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## Spanish anti-fascist 'prisoners of war' in Lancashire, 1944–46

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### Abstract

*This article assesses the significance of the experiences of 226 Spanish anti-fascists and republicans who were detained in France in the autumn of 1944 and transported to Britain as prisoners of war (POWs) of the Allied army. After arriving in different batches at Southampton, they were interned in POW camps across the country before being moved to Hall o' the Hill Camp, near Chorley, Lancashire, where most remained until their final release in 1946. This article sets the peculiar circumstances of their detention in the context of the personal, local and international situation surrounding them and documents the multifaceted campaign for their release which was articulated by trade unions, political organizations, national newspapers and some prominent figures in British society. In doing so, a contribution is made to the history of the diaspora of the opposition to Franco and to the history of POWs in Britain in the period 1944–46.*

### Keywords

Spanish anti-fascists  
republicans  
prisoners of war  
Britain

### Introduction

Some 35 million men and women were held as prisoners of war (POWs) during the course of World War II (Beaumont 2007: 535; MacKenzie 1994: 487). The 226 Spaniards detained as POWs in Chorley were, therefore, a very small proportion of the number of prisoners held, for in Britain alone there were over 150,000 Italian POWs in 1944 (Moore 2005: 31). Yet their case is worth highlighting because of the peculiar and apparently unique circumstances of their detention by the Allied forces.<sup>1</sup> While earlier studies of POWs concentrated primarily on the experience of the prisoners in the camps, more recent accounts have examined governmental policy towards their capture and the negotiations over their future (Beaumont 2007: 535–36; Moore and Fedorowich 1996: 1–2). In tune with these newer approaches, this article seeks to make a novel, although modest, contribution to POW history in Britain. Despite their small numbers in the midst of the half a million Spaniards exiled as a result of the civil war, this case constitutes a contribution to the research on all the Spaniards who fought against Franco, who were imprisoned in concentration camps in Spain and other countries or were forced into exile.

In addition, this piece shows how 'Spain' still fired the imagination and material solidarity of some sectors of the British left beyond the end of the

1 Not all of those interned were simply 'republicans', many were anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists as well. All were, however, anti-fascists. In press reports, they were referred to as 'anti-fascists' or 'republicans'. Here, both terms are used. A further clarification needed is that the camp at which the Spaniards arrived was referred to variously as Adlington, Chorley, Hall o' the Hill and Heath Charnock.

civil war into the 1940s. Finally, this article examines what ‘captivity’ (Lagrou 2005: 3) as POWs signified and how those Spaniards who fought to stay on in England after their release in mid-1946 ‘made a home’ in what was for them a foreign country.

### **The aftermath of the Spanish civil war: displacement, concentration camps and exile**

Following a preliminary phase of first-person accounts of concentration camps and exile, a vibrant and extensive field has analysed the cultural dimensions of the Spanish exile (Alted Vigil 2005; Caudet 2005; Kamen 2007), the experience of the *Retirada* (Gemie 2006), concentration camps in Spain (Rodrigo 2005), the participation of Spaniards in regular Allied armies or in the Resistance (Stein 1979), the fate of Spaniards in Nazi concentration and extermination camps (García-Maroto 1997; Rafaneau-Boj 1995), the setting up of political networks and the experience of making a home in a foreign land (Alted Vigil 2006; Dreyfus-Armand 1999; Vilanova i Vila-Abadal 2003).

The most immediate destination for displaced Spaniards was neighbouring France. When France fell, some 10,000 Spaniards who had escaped the civil war, Nationalist retribution or who had fought against the Axis powers were taken prisoner by the forces of the ‘Third Reich’. Several thousand Spaniards, including many of those detained in Chorley, were enrolled as forced labourers of the *Todt* organization in the construction of the Atlantic Wall (Dalmau n.d.; Pike 1993: 54–56; Pons Prades 2005: 312–18; Willmot 2002: 212–13).

For those who managed to avoid such a fate, the countries of Latin America, especially Mexico, were a favoured refuge. The number of Spanish anti-fascists or republicans admitted at the end of the civil war into the United Kingdom, by contrast, was very small and the government of Neville Chamberlain set up stringent conditions in order to admit only ‘very respectable’ (London 2000: 114) refugees of a certain ‘calidad intelectual’ (Lloréns 1976: 119). Apart from these small groups of intellectuals, preceded, for example, by 4000 Basque children in 1937 (Bell 2007; Benjamin 2007; Cloud 1937; Legarreta 1984), and some fifty anarchists, some of whom settled for a short time in the Tolstoyan community at Whiteway, near Stroud (Richards 1990: 10; Thacker 1993: 132–35), there were few cases of ‘ordinary’ Spaniards making their way to Britain as a route out of war and persecution (some were admitted to Britain on the fall of France in 1940: see Alted Vigil 2005: 260). In part, this stance grew out of a desire not to alienate Franco by giving refuge to republican supporters. Military chiefs of staff sought to keep Franco out of any European war or delay his entry as long as possible, and the presence of prominent republicans was in danger of undermining Franco’s goodwill towards Britain (Smyth 1985). The Chorley Spaniards were apparently the only group captured and initially considered as Axis supporters to be brought to England as POWs.

## The British government, Spain and the politics of POWs

The British stance of ‘non-intervention’ in the Spanish civil war was driven by the concern for the fate of British commercial interests in Spain, the fear of the rise of leftist movements and the hope that fascist regimes could be contained as part of an early dimension of a policy of appeasement (Moradiellos 1999). The Conservatives recognized the Franco government before the end of the war on 27 February 1939 and the following day, Pablo de Azcárate, the republican ambassador since August 1936, was displaced by the Duke of Alba as Franco Spain’s representative (Edwards 1979: 188–92; Watkins 1963).

Despite the British government favouring Franco during the civil war and the ensuing years (Buchanan 2007; Moradiellos 2002, 2005), there was concern over the position of Franco towards the Axis powers beyond the diplomatic and strategic aid he afforded them. In addition, what to do precisely with any Spaniards in Britain ‘in the event of war with Spain’ was a matter raised in the early months of World War II (Newsam 1940). If Spain came in actively on the Axis side, it was suggested that ‘the females were harmless’, but that all male known Falangists aged 16–70 years be seized and held in internment (Farquar 1940; on internment generally,



*Figure 1: Spanish anti-fascist prisoners standing at the entrance to the Chorley camp. The authorities allowed them to erect this board so that they would not be confused by the local population with fascist POWs. Photograph taken by Marie Louise Berneri. Reproduced from a private archive.*

- 2 Lists of internees and other relevant documentation can be found in file HO 396 at the National Archives, London. No mention of Spaniards is made in the index to this file.
- 3 See the documentation sent to the Home Secretary on this subject in file HO 396, particularly the memo of 18 June 1940 detailing the existence of 2786 Spaniards in Britain. Some of these Falangists were probably connected to the 'Falange Exterior'. On the Falange in America see Caudet (2005: 115–20); for Germany see Bowen (2000: 174–78, 213–15).
- 4 Dolores Long, the daughter of International Brigader Sam Wild (personal communication 20 August 2009) showed me a wooden handcrafted plaque with the words 'República Española' at the top, the republican flag in the middle and below, the words 'Oldham. Glen Mill Camp 176. 17 March 1945'. The plaque was given to Sam Wild on 6 August 1945, according to a dedication on its reverse, probably in Chorley, in recognition for his efforts to achieve the men's release.

see Gillman and Gillman 1980). However, as the possibility of war between Britain and Spain receded, it would appear that no Spaniards were in fact interned during the period 1940–45,<sup>2</sup> although there were an estimated 'sixty-odd' Falangists out of 2786 Spaniards in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

Considerations towards Spain and Spanish emigrés in 1945 were a world away from the stance taken by the British government in 1939 or 1940 (cf. Smyth 1985). Once World War II was over, the quantity of displaced persons and what to do with imprisoned Axis soldiers presented a post-war situation of enormous complexity (Cere 1995; Moore 1997: 117). Spanish nationals captured outside of Spain presented but one side of this complex picture. Often, the authorities only had the prisoners' word to go on as to their ideological or military affiliation. For example, some 126 Spaniards in the British zone Displaced Persons' Camps in Germany could not be confirmed as either republicans or Falangists (Harvey 1945). Such difficulties of identification meant that some of the Spaniards brought to Britain were initially interned in the holding camp of Glen Mill, Oldham, as Axis supporters before being moved to Chorley.<sup>4</sup> In their case, it would take until August 1945 before officials dropped the notion that they had fought for the Blue Division against the Russians, which was officially disbanded in May 1944 (Anon 1945a; see also Bowen 2000: 106–23, 166–74; Leitz 2000: 114–43). The British government, however, was attuned to the complexities thrown up by the post-war situation in respect of Spanish nationals. In addition to information arriving from the republican ambassador Azcárate and the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief on the subject of the situation of thousands of Spaniards in German extermination camps (Azcárate 1945; National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief 1945), the Foreign Office was aware that for many Spaniards it was not a simple case of being able to go back home. It was acknowledged that, despite the amnesty granted by Franco allowing for the return of Spaniards who had no major involvement in the 'anti-national' movement, the fate of potential returnees was not at all secure (Mason 1945) and the terms of Franco's amnesty were not generous (Hogg 1946).

The governmental stance with respect to Spain was, however, only one side of the story. Voluntary and political associations had a long history of engagement with matters related to the Spanish war, whether through the International Brigades, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, the reception of the Basque children or the establishment of 'Spanish Aid' committees around the country (Alpert 1984; Bell 2007: 7; Buchanan 1991a, 1991b, 2007: *passim*; Fyrth 1986, 1993), despite both the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress having accepted non-intervention in their 1936 congresses (Fleay and Sanders 1985; Vickers 2003: 121).

Aid and political campaigning for republican Spain continued after the end of World War II, although it took on a different form. It now focused on petitioning the newly elected Labour government for sanctions against Franco, alleviating suffering in Spain and supporting imprisoned Spaniards

outside of the country. Such deeply rooted solidarity with Spain would form part of the support given to the Chorley Spaniards.

### **From Southampton to Kirkham to Chorley: the journey of the Spanish internees**

There has been some discussion of the Chorley Spaniards but these are not detailed accounts (Alexander 1992: 44–45; Birtill 1976: 48–52; Cleminson 2006; Macdonald 1987: 108–09; Ward and Goodway 2003: 33, 45). The most extensive account of how some Spaniards arrived at Chorley is that of one of the detainees, 'E.J.C.', probably Eduardo Castro, whose story is recorded in a pamphlet published in October 1945 by the Morecambe and District Spanish Aid Committee. Castro commanded the 12th Brigade of the IV Division of the Maquis (Anon 1945b). Castro's account starts in a concentration camp in France in 1939. He and many others were delivered en masse to the Nazis for work on the coastal defences: 'In Bordeaux the Germans gave us documents with our names, and with the description "Spanish Red"'. Some escaped, some were given certificates by the French authorities to avoid further forced recruitment and others joined the Maquis (Castro 1945: 7).

On the Allied victory in France, some 79 Spaniards, including Castro, detained in the towns of Cousances-aux-Forges and Chamouilly, presented themselves to the Maquis on 29 September 1944 (p. 8). American army officials, however, took them to a POW camp in the company of Nazi prisoners. From Revigny, they were taken to Compiègne camp. Here they remained a fortnight, were given 'a spoonful of soup a day' and were so weak that they could not stand. 'One of our comrades who tried to pick up some apples', another detainee, José Ferri Verdú noted, 'was shot down by an American soldier' (Berneri 1945). The prisoners were then taken to Chartres and made to march twenty miles to another camp. As the prisoners were marched along, together with two or three thousand Germans, French bystanders hurled insults at them as collaborators. The journey then proceeded to Cherbourg where they embarked for Southampton on 6th October, landing on the following day (Castro 1945: 9–10). They were subsequently transferred to a POW camp with Nazi prisoners. Such a fate, surprising though it may at first sight appear, was not unusual for those held as Axis prisoners. The British government was concerned about the ability to house prisoners adequately in northern France and about the poor treatment of POWs in French hands (Moore 1996a, 1996b, 2000), and this led to large numbers being transferred to Britain.

Castro's group was soon moved to Camp 186 in Colchester and then to the former Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU) Camp 168, Brookmill, Woodlands, at Kirkham. Here they were joined by another group of some 100 Spaniards who had come from Camp 176 at Glen Mill, Oldham. Further groups of Spaniards arrived from Camps 17 (Lodge Moor Camp, Sheffield), 166 (Woollaton Park Camp, Nottingham) and 174 (Norton Camp, Mansfield) (see Thomas 2003). At the beginning of June, 29 more arrived at Kirkham having been in Guernsey (Anon 1945c, 1945d).

- 5 Brenan wrote to the *New Statesman* on 20 October 1945 to express his indignation at the Spaniards' detention (Russell 1945).
- 6 Lawson was the Labour Secretary for War from 3 August 1945 to 4 October 1946 and a member of Clement Attlee's cabinet.

Their continued internment with Nazis and the lack of response from the British authorities so frustrated the Spaniards that they declared a hunger strike from 26 June 1945, but this was eventually overshadowed by a more serious occurrence: the suicide of one prisoner, Agustín Soler, on 11 July 1945, 'a martyr to his own democratic ideals, [he] preferred to die rather than have to associate with his enemies the Nazi Fascists' (Castro 1945: 11).

It was the *Reynolds News*, the paper linked to the Co-operative Party, which was the first to report on Agustín Soler's suicide and thus raise the story of the Spaniards' imprisonment in an article entitled 'Loneliest Men in England Today' in late July 1945. According to the newspaper, the men were 'bitterly weary' of imprisonment and some had declared that 'rather than a life of confinement, they will kill themselves' (Anon 1945e). The concern over the treatment of POWs after the tit-for-tat tying of prisoners' hands in the autumn of 1942 (MacKenzie 1994: 491–92) and the shooting of a Nazi soldier by a guard at the Glen Mill camp in February 1945 was felt acutely by the British government (Moore 1996b: 52). Combined with the fact that one Spaniard had been punished at the nearby camp at Heysham by being handcuffed to a cooker for 24 h (Anon 1945f), the suicide of Agustín Soler was a pressing motive entailing the transfer of the men to the Chorley camp.

### The campaign for the Spaniards' release begins

The *Reynolds News* had since its inception been associated with 'progressive' causes and although it was not as influential as the national more strictly commercial press, the situation of the Spaniards was fast to become a national issue. This was not only for local campaigners and press but also more widely afield amongst some MPs, numerous trade union branches, the national press such as *The Manchester Guardian* and for renowned figures somehow connected with Spain, such as George Orwell and Gerald Brenan.<sup>5</sup> The men's situation was taken up with different intensities and motivations across the leftist press. The first accounts in anarchist and communist newspapers referred, respectively, to 'a situation of the most flagrant injustice' (Anon 1945g), whereby anti-fascists were being held behind barbed wire while their former overseers in Jersey and Guernsey walked free (Anon 1945h). The responsibility for the men's condition was placed at the door of both the Foreign Office, which had washed its hands of the Spaniards as they 'had no government', and the War Office, which had at no time 'questioned the bona-fides of these men' (Anon 1945i; Wild 1945).

The men slowly gathered high-level support. MPs such as C.W. Dumbleton, MP for St. Albans, wrote in August to the Minister for War, Jack Lawson,<sup>6</sup> on behalf of a trade union branch in his constituency. In the response, Dumbleton was assured that the men had been captured in Normandy and the Channel Islands wearing the uniforms of the *Todt* organization. Dumbleton was also informed, however, that discussions between the Home Secretary, War Office and Foreign Office had determined that

the men should indeed be released, not in the United Kingdom, but in France, from where a reply was awaited (Freeman 1945).

Other trade unions from places outside Lancashire, such as Liverpool and Brighton, also wrote to Lawson (Barton 1945; Pugh 1945). Local trade union organizations, such as the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, were instructed by a delegate meeting to write to Lawson communicating a resolution on the Spaniards' case (Newbold 1945), which highlighted the fact that the Spaniards were 'the first anti-fascist fighters in Europe, and should be released and given the opportunity to help with the reconstruction of Europe' (Newbold 1945; see also Anon 1945j).

This early phase of the campaign appears to have had some effect. Even though it did not secure the prisoners' immediate release, it did result in some improvements in camp conditions. The anarchist paper *Freedom* reported in early September with some satisfaction that 'As a result of agitation, certain concessions have been granted to the Spaniards interned in the prisoner of war camp in Lancashire' (Anon 1945k). These included an increase in rations and permission to use the dress of 'co-operators' rather than prisoners' uniforms and be employed in paid work, a status given to many Italian POWs after the surrender of Italy (Moore 1997: 129–30; Moore 2005: 31; Sponza 1996). But the fundamental issue of the Spaniards' POW status remained unchanged, despite their designation as 'co-operators'. The suspicion of Nazi sympathies lingered.

Despite the agreement to release the Spaniards, progress on the question of the British government's negotiation with France was slow. In a bid to assert more pressure on the government, a sixty-strong trade union delegation arrived at Chorley on 16 September 1945. In the report arising out of the visit (International Brigade Association n.d.), once again the anti-fascist credentials of the now 223 prisoners at the camp were asserted.<sup>7</sup> Other organizations, such as the Independent Labour Party (ILP), long associated with support for the Spanish Republic (Buchanan 2007: 98–121; Mates 2007: *passim*), published articles in its weekly *The New Leader* and sent protests to Lawson (Burgess 1945), as did the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) (Allen 1945).

This combined pressure was strong enough to merit a discussion of the Spaniards in the House of Commons on 9 October 1945. Lawson was questioned by a trio of MPs, Mr. Thomas Cook (Dundee), Mr. Thomas Scollan (West Renfrew) and Mr. Cyril Dumbleton (St. Albans) on the reasons behind the Spaniards' continued detention as POWs. In his response, Lawson relied on the *Todt* association to justify their imprisonment: 'These Spanish nationals were captured as serving members of an enemy paramilitary organisation and they are correctly held as prisoners of war. The question of their disposal is under urgent consideration' (Lawson 1945a). Such a response satisfied few, however. Nan Green, the Secretary of the International Brigade Association, tackled Lawson later that month on the subject of his reply to these MPs and refuted his assertion that the men were being held correctly as enemy POWs (Green 1945).

7 Of the original 226 that were housed at Kirkham, there was one suicide there, another suicide attempt at Chorley and one case of mental illness, admitted to an asylum.

### The local campaign and life in the Chorley camp

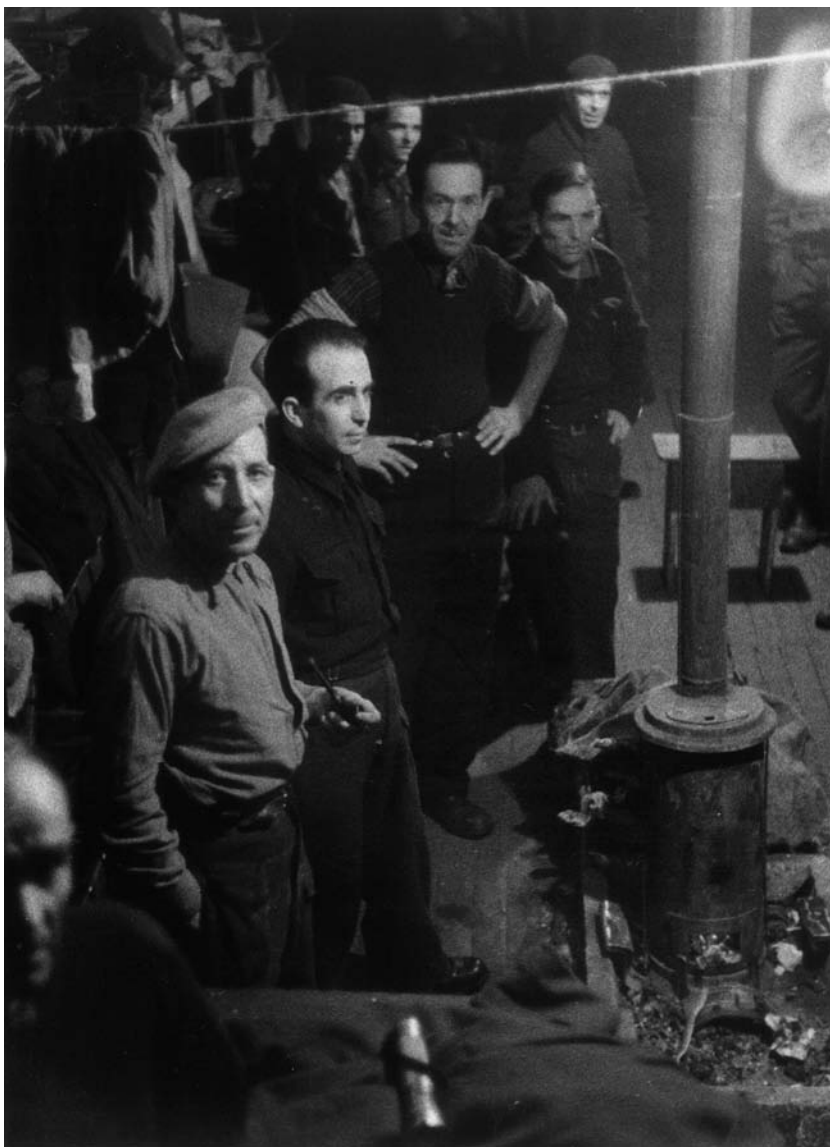
The legacy of supporting republican and anti-fascist Spain during the years of the civil war provided an infrastructure that was to remain in British society for some years to come. The Newcastle Spanish Medical Aid Committee, for example, helped remaining Basque children until 1942 (Mates 2007: 146). Kapp and Mynatt (1997: 39) note that much of the support for Austrian, German and Czech refugees in Britain during World War II was built on local committees arising out of the care of the Basques. Just as the Morecambe Spanish Aid Committee had campaigned on behalf of the Spaniards detained at Kirkham, a Chorley-based Spanish Republican Aid Committee formed in late August championed their cause. The principal aims of the Chorley organization were 'to obtain release and political refugee status for the Republicans in camp at Heath Charnock [,] to raise money for this end and provision of comforts before and after' (Anon 1945). This would be a non-sectarian organization and it hoped to invite the clergy and even members of the Conservative Party to join its cause. The Committee rapidly organized a 'Spanish Fiesta' at the Empire Cinema in late August where the internees, in the presence of the president of the International Brigade Association, Sam Wild, the cinema manager,



Figure 2: General view of the Chorley camp. Photograph taken by Marie Louise Berneri. Reproduced from a private archive.



Mr. F. Byrne, Dr. F.H. Tyrer (President), Mr. G. Bancks (Secretary) and many locals, in the words of the *Chorley Guardian*, played music on an 'odd assortment of guitarros and bandurros made with penknives from odd scraps of timber [. . .] [which] seemed to produce a magical effect [. . .] not wholly due to the novelty of the situation' (Anon 1945m). This musical pageant was followed by a 'mass meeting' at the Chorley Hippodrome on 16 September to further highlight the Spaniards' case. Here, the Aid Committee expressed 'its indignation at the injustice which has been done to the anti-Fascist fighters of Spain, who, after almost a year in Britain are still prisoners-of-war in the Hall o' the Hill camp' (Bancks 1945).



*Figure 3: Spanish republicans crowd around the single stove in one of their barracks. Photograph taken by Marie Louise Berneri. Reproduced from a private archive.*

The camp, a former Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) hostel (Anon 1945c), where there was 'no barbed wire and no sentries', a marked improvement on Kirkham (Anon 1945n), was run along the lines of a British army camp (Freedom Defence Committee 1946). The routine was as follows: at 07.00 reveille, followed by an inspection at 07.45 and breakfast at 08.00. Work started at 09.00 and there was an inspection of the barracks at 11.00. Lunch was at 13.00 followed by a four-hour stretch of work until 18.00, when supper was served. At 22.00 there was 'formation' and rest at 22.15. Any Spaniard who wished to leave the camp had to request permission from an officer and had to be back at the camp by 23.59, for which a pass would be provided. Discipline was in accordance with POW rules and the green co-operator's uniform would be worn, except when permission was given to wear civilian clothes. Wages would be the same as those received by Italian co-operators. Letters could only be sent and received within the British Empire and it was forbidden to communicate with other camps, government departments and the press, except through the camp Commander (Freedom Defence Committee 1946: 6-7).

Privations were, evidently, acute, but the local Committee and other supporters such as the anarchist Marie Louise Berneri organized relief for



*Figure 4: The prisoners were provided sackcloth to make alpargatas. Others made wooden toys. Photograph taken by Marie Louise Berneri. Reproduced from a private archive.*

the internees. Berneri asked the readers of the anarchist *Freedom* to send stamps ('which will enable them to write to their family and friends'), tooth paste and tooth brushes, coffee ('the Spaniards are not tea drinkers') and Spanish and French books (Berneri 1945). Such items were duly received gratefully by the internees. On 13 October 1945, Gregorio Segura, the elected camp spokesman, wrote to M.L. Berneri to thank her for 'las 13 libras de café, 33 *toothbrushes* [sic] y 13 tubos de pasta para los dientes' (Segura 1945). In one case, supplies were even sent from overseas, by the Alexander Berkman Fund of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Chicago (Ferri Verdú 1946).

### The road to release

Despite the efforts of their various defenders, the Spaniards remained in the Chorley camp into the winter of 1945. The campaign did not let up, however, and saw the presence of four camp delegates at the quarterly meeting of the Lancashire and Cheshire Federation of Trades Councils at the Houldsworth Hall in Manchester in November 1945. At the meeting, James Hennessy, the Secretary of the Federation, spoke to counter the association with the Nazis. It was time, in the words of another speaker, for the government to stop 'passing the buck' between departments and get on with preparations for the Spaniards' release (Anon 1945o; cf. Hennessy 1945).

Less than a month after the meeting at the Houldsworth Hall, the promised negotiations with France had eventually begun to bear their fruits. On 12 December it was reported by the *Daily Worker* that British detention officers had recently visited the camp and had taken the names of those men wishing to go to France (Anon 1945p; see also Anon 1945q). Some men, however, 'were quite definite about wanting to stay in this country' (Anon 1945r). Two days later, on 14 December, Lawson (1945b) finally announced that the French government had agreed to allow all the Spaniards to settle in France where they would return as 'free men'. But certain restrictions were to remain. Not only did Lawson repeat a by now somewhat muddled allegation of collaboration (the men 'were either wearing German uniforms or were in German organizations. At the time of the German invasion of France they were refugees from Franco Spain'), he also stated that to allow them to remain in Britain 'would be to give them an advantage over the very many thousands of other aliens who are anxious to settle here'. After some clarification required by the Chorley MP, Clifford Kenyon (Kenyon 1945), on the precise terms of the agreement with the French, Lawson confirmed that the prisoners would return to France as free men rather than as POWs (see also Anon 1945s, 1945t). Such a statement, of course, cast doubt over the conditions of their original detention as POWs.

Concerns about the conditions of their return and the slow pace of developments led some of the Spaniards to take their first bout of strike action at the Chorley camp in early January 1946 (Anon 1946a, 1946b). Eventually, nearly two months after Lawson's December statement, in

- 8 Fenner Brockway had been prominent in Spanish refugee affairs for some time. He wrote to Clement Attlee on this subject in 1942 (Brockway 1942).
- 9 Orwell was invited to speak by the anarchist George Woodcock and became the vice chairman of the Committee. Herbert Read was the chairman until the Committee's end in 1949 (Woodcock 1972: 238–39).
- 10 Information from to the Metropolitan Police, Special Branch, report of 26 March 1946 (HO 45/25554).

early February the first batch of Spanish republicans were able to leave the camp in civilian clothes and 'in good spirits' (Anon 1946c). Many of those remaining, still unhappy at the procedure, communicated a number of demands via the Chorley Spanish Republican Aid Committee before the departure of the next contingent (Tyrer and Bancks 1946). These included a claim for the return of their property and money, seized on their detention. As news of 'repatriated' comrades began to seep through to the camp internees, doubts as to their living conditions in France emerged. Although some money had been returned to them by the British authorities, the French franc notes they had been given were not valid (Segura 1946). Given these circumstances, some 110 Spaniards declared that they wished to remain in Britain instead of returning to France to an uncertain future (Anon 1946c).

Such a move had the backing of the men's supporters: 'What right has Mr. Lawson to send them back to France?' *Freedom* asked. 'Forced repatriations can only be made, we are told, against Nazis or collaborators' (Anon 1946a) and 'a last effort to obtain that they are not sent back' to France (Anon 1946d) should be made. A further hunger strike was commenced in early March to pressurize the government (Anon 1946e; Lawson 1946a). Part of this 'last effort' was the organization by the Freedom Defence Committee of a protest meeting at the Holborn Hall, London, on 26 March 1946. The assembled public (estimated at 190 by the police) was addressed by the ILP member Fenner Brockway,<sup>8</sup> George Orwell (Orwell 1998: 158, 169),<sup>9</sup> H.L. Hutchinson, MP for Rusholme, and the anarchists Marie Louise Berneri and Mat Kavanagh. Apologies were received from Mrs. Braddock, MP, and from Victor Gollancz, who was occupied in the 'Save Europe Now' campaign.<sup>10</sup>

Lawson wrote in April 1946 to say that there were about 150 Spaniards left in Adlington and that the French government had agreed to take a larger party, having hitherto only agreed to take parties of up to fifteen. It was hoped that 105 would soon leave in approximately a fortnight (in the event, they had not yet sailed even by the end of May) (Drew 1946; Lawson 1946b). Supporters continued to campaign on behalf of the remaining 45 Spaniards with a view to their settlement in England. The Assistant Secretary of the TUC, H.V. Tewson, petitioned the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, to allow the Spaniards to work in Britain 'as friendly citizens' (Tewson 1946). Attlee undertook to solicit the views of the Secretary of State for War and the Home Secretary 'as soon as possible' (Graham-Harrison 1946). Less than a week later, it was conceded that their settlement would be on a 'strictly temporary basis' and their status would be identical to that of other aliens (Hewison 1946).

In response to one of the conditions of the men's release in England that stipulated that they should not become a burden to the local community, the secretary of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council, H. Newbold, undertook to guarantee work and lodgings for the remaining Spaniards. Near the end of this prolonged process of displacement and

imprisonment, at the end of August 1946 work had been found for five of the men in stone quarries near Chorley and 37 others were seeking work in Manchester (Anon 1946f). By early September, 11 were working in the quarries but only 6 of 31 in Manchester had found work. For those that had not been offered homes by 'Lancashire folk', the Trades Council was providing board and lodging at £80 per week, including £10 pocket money (Anon 1946g).

For those of the original 226 Spaniards who journeyed back to France, in spite of the ultimate defeat of their social and political projects in Spain, at least there was release from war, concentration camps and a return to loved ones (cf. Fishman 1991; Hatley-Broad 2005). For those who stayed in England, a large degree of integration was experienced. Despite there being question marks over whether the Spaniards could marry during their stay in Britain,<sup>11</sup> some 25 had in fact married British women by January 1946 (Birtill 1976: 51). One prisoner, Julián Grimal, brought up a family in Chorley, literally streets away from the camp and remained in the locality until his death, working as a painter and decorator with his son.<sup>12</sup> Another camp internee, Pablo Lahera married Dorothy Elizabeth Lucas and started to look for work in the Chorley area (Anon 1946h). Pedro Cuadrado Hernández, who escaped the Nationalist forces by enduring a long march over the Pyrenees in bitter conditions in early 1939, married in Lancashire and settled in Bolton. This 'Spanish Papillon' had escaped or survived a total of five concentration or internment camps and had become something of a local personality, managing a restaurant that gathered fame throughout the area (Thomas 1974). For others still, there was a return to Guernsey where one man, Antonio Cortés, a member of the Libertarian Youth, had a wife and child (Ferri Verdú 1945a).

## Conclusion

The fate of Spanish republicans in the aftermath of the civil war – unjustly displaced, deported, imprisoned and exiled – is already fairly well documented. But this article is the first to construct a full account of some of these Spaniards' experiences at the Hall o' the Hill internment camp. Clearly, they were the victims of the chronic difficulties the Allies experienced in identifying friend from foe and in obtaining accurate information about what organizations such as *Todt* actually signified after World War II. Specifically, this study shows how these difficult circumstances were played out, not only on the international or diplomatic stage but, with very real effects, in the life stories of individuals caught up in the conflict on a much more local level. The story of the Chorley camp becomes in effect an 'international history of a local POW camp', a view suggested by Bob Moore's analysis of the Glen Mill camp in Oldham (Moore 1996b). Some specific constraints affected these Spaniards, however. The fact of their forced enrolment in the *Todt*, the turgid negotiations between Britain and France on the refugee status of Spanish republicans (Messenger 2008: 52–57) and the 'statelessness' of the republicans were obvious factors in delaying their

11 In April 1946, the Lancaster MP F.H.R. Maclean wrote to Lawson to ask about one of his constituents who was 'more or less' engaged to be married to a Spaniard in the camp. He asked if, in the case of the expulsion of the Spaniards, an exception could be made. Lawson replied that this was a matter for the Home Secretary (Lawson 1946c).

12 Ron Marsden (personal communication), Bob Jones (personal communication). Bob Jones gave me sight of Grimal's CNT-in-exile membership card, the organization he remained a member of until at least 1951.

- 13 The fact that Franco refused to recognize Spanish republican prisoners' nationality opened the way to deportation by the Nazis to concentration camps from September 1940 (Graham 2005: 125–26). The fact that the democratic governments viewed the republicans in effect as 'stateless' merely compounded this cruel fate.
- 14 Two examples suffice. In respect of internationalism and solidarity, José Ferri Verdú (1945b: 6–7) wrote to thank the International Brigade Association: 'Gracias por la ayuda que nos prestasteis ayer, por la que nos dais hoy y por la que estais [sic] dispuestos a darnos mañana, y a la que responderemos con todo el poder de nuestros cuerpos y con todo el agradecido sentimiento de nuestro corazón!' Another former internee, J. Rovira, attended the second and third congresses of the Syndicalist Workers Federation in 1951 and 1952 in the name of exiled CNT in Britain (details from the Anarchist Federation of Britain/Syndicalist Workers Federation archive, private collection).

departure. Under these conditions, and given the impossibility of return to Spain, a negotiated solution with France appeared to be the best option.<sup>13</sup>

The Chorley Aid Committee was a typical manifestation of the international networks of support for the Republic operating at the time, but the letters and the provision of lodgings for the prisoners suggest a broader dimension of solidarity with the displaced. One demobbed soldier returning from Palestine wrote to the *Chorley Guardian* in May 1946 of the 'mental distress' that the internees had suffered. It was necessary to remember, the letter writer observed, that these men were among the first to fight fascism. Kindness and sympathy were called for: 'As Lancashire folk are famous for their generosity to less fortunate people, no matter what race or c[r]eed, surely they can extend to these people the few small kindnesses which can easily be spared and are needed so much'. Speaking from experience, the writer knew how comforting 'a cup of tea, a cigarette, an easy chair by the fire, and a few kind words can mean'. Helping the Spaniards in this way would help 'create a strong bond of friendship' (Sadsack 1946), a quality also present in the kindness offered to Russian and other *Todt* slave workers in localities such as the Channel Islands (Willmot 2002).

Such 'humanitarian' gestures remained in the personal and local collective mentality long after the Chorley camp closed and forms part of the history of this Lancashire place. Those who remained and became integrated into local society, whether through marriage, work or friendship, participated in what some British sociologists have termed a kind of 'globalized belonging' after trauma and exile, where the local is to be understood through the lens of global relations. This 'elective belonging' is effected, not necessarily through historical connections with a place, but through what John Urry has suggested is a process whereby people dwell 'in and through being at home and away, through the dialectic of roots and routes' (Savage et al. 2005: 1). It must have been a courageous act, perhaps a means of making peace with the locality, for Julián Grimal to live within streets of his internment camp after the many routes travelled to arrive there. Many internees also effected a kind of 'ideological home-making', whereby links were maintained with those ideologies they had espoused in Spain by means of association with locally comparable organizations in order to keep those struggles and their memories alive.<sup>14</sup>

The men's lengthy detention is also an illustration of the limits of the Labour Party's support for the Republic and of its commitment to the struggles of its exiles. Nonetheless, the local struggle to release the Chorley Spaniards reflects how much 'Spain' still signified for sectors of the Communist Party, trade union and anarchist left in Britain, and comes as a marked contrast to the rather tepid solidarity from official spheres. For the Republic's British supporters, that struggle was part and parcel of the international campaign for the return of the defeated Republican government, or at least for justice for all Spanish republicans. Some of the prisoners themselves saw their situation rather differently, however, and found it a not unexpected consequence of the (predictable) perfidy of other democracies and the

democratic model, which placed them in the position of ‘eternos rebeldes frente a nuestro verdugo, el Estado’(Respina 1946; cf. Respina et al. 1946).

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# Journal of European Popular Culture

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