

## *New Preface to the 2012 Edition*

It is now seventy-five years since the first Basque refugee children came to Wales, to be sheltered and sustained by the 'Aid Spain' Movement. The first group arrived at Swansea on 30 June 1937, to be welcomed by an emotional crowd of supporters at High Street Station. These innocent victims were a tangible reminder of the terrible consequences of the military rising against the democratically elected Spanish Republican Government. But they were no mere victims: they were defiantly undefeated, proudly showing this through their clenched-fisted anti-fascist salutes and their pride in their footballing and folk-dancing skills.

Many people have asked me in recent years to re-issue my work *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, which was first published in 1984. I believe that the anniversary of that poignant arrival in Wales would be an appropriate time to make the book available once again. For that reason I dedicate this edition to those courageous children, and one in particular, Esperanza Careaga de Galindez. Appropriately named Esperanza (hope in Spanish), to us she was a warm, vivacious, charismatic person, who became part of the family of George and Gert Harris of Barry, the uncle and aunt of my wife, Mair. We had the honour of speaking at Espe's funeral on 4 December 2004. We told the tragic story of her early years, which included the summary execution of her father by the Franco forces and the break-up of her family.

There are other reasons why I needed to reprint the book with a new preface. Firstly, whilst an earlier reprint, produced by publishers Warren and Pell in 2004, carried a new preface, I did not address in it some of the historiographical and factually impressionistic issues raised by Professor Robert Stradling's *Wales and the Spanish Civil War: The Dragon's Dearest Cause?* (2004). I wish to do so now.

As I stated in my 2004 preface, I welcomed Professor Stradling's

work, as he had located and used valuable new sources, and provided new insights and analyses. He also generously praised my work. It is therefore with a degree of ‘comradely’ caution that I now offer some considered observations on his work, benefitting as I do from my closeness to so many of the volunteers, their families and their supporters, as well as from my direct involvement in the establishing of the national memorial at the South Wales Miners’ Library in Swansea University. That ‘closeness’, I should add, has included giving the funeral orations of many of the volunteers, and indeed also of some of their family members.

Professor Stradling has noted my enthusiastic celebration of the heroic and overwhelmingly anti-fascist response in Wales. But he has been somewhat perplexed that this has reached mythic proportions within contemporary Welsh historiography and credits me with achieving that apparent hegemonic position.

And this hegemony is seen most revealingly in the life of Communist novelist, councillor and leader of the unemployed Lewis Jones, who has become, seemingly, both a hero and martyr. It is true that Jones’ novel *We Live* romanticises the Welsh International Brigader, but it also, more significantly, lays bare the pain of ‘volunteering’, or more accurately ‘recruitment’. This shows Lewis Jones to have been a ‘people’s remembrancer’, an authentic voice of the South Wales valleys. It reveals his political courage and political honesty and this is not acknowledged by Professor Stradling.

I made a similar point in my Foreword to Lewis Jones’ two novels, republished by Parthian for the Library of Wales in 2007:

When in the 1970s and 1980s I wrote about the political pressures and sacrifices of those who went to Spain, and argued that there was an ‘inner party conscription’, my research was disputed by some in the Communist Party, but the survivors from Spain only needed to point to their tribune, Lewis Jones, for confirmation of the deep and troubled circumstances that made it true.’ (xviii)

Professor Stradling also makes speculative and unsubstantiated assumptions regarding the character and outlook of some volunteers and supporters. I choose three examples out of many. Rhymney

volunteer Jim Brewer is assumed to be ironic when writing of the need for an ‘anti-capitalist outlook’. I knew Jim Brewer for over twenty years; he did not do irony. What he said he meant and he never hid his views.

The poet and film maker John Ormond, who made the highly acclaimed BBC Wales Television series *Colliers’ Crusade*, is assumed to have been ‘nonplussed’ when he was confronted by the Franco supporter and member of the Spanish Foreign Legion, Frank Thomas. On the contrary, as the researcher for the series I had made John Ormond aware of Thomas: he was delighted to have had the opportunity of contrasting Thomas’ outlook with those of the International Brigaders.

And then there is the case of Rhondda writer Gwyn Thomas, who is dismissed, without any evidence, as not being ‘political’ and, bizarrely, ‘more Oxford than valleys’. For those of us who knew Gwyn Thomas he was to his core a very political citizen of the world and at the same time very proud of his valley roots to the day he died.

This approach is best illustrated by Professor Stradling’s ‘description’ of the origins of the Welsh International Brigades Memorial at the South Wales Miners’ Library, with which I was directly involved and which I initiated following discussions with Jim Brewer, Will Paynter and other volunteers. My late father, Dai Francis, also played a big role as chairman of the Appeal Committee, and as general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers in South Wales he ensured that his organisation was fully and appropriately involved.

All the decisions about the nature of the Memorial and the Appeal were taken exclusively by the Appeal Committee, made up only of the surviving Welsh International Brigaders in addition to my late father and myself. The actual design of the Memorial was undertaken by Jim Brewer and myself. Jim drafted the dedication, I chose the poem by T.E. Nicholas, and I arranged its translation into English by Professor Hywel Teifi Edwards, a Welsh Nationalist Parliamentary candidate and one of my university colleagues.

All this is in a stark contrast to what Professor Stradling ‘speculated’ when he suggested that ‘the relevant decisions were almost certainly taken by Dai Francis, in consultation with Idris Cox, Islwyn Nicholas, Bert Pearce (Welsh Communist Party secretary)

and Bill Alexander (secretary of the National IBA)'. None of this is true.

The decision to locate the Memorial in Swansea was made because Cardiff City Council failed to agree to receive the Memorial. It was my proposal alone to locate it as the South Wales Miners' Library and this was agreed unanimously by the committee. It was located initially not at Hendrefoelan House, as Professor Stradling asserts, but at Maes yr Haf in the Uplands.

There was a lively debate over the disposal of the residue of the Appeal moneys, but there was ultimate unanimity over the final proposal to use it exclusively to encourage exchanges between young people from Wales and Spain. Initially there was some criticism over the United Nations Association in Wales having been allowed to administer the scheme, because of the perception that it was a successor organisation to the League of Nations, whose unhelpful role during the Spanish Civil War was still fresh in the memory of volunteers. That was the only dispute I recall throughout the whole period of the successful Appeal.

There is also an assertion by Professor Stradling about the compilation of the roll of honour of the thirty-three Welsh International Brigaders who died in Spain. I was solely responsible for this work, which was based upon my eight years of research up until that time. Professor Stradling's assertion that this compilation might be a 'source of future public questionings and possible dispute' implied that there had been some dispute about it. However, I have been intimately and directly involved with the Memorial since its unveiling, and no such 'dispute' has ever occurred, either before Professor's Stradling's work was published or since. If there are at any point found to be any omissions of names from the Memorial then that is my responsibility and I will do my utmost to ensure that this is corrected. Moreover, it would be very appropriate to have alongside the existing Memorial a roll of honour of all the Welsh volunteers, including not only those who died, but also those who returned and those who were prevented from arriving in Spain.

Another substantive reason for the re-issue of this volume is that many people, particularly the families of volunteers, have urged me to produce a definitive list of all Welsh volunteers, including those who failed to get to Spain. Whilst this was available in my

doctoral thesis, completed in 1977, it did not appear in any of the earlier editions of *Miners Against Fascism*. With the addition now of Professor Stradling's work and the release in 2011 of the Special Branch records of all the British volunteers at the National Archives, I am able to provide such a list, which has grown from 174 in my dissertation to 206, and this is produced as an appendix in this volume. The map on pages 184-5 shows the location of the 174 volunteers as identified in my earlier research, although the pattern of distribution remains broadly the same for the 206 volunteers now known.

My final reason for the re-issue is to take account of the renewal of interest in Wales and elsewhere of the sacrifices made by men, women and children in the anti-fascist cause. One important measure of this growing awareness has been the number of new memorials in communities across Wales, often inspired by the late Arnold Owen (brother of Welsh volunteer Frank Owen), and supported by Wendy Lewis and Ray Davies with their invaluable *In the Footsteps of the Spanish Civil War: A Guide to South Wales Monuments to the International Brigades* (2004).

Alongside the memorials this re-awakening has been assisted by excellent studies on Welsh seafarers who broke the Franco blockade and on the Basque refugees in Wales, as well as autobiographical studies by Alun Menai Williams and Edwin Greening, in addition to Professor Stradling's biographical study of Frank Thomas. Elsewhere in this new volume I provide a new guide to further reading, which gives full details of these and other works.

The most recent memorial in Wales, arranged by the City and County of Swansea, was unveiled on 14 December 2011, and paid tribute to all the Swansea volunteers and seafarers who ran the blockade. This was but one more local initiative, unconnected to any party political initiative and attracting broad public support.

New research also continues to be undertaken, particularly by family members. One such researcher, Mark Thomas in Australia, recently enquired after his great uncle Brazell Thomas of Llanelli, who was killed in the Battle of the Ebro.

I wish to thank Sian Williams of the South Wales Miners' Library and Elisabeth Bennett of the Richard Burton Archives for their help and Sally Davison for making this edition possible: it is very gratifying to 'return home' to Lawrence and Wishart. But my

biggest thanks, as always, is to Mair for her comradely advice and support from the moment I began this research in September 1968, when we were married.

The enduring received memory, seven decades after the outbreak of the Civil War, has been most poignantly illustrated for me by an email I received from Gary Jones of Victoria, British Colombia, Canada on 23 March 2011:

I am currently reading *Rhondda Past and Future* and have just finished your chapter on the Spanish Civil War. Harry Dobson was my father's closest friend. When he died his wallet was sent to my father and I was given it by my mother on my father's death in 1990. The wallet contains two photographs of Harry, one of which is pierced by the bullet that killed him at the Battle of the River Ebro in 1938. In both photos Harry is wearing the informal uniform of the International Brigade. Originally my father had intended going to Spain with Harry but according to my Mother Harry dissuaded my Father from going because my Mother was pregnant with me. I have a lot to thank Harry Dobson for. As a boy I met both Jack Jones and Billy Griffiths who were friends of my parents. My father worked at the Cambrian Colliery but was injured on 15 July 1920 aged 15 and never went underground again. He became involved in union work and marched to London in 1936 to protest the Means Test. He is in the photograph with Nye Bevan in Michael Foot's biography of Bevan, they are shown leaving 10 Downing Street after presenting a petition opposing the Means Test to the PM. Your Chapter has brought back many memories of my early childhood. I have lived in Canada for 50 years but have fond memories of Blaenclwydach.

Hywel Francis, Crynant,  
St David's Day 2012