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## **Fates formed by the Spanish Civil War. Recent books on exiled children, prisoners of concentration camps and Interbrigadistas**

To start with, one has to state that the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 in spite of the mass of published books bears still a lot of *desiderata* for historical research as can be seen by more than half a dozen of books published since the mid-1990s, which concentrate on varied groups of individuals, who lived through the Spanish Civil War and suffered from it in one way or the other.

There are three groups to be dealt with in this review. The first comprises some ten-thousand children being evacuated to France and Belgium and perhaps more interesting of some thousands to the Soviet Union during the course of the Civil War. The three books introduced here are of very varied character. The first one written by Jesús J. Alonso Carballés deals with the specific group of Basque children who were exiled to France and Belgium. This book has been published by the association of the evacuated and exiled Basque children itself. It contains a large annex with maps and lists with the names and the geographical distribution of the children in the two countries as well as a lot of illustrations. The book deals exclusively with the fate of about 26,000 children who were evacuated mostly to France but also to Belgium by the regional government of the Basque country, during the first half of 1937, before the occupation of the Northern zone of the Spanish Republic by Franquist troops took place. The book bases on a wide range of Spanish and foreign sources and tries to give a very detailed insight into the children's fate and the organisational background of the operations. The book is a well-researched piece of work, which elucidates the fate of a large group of children, i.e. of a group of people which still is partially alive today.

Two others by a group of Spanish authors and by one German writer, living in Spain, have been published on the group of children being brought to the Soviet Union during the years of Civil War in Spain. One has to state that these two books are completely different in their approach and the way analysing these children's history. But interestingly enough, they both do not contain any of the existing and accessible material of the former Soviet Union. They both tend to present a rather subjective approach to the problem but they differ in the fact that Skowronnek, a journalist by profession, deals with the history of the Spanish children in the Soviet Union in a journalistic way in the worst sense of the word. When reading through this book, one could get the impression that remaining in Spain would have been better for these children, although their families became victimised either through war actions or the cruel repression of the early Franco dictatorship. Skowronnek does not tell a story, but

she tends to repeat the negative impressions of the exiled children, who certainly lived through a difficult fate in Soviet exile, but nonetheless survived. Most of them were probably saved from deprivation or even worse in Spain, from French or German concentration camps, from bombings of one or the other side in the war of Western Europe. Most of them survived the Civil War as well as World War II and could receive a higher education. Skowronnek, in contrast, mostly speaks of lost identities. One can surely be critical of the way the Soviet Union handled this group of people, but it made their survival possible and it did not send them out of the country, till the end of its existence. The evacuation and salvation of these some 3,000 children in this sense remains an act of solidarity from the Soviet side. Devillard, Pazos, Castillo and Medina chose a more objective methodology. At the beginning of their analysis they are able to show that they have chosen a sociological approach recurring to field research in the form of serial interviews of former children evacuated to the Soviet Union. They have tried to cover the completeness of the surviving Spanish *children*, being brought to the Soviet Union. Thus they prove able to put forth a more objective picture of the life of this group. On the ground of their interviews they try to sketch the overall picture of the children's fate from evacuation, in the children's homes, during WWII, through their educational and professional biographies including political orientation till the decision to stay in the Soviet Union or Russia respectively or to leave for Spain or any other country. The analysis is completed by an annex with statistical material. The picture drawn through this methodology differs very much from the one Skowronnek tries to convey. Here a much more differentiated picture of childhood, of the evacuation and hardships and also towards the Soviet Union and the Spanish homeland has been drawn. It is a pity that the book does not include full examples of interviews and since the authors are sociologists mainly, they ignore the archival material which exists in Moscow and other major cities of the former Soviet Union, still waiting for systematic and thorough analysis.

One other work deals with the fate of Spaniards being interned in the concentration camp near Mauthausen, a city in the Austrian part of the Third Reich. Pike, who already before has occupied himself with Spanish history, describes the life of the inmates of the KZ emphasising the fate of the Spanish prisoners. Pike makes clear that ninety percent of Spanish concentration camp population was drawn together in Mauthausen, even if two other more prominent Spaniards, i.e. Largo Caballero and Semprún, were imprisoned in Oranienburg and Buchenwald respectively. But Pike does not limit himself only to the Iberian inmates of the concentration camp, but he includes also other nationalities, even if his focus is on the Spaniards. He actually writes a whole history of the concentration camp which includes the liberation and the aftermath for inmates as well as torturers.

Not of Spanish origin, however, were most of the members of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Three major and interesting works have been published since the mid-1990s on this group of people coming from all over the world and taking part in the Republican war effort against the Franquist uprising and its German and Italian support. The first book to be mentioned is Carroll's description of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade of American volunteers, secondly, Skoutelsky's history of the French volunteers as the largest group and, finally, Hopkins' work on the British who came to Spain in order to fight Fascism. All the three books help to complete the picture

on one of the most interesting phenomena of the Spanish Civil War, still today cloth legends are made of. All the three of them take a sympathetic view of these men who went individually or through recruitment organisations in order to meet a dangerous fate, which a lot of them has not survived. The three books give very detailed information on the social origin of the volunteers, the internal structure of the group as well as problems inside the Brigades. It becomes clear that the opening of the archival funds of the International Brigades in Moscow and other parts of the world has also widely extended the material base for such research. It seems interesting that all the three authors can show that there happened individual atrocities inside the three national sections of the Brigades but that there was not anything like a systematic terrorist regime inside the Brigades as has often been maintained by pro-Franquist or at least anti-Communist writers. So Carroll could write in his description of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: “Even if *all* the [...] charges of assassination proved true, the number of Americans killed outside combat would total less than ten. [...] The rarity of these killings undermines the notion, made popular by George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, that the International Brigades enforced discipline by terror. No one, it should be emphasized was punished for political dissent. And numerous military deserters were permitted to return to the ranks without penalty or stigma.” (p. 187s.) This diagnosis is confirmed by Skoutelsky and Hopkins for the French and the British alike.

These books show that it still is worthwhile to investigate into the history of the Spanish Civil War, the more since there still exists a vast amount of material, which has not been gone through by researchers. One only has to think of vast amount of files lying in Moscow archives dealing with the fate of members of the International Brigades from all over the world or the records on the children’s houses till their dissolution in the 1950s. Also in the Western countries, certainly Spain itself, there still is a large amount of sources containing material on actors and actions, which were not marginal at all. We should look forward to their publication.

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