



**Labour History Archive and Study Centre**

**Information Guide No. 5**

**The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39**

### **Administrative/Biographical History**

The Spanish Civil War, 1936-39, was one of the most controversial and divisive issues of the whole inter-war period. Such was its impact that it still causes bitterness and division in modern day Spain. In July 1936 General Franco along with other leaders of the Spanish military launched a coup de ta against the left wing but democratically elected government of President Manuel Azaria.

The Fascist forces were equipped with the help of both Germany & Italy; the forces of the Republic were, by comparison, poorly equipped, although they were given weapons and planes by the Soviet Union. Atrocities were committed by both sides and the war was to cost the lives of half a million people. Amongst these were thousands of members of the International Brigades - people who joined the side of the Republican government in order to fight against the Fascists. Over 30,000 men and women from 50 or so countries went to Spain to defend the Republic. Around 2,300 men and women went from the United Kingdom, despite government efforts to stop them and around 500 were killed. The significance of the Spanish Civil War can be summed up in the words of a former member of the International Brigades, Jack Jones (1913-2009) who said “those battles were the first battles of the Second World War”.

### **Sources**

- **Pamphlets** – ref 328.63
- **Labour Party Conference Report 1936** - an excellent primary source introduction to the Spanish Civil War which includes speeches and debates about the war, Spanish speakers, resolutions attacking the British government’s position of “*non-intervention*” and the setting up of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee, amongst other related organisations and committees.
- **Tribune magazine** – this leftwing publication was established following the debates held at the 1936 Labour Party Conference, with its first edition in January 1937. The archive holds a full set of the magazine up until December 2002.
- **Labour Party International Department** – contain around six hundred pages of correspondence relating to the Civil War at ref LP/WG/SPA. Complementing this are the 19 files of letters and other material that form the Spanish Civil War Collection, LP/SCW.

- **Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) collection** – relevant material is to be found across the collection as a whole, the papers of the Political Committee, CP/CENT/PC, the International Department, CP/CENT/INT, as well as the papers of prominent members such as Harry Pollitt, and Rajani Palme-Dutt. Also within the CPGB collection there are original copies of *The Volunteer for Liberty*, the newspaper of the International Brigades.
- **Papers of Bob Edwards and Henry Noel Brailsford** - as well as prominent Communist Party members there are the papers of individuals who took part in the fighting or reported on it. Most notable are the papers of Bob Edwards, leader of the Independent Labour Party contingent and later a Labour MP and the papers of Henry Noel Brailsford, a leftwing journalist who reported from Spain.
- **National Museum of Labour History Collection (NMLH)** – there is a large collection of material which has been collected by the People’s History Museum. The collection is catalogued and contains a large number of paintings and drawings by children from the Basque region who were evacuated from Spain to the United Kingdom in 1937.

### **Related material**

Further information and catalogues can be found at [www.a2a.org.uk](http://www.a2a.org.uk)

