

# JEWISH VETERANS OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

by JOHN GERASSI

*The following article is excerpted from the author's 800 page oral history of the North American veterans of the Spanish Civil War. This, in turn, was edited from over 18,000 pages of interviews which are available to the public, along with related material, at the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives at Brandeis University. Gerassi's project will be published in 1984 by M.I.T.*

*In choosing the material for SHMATE, I have tried to do what cannot be done: namely, maintain the integrity and coherency of the author's work while utilizing 5% of his material. Therefore, criticisms concerning continuity and appropriateness should be laid at my door and not the author's.*

*The Spanish Civil War was the first battle of World War II. The tragedy of that episode is not merely the havoc wreaked on Spain, the missed opportunity to prevent the Holocaust, or the continued failure to give recognition to the Lincoln Brigade veterans, but also, the failure after forty-five years to recognize that the United States was, for all practical purposes, on the wrong side. Hopefully Gerassi's work will help to provide people with a better understanding of why that is the case.*

History," wrote Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "is still mostly written from the top down, not from the bottom up." Indeed, policies are inevitably analyzed through the motives, knowledge, and background of the policy-makers. Events are related according to the statements spouted by those who help shape them. Actions are evaluated according to the will and goals of the decision-makers who generate them. Rarely are policies, events, or actions in a historical period described through the testimony of the ordinary people who work, suffer, and die in that period. Hence, an oral history which lets those directly affected by the policies, events, and actions in a particular period of history talk at length is a much better guide to what really happened to such people than antiseptic surveys, statistical polls, or scholarly generalizations.

And yet, for the voices at the "bottom" to make sense, a stage must be delineated. So, although I have tried to write a history of a group of people at the bottom by deliberately letting each speak at length, I find that I must first try to place their lives in the context of what was happening around them.

On July 18, 1936, when the Spanish Civil War started, most of the American and Canadian men and women who would volunteer to fight with the Republic were in their twenties.

Most North American veterans of the Spanish Civil War lived their formative years just before, during, or immediately after the first world war. What's more they probably sought their first job just after the crash of 1929 and became of family-raising age during the worst period of the Great Depression. A history-from-below by such people then will certainly have to reveal much information about that depression, how it molded the lives and thoughts of those who ended up volunteering to fight fascism.

Robert Rosenstone, who based his findings on data furnished by 291 volunteers, found that over 60 percent of the

Americans came from working class backgrounds. He estimated that of the 3000 volunteers, 600 were sailors, 400 came from "steel, auto, mining, timber, garment and trucking industries." The rest were from low and middle levels of the middle class, including, he said, no less than 500 students.

My own statistics vary slightly. I have concluded that between 3200 and 3500 Americans and between 1200 and 1500 Canadians went to Spain between 1936 and 1939.

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Of these, 55 percent had working class parents, 35 percent came from middle class sectors, mostly the petit bourgeoisie, and 10 percent were from the upper middle class. Exactly nine individuals belonged to ruling class families or to their high civil servant allies.

Whatever statistics chosen, at least this conclusion is inescapable: a history of the volunteers is bound to give a good indication on how the poor, the unemployed, the industrial worker, and the salaried employee lived during the early years of this century and how they survived the depression.

But the statistics can prove more. According to my figures, no less than 46 percent were Jewish. Albert Prago, who has studied the question closely, says that figure is too high. His own count brings it down to 30 percent, still amazingly high and much higher than the overall percentage in the International Brigades, which was 16 percent. Writes Prago, a Jew and an ALB veteran himself: "They went to Spain as internationalists, as humanists, as anti-fascists, as communists — while they may not have denied their Jewish heritage, they did not go to Spain identifying as Jews. This is particularly true for the American Jews."

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And yet it was no accident that so many of the volunteers were Jewish. Among them were the top American officer, Lt. Col John Gates (alias Sol Regenstreif); Major Milton Wolff, the last ALB commander; Saul Wellman, the last political commissar of the Mackenzie-Papineau; Capt. Leonard Lamb; commissars Dave Doran and George Watt; battalion commander David Reiss; company commanders Aaron Lopoff, Paul Block, Larry Lustgarten, Sidney Levine, Julius Deutsch, Irving Weissman, Yale Stuart, Manny Lancer, Lawrence Cane, Jack Cooper, Harold Smith, Harry Schonberg, David Smith. Of the 124 members of the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy, 59 were Jews — 19 surgeons, 4 dentists, 6 technicians, 28 nurses, and 2 drivers. No less than 66 Jewish activists volunteered from the Brownsville section of Brooklyn; only 25 returned. Of the 13 teachers, alumni, and students from City College who volunteered, eleven were Jews; their leader, instructor Alfred "Chick" Chakin, wounded and repatriated in 1937, returned to Spain the next year to fight again - and die.

Thus, while most of the volunteers who were Jewish may well have been non-religious and assimilationists and did not go to Spain, as ALB veteran Alvah Bessie has said, "out of my Jewish 'nature' or 'personality' or 'unconscious' [but] to fight fascism, and specifically Naz-fascism," it is probable that being Jewish helped create that desire to fight Nazi-fascism. After all, even the most anti-religious and assimilated Jew is made to feel Jewish by the anti-Semite. As Jean-Paul Sartre once said, the Jew is he who is defined as a Jew by his society. And if a society sponsors pogroms, all Jews will inevitably hate such attackers, even the Jews who only hear or read about the attacks from relative and distant safety. Repression may cause fear, even cowardice, but it also creates consciousness.

**T**he America and Canada which molded the future volunteer was the America and Canada of the bottom, of miners and lumberjacks, sailors and machinists, of demonstrations for the right to organize for a better life and of marches to protest police brutality and the murder of comrades. It was the America of Pinkerton men and Klansmen, massacres and frame-ups.

In Ludlow, Colorado, in 1914, for example, no less than 66 miners, their wives and children were systematically executed by National Guardsmen while they crouched helplessly in their tents. *The New York Times* cheered because the miners were "savage-minded," while it, approved American warships bombarding Vera Cruz, in Mexico, killing one hundred, because Mexico had arrested some American sailors and refused to apologize with a 21-gun salute.

In Arizona in 1917, some 1200 supposed Wobblies (351 turned out to be AFLers) were sealed into a cattle train, shipped under guard to New Mexico, kept without food or water for 36 hours, then severely beaten before being locked up in a federal stockade for three months without charges. Elsewhere, scores were murdered, jailed up to 22 months

without trials, castrated, framed, gassed, executed by firing squad (Joe Hill), beaten to death, and hanged, all because the IWW recognized the reality of America, namely that, as the preamble to the IWW constitution flatly stated, "the working class and the employing class have nothing in common."

During the first world war, repression of organizing workers and farmers was downright vicious. Mostly, the excuse was that they opposed the war. "Neither workingmen nor farmers," complained the National Civic Federation, an organization of conservative businessmen and high politicians (and, as its first vice-president, the indubitable Samuel Gompers), took "any part or interest in the efforts of the security or defense leagues or other movements for national preparedness." Added the conservative *Akron Beacon-Journal*: The U.S. had "never embarked upon a more unpopular war." To quash such opposition, the ruling elites and government passed a series of sedition laws which were then used against labor organizers. Under the Espionage Act of 1917, for example, no less than 900 people were jailed simply for criticizing the war, including presidential candidate Eugene Debs, who has stated that "the master class has always declared the wars; the subject class has always fought the battles."

The Supreme Court unanimously upheld the constitutionality of the Espionage Act on the ground that criticism during emergencies can "create a clear and present danger." That now-famous justification for repression was written by the Court's leading liberal, Oliver Wendell Holmes, who, seen from the lower working-class depths rather than from the traditional historian's lofty station, was nothing but a staunch defender of the "master class."

The Espionage Act, supposed to apply only during wartime, was then constantly used after the advent of the Korean War because legally the U.S. has been in a "state of emergency" ever since. Indeed, the Kennedy Administration even tried to have it apply to "critical articles...on Diem and his government" in Vietnam. During the McCarthy era, many dissenting or uncooperative labor organizers were jailed on this Espionage Act. But in 1918, after so many were arrested, beaten, and jailed for so little the attorney general could rightfully boast: "It is safe to say that never in its history has this country been so thoroughly policed."

Few from America's middle sectors, none from its "master class," as Debs had put it, ever felt the impact of that police state described by 1918's top cop. Yet it got manifold worse after his successor, A. Mitchell Palmer, took over in 1919 (and appointed as his assistant a 24-year-old foreigner-hating, racist lawyer named J. Edgar Hoover, who described all radicals as "a gang of cutthroat aliens who have come to this country to overthrow the government by force")

Encouraged by Palmer and Hoover, mounted police in Chicago, Detroit, Boston, Seattle and New York charged into any large unionist meeting. In Cleveland, army tanks assaulted 20,000 people peacefully gathered to hear dissenting politicians. By early fall 1919, every major newspaper in America demanded severe police action against "the agitators."

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Encouraged by the press, Palmer, who had presidential aspirations, decided to unleash his infamous raids. Choosing November 7, 1919 (in commemoration of the Bolshevik revolution) and January 2, 1920 as the moments to strike, Palmer tried to destroy working class organizing. Thousands were jailed without warrants. Hundreds were deported, including 199 non-political Russians and 39 bakers who had met to plan a cooperative bakery. One U.S. citizen was arrested because, said the Newark police, "he looked like a radical." Another because he asked "what's happening?" Twelve wives and children were arrested because they tried to join their "deportable" husbands; the press reacted with the headline "Reds Storm Ferry Gates to Free Pals." The husbands were deported; the wives and children were not.

The American press had never been happier. *The New York Times* demanded more, more. The *Washington Post* warned legalists that "there is no time to waste on hairsplitting over infringement of liberty." The *Brooklyn Eagle* complained that "too many persons in this country are enjoying the right of free speech." In New York State, the Lusk Committee got the Legislature to pass laws barring elected socialists from serving, and the Supreme Court upheld these and the sedition and "Red Flag" laws enacted by 32 states. Under these laws, probably some 10,000 radicals were jailed.

The real reason for the repression, the legal lynchings, and the massive violations of all semblances of democratic fairplay at the base of society was, of course, that the base was becoming more and more agitated because it was worse and worse off. The 1913 dollar, for example, had become worth only 45 cents by 1919. Food had gone up 84 percent, clothing 114.5 percent, furniture 125 percent, the general cost of living 99 percent. But salaries has risen only 5 to 10 percent.

Those were the years, 1913-1919, during which most of the Lincoln and MacPap volunteers were born. Their families' suffering and servitude was crystallized into their first real political consciousness in 1927, when Sacco and Vanzetti were executed. The future volunteers' social commitment was wrought even more steel-firm two years later when the great crash smashed their already meager hopes for a just economic order.

**I**t was thus the American and Canadian governments' repressions, and the callous, greedy and vicious lust for profit of the continent's robber barons and industrial entrepreneurs that made the future volunteers first Wobblies, then socialists, then Communists.

Among the 5000 Lincolns and MacPaps, 60 percent were card-carrying members of their respective CPs when they went to Spain, and another 24 percent were close fellow travellers. The rest were Trotskyists, socialists, anarchists or Wobblies, and a few characterized themselves as merely adventurers (but obviously were sympathetic to the underdog for otherwise they would have joined the fascist side). As the *New York Times* correspondent to Spain, Herbert Matthews, said in 1957: "No one will ever persuade me...that the

men who came from all over the world to fight in Spain were clever or cynical or hypocritical, or that they were robots obeying orders... I still say that a vast majority of them fought and died for the highest sort of moral principles." He added: they were "the finest group of men I ever knew or even hoped to know in my life."

For most of them, of course, their real political consciousness began with the New Deal, mainly because they expected structural or serious changes in the way America and Canada were run and then discovered that nothing very fundamental would in fact change. Violent attacks against unionists, for example, never stopped. In 1934, West Coast rank-and-file longshoremen rebelled against the shape-up (a form of early morning slave market) and went on strike. They were supported by teamsters and maritime workers. But the police decided that their job was to keep the piers open and killed two pickets to do so. A general strike ensued in San Francisco when 130,000 workers protested. Immediately, 4500 National Guardsmen, with machine guns, tanks, and artillery were sent in. And it was alright to kill them, said the *Los Angeles Times*, because the strikers were "Communist-inspired and led" and "in revolt against organized government. There is but one thing to be done — put down the revolt with any force necessary."

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Later that year, a strike of 325,000 textile workers throughout the South was fought by armed deputies and strike-breakers, who killed seven and wounded 20. When the strike spread to New England, state troopers toting machine guns arrested thousands, beat hundreds, and murdered another six. Naturally, only strikers were brought to trial.

Nor were farmers better off. In 1935, of the 6,800,000 farmers, 2,800,000 were tenants earning an average of \$312 a year. And the New Deal did little to curtail racism. On the contrary, not only were black tenant farmers harassed and beaten whenever they individually or collectively demanded better working conditions, but they were often lynched. From 1936 to 1966, no less than 2800 blacks were put to death illegally while no murderer was ever prosecuted.

In March 1935, Harlem exploded. Crammed with 350,000 people, 233 per acre compared to 133 for the rest of Manhattan, rampant with rats, tuberculosis and "slave markets" — hiring points for maids for white households — Harlem had long been seething with discontent. When it finally blew, 1500 blacks swept through the streets attacking white merchant property, but not people. Seven hundred, cops, however, did not make such distinctions; two blacks were killed, hundreds severely beaten.

As late as Memorial Day 1937, shortly before the last ALB volunteer left American shores, ten strikers were killed by police at a Republic Steel plant near Chicago. It was very easy to conclude that unbridled capitalism led inevitably to fascism.

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Indeed, most ALB and MacPap volunteers felt that if they could stop German Nazis, Italian Fascists and Spanish Falangists in Spain, eventually the tide would turn against all the other fascisms, the Austrian, the Romanian, the Portuguese, the South African, the Japanese, and, yes, some day, the American as well.

After all, even the anti-labor *New York Times* had admitted that Henry Ford was "an industrial fascist—the Mussolini of Detroit." Most socially-minded Americans at the base were genuinely frightened that America was in fact well on its way to fascism.

**W**hen the Civil War in Spain did begin in July 1936, many folk, if not already members of the CPUSA, signed up in order to fight. For it was the Communist International, the Comintern (hence the CPUSA in America and the CPC in Canada), which organized the journey to Spain. Between 40 and 60,000 from 53 countries went. Many more would have gone had travel funds and facilities been available. In America in August 1936 alone, some 300,000 applied to the Spanish Embassy in Washington for combat visas. Similar spontaneous reactions occurred in Canada.

Since the U.S. and Canada were officially neutral, the Spanish embassies could not legally recruit. Hence that job was left to the CPUSA and CPC whose funds were extremely limited. Only persistent bachelors managed to get to Spain. And, CP functionaries "often discouraged party members from volunteering and argued it was more important to stay at home to work for the Communist Party programs."

The U.S. was neutral only on paper. In fact, while all U.S. and Canadian government agencies, and after a while those of other countries except Russia and Mexico, stopped shipments of foods, arms, ammunition, drugs, and fuel to the established, freely-elected Republican government, no such agency tried to stop aid to the fascists. Rockefeller's Standard Oil (Exxon today), the Vacuum Oil Co., and Texaco provided Franco with all the oil he needed — on credit. Charles Foltz, the AP correspondent in Madrid in 1945, reported that Franco told him: "Without American petrol, American trucks and American credits, we would never have won the war." Herbert Feis, economic adviser to the U.S. Embassy during World War II, wrote that the U.S. supplied Franco with 1,866,000 metric tons of oil and 12,800 trucks from 1936 to 1939—on credit. All the bombs dropped on Spaniards, Internationals, and of course Americans and Canadians during the Civil War were manufactured in America, mostly by Dupont.

**T**hose who had survived came home proud of their part in the defense of the Republic — and very sad at its defeat. They all hoped to fight fascism again, and as soon as their bodies healed from the numerous wounds suffered in Spain, they desperately tried to get into combat in World War II. But the American and Canadian governments now considered the Spanish vets unreliable, potentially dangerous, subversive, even traitorous, because they had been, as they were actually dubbed, "premature

anti-fascists." How most of the vets were kept away from the fronts of the second world war, despite their vast experience and dedication, is documented herein — and shows rather conclusively to what extent officials in both the U.S. and Canada had hoped to fight Russia, not the Axis.

That realization is what kept most of the vets from publicly voicing their disillusionment with their own parties and with the Comintern. And it kept them loyal to their parties. When, in 1945, President Truman launched the loyalty boards and unleashed the Cold War, the vets became firm activists once again. For, contrary to the views of America's traditional historians, and because of their own experiences with their governments, the A.L.B. and MacPap veterans understood that the Cold War was not directed at Russia — and never had been. It was aimed at the non-conformists and dissenters at home, especially in the labor movement.

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Truman, and Eisenhower after him, were not so much interested in wiping out the Russian elite or even its industrial potential. With that, America could come to terms. What they hoped rather to accomplish was to smash all U.S. independent unions, so that some day America would be able to accept without rebellions or even massive protests double-digit unemployment, decertification of recalcitrant unions, rigid racial imbalances, widening gaps between rich and poor, and the proletarianization of the middle class.

But, as the veterans' accounts herein so clearly reveals, this Cold War against America by America (and Canada, which has always followed suit), this destruction of its working class, of its independent intellectuals, of those functionaries and officials who tried to hold on to some principles and integrity, could not have succeeded without the help of Soviet Russia. No Subversive Activities Control Board, no HUAC, no Smith or Taft-Hartley or McCarran acts could crush the spirit of America's genuine anti-fascists. What was also needed was Stalin's Comintern agents, his crimes and executions, and Khrushchev's put down of workers in Berlin, Warsaw, Prague and Budapest while denouncing the very Stalinist code under which he acted. That and not the repressions at home made the vets abandon the Communist Party.

The American contingent, for all its gripes, disillusionments, and bitter inner feuds, remained amazingly close and cohesive. During the McCarthy period, 60 percent of those accused of being communists or fellow travellers in Hollywood immediately cooperated with the government. In the labor world, 40 percent fingered unionists turned against their comrades. But of the 23000 U.S. and Canadian survivors of the Spanish Civil War, all of whom were accused of disloyalty and over 2000 of whom were harassed by the FBI, exactly eleven cooperated with the witch-hunters.

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Most of the veterans of the Spanish Civil War remain undaunted. At 65 or 70 or even 80, they still march against U.S. wars and U.S. invasions, they still organize against nuclear outrages and industrial wastes, they still denounce the greed and corruption of America's and Canada's ruling class and their allies in government. And, of course, they still see their greatest triumph to have been when they fought and risked their lives on strange, foreign soil in solidarity with workers and peasants with whom most could not even communicate.

But they are rapidly becoming extinct.

That will be a great loss. For they, more than all the American and Canadian super-patriots described by the historians-from-above, truly represented the best of America's and Canada's soul.

**B**orn in Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York, in 1915, of Russian-Lithuanian parents, Abe Osheroff had very little contact at first with socialist or radical ideas. But his father, a confirmed trade union activist did take an active part in demonstrations against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. "I was 12 years old when I attended my first political demonstration. I remember it very clearly. It was on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. I found it difficult to understand why we should be fighting against Italian kids like crazy all the time in my neighborhood. The Italian neighborhood began on the other side of the street and we were always at each other's throats. But since they were poor, too, eventually I learned that they were not the real enemy.

"It was then, I was 15 or 16, that I began to learn who was. I was pretty heavily engaged in some street struggles, which were no longer abstract. I belonged, with a whole bunch of people from the neighborhood, to a thing called 'The Brownsville Athletic and Cultural Club.' We lifted weights and listened to classical music, but we also had squads whose jobs was to put people back in their houses when they were evicted, by force if necessary. We would do that with such repetition that landlords often grew weary and just stopped putting people out, because it cost them \$7 or \$8 to put them on the sidewalk and we would hustle the stuff right back. I got busted at 16 for that kind of activity. I spent a couple of days in jail that first time, but I remember it very well because the police beat the shit out of me. And of course, after I got arrested a few more times I was branded a communist so loudly and so often that I decided I'd better find out what being a communist was. So, by the time I was 17, I joined the YCL, the Young Communist League, because it was committed primarily, at that time, as far as I knew, to always fighting evictions of poor people."

**M**ilt Felsen's family came from Romania and Russia. His father had settled down on a little farm near Kingston, N.Y., in 1907, where Milt was born in 1912. Because his father couldn't quite make a living off the farm, Milt was raised by his mother while his father went down to Bedford Stuyvesant to get a job. From there he was only able to go to his family on weekends.

In the mid-twenties, a man living in a nearby house fascinated Milt Felsen. This man was Joe Friedman, the editor of *The New Masses*. Milt spent hours quietly listening to the conversations that took place there. "My father was not political, although he was anti-religious and felt that religion caused most of the suffering and bloodshed in the history of the world. He was an avid reader of Ralph Ingersoll, but by and large, that was all. He worked for the Singer Sewing Machine company, for about 28 years. In 1931 they dumped him unceremoniously without a word's notice, and somehow he managed to think it was his fault. He blamed himself because he had worshipped the company. The fact that there were millions who were unemployed by then did not seem to mean anything to him. He never got another job; he deteriorated, feeling himself such a victim, and ended up on the dung hill of unemployment.



"My mother raised us two boys and my sister, but we all helped by working on the farms or in hotels while we went to school. I started working when I was ten years old and kept right on going until the depression and my graduating from high school in 1930 meant that I could leave. That's when I started bumming around the world in search of a decent job, or after a rumor of such a job."

**A**fter Al Prago graduated from college in 1934, the only job he was able to get was jerking sodas in Liggett's Drug Store. Then in 1935 he got a job with a WPA project as a teacher.

"I discovered my way of life. I was a teacher. I loved it. I taught social sciences and it was going pretty good. I was active in my union, and gradually I became active in the Communist Party. I did a lot of reading and although I was certainly very naive to think that the revolution was possible in the United States, I'd certainly thought it ought to take place, and I remember being very impressed by William Foster writing a book about Soviet America. I think I myself marched in various demonstrations with a slogan, 'For Soviet America.' Aside from the stupidity of it, it certainly

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shows what a superficial elementary understanding I had of America's political and economic scene. But, that's now, in hindsight, we can say that. At that time, I was certainly very committed.

"My family was not happy at all. They knew that I was in the party. They tolerated it because, well, I was their son and after all I lived alone. I lived in a small furnished room on the upper west side of Manhattan. My mother died back in 1925 and shortly before I went to Spain, my father died. After that, family was simply two sisters and my brother, and I had very little contact with them.

"Anyway, I didn't tell my family, only good friends, that I wanted to go to Spain, that I thought I should go.

"I certainly did not think it was wrong to go. I had read a great deal about Hitler and Mussolini and I agreed with the party's analysis that fascism had to be stopped in Spain, and that if it were stopped in Spain it might prevent a second world war. I also knew about the anti-Semitism of Hitler in Germany. But I did not go as a Jew fighting back. I was not conscious of being a Jew at the time, and I behaved more as a political animal than as an anti-anti-Semite. After all, we Jews who were members of the party were assimilationists. That was the party position. There was a big Jewish movement within the Communist Party: there was a Yiddish section, the Freiheit movement, the Jewish fraternal order, Communist cells in the synagogues, etc. It was not discouraged to be conscientiously and consciously Jewish. On the contrary. But on the other hand, my whole generation was encouraged, and this was the official policy of the party, to assimilate. The Communist Party made the point that we were exploited because we were poor and powerless, as a class. Remember Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money*, one of the greatest novel-histories ever written? The solution to the exploitation of Jews is a revolution, in that book, not the union of all Jews and certainly not the creation of a Jewish homeland.

"Part of me still believes that: the solution is not the creation of another nation, Israel, which then behaves like any other nation. The solution is to destroy anti-Semitism, and the way of destroying anti-Semitism is by destroying the kind of inequality and arrogance and oppression and repression that exists in the world based on the exploitation of man by man. But the assimilationist emphasis of the party was also wrong, because it would have been the same, if you think about it, as telling blacks that they are not black, not to behave as blacks. After all, we Jews may have been atheists, but we were Jews and were being identified as Jews by the rest of the world whether we went to *schule* or not. So, as far as Spain is concerned, it was not because of my hatred of the anti-Semitism of the fascists that I went to Spain, but because of my hatred of fascists, ideologically speaking.

**B**y 1935, George Watt was working full time for the National Student League. He had been admitted to Cooper Union School of Engineering and had to work at the same time in his father's small shop. He couldn't keep up. So he quit school and just worked in the student

organization, which, though dominated by communists, was open to various organizations including the YMCA and the Methodists.

"What had radicalized me the most had been the way labor was being treated in America during the depression. I was drawn closer to communists by their militant action and by some of the violent struggles taking place in the labor movement. Harlan, Kentucky, was a great influence on me. We had student delegations there and we were sending truckloads of food in support of the Kentucky strikers in 1931. And I remember that the argument made by party leaders against socialists was that 'Look at what's happening in Harlan. All the miners are asking for is a few pennies and they are being slaughtered. They are being shot down. How can you expect to change the whole system without violence?'

"When the Spanish Civil War broke out, we all became fascinated and watched the events there very carefully. When we got the first news that there were international brigades in the defense of Madrid, in November I think, most of us felt that we wished we had been part of that defense. I was then asked by an organizer of the YCL to organize a brigade of students. Well it was very easy. I just let it be known that I was organizing and I had 25 students processed very, very quickly. As for me, I felt if I was recruiting other young people, I had no right to stay behind. So I kept pressing the New York leadership of the Young Communist League to let me go. They kept turning me down. But I kept arguing, and finally they gave me the okay. I left on July 24th. Joseph Lash went with me. He was the socialist leader whom I had worked with in the National Student League and then in the American Student Union, but his party called him back before he actually got to the front."

**A**l Prago came back from Spain with gnawing, ambivalent feelings about his role in Spain, as well as about the party that had sent him there. Not that he looks back now and regrets having fought in Spain. That he does not, "absolutely not." But in 1939 he had great misgivings about the leadership of both the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the Communist Party. Yet he did nothing about either one. "I guess what bothered me most was the lack of democracy within the people's army. I mean, don't get me wrong, by and large it was highly egalitarian. It was certainly far, far superior in that respect to any professional army, certainly to the army of the United States. But my expectations were higher. I expected to see a totally egalitarian army, and I was disturbed by the lack of democracy in some cases of promotion, where top commissars would appoint their deputies or commanders would appoint their field representatives and so on, rather than leaving it up to the men to choose their own commissars and their own commanders. I was also upset by the arrogance of some of the commissars.

"And the role of the Communist Party upset me also. The party structure, which was based on the Bolshevik model of democratic centralism, which may have been fine for the Russians, I don't know, was not good for us. It was centralist and not democratic. And yet I didn't question the structure

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in Spain and I didn't question the structure in the U.S. party either. I remained in it until 1956. There was a moment, at the signing of the Russo-German pact, when I was shocked. But when I examined it carefully, I might add, blindly but I thought carefully and reasonably, I decided that it was Stalin's way of gaining time because the so-called democracies were trying to push Hitler into attacking the Soviet Union. And that was true. But two points have to be made. I kind of made them then, but I passed them off. One was that, after all, Stalin did not gain a nickel's worth of time during the period of the pact, and secondly, that even though the pact may have been a correct tactic for Stalin, why did that mean that communist parties all over the world had to support Stalin one hundred percent. I mean the communists were being executed wherever the Nazis were in power and yet, in respect of the Russo-German pact, the parties in those same countries were stopped from opposing Hitler.

"These things bothered me but I didn't quit the party. I remember being upset by the fact that during the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia, of the fourteen charged with Trotskyism, cosmopolitanism and traitorism, or whatever, eleven were Jews; eleven out of fourteen (not the same) were veterans of the Spanish Civil War, and eleven again, though not exactly the same, were executed. These things bothered me. I guess I began to wonder just what sent me to Spain. I know at the time that I went because I was anti-fascist and social-minded and not because I was Jewish, not because Jews were being exterminated by Hitler and that this was a way of standing up for my Jewishness. But was that the real reason? And if so, how come 30% of Americans who fought in Spain were Jewish?

"When I think about it, I think the reason so many Jews fought in Spain is because Jews had not only been exploited and repressed all over the world, but also had traveled, they were much more cosmopolitan and international. The blacks who went to Spain, I think, also went out of anti-fascism in general and not because fascism was racist. But blacks, more repressed, had travelled less, were less cosmopolitan, less international, which explains why, though one out of nine Americans is black, only one out of forty-five of Abraham Lincoln volunteers was black. The blacks went out of anti-Nazism and anti-fascism, even though they too could have been wooed by the fact that the Republican army represented the first case of an egalitarian army, the first incident of a totally and fully integrated army.

"The statistics are incredible. Of the whole International Brigades, it is now estimated that 16 percent were Jews. This is a fantastic percentage, and as I say, although most of us thought then that we went out of pure anti-fascism and anti-repressiveness and because of our social conscience, obviously these figures were so high because we must have been conscious of being Jews. The fact that we did not uphold that identity, proclaim it so to speak, began to bother me when I got back.

**W**hen W.W. II broke out, Abe Osheroff volunteered for the infantry. "The lieutenant thought I was mad. He asked me why. I said 'Be-

cause I want to fight Nazis. So he sent me to be interviewed by a psychiatrist who wanted to know why I was so hostile and aggressive. But I got the infantry just the same. And then came the harassment.

"Some of the guys made it overseas. But I was held back. Every time my outfit shipped out, I was kept back on some excuse or other. Finally I went to the *Charlotte Observer* — I was down south — and told them that there were two men at Camp Sutton, where I was stationed, who had experience fighting Nazis, yet one was sweeping cigarette butts while the other was in charge of a squad of eight suspected spies and two homosexuals. The *Charlotte Observer* came out, took pictures, and ran the story in its Sunday section. The post commander immediately called me in to find out what was going on. I told him. He explained that he could not countermand orders. 'They're from above, they come from Washington. No one who fought in the Spanish Civil War can be sent overseas. But I'll make you a sergeant and you can take over the training program, so you can get the satisfaction of knowing that when the men go fight the Nazis, you will be going with them through your training.'

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*"[ The orders ] come from Washington. No one who fought in the Spanish Civil War can be sent overseas."*

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"When I got demobilized, I went back to work as a construction worker. I remained very active in the communist party, nights, Saturdays and Sundays. After three years, towards the end of 1947, the party asked me to become a full-time functionary. I did that for one year and it made me physically and spiritually sick. I was buried in this inner party life; it wasn't my style. These party functionaries seemed to live in another world. They talked in a kind of speechifying, abstract manner, which had nothing to do with reality. It was bad company, bad work, and bad vibes. I just couldn't get demoted far enough. Finally they made me a section organizer back in Brownsville, where I worked for a year, during which time I got divorced, creating quite a scandal for the puritanical party leadership. So they banished me to a Jewish middle class neighborhood.

"In 1951, I went underground for three years. It meant a change of identity, a change of social security every six months, a constant change of jobs. I couldn't work at my trade, see my family, visit my old haunts. I never went back to Brownsville. I was only in New York on very short specific occasions. I travelled all over the goddamn place. That was good experience, but looking back it was just a whole lot of stupidity.

"Indeed, in 1954-55, I started getting suspicious about the party and about what was happening in the Soviet Union. That came about through correspondence with two Soviet Yiddish writers whom I had met in New York, a long time before. The correspondence suddenly stopped. I tried to find out why. I asked the editor of the *Freiheit*, the Yiddish left-wing newspaper in New York, who was going to Moscow, to investigate for me. When he came back he kept saying, with

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VETERANS: *continued*

tears in his eyes, 'Don't ask me, I can't talk, I can't say.' So I went to my Central Committee and asked them to find out for me. Instead, they brought me up on charges, accused me of being anti-Soviet. I didn't learn until a couple of years later that my two Yiddish writer friends had been executed.

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*"I asked the editor of the Freiheit... who was going to Moscow to investigate [ what had become of two Soviet Yiddish writers I had met in New York ]. When he came back he kept saying, with tears in his eyes, 'Don't ask me. I can't talk. I can't say.'"*

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"Actually, the Khrushchev report I could have dealt with. I saw it as part of that self-correcting notion that I had. But the Hungarian invasion, there was no excuse for that and I just couldn't fit it in. I suddenly realized that if I had been a Hungarian communist, I would have been fighting the red army. There were those who said that it was the Hungarian fascists who were out in the streets. Was all of Hungary fascist? Judging from Russian newsreels, there was an awful lot of Hungarian workers rioting against the red army; were they all fascists? Sure some were. Sure the CIA was in there trying to provoke a counter-revolution. But you could see that the rebellion was a mass phenomenon, and if it were true that the mass had become fascist, then the blame had to be born by the communist apparatus.

**W**e had a big convention in 1956-57, in which the struggle came out into the open. On one side was Foster who wanted to maintain the traditional way—Soviet Russia as the center of world communism. Opposed to that was what had become known as the Johnny Gates group. In between were those who supported a sort of compromise offered by Eugene Dennis. These were old leaders. They had all gone to jail under the Smith Act. I identified with the Gates group which said that we needed a Communist Party that advocated democratic socialism. But there weren't many democrats in the group and it eventually dispersed.

"I left the national convention and the Communist Party, but not before I explained why.

"I left New York and went to California. Went to work as a carpenter and didn't do much politically. I felt like a displaced person until the 1960s, when I became involved in the civil rights movement, first locally by raising funds in support of the kids who were working in the south, then by going down myself. I spent the year of 1964 in Holmes County, Mississippi, building a community center and helping with voter registration. It was a solid black-belt town. The nearest white was seven miles away. And it was a marvelous experience for me.

"When I returned to Venice, California, I got very heavily involved in Los Angeles politics. Venice had become the scene of a real estate development where tens of millions of

dollars were going in to try to turn it into a rich man's resort, taking out all the poor white folk that lived there. I helped fight that scam. In 1970, quite by chance and for emotional reasons only, I returned to Spain. I went through the areas of the Spanish Civil War where I had been. I even asked a fisherman to row me out to where I had been torpedoed and swam back to shore from there. It was a weird experience. I walked and crawled through the places I'd been, visited every battle site. When I came to Belchite, I had what you might almost call a religious experience. I stood there and I could hear the fighting, I could see the fighting, I was just overwhelmed. I then decided to make a film about my experiences.

"*Dreams and Nightmares* was finished and released in 1974. It has been successful beyond my wildest dreams. It has been shown all over the world, in universities everywhere in this country and in France, Japan, and even the Soviet Union."

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**I**rving Goff, who went into the O.S.S. with Milt Felsen, didn't know him very well in Spain. "In fact, I really got to know him after the Spanish Civil War when he and his wife Roberta, Jerry Cook, another vet from the Spanish Civil War and his wife Anne, and my wife Sophie and I all shared an apartment in New York before the second World War. I was unemployed, looking for a job. Then the World's Fair took place and there was a giant Soviet pavilion, where there had been bomb threats, so a lot of the Spanish vets were hired as security. Milt Wolff was there and Billy Aalto, I don't think Felsen was there, but anyway, it paid a very good salary, in fact exorbitant compared to the salaries of the day. But that didn't last long, six months about, then I went on a speaking tour for the Brigade.

"The next thing I know is that Milt Wolff was called in by General Donovan who wanted to set up a sort of intelligence operation to help British intelligence. It was called something like British Special Operation. Billy Aalto ended up there and Mike Jimenez, a Spaniard born in America who had fought in Spain, and Felsen was called in, and Lossowski, and we were all supposed to go to Alexandria, Egypt, when Pearl Harbor got bombed. So instead of collaborating with the British, Donovan set up his own operation which was, of course, O.S.S., the Office of Strategic Services.

"Originally we were supposed to be I&E, Information and Education, which was based on a book researched at Yale University, which documented that if you know what you're fighting for, you make a better soldier. We were supposed to be set up as instructors for that, in other words as propagandists. Well, what it amounted to really was commissarship—I mean the United States Army was going to use this I&E, different names of course, to set up commissars to teach soldiers what they were fighting for in the second world war. This was based on this Yale report which showed that in Spain, 97 percent of the soldiers fought as bravely as they did because they knew what they were fighting for and they were constantly reminded of this by their political commissar.

"But soon we became a sort of underground operation,

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based on the fear that Franco was going to allow the Germans to seize Gibraltar. That's what we were meant to try to stop — by going into Spain and setting up an underground. But the American ambassador raised such a stink that it never took place. I was supposed to actually go in as a chauffeur for him, so that I could be flexible and move around everywhere, make contact with the Spanish underground, which was part of the Spanish Communist Party, many of whose leaders I had known.

"Well, the ambassador would have nothing of it, so that part of the operation never took place, and instead we were used first for the African landing, then for the invasion of Sicily. Of course, we knew that we were expendable. Milt Felsen, I remember, used to remind me of that all the time, and we fought down the line with our eyes open. And it was this kind of expendability that got Felsen captured and all of us almost killed. But, at the same time, I must say, Donovan liked us; he was good to us. For one thing, he made us all second lieutenants, giving us field promotions. And I liked what we were doing. I went behind the lines five different times, in Africa and Italy, and did some really crucial stuff, though of course we have never gotten promoted, except by Donovan. Those guys, who were part of our outfit but never went behind the lines, got to be made captains.

*"... the order was that no... left-winger... could become an officer."*

"Of course, we were always suspect. There was always some guy checking up on us. I know the guy that was writing on me. Every day he had to write a report on me. And not only on me, but on Lossowski and Jimenez, all the guys who had fought in Spain. They used to keep tabs on those they thought were fascists as well, I must say, since there were a couple of Ku Klux Klanners there. For a long time the order was that no communist or fellow-traveler, no left-winger in general, could become an officer. But Donovan personally lifted that order. I had an excellent relationship with him all along. And after the Africa bit, when we were sent into Italy, I went in with Donovan at Salerno.

Anyway, I set up a relationship with the Communist Party in Naples. This helped us a great deal to set up general operations behind the lines and facilitated our seizure of Naples. It was through the Communist Party that I learned that the union and party structure that ran the railroads under Mussolini had never been infiltrated and was solid anti-fascist. We used that network to our military advantage.

"Of course, most of the relationships usually got strained because the American mentality was that it didn't matter how many Italian lives were lost, if one American life could be saved. One officer actually told me that. I had him removed, even though he was a colonel and I was a second lieutenant, because with officers like that, the anti-fascist Italians up north would not cooperate with us. After all,

there were 300,000 guerillas fighting in northern Italy. And they were perfectly willing to work for us if we played fair. Anyway, Lossowski and I were put in command of this operation, and we went up north and we gave some training and maintained a liaison that was very good. I actually took 44 of our people across at various times to work in back of the lines and make contact with the guerillas. All but one got back safely and that one, who was captured and tortured, never talked.

"Donovan, of course, knew I was dealing with communists. He asked me about it one day and I simply said, 'Look. The Italian communists are interested in winning the war, we're interested in winning the war. Isn't that enough for collaboration?' He said, 'Absolutely. Keep right on going.' And so successful were the partisans in their relationship with us that I could get all sorts of advantages and requests. For example, I knew that Milt Wolff was being wasted and so I asked that he be transferred to us and, all of a sudden, six months later — actually I had forgotten all about it—there he walks in, and says, 'How the hell did I get here?' Of course he was very pleased. And I was very pleased to have him there.

Anyway we were very successful in relating to the partisans, who, after all, liberated all of northern Italy and made life extremely easy for us in our sweep up north, proving that Donovan's tactic of working with the partisans and with the communist party in Italy ultimately did pay off very concretely in saving an awful lot of American lives. When the European theater was coming to a close, I decided that it would be good to go into China to do the same thing there. I wrote up a mission, where we would be parachuted into northern China to set up intelligence, sabotage and operations behind the Japanese lines. It was accepted by Donovan.

"But then we got into trouble. There was some fascist bigoted racist senator from Mississippi, I think it was Bilbo, who started complaining that communists had become officers. So while we were literally on the way to China, going

*"You guys did a fantastic job; I can testify to your patriotism, but I need my appropriation and in order to get it... I have to let go of the known communists..."*

across the United States for take-off points in San Francisco, the whole operation came to a standstill. The press had picked up on the fact that I was an officer, that Milt Wolff was an officer, that Lossowski was an officer, and so on. I still thought that the operation was going to go, but then Donovan called me back to Washington and in a very friendly manner told me, 'Irv, I've got a requisition for twenty million dollars in Congress to carry the O.S.S. operation, and it's being jeopardized right now because of these asshole senators who think that you're not patriotic. Of course they never did a thing to defend this country in their

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lives. Nevertheless, they've got some fantastic influence in Congress. You guys did a fantastic job. I can testify to your patriotism, but I need my appropriation, and in order to get it, I'm afraid I have to let go of the known communists in my operation.'

"And that was it. Things had already been changing everywhere. In Italy, for example, known Nazis, who had even tortured and executed American and British soldiers, were being released. The British were literally letting the Nazi SS people out of jail. I told Togliatti, who was head of the Communist Party in Rome at the time and with whom I had been

*"In Italy... known Nazi [torturers] were being released... The prime American concern had become the Communists rather than the Nazis."*

in fairly close contact, that this was going to happen, and so from then on the partisans rounded up these Italian and German Nazis, and executed them. That's also why they decided to execute Mussolini and not risk turning him over to the allies as had been requested, because most probably, the allies, the Americans and British, would have freed Mussolini. I think that the partisans were correct in their estimation, because by then already the allies were thinking of using Nazis to stop communism. The prime American concern, by then, had become the communists rather than the Nazis.

All of this fortified my communist zeal and after the war I became a full time worker for the Communist Party. Meanwhile, the party in the United States was in trouble. It had been officially dissolved by Earl Browder who had reorganized the Communist Party, and I got sent to organize New Orleans in 1947. That was kind of rough. I was there for about a year. There was no party down there, so it had to be totally reconstituted.

"It's funny, you know, I went through two wars and never got wounded, but in the south I got wounded badly many times. I got kicked around, I got beaten up, I got roughed up real bad. At one point, I was grabbed by some right wing goons and given such a sound going over that I couldn't walk for weeks. And there were all sorts of inner battles, as well. One of our organizers got shot in his car. One of the problems, of course, was that we had elected blacks for local leadership. That made us cross the racist contingent within the unions, and their goons would then beat up our organizers.

"I left the south late in 1950 and was told to be prepared to go underground. Indeed, when the Smith Act arrests started, I went underground. The party had decided that fascism was coming to America and that the communist leadership was going to be jailed—and in fact, before the Smith Act trials stopped, more than 120 communist cadre were in jail. They wanted to outlaw the party because they had a perspective of world conquest with the atomic bomb. They wanted to use

the atomic bomb—'they,' meaning the American superstructure—as blackmail to dominate the world, to achieve certain military objectives and to eliminate opposition. And of course, they wanted to eliminate opposition in the rear, understandably enough. The party decided to fight with two central committees, one underground and one overground, which was arrested.

"But this was a mistake, because it created a conflict within the party. The overwhelming majority of the party was out in the open, trying with difficulty to understand whose orders to follow. I think, to a certain extent, that we were duped. I took tremendous precautions: I changed apartments every three months for about four years; I had met my wife under very guarded conditions maybe once every six months; I lived constantly under assumed names. But now it turns out that the FBI had eighteen thousand agents within the party, watching us, very possibly knowing at all times exactly where I was, where we all were, doing exactly what they wanted, namely keeping us underground so as to render the party ineffective.

"The party decided to surface, to abandon the underground, in 1955. By 1956, we were all out in the open again. The hysteria had somewhat died down, the Korean War was over.

We came out of the underground but I never really recuperated from it. My wife, for example, was so disgusted by the kind of existence that I had to lead that she left both me and the party. And, of course, added to that was the consequence of the Twentieth Congress. It affected me, too. I did a lot of thinking and I decided I would judge the de-Stalinization speech by Khrushchev as a class question, according to principles of class. Sure, there had been tremendous errors by the Soviet Union. The foreign policy of the Soviet Union was consistent with some of these internal errors. But, in the

*"While Stalin did, in many ways, objectively help capitalism by discrediting the policies of the Soviet Union, nevertheless, there was no class-confrontational system other than socialism, and without it imperialism would go unchallenged... everywhere."*

balance, socialism was intact. And it is socialism that has changed the world. So, despite Stalin's errors, which were very important and which set the movement back on a world scale for years and years and years, no question about it, there was no way in which socialism was going to capitulate to capitalism. While Stalin did, in many ways, objectively, help capitalism by discrediting the policies of the Soviet Union, nevertheless there was no class-confrontational system other than socialism, and without it, imperialism would go on unabated, unchallenged, unchecked everywhere in the world. So I decided not to quit the party. As far as I was concerned, I did nothing wrong. Everything I had done during my whole life was in the interest of the working class.

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**M**ilt Felsen, a University of Iowa student who had gone to Spain, returned to the University in 1939. "I had been a senior before I left and so I had only one semester to finish. Everybody on campus knew who I was so it was easy for me to start and build up some kind of progressive group, and I had a lot of fun. But when I graduated, I was blacklisted as far as teaching was concerned. I didn't have a chance of getting a job in the area. So I came to New York and started driving a truck. And I drove that truck until I went into the second world war.

"Meanwhile the Communist Party, of which I was still a member, thought that people who fought in Spain would make good guards for their leaders. So they assigned a couple of us to guard Browder and other top men. Browder had weird ideas, but Foster was the dullest man in the world. And that's who I was supposed to protect. But I learned a lot. I did not let the Russo-German pact affect me too much, since, as far as I was concerned then, Russia could do no wrong. Also I had become very suspicious of the policy of the United States, France, and England.

"After Pearl Harbor, something did happen to shake me up a bit about the party for the first time. There was a party plenum, a huge meeting, which was discussing everything, and everybody was there. I remember that people thought that I was a big shot because I went around and whispered something to all the leaders and they whispered something back to me. What they were whispering was 'ham on rye,' or 'bagel and lox' because I was only taking the orders for sandwiches. So, I went downstairs to get the sandwiches and got a glimpse of the papers which had come out with extras: Pearl Harbor had been bombed! I grabbed the papers and rushed back into the plenum. I was absolutely convinced that everything had changed, that this was going to radically alter all CP plans and programs.

"Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was making a speech, so I had to wait for an opportunity to go up on the stage. That wasn't easy. Some of those speeches could last five or six hours when the leaders were warmed up. But there was a slight break and I rushed up and showed the papers to the people on stage. Nothing changed. Everything continued exactly as it had been planned. The speeches had been prepared and nothing was going to change them. I could understand, in a way, that someone who had worked for six months or so to prepare some report was reluctant to suddenly change the whole trend of his or her reasoning in the middle of his or her point. But still, it was an incredible shock for me to see that no one called the meeting off, that no one said 'Let's get back two weeks from today, let's consider the new situation.' No. They had this meeting in gear; they were going to keep it running.

**B**ut shortly after that, I was called to Washington by O.S.S. I was told that a new outfit was going to be created. And then I met Irving Goff and a little bit later Vince Lossowski and, of course, the chief of our unit, that crazy man, Donald Downs. As discussion about our new unit continued, as our functions were defined, as more vets and communists were recruited, I real-

ized that we would end up in the very, very thick of it because we were considered expendables. In fact, if we did die during our duty, all the better. That's why they chose so many reds in O.S.S.

"Our training base was called Shangri-La. Today it is known as Camp David. My unit included Billy Aalto, as well as Irving Goff and others. Billy and Goff had been guerrilla fighters in Spain. They had done a fantastic job. They had faced death many times. They had been caught behind the lines and had to swim the Mediterranean to escape. They were unbelievable soldiers. Hemingway had based Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* on Goff. One day, Goff came to me and he said 'We've got a problem. Billy Aalto's cruising around picking up sailors in downtown Washington.' So we got together with Vince Lossowski, who was also there, and discussed it and decided that we had to turn Aalto in. To our everlasting shame! We felt that he might jeopardize the unit.

"Donovan did not handle it badly. He told Billy that he was a terrific guy, that everybody thought extremely well of him that he could choose any non-combat outfit he wanted, and made him an instructor to a group of recruits. It was there, in fact, during instruction, one day, that one of the recruits froze with a pin pulled out of a hand grenade; he just couldn't get rid of it. Aalto grabbed the hand grenade out of his hand but it exploded before he could get rid of it, and it blew his hand off. He was decorated for this and was discharged from the army. He later committed suicide.

"Neither Irv nor I, nor Vince, nor any of the other people there, ever discussed this anymore. We felt at the time that we had no alternative, that we would jeopardize the whole unit if we did not reveal this information to our superiors. But it was a terrible thing to do and we've all regretted it ever since.

**O**ur training was just ridiculous. Although in a way, perhaps, it was effective. At one point for example, Downs told Irv, Vince and me to put on German officer uniforms, complete in every detail, swastikas and everything, and go marching through downtown Washington. The rest of the outfit was following behind ready to explain things if we got into trouble. Not only didn't we get into trouble—we got saluted. Every soldier, every officer saluted us. Even the policemen in the streets saluted us. It was getting so bad that we decided to start making believe that we really were Germans by putting on a thick German accent. That didn't change anything. So we started asking 'Where's the defense plant? Where's the telephone company?' People not only saluted but gave us correct answers.

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*"[ In O.S.S. training ] we put on German officers' uniforms and marched through downtown Washington... We started asking, 'Where's the defense plant? Where's the telephone company?' People not only saluted, but gave us correct answers!"*

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"Next thing we had to do in our training was parachute jump. Well, the way they figured it, we were certainly not going to jump in the daytime, so we better jump at night. Of course, we weren't going to jump from very high either, so we better jump from very low. And of course, we weren't going to jump into an open field, so we better jump into some bushes. That's what they made us do — without any training whatsoever, we jumped from 2000 feet into some wooded area, accompanied by a doctor because they figured that we would get hurt. Well, the doctor broke his leg, Jimenez sprained his ankle, and the rest of us got knocked out.

"As to learning how to be an intelligence agent, nobody had any ideas. So they decided to show us some spy movies to get some hints. That's what we did: looked at scores of Hollywood movies from which we were supposed to learn how to behave as an agent behind the lines. We also almost got killed various times trying to ride this huge German motorcycle because they said that if we ever got caught behind the lines we might have to drive such vehicles to escape.

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*"He later became a general mainly because he looked like a general. A football player from Seattle, he was six foot two, blond, handsome and looked like Gary Cooper. What else do you do with a guy like that except make him a general?"*

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"Well, eventually we got to Oran. Our job was to go and free some 300 or so Spanish Republicans who had escaped to Africa rather than stay behind under Franco and whom the French had interned in camps and put to work building the trans-Sahara railroad. The conditions they were living in were certainly like concentration camps. Our job was to free them, which was relatively easy, and then group them into underground units and submarine them into Spain so that, if Franco decided to let the Germans go through his country to attack our flank after we made the African landing, these people would be ready to sabotage the way. But one of the guys that was brought into Spain on the submarine with these Spanish Republicans was a British officer who was a double agent. Tipped off, Franco raised such a fantastic stink to Roosevelt that Donovan stopped us from operating in Spain.

"But before we were to leave for Italy, we were asked to carry out a ridiculous operation for a colonel by the name of Sage who wanted to get some experience behind enemy lines, and he gave us orders to blow up something. Sage was a nice guy. He later became a general, because, mainly, he looked like a general. A football player from Seattle, he was six foot two, blond, handsome, looked like Gary Cooper. What else do you do with a guy like that except make him a general? But he was pleasant enough, except that he absolutely insisted that Vince and Irv and I organize a sortie be-

hind the lines. There was also this British soldier along, part of Sage's outfit, and when this guy saw a German standing on top of a Jeep, he just couldn't resist; he had never shot at the enemy, and so he did, there and then, and he hit him. Well, we happened at that point to be in the very midst of the 16th Panzer Division, one of Rommel's finest. And of course they immediately started circling in, and bullets started wheezing every which way, and I got hit.

"The bullet grazed my eye and went out the back of my ear. But the ear has an incredible supply of blood and can bleed like a son-of-a-bitch. The bullet spun me around and I fell down. Goff crawled over to me and said 'Don't worry, I'll take care of you,' and bandaged up the ear very effectively. Then we started running but at that point I became like honey to a patch of bees. Bullets were flying all over me, all around me, until I realized too late that what the Germans were zeroing in on were my white bandages. That was the only thing that they could see in the dark. I got hit again, badly. I couldn't move anymore.

I was taken with 800 British soldiers to a prison hospital in Bologna, where I was held for about six months, and then put in a ward with New Zealanders and Australians who were very rough. The prison was a religious school that had been converted and we had 25 nuns, acting as nurses, taking care of us. Everybody was very badly wounded, but everybody was always in a fantastic mood. What happened was that the nuns had asked how to say good morning in English, and the soldiers had explained that you say 'Fuck you.' They introduced themselves as Ace, King, Queen, and so on, so every morning, the nuns would come in and say 'Fuck you ace, king, queen. Fuck you, Jack.' Everybody would then burst out laughing, and be in a good mood for the rest of the day.

"Shortly thereafter, the Italian front collapsed and the Italians surrendered. We were trying to pull ourselves together in order to get the hell out of this prison camp, which was now abandoned by the Italians guarding us, when we heard an announcement saying there are crazy people out there taking shots. The announcement said, 'If you are prisoners, stay put; we will come and get you. We know where every prisoner is, don't move, we're coming, if you leave the hospital, if you leave your prison, you're going to get slaughtered out there because you become fair game for all the marauders.' Well, we were going to ignore the announcement, but the British general in charge said, 'No,' and he gave the order to some of his men who had picked up the arms abandoned by the Italians to stop us, physically if necessary. So we didn't leave and the next day, the Germans showed up — it had been a phony broadcast and we were all German prisoners of war. The general, eventually, committed suicide.

"There were a lot of things about being a prisoner that I had thought about and that I think have not been dealt with, either in fiction or in the movies or even in biographical books. You know it always appears as if somebody is digging a fucking hole trying to escape. That's not at all the way prisoners spend time. They did very little digging — there was no point. You're in the middle of Germany, so even if you do escape, where do you go?

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When I got back to the States, I had long talks with Donovan and suggested he set up some kind of class for the units that were going to be parachuted behind the lines in China and Japan. But while the discussions with Donovan were easy, they were also somewhat troubling. I understand that he considered us expendable. He wanted to win the war, and he was ready to use anybody for that purpose. He was a Wall Street lawyer, with the reputation of being a fighter. But at the same time he had certain admiration for his guys. He felt that we had done something that we believed in, and we had done it well. That's why he wanted veterans of the Spanish Civil War. Also, he knew that we had a lot more military experience than anybody else. We had recently fought Italians and Germans, we knew their equipment, we knew their plans, and we had proven ourselves in battle.

"Still, we knew that he was perfectly willing to sacrifice us, so that we were always looking—I was, anyway—behind our shoulder somewhere. And because of our background, we didn't get the kind of credit that we should have. There's no question that Irving Goff and Vince Lossowski should not only have gotten the kind of commendations that they got, but they should have come out generals, considering what they did. Had it been anybody else, they would have. The political consideration was always there. I remember being present during a discussion in Washington where, besides Donovan, there were also some other generals including Beetle Smith. They were discussing the ammunition and supplies that they were going to drop to the French underground and were worried about it. They said they shouldn't drop too much, because although they wanted the French underground to help significantly, at the same time, they didn't want them to take over because they were all left-wingers. In Yugoslavia, too, they helped both sides, Tito and his partisans, and Mihailovic and his Chetniks who ended up being fascists.

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*"[ In China ] the communist forces were doing most of the fighting while [ the ] nationalists were simply accumulating the arms to attack the reds later."*

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"The same was true in China, of course. There the communist forces were doing most of the fighting, while Chang Kai Shek's nationalists were simply accumulating the arms to attack the reds later. I was aware of all that. I was aware that I was going to be in a touchy situation in China, which is where I was being sent. But I never got there. The atomic bomb was exploded and the war ended and I got discharged.

"I went to work for the CIO. I was chief of publicity for the CIO Council, and it was in that capacity that I had a chance to see Donovan again. There was a Senate committee in Albany which was discussing the question of bonuses. Its counsel was General Donovan. Everybody wanted to speak, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, organizations like that which never dared bring up political ques-

tions. They knew that the committee was being run by Feinberg, the same Feinberg of the infamous 'Feinberg law' that passed terribly repressive legislation against teachers, outlawing their right to strike. This real ultra-rightist son of a bitch would, of course, give the floor to representatives of right wing organizations. Suddenly, Donovan saw me and Irving. He waved at us, motioned us to come up and asked us what we were speaking for I said, 'CIO,' and Irv, 'the Communist Party.' So he puts us on the list and told Feinberg that there were a couple of his boys who wanted to speak. Sure enough, I get called to speak next.

"Well, I made a fairly restrained speech. Nevertheless, the committee's eyebrows got raised. But the next speaker was Irving and he went all the way. With an impassioned voice, he started out by saying 'I represent the New York State Communist Party veterans, and then launched into an incredibly emotional, and I might say terrific, speech in which he described the world situation, slavery in the South, the history of imperialism, everything, while Feinberg and the audience were absolutely stunned. But no one dared to interrupt; after all, it was Donovan, counsel to the committee and Wall Street lawyer, who had introduced us as 'his boys.' Well, that was Donovan. He had a sense of mischief and he got a big kick out of all that.

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*"My wife had already been subpoenaed by Nixon's committee—she had been an organizer of the union at Macy's . . . She had never joined the party."*

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"But except for little incidents like that, I didn't enjoy working for C.I.O. public relations. I did my job well, but it was always for somebody else, and for somebody that I didn't quite identify with. So I went over to the electrical workers, to U.E., where I ended up staying as an organizer for a number of years. I handled the Westinghouse plant, the anaconda Wire and Cable, the San Antonio Hearing Aid, Otis Elevator, a whole bunch of places. I was good at my job and I really liked what I was doing. But then all left-wing unions started getting raided, and it was decided that UE should merge with IUE in order to avoid being ostracized completely. I did not have to be purged. I had never rejoined the Communist Party after coming back from Spain. Nevertheless, it was thought that I should just take a back seat, as an IUE organizer.

"But I was subpoenaed all the same. My wife had already been subpoenaed by Nixon's committee — she had been an organizer of the union at Macy's, had been fired and reinstated when the union had finally won, and she was subpoenaed even though she had never joined the party. And now I was subpoenaed in, I don't know, 1956, something like that. I decided that it was just as well that I left the IUE and, even though I had nothing to hide, I decided that I would not answer their questions; or, rather, I said I would answer no question prior to February 2, 1955. They jumped on that and said, 'Ah — that's the date you left the party, right?' I said 'No. It's my birthday.' Which kind of broke up the meeting.

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"As much as I have always been a workaholic, I think I've always ultimately done what I've wanted to do. I mean, there were moments when I had to compromise, perhaps, but by and large, whatever were the ulterior motives of people that I associated with, I never felt that I was used. People used to accuse me of having been an agent of the Comintern because it was the Comintern that organized the International in Spain. Well, maybe, but so what? I wasn't. I was doing what I believed in. I was fighting one of the worst kinds of despotism and reactionary regimes that has ever existed. After that, I tried to fight those same kinds of reactionary despots in the labor movement. I was not a member of the Communist Party, nor anywhere close to it by then. I was part of the losing team in Spain, I was part of the losing team in the labor movement, but I know that I was on the winning side in terms of humanity."

**G**eorge Watt, who had been a commissar in Spain, was also almost thrown out of the party prematurely, but survived that crisis and stayed on until much later. "It was the Nazi-Soviet pact that created the disorientation. We had a certain sudden shift of gears that was so fast that I didn't quite adapt quickly enough.

"After Pearl Harbor the party was more patriotic than anyone else. Some of the guys volunteered immediately. I couldn't volunteer because I had a wife and a child, but six months later they waived exemptions and I went in. I was assigned to the Army Air Corps, went to mechanic school, then volunteered to fly and became a flight engineer and an aerial machine gunner.

"In the spring of 1943, the army decided to isolate all the people that they labeled 'premature anti-fascists.' I was then a member of a flight crew that was getting ready to go overseas. We were in our final bit of training, on B-17s, but I was pulled out at the very last minute and assigned as a carpenter in an airplane factory. I asked Earl Browder, head of the party, to go directly to Eleanor Roosevelt, which he did, and I got orders to go overseas.

"I was quickly retrained with a new crew and went to England to join a bombardier group that flew missions over Germany, France, and Belgium. We were supposed to do twenty-five missions, then go home. I completed six. On my seventh, which was over the Ruhr valley, November 5, 1943, my luck ran out. We called the Ruhr valley happy valley because it was like riding a blanket of anti-aircraft. On that day I had jokingly said that nothing could happen because it was my 30th birthday.

"Which it was. But we got some pretty heavy ackack just the same. And a hit: our belly machine gun was put out of commission. Then the left number one engine was hit and caught fire. The pilot managed to go into a dive to snuff out the fire, which was an oil fire and not gasoline, and continued to navigate the course. But we couldn't keep up to the formation. We just didn't have the power. Some of our fighters protected us across Germany, but once we were in Belgium they left us.

"We were flying at 33,000 feet, so the pilot asked for an oxygen check. The tail gunner did not respond. Since I was in the waist gun position and that had also been knocked out, the pilot asked me to check on the tail gunner. I crawled back there and found that he had almost passed out. His oxygen mask was not on. He had been knocked away from his post by some explosion but he was not wounded. I gave him some of my oxygen and he came to, then I pushed him back to where he could reach his own mask, and I took over his gun position.

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*"I was sent to Officers Candidate school where I did very well. But . . . instead of getting my commission, I was charged with being a subversive and got discharged."*

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"No sooner did I get settled in than a German fighter came up behind us, straight at me. As he came he had me in his sights, I had him in my sights. We both opened up fire simultaneously, but my gun jammed. And as he flew past, he must have hit the front instrument panel, wounding the pilot, because we started going into a nosedive. I looked back for my chest parachute, but I couldn't find it. When the plane had taken a nosedive all the chutes had slid forward. Luckily, since we had been at very high altitude, when we hit 20,000 feet, the pressure eased. Unlike other planes, B-17s have very wide wings and are therefore slower, with a tendency to take up air speed which would force the plane to level off momentarily before taking its next dive.

"When ours did level off, I felt a tremendous amount of energy unleashed in me and I was able to move quickly. I saw my chest pack, crawled to it, snapped it on, and rushed to the waist door, which I tried to open. But it wouldn't give. So, as the plane started diving again, I hit it with my shoulder, with all the strength I had, and the next thing I knew I was out. I found myself spinning over and over, going down.

"Suddenly everything was very quiet. The noise of the plane had disappeared. My ears were deaf from the pressure of coming down. I still did not open the chute. I allowed myself to fall for as long as I thought was safe so that enemy fighters could not machinegun me in the air, as was their habit. Finally I went to pull the cord, but there wasn't any. In the moment of excitement and stress, my earliest indoctrination had come back; I had been trained on chutes that had the D-ring on the left side. I panicked for what seemed to me a hell of a long time before I finally realized that the string was on the other side. I pulled it and out came the little chute which slowly opened up and then pulled out the big chute. Suddenly I was yanked up and floating quietly, serenely towards the land.

"When I landed, I walked over to a man and asked him for directions. But he just grinned; he didn't understand French, he was Flemish. A whole bunch of people started rushing towards me, but nobody seemed to know which way I should go. Except one man who looked as if he knew. I followed his lead. After awhile everybody else dropped out, and there was

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just the two of us. The next day I was safely under the direction of the underground.

"I got to Gibraltar and from there back to England. I volunteered to fly some more, but a regulation said that once you've been captured you're not to fly or fight in the same theater again. I guess the reason was that if you're captured a second time, you could be tortured to reveal how you escaped. So I was sent back to Tampa, Florida for new training, then to officers candidate school, where I did very well. But when I came up before a review board, instead of getting my commission, I was charged with being a subversive, and got discharged.

**I** returned to civilian life and went to work for the Communist Party. Browder had been repudiated by the party, which was trying to reestablish its connections with the workers of basic industries, part of a program to get cadres into the key industries and to build a base in these industries.

"I was a truck driver for about six months, then was sent to work with Teamsters on the waterfront. I stayed there for about a year and a half. Then I became section organizer for the New York waterfront. It was a difficult period for me because the racketeering element was very strong on the waterfront, and Joe Curran, whom we had put into power before the war, was now turning right wing and was working closely with the racketeers. But it was tough elsewhere, as the CIO was purging all leftwingers and leftwing unions.

"When the cold war heated up with the Korean War, the party ordered me to go underground. I was working with Steve Nelson who was in the open and had just gotten a twenty year sentence but was out on bail. Theoretically he was running the party in Pittsburgh. In fact he couldn't. So I

was running it from the underground. But I, too, got arrested in 1953, and went on trial under the Smith Act. Eventually I got five years, but I never served any of them, because the appeal came out in our favor. My feeling is that we ought not to have gone under, that we should have stayed overground and fought the arrests and used the trials to keep the Communist Party in the vanguard of the struggle. It was a big mistake to go underground.

"But there were many more mistakes, and much more serious ones. The main one was that we gave up our own independence. The CPUSA was not an independent party. Its

*"In the spring of 1943 the Army decided to isolate all the people that they labelled 'premature anti-fascists'... We were in our final bit of training on B-17s, but I was pulled out and assigned as a carpenter in an airplane factory."*

ideological and philosophical foundation rested in the Soviet Union. It was totally unable to adapt to American conditions. For me all this was crystallized with the Khrushchev revelations and I finally left the party in 1958.

"I decided to try to get an ordinary job, to go into a shop and become a worker and get back into the trade union movement. The trade I chose was printing and I learned it. I also went back to school, got my bachelors degree, then a masters in social work. I became very active in the reform movement of the democratic party. I got a job as a community organizer, doing some of the same things I'd been doing all my life, which was organizing tenant councils, working for welfare recipients, general stuff that one does when one is a community organizer."

## GRANDSON OF S. I.

The connection between the ideology of the Right — what it says it stands for, and its program (what it really *wants* to do) — is rarely made as explicit as it is in Senate Bill 1630.

S. 1630, also known as the Criminal Code Reform Act, is the great-grandson of the Nixon administration's infamous S. 1.

Some of S. 1630's provisions include the following:

- *Obscenity.* Gets anyone who "disseminates obscene material to any person" whether by selling it or just giving it away. Casts into the stone the test "material that . . . would be found by an average person, applying contemporary community standards, to appeal to prurient interests. Also includes the test "appeals to the prurient interests of a sexually deviant class of person"; that class is not defined.

- *Engaging in a Riot, Obstructing Government Function by Physical Interference, Obstructing a Proceeding by Disorderly Conduct.* In the latter offense, "disorderly conduct" includes "noise that is unreasonable," and "violent or tumultuous behavior."

- *Draft Provisions.* Draft evaders get three years and \$250,000 fine, draft counsellors get six years and a \$250,000 fine.

- *Anti-Nuke Activities.* Any property damage at a facility "involved in the production, storage, or distribution of electricity, fuel or another form or source of energy" can get you five years.

- *Freedom of the Press, Government Whistle-Blowers.* New protection for "National Defense" and "Classified Information." Reporters protecting their sources may be

found to "Hinder Law Enforcement." Creates an offense of "revealing private information submitted for a government purpose."

- *Attempt, Conspiracy, Solicitation.* Broad and frightening. Talking about, planning or encouraging someone to attend a demonstration that **obstructs** government functions, for **example**, can get you the same punishment as actually committing the act.

- *Preventive Detention.* Gives judge broad new discretion to deny bail and to jail persons accused of a crime prior to their trial. So much for innocent until proven guilty.

- *Pot.* Possession of marijuana: 1 year and \$25,000 fine. Sale of marijuana: a felony, three years and a \$25,000 fine.

by Scott Brookie

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