explain the power of revolutionary truth in the face of the evidence of experience, Kotkin evokes workers' variable but powerful "willingness to suspend disbelief," a willingness shored up by the fact that in the closed world of Stalinist Russia, "few could imagine alternatives."[6] Historian Michael David-Fox identifies a similar process at work among fellow travelers who visited the Soviet Union. Rather than understanding prominent Western visitors, who were wined, dined, chaperoned, and flattered by their hosts, as "manipulated" into supporting the Soviet Union, David-Fox emphasizes that even the most carefully staged visits depended on visitors' "willing or eager suspension of disbelief."[7] In the case of fellow travelers, distance from the Soviet Union – not immersion in it – seems to have facilitated the voluntary forgetting of observed facts. Visitors such as Theodore Dreiser made pronouncements about Soviet Russia after returning home, where a declaration to the effect that "nowhere in Russia . . . will you find men without coats standing in bread lines waiting for a hand-out" constituted a criticism of "rich" America circa 1928 as much as praise of – or a suspension of disbelief in – the Soviet system.[8]

Although rank-and-file international communists, who lived for extended periods in the Soviet Union, might also be understood as "suspending disbelief," the term hardly captures the political and psychological complexities of their situation. They differed from both Soviet workers, who could not easily imagine alternatives to a system in which they were enmeshed, and from short-term visitors from the West, who were willing to ignore deficiencies of the Soviet system in order to imagine an alternative to their own. Because long-term international communist residents had not merely a frame of reference beyond the Soviet Union but also a store of experiences that had somehow led them to identify with "revolutionary truth," everyday "observational truth" potentially challenged their most fundamental – and freely chosen – understandings of the world and their place in it. Rather than simply overlooking unpleasant or dissonant realities, communists maintained their identities by learning to observe in particular, mediated ways. As Eugene Lyons, the United Press (UP) wire service's correspondent in Moscow, remarked of foreign communists,

[5] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 228–9.

[6] Ibid., 358.

[7] On manipulation and "manufacturing support," see Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–1940* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4,105–7, 120–2. Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 112.

[8] "Dreiser Home, Sees Soviet Aims Gaining," *New York Times* (*NYT*), 22 February 1928. Thomas P. Riggio makes a similar point, "Introduction," in Thomas P. Riggio and James L. W. West III, eds., *Dreiser's Russian Diary* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 12–13.

"Their minds become finely adjusted instruments for selecting impressions in harmony with their exalted state. The validity of their life's work, their sufferings, and their sacrifices is at stake."[9] Thus revolutionary truth structured their observational truth. Or, to borrow Ibárruri's metaphor, they saw not with their eyes, but with their hearts.

The literal impossibility of "seeing with the heart" highlights the degree to which becoming communist – or remaining a communist in a new context – required learning how to view (or, more precisely, interpret) the world. Moscow could be "seen" in its "marvelous" form only if the true communist heart somehow filtered the raw data captured by the speciously accurate eye. The ability to distinguish deceptively "transparent vision" from authentic "subjective perceptual clarity" marked an individual as a communist.[10] Thus when a comrade who had arrived in the Soviet Union full of passion for the new Russia later left, as one African American communist did in 1931, "completely demoralized" and spouting what a party official in New York characterized as "crazy slanders," the simplest explanation seemed to be that the dissident had been "an undercover agent of counter-revolutionary forces from the beginning."[11] How else to explain such a failure to "see" the Soviet Union properly?

The offices of the English-language *Moscow News*, a newspaper geared toward raising the political consciousness of English-speaking workers in the Soviet Union, offer a particularly rich site for a case study of international communists' ways of seeing and explaining the Soviet Union. Founded in 1930 by American journalist and fellow traveler Anna Louise Strong, but controlled by the Soviet party, the paper employed both communists and those attracted to the possibility of becoming communists. In 1935, the American party's leader Earl Browder accepted a check from Strong for membership dues, but never issued her a party card.[12] As Strong noted in her 1935 memoir, her journalistic instincts often "raged" against the "suppression of truth" required by the party line. At the same time, her commitment to the cause allowed her to see the logic, as the paper's editor-in-chief Mikhail Borodin explained to Strong, of understanding "truth" to mean "a clear description of the general line of our struggle" rather than "sensational unanalyzed 'facts,'" such as the number of people dying of famine in Ukraine, "from which no good can come."[13] Living in many cases for years in the Soviet Union, witnessing party purges and the arrests of Russian friends and lovers, the staff members of the *Moscow*

[9] Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1937), 95.

[10] Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 794.

[11] C. Dirba to Comrade Randolph, 23 October 1931, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 515, op. 1, d. 2225, l. 86.

[12] Tracy B. Strong and Helene Keyssar, *Right in Her Soul: The Life of Anna Louise Strong* (New York: Random House, 1983), 163.

[13] Anna Louise Strong, *I Change Worlds: The Remaking of an American* (1935; reprint, Seattle: Seal Press, 1979), 371, 375.

News were well positioned to see the "facts," sensational or otherwise, but nonetheless endured hardships and deprivations to produce an increasingly stilted propaganda sheet.

This chapter examines international communists' management of the mismatch between what they had imagined and the realities they encountered by analyzing how they represented the Soviet Union to the world and themselves; in other words, their strategies for "seeing" and "feeling" Soviet reality. Efforts to distinguish truth from "sensational" fact are visible in the newspaper itself and in the reports of Lenin School students who, much like *Moscow News* reporters, visited construction sites, factories, and collective farms and worked to interpret what they saw in "correct" ways. Drawing on contemporary letters and memoirs, the chapter also analyzes international communists' emotional responses, their sense of themselves in the Soviet Union, and their sense of participating in an international cause. I focus on the case of Milly Bennett (born Mildred Bremler, aka Milly Mitchell), who began working at the *Moscow News* in early 1931. In 1934, shortly after the Soviet state recriminalized sodomy, her Russian husband was arrested for homosexuality, as was the Russian lover of another *Moscow News* staffer, British communist Harry Whyte.[14] Nonetheless, Bennett remained on the paper's staff until at least mid-1935 and in the Soviet Union until the end of 1936, when she left for Spain. Her story illustrates the ways in which commitment to revolutionary truth could be as much personal – a component of self-identity, a means of being reborn– as ideological.

Political Commitments and Personal Ties

The complicated life stories of the *Moscow News*'s largely communist and strikingly transnational staff underscore the importance of personal ties in forging and shaping international communist identities and institutions. In her 1935 account of the paper's founding, Strong traced the rekindling of her interest in starting an English-language newspaper to Borodin. The two met briefly in 1918 in Seattle, reconnected in Moscow in the early 1920s, and became close during Strong's two trips to China in the mid-1920s, when Borodin was serving as the Bolsheviks' advisor to the Chinese Nationalists. In 1931, Strong found Borodin back in Moscow, in the lower profile post of deputy director of the paper and lumber trust. Remembering her earlier interest in "starting an American newspaper in Moscow," Borodin told her that if she "tried now" she would likely "find support."[15] Drawing on personal contacts at the Supreme Council of the National Economy (VSNKh) and among the

[14] Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 188.

[15] Strong, *I Change*, 300; on her earlier contacts with Borodin, 188, 231–5; Strong and Keyssar, *Right in Her Soul*, 95–6; 107, 125, 130–3, 140.

American émigré community in Moscow, Strong obtained official permission, hired a staff, and quickly produced the first issue.[16]

In the premier issue of 5 October 1930, Strong described the paper as targeting "English-speaking specialists working in the Soviet Union, Russian students of English, and interested persons living abroad."[17] As Milly Bennett told the story of the paper's founding, Strong had "'sold' the Soviet government the idea of backing a newspaper . . . to be distributed abroad . . . the paper to propagandize . . . or 'sell' the idea of Soviet Russia in a 'subtle, witty, amusing manner.'"[18] After 1932, when Borodin became the *Moscow News*'s editor-in-chief and the paper merged with the *Workers' News*, it became notably less subtle, witty, and amusing.[19] As noted in Chapter 1, by 1935 the *Moscow News* was recommended reading for English-speaking students at the Lenin School.[20]

This official endorsement notwithstanding, the staffers were brought together as much by personal connections and circumstances as political commitment. Bennett, for example, joined the paper in 1931 at the invitation of Strong, whom she knew from her time in China in the mid-1920s, where both had worked as journalists. Bennett had been in China from 1926 to 1927, "mak[ing] propaganda for Chiang Kai-shek," until the violent end of his alliance with the Chinese Communist Party.[21] Not a communist but always on the verge of joining the party, Bennett accepted Strong's job offer, she told George Kennan, then the third secretary of the Riga legation, out of boredom with her life in San Francisco.[22] However, boredom may not fully account for her decision. Once she was in Moscow she took, as she wrote a friend, "three separate classes in politics." She deemed the first (on communism) and third (on dialectic materialism) "knockouts," while characterizing the instructor of

[16] Strong, *I Change*, 301–3.

[17] "Representatives of Many Organizations Hail Opening of *Moscow News*," *Moscow News* (*MN*), 5 October 1930; M. Timothy O'Keefe, "The *Moscow News:* Russia's First English Language Newspaper," *Journalism Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (Autumn 1973): 463.

[18] Milly Bennett to Dear Fred, 8 April [1931?], Milly Bennet Papers, Box 1, Folder 21, Hoover Institution Archives.

[19] Strong, *I Change*, 338. Sylvia R. Margulies, *The Pilgrimage to Russia: The Soviet Union and the Treatment of Foreigners, 1924–1937* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 101. The paper became a daily, *The Moscow Daily News;* the *Moscow News* continued to appear as a weekly supplement.

[20] "The Main tasks of Students in Party Schools: Scheme of the speech of Comrade Marty," 8 October 1935, RGASPI, f. 531 op. 1 d. 72, l. 190b; "Resolution of Group II," [June 1936], ibid., d. 136, l. 11.

[21] Milly Bennett, *On Her Own: Journalistic Adventures from San Francisco to the Chinese Revolution, 1917–1927*, ed. A. Tom Grunfeld (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 74; on Bennett and Strong's less than cordial relations see, 259–64.

[22] Bennett, *On Her Own*, xi; "Interview with Milly Bennett in Riga prepared by George Kennan," 17 February 1933, National Archives College Park, Maryland (NACP), Record Group (RG) 59, 861.911/1403.

the course on Leninism as having a "mean disposition, and no talent whatsoever as a teacher."[23] She had come to Moscow to work, but was also drawn, as she wrote in a contemporary letter, to the vision of a "beautiful socialist world."[24]

In Moscow Bennett reunited with other acquaintances and friends from China, most notably Borodin, who, in 1928, after the Nationalist government's purge of its erstwhile communist allies, escaped to Moscow via the Gobi Desert.[25] The other Chinese exiles on the staff, Jack and Percy Chen, likewise spoke English (and French), not Chinese. The Chen brothers, who, along with Strong, had fled China with Borodin, were the sons of Eugene Chen, the Nationalist government's former foreign minister; their father had been the first Chinese lawyer in Trinidad, where the brothers were born.[26] In Moscow, Percy occasionally wrote articles for the paper, and Jack wrote and contributed cartoons.[27] In contemporary notes, Bennett characterized Jack as "a great joy to my souring heart. He's joined the Communist party – but managed to keep his sophisticated and charming sense of humor."[28]

In addition to the Chinese refugees, the staff included a large number of returning Russian immigrants, who had both personal and political connections to one another and to the Soviet Union. Borodin (aka Michael Gruzenberg) was himself a re-emigrant, an Old Bolshevik, who had gone into political exile after the Revolution of 1905. Having lived for a decade in Chicago where he ran an English-language school for immigrants on the city's West Side, he spoke English, as journalist Louis Fischer remembered, "intermixed with American slang."[29] Morris (Moshe) Stolar, who had left Russia in 1909, knew Borodin from Chicago, where Stolar, a printer, was a communist activist dubbed the "Chicago Lenin." Returning to Moscow, he became a "responsible secretary" at the paper. His family eventually joined him in the Soviet Union; his son Abe, his daughter Eva, and her husband all found work at the *Moscow News*.[30]

[23] Bennett to Marjory, 26 November [1932?], Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.

[24] Bennett to David, 13 May [1931?], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

[25] Percy Chen, *China Called Me: My Life inside the Chinese Revolution* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 125–77; Strong and Keyssar, *Right in Her Soul*, 130–6.

[26] Chen, *China*, 6.

[27] Ibid., 224; O'Keefe, "*Moscow News*," 464.

[28] Bennett to Peggy Taren, 4 May [1932?], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

[29] Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics: An Autobiography* (1941; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), 139; Max Lippett interview, 6 November 1951, Michael Gruzenberg, Federal Bureau of Investigation 65-HQ-58053 (FBI/Gruzenberg); Lydia Holubnychy, *Michael Borodin and the Chinese Revolution, 1923–1925* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms for the East Asia Institute, Columbia University, 1979), 18.

[30] "Report made by L. Hoyt McGuire," 21 February 1952, FBI/Gruzenberg; Meyer Zolotareff, "Imprisonment, Loss of Rights Revealed by Red Refugee," *Chicago Herald American*, 28 January 1938 (clipping in ibid.); Thom Shanker, "Refusenik's Dream Died in USSR," *Chicago Tribune*, 1 January 1989.

If Morris Stolar and Borodin returned as dedicated communists, other re-emigrants on the staff had somewhat more complicated stories in which the personal and the political were deeply entangled. In 1989 when he finally returned to Chicago, Abe Stolar, the only member of the family to survive the purges, remembered that he had emigrated to the Soviet Union as much or more for personal as political reasons. He recalled that at nineteen he had followed his Russian-born father to the Soviet Union because "my family were communists. I felt communism was natural, the right thing to be." In retrospect, he also emphasized that because he was a "youngster," he "had to go, although I didn't want to."[31] Stolar, like others who spent many years trying to return to the United States, may have exaggerated his reservations.[32] Nonetheless, his story highlights the ways in which personal ties might make political commitments "natural," even irresistible.

Some members of the staff, again for both personal and political reasons, had even less choice in the matter of emigration. Bennett described Rosie Prokofiev, the office secretary, as "brought from England, where she was born, by her [R]ussian parents when she was 13."[33] Whether she was enthusiastic about the move is unclear. Her "sweetheart" Ed Falkowski, who wrote for the paper, was more clearly committed to the cause. Bennett described him as "an ascetic young coal miner, with an extraordinary instinct for writing." The son of Polish immigrants, he had arrived in Moscow from the coal country of Pennsylvania via Berlin, where he wrote in German for the *Die Linkskurve*, the magazine of the Association of Proletarian Writers of Germany.[34] When he departed the Soviet Union in 1937, he left Rosie and a child behind.[35] Max Halff, a Russian-born Jew deported from England in 1928 as "a very dangerous communist," had studied at the Lenin School before finding a position at the *Moscow News*.[36] Bennett characterized him as the "gentlest and sweetest young thing you ever saw, all fresh and brand new out of the Communist

[31] Bill Peterson, "After 58 Years in U.S.S.R., American Comes Home," *Washington Post*, 6 July 1989.

[32] Mary M. Leder, *My Life in Stalinist Russia: An American Woman Looks Back*, ed. Laurie Bernstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 1–2.

[33] "It is raining heavily," nd, Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

[34] Douglas Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898–1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 200–9.

[35] Rose Prokofiev correspondence, Edward Falkowski Papers, TAM 120, Box 3, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University. Jenny [Miller] to Milly Bennett, 1 September 1938, Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 2; Jenny to Bennett, 10 July 1939, ibid.

[36] Steve Cohen, *No One Is Illegal: Asylum and Immigration Control Past and Present* (London: Trentham Books, 2003), 180; John McIlroy et al., "Forging the Faithful: The British at the International Lenin School," *Labour History Review* 68, no. 1 (April 2003): 103, 113; Harry Haywood places Halff at the Communist University of Toilers of the East (KUTV), *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator, 1978), 165. He may be the Max described by Strong in *I Change*, 312–13.

academy, with per[f]ect petty bourgeo[i]s standards of behavior," a description that complicates the notion that he was a single-minded revolutionary.

For others, the possibility of dispensing with petty bourgeois standards constituted a prime attraction of Soviet Russia. Lyons, who in 1932 became an unwilling neighbor of the *Moscow News* when the paper's operations took over space previously occupied by the UP, remembered the staff as a "bevy of oversexed American females and homosexual Englishmen" apparently seeking liberation in a land that, in the words of an enraptured visitor quoted by Lyons, had "liquidated sex bugaboos."[37] He may have been including Bennett among the oversexed. Described by friends as "far from beautiful – in fact, almost ugly" but at the same time "evidently a most attractive or sexually desirable woman," Bennett characterized herself as "sprung right into the mad, mad postwar business, when all of us were supposed to be flinging at life."[38] Bennett described the paper's first associate editor, British communist Charles Ashleigh, as "an emasculated IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] (in other words an IWW turned Communist.)"[39] In Borodin's FBI file, two anonymous informants interviewed in the early 1950s described Ashleigh as a "homosexual," who, along with two other homosexuals, Hillary Brown and Harry Whyte, also British communists who worked at the paper, became involved in a scandal and returned to England in 1934 or 1935.[40] In May 1934, Whyte wrote a now well-known letter to Stalin protesting the recriminalization of male homosexuality. In the letter, Whyte compared the persecution of homosexuals to "the persecution of any social group subject to exploitation and persecution in conditions of capitalist hegemony," an understanding that perhaps contributed to his 1932 decision to move to the Soviet Union.[41]

[37] Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia*, 510. 511, 331. See also James E. Abbe, *I Photograph Russia* (London: G.G. Harrap, 1935), 183–4.

[38] Freda Utley, *Odyssey of a Liberal: Memoirs* (Washington, DC: Washington National Press, 1970), 246; Bennett to Rosie [Elmer Roessner], [1934], Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 22. See also Marion Merriman and Warren Lerude, *American Commander in Spain: Robert Hale Merriman and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 41, 151.

[39] Bennett, "It is raining." Ashleigh is best known for his novel about the IWW, *Rambling Kid* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930). On Ashleigh see, Patrick Renshaw, "The IWW and the Red Scare, 1917–24," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 4 (October 1968): 68, 71; Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1959), 42, 50.

[40] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 207; O'Keefe, "*Moscow News*," 464. "Report made by L. Hoyt McGuire," 30 October 1952, FBI/Gruzenberg; Ashleigh is identified as "Ashly" in the report; Whyte as "White." Ashleigh's name disappeared from the masthead in April 1934; Whyte continued contributing articles until November 1935.

[41] Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 188–92; "Harry Whyte, a British Communist, Challenges Stalin on Homosexuality," in Glennys Young, ed., *The Communist Experience in the Twentieth Century: A Global History through Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 88–98, quotation: 90–1.

In the heady days of the early 1930s, when the whole of the Soviet Union appeared to be one vast construction site and capitalism seemed to be experiencing a decisive crisis, communists emigrated to the Soviet Union for a wide range of reasons: to build socialism, to find employment, to become "real" revolutionaries in the Bolshevik mold, to escape prison and persecution.[42] Motivations might overlap in a single individual or among seemingly similarly situated immigrants, as was the case at the *Moscow News*. For many, personal and political motivations and understandings were tightly intertwined, as immigrants imagined themselves participating in the construction of a beautiful socialist world. Although such expectations were often tragically betrayed, they nonetheless remained defining points of reference in communists' life histories.

"There Are No More Queues": Communist Ways of Seeing

For those struggling to find housing, food, and clothing in the Soviet capital, the vision of marvelous Moscow could seem very much like a lie. Such was, at least on occasion, Bennett's perspective. In a letter apparently written shortly after her arrival, she pronounced herself unwilling to "pass out the sunshine in pound rolls the way the professional sovietis do." As a professional reporting facts, she distanced herself from the "professional sovietis," among whom she included two prominent journalists, Strong and *The Nation's* Soviet correspondent Louis Fischer, who sometimes contributed to the *Moscow News*. Although it took the cover-up of the 1932–3 famine to elicit Strong's rage against the suppression of truth, Bennett fumed at Fischer and Strong's claim that "'there are no more orcherids' [*ocheredi*] (queues waiting for food, clothing). The truth being that Anna Louise has a servant to stand in ocherids for her, and Fischer a devoted wife to stand in line for him . . . and so these two talented people, neither of whom has ever waited in line four hours for meat . . . sit down and write that there are no ocherids. Although, either, by a short, observing stroll down any [M]oscow shopping street, could count 10 or 20 ocherids – or [I]'m a damned liar. . . . AND I'M NOT."[43]

For Bennett, a plausible picture of the Soviet Union had to include some measure of criticism. Ironically, she identified the *New York Times*'s correspondent Walter Duranty, best known for denying the extent and severity of the 1932–3 famine, as someone who reported truthfully – if not always the whole truth. In a contemporary letter to another newspaperwoman (probably Ethel

[42] Sergei Zhuravlev, "American Victims of the Stalin Purges, 1930s," in Brigitte Studer and Heiko Haumann, eds., *Stalinistische Subjekte: Individuum und System in der Sowjetunion und der Komintern, 1929–1953* (Zurich: Chronos, 2006), 397–400.

[43] Emphasis in original. Bennett to George, [193?], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21. Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia*, 510; Louis Fischer, *Soviet Journey* (1935; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 132–3; Strong, *I Change*, 368.

Bogardus), Bennett described Duranty as "notoriously pro-Soviet . . . but pro-Soviet in a way that you and all of us . . . (I mean tough-minded American newspaper birds) would like. He pokes fun at them . . . never hesitates to criticize, etc. when he sees cause . . . and surveys objectively."[44] Tempering sunshine with mockery, Duranty remained, from Bennett's perspective, a "tough-minded" journalist even as he left much out of his Soviet reporting.

The *Moscow News* initially operated or tried to operate along similar lines, criticizing deficiencies but representing them as transitory inconveniences that paled beside the shimmering essence of the Soviet Union: the heroic effort to build socialism. Indeed, notwithstanding Bennett's sense that Strong failed to observe accurately, Strong herself understood that Soviet officials had taken an interest in the paper as a means of "handling complaints of Americans" working in the Soviet Union.[45] However, detailing such complaints "accurately" – that is, in terms acceptable to the censor and the paper's Soviet editors – proved difficult. In the paper's first issue, Falkowski attempted a humorous take on Moscow's intractable housing shortage, citing, for example, the case of a doctor who married in order to obtain a room.[46] The censor flagged the article as "slander," completely missing, according to Strong, the effectiveness of satire as a means of simultaneously broaching and minimizing the housing problem. Only after Strong "furiously" telephoned everyone she knew late into the night did the censor relent and agree to the cutting of only "two short paragraphs which even [Strong] admitted might be misunderstood."[47] In later articles, Falkowski adopted a more cheerful and earnest tone, noting, for example, that, although the basement cafeteria in one Moscow factory was poorly ventilated, the "food was good" and the "manager explained that a new restaurant will soon be constructed."[48] Apparently skeptical that she would be doing much "tough-minded" reporting, Bennett admitted in another letter to Bogardus that "I'm not using a bi-line in the paper for very obvious reasons."[49] She did, however, often publish under the name "Milly B. Mitchell" (Mike Mitchell was her ex-husband) or the initials M. M. So identified, she passed out a good bit of sunshine, writing features with titles such as "You Can Eat in Moscow," extolling "co-operative feeding" as the "new way of life." Occasionally her articles addressed circumscribed complaints, such as the

[44] Bennett to Ethel [Bogardus?], [1931?], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21. On Duranty's reporting on the famine, see David C. Engerman, "Modernization from the Other Shore: American Observers and the Cost of Soviet Economic Development," *American Historical Review* 105, no. 2 (April 2000): 390–1; S. J. Taylor, *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty: The New York Times's Man in Moscow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 210–23.

[45] Strong, *I Change*, 301; "Representatives of Many Organizations."

[46] E[d] F[alkowski], "Moscow Nomads," *MN*, 5 October 1930.

[47] Strong, *I Change*, 305.

[48] Ed Falkowski, "What's for Dinner in the Factory," *MN*, 28 June 1931.

[49] Bennett to Ethel [Bogardus?], 4 May [1931?], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

shortage of nails among otherwise enthusiastic Finnish American immigrants in Karelia.[50]

A comparison of Bennett's reporting for the American press and for the *Moscow News* suggests how she learned to "see" – if not necessarily believe – like a communist. With coauthor Ruth Kennell, an American who had emigrated to the Soviet Union in 1922 and had recently returned to the United States, Bennett published two articles in *American Mercury* that, she wrote a friend, made her "proud fit to burst."[51] The first, published in December 1931, was poorly received in Moscow. Indeed in the 1932 interview conducted by Kennan, Bennett reported that the article had resulted in her being "dropped" from the paper's staff; only the "combined efforts" of Borodin and Strong got her reinstated.[52] The situation may explain Bennett's "request" that the *Moscow News* publish a letter she had sent to the *American Mercury*'s editor H. L. Mencken clarifying her intentions. Noting that the article "They All Come to Moscow" "has been interpreted as an attack on the Soviet Union," Bennett emphasized that "I wrote the sketches in no such spirit, but as satirical portraits of a few Americans who had come under my observation and who were by no means intended to be representative of the American worker who comes to Moscow." She regretted "if anyone has sought to use this material against either the USSR or the many fine Americans who seek work here" and asked Mencken to publish a disclaimer, stating "that no attack was intended." For their part, the *Moscow News*'s editors published her letter, but appended a postscript to it noting their "disapproval of the article mentioned and also of the mention of 'Moscow News' in that connection."[53]

In the same issue of the *Moscow News* in which Bennett's letter was published, "Moscow Mike" provided a point-by-point refutation of Bennett and Kennell's 1931 article. "Moscow Mike" was a (probably fictional) plain-spoken Midwesterner long resident in Moscow whose homey wisdom as offered to *Moscow News* reporters appeared in the regular column "Moscow Mike Tells Us." In this case the unnamed author of the column, perhaps Bennett herself, reported Mike's observation that most of the American immigrants he met in the Soviet Union "don't whine if conditions isn't always just perfect right away. . . . Not like the people I've been readin' about in a high-class intellectual American magazine, called 'American Mercury,' in an article

[50] M. M., "You Can Eat in Moscow," *MN*, 17 April 1931; Milly B. Mitchell, "Karelian Timber Trade Must Be 100 Percent Mechanized," *MN*, 25 August 1932.

[51] Bennett to Marj[ory McKillop], 24 March [1932], Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.

[52] "Interview with Milly Bennett in Riga," p. 3; "Report made by Donald G. Hanning," 30 July 1951, Mildred Bremler [Milly Bennett] Federal Bureau of Investigation file HQ 100–124391/SF 100–12592 (FBI/Bennett).

[53] "Statement re: 'American Mercury,'" *MN*, 18 December 1931. Ruth Kennell and Milly Bennett, "They All Come to Moscow," *American Mercury* 24, no. 96 (December 1931): 394–401. Bennett wrote the third and fourth sketches; Bennett to Brook, December 28 [1931], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

written by two ladies named Ruth Kennell and Milly Bennett."[54] Mike took particular issue with the fact that "sex plays a big part in the story these ladies has supplied to the 'Mercury' for the titillation of superior readers," adding "this sort of stuff disgusts me." The article was, he argued, "sneakily anti-Soviet," as "all the characters described is freaks, eccentrics, sex-hungry." Although he admitted that "such birds . . . blowed into this town some time or another," he insisted that they were "very exceptional. But there ain't a word in the article to indicate that. You'd think that we're runnin' a nut-house here, instead of a mighty vigorous work-shop for the buildin' of socialism."[55]

Bennett and Kennell's second article for *American Mercury*, published in April 1932, rectified many of the errors identified by Moscow Mike. The authors now focused on Americans who came to build blast furnaces and automobiles, lauding what Mike had characterized as "the real immigration;" that is, family men "mighty keen" to "get right down to work." They cautioned that the American worker who went to the Soviet Union with "ideas of making his fortune must be disappointed." To succeed in the Soviet Union, American immigrants had to be true pioneers, "who would rather have jobs in a land where poverty is general and hope is boundless – even standing in long lines to receive the food they pay for – than be idle in a land of plenty and despair."[56] The real heroes of the piece were the Finnish re-emigrants from the United States, who had established a commune alongside the Ford plant in Nizhnii Novgorod where they lived "in a two-story, box-like community house, eating at a common table, paying equally and sharing the expense of wives and children."[57] Indeed their story had been told in much the same terms in the *Moscow News*, although that paper's more didactic version had explicitly drawn the desired conclusion that the "commune is one of the best groups of foreign workers in the Soviet Union," who "did not allow itself to be discouraged or cast down by difficulties and hardships encountered in its work."[58] Moreover, the second article completely lacked the sex element. Moscow Mike registered no complaint.

Highlighting ambitious construction projects and hardy "pioneers" building the socialist future, Bennett and Kennell's second article adapted a fundamental communist way of seeing: measuring the bright Soviet future against both the backward Russian past and the grim capitalist present. Acknowledging the "discomforts and irritations" endured by many Americans in the Soviet Union,

[54] "Moscow Mike Tells Us: Why They All Come to Moscow," *MN*, 18 December 1931. I found only one Moscow Mike column with a byline, CA (likely Charles Ashleigh), "Moscow Mike Tells Us: How to Pay Europe's War Debts," *MN*, 1 November 1931. The column ran from late 1931 to mid-1932 and varied somewhat in tone, language, and style.

[55] "Moscow Mike Tells Us: Why They All Come to Moscow."

[56] Ruth Kennell and Milly Bennett, "American Immigrants in Russia," *American Mercury* 25, no. 100 (April 1932): 468.

[57] Ibid., 470.

[58] "'Cement': The Finnish-American Commune at Autostroy," *MN*, 28 July 1931.

Bennett and Kennell described how those able to withstand the rigors were "inspired by the size of the job" and appreciative of the special treatment accorded skilled foreign workers. To explain and excuse current hardships, they invoked Russia's status as a "backward, Asiatic country."[59] The industrializing Soviet Union, they suggested, was analogous to the old American frontier, a savage, wild land full of hope and possibility.[60] They offered less a "romance of economic development" that "valued the fruits of rapid industrialization above its costs" than an adventure for the "true pioneer, for the fellow who gets a kick out of hardship."[61] Only the Soviet Union, they emphasized, offered such opportunities for heroic action.

In her later reporting for *Moscow News*, Bennett demonstrated that she had learned the importance of "seeing" the radiant future – and of getting her readers to see it as well – even if she also still observed plenty of queues. In a series of articles on Karelia and the Soviet northeast that ran in the summer of 1932, Bennett superimposed a vision of the wondrous future on the rather bleak present. "Murmansk today," she admitted, was a pitiful, backward place: "Pigs root along the sandy stretches . . . , goats are tethered to fences. Women haul water from street wells, carry it along, balanced on sticks swinging from their shoulders. It is a wild, ugly little frontier town, and not a pavement in the place." But a visit to the office of the secretary of the regional planning commission opened her eyes to "a vision of the Murmansk of tomorrow." On the rough-hewn pine wall hung a "gaudy, futuristic map" that offered a "dream of a City Beautiful." The enthusiastic secretary detailed spending for vast industrial projects. Thus, Bennett assured her readers, "When you leave that office, a new vision of Murmansk crowds your eyes." She now "saw" not the pigs and goats and unpaved roads, but "the tall, white, modern planned port city, greater than Leningrad, they'll tell you, that is just beginning to rise on the sandy wastes."[62] Bennett presented the builders of this future as exemplars of a communist way of seeing. Thus, she reported that Alexander Leskov, the director the Karelia Timber Trust, told her, "'I like to sit at this window . . . like to sit and watch the gradual mechanization of Karelia.' And when an overburdened Ford truck lumbered past, as if Leskov had conjured this bit of mechanization with his talk, he beamed. (Nor, I might add, did he seem to see the long, tedious, dusty horse-drawn wagon train which followed close behind.)"[63] The future materializing before her readers' eyes was, Bennett

[59] Kennell and Bennett, "American Immigrants," 463, 471, 468.
[60] Ibid.," 465.
[61] Engerman, "Modernization," 383; the phrase "romance of economic modernization" is George Kennan's; Kennell and Bennett, "American Immigrants," 468. On foreign workers' living conditions, see Elena Osokina, *Our Daily Bread: Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia, 1927–1941*, trans. Kate Transchel and Greta Bucher (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), 46–52.
[62] Milly B. Mitchell, "American-Finns Help Build Socialist Karelia," *MN*, 10 August 1932.
[63] Mitchell, "Karelian Timber Trade."

suggested, the sight that mattered, even if they could still glimpse the less lovely present.

Rather than simply ignoring the deficiencies of the Soviet present, reporters in the *Moscow News* explained them as the vestiges of the past destined to be obliterated by the First Five-Year Plan. Thus, for example, Moscow Mike granted what his readers surely knew: Moscow's street cars were uncomfortably overcrowded. However, he argued that the discomforts had to be understood in context. Those foreigners who complained about the overcrowding failed to appreciate that it was "unavoidable," the consequence both of the "backward transportation system Moscow inherited from the old days" and of the city's rapid growth. Soviet citizens, by contrast, were "patient because they know we've had to go heavy on the basic industries first, in our Five-Year Plan. . . . Then, after that, we can go ahead – as we are now goin' ahead – to provide more of the amenities of life."[64]

Evidence that the promissory notes would be paid came in articles that described the progress already achieved and represented the West as stagnant and hopeless. Headlines, such as "No Hope for Solution of World Wide Crisis: Soviet Union Alone Faces Year 1931 with Confidence," effectively captured a central comparison that structured the paper's reporting of topics as diverse as unemployment, marriage law, race relations, and prisons.[65] Moscow Mike, for example, asserted that whereas the Moscow metro would soon solve the local transit problem, the London and New York subways were doomed to remain "crowded in order to make profit." When Ashleigh joined the staff in September 1931, among his early contributions was an article describing his "first impressions" on returning to Europe after eight years. Stopping in Germany on his way to Moscow, he saw, he emphasized "no difference": "Hunger and unemployment press upon the workers. . . . Men sleep in old hulks in the harbour for want of better shelter." By contrast, Moscow had been transformed. He saw not cobblestones and droshkies, but paved streets and shiny new cars. Although he heard of shortages, people appeared better dressed; houses had been repaired and repainted. Most of all he noticed order: "Out of the chaos left by civil war, up from the starvation and blockade and the struggle for power, there has come order – the planned co-ordination of the

[64] "Moscow Mike Tells Us: A Sure Way of Solving Traffic Problems," *MN*, 22 November 1931. See also "Moscow Mike Tells Us: When, and When Not to Say 'Zavtra,'" *MN*, 22 January 1932; Eugene Lyons, "Nations Build New Life Along Ancient Volga," *MN*, 20 October 1930; Anna Louise Strong, "Sleeping to Berlin," *MN*, 26 November 1930.

[65] *MN*, 11 January 1931. "Unemployment Depopulating Europe whilst USSR Adds 3 Million Yearly" and "'Communism the Only Hope of the Negro People,'" *MN*, 17 September 1931; "May Day Delegates, Welcome to the USSR! How You May Judge What You See Here," *MN*, 28 April 1932; "Marriage Law in Old England Still Medieval" and "Birth Control Scientifically Handled by Soviet State," *MN*, 30 October 1930; "Moscow Mike Tells Us: Where Brides Are for Sale," *MN*, 7 January 1932; Anna Louise Strong, "Sunny California Hell for Workers," *MN*, 6 February 1931.

resources of a vast land." The revolution, he concluded, "has gone forward. There is still a great territory to be conquered, but the troops are fit and new strength comes at every step."[66]

Thus the *Moscow News*'s reporting of the First Five-Year Plan, like the reporting in the central Soviet press, prefigured the aesthetic of socialist realism. Systematized only in 1934, socialist realism, as summed up by central committee member Andrei Zhdanov, combined "the most matter-of-fact, everyday reality with the most heroic prospects."[67] In his study of the prehistory of socialist realism in Soviet mass journalism, historian Matthew Lenoe emphasizes that "journalists, literati, and agitprop [agitation and propaganda] officials strove to develop print genres that would *both* convey a political message *and* galvanize young male activists" by drawing on the "perceived preferences of these activists for narratives of heroism, adventure, and military glory."[68] The *Moscow News*, with its stories of rough and ready pioneers and its use of language, such as Ashleigh's quoted earlier, that turned workers into "troops," appeared to fit this mold.However, because its imagined readers were not Soviet "activists," but were English-speaking engineers initially and, after its May 1932 merger with the *Workers' News*, all English speakers in Soviet industry, the *Moscow News*, which often published translations from the Soviet press, also provided instruction on how foreigners should "see" the Soviet Union. The "Moscow Mike" column that ran until mid-1932 and stories such as Bennett's on Karelia explained to readers, who, unlike their Soviet counterparts, had very clear pictures of alternative systems, how to make sense of the hardships and shortages they saw around them.

By 1933 and the beginning of the Second Five-Year Plan, both the *Moscow News*'s audience and its tone had shifted. With the completion of the First Five-Year Plan, the Soviets had stopped paying skilled foreign workers in hard currency; many left and few arrived to take their places. Those foreign workers who remained were often political refugees, predominantly communists, from Germany, Austria, and Spain.[69] In 1934, Borodin told Strong that as

[66] Charles Ashleigh, "First Impressions after Eight Years," *MN*, 2 October 1931. See also Anna Louise Strong, "Thirteen Years of Building Socialism Progresses with Unchanging Purpose Conditioned by Four Major Epochs," *MN*, 5 November 1930.

[67] Zhdanov quoted in Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 34.

[68] Emphasis in original; Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 71. See also Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 109–10.

[69] Andrea Graziosi, "Foreign Workers in Soviet Russia, 1920–40: Their Experience and Their Legacy," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 33 (Spring 1988): 41; Sergei Zhuravlev, "Inostrannaia koloniia v Sovetskoi Rossii v 1920–1930-e gody (Postanovka problemy i metody issledovaniia)," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*,1994, no. 1: 181; Andrea Graziosi, "'Visitors from Other Times': Foreign Workers in the Prewar *Piatletki*," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 29, no. 2 (April-June 1988): 162.

the *Moscow News*'s readers changed, "we change ourselves to fit them. The valuta [hard currency] specialists go and we drop the fluffy stuff that amused them." Those who stayed had different needs; indeed, he warned her that they might not need an English-language paper at all. Borodin related that when he attended "factory meetings of 'Readers of *Moscow Daily News*' I ask what language I shall use and they tell me Russian!" The workers themselves were "neither Russian nor American: they are Pole, Jugo-Slav, Hungarian, Finn, the nomad workers of the world," who "are Americans to us because they learned to read in America," but who "understand Russian because it is spoken around them." Their readers, Borodin argued, needed not "clever writing" but help to "function efficiently in Soviet enterprises" – hence his willingness to "take some Russian articles;" that is, translations from the Soviet press.[70] By 1935 the paper carried regular columns of statistics lauding the successes of the Second Five-Year Plan along with more reporting of high culture – such as Bennett's review of a new production of *Carmen* – and less humor and international news than it had a few years earlier.[71]

Even as it provided fewer of the "snappy American articles" favored by Strong and more Soviet-style analysis, the *Moscow News* continued to publish articles that depicted Americans in the act of observing the Soviet Union.[72] After she returned from a book tour in the United States to promote her memoir *I Change Worlds*, a work structured in large part around explaining her realization that "party membership had begun to seem inevitable," Strong contributed sunny articles on the state of collective farming.[73] She emphasized her personal observations of Soviet progress, of obstacles decisively overcome, as in this passage:

> Five years ago [1930], when I traversed the southern steppe lands of the Ukraine, the soil was criss-crossed by a hundred narrow strips of privately owned land, separated from each other by boundary ridges of weeds. Three years ago, though the boundary ridges were broken, the weeds, encouraged by inefficient farming and sabotage, had filled large areas with their waist-high growth. Today the weeds have been beaten back to the gutters of the roadways. . . . Green shoots of winter wheat breaking from black soil sweep unchecked to the horizon, in undulating prairies marked by no fence or boundary ridge.[74]

In such articles she offered a glorious view of the successes of collectivization, reflected in the eyes of the first graduates from the collective farm's seven-year

[70] Strong, *I Change*, 408–10.
[71] Milly B. Mitchell, "A New Version of 'Carmen' by Stanislavski," *MN*, 9 May 1935. Much of the article was reprinted in "Four Carmens in Moscow," *NYT*, 2 June 1935.
[72] Strong, *I Change*, 406.
[73] Ibid., 414; Strong and Keyssar, *Right in Her Soul*, 163.
[74] Anna Louise Strong, "I Visit a Collective Farm in the Ukraine," *MN*, 7 November 1935. See also, Strong, "Pioneers Hew Collective Farms out of Birobijan Wilderness," *MN*, 30 May 1935.

school that "seemed to sparkle with an even livelier electricity than that which came by wire from Dnieper Dam to the streets of the village."

A series of articles on collective farming by Robert Merriman, a graduate student in economics at the University of California at Berkeley, who traveled to the Soviet Union in 1934 to study the Soviet economy, similarly emphasized eyewitness observation of Soviet achievements. Adopting a more detached and scientific tone than Strong, Merriman reported both statistics and conversations with "the more enlightened collective farmers" that verified his picture of collective farming as a successful "agricultural system which is more revolutionary than any previously known."[75] In a memoir published in 1986, Merriman's widow Marion represented Bennett as skeptical of such absolute claims, and her husband, whom she quoted speaking in terms that echoed his articles in the *Moscow News*, as an objective observer, who merely reported "what I saw as an economist."[76] She explicitly denied that he was a communist – a denial that does not square with the autobiography Merriman wrote when he joined the International Brigades.[77] Indeed the articles' unremitting optimism, not to mention their publication in the *Moscow News*, suggests that Merriman saw not only as an economist but also as a communist.

In his contribution to *The God that Failed* (1950), the by then disillusioned Fischer described himself and, by extension, his journalism in the 1930s as looking at the Soviet Union "through the magnifying glass of hope." The metaphor suggested that he and others who trumpeted Soviet achievements saw clearly but partially and with a good measure of exaggeration. Drawing, as did Strong, on powerful personal observations, Fischer recalled his visits to the Dnieprostroi Dam: "With the chief Soviet engineer I climbed over the boulders on the river-bed when the water was first pumped away, and five years later I drove in a car over the mighty concrete wall, more than a hundred feet high and a third of a mile long, which rested on those boulders." Fischer contrasted such emotionally charged and authentic memories to socialist realism, which he defined as "the Soviet device for distorting the truth." Yet, as Fischer himself implied, the two instruments – his magnifying glass and the Soviet truth-distorting device – had more in common than he might care to admit. Both worked by "treat[ing] the present as though it did not exist" – or as though it were unimportant – "and the future as if it had already arrived."[78] The difference was that the Soviet device could work on

[75] R. H. Merriman, "Among Collective Farmers in the Tatar Republic," *MN*, 24 October 1935; Merriman, "Some Collective Farm Problems and How They're Being Solved," *MN*, 14 November 1935.

[76] Merriman and Lerude, *American Commander*, 55. John Scott represents Merriman in similar terms, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (1942; reprint, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 209.

[77] See Chapter 4.

[78] Louis Fischer in Richard Crossman, ed., *The God that Failed* (1950; reprint, New York: Bantam Books, 1965), 186–7.

observations resistant to Fischer's magnifying glass, namely the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact, which he viewed as the "gravestone of Bolshevik internationalism."[79] "Seeing" with the heart – or through the magnifying glass of hope – was not always easy or natural, but was essential and compelling to people such as Bennett, who refused to understand themselves as liars, while seeking to reconcile the observed "ragged, filthy child, about 10" begging in central Moscow with the conviction that "the 140,000,000 workers and peasants are better off now than they've been before – and in many ways better off than the same class of any country on earth."[80]

"Karl Meredith Did Not Feel Fully at Home in the USSR"

Learning how to see "correctly" constituted a central component of the Lenin School curriculum. Students, like *Moscow News* reporters, visited factories and collective farms and were expected to describe what they saw in articles both for the Soviet press and for communists back home. They also engaged in propaganda work, describing for sometimes skeptical Soviet workers the (wretched) conditions and revolutionary struggles of the working class in the West. In both cases, their pictures had to magnify the right details and put them in the proper context. Students had to learn, as the American communist Karl Meredith, who was ultimately expelled from the Lenin School, did not, to view the Soviet Union from the perspective of a "proletarian revolutionary" rather than a "bourgeois statistician."[81]

In 1930, incoming Lenin School students participated in "practical work," visiting factories in Moscow, Leningrad, Nizhnii Novgorod, and Ivanovo-Voznesensk even before classes started. The program of excursions aimed to "acquaint students with concrete examples of the practice of socialist construction in the USSR."[82] Factory tours began with a sixty- or ninety-minute discussion with a representative of the factory's party committee, after which students examined the production process, engaged in conversations with workers, and listened to prepared talks over lunch. While traveling in the Soviet Union, the students, divided into language groups, also undertook an extensive program of "international propaganda."[83] In the course of their two-week excursion, the French group, for example, made eighty-two speeches in factories, clubs,

[79] Fischer, *God*, 201.

[80] Bennett to Esther [Johnson?], 25 April [1931?], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21; Bennett to Ethel [Bogardus?], 23 May [1931?], ibid.

[81] "Resolution on the Expulsion of Karl Meredith from the L. S.," 14 May 1936, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 167, l. 11.

[82] "Otchet o rabote komissii po priemu novykh studentov," [1930], RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 15–15ob.

[83] Ibid., ll. 16ob, 18ob. See also, "Ob"iasnitel'naia zapiska k planu uchebnoi i partiino-vostpitatel'noi raboty MLSh," 1933–4, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 43, ll. 80–1; "Ob"iasnitel'naia zapiska k planu uchebnoi i partiino-vostpitatel'noi raboty MLSh," 1934–5, ibid., ll. 91ob–20b.

and Red Army units, reaching twenty thousand people. One of the English-language groups organized fifty-five speeches and wrote twenty-two articles for the local press and twenty-three for the foreign press. The talks reportedly inspired Soviet workers to undertake shock work and engage in socialist competition – both heavily promoted work speedups during the First Five-Year Plan – as well as to contribute funds to aid political prisoners in capitalist countries.[84]

When students visited Soviet factories and met Soviet workers, they gained a new and, the report on the 1930 excursions suggested, generally "accurate" view of Soviet life. For example, the German group that visited Nizhnii Novgorod affirmed that the trip had allowed them "to see that socialist construction is the flesh and blood of Soviet workers, that, as shown by the facts, the Five-Year Plan in four years is carried out by the real enthusiasm of the working class."[85] The Russian-speaking group had "clearly seen how local party organizations struggle against difficulties," which they attributed to the negative influence of "kulaks," "right and left opportunists," and "conciliators." The report concluded that the excursions offered a powerful means of helping students "to overcome incorrect representations of Soviet reality," including the "very negative impression" of Moscow that a few comrades had formed when they observed queues for food in the capital.[86]

The emphasis on the difficulty of overcoming "backwardness" that figured so prominently in the *Moscow News*'s coverage of industrialization and collectivization also appeared in reports on "practical work" at the Lenin School, often explicitly attached to concerns about identifying – and quashing – political opponents. When some workers in Leningrad told the recently arrived students to "let workers overseas know that Russian workers are dying of starvation," the students were allegedly "able to discern . . . the impact of kulak ideology on some unstable elements among the workers." Moreover, they recognized the "unstable" workers as "newly arrived from the village;" that is, scarcely distinguishable from (backward) peasants.[87] The students' "discernment" can be understood as the result of the fact that they "succumbed" to the justifications "cogently presented" by their Soviet minders, as the disillusioned communist Fred Beal – one of the organizers of the 1929 Gastonia, North Carolina, textile strike, who had jumped bail and fled to the Soviet Union– argued in his 1937 memoir.[88] The instructors, however, took the students' conclusions as evidence that their charges "saw" clearly. When students themselves demonstrated "unhealthy attitudes" – asserting, for example, that

[84] "Otchet o rabote," ll. 19, 20. See also "Resolution on Practical Work of Sector 'D,' 1934," 3 September 1934, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 166, l. 7.
[85] "Otchet o rabote, " ll. 210b-2.
[86] Ibid., l. 220b.
[87] Ibid., l. 23.
[88] Fred E. Beal, *Proletarian Journey: New England, Gastonia, Moscow* (New York: Hillman-Curl, 1937), 243. Beal briefly attended the Lenin School, ibid., 263.

Czechoslovak workers and Spanish peasants were more politically developed than their Soviet counterparts or that "Russian workers live in awful conditions" – they were met with their peers' sharp rebukes. The report on the 1930 excursions noted that students who made inaccurate observations "recognized their errors – although how sincerely must be verified."[89]

Students had greater opportunity to observe "backward" Russia when they undertook summer practical work outside the major industrial centers, often visiting collective farms. On such visits students were supposed to gain practical experience in "mobilizing the masses" and refuting, as one 1934 report put it, "the false theories, lies, and slanders of the bourgeoisie and their allies, the social-fascists."[90] Their reports often emphasized that foreign communists' descriptions of the capitalist West motivated Soviet workers. Among the most effective speakers were African American students, who described American racism.[91] Students who paid too much attention to Soviet shortcomings, such as an American comrade who was disturbed by the sight of armed Red Army soldiers in the countryside and who expressed – in Russian – his judgment that workers' apartments were "very bad," risked aligning themselves with "antiproletarian" and anti-Soviet elements.[92] On the other hand, students who went too far in the direction of exaggerating Soviet achievements and criticizing the West, as did Spanish students visiting the Tatar Republic in 1934 who claimed that Spain had neither hospitals nor labor laws, risked undermining their credibility with Soviet workers.[93]

The theme of "backwardness" comes out more forcefully in retrospective accounts of students' practical work in the countryside. British communist Harry Wicks, looking back on the youthful communist commitment that he had long since renounced, remembered the summer of 1929, when he visited Dagestan in the North Caucasus, as a rude awakening: "With our heads full of Socialism in One Country, our eyes showed us social relations which were pre-feudal," particularly with regard to the treatment of women. He described the shock among the visiting students as mutual and deeply felt; "no discussion was necessary, we could see each other's faces."[94] Although Wicks seemed to take the experience, at least in anticommunist retrospect, as an indicator of the failure, if not futility, of the Soviet project, Steve Nelson, a less bitter former communist who visited collective farms in the summer of 1932, remembered learning a more hopeful lesson. Recalling the "unsettling" observation that

[89] "Otchet o rabote," l. 23.
[90] "Resolution on Practical Work of Sector 'D,'" l. 1.
[91] "Dokladnaia zapiska o rabota sektora 'D' v vostochnoi sibiri," 28 August 1934, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 166, l. 13.
[92] Ibid., l. 15.
[93] "Otchet o letnei praktike (sektora 'L')," 2 November 1934, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 183, l. 63.
[94] Harry Wicks, *Keeping My Head: The Memoirs of a British Bolshevik* (London: Socialist Platform, 1992), 117.

collective farm leaders "packed pistols," Nelson, even in 1981, seemed ready to take at face value their explanation that "there are still White Guards and counterrevolutionaries around."[95] He also remembered seeing such disturbing details as evidence of the "contradictions that arose from the efforts to build an industrialized society out of an underdeveloped agrarian country."[96] He "saw this inefficiency – you couldn't help but see it – but side by side with it I saw an effort to do something great."[97]

A student who proved unable or unwilling to see at least the beginnings of "something great" might be deemed, as Karl Meredith (school pseudonym, possibly for Karl Lochner) was in May 1936, "unfit to be a student at the Lenin School."[98] Although the charges leveled against Meredith included holding himself "aloof" from the collective, violating party discipline, and having a "very irresponsible attitude to Party assignments," his fundamental transgression was a desire to return home. Summarizing "the reasons for his request to leave for the United States," the resolution expelling him from the school emphasized that "*Karl Meredith did not feel fully at home in the USSR*."[99] He had, according to the resolution, developed an unhealthy "attitude to socialist construction in the USSR." The root of the problem was his "mechanical, typically bourgeois method of comparison of figures," which allowed him to reach the "erroneous conclusion that the standard of living in the USSR is lower than in the USA." In short, he did not know or refused to learn how to view the Soviet Union correctly: "Declaring that he was 'looking at the USSR *objectively*,' he began looking for shortcomings."[100] Moreover, he persisted in his incorrect "views of the Soviet Union," despite opportunities, notably in the course of practical work in the Donbas, "to convince himself by seeing for himself."[101]

Foreign communists who lived, often for many years, in the Soviet Union had ample opportunity to see all kinds of inefficiencies and failures, not to mention evidence of political repression. For Lenin School students, "practical work" provided an essential test of their commitment to the cause, one that went well beyond a commitment to ideological principles. Confronted with difficult observed truths, international communists had to find ways of seeing something great and feeling at home in the Soviet Union.

[95] Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson, American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 134.
[96] Ibid., 135.
[97] Ibid., 135–6.
[98] "Resolution on the Expulsion," l. 10. On Lochner, see "Spisok: Studentov po stranam," 7 April 1936, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 106, l. 35.
[99] Emphasis in original. "Resolution on the Expulsion," ll. 10, 11. For his request see Karl Meredith to Comrade Griffin, 21 January 1935, ibid., l. 14.
[100] Emphasis in original. "Resolution on the Expulsion," l. 11.
[101] Ibid., l. 12.

"Rationalizing Works on Me like an Acid": Feeling the Revolution

In an 18 April 1934 letter to an old friend, Bennett recounted the arrest of her Russian husband of about two years, Evgenii Vasilevich Konstantinov. By the time she wrote the letter, Konstantinov, an actor, was "on his way to Siberia under a three year sentence in a concentration camp." The Soviet political police (OGPU), she wrote, had "found him guilty of homosexuality." Bennett took the precaution of having Duranty mail the letter for her from Berlin.[102]

In the letter, Bennett described walking into Konstantinov's apartment just after midnight on 27 February to find a search already underway. Her first thought "was confusion." Perhaps "the agents were guests, friends of [Z]henya's." When she asked "what's this . . . what does this mean?" and her husband replied, "an [OGPU] search," they were warned against speaking "any foreign language." The agent, "with what he seemed to think was a bright smile," told her they were looking for guns. The search went on until three o'clock in the morning, with Bennett apparently wisecracking throughout. When one of the agents took an interest in a *New Yorker* magazine, for example, she "assured him that it was an [A]merican humorous magazine, much like the soviet 'Crocodile,' except that as he could see it was printed on much better paper."[103]

Not until early April was Bennett able to confirm the reason for her husband's arrest. As she explained in her letter, on 8 March "the press carried a *new law*, the crime of being a homosexual, (mind, there was no law against this practice previously)."[104] At the same time she heard of the arrests of one Victor Pavilovich [sic], presumably someone associated with the *Moscow News*, and of two homosexual men who worked at the Bolshoi Theater. She thus initially concluded that her husband, who had told her about earlier affairs "some with women and some with *men*," was "being held as a witness." Only a month later did she manage to arrange a meeting with the prosecutor, who informed her that Konstantinov had been found guilty of homosexuality. When Bennett protested that "he's been living with me for two years," the prosecutor produced a statement signed by her husband confessing to have "taken part in homosexual evenings in 1933." Whether a "homosexual evening," as Bennett rather indelicately put it, "meant an evening at which homos were present, or whether [Z]henya actually committed acts of homosexuality" she was never able to learn. She did, however, get permission to visit him in exile north of Novosibirsk in July.

Although Bennett often affected a hard-boiled tone in her letters about the arrest, it seems to have struck a deep blow, posing a far greater challenge to

[102] Bennett to Marjory [McKillop], 18 April [1934], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

[103] On Bennett's penchant for wisecracking, see Si-lan Chen Leyda, *Footnote to History* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1984), 70.

[104] Emphasis in original. Bennett to Marjory [McKillop], 18 April [1934].

her faith in the revolution than the material hardships of Soviet life. For all her bluster, Bennett characterized herself to friends as someone who "feels first and thinks after."[105] Freda Utley, a British communist then living in Moscow, remembered finding Bennett after the arrest "in tears in her hotel room," a description that rings true despite the fact by the time she wrote her memoir, Utley was a vocal anticommunist.[106] Before her husband's arrest, Bennett described her strategy for coping with all that was "bitter . . . and dark, past understanding" in the Soviet Union: The "thing you have to do about Russia," she advised in a letter, "is what you do about any other 'faith.' You set your heart to know they are right . . . and then, when you see things that shudder your bones, you close your eyes and say . . . 'facts are not important.'"[107] After Konstantinov's arrest, setting her heart apparently became more punishing. In an August 1934 letter to a friend, Bennett introduced her situation with typical bravado, writing, "Well, the boy friend falls into the hands of the law six months ago . . . and then one rationalizes." However, she confessed, "Rationalizing works on me like an acid. It eats away my flesh while blanching my mind. Is that right? Blanching? Bleaching, perhaps."[108]

Harry Whyte, the other *Moscow News* staffer who left a detailed rumination on the new law recriminalizing homosexuality, likewise emphasized that it was eating away at his sense of himself in the Soviet Union. Writing to Stalin in May 1934, Whyte began with a question that he deemed "of great importance for a large number of communists in the USSR and other countries as well": "Can a homosexual be considered a person worthy of becoming a member of the Communist Party?" Concluding that the "law just published about criminal sodomy . . . obviously means that a homosexual cannot be considered worthy," Whyte, who described himself as "personally interested in this question," produced a lengthy analysis, running to well over three thousand words, of the law's flimsy "theoretical basis." The personal pain was clearest in Whyte's admission that he had "visited two psychiatrists to ask them if it is possible to 'cure' homosexuality" because he needed "some way out of this damned dilemma."[109]

Both Bennett and Whyte struggled to maintain faith in communism and deference to Bolshevik understandings of the best interests of the revolution as they worked to make sense of the arrests of their lovers. Bennett seemed to accept at face value the notion that the arrest served some larger, if murky, political purpose. In the letter she entrusted to Duranty, she explained that her

[105] Bennett to Esther [Johnson?], 26 April [1931?], Bennett Papers, Box 1 Folder 21; see also Bennett to Blake, 21 April [1931?], ibid.
[106] Freda Utley, *Lost Illusion* (Philadelphia: Fireside Press, 1948), 238.
[107] Bennett to Florence, 27 January [1932?], Bennett papers, Box 2 Folder 1.
[108] Bennett to Lionel [Houser?], 18 August 1934, Bennett Papers, Box 2 Folder 2.
[109] Whyte, "Letter," 89, 90, 95.

situation had to be understood "in the light of the Revolution . . . they have decided that homosexuality is a threatening evil . . . and thus, they set about stamping out homosexuality."[110] An article she contributed to the *New York Times* in 1935 offers an oblique view of how she may have explained the Soviet decision to recriminalize homosexuality. Outlining the "stricter social laws" that redefined the place of Soviet women, Bennett denied that the new emphasis on family life marked a "return to Philistine morals." Rather, she described the "struggle for a healthy family life" – potentially including the recriminalization of sodomy, which the article did not mention –as "a struggle for the continuation of the species."[111]

Even if she did not fully understand or embrace the supposed logic of these "stricter social laws," Bennett represented herself in her letters as remaining, or trying to remain, emotionally committed to the Soviet project. After visiting Konstantinov in Siberia, Bennett was still able to declare, "There is no answer . . . except scientific socialism." She had, she reported, found her husband "in splendid health . . . sunburned and with fine muscles . . . and in cheerful spirits."[112] The former actor and "dancer of small parts at the Grand Opera House" was a "member of the Agitation Propaganda Brigade," traveling "throughout the Siberian countryside giving programs aimed at raising the spirits of collective farmers."[113] She knew "full well," she wrote another friend, "that it was necessary for him to have experienced some such realities as he has seen." Nonetheless, with "friends" who insisted that "'it will do him good,' [I] am restrained, by heaven knows only what inner strength, from clouting in the nose."[114]

The more politically sophisticated Whyte attempted to reconcile the emerging communist equation of fascism with homosexuality with the promise of a communist private sphere. As historian Dan Healey notes, the "virulent propaganda war" between fascism and communism that followed Adolf Hitler's rise to power "significantly contributed to justifications for the decision to recriminalize sodomy" in the Soviet Union.[115] *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag*, written by a collective of German communists in exile – which was published in 1933, translated into twenty languages, and distributed in large print runs in twenty-six countries – constituted a particularly prominent weapon in this propaganda war. Debunking the myth of the Reichstag fire as the result of a communist conspiracy, the book, which Whyte referenced, proposed instead "a conspiracy of homosexual

[110] Bennett to Marjory, 18 February [1934], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.
[111] Bennett, "Soviet Russia Discovers 'Home, Sweet, Home,'" *NYT*, 10 November 1935.
[112] Bennett to Esther [Johnson?], 3 October [1934], Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 2. See also Bennett to Bill, 3 October [1934], ibid.
[113] Bennett to Cleo, 20 June [1934], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.
[114] Bennett to Grace [Gould], [September 1934], Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 42.
[115] Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 182.

Nazis."[116] It asserted that inquiries into the arsonist Marinus van der Lubbe's life in his hometown of Leyden "have definitely established the fact that he was homosexual" and alleged that he had had homosexual relations with, among other Nazis, Ernst Röhm. It was precisely these "homosexual connections with National Socialist leaders and his material dependence on them [that] made him obedient and willing to carry out the incendiary's part."[117] Whyte endorsed this conclusion, but also called attention to the book's condemnation of the Nazis' attack on Magnus Hirschfeld, the "'liberator' of the homosexual movement."[118] Attempting to find an acceptable theoretical basis for his defense of homosexuality, he emphasized that Friedrich Engels had attacked homosexuality only when "it took the form of a political organization by specific bourgeois elements." Moreover, because psychiatrists had informed him that homosexuality was often "incurable," Whyte concluded that there was "no justification for making these people criminals on the basis of their distinguishing features, which they are in no way responsible for creating, which they cannot change, even if they wanted to."[119] His logic failed to impress Stalin, who noted the following in the letter's margin: "To the archives. An idiot and a degenerate."

Whyte ultimately left the Soviet Union, probably in late 1935 or early 1936. However, until November 1935, he was still contributing pieces on Soviet theater, his usual subject, to the *Moscow News*.[120] After his departure, he seems to have remained a communist or was aligned with the Communist Party at least for a time, contributing in 1936 to *Left Review*, the journal of the British branch of the Writers' International.[121] In the years of the Popular Front against fascism, the Soviet Union's relatively quiet "proscription of male homosexuality" perhaps appeared a lesser evil when contrasted with "Hitler's loud and crude antihomosexual campaigning."[122]

For reasons both personal and political, Bennett remained in Moscow until late 1936, when she left to join the antifascist struggle in Spain. In the April 1934 letter carried out of the Soviet Union by Duranty, Bennett wrote that she planned to stay to the end of her husband's term "unless the bolos give

[116] Harry Oosterhuis, "The 'Jews' of the Antifascist Left: Homosexuality and Socialist Resistance to Nazism," *Journal of Homosexuality* 29, no. 2/3 (1995): 233. On the writing of the book, see Gustav Regler, *The Owl of Minerva*, trans. Norman Denny (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959), 162–4.

[117] World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1933), 46, 48, 52.

[118] Whyte, "Letter," 92.

[119] Ibid., 97.

[120] H. O. Whyte, "Chelyuskin Epic Now a Play," *MN*, 21 November 1935.

[121] H. O. Whyte, "Goodbye to a' That!," *Left Review* 2, no. 14 (November 1936): 790–1. Ashleigh was also a contributor: "Fred Ellis in London: Famous Revolutionary Artist Interviewed by Charles Ashleigh," *Left Review* 2, no. 12 (September 1936): 608–12; Charles Ashleigh, "It Mustn't Happen Here," *Left Review* 2, no. 4 (January 1936): 188–91.

[122] Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 183.

me an unrequested exit visa."[123] Also keeping her in Moscow, at least for a time, was an intense and ultimately unhappy affair with Lindsay Parrott, the head of the Moscow bureau of the International News Service (INS). When Parrott's wife, Marian Moore, who was apparently having an affair of her own, refused to agree to a divorce, Parrott ended the relationship with Bennett. In a letter with no date and the time "2 am," she accused Parrott of trying "to salve what appears to be your conscience about me with 'jobs'" for the *New York Times*, "a fair swap of course for having the correspondent's colony of [M]oscow . . . believe that while being [M]arion [M]oore's 'best friend' [I] was stealing or trying to steal her husband."[124] In 1935, Bennett did begin to work as a "correspondent for the capitalist press," writing for the *New YorkTimes* when Duranty was out of the country, although she contined to contribute to the *Moscow News* until at least mid-1935.[125]

By early 1936, Bennett was apparently working exclusively for the "capitalist press," having taken over what was left of the INS's Moscow operation after Parrott's departure in December 1935. Parrott, she reported, had left her exactly "1 rubber stamp" and "200 sheet of letter head paper."[126] He had also passed the apartment assigned to the agency "to an undersecretary of the Chinese embassy," leaving Bennett to operate the bureau from her apartment, from which she was subsequently evicted.[127] Bennett seems to have understood her work for INS, which she called "the lousey [H]earst outfit," as to some degree an abandonment of her ideals, but as preferable to writing the "sob stuff rubbish" that a job in America would require.[128]

Bennett's decision to take a position with the Spanish Republic's foreign propaganda service can thus be understood as allowing her both to reclaim her ideals and to satisfy her professional interest in reporting on "this war business."[129] She apparently divorced Konstantinov in late 1936, amending

[123] Bennett to Marjory [McKillop], 18 April [1934].

[124] Bennett to Lindsay [Parrott], [1935?], 2 am, Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 3. Parrott published under the name "Lindsay," but also used "Lindesay." His wife's name was spelled "Marian."

[125] Utley, *Odyssey of a Liberal*, 246; Bennett, "Soviet Russia"; Milly Bennett, "Russia's New Hero Sticks to Mine," *NYT*, 8 December 1935; Milly B. Mitchell, "Preserving an Ancient Folk Art," *MN*, 6 June 1935.

[126] Bennett to [Elmer Roessner], [1936], Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 22; Bennett to William Hillman, 17 September 1936, Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 51.

[127] Bennett to International News Service, 2 March 1936, Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 51; Loy W. Henderson, Chargé d'Affaires ad Interim to Secretary of State, 18 January 1936, NACP, RG 59, 811.91261/137; Milton K. Wells, American Vice Consul, Valencia to Secretary of State, 7 November 1937, NACP, RG 59, 800.00B Mitchell, Mildred B./1.

[128] Bennett to [Elmer Roessner], [1936], Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 22; See also Falkowski's account of a meeting with her in October 1936, Falkowski Papers, Box 1, Folder 5.

[129] Bennett to [Elmer Roessner], [1936]; "Ministerio del Estado, El Jefe de la Oficina de Prensa," 19 January 1937, Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.

her U.S. passport in November to reflect a change in marital status.[130] By January 1937, his three-year term would have been nearing an end. Some fifty years later, Marion Merriman, who also made her way to Spain in 1937, remembered that Bennett "had left her Russian ballet-dancing husband, though she continued to send money to his family in Moscow."[131] A year or so after she left for Spain, Bennett told the story of her departure in her signature hard-boiled style, emphasizing less professional ambition, political ideals, or personal entanglements than simple adventure. She recalled that William Bullitt, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union, had said to her when she presented her papers, "My God, girl, dont [sic] go to Spain. After six years in Russia! Go somewhere and relax. Bermuda where the sands are white and the seas are blue." And she had replied, "You'd go yourself, Bill, if you could. . . . Bullitt signed my papers."[132]

Although largely invisible in Bennett's contemporary letters and stories, the sense of fear and hope that looms so large in other foreigners' retrospective accounts of 1936 in Moscow may also have contributed to her decision to leave for Spain. In his *God that Failed* essay, Fischer recalled that even before the first of the great show trials in August 1936, he had vaguely perceived that a "black plague cast its shadows" over Moscow, and he "gladly left Russia to be near the battle" in Spain, the "front line against Fascism." He welcomed the prospect of an open struggle:"Death stalked Russia in the cellar. Death came to Spain in open combat in the sun." Like "innumerable persons in the Soviet Union," Fischer "hoped that Spain would be a spiritual blood transfusion for the prostrate élan of Bolshevism."[133] The German communist Gustav Regler, a contributor to *The Brown Book*, remembered the Moscow mood in remarkably similar terms. In retrospect he characterized his reaction to the news of war in Spain as one of "grotesque" joy: "I felt as though the grey sky overhanging the Russian town had suddenly cleared." He, too, saw in Spain the revolutionary spirit that had once drawn him to the Soviet Union, and he, too, looked forward to the "obvious dangers" that he would face there.[134]

Bennett's contemporary letters and stories lack this retrospective coherence. Nonetheless, her writing hinted at the sense that Spain represented a place to recapture the idealism and internationalism of the Russian Revolution. In a story she sent to her agent Hal Matson she described a rooftop gathering in Madrid of a cosmopolitan group of writers – Nordahl Grieg from Norway, Martin Andersen Nexø from Denmark, Jef Last from the Netherlands, Ludwig

[130] "Report made by Francis Butterworth, Jr.," 5 October 1942, FBI/Bennett; Wells to Secretary of State, 7 November 1937.

[131] Merriman and Lerude, *American Commander*, 151.

[132] "I couldn't say," Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 5.

[133] Fischer, *God*, 196, 197, 199. Arthur Koestler makes a similar point, ibid., 55.

[134] Regler, *Owl*, 258, 271; Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 243, 254–5.

Renn from Germany, and Aleksander Fadeev from the Soviet Union. Grieg, who Bennett knew from her days in China, had just returned to Madrid from the front, "heartsick" that the "iron ring" around the city "would not be broken." Renn "who hates war, but fights this one, is telling someone why." Fadeev was singing in a "deep bass" that made Bennett "think of the voices of the Russian deacons in the dim, little incense filled orthodox churches on Easter midnight," except that Fadeev "was singing of the 'Red Partisan' soldier who died on the taiga in the long ago Soviet Civil War."[135] In Spain, Bennett suggested, one felt the moving and heroic emotions of the Russian Revolution. And it was in Spain that she finally decided to apply for membership in the Communist Party.

[135] "milly bennett for hal matson," [1938?], Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 5.

PART II

BEING BOLSHEVIK: MAKING HISTORY IN SPAIN, 1936–1939

3

"All Advanced and Progressive Humanity"

During the civil war, one of the first things that new arrivals in Republican Spain noticed was, as Finnish American volunteer Ranse Edward Arvola wrote in a letter home, "This thing sure is International." The mix of languages in the air and on posters was breathtaking. Arvola, a working-class communist from Michigan who spoke English and Finnish, wished that "I knew a dozen languages now."[1] In Paris on his way to Spain, William Sennett wrote his wife, "I have been trying to talk in so many different languages that by the time I come home I'll be talking broken English. I get along best speaking German. It's somewhat like Yiddish," his first language as the child of Russian Jewish immigrants in Chicago.[2] In the first pages of the journal he kept in Spain, American novelist Alvah Bessie described the International Brigades' base at Figueras in early 1938 as a "babble of tongues." He saw "notices posted in every language, publications ditto" and transcribed the slogan "Workers of the World, Unite!" displayed in Spanish, German, French, Polish, and Italian. He concluded that "comradeship between these men, young and old, of every land, real and touching."[3]

[1] Ranse Edward Arvola to H[elen Kruth] and F[annie Arvola], 3 June 1937, Mito Kruth Papers, ALBA 240, Box 1, Folder 1, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

[2] William Sennett to Gussie [Machen], 5 March 1937, Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Bay Area Post, (VALB), BANC MSS 71/105 z, Container 1, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Sennett and Augusta (Gussie) Machen were married in October 1938, William Sennett, "Communist Functionary and Corporate Executive," an oral history conducted 1981 and 1982 by Marshall Windmiller, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1984, 42; on his experiences in Paris, see ibid., 67–70.

[3] Alvah Bessie, *Alvah Bessie's Civil War Notebooks*, ed. Dan Bessie (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002), 2.

Such impressions of "a babble of tongues" accurately reflected the makeup of the International Brigades. Over the course of the war, perhaps thirty-five thousand volunteers from fifty-three countries, speaking about twenty different languages, served in Spain. Although they constituted only a small fraction of the Republic's military forces – about 2 percent – they had great symbolic and often military significance.[4] The first international volunteers were people who happened to be in Spain in July 1936 at the time of the military uprising against the Republic. The International Brigades themselves had their origin in the 18 September 1936 decision of the Comintern's executive committee to "recruit volunteers having military experience among workers of all countries, with the purpose of sending them to Spain."[5] Paris emerged as the key center of recruitment and transport to Spain; the critical organizing role of the Comintern and communist parties was largely hidden. That many leading communists took noms de guerre in Spain added to the conspiratorial atmosphere. The Soviets worked to recruit foreigners resident in the Soviet Union, ultimately sending about 589 to Spain.[6] Almost immediately after the decision to organize the Brigades, the authorities at the Lenin School began compiling information on current students with military experience who might serve in Spain.[7] In February 1937, about thirty students – Swedish, Norwegian, British, Canadian, American, Czech, and Slovak – were recommended for "use."[8]

In October 1936, the first five hundred international volunteers arrived at the training base in Albacete, a small town about 250 kilometers (155 miles) southeast of Madrid on the plain of La Mancha. The base, like the Brigades themselves, was a Comintern – and thus ultimately Soviet – operation run on a day-to-day basis largely by West European communists. French communist André Marty, the first base commander, was succeeded by another French communist Vital Gayman (known as "Vidal"), who ran the base at Albacete from October 1936 until his removal in July 1937, the period of most

[4] M. T. Meshcheriakov, "Sud'ba interbrigad v Ispanii po novym dokumentom," *Novaia i noveiashaia istoriia*,1993, no. 5: 20; Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175–7, 201, 356; Verle B. Johnston, *Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969), 56, 88–9.

[5] Daniel Kowalsky, "The Soviet Union and the International Brigades, 1936–1939," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 19 (2006): 687; on the early volunteers, see Johnston, *Legions of Babel*, 28–32.

[6] Meshcheriakov, "Sud'ba," 20.

[7] "Svedeniia o studentakh leninskoi shkoly," 22 September 1936, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f, 531, op. 1, d. 106, l. 101; "Spisok studentov LSh, sluzhivshikh na voennoi sluzhbe," 22 December 1936, ibid., l. 157. The identification of students' prior military experience suggests that the military training provided by the Lenin School was not the totality of graduates' "preparation for military service" in Spain as suggested in Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrickh Firsov, eds., *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 204.

[8] "Zav. Otdelom kadrov IKKI," 19 February 1937, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 134, l. 1.

concentrated Soviet aid to the Republic.[9] In December 1936, Italian communist Luigi Longo (known as "Gallo"), who had served on the Madrid front, became Gayman's assistant as the base's general inspector.[10] The languages of business on the base – at least as reflected in the reports preserved in the archives – appear to have been French and Spanish. Working in this polyglot environment, the troops communicated in a mix of languages, perhaps something like what Finnish American volunteer Mito Kruth described as an "international jargon which slightly resembles French or Spanish."[11] As Wilfred Mendelson noted in a 1938 letter, Yiddish was the "real international language" among "Jews from Germany, France, England, Poland, Czech [sic], Hungary, Rumania."[12]

Although establishing the reality of the "babble" is relatively straightforward, assessing the level and reality of "comradeship" is more complicated. Despite the tendency of contemporaries and historians to describe battalions or brigades as, for example, "English" or "German," there was a great deal of linguistic and national diversity in most units. Such diversity, as Bessie's notebook and volunteers' letters home often attested, could create a "real and touching" sense of international solidarity. The very fact of linguistic diversity seemed to offer powerful evidence of international solidarity. However, what Longo tactfully characterized as "differences in language, military experience, and customs"[13] could also, as commissars' reports frequently noted, produce frictions within and between units, occasionally with unpleasant if not disastrous results.

Much of the early organization of the International Brigades was improvised and unsystematic as the base administration worked quickly to establish units able to assist in the critical defense of Madrid from Francisco Franco's advancing Nationalists. Between October and December 1936, brigade officials hastily organized battalions, primarily but not strictly on the basis of language. The Eleventh Brigade, which was dispatched to the Madrid front in the first week of

[9] Meshcheriakov, "Sud'ba," 22; Kowalsky, "Soviet Union," 686, 687. The Bulgarian Georgii Damianov (known as Lt. Colonel Belov in Spain) succeeded Gayman on 1 August 1937; Wilhelm Zeisser (known as Gómez in Spain) took over on 15 November 1937; see Gómez's report of July 1938, in Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habek, and Grigory Sevostianov, eds., *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 465, 466. On Belov, see Fridrikh I. Firsov, "Dimitrov, the Comintern, and Stalinist Repression," in Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott, eds., *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 71.

[10] Biographies of personnel in Brigades' commissariat, 29 October 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1, d. 61, l. 40: Gallo autobiography, 26 April 1938, ibid., ll. 1–4.

[11] Mito Kruth to Helen [Kruth], 2 May 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

[12] Wilfred Mendelson to Folks, 22 June 1938, in Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, eds., *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 40; see also William Herrick, *Jumping the Line: Adventures and Misadventures of an American Radical* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 139.

[13] "Doklad Voennogo komissariata interbrigad," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1, d. 2, l. 3.

November 1936 and provided timely military and moral support to Republican forces, was quite heterogeneous in terms of both language and nationality. It brought together the mostly Austro-German Edgar André battalion; a company of British gunners; the predominantly Franco-Belgian Commune de Paris battalion; and the mostly Polish Dąbrowski battalion, which also included Bulgarians and Ukrainians.[14]

Until they were reorganized in August 1937, all the brigades were similarly mixed. The Twelfth Brigade, which was also rapidly set up and sent to defend Madrid in November, as well as the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Brigades established in December 1936, included diverse international assortments of troops, described in one report as "French or Franco-Belgians, Italians, Germans, or Slavs (Polish, Balkan)," with "Balkan" itself denoting diverse backgrounds and languages.[15] The Fifteenth International Brigade organized in February 1937 likewise included an English battalion, a French battalion, two companies of Slavs, an Italian battalion, and a Spanish battalion. The Americans arriving in January and February were formed into what they decided to call the "Abraham Lincoln battalion." The battalion joined the Fifteenth Brigade already deployed at the Jarama front, where the rebels were attempting to take the Madrid-Valencia road.[16]

In propaganda spread in the United States and Canada, the entire Fifteenth Brigade was often referred to as the "Abraham Lincoln Brigade," a situation that "created resentment among the comrades of other nationalities," who believed that "the Americans were seeking the hegemony of the Brigade."[17] In general, the naming of battalions after foreign heroes – imprisoned German communists Ernst Thälmann and Edgar André; Jarosław Dąbrowski, a Pole who died defending the Paris Commune; the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Garibaldi – had a strong negative "effect on the Spanish comrades," who from at least early 1937 participated in every International Brigade.[18] More Spaniards joined the Internationals in the autumn of 1937, when the brigades were incorporated into the Republican Army. Indeed by 1938 a combination of

[14] "La formation de la XVè Brigade," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 32, l. 105; Nikolai Platoshkin, *Grazhdanskaia voina v Ispanii, 1936–1939 gg.* (Moscow: Olma Press, 2005), 221–2; Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers and the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936–1939* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 52; Johnston, *Legions of Babel*, 45–6; Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 288–9; Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War: Revised Edition* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 465–70.

[15] "La formation de la XVè Brigade," l. 105. See also Johnston, *Legions of Babel*, 59–64; Michael W. Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994), 18.

[16] "La formation de la XVè Brigade," ll. 107–9.

[17] "Report on the political development of the XV International Brigade," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 21, l. 22.

[18] Ibid.

high losses and slowed recruitment from abroad made Spaniards the majority throughout the "International" Brigades.[19]

Although differences of both language and nationality could cause problems within the brigades, exactly what counted as a "national" group was not always clear. An analysis conducted in December 1937 of the Anglo-American group, for example, identified three "nationality" groups in the American section: "U.S." (2287), "Negro" (74), and "Latin" (110). The "U.S." group was further broken down into "Native American Born" (1252) and "Foreign Born" (1035). The English-speaking group also included British and Canadian volunteers, who were both "native" and "foreign born" and might be subdivided as such.[20] A later report on "two years of political and military work in the 15th Brigade" also described the brigade as nationally heterogeneous, but cataloged "five national groups": Cuban, Canadian, British, Spanish, and North American – a catchall term for those from the United States.[21] The African Americans were now apparently subsumed into "North American" – although "Canadian" remained a distinct nationality. Members of both groups, however, complained about "chauvinism" and being excluded from key posts in the unit.[22]

In conformity with the Popular Front line, the International Brigades were not an exclusively communist organization. They were open to all representatives of "advanced and progressive humanity," to quote Joseph Stalin's characterization of the supporters of the Loyalist cause who wished to fight fascism.[23] Indeed when they compiled statistics on the brigades, Comintern functionaries did not always include party affiliation.[24] Still, communists predominated. By one count 75 percent of the American contingent were party members or members of the Young Communist League (YCL).[25] In some cases people who had long been sympathizers joined or attempted to join the party in Spain. In this chapter I focus on communists, particularly those of long standing or those who had also worked or studied in the Soviet Union – groups with considerable overlap – as a means of examining how experiences in Spain interacted with earlier experiences and understandings of the cause.

The least visible group among the Internationals were Soviet citizens, although Spaniards and Internationals saw plenty of evidence of Soviet support

[19] On growing percentages of Spaniards in the Brigades see Mershcheriakov, "Sud'ba," 28–9; "Otchet nachal'nika Bazy interbrigad Vidalia o strukture i deiatel'nosti Bazy za period oktribria 1936 g. po 1937 g.," [report in French], RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 32, ll. 366–73.

[20] "Anglo-American Group Analysis: Personnel Section," 22 December 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 5, l. 10. Myron Momryk, "Hungarian Volunteers from Canada in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939," *Hungarian Studies Review* 24 (Spring 1997): 3–14; Myron Momryk, "Ukrainian Volunteers from Canada in the International Brigades, Spain, 1936–1939," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 16 (June 1991): 181–94.

[21] "Report on Two Years of Political and Military Work," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 75a, l. 21.

[22] Ibid.; "Interview with Thomas Page," 16 December 1937, RGASPI f. 545, op. 3, d. 469, l. 2.

[23] *Pravda*, 16 October 1936.

[24] See statistics on volunteers arriving in 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 6.

[25] "Anglo-American Group Analysis," l. 10.

for the Republic – and Loyalists' enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. When he arrived in Spain from Moscow in 1937, what caught Robert Merriman's eye was an "interesting poster" in Barcelona featuring the Russian alphabet and advertising a "Course in Russian" sponsored by the socialist-affiliated Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT). At the International Brigades' base in Albacete he noted more posters drawing comparisons to the civil war in Russia and lauding Soviet aid.[26] Volunteers exulted over "our Soviet anti-aircraft guns giving the fascists' planes hell!"[27] They often, and sometimes with great enjoyment, watched Soviet films.[28] However, they saw few Soviet people. As American volunteer Don MacLeod observed in a letter home, "There are practically no Russian soldiers here," adding, "yet we all know that without Russia we would not be in the advantageous position we hold today."[29] Actually, about 2,200 Soviet military personnel – tank crews, pilots, and advisors – were active in Spain, but they were not integrated into the International Brigades. Rather, the Soviets remained under the aegis of a separate Red Army military mission known as "Operation X."[30]

The low profile of Soviet personnel allowed the Soviet Union to aid the Republic while publicly maintaining that it was honoring the Nonintervention Agreement. Sponsored by France and Britain in the summer of 1936, the agreement prohibited signatories, including the Soviet Union, Germany, and Italy, from intervening in the civil war, although neither the Germans nor the Italians allowed it to curtail their aid to the rebels. Some historians have also understood the secrecy of Soviet military involvement in Spain as evidence that the Soviet goal was not, as Stalin claimed, to defeat fascism, but rather to turn Spain into a Soviet satellite.[31] From this perspective the Internationals were Stalin's "Comintern soldiers," at best "duped" by Soviet professions of antifascism, at worst "spies in the making" – but certainly not the "freedom fighters" conjured in paeans to international solidarity in the fight against fascism.[32]

[26] Robert H. Merriman diary, vol. 1, 1 enero [1937], 5 diciembre (I refer to entries by the dates printed in the diary; however, the printed dates do not always correspond to the date of entry), Robert Merriman Papers, ALBA 191, Box 1, Folder 3.

[27] Ben Gardner [to Alice Gardner], 30 August 1937, VALB, Container 1.

[28] See Chapter 4. Mikhail Kol'tsov, *Ispankii dnevnik* (Moscow: Grifon, 2005), 27–8. Julian Graffy, *Chapaev* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 88–90; José Cabeza San Deogracias, "Buscando héroes: La historia de Antonio Col como ejemplo del uso de la narrativa como propaganda durante la Guerra Civil española," *Revista Historia y Comunicación Social* 10 (2005): 37–50.

[29] Don McLeod to Stuart, 8 June 1937, VALB, Container 1. See also John Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight: An Autobiography of the Spanish Civil War* (South Hadley, MA.: Bergin and Garvey, 1985), 117.

[30] Kowalsky, "Soviet Union," 686, 689; Iurii E. Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X": Sovetskaia voennaia pomoshch' respublikanskoi Ispanii (1936–1939)* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2000).

[31] Radosh et al., *Spain Betrayed*, xxiii.

[32] George Esenwein, "Freedom Fighters or Comintern Soldiers? Writing about the 'Good Fight' during the Spanish Civil War," *Civil Wars* 12, no. 1–2 (March–June 2010): 156–66; Richard Baxell, "Myths of the International Brigades," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies: Hispanic Studies*

To debunk the "myth" of the "good fight" historians have emphasized that political rivalries – especially the feverish hunt to unmask Trotskyites – often overwhelmed the celebrated comradeship of the cause and that Comintern officials executed an "untold number of . . . alleged subversives" as a means of disciplining troops.[33]

By contrast, this chapter aims not to debunk myths but rather to examine the everyday lives of the International brigadistas to get a sense of whether and how participants understood the abstraction "international solidarity" to operate on the ground in Spain. It sets the less than mythic realities of the International Brigades in the larger contexts of Republican Spain and international communism. As historian Helen Graham argues, all actors in Spain were limited by the brutal and changing realities of the war. To focus narrowly on the question of whether the Internationals were freedom fighters or Stalinist dupes risks treating Spain as "a blank screen waiting to be written on by Soviet and Comintern players."[34] It also risks ignoring the understandings, experiences, and identities that volunteers brought with them to Spain and that circumstances there might challenge, reinforce, or perhaps remake. This chapter thus explores how the volunteers' ideas of themselves, their cause, and the Soviet Union interacted with the unanticipated and often poorly understood military, political, and social context in which they operated. What did the "good fight" mean to the undersupplied, multinational, often poorly trained, multilingual, mostly communist volunteers in Spain?

Language Barriers, International Solidarity, and the *Internationale*

In 1937, Lini De Vries (aka Lee Moerkirk Fuhr), a Dutch American nurse volunteering with the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, began a letter home with a description of the sounds of Spain. From her office in the hospital, she could hear French troops "practicing French revolutionary songs," apparently "copying the plan of the Germans who are putting on a chorus." She wrote that on the previous evening, 14 April, in honor of the anniversary of the Spanish Republic, several people, whom she described as a Greek, a Spanish anarchist, and a Spanish communist, had collaborated on writing a speech that was then translated into German, French, English, and Italian. After the speech, the "Spaniards sang "rev.[olutionary] songs, then the

and Researches on Spain, Portugal and Latin America 91, no. 1–2 (2014): 11–24; Chris Ealham argues against the view of Internationals as "spies" in "'Myths' and the Spanish Civil War: Some Old, Some Exploded, Some Clearly Borrowed and Some Almost 'Blue,'" *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 2 (2007): 372; Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army: The International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982).

33 Esenwein, "Freedom Fighters," 163. Both Mershcheriakov and Kowalsky argue that the number was likely low, "Sud'ba," 25; "Soviet Union," 696. See Chapter 4.

34 Helen Graham, "Spain Betrayed? The New Historical McCarthyism," *Science and Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 367.

girls, then me solo & then there was group singing. It was very moving." Later in the letter, describing her daily routine, she provided a long and diverse list of non-nursing, organizational, and political duties and concluded, "I can't walk 5 ft. without some one stopping me to ask something or settle something – & this in about 10 different languages."[35] For De Vries, Spain was a place where everyone spoke a different language, yet no one had trouble communicating. In her telling, the "babble of tongues" produced not "legions of Babel,"[36] but an international chorus singing revolutionary songs.

De Vries may well have minimized the difficulties of dealing with patients and staff who often lacked a common language. As cultural historian and World War II veteran Paul Fussell notes, letters home from war "are composed largely to sustain the morale of the folks at home, to hint as little as possible at the real, worrisome circumstance of the writer."[37] De Vries may also have hoped to shore up faith in the possibility and power of international solidarity. She had joined the Communist Party in 1934 – she is best known as the woman whom confessed spy Elizabeth Bentley named as recruiting her into the party – and offered in her letter to send a copy of the anniversary speech for use in the party's *Daily Worker*.[38] Finally, her letter was no doubt written with the understanding that it would have to clear the censor.

Still, the insistence that the diversity of languages spoken (and sung) by the volunteers constituted a defining feature of the brigades – if not always an unproblematic one – is significant. It shows up in letters home and in later reminiscences, as well as in the reports generated by commissars and commanders. The administrative records often emphasized the problems caused by linguistic diversity, but always with the hope of finding ways of overcoming language barriers and achieving the promise of international solidarity.

The multiple languages spoken in the brigades had the most serious potential consequences at the front. In the Twelfth Brigade, for example, the Soviet-trained Hungarian commander Máté Zalka (known as "Pavol Lukács") gave commands in Russian that an adjutant translated into French so others could then translate them into German, Spanish, and Italian.[39] Unsurprisingly, commands often got muddled in the course of multiple translations; language and communications problems contributed to severe losses in the battle for Madrid.[40] At Jarama in February 1937, the main communication problem

[35] Lini De Vries to Max, 15 April [1937], Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001, Box 6, Folder 19.

[36] Johnston, *Legions of Babel*.

[37] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 145.

[38] On Bentley see Chapter 7.

[39] Mershcheriakov, "Sud'ba," 27.

[40] Robert G. Colodny, *The Struggle for Madrid: The Central Epic of the Spanish Conflict, 1936–1937* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 74; Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*

was the lack of working field telephones between the battalions and Fifteenth Brigade headquarters. Still, in a May 1937 report, Merriman, who had served as the commander of the Abraham Lincoln battalion at Jarama, emphasized that language barriers contributed to the confusion and lack of coordination that marked the battle as a whole. He blamed difficulties communicating with the French drivers of the convoy that brought the Lincolns to the front for the loss of "3 trucks with very important materiel and 20 men."[41] In the aftermath of the battle in which the Lincolns sustained more than one hundred casualties, a result, they believed, of poor command decisions, the brigade commissar, French communist Jean Chaintron (known as "Barthel"), struggled to appease the near-mutinous men through a translator, who, according to the brigade's history, "knew very little French and consequently added to the difficulties of the argument, since the Commissar neither understood English, nor the comrades French."[42] Language barriers thus appear to have added to the human costs of the successful defense of Madrid.

Multilingual brigadistas, including the large foreign-born contingent among the Americans, both facilitated and complicated communication across languages. As translators, they were "worth their weight in gold."[43] For Robert Gladnick, a Russian-born American in the Fifteenth Brigade, his native knowledge of Russian, along with an ability to speak German and an apparent facility for picking up other languages including Spanish and French, fundamentally transformed his service in Spain. As Gladnick tells the story in his memoir – a self-aggrandizing and not always reliable source – Russian general Dmitrii Grigorevich Pavlov for whom he acted as an impromptu translator recognized him as "one of us" and saw to his transfer (as Roman Gladnik) to the Soviet tank corps. His language skills would have been particularly useful there, because tank crews might include a Soviet commander, an International technician – mostly members of the Czechoslovak, Austrian, German, and Bulgarian parties – and a Spanish gun loader.[44] Ultimately, Gladnick was transferred to the tank school at Archena as a translator.[45] More commonly, bilingual troops provided a convenient source of casual translators. For example, although there was far less demand for Finnish than Russian translators, Arvola occasionally

(New York: Penguin, 1982), 136. On similar language problems at Fuentes de Ebro, see John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1958), 51.

41 "La Bataille du Jarama," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 32, l. 426. See also "A Documentary History of the XV Brigade," ibid., op. 3, d. 471, l. 25, 30.

42 "Documentary History of the XV Brigade," l. 35.

43 Mershcheriakov, "Sud'ba," 27.

44 Robert Gladnick memoirs, chapter 3, pp. 4, 13–15, Hoover Institution Archives; Kowalsky, "Soviet Union," 694; "Spisok Internatsionalistov rabotavshikh tankovykh chastiakh Respublikanskoi Armii," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 120, ll. 15–19. On Gladnick's language skills, see Herrick, *Jumping the Line*, 137–8.

45 "Spisok Internatsionalistov," l. 160b. Gladnick describes himself as an "instructor" at the school, not a translator, Gladnick memoirs, chapter 9, p. 4.

found himself pulled away from other tasks to translate for the Scandinavian political commissar.[46]

At the same time, troops speaking and writing their "own" languages could to some degree escape the scrutiny of political commissars and superior officers. At Brunete in July 1937, American officers Steve Nelson and Mirko Markovicz consulted with the commander of the Fifteenth Brigade, Lieutenant Colonel Klaus Becker, through a translator who spoke English and German. Taken aback by what seemed to him an impossible order, Markovicz expressed his doubts to Nelson in their native Croatian, a language neither Becker nor his translator understood. The irritated colonel demanded that his subordinates speak English. As soon as he understood Markovicz's objections, Becker relieved him of command.[47] In a similar vein, the base inspector Longo reported that one of the early problems facing his office was the lack of "personnel necessary to censor all the letters, especially those in lesser-known languages."[48] The problem was well known enough for Mito Kruth to warn his wife that the Finnish letters he sent to his mother would take longer to arrive than the letters in English he wrote to her.[49]

Thus even away from the front, where translation had somewhat less urgency than under fire, translators were in great demand. Longo viewed effective translation as essential not only to censorship but also to maintaining morale. Worrying that failing to provide necessary translations would create "manifestations of wounded national pride," he asked for authorization to make sure his office had a staff able to translate into every possible language.[50] Language skills thus became a key qualification for brigade functionaries. When Robert Merriman, still recovering from the wounded shoulder he suffered at Jarama, tried to find employment in the brigades for his wife Marion, recently arrived from Moscow, he received the reply that an assignment would depend on "what languages she knows."[51] Underscoring the importance of language, lists of military instructors at the base specified not their party affiliation – which may have been uniformly communist –but rather the language or languages they spoke.[52]

[46] Ranse Edward Arvola to Comrade Helen [Kruth], 16 July 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

[47] Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 143–4. R. H. Merriman to Comrade Bielov, 4 August 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 947, l. 52. Markovicz's Croatian was apparently better than his English, see Cecil Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969),142.

[48] "Doklad Voennogo komissariata," l. 50.

[49] Mito Kruth to Helen, 25 June [1937], Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 10.

[50] "Doklad Voennogo komissariata," l. 53.

[51] Estado Mayor to Merriman, 21 March [1937] as copied by Merriman into his diary, vol. 1, 27 septiembre, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

[52] "2nd Battalion of Instruction, Tarazona," 21 September 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 65, l. 23.

The reorganization of the brigades undertaken in August 1937 in the wake of the costly and failed Brunete offensive aimed to "reduce the difficulties of language that exist in the different brigades" by reducing the number of languages spoken in each unit.[53] As Longo and the base commander Gayman recognized, it was the heavy casualties suffered in July, along with the almost total lack of leaves from the front – not concerns about language barriers – that constituted the root causes of demoralization and desertions.[54] Still, Longo suggested that the reorganization along linguistic lines – something in which troops had expressed interest and that had begun before the offensive – would help restore morale.[55] Moreover, separating the brigades according to language conformed to standard Comintern practice, visible, for example, in the organization of Comintern schools into language sections.

However, even after the reorganization, the brigades were not linguistically homogeneous. Because all brigades included large numbers of Spaniards, the reorganization produced a "Spanish-Italian" Twelfth Brigade, a "Spanish-French" Fourteenth, and a "Spanish-English" Fifteenth Brigade. The Eleventh was designated the "Spanish-German" Brigade, but also included Dutch speakers and speakers of various Scandinavian languages. The Thirteenth "Spanish-Slavic" Brigade included speakers of Polish as well as a number of other Slavic languages.[56]

To facilitate better relations between the brigadistas and Spanish troops, Longo's office advocated and organized Spanish-language instruction for the Internationals and literacy courses for the Spanish conscripts. Commissars regularly reported organizing language instruction.[57] Among Lini De Vries's hospital duties was organizing a Spanish class for hospital personnel.[58] Propaganda among the troops also encouraged language learning. A collection of materials for publication in the Fifteenth Brigade's newspaper and bulletin includes the

[53] "Informe sobre la acción y la situación de las Brigadas Internacionales," 11 August 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1, d. 4, l. 24.

[54] Ibid., ll. 15–19 ; "Conclusions au mémorandum sur la situation des Brigades Internationales," 11 August 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 32, l. 386.

[55] "Informe sobre la acción ," ll. 17, 25 ; "Informe sobre el trabajo del comisariado político de la XV Brigada," 16 April 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 4, d. 435, l. 21; Mershcheriakov, "Sud'ba," 28.

[56] "Conclusions au mémorandum," l. 388; Mershcheriakov, "Sud'ba,"29 ;"Informe sobre la acción ," l. 23. Soviet officers Manfred (Moshe) Stern (known as Emilio Kléber in Spain) and Karol Świerczewski (or Sverchevskii, known as Walter in Spain) disagree on the details of the reorganization: "An account by M. Fred [Manfred Stern] on work in Spain," 14 December 1937, in *Spain Betrayed*, 346; "Notes on the Situation in the International Units in Spain Report by Colonel Com. Sverchevsky (Walter)," 14 January 1938, in ibid., 437.

[57] On language and literacy see "Informe sobre el trabajo del comisariado," l. 19; "The Meeting of the Political Commissars held May 10th [1937]," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 4, d. 435, l. 30; "Informe sobre las 35 y 45 Divisiones y otras unidades internacionales durante el periodo del 2 al 7 de julio de 1938," ibid., op. 1, d. 3, l. 313; "Informe sobre las divisiones 35 y 45," 16–22 July 1938, ibid., l. 325.

[58] Lini De Vries to Max, 15 April [1937], Martin Papers, Box 6, Folder 19.

song "La Joven Guardia" (The Young Guard), the anthem of the Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas (JSU, the communist youth organization), accompanied by a note instructing as follows: "COMRADE: YOU ARE ENCOURAGED TO COPY THIS SONG AND LEARN IT AT YOUR LEISURE. IT WILL NOT ONLY HELP YOU TO LEARN SPANISH, BUT ALSO A POPULAR REVOLUTIONARY SONG."[59] The troops were also encouraged to learn the *Internationale*, "the communist hymn," in Spanish and to attend a Spanish class that met "at 2 everyday."[60]

Whether or not brigadistas actually learned much Spanish is another question. One Irish volunteer claimed that few learned the language because "there was a superstition that anyone who started to study Spanish grammar got killed," which provided a convenient "excuse for not doing it."[61] Italian communist and Comintern representative Palmiro Togliatti (known in Spain as "Alfredo") considered the failure of the Internationals to learn Spanish and read the Spanish press as evidence of "inadequate" political work. With what sounds like some exaggeration, he claimed that it was "easier to find a brigade of Spaniards who can read some Polish or German than the other way around."[62] Cecil Cole, a twenty-four-year-old Berkeley graduate from Oakland wrote home that "it's really lots of fun to learn the language" by conversing with the locals; however, he noted, "most of the men don't care to learn the language, . . . so I do speak almost fluently in comparison to the majority of men here."[63] Steve Nelson judged intensive language study unnecessary. Imprisoned in France on the way to Spain, he wrote to his wife, "I am learning German, Italian, Spanish & French at the same time. Not making much progress but can get along with all."[64] Ben Gardner, a party organizer born in the town of Uman in Ukraine, followed a similar strategy, noting, "I speak English, Yiddish, Rus. & Spanish combined to some of our Internationals. It's a regular riot. But somehow I make out."[65]

Others reported making serious, if sometimes frustrating, attempts to master Spanish. Kruth, a long-time communist organizer and teacher, began trying to learn Spanish almost as soon as he arrived. In the hospital in August 1937, he wrote his wife that he had again picked up a Spanish grammar book,

[59] Emphasis in original."La Joven Guardia," 2 August 1937, RGASPI f. 545, op. 3, d. 473, l. 83; *Canciones de las Brigadas Internacionales* (1938, reprint, Seville: Renacimiento, 2007), xiii, 19.

[60] RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 473, ll. 96, 183 (Notes, poems, lyrics, slogans, drawings for Fifteenth Brigade newspapers and bulletins).

[61] Joe Monks quoted in Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 146.

[62] Untitled report, 29 August 1937, in *Spain Betrayed*, 256.

[63] C. M. Cole to Jeff, 1 January 1938, VALB, Container 1.

[64] Steve Nelson to Maggie [Nelson], from Perpignan, France, nd, Steve Nelson Papers ALBA 008, Box 1, Folder 8.

[65] Ben Gardner to Alice [Gardner], 6 January 1938, VALB, Container 1.

"trying to master the verbs enough to get along." The process reminded him of his experiences studying in Moscow in the early 1930s: "Remember the old Russky? Well it's the same old ground all over again."[66] At the end of October, unsatisfied with his progress, he wrote, "I hope the next war is in a country where I can speak the language. It makes it so much easier."[67] Merriman did not detail his learning process, but noted in his diary that he knew enough Spanish to give the morning drill in Spanish. (He also prided himself on his ability to participate in party meetings in Russian.[68])

Ignoring or minimizing the practical difficulties of learning Spanish and of working in a multilingual environment, many volunteers in their letters, diaries, and reminiscences idealized the literal and metaphorical music of the many languages heard in Spain. Some, such as Nelson and Gardner, suggested that the ease and naturalness of communication across language barriers demonstrated the reality of international solidarity. With relatively little effort, they could "get along with all" in whatever language they happened to speak. Arvola emphasized the odd and wonderful mix of languages and nationalities possible only in Spain. In the field kitchen he ran in Teruel, he found a new world in the making: "The Spanish comrade is singing songs. The Negro comrade telling (interrupting) us with stories and I have to join in."[69] Similarly, for Gene Wolman, a volunteer from New York, among the "rural joys" of being at the front was seeing "some 'foreign' bunch go marching gaily past us singing their national songs. The best singers, in my opinion, are the Germans, Slavs, and Italians."[70] Such unexpected and harmonious combinations of languages appeared to provide vivid proof that the brigades were successful in what Giuseppe Di Vittorio (known as "Nicoletti"), the chief political commissar of the Albacete base, deemed their "role and aim": "symbolizing the unity of all workers, and the union of all the peoples of Europe in the fight for bread, peace, and liberty."[71]

Those volunteers who emphasized the moving sense of solidarity they felt in Spain often illustrated it with examples both of the pervasiveness of communal singing and the possibility of hearing songs and conversation in an astonishing range of languages. Collective singing – and adding new songs inspired by Spain to the national "revolutionary repertoire" – was, as Josie McLellan emphasizes

[66] Mito Kruth to Helen, 30 August [1937], Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 11. See also, Mito to Helen, 18 April [1937], 25 April [1937], Box 1, Folder 9; 20 June 1937, Box 1, Folder 10; 2 September [1937], Box 1, Folder 11.

[67] Mito Kruth to Helen, 31 October 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 12.

[68] Merriman diary, vol. 1, Merriman papers, Box 1, Folder 3, 1 junio (Russian), 3 junio (Spanish); Merriman diary, vol. 2, ibid. p. 59.

[69] Arvola to Sis and Helen, 26 January 1938, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. See also Merriman diary, vol. 2, 30 October 1937, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

[70] Gene Wolman to Family, Letter no. 3, nd, VALB, Container 1.

[71] "Doklad Voennogo komissariata," l. 19.

FIGURE 1. Ranse (Frank) Edward Arvola, chief cook in the Auto Park, Alcover. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University (ALBA Photo 11–0334 [Series E])

in her study of German volunteers, "a powerful symbol" of solidarity among German communists.[72] In his memoirs, Gladnick suggests a similar impulse to forge and mark solidarity across national lines through singing. On the train from Paris to the Spanish border, the volunteers "began asking one another 'Votre Nationalite' in reply we got Pollonaise, Bulgar, Hungoire, Italienne." When Joe Gordon (born Joseph Mendelowitz) "was asked he replied Juif des Etats Unis – all of a sudden the Pollonaise, Hungoise said 'Vis send oich Yidden' (We too are Jews) so Joe proposed that instead of singing the International we should sing the Hatikva [the Zionist anthem] – the Poles & Hungarians knew the words. Most of us had to hum along."[73] That they needed to sing something together went without saying.

The *Internationale*, a song that virtually all the volunteers knew, even if in different languages, provided for many a particularly emotional means of bridging language divides. The song itself, and especially repeated communal

[72] Josie McLellan, "'I Wanted To Be a Little Lenin': Ideology and the German International Brigade Volunteers," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 301.

[73] All spelling as in original. Gladnick memoirs, chapter 5, p. 5. On Joe Gordon see Daniel Czitrom, "Volunteers for Liberty: Letters from Joe and Leo Gordon, Americans in Spain, 1937–38," *Massachusetts Review* 25 (Fall 1984): 348–54.

FIGURE 2. Soldier playing mandolin and singing with group. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University (ALBA Photo 177–177080)

singing of it, underscored shared allegiances without specifying them too precisely. After all, the song was at once familiar from home, the international anthem of the proletarian cause, and the Soviet national anthem. In Republican Spain, it echoed everywhere. Volunteers sang it on the train from Paris to Perpignan on the Mediterranean near the Spanish border.[74] They sang it on reaching Spain after crossing the Pyrenees.[75] They sang it on the march and at the front.[76] In June 1937, political commissar Frederick Lutz, enjoying a rare leave from the front, described the sounds reaching him through the window: "The propaganda loud speaker is playing the ever-thrilling 'Internationale' and the townspeople and the troops are all singing. You know I can't get over the thrill of hearing the 'Internationale' and the 'Youthful Guardsman'

74 Beevor, *Spanish Civil War*, 126.

75 Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson, American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 202; Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, *Edwin Rolfe: A Biographical Essay and Guide to the Rolfe Archive at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 23.

76 Steve Nelson, *The Volunteers* (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1953), 160; Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 13; Marcel Acier, *From Spanish Trenches: Recent Letters from Spain* (New York: Modern Age, 1937), 35, 117, 156; Alexander Szurek, *The Shattered Dream*, trans. Jacques Grunblatt and Hilda Grunblatt (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1989), 22, 174, 229; William Rust, *Britons in Spain: The History of the XVth International Brigade* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1939), 134.

sung by everyone everywhere I go."[77] According to Harry Meloff (aka Malofsky), a composer and playwright killed in action in 1937, the sound of the *Internationale* in Spain moved his friend, fellow New Yorker Abe Harris, to tears.[78]

A poem submitted to the Fifteenth Brigade's newspaper provides a glimpse of how the brigadistas imagined and mythologized themselves, as well as the importance of song and language in this process. The poem emphasized both the diversity of the soldiers and their unity in struggle and in song. "Men from the Nazi dungeons,/ Scots from the Glasgow slums,/ Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Irish,/ What is the host that comes?/ Speaking a score of lingoes,/ Dirty and ill-arrayed." A subsequent stanza expanded the "host" to include "Bulgars, Chinese, and Negroes,/ Men of a myriad hues,/ Danes, and Italians, and Lascars [sailors from the Indian subcontinent],/ Slovaks, Englishmen, Jews." Yet they were all united, "Singing into the battle" – perhaps songs in a dozen languages, perhaps the *Internationale*.[79] Song here functioned as a bridge across "a score of lingoes." Despite all the difficulties and confusion caused by language, simply hearing so many languages resound could nonetheless function as thrilling proof of international solidarity in Spain. In this way, the fact of linguistic diversity contributed to the production and power of the "myth" of the brigades.

Cigarettes, Shortages, and the Limits of International Solidarity

If the sounds of Republican Spain announced the unprecedented international scope of the cause, the smells confirmed the ugly and prosaic realities of war. Moving into battle with a reserve unit, Bessie was overwhelmed by the "sudden, sickening smell of the dead."[80] Life in the trenches had its own "characteristic smell" – in George Orwell's "experience a smell of excrement and decaying food."[81] Judging from the incessant references to cigarettes and smoking in diaries, letters, and reports on troop morale, the "constant scent of cigarettes" was, as Fussell noted about World War II, "part of the unique atmosphere of the war" along with "the automatic, ubiquitous actions of deep inhaling, borrowing, and offering smokes."[82] "Tobacco helps you remain sane," Bessie noted

[77] Frederick Lutz to Shirley [Gottlieb], JunJl26e 16 '37 [sic], in *Madrid 1937*, 104–5.

[78] Harry Meloff to Mim, 16 May 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 148. See also Gustav Regler, *The Owl of Minerva*, trans. Norman Denny (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1959), 309.

[79] "International Brigades," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 473, l. 54.

[80] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 88.

[81] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938; reprint, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 16. Orwell served in a POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) militia unit, but his description squares with conditions found in the People's Army. Michael Seidman, "Quiet Fronts in the Spanish Civil War," *Historian* 61, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 827.

[82] Fussell, *Wartime*, 145. Michael Seidman, *Republic of Egos: A Social History of the Spanish Civil War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 110.

FIGURE 3. Three soldiers, one handing a cigarette to another. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University (ALBA Photo 177–178023)

during the terrifying 1938 offensive on the Ebro, "but it's not enough . . . – you smoke like a house afire."[83] "War," wrote poet and volunteer Edwin Rolfe, "is your comrade struck dead beside you, his shared cigarette still alive in your lips."[84]

In Spain, where cigarettes were always in short supply and everyone smoked, sharing cigarettes could be an act of profound solidarity. As in World War I, the war in which smoking and cigarettes had become ubiquitous, the tobacco ration never seemed to be sufficient.[85] Ben Gardner provided his wife a list of key items difficult to find in Spain: soap, soft drinks, and "good cigarettes." Perhaps hoping to inspire folks at home to send care packages, he added,

[83] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 92.

[84] Edwin Rolfe, "City of Anguish," in *First Love, and Other Poems* (Los Angeles: L. Edmunds Book Shop, 1951), 19, quoted in Carroll, *Odyssey*, 91.

[85] On World War I see Chris Wrigley, "Soldiers and Cigarettes: Smoking for King and Country," *History Today* 64, no. 4 (April 2014): 24–30; Allan Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 51–4.

"Boy if our comrades and friends could only see how much it means to our fighters to get American cigarettes!"[86] Volunteers obsessively managed their cigarette ration – which Bessie described as "1 pack French Gaulois[es] blue or American Twenty Grand a week."[87] Hank Rubin, a college student turned political commissar, remembered "how carefully we had hoarded our tobacco. On the rare occasions we got a real cigarette, we often cut it in two and rerolled the parts to make two cigarettes. At the very least, we saved the cigarette butts."[88] In these circumstances, the sharing of cigarettes could cement personal and political bonds. When Arvola received a letter with cigarettes, he shared them all, save one, with his comrades "from Fascist or Semi-Fascist countries" who had no hope of receiving any from home.[89] For Bessie, the emblem of "comradeship and generosity" at the front was a "man who received 2 cartons of Camels today, has given them all away."[90]

A "tobacco famine" could quickly demoralize troops.[91] American commissar DeWitt Parker looked forward to the arrival of packages from the United States containing chocolate and tobacco, noting "a cigarette becomes a very important political instrument sometimes."[92] Longo's early 1938 report on morale within the brigades similarly noted that a several week hiatus in the distribution of cigarettes to the troops – they were being held up in Spanish customs – "has created a malaise that will be aggravated if the situation continues."[93] He deemed the "fact that package service from abroad functions very badly and that many packages don't arrive at their destinations" as having "a negative influence on the men."[94]

Although the volunteers may have griped most about cigarettes, tobacco was hardly the only item in short supply in Republican Spain. According to a documentary history of the Fifteenth Brigade, at the time of its formation, "the men were poorly clothed and poorly armed;" of the roughly one hundred Italians in the Dimitrov battalion, "there were still about 30 who were in civilian clothes, had their suitcases, and were without military knapsacks."[95]

[86] Ben Gardner [to Alice Gardner], 24 July 1937, VALB, Container 1. For a similar hint, see Lloyd to Pop [F. J. Edmonds], 24 June 1937, in Lloyd Edmonds, *Letters from Spain*, ed. Amirah Inglis (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 110.

[87] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 4.

[88] Hank Rubin, *Spain's Cause Was Mine: A Memoir of an American Medic in the Spanish Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 148; Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 4.

[89] Ranse Edward Arvola to Helen [Kruth], 4 October 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. Nearly all of Arvola's letters make reference to cigarettes.

[90] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 17.

[91] The phrase "tobacco famine" is from Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 59.

[92] DeWitt Parker to Funny, 26 October 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 177.

[93] "Informe sobre la situación de las brigadas internacionales," 1 January 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1 d. 3, ll. 80–1.

[94] Ibid., ll. 80 (quotation), 333, 334.

[95] "Documentary History of the XV International Brigade," l. 3.

The situation never improved appreciably; by the last year of the war, when less military aid was arriving from the Soviet Union, it had deteriorated. In a confidential memo written in July 1937, on the eve of his dismissal from the command of the Albacete base for alleged embezzlement, Gayman reported "demoralization" brought on by the difficulty of obtaining "authorizations for the purchase of provisions, and for the supply of equipment and clothing."[96] Laurie Lee, a British volunteer who arrived in the winter of 1937, described the brigades as armed with "antique muskets and jamming machine guns."[97] In January 1938, Longo reported acute shortages of pants and shoes (*alpargatas*, espadrilles) and recommended the regular distribution of tobacco, short leaves from the front, better clothing, and the provision of necessary gear, including entrenchment tools, helmets, and gas masks, as essential to maintaining morale.[98] When Bessie arrived at the front in March 1938 in the wake of the Nationalist breakthrough in Aragon, he found the men without "decent clothes, shoes, or even blankets; few have mess kits – we use tin cans and fingers. Tin cans are hard to come by."[99] In July 1938, Longo's office was still reporting that "there are many comrades, especially in the 15th Brigade, who are completely barefoot" and thus unable to participate in military exercises.[100]

Such shortages, which constituted a defining feature of life in Republican Spain, were a consequence of the August 1936 Nonintervention Agreement. As Helen Graham argues in her history of the Spanish civil war, the British and French refusal to sell arms or make loans "placed the Republic . . . at an enormous material disadvantage."[101] The effects of nonintervention were felt first in the military sphere. While Nazi Germany and fascist Italy violated the agreement with impunity, supplying men and material to the Nationalists, the agreement effectively barred the Republic from "normal channels for buying modern military weaponry."[102] In the face of the arms embargo, the Republic was forced to "procure arms at extortionate prices on the black market" and

[96] Translation from "Confidential Note on the Situation of the International Brigades at the End of July 1937," in *Spain Betrayed*, 247. *Spain Betrayed* includes part of the memo, as held in the Russian State Military Archives (RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, d. 90, ll. 539–5[sic]33), 241–8. The 453-page "Otchet nachal'nika Bazy" is held at RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 32 (quotation l. 383). On deliveries of Soviet hardware to Spain, see Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* [electronic resource] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), chapter 10.

[97] Laurie Lee, *Moment of War: A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: New Press, 1991), 46.

[98] "Informe sobre la situación," ll. 79, 87.

[99] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 17. On the retreats, see Carroll, *Odyssey*, 171–88.

[100] "Informe Sobre las 35 y 45 Divisiones," l. 316.

[101] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, xi. Michael Seidman argues that the Nationalists used foreign aid more effectively, *Victorious Counterrevolution: The Nationalist Effort in the Spanish Civil War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 6.

[102] Kowalsky, "Soviet Union," 681. On German and Italian military aid to the insurgents, see Michael Alpert, *An International History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 78, 82–6, 90–4.

ultimately to rely on a frequently disrupted flow of Soviet military aid of uneven quality and insufficient quantity.[103] Paying "crippling prices" for arms meant that the Republic struggled to purchase other necessary goods, such as foreign wheat, when in 1937 it faced a crisis of grain production at home.[104] As the war dragged on and more and more territory was lost to the Nationalists, the costs of economic isolation increased, producing shortages throughout the economy. Spanish troops in the People's Army, no less than the brigades, often lacked food, coats, shoes, and arms; they, too, smoked cigarettes "as thin as toothpicks."[105]

However, this larger context hardly figured in the explanations of shortages, especially of cigarettes, proposed by the Internationals or their commanders and commissars. From the brigadistas' perspective, shortages resulted not from the international situation facing the Republic, but rather from, at best, inefficiency or inadequate political work or, at worst, from corruption or even sabotage. Emphasizing bureaucratic inefficiencies, Longo granted that some measure of blame for the poor mail delivery might fall to the brigades, but insisted that much depended on the Customs Service; he had therefore "solicited and obtained the intervention of superior authorities"[106] In his July 1937 memo, Gayman identified a "provocation" in the director of the tobacco monopoly's use of "his pen to transform these two million individual cigarettes" sent by Belgian and Dutch branches of the International Red Aid "*into two million packs*, which allowed him to invite all branches of the army – ground, air, and sea – to ask the International Brigades for these cigarettes."[107] At the same time, Gayman faulted the British and Americans for failing to share their cigarettes and care packages with the other Internationals, noting that donations "sent by French organizations were distributed in all international units, while those which came from America or England were reserved exclusively to the British and Americans."[108] The English-speaking brigadistas themselves complained that their cigarettes were (mis)directed to Spanish troops. They blamed the American party, which raised funds for Spain "on a basis of misrepresentation – that these funds buy comforts for 'the American boys in Spain,' which the A. b. in Spain never see (or rarely) since these comforts go to the General

[103] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 150, 157; Kowalsky, "Soviet Union," 682; Klement Voroshilov to the Politburo of the CC VKP(b), 16 February 1939, in *Spain Betrayed*, 512.

[104] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 158; Seidman, *Republic of Egos*, 167, 82. On food aid, see [Pedro] Checa and Luis [Comintern representative Vittorio Codovilla] to G. Dimitrov, 11 September 1937, in *Spain Betrayed*, 380.

[105] Lluís Montagut quoted in James Matthews, *Reluctant Warriors: Republican Popular Army and Nationalist Army Conscripts in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 112; Seidman, *Republic of Egos*, 178.

[106] "Informe sobre la situación," ll. 80–1.

[107] Emphasis in original.Translation from "Confidential Note" in *Spain Betrayed*, 245, with slight modification; "Otchet nachal'nika," ll. 380–1.

[108] "Otchet nachal'nika," l. 450.

FIGURE 4. Soldiers distributing mail. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University (ALBA Photo 11–1463 [Series E])

Intendencia [Quartermaster] of the army and are distributed among the entire Spanish army."[109] That morale among the rest of the army might also be suffering because of a lack of cigarettes – or that solidarity might require sharing the Internationals' cigarettes and "comforts" more broadly – seems to have occurred to very few members of the brigades.[110]

The commissars' tendency to attribute shortages (and the resultant demoralization) to inefficiency or insufficient political work grew out of their more general conviction that all problems facing the brigades could be solved with enough vigilance, persistence, and education. The history of the Fifteenth Brigade noted that initially "each particular national group complained about the other National groups." Complaints ranged from "being neglected and kept away from all Battalion activities" to "not being told when foods were distributed, military orders given," or being "assigned to the worst place."[111]

[109] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 51.
[110] Świerczewski makes a similar point in "Notes on the Situation," in *Spain Betrayed*, 449, 453.
[111] "Documentary History of the XV International Brigade," l. 3.

However, the report did not conclude that scarcity fueled charges of "neglect" or lack of access to food distribution. Rather, it argued, "This misunderstanding among different national groups was chiefly due to the difficulties arising out of the inability to communicate properly because of the language impediments," suggesting that with better communication, national tensions would disappear.[112]

Yet despite the commissars' efforts, the "political error" of each national group focusing on its own interests persisted. Gayman's 1937 memo, for example, noted that the German volunteers, mostly political émigrés, had nothing but contempt for the more numerous and less politically homogeneous French volunteers, whom the Germans viewed as "drinkers, quarrelsome, and sometimes sloppy."[113] The Austrians, Scandinavians, and German speakers from Czechoslovakia in battalions dominated by Germans "complained" in turn "that they were 'oppressed' by the Germans who reserved all the officer and political commissar positions for themselves."[114] Karol Świerczewski (or Sverchevskii, known as "General Walter"), a Polish Red Army officer who commanded the Internationals, noted that "anti-Semitism flourished" in the early days of the brigades and as late as early 1938 "still has not been completely extinguished" – this despite the fact that Jews, at about 18 percent of the brigades, constituted the largest "national" group.[115] Gayman concluded that the failure to resolve "frequent conflicts between different nationalities" required heightened vigilance, because such conflicts provided "fertile ground for enemy agents."[116]

It was, as Gayman's warning suggests, often a short step from explaining conflicts and shortages as the result of political errors to understanding such problems as an opening to, or even as evidence of, sabotage. Bessie's summary of the troops' "dissatisfaction" described the "mail and package situation" as "badly handled and possibly even the object of definite sabotage," although he gave no specific evidence to support his conclusion.[117] In a March 1938 letter to the central committee of the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España, PCE), Marty, likewise citing no specific evidence, suggested that delays in the delivery of tobacco and care packages to the Internationals might be the work of a "5th column agent" exploiting "bureaucratic formalities to stop packages sent from abroad."[118] Marty may have used the suggestion of

[112] Ibid.
[113] "Otchet nachal'nika," ll. 448, 449.
[114] Ibid., l. 449.
[115] "Notes on the Situation," in *Spain Betrayed*, 448. Hywel Francis, "'Say Nothing and Leave in the Middle of the Night': The Spanish Civil War Revisted," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 32 (Autumn 1991): 71.
[116] "Otchet nachal'nika," l. 449.
[117] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 51.
[118] André Marty to Secretariado del C. C. del P.C.E., 28 March 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1, d. 11, l. 35.

sabotage as a crude means of motivating prompt action on behalf of the Internationals. At the same time, the easy recourse to "sabotage" as an explanation on the part of both brigadistas and their commander suggests a shared tendency to attribute any and all problems and mistakes to hidden "enemies" – a clear echo of the contemporary purges in the Soviet Union that aimed to "unmask" enemies.

A similar conspiratorial frame of mind shaped efforts to explain the Republic's failed July 1937 offensive at Brunete, about thirty kilometers (nineteen miles) west of Madrid. The operation had been designed to relieve pressure on the capital and to hasten a negotiated end to the war by demonstrating the Republic's strength. Fought in scorching heat, it was one of the deadliest battles of the war, in which the brigades provided the Republic's shock troops. Their initial gains proved unsustainable, because they were not backed by sufficient reserves of men or arms, due to delays at the French frontier and an effective blockade of Republican ports.[119] The Internationals suffered heavy casualties, with the Fifteenth Brigade the hardest hit, its strength reduced from 2,144 to 885 men – with 293 dead, 735 wounded, and 167 missing.[120]

Unsurprisingly, the battle left the troops badly demoralized. As an early August report on morale in the Fifteenth Brigade noted, "even the most tried and reliable [comrades] began to think 'the end of this war is so far off now that we shall never come out alive.'"[121] Thus the brigades' commissars' reports focused less on explaining the failures at Brunete than on restoring morale. Indeed getting the troops to see Brunete as a "significant," if not entirely successful, operation constituted an important part of their morale-building work.[122] The commissars also proposed the provision of longer and more frequent leaves for the troops, some of whom had been on the lines for 150 days with scarcely a break.[123]

When they did turn to the sources of problems within the brigades, the commissars highlighted the action of "fifth column agents" and "masked" fascists among the new Spanish recruits. They reported, for example, that when two Spanish battalions in the Thirteenth Brigade violated orders and abandoned the front, they did so with "perfect order, which proved that the action had been organized by enemy agents." In the Fourteenth Brigade, the commissars' "vigilance" led to the detention of a Spanish recruit who turned out to be a "fascist," and to uncovering "shady elements in other

[119] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 318–19; Beevor, *Spanish Civil War*, 197–201; Carroll, *Odyssey*, 140–5.

[120] "Informe sobre la acción," l. 17. See also, Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 88. After the losses at Brunete, the two American battalions were merged into a single Lincoln-Washington battalion, Carroll, *Odyssey*, 142; on deserters, see ibid., 147–51.

[121] "Report on Morale of XV Brigade," 8 August 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 4, d. 35, l. 172.

[122] Ibid., l. 173.

[123] "Mémorandum sur quelques questions concernant les Brigades Internationales," 19 May 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 32, ll. 357–8.

Brigades."[124] Only after detailing similar incidents in all the International Brigades did the report turn to what appears to be a simpler explanation for the self-inflicted wounds and desertions noted among the (probably quite young) recruits: their near-total lack of military training. Many came to the front without ever having seen a rifle; some "died without ever having fired a shot in their whole lives, and some fired on our men out of inexperience or treason." Moreover, "in general they were not prepared to withstand strong artillery fire or strong bombardment" – all of which, the report concluded, "demonstrated the new recruits' lack of military and political education."[125]

This conflation of political and military errors is telling. Presenting themselves as unable to discern whether the recruits "fired on our men out of inexperience or treason," the commissars effectively downplayed the consequences of poor training – and the lack of arms and ammunition that made live fire training impossible. Instead they took betrayal and sabotage as essentially indistinguishable from and even directly linked to the inexperienced soldiers' inability to hold up under fire. Even as they objected to the "savage and unjustified criticism of Spanish troops [that] was heard, particularly from the weakest comrades,"[126] the commissars themselves made the political unreliability of Spanish troops central to their account of military failures.

In his memo assessing the situation of the brigades after Brunete, Gayman emphasized that the Internationals felt betrayed by the Spanish leadership and that such charges had merit. He reported that the "great majority of officers, noncommissioned officers and volunteers in the International Brigades . . . are consumed by the idea that the International Brigades are considered a foreign body, a band of intruders – I will not say by the Spanish people as a whole, but by the vast majority of political leaders, soldiers, civil servants, and political parties in Spain."[127] Gayman thus distinguished the "Spanish people," whom the brigadistas often romanticized (a point taken up later), from Spanish "political leaders, soldiers, civil servants, and political parties," whom the Internationals, correctly in his view, deemed enemies of the brigades. Among the "facts" Gayman marshaled to support this view was the "patently clear" "prevailing opinion among high officers in the Spanish army, more or less regardless of political affiliation, that the International Brigades are nothing but a foreign legion, an army of mercenaries fighting for money."[128]

[124] "Informe sobre la acción," l. 21; see also "Informatsiia komissar-inspektora interbrigad L. Gallo,"RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1, d. 1, l. 8; "Doklad Voennogo komissariata," ll. 173–4.

[125] "Informe sobre la acción," l. 22. On the recruits' lack of training and youth, see Matthews, *Reluctant Warriors*, 60–1, 189.

[126] "Report on Morale of XV Brigade," l. 172; see also "Notes on the Situation," in *Spain Betrayed*, 449–50.

[127] Quotation from "Confidential Note" with slight changes, in *Spain Betrayed*, 241, 234; "Otchet nachal'nika," l. 374.

[128] Quotation from "Confidential Note" with slight changes, in *Spain Betrayed*, 241; "Otchet nachal'nika," ll. 374–5.

Gayman's charges echoed and endorsed the views of the men themselves who, according to a commissar's report, understood their losses at Brunete to be the result of the failures, if not betrayals, of vaguely specified authorities. The commissars described the men as expressing "something like contempt for the 'Power' or 'Higher Command.'" As evidence, the report recounted that, when a number of long-serving American volunteers were finally reassigned to the rear guard, even the noncommunist brigadistas explained the release of men from the front as the result of the pressure put on the Spanish authorities by the American party, which defended them "whatever the Spanish Government does."[129]

Gayman's brief against the Spanish authorities ignored the shortages and dislocations that plagued the Republic as a whole, blaming the high casualties suffered by the brigades instead on a presumed "concerted effort to annihilate and sacrifice the international contingents."[130] He found proof of contempt for the brigades in the alleged "unequal treatment" they received: They were allotted inferior, obsolete arms; denied leaves; and "entrusted with the most difficult sector in every battle."[131] In some matters, the brigades did suffer "unequal treatment." Until they were incorporated into the People's Army, for example, they received lower pay (seven versus ten pesetas per day) than Spanish troops.[132] However, complaints about the lack of leaves, rifles, and food could be heard throughout the People's Army. Entrusting the brigades with "the most difficult" sectors may not, as Gayman argued, have been an "honor," but may have been a necessity. Even if military historian Gabriel Cardona overstates the matter when he argues that the Brigades, predominantly Spanish by the time of the final Loyalist offensive at the Ebro in 1938, constituted "the only Republican troops capable of sustaining serious offensive combat," their heavy casualties likely reflected less a desire on the part of Republican leaders to destroy them than their vital military role.[133]

A similar readiness on the part of the Internationals to understand losses as the result of sabotage reappeared after the failure of the Teruel offensive. Launched in the midst of a fierce blizzard, the offensive – initially an all-Spanish operation – captured Teruel in late December 1937. The Internationals joined

[129] "Report on Morale of XV Brigade," l. 174.

[130] "Confidential Note" in *Spain Betrayed*, 242; "Otchet nachal'nika ," l. 376.

[131] "Confidential Note" in *Spain Betrayed*, 242; "Otchet nachal'nika, l. 375." For a contrary view see Longo, *Las Brigadas Internacionales en España*, trans. Victor Flores Olea (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1966), 200.

[132] Gallo to Estimados Camaradas, 1 March 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1, d. 9, l. 21.

[133] "Confidential Note" in *Spain Betrayed*, 242; "Otchet nachal'nika," l. 376; Gabriel Cardona, "El Ejercito Popular y las Brigadas Internacionales ¿Cúal fue la importancia de las Brigadas?" in Manuel Requena Gallego and Rosa Mª Sepúlveda Losa, eds., *Las Brigadas Internacionales: El contexto internacional, los medidos de propaganda, literatura y memorias* (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2003), 43. On the offensive capability of the People's Army, see Seidman, "Quiet Fronts," 821–41.

the fighting in January, just as the counterattack began; the Nationalists recaptured Teruel in late February 1938. Just two weeks later, the rebels launched a surprise offensive along almost the entire Aragon front. The Loyalist retreat turned into a rout (the so-called Great Retreats). In April 1938, the Nationalists reached the Mediterranean, establishing a corridor that separated Catalonia from the rest of Republican Spain. Bessie noted rumors circulating among the troops in March 1938 that "sabotage apparently accounted for the loss of Teruel and Belchite."[134] A month later he recorded that the troops understood the decimation of the International Brigades during the Great Retreats as due in large part to the "definite sabotage by Spanish officers who hated 'Reds' ([former War Minister Indalecio] Prieto) or were jealous of IB reputation, or both."[135] Such explanations ignored the Nationalists' distinct advantages, including trained reserves, superior artillery, and the Nazi Condor Legion's devastating air strikes.

The volunteers' suspicions of Spanish leaders dovetailed with their concerns about the loyalty and ability of Spanish soldiers and officers. In an early 1938 report, Soviet advisor Świerczewski deplored the Internationals' continuing and, from his point of view, baseless, tendency to blame military failures on Spanish recruits.[136] More broadly he faulted the Internationals' "stubborn refusal to face the fact that we are on Spanish soil, we are subordinate to the Spanish army." Drawing on statistics detailing the overrepresentation of Internationals in the "key command and political positions" of the Eleventh and Fifteenth Brigades, Świerczewski pointed out that, even as the number of Spaniards in the brigades increased, the Internationals allowed only a few "the right and the honor to lead their own compatriots."[137] A contemporary commissar's report, which concluded that Internationals took the appointment of Spanish commissars or officers as a "hostile" act, appears to confirm Świerczewski's sense of the patronizing and distrustful mood in the brigades.[138]

The Republic's low level – and perhaps inefficient use – of foreign aid sentenced it to a "hand-to-mouth" existence.[139] Yet the Internationals and their leaders, as if unaware of the problems of supply facing the Republic, often explained setbacks ranging from tobacco famines to Nationalist victories as the work of so-called fifth-column agents and saboteurs. However, the tendency to turn "problems caused by shortage and dislocation . . . into accusations of

[134] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 17.
[135] Ibid., 34. He recognized that "incompetence or inexperience" also played a role. On Prieto see Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 360–1.
[136] "Notes on the Situation," in *Spain Betrayed*, 436.
[137] Ibid., 450. Somewhat different figures (also from December 1937) corroborate the tendency of Spaniards to be concentrated in the lower ranks, in "Anglo-American Group Analysis," ll. 25–6.
[138] "Informe sobre la situación," ll. 81, 77.
[139] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 318.

treason and crypto-fascism," although prevalent among the Internationals, was not necessarily a foreign import; it can be understood as rooted to some degree in the fact that the civil war itself had begun with a conspiracy of military officers.[140] Who could tell if other conspirators remained hidden in the ranks of the Republic's army? This interpretive framework can also be understood as a corollary to the faith voiced, for example, by Kruth on his arrival in Spain, in "the invincible character of the advanced farsighted people."[141] The sense that they stood on the side of history could raise unrealistic expectations among the Internationals, even those who recognized the very real obstacles to victory. As British volunteer Laurie Lee remembered the winter of 1937, "Perilous as the situation may have been, it was a time of crazy optimism, too, and all the talk was of an offensive. . . . It would be an Olympian battle to turn the war."[142] When the "Olympian battle" ended in the defeat of the "advanced farsighted people," a nefarious network of "hidden fascists" may have seemed a reasonable explanation.[143]

The Cause, the Spanish People, and the "Legend" of the Brigades

General Świerczewski did not doubt the pervasiveness of the brigadistas' sense that their cause was the cause of "all advanced and progressive humanity." Yet, from his perspective, this conviction made them an often undisciplined and unreliable fighting force. In an early 1938 review of the situation in the International Brigades, he complained that the Internationals, unlike the best Spanish units, did a poor job of caring for their weapons and carrying out their officers' instructions because, rather than concerning themselves "only with matters entrusted to them," they took on the "key problems of immediately reconstructing the world and saving Spain, about which our internationalists love to argue all the time." He disapproved in particular of the of the Internationals' conviction that "being an 'antifascist revolutionary' allows you to argue and debate with the commander, as a rule, using the familiar 'tú' with your hands in your pockets and a cigarette in you mouth."[144] American commissar Steve Nelson took a more generous view of the same behavior, explaining in his memoir that "blind discipline to authority might work in some armies, but it was out of the question in the International Brigades." He understood the commissar's job as explaining "every situation, to see that military decisions and objectives are understood." Thus when he was told to prepare his exhausted

[140] Ibid., 144.
[141] Mito Kruth to Helen, April 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.
[142] Lee, *Moment of War*, 73. See also Mito Kruth to Helen, 2 May [1937], Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9; Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 46.
[143] Radosh et al. make a similar point, *Spain Betrayed*, 474–5.
[144] "Notes on the Situation," in *Spain Betrayed*, 445, 446. On Świerczewski's dim view of British informality, see Len Crome, "Walter (1897–1947): A Soldier in Spain," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 9 (Spring 1980): 124.

men to return to the lines in Brunete, Nelson held a meeting in which he got them to agree to the order – which fortunately was rescinded.[145]

In their letters home, volunteers often emphasized the antifascist political commitments that brought them to Spain. Writing home about a month after his arrival, Arvola captured the politically charged atmosphere in the brigades, describing how he and a "comrade from Finland" had discussed the workers' role "in the present world situation, late into the night." In Spain, he concluded, one could see more clearly than elsewhere the role of the party and the working class.[146] Volunteers attempting to convince their families of the justice of the cause, as well as those whose spouses shared their convictions, wrote letters that echoed the party press's insistence that "to defeat fascism in Spain was to defend democracy everywhere."[147] In May 1938, Cecil Cole explained to his family, "Even tho [sic] you are not in sympathy with communism, remember we are not fighting for a communistic state in Spain but for a democracy. . . . We are fighting as you in the states would fight against a forced dictatorship."[148] Gene Wolman likewise explained to his skeptical family, "Sure life is sweet at twenty four and it is just for this reason that we are fighting. We are battling to prevent it from becoming the sour stench that Fascism brings." On the "positive side," he added, "We are fighting to make life much sweeter. Under Capitalism life with its worries, pettiness, meanness is none too sweet. Under the modified Capitalism toward which Spain is driving, life will indeed be *muy dulce*."[149] (Both Cole and Wolman were killed in action in Spain.) In remarkably similar language, Ben Gardner explained to his wife, who was working for the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, the thrill of being on guard duty, when he had "the wonderful feeling of holding a rifle with a bayonet, guarding Democracy."[150]

Many volunteers linked the cause in Spain to the Soviet Union – as a model for the future, a source of aid, and a guarantor of victory. In a diary entry written on the eve of the battle at Jarama, Merriman prepared himself to die for the cause, justifying his actions in terms at once heartfelt and bombastic: "About to lead first Battalion of Americans in this war. . . . Long Live Communism! Long live the Soviet Union! . . . Men die and mean to die (if necessary) so that the revolution may live on. They may stop us today but tomorrow we still

[145] Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 203, 224–5; "Report on Morale of XV Brigade," l. 72 largely confirms Nelson's account.

[146] Ranse Edward Arvola to Helen, 16 July 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

[147] Steve Nelson, "We Sailed on Christmas," 1937 clipping from party press held in Nelson Papers, Box 1, Folder 13.

[148] C. M. Cole to Family, 19 May [1938], VALB, Container 1.

[149] Gene Wolman to Family, Letter # 6, 10 June 1937, VALB, Container 1.

[150] Ben Gardner [to Alice Gardner], 5 July 1937, VALB, Container 1. See also Don MacLeod to Stuart, 8 June 1937, VALB Container 1; Mito Kruth to Helen, 2 May [1937], Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

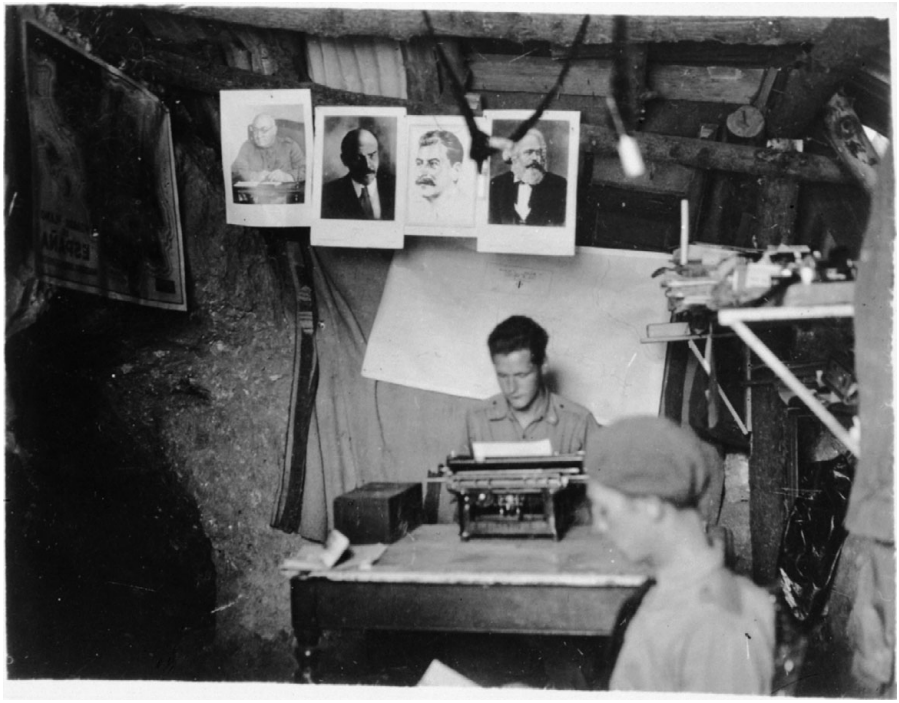

FIGURE 5. Portraits of president of the Spanish Republic Manuel Azaña, Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, and Karl Marx hang over soldier working at a typewriter. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University (ALBA Photo 177–178068)

take up the march."[151] Letters home tended to be less dramatic. Kruth, who often took a didactic tone in letters to his wife, explained in April 1937 that "without the S.[oviet] U.[nion] Spain would today be a fascist country."[152] Don MacLeod likewise affirmed in a letter home that "the very existence of the strong & powerful working class government of the USSR is the greatest assurance we have that the Spanish loyalists will be victorious."[153]

Defending Spain with the assistance of the Soviet Union, the volunteers identified themselves with an international cause. This sense of connection via the Soviet Union to a global movement appears most clearly in Internationals' accounts of the celebration of Soviet holidays in Spain.[154] On the eve of the

[151] Merriman Diary, vol. 1, 17 febrero, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

[152] Mito Kruth to Helen, 25 April 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9; see also Mito to Helen, 21 August 1937, 23 August [1937], Box 1, Folder 10.

[153] Don MacLeod to Stuart, 8 June 1937, VALB, Container 1.

[154] On the celebration of Soviet holidays in Spain see Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, chapter 7.

1 May holiday in 1937, William Sennett described the celebration planned in Spain as part of an international event. He sent his wife the program for the local observance, directing her to "notice the evening discussions in an educational form in three different languages. I am leading the one in English." He then immediately connected this local event to the one he was missing in Chicago, along with the one he imagined was happening in New York. He hoped, he wrote, "to hear of the biggest Chicago demonstration ever with the most colorful parade ever seen. New York I know will come through."[155] Likewise, on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in November 1937, Gardner described his local "little celebration" as both uniquely Spanish with its "young workers mandolin orchestra" and – with its hour-and-a-half speech that is "killing the whole program," its stage adorned with Republican flags and "pictures of Lenin, Marx & Engels," as well as Spanish communist Dolores Ibárruri and the Republic's president Manual Azaña – as not so very different from the much larger gathering he was missing in Philadelphia.[156] Communists everywhere celebrated the same heroes, heard the same speeches, and sang the *Internationale*. The holiday in a Spanish village was connected to those in Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York and resembled, or so Kruth imagined in a letter home, "celebrations in the Russian villages."[157]

Such letters, as a number of the volunteers' wives complained, sounded very much like party propaganda. Responding to criticism of his letters, Gardner wrote, "Alice dear, you say that I don't write anything but an agitation letter." He was, he admitted, constrained, although whether by the censor or a self-imposed need to maintain morale is unclear: "In war time lots of things cannot be written, so at certain moments one just feels empty." He pledged to try to make his letters "as concrete & full of actual events as possible."[158] Helen Kruth likewise complained about Mito's "stereotypical letters," and he too promised to do better.[159]

However unsatisfying they may have been to receive, "stereotypical" letters stuffed with party rhetoric were not necessarily insincere or mere propaganda. For Kruth, the language of the party seemed to be a primary mode of expression. In a 1935 letter to Helen written when he was in Michigan on party business, Mito tried to cheer her up with Friedrich Engels' "adage that beaten armies learn well."[160] In Spain, he framed his efforts to produce more personal letters in political terms, vowing to do "some real self criticism."[161] Two months later he finally succeeded in surprising Helen "as well as myself by writing a

[155] William Sennett to Gussie [Machen], 30 April 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[156] Ben Gardner to Elky [Alice Gardner], 6 November 1937, VALB, Container 1. See also Mito Kruth to Helen, 9 November 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder, 12.
[157] Mito Kruth to Helen, 25 April 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.
[158] Ben Gardner [to Alice Gardner], 8 September 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[159] Mito Kruth to Helen, 19 February [1938], Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 13.
[160] Mito Kruth to Helen, 27 February 1935, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.
[161] Mito Kruth to Helen, 19 February [1938].

whole letter without politics."[162] In some cases political clichés could carry strong emotional content. Thus Ben Gardner also offered comfort in the form of a slogan, writing to his wife Alice in June 1938 as he neared the one-year anniversary of his service in Spain, "I suffer & feel guilty when I read how much you have to go thru, but at the same time I feel that I have & am doing my little share in this great & historic struggle of the Spanish people."[163] In the same month, William Sennett wrote his partner Gussie, "So many things are happening throughout the world [China, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Britain, France, etc.] that if a person were not a Communist he would be in despair."[164]

As Sennett's lumping together of China, Spain, Czechoslovakia, etc., suggests, the volunteers often had little specific knowledge of the Spain that they imagined themselves to be saving. They relied on often schematic, idealized, and sometimes condescending notions of the "Spanish people." Laurie Lee, who had traveled in Spain before the war, was able to see the "empty villages that seem to have had their eyes put out" as evidence "of the gaseous squalor of a country at war."[165] But other volunteers assumed that what they were seeing was the eternal backwardness of Spain. In a letter home, Kruth described an unnamed village as "of course . . . very backward. The people must have lived this way 1,000 years ago."[166] In a letter to his wife Marion, then still in Moscow, Robert Merriman detailed with ethnographic exactness the customs of the local family that had him to dinner: "No plates or knives and forks are used at all. Each person is given some flat tough bread with which he scoops up his food from the main pot and places it on another piece of this bread which serves as a plate." Ever concerned with the agricultural issues that had brought him to the Soviet Union three years earlier, Merriman peppered his hosts with questions "about the land problem here" and concluded that collectivization would be premature because "the material conditions are not yet ripe for such a thing."[167]

Such understandings of Spanish "backwardness" coexisted with and perhaps reinforced both warm feelings for the Spanish people and a desire to help them. Kruth decided that "there is nothing like the Spanish people for kindness and consideration."[168] The volunteers seem to have taken up with enthusiasm the programs designed by their commissars to cultivate good relations with Spanish civilians. When on leave in small villages, they organized fiestas, passed out candy and gifts to the children, provided basic medical care, and "helped" with

[162] Mito Kruth to Helen, 19 April 1938, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 13.
[163] Ben Gardner [to Alice Gardner], 14 June 1938, VALB, Container 1.
[164] William Sennett to Gussie, 9 June 1938, VALB, Container 1; see also William Sennett to Gussie, 14 July 1937; William Sennett to Gussie, 14 September 1937, ibid.
[165] Lee, *Moment of War*, 49.
[166] Mito Kruth to Helen, 18 April [1937], Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.
[167] Robert Merriman to Marion Merriman, 13 February 1937, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.
[168] Mito Kruth to Helen, 18 April [1937]. See also Mito to Helen, 9 May 1937, ibid.

the harvest; Nelson related that the brigadistas, most of whom grew up in cities, "wasted so much barley that the farmers, with the utmost tact and delicacy, asked them not to trouble themselves further in the matter."[169] (On leave they also might get drunk, fight, bust up wine shops, and carouse.[170]) Alongside their hospitals, the Internationals organized homes for refugee children; volunteers contributed funds for books, clothing, and food.[171]

Even as they "helped" the civilian population, the volunteers, as noted earlier, often resented, denigrated, and distrusted Spanish "political leaders, soldiers, civil servants, and political parties." Of course, such feelings were not universal. Cecil Cole, for example, noted in a letter home that "they're a swell people taken individually or collectively. I'm working now to have more Spanish added to my group."[172] Cole, however, spoke more Spanish than most of his fellow brigadistas – enough to realize that people in Spain spoke "four distinct languages"[173] – and thus may have been able to make a more sophisticated evaluation than most Internationals of both his Spanish comrades and the situation in Spain. Indeed Świerczewski, who picked up a "rough and ready" Spanish and also learned French "tolerably well" in the short time he commanded the Fourteenth Brigade, deemed the ability to speak Spanish a vital qualification for all Soviet advisors in Spain precisely because it allowed them to make independent assessments and to meet their Spanish comrades as equals.[174] Świerczewski advocated "quickly eliminating the condescension and the patronizing tone" that characterized the Internationals' interactions with the Spaniards.[175] Thus when Len Crome, a Russian who had emigrated to Scotland as a teenager and served as the chief medical officer of Świerczewski's Thirty-Fifth Division, failed to punish a drunk Irish driver who, in his eagerness to evacuate a field hospital, threatened a Spanish surgeon with a gun, Świerczewski accused him of behaving like a "British soldier in India."[176] The same could perhaps be said of many of the Internationals, who devoutly wished to save Spain, but were also ready to judge the "natives" as ignorant and incompetent if not traitorous.

[169] "Informe sobre la situación," l. 83; "Informe sobre la 35 y 45 división durante el periodo del 9 al 15 de julio de 1938," 21 July 1938, RGASPI, f. 525, op. 1, d. 3, l. 325; Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 212.

[170] Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 210; "Perepiska iuridicheskoi komissii shtaba XV brigady," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 451, ll. 41–53.

[171] "Doklad Voennogo komissariata," l. 386. George Foucek to Folks, 3 October 1937, VALB, Container 1; Lini De Vries to Max, 15 April [1937], Martin Papers, Box 6, Folder 19; Johnston, *Legions of Babel*, 92.

[172] C. M. Cole to Family, 22 November 1937, VALB, Container 1.

[173] C. M. Cole to Jeff, 1 January [1938], VALB, Container 1.

[174] On Świerczewski's language skills see Crome, "Walter," 121; "About the work of our people in Spain," undated memorandum, in *Spain Betrayed*, 495–6.

[175] "About the work," in *Spain Betrayed*, 492.

[176] Crome, "Walter," 116, 125; Szurek, *Shattered Dream*, 231.

Still, the brigadistas' love for the kind and hospitable Spanish people, however abstract or tinged with condescension, was often sincere, widespread and, long lasting. In a 1937 letter, Lini De Vries gushed, "And the Spanish people – words can't describe them – there they are in a society semi-feudalistic – yet so much higher on the thinking political level than the American proletariat – alert, sensitive, and intelligent. I love them!"[177] In a letter written as he prepared to leave Spain in 1938, Canute Frankson, a skilled machinist who had emigrated from Jamaica to the United States in 1917 and joined the Communist Party in 1934, asked, "I wonder will we ever forget the tears of Spain? The pictures of the dead mothers and the little hands of their children wounded, and dead, clinging to their breasts. I doubt it very much. . . . There will be many of us who will want to return to Spain. Because we love the Spanish people."[178] In 1939, William Rust, a British communist who served as the *Daily Worker*'s correspondent in Spain, emphasized the mutuality of that love: "Received into families, the Internationals made warm friendships and were loved by the children, for whom they bought toys and sweets out of their scanty pay of ten pesetas a day." He also emphasized that "between the British and Spanish soldiers there exists a mutual love and respect."[179] Even those who ultimately renounced communism, such as Robert Gladnick, often retained a fondness for the Spanish people. In his 1996 memoir, he described his service in the Soviet tank corps as a pivotal moment: "I was to serve with the Spaniards whom I learned to love & the Russians with the exception of a few – I learned to hate."[180]

In October 1938, at an impressive farewell celebration in Barcelona, Dolores Ibárruri, the legendary communist orator better known as La Pasionaria, codified the sentimental story of solidarity with the Spanish people for the brigadistas. The farewell came in the wake of the Internationals' participation in the Republic's last great offensive, a surprise attack across the Ebro River in July 1938. As in previous offensives, initial gains, made at great cost, were turned back. But in this case, the problem was less the shortage of arms and reserves – and they were quite scarce – than international events, namely the Munich Agreement signed in September 1938 as Loyalist troops were retreating in the face of Nationalist counterattacks. The British and French decision to appease Adolf Hitler clearly spelled the failure of the offensive to achieve its aim of persuading the democracies to lift the arms embargo. In a September address to the League of Nations, Juan Negrín, the Republic's prime minister, offered to withdraw the International Brigades in hopes of creating pressure for the withdrawal of the Italian and German troops aiding the rebels. On 29 October 1938, perhaps two hundred thousand people lined the streets of Barcelona to

[177] Lini Fuhr [De Vries] to Ida, 15 March 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 242.
[178] Canute Frankson to My dear, 10 May 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, 134.
[179] Rust, *Britons in Spain*, 19, 154.
[180] Gladnick memoirs, chapter 5, p. 11.

cheer the departing volunteers.[181] Gardner, who was among the six thousand Internationals there that day, wrote, "It wasn't just a show like in a capitalist country a parade. You could see & feel it that the people love the internationals from the bottom of their hearts. . . . It was the highest expression of the unity of the international proletariat & the Spanish people."[182]

Ibárruri's speech at the farewell celebration emphasized precisely the love and solidarity that Gardner felt. She spoke, she said, with "anguish and infinite sorrow." She appealed to the mothers and women of Spain to tell their children how the volunteers "came to our country as crusaders for liberty . . . they sacrificed everything – their loves, countries, homes, fortunes, mothers, wives, brothers and sisters, children – and they came to us and said, 'We are here! Your cause, Spain's cause, is our cause, the cause of all advanced and progressive humanity.'" To the departing brigadistas, she declared, "You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend."[183] With profound emotion, Ibárruri thus summed up everything many believed or wanted to believe about the reality of international solidarity in Spain: the great cause of progressive humanity united people across language and nationality. The mothers of Spain would remember the departing heroes and the heroes "shrouded in the Spanish earth."

For many of the volunteers the legend long remained powerful and persuasive. On the one hand, it elevated and celebrated their often deeply felt experiences of sacrifice in the name of a great cause and the thrilling feeling of working in a truly international environment. On the other hand, the story Ibárruri sent them off with simultaneously obscured or minimized the limits of international solidarity. Her assertion that "Communists, socialists, anarchists, republicans, men of every color, of differing ideologies, of antagonistic religions . . . came and offered themselves unconditionally" glided over not only national animosities – within the brigades and between the Internationals and the "natives" they both loved and distrusted – but also the fears of hidden "enemies" so central to the way many volunteers understood the war. The Internationals' tendency to explain failures as the work of saboteurs and "wreckers" grew in part out of the conviction that they stood on the side of progress. It also linked them to the culture of Stalinism – which encompassed not only denunciations, purges, and terror but also the rituals, symbols, heroes, and narratives cherished by international communists.

[181] On Munich, see Alpert, *International History*, 165–7. On the Ebro and the withdrawal of the Brigades, see Johnston, *Legions of Babel*, 135–43; Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 382–4; G. Dimitrov and D. Manuilsky to Voroshilov, 29 August 1938, in *Spain Betrayed*, 469.

[182] Ben Gardner to Elky [Alice Gardner], 1 November 1938, VALB, Container 1.

[183] Dolores Ibárruri, "Hasta pronto, hermanos: Mensaje de despedida a los voluntarios de las Brigades Internacionales," in Manuel Vásquez Montalbán, *Pasionaria y los siete enanitos* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2005), 407–9.

4

True Bolsheviks and Trotskyite Bastards

On 29 September 1937, fourteen men arrested for desertion were returned to the Fifteenth International Brigade, then in Aragon.[1] Over the course of two days, on 4 and 5 October, twelve of them stood for trial. Henry Shapiro, who had arrived in Spain only two months before and "never saw action" was sentenced to be shot. He had, according to the laconic trial report, "organised stealing of [the American-Canadian] battalion's only ambulance . . . and worked out the route through Spain" that he and his co-conspirators would take to the French border. Robert W. Isenberg, a seaman from New York, was also "sentenced to be shot" for participating in stealing the ambulance. He had been in Spain only two weeks longer than Shapiro and likewise "never saw action." They received death sentences because both "lied continuously throughout the trial, showed no antifascist conduct, both are lumpen elements."[2]

By contrast, Richard deWitt Brown, a seaman from Kansas City, Missouri, who also "participated in deserting with the ambulance," received a one-year prison term "because he took a more sincere stand at the trial, exposed the plot . . . and also because he had already seen service at the front and asked for a chance to redeem himself in coming operations." The rest, who apparently deserted in separate incidents, were sentenced to prison terms ranging from one month to "the duration of the war." The lightest sentence went to Henry Plotnick, a nineteen-year-old communist who "cracked under strain of battle;" the longest to Nelson Fishnelson, a communist who was unwilling "to help

[1] "Etat Major de la 15° Brigade," 29 September 1937, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 545, op. 3, d. 451, l. 86.

[2] "Report on the Trials of 12 Deserters," 9 October 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 435, l. 81. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) database, www.alba-valb.org, identifies Shapiro as a traveling salesman from Roxbury, Massachusetts. Michael Petrou identifies him as from Montreal, *Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 231.

in the proceedings of the trial," and to Murray Krangle [Morris or Murray Krangel], also a communist, who had been to officers' training school and "deserted once before."[3]

On their face, the death sentences handed down to raw recruits appear to confirm dark conclusions about the pervasiveness of Stalinist terror in Spain. Drawing on similar evidence, historians Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov argue that the archives document "ideological warfare and personal terror directed at some volunteers by their own comrades."[4] As proof they present a letter describing the October 1937 trials that "does not, however, confirm the executions," along with a long list of "suspicious individuals and deserters" from the Fifteenth Brigade, which includes the name of a volunteer whom several veterans claimed was executed. They acknowledge that estimates of the "number of American volunteers executed for desertion vary from none to several score."[5] Still, they agree with historian Stanley Payne that, even if "the total number of victims was not particularly great," the recourse to the "liquidation" of deserters verifies a deep penetration of Stalinist practices.[6]

The importation into Spain of the culture of Stalinism is often understood as the work of Soviet NKVD agents and the Republic's military intelligence service, which was organized with assistance from the NKVD.[7] The June 1937 arrest and execution of Andreu Nin, the leader of the POUM (Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista, Workers' Party of Marxist Unity), who in the 1920s had lived in Moscow and worked as Lev Trotsky's secretary, was almost certainly an NKVD operation.[8] The NKVD was also likely responsible for the disappearance and death of José Robles, a Spanish-born, Russian-speaking Johns Hopkins professor who had served as a translator for top Soviet advisors.[9]

[3] "Report on the Trials of 12 Deserters," ll. 81–2. Corrected spellings of names from ALBA database.

[4] Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 186, 187.

[5] Ibid., 160.

[6] Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 205.

[7] Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov, eds., *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xvii–iii, 106–7, 208–9, 372–3, 476; Klehr et al., *Secret World*, 151–87; Pedro Corral, *Desertores: La Guerra Civil que nadie quiere contar* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2006), 218–28.

[8] Ángel Viñas, *El escudo de la República: El oro de España, la apuesta soviética y los hechos de mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2007), 605–27; Payne, *Spanish Civil War*, 227–30; Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 287–90, 344–6. Víctor Alba and Stephen Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: A History of the POUM* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988). José María Zavala, *En busca de Andreu Nin: Vida y muerte de un mito silenciado de la Guerra Civil* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 2005).

[9] Enric Ucelay Da-Cal, "La 'Traición revolucionaria': Los escándalos soviéticos en la guerra civil española y los orígenes de la 'guerra fría,'" in *Los rusos en la guerra de España, 1936–1939* (Madrid: Fundación Pablo Iglesias, 2009), 110–11. Another contested example is the death of

Yet for all its documented horrors, the "terror" in Spain never operated on the Soviet scale. Even if Soviet agents aimed to approximate domestic practice more closely – advocating, for example, the dissolution of the "counter-revolutionary officer corps" – they were to some degree constrained by the larger Spanish context.[10] As one Soviet advisor, a Comrade Kachelin, noted in an October 1937 report to military intelligence in Moscow, Soviet personnel, unable to "even imagine" the sort of contentious, multiparty political environment in which they found themselves, acted in inappropriate and counterproductive ways. In general, Kachelin complained, Soviets in Spain "really overdo it with tacking on labels; they say that this one is a 'fascist,' that one is a 'wrecker,' and so on."[11] Applying Stalinist labels in Spain signaled Stalinist ways of thinking, but Soviet expectations notwithstanding, such labels did not "work" as they did in the Soviet Union to justify and drive mass terror.

In the cases tried in October 1937, the convicted deserters seem to have escaped execution. Robert Merriman, then the Fifteenth Brigade's chief of staff, recorded in his diary that he had quarreled with brigade commander Vladimir Ćopić over the suggestion made by division commander General Walter (Karol Świerczewski) "about even shooting a few if necessary." The unit, Merriman noted, was "demanding tough sentences even death." But he also suggested his own uneasiness with such extreme measures: "In the evening, some drinking took place. I helped myself heavily."[12] Ćopić's own journal notes that shortly after the trial the two condemned men "were pardoned and later they held up well."[13] Shapiro, who was sentenced to death in 1937, was listed as "missing"

Bob Smillie, who served in the POUM militia. Tom Buchanan, "The Death of Bob Smillie, the Spanish Civil War, and the Eclipse of the Independent Labour Party," *Historical Journal* 40, no. 2 (June 1997): 435–61; John Newsinger and George Kopp, "The Death of Bob Smillie," *Historical Journal* 41, no. 2 (June 1998): 575–8; Tom Buchanan, "The Death of Bob Smillie: A Reply," *Historical Journal* 43, no. 4 (December 2000): 1009–112.

[10] "Letter of Comrade Donizetti [Yan Berzin] from 22/2/37," in *Spain Betrayed*, 150. On constraints see Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 284–6.

[11] "Report of Com. Kachelin," in *Spain Betrayed*, 293. See also Karl Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Malden, MA: Polity, 2012), 103–8.

[12] Robert Merriman diary, vol. 2, p. 19, Robert Merriman Papers, ALBA 191, Box 1, Folder 3, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University. On Lincoln veterans' support for shooting repeat deserters see John Dollard, *Fear in Battle* (Washington, DC: Infantry Journal, 1944), 37. In a January 1938 report, Świerczewski could not recall a single case of "punishment for desertion by an internationalist." "Notes on the Situation in the International Units in Spain, Report by Colonel Com. Sverchevsky (Walter)," 14 January 1938, in *Spain Betrayed*, 455. Other sources claim that Świerczewski carried out harsh penalties, including execution, for desertion. Richard Baxell, *British Volunteers and the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936–1939* (New York: Routledge, 2004),140; Alexander Szurek, *The Shattered Dream*, trans. Jacques Grunblatt and Hilda Grunblatt (Boulder, CO: Eastern European Monographs, 1985), 105. On executions in the Republic's Army see Matthews, *Reluctant Warriors*, 196–7, 211.

[13] John Peter Kraljic, "The War Diary of Vladimir Copic," *The Volunteer: Journal of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* 24, no. 3 (September 2002): 8.

in 1938, presumably killed in action or captured and executed at Teruel. I have found no trace in the archives of Isenberg's fate.[14]

The apparently nonlethal outcome of these and other trials[15] points to the importance of distinguishing the culture of Stalinism from a particular set of deadly results. Understanding NKVD agents as the primary carriers of Stalinism in Spain cannot help us explain why, as Merriman noted in his diary, some brigadistas demanded death sentences for deserters. Likewise, emphasizing that the Soviets sought to "manipulate and control events" discourages an analysis of how and why, in reporting the trial of the deserters, political commissar Dave Doran, a communist trade union organizer from upstate New York, without any apparent prompting or pressure from Soviet agents, used classic Stalinist formulas: Deserters wished to "redeem" themselves in combat; "every battalion and unit sent in resolutions passed by the men calling for the death penalty."[16] A focus on Soviet agents' manipulation and on the egregious instances of political terror that they perpetrated risks ignoring the everyday meanings and operation of Stalinist culture in Spain and the question of how – through films and the press, as well as through political education and the hunt for Trotskyites – Stalinism shaped the lives and understandings of rank-and-file international communists, who were themselves neither victims nor perpetrators of terror.

Little Chapaevs in Spain

Even for many noncommunists in Spain, the Soviet Union – specifically the October Revolution and the Russian civil war – provided models of revolutionary behavior that shaped, if not their own conduct, then their aspirations. George Orwell, whose *Homage to Catalonia* published in 1938 became both one of the most celebrated and one of the most explicitly anti-Soviet memoirs of the war, joined the anti-Stalinist POUM militia, whose members trained at the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona and fought in the Lenin Division.[17] Of course, Orwell and his comrades, whether Spanish or British, may have had something different in mind when they invoked Lenin than did the German volunteer in the International Brigades, who went to Spain because "I wanted to be a little

[14] Petrou, *Renegades*, 133. The ALBA database lists Shapiro as "killed in action" in 1938. Mark Zuehlke concludes that Shapiro was executed and was reported missing as part of a cover-up, *The Gallant Cause: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939* (Mississauga, Ontario: Wiley & Sons Canada, 2007), 181. Other sources conclude that no one was executed. Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 165; Cecil Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), 174.

[15] Peter Carroll, "The Myth of the Moscow Archives," *Science and Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 339.

[16] Radosh et al., *Spain Betrayed*, xxx; "Report on the Trials of 12 Deserters," ll. 81, 82.

[17] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938; reprint, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 6–7, 112.

Lenin."[18] But they, too, would likely have taken as a compliment the praise recorded by Merriman in his diary: "Bill and Gall said I knew how to work like a Bolshevik."[19] As historian Tom Buchanan notes, even the anti-Stalinist leftists respected the "authority of Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution."[20]

Long-standing respect for the Bolshevik revolution among the noncommunist left in Spain intensified during the civil war. In 1921, when the Spanish Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) voted against affiliation with the Third International, its executive committee explained that the rejection of the Comintern's Twenty-one Conditions did not mean the rejection of the Revolution: "We are with the Russian Revolution; and to our Party we say, as always, that we consider ourselves obliged to defend it."[21] More broadly, in the 1920s and 1930s, the Spanish middle classes saw in the Soviet Union an "icon of modernity."[22] On the eve of the civil war, more than thirty chapters of the Friends of the Soviet Union operated in the Republic, distributing Spanish-language propaganda shipped from Moscow that promoted Soviet economic and cultural "advances."[23] Francisco Largo Caballero, a prominent and quite moderate socialist in the 1920s, was hailed after the Popular Front victory in 1936 as the "Spanish Lenin."[24] The sense that an association with Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution, however inappropriate, added a gloss of revolutionary modernity grew in tandem with the arrival of much-needed Soviet aid in the wake of the military rebellion. As Orwell grimly noted, "The Russian arms and the magnificent defense of Madrid by troops mainly under Communist control had made the Communists heroes in Spain. . . . Every Russian aeroplane that flew over our heads was Communist propaganda."[25] Soviet arms and the International Brigades provided a boost to Republican morale and produced a "sudden craze" for all things Soviet – from hats to films.[26]

And the Soviets were happy to indulge the craze. Along with military and humanitarian aid, the Soviet Union supplied cultural products – literature, magazines, records, posters, and especially films – to the Republic.[27] The

[18] Quoted in Josie McLellan, "'I Wanted To Be a Little Lenin': Ideology and the German International Brigade Volunteers," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 292.

[19] Bill is probably Bill Lawrence, the American party's representative in Albacete. Gall (or Gal) is Janos Galicz, the Hungarian Red Army officer who commanded the Fifteenth Brigade. Merriman diary, vol. 1, 31 mayo, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

[20] Tom Buchanan, "The Death of Bob Smillie," 458.

[21] Quoted in Gerald H. Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914–1923* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 370, see also 103, 209.

[22] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 18, 181.

[23] Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* [electronic resource] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), chapter 6, paragraphs 9, 12.

[24] Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War: Revised Edition* (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 155.

[25] Orwell, *Homage*, 63.

[26] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 174.

[27] Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, chapter 7.

Russian civil-war-themed films *We're from Kronstadt* (My iz Kronshtadta, 1936) and *Chapaev* (1934) were widely screened in the Republican zone. Billeted in the small town of Villanueva de la Jara in early 1937, the Lincoln battalion ran films three times a day, including one showing for the townspeople who apparently enjoyed "equally well" *We're from Kronstadt*, which was about the 1919 defense of Petrograd during the Russian civil war, and *How to Operate a Maxim Machinegun*.[28] Still, when given the option, civilians clearly preferred Hollywood films, which dominated Madrid's movie houses. The musical *Circus* (Tsirk, 1936) was the only Soviet production among the fifty films most widely viewed in the city during the war.[29]

Loyalist troops, both Spanish and International, provided the largest and most enthusiastic audiences for Soviet films. *Chapaev*, the story of the legendary civil war commander Vasilii Chapaev, appears to have been particularly popular. Mikhail Kol'tsov, *Pravda*'s correspondent in Spain, attributed the film's popularity to the soldiers' identification with the heroic Bolshevik fighting a familiar (if anachronistic) "fascist" enemy along the "Ural River, so like the Ebro River."[30] Kol'tsov's emphasis notwithstanding, such identification was not necessarily ideological. Soldiers might see in Soviet civil war films a reflection – however idealized and romanticized – of their own experiences or expectations of combat. When in October 1937 American volunteer Mito Kruth saw *Chapaev* for at least the second time since his arrival in Spain, he likened the experience to watching a "wild west" picture: "When the enemy gets licked a great cheer goes up."[31] After viewing *We're from Kronstadt* for the fourth time in mid-September 1937, during the Aragon offensive, Ben Gardner took a more somber view, writing that this time, "Certain scenes looked like the ones we went thru. Watching our Russian comrades in the picture we felt we are participating in the picture."[32]

Chapaev himself offered soldiers a charismatic and unpretentious role model. Dedicated to the cause and confident of victory, Chapaev was nonetheless unsure about whether there was a difference between Bolsheviks and

[28] Eby, *Between the Bullet*, 28–9.

[29] José Cabeza San Deogracias, *El descanso del guerrero: El cine en Madrid durante la Guerra Civil española (1936–1939)* (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 2005), 17, 44.

[30] Mikhail Kol'tsov, *Ispankii dnevnik* (Moscow: Grifon, 2005), 27–8. See also Colonel Simonov to Kliment Voroshilov, 21 August 1937, in *Spain Betrayed*, 249; Alfred Kantorowicz, *Chapaev – batal'on dvadtsati odnoi natsional'nosti* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1939); Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 494; Julian Graffy, *Chapaev* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 88–90; Vsevolod Vishnevskii, "Nash fil'm v Madride," in *Stat'i, dnevniki, pis'ma: O literature i iskusstve* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1961), 192–3.

[31] Mito Kruth to Helen [Kruth], 31 October 1937, Mito Kruth Papers, ALBA 240, Box 1, Folder 12. See also Mito Kruth to Helen, 21 August 1937, Box 1, Folder 11.

[32] Ben Gardner to Elky [Alice Gardner], 13 September 1937, Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Bay Area Post, (VALB), BANC MSS 71/105 z, Container 1, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

communists.[33] If, as Julian Graffy argues in his study of the film, Chapaev's description of himself as having "only known how to read for two years" was "calculated to endear him to those large sections of the [Soviet] audience who have themselves only recently become literate," his recently attained literacy – along with his political ignorance – was also well suited to audiences of Spanish recruits, who often learned how to read in the army.[34] The historian Richard Stites describes the character of Chapaev, although based on a real commander, as "folkloric." Chapaev and his men returned from battle on the steppe "like cowboys back from the range: tough, dirty, rude, even menacing, but also humorous, brave, loyal, and egalitarian except in their universal deference to the leader."[35] It was with this Chapaev that American volunteer Alvah Bessie identified not himself but his company's acting commander, Pavlos Fortis, whom he described as "like Chapayev in many ways." Although Bessie did not specify the similarity, his earlier description of Fortis as a "crack machine-gunner," a "swell, big-hearted guy – but not having the attributes of a commander – language difficulty also" suggests an immigrant Greek cowboy, a down-to-earth and idealized volunteer for liberty.[36]

Republican journalists and propagandists expected that Spanish troops would not only identify with the revolutionary heroes on screen but would also imitate them. After observing an open-air screening of a Soviet film, journalist and novelist Clemente Cimorra had no doubt that the hundreds of soldiers in the audience would follow the example set by the celluloid combatants. He reported that Spanish soldiers who viewed a film about the Red Army went on to undertake the "most successful operations in the history of the division."[37] To make sure that soldiers understood the films correctly, commissars organized "explanatory conversations" after the screenings.[38]

The most remarkable case of life imitating art was that of Antonio Col, a native of Madrid whose marine unit had taken the name "Sailors of Kronstadt." In November 1936, less than one month after the first Madrid screening of *We're from Kronstadt* (the Spanish title was *Los marinos de Cronstadt*), six local newspapers reported that Col heroically destroyed four enemy tanks with hand grenades and then sacrificed his life in defense of Madrid: He was either

[33] Denise Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010), 43.

[34] Graffy, *Chapaev*, 38; Matthews, *Reluctant Warriors*, 98–9.

[35] Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45. See also John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 164.

[36] Alvah Bessie, *Alvah Bessie's Civil War Notebooks*, ed. Dan Bessie (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002), 48, 43.

[37] Quoted in José Cabeza San Deogracias, "Buscando héroes: La historia de Antonio Col como ejemplo del uso de la narrativa como propaganda durante la Guerra Civil española," *Revista Historia y Comunicación Social* 10 (2005): 47.

[38] Ministry of War pamphlet as quoted in Cabeza San Deogracias, "Buscando," 48.

gunned down by a fifth tank or killed a few days later in a different battle. Although accounts of his exploits varied, all narrated Col's acts in terms that conjured the brief scene in the film *We're from Kronstadt* in which a lone soldier immobilizes a tank. One newspaper added an additional detail that paralleled the action in the film: "Our troops advanced singing the Internationale."[39] Col's widely publicized heroism quickly inspired others, whose actions in turn were also widely publicized. A 1937 Republican manual on methods of propaganda advised publicizing examples of those who fought tanks with grenades as a practical means of teaching young people how they could destroy tanks and become heroes.[40]

Chapaev – as did the soldier in *Kronstadt* who stops the tank, shoots its occupants through a small gun embrasure, and then nonchalantly rolls a cigarette while sitting on the turret – provided compelling, if ruthless, images of Bolshevik masculinity. As Kruth wrote to his wife after seeing *Chapaev* for the first time in Spain, "We too will be little Chapayevs in our small way."[41] In her study of German volunteers, Josie McLellan suggests that the "wish to be a 'little Lenin' was an ideological one, but it also expressed a yearning for a purposeful, active masculinity."[42] A similar argument could be made more forcefully for Chapaev or the sailors from Kronstadt, whose militarized masculinity was more directly relevant to soldiers.

The masculinity modeled in Soviet civil war films – at once rough-edged and loyal to the cause – may have been particularly important in the People's Army. Historian James Matthews argues that the Republic worked to transform constructions of gender. Reacting "against the ultra-masculine and rigidly hierarchical version manifested by their enemies," Republican propagandists promoted ideals of masculinity – for example, in mobilization campaigns – that fused traditional bravery, sacrifice, and dedication to the expectation that the soldier be "literate, educated, and freethinking."[43] In the film, Chapaev becomes more disciplined under the tutelage of his commissar who, to quote Stites, "harnesses the energy of the steppe warrior to the cause of Bolshevism."[44] The presence in the film of a female soldier – the highly skilled Anka, the machine gunner – also signals a revolutionary transgression and reconfiguration of traditional gender identities.[45] Still, Chapaev's steppe

[39] Cabeza San Deogracias, "Buscando," 38–40; *Ahora*, 9 November 1936, as quoted in ibid., 40. The film is available online; see http://video.mail.ru/list/negativa.net/RETROFILM4/22686.html (*Internationale* at the 2:00 minute mark; tank sequence 6:35), accessed 6 November 2014.

[40] Cabeza San Deogracias, "Buscando," 42–3.

[41] Mito Kruth to Helen, 21 August 1937 (second letter), Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.

[42] McLellan, "'I Wanted To Be,'" 303.

[43] Matthews, *Reluctant Warriors*, 94. See also Mary Vincent, "The Martyrs and the Saints: Masculinity and the Construction of the Francoist Crusade," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 47 (Spring 1999): 68–98.

[44] Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 45.

[45] Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 67–68, 200–201; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes:*

masculinity – humorous, spontaneous, irreverent – is never fully tamed in the film, making him a less ideologically motivated and more appealing character than the smug commissar.

Soviet propaganda in Spain inserted Stalinist symbols, images, and heroes into new and unexpected contexts, where they potentially acquired new meanings and associations. Spanish conscripts – often young, poorly educated, and noncommunist – and the predominantly communist international volunteers viewed the same films, but likely came away with different understandings of Chapaev and the sailors from Kronstadt as models for male (communist) behavior in war. *We're from Kronstadt*'s lesson in antitank warfare may have resonated more strongly for some than the implied analogy between the Russian and Spanish civil wars. The aspiration to be a "little Chapaev" might have more to do with the attractions of a certain kind of larger-than-life masculinity than with a desire to achieve greater political consciousness. The ubiquity of Chapaev as a point of reference in Spain highlights not only the international reach of Stalinist culture but also the ways in which Soviet cultural products might be transformed as they crossed into more open political cultures.

La Pasionaria in the Soviet Union

The circulation of images of true Bolsheviks (or true antifascists, at a time when international communists understood the two as synonymous) was not unidirectional. In the Soviet Union, the media encouraged Soviet people to identify with the "heroic Spanish people" and especially the "fiery" communist orator Dolores Ibárruri (better known as *La Pasionaria*, the passion flower) as actors in a great international struggle against fascism.[46] Briefly pushed off the front pages of Soviet newspapers by the first of the show trials in mid-August 1936, the Spanish civil war received substantial, if diminishing, coverage to the end of the conflict.[47] By early August 1936, the war and especially the massive campaign to raise money for humanitarian aid to "heroic Spain" dominated the Soviet press.[48] In late August, Il'ia Ehrenburg joined Kol'tsov in Spain as

British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities (London: Routledge, 1994), 13.

[46] Olga Novikova, "Las visiones de España en la Unión Soviética durante la guerra civil española," *Historia del presente*, no. 11 (2008): 9–44; Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, chapter 8; Timur Mukhamatulin, "'Prisvoenie Ispanii': Ispaniia v sovetskom obshchestve v 1936–1939 godakh," *Bulletin des DHI Moskau* Band 6 (2012): 113–27 (Perspectivia.net).

[47] Jeffrey Brooks finds that, in *Pravda*, coverage of the trials overshadowed the war, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 151. A wider survey of the Soviet media makes clear that editors continued to pay attention to the story. See also Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, 95–8.

[48] On early coverage in *Izvestiia* see David E. Allen, "The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1952), 431. Allen reviewed virtually every issue of *Izvestiia* for the duration of the war, pp. 419–39. Examples of early coverage in *Pravda* include "Voenno-fashistskii miatezh v Ispanii," 20 July 1936; "Deistviia fashistskikh interventov," 11 August

Izvestiia's correspondent. *Izvestiia*'s coverage of the war peaked in October 1936, when it devoted approximately a quarter of its column inches to events in Spain. As late as February 1939, by which time Soviet intervention had largely ended and the war was all but lost, events in Spain still claimed about 6 percent of the paper's space.[49] Coverage of events in Spain appeared – if not always on the front page – in nearly every issue of *Pravda* to March 1939, often accompanied by a map and, until November 1937, a feature article by Kol'tsov. Writing in *Leningradskaia pravda* in October 1936, the poet Nikolai Tikhonov described, or perhaps prescribed, the mood of the moment: "Every morning we awake with one thought: What's new in Spain?"[50]

Soviet coverage of Spain was hardly limited to the newspapers. The filmmakers Roman Karmen and Boris Makaseev arrived in Spain in late August 1936, and their first newsreels of the conflict appeared in Moscow theaters in early September, a remarkably fast turnaround. Their feature-length documentary *Madrid Defends Itself* (Madrid oboroniaetsia) was released in December 1936. The two remained in Spain for eleven months, shooting almost forty thousand meters of film for the documentary series "K sobytiiam v Ispanii" (On Events in Spain). The film *Ispaniia*, directed by Esfir' Shub with footage by Karmen, premiered in Moscow months after the war ended, in the summer of 1939.[51]

During the war, a craze for all things Spanish overtook Soviet mass culture. Soviet radio broadcast Spanish revolutionary songs. Soviet theaters staged Spanish plays, notably, Frederico García Lorca's 1933 tragedy *Bodas de sangre* and Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna*, a story of a fifteenth-century peasant revolt. A review described the latter play as providing an "unforgettable picture of a Spanish woman in which the spectator sees a forerunner of the fiery Dolores Ibárruri."[52] Translations of Spanish literature, Soviet literature honoring Spain, and accounts of the war and of key figures – especially Ibárruri, the only Spanish communist whose picture appeared fairly regularly in the Soviet

1936; "Fashistskii terror," 19 August 1936; Mikhail Kol'tsov, "Germanskaia pomoshch' ispanskim miatezhnikam," 31 August 1936; V. Rudol'f, "Molodye antifashisty," 1 September 1936; "Zverstva ispanskikh fashistov," 13 September 1936; "Ispanskaia kompartiia v bor'be protiv fashizma," 14 September 1936; "Ispanskie pisatel'i – zhertvy fashizma," 26 September 1936.

[49] Allen provides a monthly tabulation of the "Percentage of space in *Izvestiia* devoted to the Spanish story," in "The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War," 437–8.

[50] N. Tikhonov, "Ne zakhlestnut' dozhdem pulemetov muzhestvo ispanskikh rabochikh," *Leningradskaia pravda*, 10 October 1936.

[51] Daniel Kowalsky, "The Soviet Cinematic Offensive in the Spanish Civil War," *Film History: An International Journal* 19, no. 1 (2007): 10–19. Allen, "The Soviet Union," 439. For announcements of the films see *Pravda*, 5 September 1936; *Izvestiia*, 12 December 1936. R. Karmen, "Odinnadtsat' mesiatsev na frontakh v Ispanii," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 5 August 1937. L. Arnshtam, "Kino: 'Ispaniia,'" *Pravda*, 7 June 1939.

[52] "Chronicle," *International Literature* 1938, no. 9: 98. Allen, "The Soviet Union," 440. *Krovavaia svad'dba*, trans. F. V. Kel'in (verse) and A. V. Febral'skii (prose), *Internatsional'naia literatura* 1938, no. 8: 101–24.

press – were published in large press runs as late as January 1939.[53] Adapting the tradition of naming children after revolutionary heroes – or simply attracted to the exoticism of Spanish names in the news – Soviet parents made Dolores and José (after José Díaz, secretary-general of the Spanish Communist Party) popular children's names in the mid-1930s.[54]

Whereas in Spain Chapaev provided a model of Bolshevik masculinity, in the Soviet Union, coverage of the Spanish civil war offered influential and to some degree competing models of militarized and maternal communist womanhood. The "rifle-toting militiawoman dressed in dungarees" became in the Soviet Union, as in Spain, a symbol of the war.[55] The young Spanish women with guns who appeared in the Soviet press dramatically illustrate the Stalinist state's continuing use of the new woman as a revolutionary icon – its "resurrection of the family," notably 1936 legislation outlawing abortion and restricting divorce, notwithstanding.[56] Young Soviet women for whom Anka the machine gunner was an "obsession" could look to accounts of the Spanish civil war for real-world inspiration and validation.[57] This is not to say that women's emancipation constituted a Spanish or a Soviet reality. When in the fall of 1936 the Republic's People's Army replaced the hastily organized militias, women largely disappeared from the front and were officially banned from combat units.[58] In the Soviet Union, women who actually "penetrated the bastions of male primacy" were often resented, marginalized, or demeaned – by both men and more traditional women – for crossing still powerful gender divides.[59]

[53] Allen, "The Soviet Union," 440–4. *Geroicheskaia Ispaniia* (Moscow: Partizdat TsK VKP(b), 1936) had a pressrun of 300,000; for a review see *Pravda*, 7 October 1936. Dolores Ibárruri, *Rechi i stat'i 1936–1938 gg.* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1938) had a pressrun of 90,000; for a review, see *Pravda*, 25 August 1938. Mikhail Kol'tsov, *Ispanskii dnevnik* was serialized in *Novyi mir* in April to September 1938. For favorable reviews see V. Aleksandrov, "Pervaia kniga 'Ispanskogo dnevnika,'" *Literaturnyi kritik* 1938, no. 6: 132–47; A. Tolstoi and A. Fadeev, "'Ispanskii dnevnik,'" *Pravda*, 4 November 1938.

[54] Ales' Adamovich and Daniil Granin, eds., *Blokadnaia kniga* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1982), 12. *Izvestiia*, 14 October 1936, 9 May 1937, cited in Allen, "The Soviet Union," 448. On naming practices see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 111–12.

[55] Frances Lannon, "Women and Images of Women in the Spanish Civil War," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Ser., vol. 1. (1991): 217. Militia women appeared regularly in the Soviet press in the first months of the war: *Pravda*, 12 August 1936, 17 September 1936, 20 September 1936, 28 September 1936, 30 October 1936; *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 24 September 1936; Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 65.

[56] Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 296–336.

[57] Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 68.

[58] Lannon, "Women and Images of Women," 221–2; "Decisiones del Secretariado," 12 January 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 7, l. 3.

[59] The quotation is from Choi Chatterjee, "Soviet Heroines and the Language of Modernity, 1930–39," in Melanie Ilič, ed. *Women in the Stalin Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 54. Melanie Ilič, "*Traktoristka:* Representations and Realities," in ibid., 121–2; Wendy Goldman, "*Babas* at the Bench: Gender Conflict in Soviet Industry in the 1930s," in ibid., 85–6; Mary Buckley,

Indeed, Soviet coverage of the war in Spain, and specifically of Ibárruri, did much to popularize a compelling image of fierce communist motherhood. Even as the Soviet media publicized Spanish militia women in arms, they added mothers and housewives to the Bolshevik "visual lexicon."[60] Ibárruri's self-presentations and representations of her in the Soviet press evoked these more traditional models. La Pasionaria, the nom de plume Ibárruri chose in 1918, when she published her first political article during Holy Week, drew on her recently abandoned faith to evoke "the Passion of Christ and the sorrows of his mother."[61] Effectively fusing Catholic imagery with her own biography – dire poverty, the deaths of four children – she emphasized her intimate and painfully won understanding of the suffering of Spanish mothers. Ibárruri thus constructed a place for herself as an orator and propagandist, particularly on women's issues, in the male-dominated and profoundly masculinist culture of the Spanish Communist Party.[62] In the mid-1930s, around the time of her fortieth birthday, Ibárruri began appearing always in widow's black.[63] The costume disguised the fact that she was separated from her husband Julián Ruiz and allowed her to project an "asexual maternity," simultaneously "feminine and ferocious."[64]

"The Stalinist Subject and Gender Dimensions," in Brigitte Studer and Heiko Haumann, eds., *Stalinistische Subjekte: Individuum und System in der Sowjetunion und der Komintern, 1929–1953* (Zurich: Chronos, 2006), 348–55; Pasha Angelina, "The Most Important Thing," in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 312.

60 Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 10 ("visual lexicon"). On mothers and housewives see Victoria Bonnell, "The Peasant Woman in Stalinist Political Art in the 1930s," *American Historical Review* 98 (February 1993): 63, 75; Susan E. Reid, "All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 57, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 136. On women as icons of the Stalinist revolution see Ilič, "*Traktoristka*," 110–12; Chatterjee, "Soviet Heroines," 54–9. On women aviators and other role models, see Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 75–83; Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 68–72; Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 46–84; Reina Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007),14–17.

61 Gina Herrmann, *Written in Red: The Communist Memoir in Spain* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 26. See also Juan Avilés Farré, *Pasionaria: La mujer y el mito* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2005), 29, 100.

62 Gregorio Morán, *Miseria y grandeza del Partido Comunista de España, 1939–1985* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1986), 23; Herrmann, *Written in Red*, 27; Lannon, "Women and Images," 220; Kol'tsov, *Ispanskii dnevnik*, 47.

63 Avilés, *Pasionaria*, 74; Carrie Hamilton, "Activism and Representations of Motherhood in the Autobiography of Dolores Ibárruri, *Pasionaria*," *Journal of Romance Studies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 18.

64 Gina Herrmann, "The Hermetic Goddess: Dolores Ibárruri as Text," *Letras Peninsulares* 11 (Spring 1998): 196, 194. Hamilton makes a similar point, "Activism and Representations," 18. See also Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995), 54–7.

During the civil war, beginning with her call to arms "*¡No pasarán!*" (They shall not pass!), broadcast by radio on 19 July 1936, just two days after Spanish troops in Morocco launched the military coup against the Republic, Ibárruri's popular influence and appeal had less to do with a specifically communist message than with her powerful and profoundly gendered performance of defiance and self-sacrifice. The emotional intensity of her September 1936 speech in Paris, where she introduced the slogan, "Better to die on your feet than live on your knees," was clear, or so observers and later biographers claimed, even to those who did not speak Spanish, and it made her an international icon.[65] In mid-October, with Nationalist forces threatening Madrid, she proclaimed, "Better the widow of a hero than the wife of a coward!" Throughout the dangerous and difficult defense of the city, she was regularly photographed "digging trenches, haranguing the troops, and consoling soldiers."[66] Her austere beauty visible in the photographs from the period amplified her message.

In Soviet accounts, Ibárruri came to embody the nobility and pathos of the Spanish people and their cause. In one of his earliest columns from Spain, Kol'tsov described her as a "daughter of the people – yesterday a simple, illiterate worker, today one of the leaders of the Spanish communist party . . . a simple Spanish woman in a black housedress."[67] Writing in *Izvestiia* Ehrenburg described for Soviet readers the physical presence that made it so easy to imagine her as a symbol: "exacting eyes, silver hair, traditional earrings, in a long black dress – this is Spain."[68] In a letter published in *Pravda*, addressing the Soviet actress who had played her in Aleksandr Afinogenov's play *Salut, Ispanii!*, Ibárruri attributed her success as an orator to her ability to express – to become – the suffering and courage of the Spanish people: "My voice is the outraged cry of a people that does not wish to be enslaved. . . . In my voice sounds the cry of mothers, the lament of women in bondage, demeaned and scorned."[69] By 1939, the "woman-revolutionary Dolores Ibárruri" constituted an "ideal" of Soviet youth.[70] She also prefigured the real and symbolic mothers who became so central to Soviet propaganda during the Great Fatherland War.

Although it is of course impossible to say how the "average" Soviet citizen responded to this coverage, anecdotal evidence suggests that at least some

[65] Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Pantheon, 2003), 133. See also Paul Preston, *¡Comrades! Portraits from the Spanish Civil War* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 291; Vásquez, *Pasionaria*, 93–94; Herrmann, *Written in Red*, 36–37. "Paris Plea Made by La Pasionaria," *New York Times* (*NYT*), 3 September 1936.

[66] Preston, *¡Comrades!* 293; Herrmann, *Written in Red*, 28.

[67] Mikhail Kol'stov, "Dolores na fronte," *Pravda*, 22 August 1936.

[68] Il'ia Erenburg, "Zhenshchiny Ispanii," *Izvestiia*, 8 March 1937. On the identification of Ibárruri with Spain see Herrmann, *Written in Red*, 37.

[69] Dolores Ibárruri, "Pis'mo Dolores Ibarruri," *Pravda*, 9 February 1937. On the playwright, who became a target of the great purge, see Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 303–45.

[70] Tamara Sycheva as quoted in Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 87.

Soviet people identified strongly with the official accounts of the war in Spain. In December 1936, during the crucial battle to defend Madrid, Vladimir Zheleznyakov, the chairman of a remote village soviet, recorded in his diary that he had dreamed of bayoneting fascists in Spain. Awakened mid-dream, he wrote, "You, Wife, be more careful when turning over tomorrow night. I will be fighting fascism."[71] In December 1939, nine months after the Republic's defeat, Nina Khor'uptenko, a "simple woman" from Khar'kov, wrote to Ibárruri and José Díaz to express her great joy that they were in Moscow. Suggesting a profound, almost pathological commitment to Spain, she wrote, "For so many months (even years) have I, together with the whole Soviet people, watched with worry and joy the heroic struggle of the Spanish people under the direction of the Communist Party. . . . How much I have suffered! It is enough to note that at one time, the doctors prohibited me from reading about events in Spain."[72]

Encountering Spain only through the Soviet media, many Soviet citizens seem to have internalized a political and emotional identification with the Republic. In the 1960s, the fiction writer and literary historian Lidia Libedinskaia, who was fifteen in 1936, recalled that she and her friends had "dreamed of going" to Spain.[73] In a 1991 reminiscence Grigorii Brailovskii recalled how during the Spanish civil war he and his young friends "wore blue forage caps with tassels and tossed around Spanish words: 'viva,' 'salud,' and 'no pasarán.' We fiercely hated Franco, and worried grimly about the republicans."[74]

Such emotional reactions – dreams, worry, suffering, hatred – perhaps went beyond official intentions. To take one example, the changes made to the poet Rafael Alberti's account of his 1937 visit to Moscow suggest a concern with moderating the identification of the Soviet Union – and especially Josef Stalin – with the Spanish cause. The article as it appeared in *Izvestiia* omitted Alberti's assertion that in Moscow he felt as if he were still in Spain because he found Spain "in all Soviet hearts." Tellingly, in the Spanish manuscript version, Alberti remembered the two hours he and his wife, the author María Teresa León, shared with Stalin as filled with "acute emotion for Spain." The Russian version, by contrast, emphasized acute emotion for Stalin, noting that the meeting with the leader "left a deep impression in our memory."[75]

[71] Diary entry for 13 December 1936 as quoted in Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 92–3. See also Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, chapter 4; Mary M. Leder, *My Life in Stalinist Russia: An American Woman Looks Back*, ed. Laurie Bernstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 130–1; Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 228.

[72] Nina Khor'uptenko to Dolores Ibárruri and José Díaz, 24 December 1939, Russian original and Spanish translation, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, El fons centro español de Moscú (ANC), sig. 202.

[73] Lidia Libedinskaia, "The Green Lamp," in *In the Shadow of Revolution*, 300.

[74] Grigorii Brailovskii, "Minuty molchaniia," *Nevskoe vremia*, 22 June 1991.

[75] Rafael Alberti, "Mi tercera visita a Moscú. Mi tercera despedida," Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva, f. 2555, op. 1, d. 316 R, ll. 13, 14; Rafael Alberti, "Moia Moskva,"

The Soviet media also encouraged, or anticipated, pragmatic responses to campaigns to raise money for the women and children of Spain. In addition to lauding Soviet citizens' generosity, the press emphasized the material benefits, often measured in citrus fruit, of Soviet aid. The papers provided regular updates on the number of crates of lemons, tangerines, and oranges arriving at Soviet ports from republican Spain – extraordinary luxuries in the Soviet economy of scarcity. Alongside stories on the heroism of Spanish workers, Soviet newspapers carried advertisements advising mothers that "for the health of daughters and sons there is nothing better than a SPANISH ORANGE."[76] The actual appearance of oranges in the stores in 1937 significantly enhanced the media message.[77]

These reactions in the Soviet Union to the Spanish civil war – and the enthusiasm for Soviet heroes in faraway Spain – both suggest how the war worked to internationalize Stalinist culture and offer a useful reminder of the paradoxes of that culture. The mid-1930s in the Soviet Union have been described as a moment of "Great Retreat" marked by the increasing prominence of Russian nationalism in Soviet propaganda, the growing xenophobia that accompanied the purges, and a new emphasis on motherhood and family.[78] To some degree, the Soviet media's coverage of the Spanish cause and of Spanish heroes challenged these trends, reviving at least rhetorical commitments to both internationalism and a revolution in gender roles. Increasingly marginalized in dominant Soviet discourses, older revolutionary values remained visible in accounts of the Spanish civil war; they remained part of the Stalinist cultural landscape.

Real War, Real Enemies: The Spanish Civil War as Escape from the Purges

In 1932, Argentine-born Adelina Abramson, fourteen years old and speaking no Russian, emigrated to the Soviet Union with her family. Her father, an "eternal Don Quixote" who had left Russia in 1910 to escape a death sentence, decided to return to the USSR despite the warnings of friends in Buenos Aires

Izvestiia, 23 March 1937. For an account of the meeting see *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1939*, Ivo Banac, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 60.

[76] The advertisement ran in *Izvestiia*, 16 May 1937, as translated in Allen, "The Soviet Union," 417. See also *Izvestiia*, 9 January 1937, 11 January 1937, 24 January 1937, 27 March 1937, 6 April 1937, 17 April 1937, and 3 January 1939.

[77] Valentina Bogdan, "Memoirs of an Engineer," in *In the Shadow of Revolution*, 400.

[78] Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946); David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); William J. Chase, *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 45–6, 226; David L. Hoffman, "Was There a 'Great Retreat' from Soviet Socialism? Stalinist Culture Reconsidered," *Kritika* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 651–74; Matthew E. Lenoe, "In Defense of Timasheff's *Great Retreat*," *Kritika* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 721–30.

that "things seem rosy at a distance, but black up close."[79] In a 1994 memoir written with her older sister Paulina, Adelina remembered that in Moscow the family was immediately "suspect" because half of its members (she and her sister) were "foreigners" and half Russians who had lived "many years outside the country." To avoid "tragic consequences," they broke all ties with friends and family in Argentina.[80] Adelina was denied membership in the Komsomol (Young Communist League) because she was "considered the daughter of a Trotskyite with the aggravating circumstance of having been born in Buenos Aires."[81] Then, as she tells the story, the war in Spain broke the spell, at least temporarily:

> At school, the students were electrified by events in distant Spain, and undertook projects to offer immediate aid; some, the most daring, quietly swore that they would volunteer to fight fascism. It seemed that the atmosphere had been purified: . . . From the first days of July '36, people at solidarity rallies raised their fists and shouted *¡No pasarán!*[82]

Both sisters, who by then spoke Russian, went to Spain as translators. Their participation was invaluable, as the Soviets never had "sufficient personnel trained in Castilian."[83] Paulina interpreted for Kol'tsov and Karmen and later Aleksandr Orlov, the NKVD chief in Spain; Adelina for Soviet advisors to the Republic's armed forces.[84] In early 1938, Adelina returned to Moscow and an atmosphere of "anxiety, uncertainty, and fear."[85] Writing in the 1990s, neither she nor her sister harbored illusions about the dark side of Soviet intervention. Paulina held Orlov responsible for the murder of Andreu Nin; both saw the grim toll the purges took on those, including Kol'tsov and Vladimir Ćopić, the commander of the Fifteenth Brigade, who had been in Spain. Nonetheless, they looked back on Spain as a light in the Stalinist night, underscoring the dignity and honor of the "volunteers for liberty," as well as the friendship and camaraderie of Soviet and Spanish pilots, engineers, and mechanics.[86]

Even for those who remained in the Soviet Union, Spain as covered in the Soviet media could appear as a counterpoint to the terror and disruption of the contemporaneous purges. Certainly the oranges were a bright spot in an otherwise bleak landscape. Daniel Kowalsky argues that the "cheery" story of Spanish children evacuated to the safe and happy Soviet Union had particularly high domestic propaganda value as "a foil to the general gloom that enveloped

[79] Paulina Abramson and Adelina Abramson, *Mosaico Roto* (Madrid: Compañía Literaria, 1994), 34.
[80] Ibid., 12.
[81] Ibid., 13.
[82] Ibid., 13, 14.
[83] Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, chapter 7, paragraph 25; chapter 13.
[84] Abramson and Abramson, *Mosaico Roto*, 47, 162, 67. Kol'tsov, *Ispanskii dnevnik*, 123–36.
[85] Abramson and Abramson, *Mosaico Roto*, 113.
[86] Ibid., 52, 186, 73, 103.

Soviet society."[87] Spain, of course, was not the only "cheery" news in the Soviet media. During the Spanish civil war and the purges, the press offered a constant round of joyous stories ranging from accounts of astounding record-breaking long-distance flights and polar expeditions to prodigious feats of industrial and agricultural production and celebrations of the poetic genius of Aleksandr Pushkin.[88]

What set the Spanish story apart from these other happy stories of Soviet accomplishment was the element of idealistic, even revolutionary, struggle against real and overt enemies. On returning to Moscow from Spain in late 1936, journalist Louis Fischer found that "everybody talked Spain . . . At least eight Soviet friends asked me how they could go and fight in Spain." To his questions about the Soviet Union his friends replied, "Spain is more important. . . . If we win in Spain we will be happy here."[89] Libedinskaia's remembered dreams of joining the "valiant Spanish Revolution . . . struggling and bleeding" underscore the attraction for at least some Soviet citizens of imagining themselves as idealistic, self-sacrificing revolutionaries.[90] Updating the children's game of playing at being partisans in Chapaev's legendary civil war detachment, the Leningrad boys in forage caps, who hailed one another in Castilian, found in the story of Spain the romance of fighting for a grand international cause. For all their daring, even the Soviet test pilots could not match the élan of the Spanish volunteers fighting the fascist enemy.

Robert Merriman's decision to leave Moscow for Madrid in early 1937 suggests the power of the struggle in Spain to (re)ignite revolutionary fervor and idealism. In her rather hagiographic reminiscences, Merriman's widow Marion described a trip in the summer of 1936 to Budapest, Vienna, and Prague as "a turning point" in her husband's shift from "observer to activist," because in Eastern Europe "we began to feel the threat of war."[91] Asserting that his previous interest in the Soviet Union had been purely academic, she insisted that he went to Spain as an "idealist," not a party member.[92] These assertions understate her husband's earlier communist activism and contradict clear evidence – in the autobiography he prepared in Spain and in evaluations of his work there – that he was a member of the Communist Party, probably before

[87] Kowalsky, "Soviet Cinematic Offensive," 13. Immaculada Colomina Limonero, *Dos patrias, tres mil destinos: Vida y exilio de los niños de la guerra de España refugiados en la Unión Soviética* (Madrid: Ediciones Cinca, 2010).

[88] Petrone, *Life Has Become*. For examples see: *Pravda*, 12 August 1936, 14 September 1936, 17 June 1937 (long-distance flights); 8 December 1936 (Stalin constitution); 8 February 1937 (Pushkin); 7 October 1937, 29 December 1937 (Stakhanovites); 21 September 1938 (polar expedition).

[89] Louis Fischer, *Men and Politics: An Autobiography* (1941; reprint, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), 403.

[90] Libedinskaia, "The Green Lamp," 300.

[91] Marion Merriman and Warren Lerude, *American Commander in Spain: Robert Hale Merriman and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 63, 66.

[92] Ibid., 80.

he left for the Soviet Union in 1934 and certainly after he arrived in Spain. In his autobiography, Merriman described himself as "in Party Nucleus" while working in 1934 as a body polisher and carpenter at the Ford assembly plant in Richmond, California. (This piece of information is difficult to reconcile with the marginal note, in Merriman's handwriting: "Not Party member – have applied 1/1937 since being in Spain.") He also described himself as an "organizer" for the International Labor Defense in San Francisco and Oakland, a position that implied party membership – all this while also being a graduate student in economics at the University of California, Berkeley. In the Soviet Union, he noted, he spent a year at the Communist Academy, a prestigious research institution closely associated with the party.[93] In a May 1937 letter, a State Department observer emphasized "that the longer Mr. Merriman stayed in the Soviet Union the more violently pro-Soviet he became in language and action."[94] When Marion herself arrived in Spain from Moscow, she, too, became a party member.[95] Clearly, the Merrimans were not, as she insisted, simply nonparty "idealists."

However, although Spain was not the first communist cause Merriman was involved in, it may have been the one to which he was committed most fully and emotionally. It is entirely possible that, as Marion claimed, it was the experience of "having seen for himself the spreading power of Hitler," rather than any previous work for the party, that inspired Bob to fight in what he assured her would be a short war.[96] Fischer recounts that some time after he returned to Moscow, Merriman, his erstwhile tennis partner, "phoned to find out how he could get to Spain."[97] Unfortunately, Fischer provides no further information about either his own assistance in the matter – having worked to organize the International Brigades, he was likely in a position to help – or Merriman's reasons for going, which he seemed to assume were self-evident.[98] Writing in 1986, Marion rather understandably denied Bob's communism and emphasized his idealism. But there is no reason to doubt her claim that the struggle in Spain renewed his – and perhaps her – sense of (communist) idealism.

[93] "Merriman," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 947, l. 31. "Characteristics of Chief of Brigade, War Commissars and Chiefs of Estado Mayor," describes Merriman as "Member of C.P.U.S.A." and as "organiser for I.L.D. in California," ibid., l. 34. Ćopić's characterization of Merriman describes him as joining the Communist Party in Spain, ibid., l. 29. On the Institute of Red Professors and the Communist Institute where Merriman worked (albeit later) see Michael David-Fox, "Symbiosis to Synthesis: The Communist Academy and the Bolshevization of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 1918–1929," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 46, H. 2 (1998): 219–43.

[94] Elbridge Durbrow to Secretary of State, 13 May 1937, National Archives College Park, Maryland (NACP), Record Group (RG) 59, 852.2221 Merriman, Robert H./1.

[95] Robert Merriman diary, vol., 1, 9 junio, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

[96] Merriman and Lerude, *American Commander*, 66, 72.

[97] Fischer, *Men and Politics*, 403.

[98] Ibid., 386; Luigi Gallo [Longo] to Louis Fischer, 20 September 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1, d. 11, l. 30.

FIGURE 6. Marion Merriman and Robert Merriman (center) with officers. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University. (ALBA Photo 177-177027)

Participating in the Spanish civil war also offered a politically acceptable way out for resident foreigners who wanted or needed to leave the Soviet Union while remaining publicly supportive of it. Thus, for example, more than 200 Austrian exiles applied to serve, of whom more than 150 were permitted to go to Spain.[99] A letter apparently from Henry Shapiro, the United Press correspondent in Moscow, that Merriman copied into his Spanish diary hints that he may also have made this more complicated type of exit. Adopting a joking tone – and signed "Henrico (not Shapiro)" – the letter alluded to some sort of political trouble or misunderstanding that had prompted Merriman to leave Moscow without a forwarding address: "I know how you must have felt you and many of your best friends going around wearing an artificial 'filthy mug' or safety mask, largely the result of sticking your nose into something

[99] Barry McLoughlin, "Proletarian Cadres En-route: Austrian NKVD Agents in Britain, 1941–1943," *Labour History Review* 62, no. 3 (Winter 1997): 304. See also Andrea Graziosi, "Foreign Workers in Soviet Russia, 1920–40: Their Experience and Their Legacy," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 33 (Spring 1988): 48; Gleb J. Albert, "'To Help the Republicans Not Just by Donations and Rallies, but with the Rifle': Militant Solidarity with the Spanish Republic in the Soviet Union, 1936–1937," *European Review of History* 21, no. 4 (2014): 504–12.

you ordinarily wouldn't go near – and where you are now you have at least the one advantage of knowing who's who."[100]

The letter specified neither what Merriman was "sticking his nose into" nor exactly how he now knew "who's who." However, its assertion – "It must be wonderful to be in such good company as you are, for a change – really good people, unselfish, willing to sacrifice all (if necessary) not just for a cause but to *the real* cause, scientifically sound and historically progressive" – suggests a contrasting state of affairs in Moscow. Spain offered an appropriately idealistic reason for leaving an unpleasant, perhaps dangerous, situation, although the fact that Marion remained in the Soviet Union until Bob was wounded at Jarama in February 1937 implies a rather low level of fear.

The case of Hermann Muller, a prominent American geneticist who had been working in the Soviet Union since 1933 and who socialized in the same expatriate circles as the Merrimans, offers a clearer example of how Spain functioned as a politically acceptable escape from the terror. Muller's leftist involvements had begun at the University of Texas, which he left in 1932 when his participation in a communist student organization came to the attention of the FBI. In 1933, Muller was a fellow at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research in Berlin. The Nazi seizure of power and a subsequent physical attack on the institute and some of its scientists persuaded Muller to accept an invitation to direct a genetics lab in the Soviet Union. However, by 1936 the rise of Lysenkoism made the Soviet Union an increasingly dangerous place for a classical geneticist. Moreover, Muller, perhaps unaware of the stakes, became one of Trofim Lysenko's most outspoken opponents.[101] He also incurred Stalin's displeasure with his advocacy of a program of "Bolshevik" eugenics.[102] By March 1937, a number of prominent Soviet geneticists had been arrested on charges of holding fascist or Trotskyite views, and Muller himself became the target of what he characterized as "scurrilous and insipid attacks." He decided that he needed to leave, but as historian Peter Kuznick notes, he wanted to do so without creating "the impression that he had gone over to the enemy camp" or putting his Soviet colleagues at further risk.[103] Muller's solution was to go to Spain, where he served in the Instituto Hispano-Canadiense de Transfusión de Sangre (Spanish-Canadian Blood Transfusion Institute) organized by Canadian surgeon Norman Bethune. Muller, whose research on genetic mutations

[100] "First outside letter received in Spain. Moscow Jan. 14, 1936," Merriman diary, vol., 1, 29 octubre, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. On news of arrests in Moscow, see 19 septiembre.

[101] Peter J. Kuznick, *Beyond the Laboratory: Scientists as Political Activists in 1930s America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 121, 122. See also Elof Axel Carlson, *Hermann Joseph Muller, 1890–1967* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 2009), 12, 14, 16–20.

[102] "Pis'mo Germana Mellera – I. V. Stalinu," ed. I. A. Zakharov, *Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniia tekhniki*, 1997, no. 1: 65–76.

[103] Kuznick, *Beyond the Laboratory*, 136. "Moscow Cancels Genetics Parley," *NYT*, 14 December 1936; the *Times* erroneously reported N. I. Vavilov's arrest.

in fruit flies earned him a Nobel Prize in 1946, arrived in Spain as an expert on Soviet techniques for preserving the blood of the dead for transfusion. He stayed only eight weeks – long enough to make service in Spain a plausible reason for his decision to leave his post in the Soviet Union.[104]

In the Soviet Union, the official call to join "all advanced and progressive humanity" in the fight against overt fascist aggression made possible figurative and literal escapes from Stalinist terror. The fight in Spain seemed to offer a purifying alternative to hunting for hidden enemies and Trotskyite plots – or to being hunted. Yet the escape was never complete, because the press explained setbacks in Spain as the work of the same agents of a worldwide "Trotskyite-fascist" conspiracy that threatened the Soviet Union. A good communist like Mito Kruth might at the same time aspire to participate in the pure cause as a "little Chapaev" and subscribe to the notion that defeats in Spain were the work of Trotskyite "rats" and "traitors."[105]

Trotskyites Everywhere: The Spanish Civil War as Part of the Story of the Purges

From the perspective of high politics, the Spanish civil war appears closely connected to the development of the "Great Terror" in the Soviet Union. Historian Oleg Khlevniuk argues that, although events in Spain did not necessarily cause the terror, Stalin understood them as demonstrating "the need for a policy of repression."[106] As a Soviet trade representative reported from Spain in December 1936, "it is not out of the question that amongst the highest [Republican] officers there exists a Fascist organization which is engaged in sabotage and, of course, spying."[107] That explanation effectively captures the way in which the Soviet leadership filtered information through a distinctive worldview. Such "evidence" that Republican defeats could be attributed to traitorous officers may have confirmed for Stalin the wisdom of preparations already being made to purge allegedly Trotskyite Red Army commanders.[108]

[104] On Bethune see Petrou, *Renegades*, 158–68. On Muller's blood transfusion expertise see "A new technique of blood transfusion," [c. 1939–40], Milly Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6, Hoover Institution Archives; Hermann Muller to Milly Bennett, 11 May 1937, ibid., Box 4, Folder 6. On Soviet experiments in blood banking see Douglas Starr, *Blood: An Epic History of Medicine and Commerce* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 67–70.

[105] Mito Kruth to Helen, 9 May 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

[106] Oleg Khlevniuk, "The Reasons for the 'Great Terror': The Foreign-Political Aspect," in Silvo Pons and Andrea Romano, eds., *Russia in the Age of Wars, 1914–1945* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000), 163. See also Hiroaki Kuromiya, "Accounting for the Great Terror," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 53, H. 1 (2005): 86–101.

[107] Khlevniuk, "The Reasons," 164.

[108] Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 190–1; Robert W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934–1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 50–7.

From the perspective of readers of Soviet newspapers, the story of the heroic battle against fascism in Spain could simultaneously validate and provide a kind of escape from the domestic "reign of the lie."[109] Whether or not reports from Spain drove decision making at the highest levels, the Soviet media's representations of the situation in Spain made terror at home thinkable, even reasonable. Measuring the column inches devoted to news from Spain versus accounts of show trials, although analytically useful, obscures the ways in which both were part of the same story: awe-inspiring achievements threatened by shadowy enemies, an unholy alliance of Lev Trotsky and the Gestapo dedicated to assassinating the leaders of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) and abetting the spread of fascism.[110]

For all its unique features, Spain fit quite well into the Stalinist political culture of "omnipresent conspiracy."[111] In the Soviet media's telling, the "heroic Spanish people" faced not only open German and Italian intervention but also, and perhaps more ominously, disguised "accomplices in the murder of Spanish children" – the "traitors, spies, and saboteurs" of the allegedly Trotskyite-fascist POUM.[112] In an article on "Trotskyite agents in Spain," Kol'tsov accused the POUM militias of abandoning the front and the POUM press of spreading anti-Soviet lies about famine in Leningrad, the liquidation of the Comintern, and the arrest of its leader Georgi Dimitrov.[113] The Soviet press characterized the street fighting that broke out in Barcelona in May 1937 as a Trotskyite-fascist "putsch" orchestrated by the POUM with the aim of aiding Francisco Franco and his German and Italian allies.[114]

Such charges of collusion with the enemy had little connection to reality: The violence in Barcelona is more convincingly explained as a result of "the social and political protests of radicalized workers and the urban poor."[115] But there was enough substance to Soviet charges of sabotage and spying in Spain to give them a whiff of plausibility. The war, after all, had begun with an uprising of traitorous officers supported by Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Opponents operating within the Republic and engaging in activities ranging from spying

[109] Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, trans. Max Hayward and Manya Harrari (New York: Pantheon, 1958), 507.

[110] "Trotskii-Zinov'ev-Kamenev-Gestapo," *Pravda*, 22 August 1936. See also *Pravda*, 16 September 1937; Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937*, 101.

[111] Gábor Tamás Rittersporn, "The Omnipresent Conspiracy: On Soviet Imagery of Politics and Social Relations in the 1930s," in J. Arch Getty and Roberta Manning, eds., *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 99–115.

[112] "Inostrannaia pechat' o protsesse antisovestskogo 'pravo-trotskistskogo bloka,'" *Pravda*, 7 March 1938. See also, "Trotskistskie shpiony na sluzhbe u Franko,"*Pravda*, 21 June 1937.

[113] Mikhail Kol'tsov, "Agentura Trotskogo v Ispanii," *Pravda*, 22 January 1937. See also Kol'tsov, "Raskrytie trotskistskoi shpionskoi organizatsii v Barselone,"*Pravda*, 25 October 1937.

[114] B. Mikhailov, "Trotskistsko-fashistskii putch v Barselone,"*Pravda*, 11 May 1937.

[115] Graham, *The Spanish Civil War*, 63. George Orwell suggested a possible communist provocation, Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 157. Payne deems a communist provocation "likely," *Spanish Civil War*, 217; Viñas disagrees, *Escudo*, 541–8.

to spreading demoralizing rumors constituted a real and "serious problem" for the Republic that "expanded as the war went on" – even if they lacked the level of coordination implied by the label "fifth column."[116] International espionage was not merely a figment of the fevered Stalinist imagination. The Italian secret police and the Gestapo really had agents active in Republican Spain.[117] The U.S. government really convicted a "ring" of German spies in 1938.[118] For those fighting in Spain, the "reality" of such plots was palpable. As noted in the previous chapter, both the Internationals and their commanders often understood everything from tobacco shortages to military defeats as the result of the fascist "fifth column." From there it was a short step to the conclusion that (complicated and poorly understood) political rivalries on the Republican side disguised particularly insidious fascist agents.

If the Spanish plots were plausible – and they might seem so particularly at a distance and to people with little knowledge of Spanish politics – and if the vipers were truly everywhere, then the alleged crimes of erstwhile Bolshevik leaders were perhaps not so fantastic after all.[119] The stories of Gestapo agents operating everywhere from New York to Madrid, from Finland to Bulgaria, had the cumulative effect of both explaining the rebels' successes in Spain and lending a certain credibility to the conspiracies uncovered at home. In the Soviet media the domestic hunt for "enemies of the people" was thus fundamentally inseparable from the valiant struggle in Spain to defeat fascist aggression and unmask Trotskyite-fascists. The insistence that the Soviet Union fought on the side of all progressive humanity did not rule out, but rather shored up, conspiracy theories.

Ultimately, Stalinist charges of "Trotskyite fascism" relied on the claim that the Soviet Union alone represented all progressive humanity and that only its leaders knew the best path to the radiant future. George Orwell, an eyewitness to the May Days in Barcelona, was willing to grant that a case could be made – although he ultimately did not agree with it – for the communist contention that the POUM's revolutionary agitation "weakened the Government forces and thus endangered the war" effort. What he could not tolerate, and what from his point of view revealed the true face of Stalinism, was the communist attack on the POUM as "a gang of disguised Fascists, in the pay of Franco and Hitler." Writing before the war ended, Orwell correctly noted that this mendacious "story was spread all over Spain . . . and repeated over and over in

[116] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 342. José Luis Rodríguez Jiménez, "La 'Quinta Columna' en la Guerra Civil," *Historia y vida* 20, no. 226 (1987): 116–25. The term "fifth column" is usually attributed to General Emilio Mola; Payne argues that it was an "invention of Communist propaganda," *Spanish Civil War*, 88 n. 2.

[117] Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 295–6, 342.

[118] V. Minaev, "Raskrytie germanskogo shpionskogo tsentra v SShA," *Pravda*, 23 July 1938. "Nazis Seized Here in Spy Ring Case," *NYT*, 7 April 1938; "Prison Sentences Given Three Spies Here," *NYT*, 3 December 1938.

[119] John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1958), 54.

the Communist and pro-Communist press of the whole world."[120] For Orwell, such accusations aimed to disguise the fact that the Comintern was concerned only with Soviet security and that in Spain the Soviet Union was an "anti-revolutionary" force.[121]

It was precisely this paradox of (perhaps temporarily) nonrevolutionary communism in Spain that turned some international communist participants in the war – particularly those who had joined the party during the Comintern's revolutionary Third Period and still defined themselves in terms of its radicalism – against the Soviet Union. Robert Gladnick, who joined the party in the early 1930s in Texas, remembered being greeted at the Spanish border by an anarchist militia, whose frontier post flew not the Republic's red, gold, and violet tricolor but "the anarchist Red & Black Flag." When the anarchists responded to the volunteers' "Viva la república" and "Viva el frente popular" with "Viva la revolución proletaria," Gladnick "as an old Third Period Communist" was "thrilled but most of the men were Popular Front recruits – did not understand the subtlety of this."[122] Firsthand experiences with Russian antisemitism in Spain further soured him on the notion that the Soviets were revolutionaries.[123] Gladnick's buddy William Herrick was likewise an old Third Period communist who eventually repudiated the party. In his 1998 memoir, he remembered sympathizing with the POUM and the anarchists who "socialized factories and formed voluntary communes," who made *señor* "taboo" and replaced it with "*compañero*, friend."[124] By contrast, "my Party called for bourgeois democracy, and lowered the red flag. I couldn't understand it." In retrospect he explained the Popular Front as pure cynicism: "We really were for the revolution, but not yet; only when *we*, the vanguard of the proletariat, were prepared to take power ourselves."[125] At the time, however, he may have been upset primarily by the betrayal of his sense of what it meant to be a communist.

For those international communists willing to accept that the Soviet Union was, as the Comintern often reminded them, the only country to have made a socialist revolution and thus the legitimate leader of the world proletarian movement,[126] Stalinist "explanations" provided a means of making sense of events about which they often knew very little. As Australian volunteer Lloyd

[120] Orwell, *Homage*, 64.
[121] Ibid., 56.
[122] Robert Gladnick memoirs, chapter 5, pp. 5–6, Hoover Institution Archives.
[123] Ibid., chapter 3, p. 16.
[124] William Herrick, *Jumping the Line: Adventures and Misadventures of an American Radical* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 120.
[125] Emphasis in original. Ibid., 121. Payne makes a similar argument, *Spanish Civil War*, 137–8.
[126] Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform*, trans. Brian Pearce (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pt.1, 75–7; Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 51, 79–80.

Edmonds noted in a 1983 interview, "I was very ignorant about Spain. . . . You see we were concerned in those days – and I'm sure this applies to most people who went to Spain – primarily with the fight against fascism. After you hit Spain, you suddenly gathered that this was a Spanish war really."[127] Or as Herrick put it more bluntly, "we knew and learned little about [Spain], except what our ignorant and biased commissars told us."[128] It may be the case, as historian Michael Petrou argues in relation to the Canadians, that the "concept of Trotskyism" "meant little to the average" volunteer.[129] However, many among the communists, notably but not only the alumni of the International Lenin School, had long familiarity with this potent epithet. By the mid-1930s, Trotskyism was a catchall term that covered the behavior of all manner of alleged enemies, traitors, wreckers, undisciplined elements, and spies.[130]

The volunteers' use of "Trotskyism" and "Trotskyites" to explain the situation in Spain to friends and family back home suggests that they viewed these terms as offering understandable explanations or at least explanations likely to sustain home-front morale – and pass the censor. The vehemence with which they used the terms points to their own investment in these explanations. In a mid-May 1937 letter, written just after the uprising in Barcelona had been put down, Jack Friedman, the commissar of the transport division, explained to his comrade Joe Freedman,

> In one of our truck convoys we had to guard ourselves with guns, not against the fascists – but against the Trotskyites. You see Trotskyism is no longer a theoretical question to us, it is real, and any bastard that tries to discuss and uphold the theory of it is quite apt to get the butt of my gun over his fucking head as a most convincing argument.[131]

The letter may not demonstrate a high-level understanding of Trotskyism as a "concept," but Friedman took up the attack on Trotskyites with enthusiasm and real Bolshevik style as a question of practice not theory.

Other volunteers were equally emphatic if also equally vague in their attacks on Trotskyites. William Sennett wrote to his partner Gussie, a Young Communist activist in Chicago, that they could learn from the Youth movement

[127] Lloyd Edmonds, *Letters from Spain*, ed. Amirah Inglis (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 86; Jack Taylor to the Commission of Work among Internationals, CC, CPS [Central Committee of PCE], 20 February 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 11, l. 2.

[128] Herrick, *Jumping the Line*, 220.

[129] Petrou, *Renegades*, 113.

[130] On "Trotskyite" behaviors see ibid., 113–19.

[131] Jack Friedman to Joe [Freeman], 13 May 1937 in Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, eds., *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 349. See also Jack Friedman to George, 27 February [1937], ibid., 64; Carl Geiser to Impy, 3 June 1937, ibid., 158; Leon Rosenthal to Lee, 2 August 1937, ibid., 166; Lawrence Kleidman to Family, 18 December 1937, ibid., 122; Lini De Vries to Evelyn, 27 June 1937, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001, Box 6, Folder 19.

in Spain whose newspaper "has come out openly against Trotskyism and . . . is carrying on a consistent campaign for the extermination of this evil force."[132] Having heard that his sister was a Trotskyite, Ralph Fasanella, an Italian American from the Bronx who served in the transport division, threatened to throw her out a window if he returned from Spain, explaining, "Mom, there is [sic] only two sides today and that is Democracy or fascism. These ultra lefts are a bunch of bastards." Fasanella did return home, becoming an artist known for his labor-themed paintings, but apparently never carried out his threat.[133]

Indeed the brigadistas were familiar enough with the term "Trotskyite" and with the conventions of Stalinist discourse more generally that they were able to parody it. At the front, where the distance between the cheery news carried in the *Volunteer for Liberty* and military realities was particularly clear – and might have been funny had the reality been less grim – the Anglo-American troops dubbed their political commissars "comic stars."[134] In letters home and in their submissions to company or battalion publications, the men demonstrated a keen ear for the slogans that at once endowed their decision to fight in Spain with world historical significance and, under their current circumstances, sounded a little absurd. Sennett, whose letters to Gussie Machen were often full of earnest political arguments and lessons, treated her in a September 1937 letter to a "satire" by Dave Thompson, a communist who was the scion of a wealthy California family:

> Dialectically, from a true Marxian standpoint, an analysis of the political and general internal situation on the Iberian peninsula, is . . . a source wherein an unbiased student of world affairs is able to better understand, and appreciate to a fuller degree, the struggle not only here, now, but everywhere, anytime. It's overwhelming! It's collossal! [sic] You'll laugh, you'll cry. You'll have the bestest fun EVER![135]

In an October letter, Jack Friedman enclosed a clipping from the transport division's newspaper of perhaps the same "satirical article by Dave Thompson," whom he described as a "swell guy with plenty of wit."[136]

A handwritten submission to an unspecified Fifteenth Brigade publication illustrates the degree to which Stalinist political discourse pervaded the brigadistas' everyday life and thus their senses of humor. Beginning with the assertion, "Someone should teach the facts of life to the young men of Company One," the story equated sexual and political immaturity. The hardened veterans of Company Two pointed out that the "lads of Company One unblushingly indicated their ignorance of this advanced subject of nature when they organized a strident snake dance through neighboring barracks the other night loudly

[132] William Sennett to Gussie [Machen], 3 June 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[133] Ralph Fasanella to Mom, 20 April 1938, VALB, Container 1. Roberta Smith, "Ralph Fasanella, 83, Primitive Painter Dies," *NYT*, 18 December 1997.
[134] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 31; Eby, *Between the Bullet*, 31, 53, 117, 227.
[135] William Sennett to Gussie, 16 September 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[136] Jack Friedman to Esther, 8 October 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 174.

proclaiming that [the company dog] Minnie had pups." They lectured, "Oh dear children, the stork must have notification months in advance," and also pointed out that "the potential father of the pups must be old enough to have adult proclivities. (That means: You must become a man, my son.)" The story then took a strangely politically turn, as the men of Company Two deemed it "our duty" to reveal – "And remember, you youths approaching manhood, this hurts us more than it does you" – that "the Company Two Gay Pay OO" (GPU, the Soviet political police, later known as the NKVD) had "conclusive proof" that Minnie "belongs to the secret organization of the MOUP – (the POUM is just against the anti-fascist united front, the Soviet Union and 183½ other things. MOUP is against *everything*!)" The proof of her political transgressions came in the form of a letter in which she credited a patent medicine with giving her the energy to "sleep with anybody's husband" – a parody that relied on familiarity with the Stalinist habit of conflating political and personal failings. The story's conclusion offered at once good political and sexual advice: "the young men of Co. 1 must be much more careful of both the company they keep and the way they pop off prematurely."[137]

Yet the brigadistas' bitter mockery did not rule out affirmations of the importance and power of their communist convictions. In April 1938, after the Nationalist breakthrough in Aragon, Bessie recorded in his notebook that the Brigade was "practically annihilated." "But," he added, "for the benefit of folks at home" the Brigade "is 100% American and numbers about 1,000 to 2,000."[138] If he resented such communist propaganda, he nonetheless appreciated the fact that the party members in the Brigade continued to stand out as having "higher morale and more developed consciousness of responsibility."[139] He lauded precisely the linkage of sound politics and sound individual behavior that provided the satiric bite in the story of Minnie and her pups.

Stalinism as an international culture drew communists together with shared narratives, heroes, holidays, emblems, and enemies. But for all they shared, local communist political cultures remained distinct. In Spain, officers and commissars had a penchant for labeling all sorts of behaviors as "Trotskyite" and for threatening to arrest or shoot malingerers, deserters, and malcontents.[140] However, they rarely did – which is not to excuse or minimize the executions that occurred, such as the one Bessie matter of factly noted in March 1938: "One major (Spanish) and 2 Lts. and 1 Sgt. were shot yesterday for cowardice."[141] Rather, the point is that nothing like the Soviet terror existed in Spain. What was dangerous for Soviet advisors in Spain was

[137] RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 473, ll. 161–3. See also "A lesson in dialectics," ibid., l. 159.
[138] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 33.
[139] Ibid., 34.
[140] Merriman diary, vol. 2, pp. 32, 63, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3; Eby, *Between the Bullet*, 227–8; Szurek, *Shattered Dream*, 101.
[141] Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 17. On executions in spring 1938, see Petrou, *Renegades*, 131–3.

returning to the Soviet Union, where many were arrested and executed, among them Kol'tsov, Ćopić, military attaché Vladimir Gorev, Ambassador Marcel Rosenberg, the Soviet consul in Barcelona Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, head of military intelligence Yan Berzin, and economic advisor Artur Stashevskii.[142] Polish volunteers summoned to Moscow were likewise arrested and executed.[143] The lower level of political violence in Spain underscores the fact that in the Spanish context, it was possible to think – or threaten – like a Stalinist, but it was not always necessary or possible to act like one.[144] The story of "Minnie of Co. 1" was unlikely to be submitted for publication in the Soviet Union, yet it would not have been written without the powerful influence of Stalinist political culture.

Evaluating Communist Behavior

The willingness to label almost any sort of disruptive behavior "Trotskyite" drew on the longstanding communist convention of defining ostensibly private behaviors as politically meaningful.[145] This practice is particularly clear in the ratings of volunteers prepared by the Foreign Cadres Section of the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España, PCE). In rating nonparty volunteers, the cadres section used a scale – "good," "fair," "drunk," "bad," or "very bad" – that made no distinction between personal behavior and military service. Thus Oscar Aho, a Finnish American from Minnesota was rated "Drunk," but with the notation "Brave at the front." Amos Archer, an African American from Ohio was rated "Bad. Stole rations from the kitchen to give to a woman." Alfred Litwin, a graduate of City College in New York, was also rated "Bad. Sexual pervert." Frank Lucas, a Croatian American who fought both at Brunete and the Ebro, was rated simply "Good."[146] There was a different scale for measuring party members: "cadre," "needs political instruction," "good," "fair," "weak," and "bad." Again, the ratings encompassed the military, political, and "moral sphere." The "bad" cadres were those who had

[142] Radosh et al., *Spain Betrayed*, 93–4.Enrique Líster López, "¿Qué fue de ellos? El Destino de los militares soviéticos que participaron en la Guerra de España," in *Rusos en la guerra*, 116–20.

[143] Fridrikh I. Firsov, "Dimitrov, the Comintern and Stalinist Repression," in Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott, eds., *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 72–3.

[144] Radosh et al., *Spain Betrayed*, 176; Graham, *Spanish Republic*, 384–7.

[145] Tim Rees, "Deviation and Discipline: Anti-Trotskyism, Bolshevisation and the Spanish Communist Party, 1924–34," *Historical Research* 82, no. 215 (February 2009): 152, 148. Brigitte Studer and Berthold Unfried, "Private Matters Become Public: Western European Exiles and Emigrants in Stalinist Russia in the 1930s," *International Review of Social History* 48, no. 2 (2003): 211–12.

[146] "Primera lista alfabética de los voluntarios internacionales sin partido," 17 November 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 852, ll. 2–4. In the ALBA database, these volunteers are identified as party members, www.alba-valb.org.

"shown themselves to be largely useless or harmful to the antifascist cause in Spain." An explanation of the rating advised that "bad" comrades – there were 10 on the initial list of 207 – should not "be regarded as political enemies, but without exception their defects are serious ones such as constant drunkenness, cowardice coupled with indiscipline, disruptive tendencies, Trotzkyist [sic] tendencies, etc." and they should be "excluded from the Party without exception."[147]

These sorts of "characterizations" would have been familiar to most communists before they reached Spain. However, even having a formal party education provided no guarantee that a comrade would demonstrate behavior worthy of a communist. The Lenin School alumni who fought in Spain, for example, were not necessarily braver, better disciplined, or more politically correct than their peers. Some, such as Mack Coad who had spent two years at the Lenin School in the early 1930s at the time of the "white chauvinism" disputes, proved themselves exemplary communists and soldiers. Coad arrived in Spain in October 1937 and attended officer training school in early 1938. The instructors characterized him as having "plenty of intelligence politically" and as an "excellent student." Commissar John Gates judged him a "Very responsible and sincere comrade. Carries out party work well. Is even tempered."[148] In August 1938, he was wounded in his right eye at Gandesa; he was repatriated at the end of the year.[149]

By contrast, Sterling Rochester, who was among the Lenin students sent directly from Moscow to Spain, got into trouble in both places during his service. He, like many volunteers, was disciplined for drunkenness. When in custody he "attempted to start fights with several comrades," and the brigade's physician, Sidney Robbins, an Austrian communist, recommended the (unspecified) "usual procedure against uncontrolled drunkedness [sic]," perhaps a short stay in the guardhouse to dry out.[150] On the Soviet side, Rochester caused a disturbance by sending a letter from Spain to his girlfriend in Russia. The school immediately undertook an investigation of this breach of "conspiracy," which was especially egregious because he used his real name (not his school name, Stanley Taylor) in the correspondence. He seems, however, to have suffered no penalty in Spain.[151]

[147] "To the Central Committee of the Communist Party," 20 December 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 852, l. 940b; "Primera lista alfabética de los camaradas voluntarios de las Brigadas Internacionales – Militantes del Partido Comunista," 17 November 1938, ibid., l. 71.

[148] "Coad, Mack," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 874, l. 9.

[149] Ibid., ll. 3–6.

[150] S. S. Robbins to the Etat Major, XV Brigade, Judiciary Commission, nd, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 451, l. 78. On punishments, see Petrou, *Renegades*, 128, 130. For a positive assessment of Rochester as a combatant, see John Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight: An Autobiography of the Spanish Civil War* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1985), 50–1.

[151] "Direktoru Leninskoi Shkoli tov. K. I. Kirsanovoi: Raport," 5 March 1937, RGASPI, f. 531, op. 1, d. 127, l. 2; Sterling Rochester to Nina [Strokova], 9 February 1937, ibid., l. 3.

FIGURE 7. Corporal Mack Coad, Company 2, MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University. (ALBA Photo 11-0212 [Series B])

Two of the best-known American Lenin School alumni in Spain, Harry Haywood and Steve Nelson, served as political commissars, and both got into trouble, albeit of different sorts. They arrived in spring 1937 after the Lincoln battalion's disastrous losses at Jarama. Nelson (then thirty-four), who had no military experience, served as the Lincoln battalion's commissar; Haywood (thirty-nine), a veteran of World War I, became the Fifteenth Brigade's adjutant commissar. Both left Spain by the fall of 1937. In his 1978 autobiography, Haywood described his time in Spain as a "defeat, a setback which would affect my life in the Party for some years to come." Much to his surprise, on reaching the front Haywood recognized Ćopić as "Sanko" from their Lenin School days; however, the two took an almost immediate dislike to one another. As Haywood told the story, during the battle of Brunete, he was forced out of his position because Ćopić managed to turn the brigade staff against him.[152] Haywood's Comintern file tells a simpler story: "unworthy and non-party

[152] Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978), 470, 475, 482, 487. Carroll, *Odyssey*, 134–5.

FIGURE 8. Sterling Rochester (right) with Slavonivitch, chief of information at Jarama and Brunete. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University. (ALBA Photo 177-178005)

behavior in Spain: drunkenness and cowardice in battle." In 1939, he was removed from the American party's central committee and politburo.[153]

Nelson, the battalion's best-loved and probably most effective commissar, had a much more positive experience in Spain. Unpretentious, a good listener, and pragmatic, he immediately won the men over and by all accounts contributed enormously to rebuilding morale in the battalion. Even the habitual complainers had a good word for Steve Nelson.[154] Wounded at Belchite in September 1937, Nelson returned to the United States, and it was there that he ran afoul of the International Brigade leadership. In a June 1938 letter to Gates, then the Lincoln battalion's commissar, Nelson, newly appointed to the American party's central committee, observed, "I hope by the time you get this letter that you will be on your way home along with dozens of other boys who have been there a long time already. . . . Naturally, I'm saying this because I feel that

[153] "Spravka," 27 December 1939, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261 d. 6509, l. 9.
[154] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 131–2.

certain steps are being taken regarding our boys in Spain."[155] The letter arrived as the Internationals were preparing for the Ebro offensive, and the commissar was busy scotching rumors of repatriation. Jim Bourne, another Lenin School alumnus then serving as a PCE representative in the Fifteenth Brigade, sent word of the letter to André Marty, noting that "these views were held by the Central Committee of the American Party."[156] Marty in turn quoted Nelson in a letter to American party leader Earl Browder, in which he warned of "the bad effect of such letters on the moral [sic] of the fighters. And such letters are coming very numerous. . . . For that I inform you."[157] However, by September plans were being made to withdraw the Internationals, and no hint of this incident appears in Nelson's Comintern file. Instead, a later incident – his positive 1940 review of Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* – brought criticism of his insufficient "political vigilance."[158] Whereas Haywood's alleged drunkenness and cowardice became a permanent political blot, Nelson's allegedly demoralizing letter and incorrect assessment of Hemingway scarcely affected his overall evaluation as a "loyal and steadfast comrade."[159]

Haywood's and Nelson's stories illustrate the ease with which in one case an ostensibly personal failing – fear at the front – could become a political marker and, in another, political missteps might be excused by loyalty and steadfastness. They also suggest that the most lasting result of the Lenin School experience was not necessarily behavior that was consistently worthy and party-minded. Rather the shared experience produced a web of personal ties that, although they did not always promote trust, as the case of Haywood and Ćopić demonstrates, did facilitate a sense of the reach of the Comintern network. In their memoirs, Haywood and Nelson emphasized both the presence of former schoolmates among the International Brigades and the acute pain of seeing a comrade whom they had met in Moscow die in Spain. When he arrived, Haywood learned that his "old friend and schoolmate" Dave Springhall had been wounded at Jarama. At Brunete, he "encountered the horrible sight of the bodies of women and children lying in the road, as well as members of the British Battalion," among whom he recognized someone he knew only as "Brown," "formerly of the Lenin School."[160] In telling the story of his years at the Lenin School, Nelson called attention to those, like Mack Coad who "also

[155] Steve Nelson to Johnnie [Gates], 15 June 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 953, l. 33.
[156] Jim Bourne to André Marty, 3 July 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 953, l. 34. *Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-fourth Congress: Investigation of Communist Activities in the Seattle, Wash., Area* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955), 357.
[157] André Marty to Earl Browder, 13 July 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 953, l. 39. See also "Sección Anglo-Americano-Canadiense," 15 July 1938, ibid., op. 1, d. 3, l. 333.
[158] "Tov. Raian [Eugene Dennis] II.IV.41 g kharkterizoval t. Stiv Nel'son," RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 108, l. 105.
[159] "Spravka," 25 August 1941, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 261, d. 108, l. 105.
[160] Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 474, 481–2.

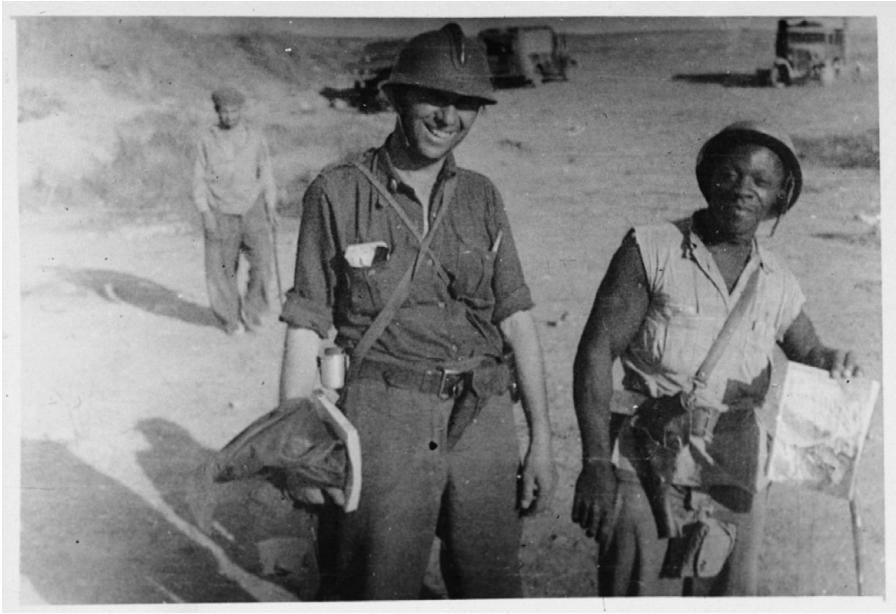

FIGURE 9. Steve Nelson (left) with Douglas Roach. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University. (ALBA Photo 177-179075)

went to Spain" – Coad arrived in the fall of 1937 just as Nelson departed – and those he met "again on the battlefields of Spain." He remembered in particular George Brown, "a tall handsome Irishman from England" killed in July 1937 – perhaps the same Brown that Haywood knew. Nelson wrote, "The sight of his body stretched out on the road to Brunete is something I've never forgotten."[161]

The personal ties that linked international communists might also, as Rochester's case illustrates, cause unexpected political problems. Indeed the political and the personal were often entangled for individual communists. As Rochester wrote in his letter to Nina from Spain, "I can't forget the red capital of the world, or the sweetest girl there."[162] Recognizing the possibility of such entanglements, commissars and commanders in Spain closely monitored personal behavior for its political effects. Soviet advisor Karol Świerczewski argued against this practice in a report to Moscow, noting that efforts to control the private lives of Spanish troops were counterproductive. He quoted with disapproval the verdict in the case of a Spanish deserter who had abandoned the front to get married: "Marriage during war is a grave mistake, and the soldier who decides to take this step should not forget the responsibility that

[161] Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 126, 131.
[162] Sterling Rochester to Nina [Strokova], l. 3.

he must bear if his wife and child are orphaned." He derided such judgments as reflecting the "refined, sadistic-pharisaical virtue of impotent men who recommend celibacy to achieve victory over fascism."[163] That Świerczewski, who had a wife and children in Moscow, acquired a "wife" in Spain may account for some of the vehemence of his response.[164] Nonetheless, the objection highlighted a key feature of Stalinist culture and went to the heart of the contested and thorny question of how communist "virtue" – especially in the realm of sex, love, and family – ought to be defined.

[163] "Notes on the Situation," in *Spain Betrayed*, 455–6.
[164] Szurek, *Shattered Dream*, 182–3.

5

Best Comrades, Tough Guys, and Respectable Communists

Looking back on the Spanish civil war in 1996, Irene Falcón, Dolores Ibárruri's long-time secretary and friend, reflected that "when death is so close, love frequently comes and goes." In wartime, Falcón observed, men were forgiven when "new loves emerge in a flash, like bombs or gunfire," whereas in the case of women the "attitude of tolerance gave way to the oldest traditions and prejudices."[1] She remembered with particular bitterness the rumors that swirled around Ibárruri's affair with Francisco Antón, a political commissar some fifteen years her junior.[2] Underscoring the sexism involved, Falcón emphasized that it was usually men "who stir up this criticism."[3] Ibárruri never publicly acknowledged the affair, which ended in 1943.[4]

One of the men who stirred up criticism of Ibárruri's private life, Jesús Hernández, was himself involved in a wartime romance that highlights both the double standard identified by Falcón and the communist tendency to conflate the personally and politically scandalous. An evaluation of Hernández, who had served as the Republic's minister of education, which was based on

[1] Irene Falcón with Manuel Jiménez and Jesús Montero, *Asalto a los cielos: Mi vida junto a Pasionaria* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1996), 215.

[2] Paul Preston, *¡Comrades! Portraits from the Spanish Civil War* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 298; Carrie Hamilton, "Activism and Representations of Motherhood in the Autobiography of Dolores Ibárruri, *Pasionaria*," *Journal of Romance Studies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 22–3; Joan Estruch Tobella, *Historia oculta del PCE* (Madrid: Ediciones Temas de Hoy, 2000), 136–7. Sources disagree on exactly how many years younger Antón was; estimates range from fifteen to twenty years. Ivo Banac, ed., *The Diary of Gregory Dimitrov, 1933–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 73.

[3] Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos*, 215.

[4] In her memoir, Ibárruri mentioned Antón only in passing, Dolores Ibárruri, *Memorias de Pasionaria, 1939–1977: Me faltaba España* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1984), 54, 126.

information provided by Spanish leaders and Comintern officials, emphasized concerns about his "relations with women," specifically "the way he took up with his current wife." Indeed the critique focused less on Hernández's own failings than on those of his wife, Pilar Boves, who had allegedly "lived with the fascist toreador Cagancho" [Joaquín Rodríguez Ortega], thereby arousing communist suspicions. When Boves left the secretary of the Madrid party organization Domingo Girón, her husband of only a few months, for Hernández their relationship precipitated "political discussions" (according to the Russian version of the report) and a "scandal" (according to an earlier evaluation by Palmiro Togliatti, the Comintern representative in Spain).[5] However, although the report questioned Hernández's judgment in the matter, Boves, whose behavior was described as sometimes inappropriately "petty-bourgeois," emerged as the primary culprit.[6] In this case, the affair was publicly acknowledged – Hernández and Boves wed – but it nonetheless underscored the contradictions of communist norms that at once embraced female emancipation and insisted on female virtue.

The promises and limits of the communist commitment to emancipation emerge even more clearly in the case of Salaria Kee's wartime romance. In Spain, Kee (or Kea), an African American nurse who apparently joined the communist party in 1935, fell in love with and married a wounded Irish volunteer, Patrick O'Reilly.[7] In a draft of her 1938 memoir she remembered their courtship as steeped in politics: O'Reilly recited poems and "We discussed North America, Ireland, and all groups and races who were victims of fascism and other injustices and how we two could help to abolish the enemies of the human race."[8] In December 1937, the marriage received celebratory coverage in the African American community's *Philadelphia Tribune*, which described it as "one of the most romantic interracial romances" and noted that in lieu of the wedding march "a chorus of young Spanish girls sang 'Joven Guardia,'" the Young Communist anthem.[9] At the same time, the interracial marriage posed a potential public relations problem for the party as it sought to attract broad support for the cause in Spain. When she returned to the United States in May 1938, the Medical Bureau and the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy's press release mentioned the marriage and a planned fundraising

[5] "Spravka," Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 495, op. 220, d. 44, ll. 410b, 72; Gregorio Morán, *Miseria y grandeza del Partido Comunista de España, 1939–1985* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1986), 24.

[6] "Spravka," ll. 410b, 72; Morán, *Miseria*, 24.

[7] Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 197; Emily Robins Sharpe, "Salaria Kea's Spanish Memoirs," *Volunteer* 28, no. 4 (December 2011): 18, 19.

[8] As quoted in Sharpe, "Salaria Kea's," 19.

[9] "Interracial Romance Blooms, Blossoms in War-Torn Spain," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 2 December 1937.

tour.[10] However, just a month later, Pearl Levenstein at the Medical Bureau forwarded Kee a letter from organizers in Cincinnati, who believed it "unwise to publicize her marriage to a white man, this would prejudice her not only with the white people, but with the Negroes."[11] In response, Kee asked to be relieved of the obligation to speak in Cincinnati, because "I hate prejudice whether it comes from the Negroes or whites. I shall fight it unto death." For her, support for the cause simply ruled out such prejudice. "I really do not understand," she wrote, "how any people white or black who supposed to be interested in the loyal struggle in Spain can let my domestic affair excite them."[12] She clearly understood the political meanings of her marriage, but did not expect such prejudices among communists or even among the Popular Front left more generally.

These varied stories of communists in love open a view of the ambivalences, complexities, and contradictions in norms of communist comportment. Both the war itself, with its separations and anxieties, and earlier Soviet and socialist norms associated with the theories of Aleksandra Kollontai and August Bebel led communists like Falcón to advocate "personal freedom in matters of love."[13] However, they operated, as Falcón also noted, in an environment marked by a return of "rigor and puritanism" in communist gender norms, as exemplified by the 1936 Soviet legislation outlawing abortion and restricting divorce.[14] This chapter explores a number of intimate stories – of marital relations, homosocial bonding, and wartime romances – as a means of tracing the personal and political challenges of communists in love. As men and women crossed national, gender, and racial divides, they at once made good communism's promises of emancipation and exposed the degree to which traditional boundaries continued to operate within the international communist community.

"Thinking of My Best Comrade and Wife Back Home"

Many, if not most, of the international volunteers in Spain were single. As the historian Michael Petrou notes with regard to Canada, the "Communist Party preferred volunteers without families so that it would not be responsible

[10] "For Immediate Release," 13 May 1938, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001, Box 9, Folder 84, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

[11] Pearl W. Levenstein to Salaria Kee, 18 June 1938, Martin Papers, Box 9, Folder 84.

[12] Salaria Kee to Pearl Levenstein, 20 June 1938, Martin Papers, Box 9, Folder 84.

[13] Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos*, 21; Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 354.

[14] Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos*, 135; Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 296–336.

for widowed wives and orphans." He also suggests that choosing to fight and perhaps die for the cause was an "easier decision" for single men than their married comrades. In any case, Petrou finds that of the 611 Canadian volunteers for whom information is available, 103 (or about 17 percent) were married when they left for Spain.[15] Historian Peter Carroll similarly reports that "relatively few" of the American volunteers – about 15 percent – were married.[16] Adopting a somewhat broader measure, Rémi Skoutelsky finds that about 29 percent of the French volunteers, the largest single national group, were married or cohabitating, with communists more likely to be married than noncommunists.[17] Percentages similar to those in the American and Canadian contingents seem to have held across the Brigades.[18]

The prolific letter writers introduced in previous chapters are thus somewhat anomalous in that most were married. From his arrival in Spain in April 1937 through early 1938, Mito Kruth wrote faithfully to his wife Helen, often several times a week. In roughly the same period William Sennett sent frequent letters to Gussie Machen. Although the two married after his return from Spain in October 1938, as Sennett explained in an interview in the early 1980s, the couple "dated our wedding anniversary from September 1, 1934, the beginning of our nonlegal period of cohabitation."[19] From July 1937 to February 1939, Ben Gardner likewise wrote frequently to his wife Alice, who received and saved at least two letters per month. In his detailed letters to his wife Marion, Robert Merriman often included information about troop movements and military operations. Steve Nelson, by contrast, excused his less informative letters by reminding his wife Margaret, "You know why I can not go and talk about many things in letters under war conditions."[20]

That married communists, who constituted such a relatively small percentage of the volunteers, are well represented, even overrepresented, in the archival and published collections of letters from Spain may be a function of the fact that they felt a responsibility or desire to write home frequently or that they

[15] Michael Petrou, *Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 13.

[16] Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 16.

[17] Rémi Skoutelsky, "L'engagement des volontaires français en Espagne républicaine," *Mouvement social*, no. 181 (October-December 1997): 12, 18.

[18] Michael W. Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994), 47; Hywel Francis, *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), 92; Nir Arielli, "Induced to Volunteer? The Predicament of Jewish Communists in Palestine and the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 4 (2011): 868.

[19] William Sennett, "Communist Functionary and Corporate Executive," an oral history conducted 1981 and 1982 by Marshall Windmiller, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1984, 42.

[20] Steve Nelson to Margaret Nelson, 22 [June] 1937, Steve Nelson Papers, ALBA 008, Box 1, Folder 8.

wrote primarily to their spouses, who may have been particularly likely to save the letters. Leon Rosenthal, for instance, imagined his letters to his wife Lee as a means of having "a little chat" with her when he felt "lonesome for you."[21] Dave Gordon pledged to write his wife Lottie "daily," but was not always able to keep his word.[22] In 1989, Mary Rolfe, the wife of the poet Edwin Rolfe, had 350 pages of his civil war letters stashed in a closet.[23] By contrast, volunteers from countries with underground communist parties often hesitated to write to anyone back home.[24] Letters to the troops were often lost in what historian Hywel Francis calls "the normal ravages of war."[25] Thus, although letters from married American communists in Spain cannot be understood as typical, they nonetheless offer an interesting window into how committed communists understood the relationship between marriage and politics. How could one be at once married and married to the party?

In leaving spouses and, perhaps less commonly, children to risk their lives in Spain, the volunteers were in many ways stereotypical communists – selfless to the point of forgoing domestic comforts, serious to the point of humorlessness.[26] In two interviews published in the 1980s, Centa Herker-Beimler, the widow of Hans Beimler, a German communist killed in the defense of Madrid, depicted her husband in just such terms. She emphasized that Hans "subordinated everything to party work. The family too. I didn't always think that was a good thing." Her "I didn't *always* think" suggests that she shared – or tried to share – his principles to some degree. Still, there was little "time for each other" in a marriage that was "actually first and foremost illegal party work."[27]

[21] Leon Rosenthal to Lee [Rosenthal], 29 August 1937, in Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, eds., *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 217. See also his letter of 29 September 1937, ibid., 114.

[22] Dave Gordon to Lottie [Gordon], 5 November 1938, in *Madrid 1937*, 442. See also his letter 19 November 1938, ibid., 415.

[23] Cary Nelson, "Introduction," *Madrid 1937*, 15. Marcel Acier, ed., *From Spanish Trenches: Recent Letters from Spain* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1937), does not always note the marital status of letter writers, but a number from the United States and Holland wrote to their wives.

[24] Jessie McLellan, "'I Wanted To Be a Little Lenin': Ideology and the German International Brigade Volunteers," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 289.

[25] Hywel Francis, "'Say Nothing and Leave in the Middle of the Night': The Spanish Civil War Revisited," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 32 (Autumn 1991): 73. Few letters by Spanish combatants have survived; James Matthews, *Reluctant Warriors: Republican Popular Army and Nationalist Army Conscripts in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 138.

[26] Questionnaires distributed to the Internationals sometimes asked about marital status, but not about children. Letter writers often took special note of those who left children behind, suggesting that the situation was unusual. Elizabeth Roberts, "British and American Volunteers and the Politics of Dress and Demeanour in the Spanish Civil War," *Limina* 14 (2008): 64–5.

[27] Quoted in Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades, 1945–1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 125–6.

FIGURE 10. Soldiers writing letters home. Courtesy Tamiment Library, New York University. (ALBA Photo 11–1493 [Series E])

The volunteers who left for Spain without consulting or in some cases notifying their wives likewise appeared to put party or principles before family. In a letter to his cousin Gussie Moskowitz, Leo Gordon (born Mendelowitz) excused his abrupt departure for Spain as

> necessary. As a matter of fact, it was the only way. Some time ago I informed Agnes [his wife] that I wanted to go. She nearly passed out. She refused to discuss the question at all. Had I persisted it would have broken us up eventually. . . . I'm sorry I hurt her. It's the toughest part of being out here. But look at it this way. On all sides of me in camp, the same problem confronts hundreds of boys. . . . What's your solution? Stay home and fight fascism in the U.S. while the fascists take over Spain?[28]

Ben Gardner similarly emphasized the necessity of leaving, even without his wife Alice's consent. In August 1937, during a lull in the Brunete offensive, he wrote, "Alice dear, I want to repeat what I stated in previous letters. I was no doubt wrong by not consulting you, but I didn't do it willingly. . . . it is

[28] Leo Mendelowitz to Gus, 26 August 1937, as reproduced in Daniel Czitrom, "Volunteers for Liberty: Letters from Joe and Leo Gordon, Americans in Spain 1937–38," *Massachusetts Review* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 354.

unavoidable. Our lives are full of suffering & we are struggling to make it better."[29] Gardner returned home from Spain, only to be killed in 1944 in France, fighting his second war against fascism. Gordon was killed in Spain during the retreats of March 1938.[30]

In some cases, wives were consulted about the decision to fight in Spain and, however reluctantly or enthusiastically, apparently agreed with it. In a 1986 interview, Nelson emphasized that both he and his wife Margaret "had this complete commitment to the idea that the movement comes first. And we had no kids to worry about."[31] In contemporary letters, he simply assumed that Margaret would do whatever the movement required. Deeming it "a crime for the comrades back home not to write to every comrade here," he instructed her in a May 1937 letter to get the local comrades to send more letters to Spain.[32] William Sennett persuaded his partner Gussie to agree to his departure by emphasizing, as many volunteers did, that the war was likely to be short; he thought he would be home in three months.[33] As it turned out, he spent eighteen months in Spain, from February 1937 to October 1938. However, as in the cases of Alice Gardner and Agnes Gordon, the sources provide only the husbands' impressions of the wives' points of view.[34]

At least from the husbands' perspective, a defining feature of these communist unions – and what overcame even the pain of separation – was shared political commitments. Thus Leon Rosenthal assured Lee that "the hardship of being separated from each other is part of the sacrifice we must all make in this gigantic, decisive battle of the 'final conflict.'" He advised her to "Keep thinking of our victory, of what it will mean to everybody and continue your splendid work for Spain."[35] For him, at least, their marriage appeared to be a political and romantic union.

Husbands often emphasized that they followed their wives' political activities with real interest, and they offered touching, if sometimes condescending, advice. Robert Merriman wrote to Marion that "I am proud of you and the fine

[29] Ben Gardner to [Alice Gardner], 30 August 1937, Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB), Bay Area Post, BANC MSS 71/105 z, Container 1, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[30] "Gardner, Ben: Biographical Information," VALB, Container 1. Czitrom, "Volunteers," 352.

[31] Donald Miller and Steve Nelson, "Fighting in Spain: A Conversation with Steve Nelson," *Salmagundi*, no. 76/77 (Fall 1987–Winter 1988): 118.

[32] Steve Nelson to Margaret, 31 May 1937, Nelson Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

[33] William Sennett to Gussie [Machen], 25 March 1937, VALB, Container 1. See also Marion Merriman and Warren Lerude, *American Commander in Spain: Robert Hale Merriman and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 72; Luigi Longo, *Las Brigadas Internacionales en España*, trans. Victor Flores Olea (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1966), 211.

[34] For the perspective of angry wives see Elizabeth Roberts, *"Freedom, Faction, Fame, and Blood": British Soldiers of Conscience in Greece, Spain, and Finland* (Portland, OR.: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 93.

[35] Leon Rosenthal to Lee [Rosenthal], 2 September [1937], in *Madrid 1937*, 221.

work you are doing" – raising funds for Spain since her return to the United States – and concluded somewhat patronizingly that her work was "having the result I hoped for – to develop my Marion."[36] Emphasizing their shared commitments and also his superior knowledge, Bob offered specific advice on making speeches; in another letter he paraphrased Lenin, exhorting Marion to "Learn Learn Learn and be my sweet girl."[37]

Both Mito Kruth and William Sennett frequently encouraged their wives to assert themselves and to have greater confidence in their abilities. Mito concluded a letter to Helen with the request that she "Write more of what you are doing. If it helps I will try to express opinions from here."[38] Less than two months later, in August 1937, he wrote, "You certainly are developing fast and now that you work without my being there you will do very well."[39] In September 1937, he was "glad to hear in one of your letters that you were not afraid to assert yourself with the [party] section and speak up. That is about the only way to get recognized with some of them."[40] William Sennett offered similar assurance and encouragement to Gussie: "I know that in a short time you could be [a Young Communist League] section organizer – No kidding – Your main fault now is not enuf [sic] confidence and aggressiveness."[41] Three months later, in June 1937, he had nothing but praise for her, beginning his letter with these words: "While we're on this business of pride, I must say that with every letter you send I feel that the content is an expression of your development. It is a joy to be able to read that your own wife appreciates the upsurge in the labor movement and activizes [sic] herself accordingly."[42]

Such appreciations of their wives' progressive political engagement did not necessarily rule out expressions of their inability to look after themselves. Mito Kruth and Leon Rosenthal worried that their wives were working too hard. Leon warned Lee not to "wait for a nervous crisis" before taking a "week's vacation." He also admonished her to "don't lose any more weight, skinny!"[43] Mito likewise advised Helen, "Look out for dangerous signals of exhaustion" and to "put your foot down hard" if the comrades objected to her taking time off. "That is good communism."[44] With less apparent interest in his partner's

[36] Robert Merriman to Marion [Merriman], 28 March 1938, Robert Merriman Papers, ALBA 191, Box 1, Folder 2.
[37] Quotation in Robert Merriman to Marion, 29 August 1937, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 2; on speeches see Robert to Marion, 28 March 1938, ibid.
[38] Mito Kruth to Helen [Kruth], 25 June [1937], Mito Kruth Papers, ALBA 240, Box 1, Folder 10.
[39] Mito Kruth to Helen, 17 August 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.
[40] Mito Kruth to Helen, 11 September [1937], Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 11. See also Mito to Helen, 8 September 1937, ibid.
[41] William Sennett to Gussie, 2 March 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[42] William Sennett to Gussie, 12 June 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[43] Leon Rosenthal to Lee, 2 August 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 167, 168.
[44] Mito Kruth to Helen, 5 August 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.

health than her looks, William Sennett berated Gussie for putting on weight, reminding her that she should not go over 130 pounds.[45]

The most pressing worries were often financial. Volunteers were relatively well paid, but in pesetas, and were thus unable to help support their wives, who struggled with unemployment and high rents. Leo Gordon tried to reassure his cousin Gussie and himself that "My staying at home wouldn't have altered [his wife Agnes'] financial status. On relief, one can live as cheaply as two."[46] He was nonetheless concerned when he finally received a letter from Agnes and learned "she's drifting around." "What's it all about?" he asked his cousin.[47] Ben Gardner was unhappy to discover that Alice was paying twenty-nine dollars a month in rent and was broke. He concluded in a January 1938 letter, "Yep, it looks like I have to control your budget as well."[48] A more sympathetic William Sennett wished that he could convert his extra pesetas to dollars to help Gussie out of debt.[49] Mito Kruth tried to remain optimistic, writing Helen that he felt things were looking up: "I am certainly glad you have a room and hope you will soon have a job."[50] A husband's decision to fight meant both greater loss of control and greater hardship for his wife than either may have anticipated.

These letters from men at war to their partners at home suggest the sometimes surprising and moving ways in which politics saturated communist marriages. Wanting to do something thoughtful for his wife, Sennett promised to send "Kerchiefs with Stalin's picture;" Ben Gardner sent Alice "a red hankey with a sickle & hammer & star."[51] Neither represented their gifts as mainly political: they were tokens of affection, apparently made more meaningful or sentimental because they included political symbols. In a rather less orthodox communist spirit, Robert Merriman proudly presented Marion with a gift "from a place [in Belchite] that I personally bombed (grenaded). . . . It is so beautiful that I decided to violate our rules about taking things and got this for you."[52] Here Merriman suggested that the unnamed object was special and beautiful because it flowed directly from his own (military) engagement in the cause. For Mito Kruth, the prospect of seeing the film *Chapaev* called to mind the time he and Helen "charged up to the Bronx in order to see it," and he wrote that he would be thinking of her while he watched it.[53] He connected the film both to a happy memory and their shared political commitment.

[45] William Sennett to Gussie, 3 July 1938, VALB, Container 1.
[46] Leo Mendelowitz to Gus [Moskowitz], 26 August 1937, in Ciztrom, "Volunteers," 354.
[47] Leo Mendelowitz to Gus, 18 February 1938, in Ciztrom, "Volunteers," 360.
[48] Ben Gardner to Alice [Gardner], 24 January 1938, VALB, Container 1.
[49] William Sennett to Gussie, 30 April 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[50] Mito Kruth to Helen, 9 November 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 12.
[51] William Sennett to Gussie, 14 September 1937, VALB, Container 1; Ben Gardner to [Alice Gardner], 24 October 1937, ibid.
[52] Robert Merriman to Marion, 8 [September] 1937, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.
[53] Mito Kruth to Helen, 21 August 1937 (2nd letter), Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 11.

These communist men often noted that finding a personal space clear of politics posed a challenge. Gardner asserted, "Our correspondence must not and cannot be purely of a political nature, for our relations would be hollow, empty if we did not share our troubles, feelings, etc."[54] Nonetheless, he had "trouble in worrying about the sex problem. . . . After all, if we look at it from a Party point of view (& that is the only view we can hold) our life together has been rich."[55] William Sennett assured Gussie, "You need have no worries over other women occupying my attention. I am to [sic] occupied working and thinking of my best comrade and wife back home."[56] However, six months later, in November 1937, having not received a letter from her in a while, he began to worry that comradeship might not be enough for her: "I've been gone so long now that you've probably found some male friend."[57]

In an October 1937 letter, Mito Kruth confessed to Helen his ignorance of how to write about love. He reported that when a German comrade asked if he was writing a love letter, he had replied, "yes but then began to think how do you write one anyway. What a dope; here I am with a wonderful wife and don't even know how to write a love letter." He vowed to "try and make a study of them."[58] When in a February 1938 letter he imagined his homecoming, he relied on the most traditional, not to say bourgeois, clichés of marital bliss: when he returned home Helen "should tell me what to eat and what not to eat and you know how the song goes 'make a fuss over me.'" Apparently not entirely satisfied with this vision, he added, "Anyway I am sure you understand. . . . Be assured that I love you more than ever and hope we will be together again soon."[59]

Love and sex were plainly important components of these communists' marriages, but they often received less sustained attention than politics in letters home. As the editor of a collection of American letters notes, the knowledge that letters would be read by the censor "may well have made the Lincolns reluctant to be erotically explicit."[60] Indeed few letters suggested as much passion as the one Leon Rosenthal closed "With a last tight, hot, close fitting hug & wet, tonguey kiss & bite."[61] But censorship does not entirely explain these writers' tendency to present the excitement of shared political activism and the excitements of love and marriage as intimately related. Thinking of their wives as their "best comrades," these volunteers may have construed their decision to leave home and risk their lives less as a renunciation of personal

54 Ben Gardner to Alice, 25 June 1938, VALB, Container 1.
55 Ben Gardner to Alice, 25 February 1938, VALB, Container 1.
56 William Sennett to Gussie, 29 May 1937, VALB, Container 1.
57 William Sennett to Gussie, 24 November 1937, VALB, Container 1.
58 Mito Kruth to Helen, 31 October 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 12.
59 Mito Kruth to Helen, 22 February 1938, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 13.
60 Nelson, "Introduction," 15.
61 Leon Rosenthal to Lee, 29 September 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 114.

life than, as they themselves expressed it, a "necessary" and "unavoidable" – if also painful and difficult – consequence of being communists in love.

Real Men Drink, Real Communists Abstain

In a memoir written in 1996–7, Robert Gladnick recalled that, when the first group of American volunteers reached the fortress at Figueras that functioned as a collection point for those who had crossed the Pyrenees into Spain, their commissar Phil Bart made a "final appeal and threat" – "You are not to indulge in any alcoholic beverage!!" – and told them that anyone who drank would face a court martial. Following orders, the Americans refused the offered *porrones* (traditional long-necked decanters) of wine, even after the local anarchist militiamen demonstrated how to drink from them. According to Gladnick, the Catalans were at a loss; as far as they were concerned, only "maricones" – queers – "don't drink wine." Through an interpreter, the chief of the militia offered an alternative explanation: "You Americans come from a rich country & your wines are of a better quality than our Catalonian wine – I know you would prefer to drink the wine of Chicago – Washington or Scranton where my cousin lives but all we have is our poor Catalan wine." Not wanting the Americans to insult the Catalans – or to be thought homosexuals – the commissar relented, giving the volunteers the go ahead to drink, "but not too much."[62]

Gladnick's story illustrates how competing constructions of masculinity could complicate efforts to define and enforce appropriately communist behavior. The commissar's directive flowed from the premise that a politically engaged (male) worker abstained – from both too much alcohol and too much sex. He was aligning himself with what historian Paul Michel Taillon in his study of Railroad Brotherhoods in the United States calls "respectable" working-class manhood that prized temperance and self-discipline. By contrast, the Catalan anarchists viewed abstinence as effeminate and associated the consumption of alcohol with what Taillon characterizes as "rough" masculinity.[63] The decision to resolve the tension with a concession to "rough" behavior suggests that in practice these categories could be quite permeable. The commissar, committed to maintaining abstinent norms, could be moved to loosen if not abandon such strictures when drinking became a means of solidifying friendship and comradeship among soldiers. To drink

[62] Robert Gladnick memoirs, Hoover Institution Archives, chapter 5, pp. 6–7. Cecil Eby recounts a similar story, *Between the Bullet and the Lie: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 15.

[63] Paul Michel Taillon, "'What We Want Is Good, Sober Men': Masculinity, Respectability, and Temperance in the Railroad Brotherhoods, c. 1870–1910," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 319–38.

"for company" – to share wine with Catalan militiamen – might make for a less than respectable communist, but, particularly in wartime, might sometimes be necessary, even decent.[64]

By the end of the nineteenth century, trade unions, socialist parties, and workers' organizations in a wide range of contexts promoted some version of "respectable" working-class manhood as an alternative to a "rough" masculinity associated with whorehouses, saloons, and drinking on the job. Well before the October Revolution, Russian revolutionary discourse distinguished the "conscious" or "advanced" worker, who, according to historian Laura Phillips, "valued sobriety, clean language, neat dress, sexual restraint, political involvement, and educational improvement" from the "rank-and-file" or "backward" worker, who engaged in – even "esteemed" – "heavy drinking, brawling, womanizing, and cursing."[65] Here "advanced" and "backward" constituted alternative models of working-class masculinity. As Phillips's inclusion of "womanizing" on the list of characteristic behaviors suggests, the imagined "worker" in question was male. Moreover, as historian Kate Transchel points out, women were excluded "from taverns as well as from the drunken camaraderie of the shop floor."[66] Although "respectable" members of the Railroad Brotherhoods hardly shared the Russians' revolutionary aims, they emphasized many of the same behaviors: "self-control, self-improvement, and unflinching defense of one's rights against unjust oppression."[67]

In short, the construction of "advanced" or "respectable" working-class masculinity was neither uniquely Russian nor specifically communist. The German labor movement, which some Russian activists took as a model, "worked actively from the turn of the century to alter working class drinking behavior" and attitudes that equated alcohol consumption with "virility."[68] Similarly, historians have characterized the cultures of both Austrian and Swedish socialism as "puritanical."[69] Historian Andrew Thorpe emphasizes that British

[64] Laura L. Phillips, "Message in a Bottle: Working-Class Culture and the Struggle for Revolutionary Legitimacy, 1900–1929," *Russian Review* 56 (January 1997): 31.

[65] Ibid., 25, 26.

[66] Kate Transchel, *Under the Influence: Working-Class Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895–1932* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 10. On the tavern as a masculine space see Madelon Powers, "Women and Public Drinking, 1890–1920," *History Today* 45, no. 2 (February 1995): 46–52; Craig Heron, "The Boys and Their Booze: Masculinities and Public Drinking in Working-Class Hamilton, 1890–1946," *Canadian Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (September 2005): 446–50.

[67] Taillon, "'What We Want,'" 324.

[68] James S. Roberts, "Drink and Industrial Work Discipline in 19th Century Germany," *Journal of Social History* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1981): 32, 27; Phillips, "Message," 27.

[69] Barry McLoughlin, "Proletarian Cadres En-route: Austrian NKVD Agents in Britain, 1941–1943," *Labour History Review* 62, no. 3 (Winter 1997): 302; Madeleine Hurd, "Liberals, Socialists, and Sobriety: The Rhetoric of Citizenship in Turn-of-the-Century Sweden," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 45 (Spring 1994): 54, 55. See also Jacqueline Lalouette, "Alcoolisme et classe ouvrière en France aux alentours de 1900," *Cahiers d'histoire*

communists' much remarked "puritanism" not only "parallel[ed] developments in the Soviet Union" but also constituted an "organic growth" among activists who were "committed teetotalers long before the Comintern had even been thought of."[70]

However, after 1917 Bolshevik leaders were in the unique position of being able to muster state resources to promote the ideal of the "advanced" worker. Although officials encouraged Soviet workers to refrain from vodka, tobacco, cursing, and casual sex, less abstinent norms, particularly with regard to alcohol consumption, remained deeply embedded in the cultures of both workers and peasants.[71] Given the vital role that alcohol played in both "initiating and reinforcing comradely relations" and in shaping masculine identities, that failure is perhaps not so surprising.[72] Drinking, remained, as Phillips notes, a "'masculine' prerogative" – one that many working-class men perpetuated as they "invoked the language of revolution to affirm the legitimacy" of celebrating Soviet holidays with alcohol, visiting a workers' club while drunk, or drinking on the job.[73]

Even among the narrower and supposedly more politically conscious strata of party members, "rough" masculinity and the excessive drinking that went with it proved resilient. In the brutal and uncertain years of civil war that followed the Revolution (1917–21), the prototypical communist was a "crass commissar in a leather jacket, who swore, spat, drank heavily, and engaged in casual sex."[74] Worried that such communists represented a threat to both social order and socialist construction, Bolshevik leaders in the 1920s struggled to root out alcoholism and drunkenness among communists.[75] By 1928 "drinking

42, no. 1 (1997): 89–107; Renato Monteleone, "Socialisti o 'ciucialiter'? Il PSI e il destino delle osterie tra socialita e alcoolismo," *Movimento Operaio e Socialista* 8, no. 1 (1985): 3–22.

[70] Andrew Thorpe, "The Communist International and the British Communist Party," in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, eds., *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 79, 80.

[71] Transchel, *Under the Influence*, 11. See also, O. I. Gorelov, "'P'iut partiitsy i komsomol' tsy, i vse, vse': Spavka Informatsionnogo otdela TsK VKP(b) I. V. Stalinu, 1925 g.," *Istoricheskii archiv* 2001, no. 1: 4–13. Mary Neuburger finds a similar inability to curb drinking and smoking among Bulgarian communists, *Balkan Smoke: Tobacco and the Making of Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 80–1.

[72] Phillips, "Message," 30; see also Heron, "The Boys," 411–12.

[73] Laura L. Phillips, "In Defense of Their Families: Working-Class Women, Alcohol, and Politics in Revolutionary Russia," *Journal of Women's History* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 98; Phillips, "Message," 33 (second quotation), 7.

[74] David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 60.

[75] Igor' Grigor'evich Ivantsov, "Vnutripartiinyi kontrol' VKP(b) v bor'be s p'ianstvom v srede kommunistov (1920-e – nachalo 1930-kh godov)," *Prepodavanie istorii v shkole*, 2011, no. 2: 77–80; Matthias Braun, "Vremja Golovokruzenija – Zeit des Schwindels: Der Alkoholische Raush als Geste Kulturellen Beharrens in der Sowjetunion der 1920er – und 1930er-Jahr," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 51, no. 10 (2003): 896–911; Kate Transchel,

became the number one reason people lost their party membership."[76] But party members continued to imbibe – and the Soviet state continued to rely on revenues generated by the state vodka monopoly. In 1933, Stalin simply declared that "alcoholism had been overcome and encouraged workers to reward themselves for a job well done with a 'little glass of champagne.'"[77] Given that many ostensibly "advanced" workers often indulged in so-called backward behaviors, the imperative became less to eliminate such behaviors than to dress them in a veneer of *kul'turnost'*– literally "culturedness," a term that the literary historian Vera Dunham translates as a "fetish notion of how to be individually civilized."[78] Or, as critic Svetlana Boym notes, the "unwritten Soviet etiquette of *kul'turnost'* " mandated that "you drink a few shots of vodka accompanied by pickles and pleasantries, but you do not get drunk."[79] A "lavish" dinner with Soviet tankers recalled by Polish volunteer Alexander Szurek suggests how such norms operated in Spain. According to Szurek, vodka flowed freely, and the "atmosphere was cordial and good-humored, and, at the same time, disciplined."[80]

Although few international communists were likely to have been familiar with the Soviet concept of *kul'turnost'*, many internationals arrived with or quickly acquired an understanding of Bolshevik conceptions of appropriate (male) communist comportment. The Russian-born Gladnick recounted that only among the Russian tank crews in Spain did he learn that in the Soviet Union "old Russian words took on different meanings": a "cultured person" was no longer someone with "knowledge of the arts & literature" but rather "one who washed his hands & shaved his face."[81] He also emphasized that Russian communists often failed to meet even such rudimentary levels of "culture," as they "gorge & drink to a stupor."[82] By contrast, in his 1937 account of the war, British volunteer Esmond Romilly, a noncommunist who defended Madrid with the predominantly German Eleventh Brigade, identified restrained and respectable behavior as the mark of what he deemed a "Real Communist": "you had to be a serious person, a rigid disciplinarian, a member of the Communist Party, interested in all the technical aspects of warfare, and lacking in any such selfish motive as fear or reckless courage."[83] He included in this classification

"Staggering toward Socialism: The Soviet Anti-Alcohol Campaign, 1928–1932," *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 23, no. 2 (1996): 191–202.

[76] Transchel, *Under the Influence*, 112.

[77] Transchel, "Staggering," 202.

[78] Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (1976; reprint, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 22.

[79] Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 102.

[80] Alexander Szurek, *The Shattered Dream*, trans. Jacques Grunblatt and Hilda Grunblatt (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1989), 122.

[81] Gladnick memoirs, "In the Tank Corps with Soviet Comrades," p. 13.

[82] Ibid., p. 14.

[83] Esmond Romilly, *Boadilla* (1937; reprint, London: Macdonald, 1971), 64.

men like Beimler, the British poet John Cornford, and his British comrade in the Eleventh Brigade Lorrimer Birch.[84] For these men – all of whom died in Spain – "communism was a thing which lasted seven days a week," a principled way of being more than a party card or a political creed.[85]

For many communists, discipline constituted a primary principle. Romilly found a straightforward articulation of norms of real communist behavior in notices tacked up at the Internationals' base in Albacete: "The Germans had printed a notice entitled 'Discipline.' 'We exalt discipline.' In French was an exhortation not to render ourselves unfit for service by getting diseases at brothels."[86] Kruth suggested that "discipline" could be defined largely in terms of abstaining from alcohol. Responding to the news that a friend had decided to volunteer, he noted in a May 1937 letter that "any tendencies to drink it will be held down here. They are getting very strict on discipline such as drunkenness."[87] Sennett had firsthand experience with strict discipline on the sexual front, because he had been in charge of keeping his cohort of volunteers in line while they waited in Paris for transport to Spain. In a February 1937 letter he described the French system of licensed prostitution and reported, "Among the boys here the penalty for seeing a prostitute is expulsion from the CP [Communist Party] and YCL [Young Communist League] and I as the leader of the Americans here have to deal with these people very sharply."[88] The primary concern was to check the spread of sexually transmitted disease – although Sennett did not emphasize this point in the letter to his wife.[89] Nor did he specify whether he ever imposed the maximum penalty.

The war in Spain brought out in particularly sharp relief the difficulties of realizing norms of "advanced" communist manhood. Drunkenness, although perhaps "backward," is hardly surprising among men at war for whom, as literary historian Paul Fussell notes in his study of behavior during World War II, "drinking far too much" constituted a "traditional comfort."[90] The ever-optimistic Kruth judged that sobriety "has not been a hard thing to enforce as we have plenty [of] good class-conscious material with whom self-discipline has almost become second nature."[91] However, disciplinary records from the Internationals' base at Albacete and the training center at Tarazona document that a regular stream of volunteers spent time in the guardhouse for engaging in behavior similar to that of new recruits Francis Daly and Wesley

[84] Ibid., 64, 183.
[85] Ibid., 42. Roberts makes a similar point in "Dress and Demeanor," 64.
[86] Romilly, *Boadilla*, 46.
[87] Mito Kruth to Helen, 23 May 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.
[88] William Sennett to [Gussie Machen], 28 February 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[89] John Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight: An Autobiography of the Spanish Civil War* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1985), 18.
[90] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 105.
[91] Mito Kruth to Helen, 23 May 1937, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

Mikalauskas – the latter a member of the Young Communist League – whom Merriman brought in on 20 July 1937, for "drunkedness [sic] and loitering in saloons on the square and failing to report for parade on pretense of being excused by the doctor."[92] The fact that, as noted in Chapter 4 in the case of Sterling Rochester, the Fifteenth Brigade's doctor had a "usual procedure against uncontrolled drunkedness [sic]"[93] suggests that such a procedure was necessary.

What Fussell defines as the soldier's other, but less readily available, comfort –"copulating" – left fewer traces in official brigade records. Where mentions of this behavior appeared, it was often presented as a failing of undisciplined women as much as undisciplined men. Thus the evaluation of Henny Peeks, a Dutch nurse, noted that she refused to do any work unrelated to nursing such as cleaning or working in the kitchen. Moreover, the evaluation continued, "this nurse, knowing that she was infected with a venereal disease, had sexual relations with comrades, now unable to return to the front until they are cured of this disease."[94] In early 1938, a report on the situation among the International Brigades noted that "due to the lack of leaves, there has been an increase in the cases of venereal diseases, which have also spread among the civilian population." The response – an increased number of instructional lectures and expanded distribution of prophylactics – suggests an effort to encourage abstinence along with a willingness to settle for safer sex.[95]

Veterans' accounts, both contemporary and retrospective, confirm the Spanish and International Brigades authorities' tendency to supply condoms and look the other way. In a May 1937 letter to Miriam Sigel, Harry Meloff emphasized the "heartbreaking" fact that the volunteers had no opportunity to use "the 'supplies' the doctor handed out when we first arrived" except as "tobacco pouches." Nonetheless, he concluded, "We still have hopes of going on leave in a big city like Valencia or Barcelona, and there find out if we are still men or not."[96] Driving the expectation that such hopes might be easily realized was the perception, noted by Alvah Bessie in his journal, that "Prostitution flourishes despite government discouragement."[97] In his 1998 memoir, William Herrick likewise recounted that although both "the Anarchists and the Party declaimed their opposition to prostitution" he "never discerned any attempt to prevent

[92] "Guard Report," 20 July 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 2, d. 265, l. 22. More generally: "Perepiska iuridicheskoi komissii shtaba XV brigady," 21 December 1937–January 1939, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 451.

[93] S. S. Robbins to Etat Major, XV Brigade, nd, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 451, l. 78.

[94] "Características de nuestro personal sanitario, Valencia," 13 May 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op.1, d.1, l. 49.

[95] "Informe sobre la situación de las brigadas internacionales," 1 January 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 1 d. 3, l. 80.

[96] Harry Meloff to Mim [Sigel], 6 May 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 146.

[97] Alvah Bessie, *Alvah Bessie's Civil War Notebooks*, ed. Dan Bessie (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002), 60.

it." Indeed Herrick claimed that one "magnificent bordello" in Barcelona was "inhabited by whores who belonged to the CNT [Confederación Nacional de Trabajo], the Anarchist union."[98] By contrast, in a July 1937 letter, Lee Royce suggested a more thorough crackdown, noting that in an effort to "prevent the spread of disease, the government closed most of the houses of prostitution." Nonetheless, the primary reason that the "sex problem is a difficult one for the men of the brigade" seemed to be that "the Spanish women – as far as I know – are amazingly virtuous."[99] Their parents and grandparents also had a reputation for being extremely protective. The constant presence of chaperones, Steve Nelson recalled, "cramped the style of the Americans, but they persevered."[100] In the realm of sex, apparently no one counted too much on the virtue of the volunteers.

Those, such as Kruth, who nonetheless considered the brigadistas fundamentally class conscious and self-disciplined, justified the occasional drink as a necessary escape or a concession to Spanish custom. Gladnick, for example, extolled the virtue of the well-timed drink, crediting a "slug of cognac at my baptism under fire" – supplied tellingly by a Belgian, not one of the excessively puritanical American comrades – of curing him once and for all of "the jitters."[101] In an October 1937 letter, American commissar Sandor Voros provided an informal transcript of a conversation with a Danish ambulance driver that offers understated evidence of the need to find some relief from the realities of war. The driver, "slightly drunk – former seamen – travelled in States," urged, "Have a drink. Have another one. I got another bottle. Have some more. I shouldn't. I haven't eaten all day. That's nothing. Will make you forget it."[102] Moreover, in Spain wine and cognac were staples, part of the troops' regular rations.[103] To abstain was impractical and ungracious, if not unmanly. In an August 1937 letter to his wife, Edwin Rolfe described a dinner with Spanish comrades in a small village during which, "All of us filled and refilled our glasses with excellent wine (and when I say glasses I do not mean the small wine glasses of America but the large glasses which *we* use for milk)."[104] Where wine flowed like milk, there perhaps seemed little harm in drinking.

[98] William Herrick, *Jumping the Line: The Adventures and Misadventures of an American Radical* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 185. See also Tisa, *Recalling*, 77–8, 113, 115; Szurek, *Shattered Dream*, 93; Michael Seidman, *Republic of Egos: A Social History of the Spanish Civil War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 74–5.

[99] Lee Royce to Hy and Sal, 4 July 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 107. See also Tisa, *Recalling*, 149.

[100] Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson, American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 212. See also Sandor Voros to [Myrtle Hausrath Day], 30 July 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 108.

[101] Gladnick memoirs, chapter 2, pp. 13–14.

[102] Sandor Voros to Sam [Handelman], 11 October 1937, in *Madrid 1937*,256.

[103] Bessie, *Spanish Civil War Notebooks*, 20, 27. Gladnick memoirs, chapter 2, p. 13.

[104] Emphasis in original. Edwin Rolfe to [Mary Rolfe], 17 August 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 294.

The volunteers often blamed more serious infractions on the few reprobates and miscreants – probably French or Irish – among the otherwise upstanding Internationals. Thus in a July 1937 letter, Hank Rubin explained discipline problems as a result of the fact that "This is not a Communist army, but very much a general 'antifascist' army with many who are mainly adventurers. Some of these hit the 'vino front' and are put in the brig."[105] The Fifteenth Brigade's own documentary history emphasized that the Americans behaved in exemplary fashion, in sharp contrast to some of their less disciplined European comrades. According to this official account, when in January 1937 the first Americans arrived at their training base in Villanueva de la Jara, they "were greeted by closed shutters and a hostile atmosphere. Women, when they saw a comrade, dashed away from his presence." The Lincolns later learned that this hostility was a result of the "bad reputation made by a few undesirable elements among the French who preceded the Americans. These few among the French, it was alleged, became constantly drunk, caused nuisances, molested the townspeople, and even went so far as to attack the local women." Fortunately, concluded the report, "As a consequence of the excellent work performed by the Cuban comrades who naturally spoke the language of the villagers, a close attachment and comradeship gradually developed between the men of the Lincoln Battalion and the local people."[106] In a May 1937 letter, Alfred Amery told much the same story about the raucous French, despite the fact the he arrived in Villanueva de la Jara months after the group described in the brigade's history supposedly repaired relations with the locals. He concluded, "With only a handful of exceptions we have excellent self-discipline." Those exceptions included "a sailor of Irish descent, a 'tough guy'" who bought a bottle of rum, "got drunk, and after a bloody struggle with the guards was thrown in the guard house." His punishment included being "placed before the scornful eyes of the whole battalion and shamed to a condition lower than a dog's by the appropriate words of the battalion commander." Amery imagined that "His conscience must wrack him with indescribable tortures."[107]

This confidence in the power of communist shaming notwithstanding, at least some volunteers remembered embracing both drinking and the satisfaction of "strenuously heteroerotic" desire.[108] For these "tough guys," such behaviors served as markers of a rough masculinity that they deemed, at least in retrospect, appropriate to communists, and perhaps especially to communists at war. Some sixty years after he left for Spain, Gladnick represented himself as a tough seaman, recalling in his memoir that on board the ship to France he and the other "waterfront boys" among the volunteers "completely ignored the order"

[105] Hank Rubin to Audrey, 27 July 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 164.
[106] "A Documentary History of the XV International Brigade," RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 471, l. 21; see also Eby, *Between the Bullet*, 23; Herrick, *Jumping the Line*, 147.
[107] Alfred Amery to George & Lawrence, 24 May 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 102, 103.
[108] Fussell, *Wartime*, 109.

not to drink.[109] At a similar distance in time from the events he described, Herrick – like his friend Gladnick, a communist who later publicly broke with the party – confessed that his love for the girlfriend he left behind in New York "didn't stop me from wanting to have sex with a Folies Bergère dancer" on board the ship to France. According to Herrick, Gladnick, a stowaway, had discovered the troupe "as he perambulated freely about the boat;" Herrick speculated that Gladnick slept in one of their cabins.[110]

Bill Williamson, a Canadian communist, lumberjack, seaman, and self-taught photographer who made his own way to Spain and served in a Basque militia before joining the International Brigades in May 1937, similarly prized his tough guy status. In a 1990 interview, he expressed particular contempt for the "big percentage" of Americans "from City College in New York, a lot of them Jewish" who "allowed themselves to be shepherded around by keepers," who warned them "you mustn't get drunk."[111] As Williamson emphasized, many of the volunteers who had attended City College were in fact Jewish New Yorkers – although a fair number, like Kruth, were not.[112] However, his description of these New Yorkers as sheltered Jewish boys, who allowed themselves to be led around (by, perhaps, a Jewish communist like Sennett), tells us less about their activities in Paris than Williamson's own disdain for respectable communist masculinity, especially as practiced by (Jewish) intellectuals.[113]

Like many of the Canadian volunteers – predominantly miners, lumberjacks, and temporary or seasonal laborers, who, according to Edward Cecil-Smith, the top Canadian commander in Spain, had "been on the tramp since leaving school" – Williamson viewed the Americans as soft.[114] Jack Taylor, the Canadian party's representative in Spain, reported in a 1938 letter to the Central Committee of the Spanish Communist Party that he had heard one of the Canadian volunteers refer to the Americans as "New York ice cream boys."[115] Another allegedly complained that a "clique of New York [Young Communist League] Jews" ran the Fifteenth Brigade.[116] By contrast, the Canadians characterized themselves as uninterested in command, wanting only to be "one of the boys" – not disobedient, as volunteer John "Paddy" McElligott explained in a 1965 interview, but simply "Canadian; we're independent."[117] The

[109] Gladnick memoirs, chapter 5, p. 2.
[110] Herrick, *Jumping the Line*, 131, 133, 246.
[111] As quoted in Petrou, *Renegades*, 146.
[112] For profiles of volunteers who attended City College, see the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive database, www.alba-valb.org. Albert Prago, "Jews in the International Brigades," in Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, eds., *Our Fight: Writings by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York: Monthly Press, 1987), 97.
[113] Gladnick, who was Jewish, had similar disdain for "the New York City College (CCNY) and Brooklyn College boys," Gladnick memoirs, chapter 2, p. 11.
[114] As quoted in Petrou, *Renegades*, 17.
[115] As quoted in ibid., 111.
[116] Personnel file as quoted in ibid., 16.
[117] As quoted in ibid., 110.

emphasis on national identity is striking, because some 78 percent of the Canadian volunteers were foreign born and most of these were recent immigrants.[118] Here "Canadian" functioned as a surrogate for a certain kind of masculine identity, as the volunteers described themselves as proudly championing rough working-class norms that both the party and the more respectable, if no less working-class, New Yorkers judged uncultured and undisciplined.

Important as questions of drinking and sex may have been, in Spain many communists found the ultimate test of manhood in battle, where their civilian notions of manliness and toughness sometimes had to be revised. Ben Gardner, who had known Steve Nelson in Philadelphia, wrote that he gained new respect for Nelson after having seen him in combat:

> I'll never forget the day at Belchite when I carried about 15 canteens of water to the front line where my Co. was without a drop of it all day. On the road I met Steve, a little bent over looking sharply forward and stepping briskly to avoid fascist snipers. . . . I admired him in those moments & wondered why I haven't thought so much of him at home. The real man in him came to light in this war for freedom.

As Gardner's earlier letters to his wife made clear, he had long considered Nelson a good communist. Only in Spain, however, did he see him also as a "real man."[119]

In an August 1937 letter to his cousin, Leo Gordon offered a more ambivalent understanding of a real communist man in battle. Describing the profound transformation of a "guy from my neighborhood," Hy Stone, who had volunteered with his brothers Joe and Sam, Gordon wrote,"Back home," Hy "was sort of a quiet, retiring kind of egg. Out here he went thru hell and spat in the devil's eye." Near Brunete, after the entire command of his company was killed, Hy "ran the show." When Hy received the news "that both brothers had been killed," the company "watched him closely, fearing that he would break. Hy compressed his lips – and went into action." Emphasizing that Stone was "cited for bravery shortly after," Gordon was less clear about whether crossing the line between bravery and what Romilly described as "reckless courage" constituted conduct unbecoming a communist. Although Stone lectured Gordon on the importance of "ducking into cover & digging in at every available opportunity," he himself was known to have run "along a ridge once in order to draw enemy fire so that he could discover their positions." As Gordon clarified for his cousin's benefit, "That happens to be the closest substitute to suicide yet known to science." Although another friend of Hy's judged him a "damn

[118] Ibid., 22.

[119] Ben Gardner to [Alice Gardner], [31?] December 1937, VALB, Container 1. See also Ben Gardner to [Alice Gardner], 7 August 1937; Ben Gardner to [Alice Gardner], 23 November 1937, ibid.; Herbert Hutner to Mr. & Mrs. Wolman, 9 Dec. 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 195; Steve Nelson to Maggie [Nelson], from Perpignan France, nd, Nelson Papers, Box 1, Folder 8; Bessie, *Civil War Notebooks*, 62; Tisa, *Recalling*, 143.

fool," Gordon's letter leaves the impression that there was something laudable and powerful in this reckless, suicidal bravery.[120]

At the same time, some soldiers described the transformation of communists into "real" men at the front in emotional, even loving terms. Kruth emphasized that communists safe at home failed to understand the experiences and attitudes of soldiers, and thus the compatibility of toughness and tenderness. Apparently responding to Helen's inquiry, he wrote that the troops had received the socks sent by the Finnish communists, but he regretted that they did not receive the "sentimental" notes written to accompany them: "War is a grim hard business and a little sentiment now and then goes a long way." There was no need, he concluded, to "try to toughen the boys that way. They don't need that."[121]

In September 1937, in the wake of the Brunete offensive, Sennett provided his wife a vivid picture of the rough and touching camaraderie of soldiers. "I'm in fine health," he assured her, "and never got to know real people, comrades so intimately as here.... We curse and swear as I've never heard cursing and swearing but its [sic] all in good stead. We lost one fellow who was hit by a bomb and another (confirmed now) was captured. It was like losing members of our family."[122] In a letter from the same period after Brunete, Sidney Kaufman, a New York merchant seaman, described an even more intense connection: "Vince & I have grown very close to each other here – read each other's mail – discuss our most intimate problems together, etc. We have a sort of mutual agreement that we won't go back to the States unless we can go together."[123]

For some, such sentiments were easily squared with a serious communist sense of purpose. Gardner, at the Internationals' base in Albacete, explained the pain of being separated from his comrades still at the front in terms at once deeply personal and politically correct. In an October 1937 letter to his wife, he wrote, "I miss them terribly, feel a great affection towards them... Never before did I feel such a deep regard for comrades, especially those who took the fight with a real antifascist and bolshevik stamina. I long for news of these comrades."[124]

Still, if drinking, whoring, and reckless daring raised fears of "excessive and uncontainable" masculinity, the intimate bonds among men forged at the front could generate anxiety about "insufficient" or "inadequate" masculinity.[125] However, such anxieties, linked to the communist equation of homosexuality and fascism (see Chapter 2), surfaced rarely in letters home or memoirs. In a May 1937 letter to Mim Sigel, Meloff adopted an irreverent tone that took

[120] Leo Mendelowitz to Gus, 26 August 1937, in Czitrom, "Volunteers," 355.
[121] Mito Kruth to Helen, 17 January 1938, Kruth Papers, Box 1, Folder 13.
[122] William Sennett to Gussie, 7 September 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[123] Sidney Kaufman to Eth, 8 September 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 212.
[124] Ben Gardner to [Alice Gardner], 24 October 1937, VALB, Container 1.
[125] Iker González-Allende, "Masculinities in Conflict: Representations of the Other in Narrative during the Spanish Civil War," *Hispanic Research Journal* 11, no. 3 (June 2010): 194–5.

some of the edge off his worries about the possibility of "going 'fruit' altogether. Already the boys are beginning to ogle eyes at each other, and sometimes Ernie frightens me." He apparently feared both that close male friendships at the front might lead to what a psychoanalyst of the day called "emergency homosexuality"[126] and that soldiers' domestic activities might turn them into women: "You should see us washing our clothes, and yes, even sewing buttons on our underwear." However, Meloff described himself as unwilling to compromise his manhood to that extent, preferring to throw away his underwear and "go around without."[127]

In his memoir, Gladnick addressed communist anxiety about homosexuality more directly and more politically. Telling the story of "two German boys – no older than eighteen years – typically blonde & blue eyed," who were "caught by the guards – making oral sex to one another" and shot, he emphasized that communists understood homosexuality as a political failing. Gladnick claimed to have seen the "fallen bodies of the two German boys."[128] I have been unable to confirm the story in other sources; however, even if exaggerated, Gladnick's account suggests the persistence of communist anxieties about insufficient or effeminate masculinity as both a cause and symptom of fascism. He explained, "In Spain, as in most left wing circles in the 1930s homosexuals – because those known to be of that sexual persuasion – were from the upper classes – were regarded as Fascists."[129] Recognizing that in 1997 it was "politically correct to say the Nazis were Homophobes," Gladnick, by then an ardent anticommunist, argued that the communist view contained a "certain amount of truth," because the Nazis "had a great number of Homosexuals in their ranks & in the storm troops they dominated that organization."[130] From the vantage point of 1997, what horrified him was less the logic of the communist position than what might be termed "Bolshevik ruthlessness," the failure of the German and Bulgarian communists with whom the young men served to argue against the death penalty. Gladnick described himself as having "very little sympathy for homosexuals – but I certainly was not in favor of executing young men."[131]

The pervasive construction of homosexuality as incompatible with communist manhood encouraged both its official and informal erasure from the story of the brigades. This tendency was particularly clear in the German Democratic Republic, where state-approved editors removed "all references to

[126] German Marxist psychoanalysist Wilhelm Reich as quoted in Harry Oosterhuis, "The 'Jews' of the Antifascist Left: Homosexuality and Socialist Resistance to Nazism," *Journal of Homosexuality* 29, no. 2/3 (1995): 240.

[127] Harry Meloff to Mim [Miriam Sigel], 6 May 1937, in *Madrid 1937*, 146.

[128] Gladnick memoirs, chapter 8, pp. 2, 3.

[129] Ibid., p. 2; see also chapter 3, p. 2.

[130] Ibid., chapter 9, p. 2. On "the construction of homo-fascism," see Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 1–37.

[131] Gladnick memoirs, chapter 8, p. 3.

homosexuality" from the memoirs of Ludwig Renn and other volunteers.[132] However, discomfort with homosexuality was not limited to post–World War II people's democracies. The case of Finnish American communist Bill Aalto demonstrates that volunteers themselves might refuse to accept the possibility of a homosexual communist. A 1938 evaluation prepared by the Spanish party deemed Aalto, who had distinguished himself in a series of dangerous and dramatic guerrilla operations, as "Serious. Disciplined. Conscientious. The most outstanding American, militarily and politically, among the Americans in the Southern Zone."[133] During World War II, the Office of Strategic Services recruited Aalto along with a number of his fellow Soviet-trained guerrillas to undertake similar work in North Africa. However, after Aalto confessed to Irving Goff, one of his closest comrades from Spain, that he was gay, the other veterans asked that he be reassigned. In an interview, Goff recalled that he found the revelation simply unbelievable: "How could a big, athletic guy like that be one of those?"[134] Unable to square Aalto's wartime record with his "inappropriate masculinity,"[135] his comrades decided, however reluctantly, that he was no longer one of "us."

This exclusion of homosexuals from the community of real communist men marked a point of convergence in conceptions of communist masculinity. The Soviet party and many national parties – drawing on Soviet models as well as local traditions – promoted norms of disciplined, respectable working-class manhood, of proletarian "moral purity and chastity."[136] As communists never tired of reiterating, iron discipline constituted their defining characteristic and their principal asset in wartime.[137] Yet quite a few of the volunteers preferred to present themselves as exemplars of a rougher, less contained masculinity. Moreover, war often blurred the distinction between disciplined heroism and reckless courage, between laudable camaraderie and a drunken spree. According to his adjutant Szurek, General Karol Świerczewski, who "loved danger" and often exposed himself to enemy fire, was unable to conceal his approval when he saw a motorcyclist, who "nonchalantly stalled on the highway as bullets whistled around him and, elegantly and haughtily, pulled on a pair of

[132] McLellan, *Antifascism*, 119.

[133] "Primera lista de los comunistas norte-americanos de la zona del sur," 14 January 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 852, l. 175. See also the questionnaire dated 6–12–1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 855, ll. 8–10ob; Carroll, *Odyssey*, 167–8.

[134] Undated interview as quoted in Carroll, *Odyssey*, 255. See also Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 53, 100–1, 148.

[135] González-Allende, "Masculinities," 195.

[136] George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 128.

[137] Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 266–9; Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War, 1936–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 148, 173, 367; Longo, *Brigadas Internacionales*, 172; Szurek, *Shattered Dream*, 116.

white gloves."[138] Even Lorrimer Birch, Romilly's exemplary "Real Communist," visited a brothel – supposedly not to satisfy his own desires but as an act of solidarity with his comrades.[139] To cope with or forget fear and death, even the most respectable communist might, at least occasionally, indulge in "drinking far too much" and copulating. Like the tough guys, they worried that too much discipline – abstaining entirely from drinking, meekly sewing buttons on their own underwear – might mark them as "queer." Despite the fact that gay men served in the International Brigades, homosexuality remained for many communists presumptively fascist.[140] Imagined as at once savage and effeminate, homosexuals seemed to violate the norms of both respectable and rough communist masculinity.

Intimate Revolution

In October 1937, Milly Bennett, who had spent the better part of the previous decade producing propaganda for English-language communist newspapers in China and Moscow, applied to join the Communist Party of the United States. Bennett had arrived in Spain from Moscow in January 1937 to take up an assignment with the Foreign Press Bureau of the Republic's Press and Propaganda Service, under the direction of Constancia de la Mora; she also provided stories to the Associated Press.[141] Ten months later, she wrote from the Internationals' base at Albacete to Edward Bender, the head of the American Department of Cadres, in terms suggested by Steve Nelson:

> I have been in contact with the movement since 1917 when as a cub reporter on the S. F. News I worked on the [Tom] Mooney case. . . . In 1926–27 I worked with the Party in China as editor of the Peking "Chung Mei News Agency" until my arrest on the eve of the raid on the Soviet embassy in Peking . . . I worked on the organization of the Moscow News, remaining with that paper from 1931–1935. . . . I came to Spain on my own account . . . and am editor of an information bulletin in English issued by the prensa extranjera. . . . I am 37 years of age and have worked with the Party long enough so that I feel now that my period for "freelancing" is definitely at an end. I wish to join the Communist Party and accept Party discipline.[142]

[138] Szurek, *Shattered Dream*, 104, 103. See also Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 223; James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 177–8, 274.

[139] Romilly, *Boadilla*, 185.

[140] Many accounts mention in passing the service of gay men in Spain. For example, Eby, *Between the Bullet*, 136; Hopkins, *Into the Heart*, 180, 226, 269; Carroll, *Odyssey*, 256–7; Roberts, *"Freedom, Faction,"* 106.

[141] "by milly bennett," [1937], Milly Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 5, Hoover Institution Archives; Safe conduct passes, ibid., Box 1, Folder 17; Milly Bennett to Hal [Harold Matson], 27 November 1940, ibid., Box 3, Folder 22.

[142] Milly Bennett (Mitchell) to Edward Bender, 17 October 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 862, l. 96. Tom Mooney was a labor activist convicted in the 1916 Preparedness Day bombing in San Francisco.

Four days later she received a reply from Sol Rose in the personnel office, who advised her to "Get two comrades in good standing" to recommend her for membership. He was "sure that when you take this matter up with the comrades in Valencia who know you, that they will gladly take care of this."[143]

Although the brigades' archives provide no record of a previous application, in June 1937 letters to the geneticist Hermann Muller – with whom she had begun an affair in Moscow that briefly continued in Spain – Bennett described an earlier attempt to join the party. She explained her decision as the result of the recognition that only as a "party person" would the "good, loyal, but entirely inexperienced" people in the foreign press office take her journalistic advice.[144] She resolved that "if and when i go to the next revolution, it will be as a party member. then, at least you have a fighting chance."[145] At the time of her first application, probably in late May 1937, a representative of the American party advised her to apply when she returned to the United States. Nonetheless, she reapplied in October while still in Spain.[146]

What is striking about these efforts is not only Bennett's persistence but also her timing. Joining the party was something that she had long considered – not only as a means of being taken seriously by her comrades but also as an alternative to marriage. In an undated letter from Moscow, likely written between 1931 and 1933, Bennett confided, "I've more or less made up my mind to join the Party when I come home – that is, if I don't grab off a husband. I'm sick of dreams with obvious Freudian meanings. And if I don't get to mortify my flesh one way – I'll try the other."[147] However serious Bennett was at the time, in Spain a series of personal crises coincided with the long-delayed, doggedly pursued, and perhaps ultimately failed or abandoned effort to join the party. In a memoir that she tried to get published after she returned from Spain she wrote, "I never became a convert, although on one occasion, I escaped by the narrowest of squeaks."[148] She ended up leaving Spain with a (communist) husband, but apparently without a party card.

A few days before she left Moscow in December 1936, Bennett had begun an affair with the forty-six-year-old Muller. In a late April letter aimed at terminating their relationship, he recalled its beginnings. In Moscow, she had told him, "I've been trying to seduce you all year." He was surprised, he

[143] Sol Rose to Comrade Milly Bennett, 21 October 1937, Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 23.

[144] Bennett to Hermann [Muller], 9 June [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6. The file holds multiple drafts of letters to Muller; it is not clear which, if any, Bennett actually sent.

[145] Capitalization as in original. Bennett to Hermann [Muller], 2 June [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6.

[146] Bennett to Hermann [Muller], 9 June [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6.

[147] Bennett to Mary, nd, Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

[148] Milly Bennett, *On Her Own: Journalistic Adventures from San Francisco to the Chinese Revolution, 1917–1927*, ed. A. Tom Grunfeld (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), xix. On her efforts to publish the memoir, see Harold Matson to Milly Bennett, 3 November 1939, Bennett Papers, Box 3, Folder 22.

confessed in April 1937, to find out that she had "meant it in such a full and final way." When he arrived in Madrid in March, they resumed their affair because, he claimed, it seemed "obvious that we should be together like two shipwrecked people and at the same time two comrades with a common purpose on the same raft." But he had no interest in a long-term commitment, reminding, or perhaps informing her for the first time, "I have very free ideas & habits about these things, and thought you did, too; it has been a part of my 'philosophy,' hasn't it of yours?"[149]

However, the relationship did not end as cleanly as Muller might have hoped. Their liaison in Spain had been interrupted by what Muller, ever the rational biologist, called a "horrible irruption of the micro-invaders" and the possibility that he had infected Bennett with syphilis or gonorrhea. In mid-April, Bennett visited the American Hospital in Paris, where lab tests for sexually transmitted diseases came back negative.[150] Nonetheless, a month later, when Muller was already on his way back to the United States, she remained worried that the tests had been done too early to reveal the disease, particularly in light of the timing of Muller's encounter with "the frenchwoman," the suspected source of infection. Given that it was "not possible for me to go to the local doctors, after the last fiasco" – which she did not specify – she asked Muller to have himself tested in the United States "when the time falls due and cable me the results, so that i can take action, if it is needed."[151] I have found no evidence of further tests or treatment in Bennett's papers.

However, by early May it was clear that Bennett was pregnant. In their correspondence, she and Muller dubbed the fetus "medicine ball." Thus on 11 May 1937, Muller, then in Cambridge, England, wrote to advise her to "Come back if you continue to be sick – we must conserve the bird songs. And birds must take care of their medicine balls."[152] In a draft of a letter dated "2:40 27th," presumably of May, Bennett recounted an air raid that had begun at 2:30 a.m.: "I heard that steady drive of heavy bombing planes (many of them) . . . the hotel shook so violently as I ran down the hall, that I fell. . . . oh dear, I have tried to be so careful about medicineball – so much orange juice; and sleep; and sun baths on the beach – and eating properly and regularly." She planned to stay "flat on my back in this bed," but reported that she had a persistent temperature, and that the doctor was "pessimistic."[153]

In mid-June, Muller, then in Texas, received a letter dated 28 May 1937, with a version of these events. He again suggested that Bennett leave Spain "while you still can, before it is too late. Do not kill the goose that lays the

[149] Muller to Bennet, 25 April 1937, Bennett Papers, Box 4 Folder 6.
[150] "Bordet Wassermann," 16 April 1937, Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 17.
[151] All capitalization as in original. Bennett to Muller, 15 May [1937] (one of many drafts), Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6.
[152] Muller to Bennett, 11 May 1937, Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 6.
[153] Bennett to Hermann [Muller], 27 [May 1937], Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6.

golden medicine ball."[154] On 24 June, he cabled her regarding the possibility of an "operation" in Paris.[155] In mid-July, on his way back to Europe, he wrote to thank her "for taking hold of the situation and, in spite of all, thinking out just what had to be done, and offering to do it for me. You know I appreciate it, as I have appreciated all else you have done and sacrificed for me."[156] With its reference to "sacrifice" "for me," the letter may reference a decision to have an abortion. I have found no evidence to confirm an abortion or to suggest whether or not "medicine ball" survived the fall in May. However, it appears that Milly Bennett never had a child.

It was precisely in the midst of this crisis that Bennett made her first attempt to join the party. Working long hours (apparently despite her vow to stay in bed), earning less than her hotel bill, and living under threat of air attack seem to have clarified and solidified the nature of her commitment to the cause.[157] In the letter dated 9 June in which she described her own efforts to join the party, she also tried to understand Muller's decision to return briefly to Moscow to aid his former colleagues in their struggle against Lysenkoism. "It goes back strangely" she wrote, "to the cliché – what profit it a man that he gain the world if [he] loses his soul. I have felt that you saw the English job as somewhat of a 'retreat' from your revolutionary principles. Is that right?"[158] She may have seen her own situation in similar terms – although she seemed to have a difficult time articulating her perspective in an unsuccessful interview with a party representative, who "was audibly unsatisfied with the answers I gave to his questions. . . . and when he said 'why have you waited this long before applying?' – and I said 'because in America the Party discipline was distasteful to me' – and in Russia it isn't possible to join – he was clearly displeased."[159] She did not suggest what had made party discipline suddenly more palatable or even welcome. In the midst of high-stakes personal and political crises, she perhaps felt the time had come for a clear commitment. Or perhaps she hoped that joining the party would finally help her to achieve the "faith of my own conclusions" that, in an undated letter from Moscow, she imagined was the property of every "good communist."[160]

In July one further complication entered Milly Bennett's life: Wallace Burton, a brigadista with whom she had had an affair in the early 1930s in San

[154] Muller to Bennett, 15 June 1937, Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 6.
[155] "Telegram to Milly Bennett, care American consulate (Barcelona)," 24 June 1937, Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 6.
[156] Muller to Bennett, 15 July 1937, Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 6.
[157] Bennett to Wallace [Burton], 29 May [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 9, folder 6; Bennett to Jenny and Bob [Miller], 26 August [1937], ibid., Box 4, Folder 2.
[158] Bennett to Muller, 9 June [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6.On Muller's visit to Moscow see Peter J. Kuznick, *Beyond the Laboratory: Scientists as Political Activists in 1930s America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 137.
[159] Bennett to Muller, 9 June [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6.
[160] Bennett to Bessie, 30 November [1931?], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

Francisco – between her assignments in China and the Soviet Union. (She also had an affair with Wallace's twin brother Wilbur in the 1920s in China.[161]) Wallace Burton was a veteran of World War I, the French Foreign Legion, and the Gran Chaco War fought between Paraguay and Bolivia (1932–5). He was also a party member – Bennett hoped he would tell her "with or without a glass of beer, how you disciplined yourself into taking party discipline" – who in March 1937 enlisted in the International Brigades.[162] He earned several promotions during the battle at Brunete in July 1937. However, he was demoted to private when, bored with the sleepy village where his unit had been sent on leave after more than twenty days at the front, he led "his company," as Bennett described it, "in a flying raid on the [M]adrid whorehouse district."[163]

In draft letters to Jenny and Bob Miller, journalists and friends from Moscow, Bennett offered a romantic description of the early August morning when Burton arrived on her doorstep in Valencia. On 18 or 19 August, she was reading in bed when "the concierge slammed at the door and handed in a torn piece of paper with wallace f. burton written on it. i pull on my robe . . . and went down to the entrance and there he was, a deep reddish brown like an indian and big and greyeyed and dirty and sweaty and cognacy and with that funny, disarming smile of his – and i was in his arms and he was just where i left him some six years, eight months ago back in sanfranciso."[164] An hour or so later, she accompanied him back to the train station, where he introduced her as "my wife – this is my girl . . . she is going to marry me."[165] When they finally parted, "he said – this is five wars i've been to – and this is the only one i ever really cared about coming home from. we both cried, great, big, wringing tears."[166]

Two weeks later, Burton was killed on the Aragon front. Arriving at the front on 4 September to cover the capture of Belchite, Bennett spoke with a wounded man and "three sanitary squad men" who "had heard Wallace was killed." When she returned to Valencia, she found a note confirming that on 2 September he had been shot by a sniper. A few days later she confided to Jenny Miller, "In my whole life, I have never felt so entirely alone."[167]

[161] Bennett to Mrs. [Barbara] Shaver, [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 5, Folder 5; Wilbur Burton to Mildred, 4 October 1937, Box 2, Folder 24.

[162] Quotation from Bennett to Wallace [Burton], 29 May [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 6; "Reuters Special Service," 7 September 1937, ibid., Box 5, Folder 5; Eby, *Between the Bullet*, 133; Carroll, *Odyssey*, 74–5.

[163] Bennett to Jenny and Bob [Miller], 26 August [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 2; see also Bennett to Jen and Bob, 12 September [1937], ibid.

[164] All spelling and capitalization as in original. Bennett to Jen and Bob, 12 September [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 2.

[165] Bennett to Jen and Bob, 12 September [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 2.

[166] All capitalization as in original. Bennett to Jenny and Bob, 26 August [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 2.

[167] Bennett to Jen and Bob, 12 September [1937], Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 2. For a slightly different account of Burton's death see "Interview with Emanuel Lanzer," 17 December 1937, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 3, d. 469, l.5.

On 17 October 1937, Bennett sent a formal letter seeking admission to the party. Once again, a personal tragedy seemed to make "accepting party discipline" attractive or possible. However, there is no evidence that she followed up with the advice that she find two members in good standing to sponsor her application. Rather, she sought out Burton's commander, Hans Amlie, in hopes of learning more details of her fiancé's death. Amlie had arrived in Spain as a socialist, but, disappointed with that party's weak show of support for the Republic, had joined the communist party.[168] Robert Merriman, Bennett's friend from Moscow and then the Fifteenth Brigade's chief of staff, judged Amlie an "ass;" in his diary he noted that Amlie was prone to "shooting off his mouth" and "encouraging the men to protest against saluting[,] for vacations etc. etc."[169] Bennett, however, formed a more favorable opinion. By the end of November, they had decided to wed and were married on 1 December. Amlie, who had been wounded and whose brother Thomas Amlie was a progressive member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Wisconsin, was scheduled to be repatriated, the party leadership having decided he was more valuable on the propaganda circuit at home than on the front in Spain.[170] On 1 January 1938, the couple arrived in New York.[171] Spain turned out to be Milly Bennett's last revolution.

Offering an unusually rich sense of the immediate circumstances surrounding a decision to apply for membership in the party, Bennett's story makes it possible trace the linkages between political commitment and an individual life. Indeed as she told her own story in letters to friends and lovers, the lines between personal and political life are difficult to discern. Her desire to "accept party discipline" flowed as much from her sense of the importance of the struggle in Spain as from a need to make sense of and cope with a series of personal shocks and losses. She seemed to understand her decision to stay in Spain, endangering herself and her pregnancy, as an unwillingness to "retreat" from "revolutionary principles." Her eventual decision to marry, be happy, and, as she told an interviewer in San Francisco, enjoy good coffee may have for her ruled out membership in the party.[172] Yet even this "personal" decision seems to have had connections to politics, specifically the party's sudden and dramatic change of line in the summer of 1939 from fighting fascism in Spain to embracing the Nazi-Soviet Pact.[173]

[168] Bennett to Jen and Bob, 12 September [1937]; Carroll, *Odyssey*, 72–3.

[169] Robert Merriman diary, vol. 2, pp. 2, 32, also 30, Merriman Papers, Box 1, Folder 3; Robert Merriman to [Marion Merriman], September [1937], ibid., Folder 2.

[170] "Averiguaciones sobre los cuadros," 28 October 1938, RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 857, l. 33.

[171] Milly Bennett, "Article Two," nd, p. 3, Bennett Papers, Box 9, Folder 5. "2 Americans in Spain Managed to Wed by a Ruse," clipping from *New York World Telegram*, 25 January 193[8], Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 13; "Millie Bennett Comes Home," clipping from *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 March 1938, ibid.

[172] "Millie Bennett Comes Home."

[173] Milly Bennett, "Tom Wintringham Writes" [letter to the editor], *Nation*, 26 April 1941, 510.

Small-scale intimate stories of individual communists provide a unique and telling view of communist understandings of masculinity and femininity. In these idiosyncratic life histories, it is possible to see the difficulties of applying communist norms to the extraordinary circumstances of wartime. Did party discipline require abandoning wives and lovers to fight in Spain? Could homosexuals be good communists? How "tough" could a communist be without being undisciplined? As individuals acted as communists, they necessarily, if implicitly, made decisions about how communist principles should be enacted in everyday contexts that, even if disrupted by war, were not obviously political. For those who saw communism as a way of being, who aspired to be good communist men and women "seven days a week," the "private" sphere of family, lovers, husbands, and wives was always and intimately intertwined with the political. Political convictions shaped everyday behaviors, and, as became clear in the aftermath of the war, accommodating (or rejecting) shifts in the party line required both personal and political adjustments.

PART III

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISTS AND THE MEMORY OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1939–1953

6

From "Our War" to the Great Fatherland War

In 1939, the Spanish civil war ended with the fall of the Republic, and World War II began with the fall of Poland. For communists who understood the fight against fascism as the cause of "all advanced and progressive humanity," the announcement in August of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact that hastened the invasion of Poland by both Germany and the Soviet Union came as a shock, and for some it was a betrayal. This was not the war they had expected. Even Comintern secretary-general Georgi Dimitrov was caught unawares. On the eve of the agreement, the secretariat had called on communist parties "to continue even more energetically the struggle against the aggressors, especially German fascism."[1] On 27 August, Dimitrov and Dmitrii Manuil'skii, a member of the Soviet party's central committee who also served on the Comintern's secretariat, asked Stalin's advice as to how "Communist parties of the capitalist countries," especially France and England, ought to respond to the pact. "We think," they ventured with regard to the party in France, "that the Communist Party must maintain its position of resistance to the aggression of fascist Germany." They received no answer.[2]

A clearer sense of how parties in "capitalist countries" should respond to the pact came with the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939. Having heard Foreign Minister Viachaslav Molotov's 31 August report on the pact, in which he affirmed that Germany and the Soviet Union were no longer

[1] Quoted in Monty Johnstone, "The CPGB, the Comintern, and the War, 1939–1941: Filling in the Blank Spots," *Science and Society* 61, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 28. Georgi Dimitrov, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, Ivo Banac, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 112; Alexander Dallin and F. I. Firsov, eds., *Dimitrov and Stalin, 1934–1943: Letters from the Soviet Archives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 112.

[2] Dimitrov and Manuil'skii to Stalin, 27 August 1939, in *Dimitrov*, 150; V. P. Smirnov, "Frantsuzkaia kommunisticheskaia partiia i Komintern v 1939–1940 gg.: Novyie arkhivy materialy," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 1994, no. 1: 33.

"enemies," Dimitrov now advised Maurice Thorez, the secretary-general of the French party, that he "ought not to announce your unqualified support" for the current French government, but rather should condemn its "betrayal" of Czechoslovakia and Spain and its support for the "policy of the English warmongers against the USSR."[3] Still struggling to provide instructions to member parties, Dimitrov again asked for Stalin's advice. In a meeting at the Kremlin on 7 September, Stalin offered the explanation, according to Dimitrov's notes, that "*The division of capitalist states into fascist and democratic no longer makes sense.*"[4] Two days later, the Comintern sent a directive to member parties, informing them that "the bourgeoisie of all belligerent states bear equal responsibility" for the war. However, the French and British parties in particular were slow to respond to the new line, fully abandoning antifascism only in late September after the Soviets "liberated" eastern Poland in accordance with the pact's secret protocol.[5] A November 1939 article written by Dimitrov, revised by Stalin, and designed to provide guidance to national parties, moved beyond the claim of "equal responsibility" to identifying Britain and France as "the most zealous supporters of the continuation and further incitement of war."[6] The Popular Front against fascism was dead.

Communists, of course, had a long history of accommodating themselves to rapid and dramatic shifts in the party line. The key to weathering such changes in direction was the international communist's fundamental faith that Stalin and the Soviet party knew best. "Was it not," British communist Eric Hobsbawm asked in his 2002 memoir with regard to the Nazi-Soviet Pact, "the essence of 'democratic centralism' to stop arguing once a decision had been reached, whether or not you were personally in agreement? And the highest decision had obviously been taken."[7] Some version of the refrain "the great party line is correct," "Stalin is right," and "Stalin knows what he's

[3] Dimitrov, *Diary*, 114; "Protokol," 1 September 1939, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 495, op. 1, d. 1292, l. 8; Smirnov, "Frantsuzkaia," 33.

[4] Emphasis in original. Dimitrov, *Diary*, 115.

[5] Johnstone, "The CPGB," 29, 32; *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War: The Verbatim Record of the Central Committee Meetings of 25 September and 2–3 October 1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Smirnov, "Frantsuzkaia," 33–5; Lynne Taylor, "The Parti Communiste Français and the French Resistance in the Second World War," in Tony Judt, ed., *Resistance and Revolution in Mediterranean Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 53–79; Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 195–7.

[6] "Extracts from an Article by Dimitrov on the Tasks of the Working Class in the War," in Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919–1943: Documents*, vol. 3: *1939–1943* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), 451. See also Dallin and Firsov, *Dimitrov*, 153, 160, 164–5; N.S. Lebedeva and M.M. Narinskii, eds., *Komintern i vtoraia mirovaia voina: Chast' I: do 22 iunia 1941 g.* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istorichskoi mysli, 1994), 117.

[7] Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: New Press, 2002), 153.

doing," shows up again and again in the reminiscences of communists and former communists attempting to explain their willingness to turn virtually overnight from condemning the British and French failure to aid Spain against Germany and Italy to celebrating Stalin's tactical brilliance in coming to terms with the Nazis.[8] As International Brigade veteran Steve Nelson noted in his 1981 memoir, "We treated the Soviet Union as the single pivot in the world around which everything else was centered. Nothing else mattered."[9] The note of regret was apparently retrospective. According to FBI surveillance, Nelson in 1939 enthusiastically supported the "imperialist war" line, arguing that in the event of war the American Communist Party's policy would be to "encourage the soldiers to turn their guns on their own leaders of capitalist countries and not upon the poor working men in the opposite trenches." The agent in charge of Nelson's case recommended that he "be considered for 'custodial detention' if the US entered a national emergency."[10]

The memory of the war in Spain potentially complicated such determination to follow the party line. After three years of war, the heroism, sacrifices, and struggles in Spain had become for many communists – particularly those who were there – a defining moment personally and politically. Although the communists' world continued to revolve around Moscow, the communist line as lived in Spain made strong claims on their emotions.[11] Just one month before the pact, in July 1939, the Spanish party leadership in the Soviet Union had drafted a resolution on "the lessons of the Spanish people's war for independence," reaffirming that it had been "*a struggle against international fascism, for democracy and for peace, liberty, and progress*." Spain's struggle was international and romantic: "the glorious International Brigades recall[ed] the best traditions of the last century's wars for independence, the traditions of the French Revolution's volunteers, of George Byron and of [Giuseppe] Garibaldi."[12] Such mythologized memories of the war provided compelling

[8] Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C. M. Woodhouse (1957; reprint, London: Ink Links, 1979), 81; Enrique Castro Delgado, *Mi fe se perdió en Moscú* (Barcelona: Luís de Caralt, 1964), 47; Ernst Fischer, *An Opposing Man*, trans. Peter Ross and Betty Ross (London: Allen Lane, 1974), 349; Santiago Carrillo, *Memorias: Testimonio polémico de un protagonista relevante de nuestra transición* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2008),383.

[9] Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson, American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 249.

[10] Katherine A. S. Sibley, "Soviet Military-Industrial Espionage in the United States and the Emergence of an Espionage Paradigm in US-Soviet Relations, 1941–45," *American Communist History* 2, no. 1 (2003): 39 n.89, 40.

[11] Peter N. Carroll, Michael Nash, and Melvin Small, eds., *The Good Fight Continues: World War II Letters from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3–4; Rémi Skoutelsky, "L'Espagne après l'Espagne: La mémoire des Brigades internationales," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, no. 7 (April-June 2003): 33.

[12] Emphasis in original. "Las enseñanzas de la guerra por la independencia del pueblo de España (Resolución del Comité Central del P.C. de España)," 14 July 1939, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18., d. 1288, ll. 5, 21.

narratives of communist identity, narratives that were out of synch with the exigencies of the Nazi-Soviet pact, but not necessarily jettisoned entirely.

The 22 June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union thus came for many as something of a relief. As Nelson noted, "The interests of the Soviet Union and the political principles for which we struggled throughout the thirties were no longer at odds."[13] However, the U.S. alliance with the Soviet Union did little to alleviate American officials' suspicions of veterans of the International Brigades. That American brigadistas maintained the connections they had forged during the Spanish civil war through a veterans organization and personal correspondence reinforced the impression that their primary loyalty was not to the United States, even though, during the war, they came together as Spanish civil war veterans (and, less explicitly, as communists) primarily to protest the U.S. military's tendency to deny them combat assignments and promotions. Still, evidence of espionage, such as Nelson's apparent efforts to gather, according to a 1943 FBI report, "some highly confidential data regarding the nuclear experiments then in progress" at the Berkeley Radiation Laboratory, suggests that suspicion of Spanish civil war veterans, although perhaps exaggerated, had some foundation.[14]

In the Soviet Union, Spanish exiles and veterans also faced a state suspicious of their identification with the Spanish cause. More than six hundred Spaniards fought for the Soviet Union, but they, too, were often denied the combat assignments they desired.[15] Maintaining links with one another, the exiles appealed to Spanish party leaders when the Soviet authorities rejected their petitions to serve at the front. Their difficulties were particularly ironic given the Soviet Union's appropriation of conventions developed during the Spanish civil war in its coverage of the Great Fatherland War. The stories of two of the most famous Spaniards to fall in the Great Fatherland War – Rubén Ruiz Ibárruri, the son of Spanish communist icon Dolores Ibárruri, and Santiago de Paúl Nelken, son of Margarita Nelken, who was expelled from the Spanish party during the world war – illustrate the complex linkages of the Spanish and Soviet wars in individual lives and communist propaganda.

Throughout the "strange interlude" of the Nazi-Soviet pact as well as the Soviet war against fascism, the Spanish civil war remained a vital element of the Stalinist cultural landscape.[16] The images central to the Soviet reporting (and mythologizing) of the war in Spain – civilians under siege, soldiers

[13] Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 253.

[14] Sibley, "Soviet Military-Industrial Espionage," 44. Nelson denied any involvement in espionage; Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 292–5.

[15] Immaculada Colomina Limonero, *Dos patrias, tres mil destinos: Vida y exilio de los niños de la Guerra de España refugiados en la Unión Soviética* (Madrid: Ediciones Cinca, 2010), 67; David Wingeate Pike, *In the Service of Stalin: The Spanish Communists in Exile, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1993), 152–3.

[16] Harold C. Deutsch, "Strange Interlude: The Soviet-Nazi Liaison of 1939–1941," *Historian* 9 (Spring 1947): 107–36.

standing against tanks, female combatants, mothers and the motherland – shaped representations and understandings of the Great Fatherland War. For those who fought it, "our war" in Spain remained a self-defining memory – one that could alternately reinvigorate, reconfigure, weaken, or subvert communist identities.[17]

Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the Politics of Memory

In January 1938, Milly Bennett and her new husband Hans Amlie, a former commander of the Abraham Lincoln battalion, returned to New York City. On February 13, they joined Lillian Hellman and "Hollywood magician and actor" Fred Keating on stage at the Belasco Theater in a celebration of the first anniversary of the "formation of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade"[18] Like many returning veterans, including Nelson, Amlie undertook a national fund- and consciousness-raising tour on behalf of the Americans in Spain. Starting on the West Coast at the end of March, he traveled throughout the Midwest giving speeches and attending events, arriving in Washington, DC, in late April.[19]

The Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade organized fundraisers and speeches that reached an audience beyond party members, but nonetheless remained closely linked to party circles. In Los Angeles, Hellman "gave a little party" in Amlie's honor that, he wrote Bennett, included "movie people," most of whom "were writers and church people. Our kind of church of course."[20] In mid-April 1938, he regretfully informed Bennett that he would be returning to their home in Mill Valley, California, later than expected, because "the party thinks that I am the only man who can handle New England and the plans now call for a ten day extension in order to go there."[21] In Boston, he wanted to attribute the success of a fundraising dinner to "the work the party put behind it," but admitted that the presence of Robert Raven, a veteran who had been blinded in Spain "appeals to a certain group that otherwise would not be affected."[22] He was more enthusiastic about the Communist Party convention in New York City in May, describing a "packed audience 22,800 people"

[17] P. S. Blagov and J. A. Singer, "Four Dimensions of Self-Defining Memories (Specificity, Meaning, Content, and Affect) and Their Relationships to Self-restraint, Distress, and Repressive Defensiveness," *Journal of Personality* 72 (2004): 481–511; C. Lardi et al., "Further Characterisation of Self-Defining Memories in Young Adults: A Study of a Swiss Sample," *Memory* 18, no. 3 (April 2010): 293–309.

[18] Advertisement, Milly Bennett Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, Hoover Institution Archives.

[19] Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 9; Box 1, Folder 4; Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 233–5.

[20] Hans Amlie to [Milly Bennett] 24 [March 1938], Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 9.

[21] Hans Amlie to [Milly Bennett], 12 [April 1938], Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 9; see also Amlie to [Milly Bennett], 20 [May 1938], ibid.

[22] Hans Amlie to [Milly Bennett], 20 [May 1938]. On Raven see, Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 105, 213.

at Madison Square Garden, where Bob Minor gave a "fiery" speech about Spain.[23]

Connected by their experiences in Spain and very often their communist convictions, veterans maintained a vital social and political network of formal organizations and personal contacts. During the Spanish civil war, the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB), founded in late 1937 by Nelson among others, raised money for the Spanish Republic and for disabled veterans; it also organized protests against German and Italian intervention and in favor of lifting the American embargo on the Republic.[24] As the war wound down, the Friends honored the dead, raised money to bring Americans home, assisted foreign-born veterans detained at Ellis Island, and protested the polices of nonintervention in Spain and appeasement of Nazi Germany.[25]

The personal ties that sustained such networks emerge clearly in the case of efforts to locate Robert Merriman, who disappeared in April 1938 during the Great Retreats along the Ebro. Rumors circulated that he had been taken prisoner, and his wife Marion called on friends and acquaintances in the United States and Europe to put pressure on the Nationalists to provide information. She dispatched cables to Berkeley, where Merriman had been a graduate student, prompting a petition campaign, and to Hermann Muller, the renowned geneticist they had known in Moscow. Muller in turn organized a group of British and American scientists to send a telegram to General Francisco Franco expressing concern about Merriman.[26] Bennett contacted other friends from Moscow, including the journalist Bob Miller and his wife Jenny, then in Paris, where Bob worked for the Republic's information agency. The Millers followed up with their contacts in the press and the State Department, tracking the rumor that Merriman was being held in a Nationalist prison in Bilbao. Jenny wrote Bennett in September 1938, "Millichka darling, we are making real nuisances of ourselves, going around and asking people about

[23] Hans Amlie to [Milly Bennett], 27 May [1938], Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 9. "22,000 Communists Open Session Here," *New York Times* (*NYT*), 27 May 1938.

[24] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 219–23; "'Lift the Embargo' Cried in Times Sq.," *NYT*, 25 January 1939.

[25] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 215, 219; "Plan To Bring Back Americans in Spain," *NYT*, 1 October 1938; "Americans Who Died in Spain Honored," *NYT*, 23 February 1939; "Seek Funds to Aid Americans in Spain," *NYT*, 26 June 1938; "Czech Cause Urged in Belated Parade," *NYT*, 2 October 1938.

[26] Marion Merriman and Warren Lerude, *American Commander in Spain: Robert Hale Merriman and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986), 227; William P. Carney, "Writer Sees 80 Americans Held in Spanish Rebel Camp," *NYT*, 11 July 1938. "Telegram re: petition from Berkeley [22?] May 1938, Robert Brady to Henry F. Grady," National Archives College Park, Maryland (NACP), Record Group (RG) 59, 852.2221 Merriman, Robert H/7; Eugene Staley to Pierrepont Moffat, 10 June 1938, ibid., 852.2221 Merriman, Robert H./20; "Telegram Received from Madrid (St Jean de Luz) dated June 29, 1938," ibid., 852.2221 Merriman, Robert H./37; Claude G. Bowers to Secretary of State, 1 July 1938, ibid., 852.2221 Merriman, Robert H/46.

Merriman," and asked Bennett to tell Marion that "nobody knows anything." They were willing to be nuisances because they had known the Merrimans in Moscow and sympathized with their politics; the Millers were then or would soon become party members. Moreover, in Paris they had a close view of "the whole Spanish business – these boys coming in armless and legless and having to go home and scratch for a living."[27] Shared experiences and commitments activated a transnational effort to learn Merriman's fate, although his body was never recovered.

The signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact put pressure on such networks. The ostensibly nonparty VALB, which in December 1939 succeeded the Friends as the most visible organization of Lincoln veterans, ostentatiously embraced the new communist line, to some degree abandoning the antifascism that had been at the heart of the Spanish struggle.[28] At its December 1939 convention, the two hundred delegates adopted a resolution supporting the Soviet invasion of Finland and condemning "the people who prate about the rights of small nations." The veterans' organization adopted the slogan, "The Yanks Are Not Coming," an odd echo of the nonintervention policy they had opposed so recently and vehemently. Still, the veterans did not entirely forget the cause that had brought them together. Speakers at the December convention criticized the State Department for failing to assist the thousands of Spanish Loyalist refugees in France.[29] In early 1941, the VALB's newsletter, *The Volunteer for Liberty*, trumpeted the organization's "leading role" in demonstrations against the passage of the Lend-Lease bill, even as it saluted those who had died in Spain: "Salud! The fight still goes on. May we play such a part that we shall be entitled to the same high honor we give to you."[30] Where and how they expected the fight to continue remained (necessarily) obscure.

Drawing selectively on their memories of the Spanish civil war, some veterans reconciled themselves to the turn toward Nazi Germany by remembering their wartime anger at nonintervention. In the contemporary communist press and in interviews conducted decades later, many American veterans, as historian Peter Carroll notes, drew on "personal experience to rationalize" their support of the pact. Thus in his report to the VALB convention in December

[27] Jenny [Miller] to Milly [Bennett], 1 September 1938, Bennett Papers, Box 4, Folder 2; see also Bob [Miller] to Millichka [Milly Bennett], 5 September 1938; Jenny to Millichka, 10 July 1939, ibid. For the rumor that Merriman was alive, see William P. Carney, "Rebels Bar Talk with U.S. Captives," *NYT*, 29 May 1938. On the Millers' connections to the party and KGB see John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev, *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* (Ann Arbor: Sheridan Books, 2009), 253–6.

[28] "FBI Raids Spanish Loyalist Veterans Here," *NYT*, 10 February 1940.

[29] "Friends of Finns Condemned Here," *NYT*, 25 December 1939.

[30] "Vets Storm Capital," *Volunteer for Liberty* 3, no. 3 (March 1941): 1; see also, "Vets Act for Peace," *Volunteer for Liberty* 3, no. 1 (February 1941): 1; "Lincoln Veterans Condemn 'Lend-Lease,'" *Volunteer for Liberty* 3, no. 2 (February 1941): 1. "Our Victory Shall Be Your Vengeance," *Volunteer for Liberty* 3, no. 3 (March 1941): 2.

1939, David McKelvy White emphasized that veterans embraced the slogan, "The Yanks Are Not Coming," because "When the governments that stabbed Spain in the back claim they are fighting for democracy, we have good reason to call them hypocrites and liars."[31] Looking back from the vantage of 1988, Milton Wolff, a commander in Spain who in 1939 became the leader of VALB, recalled that during the period of the pact, "Everything I said was based on the Spanish experience – who had helped us; who had not helped us; who had been part of the sellout" of Spain.[32] In his 1981 memoir Nelson remembered a more emotional response: "Perhaps because I had been to Spain, I was more bitter than most people about British and French indifference to Hitler. When the Nazis attacked Poland in September 1939, and Britain and France were forced into war, my feelings were that 'the sons-of-bitches had it coming.'" The fate of Poland did not apparently concern him.[33]

The French government's internment of hundreds of thousands of retreating brigadistas and Spanish refugees in vast camps lacking adequate food, shelter, and sanitation also stoked the veterans' anger and their sense of international solidarity. The conditions in the "camps," beaches or other barren stretches of land ringed by barbed wire, were so appalling that in February and March 1939, about fifty thousand refugees voluntarily returned to Spain, where they faced prison or worse. (Ultimately, about 238,000 returned.[34]) American veterans supported the efforts of comrades in Uruguay and Mexico who were working to bring Spaniards, as well as International Brigade veterans unable to return to their countries of origin, to the Americas. *The Volunteer for Liberty*'s coverage of "Internationals in Other Lands" included a Canadian veteran's appeal to "remember our brothers in France" by sending letters to veterans – "American, German, Italian, Czechoslovakian, Polish, Rumanian" – held in French camps and prisons.[35] For communists, the shocking conditions in which the French government held Spanish Loyalists and their international

[31] "The Main Report of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade's National Executive Committee, by David White, to the VALB Convention. December 23, 1939 in New York," in Carroll et al., *Good Fight*, 32.

[32] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 226.

[33] Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 248.

[34] Michel Fabréguet, "Un groupe de réfugiés politiques: Les républicains espagnols des camps d'internement français aux camps de concentration nationaux-socialistes," *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale et des conflits contemporains* 36, no. 144 (October 1986): 21–3. Juan B. Vilar, "El exilio español de 1939 en el Norte de Africa," in Abdón Mateos, ed., *¡Ay de los vencidos: El exilio y los paises de acogida* (Madrid: Ediciones Eneida, 2009), 71–2; Regina M. Delacor, "From Potential Friends to Potential Enemies: The Internment of 'Hostile Foreigners' in France at the Beginning of the Second World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 3 (2000): 361; Carroll et al., *Good Fight*, 3; Ave Buzzichesi to Dr. [Leo] Eleoesser, 31 January 1940 in ibid., 34–5; Skoutelsky, "L'Espagne," 28.

[35] "Internationals in Other Lands," *Volunteer for Liberty* 3, no. 1 (February 1941): 3–4.

brothers-in-arms dramatized the hypocrisy of "democratic" states and the correctness of the Soviet line.[36]

Even for those who left the party, at least in part as a response to the pact, the Spanish civil war often remained a critical personal and political touchstone. Robert Gladnick had ceased to see himself as a communist during the war, a result, he claimed in his memoir, of exposure to Soviet personnel and especially Soviet antisemitism. In the wake of the pact, he and two other disillusioned Jewish communists, Morris Maken (aka Mickenberg) and William Herrick, expressed their dissatisfaction with the party by attempting to establish a rival to VALB, which they dubbed the Veterans of the International Brigades, Anti-Totalitarian. According to Gladnick, the "small vocal, well organized & well financed minority" of veterans who sided with Stalin "took over the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade" and thwarted their efforts.[37] Although his assessment seems to underestimate the number of veterans who remained loyal to the party, the rival organization managed to attract only a handful of members before Gladnick left to join the Canadian army, where he was able to reactivate the antifascist principles that had led him to Spain.[38]

British veteran Tom Wintringham, who had been expelled from the party in 1938 because of his relationship with American journalist Kitty Bowler, an alleged Trotskyite spy, likewise continued to identify himself in terms of his experiences in Spain.[39] Moreover, despite his expulsion and the pact, the former British commander at Jarama continued to "see himself as a Communist," although in a mold currently rejected by the Comintern.[40] In July 1940, he took advantage of the British government's call to organize "local defense volunteers" to establish an unofficial Home Guard training school. Drawing explicitly on military and political lessons learned in Spain, Wintringham claimed that "in courses lasting only two days we gave a more coherent description of German tactics, and of the answer to these tactics, than was available elsewhere, in the Regular Army as well as the Home Guard;" the course also taught the "essential elements of guerrilla warfare."[41] Wintringham's second-in-command at the school, Hugh Slater, and at least one instructor were also

[36] Antonio Mije, *Los refugiados republicanos españoles en Francia y la solidaridad americana* (Mexico City: Editorial Morales, 1940).

[37] Robert Gladnick memoirs, "French Camp – Perpignan," p. 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

[38] Carroll et al., *Good Fight*, 4; Carroll, *Odyssey*, 229–30; Gladnick memoirs, "French Camp," p. 18.

[39] Hugh Purcell, "Kitty Bowler: The English Captain's Spy," *History Today* 62, no. 2 (February 2012): 16–17; Tom Buchanan, "Holding the Line: The Political Strategy of the International Brigade Association, 1939–1977," *Labour History Review* 66, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 294–312.

[40] David Fernbach, "Tom Wintringham and Socialist Defense Strategy," *History Workshop*, no. 14 (Autumn 1982): 73, 78 (quotation). See also Hugh Purcell, "Tom Wintringham, Revolutionary Patriot," *History Today* 54, no. 10 (October 2004): 11–17.

[41] Quoted in Fernbach, "Wintringham," 74–5.

International Brigade veterans. The staff included "three Spanish refugee miners teaching the use of explosives against tanks."[42] In an April 1941 letter to the editors of *The Nation*, Milly Bennett, who knew both Wintringham and his wife Kitty, quoted from a letter from him, emphasizing his status as someone who "fought with the Loyalists in Spain." Taking a stance not exactly at odds with the pact, Wintringham granted that "this war is not yet an anti-fascist war but can be made so if anti-fascists will show that they are better at all necessary jobs than the imperialists" – a position he deemed in line with "the real democracy we fought for in Spain."[43]

Bennett, too, seems to have struggled to reconcile allegiances to the communist and Spanish causes. In a February 1939 letter to her agent regarding an article about her experiences in the Soviet Union submitted to *American Mercury*, she described herself as "not anti-Soviet" and someone who "certainly could not afford, from the standpoint of my conscience, to be put in that position." Thus although she underscored that she and Amlie needed the hundred dollars and that she had no objection to the story being cut, she insisted on having "*a chance to check it in the form they are willing to buy it*." The piece never appeared. In the meantime she was moving slowly on her book, because "*I had to give four or five days this week to Spain*." She and Amlie "feel so goddam wretched about Spain and so terribly separated from it."[44] Fourteen months later, in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, she may have seen in Wintringham's letter a way to remain both "not anti-Soviet" and connected to Spain.

Indeed it was precisely the identification and self-identification of International Brigade veterans with "real democracy" that made Western governments hesitant to accept their expertise, even after the Nazi invasion turned the Soviet Union into their ally. Although the British War Office ultimately saw the value of the training offered by Wintringham's school, taking it over in late 1940, he himself became the victim of "security restrictions" that prohibited "instructors who had fought in Spain, or were regarded as left-wingers" from becoming commissioned officers.[45] Similarly, in 1942 the FBI investigated Hans Amlie, then in the far less sensitive position of camp manager at the Yuma Farm Labor Supply Center in Somerton, Arizona, to determine whether he ought to be dismissed from government service as "a person who is a member of an organization which advocates the overthrow of the Government of the United States."[46] From FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's perspective, veterans

[42] Fernbach, "Wintringham," 74. Purcell describes two Basque miners, "Wintringham," 15.

[43] Milly Bennett, "Tom Wintringham Writes," *Nation*, 26 April 1941, 510; Kitty [Bowler] to Millie [Bennett], 31 October (1937), Bennett Papers, Box 2, Folder 4.

[44] Emphases in original. Milly Bennett to Hal [Matson], 10 February 1939, Bennett Papers, Box 3, Folder 22. See also Milly Bennett, "More About José Robles" [letter to the editor], *New Republic*, 19 July 1939, 309–10.

[45] Fernbach, "Wintringham," 78; Purcell, "Wintringham," 15.

[46] T. Roy Reid to Hans Amlie, 16 December 1943, Bennett Papers, Box 5, Folder 20.

of the International Brigades were likely subversives. As he noted in a 1938 memo to President Franklin Roosevelt, the Communist Party had sent "men to Spain to fight in the ranks of the Loyalists" in order to train them "to lead the vanguard of the revolution in this country."[47] The FBI's investigation of Amlie turned up the fact that in 1936 he "was a registered Communist" in northern California.[48] Nonetheless, Amlie received notice in December 1943 that he had been cleared to work for the War Food Administration.[49] Indeed Bennett's FBI file suggests that her work for the Spanish Republic's Ministry of Press and Propaganda raised more suspicions than her husband's participation in the International Brigades. The American consul in Valencia reported that a "well-informed" source "described her as 'the Spanish government's best spy.'"[50]

The American military authorities likewise singled out those who fought in Spain, identifying them in their service dossiers as "Communist," "Red," "Subversive," or "Radical."[51] Because many of the more than four hundred American veterans of the International Brigades who served in World War II read *The Volunteer for Liberty* and corresponded with one another as well with Jack Bjoze, the executive secretary of VALB, they quickly perceived the discrimination. Their complaints – being passed up for promotions, thrown out of officer training programs, or relegated to clerical positions far from the front – had a numbing similarity.[52] In 1942, for example, John Gates, a commissar in Spain, wrote Wolff that he had been turned down for officers' training "only because, I must assume, of my political beliefs."[53] In 1943, he complained to Bjoze that a transfer out of a unit headed overseas had placed him in a headquarters company, writing reports and filling out forms – his two years' experience of "war against Nazis and Fascists in Spain," rendered

47 J. Edgar Hoover, "1938 Memorandum to Attorney General Homer Cummings and President Franklin Roosevelt on the Spanish Civil War and the New York Workers School," *Science and Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 363; Carroll, *Odyssey*, 279–94; Phillip Deery, "'A Blot upon Liberty': McCarthyism, Dr. Barsky and the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee," *American Communist History* 8, no. 2 (December 2009): 167–96.

48 The investigation of Amlie is included in Bennett's FBI file; a Freedom of Information Act inquiry determined that he had no separate file. Report made by Eugene P. Greer, 8 January 1943, Mildred Bremler [Milly Bennett], Federal Bureau of Investigation File, HQ 100–124391/SF 100–12592 (FBI/Bennett).

49 T. Roy Reid to Hans Amlie.

50 Milton K. Wells, American Vice Consul, Valencia to Secretary of State, 7 November 1937, NACP, RG 59, 800.00B Mitchell, Mildred B./1; John Edgar Hoover to Special Agent in Charge, San Francisco, 22 July 1942, (FBI/Bennett); "Memorandum for Mr. Alden," 13 May 1943, ibid.

51 John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *In Denial: Historians, Communism, and Espionage* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003), 123; Peter Carroll with assistance from Daniel Bertwell, "Premature Anti-Fascists, Again," *Volunteer* 25, no. 4 (December 2003): 5–6, 8.

52 Carroll, *Odyssey*, 252–4, 257–64; Carroll et al., *Good Fight*, 62–115.

53 John Gates to Milt [Wolff], 12 February 1942, Complaints of Discrimination during World War II, ALBA 069, Box 1, Folder 56, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

"completely useless."[54] Wolff in turn complained to Bjoze that he had been assigned to a unit of Italians and Germans, who were considered, along with the communists, to be unreliable soldiers – a particularly unsavory fate for someone who had fought in Spain.[55] In 1943, Bjoze took the veterans' cause to the War Department and, more successfully, to the press, with the result that many who had been denied commissions or combat assignments now received them.[56]

The veterans themselves found such discrimination particularly galling because they understood the current war as a continuation of the war they had fought in Spain. If few affirmed as explicitly as Gates that the world war demonstrated that "our struggle was not in vain," their efforts to keep in touch with one another and their frequent evocations of Spain suggest the degree to which memories of Spain functioned as a point of personal and political reference.[57] Gates, sounding very much like the commissar he once was, attributed the Allied victory in North Africa to the toll taken on Franco's forces by the Republic's fierce resistance.[58] Ben Gardner's December 1943 letter to Bjoze suggested both a powerful connection to his fellow veterans – "our boys," whom he hated to see "getting it now, when they came thru Spain" – and an abiding interest in Spanish politics, as he noted with satisfaction Jesús Hernández's arrival in Mexico.[59] (Gardner himself died in France in October 1944.) Irving Goff, who served with the Office of Strategic Services in Italy, found that his status as a veteran of the International Brigades continued to connect him to an international antifascist network. After he was able to persuade communists in the Italian resistance that he had fought in Spain – he knew the street address of the Communist Party's offices in Madrid – they were willing to trust him.[60]

Often addressing one another as "camaradas" or "amigos" and signing their letters "Salud y Victoria," the veterans' World War II letters evoked the sound and spirit of Spain and suggested that both they and their political commitments remained deeply rooted in their Spanish experiences. Thus in a letter that alluded to pointed disagreements about the value of Ernest Hemingway's work on the Spanish civil war, the poet Edwin Rolfe addressed Wolff as

[54] John Gates to Jack [Bjoze], 21 January 1943, ALBA 069, Box 1, Folder 56.
[55] Milton Wolff to Jack [Bjoze], nd, ALBA 069, Box 3, Folder 70.
[56] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 260, 263, 275; "Report: Summary of Discrimination Cases," nd, ALBA 069, Box 4, Folder 47; Drew Pearson, "Washington Merry-Go-Round: Heroes of Lincoln Brigade Complain of Discrimination," *Washington Post*, 14 April 1943; Milton Wolf to Lennie [Leonard Lamb], 10 January 1945, ALBA 069, Box 3, Folder 70; John Gates to Hal, 2 June 1944, ALBA 069, Box 1, Folder 56.
[57] John Gates to Milt [Wolff], 12 February 1942, ALBA 069, Box 1, Folder 56.
[58] John Gates to Jack [Bjoze], 26 February 1943, ALBA 069, Box 1, Folder 56.
[59] Ben Gardner to Jack [Bjoze], 5 December 1943, ALBA 069, Box 1, Folder 54.
[60] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 270.

"mi viejo amigo."[61] Political disagreements could not, he suggested, come between old friends from Spain. Bill Aalto called on his rather rough Spanish to send Rolfe and his wife Mary, whom he addressed as Maria, "Un saludo carinosa de ejercibo americano éstá vez" [an affectionate greeting from an American soldier, this time]. Apparently only the Spanish greeting could convey the necessary warmth and meaning.[62]

In contemporary letters and contributions to *The Volunteer for Liberty* as much as in memories recalled decades later, veterans of the International Brigades represented themselves as indelibly marked by their experiences in Spain. That their memories were deeply political – in the sense of being shaped by the moments in which they were remembered and by larger ideological considerations – was particularly clear during the months of the Nazi-Soviet Pact when what communists recalled about the war was British and French nonintervention, rather than the Nazi Condor Legion. At the same time, memories of the war were profoundly personal, grounded in comradeship and shared sacrifice and offering a means of endowing loss with meaning. The war, veterans suggested – and governments worried about subversives seemed to agree – had to some degree reforged them. Or, perhaps more accurately, it had reconfigured the networks that connected them to each other and to the wider world. Ever after, both those who left the party and those who remained in Moscow's orbit defined themselves and were identified by others as having fought with the Loyalists in Spain.

Fashioning Spanish Communist Identities in the Soviet Union

In the spring of 1939, many of the hundreds of thousands of civilians and soldiers who fled Spain as Franco's victorious Nationalists began a campaign of mass arrests and executions looked with hope to the Soviet Union.[63] The Soviet Union, after all, was the only major power to aid the Republic. In early 1939, the Soviet state contributed five million francs to aid Spanish refugees in France. However, after the fall of the Republic, it provided no additional humanitarian assistance to the refugees. Several hundred European communists who had traveled from Soviet exile to join the International Brigades and were now interned in France found themselves denied reentry. Despite Dimitrov and Manuil'skii's August 1939 appeal to Stalin, the Politburo also refused to admit some three thousand communists from throughout Europe – Poland,

[61] Edwin Rolfe to Milt [Wolff], 8 June 1943, ALBA 069, Box 3, Folder 9.

[62] Spelling as in original. William Aalto to Ed [Rolfe] and Maria [Mary Rolfe], 9 December 1941, in Carroll et al., *Good Fight*, 49. Numerous letter writers used Spanish, especially "Salud" or "Salud y Victoria." See for example, ibid., 25, 30, 39, 47, 48, 51, 53, 60, 66, 85, 88, 89, 94, 96, 97, 100, 101, 109, 111, 112, 113.

[63] Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco's Spain, 1936–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Yugoslavia, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Czechoslovakia – who were unable to return home or find asylum in the West.[64] Although about eighty thousand refugees ultimately found safe haven in Mexico or elsewhere in the Americas, more than one hundred thousand remained in France, soon engulfed by another war. After occupying France, the Nazis deported approximately nine thousand "Red" Spaniards to Mauthausen and other concentration camps; although exact figures are lacking, it seems likely that at least ten thousand refugees from Spain fought with the French resistance during the World War II.[65] Ultimately, only about two thousand refugees – mostly members of the Spanish Communist Party (Partido Comunista de España, PCE), including its most visible leader Dolores Ibárruri – were admitted to the Soviet Union.[66]

The Spaniards who sailed from Le Havre to Leningrad in April and May 1939 could imagine the passage into political exile as a homecoming. In many ways they were already insiders, who identified themselves with the Soviet project and were lionized by Soviet propaganda. At the same time, the Spaniards were also outsiders, communists who understood the "internationalist cause" in terms of their fight "to liberate Spain."[67] Their conceptions of the model communist filtered Soviet norms – encountered via travel or publications such as *USSR in Construction* – through the needs and possibilities of civil war Spain. Such conceptions did not necessarily correspond to those they found in a Soviet Union increasingly committed to Russian nationalism and, at least between August 1939 and the German invasion of June 1941, to peaceful relations with fascism.[68]

[64] Daniel Kowalsky, "The Soviet Union and the International Brigades, 1936–1939," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 19 (2006): 698–702.

[65] Friedrich Katz, "Mexico, Gilberto Bosques, and the Refugees," *The Americas* 57, no. 1 (July 2000): 4–12; Fabréguet, "Un groupe," 26, 34–7; Julio Martín Casas and Pedro Carvajal Urquijo, *El exilio español (1936–1978)* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2002), 118; John F. Sweets provides a figure of 300,000 refugees remaining in France, *Choices in Vichy France: The French under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 112–13; Secundino Serrano, *Maquis: Historia del la guerrilla antifranquista* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2001), 123; Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand argues that a "significant percentage" of Spanish refugees participated in the French resistance, *L'exil des Républicains espagnols en France* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999), 167.

[66] Pike, *In the Service*, 17, 36. A. V. Elpat'evskii, *Ispanskaia emigratsiia v SSSR: Istoriografiia i istochniki, popytka interpretatsii* (Tver: GERS, 2002), 38–40. Alicia Alted Vigil, *La voz de los vencidos: El exilio republicano de 1939* (Madrid: Aguilar, 2005), 48, 162–3; RGASPI, f. 545, op. 6, d. 56, l. 11 (Statistics on volunteers); "Informe del camarada Checa," Archivo histórico del Partido Comunista de España (AHPCE), Dirigentes PCE, sig. 7/3.1.4, p. 18.

[67] Xosé-Manoel Núñez and José M. Faraldo, "The First Great Patriotic War: Spanish Communists and Nationalism, 1936–1939," *Nationalities Papers* 37 (July 2009): 406.

[68] Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1946); David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931–1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 43–62; Jesús Hernández, *En el país de la gran mentira* (Madrid: G. del Toro, 1974), 22–3.

Ibárruri and the other PCE leaders in the Soviet Union often addressed the Spanish exiles as a community, which they assumed looked to the Spanish party for guidance in all aspects of their lives. On 20 August 1939, just four days before *Pravda* announced the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, General-Secretary José Díaz sent a letter to his "dear comrades" in the Soviet Union. "In your new socialist life," he advised the new arrivals, "you can and must prepare for the future because the struggle in Spain has not ended and will not end until we liberate our people from fascist domination."[69] In these circumstances, their behavior had to be exemplary and revolutionary in both "public and private life." Combining an appeal to Spanish patriotism with deference to the Soviet fatherland, Díaz prescribed diligent work along with devotion to heroic Spain, the "grand Soviet people," and dear comrade Stalin, all in preparation for the great antifascist struggle ahead.

Díaz's letter took no account of the very different situations, both material and political, of Spaniards in the Soviet Union. The PCE leaders in Moscow, who were assigned posts in the Comintern apparatus, enjoyed the perks and privileges of the Soviet elite and were largely insulated from the day-to-day problems facing other émigrés.[70] Approximately thirty émigré military officers, including Juan Modesto and Enrique Líster, enrolled at the Frunze Military Academy, where, their shared privileges notwithstanding, relations between strong and weak students and between Spaniards and Catalans were apparently less than "cordial."[71] Another relatively privileged group of about 110 émigrés attended a newly organized "party school" under the auspices of the Comintern. Short biographies prepared before they were admitted indicate that all were members of the PCE or Catalan Communist Party (Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya), most (sixty-six) having joined between 1931 and 1935. All had ably undertaken "responsible" work during the war – as commanders, commissars, party organizers, or intelligence operatives; only thirteen were women.[72] The remaining émigrés, low-level party members or activists, were assigned to factories in and around Moscow, where about three hundred party members worked in December 1940, as well as further afield.[73] Often working in unfamiliar occupations and unable to keep up with the "shock" pace of Stalinist factories, many lived in impoverished conditions even before the

[69] Díaz to Queridos camaradas, 20 August 1939, AHPCE, Dirigentes PCE, sig. 9/1.2.

[70] RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1317, ll. 111–35, 159, 178 (Comintern salaries and benefits).

[71] AHPCE, Emigración política, caja 101/3 (Meeting at Frunze Academy, October 1939); ibid., caja 101/1 (Military academies). Alted, *La voz*, 166; Joan Estruch Tobella, *Historia oculta del PCE* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2002), 147.

[72] RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1292, ll. 17–39 (Information on Party School); Alted, *La voz*, 166. Estruch, *Historia oculta*, 147. Head of the IKKI Cadres Department to Dimitrov, 2 September 1939, RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1325, ll. 16–17.

[73] RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1325a, ll. 155–6 (Foreign workers in Moscow factories); Pike, *In the Service*, 35–6, 45.

German invasion substantially lowered living standards throughout the Soviet Union.[74]

These new arrivals joined several thousand Spaniards already in the Soviet Union. During the civil war, the Soviet Union had taken in approximately three thousand children of the more than thirty thousand Spanish children evacuated from the war zone. These children had been accompanied by more than one hundred teachers and caregivers.[75] When the war ended, there were also about 150 Spanish pilots training in the Soviet Union and about 200 sailors stranded in Soviet Black Sea ports.[76] Few nonparty people arrived from Spain in 1939, but many earlier arrivals – teachers, pilots, sailors, and of course the children – were not necessarily members. In many ways, the children were a special case and, at least initially, enjoyed something close to "celebrity status" in the Soviet Union.[77] In contrast, the nonparty adults, especially those who evinced a desire to leave, received little consideration; in 1940 and 1941, many were arrested, ending up in labor camps in Kazakhstan.[78]

As this brief sketch makes clear, the notion of a unified Spanish community in the Soviet Union was in many ways a fiction – even the small "community" of privileged officers was riven by national and educational differences. What potentially united the exiles was a tendency to understand their experiences in Spain, however they remembered and contested them, as significant personally and internationally. As Líster reminded his fellow students in the midst of their criticism and self-criticism, "we are Spanish combatants."[79] Their current situation, he suggested, could only be understood in relation to their war. It was to this sense of community – the community of those defined by their past and future struggle against fascism – that Díaz's letter appealed, even as it ignored the different paths that émigrés had taken to the Soviet Union and their differing experiences among the "grand Soviet people."

Imagining the exiles as a community bound by their memories of the Spanish civil war, the Spanish leadership explained the Nazi-Soviet Pact as a continuation of the spirit that had animated "our war." In a pamphlet addressed to Spanish exiles in the Soviet Union and the Americas, Díaz and Ibárruri justified the pact in the emotional language of memory, linking the current conflict to English and French perfidy during the civil war: "Tens of thousands

74 RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1325a, ll. 154, 146 (Correspondence with Central Committee of VKP(b)).

75 Daniel Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War* [electronic resource] (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), chapter 5, http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kodo1/ (accessed 15 November 2014).

76 Elpat'evskii, *Ispanskaia emigratsiia*, 38–40. Alted, *La voz*, 48, 162–3.

77 Kowalsky, *Stalin and the Spanish Civil War*, chapter 5, paragraph 54. Pike, *In the Service*, 38.

78 Luiza Iordache, *Republicanos españoles en el Gulag (1939–1956)* (Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2008), 13, 29–36.

79 AHPCE, Emigración política, caja 101/3. See also Manuel Tagüeña Lacorte, *Testimonio de dos guerras* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2005), 345.

of Spaniards who fell heroically on the field of battle, thousands of martyred women, and thousands of innocent children destroyed by shrapnel accuse the English and French bourgeoisie . . . of having hands stained with the blood of antifascists."[80] They urged their compatriots to remember the tragic consequences of the democracies' refusal to supply the Republic with arms and implicitly to forget Nazi atrocities such as the bombing of Guernica.[81] Recognizing Stalin's decisive role, they also called on the exiles to maintain the distinctive "abnegation and heroism" forged in the Spanish civil war.[82]

A number of historians have taken such reconfigurations of the story of the Spanish struggle as evidence that Spanish communists, unlike their British and French comrades, suffered "no special problems of conscience" as a result of the pact and the subsequent partition of Poland.[83] The case of Santiago Carrillo, then a young communist who had publicly and vehemently accused his socialist father of treason, later a central figure in the elaboration of "Eurocommunism," seems to support such conclusions.[84] His retrospective accounts of this period – a 1948 article, a 1974 interview, and a 2006 memoir – emphasized that the pact harmonized with his own "anger" at years of British and French "cowardice."[85] Manuel Tagüeña Lacorte, who had commanded communist forces in the civil war and who, like Carrillo, was in France when the pact was announced, recalled the same "rancor" and the sense of vindication among the Spaniards, whose reactions, he emphasized, stood in sharp contrast to their "completely disconcerted" French comrades.[86]

Although anger of the sort emphasized by Carrillo and Tagüeña may have been deeply felt, it does not necessarily demonstrate that Spanish communists "found it easier to adapt to the consequences of the Nazi-Soviet pact than their British and French comrades."[87] After all, their public personas and very often their self-identifications were tightly linked to the sacrifices made in Spain. Líster's insistence on the community of "Spanish combatants" came in the course of an October 1939 meeting at the Frunze Military Academy in which the students affirmed the unabashed and now unorthodox antifascism of Díaz's August letter: "the struggle in Spain has not ended and will not end until we

[80] José Díaz and Dolores Ibárruri, *España y la guerra imperialista* (Mexico City: Editorial Popular, 1939), 6.
[81] Castro Delgado, *Mi fe*, 47.
[82] Díaz and Ibárruri, *España y la guerra*, 9.
[83] Juan Avilés Farré, *Pasionaria: La mujer y el mito* (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2005), 151. See also Gregorio Morán, *Miseria y grandeza del Partido Comunista de España, 1939–1985* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1986), 30; McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 197–8.
[84] Victor Alba, *The Communist Party in Spain* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1983), 302–6, 417.
[85] Carrillo, *Memorias*, 383. For his earlier accounts see Pike, *In the Service*, 21, 22; Estruch, *Historia oculta*, 151; Santiago Carrillo, *Demain l'Espagne: Entretiens avec Régis Debray et Max Gallo* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), 75.
[86] Tagüeña, *Testimonio*, 364.
[87] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 198.

liberate our people from fascist domination."[88] Despite the Nazi-Soviet pact, these officers understood the primary enemy as "fascism." Like the American veterans discussed earlier, they wanted to continue the fight.

This identification with antifascism was particularly powerful and public in the case of Ibárruri. Whatever claims about "imperialist war" she made in political pamphlets, she remained a vivid symbol of the Spanish struggle. The numerous letters, invitations, and gifts she received in this period from Soviet institutions and individuals suggest that the wartime press coverage of Spain in the Soviet Union made a lasting impression. The letter referenced in Chapter 4 from Nina Khor'uptenko, whose doctors had forbidden her to read about events in Spain because they agitated her so, dated to October 1939. In another letter dated September 1940, Khor'uptenko noted that she often looked into the eyes of the portrait of Ibárruri that "hangs on my wall with the portraits of the beloved leaders of our party and my beloved writers" and saw "all the pain, all the suffering of the Spanish people."[89] Ibárruri received dozens of less intimate letters, inviting her to speak in honor of International Women's Day or the seventieth anniversary of the Paris Commune, asking for permission to name a work collective in her honor, soliciting articles for the Soviet press, or requesting her presence at a meeting of a local branch of International Red Aid (MOPR). In early 1941, a seventh-grade student from the Donbas wrote to tell her about his progress studying Spanish – he included his grades – and to complain about his undisciplined classmates.[90] For these correspondents she remained Pasionaria, the "fiery Dolores, people's tribune of Spain."

In her contemporary correspondence with Spanish exiles, Soviet citizens, and international communists Ibárruri often played on her iconic status as the proletarian mother of Spain.[91] She seems to have left, however, no account of her "personal" reaction to the pact. Her silence, notably in her 1984 memoir, can be taken as a calculated cover-up, as well as an indication of the real difficulty for her of remembering this period; that is, of fitting it into a coherent picture of her life and her self. Ibárruri's account of her first months in Moscow consists of a catalog of the famous communists she met and an anecdote about studying Russian. Having learned the Cyrillic alphabet and realizing that "political terms are more or less alike in all languages," Ibárruri found that "with a little intuition and experience" she could decipher *Pravda* "– although," she admitted, "to tell the truth, at times I understood exactly the opposite of what they put in the newspaper."[92] The passage suggests not only

[88] AHPCE, Emigración política, caja 101/3.

[89] Nina Khor'uptenko to Dolores Ibárruri, 28 September 1940, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, El fons centro español de Moscú (ANC), sig. 202.

[90] Letter from student dated 6 February 1941 and other examples in ANC, sig. 202.

[91] Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, "Exile, Gender, and Communist Self-Fashioning: Dolores Ibárruri (La Pasionaria) in the Soviet Union," *Slavic Review* 71, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 577–89.

[92] Dolores Ibárruri, *Memorias de Pasionaria, 1939–1977: Me faltaba España* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1984), 51–2.

a lack of facility in Russian but also the linguistic and emotional difficulties of understanding and internalizing the profound shift in communist rhetoric and policy.[93] In August and September 1939, communist "intuition," particularly intuition that drew on understandings shaped by the Spanish civil war, would have been a particularly poor guide to the contents of *Pravda*. The excision of the pact from her account of this period – she never specifies what she misunderstood – suggests that the experiences that "made" Ibárruri a communist served (temporarily) only to disorient her.

Spanish communists often made "our war" the center of their own self-understandings. Like American veterans of the International Brigades, Spanish communists rationalized the nonaggression pact with Germany as the bitter fruit of the democracies' abandonment of Loyalist Spain, emphasizing, even decades later, their anger at the British and French. Still, despite the fact that Spaniards in the Soviet Union had far less room for maneuver than communists in the West, as well as less incentive to voice even implicit criticism of the new line, some, such as the communist officers at the Frunze Academy, managed to express a continuing and fundamental identification with "our war" against fascism. Thus the "cause of all progressive humanity" in Spain remained part of the cultural memory of international communism, latent perhaps, but still emotionally powerful in the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

"Our War" and the Great Fatherland War

On 22 June 1941, the day the Nazis and their allies invaded the Soviet Union, the "imperialist" war suddenly became a "people's war" against fascism.[94] The conventions developed in Soviet reporting of the Spanish civil war, notably the image, most strongly associated with Dolores Ibárruri, of the implacable and self-sacrificing mother, perfectly suited the Soviet media's emphasis on mothers and the motherland calling men to fight. Women like the sniper Liudmila Pavlichenko, "the girl who killed 300 fascists," followed in the footsteps of the Spanish militiawomen who had become emblems of the Spanish civil war. Stories of young women bravely standing watch on Leningrad's rooftops echoed stories of civilians under fire in Madrid.[95] Ibárruri's civil war slogan, "Better the widow of a hero than the wife of a coward," reappeared, without

[93] Paul Preston, *¡Comrades!: Portraits from the Spanish Civil War* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 304; Irene Falcón with Manuel Jiménez and Jesús Montero, *Asalto a los cielos: Mi vida junto a Pasionaria* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1996), 187–8.

[94] "Vystuplenie tov. Dimitrova G. M. na zasedanii sekretariata IKKI 22 iunia 1941 goda," RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1335, l. 30b.

[95] 'Streliai, kak Liudmila Pavlichenko,"*Komsomol'skaia pravda* (*KP*), 2 June 1942; Ol'ga Chechetkina, "Leningradtsy," *KP*, 11 December 1943; Lisa A. Kirschenbaum and Nancy M. Wingfield, "Gender and the Construction of Wartime Heroism in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union," *European History Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (July 2009): 468–9.

attribution, in the Soviet press.[96] In September 1941, Dimitrov recorded in his diary that Ibárruri's "impassioned speech at a women's rally" impressed Stalin, who deemed it a "good speech" and Ibárruri a "good woman."[97] The new situation seemed to offer an opportunity for Spanish exiles to continue the struggle lost in Spain.

From the Soviet perspective, however, the current war – their war – was not simply the continuation of the war in Spain. Rather, it was a holy war, the Great Fatherland War – a conception that defined the Spaniards, their combat experience and impeccable antifascist credentials notwithstanding, as outsiders. Much to their chagrin, none of the Spanish officers then finishing their studies at the Frunze Academy received commands in the Red Army. A few days after the invasion, they were told that Stalin had denied their request to join the Red Army, "saying that our place was in Spain, and that we ought to be held in reserve to fight there."[98] At roughly the same time, 21 of the 200 Spanish pilots who had been training in the Soviet Union when the Spanish civil war ended and who had expressed a desire to leave were sent to the gulag.[99] About fifty of the Spanish sailors likewise stranded in the Soviet Union, who had hoped to leave for Spain or elsewhere, were also arrested in late June 1941 despite their offer to join the fight against the Nazis.[100]

Among those Spaniards most likely to gain entrance to the Red Army were the now teenaged refugee children, the *niños de la guerra*, who were, if not more Sovietized than the adult refugees, then more likely to speak Russian.[101] In total, more than six hundred Spaniards served in the Red Army and in partisan units, approximately two hundred of whom died defending the Soviet Union or went missing in action.[102] The most prominent Spaniards in the Red Army were not the officers who founded the Fifth Regiment, but Rubén Ruiz Ibárruri and Santiago de Paúl Nelken, the sons of two important Spanish communists; Santiago's mother, Margarita Nelken, had joined the Communist Party during the Spanish civil war.[103] Their connections may, as historian David Wingeate Pike asserts, have,won them the commissions denied so many of their

[96] Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, "'Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families': Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda," *Slavic Review* 59 (Winter 2000): 833–4.

[97] Dimitrov, *Diary*, 193.

[98] Tagüeña, *Testimonio*, 416–17. See also Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos*, 217–18.

[99] Iordache, *Republicanos*, 13.

[100] Ibid., 56–7.

[101] Glennys Young, "To Russia with 'Spain': Spanish Exiles in the Soviet Union and the *Longue Durée* of Soviet History," *Kritika* 15, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 406–11. I thank the author for sharing a draft of this article with me. Colomina Limonero, *Dos patrias*, 59–63; AHPCE, Emigración política, caja 100/64.2 (List of Spaniards mobilized, June 1941).

[102] "Caídos en la defensa de la URSS en la Segunda Guerra Mundial," AHPCE, Emigración política, caja 99/3; ibid., caja 100/59 (List of Spanish guerrilleros); Pike, *In the Service*, 150–3; Colomina Lionera, *Dos patrias*, 67.

[103] Paul Preston, *Doves of War: Four Women of Spain* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), 365–6.

compatriots.[104] However, it is also the case that as young teenagers before the Spanish civil war, both lived and studied in the Soviet Union, learning Russian and gaining an understanding of, and perhaps an attachment to, Soviet life. In 1936, both were too young to enlist – Santiago was fifteen, Rubén sixteen – but nonetheless they fought in Spain.[105] In 1939, the young veterans returned to the Soviet Union, Rubén joining his mother in Moscow and Santiago electing the Soviet Union over his mother's place of exile in Mexico and his father's home in the Netherlands.[106] Although Margarita Nelken's fame may have facilitated Santiago's emigration to the Soviet Union, she herself was expelled from the party in October 1942 as an enemy of the party and the "Spanish people," a year before her son completed artillery school; thus she may have hurt his chances of receiving a commission.[107] Both young men had deep ties both to Spain and the Soviet Union that, perhaps as much or more than their famous mothers, facilitated their Red Army service.

During the Great Fatherland War, Dolores Ibárruri constituted the most visible and most powerful embodiment of the link between "our war" and the Soviet cause, or so Spaniards in need of assistance hoped. A review of her copious correspondence with the émigrés provides a glimpse of her self-presentation and its reception, and it suggests that the role of Iberian mother was more than symbolic.[108] Ibárruri and her correspondents, both prominent and rank-and-file exiles, who wrote requesting everything from help securing a pension or housing to permission to join the party, took seriously her responsibility – as Pasionaria and, after Díaz's suicide in March 1942, as general-secretary – for their material and emotional well-being.[109] Those who, after the German invasion of June 1941, turned to Ibárruri in hopes of being allowed to fight with the Red Army trusted her to recognize their requests as grounded in their experiences in Spain. In November 1942, for example, a group of pilots who had petitioned unsuccessfully to go to the front appealed to Ibárruri as someone who "well understood the Spanish national character" and thus could appreciate the deep shame they suffered "doing nothing for the general

[104] Pike, *In the Service*, 153.

[105] Preston, *Doves*, 370; A. Ibarruri, "Moi brat Ruben," in V. R. Tomin, ed., *My budem borot'sia vmeste: Ocherki o boitsakh-internatsionalistakh* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1985), 9, 11–12.

[106] Margarita Nelken, "Un héroe español del ejército rojo: Santiago de Paúl Nelken," Archivo Histórico Nacional, Archivo de Margarita Nelken (AMN), legajo 3245; Preston, *Doves*, 376.

[107] "Resolución sobre Margarita Nelken," 23 October 1942, AHPCE, Documentos PCE, carpeta 23; "Spravka," 17 September 1945, AMN, legajo 3235–150; Preston, *Doves*, 381.

[108] The fond of the Spanish Center of Moscow holds 170 letters written between 1939 and 1944, ANC, sig. 203. The PCE archive holds additional letters.

[109] Díaz had long suffered with stomach cancer. That the death was a suicide was not publicly acknowledged at the time. Daniel Arasa, *Los españoles de Stalin* (Barcelona:Editorial Vorágine, 1993), 28–30, 133–4.

cause of liquidating fascism."[110] Others relied on her apparent concern for the intimate details of the exiles' lives. In 1944 when comrade Pedro Felipe asked her to meet with his estranged wife Palmira on his behalf, Ibárruri agreed to try to effect a reconciliation. After the meeting, she sent a blunt update to the husband: "I have come to the conclusion that Palmira has separated from you because she has ceased to love you." Disregarding Stalinist efforts to impede divorce, she advised accepting "the situation and looking, dear Pedro, to your work and the fulfillment of your duty for some compensation for this lack of affection."[111]

Ibárruri also provided sterner advice, while still communicating both an intention to care for the exiles and respect for their contributions to the Spanish cause. Writing in 1943 to admonish Lupe Cantó for petitioning on behalf of a group of Spaniards evacuated to Uzbekistan who wished to return to Moscow, Ibárruri granted that "life is hard: but, comrade," she asked rhetorically, "don't the Soviet people suffer more than anyone?" She enjoined Cantó to remember that "cheering discord [and] collecting and spreading gossip" were activities unworthy of her militant past. (Cantó, who had been a local party secretary in Spain, had been recommended for the party school in 1939 as a comrade who was "politically well developed," "disciplined, and committed to the party."[112]) Despite the rather critical tone of the letter, Ibárruri signed herself, "Yours affectionately."[113]

The overlap of real and symbolic mothering and of commitments to the Spanish and Soviet causes emerged most powerfully when Ibárruri's son died at the Stalingrad front in September 1942. The *Komsoml'skaia pravda* story that ran under the headline "Our Rubén" began by quoting the telegram announcing his death. The words seem designed to call to mind the countless similar telegrams received across the Soviet Union.[114] Thus connected to the generalized experience of loss, Dolores Ibárruri appeared as a familiar Soviet mother in mourning. But she was also, the article quickly reminded its readers, "the heroine of the Spanish people, the fiery Dolores." Indeed in the newspaper's telling it was her exhortation, "Better to die on your feet than live on your knees," that appeared to have inspired Rubén, who began fighting against the "German-Italian fascists" on the "banks of the Ebro" and died defending Stalingrad. That the "son of the fiery Pasionaria died on his feet" lent credibility to her appeals to other mothers to send their men to war and perhaps brought some consolation to those whose sons, husbands, and brothers had fought and died.

[110] Elpat'evskii, *Ispanskaia emigratsiia*, 164. See also AHPCE, Emigración Política, caja 99/2.3; Manuel Tagüeña Lacorte to Ibárruri, 14 February 1944, ANC, sig. 203; Tagüeña, *Testimonio*, 416–17; Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos*, 217–18.

[111] Ibárruri to Pedro Felipe, [c. October 1944], ANC, sig. 203.

[112] RGASPI, f. 495, op. 18, d. 1292, l. 19.

[113] Ibárruri to Lupe Cantó, 29 October 1943, ANC, sig. 203.

[114] "Nash Ruben," *KP*, 24 October 1942.

Ibárruri's own public responses to Rubén's death emphasized the same connections between the battle lost in Spain and the war to be won in the Soviet Union that structured *Komsoml'skaia pravda*'s account. In letters she exchanged with Red Army soldiers in 1943, Ibárruri described Rubén as the embodiment of the linkage between Spain and Stalingrad. To Lieutenant Major P. Glukhov, who wrote to inform her of his unit's vow to avenge Rubén's death, Ibárruri replied, "Your letter was like a caress from my son, my Rubén, who sealed with his blood the battle brotherhood, born in the fields of Spain, of the Spanish people and the Soviet people, from whom we received generous aid in the difficult days of our war." As she may have expected, her letter was publicized by its recipients, who exulted in their reply to her, "Pasionaria wrote to us!"[115]

A hint of the personal pain that informed Ibárruri's efforts to understand Rubén's death in terms of the "fusion" of Spain and Stalingrad emerges in her 1984 memoir. Even at a distance of more than forty years, she had, she asserted, no adequate means of expressing the depth of her loss. "How," she asked, in one of the memoir's few reflective moments, "can I speak of my sorrow? It was the sorrow, the deepest of all sorrows, of a mother who lost her son. And he was my only son. Only Amaya was left to me of the six that I brought into the world."[116] Unable to represent her own pain, she told the story of "my Rubén" via an assemblage of public and semi-public texts by others that depicted her as at once a mother in pain and the symbolic mother of fighters in the international antifascist struggle. She quoted in full Dimitrov's emotional letter of condolence, which balanced the acknowledgment that the death of a "magnificent son" is the "most tragic personal blow that fate can deal" with the conviction that "you, dear Dolores, will know how to transform your great pain into a source of strength, energy, and ruthlessness toward the hated fascist."[117] A stanza from Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's "Canto a Stalingrado" echoed Ibárruri's evocation of childbirth and raised it to the level of allegory: "Spain shakes herself with your blood and your dead,/ Because you, Stalingrad, held out to her your soul/ when Spain gave birth to heroes like yours."[118] Such texts, Ibárruri suggested, embedded her son's death in a larger antifascist narrative that encompassed both the Soviet Union and Spain, endowing his sacrifice with world historical significance, but never really consoling his mother.

When Margarita Nelken's son was killed in action in January 1944, she, too, attempted to make sense of his death in "private" letters with a

[115] Dolores Ibárruri to Lieutenant Major P. Glukhov, nd, ANC, sig. 207. I have found no contemporary "personal" documents addressing her loss in the archives or referenced by her biographers.

[116] Ibárruri, *Memorias de Pasionaria*, 66. See also Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos*, 213, 212; Santiago Carrillo, "Dolores Ibárruri," in *Dolores Ibárruri* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2004), 152; A. Ibárruri, "Moi brat Ruben," 21.

[117] Ibárruri, *Memorias de Pasionaria*, 66.

[118] Ibid., 67.

potentially public readership that emphasized the fusion of the Spanish and Soviet causes.[119] In 1946, she wrote both to the director of the school in Moscow where her son had studied before the Spanish civil war and to the head of the local soviet in the town near which he died, proposing to establish memorial prizes in Santiago's honor. At the school, the prize would honor a fourteen-year-old – "the age of my son when he studied there" – and in Mitrofanovka a twenty-two-year-old, "the age of my son when he died there."[120] In both cases, Nelken proposed to award a gold watch engraved with the recipient's name, her son's name, and the date. In the letter to the school director, she prefaced her request with a long narrative establishing Santiago as a Spanish and Soviet hero. She emphasized that, in 1935, Santiago had quickly felt himself at home in the Soviet Union; nonetheless, in March 1936 he returned to Spain, where, after lying about his age, he spent the entire war in "the most dangerous posts." At seventeen, he was among the last to retreat from Catalonia; in France, he declined the safe haven of his grandmother's house, preferring to join the men under his command interned in the camp at Saint Cyprien. Omitting her own role in freeing both Santiago and Rubén Ruiz Ibárruri from the camp, Nelken emphasized that when the PCE leadership offered Santiago the opportunity to go the Soviet Union, he accepted "with enthusiasm." When the Nazis invaded, he immediately enlisted in the Red Army, and he became a hero in a second war against fascism.[121]

Alongside this heroic Spanish-Soviet narrative, Nelken also conveyed a sense of inconsolable loss. "As a mother," she pleaded with the president of the Mitrofanovka soviet to send her any information he could find about her son. She longed for "some information about his last days and his last moments. . . . how was he wounded; did he die immediately or in a hospital . . . did he have a girlfriend there." She asked also for details of her son's grave and perhaps a photograph. If it was an individual grave, she requested that it be marked with an inscription in Russian and Spanish reading "Santiago de Paúl Nelken, born in Madrid (Spain) 11 March 1921. Died in Mitrofanovka 5 January 1944, for the USSR, for Spain, and for the liberty of all peoples." She wished flowers to always be kept on the grave and offered to pay for them. Apologizing for "so much trouble," she explained, "you will understand the pain of a mother who has lost her only son."[122] Ensuring that her son's grave in the Soviet Union was

[119] Rebecca Earle, "Introduction: Letters, Writers, and the Historian," in Rebecca Earle, ed. *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 2–4; Preston, *Doves*, 384; Yuri V. Daskevich (TASS) to Margarita Nelken, 13 June 1945, AMN, legajo 3235–142.

[120] Margarita Nelken to the President of the Mitrofanovka Soviet, 1946, AMN, legajo 3240–109; Margarita Nelken to the Director of School 16 (Moscow), 23 February 1946, AMN, legajo 3235–159.

[121] Margarita Nelken to the Director of School 16 (Moscow); Preston, *Doves*, 375.

[122] Margarita Nelken to the President of the Mitrofanovka Soviet; A. E. Badalián to Margarita Nelken, 10 October 1949, AMN, legajo 3235–205 (confirming marker and flowers); Preston, *Doves*, 386–89.

well looked after became a means of preserving the sanctity of his death "for the liberty of all peoples," of convincing herself that he died in a just war, one that had begun in Spain.[123]

The emerging cold war complicated Nelken's efforts to sustain the fusion of the Soviet and Spanish causes that she believed gave meaning to her son's death. In 1948, she returned to Europe with "the hope of visiting the grave of my son;" however, the hostility in the West to those labeled communists rendered the visit impossible. She knew, as she wrote a friend, that "if I went there, no one would believe it was just for 'THAT,' and afterwards I wouldn't be allowed to teach courses in Mexico." The situation raised the "awful" thought that "those who fell, those who gave everything, have made their sacrifice in vain, for a world even more selfish and mean than the one they believed they were going to change."[124] Leaving open the question of whether she had in fact come to believe that her son died in vain, Nelken assigned no blame. Although expelled from the party in 1942, she never joined, as historian Paul Preston emphasizes, "the ranks of the ex-Communists who were shrilly denouncing the God that failed."[125] When in 1950, Jesús Hernández, who himself had been expelled from the party in 1944, asked her to sign a letter condemning communists' attacks on Yugoslav veterans of the International Brigades, she declined, explaining she did "not want those who look after" her son's "grave to see me as an enemy."[126] Remaining silent and outwardly loyal to the cause served in Nelken's case the deeply personal purpose of coping with, if not easing, persistent sorrow by keeping her son's memory alive in the Soviet Union.

In the cases of these two Spanish women whose sons died in the Soviet Union – as in the cases of so many communists who remembered and mythologized the Spanish civil war – antifascism was not merely or primarily a political line. Rather, it functioned as a marker of identity, a link to both the Soviet Union and to an international community defined by the struggle in Spain. The memory of "our war" was both powerful and malleable. For those who defended the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the British and French "betrayal" of Spain could provide an emotionally compelling justification of the Soviet about-face. Indeed the desire to remain connected to comrades from those heroic days encouraged continued loyalty to the cause. With the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, atrocities that communists had momentarily "forgotten" in 1939 might link the defense of the Soviet Union to the cause of all humanity. For the former communist Nelken as much as for the communist icon Ibárruri, the memory of Spain provided a means of making sense of their loss. In some cases, for

[123] Margarita Nelken, *Las torres del Kremlin* (Mexico City: Industrial y distribuidora, 1943), 245; Preston, *Doves*, 383.

[124] Margarita Nelken to Pablo Casals, 28 February 1948, as quoted in Preston, *Doves*, 395.

[125] Preston, *Doves*, 394.

[126] Margarita Nelken to Jesús [Hernández], 4 July 1950, AMN, legajo 3237–78; I have used the translation in Preston, *Doves*, 390–1. On Hernández's expulsion, see Kirschenbaum, "Gender, Exile."

example that of French veterans of the International Brigades who fought in the maquis, local victories in this wider antifascist war might eclipse memories of the war in Spain. But even among those who had such victories to celebrate, memories of Spanish solidarity and tragedy often remained self-defining.[127] Those who had been part of the struggle in Spain remained, whether they liked it or not, part of an international community and closely associated with Moscow.

[127] Skoutelsky, "L'Espagne," 30–1.

7

The Early Cold War and the Fate of "Progressive Humanity"

As World War II ended, hopes ran high that victory over Nazi Germany and fascist Italy spelled the defeat of the regime in Spain that they had fought to create. In wartime radio broadcasts from Moscow, Dolores Ibárruri struck a remarkably optimistic note, encouraging Spaniards to understand Allied victory as a prelude to the inevitable destruction of fascism in Spain.[1] In late 1944, Josef Stalin approved the dispatch of Spanish communist officers from the Soviet Union to Yugoslavia, where they received training in guerrilla warfare, and from there to the south of France, with the aim of unifying Spanish partisan groups.[2] In February 1945, Ibárruri left the Soviet Union to join her comrades in France. They had, she remembered forty years later, Stalin's full support. "Comrade Dolores," he assured her before she left, "You can count on us. The Spanish antifascist fighters are our allies."[3] In France, where exiled Spaniards had played important roles in the underground, the resistance newspaper *Combat* promoted the Spanish cause, emphasizing that the war against fascism had begun in Spain "and thus had to end there as well."[4] In January 1945, International Brigade veteran Milton Wolff, then serving with the Office

[1] "El ejército ante el futuro de España," 13 October 1944, Dirigentes PCE, caja 16/2.4, Archivo Histórico del Partido Comunista de España (AHPCE); "De ventana a ventana," 8 June 1944, ibid., caja 16/1.2; "España no será una excepción," 11 January 1945, ibid., caja 17/3.1.

[2] A. A. Sagomonian, "Sovetskii soiuz i ispanskii vopros, 1944–1947 gody: Po novym arkhivnym materialam," *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, 2008, no. 2: 60.

[3] Dolores Ibárruri, *Memorias de Pasionaria, 1939–1977: Me faltaba España* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1984), 90.

[4] David A. Messenger, "A Real Break or Reluctant Parting? France, the United States, and the Spanish Question, 1946," *Journal of European Studies* 38, no. 2 (2008): 142. See also Tom Buchanan, "Holding the Line: The Political Strategy of the International Brigade Association, 1939–1977," *Labour History Review* 66, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 301.

of Strategic Services (OSS), met a group of Spanish maquis operating out of southern France who predicted victory in Spain within weeks.[5] In short, the end of fascism in Spain was widely understood as the necessary last act of World War II.[6]

Even those who doubted the imminence of regime change often framed the so-called Spanish question in terms of wartime politics and emotions. In 1945, President Franklin Roosevelt reminded Carleton Hayes, the former ambassador to Spain, who considered any effort to remove Francisco Franco "unrealistic," that "the present regime in Spain is one which is repugnant to American ideas of democracy and good government."[7] Harry Truman, who assumed the presidency when Roosevelt died in April 1945, shared his predecessor's distaste for Franco, whom he described as "no different" than Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.[8] Responding to still powerful "resistance rhetoric and imagery," the French National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Commission unanimously approved resolutions in May 1945 and again in August to break diplomatic relations with Spain.[9] In June 1945, delegates at the founding conference of the United Nations (UN) in San Francisco approved by acclamation a Mexican proposal barring from membership any state established with the military aid of those who had fought against the Allies – that is, Spain. As the war ended, American public opinion was solidly against Franco.[10]

Although such attitudes could be quite resilient – Truman, for one, never abandoned the equation of Franco with Hitler and Mussolini – they were, from the American point of view, increasingly problematic as the Spanish question soon become an issue in the emerging cold war.[11] The tensions were visible by early 1946, when the French proposed that the UN Security Council consider imposing sanctions against Spain. The French government continued to view Spain through the lens of World War II: Franco was rumored to be sheltering Nazi atomic scientists working on a bomb designed to reverse the outcome of the war. When in February 1946 the Spanish government executed twelve Spanish guerrillas, including Cristino García, a hero of the French resistance, the French government – a coalition of Christian Democrats, Socialists, and

[5] Milton Wolff to Lennie [Leonard Lamb], 10 January 1945, Complaints of Discrimination during World War II, ALBA 069, Box 3, Folder 70, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 275; Mark Byrnes, "Unfinished Business: The United States and Franco's Spain, 1944–47," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 11, no. 1 (March 2000): 136.

[6] Irene Falcón with Manuel Jiménez and Jesús Montero, *Asalto a los cielos: Mi vida junto a Pasionaria* (Madrid: Temas de hoy, 1996), 239.

[7] Quoted in Byrnes, "Unfinished Business," 136. 137.

[8] Quoted in ibid., 146.

[9] Messenger, "Real Break," 141, 144.

[10] August 1945 Gallup poll cited in Byrnes, "Unfinished Business," 142–3.

[11] On Truman see ibid., 160 n.60; Jill Edwards, *Anglo-American Relations and the Franco Question, 1945–1955* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 173–4.

Communists – closed the border with Spain and sought British and American support against Franco. Although the appearance of supporting Franco caused "severe embarrassment,"[12] both the British and Americans rejected the French bid to take the matter to the Security Council. Much to the French government's dismay, the Soviets offered their support for the French effort. The UN ultimately recommended only a withdrawal of ambassadors from Madrid.[13]

The French proposal came at a moment when the U.S. State Department increasingly saw the Spanish question through the lens of worsening relations with the Soviet Union. In a telegram sent to the U.S. secretary of state before the French closed the border, George Kennan, the American chargé in Moscow, provided a framework for understanding the French move as serving Soviet interests. The Soviets, Kennan argued, hoped to mobilize "western opinion against Franco" in hopes of pressuring Western governments to "make strong action to bring about downfall of Franco regime." In the ensuing chaos, he predicted, the Soviets would try by means of "superior discipline and revolutionary methods" to install a communist regime in Spain.[14] In a follow-up telegram sent 1 March 1946 – after both the French decision to close the border and his own "Long Telegram" of 22 February describing the Kremlin as "impervious to logic" but "highly sensitive to logic of force" – Kennan emphasized the importance of resisting "Soviet pressure groups everywhere beginning with the French Communists."[15] The 1943 dissolution of the Comintern had done little to challenge the conviction that national parties followed Moscow's orders.[16]

Growing suspicion of alleged "Soviet pressure groups" abroad coincided with and encouraged suspicion and persecution of such groups at home. The coincidence was not necessarily planned or welcomed by U.S. policy makers. Kennan closed his "Long Telegram" with the warning that "the greatest danger

[12] Edward Johnson, "Early Indications of a Freeze: Greece, Spain, and the United Nations, 1946–47," *Cold War History* 6, no. 1 (February 2006): 50, 51. See also Enrique Moradiellos, "The Potsdam Conference and the Spanish Problem," *Contemporary European History* 10, no. 1 (March 2001): 86.

[13] "The Ambassador in France ([Jefferson] Caffrey) to the Secretary of State," 27 February 1946 in *United States Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946* (FRUS), vol. 5, *The British Commonwealth, Western and Central Europe* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 1043–4 (http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS.FRUS1946v05); David Wingeate Pike, "Franco et l'admission aux nations unies," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 41, no.162 (April 1991): 107–11; Messenger, "Real Break," 148–51.

[14] *FRUS*, vol. 5, 1035, 1036; Messenger, "Real Break," 149–51; Sagomonian, "Sovetskii soiuz," 63.

[15] Telegram, George Kennan to George Marshall ["Long Telegram"], 22 February 1946, Harry S. Truman Administration File, Elsey Papers, (http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/6--6.pdf), p. 15."The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State," 1 March 1946, *FRUS*, vol. 5, 1045.

[16] Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 210–11.

that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet Communism, is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping."[17] Truman had little patience with people who insisted that the Spanish Republic had been "communistic," a charge that he dismissed as "the best retreat of every opponent of liberal policies."[18] Nonetheless, the premise that the Soviets were able to mobilize and even "control" Western public opinion legitimized, perhaps required, efforts to unmask purportedly idealistic or humanitarian organizations as communist fronts.[19] Kennan's warning that the Soviets managed to infiltrate trade unions, women's groups, and youth groups dovetailed with both anticommunist sentiments that predated the cold war and the "espionage paradigm" – the conviction that the "Soviet Union and its agents were a significant and growing threat to a vulnerable United States" – that emerged during World War II.[20] From this perspective, organizations advocating sanctions against Franco were particularly dangerous: Their appeals had emotional and political resonance, but they served Soviet interests, wittingly or not. Such convictions help explain why in early 1946 the first postwar subpoenas served by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) – and the first jail terms it imposed for contempt – went to board members of the innocuous-sounding Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, a nonprofit organization devoted to aiding Spanish refugees.[21]

In these same years, a wave of purges far deadlier than the American red hunts but with sometimes similar targets moved through the Soviet Union and its satellites.[22] In the Soviet sphere an "espionage paradigm" and fears of capitalist encirclement had long predated World War II. Masked enemies, Trotskyite spies, and foreign intelligence operatives had played central roles in the scripts of the great show trials of the late 1930s – and in Soviet representations of enemies in Spain. By the late 1940s, American intelligence operatives took over the parts formerly played by Gestapo agents or Japanese spies.

[17] "Long Telegram," p. 17; X [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 582.

[18] Harry Truman to Rep. William B. Barry, 8 January 1946, as quoted in Byrnes, "Unfinished Business," 146.

[19] *FRUS*, vol. 5, 1033

[20] Katherine A. S. Sibley, "Soviet Military-Industrial Espionage in the United States and the Emergence of an Espionage Paradigm in US-Soviet Relations, 1941–45," *American Communist History* 2, no. 1 (2003): 22, 21; Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents*, 2d ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 20.

[21] "War Fund Approves Refugee Committee," *New York Times* (*NYT*), 1 September 1944; Phillip Deery, "'A Blot upon Liberty': McCarthyism, Dr. Barsky and the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee," *American Communist History* 8, no. 2 (December 2009): 167, 172–3; Howard Fast, *Being Red: A Memoir* (New York: Laurel, 1990), 146–55, 173–7; Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 15–16.

[22] Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and Their Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 130.

As the new threats of the atomic age added to Soviet insecurities, the Soviet state updated the old remedy of unmasking hidden enemies.[23] Defendants identified as "rootless cosmopolitans" were charged with "groveling before the West" and spying for the United States.[24]

Although many studies have noted the prominence of Spanish civil war veterans, the so-called Spaniards, among the victims of the postwar purges in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and East Germany, the legacy of the Spanish civil war rarely figures in synthetic accounts of the early cold war.[25] Yet paying attention to the Spanish question illuminates the degree to which a desire not only to silence but also to discredit, even demonize, interwar and wartime internationalism shaped early cold war cultures on both sides of the iron curtain. In the United States, where Spain carried straightforward political significance – those who fought for the Republic were assumed to be communists or at best fellow travelers – the taint was nonetheless more than simply ideological.[26] The networks that linked veterans to their international comrades made them dangerously "un-American," and the ties fostered by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB), an alleged communist front organization, magnified their potential threat as conspirators and spies. On the Soviet side, fears of espionage that had long complicated Stalinist internationalism became paramount as Spain emerged as a key nexus in trials of alleged American spies throughout the eastern bloc. That the veterans, east and west, continued to define themselves in terms of their fight for "all progressive

[23] Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3–7, 23, 72; Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, "Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Problems, Perspectives, Interpretations," in Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, eds., *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 5.

[24] Konstantin Azadovskii and Boris Egorov, "From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism: Stalin and the Impact of the 'Anti-Cosmopolitan' Campaigns on Soviet Culture," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 68, 74; Epstein, *Last Revolutionaries*, 139–43; George H. Hodos, *Show Trials: Stalinist Purges in Eastern Europe, 1948–1954* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 35; Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 210–13.

[25] Hodos, *Show Trials*, 35, 37, 73, 99; Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 153–62; Epstein, *Last Revolutionaries*, 130, 149–50; Mastny, *Cold War*, 67, 156; Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades, 1945–1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 57–61. An exception to the neglect of Spain is David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Recent studies include Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War: From the October Revolution to the Fall of the Wall* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk, and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (New York: Berghahn, 2012); Douglas Field, ed., *American Cold War Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).

[26] Reynold Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists: A Political and Cultural History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 18.

humanity" further stoked suspicions. As both sides worked to build impermeable barriers between opposing blocs, Spain became shorthand for the dangers of permeable borders and promiscuous, rootless international interaction.

By 1950, Spain itself was no longer a front in the cold war. Seeing little advantage in further antagonizing his former allies on the Spanish question, Stalin in 1948 recalled Ibárruri to Moscow. He counseled "patience," suggesting that the Spanish party abandon guerrilla warfare. Initially resistant, the Spaniards ultimately convinced themselves, as they had in 1939, that "Stalin was right."[27] The decision meant the abandonment of hopes for a speedy end to their Soviet exile and required a readjustment of their politics. In 1950, the year the United States dispatched an ambassador to Franco's regime and approved a $62.5 million loan, Ibárruri's correspondence with Spaniards in exile railed against "the Yankee colonization of Spain."[28] In 1953, the United States acquired naval and air bases in Spain in return for $226 million in military and economic aid. Two years later, the Soviets joined a unanimous UN vote in favor of Spanish membership: part of a "package deal" that brought sixteen states into the organization.[29] The cold war divide effectively quashed the Spanish exiles' and their supporters' optimism that the war against fascism would soon end where it had begun.[30] Nonetheless, the veterans of the Spanish civil war continued to offer a powerful and often unwanted reminder of both international solidarity and "the monsters we failed to destroy."[31]

Real and Imagined Spies: West

In the early years of the cold war, spy mania gripped states on both sides of the iron curtain. In both east and west, these concerns about espionage had a

[27] Ibárruri, *Memorias de Pasionaria*, 127; Sagomonian, "Sovetskii soiuz," 70–1. See also Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*, 94–8, 104.

[28] "Al congreso español de la paz," 30 October 1951, Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, Fons centro español de Moscú (ANC), Sig. 207; "Los americanos buscan en España carne de canon," 12 September 1950, AHPCE, Dirigentes PCE, caja 17/3.2; Sonsoles Cabeza Sánchez-Albornoz, "Posición de la República española en el exilio ante el ingreso de España en la ONU," *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, no. 17 (1995): 164; Pike, "Franco," 13–14; Edwards, *Anglo-American Relations*, 168–74.

[29] Pike, "Franco," 114; Alberto José Lleonart Amsélem, "El ingreso de España en la ONU: Obstáculos e impulsos," *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, no. 17 (1995): 114–16; "United Nations Member States," http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/org1469.doc.htm (accessed 15 November 2014).

[30] Matilde Eiroa San Francisco, "Sobrevivir en el socialismo: Organización y medios de comunicación de los exilados comunistas en las democracias populares, "*Historia social* 69 (2011) : 82; Santiago Carrillo, *Memorias: El testimonio polémico de un protagonista relevante de nuestra transición* (Barcelona : Planeta, 2008), 542–52.

[31] Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 260.

basis in reality. Soviet spies really acquired atomic secrets, although how vital they were to the Soviet bomb project remains an open question.[32] The U.S. government really organized covert operations to destabilize Soviet satellites, although none were successful.[33] The processes and the outcomes of Soviet and American espionage and counterespionage varied enormously, which is hardly surprising given their great differences in political culture.[34] Yet both sides can be described as often responding irrationally even to documented security threats and as frequently exaggerating or fabricating the dangers. The hysteria owed much to the tense and unstable world situation; ordinary people, if not the leaders, on both sides feared that conflicts in Berlin or Korea would spark World War III.[35] Still, such circumstances do not fully explain the depth of the shared anxiety. Focusing on the veterans of the Spanish civil war among the suspects on both sides opens a new perspective on the spy mania, suggesting that it was rooted not only in abiding fears of war, espionage, and sabotage but also in efforts to contain, discipline, and disgrace individuals whose (often celebrated) histories of crossing borders and hybrid identities challenged increasingly rigid global divisions.

During World War II, mounting evidence of Soviet military and industrial espionage in the United States had prompted "a vast expansion in the nation's security and counterintelligence apparatus."[36] By the late 1940s, that apparatus had exposed sometimes damaging acts of espionage. Historians long treated with skepticism the information that former Soviet spy Elizabeth Bentley provided to the FBI when she defected in 1945.[37] However, recently-opened American, Soviet, and Hungarian archives have confirmed many of her claims; the Alger Hiss case remains controversial, but even here much evidence

[32] Christof Laucht, *Elemental Germans: Klaus Fuchs, Rudolf Peierls and the Making of British Nuclear Culture, 1939–59* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 90–3; Vladislav Zubok, "Atomic Espionage and its Soviet 'Witnesses," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 4 (September 1994): 50, 52–3 (http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHPBulletin4_p2.pdf, accessed 15 November 2014); V. I. Lota, "Vklad voennykh razvedchikov v sozdanie otechestvennogo atomnogo oruzhiia, 1941–1945 gg.," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 2006, no. 11: 40–4.

[33] Sarah-Jane Corke, *US Covert Operations and Cold War Strategy: Truman, Secret Warfare and the CIA, 1943–53* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Peter Grose, *Operation Rollback: America's Secret War behind the Iron Curtain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

[34] Kristie Macrakis, "Technophilic Hubris and Espionage Styles during the Cold War," *ISIS: Journal of the History of Science in Society* 101, no. 2 (June 2010): 378–85.

[35] Fast, *Being Red*, 264; John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1958), 133–4; Scott Martelle, *The Fear Within: Spies, Commies, and American Democracy on Trial* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 94–5, 233–4; Elena Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957*, trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 82–3; Harrison E. Salisbury, *A Journey for Our Times* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1983), 369–73.

[36] Sibley, "Soviet Military-Industrial Espionage," 22, 21.

[37] David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 56.

supports her story that he was a Soviet agent.[38] Similarly, the atomic espionage case of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were sentenced to death in 1951 and executed in 1953, remains contentious; however, available evidence suggests that Julius (but not Ethel) indeed engaged in extensive industrial and atomic espionage.[39]

As revelations such as Bentley's underscored the reach of Soviet wartime espionage, and as troubling events such as the Chinese revolution and the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb provided further evidence of American vulnerability, the security apparatus constructed during World War II grew into an enormous, sometimes demagogic anticommunist contraption designed to ferret out all manner of communist activity. The U.S. government used legislative, judicial, and administrative means to locate and persecute communists: hearings before the House Un-American Activities Committee, criminal prosecutions under the Alien Registration Act of 1940 (the Smith Act) for advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government, and registration of front organizations by the Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB), respectively.[40] In these circumstances Bentley's testimony, which pointed to actual spies such as Julius Rosenberg, also set in motion the harassment of individuals "guilty" only of being or of having been communists. When Bentley revealed that Lee Fuhr (Lini De Vries) had recruited her into the party, the veteran nurse who had served in Spain became the target of FBI surveillance that forced her out of a number of jobs. Ultimately, she emigrated to Mexico.[41]

[38] Eduard Mark, "*In Re* Alger Hiss: A Final Verdict from the Files of the KGB," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 26–67; John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 167–72; Schrecker, *The Age*, 21–3, 31–42; Sibley, "Soviet Military-Industrial Espionage," 21–61; Mária Schmidt, "Noel Field – The American Communist at the Center of Stalin's East European Purge: From the Hungarian Archives," *American Communist History* 3, no. 2 (2004): 229–30, 242–3.

[39] Steven T. Usdin, "The Rosenberg Ring Revealed: Industrial-Scale Nuclear and Conventional Espionage," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 91–143; John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Early Cold War Spies: The Espionage Trials that Shaped American Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 166, 176; for a more skeptical view, Bernice Schrank, "Reading the Rosenbergs after Venona," *Labour / Le Travail* 49 (Spring 2002): 189–210; Lori Clune, "Great Importance World-Wide: Presidential Decision-Making and the Executions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg," *American Communist History* 10, no. 3 (December 2011): 266–7, 283.

[40] Robert Lichtman and Ronald D. Cohen, "Harvey Matusow, the FBI, and the Justice Department: Becoming a Government Informer-Witness in the McCarthy Era," *American Communist History* 1, no. 1 (2002): 43–4, 46.

[41] Elizabeth Bentley, *Out of Bondage* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1951); Kathryn Olmsted, *Red Spy Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth Bentley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 8–10; Lauren Kessler, *Clever Girl: Elizabeth Bentley, the Spy Who Ushered in the Cold War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 33–51; "Lini Moekerk De Vries," Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001, Box 6, Folder 20, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; Fredericka Martin, report on interview with Lini Fuhr, 1980, Martin Papers, Box 6, Folder 23; Lini Fuhr, "Up from the Cellar" [typescript], Martin Papers,

Although the Smith Act prosecutions had "nothing to do with espionage," they reflected the assumption of the most zealous red hunters that every communist constituted a potential Soviet agent.[42] Essentially making it illegal to advocate communism, the Smith Act provided a means of pursing criminal charges against communists when the government lacked sufficient evidence for espionage prosecutions. The 1949 prosecution of eleven national leaders of the Communist Party of the United States directly followed the failed effort to obtain espionage indictments on the basis of Bentley's testimony, which could not be corroborated. Indeed the same grand jury that heard Bentley issued the indictments for the leaders of the Communist Party, who were charged not with spying or sabotage but with conspiring to "teach and advocate the overthrow and destruction of the Government of the United States by force and violence."[43] Similarly, Steve Nelson's 1948 appearance before the HUAC focused on FBI intelligence that seemed to establish his connection to efforts to pass atomic secrets to the Soviets; however, both his 1952 conviction under Pennsylvania's sedition statue and his 1953 conviction under the federal Smith Act relied not on evidence of espionage but rather, like the other Smith Act trials, on criminalizing speech. (In 1957, the U.S. Supreme Court found the Smith Act unconstitutional on First Amendment grounds.[44]) In some cases, Smith Act convictions rested on the perjury of "professional witnesses" paid by the government, a practice that suggests a desire – whether driven by fear or political ambition – for conviction by any means necessary.[45]

The lives of Milly Bennett and Hans Amlie illustrate how the presumed linkage of communism and subversion affected even obscure communists – perhaps by 1943, former communists – who posed no risk to national security. During the war, the FBI investigated both Bennett and Amlie, raising questions about her status as an alleged spy for the Spanish Republic and his communist past, including his service in Spain.[46] Bennett, if not Amlie, seemed to experience the surveillance as harassment. When an agent stopped by to

Box 6, Folder 27, pp. 112–17, 194; Cedric Belfrage, *The American Inquisition, 1945–1960* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), 19, 45–7.

42 Schrank, "Reading the Rosenbergs," 193; Ellen Schrecker, "Before the Rosenbergs: Espionage Scenarios in the Early Cold War," in Marjorie Garber and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, eds., *Secret Agents: The Rosenberg Case, McCarthyism, and Fifties America* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 129.

43 Martelle, *Fear Within*, 19–23, 31, 40, 68–9; "Text of Indictment of 12 Communists," *NYT*, 17 January 1949; Schrecker, "Before the Rosenbergs," 135.

44 "Text of Report by House Committee on Un-American Activities Relating to Atomic Espionage," *NYT*, 28 September 1948; "Steve Nelson Guilty on 12 Sedition Counts," *NYT*, 1 February 1952; "Five Convicted as Reds in Long Trial at Pittsburgh," *NYT*, 21 August 1953; Julia M. Allen, "'That Accursed Aesopian Language': Prosecutorial Framing of Linguistic Evidence in *US v. Foster*, 1949," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2001): 109–34; Martelle, *Fear Within*, 251–3.

45 Lichtman and Cohen, "Harvey Matusow," 45–6, 65–6.

46 See Chapter 6.

interview them in early 1943, Bennett took the opportunity "to berate the Federal Bureau of Investigation for conducting investigations of alleged members of the Communist Party." The agent, clearly annoyed, noted in his report that the "jurisdiction of the Bureau in such matters was explained to her." He did not note Bennett's response.[47] That confrontation notwithstanding, the investigation found "no evidence of Communist activity," and in July 1943 the Bureau cleared Amlie to continue as an employee of the federal government.[48]

As the cold war fed fears of Soviet espionage and sabotage, Amlie and Bennett found themselves once again under suspicion. In 1948, the FBI's Phoenix office recommended reopening the case and preparing a security index card identifying Amlie as a native-born communist.[49] Acknowledging that the earlier investigation had "failed to disclose present membership" in the Communist Party, the Phoenix agent emphasized that Amlie admitted that "he had fought with the Abraham Lincoln Battalion," an admission that warranted including him on the index of "dangerous" persons – this despite the fact that in 1943 Attorney General Francis Biddle had prohibited such a list as "unpractical, unwise, and dangerous."[50] In June 1948, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover confirmed that the "security index card has been prepared at the Bureau."[51] In January 1949, "in view of the tense international situation at the present time" – Hoover may have had in mind the progress of the Chinese Communists to Beijing – the director requested an updated report on Amlie. The Phoenix office thus interviewed at least a half-dozen of Amlie and Bennett's neighbors, but "developed" no evidence "of Communistic membership or activities."[52] In June 1949, the Bureau canceled its security index card on Amlie.[53] His death six months later, the result of a farm accident, did not, however, end the matter for his widow, who herself became the subject of a reinvestigation in 1950.[54]

Bennett's connections not only to Spain but also to China and the Soviet Union apparently established her as a potential threat. The FBI's renewed interest in her stemmed from the fact that her name appeared in the Shanghai Municipal Police records in relation to her work in the 1920s at the communist-affiliated Chung Mei News Agency.[55] Given the recent "loss" of China, the FBI saw such connections in a new and sinister light. Particularly suspicious were

47 "Report made by James T. Mullan," 1 March 1943, Mildred Bremler [Milly Bennett] Federal Bureau of Investigation File, HQ 100–124391/SF 100–12592 (FBI/Bennett).
48 "Report made by William John Hurley," 1 July 1943, FBI/Bennett.
49 Kenneth Logan to Director, FBI, 22 April 1948, FBI/Bennett.
50 SAC [Special Agent in Charge], Phoenix to Director, FBI, 3 May 1948, FBI/Bennett; attorney general quoted in Sibley, "Soviet Military-Industrial Espionage," 30.
51 John Edgar Hoover to Special Agent in Charge, Phoenix, 11 June 1948, FBI/Bennett.
52 "Report made by Robert C. Moody," 13 May 1949, FBI/Bennett.
53 SAC, Phoenix to Director, FBI, 15 June 1949, 19 December 1949, FBI/Bennett.
54 SAC, Phoenix, to Director, 12 October 1950; SAC Washington Field to Director, FBI, 22 June 1951, FBI/Bennett.
55 "Report made by Donald G. Hanning," 30 July 1951, FBI/Bennett.

her associations – more than twenty years previously– with William Prohme, a "notorious Communist," and Wilbur Burton, "said to be in the pay of the Soviet government," her then-lover and the twin brother of Wallace Burton to whom she was briefly engaged in Spain.[56] The FBI tried, without success, to uncover a connection between her and the Richard Sorge spy ring.[57] Bennett's long-term acquaintance in both China and the Soviet Union with Mikhail Borodin also attracted the FBI's attention, as it tried to determine whether one of his American-born sons was involved in Soviet espionage.[58]

Despite the scantiness of the evidence linking Bennett to the party, let alone to espionage, the FBI persisted in tracking her. Throughout 1952, its San Francisco office made repeated efforts to contact her, but was unable to do so because she was in Hawaii.[59] When Bennett finally returned to San Francisco in October 1952, the FBI's request for an interview was met by a phone call from Ernest Besig, the director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, who informed agents that "he would permit an interview" with Bennett "only in his office, at his convenience and in his presence." The memo to Hoover outlining the conditions was annotated with an emphatic "*No!*" in the margin and a directive to place a copy of "this serial" in Besig's file.[60] Whether or not Bennett had by then become an anticommunist, as Freda Utley, an old friend from Moscow, claimed in her 1970 memoir, she evidently retained the hostility to the FBI's investigations that she had displayed in 1943.[61]

Only in April 1953, after tracking her for the better part of a decade, did the FBI close Bennett's case. A handwritten note on the memo noting the decision summarized the reasons for ending the investigation: "No bona fide espionage or other complaint . . . Subject practically blind now – not considered to warrant S.I. [security index]."[62] Nonetheless, in late 1953, the San Francisco office once again attempted to "interrogate" Bennett without a third party

[56] Ibid. The report references a State Department memorandum, 14 July 1933, National Archives College Park, Maryland (NACP), Record Group (RG) 59, 800.00B-Burton, Wilbur H/1.

[57] SAC, San Francisco to Director FBI, 19 November 1951; Director, FBI to SAC, San Francisco, 13 December 1951, FBI/Bennett; A. G. Feslun, "Novye dokumenty po 'delu Zorge,'" *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia*, no. 2 (March 2000): 118–46.

[58] SAC, San Francisco to Director, FBI, 23 May 1952; Director, FBI to SAC, New York, 9 April 1952, FBI/Bennett. Michael Gruzenberg [Borodin], Federal Bureau of Investigation 65-HQ-58053. On Norman Borodin, who was a Soviet agent, see http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_b/borodin_nm.html (accessed 15 November 2014).

[59] SAC, San Francisco to Director, FBI, 8 October 1952, FBI/Bennett. For earlier attempts to contact her, see SAC, San Francisco to Director, FBI, 3 January 1952, 22 March 1952, 23 May 1952, 8 July 1952, FBI/Bennett.

[60] SAC, San Francisco to Director, FBI, 30 October 1952, FBI/Bennett. On Besig see Judy Kutulas, "In Quest of Autonomy: The Northern California Affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union and World War II," *Pacific Historical Review* 67, no. 2 (May 1998): 201–31.

[61] Freda Utley, *Odyssey of a Liberal: Memoirs* (Washington, DC: Washington National Press, 1970), 246.

[62] SAC, San Francisco to Director, FBI, 6 April 1953; handwritten note dated 23 April 1953, FBI/Bennett.

present, in the hope that she might provide information on Anna Louise Strong or Owen Lattimore, a Far Eastern specialist at Johns Hopkins charged with perjury.[63] Indeed, in May 1959, in response to a request apparently from British intelligence, the FBI prepared yet another report on her activities.[64] Bennett died of cancer a year later, at age sixty-four.[65]

Although the FBI turned up no evidence to suggest that Bennett constituted a security risk, the decision to keep tabs on her for a decade was hardly surprising or unusual. A Jewish (former) communist (or fellow traveler) with ties to the Soviet Union, Spain, and China, she was the quintessential usual suspect. As the FBI's decision to reopen its file on Amlie illustrates, veterans of the International Brigades, not to mention reputed spies for the Republic, were presumed communist and dangerous. Association with the Abraham Lincoln battalion, deemed suspicious in its own right, also lent seeming credibility to charges that had little connection to Spain. Bennett's years in the Soviet Union and, especially after 1949, to China further marked her as dangerous. Her long-term connections with Borodin and Strong, both of whom had deep links to the Chinese revolution, reinforced suspicions. Antisemitism, a "barely disguised" subtext in many anticommunist investigations, is hard to discern in Bennett's FBI file, which only hints at her Jewish background, noting that she was born Mildred Bremler and that her father Max Bremler was born in "Posen, Germany, Poland."[66] Whether or not antisemitism was a factor in Bennett's case, Jews often found themselves under suspicion as communists – and communists were often assumed to be Jews. The ranks of the un-Americans included large number of minorities, including Jews, notably on the Hollywood blacklists, as well as homosexuals and African Americans – perhaps the only two "dangerous" categories into which Bennett did not fit.[67]

Such profiling was a central means of conflating membership in the Communist Party and subversive activity. A 1948 HUAC report on atomic espionage relied on such incriminating associations, describing Nelson as a known communist, who in 1934 had been "seen in Russia" where, under an alias, "he appeared to be engaged in taking various Communist courses of instruction,"

[63] Director, FBI to SAC, San Francisco, 23 December 1953, FBI/Bennett; "Lattimore Moves to Kill Indictment," *NYT*, 17 February 1953; Robert P. Newman, *Owen Lattimore and the "Loss" of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 365–377.

[64] Director, FBI to Legat, London, 5 May 1959, FBI/Bennett.

[65] "Milly Bennett, 64, Former Reporter," *NYT*, 7 November 1960.

[66] Paul Buhle, "The Hollywood Blacklist and the Jew," *Tikkun* 10, no. 5 (September/October 1995): 35; "Report made by William P. Jones," 20 November 1942, FBI/Bennett. After Germany's defeat in 1945, all of Posen/Poznań came under Polish control.

[67] Humphries, *Hollywood's Blacklists*, 12–14, 41, 82; Morton J. Horwitz, "Jews and McCarthyism: A View from the Bronx," in *Secret Agents*, 257–64; David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Martin Halpern, "'I'm Fighting for Freedom': Coleman Young, HUAC, and the Detroit African American Community," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 19–38; Martelle, *Fear Within*, 196.

and in 1937 "was evidently fighting in the war in Spain."[68] Although not mentioned in the report, the FBI file on which the hearing relied described Nelson as having "Jewish" features, a detail the agent seemed to think relevant to the investigation.[69] In Nelson's case, unlike Bennett's, the FBI turned up evidence of espionage, but that evidence – not enough to support an indictment – was strengthened by the fact that he, like Bennett and so many others who found themselves before juries and congressional inquiries, neatly fit the profile of the world revolutionary connected to "dangerous" people and places. Such profiling made it easy to confuse real and imagined spies.

Real and Imagined Spies: East

Soviet spy mania, too, had grounding in reality. As early as 1949, Soviet agents infiltrated American and British guerrilla training camps in Europe and learned of the newly organized Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) ambitious plans to destabilize Soviet-backed governments in Eastern Europe. The most infamous covert operation of this period, dubbed the "Albania tragedy" by a former CIA agent who helped plan it, was apparently undermined by double agent Kim Philby who, from his perch in British intelligence learned the details down to the drop sites for Albanian anticommunists parachuted in to lead the resistance, and turned them over to the Soviets. In similar operations attempted throughout Eastern Europe, "failure was the rule rather than the exception."[70] Of course even failed plans could inflame anxieties, especially when they were foiled by Soviet counterespionage.[71] The Soviets, like the Americans, uncovered enough evidence of covert activity to conclude that espionage posed a clear and present danger.[72] However, because American intelligence relied more on technology than human spies, the Americans never operated – and thus the Soviets never uncovered – anything like the far-reaching Rosenberg or Sorge spy networks.[73]

The most sensational Soviet bloc espionage cases in these years thus involved "spies" invented by the Soviet political police. In February 1949, the Soviet government expelled Anna Louise Strong as an American spy and arrested

[68] "Text of Report."

[69] Sibley, "Soviet Military-Industrial Espionage," 40.

[70] Quotations from John Limond Hart, *The CIA's Russians* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 6, 2; Corke, *US Covert*, 2–3; Grose, *Operation Rollback*.

[71] David Stafford, *Spies Beneath Berlin* (New York: Overlook Press, 2003); David E. Murphy, Sergei A. Kondrashev, and George Bailey, *Battleground Berlin: CIA vs. KGB in the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); George Feifer, "The Berlin Tunnel," *MHQ: Quarterly Journal of Military History* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 62–71.

[72] Trevor Barnes, "The Secret Cold War: The CIA and American Foreign Policy in Europe, 1946–56, Part I," *Historical Journal* 24, no. 2 (June 1981): 399–415; Hart, *CIA's Russians*, 18; David E. Murphy, "Spies in Berlin: A Hidden Key to the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 4 (July/August 1988): 171–8.

[73] Macrakis, "Technophilic Hubris," 380; P. P. Shchelchkov, "Brosok amerikanskogo diversanta na Sakhalin," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 2001, no. 10: 36–40.

most of the *Moscow News* staff, including Borodin. Strong was hardly an American agent. Skeptics suggested that the expulsion was a Soviet ruse to raise her prestige among anticommunists.[74] Strong, however, did little to win over anticommunists, because she blamed her arrest not on the Soviets, who held her at Lubianka for five days, prohibiting contact with the American embassy, but rather on the "war hysteria which the American Press has done so much to stir up."[75] The Soviets themselves seem to have been particularly concerned about Strong's pro-Chinese sentiments and apparently decided that charging her with being an American spy constituted a clever way of countering her enthusiastic promotion of Mao Zedong's brand of communism. The expulsion also rid them of a supporter who had turned into a nuisance, complaining to anyone who would listen that the Soviet government refused to grant her a transit visa to Manchuria.[76]

The lack of evidence notwithstanding, the Strong case served the broader Soviet purpose of ratcheting up the spy scare. Western journalists in Moscow, spooked by her expulsion and subject to a constant barrage of anti-American propaganda, immediately grasped the connection. Harrison Salisbury, who arrived as the *New York Times*'s Moscow correspondent shortly after Strong's expulsion, warned the newspaper's publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger that anyone connected with the West was under suspicion. He worried that the "next 'case' will not be a mere eviction as in the instance of [NBC correspondent Bob] Magidoff and Anna Louise Strong but a public trial and a prison term." In May 1949, the Soviet journal *Ogonek* seemed to confirm Salisbury's admittedly "fantastic" fears, accusing American foreign correspondents of being "trained intelligence agents, spies, diversionists and devoted servants of capitalism."[77]

The unmasking of an alleged American agent was linked to the antiwestern and antisemitic purges then gearing up in the Soviet Union and its satellites. Although Borodin's connections to the "spy" Strong may have put him at risk, his arrest was also part of the so-called anticosmopolitan campaign. A secular Jew who had lived for more than a decade in the United States and who had since 1932 been the editor of the English-language *Moscow News*, Borodin

74 "Skepticism Voiced over Anna Strong," *NYT*, 16 February 1949; "Subpoenaed by U.S. Grand Jury," *NYT*, 24 February 1949; "Jury Hears Writer Moscow Expelled," *NYT*, 26 February 1949.

75 Tracy B. Strong and Helene Keyssar, *Right in Her Soul: The Life of Anna Louise Strong* (New York: Random House, 1983), 241–9, quotation from Associated Press report, 252; Bertram D. Hulen, "Soviet Bars Talk with Miss Strong," *NYT*, 18 February 1949; Philip Jaffe, "The Strange Case of Anna Louise Strong," *Survey*, no. 53 (1964): 131–9; "Miss Strong Arrives Here by Air," *NYT*, 24 February 1949.

76 Jaffe, "Strange Case," 137–8; Strong and Keyssar, *Right in Her Soul*, 243–4. On Soviet relations with Mao, see Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*, 112–16.

77 Harrison Salisbury to Arthur Hays Sulzberger, 15 April 1949, Harrison E. Salisbury Papers, Box 187, Folder 2, pp. 1, 2, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library; "Expelled Reporter Quits Russia," *NYT*, 19 April 1948; "US Correspondents 'Spies,' Says Russian," *NYT*, 9 May 1949.

could easily be fitted into the preferred categories of the postwar purges as a "rootless cosmopolitan," guilty of "groveling before the West." The *Moscow News* itself, whose staff a Kremlin official described in 1948 as consisting of "one Russian, one Armenian, twenty-three Jews and three others," was seen as a hotbed of cosmopolitanism and fell victim to the antisemitic crackdown.[78] Having worked during the war to document Nazi crimes against Soviet Jews, Borodin was also linked to the Jewish Antifascist Committee, itself a primary purge target.[79] Arrested in 1949, he died in 1951, probably shot in prison.[80]

In the Soviet satellites, real concerns about security likewise produced an urgent campaign against imagined spies, saboteurs, traitors, and a wide range of enemies, often defined by their ties to the West and increasingly identified as Jews.[81] The Soviet political police in coordination with local authorities concocted an elaborate espionage plot around Noel Field, the most notorious "spy" unmasked on the Soviet side during the early years of the cold war. Field, who knew a large number of East European communists as a result of his relief work in French internment camps following the Spanish civil war and in Switzerland during World War II, had at one time been a *Soviet* agent. During the war he had also worked to establish mutually beneficial relations between the OSS and underground communist resistance groups. By late 1948, as the case of his friend and former colleague in the State Department Hiss was breaking in the United States, Field decided to seek refuge in Eastern Europe. In May 1949, he was arrested in Prague and handed over to Hungarian security. Soviet agents supervised his interrogation in Budapest, extracting under torture the confessions subsequently used against communists throughout the Soviet bloc.[82] Later his wife, brother, and adopted daughter, the child of a German communist doctor who served in Spain, were arrested in Prague, Warsaw, and East Berlin, respectively; their coerced confessions further extended

[78] G. V. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitzm* (Moscow: Mezhdunardnye otnosheniia, 2001), 329.

[79] "Testimony by Isaac Fefer," in Joshua Rubenstein and Vladimir P. Naumov, eds., *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 103; Marina Sorokina, "People and Procedures: Toward a History of the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in the USSR," *Kritika* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 816 n.59; Anna Arutunyan, "A Parallel Universe of Positive Soviet Facts," *Moscow News*, 30 May 2009 (http://rbth.ru/articles/2009/05/30/300509_universe.html, accessed 15 November 2014).

[80] "Borodin (Gruzenberg) Mikhail Markovich," http://www.hrono.ru/biograf/bio_b/borodin_gizb.php (accessed 15 November 2014). Some sources claim he died in a Siberian labor camp. Theodore Shabad, "Soviet Rehabilitates Borodin, Aide in China in '20's," *NYT*, 1 July 1964; Dan N. Jacobs, *Borodin: Stalin's Man in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 326.

[81] McDermott and Stibbe, "Stalinist Terror," 5–10.

[82] Schmidt, "Noel Field," 235–9, 224–5; Igor Lukes, "The Rudolf Slánský Affair: New Evidence," *Slavic Review* 58, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 168–71; Thomas Sakmyster, "Mátyás Rákosi, the Rajk Trial, and the American Communist Party," *Hungarian Studies Review* 38, no. 1–2 (Spring-Fall 2011): 45–6; Mark, "*In Re* Alger Hiss," 31–2.

and embroidered the plot.[83] With superhuman prescience, Field had allegedly masterminded a vast conspiracy, recruiting, as early as 1939, the future leaders of the postwar people's democracies as double agents ready to undermine states that did not yet exist. Field himself was never tried; he and his family were released in 1954 and 1955.

In the Soviet bloc, as in the Soviet Union (and indeed, the United States), particular profiles more than specific acts raised suspicions.Although local concerns and international events produced different patterns throughout the Soviet bloc, the usual suspects in the far-reaching conspiracy allegedly orchestrated by Field fell into a number of clear and often overlapping categories: those returning from exile or concentration camps in the West, many of whom had fought in the wartime resistance; the leaders of home underground movements; veterans of the International Brigades; and Jews.[84] The 1949 show trial in Hungary, which followed Stalin's decision to attack what he considered Josep Broz Tito's renegade communist regime in Yugoslavia, focused on a Titoist plot and implicated a number of Hungarian communists connected to the American party. The chief defendant, the former minister of the interior László Rajk, was charged with being the "agent of a European Trotskyist organization, which was in contact with the Americans" and later with the Yugoslavs, who allegedly took over the American spy network.[85] The primary "evidence" was Field's confession and Rajk's biography. In addition to being General-Secretary Mátyás Rákosi's primary political rival, Rajk fit three suspicious categories: A veteran of the Spanish civil war, he spent three years in a French internment camp before escaping and returning to Hungary in 1941, where he became a leader of the communist underground.[86]

In Czechoslovakia the proceedings took on an overtly antisemitic tone.[87] Eleven of the fourteen party leaders tried in 1952 were Jews, including the former general-secretary Rudolf Slánský. He fit no other "dangerous" categories; being neither a Spaniard nor a veteran of resistance movements in the West, Slánský fell into the usually safer category of "Muscovite," having remained in Czechoslovakia until 1938 when he fled to the Soviet Union.[88] Slánský's

[83] Lukes, "Rudolf Slánský," 169–70; Schmidt, "Noel Field," 225–6; Hermann H. Field and Kate Field, *Trapped in the Cold War: The Ordeal of an American Family* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Erica Glaser Wallach, *Light at Midnight* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

[84] Hodos, *Show Trials*, 35; Karel Bartošek, "Central and Southeastern Europe," in Stéphane Courtois et al., eds., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 428–31; McDermott and Stibbe, "Stalinist Terror," 8–9.

[85] Mihály Farkas quoted in Schmidt, "Noel Field," 216, 217; Sakmyster, "Mátyás Rákosi," 45–7.

[86] Hodos, *Show Trials*, 36–7; Schmidt, "Noel Field," 216.

[87] Hodos, *Show Trials*, 74.

[88] Kevin McDermott, "A 'Polyphony of Voices'? Czech Popular Opinion and the Slánský Affair," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 846–9.

right-hand man, Bedřich Geminder, who was accused of having contacts with Israeli diplomats and "agents of Western imperialism," had Jewish origins as well as personal ties to the West; not a Spanish civil war veteran, he was the former lover of Ibárruri's long-time secretary Irene Falcón.[89]

The targeting of these individuals rested on the assumption that people with transnational or "cosmopolitan" contacts, even within international communist circles, could be, and likely were, spies. Klement Gottwald, the communist president of Czechoslovakia, offered the explanation that International Brigade veterans in French internment camps had "lived in appalling conditions" and were "subjected to pressure and blackmail first from the French and American espionage services, and later by the Germans," who "managed to enlist a number of them as agents."[90] The biographies of many communists in Czechoslovakia could be understood as fitting this narrative. For example, Artur London's now suspicious behavior included fighting in both the International Brigades and French resistance, surviving Mauthausen, and recuperating in a Swiss hospital run by the Unitarian Service Committee, the employer of alleged American master spy Field.[91] Purges in Poland, Romania, and East Germany likewise played on suspicions of leaders, often with Jewish origins, who had international connections, notably Waclaw Komar (Mendel Kossoj), a veteran of both the International Brigades and the Polish Army in France, and Romanian International Brigade veterans Valter Roman (Ernö Neuländer) and Elisabeta Luca (née Birnbaum).[92] Purged German veterans included Franz Dahlem and Gerhart Eisler, who had spent the war years in the United States. Having been deemed a dangerous Soviet agent by the FBI and facing prison, Eisler fled the United States in 1949 as a stowaway. By 1953, the daring escape had come to be interpreted as part of an elaborate plot to infiltrate an American agent into East Germany.[93]

The selection of show trial defendants and purge targets was arbitrary in the sense that none had engaged in espionage or sabotage. Still, the particular categories from which they were chosen, as Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe emphasize in their overview of "Stalinist terror in eastern Europe," highlight the degree to which purges aimed to create the "monolithic homogeneity" deemed essential – in Moscow as much as Prague or Budapest – to the construction of socialism.[94] The quest for homogeneity and purification of the body politic

[89] Karel Kaplan, *Report on the Murder of the General Secretary*, trans. Karel Kovanda (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990), 194; Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos*,278–9.

[90] Quoted in Artur London, *The Confession*, trans. Alastair Hamilton (New York: William Morrow, 1970), 90.

[91] London, *Confession*, 83–114; Hodos, *Show Trials*, 78; Bartošek, "Central and Southeastern," 430–1.

[92] Teresa Toranska, *Them: Stalin's Political Puppets*, trans. Agnieszka Kolakowska (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 331–2; Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 161, 198, 213.

[93] Epstein, *Last Revolutionaries*, 91–9, 140–1, 143–7.

[94] McDermott and Stibbe, "Stalinist Terror," 5.

had also been a factor in the Soviet terror of the late 1930s. However, that earlier terror had coexisted, however uneasily, with a pervasive and powerful internationalism symbolized above all by Soviet and international communist aid for the Spanish Republic. In the 1930s, international networks appeared at once threatening and galvanizing, offering both potentially dangerous conduits of hidden foreign enemies and a vital means of creating Moscow-centered solidarity if not homogeneity. The early cold war, by contrast, marked a victory of suspicion over solidarity. Ties to the West that had come in loyal service to the cause now worked to call loyalty into question. Indeed the trials of communists in the Soviet satellites attempted to rewrite the past and individual biographies, transforming the noblest of contacts with the West – in Spain, in resistance organizations, in Nazi camps – into evidence of treason.

Communists on Trial

Beginning in 1949, large numbers of prominent communists went on trial in the United States and in Eastern Europe, charged on both sides of the iron curtain with seeking the overthrow of their respective governments. The parallel trials constituted one of the stranger ironies of the cold war, although American communists convinced of the guilt of those accused in the Soviet satellites, and who, like their foreign comrades, saw their own arrests as evidence of nascent American fascism, were not inclined to see the situations as analogous.[95] Strong, seeking to portray her expulsion from the Soviet Union as the work of a few "stupid officials and bureaucrats" unable to distinguish good journalism from spying, was one of the few communist sympathizers who saw similarities.[96] To highlight her solidarity with the eleven American communists on trial in New York, she sent their defense fund a $1,000 donation check endorsed "For the American Communists who are getting as raw a deal from American justice as I got from the USSR. From a fellow victim of the cold war." The check was angrily returned.[97]

Indeed the trials operated quite differently. The 1949 Rajk trial in Hungary, as did the Slánský trial in Czechoslovakia a few years later, purported to uncover a vast and active conspiracy. The prosecution in both cases relied on coerced confessions and scripted courtroom exchanges. In Hungary, all the defendants were found guilty, with Rajk and two of his seven codefendants sentenced to death. In Czechoslovakia, all the defendants were likewise found guilty; Slánský, together with all but three of his thirteen codefendants, was executed.The leaders of the Communist Party in the United States, by contrast,

[95] Sakmyster, "Mátyás Rákosi," 50–1; Martelle, *Fear Within*, 37–9; Fast, *Being Red*, 197–9; Steve Nelson, *The Thirteenth Juror* (Leipzig: Paul List Verlag, 1956), 266–8.

[96] "Jury Hears Writer Moscow Expelled."

[97] "Reds on Trial Refuse Aid of Anna Louise Strong," *NYT*, 30 March 1949; Strong and Keyssar, *Right in Her Soul*, 260.

stood accused of conspiring to advocate and teach – not actually undertake – the overthrow of the government. The prosecution relied on "literary evidence" such as *The Communist Manifesto* and the 1928 *Program of the Communist International*. Not only was much of this material "quite dated" but also the government, as legal scholar Michal Belknap emphasizes, "could offer no proof that American communists were about to translate into action any of the ideas it contained."[98] However, the Smith Act did not require such proof. All eleven defendants were found guilty, fined $10,000 each, and sentenced to jail terms of up to five years in federal prison. Additionally, the judge sent all five defense lawyers to jail for contempt, with terms ranging from thirty days to six months.[99]

For all their differences, the trials shared an interest in demonstrating that transnational networks were inherently conspiratorial and subversive. In the United States as much as in Eastern Europe, cold war divides made suspect those who had crossed borders under very different circumstances. Artur London's observation that in postwar Czechoslovakia "Everything we had done was judged in the light of the immediate international situation" effectively describes the situation on both sides of the iron curtain.[100] In both the East and West, prosecutors argued – albeit in distinctive ways and with far deadlier consequences in the East – that international connections once understood as idealistic had in fact been grounded in lies, conspiracy, and treason.

In the United States, the state's effort to establish the criminal, conspiratorial nature of the Communist Party as a whole produced trials focused on words rather than deeds, on abstractions rather than individuals. Much to the defendants' consternation, the judge presiding over the 1949 Smith Act trial severely limited opportunities for communists to present their individual biographies – especially any parts of their biographies, such as fighting for the Loyalist cause in Spain, that might cast them in an idealistic light. In May 1949, when defense attorney Harry Sacher asked John Gates, the first defense witness called five months into the trial, to recount his experiences fighting fascism in Spain, Judge Harold Medina cut him off, deeming such questioning a "waste of time."[101] Richard Gladstein, another member of the defense team, countered that biography was the best means of getting at "a man's past state of mind and intention," a critical issue in the case. Medina disagreed, ostensibly because such testimony would take too long: "It is obvious that if I permit these defendants to bring in everything they ever said, everything they ever wrote, all their conduct in all matters having to do with anti-Semitism, arguing matters

[98] Michal R. Belknap, "Cold War in the Courtroom: The Foley Square Communist Trial," in Michal R. Belknap, ed., *American Political Trials*, revised ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 215.

[99] Ibid., 221; Martelle, *Fear Within*, 211–16.

[100] London, *Confession*, 114.

[101] Martelle, *Fear Within*, 170.

for the Negroes, being in support of the Republican government in Spain, being opposed to Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese government, and so on, we will be here for an indefinite period, and I have felt that I am drawing the line at the proper place. Now one of those places is that war in Spain is out."[102] Cutting off Gates's testimony may have saved time, although how much in a trial that lasted almost ten months is unclear. In any case, Medina's list of irrelevant topics included the actions and attitudes for which communists had suffered and of which they were most proud. Ruling that "Spain is out" meant denying communists the opportunity, as another defendant, Gilbert Green, wrote in a letter to his wife, "to defend everything that my life has meant to me, everything that communism stands for."[103] The trial thus reduced the meaning of communism, and the lives of individual communists, to the incendiary passages from communist tracts that the prosecution read into the record.

Only outside of the courtroom could American communists recount the actions that gave meaning to their lives. In a contemporary account of his trial and imprisonment for sedition in Pennsylvania, Nelson emphasized the formative importance of his fight against fascism in Spain. In 1952 the state of Pennsylvania sentenced Nelson to twenty years in prison and, denying him bail pending appeal, sent him to the Blawnox Workhouse to await trial under the federal Smith Act. Describing the prison as following "medieval practices in handling prisoners, who were treated as subhuman, beaten at will by the guards, thrown in the hole and kept on bread and water for nine days at a time," he recalled that a primary comfort was reading the letters sent by International Brigade veterans from many countries.[104] A small book published to build sympathy and defense funds for Nelson similarly emphasized that his actions in Spain revealed, as veteran Milton Wolff wrote, "the kind of guy Steve was."[105] Exiled Spanish poet Rafael Alberti contributed a poem underscoring that Nelson had been and remained a fighter for all humanity, who had given his "life for my people/ and for his people."[106] While prosecutors presented, as they did in Nelson's state sedition trial, "nearly all the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin" as evidence against American communists, communists found ways to present their own life stories as the clearest and truest accounts of their political commitments.[107]

In Eastern Europe, by contrast, show trials and secret purges alike hinged on viciously, often brutally, rewritten life stories. The attacks on old

[102] Gladstein and Medina quoted in ibid., 171.
[103] Gilbert Green to Lil Green, 30 May 1949 as quoted in ibid., 180.
[104] Nelson, *Thirteenth Juror*, 61, 121. See also Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson, American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 341–71.
[105] Milton Wolff in *Steve Nelson: A Tribute by 14 Famous Authors* (no publication information, probably 1952), 14; available at University of Pennsylvania Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Print Coll. 1, Box 130.
[106] Rafael Alberti, trans. Jose Yglesias in *Steve Nelson*, 10.
[107] Steve Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 330.

communists were everywhere "biography-based," drawing on and manipulating longstanding communist practices of autobiographical writing and self-criticism.[108] George Hodos, "one of the fortunate survivors of the Rajk trial," drew on his own experiences to describe the process in depersonalized but still chilling terms:

> The starting point was always the autobiography of the arrested person, his own account of his political life. Only then could the interrogators begin a political reinterpretation of that life, achieved with rubber truncheons, rifle butts, electric shocks, sleeplessness, hunger, and cold – a mixture of the most advanced and archaically barbaric methods of physical and psychological tortures. The interrogators suggested "reinterpretations" of previous arrests for underground communists' activities so they became informer services for the fascist police. Personal or professional contacts with the co-accused became plotting with and spying for the agents of imperialism. Step by step, each version was transformed by torture into a new and uglier one until every moment of the accused's life was reinterpreted into an abominable crime.[109]

This process of reinterpretation, Hodos emphasized, "destroyed not only . . . bodies but . . . entire lives."[110] London, too, recalled the pain of having his own biography – a past he was "proud" of – destroyed. He was shocked to find "political records," reports from Spain in which "we had been at pains to emphasize every shadow and error," in his interrogators' hands, transformed into "police records." Bolshevik self-criticism became evidence of treason: "And this was what became of our intransigence towards ourselves! Everything became petty and dirty. Everything was turned against us."[111]

The construction of often surreal biographies and their use as a disciplinary tool linked the East European show trials to earlier communist practices and purges, while clearly distinguishing them from their counterparts in the West. London's remembered surprise at finding self-criticism transformed into criminal accusation is itself somewhat surprising, given that he was in Moscow during the first of the show trials in 1936 and knew many who disappeared in the great terror.[112] In those earlier trials, too, accusations had "originated in the nightmarish world of omnipresent enemies and conformed to irrational and stereotype images."[113] Like the great terror in the Soviet Union, the postwar purges and show trials effectively sowed "terror in the party's ranks." As historian Catherine Epstein emphasizes in the case of East Germany, where planning for a show trial ended with Stalin's death in March 1953, the purges, for all

[108] Epstein, *Last Revolutionaries*, 130.
[109] Hodos, *Show Trials*, xiv, 46; see also Kaplan, *Report*, 110.
[110] Hodos, *Show Trials*, 47.
[111] London, *Confession*, 52, 53.
[112] Ibid., 253–4.
[113] Berthold Unfried, "Foreign Communists and the Mechanism of Soviet Cadre Formation in the USSR," in Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott, eds., *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 187.

their irrationality, had the "rational purpose" of disciplining even – and perhaps especially – the most distinguished communists by reminding them "that the party, the arbiter of revolutionary reputations, held sway over all that was most meaningful to them."[114] Signing a coerced confession, the accused became whatever the party dictated: a Titoist, Trotskyite, Zionist, bourgeois nationalist, agent of American imperialism, or spy.[115] Communists thus internalized a new understanding of the party if not of themselves. London remembered trying to reclaim his past in the hours between interrogations: "against the mud which [the interrogators] churned up day after day, I tried, when they left me alone, to reconstruct our Spain, the Spain which remained in my heart."[116] Nonetheless, he ultimately confessed and followed the required script at his trial.

The trials of communists in the United States and the far deadlier trials in the Soviet bloc were, for all their incommensurability, uncanny reflections of shared fears. States on both sides of the cold war divide responded, in however overblown and irrational a fashion, to deeply felt security concerns by constructing a remarkably similar gallery of suspicious types, enemies who carefully hid long-term ties with a foreign power and conspired to undermine an entire way of life. In the context of the early cold war, those who had connections to the other side were necessarily dangerous; the cause of Spain, which had united so many across national lines and had been mythologized so effectively, emerged as a particularly powerful source of anxiety. In transforming international solidarity into espionage, the American trials sought to equate communism and treason. In communist states, the same transformation served to discipline veterans, who nonetheless often maintained, as did their American comrades, a Spanish-centered understanding of the revolutionary movement.

International Networks and the Memory of the Spanish Civil War

In the spring of 1943, at Stalin's behest, the Comintern's executive committee recommended that the organization dissolve itself. Whether Stalin's chief motivation was a desire to improve relations with his British and American allies or, as he emphasized in a Politburo meeting in late May, to adjust to the fact that it had become "impossible to direct the working-class movement of all countries from a single international center," the news took both foreign communists and Soviet citizens by surprise.[117]

[114] Epstein, *Last Revolutionaries*, 130, 153, 154. McLellan makes a similar point, *Antifascism and Memory*, 10.

[115] London, *Confession*, 267, 272; Unfried, "Foreign," 190.

[116] London, *Confession*, 84; see also McLellan, *Antifascism*, 202–3; Epstein, *Last Revolutionaries*, 150; Kaplan, *Report*, 113.

[117] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 204–9; Georgi Dimitrov, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949*, Ivo Banac, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 275 (quotation); Enrique Castro Delgado, *Mi fe se perdió en Moscú* (Barcelona: Luís de Caralt, 1964), 248–50;

Ultimately, the dissolution entailed, as Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew emphasize in their history of the Comintern, "no real weakening of Moscow's control of the international communist movement."[118] Georgi Dimitrov, the now former head of the Comintern, transferred his office to the Central Committee where he continued to direct international operations, retaining control of national radio broadcasting, the telegraph agency, and the Foreign Language Publishing House.[119] Three "special institutes," designated only by the numbers 99, 100, and 205, employed many former Comintern staffers in their previous capacities.[120] When in 1945 Stalin decided that American comrades had gone too far toward accommodating their noncommunist allies by dissolving the party and replacing it with a Communist Political Association, he got the message to American leaders via a letter that appeared under the byline of Jacques Duclos, the deputy head of the French party, in the journal *Cahiers du Communisme*. That the attack on Earl Browder came from Moscow was immediately obvious to American comrades. Steve Nelson recalled that he understood the letter "as a direct blast from Moscow" – a conclusion supported by documents in the archives of Institute 205, which suggest that the letter was drafted in Russian and then translated into French. The signal from Moscow proved effective. As Nelson remembered with a measure of retrospective regret, the American party's leaders, swayed by the "collective weight of international Communism," quickly set aside their shock and confusion in order to "return to the fold" and reconstitute the party.[121]

Important as such hierarchical links between center and periphery continued to be, they did not entirely displace more diffuse, informal personal networks among international communists. Ibárruri, residing in Moscow, stood at the heart of one such network. She maintained a far-flung circle of correspondents that included Spanish communists in Eastern Europe and Mexico, foreign veterans of the Spanish war, and a who's who of international communist leaders. Such networks persisted despite the campaign against "cosmopolitans" that

Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C. M. Woodhouse (1957; reprint London: Ink Links, 1979), 217–24; Timothy Johnston, *Being Soviet: Identity, Rumour, and Everyday Life under Stalin, 1939–1954* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 73–4. "Protokol (B) No. 825: Zakrytogo zasedaniia prezidiuma IKKI," 17 May 1943, in N. S. Lebedeva and M.M. Narinskii, eds., *Komintern i vtoraia mirovaia voina: Chast' II: posle 22 iuniia 1941 g.* (Moscow: Pamiatniki istoricheskoi mysli, 1998), 359–65. The news appeared in *Pravda*, 22 May 1943.

[118] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 209.

[119] Dimitrov, *Diary*, 282.

[120] McDermott and Agnew, *Comintern*, 210; N. S. Lebedeva and M. M. Narinskii, "Rospusk Kominterna i sozdanie Otdela mezhdunarodnoi informatsii TsK VKP (b). Mai 1943-mai 1945," in A. O. Chubar'ian, ed. *Istoriia Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala, 1919–43: Dokumental'nye ocherki* (Moscow: Nauka, 2002), 231–4, 239–53.

[121] Haslam, *Russia's Cold War*, 30–1; Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 95–106; Nelson et al., *American Radical*, 273–4.

drove the postwar purges and show trials, the effects of which even Ibárruri, her international celebrity notwithstanding, could not entirely escape. As noted earlier, the 1952 show trial in Czechoslovakia touched her inner circle; her longtime companion Falcón suffered banishment from the party and loss of employment following the execution of her former lover.[122]

Ibárruri's correspondence in the years after the war can be understood as emphasizing and enacting the emotional and personal connections that underpinned communist internationalism and that were increasingly under attack on both sides of the iron curtain. On the occasion of International Women's Day in 1952, for example, Ibárruri sent more than a dozen telegrams to communist women in Europe, Mexico, and China. Each message was lightly tailored to the recipient. The note to Romanian communist Ana Pauker, whom Ibárruri had met when both were in Moscow during the war – and whom she allegedly did not much like – emphasized their personal acquaintance, concluding, "I remember you fondly, and send heartfelt greetings [te saludo con el alma] on International Women's Day."[123] At the same time, Stalin's growing suspicions worked against such international solidarity. Just over a month after Ibárruri warmly greeted Pauker, Stalin told visiting Romanian leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej to "get rid of Ana Pauker . . . If I were in your place, I would have shot her in the head a long time ago."[124]

The continuing importance of international connections, despite the suspicions that such contacts engendered, emerges clearly in letters sent to Ibárruri. In 1951, American communist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn sent a telegram soliciting a "tribute to Mother Ella Reeve Bloor Great working class leader died August tenth." The appeal to an international communist then living in Moscow is particularly striking in the context of Flynn's June 1951 arrest for violating the Smith Act. (After a nine-month trial, she was convicted and served two years in a federal prison camp.) Ibárruri obliged the Americans with a formulaic but also seemingly heartfelt paean to Bloor's exemplary "strength and abnegation."[125] The request and Ibárruri's willingness to grant it suggest that communists valued such ritual expressions of sympathy and solidarity as a means of building and sustaining an international movement. A similar sense of the importance of such connections is visible in the letter that communists from a local party organization in Brno-Chrlice wrote to Ibárruri in 1951 to affirm that building socialism in Czechoslovakia constituted a means of "liberating the Spanish

[122] Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos*, 278–87.

[123] "Correspondencia de Dolores Ibárruri," 7 March 1952, ANC, Sig. 207; Castro Delgado, *Mi fe*, 78.

[124] Levy, *Ana Pauker*, 203.

[125] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn to Dolores Ibárruri; Ibárruri to Flynn, [1951], ANC, Sig. 207; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Alderson Story: My Life as a Political Prisoner* (New York: International Publishers, 1963).

and Yugoslav peoples from capitalist and fascist oppressors."[126] That Ibárruri herself remained an important "personal center" of international communism underscores the degree to which the memory of the Spanish civil war remained vital to communist imaginings of the international cause.[127]

In Ibárruri's correspondence with the Spanish exiles, the genre of the sentimental political letter that made little distinction between political goals and personal needs likewise provided a powerful means of maintaining a transnational network that conflated and solidified personal and party relationships. For example, her 1953 correspondence with Manuel Delicado, a central committee member then in Warsaw, focused on the positive effects that attending trade school in the Soviet Union had had on his son; thus it provided good news at once personal and political. For his part, Delicado, who apparently hoped to enlist Ibárruri's help with his medical problems, replied as both a father and a communist, readily endorsing her suggestion that his son's progress had been the result of the "grand Soviet school" and agreeing to let him visit Warsaw for a few weeks.[128] In the same period, Juan Modesto, a former Republican commander, petitioned Ibárruri to allow him a more active role in the Spanish struggle, emphasizing the personal impossibility of continuing his sedentary life in Prague. She responded in early March 1953, advising him that he should direct his eagerness to fight, which she deemed "a natural desire" for every communist, toward study and work. She reminded him of the example of the Bolshevik exiles, especially Lenin, who after the 1905 Revolution occupied themselves with "study and the formation of cadres to lead the fight at any time, in any circumstance."[129] Here, as in her correspondence with international communists, Ibárruri worked to build a web of relations, simultaneously personal and political, that linked communists to Spain, the Soviet Union, and one another.

How recipients read such letters is, of course, difficult to say. Nelson's recollection of receiving letters in prison underscores their potential emotional power: "Other veterans of the battles in Spain often wrote me – from Canada, Australia, England, South America, from various points in the United States – and their reminiscences of that struggle in which I shared, their pledges of support, and warm expressions of affection were wonderfully heartening."[130]

[126] Party organization, Brno region, Czechoslovakia to Dolores Ibárruri, 17 March 1951, ANC, Sig. 207.

[127] Kevin Morgan, "Parts of People and Communist Lives," in John McIlroy, Kevin Morgan, and Alan Campbell, eds., *Party People, Communist Lives: Explorations in Biography* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2001), 23.

[128] Dolores Ibárruri to Comrade Delicado, 26 January 1953, ANC, Sig. 207; Delicado to Ibárruri, 28 February 1953, ibid.

[129] Dolores Ibárruri to Comrade Modesto, 11 March 1953, ANC, Sig. 207; Modesto to Ibárruri, 27 March 1953, ibid.

[130] Nelson, *Thirteenth Juror*, 121.

Yet the letters, or at least the snippets he quotes, are not especially moving or personal. One Italian American communist deported after returning from Spain wrote "to let you know you are still remembered by an old *Camarada* of Spain."[131] Nonetheless, Nelson emphasized that the letters allowed him to transcend, at least briefly, the miseries and indignities of prison.[132] Indeed the physical fact of the letters appears to have been at least as important as their rather banal messages. Coming from all over the United States and the world, they offered evidence that he had not been forgotten, that he remained part of an international movement, still tied to his comrades from Spain.

Ironically, the lasting personal significance of such ties emerges with particular clarity in the statements of former communists who testified as government witnesses at the 1954 SACB hearing that deemed the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade a communist front.[133] Three of the veterans who testified against VALB – William Herrick, Robert Gladnick, and Morris Maken (Mickenberg) – had known one another in Spain. Having returned disillusioned with communism, they became further disillusioned by VALB's decision to support the Nazi-Soviet Pact.[134] Thus their testimonies served the government's purpose of establishing a direct link between the party and the veterans. But for all their anticommunism, they remained proud of their service in Spain, distinguishing the "good," antifascist communism that brought them to Spain from the corrupt, Soviet-dominated communism that displaced it.

Maken in particular seemed to relish his opportunity to attack the communists who had expelled him from VALB. His testimony, as historian Peter Carroll notes, "emphasized the arrogance and incompetence of the Communist leadership running the brigade."[135] But it also struck a note of almost wistful nostalgia, a tone at odds with his self-described talent for composing "vicious" "ditties" about unpopular commissars.[136] Recalling the "romantic talk" among the volunteers on the ship to France, he noted that they had been "certain that we would be trained by and serve with and led by these legendary characters that we had been hearing about in our Communist world: German anti-Fascists, the underground fighters against Hitler, some of the Poles who had been living under grim semi-Fascist conditions in their country."[137] The closest the volunteers came to this romantic vision was apparently the train trip from Paris to the Spanish border, which Maken described in loving detail: "For

[131] Ibid., 120.
[132] Ibid., 121.
[133] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 298–312.
[134] Ellen Schrecker, ed., *Records of the Subversive Activities Control Board, 1950–1972: Microfilmed from the Holdings of the National Archives and Records Administration* (Frederick, MD: University Publication of America, 1988) (SACB microfilm), reel 32, 545, 881–8; reel 33, 1539–42.
[135] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 304.
[136] SACB microfilm, reel 32, 1079–80.
[137] Ibid., 727.

whatever it is worth, it was just about the most wonderful experience a man could have in a lifetime, to see these many, many hundreds of men from all parts of the world, including one from Ethiopia, a Negro, and men from Latvia, men who looked laggard, sick, and frail. They had gone through hell to get to Paris. They were wonderful. So we had a joyous time of it, breaking the ice, getting acquainted, pioneers of the proletarian army."[138] As he completed his testimony, he reiterated, "Spain and the circumstances and events surrounding it will always be very important and precious to me, as the experiences of a lifetime."[139]

Even as they severed their connections with the party, Maken, Gladnick, and Herrick wanted to remain connected to the "experiences of a lifetime." Herrick testified that he had been slow to leave the party when he returned from Spain both because he relied on party-funded medical care and because "I knew too many people who were in Spain, too many people whom I respected and had great feeling for."[140] In the wake of VALB's endorsement of the Nazi-Soviet pact, Gladnick was heartened to learn that "quite a number of Veterans . . . were just as indignant as I was about the sacrilege committed in the name of men who had the guts and fortitude to fight for freedom, for democracy, for idealism in Spain."[141] Their contempt for the party, coupled with a desire to preserve the "precious" memory of Spain, ultimately led them to organize an alternative and short-lived "Anti-Totalitarian" veterans' organization.[142] Continuing to define themselves as antifascist, they remembered and desired an international solidarity untainted by association with Moscow.

However, it was, of course, the associations with Moscow – not fond memories of the "romantic" ideas that had brought the volunteers to Spain – that interested the Board. In May 1955, it handed down the "expected" conclusion that VALB "is substantially directed, dominated, and controlled by the Communist Party of the United States and is primarily operated for the purpose of giving aid and support to the Party and world Communist movement."[143] In December 1955, the SACB ordered the organization to register as a subversive organization. (VALB fought the order, which was finally overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1965.[144])

More than a falling out of erstwhile allies against Hitler, the cold war represented an effort to impose global order by treating "cosmopolitan" identities and transnational dreams of "building a new egalitarian world"[145] as

[138] Ibid., 736.
[139] Ibid., reel 33, 1131–2.
[140] Ibid., reel 32, 527, 671, 558 (quotation).
[141] Ibid., reel 33, 1544.
[142] Ibid., reel 32, 890–1; reel 33, 1670. See also Chapter 6.
[143] Carroll, *Odyssey*, 309.
[144] Ibid.,310.
[145] Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution, and Revenge* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 7.

dangerous and subversive – un-American on one side of the iron curtain, anti-patriotic on the other. The veterans of the Spanish civil war aroused suspicions as the embodiments of the border crossing and transnational interactions that both cold war powers attempted to limit and anathematize, if not eradicate. Labeled subversives and spies by authorities on both sides, they were harassed, tried, convicted, and, in the Soviet bloc, tortured and sometimes executed. In an undated letter to Nelson, Fredericka Martin, who had served as the chief nurse and administrator of the American medical personnel in Spain, worried that such pressures had perhaps undermined the international solidarity that was a core piece of the International Brigade members' identity. Reflecting on the American veterans' "feeble efforts" to "persuade Poland to cease her cruel treatment of Polish IB'ers of Jewish extraction," she felt it necessary to "ask ourselves– are we no longer internationalists?"[146]

The veterans' responses were political – defending the effort to remake the world across national boundaries for which they had sacrificed – and also deeply personal. Maintaining local and international networks, they perpetuated the story of the good fight in Spain as both a means of reasserting their political identity as internationalists and of protecting precious, self-defining memories. For many veterans, the memory of "the cause of all advanced and progressive humanity" remained an essential one, even as the fact that Stalin had coined the phrase became increasingly troubling – both personally and politically.

[146] Martin to Nelson, draft, nd, Martin Papers, Box 19, Folder 22.

Epilogue

Internationalism and the Spanish Civil War after Stalin

In the wake of Josef Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, his successors began – slowly, fitfully, partially – to repudiate his legacy. The first sign of a shift came in April, when *Pravda* reported that the conspirators in the so-called Doctors' Plot, the culmination of the anticosmopolitan campaign, had been falsely accused and that the investigators in the case had been arrested.[1] Beginning in 1955, a series of cultural exchanges brought Western art exhibitions, literature, films, music, theater, and tourists to the Soviet Union, dispelling the grim xenophobic mood that had gripped the country in Stalin's last years.[2] A more direct attack on Stalin's methods came in February 1956, when in a four-hour so-called secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress Nikita Khrushchev offered a limited, but still stunning, disclosure of the former leader's crimes. Presented at a late-night session closed to foreign delegates, the speech did not remain secret for long, circulating among millions of activists within and beyond the Soviet Union.[3]

In contemporary and retrospective accounts of the speech, foreign and Soviet communists remembered their initial reaction as "bitter silence."[4] Some likened

[1] Jonathan Brent and Vladimir P. Naumov, *Stalin's Last Crime: The Plot against the Jewish Doctors, 1948–1953* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 324–5.

[2] Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 88; Eleonory Gilburd, "The Revival of Soviet Internationalism in the Mid to Late 1950s," in Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, eds., *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 364–5. I thank the author for sharing an advance copy of her work.

[3] William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 283–4; John Rettie, "How Khrushchev Leaked His Secret Speech to the World," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 62 (2006): 187; "Text of Speech on Stalin by Khrushchev as Released by the State Department," *New York Times* (*NYT*), 5 June 1956.

[4] Irene Falcón with Manuel Jiménez and Jesús Montero, *Asalto a los cielos: Mi vida junta a Pasionaria* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1996), 305. See also Eleonory Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw

their shock to a physical blow. Alexander Yakovlev, a thirty-two-year-old veteran of the Great Fatherland War (and later an architect of perestroika) recalled his faith "exploding in shrapnel like a grenade shell."[5] Steve Nelson, who chaired the meeting in late April 1956 at which the speech was read to about 120 activists in the American party, remembered that the "words of the speech were like bullets, and each found its place in the hearts of the veteran Communists. Tears streamed down the faces of men and women who had spent forty or more years, their whole adult lives, in the movement."[6] Nelson, who was himself among those who spent his entire adult life in the party, ultimately left it in late 1957.

Shocking as the revelations were, those who made and embraced them, first and foremost Khrushchev himself, emphasized that they were less a break than a return, a recovery of "Leninism" and of "lost revolutionary and internationalist values."[7] In his speech to the party congress, Khrushchev attempted to balance potentially risky disclosures of Stalin's crimes with legitimizing and optimistic tales of Lenin's revolutionary rectitude, of "Leninist" collective leadership and socialist legality, and of the "neo-Leninist future."[8] Moscow writers who assembled to discuss the speech in late March 1956 applauded the "return of Leninism" and "burst out singing 'The Internationale.'"[9] Spanish communist Santiago Carrillo recalled in his 2006 memoir that the speech itself came as less of a "shock" than listening to his old friend Artur London, recently released from a Czechoslovak prison, recount his torture and imprisonment. Although London's story "personalized" the "perversion of the police system" in a way that the speech had not and effectively disabused Carrillo of "the semireligious aspects of my communist convictions," it also offered a model for how to remain a communist in the shadow of the "darkest aspects of the Stalinist system." At least in retrospect, Carrillo concluded that the August

Culture," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, no. 1–2 (January–June, 2006), 66; Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson, American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 387.

5 Zubok, *Zhivago's Children,* 61. See also Iurii Aksiutin, "Popular Responses to Khrushchev," in William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason, eds., *Nikita Khrushchev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 185.

6 Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 387. See also James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 253–62; Falcón, *Asalto a los cielos,* 302–7.

7 Zubok, *Zhivago's Children,* 72.

8 Polly Jones, "From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin: Real and Ideal Responses to De-Stalinization," in Polly Jones, ed., *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Social and Cultural Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Routledge, 2006), 42. The full text of the speech is available online, http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2007/apr/26/greatspeeches1 (accessed 15 November 2014).

9 Zubok, *Zhivago's Children,* 71.

1956 encounter with London at a holiday residence in Varna, Bulgaria, "filled me with great confidence" in communist "courage and honor."[10]

The potentially disconcerting and destabilizing opening to the West was also cast as a return to earlier revolutionary norms. In the fall of 1956, the first Soviet exhibition of Pablo Picasso's artwork upset long-settled notions of "socialist" art, and many viewers responded to it with hostility and suspicion.[11] But visitors to the exhibition and cultural authorities also linked the show to the purest of revolutionary values and the "most romantic period of Soviet history – the Spanish war."[12] The few sources of information on Picasso available to the Soviet public, including an article by Il'ia Ehrenburg, emphasized the artist's membership in the Communist Party and his monumental antifascist painting *Guernica*.[13] The 1957 Youth Festival that brought more than thirty thousand foreigners to Moscow likewise upset "the balance of social and moral order."[14] But it, too, could be understood as a part of a "revival of Soviet internationalism."[15]

However optimistic communists might be about the neo-Leninist future, making personal and political sense of de-Stalinization nonetheless required a reconsideration of the past. Focusing on Soviet reactions, historian Miriam Dobson observes that the condemnation of "Stalin and the terror compelled society to rethink the way it understood its own recent, and very bloody, past – and by extension how people were now to relate to their own life stories."[16] The same could be said for many foreign communists. In both cases, communists could validate lives spent in the party by narrating them as tales of communist idealism maintained in the face of Stalinist perversions. In the Soviet case, Khrushchev endorsed the recovery of the narrative of a people's war, emphasizing that the people (and the party) had defeated fascism despite, not because, of Stalin.[17] For foreign communists, Spain could serve a similar purpose. Indeed the Spanish civil war enjoyed a revival within the Soviet Union, where

[10] Carrillo uses the English word "shock;" Santiago Carrillo, *Memorias: El testimonio polémico de un protagonista relevante de nuestra transición* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2008), 563, 564.

[11] Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw Culture," 83–5.

[12] Petr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, "60-e: Mir sovetskaia cheloveka," in *Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh* (Ekaterinburg: U-Faktoriia, 2003), 1: 564; Zubok, *Zhivago's Children,* 119.

[13] Gilburd, "Picasso in Thaw Culture," 85; Il'ia Erenburg, "K risunkam Pablo Pikasso," *Inostrannaia literatura* 10 (1956): 243–53.

[14] Kristin Roth-Ey, "'Loose Girls' on the Loose: Sex, Propaganda, and the 1957 Youth Festival," in Susan E. Reid, Melanie Ilič, and Lynne Attwood, eds., *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 90.

[15] Gilburd, "Revival of Soviet Internationalism," 390.

[16] Miriam Dobson, "The Post-Stalin Era: De-Stalinization, Daily Life, and Dissent," *Kritika* 12, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 908. Zubok makes a similar point, *Zhivago's Children,* 61.

[17] Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 154–60.

enthusiasm for the Cuban revolution among "younger educated Russians" stirred up memories of the romance of Soviet support for Republican Spain.[18]

Remembering Spain provided veterans a means of coping with painful revelations and of insulating their own life stories as communists from the taint of Stalin's crimes. The importance of preserving Spain as a pivot for communist life stories emerges with particular clarity in the case of American veterans. The Subversive Activities Control Board's 1955 decision to list the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB) as a communist front almost destroyed the organization. The drawn-out legal battle substantially depleted the organization's finances and membership. At a November 1956 meeting in New York, VALB's leaders, Milton Wolff and Moe Fishman, advocated disbanding. However, as historian Peter Carroll notes, "Most veterans disagreed."[19] Carroll attributes the subsequent resurgence of the organization to the emergence in 1958 of a galvanizing issue that resonated with the veterans' own experiences of "domestic persecution" – the "oppression of political prisoners in Spain."[20] But he offers little explanation of the 1956 decision to save the organization. I argue that the gathered veterans, mostly communists, were likely influenced by the Soviet invasion of Hungary that coincided with the meeting.

In voting to sustain their organization, the veterans sought a way to distance the memory of international solidarity in Spain from both Stalinism and the Soviet Union. The new executive secretary Maury Colow was a former communist expelled from the party in 1952.[21] His very presence suggested an effort to demonstrate that the organization was not a tool of the party. An article in the January 1957 issue of the *Volunteer for Liberty* emphasized that the VALB had "long lost whatever political character it formerly possessed," while also affirming the political truth for which the veterans had fought: "We the veterans of the fight for democracy in Spain, who, in effect, 20 years ago pledged the soul and heart of America to fight against Nazism and Francoism are a fact that no one and nothing can gainsay."[22] In February 1957, just as the national party conference convened to discuss reform, five hundred people, veterans and their supporters, gathered at a New York hotel to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Lincoln battalion and to pledge "Next year, in Madrid!"[23] At a time when the party was bitterly

[18] Zubok, *Zhivago's Children,* 118–19. See also, Gilburd, "Picasso and Thaw Culture," 100–1; Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 348–9.

[19] Carroll, *Odyssey,* 311.

[20] Ibid., 360, 361.

[21] Ibid., 311.

[22] "We Are Going On!" *Volunteer for Liberty* 19, no. 1 (January 1957): 1, as quoted in Peter Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 93.

[23] Carroll, *Odyssey,* 312.

split and losing members over the issue of how and whether Americans could interpret Marxism-Leninism for themselves, celebrating Spain made it possible to (re)define communism in terms of a glorious moment of international solidarity.[24]

For both the revisionists, who ultimately lost the battle to reform the party and dropped out, and for those who remained, VALB offered an alternative means of maintaining personal and political connections with comrades at home and abroad who shared a (perhaps romanticized) memory of communist antifascism in Spain. After Nelson left the party in 1957 and returned to New York, his chief "political and social activities . . . revolved around the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade." In 1980, when he was working on his memoir, he described the veterans' organization as "my primary interest aside from my family."[25] The organization's new leaders focused on getting it removed from the attorney general's list of subversive organizations and on aiding Spanish political prisoners, a task that they coordinated with a prisoners' aid committee in Paris.[26] A few traveled to Berlin in the summer of 1961 to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish civil war.[27] By the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Lincoln battalion in 1962, the veterans' organization, still listed as a subversive organization, had rebounded. More than 1,100 veterans and their supporters met in New York to listen to a dramatic reading of Dolores Ibárruri's farewell to the International Brigades, to sing antifascist songs in German and Spanish, and to view enlarged photographs of scenes from the war. The gathering raised over two thousand dollars.[28] The veterans were thus part of an international network that circumvented (and largely ignored) Moscow; the Soviet Union, after all, had supported Francoist Spain's 1955 admission to the UN.

Separating the memory of the good fight in Spain from Stalinism relied on often nostalgic personal memories. In the 1960s, Fredericka Martin, who had served as the administrator of American medical personnel in Spain, began a massive project to collect information on international medical volunteers in Spain. She corresponded with hundreds of veterans from around the world, soliciting comprehensive accounts of their service in Spain. She compiled, for

[24] Barrett, *William Z. Foster,* 263–7; "Osnovanie: izlozhenie besedy s synom Polia Robsona," 26 February 1957, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI), f. 495, op. 261, d. 108, l. 5.

[25] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 409, 410.

[26] Ibid., 409; Miguel Sanchez-Mazas, *Spain in Chains: A Report on Political Repression in Franco Spain* (New York: Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade [1959?]).

[27] Alvah Bessie to Camarades Generales Wertrov y Smirnov and Camarada Marie Fartousse, 4 November 1966, Spanish Civil War Collection, correspondence, Box G1, Folder 005, University of Illinois Rare Book and Manuscript Library; Carroll, *Odyssey,* 359; Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia,* 94–6.

[28] "25th Year Marked by Lincoln Brigade," *NYT,* 26 February 1962; Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia,* 96–100.

example, everything from lists of medical personnel who married in Spain to information on the nurses and doctors from Czechoslovakia.[29] In a 1971 letter to Nelson, she emphasized the profound importance she attached to the project of recovering the volunteers' small, everyday stories: "All my life is focused now on writing a book that will move the hearts of readers and let them see us as we were."[30] In another letter to Nelson the following year, she suggested the political purposes of her project, explaining that she was trying "to show the unity of variety in such a way that it is convincing and contradicts without saying so the falsehoods told of Moscow control, etc."[31] Nelson supported her efforts, but suggested that she focus more on "the broad picture," asking her correspondents, for example, "Did you really think you could help stop Hitler?" Such questions, he emphasized would make the story of Spain relevant to the new left, especially activists involved in protesting the war in Vietnam who "don't care about if you were at Jarama or Teruel."[32] Still, he seemed to agree that personalized memories would best capture the true nature of the volunteers' commitments and their work in Spain. For those who fought in Spain, memories of the civil war performed essentially the same operation as Khrushchev's secret speech: They reclaimed what was good and true and revolutionary and even humanitarian about communism, while minimizing the impact and importance of Stalin.

Emphasizing the emotional and personal truth of international solidarity could thus require a large measure of forgetting. Nowhere was the forgetting clearer than in a 1977 interview that Ibárruri gave after returning to Spain. A question about the arrests of Spanish exiles and veterans in the Soviet Union drew an emphatic response from the eight-two-year-old Ibárruri: "If Spaniards were arrested I don't remember. . . . I don't remember, I don't remember, what more do you want?"[33] This is a startling lapse given the number of friends and acquaintances, both Spanish and Soviet, who disappeared in the purges.[34] It suggests the persistence of Ibárruri's Stalinism, the discipline or perhaps self-delusion that allowed her to recall in her 1984 memoir that she reconciled herself to Stalin's withdrawal of support for the Spanish guerrillas with the mantra, "Stalin is right."[35] At the same time, her unwillingness or inability to

[29] "AMB personnel who married in Spain," Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001, Box 5, Folder 6, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; "Czechoslovakia – Doctors, Nurses," ibid., Box 2, Folder 7.

[30] Fredericka Martin to Steve Nelson, 6 February 1970, Martin Papers, Box 19, Folder 22.

[31] Martin to Nelson, 3 March 1971, Martin Papers, Box 19, Folder 22.

[32] Nelson to Martin, 13 March 1971, Martin Papers, Box 19, Folder 22.

[33] Merle Wolin, "*La Pasionaria:* After Forty Years of Exile One of the Greatest Living Revolutionaries Speaks for the First Time from her Beloved Spain," *Viva,* September 1978, 87.

[34] Luiza Iordache, *Republicanos españoles en el Gulag (1939–1956)* (Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2008).

[35] Dolores Ibárruri, *Memorias de Pasionaria, 1939–1977: Me faltaba España* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1984), 127. On self-delusion, see John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "A Peripheral Vision: Communist Historiography in Britain," *American Communist History* 4, no. 2 (2005): 144.

remember arrests can be understood as the obverse of her powerful memory of the Spanish civil war. It is useful to contrast Ibárruri's vehement forgetting with her contemporary letter to Nelson on the occasion of his seventy-second birthday. Here she insisted that "the time and distance separating us notwithstanding, we have not for a moment forgotten the meaning of your [*vuestra*] participation in the struggle to liberate our people, and feel ourselves forever indebted to you."[36]

Of course, critics of Soviet intervention in Spain have long called attention to this sort of forgetting, dismissing as "myth" "illusion," or "fairy tale" the notion that the war was a "struggle to liberate our people."[37] On the other side, many historians have challenged this picture of the Soviets as matchless deceivers and the volunteers as utterly deceived, arguing that it is grounded in a misuse of historical evidence and a failure to attend to the "broader picture of Republican Spain at war."[38] What has received less attention is the postwar, post-Stalin context of many representations of the war as noble and selfless. This larger context suggests that veterans worked to preserve and perpetuate their memories of the good fight as a means of asserting that, whatever might be revealed about Stalin, their cause and their actions remained pure.

The persistence of such powerful and necessarily partial memories can help us see Stalinism itself in new ways, to see that it retained international dimensions even as the Stalinist state increasingly embraced Russian nationalism and xenophobia. Stalinism has often been understood in terms of the limitation, abandonment, or betrayal of the emancipatory promises of October as it criminalized abortion and homosexuality, sentimentalized motherhood and family, and promoted Russian nationalism. What is notable in the stories and memories of communists connected to Spain is that this sense of a return of traditional values and a turn away from individual emancipation, although visible, is not the whole story. For many communists, the communist community – international solidarity– mattered at least as much as individual emancipation. A large part of what attracted African Americans, emancipated women, and gay men to the party seems to have been its promise not only of liberation but also of a solidarity that transcended, but did not efface, difference – that, to borrow Fredericka Martin's phrase, fostered "the unity of variety." Communist

[36] Dolores Ibárruri to Steve Nelson, 19 January 1975, Steve Nelson Papers, ALBA 008, Box 2, Folder 20.

[37] Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 290; Tony Judt, "Rehearsal for Evil," *New Republic* 225, no. 11 (10 September 2001): 34; Christopher Hitchens, "Who Lost Spain?" *Wilson Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 107.

[38] Helen Graham, "Spain Betrayed? The New Historical McCarthyism," *Science and Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2004):367 (quotation); Peter Carroll, "The Myth of the Moscow Archives," *Science and Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 337, 338; Chris Ealham, "'Myths' and the Spanish Civil War: Some Old, Some Exploded, Some Clearly Borrowed and Some Almost 'Blue,'" *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 2 (2007): 372.

solidarity was not the solidarity of racial or national purity so prominent in many political movements of the interwar period, especially in Nazism, but rather a solidarity that crossed borders and that embraced border crossers, outsiders, heterogeneity, and hybrids of all kinds.

Through the late 1930s, this promiscuous solidarity of immigrants, exiles, and border crossers remained a communist ideal and to some extent a communist practice – nowhere more visibly and dramatically than among the International Brigades in Spain. It coexisted, however uneasily and precariously, with the contemporary show trials and purges that promoted a very different vision of communist solidarity, one that demanded vigilance and purity – first of all ideological purity, the absence of anything that smacked of "Trotskyism." Trotskyism, of course, could designate almost any sort of "enemy" and any sort of difference might arouse suspicions of it. By 1937 deepening anxieties about the threat of war brought hundreds of foreign communists under suspicion; any émigré might be a foreign agent in disguise.[39] And yet foreign communists were still bringing their children to the Soviet Union, appealing for help as participants in a vital international movement. Only in the aftermath of World War II did Stalinism decisively subordinate internationalism to anticosmopolitanism. However even then, the desire for and the memory of the hybrid solidarity of the interwar years remained a central element of the life stories of many communists especially, but not only, veterans of Spain. To stop being a communist, to stop wanting to be a communist – or to renounce the good that one had done as a communist – was to stop being oneself or one's imagined best self. By recovering the lives of individual communists and taking seriously their political and emotional ties to Moscow and one another, we can begin to understand the appeal of a cause that promised solidarity even as it practiced terror.

The personal dimension is particularly clear in the case of people like Nelson, who, as the extent of Stalin's crimes became clear, left the party, but "could not and would not renounce my past."[40] Among the "proud" moments he refused to abandon was participation in the war in Spain, a decision reinforced by "close kinship with the other vets."[41] Likewise, although Ibárruri's letters and Martin's memory project may have effectively whitewashed the Soviet role in Spain, they also worked to preserve international connections and personal memories from the corrosive influence of Khrushchev's revelations. For many veterans, the memory of "the cause of all advanced and progressive humanity" remained an essential one and therefore had to be uncoupled, consciously

[39] William J. Chase, *Enemies within the Gates? The Comintern and Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 226.

[40] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 399. Josie McLellan, "The Politics of Communist Biography: Alfred Kantorowicz and the Spanish Civil War," *German History* 22, no. 4 (November 2004): 541.

[41] Nelson et al., *American Radical,* 409.

or not, from the knowledge that the phrase was Stalin's. Thus idealized, the cause offered a touchstone and a resource for others seeking to build a new egalitarian world without borders.[42] At VALB reunions, the veterans' literal and metaphorical grandchildren still raise their fists in antifascist salute and sing the *Internationale*, not in tribute to the Soviet Union or Stalin, but to remember a moment of palpable international solidarity when everyone knew the same song in dozens of languages.

[42] Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia,* 131–72.

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Index