

The Spanish Civil War in England - Epilogue

Kawanari, Yo

(出版者 / Publisher)

法政大学小金井論集編集委員会

(雑誌名 / Journal or Publication Title)

法政大学小金井論集 / 法政大学小金井論集

(巻 / Volume)

7

(開始ページ / Start Page)

1

(終了ページ / End Page)

12

(発行年 / Year)

2010-12

(URL)

<https://doi.org/10.15002/00007097>

The Spanish Civil War in England — Epilogue

Yo Kawanari

As of the year 2000, fifty-four monuments and memorials in all to the International Brigade have been built all over the Great Britain.⁽¹⁾ The movement has been spreading steadily in cooperation with the regional governments.

Unfortunately not all of these monuments were given blessing when they were built. For instance, when the ceremony of unveiling a monument was held by Glasgow Chapter of the British International Brigade Society at Custom House Quay in Glasgow, Scotland on 23 February 1980, *The Morning Star* dated 25 February 1980 reported as follows:

The International Brigade volunteers who fought fascism in Spain over 40 years ago were honoured in a lasting tribute by the city of Glasgow at the weekend.

A statue of Spain's anti-fascist heroine, Dolores Ibarruri - "La Passionaria" - was unveiled by the Glasgow's Lord Provost David Hodge before 400 people at Custom House Quay in the city centre on the river side.

Mr. Arthur Dooley's sculpture shows La Passionaria's defiant arms outstretched to the sky and the inscription carries her famous words to the Spanish people when Franco generals rebelled against Spain's newly elected government in 1936: "Better to die on your feet than to live forever on your knees."

In the crowd were over 40 members of the British Battalion of the English-speaking 15th Brigade, one of the five international volunteer

brigades which fought at the side of the Spanish Republican army.

Prominent among the war veterans were battalion commander Bill Alexander and former transport union general secretary Mr. Jack Jones.

Two banners were on display - the International Brigade Association banner and the Glasgow roll of honour banner containing the names of 65 Glasgow men who fought and died in Spain between 1936 and 1938.

The occasion was both emotional and uplifting for the many veterans and representatives of Scottish Labour & Trade Union and progressive movements who attended.

Mr. Jones said Glasgow was due great credit for erecting the memorial. "New generations can look upon it and understand what it was all about."

Mr. Alexander said 437 brigaders - including 300 from Glasgow - left for Spain from Scottish addresses; it was therefore extremely appropriate the memorial should be erected in Glasgow.

The International Brigade was a living example of how working class people had the ability to lead, he said. The working class had the ability to do anything history demanded.⁽²⁾

On the same day, 25 February, *The Guardian* reported that the unveiling ceremony was disturbed by two Conservative Councilmen and interrupted for a while.⁽³⁾

In 1992 a monument of the British Battalion at Jubilee Gardens, London, was damaged with a hammer by an anonymous person. Luckily the monument was not totally broken and restored immediately. However, since it would be next to impossible to prevent such violent actions beforehand, a low fence was put up around the monument in 2000 against the wish of the parties concerned.⁽⁴⁾

In the late autumn of 1992 Bill Alexander introduced me a woman named Frida Knight who was living in Cambridge. When I first met her, she gave me an impression exactly as Bill had told me about her before, "a too much self-assertive, hard-working activist" of 82 years old, though she looked much

younger than her real age.

At the end of December that year, I paid a visit to Frida at her large house by Jesus Green, Cambridge. Since this was the first time I met her, I refrained from using cameras or audio tapes. During the high tea that evening, Frida talked on various topics while I listened to her. I didn't have much chance to speak then.

At the end of January 1993, I managed to make an appointment with Frida and finally succeeded in talking with her leisurely.

In 1901 Frida was born in the house in Cambridge where she is living now. Her father was a professor of French language and literature at Trinity College and her mother was the first year alumna at Newnham College. So Frida comes from one of the prestigious "university families" in Cambridge. During the latter half of 1920's and 30's she worked as a director and producer in music and dramas. She also began to take an interest in the matters of social conditions and lend a hand in relief operation for the unemployed and the People's Front Movement. However she did not join any particular political parties or political bodies. The only group she joined was the Left Book Club.

During the Spanish Civil War, Frida was taking an active part in fund-raising and propagating campaign for sending ambulances and medical equipments to the Spanish Republic as a board member of the Organization for the Relief of Spanish Children. At the end of June 1937, she entered Spain driving an ambulance by herself. In Barcelona she left the ambulance at a hospital managed by the International Brigade and started for Madrid, "the capital of the world", by way of Valencia to work as a journalist at the International Writer's Congress which was to be held there.

She attended the Congress and visited Madrid University, which is called "Ciudad Universitaria", one of the hard-fought areas. As the injury on her right arm she got on her way to Madrid began to fester, she was hospitalizd for some time. As it seemed to take time to heal her injury and the number of soldiers wounded at the Battle of Brunete and carried to the hospital was increasing, she had to go back to her country. She stayed in Spain only for two weeks.⁽⁵⁾

After coming back to England, she resumed to work at the Organization for the Relief of Spanish Children, in organizing a children chorus and giving concerts all around England and far at Zermatt in Switzerland with raising the relief funds. When the Organization for the Rescue of Spanish Refugees was set up in November 1938 to give a hand to those who fled from the Spanish battlefields to France, She joined it and opened her own house of refugees in Perpignan. In February 1939 she managed to make some of the refugees wishing to go to Mexico board a ship for Mexico.⁽⁶⁾

While she was staying with a friend of hers in France spending a quiet time of learning French conversation, the Second World War broke out. At last France surrendered to Germany, which came to occupy France. Frida was arrested on suspicion of espionage and sent to a concentration camp. While being sent from one camp to another she tried to escape and succeeded in returning to England. Later she wrote her experience at that time and published a book titled *Dawn Escape*⁽⁷⁾ in 1943. In the book her escape was described as an amusing and funny adventure, which reflects her optimistic character.

After the War Frida engaged herself in social problems as before and at the same time she began to involve herself in the study of music. Among several music books she wrote, a book was translated into Japanese, whose title was *Beethoven and the Age of Revolution*.⁽⁸⁾ In spite of her advanced age she is still in charge of the book review with *The Morning Star*.

My interview with her lasted almost six hours. During the time we had several tea breaks with small talks. While we were enjoying a small talk, she received a call from Christopher, John Cornford's younger brother. I was given a chance to talk with him over the phone after 15 years' absence. He said he was suffering from a cardiac disease and would be hospitalized before long. We both wished to see each other again. His father being a professor at the Trinity College, the Cornfords was also what is called "university family". They were well acquainted with the Stewarts, the family of Frida's parents'. They are still in very friendly terms. Frida said to me smilingly, "John was a very handsome boy".

She also said that Margot Heinemann to whom John dedicated a poem, "To Margot Heinemann", had passed away after suffering from lung cancer in October 1992. I gave my condolences on the death of that hardcore Communist-social scholar.

Frida also passed away in October 1996. After a month of her death, on November 6, *The Guardian* reported:

Frida Knight, a British volunteer, died five weeks ago, aged 85, with the memory of a Spanish love still fresh in her mind. She went to Madrid in 1937 and worked as an interpreter and journalist. Her ashes were scattered, and as she had wished, at the foot of a bridge, the Puente des los Fraceses, while her former brothers in arms sang the Internationale.

Rummaging among her possessions, her granddaughter found a book of Lorca's poetry with some faded violets tucked inside, a yellowing picture of an officer, and a letter which described how he had fallen at the Puente des los Fraceses. ⁽⁹⁾

That was her way of missing the dear person who had passed away.

I have been tracing the footsteps of such old volunteer soldiers and volunteer workers, while wishing to see those writers who had involved in the Spanish Civil War. I read an article on *The Sunday Telegraph* dated 11 November 1990; "Spender salutes General Franco".

More than half a century after the end of the Spanish Civil War, a tablet has been unveiled in Madrid to the memory of five British writers who died fighting for the Republicans: Julian Bell, John Cornford, Christopher Caudwell (Christopher St John Sprigg), Charles Donnelly and Ralph Fox. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Its promoters are the poet Sir Stephen Spender, who gave intellectual support to the Republicans, and David Lea, assistant general secretary of the TUC. Among those at the ceremony were members of the dead men's

families, the British ambassador, Robin Fearn, and two British historians of Spain, Sir Raymond Carr and Lord Thomas of Swyanerton.

A heart attack prevented Spender from travelling to Madrid, but in his preface to the commemorative volume he makes a remarkable confession:

“Those who bitterly regretted the victory of Franco at the time, may, viewing Spain from the standpoint of 1990, have terrible doubts if they ask themselves the question of what would have been the consequences if the Republicans had won the Civil War a few months before the beginning of the Second World War, and with the rest of Europe soon to be subservient to Hitler’s Germany. Perhaps Franco - meeting with whom Hitler compared to the worst of visits to the dentist - provided the petty obstacle which, standing in the way of Hitler between the Spanish frontier and Gibraltar, and neutralising the peninsula, enabled European democracy to survive.”

Among the few poets to support Franco in the Civil War was the South African -born Roy Campbell, who much resented being called a fascist by Spender.

In 1949 the two poets waged their own Civil War. Spender was reading his verse at a meeting of the Poetry Society in Bayswater, when a drunken Campbell emerged from the audience, swung a punch at him and made his nose bleed.

“It happened,” Spender told me last week, “in the crypt of the Ethical Church.”⁽¹¹⁾

The Guardian also quoted his view, indirectly criticizing his political betrayal.⁽¹²⁾

Needless to say. Spender is one of the leading poets, as well as W. H. Auden, of Auden Group, the young group of poets advocating extrovert literature and writer’s social commitment. At the age of twenty eight his political essay, *Forward from Liberalism*⁽¹³⁾ was published. It was a laborious and epoch-

making work showing the birth of the critic Spender who criticized the then traditional left, Stalinists, while standing firmly on the ground of anti-Fascism.

In connection with the Spanish Civil War, Spender met Harry Pollitt, Chief Secretary of The British Communist Party, in January 1937 and agreed to join the Party. Then he went to Spain as a correspondent of the Communist organ, *The Daily Worker*. Full description of his activities in Spain is found in his autobiography, *World Within World* ⁽¹⁴⁾ .

Having returned to England, Spender continued to support the Republicans. As was written before, he was one of the promoters in the questionnaire campaign, 'Authors Take Sides' in June 1937. In July next year he was invited to The International Writers' Congress held at Valencia and Madrid as an English representative.

For quite a long time I had been wishing to ask Spender what was his true intention of giving such comments quoted above in spite of his reputation as the active poet supporting the Republicans. In the afternoon on 12 August, 1992, I had at last a chance to visit the poet Sir Stephen Spender at his house with the introduction of the woman writer Iris Murdoch (1919 ~ 1998). His house was in a fashionable residential district in the north of London. At my call Mrs. Spender came to the entrance hall, telling me that he was working with one of his young students in his study.

Before long he came with cane into the drawing room. As a man born in 1909, he looked younger than I had expected. When he sat on the sofa, his red swollen leg was seen at the hems of his pants.

Sir Spender was a quiet man. He spoke slowly choosing his words. He told me that as he had grown older he restricted his work to recording and transcription for his autobiography, a sequel to *Journals 1939-1983* (Faber & Faber, 1985). Thanking him for sharing his precious time, I began to ask him of his comment on the Spanish Civil War and General Franco in the said paper. Spender told me what he had really meant there as follows:

In summer 1990 he was invited as a lecturer to a literature seminar held in Madrid by Madrid University. The Spanish Republic he remembered through

his young days' experience during the Civil War was a poor anarchic developing country, with terrorists striding around.⁽¹⁵⁾ No one and no party had the leadership strong enough to straighten out the anarchic society into order. Eventually the Communist Party backed up by Stalinists extended their influence, spreading their propaganda against Fascism, restoration of order and victory in the Civil War. They put other parties under pressure, had the Republican Government under control and made the Republic collapse from within.

General Franco, the victor of the Civil War, established the military dictatorship, which received some negative evaluation, for example, that he reversed Spain into a Medieval country of the Inquisition. In spite of such criticism Franco narrowly escaped the entry into World War II with his crafty foreign policy while putting the first priority in recovering safety and stability in the exhausted Spanish society after the Civil War. As the Spanish society became stabilized, the middle class swelled and Spain's long-wished return to European society, "*européizacion*" was realized. Such realization would not have been possible for those Republican leaders who had just a bit of patriotic sentiment and no realistic political ideas like Franco, merely advocating incoherent idealism while trying to suffocate their political opponents. Octavio Paz (1914 ~ 1998), another invited lecturer and Spender's best friend through the Civil War, had the same opinion as his. There was no argument against his opinion about Franco from readers of the two papers. He added somewhat equivocally that the two papers quoted his words with inadequate explanation.

Spender went on talking about "Auden Group", J. Bell, J. Cornford, the Left Book Club, A. Koestler and George Orwell. When I mentioned that the British Battalion of the 15th International Brigade was called "Poets Battalion", he corrected it saying that only a few of them were real poets and that the nickname was overstatement. I didn't give any comments then but in my assumption "Poets Battalion" was named because poets, who were commonly regarded as the most unsocial milksops, were in fact the bravest soldiers in the British Battalion.

There seem to have been quite a few volunteer soldiers who had poetic

spirit, if not socially appreciated as poets. The John Cornford Poetry Society, founded in London in 1970, has still issued its annual bulletin and private poetic anthologies. Some poems among them were included in Penguin Anthology of Poems. The leader of the British Battalion was Tom Wintringham, “a poet who was too busy fighting in the battle to write a poem”.⁽¹⁶⁾ The Leader Auden of the Auden Group known as “the poet who composed poem of the Civil War” published his poem “Spain 1937”, which is called the best poem about the Spanish Civil War⁽¹⁷⁾, when he came back home from the front where he work as a stretcher bearer for a week or so. He wrote no poems about the Civil War after that.⁽¹⁸⁾

Spender was, of course, one of the poets who wrote poems of the Civil War. He passed away at the age of 86 on 6 July 1995. He was one of the unforgettable poets for me.

On 3 March 2000 a memorial monument for the British volunteer soldiers such as Cornford and Fox was built by the general will of villagers and council members of Lopera where they were killed. In the monument were engraved the words “LOS ESCRITORES Y BRIGADISTAS INGLESIS, R. W. FOX Y R. J. CONFORD”.⁽¹⁹⁾

Bill Alexander who told me about the activities of the Brigade Society passed away on 10 July 2000. As he was born 13 July 1910, he died at the age of 90. Since 1996 he had been a supervisor of those young scholars who were studying on the International Brigade as the theme of their doctor theses entrusted by the Economic Department of London University. The last job must have been the most suitable one to him as his last vocation. He always said, “We have to engrave our footsteps in history”.

I was supposed to see him at the Marx Library in London on 28 July 2000 and was so disappointed at the sad news that he passed away only 18 days before my appointment. His secretary at the library said pancreas cancer was the cause of his death

On his desk at the corner of the International Brigade Society Bureau was a small bouquet of white flowers.

Obituaries of Bill Alexander in various papers. *The Independent* (14 July), *The Guardian* (14 July), *The Times* (20 July) and *The Morning Star* (20 July), were unusually long. The long one written by Tish Collins, Secretary of the International Brigade Society, for *The Independent* closes as follows:

Alexander had a commanding presence and a delivery that was hard to ignore. His voice resounded around many a meeting hall. When he believed in the justice of a cause or the correctness of a position, he was steadfast and totally inflexible; his opponents often called him ruthless. At the same time, he was receptive to new ideas and, far from living in the past, was involved with current politics. He had no time for attempts to revise Marxism and, although he was no longer a member of a Communist party (his card was taken away by the CPGP when the party split in 1988), he remained a committed Communist to his dying day.

In 1996 a unanimous vote of the Spanish government honoured a long term promise made by the prime minister Juan Negrin to the Brigaders sent home in 1938 which offered Spanish citizenship to any veteran who applied. Alexander was one of the 60 or so veterans from Britain who took up the offer. He felt that the step was “part of the healing process” that the Spanish had been going through since the death of General Franco.

Bill Alexander never forgot the words of the Spanish orator Dolores Ibarruri (La Passionaria - “the passion flower”), “It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees nor the rallying cry of the Spanish Republicans:

“¡No pasaran!” - “They shall not pass!”⁽²⁰⁾

At the end of this epilogue it should be discussed what made the British volunteers devote themselves to such tremendous altruistic actions to fight in the Republican front?

The Republicans were defeated and they could not defend the Republic

nor prevent a potential larger-scale war (World War II) , which were the two reasons for their participation in the Civil War. Now it would be easy to criticize them as losers. But it would also be too impertinet and biased to say so just looking back the history from the present standpoint.

Those volunteer soldiers kept fighting their way fervently without any blueprints or forerunners. We should not over-estimate their deeds nor underestimate them. If we confine them in the “legendary” world, we would not be able to learn anything from them.

The following passage in John Conford’s “Full Moon at Tierz : Before the Storming of Huesca” might give us some hint to our question here.

Do understand before too late
Freedom was never held without a fight.
Freedom is an unspoken word
But facts are stubborn things. ⁽²¹⁾

We have to listen to their unspoken words and learn from their unadulterated heart. It is our duty to engrave in the world history their naive and honest life of giving themselves up to the fight in order to change the radical torrent of Fascism.

(1) William, Colin. & Alexander, Bill. & Gorman, John. *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War : The Official Publications Of the International Brigade Association*, Alan Sutton Press,1996, pp.2-3.

News Letter of I. B. A., January 2000. p.2.

(2) *The Morning Star*, 25 February 1980.

(3) *The Guardian*, 25 February 1980.

(4) Kawanari, Yo. “rekisi to kasu kokusairyodan” *Asahi Sinbun*, 8 April 1993.

(5) Kawanari, Yo. “Frida Knight no oboegaki” *Supein Gendaisi* vol.9. 5 May 1995.

pp. 122-35.

- (6) Fyrth, Jim. and Alexander, Sally. eds. *Women's Voice from the Spanish Civil War*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1991, pp. 285-7.
- (7) Stewart, Frider, *Dawn Escape*, Everybody's Books, 1943.
- (8) Knight, Frider. *Beethoven and The Age of Revolution*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1973.
- (9) *The Gaurdian*, 6 November 1996.
- (10) Rulph Fox (1900 ~ 36)
- (11) *The Sunday Telegraph*, 11 November 1990.
- (12) *The Gaurdian*, 12 November 1990.
- (13) Spender, Stephen, *Forward from Liberalism*, Left Book Club, 1937.
- (14) Spender, Stephen. *World Within World*, Faber & Faber, 1987.
- (15) Cf. Lee, Laurie. *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*, Penguin Books, 1990.
Lee, Laurie. *A Moment of War*, Penguin Books, 1992.
- (16) Gurney, Jason. *Crusade in Spain*, Faber & Faber, 1976, p. 70.
- (17) Osborn, Charles. *Auden: The Life of a Poet*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1985, p. 200.
- (18) Hynes, Samuel. *The Auden Generation : Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*, Faber & Faber, 1995, p. 256.
- (19) *News Letter of I. B. A.*, Jan. 2000, pp. 2-3.
- (20) *The Independent*, 14 July 2000.
- (21) Cunningham, Valentine. *Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War*. Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 259-60.