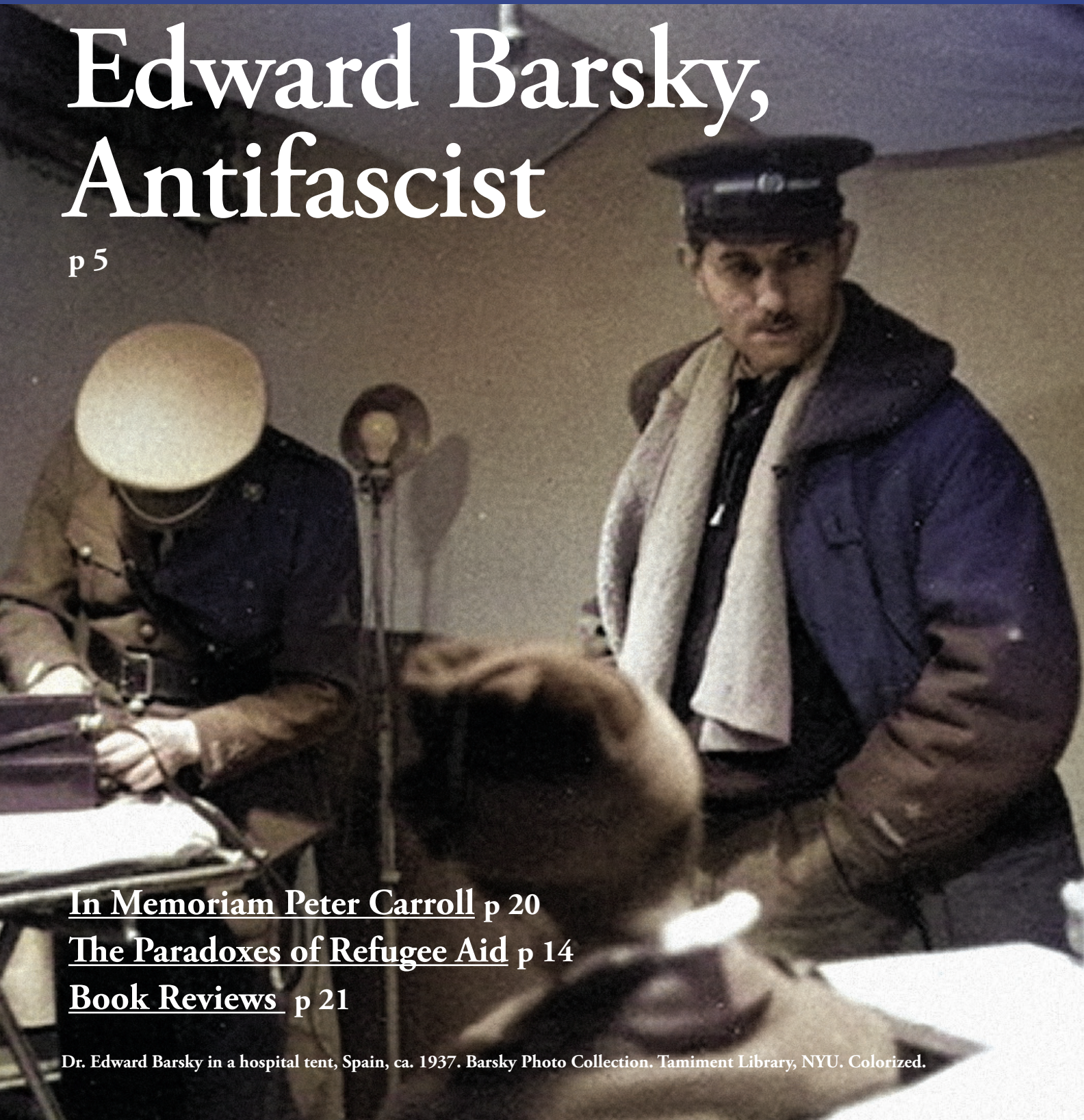


# The Volunteer

FOUNDED IN 1937 BY THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE LINCOLN BRIGADE.  
PUBLISHED BY THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVES (ALBA)

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# The Volunteer

Founded by the Veterans of the Abraham  
Lincoln Brigade

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The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) is an educational non-profit dedicated to promoting social activism and the defense of human rights. ALBA's work is inspired by the American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade who fought fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Drawing on the ALBA collections in New York University's Tamiment Library, and working to expand such collections, ALBA works to preserve the legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade as an inspiration for present and future generations.

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Dear Friends,

The past couple of months have been marked by losses. As we were still reeling from the sudden passing of Peter Carroll, longtime ALBA chair and editor of *The Volunteer*, we had to find a way to process the outcome of the elections—in the runup to which we partnered with 18by Vote to bring young people to the polls.

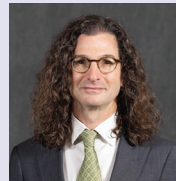
Like many of you, we're worried about what lies ahead. At ALBA, we're gearing up for what will no doubt be an intensified barrage of attacks on the values we have always defended: democracy, civil rights, solidarity, social justice, and education. But, with your and our partners' support, we are also determined to redouble our efforts as we continue to do what we do best: educate this country and the world about the many ways in which the history of antifascism and internationalism can inspire us today.

This is not a difficult argument to make. At our annual New York teacher workshop in November, as we read Henry Wallace's 1944 piece in the *New York Times* on the dangers of American fascism, the teachers were struck by the uncanny parallels with our political present. Similarly, it's been touching to see how many grandchildren of Lincoln veterans proudly embrace their family's antifascist legacy. At our end-of-year get-together in New York on December 7, we'll screen a cinematic compilation of their testimonies.

The bulk of this issue is dedicated to one of those veterans: Dr. Edward Barsky (1895-1975), the remarkable New York surgeon who saved so many lives during the Spanish war, innovating frontline medicine in the process. After the war, he became a pioneer in refugee aid—and one of the most prominent victims of McCarthyism. "The Un-American Activities Committee had no principles," he told Richard Avedon and Doon Arbus in 1969. "They were just a bunch of bastards, you see. They were un-American. ... We knew we were right. You didn't have to be a magician—or a god—to know that."

We'd like to thank Nancy Phillips, a longtime admirer of Barsky's work, for her generous sponsorship of this issue. We can't tell you how thrilling it is to be a part of such a generous, supportive community. We're going to need all your help in the years to come. But we know we can count on you.

¡Salud!



Aaron Retish,  
Chair of the Board of  
Governors



Sebastian Faber,  
Co-Editor

P.S. We especially welcome gifts in Peter Carroll's memory to the Peter N. Carroll Antifascist Education Fund. <https://alba-valb.org/donate/>. We are preparing a memorial event for this spring. We'll keep you informed through our email newsletter.

P.S. (2) We are thrilled to welcome Prof. James D. Fernández to the *Volunteer's* editorial team.

## AABI Still Awaits Royal Decree to Confirm Citizenship Law

The Friends of the International Brigades (AABI) has expressed concern about the inexplicable delay affecting article 33 of the 2022 Law of Democratic Memory, which allows descendants of International Brigade volunteers to apply for Spanish Citizenship. The 166 applications AABI has helped prepare to date are in bureaucratic limbo as long as the *Boletín Oficial del Estado* has not yet published the Royal Decree that would activate article 33. For the time being, therefore, AABI will suspend processing applications.

For more articles, see *The Volunteer's* online edition  
at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org)

# ALBA NEWS

## Join Us for a Film Premiere on December 7

In late 2023, we sent out a call to the ALBA community requesting short videos from grandchildren of *Brigadistas* sharing memories of their grandparents and what it meant to carry on the legacy. The many moving responses we received are now hosted on [our webpage](#). Given the quality of the testimonies, we decided to create an 18-minute compilation of the testimonies, which will be premiered at ALBA's end-of-year gathering on Saturday, December 7th. Please join us. It will be a great opportunity to gather and discuss what it means to preserve the Lincolns' legacy, the paths that led the Lincolns to Spain, and how we put their example into action in our lives.

**Saturday, December 7th**

**Doors Open at 12:30 PM ET**

**Event Begins at 1 PM ET**

**Followed by Open Discussion and Catered Reception**

**Tickets \$40 : [www.eventbrite.com/e/a-grand-tribute-tickets-1053352639099](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/a-grand-tribute-tickets-1053352639099)**

## ALBA's Film Series Continues

ALBA's new film series, hosted as part of the Peter N. Carroll Antifascist Education Fund, continues on December 18, at 4 pm ET, with a discussion of Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* (1995), led by Lisa Berger, a Barcelona-based producer who collaborated with Loach on the film. Anyone registering for the event will receive a special introductory video produced for this occasion. Participants are asked to watch the introduction and the film itself before the discussion. To register, visit ALBA's event calendar at [alba-valb.org/EventCalendar](http://alba-valb.org/EventCalendar).

On January 22, ALBA's own Steve Birnbaum will lead a discussion on a legendary East German film on the Spanish Civil War, Frank Beyer's *Five Cartridges (Fünf Patronenhülsen, 1960)*. Later this spring, Hemingway expert Alex Vernon will lead a discussion on the Hollywood classic *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Earlier this fall, hundreds—including many teachers—joined for three lively and informative discussions on Michael Curtis's *Casa-blanca*, Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive*, and Joris Ivens' *The Spanish Earth*, respectively led by Peter Carroll, Sebastiaan Faber, and Jo Labanyi. As part of the Labor Film Fest in Madison, WI, ALBA also cosponsored a screening of three Spanish Civil War documentaries, including *The Good Fight* (Noel Buckner, Mary Dore, Sam Sills), *Into the Fire* (Julia Newman), and *The Last Cause*, (Stephen K. Franklin and Alex Cramer). The screenings were curated by Ronald Kent.

## Susman Lecture: Marion Nestle

On November 20, Marion Nestle gave ALBA's annual Susman Lecture, reflecting on her upbringing as a red diaper baby. A leading nutrition scholar and the author of award-winning books on food politics, Marion Nestle is professor emerita at NYU. Her father, Ted Zittel, was a labor publicist, most notably for the strike against the Brass Rail Restaurant in New York City. Doing research for her memoir, *Slow Cooked*, Nestle discovered that, when she was a toddler, she was featured in a *Daily Worker* ad to support the Spanish Republic.

## Teachers from New York and Elsewhere Join ALBA Workshop

On Election Day, ALBA held its annual workshop for New York teachers on "The United States and World Fascism: Human Rights from the Spanish Civil War to Nuremberg and Beyond." The full-day workshop drew participants not just from New York City but also from other parts of the United States, as well as Spain and the Netherlands, who engaged in lively discussion about the continued relevance of the Lincolns' antifascist legacy for young people today.

## Dr. Edward Barsky Remembered

This coming February 11, ALBA will pay tribute to Dr. Edward Barsky (1895-1975), who is also featured in this issue, with an online event to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. More details to follow.

## Watt Jury Identifies Winners

The jury of ALBA's annual George Watt Essay Prize has concluded its deliberations, identifying winners in the pre-college, college, and graduate categories. This year, yet again, saw a high number of submissions. Excerpts of the winning essays will be published in the March issue.

## Einstein Forum Celebrates Paul Robeson

The Einstein Forum in Berlin, led by the US philosopher Susan Neiman, held a three-day conference on the life, music, and activism of Paul Robeson, with a slate of prominent speakers that included Susan Robeson, Albie Sachs, Margaret Burnham, Victor Grossman, and Penny Von Eschen. Peter Carroll's contribution on Robeson and the Spanish Civil War was presented by Sebastiaan Faber. The lectures can be viewed at [www.einstein-forum.de/tagung/the-universalism-of-paul-robeson/](http://www.einstein-forum.de/tagung/the-universalism-of-paul-robeson/)

## ALBA Joins 18by Vote in Pre-Election Campaign

This election season, ALBA joined 18by Vote, winner of the 2024 ALBA/Puffin Award, in a campaign to draw young voters to the polls. ALBA's contribution included a social media blitz and video messages from members of the ALBA board and honorary board, including Karen Nussbaum.

# An ALBA Tribute to Edward K. Barsky (1895-1975)

The *Volunteer* is thrilled to honor Dr. Barsky on the fiftieth anniversary of his death.

When Dr. Edward K. Barsky passed away, in February 1975, his *New York Times* obituary described him as the doctor “who left his post as a surgeon in New York to join the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War”; who “helped Spanish republican refugees” after the war; and who “was convicted of contempt of Congress in 1947 for refusing, with other members of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, to turn over the group’s records” to the House Un-American Activities Committee. As a result of this conviction, Barsky lost his license to practice medicine.

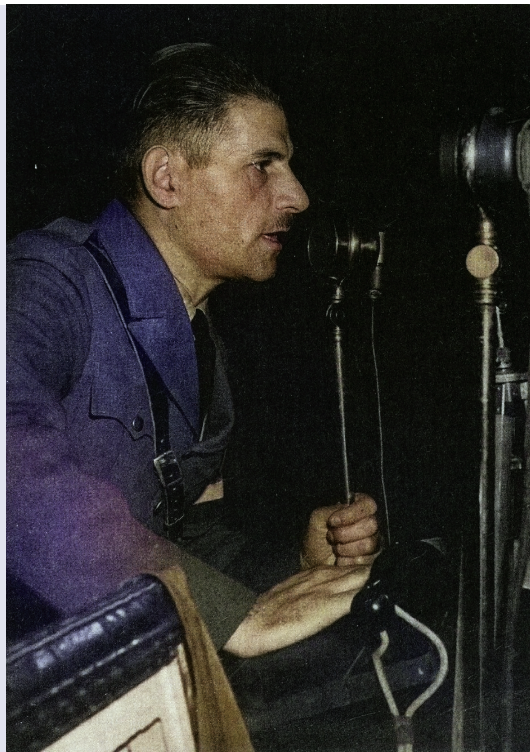
In this special *Volunteer* tribute to Dr. Barsky, you will find stories about all these aspects of Barsky’s work on behalf of Spanish democracy. We are also proud to include a handful of texts by the surgeon himself, who, despite being naturally shy and self-effacing, was an inspiring public speaker.

“When you go before the Un-American Activities Committee, you’re not just a man—or a woman—picked out of the air,” he told Richard Avedon and Doon Arbus six years earlier, as he sat for a portrait that would appear in the book *The Sixties*:

You’re somebody who has something to do with something. And that something should be a matter of principle to you. The Un-American Activities Committee had no principles. They were just a bunch of bastards, you see. They were un-American. So when I was up there and they asked me questions, I wouldn’t answer them. If I hadn’t gone to Spain, I wouldn’t be here talking to you, you know? And I wouldn’t have gone to jail, and I wouldn’t have lived that kind of a life. And I’m proud and happy that I did live that kind of life. ... We knew we were right. It was a very simple thing as far as we were concerned. It was the simplest thing. You didn’t have to be a magician—or a god—to know that.

This clarity of vision accompanied Barsky throughout his life and work. As head of the American medical unit in Spain, he was indefatigable. “Every operation that Dr. Edward Barsky performed was really a work of art,” Mildred Rackley recalled in the pamphlet *From a Hospital in Spain*. “One night at 2 o’clock, in the middle of an operation, the battery went dead. All of us ran for our flashlights, and with the feeble glimmer of eight flashlights, Dr. Barsky finished removing a shattered kidney.”

Always generous and self-effacing, Barsky shunned the limelight and often credited the Spanish people with modeling for him what courage ought to look like. “I remember in Barcelona



when they used to bomb us every two hours—on the clock. ... And I would see young girls standing in the street, old women, old men, shaking their fists and cursing at the planes. But they had that courage.”

He credits the wounded patients that he treated under the most horrific conditions with giving him strength: “It is inspiring to witness the wonderful spirit that all the wounded have—they try to assist each other and cooperate with everyone. It is only because they—each and every one of them—know that they are fighting and why they are fighting that they are able to carry on as they do. ... They know what it is all about.”

He was, moreover, always sure to credit his team of health-care professionals – the nurses in particular – for the “wonderful work” they did in the most difficult of circumstances, singling out their clarity, endurance, and bravery: “These girls have worked under all sorts of strain with a willingness and courage that, between you and me, is a source of inspiration to the doctors.”

Dr. Barsky, always the team player, might have balked at the idea of being singled out for praise in a tribute like this special issue of *The Volunteer*. He would have been the first to remind us, like so many volunteers have done throughout the years, that in fighting for the cause of Spain, he received more than he gave. ▲

## Barsky Award

The Edward Barsky Award, established in 1984, is an international prize granted annually at the Health Activist Dinner, which is celebrated during the meetings of the American Public Health Association. The dinner traces its roots to the Physicians Forum (1941), in which Barsky played a leading role. The first physicians’ organization to propose a national comprehensive healthcare system for the United States, the Forum fought for full rights for African American physicians and other minority health workers, and helped found the Medical Committee for Human Rights and Physicians for Social Responsibility. The Forum opposed the Vietnam War and U.S. intervention in Central America, while supporting health workers in Cuba, Chile, and Nicaragua. Later, its members helped draft Senator Edward Kennedy’s health care legislation and Ron Dellums’ National Health Service Act. More information at [HealthActivistDinner.org](http://HealthActivistDinner.org).

# A GIANT OF A MAN: THE SACRIFICES OF EDWARD BARSKY

By Phillip Deery

Self-effacing and shy though he was, Dr. Edward Barsky's experience in Spain made him an outspoken activist, tireless organizer, innovative frontline surgeon, and political prisoner. "Eddie is a saint," Hemingway wrote. "That's where we put our saints in this country—in jail."

Edward K. Barsky was born in New York in 1895, attended Townsend Harris High School, and graduated from Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1919. He undertook postgraduate training in Europe and, on return, commenced an internship in 1921 at Beth Israel Hospital in New York, where he became Associate Surgeon in 1931 and where he established a flourishing practice. His father was also a surgeon at Beth Israel, and his two brothers, George and Arthur, also became doctors. Barsky's private practice focused on industrial injuries and workers' compensation cases that required surgery.



In 1935, Barsky, along with a great many other New York Jews, joined the Communist Party of the USA. This profoundly shaped his outlook on developments in Europe. Fascism was then ascendant, but in Spain there was hope. When the pro-fascist army generals arose against the elected Republican government in July 1936, Barsky realized, like Orwell, that this was a state of affairs worth fighting for. As he told a reporter, "I came to Spain for very simple reasons. Nothing complicated. As an American I could not stand by and see a fellow democracy kicked around by Mussolini and Hitler...I wanted to help Republican Spain."

As casualties mounted, Barsky acted. In October 1936, he founded the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy. After frantically fundraising and then collecting, storing, and loading provisions to equip an entire hospital in Spain, Barsky—along with sixteen doctors,

nurses, and ambulance drivers—sailed for Spain on January 16, 1937. This was just three weeks after the first American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade had departed.

Barsky assumed control of the medical service within the International Brigade and his contributions and initiatives were significant. He established and headed seven front-line, evacuation, and base hospitals; refined the operating techniques of medical surgery under fire; pioneered a surgical procedure for removing bullets and shrapnel from chest wounds; and helped create the mobile surgical hospital that became a model for the U.S. Army in World War II.

In July 1937 he took a brief leave from the front lines, to return to New York to raise funds for more medical aid. He addressed 20,000 at a rally in Madison Square Garden. When he returned (and he stayed in Spain until October 1938), he was made an honorary major in the Spanish Republican Army. In 1944 he wrote the autobiographical 302-page *Surgeon Goes to War*, which captures his deep commitment to and empathy with the Spanish cause. When the celebrated author of *Citizen Tom Paine*, Howard Fast, first met Barsky in late 1945, he described him as "a lean, hawklike man, handsome, commanding, evocative in appearance of Humphrey Bogart, a heroic figure who was already a legend." According to Fast, he was "a giant of a man, tempered out of steel, yet quiet and humble."

## The Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee

From various organizations (United American Spanish Aid Committee, American Committee to Save Refugees and American Rescue Ship Mission) and individuals (especially veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade) that supported the Spanish Republic during the civil war, the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee (JAFRC) was born on March 11, 1942. The driving force was Barsky. With the Loyalists' defeat in 1939, an exodus of more than 500,000 Republican Spanish refugees spilled over the Pyrenees into France. Most congregated in overcrowded refugee camps and then, from 1940 after the German occupation, were conscripted as laborers or sent to concentration camps. Thousands died in the Mauthausen camp. Thirty thousand were interned in North Africa. Eighteen thousand who escaped incarceration fought alongside the French Resistance (as well as de Gaulle's Free French in Algeria). Some remained in Franco's Spain, underground, attempting to avoid imprisonment or death. Others escaped to Spanish-speaking countries: Mexico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic.

In the immediate aftermath of the civil war, Barsky—with his direct experience behind him but his visceral attachment to Spain intact—became preoccupied with the plight of these Spanish refugees. This preoccupation led directly to the establishment of the JAFRC, and the refugees were its *raison d'être*. Under Barsky's indefatigable leadership, the JAFRC acquired legitimacy during World War II. Licensed to provide aid by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's War Relief Control Board, it was granted tax-exempt status by the Treasury Department. The committee raised funds, formed sixteen chapters in major American cities, established orphanages, and strenuously opposed Franco's regime. As Barsky told dinner guests at the opening of the Spanish Refugee Appeal, which sought to raise \$750,000, in March 1945: "Our program consists of relief, rehabilitation, medical care, transportation and associated welfare services, in many parts of the world. . . . Who will help [the refugees]? We! We are the only people to help them. We help them or they die."

The Spanish Refugee Appeal sent thousands of dollars and tons of food, clothing, and medicines to Spanish refugees in both France and North Africa. The Unitarian Service Committee and the American Friends Service Committee, the latter a Quaker organization, distributed this relief on behalf of the JAFRC. An examination of the records of the Unitarian Service Committee reveals the very close working relationship with the JAFRC and the devotion of both to assisting refugees. The extensive correspondence dating back to 1941 does not contain a whiff of "communist front" about it. Instead, as one report later noted, the work of the JAFRC "was a work of mercy; it sheltered the



homeless, fed the hungry, healed the sick." Material and legal support was given to other refugees to emigrate to one of the few countries that welcomed them—Mexico. There, a school for refugee children was built and the Edward K. Barsky Sanatorium was opened when the JAFRC collected \$50,000 after a national fundraising campaign in January 1945.

## HUAC

On May 4, 1949, Barsky received some good news. His reappointment as surgeon at Beth Israel hospital, where he had worked since 1923, had been confirmed for another two years. Twelve months later, he received some disturbing news, and his life was changed irrevocably. He learnt that the Supreme Court had upheld a decision that he should serve a six-month sentence in a federal penitentiary. Upon his release, he learnt that his license to practice medicine would be revoked. These misfortunes had nothing to do with medical malpractice or professional incompetence. On the contrary, he was widely respected and trusted by patients, colleagues and hospital administrators. Instead, Barsky was paying the heavy price for a political decision he made in 1945—that, as chairman of the JAFRC, he would not cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). It was a fateful decision. He did not know it then, but for Eddie Barsky, the Cold War at home had started.

The JAFRC was the first to be subpoenaed by HUAC, the first to challenge HUAC's legitimacy, and the first to set the pattern for Cold War inquisitions. In 1950, after three years of unsuccessful legal appeals, the JAFRC's entire executive board was jailed. Coming before the Hollywood Ten trial and the Smith Act prosecutions, this mass political incarceration was the first since the Palmer Raids nearly thirty years before and the biggest during the McCarthy era. Barsky received the most severe sentence.

*As an American I could not stand by and see a fellow democracy kicked around by Mussolini and Hitler.*

Upon release, Barsky lost his right to practice medicine. By early 1955, the JAFRC had dissolved: Like Barsky's career, it had been crippled by McCarthyism. The actions against Barsky and the JAFRC were a historical marker. They signaled the first flexing of political muscle by HUAC, which saw its confrontation with JAFRC as a litmus test of its legitimacy. Because HUAC, not the JAFRC, triumphed, the framework was established for future congressional inquisitions that were to become such an emblematic feature of McCarthyism. What follows is an outline of how a once-flourishing medical career was thwarted and a once-viable organization was destroyed.

## Persecution

HUAC subpoenaed Barsky and the JAFRC's stalwart administrative secretary, Helen Reid Bryan, to appear before it in Washington on December 19, 1945. They were to "produce all books, ledgers, records, and papers relating to the receipt and disbursement of money" by the JAFRC, together with "all correspondence and memoranda of communications by any means whatsoever with persons in foreign countries." On December 1, HUAC had requested the president's War Control Board to cancel the JAFRC's license to collect and distribute funds for the relief of Spanish refugees in Europe. The executive board held a special meeting on December 14 and unanimously adopted a resolution "to protect the rights of this Committee and its supporters" from HUAC. It would not surrender its records. In early January 1946, Barsky wrote to all contributors explaining the position of the JAFRC executive board. He cited a recent speech by Congressman Ellis Patterson (D.-Calif.), who called for the dissolution of HUAC, describing it as a "sham" that "violated every concept of American democracy." That a showdown with HUAC loomed was implied by Barsky's concluding remarks: The JAFRC was "determined to continue its humanitarian and relief work" and would "let nothing stand in the way of providing this aid."

Why did HUAC swoop on Barsky and the JAFRC? There were several reasons, best encapsulated by Congressman Karl Mundt's argument that the JAFRC was engaged not merely in disseminating un-American, anti-Franco propaganda but also in "secret and nefarious activities." FBI files confirm that, by 1944, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover believed that the JAFRC was actually subversive. He was convinced, by two different "confidential" sources, that veterans of the closely associated Abraham Lincoln Brigade, who had been trained in military warfare, would

"lead the vanguard of the revolution in this country." Funds raised by the JAFRC, ostensibly for Spaniards' relief, would assist that goal. Given the symbiotic relationship between the FBI and HUAC (in February 1946, a conference of senior FBI officials resolved to provide covert support to HUAC), it is probable that underpinning HUAC's postwar harassment of the JAFRC was Hoover's longstanding anticommunist crusade.

The closed executive session of HUAC that interrogated Barsky began on February 13. Barsky was not one whom HUAC could easily intimidate. Dressed in his "impeccably-clad double-breasted suit" and with his "business-like manner," there was a "sureness about his manner, his talk, his gestures." Throughout the hearings, he retained his dignity. Some HUAC members did not. Even at a distance of nearly eighty years, their rudeness, intimidation, capriciousness, and sheer bullying during these closed congressional hearings astonishes and shocks the reader of the transcripts.

Although Barsky wrote individually signed letters, twice, to every congressman, the only correspondence he provided to HUAC, upon request, was the names and addresses of all executive board members. This enabled the next round in the congressional committee's offensive against the JAFRC. On March 16, 1946, every member of the executive board (in addition to Bryan and Barsky) was cited for contempt of Congress. Astonishingly, none of these individuals had been subpoenaed, none had appeared before HUAC, and none was given any opportunity to answer any questions.

This made no difference to members of HUAC. To Mundt, the JAFRC was "honeycombed" with communists, was "bringing foreigners to America," and was "trying to destroy the things for which our flag stands"; to J. Parnell Thomas, the JAFRC was "a vehicle used by the Communist Party and the world Communist movement to force political, diplomatic, and economic disunity." The JAFRC had become the enemy within. John Rankin hoped that the House of Representatives would "support the committee and let the world know that we are going to protect this country from destruction at the hands of the enemies within our gates." The House complied. By a staggering majority, 339 to 4, the House voted in favor of citing Barsky for contempt of Congress.

Thereafter, all remaining sixteen executive board members were served with subpoenas. All appeared before HUAC, all refused to hand over any books or records, and all were



cited. Legal representation was denied. Once again, the proceedings became aggressive. Recalcitrance was met with truculence. When the soft-spoken Professor Lyman Bradley was interrogated, a report noted, HUAC members “were exceedingly abusive in language and demeanor.” The congressional confirmation of this mass contempt citation in April 1947 resulted in the House of Representatives voting 292 in favor, 56 against, and 82 abstentions.

Twelve months passed before the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia, on March 31, 1947, heard the indictment initiated by Justice Department prosecutors. The board was charged with “having conspired to defraud the United States by preventing the Congressional Committee from obtaining the records.” This changed a misdemeanor (contempt) into a felony (conspiracy) and thereby jeopardized the license to practice of doctors and lawyers (both well represented on the JAFRC board). When appealing for funds to cover immediate legal expenses Barsky rightly wrote that “This case against us is a potential threat to the civil liberties of all Americans.”

On June 16, 1947, the eighteen executive board members of the JAFRC were brought to trial in the Federal District Court of Washington. Eleven days later, the federal court jury convicted all eighteen board members of contempt. Immediately after the guilty verdict, five defendants got cold feet. They “purged” their contempt by recanting and resigning from the JAFRC board. Their sentences were suspended. The remainder, except Barsky, were sentenced to jail for three months and fined \$500 each; Barsky received a six-month sentence. He received hundreds of letters of support, from Pablo Picasso in France to this unknown woman in Milwaukee: “My heart is sad by your suffering. I only wish I could give more. All the money I have to give is in this envelope. I gladly give my widow’s mite.” The thirteen convicted JAFRC members served notices of appeal and released on bond, but their drawn-

out appeals were unsuccessful and three years later were incarcerated.

## Imprisonment

On the day the board members commenced their jail sentences, June 7, 1950, a solitary line of about fifty veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade marched outside the White House. Their placards read “No Jail for Franco’s Foes” and “Franco was Hitler’s Pal.” A more “respectable” protest to the president was made by Francis Fisher Kane, an “old member of the Philadelphia Bar” and U.S. Attorney General under Woodrow Wilson. He “earnestly” requested that Truman commute the sentences imposed, because imprisonment was “a denial of justice and a blot upon American liberty.” Washington prison authorities, meanwhile, were itemizing the clothes of their new inmates—in Barsky’s case, a green hat, blue shirt, gray and yellow necktie, and brown pants and coat. He became Prisoner No. 18907. Ernest Hemingway (who met Barsky in Spain) transfigured him into a martyr: “Eddie is a saint. That’s where we put our saints in this country—in jail.”

The thirteen prisoners came from a range of backgrounds—academic, legal, literary, medical, labor union, and business. Initially, the male detainees were confined to the District of Columbia prison in Washington. The female board members were sent to the Federal Penitentiary for Women at Alderston, West Virginia. They were treated no different from the common criminal: handcuffed, stripped, processed naked, fingerprinted twice, showered, given faded blue uniforms, and locked in a shared cell five by seven feet in a towering prison block. After nine days, the men were deliberately scattered, being sent to Connecticut, Kentucky and West Virginia.

Barsky was sent to an isolated penitentiary, the Federal Reformatory in Petersburg, Virginia, 400 miles from New York. There, he lost twenty-five pounds, suffered from ulcers, was permitted only two visiting hours per month from his wife only, and was not permitted to do any medical work, only menial work. Coupled with the psychological strain of the past four years of criminal and civil litigations and appeals, his months in this remote jail would have tested his resilience. He would also have been concerned by the financial effects on his dependent wife, Vita, and two-year-old daughter, Angela, of his prolonged cessation of income. According to his lawyer, they “suffered extreme hardship during his incarceration.” Because of his regular and substantial donations to the Spanish Refugee Appeal, Barsky’s family had no reservoir of savings on which to draw.

A heartfelt, handwritten, two-page letter was sent to him from an acquaintance (“I don’t know if you remember me”), Samuel Anderman. The letter is worth noting be-



*He was a giant of a man, tempered out of steel, yet quiet and humble. —Howard Fast  
HUAC saw its confrontation with the JAFRC as a litmus test of its legitimacy.*

cause it illustrates how the persecution of Barsky touched a great many Americans unconnected with the JAFRC. After telling Barsky that his jailing had had a “profound effect” on him, Anderman continued: “There are many people like myself around, who are not sleeping easily while you and other patriotic Americans are being jailed. . . . Be of good cheer. This period is a severe trial but every great man has had to suffer for his convictions. Your suffering is not in vain.”

Barsky was freed from Petersburg on November 7. He was in time to both greet and say farewell to his loyal, steadfast secretary, Helen Bryan, as she began her three-month sentence on November 13. The night before, 200 friends, including Barsky, attended her farewell party at Fairfax Hall in New York. It was the final function he attended as JAFRC chairman. He resigned as officer, director, and member of the JAFRC in January 1951.

It could not have been easy for Barsky to relinquish the organization he had founded nearly a decade earlier. It was pivotal to his existence. According to a JAFRC staffer, “We never saw anybody with such single-mindedness. His entire life is wrapped up in the work of helping the refugees, in helping Spain.” He himself told a reporter: “Best committee in America. No committee in America has this tradition.” The reporter noted that it was near-impossible to get Barsky off the subject of the work of the JAFRC, about which he slipped into “lyricism.”

## License Lost

If he thought deprivation of freedom would end upon his release from jail, Barsky was wrong. Another round of harassment commenced; another fight to resist it became necessary. It concerned not his political or humanitarian activities for the JAFRC, although these continued to stalk him, but his right to practice medicine. And it did not end until 1955, by which time the JAFRC announced its own dissolution. During his time in Petersburg penitentiary, Barsky’s medical license was revoked. The expectation was that restoration would be a formality.

At the hearing of the powerful Board of Regents, which decided his fate, the Assistant Attorney General of the state of New York, Sidney Tartikoff (for the Board), focused on the “communist front” activities of the JAFRC, the contempt of Congress citation, the constitutionality of HUAC, and, especially, the Attorney General’s List of Subversive Organizations that included the JAFRC. None of these issues, for which Barsky had endured five

months in prison and five years of litigation, was relevant to medical competence. None of these issues involved “moral turpitude,” the customary concern of the Board. None of the dozens of testimonials counted. Barsky was found guilty of nothing, other than his failure to produce records subpoenaed by a congressional committee. The Board revoked Edward Barsky’s medical registration, first issued in 1919, for a period of six months. No reasons were given. Subsequent appeals were all unsuccessful, and on June 25, 1954, the suspension of Barsky’s medical license took effect.

Eventually, Barsky picked up the threads of his practice. Unlike the organization he founded and to which he was utterly devoted, Barsky survived. McCarthyism, which had so deeply gouged the American political landscape, was waning. Barsky continued to support progressive causes, especially civil rights and the peace movement. He was involved in a strike at Beth Israel Hospital in 1962, organized by Local 1199, over recognition of union membership of hospital employees. Two years later, he helped establish the Medical Committee for Human Rights. It provided doctors and medical staff for civil rights activists who went to Mississippi in the violent “Freedom Summer” of 1964. He remained active in this committee as well as in the anti-Vietnam War movement. He died at the age of seventy-eight, on 11 February 1975.

Edward K. Barsky was a self-effacing man. According to his daughter, he was a “very private, a shy man who did not toot his own horn.” Never given to effusive displays or the grand gesture, he was motivated by compassion and ideology, not the limelight, when he went to Spain and later supported Spanish refugees. He would have been uncomfortable, yet gratified, when seven ambulances sent in 1985 from the US to Nicaragua in 1985 in support of the Sandinistas were named in his honor. Howard Fast was right: he was a giant of a man. ▲

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# Someone Had to Help

By Edward K. Barsky with Elizabeth Waugh

In 1944, Barsky wrote *A Surgeon Goes to War*, an 18-chapter memoir of his time in Spain, which was never published but can be consulted at NYU's Tamiment Library. This is the first chapter.





The deck space reserved for third class passengers on *S. S. Paris* is not very big but from it you can clearly see the skyline of New York as it piles up into the biggest castle in the world. But I could not look at it; I was too tired to see. I did not want to say good-bye again to anybody or to blink in the glare of flashbulbs or to answer the questions of any more reporters. I went below and crawled into my dark berth, alone for the first time in thirty seething hours. Let the others watch to see the last of our shores. My throat was sore from talking—and my clothes hurt my body which was sore from fatigue. It was too much trouble to undress, or to get a drink of water or even to pull up the blankets. There was that steamer smell of rubber, linoleum, clean greased engines and paint. For a second I thought about my fantastic situation and then, as if anesthetized, I fell into a dreamless sleep.

This was the afternoon of the sixteenth of January, and the engines which had begun to shake me gently were taking me to Spain. Nothing would have seemed more impossible to me three months before than that I should be sailing away to a country at war at the head of a medical mission. For I had been very busy, a typical New Yorker, I suppose. I was absorbed in my work. I hadn't time enough for my friends or for my family. Also, I was supposed to be threatened by

some sort of breakdown due to overwork. Afterward in Spain everybody had a good time laughing about it. How had it started?

First of all, there was an interest in Spain, a country trying, after years of black repression, to be a democracy, and in a measure succeeding. So much I had read in newsprint. Then the Spanish government had sent a delegation to beg for American help, American sympathy. I went to a meeting. Yes, that was the beginning.

Two persons, neither at all typical of a new Spain spoke movingly: a woman lawyer, and a Catholic priest from the Basque provinces. There were not many women who had become lawyers even in Republican Spain and persons who associate the Spanish Catholic Church with Fascism and nothing but Fascism forgot the Basque Catholic clergy who were solidly on the side of the people.

These two spoke to us in such a way that we saw a clear issue. A peacefully elected government made up of many factions trying to balance itself, trying to restore a measure of social justice, had been attacked by a perjured army, by generals who had first sworn alliance to the government and then enlisted foreign help against it. But their *coup d'état* had failed. The people themselves had wanted to keep their newly won freedom.

They fought desperately. Sometimes unarmed, men and women together, in overalls, untrained militia fighting machine guns with picks and stones. They fought for freedom. Not only the sort of freedom which was won for the United States of America when in 1778 [sic] the British fleet sailed away from the port of New York eastward down Long Island Sound—not as much freedom as that. In Spain they wanted only liberty to think each according to his conscience, not to starve in fertile fields untilled, to live un-menaced by secret police. This modest liberty, this democracy which the Spaniard had won legally at the polls without civil war, seemed as valuable to me as it did to them. Why should it be taken away by force, by foreign force?

The next thing I remember was that a group of us met at Dr. Louis Miller's house. Dr. Miller knew a good deal about American medical missions to various foreign lands. He knew about the services they had rendered and a little about their organizations. American medical practice, he said, was never more needed. Others spoke of the American Quaker relief work done in Germany during the famine which was the result of the blockade at the end of the Great War.

I was a member of a group of doctors who met together to talk about all sorts of things. One night at a meeting of

*The writers came disguised as chauffeurs, as ambulance drivers, as mechanics, as male and female nurses and, I regret to say, sometimes as doctors.*

this informal group we were talking about Spain. The government had almost no medical service. Somebody said, "That sort of thing ought to be our meat."

The American Friends of Spanish Democracy had been formed. The North American Committee had been organized for the purpose of sending clothes and food to Spanish refugees. Then one October night at Dr. Miller's house the American Medical Bureau to aid Spanish democracy was born. It was under the auspices of this committee that all our work in Spain was conducted.

Soon we had a Purchasing and a Personnel Committee, for we envisaged the plan of sending a medical unit to Spain. Most of us were professional people; we had slender resources, yet the end of it was that we raised more than a million dollars. November and December were busy months. The work of raising money went on with enthusiasm. We had many meetings in New York and also in nearly all the big cities of the country. Our appeal was heard from Maine to Florida and west to the coast. There was much interest in Spain, all over the country. We set as our immediate objective the complete equipment of a seventy-five-bed mobile hospital. It was more difficult to find the personnel than equipment. Nurses and doctors of the type we must have were more apt to be busy people with jobs they could not leave. Yet in the end just these people came. They were motivated by the idea of service and willing to do their bit in this fight for democracy. To come with us these people were in some cases to give their health; some gave their lives; in all cases they gave their jobs.

"To come with us," but at this time I had no intention of going. I worked all day, and we had meetings all night, sometimes two or three meetings, and then we finished the small hours in some coffee-house perfecting our plans.

Towards the end of December contributions began to fall off. We had to face the fact squarely that our plan of sending a

seventy-five-bed hospital to Spain looked beaten, for the present anyway. Yet we knew what time must mean in Spain. We felt that if we could once get that hospital across the seas and in action contributions would continue to support it. It would be something concrete. The hospital must sail: We still lacked essential equipment and essential personnel.

As head of the purchasing committee, it was my job to figure out everything needed for this new kind of hospital. We had to buy everything; mattresses for the ward beds, surgical equipment, etc. etc.; in fact, everything from a safety pin to a special operating room light running on dry battery. (Afterward, by the way, to be known as the "Light that Failed.") Lister bags for carrying water, etc., etc., besides all sorts of special medications, serums, anti-toxins. From the start we were very careful about paying our bills; we only paid those we had to pay!

It was my job as head of the personnel committee to see that we picked only the right sort of people. They must not be sentimentalists, yet we could take only persons ready to die if necessary for their convictions. Also, most essential, they must be persons of proven skill in their present professions. In the matter of chauffeurs, it meant nothing to us if a man could drive a car; he must also be an all-round mechanic, perhaps an orderly, with the right stuff in him to make a nurse if necessary, and he must be young and healthy and mentally well-balanced. We had to have a pharmacist, and laboratory technicians. The nurses to be enlisted must be in better than average good health.

One type we had no particular use for, and these came to us in droves: writers. We had a very impressive permit from the State Department licensing our work and permitting us to send personnel overseas, and these literary gentlemen were anxious to ride on this magic carpet. The writers soon learned that in their particular capacity we had no use for them. But they, as might have been expected, were men and women of imagination and more, of

histrionic ability. They came disguised as chauffeurs—it would usually turn out that they drove a car—as ambulance drivers, as mechanics, as male and female nurses and, I regret to say, sometimes as doctors. But we managed to pierce all these disguises. Perhaps it was no wonder that things went slowly or that we thought they did.

Things were now so retarded that our whole project hung in the balance. I was beginning to feel the strain of carrying on my practice and continued lack of sleep. There were so many things to worry about, even if I did get to bed. One thing was that we had not yet found the right man to head the expedition. I knew how much would depend on him.

One night after we had had three meetings and our contribution had been far less than we hoped, a small group of us talked frankly about our difficulties. We admitted to each other for the first time that the whole thing was still uncertain.

"Look here," somebody said, "we've got to go! The way to go is to go. We set a date right here. Tonight. When do we go?"

"Well, make it January sixteenth."

And then very solemnly we all shook hands and decided that the hospital would sail on that date. How, was another matter.

The outfit would sail. Things, as we had foreseen, moved along faster after we had made our big decision. But one important thing was still undecided. Who was to head the outfit? When late one night someone suggested that it might be myself, the idea at first seemed ridiculous. How could I even think about it?

"How can any of us?" they asked. Then somehow all at once I realized that I had been eager to go from the start, perhaps in some deep part of my mind I had known that I would go all along. Yet for days I could not get over my sense of surprise.

On the morning of the fifteenth of January, the equipment which we had spent months collecting was in a warehouse, not yet completely packed, we had our per-



*To come with us, some people gave their health; some gave their lives; all gave their jobs.*

sonnel together, we had very becoming and serviceable uniforms—but we had no money. We could not sail without at least three thousand dollars—this was not extra money, you understand, it was to pay among other things for our third-class passages and our food.

That night there was to be a mass meeting in the Manhattan Opera House and on the collection taken in our fate depended. The Spanish Consul was there, there were two bands, and we wore our new uniforms with “A.M.B.” (American Medical Bureau), on the armbands, for the first time. Everybody thought we were going to Spain; we hoped we were ourselves, desperately we hoped. And then when the tumult and the shouting died away, we counted the collection.

We had between five and six thousand dollars and the next day we would sail for Spain!

The rest of that night was spent by doctors, nurses, pharmacists and laboratory

technicians, in crating and packing the stuff in the warehouse. At one time we were afraid we would never get that done in time either but at last some bedraggled individuals who had been doctors and nurses got on the boat, and we heard the whistle which meant all aboard for the Spanish Front.

Bands were playing and everybody waving and crying and cheering. It seemed that we would never, never leave that dock. When in the end we did, I went below and let the others watch for the Statue of Liberty.

One of the other doctors woke me up. He told me that on board were about ninety young men in plain clothes. It was whispered that they were going to enlist in the Lincoln-Washington Brigade. My worries were now few as compared to the load I had been carrying but I had to see that our outfit did not openly fraternize with these men. We were a non-partisan unit. Also, I was worried about a little box in my pocket. Just as the whistle

blew a friend had opened my hand and put the little box in it.

“Here, Eddy, take this,” he had said.

I opened the box. It contained about six grains of morphine. If I were to be caught with this contraband in my personal possession I could easily be returned to the United States—yet it was hard to throw away even this much of the stuff I knew would soon be very precious to us. I spent a good deal of time worrying over this trifle. ▲

*From “The Surgeon Goes to War,” an undated, unpublished manuscript by Dr. Edward K. Barsky with Elizabeth Waugh (ALBA collection, Tamiment Library). This chapter appeared in Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War (2007), edited by Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernández.*

# Dr. Barsky and the Paradoxes of Refugee Aid

By Sebastiaan Faber

FOR EDWARD BARSKY, POLITICAL AND HUMANITARIAN ACTIVISM WERE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN. THOSE WHO PERSECUTED HIM BEGGED TO DIFFER.



The worldwide campaigns on behalf of the Spanish Republicans that began in 1936—and which continued for many years after the Republic’s defeat—betrayed a curious tension. On the one hand, the Spanish people appeared in posters, newsreel footage, documentaries, and photographs as political heroes bravely fighting on the frontline of the struggle against world fascism. On the other, they were portrayed as defenseless victims in need of protection and aid. This same tension runs through the many refugee aid organizations that emerged in the wake of the Spanish war and grew in scale during and after World War II. At its heart are two larger questions: Are mass displacements caused by political conflict a *humanitarian* or a *political* phenomenon? And is helping refugees a humanitarian or political act?

Hannah Arendt famously argued for a political interpretation. The ability of states to simply expel entire communities, she pointed out in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, is a perverse byproduct of the doctrine of state sovereignty. The statelessness of refugees, in effect, robs them of their rights. “No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony,” Arendt wrote in 1951, “than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as ‘inalienable’ those human rights, which are enjoyed only by

citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves.” “The popular idea that the world refugee problem is somehow independent of politics is certainly touching,” Roger Rosenblatt remarked later. “But it is also stupid and dangerous. The confusion works to the great advantage of the world’s more malevolent leaders [...] because the preoccupation with suffering, any suffering, diverts attention from what produced that suffering in the first place.”

If the distinction between politics and humanitarianism in matters of refugee aid seems fuzzy, it was nevertheless crucial to the thousands of U.S. citizens who felt deeply affected by the events in Spain and compelled to do something to help. The distinction was especially important to the fundraising efforts on behalf of Republican Spain during and after the conflict. After all, the neutrality laws that the U.S. Congress had adopted in 1935, 1936 and 1937 expressly prohibited any contribution to the military effort, leaving a small legal loophole for collections for “purely” humanitarian purposes. Once the Republic had been defeated, the same legal and fiscal limitations applied to the many organizations providing aid to refugees.

Yet, ironically, the legal framework that made the aid possible in the first place ended up being the source of its demise. The

# Is helping refugees a humanitarian or political act?

mere suspicion that entities like the one headed up by Barsky may have had political motives was enough to paralyze them almost completely. As Phillip Deery writes in this issue, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) justified its investigation and persecution of Barsky and company after World War II by alleging that they were involved in subversive political propaganda instead of humanitarian work.

How could things have come this far? Almost immediately after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, hundreds of groups emerged across the US that identified with the Republicans, the most important of which was the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (NACASD or NAC). Founded in October 1936 at the initiative of the American Friends of Spanish Democracy and other allied groups, the NAC was directed by the Methodist bishop Francis McConnell and the reverend Herman Reissig. The American Friends also created the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy (MBASD), headed by Dr. Barsky. The MBASD and NAC merged in January 1938.

Both organizations were “Popular-Frontist” in nature, uniting a broad range of antifascists, from pacifists and liberal progressives to Communists and Socialists—the kind of broad unity in the face of fascism that Georgi Dimitrov, head of the Communist International, had called for in the summer of 1935. Like many of the organizations inspired by Dimitrov’s appeal, the NAC and MBASD benefited from the expertise and organizational capacity of the Communist Party members, without necessarily ceding all institutional control to them.

Between 1936 and 1939, the NAC and MBASD undertook a series of successful campaigns that attracted broad media attention and allowed them to raise significant funds that allowed the Bureau to send medical personnel, drugs, ambulances and other goods to Republican Spain, where Barsky was doing an extraordinary job organizing the Republican army’s medical services and hospital installations. Pro-Republican organizations in the United States also applied pressure to the Roosevelt administration to abandon neutrality, lift the arms embargo on Spain, and intercede on behalf of Spain’s democratically elected government.

Around the time of the Republic’s defeat in 1939 and the ensuing crisis—up to half a million Spaniards were estimated to have fled to France—several pro-Republican organizations decided to dissolve or turn themselves into nonprofits exclusively devoted to aid to prisoners and refugees. In the US, organizations providing this type of aid included the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Unitarian Service Committee

(USC), the Spanish Refugee Relief Campaign (SRRC), the International Relief Association, and the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC), which would later merge with the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Although all these organizations defined their mission as exclusively humanitarian, and several worked together, their job was hampered by political tensions.

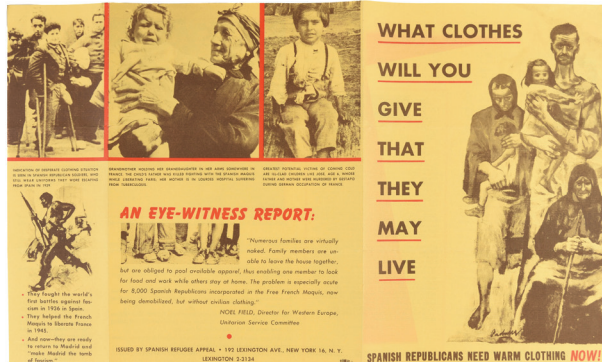
In April 1939, the NAC/MBASD transformed itself into the Spanish Refugee Relief Campaign (SRRC), with a purely humanitarian profile and with “no connection with any political group.” The decision to minimize the political profile of the old NAC was both tactical and pragmatic. The half a million Spanish refugees in southern France posed a tremendous humanitarian challenge, whose solution demanded an unprecedented fundraising effort. More than ever, it was necessary to appeal to the broadest possible segment of the U.S. population. No one doubted that clear political affiliations would prove

counterproductive for this effort, especially among the various religious communities. Similarly, it was necessary to depoliticize the organization in order to make it eligible for the increasingly generous funds that the U.S. administration and other governments were setting aside for refugee aid in Europe through the National War Fund (1943-47) and the War Refugee Board (1944-45).

The SRRC’s main task was to maintain the American public interest for the Spanish problem, to convince it that the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Spanish refugees in the south of France was unjust and unacceptable and persuade it of the fact that the urgency of the situation transcended any kind of particular political interest. With those goals in mind, the SRRC developed several media campaigns. This made sense: Photography and film had already been central to media coverage of the war, as well as in both camps’ efforts to secure international support.

In fact, the refugee crisis intensified the role of photojournalism. The images of the thousands of desperate refugees who starting in January tried to cross the Spanish French border were more dramatic than ever. But these pictures did not only appear in magazines and newspapers. Robert Capa and other war photographers allowed the SRRC and other refugee organizations to use their images for their awareness and fundraising campaigns, trying to turn the public’s outrage into a philanthropic impulse.

In the course of 1939, the New York office of the SRRC and its more than one hundred delegations across the United States undertook a broad range of projects. The most ambitious was a fundraising campaign around a 30-minute documentary film on the French concentration camps in which the hundreds of thousands of Republican refugees languished. Entitled *Refuge*, it



was a dubbed and shortened version of the French film *Un peuple attend* (A People in Waiting), directed that same year by Jean-Paul LeChanois (aka Jean-Paul Dreyfus). It included newsreel footage but also original takes of life in the camps, shot with a camera hidden in a grocery bag.

But, as it turned out, the *Refuge* campaign would be the SRRC's last large project. As many other Popular-Front organizations, it did not survive the consequences of the German Soviet non-aggression pact of August 1939. In March of the following year, a conflict between Communists and non-Communists led to the departure of Barsky and his allies. Those who left formed their own independent organization, devoted primarily to a "Rescue Ship Mission"—a boat that would transport the Spanish refugees to Latin America—but that project, too, ran aground due to internal conflicts and barriers that the U.S. government put up. In March 1942, the United American Spanish Aid Committee, the Rescue Ship Mission and the American Committee to Save Refugees merged to form the Joint Anti-fascist Refugee Committee. Directed once more by Barsky, it poured all its energies in a new campaign: the "Spanish Refugee Appeal." (The remaining members of the SRRC, meanwhile, ended up joining the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC), directed from France by Varian Fry, who famously helped save dozens of artists and intellectuals, including Hannah Arendt, Marc Chagall, and Anna Seghers.) Because the JAFRC did not have a license to dispense humanitarian aid in Europe, however, Barsky's committee allied itself from the start with the Unitarian Service Committee (USC). It was the USC which distributed the funds raised by the JAFRC, under specific conditions set by Barsky's group. Central among the collaborative projects between the Joint Antifascists and the Unitarians was the Varsovia Hospital in Toulouse.

The Unitarian Service Committee, established in 1940 by the American Unitarian Association as one of the largest and most important U.S. refugee organizations, played a decisive role saving thousands of displaced Europeans before, during, and after World War II. At the height of its activity, the USC managed an annual budget of over a million dollars. These funds came not only the National War Fund, the War Refugee Board and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, but also from Barsky's Spanish Refugee Appeal, which over its various years of operation contributed around \$300,000.

Yet shortly after the end of World War II, the Unitarians' refugee work suffered a major blow, thanks in large part to its collaboration with Barsky's JAFRC, which in late 1945 landed in the crosshairs of Wood and Rankin's HUAC. HUAC suspected that the Committee was a Communist front organization,



which would disqualify it for its federal license as a charitable, tax-exempt organization. HUAC's investigations of the JAFRC led it to the Unitarians.

In October 1946, a seven-member Unitarian delegation appeared before Wood and Rankin to prove that the USC was a purely American and humanitarian organization—that is, apolitical and not subservient to foreign interests. In a closed session, the Unitarians declared that their Service Committee dispensed aid to all refugees in need of it, independent of their political affiliation, and "as long as there was no attempt to make use of the relief for political purposes." At the same time, however, they had to admit that the USC had no specific mechanisms in place to prevent

the presence of Communists in its ranks. The case stained the Unitarians' reputation and sparked political conflicts within the Association, while tensing the relations with other refugee aid outfits. Throwing more fuel on the fire, that same year a representative of the rival International Rescue Committee wrote a letter to the Unitarian leadership to complain that two of the USC's central operatives in Europe, Herta (Jo) Tempy and Noel Field, were giving preferential treatment to Communist refugees, were themselves Communist Party members, and even worked for the Soviet secret police. Around the same time, similar charges surfaced in Toulouse, where several non-Communist organizations alleged that the recipients of USC funds were discriminating against non-Communists. This included the Varsovia Hospital, which in the U.S. was known as the Walter B. Cannon Memorial, named for a well-known surgeon from Boston who had died in 1945. In light of these accusations, Cannon's widow asked the Joint Antifascist Refugee Committee in 1948 to stop using her late husband's name. The JAFRC ignored the request. By then, however, the Unitarians had already withdrawn from the hospital project. The episode prompted a purge among the Unitarian ranks.

It was in the context of growing doubt and suspicion that the USC and the JAFRC decided to undertake another publicity campaign that, once again, put visuals front and center. In 1946, they commissioned the German-born filmmaker Paul Falkenberg to produce the documentary *Spain in Exile*, and in the spring of that same year, the USC hired Walter Rosenblum, a young, Jewish photographer from New York to spend several months in Europe to document the Committee's extensive work with refugees.

"It is certain that you will dislike the shameful truth that this picture is about to reveal," Quentin Reynolds, a well-known war



correspondent, tells the viewers in his introduction to *Spain in Exile*. “The picture is the story of a debt—a debt that we owe, a debt that is still on the books. It is an old debt. It was incurred eight years ago, long before Hitler marched into Poland.” The 20-minute film combines newsreel footage of the Spanish Republican exodus in early 1939 with newly shot scenes documenting the lives of the thousands of Spanish refugees remaining in France. The narration links the Spanish Civil War directly to World War II. “We didn’t know then what we know now,” Reynolds’ voice booms over the heart wrenching newsreel images of the Spaniards’ border crossing and their lives in the French refugee camps. “This is what total war looks like. The first experiment in total war and already half a million refugees . . .” The film goes on to highlight the Spaniards’ role in the fight against the Nazis, their use as forced labor, and their passage through camps like Mauthausen, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen. It also contrasts their heroism in the struggle against international fascism with their precarious existence in postwar France—“They are underfed, poorly clad,” Reynolds says; “they wear the same clothing winter and summer”—which is similar to their life during the war. At the same time, *Spain in Exile* highlights the good work done by the Joint Antifascist Refugee Committee through the Unitarian Service Committee at the Varsovia Hospital and elsewhere. After the film’s closing scene, Reynolds reappears on the screen with a final appeal to the viewers:

You have just seen the truth about the first victims of total war. It is not enough just to stand appalled. Our job is to see that the heroic men and women who struck the first blows against Hitler and Franco do not remain the forgotten fighters of World War II. The children you have seen in this picture are the hope of Spanish democracy. Boys and girls who were baptized in the blood of their fathers fighting in Spain are the chief concern of the Committee. I hope they are your concern, too.

While *Spain in Exile* circulated among the Unitarian community, Rosenblum’s touching refugee portraits taken alongside the film crew reached a much wider audience through the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the paper *PM*, and the popular weekly *Liberty*. Yet even this successful campaign involving film and photography did not serve to stem the negative effects of the HUAC investigation. As fundraising dwindled—both among the Unitarian congregations and the general public—government funds dried up as well. By 1948, the USC had cut its number of programs in half. By early 1949,



Noel Field, who had left the USC in December 1947, mysteriously disappeared. In the course of the next three years, his name came up prominently in several spy trials in Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia.

In 1953, two prominent American Trotskyites, Nancy and Dwight MacDonald founded the Spanish Refugee Aid (SRA), devoted exclusively to aiding non-Communist refugees, whose fate, the MacDonalds felt, had been neglected for years. Two years later, the JAFRC dissolved itself, after Barsky had withdrawn from the organization following his release from prison.

Still, Barsky continued to be involved in progressive causes. In 1964 he was a founding member of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, which gave medical help to activists who joined in the struggle for civil rights in the US

South. Later, he protested the war in Vietnam. He did not live to see the end of the dictatorship in Spain; he died nine months before Francisco Franco. ▲

*Sebastian Faber teaches at Oberlin College. This article draws on “Image Politics: U.S. Aid to the Spanish Republic and Its Refugees,” published in Forma: Revista d’estudis comparatius (Barcelona), no. 14 (2016).*

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# Franco Spain Must Go!

By Edward K. Barsky

On September 24, 1945, Dr. Barsky delivered this speech during the Spanish Refugee Appeal rally at Madison Square Garden.

## *Their children, born within concentration camps, are the future leaders of a great nation.*

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I welcome you tonight in the name of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. It is about time that we had a Garden meeting for Spain. And there is no doubt that if all of us get together and work hard enough, we shall soon have another Garden meeting, celebrating the victory of Democracy in Spain. We have had our V-E Day and our V-J Day, which this war will never have a V-S Day, —victory over a Fascist Spain. We fought this war to defeat reaction everywhere. Democracy will never be safe, nor can a democratic world exist as long as there is a fascist Spain. For a world of security, justice and peace, Franco Spain must go!

The Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee is the only major committee in the United States that has consistently done everything possible to help the Spanish Republicans in exile; ever increasing its commitments and never failing to fulfill its responsibilities.

Who are these Spanish Republicans in exile and why do they deserve our admiration, our gratitude and our help? Spain was the first country invaded by the Axis, and in Spain was fought the first battle of World War II. The Spanish people, neglected and hindered by the democracies of the world, fought a courageous and heroic struggle against the German and Italian invading forces. It is to the everlasting shame of Great Britain, France and the United States that they permitted their sister republic to go down to temporary defeat. For that action, we have paid with the blood of our soldiers.

Poorly armed and against highly mechanized and well-trained aggressors, the Spaniards waged a battle that will long be remembered even amongst the great battles of World War II. The dangers of the fifth column, large-scale guerrilla tactics, and mobilization of the entire people, were lessons that France, Yugoslavia and Greece learned from Spain. Every single resistance movement of Europe had in its top leadership, men who had fought in Spain.

The Spaniards blazed a trail in the fight against fascism. They are the valiant undefeated. Forgotten, neglected by the world, as no other group has been forgotten and neglected, they have never accepted their fate. Through the long years of their exile, separated from their homeland and their loved ones, they have gone on hoping and planning and fighting for their future. Never for a moment did these Spanish Republicans falter in this struggle. They wrecked railroads, blew up bridges, destroyed mines, sabotaged factories during the period of German occupation of France, and when the moment of liberation came, they fought with the underground. A Spaniard was the first to be killed in the storming of the Paris city hall. French tanks were driven by Spaniards and bands of Spanish Maquis liberated French towns and took thousands of German prisoners.

In the waning strength of their weakened and starving bodies, there burned fiercely the hatred of fascism and the determination to do whatever possible in the fight for democracy.

Today in France there are about 200,000 Spanish Republicans suffering from hunger and illness. Many are still disabled because of wounds received during the war in Spain. Malnutrition, tuberculosis, intestinal diseases and anemias

are common, especially among the children. They have no clothes. In many a home, they have to pool their clothing so that one person can go out—in rags—to look for work or hunt for food. Shoes are luxuries: boards tied to their feet are the only protection. In the coming winter, with the severe lack of heating facilities, these people will suffer. There are also the thousands of Spaniards who are now returning from years of servitude in the slave battalions in Germany, weakened by disease, starvation, overwork and inhuman treatment at the hands of their Nazi jailers. Of the 12,000 Spaniards who were in the concentration camp at Mauthausen, only about 1,000 survived. Unless we can help them, many of them will still perish.

Despite all the suffering and the inroads of hunger and illness, the morale of the Spaniards in exile is *wonderful*. Their only wish is to keep strong enough and to get back to Spain to help rebuild a land of freedom. These people are the guarantee of a democratic Spain. Their children, born within concentration camps, are the future leaders of a great nation that will help cement the forces of world democracy for the insurance of global peace and security.

These, Ladies and Gentlemen, are the Spanish Republicans in exile. We Americans owe them a debt of gratitude. For the sake of our future and as an obligation to our own sense of justice and self-respect, we must make every possible effort to alleviate their sufferings.

The Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee is determined to bring all conceivable aid to these people. For this purpose, we are conducting a campaign known as the Spanish Refugee Appeal. Tonight's meeting marks the opening of the fall campaign. Our goal for the rest of the year is \$300,000. The relief in France is administered through the facilities of the United Service Committee, in cooperation with an advisory committee of Spaniards of whom Pablo Picasso is the chairman. In this manner, the money that we send to France is most efficiently utilized. In addition to all sorts of welfare and rehabilitation services, we maintain two hospitals in France for the wounded and tubercular. There are also those who are blind and limbless. These require special help. In Mexico, supplementing all types of assistance to the Spanish refugees, we support a school and a hospital. Our funds go to Portugal, Switzerland, Cuba and other parts of the world.

The work that the committee does is a matter of life or death. It takes but a little food to keep a starving man from dying; a little clothes will keep a naked man warm; a little medical care may save a sick man from death.

That is the story, Ladies and Gentlemen, and that is the job the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee is doing. We have been through a great war, and we have all played our part in this war. We are now confronted with many problems and perplexities—the dangers of inflation, lost jobs, the difficult period of reconversion, the rising threat of reaction within our own country and the confused state of our foreign policy. But despite all these, important as they are, the American people must, and I am sure will, fulfill their obligations to these most heroic Spanish people who at all times preferred to fight and die on their feet than to live on their knees. ▲

# Peter Neil Carroll (1943-2024)

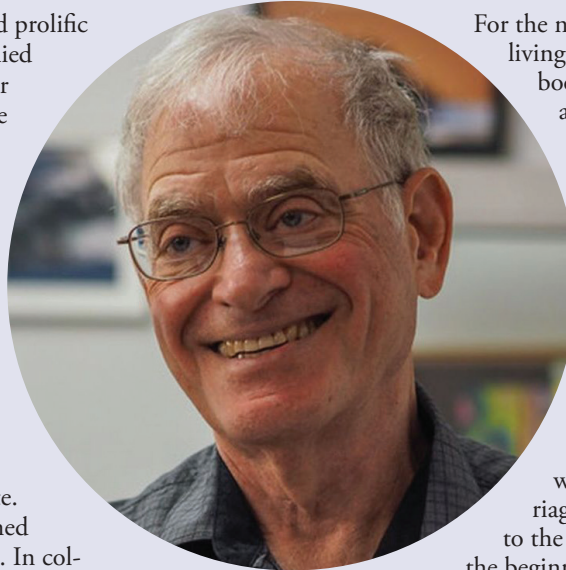
By Sebastiaan Faber

**Peter N. Carroll**, a respected and prolific writer, poet, and US historian, died after a short illness on September 16, surrounded by his family. He was 80.

Born in New York City in 1943 to a secular Jewish family, Peter grew up in the Bronx and Queens, where his father worked as a composer, arranger, and high school music teacher. Peter, a talented trumpet player, alternated first chair in the high school band with Alan Rubin and watched Miles Davis jam at the Blue Note. Academically precocious, he joined Queens College as a 16-year-old. In college, he took classes with the philosopher John J. McDermott who, he said later, “set him straight”; coincided with classmate Paul Simon; and worked as a sports editor for the student newspaper, *The Phoenix*. In the fall of 1961, the paper challenged the administration for banning left-wing speakers—Ben Davis and Malcolm X—and organized a strike of classes for free speech. Soon afterward, an editorial against the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) led the college president to punish the editors with “disciplinary probation, with warnings of potential expulsion.” It was Peter’s first taste of McCarthyism.

When he was 20, Peter started his doctorate in US intellectual history at Northwestern University. By 1968, he had finished his dissertation—on Puritanism and the American wilderness—and landed his first academic job, at the University of Illinois, Chicago, just as his thesis was being published. A few months later, he was hired at the University of Minnesota with full tenure. The lightning-quick transition into academic respectability—not to mention life-long job security—coincided with his political awakening. “The more I became concerned about the Vietnam War, the more my landscape broadened,” he later said in an interview.

Tenure did not give Peter peace of mind, to the contrary. “My future was so secure that I had no future at all,” he wrote in his 1990 memoir, *Keeping Time*. He decided to give up his academic career, but not before spending the last year of his appointment on a fellowship interviewing 25 former classmates from graduate school. As it turned out, his discontent was more widespread than he thought: about half of the people he talked to had switched careers.



For the next five decades, Peter made a living as a prolific freelance author, book reviewer, magazine editor, and teacher. He continued to be deeply interested in innovative takes on US history—including Black history, women’s history, and psychohistory—and helped modernize the field through books and textbooks such as *The Free and the Unfree*, co-authored with David Noble.

Peter’s career change in the early 1970s roughly coincided with the end of his first marriage, his first trip to Spain, a move to the San Francisco Bay Area, and the beginning of his relationship with Jeannette Ferrary, a writer and photographer who had also grown up in New York. Settled down with Jeannette in Belmont, California, Peter worked as a book reviewer for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, a radio host for Pacifica, and an adjunct lecturer at Stanford, where he taught a popular summer course on film and US history for many years.

In 1975, when the San Francisco *City Magazine* asked Peter to do a feature on the San Francisco Book Fair, he got to interview Alvah Bessie, a screenwriter—one of the Hollywood Ten—who had fought against fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) as a volunteer in the International Brigades. Bessie introduced him to other veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, including Milt Wolff, Abe Osheroff, and Jack Lucid. For the next couple of decades, Peter would interview dozens of veterans of the Spanish war as part of a massive oral history project that culminated twenty years later in *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, 1994)—an authoritative history of the close to three thousand Americans who traveled to Republican Spain as volunteer soldiers, drivers, or medical personnel.

An energetic activist and passionate educator, Peter became centrally involved in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA), a non-profit founded in the late 1970s to safeguard the archival materials documenting the involvement of American volunteers in the Spanish struggle against fascism and to use them to educate the public about this often-overlooked chapter of American history. Peter chaired ALBA’s Board of Governors from 1994 until 2010 and between 2018 and 2020; served on its Executive Committee; co-edited its quarterly magazine, *The Volunteer*; co-curated several exhibits;

and taught dozens of teacher workshops across the country.

For several years, Peter chaired the Advisory Committee of the Puffin Foundation; advised the Activist Gallery of the Museum of the City of New York; and served on the jury for the Puffin/Nation Prize for Creative Citizenship. As ALBA chair, Peter was instrumental in the creation of the ALBA/Puffin Prize for Human Rights Activism, which has been awarded annually since 2010. In 2023, ALBA honored Peter's decades-long service to the organization by creating the Peter N. Carroll Anti-Fascist Education Fund.

In his late sixties, following major heart surgery, Peter embarked on a successful career as a poet. "The source for poetry is the other half of my brain, the creative side—which is not easy to access," he said in an interview. "When I pick up a pen, my first instinct is still to start writing prose. I often have to read poetry, others' poetry, to get my head in the right place. But then something will start to cook. It's an emotional thrust."

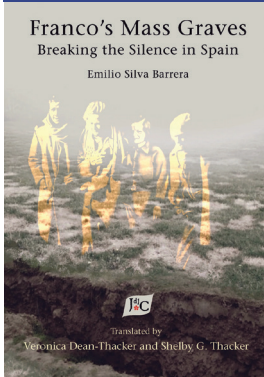
Peter Carroll, a rigorous historian, fierce polemicist, sharp-eyed editor, and warm and generous friend, wrote and edited more than 20 books, including *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier* (1969); *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s* (1990); *We The People: A Brief American History* (2002); and *From Guernica to Human Rights: Essays on the Spanish Civil War* (2015). He also authored more than ten volumes of poetry, including *A Child Turns Back to Wave* and *This Land, These People*, both of which have won the Prize Americana. In 2024 he published *Sketches from Spain*, a lyric homage to the volunteers of the Lincoln Brigade, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

Peter is survived by his partner, Jeannette; his son Matthew and daughter-in-law Josie; his daughter Natasha and son-in-law Adam; and his six grandchildren: Eva, Ben, Jed, Noah, Jason, and Ryan.

## Book Review

*Franco's Mass Graves: Breaking the Silence in Spain*, by Emilio Silva Barrera. Translated by Veronica Dean-Thacker and Shelby G. Thacker. Newark, Del.: Juan de la Cuesta. 172 pp.

Reviewed by James D. Fernández.



The journalist Emilio Silva Barrera (born in Elizondo, Navarra, Spain, in 1965) belongs to the generation of grandchildren of those who experienced the Spanish Civil War as adults. His grandfather and namesake, a politically moderate small business owner in a small town in Northwestern Spain, was first harassed and extorted, later arrested, killed, and thrown into an unmarked mass grave by local fascist thugs in October of 1936,

just a few months after the coup d'état of July 17-18. The family store and its inventory were confiscated. Without any savings or source of income, Emilio's grandmother, Modesta, was left to care for four sons—Emilio's father and three uncles—and would have to live among her husband's assassins for the duration of the Franco regime and, indeed, for the rest of her life. For all of those long decades, whenever the story of her husband would come up in the family house—always in whispers—Modesta's fist would inevitably come down hard on the kitchen table, imposing the silence of fear and survival.

Second generation: Emilio's father and uncles, as young boys, had taken food and clothes to their father in the makeshift jail where he was held after being arrested and before being murdered. Emilio's father was only ten years old when his father

was executed, but he would never again step foot in a classroom. He was now the breadwinner. That heavy silence of fear and survival became the very air that the children of Emilio and Modesta breathed, as the offspring of "un rojo" who, after all, was probably guilty of something...

Third generation: Emilio himself was ten years old when Francisco Franco died in bed in 1975. So most of Emilio's formal education took place in a democratic post-Franco Spain. He studied sociology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and went on to work as a journalist. But some traumas do get transmitted from generation to generation, some lessons do get tacitly ingrained in children and grandchildren. "Don't stick your head out. Just try to blend in. Don't ask too many questions. Don't dare to dream, because those who live dreaming end up being killed, like your grandfather, by reality." Emilio, introverted and insecure, watched how Spain fashioned a triumphant transition to democracy without even a nod toward the truncated promise of the Second Republic, just as he was expected to forge a future for himself without thinking too much about his absent grandfather, abandoned somewhere in a ditch.

Emilio eventually revolted against this state of affairs, against the imposed silence; he became obsessed with his grandfather's "disappearance", and indefatigably investigated the case. In the end, he was able to locate the mass grave where his grandfather and twelve other victims had been buried. He led a scientific exhumation of the grave, and proved through DNA testing that he had in fact unburied the remains of his grandfather. The exhumation of "The Thirteen of Priaranza" received a good deal of media attention, and before long, thousands of families reached out to Emilio for assistance in searching for their own loved ones. A silence, both personal and collective, had been broken. A movement had been born.

*Franco's Mass Graves: Breaking the Silence in Spain* is the much-needed English translation of the shout emitted by Emilio Silva once he managed to recover his voice and his dignity at the foot of his grandfather's tomb in October, 2000. The original version of the book was published in 2003; in this clear and precise translation, Emilio tells the story of his family, and

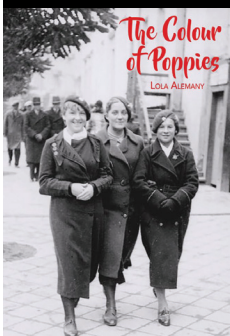
of the historic exhumation and its aftermath, just as he gathers, in the body of the text and in a number of addenda, a valuable archive or casebook, that includes photographs, newspaper clippings, personal letters, United Nations reports and even excerpts of Spanish legislation.

What will the great-grandchildren of those who lived through the Spanish Civil War do, now that revisionist oblivion seems to be all the rage? What will the great-grandchildren of those who helped defeat fascism in World War II do, now that the uniform of fascism looks more like a business suit than anything else? One can only hope that they read this book.

*James D. Fernández teaches at NYU and is co-editor of this magazine.*

## Books Briefly Noted

*The Colour of Poppies*, by Lola Alemany. Translated by David Roe. Editorial Cuadranta, 2023. 260pp.



The main reason for creating this Briefly Noted section two years ago remains true today: we receive books in such great numbers that we cannot always find a reviewer for each. One genre that continues to arrive in a steady stream is the testimonial, biography, or fictional portrayal of International Brigad-

ers, including Lincoln volunteers, written by their children and grandchildren. These works share an impulse to tell a personal story, summarize a life and, not surprisingly, to keep alive the political commitments of a loved one considered to represent a whole generation.

*The Colour of Poppies*, the translation of Lola Alemany's *De color de amapola* (2022), seeks to honor the memory of the Brigades through an interwoven story of women volunteers fighting and working in Albacete, the IB headquarters, and a contemporary female character trying to unearth the bones of her grandfather from a mass grave in Albacete, all the while redefining her own relation to politics, society, and her family.

Each character in the wartime context, too, struggles to balance the personal and the political within the gendered role imposed on them, and to honor various social and ideological commitments during the many upheavals of the war. Meanwhile, the protagonist's efforts to exhume her loved one in twenty-first-century Spain force her to negotiate with lawyers, the Spanish state, and local authorities, as she bonds with strangers whose relatives lie buried in the same mass grave.

Based as it is on archival research, outlined in an epilogue that also reveals the author's personal connections to the past, Alemany's novel should have a wide appeal.

—Joshua Goode

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