

Christopher Hall, *'In Spain with Orwell': George Orwell and the Independent Labour Party volunteers in the Spanish Civil War*, Tippermuir Books, Perth, Scotland, 2013, pp. 265 + i-xii, £12.50. Reviewed by Darryl Anthony Burrowes

Christopher Hall has given this revised and expanded edition of his 2009 work *'Not Just Orwell'*, an unfortunate new title. The new title, *'In Spain with Orwell'* leads the uninitiated reader to think that this is a book that focuses on George Orwell's experiences in Spain. It is the long subtitle that gives the real intention of the book, which is to address the historiographical lacuna of books that deal, in any detail, with the specific role played by the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in the Spanish Civil War and motivations and experiences of the small number of British volunteers who went to Spain under ILP sponsorship. Orwell and the other forty to forty-five ILP volunteers ultimately went to Spain with a different agenda to the International Brigaders recruited by the Communist Party of Great Britain. They went to 'defend the new revolution in Aragon and Catalonia, rather than the Republican Government' *per se* (247). The ILP leadership supported the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), the Unified Marxist Workers' Party, as a matter of priority. This was the Spanish political party which was most akin to their own philosophy. It is debatable how much individual ILP volunteers understood of the power politics behind the internecine struggle, 'the civil war within the civil war', in which they became embroiled in May and June 1937, or even how much they understood of the reasons as to why they were issued with antiquated weapons and given virtually no military training. These volunteers were mainly young single working-class men with no

military experience. Orwell certainly claims initial ignorance in his memoir *Homage to Catalonia*.

This is a short and accessible book of nine chapters. Chapters one and two deal with the history of the ILP, chapters three and four look at the POUM, chapters five and six discuss the Civil War and Revolutionary Militias, chapters seven and eight deal with the ILP contingent and its leaders, and chapter nine recounts the stories of forty-one individual members, to a greater or lesser extent. The book has forty-three black and white illustrations of varying quality which are integrated into the relevant chapters which certainly add to its appeal.

Hall's book goes some way in telling the story of ILP volunteers other than Orwell. However, as the author admits there is more to be told and he hopes that at some future date this study will be expanded and more volunteers' stories added (249). The details of some of the ILP members in chapter nine are very sketchy indeed. Hall has not even been able to ascertain all the volunteers' dates of birth or death, let alone what they exactly did in Spain or how their experience in the war impacted on their lives afterwards. The most sketchy is the entry for the single-named volunteer, 'Julius' which reads:

The only information we have about this volunteer is that he is mentioned in the Tapsell Report as a volunteer who wishes to leave the POUM militia' (201).

The entry for Robert MacDonald is not much better:

Robert MacDonald was from Derry in Northern Ireland. He went to Spain and served in the POUM/ILP force. The only other information we have about this volunteer is that he was arrested in Valencia in June 1937 and repatriated back to Derry' (202).

Fortunately there are some entries which are meatier. Stafford Cottman, who fled Spain with Orwell and his wife, is allotted five pages, and Frank Frankford who loathed Orwell and denounced the POUM/ILP militia in the communist newspaper, *Daily Worker* has five and a half pages.

'In Spain With Orwell' is a readable book and is especially strong on the chapters concerned with the history of the ILP. This makes it an excellent source for those who want to know more about the only political party George Orwell ever joined, albeit for a short period. When it comes to the personal sketches of the individual volunteers, other than the handful that are already well-known, it is weak and definitely a work in progress.