5

Battleground of Reputations: Ireland and the Spanish Civil War

R. A. STRADLING

I

Representation

In a recent feature-film set in the Spanish War, a young scouser, Dave Carr — a generic working-class hero who embodies the wish-fulfilment of so many leftist writers — arrives at the Aragon front with a batch of new POUM recruits. Moving in single file up a hillside towards their trenches, they disturb a couple taking advantage of the fleeting absence of war in order to make love under a tree. The male section of this partnership turns out to be the leader of Dave's platoon — Pat Coogan, ex-IRA, dedicated enemy of Fascism and British Imperialism, as reckless in the passions of love as in those excited by political commitment and the heat of battle. A few weeks later, he meets his death in an incident full of ironies. During an attack on an enemy-held village, he is shot — not by an enemy soldier, but by the parish priest, treacherously sniping from his church tower. Coogan is laid to rest in the Spanish earth under the Irish tricolour, whilst his comrades intone 'The Internationale', and his girl makes a speech heavily indebted to La Pasionaria.[1]

The red-headed and red-kerchiefed Coogan is a stereotype, an image epitomizing elements commonly attributed to

1 The film *Land and Freedom*, directed by Ken Loach, was made in English and Spanish versions and premiered in Madrid in April 1995. Here and elsewhere, it deservedly filled high-street cinemas for much of the summer.

Irishmen. He is a libertarian rebel, violent and tender by turns, the stuff of which physical courage is made, a soldier and martyr for the cause. These are, to most minds, essences of Irishness. Each is a compelling reason why Irishmen went to Spain, and together they seem to provide an incontestable expression of the faith of one hard-achieved Republic in the final triumph of a dear sister over the forces of oppression. But to rehearse this litany *ad infinitum*, memorializing its meaning in hymns and arias such as Christy Moore's well-known ballad 'Vive el Quinte Brigada' — where the names of the glorious dead are solemnly intoned — is part of a conventional piety which elides the contradictory realities of Ireland's response to the Spanish Civil War. As the film *Land and Freedom* itself reveals, the historical issue is tortuous enough even without the special twists imparted by the Irish dimension. For example, if the 'Fascist' priest had not killed Coogan, our hero might well have ended up — as a member of the 'objectively Fascist' POUM — being eliminated by his Stalinist comrades.[2] Yet even more shocking to liberal sensibilities is the fact that by far the greater number of Irishmen who went to Spain in 1936 were not enlisted in the ranks of the Republic at all, but rather in those of their Nationalist enemies.

II

Reputation

'¡No pasarán! The struggle continues!'. As Coogan's girl announces over his Aragonese grave, so Carr's grieving granddaughter ritually repeats at the Liverpool cemetery sixty years on. The Spanish Civil War has come to encapsulate modern ideals of progress, to represent the most meaningful chapter in the long march of socialist Everyman. For a minority — particularly surviving veterans on the left — it is still a living and (what is different) a vital site of struggle. This is so

2 The main purpose of *Land and Freedom* is to realize on the screen, with the cosmetic alterations necessary to communicate with a modern audience, the political message patented by George Orwell in his *Homage to Catalonia*. There are no more than three grammatical errors in the title of Christy Moore's ballad, but they suggest that Spanish is not his strong suit.

because liberty and progress are always and everywhere under attack, and because resources to defend them in the here-and-now can be derived from the unique Spanish experience. For these reasons too, the past is a matter of reputation; reputation comes from commitment, commitment from sacrifice. Thus those who have fought in a war, or have lost friends, husbands, sons, uncles, lovers will not easily settle for less than absolute justification. It is not simply a jealousy of personal worth. The store of honorific memory, the sense of illustrious value, is collective, abstract and metaphysical. It is unaffected equally by the sordid compromises and bloody divisions of the period itself; by the accreting, and thus changing, historical record of the event we call 'The Spanish Civil War'; or by ephemeral alterations in intellectual fashion. It perhaps resembles more the Catholic doctrine of a boundless well of virtue provided by Christ, his saints and martyrs, than the Marxist notion of surplus material value. In the last analysis — like any myth-complex — it concerns power and power-relations. It provides a fighting fund for those dedicated to freedom in the present and the future. The trenches along the Jarama must be manned and supplied: one day Hill 481, overlooking Gandesa on the Ebro battlefront, will at last be taken.

The community of true progressives, however, must be carefully defined. Not all can belong: above all, the sinister heirs of international Fascism, always masters of disguise, must never approach the shrine. Indeed, by definition, such heretics can have no authentic desire for salvation, but only a mission to steal, defile, diminish or subvert the Ark of the Covenant. Paradoxically, although its value for members is infinite, reputation cannot be shared with others. Any other person or body who lays claim to a benificent heritage deriving from the Spanish War, in doing so detracts from the store of reputation. This vigilance has a specially bitter side in Ireland, where such a claim can be plausibly advanced on behalf of those who took up arms against the cause of the Popular Front. In this case, the sanctions outlined above are uniquely strengthened by those of a populist nationalism also rooted in a mythology of self-perception. The very phrase 'an Irish Fascist' seems perversely oxymoronic, a cultural contradiction in terms. In every sense of the phrase, Fascism has no place in Irish

history. To suggest otherwise is somehow to cast a slur on the reputation of the Irish Republic itself as a modern, democratic and progressive state.

In modern Ireland, such has been the public anxiety associated with the whole experience of indigenous Fascism that historical study of it has not been encouraged. Whenever the volunteer unit which went to Spain with General Eoin O'Duffy is recalled, the reaction is an embarrassed silence or a quick resort to the deprecating snigger of anecdote. In contrast, no jokes and no embarrassment are in evidence when their opposite numbers are on parade. The men of the so-called 'Connolly Column' are accepted as nothing less than sentinels of civilization. The monument to their dead installed at the approach to Liberty Hall, the Trade Union headquarters in Ireland's capital city, was 'Unveiled by the Lord Mayor ... as part of the Dublin European City of Culture'. In contrast, there is no public memorial in Ireland to those men who fought and died for another, different set of ideals: in general, to preserve the right of religious belief and practice; in particular, to defend their Catholic faith and the lives of men and women in Holy Orders. These principles are no less civilized than any espoused by their opponents, and the willingness to suffer and die for them is no less worthy of recognition.

In the event, the sacrifice demanded of the Irish Internationals was considerably greater than that imposed on most members of the O'Duffy Brigade. As the poet said, 'too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart'.[3] Thus it is not easy for survivors to acknowledge any positive qualities among men of their own nation who were members of an army responsible for the deaths of their comrades; and which (what is more) totally defeated the Republican cause. The present essay is the work of one who admires the volunteers of both sides, and regrets that the process of revision will inevitably be regarded by one of them as an attempt to lessen its store of reputation.

3 From W. B. Yeats' 'Easter, 1916'.

III

Politics

As the success of the Loach/Allen film inside and outside Spain demonstrates, its subject matter continues to excite widespread popular interest. At a basic contextual level, the fate of 1930s Spain is perceived as part of the history of several dozen other nations in Europe and the wider world.[4] In most cases it is impossible to state that these nations — whether governments or people — supported one side or the other in the conflict. We know, however, that impressive numbers of their citizens went voluntarily to Spain to fight for the Republic; and that in subsequent years, the community of historians and other intellectuals produced by the nations concerned applauded this act and deplored the pathetic neutralism of their governments. But the Irish case is radically different; it transgresses the norm, subverting many of the assumptions which surround the mythology and the historiography of the war in Spain — of which *Land and Freedom* is merely a particularly influential and current vehicle.

The government of the Free State (Saorstát) certainly stayed neutral, but the population at large supported the Nationalist side, in a substantial minority of cases persistently and vociferously. Whereas in Britain, most pressure was brought to bear on Baldwin's and Chamberlain's governments materially to support the *de jure* government of the Republic, in the Saorstát much more significant pressure was placed upon Eamon de Valera and his Cabinet colleagues to recognize Franco's regime. Indeed, a majority of supporters of De Valera's Fianna Fáil government — the more economically-deprived section of the electorate — disapproved of his non-intervention policy.[5]

---

4 Recent treatments of the war's international dimensions are M. Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1994) and J Avilés Farré, *Pasión y farsa: franceses y británicos ante la Guerra Civil Española* (Madrid: Eudema, 1994) .

5 For the general background of Irish history in this period, see J. A. Murphy *Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1975) — a useful, short introduction; and the more substantial work by D. Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Nation and State* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1995).

Allegiance to Roman Catholicism, both professed and practised, was a palpable feature of Irish society in this decade. This allegiance cut sharply across economic and intellectual divisions, something which stood in contradistinction to the situation in the rest of Europe, including, in notable measure, Spain itself. Even in the British context, it has recently been demonstrated that Catholicism was a seriously disruptive factor in the attempts of working-class organizations to present a united front over the Spanish War.[6] With the *Saorstát*, it is not sufficient to state that the clauses of the previous sentence might be exactly reversed. Even the policies of the Irish Trade Union movement and the Labour Party were dominated by strongly anti-Republican emotions. Though it would be an exaggeration to assert that class was not a major factor in Irish politics, the symbiosis of Catholicism and the cause of national independence — a gradual and often painful process — was a culturally-achieved phenomenon by the 1930s. Social class, or at least the educational orientation that went with it, may have predisposed individuals to accept or reject the pronouncements of the clergy on political issues. But the evidence of Irish public opinion suggests that in 1936, only small numbers of urban working-class males, and middle-class intelligentsia of both sexes, remained indifferent — and fewer still hostile — to the cause of the Catholic Church in Spain.[7]

All this is not to suggest that Irish politics and society were free of bitter or profound divisions. For a start, what is glibly referred to above as 'the cause of national independence' was far from meaning the same thing to all citizens of the Free State. As in other countries, those who demanded that the Dublin Government forswear non-intervention and support for the

---

6 See the relevant sections in T. Buchanan, *The British Labour Movement and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1992), esp. chapter 5.

7 For existing work on the broad subject-area of the present essay, including cogent treatment of the domestic Irish context, see D. Keogh, *Ireland and Europe, 1919-48* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1988) especially pp. 65-97, and J. Bowyer Bell, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War 1936 to 1939', in *Strong Words Brave Deeds: The Poetry, Life and Times of Thomas O'Brien in the Spanish Civil War*, ed. H. Gustav Klaus (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1994), 24-26. (The latter is a slightly updated version of a piece first published in 1969.)

'legitimate' Spanish Republic, were part of the broad left of politics. The difference was that the most active element in their composition was not socialist but radically nationalist groups of the IRA — irreconcilables left isolated by De Valera's formation of the new Fianna Fáil party, and his espousal of the constitutional path, in 1927. Such men regarded national independence as humiliatingly incomplete without the integration of the six northern counties, and therefore considered the war against Britain as still on foot. They had followed De Valera into opposition and Civil War in 1922-23, refusing to accept the Treaty, establishing the partition of the island of Ireland, which their Sinn Féin colleagues had negotiated with Lloyd George.[8] For their part, the latter formed a pro-Treaty grouping, with a clear majority in the *Dáil*. Following victory in the Civil War, they became the governing party of the new nation. The war itself, though lasting less than a year, was a ruthless and bloody affair which poisoned the well of Irish politics, and which even today is still capable of arousing bitter feelings.[9] In its wake, the IRA was banned, whilst most of those known to have supported the 'insurgency' forfeited any right to government employment. The triumphant party (Cumann na nGhaedheal) ruled Ireland, under the leadership of W. T. Cosgrave, until the indecisive general election of 1932. Ousted from power at last by Fianna Fáil the following year, they split up into mutually recriminatory factions. By 1936, however, they had regrouped in the new Fine Gael party, and were able to provide an effective parliamentary opposition. Their support of Franco and the Spanish Nationalists, and the (variously) contrasting attitudes of their erstwhile enemies, seemed to adumbrate a return to the internecine hostilities of 1922.

Thus, following 1933, the wound in Ireland's side gaped wider and bled more profusely than at any time since the shooting had stopped a decade earlier. Legalized by De Valera after his marginal polls victory of 1932, the IRA began a

---

8 See J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: A History of the IRA, 1916-1970* (London: Anthony Blond, 1970).

9 Still the most thorough treatment is C Younger, *Ireland's Civil War* (London: Collins, 1968 [paperback repr., 1970]).

campaign of sustained physical intimidation of the opposition. In the confusion of a sudden loss of long-accustomed power and place, the ex-Cosgrave men became convinced that the IRA were being used by their opponents to hound them out of public life. Whilst they saw De Valera as a potential dictator, in fact a process of mutual alienation between Fianna Fáil and the IRA had now become definitive.[10] The year 1933 witnessed the paramilitary moment. De Valera set up the reserve army force (FCA), in effect a uniformed section of his party, but ostensibly intended to draw the young unemployed away from the IRA. He also sacked the Police Commissioner, General Eoin O'Duffy, founder of the unarmed national police (the Garda Siochána) and proceeded to appoint a new head and membership of this force, more amenable to government needs. Within a few weeks, O'Duffy had accepted the leadership of the Army Comrades Association, a body of ex-army men (i.e. Pro-Treaty veterans of 1922-23); within a few months he and a few collaborators had turned it into a semi-uniformed body which paraded at noisy rallies, and did not flinch from violent confrontation with the IRA.

The Blueshirts — as they later called themselves — were a proto-Fascist organization, reaching at their zenith an enormous membership of forty thousand and adopting a programme derived from Catholic (or 'Christian Democratic') social teaching and Italian Fascist (or 'corporatist') economic ideas. Unlike their adversaries, they never actually declared themselves against the established forms of the constitution. Most thinking Blueshirt supporters would have acknowledged a desire to change the nature of democracy in Ireland, but few accepted the appellation 'Fascist' — except occasionally in the heat of heckling debate, when forced to acknowledge Fascism as the extremest and thus most effective form of resistance to atheistic Communism.[11] Not more than a handful ever wanted

10 Bowyer Bell, *Secret Army*, 99-127.

11 For a balanced and thorough account, see M. Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1970). See also, however, the recent work of M. Cronin, 'The Socioeconomic Background of the Blueshirt Movement in Ireland, 1932-5', *Irish Historical Studies*, XIV (November 1994); and 'The Blueshirt Movement: Ireland's Fascists?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, (April 1995), 311-32. The question of whether the Blueshirts were 'Fascist' can never be

General O'Duffy as dictator, any more than their rivals wished a similar role for Eamon de Valera. Yet for over two years (1933-35) democracy in Ireland took a severe battering. With running battles in the streets of Dublin and Cork, and a kind of guerrilla warfare in the countryside, government seemed caught in a crossfire between the IRA-radical Left alliance and the Blueshirts. A semblance of order had not long been restored — mainly due to fractious leadership divisions inside opposition groupings — when the Spanish Civil War broke out in the summer of 1936.

The declaration of the Spanish Second Republic in 1931 had been greeted with approval in most quarters of Irish opinion. A pervading sense of empathy with many of Spain's democratic-reformist aspirations dulled the edge of Irish reaction to the signs of a visceral anticlericalism which the coming of the Republic unleashed. However, as the single-minded determination of the Spanish Republic to confront and destroy the power of the Church became increasingly apparent, and especially when this policy turned (in the estimation of Catholics) to actual persecution, Irish perceptions began to change. Before the summer of 1936, nevertheless, alarm was muted; indeed, the minatory attitude of the Third Reich towards its Catholic citizens evoked greater attention and condemnation in the press. The military rising of July 1936, and the social revolution it precipitated in various parts of Spain, changed this situation overnight. Immediately, accounts of atrocities against Catholics, and especially against clergy, appeared in the newspapers. The summer months were marked by saturation coverage, fuelled by an apparently endless supply of sensational copy relating the murder of priests. This, in turn, stimulated a chorus of indignation, expressed in press and pulpit, as well as public gatherings from

---

resolved, since the historical issue has been overlaid with innumerable layers of insult, accusation and exculpation. I use 'proto-Fascist' since (a) in the context of the 1930s, a group which paraded in uniform, gave straight-arm salutes, adopted violence as a political tactic, and enunciated a domestic policy influenced by Mussolini's party can hardly be regarded as non-Fascist, but (b) I am persuaded that the majority of its adherents believed they were defending democracy, not undermining it, and few of its rank-and-file thought of themselves as Fascist.

bar-room to council chamber.[12]

The mass murder of religous in 'loyalist' Spain is no longer a matter of serious dispute. Although exact figures will never be agreed, it seems certain that something between seven and ten thousand clergy, including hundreds of nuns and over a dozen bishops, met violent deaths in 1936.[13] Many of the atrocity stories circulated by the contemporary media were full of lurid exaggeration. The element of misrepresentation present here was just as politically-motivated and systematic as the murder campaign itself. It was meant to excite universal fear and hatred of Socialist revolution. In the press and cinema newsreels the terror-gangs were invariably referred to as 'reds'. Nowhere was the intended effect of this campaign more thoroughly achieved than in the Free State. The reiterated warnings of the hierarchy that Ireland itself was being infiltrated by agents of Bolshevik revolution, seemed to be justified. This process was portrayed, in exactly the terms which Stalin was anxious to counter, as part of a world-wide conspiracy orchestrated from Moscow. In Ireland, sympathy for Spanish landowners and other plutocrats whose property was being forcibly expropriated by the people was limited — despite the charitable sanctions of Christianity. But when it came to the killing of priests and nuns, the wanton destruction of churches, and the symbolic abuse of familiar objects of common devotion, feelings ran high. A thrill of anti-Communist fervour ran across Ireland, having a specially keen effect in the rural

12 Bowyer Bell, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War', 242-45; Keogh, *Ireland and Europe*, 66ff.

13 For a measured general assessment of the anticlerical fury see J. M. Sánchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Indiana U. P., 1987). For Catalonia, eyewitness testimony is collected in *La persecució religiosa de 1936 a Catalunya: testimoniatges*, ed. J. Massot I Montaner (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1987); and the basic monograph is J. M. Solé and J. Villaroya i Font, *La repressió a la reraguarda de Catalunya (1936-39)*, 2 vols (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1989-90). The main study for Spain as a whole, with statistics which have been much disputed, is A. Montero Moreno, *Historia de la persecución religiosa en España, 1936-1939* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1961).

towns and villages which held two-thirds of the population.[14] But this majority had little awareness of Spain. To bring about a more focused identification with one victimized section of the Spanish people, and against another, comprising criminal assailants controlled by the agents of an alien power and ideology, some catalyst was needed.

IV

History

Ireland's past was pertinaciously plundered for this purpose. In terms of national education — mostly in the hands of Catholic clerics — it was already a deeply mythologized history, with a powerfully Romantic profile, and this gave its connection with Spain a particularly seductive glow. In pro-Catholic newspapers, from the nationally-circulating *Cork Examiner* to local editions like the *Tuam Herald*, features appeared celebrating the glorious crusading history of Spain, the profound heritage of its religion and art, the visions of its saints and the sufferings of its martyrs. Given that the nation was experiencing one of its periodic resurgences of mariology, the age-old devotion of ordinary Spaniards to the Blessed Virgin was by no means neglected.[15] It might be suspected, moreover, that the very medium which in 1995 stimulated a wave of

14 This conclusion is drawn from secondary sources, already cited; and the newspaper press of the Saorstát in 1936-37. The features outlined were a speciality of the *Irish Independent*, the most popular daily, despite its opposition to Fianna Fáil. The issue of 18 August 1936 contained a long account of priest-hunting in Barcelona and elsewhere reported that: (1) Spanish 'reds' were trained in Moscow; (2) 'Chekas modelled after those of Soviet Russia are slaughtering the citizens wholesale'; (3) churches were being turned into 'red' offices named 'Lenin' or 'Dimitroff'; (4) arms were supplied from Russia and eighteen military advisers had arrived in Cadiz; (and perhaps most impressive) (5) advice on revolution-making was being broadcast in Spanish in Soviet Radio. There was no mention of offences against property — though the paper was owned by a Dublin banker.

15 See e.g. 'Old Toledo' and 'The Irish in Spain ... Soldiers and Statesmen in Spanish Service', *Cork Examiner* (Week-end magazine section), 1 and 22 August 1936; 'Ireland and Spain — Old Memories', *Tuam Herald*, 19 September 1936.

posthumous sympathy for the Spanish revolution was involved in the campaign of 1936 to stifle it as soon as possible. Two of the feature films on general release in small-town cinemas in September 1936 were *The Crusades* and *Castles in Spain*.[16] Meanwhile, on 10 August, General O'Duffy wrote to *The Independent*, asking for volunteers to form an Irish Brigade to fight in Spain 'on the side of the Christian forces'.[17]

In subsequent weeks, readers were reminded that Spain had repeatedly stood by Ireland in its centuries of oppression by English Protestantism. Preaching on a 'Day of Reparation for Spain' in St Mel's Cathedral, Longford, Bishop MacNamee finished with a peroration which — despite its bathetic ending — resembled a call to arms.

> Spain has had intimate relations with our own Ireland. She supported us against religious persecution in the days of Elizabeth. She offered a home to our exiled princes. She trained our greatest Catholic Captain, the hero of Benburb [Owen Roe O'Neill]. So let us pray for Spain.[18]

Spanish Armada survivors (it was dubiously alleged) had been taken in and protected by the Catholic gaels. Above all, the names of the leaders of the diaspora which followed the failure of the Spanish-assisted rebellion against Elizabeth I — the O'Donnell Abu, the O'Neill and the O'Sullivan Mór — were often invoked. W. B. Yeats had used this heritage of the earls, and the central national legacy of the exiled swordsmen (the so-called 'Wild Geese') in marching songs he had written for the Blueshirts in 1934.

> Fail, and that history turns into rubbish,
> All that great past to a trouble of fools;
> Those that come after shall mock at O'Donnell
> Mock at the memory of both O'Neills.[19]

---

16 The latter succeeded the former in the Mall Cinema, Tuan, in the third week of September (*Tuam Herald* 13 September 1936).

17 *Irish Independent*, 10 August 1936.

18 *The Universe*, 18 September 1936.

19 From the first of W. B. Yeats' 'Three Marching Songs'. See F Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: Macmillan, 1981) for the story behing these effusions.

Taking his cue, O'Duffy cited these epic heroes in expounding Ireland's debt to the religious and military patronage of Spain, which was one inspiration for undertaking his crusade. According to O'Duffy's account, General Mola referred independently to this traditional connection between the two nations during their negotiations in Valladolid.[20] Indeed, some of the Spanish grandee descendants of the ancient Irish chieftains were to take an active interest in the Irish Brigade during its sojourn in Spain. It seems unlikely that this exploitation of historical-romantic sentiment was as powerful an inducement to recruits as the religious motivation *per se* — but the two elements dovetailed perfectly for many young Catholic idealists, and perhaps especially for the potential officer corpos who had missed out on the glorious adventures of 1916-21.

In early November 1936, the undergraduates of the Trinity College Historical Society debated the issues of the Spanish War: the Marquis MacSwiney of Mashanaglass, presiding, intervened strongly in favour of O'Duffy's stance:

> It might be asked why Irish people were mixing in another's peoples affairs. But he [the marquis] would point out that Irish Catholics were granted by King Philip V ... all the rights and privileges of Spanish-born subjects. He did not think that the *Cortes* had ever passed a measure revoling that privilege.[21]

This performance, remarkably *ultra vires* as it was coming from the chair, was enough to persuade his audience, Protestant almost to a man, to support the Republican cause by a vote of over two to one. Yet the pro-loyalist side was also keen to claim the sanction of history. In this camp, however, the focus of sentiment was the more recent past and a more secular inspiration — Wolfe Tone and the Jacobin tradition, O'Donovan Rossa and the early Fenians 'who were linked with Marx and Engels through the International Working Men's Association.'[22]

---

20 E. O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain* (Dublin: Brown & Nolan, 1938) pp. 16, 24.

21 *Irish Press*, 12 November 1936.

22 M. O'Riordan, *Connolly Column* (Dublin: Free Press, 1979), 53-54. In November 1938, the Duchess of Tetuán — an O'Donnell descendant who patronized O'Duffy — visited the latter's sworn enemy, Frank Ryan, at the

Both the IRA Congress and the Irish Communist Party, who collaborated in organizing Ireland's contribution to the International Brigade, saw the figure of James Connolly, the socialist martyr of the Easter 1916 uprising, as central to their efforts. It was Connolly's name which was later used for the title of an allegedly exclusive Irish battalion. The precipitate (perhaps the main) motive for left-wing intervention was linked to this: the need to counter O'Duffy's initiative, and to save the honour of Ireland which he threatened to besmirch.[23] Moreover, some Irish veterans of the International Brigade were in due course to insist that they, and not their rivals, deserved recognition as the modern 'Wild Geese'.[24]

V

Experience

Over a twenty-two month period stretching from September 1936 to July 1938, nearly one thousand Irishmen went to fight in Spain.[25] This was only the outward sign of Ireland's inward

---

POW camp in Burgos. Her intercession with Franco may have helped to save Ryan's life. The action was in return for a favour which an Irish O'Donnell had done for a Spanish O'Donnell in the early days of the revolution (*ibid.*, 121).

23 Ryan frequently reiterated this point in his correspondence and other writings; see also 'Irish Volunteers in Spain' by 'C.Q.' in the International Brigade magazine *Volunteer for Liberty*, 11 November 1937.

24 E.g. by Paddy O'Daire, one of the most admirable leaders of the British Battalion, in an interview during the RTE documentary *Even the Olives Are Bleeding* made by Cathal O'Shannon in 1975; according to his *compadre*, J. Monks, O'Daire was inclined to argue this point in the trenches (*With the Reds in Andalucia* [London: privately printed, 1985], 11).

25 No complete lists of volunteers seem to have survived on either side. The lists in M. O'Riordan of pro-government volunteers (*Connolly Column*, 164-67) are deficient in every important respect. To refer only to the quantitive aspect, material in the Spanish archives indicates the total was nearer 200 than the 146 given by O'Riordan. Estimates of the size of the Irish Brigade range from 600 to over 900; *cf.* H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [3rd ed.] 1975), 979-80, with V. Ennis, 'Some "Catholic Moors" ', unpublished typescript, Irish Military Archives, Dublin. (I wish to thank the archivist, Commandant P. Young, for providing me with a photocopy of the latter and permission to cite it.) General O'Duffy was known

agony. The Irish people as a whole were emotionally and politically involved in the war to a far greater extent than is represented, and to a deeper extent than any other people in the world — with the possible exception of the Portuguese. At first glance, the total number of volunteers may seem unimpressive. In fact, even in terms of bare statistics, it is remarkable when compared to the record of other countries — for example, given relative population figures, it puts the aggregate of less than two thousand from all the remaining regions of the British Isles into perspective. No other nation (it seems) contributed such comparatively substantial numbers of genuine volunteers to both sides.[26]

Less than three weeks after O'Duffy's public appeal, the *Cork Examiner* reported an official claim that the response had exceeded five thousand men. Though this figure is not corroborated elsewhere, given the numbers involved in the Blueshirts and their successor organizations, it seems otiose to question its accuracy.[27] Ireland was being mobilized for an anti-Communist crusade, her fervour focused by the crisis in Spain. Alongside O'Duffy's initiative, another had been launched by a Dublin businessman and T.D., Patrick Belton, founder of a nationwide organization called the Irish Christian Front — Ireland's answer to the Popular Front. Belton insisted

---

to have kept meticulous records in his Blackrock home, but these were lost or destroyed after his death. They included the papers of his National Corporate Party which organized the recruitment of the Brigade. Figures compiled by the present writer currently project a total of not more than 700 members.

26 Various caveats should be registered here. R. Rosenstone refers to the existence of a French volunteer force ('Compagnie Jean d'Arc'), 500 strong which fought at Jarama (*Historical Dictionary of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39*, ed. J. Cortada [Westport, Conn./London: Greenwood Press, 1982], 476). I have found no other reference to this unit, which seems not to have any relation to the so-called *camelots du roi* — individuals who enlisted (e.g.) with the *requetés* (see Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, pp. 768, 980. Pro-Franco German and Italian units in Spain were, of course, regular armed forces provided by the governments concerned. But the Italian title ('Corpo Truppe Volontarie') — often derided — was not wholly without foundation in fact, and the German force contained many who were not specifically obliged to serve in Spain, both professional and conscript.

27 O'Duffy himself claimed only 'over two thousand' in an interview given a few days earlier (*Cork Examiner* 24 and 27 August 1936). The final figure was — he later asserted — over 6,000 (*Crusade in Spain*, 13-14).

that help to the Spanish Nationalists must be non-military, and in this way he was able to obtain the official endorsement of the Catholic hierarchy, who withheld it from O'Duffy. Belton and his ICF enjoyed a purple patch of quasi-fanatical popularity, organising so-called 'monster rallies' in Dublin and other cities.[28] The later months of 1936 were punctuated by these jamborees. Thousands marched under the banners of the Legion of Mary or the Union of Catholic Mothers, gathering in open spaces for speeches spiced with dire warnings of Communist conspiracy and praise of Catholic resistance in Spain. It was announced that collections would be taken outside the churches for medical and other civilian help to 'Catholic Spain'. The first of these, held on behalf of the hierarchy in October, raised £43,000; another was held later by the ICF and realized £32,000.[29]

These were enormous donations, largely deriving from a poor, in some respects penurious, community. Meanwhile, Sunday sermons all over the country contained admiring references to General Franco. With little opposition, and in most cases unanimously, dozens of local town councils voted through resolutions, based on a prototype passed in Clonmel, calling for official recognition of the 'Burgos government'. Similar motions were passed by Trade Union committees, and at other public meetings up and down the country. The multi-partisan weight of feeling thus demonstrated was turned on the government by Belton and other opposition leaders. At first, attempts were made to persuade De Valera's government not to adhere to the non-intervention agreements. Later, when it was realized that this policy did not in practice disadvantage the Nationalists, the objective became less modest — outright recognition of Franco's regime.[30] In November 1936, one of the main newspapers in the Nationalist zone proclaimed its

28 Bowyer Bell, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War', 250-51.

29 O'Riordan, *Connolly Column*, 31. The first collection was made on the day of Christ the King, a feast of central significance for the Carlist *Requetés*, whose volunteer battalions it seemed at this juncture that the Irish Brigade might join (O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain*, pp. 13, 180-81, and J. del Burgo, *Conspiración y Guerra Civil* [Madrid: Alfaguara, 1970], 249-50.

30 Keogh, *Ireland and Europe*, pp. 67ff., provides more narrative detail about these events.

confidence in two imminent events: the new *Caudillo*'s capture of Madrid, and the Irish Free State's official recognition of his government. In fact Franco had to wait until the end of the war for both these triumphs.[31]

In the midst of the storm, De Valera remained firm, with a superb sense of opportunism when it came to dividing or wrong-footing his rivals. The *Taoiseach* was a devout Catholic. His position was potentially weakened by the fact that he had never fully repaired the breach with the Church caused by his earlier defiance — now regarded as a disadvantage to Fianna Fáil. He felt it politic to allow his newspaper, the *Irish Press* to display a pro-Catholic — though not pro-Francoist — sympathy over Spain. Perhaps his stand against the populist-clerical tide came more from natural obstinacy than visionary statesmanship. In any case, he rode the crisis with an Olympian style which later became famous. Not only did the Government survive motions of censure, and the bitter confrontation of February 18 1937 — when, after one of the most virulent debates in its history, the Dáil passed a non-intervention measure which made it illegal to send reinforcements to O'Duffy in Spain — but also De Valera won a general election later that year, along with a referundum on his new anti-British constitution.[32] By this time, the peak of national obsession had passed. In Spain attacks on priests and churches had almost ceased; survivors among the former were in custody or hiding, and relatively undamaged examples of the

31 *El Adelanto de Salamanca*, 28 November 1936. The hypothetical issue of whether the former event should lead to the latter was certainly raised at Cabinet level by the foreign minister, Seán MacEntee; see his memo of 11 November 1936, Irish National Archives (Dublin) Department of Foreign Affairs, File 277/87. The Republican Government had earlier rejected De Valera's offer to mediate between it and the rebels (Foreign Ministry to Dublin Embassy, 23 August 1936, Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores [Madrid] [Sección del] Archivo de Barcelona, Legajo R415 f. 44).

32 Keogh, *Ireland and Europe*, 83-85. In what seems to be an undated draft of his *Dail* speech of 18 February, MacEntee began with the words: 'No matter what side in the present conflict one's sympathies may lie, and there can be no doubt on which side is the sympathy of the vast majority of the people of this country ...'. In the pencilled corrections, 'no' is replaced with 'little' as a qualifer of 'doubt' and 'vast' has been deleted (Irish National Archives, Foreign Affairs, 227/87).

latter had been boarded up. The *Irish Independent* and the Catholic Sunday press constantly returned to the old martyrdom stories, and made the most of any fresh ones, they could never maintain the level of outrage in their readers whipped up during 1936.[33] Moreover, they obviously failed to influence many of its 'natural' socio-economic constituency against Fianna Fáil.

One important sociological distinction between the two groups which were travelling to Spain to fight on opposite sides, must be registered at this point. The overwhelming bulk of Irish who went to join the Republicans were from the urban working-class slums (Dublin, Derry, Belfast, Cork). In contrast the Catholic Brigade derived its members equally disproportionately, from small towns and rural farming communities. After many difficulties with domestic organization and overseas transport — which O'Duffy overcame with determination and skill — the latter unit assembled in Spain in the last days of 1936. It has a unique status as the only organized and integral volunteer force to join the Francoist rebels.[34] It would be an exaggeration to state that its membership represented a cross section of Irish opinion. All the same, it included a notable minority who had fought with the IRA in some or all of the campaigns of 1917-23. Other recruits had been active in the ranks of the labour unions, and there was a token handful of Protestants. For them, the need for unity in the Christian Cause, combined with horror at the priest-killings, overcame confessional considerations and even suspended strong contra-indicative emotions deriving from earlier political experience. Equally notable is the fact that

33 For as long as the Irish Brigade remained in Spain, the *Irish Independent* helped justify its constant support by topping-up the righteous outrage factor; see, e.g., its editions of 1, 5, and 12 March 1937.

34 A summary account of the recruitment of the Irish Brigade and its transportation to Spain has been given in my 'Franco's Irish Volunteers', *History Today*, (March 1995), 40-47. For what follows on the military and other experiences of volunteers, the fundamental secondary sources are O'Riordan and O'Duffy (*op. cit.*). However, the political bias of these versions makes excessive dependency unwise. I have thus blended information from a spectrum of interest and witness, but detailed references are restricted to material which is new and/or controversial. Full scholarly apparatus and lists of sources will appear in the book I am compiling on this subject.

many of the political radicals who followed Frank Ryan into the ranks of the International Brigades were also — like their leader himself — practising Catholics. For them, the need for unity amongst a working class engaged in a life-or-death fight against Fascism was more urgent than personal religious convictions. However, alongside the majority group of IRA stalwarts in the ranks of the Irish International Brigaders, there were over a dozen Communist Party members. On the issues of Fascism and Imperialism no measurable gulf existed between such men.

The experiences in Spain of Irishmen on both sides have similarities, but also striking differences. Around eighty of the eventual total of two hundred pro-Republican volunteers, went to Spain in Ryan's original party in December 1936. They arrived at the International Brigade HQ at Albacete not long before Christmas 1936, at approximately the same time as their opponents reached the base at Cáceres. A handful of individual Irishmen were already serving in Republican militia units. Still others, over one hundred in total, were to arrive in small groups, by means of the regular Communist-organized 'underground railway', at various stages until the late summer of 1938. There were soon cases of serious friction between Irish and English members of the XV Brigade, especially the English officers with middle-class accents and regular army attitudes. A baroque series of mistakes and misunderstandings led to a crisis within a month of their arrival. In violent and bitter circumstances, the Irish contingent split up, the majority decamping to join the recently-arrived US battalion. No sooner had this happened than the Nationalist offensive began on the Jarama. During the chaotic and critical three weeks that followed, a dozen Irishmen lost their lives in company with proportionate numbers of American and British comrades. Around forty uninjured survivors seem to have been gradually reintegrated into the British (16th, later 57th) Battalion, which later arrivals were also required to join. Mutual resentments continued, however, since they were rooted not only in national resentments, but also in religious problems which divided Irishmen from each other. As we have seen, most Irish brigaders — not least Frank Ryan himself — were sincere Catholics. Some did not welcome the obligatory ideology lessons

in the trenches, and were disturbed by the fact that the practice of their religion was not even available to them when on leave behind the lines.[35]

Those who joined the Republican forces saw considerably more military action — often in horrifying circumstances — and endured greater privation than their Nationalist counterparts. This was, in part, a paradoxical result of the fact that the global numbers of foreign volunteers flocking to the Government side were sufficient to permit the International Brigades as a whole to operate as an autonomous unit.[36] At any one time in its twenty-two month existence, it was mustered roughly at (British) regimental strength — that is, fifteent to twenty thousand — though the ranks were increasingly filled out with native Spaniards in the later stages. It comprised 'mixed brigades', each with its own command staff, transport, communications, artillery and medical sections. Thus the International Brigades were capable of fighting major engagements, and indeed played an important part in most of the great battles of the war (Jarama, Brunete, Teruel, the Ebro). Irishmen were killed and wounded fighting bravely in all these sectors and in many less celebrated confrontations. The fact that the Brigades were of tremendous military significance to the Republic is demonstrated by the fact that the British Battalion (16th, later 57th) of the XV Brigade was only

35 For religious policy in the loyalist zone, see F. Díaz Plaja, *La vida cotidiana en la España de la guerra civil* (Madrid: Edaf, 1995), 143-61. On Ryan's attitudes, see S. Cronin, *Frank Ryan: The Search for the Republic* (Dublin: Repsol, 1980), especially pp. 79-81. By August 1937, some access to Catholic services was being allowed in Madrid, and in November, Ryan apparently attended Mass there (*ibid.*, 121-22). Another International, Jim Haughey, was recalled by one comrade as of 'naive Catholic faith', who asked 'prior to the Ebro offensive whether or not the International Brigaders might have a priest to minister to them at the front' (E. Downing, cited by Manus O'Riordan in a letter to C Geiser, 7 April 1993, Marx Memorial Library [London], International Brigade Association Archive Box D-3, File G/1).

36 There is no satisfactory general history of the International Brigades. The best (more or less) objective account is A. Castells, *Las Brigadas Internacionales de la Guerra Civil Española* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1974) which has many and vast lacunae. On the British Battalion, see W. Alexander, *Volunteers for Liberty: Spain 1936-39* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [2nd ed.] 1986) — the official IBA Communist Party account, but useful once due allowance is made.

once absent from the front for a period of more than a few weeks. Not surprisingly, its overall casualty rate was over forty per cent including about twenty-five per cent dead.

On the Nationalist side, in contrast, some seven hundred Irishmen were simply not enough to play an autonomous role, or even to be used effectively. There were no similar foreign volunteer units with whom they could be constructively deployed: the Germans had specialist units of artillery and air force, the Italians operated almost independently. Moreover, the elite Foreign Legion (or *Tercio*) to which they were affiliated did not operate as an integral force, but formed *Banderas* distributed among various army groups, to be used as the need arose. The XV Bandera (Irlandesa) del Tercio was thus an isolated and under-strength infantry battalion dependent on external Spanish units for all support services. During the very days (mid-February 1937) when it was making its way into the arena of fighting in the valley of the Jarama, to the south of Madrid, Franco decided to call off his offensive. In one sense, this was fortunate for the Irish, since it spared them the appalling losses incurred generally during the battle. However, so trigger-happy were the combatants by the second week of this awful struggle that they were mistaken by their own side for an infiltrating party of Internationals. In the pitched battle which followed four of their number were killed — though they inflicted a high casualty rate on the 'enemy'.[37] In another

37 An Irish officer later estimated that 'over forty' of their attackers — a unit from the Canary Islands — were killed (S. O'Cuinneagáin, *The War in Spain* [Enniscorthy: privately printed, n.d. but 1976], 3). O'Duffy claimed that the opposition 'left more than half their number dead on the field'. Fault for the calamity lay on the Spanish side, and this conclusion was reached by the Army Tribunal (O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain*, 138-40). Although the Tribunal's records are alleged to be extant, a thorough *in situ* search of catalogues for the *Juticia* and other cognate sub-sections of the *Sección Cuartel General del Generalísimo* of the Military Archives in Ávila failed to locate them. For a general description of Jarama, the only battle in which both groups of volunteers were involved, see Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 588-95. For greater military detail see R. Colodny, *The Battle for Madrid* (New York: Paine-Whitman, 1958), J. M. Martínez Bande, *La lucha en torno a Madrid* (Madrid: Editorial San Martín, 1968) and S. Montero Barrado, *Paisajes de la guerra: nueve itinerarios por los frentes de Madrid* (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1987).

sense, and without knowing it, they had already lost the most crucial casualty: their reputation. From then on the Irish were isolated in a 'quiet sector of a quiet front', and only had one more half-chance of glory. Liaison between the Irish field officers and Spanish general staff was poor, whilst that between O'Duffy and his immediate superior in Toledo was non-existent. When at last the Bandera was ordered 'over the top' it was as part of a large-scale diversionary attack intended to help the Italian advance on Guadalajara, far to the north-west. The operation was never intended to 'succeed' in the obvious sense — the gaining of physical objectives stated and observed — that its participants naturally understood.[38] Even O'Duffy, perhaps not through his own fault, seems to have been ignorant of the strategic context or purpose of the action, in which four of his men were killed and several others wounded. Faced with an apparent threat of mutiny from some officers, he refused to obey his orders to renew the attack the next day.[39] Not long afterwards, the Bandera was moved to another section of the Madrid front. O'Duffy had always insisted that his men would not fight in the north against the strongly Catholic Basque Republic; but it was precisely to this zone that the action of the Nationalist war-effort was now switched.

As among the Internationals, so in the O'Duffyite ranks fissures opened up under pressure. Serious problems originated in March, following the attack described above. Officers suspected it had been a mismanaged manoeuvre which led them into a death-trap for no apparent military reason. Little attempt was made on the Spanish side to explain matters. In any case, the rigid protocol of the *Tercio* ('the Bridegrooms of Death' as their motto had it) rejected anything short of blind

38 For the hidden political agenda of military decisions made during the Guadalajara battle, see P Preston, *Franco* (London: Harper-Collins, 1993), 229-33. Nationalist attacks took place all along the Jarama front on 12-15 March 1937. Republican army *partes* (daily reports) for these operations celebrate the successful use of artillery, which (other accounts agree) made the Irish advance towards the heights of Titulcia particularly suicidal (*Partes de la Guerra: Tomo II, Ejército de la República*, ed. J. M. Gárate Córdoba [Madrid: Editorial San Martín, 1978], 241).

39 *Cf.* O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain*, 161-63, with O'Cuinneagáin, *The War in Spain*, 20-21.

obedience as dishonourable. During the further period of inaction which followed, O'Duffy lost the loyalty of a number of his officers. The general's excessive drinking did not help matters, nor his long absences from the front, mostly spent with a few privileged aides in a luxury hotel in the Nationalists's military capital, Salamanca.[40] The former tendency naturally percolated downwards and began to affect discipline. However, the latter example was not imitated, and there were very few desertions. On the contrary, new recruits continued to arrive in Cáceres throughout the period of Irish service, despite rigorous enforcement of the non-intervention agreement by Dublin.[41] Nevertheless, morale and respect were slowly eroded. Most of the rank and file still revered O'Duffy, but without his personal exercise of responsibility authority was badly undermined.

At the end of March 1937, the Colonel-in-Chief of the *Tercio*, Juan Yagüe, made a surprise inspection, as a result of critical reports from Spanish liaison officers, and whilst O'Duffy was away on a jaunt in Seville. By this time, too, Franco had become concerned about the sheer cost of the XV *Bandera*, which was receiving little or no support from Irish sources. Since O'Duffy resisted persistent pressure to allow his men to be integrated fully into the Nationalist army — in effect, to subsume them in a viable operational unit under Spanish command — in mid-April, the Generalísimo decided that disbandment was his only option. A few weeks later the *Bandera* was stood down from the line. During the weeks it took to organize their repatriation, the men were prey to

40 Reports quickly reached Dublin that O'Duffy spent little or no time with his men (J. P. Walshe to J Kerney [Irish envoy to Spain], 6 March 1937, Irish National Archives, Foreign Affairs, Letter Book 'B'). The main witness to the Salamanca junketings was the Director of the Irish College in the city, Fr Alexander McCabe, whose reminiscences were at times more cynical than merely sceptical (see D. Keogh, 'An Eywitness to History: Fr Alexander McCabe and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', *Breifne: Journal of Breifne Historical Society*, VIII [1995], No. 30, 445-88). His observations are corroborated in P. Kemp, *Mine were of Trouble* (London: Cassell, 1957), 87-88, and F. McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain* (London: Burns & Oates, 1937), pp. 150-51, 245, 263-64.

41 O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain*, 169, confirmed by note of Yagüe to Franco, 3 April 1937, Archivo General Militar (Ávila) Cuartel General del Generalísimo, Organización legajo 156.

faction, exacerbated by boredom, rumour and disillusionment. At times, the behaviour of an irresponsible minority must have tested the goodwill of their hosts in Cáceres.[42]

The International Brigades fought on for eighteen months after their despised 'Fascist' compatriots had quitted the field. Not until October 1938 were they disbanded and repatriated as a result of an agreement brokered by the Non-Intervention Powers. Even worse hardship was endured by dozens of their comrades who had become prisoners of war, held in dreadful conditions in a medieval monastery crudely converted into a prison outside Burgos. Most were released at the time of Franco's victory in April 1939.

VI

Memory

When the Irish Brigade arrived home (June 1937) they enjoyed an official civic reception in Dublin and were given a warm welcome in most of the members' home towns. By now, however, they were irreconcilably split into factions, and some were not averse to public rehearsal of their differences and complaints of their treatment in Spain.[43] The Irish public came to realise that glorious accounts of the Brigade's exploits which had occasionally appeared in the papers (especially the *Independent*) were somewhat divorced from reality. O'Duffy

42 This account of the dissolution of the *Bandera Irlandesa* is based on a series of documents in O'Duffy, *op. cit.* See especially Yagüe's report to Franco (24 March); O'Duffy's defence of the Bandera to Franco (9 April); and the latter's final decision (issued on 13 April). The Irish journalist, McCullagh, who was based in Salamanca for much of this period, alleged that the Brigade had cost the Nationalists the enormous sum of £170,000 (McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain*, 306). The figure seems exaggerated; none the less, there was a serious financial complication from the point of view of Burgos (see also Keogh, 'An Eye Witness', 485-88).

43 O'Riordan, *Connolly Column*, 101. In contrast, O'Duffy's account at no point betrays any indication that even the slightest disagreement disturbed the glowing relationships between himself and any other party to the enterprise, whether Spanish or Irish.

himself sank into terminal illness and political obscurity, though he helped his men whenever he could, and always responded to appeals from those who had fallen on hard times. Attempts were made by various officers to form a veterans' association which might dedicate itself to repairing bridges and limiting further damage, but to no avail.[44] During the hottest years of the Cold War, the Brigaders were due some honour as a vanguard in the fight against the Communist menace, which had now - just as the priests had predicted in the 1930s — spread atheistic tyranny and persecution to many small, helpless Catholic countries. In the late 1940s, the party to which most veterans retained allegiance — Fine Gael — entered government for the first time. But any hope veterans nurtured for belated justification was rendered void by the growing distaste for the legacy of the Blueshirts. This was linked to a renewed depreciation of the Brigade's military performance. Brendan Behan's devastating quip that they were the only army ever to return from a war in larger numbers than those they left with became familiar to every citizen of the Republic.[45] As the years passed, their contribution was increasingly regarded as meaningless even by those who had once prayed for the victory of Franco. In fact, the Catholic Church in Ireland, whose loyal servant O'Duffy had been, never accorded the grateful recognition to him or his men which might have been felt appropriate. Though Ireland remained a deeply Catholic country, the majority mores of politics changed. By the 1960s and the era of the trendy left, veterans were not tempted to recall their campaign in public, whilst children and grandchildren were ashamed of any connection with it. After 1939, at least, most kept their counsel, and died without ever speaking of the experience, let alone leaving any record of it. Many joined the British army after 1940; some felt — once more

---

44 An association was established before the Brigade left Cáceres, and 'a council representative of each of the 32 counties was elected' (O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain*, 240-41). Capts. O'Cuinneagáin and Quinn were moving spirits behind later attempts to preserve links, 'organising under great difficulties of distance and want of knowledge of survivors' (circular [?1947] sent to veteran Leo McCloskey, Private Collection).

45 Behan's jibe appeared in his *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (London: Hutchinson, 1965). 133.

— that it was the right thing to do; others were simply soldiers, and always soldiers; and doubtless one or two enlisted with the British just to defy De Valera who had again opted for neutrality. Whatever their reasons, the net effect was that some 'Irish Fascists' died fighting in the great war against Fascism.

The surviving Irish International Brigaders received no public acknowledgement on their return home. On the contrary, veterans have testified that a record of fighting with the 'Reds' rendered them unacceptable as far as potential employers were concerned. Some were kept out of jobs for years through the pernicious influence of various clergy.[46] But they were to have the ultimate reward for struggle and sacrifice, for defeat and victimization. 'You are History: you are Legend' were the prophetic words of 'La Pasionaria' (Dolores Ibárruri) at the stand-down parade of the International Brigades in Barcelona in October 1938. These warriors indeed became part of history and legend. Most of the survivors joined the International Brigade Association, set up before the war ended, in which the small and manageable Irish branch was sustained by an appropriately international organization. By the 1960s, they had acquired the status of visionaries who perceived the evils of Nazism and Fascism well before their political leaders, and were prepared to lay down their lives in order to warn the world. In November 1995, the Parliament of democratic Spain voted to offer honorary Spanish nationality to surviving veterans of the International Brigades.[47] These grizzled super-Republicans can now become — if they so desire — subjects of His Majesty King Juan Carlos I. It is a bizarre consummation.

---

46 See, e.g., Manus O'Riordan, *Portrait of an Irish Anti-Fascist: Frank Edwards, 1907-1983: An Appreciation* (Dublin: privately printed, 1984), Marx Memorial Library, International Brigade Archive Box A-12 Ed/1.

47 G. Jackson, 'Un acto de reconocimiento histórico', *El País*, 7 de diciembre de 1995.