

Glossary and notes

BOD Jewish Board of Deputies

BUF British Union of Fascists

CP Communist Party of Great Britain

ILP Independent Labour Party

JLB Jewish Lads Brigade

YCL Young Communist League

? *Unless otherwise specified reference to “the Communists” or the “CP” refers to members of both the Communist Party and Young Communist League collectively.*

? *The testimonies included are in their original colloquial form.*

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In memory of Samuel Bagon

Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is perhaps, oddly, not to document the heroic activities of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, as thankfully this task has been more than adequately fulfilled by the plethora of specialist books on the subject; rather, this dissertation serves to examine, and where possible discern, the motivation of those British-Jews who volunteered to fight with the International Brigades in Spain.¹

Thus, what began as a simple investigation as to why British Jewry was disproportionately over represented amongst British brigaders has evolved into a chronicle of the rise of fascism in Britain and the development of a premise that the growth of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), along with the advance of fascism in Europe during the 1930s, was fundamental to the decision of many Jewish brigaders to volunteer to join the International Brigades.

It will be argued that the underlying anti-Semitism that existed in Britain, subsequently intensified by the BUF, constituted the primary catalyst behind the seemingly ‘natural gravitation’² of British Jewry towards the Communist Party (CP) and Young Communist League (YCL). The emigratory origins of many British Jews along with the nature of Jewish employment and living conditions meant that even before the rise of the BUF, the CP and YCL were already widely perceived in a highly sympathetic light and indeed could boast the support of many Jewish members.

This dissertation, however, seeks to illustrate that for many previously unpoliticized British Jews it was not communist ideology that attracted them to the CP but it was because the ‘CP appeared to be the only organization willing to fight fascist-related anti-Semitism’.³ Furthermore, it will be asserted that once

¹ I would like to thank all those who helped and contributed to the writing of the dissertation. I thank in particular Dave Goodman who sadly recently passed away and Sam Russell, both of whom kindly allowed me to interview them about their experiences in Spain. I also am indebted to Joseph Harrison, whose advice and encouragement has been invaluable to the completion of this dissertation.

² *Lou Kenton*, Oral History Recording 9722/6, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

³ N.Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Macmillan Press London 2000), p.44.

these Jews had joined the Communists, and become aware of German involvement in Spain, it was a natural progression for them to volunteer to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War; a conflict which ‘crystallized many people’s political ideas into a neat black and white, Fascist versus anti-Fascist pattern’.⁴

The validity of this assertion is based upon the testimonies of thirteen Jewish brigaders and a comparative analysis of the motivation of a sample of five non-Jewish brigaders, who constituted the majority, of approximately 2,000 Britons who joined the International Brigades.⁵

Given that over sixty-five years have elapsed since the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the parameters of this study are unfortunately limited by the scarcity and frailty of living brigaders. Consequently, the oral testimonies housed in the Spanish Civil War Collection at the Imperial War Museum form the backbone of research material used, along with the International Brigades archives housed in the Marx Memorial Library and several interviews that were conducted with surviving Jewish brigaders. Despite these limitations, the source material used can be collectively regarded as representative of the much larger number of British brigaders whose accounts remain unheard. Indeed, there has been an attempt to draw upon testimonies from as diverse a collection of individuals as possible, a measure that it is hoped, will help to give rise to some interesting and revealing findings.

As the principal question of this dissertation is one of assessing ‘motivation’ it is crucial to have an accurate and practical definition of the word. In this regard, the meaning of motivation as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary is ‘that which moves or induces a person to act in a certain way: desires, fear, reason etc. which influences a person’s volition’.⁶ Using this definition it is clearly valid, as a method of determining the Jewish brigaders’ motivation, to review the background factors that influenced their decision to volunteer.

Hence, the first chapter presents an assessment of working class Jewish life in Britain during the early 1930s. The second chapter will focus upon an appraisal of the reaction of the Anglo-Jewish community to the rise of the BUF and its associated anti-Semitism. The final chapter will draw upon the testimonies of brigaders, and determine their motivation for volunteering to join the International Brigades.

At this stage it is important to define what is meant by ‘being Jewish’. Finding an adequate definition of what exactly it is to be a Jew has been the

⁴ Ibid., p.51.

⁵ B.Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty Spain 1936-39* (Lawrence and Wishart London 1986), p.29

⁶ C.T.Onions (ed), *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 3rd Edition* (Oxford OUP 1983), Volume II, p. 1361.

subject of much heated religious and scholarly debate and numerous volumes of dedicated work. For the purpose of this dissertation and in accordance with the 'socio-cultural' school of thought, a very broad definition has been adopted.

A Jew is thus understood as 'an individual with a Jewish family background who perceives themselves as being Jewish'.⁷ The ambiguous term 'Jewish background' is deliberately used as it is designed to include those brigaders without the normally obligatory maternal-Jewish lineage. Equally, the notion of 'a Jewish self-perception' is also employed because unless an individual has a self-identification of being Jewish, be it in a social, cultural or religious context, it would be inappropriate to define them as Jewish. By the same merit, adherence to only one of the two criteria also falls foul of the definition. Accordingly, an individual who perceives himself as Jewish without a Jewish background is not understood as being Jewish. Such a definition is clearly distinct from the traditional *Halakhic* edict which 'depends either on the status of the mother or conversion to Judaism'.⁸

As already mentioned, this dissertation is not directly concerned with the military history of the International Brigades; yet, it is still of clear value to briefly outline the role of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. The International Brigades were formed on '17 October 1936 following the establishment of a military training base for the some 8,000 to 10,000 foreign volunteers [to the Republican Army] who crossed the French border [into Spain].'⁹ The majority of these volunteers 'saw the [Spanish Civil] War as part of a general struggle against fascism'¹⁰ and the International Brigades became the military attachment of non-Spanish volunteers fighting in the Republican Army.

The International Brigades were sub-divided into individual battalions along national lines. Thus, for example the Abraham Lincoln Battalion was formed for American volunteers and 'the XV Battalion was formally established on 31 January 1937 as the British Battalion,'¹¹ 'although this was a misnomer, since the unit was initially formed of all the English-language speakers'.¹² Occasionally, the British Battalion was referred to by its official name: 'the Saklatvala Battalion - after the Indian communist of the same name'.¹³ Interestingly, there were

⁷ Interview with Bill Williams, 13 January 2001

⁸ L.Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford OUP 1995), p. 285.

⁹ G.Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War 1931-1939* (Princeton University Press 1971), p.318.

¹⁰ Imperial War Museum, *The Spanish Civil War Collection: Sound Archive Oral History Recordings*, (Imperial War Museum Staples Printers Rochester 1996), p. i.

¹¹ B.Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty Spain 1936-39* (Lawrence and Wishart London 1986), p. 65.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹³ H.Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Penguin London 1990), p 591.

frequent calls for the establishment of an exclusively Jewish company, a testimony to the level of Jewish commitment in the Spanish Civil War.¹⁴ A Jewish company was finally established, after initial opposition by the International Brigades' commanders, on 12 December 1937 and named the Botwin Company after Naftali Botwin, a Polish Jewish Communist.¹⁵

The completion of logistical parameters of this dissertation requires a brief summary of the method of investigation. As the primary concern of this dissertation is Anglo-Jewish brigaders (using the definition of Jewish as already outlined) within the XV British Battalion, it is essential to devise a reliable method of determining who the Jewish brigaders were. In Arno Lustiger's seminal paper on '*German and Austrian Jews in the International Brigade* [sic]' Lustiger's method for estimating the number of Austro-German Jewish brigaders was based solely upon the inclusion of all brigaders with 'Jewish sounding names'. Lustiger, however, is the first to point out that his was a less than satisfactory method of examination and consequently a more reliable approach was sought for this study.

The method devised for this dissertation is twofold. It involves firstly using Lustiger's technique of searching for Jewish sounding names from the records available in the Imperial War Museum's *Spanish Civil War Collection*. In addition to this, to ensure further accuracy, each of the accompanying synopses were read, and only if this contained a mention of an individual's original Jewish faith was the testimony deemed as that of a Jewish brigader.

This is admittedly not an infallible methodology as the case of Maurice Levine¹⁶ demonstrates, who, although clearly originating from a Jewish background, fails to mention this in any of his testimonies. Nevertheless, Levine's failure to declare his Jewish origins can, in itself, be interpreted as significant, as by its very omission, it provides a solitary example of a Jewish brigader who believed that his religious background was of no significance to his decision to fight in the International Brigades. However, notwithstanding Levine's testimony, it does appear that this twofold method of investigation has been successful and its findings accurate.

Curiously, the foremost challenge faced when researching the Anglo-Jewish brigaders is the absence of any material, written or otherwise, on the subject. This was a surprising discovery, especially after it became apparent following the

¹⁴ C.Shindler, Jewish Quarterly '*No Pasaran: the Jews who fought in Spain*' (1986, Issue 3), p.38.

¹⁵ H.F.Srebrnik, *The Jewish Communist Movement in Stepney: Ideological Mobilization and Political Victories in an East London Borough, 1935-45* (Unpublished PhD thesis 1984), p. 165.

¹⁶ Maurice Levine, Oral History Recording 9722/6, 1987, Imperial War Museum.

completion of preliminary research that the number of British Jewish brigaders was significant; greatly disproportionate to the size of the British Jewish community.¹⁷ This immediately posed the question of why this particular area of Jewish history has until now been neglected. The answer possibly lies in the relatively unexplored subject of Jewish resistance to fascism, a discourse that invariably seeks to demonstrate the passivity and submission of the Jewish community. Mass murder of Jews is well documented; by comparison, Jewish resistance and non-conformism is not.

It should be stressed that the British Jewish brigaders were part of an estimated 'more than 6000 Jewish volunteers from across Europe'¹⁸ who fought in Spain and, as such, they should be regarded as 'amongst the first Jews to take up arms against the advance of fascism'.¹⁹ Such an interpretation is further enhanced when it is considered in relation to the second premise of this dissertation. This predicates that the majority of Anglo-Jewish Brigaders became convinced of the necessity of volunteering to fight in Spain in reaction to the rise of fascism in Britain, and the threat posed by the seemingly unstoppable ascent of fascism in Europe. It is therefore hoped that, by uncovering the significant contribution of the British Jewish community to the fight against fascism in both Britain and Spain, this dissertation will go some way towards dispelling the myth of Jewish passivity in fascist Europe.

¹⁷ It is estimated that Jewish brigaders constituted approximately 10 per cent of all British brigaders whilst according to the 1931 census the British Jewish community accounted for only 0.66 per cent of the population of Britain. C.Shindler, Jewish Quarterly 'No Pasaran: the Jews who fought in Spain' (1986, Issue 3), p.37.

¹⁸ A. Lustiger, Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 'German and Austrian Jews in the International Brigade' (1990), p 298.

¹⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER ONE.

One of the most common misconceptions of the International Brigades is that its volunteer-soldiers were almost entirely composed of romantics and intellectuals. It is well documented, as Margot Heinemann, a Cambridge undergraduate during the Spanish Civil War verifies, that ‘all the advanced intellectuals, all the people you have ever heard of among writers and artists were overwhelmingly in support of the Republic’.²⁰ It is equally well known that amongst many notable literary figures, George Orwell, Ernest Hemingway and the young poet John Cornford fought and in Cornford’s case died in Spain.²¹ But, to regard these intellectuals as representative of the Brigades some 35,000 members²² is inaccurate. Indeed, if it is at all possible to generalize about the composition of the International Brigades, it is far more accurate to describe its volunteers as working class in character.

The intention of this chapter is to establish the social background of the Anglo-Jewish brigaders. This essentially will involve determining where the Jewish brigaders lived in Britain and assessing the importance of their socio-economic circumstances, as a politicizing factor. In so doing, it should become possible to establish firstly how important impoverished living conditions were to the emergence of wide spread working class Jewish sympathy and support for left-wing politics and secondly whether young British Jews, as a distinct group, were more susceptible to politicization than their non-Jewish counterparts. This critique serves to examine the pivotal question of to what extent socio-economic factors motivated British Jews to support the CP.

The similarity in geographical distribution of the Jewish brigaders namely; that all the Jewish brigaders originated from large urban centres, is a notable characteristic. Of the thirteen Jewish brigaders researched, eleven were from London, one from Manchester and one from Middlesbrough. Tony Gilbert recalls that ‘all my neighbours in Stepney [East London] were Jewish’,²³ a statement which is consistent with the remaining ten London Jewish brigaders, who all lived in very close proximity to each other in London’s East End. Such findings may not at first appear so significant, since it is well documented that Britain’s immigrant Jewish communities tended to congregate in larger towns and

²⁰ Margot Heinemann, Oral History Recording 9239/5, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

²¹ H.Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Penguin London 1990), 3rd edition, p.456.

²² *Ibid.*, p.982.

²³ Tony Gilbert, Oral History Recording 9157/10, year unknown, Imperial War Museum, transcript p.5.

cities.²⁴ Yet, to simply dismiss the location of British Jewry as inconsequential to the politicization of working class Jewry is to miss the point.

It appears that the affinity of the British Jewish community to urban living directly facilitated the political indoctrination and radicalization of its members. This view is supported by the testimonies of Jewish brigaders, who overwhelmingly purport that living in an urban environment, especially during the depressed late 1920s and early 1930s, meant that the emergence of some form of political awareness was almost unavoidable. Gilbert recalls that ‘the East End of London was full of street corner meetings. You could hardly go into any area of the East End and not see a street corner meeting of one character or another’.²⁵ Similarly Frank Lesser who lived in Hackney, East London, testifies that, ‘the time that we are talking about, [the 1930s] is one in which I think now, and I believe I thought then, it was impossible not to be interested in politics’.²⁶

The established explanation for the emergence of widespread Jewish support for Left-wing politics emphasises the politicizing effect of working-class Jewry’s impoverished living conditions, yet, such an interpretation fails to explain why the CP in particular, attracted such a large Jewish following. It is certainly true that working-class Jewry lived in horrendously poor conditions in the 1930s. Charlie Goodman was born in the East End of London and lived in ‘bug infested tenement buildings, where we used to sit outside at night because you couldn’t sleep because of the bugs, even the wallpaper used to move’.²⁷ Maurice Levitas moved with his family from Dublin to Stepney, East London in 1931 because of the depression and described the period as ‘one of the most poverty stricken phases of my life with my father in work for some time and out of work for some time ... there wasn’t enough room [in the tenement] so my elder brother and I went down to live with my aunt also in Stepney.’²⁸

The obvious conclusion to draw from this is that socio-economic factors were responsible for the politicization of Anglo-Jewry. However, this economic interpretation although perfectly valid, is too simplistic, crucially failing to appreciate the subtler social cleavages within the Jewish community. By prying a little deeper into the social composition of the Anglo-Jewish community in the 1930s it becomes apparent, as the Jewish brigaders testimonies substantiate, that on a number of different levels, working-class Jews in particular were susceptible to politicization.

²⁴ C.Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939* (Edward Arnold London 1979), p.5 and H.Pollins, *Economic History of Jews in Britain* (Associated Uni Presses Toronto 1982), p.132.

²⁵ *Tony Gilbert*, Oral History Recording 9157/10, date unknown, Imperial War Museum, transcript p.6.

²⁶ *Frank Lesser*, Oral History Recording 9408/7, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

²⁷ *Charlie Goodman*, Oral History Recording 16612/4, 1996, Imperial War Museum

²⁸ *Maurice Levitas*, Oral History Recording 16358/5, 1995, Imperial War Museum.

On one level, the distinct social structure of the British Jewish community certainly lent itself to the politicization of its members. To begin to understand the complexities of the Jewish community in the 1930s first requires the nominal rejection of any romantic notion of tranquil communal homogeneity. The reality was far more turbulent; by the 1930s there was a great disparity of wealth within the Jewish community and this was the cause of a growing internal polemic and escalating tensions.

The introduction of emancipatory laws²⁹ during the nineteenth century had allowed some of Britain's longer-settled Jews³⁰ to make considerable social advances. This, in effect, created a Jewish upper class or 'aristocracy' whose members were able to trace their British ancestry back over several generations. The social mobility of the newly *embourgeoised-Jews* was reflected in their movement away from tenement dwellings in the poorer areas of Britain's cities, to more comfortable suburban climes³¹, which were believed to be more 'befitting' of their newly attained professional status. To facilitate this social movement, some upper class Jews made a concerted effort to anglicize by discarding what they perceived as the more irksome Jewish religious and cultural practices, replacing them with more 'gentrified graces'. Sir Basil Henriques, a prominent Jewish philanthropist and community leader, educated at Harrow and Oxford³² arguably personifies many of these changes, a view supported by Charlie Goodman who described Henriques as 'being more English than Jewish'.³³

The culmination of these changes meant that the more affluent Jews sought to distance themselves from their poorer, 'uncouth' brethren, whose numbers dramatically increased due to economic migration, and in the aftermath of the 1903-06 pogroms in the former Russian Empire³⁴. Pollins estimates about 60,000

²⁹ Jews became politically emancipated in Britain following the passage of the 'Act to substitute One Oath for the Oaths of Allegiance, Supremacy and Abjuration; and for the Relief of Her Majesty's Subjects professing the Jewish Religion on 23 July 1857 allowing the inauguration of Lionel Rothschild as the first Jewish MP on 26 July 1857: M.C.N. Salbstein, *The Emancipation of the Jews in Britain* (Associated University Presses Toronto 1982), p.238.

³⁰ Jews have continuously lived in Britain since the Norman Conquests, although they were officially exiled between 1290 and 1664. In 1753 it is estimated that the Jewish community was 8,000 strong: C.Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939* (Edward Arnold, London 1979), pp. 2&4.

³¹ C.Holmes, *John Bull's Island* (Macmillan London 1988), p.26.

³² L.L. Loewe, *Basil Henriques : A Portrait* (Routledge and Kegan Paul London 1976), pp. 8-18.

³³ *Charlie Goodman*, Oral History Recording 14575/3, 1994, Imperial War Museum

³⁴ The 1903-06 Russian pogroms were the second incidence of wide-spread violent anti-Semitism in the Jewish Pale following earlier persecutions between 1881-84. In the aftermath of the pogroms a significant Jewish exodus occurred from Eastern Europe westwards. Although many of the Jewish migrants set-out with an objective of settling in America a significant number arrived and established residence in Britain during the 1910s: J.D.Klier & S.Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*,(Cambridge University Press 1993).

Jews lived in the British Isles in 1880 but by 1914 the number had grown to perhaps 300,000.³⁵

In the 1930s the Jewish upper class consisted of the fortunate few; their newly acquired affluence, although a developing trend, was markedly atypical of the general social standing of the Jewish community, which remained overwhelmingly working class in character.³⁶ Consequently, the greater part of Anglo-Jewry tended to live a 'ghetto-like' existence in the poorest and most downtrodden areas of Britain's major cities such as in the East End of London, particularly Stepney and around Strangeways and Cheetham Hill in Manchester.

Mimicking, the Eastern-European *shtetl-life* that the immigrant Jews had left behind them, and also to ease the observance of Sabbath laws, Britain's Jewish communities grew up within defined areas, restricted by the religious need to live within walking distance of the local *steibel*, (small housed based synagogues).³⁷ Consequently, certain areas became highly concentrated with Jewish inhabitants, a process that can be interpreted as amounting to a self-inflicted ghettoisation. Gilbert regarded 'the ghettos in the East End of London as affording some safety and a feeling of security'.³⁸ However, even if ghetto life provided a feeling of safety, the densely populated and impoverished conditions of these Jewish neighborhoods meant that even before any further factors are considered, such areas inevitably developed into Britain's most potent political hotbeds, and as such, the perfect spawning grounds for both communism and fascism.

The stark difference in lifestyle between rich and poor Jews in Britain, deliberately exaggerated by the Jewish aristocracy, 'who felt threatened by the mass arrival of Jews from the East,'³⁹ led to a series of internal community strains; a feeling expressed by Charlie Goodman who bitterly recalls that 'of course nobody he knew went down Park Lane where all the Jewish millionaires lived'.⁴⁰ The poorer members of the Jewish community were alienated from their better educated, self-appointed Jewish representatives, who pursued their own agenda with a total disregard for working-class opinion (an oversight that was to have serious repercussions with the rise of the BUF).

As a result of community alienation, working class Jewry was vulnerable to politicization, particularly the class based politics of the Left. Frank Lesser recalls that 'there was an organization called the Workers Circle in the East End of London that was quite important among working class Jews, and they argued that

³⁵ H.Pollins, *Economic History of Jews in Britain* (Associated Uni Presses Toronto 1982), p134.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.185.

³⁷ C.Holmes, *John Bull's Island* (Macmillian London 1988), p. 46.

³⁸ *Tony Gilbert*, Oral History Recording 9157/10, recording year unknown, Imperial War Museum, transcript p. 4.

³⁹ *Jewish Socialist*, *Lines of Dissent* Spring 2000 No. 41, p.20.

⁴⁰ *Charlie Goodman*, Oral History Recording 14575/3, 1994, Imperial War Museum

Jews, in order to be equal, in order to be emancipated, had to engage themselves in this side of [Left wing] politics in order to secure rights for all people repressed.’⁴¹ For Jack Shaw ‘and for a lot of us [Jews], Russia was the utopia. It was the utopia for the working class, and we were always attending meetings’.⁴²

Politicization also occurred because of the nature of Jewish employment during the 1930s. The tendency of working class Jewry to work in particular trades, a trend that originated both out of strong community ties and the proliferation of a ‘strength in numbers mentality’⁴³ (a by-product of the ever-presence of anti-Semitism), undoubtedly contributed to an environment that meant some form of political indoctrination was almost inevitable. Evidence of this trend is manifest in the heavy involvement of the London and Manchester Jewish communities in the fur, clothing and furniture trades. John Jones, a non-Jewish brigadier from London described himself as “one of the only gentiles in the fur trade”⁴⁴ and believes he was only offered a job because his foreman misheard his name and thought he was Jewish!

Jewish trading companies were typically highly unionized small workshops, an arrangement that guaranteed all the employees a certain level of exposure to socialist ideas and politics. When asked how he became involved in politics, Jones replied that “one of the shop foreman, Dave Kirsh ... began to teach me on the history of the Labour movement and listening to him I got interested”.⁴⁵ Jud Colman, who worked in the textile industry in Manchester recalls ‘always [being] in the union, I left school at fourteen, I wasn’t particularly political, I was introduced to politics at work’.⁴⁶ For large numbers of workers employed in Jewish petty trading, this type of ‘shop-floor political education’ was a common route into socialist political activity; a process fueled by the notoriously low pay and bad working conditions that accompanied such work.

An equally important cause of politicization is illustrated by a generational analysis. Without exception all of the Jewish brigadiers were first-generation Britons; the offspring of Eastern European immigrant parents. Indeed, with the exception of Bloom and Levine, all of the Jewish brigadiers were born within five years of each other between 1912-17,⁴⁷ which meant that when they joined the CP, typically between 1935-37, they were all young, either in their late teens or early twenties.

⁴¹ *Frank Lesser*, Oral History Recording 9408/7, 1986, Imperial War Museum

⁴² *Jack Shaw*, Oral History Recording 13547/3, 1991, Imperial War Museum

⁴³ H.Pollins, *Economic History of Jews in Britain* (Associated Uni Presses Toronto 1982), pp. 142 & 145.

⁴⁴ John ‘Bosco’ Jones, Oral History Recording 9392/6, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Jud Coleman*, Oral History Recording 14575/3, 1994, Imperial War Museum

⁴⁷ See biographies.

The generational distinction illustrates a fundamental difference in attitude between the immigrant generation and their British-born offspring. The immigrant generation appears to have followed a Smilesean ideology,⁴⁸ were prepared to endure harsh and often hazardous working conditions⁴⁹ and live in decrepit and dilapidated housing. Such conditions were tolerated because the immigrant generation were embarking on a new life and could therefore, initially at least, expect to struggle. Charlie Goodman recalls how the employers would take advantage of the new immigrants; ‘many would go to work in the sweat shops and work all day long and sleep on the cutting table or the pressing table at night’.⁵⁰

Similarly, the relative safety that Britain offered from persecution was regarded by the immigrant generation as an infinitely better alternative to remaining in the Jew-hating societies of Eastern Europe. Dave Goodman recalls his Polish émigré father becoming a staunch Liberal ‘impressed with the political freedoms he found in Britain’.⁵¹ Any anti-Semitism that did exist in Britain was largely ignored in an effort to avoid attracting any unnecessary attention to the newly established communities⁵². Moreover, the level of anti-Semitism that existed in Liberal Britain paled in comparison to the violence the immigrant Jews had been exposed to in Eastern Europe.⁵³ W. Goldman in his autobiography of East End life notes that,

*‘it was probably our traditional ‘minority’ status that kept us in restraint. We were never allowed to forget that we were foreigners. It was up to us to be on our best behaviour. Our parents continually reminded us: “One bad Jew gets the whole race into trouble. The Gentiles don’t judge us by the best, but by the worst amongst us”’.*⁵⁴

The unyielding dedication of the immigrant generation is in stark contrast to the attitude held by the first generation of British born Jews who by the 1930s, had begun to reach adolescence and maturity. The brigadier’s generation had much higher expectations than their parents and were far less prepared to resign themselves to a life of endless and ultimately fruitless toil. Shaw recalls ‘that a lot of my friends were only boys, they wanted to be smart [to dress up in

⁴⁸ C.Holmes, *John Bull’s Island* (Macmillian London 1988), p46.

⁴⁹ H.Pollins, *Economic History of Jews in Britain* (Associated Uni Presses Toronto 1982), p.147.

⁵⁰ *Charlie Goodman*, Oral History Recording 16612/4, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

⁵¹ Interview with *Dave Goodman*, 16 December 2000.

⁵² H.Pollins, *Economic History of Jews in Britain* (Associated Uni Presses Toronto 1982), p.137.

⁵³ C.Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876-1939* (Edward Arnold London 1979), p.104

⁵⁴ W.Goldman, *East End My Cradle : Portrait of an Environment* (Robson Books London 1988), p. 20.

fashionable clothes] and go out with girls'.⁵⁵ Boxing was regarded by many as offering a route out of the misery of tenement poverty and during the 1930s the sport hosted a range of Jewish prize fighters.⁵⁶

Yet, for the vast majority of first-generation British-born working-class Jewry, perhaps with the exception of the first-born male in a family, financial constraints meant there was little opportunity to remain in education beyond the age of fourteen. Of the Jewish brigaders investigated there is evidence to support that eight left school with only elementary education.⁵⁷ Consequently, like their parents, these Jews were expected to enter full-time employment at a very young age, with little prospect of improving their social standing. In the wake of the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the ensuing worldwide depression the economic situation was arguably even bleaker for the brigaders' generation.

The depression naturally fueled the radicalization of politics, a trend clearly evident in the poorer areas of Britain, which became saturated with street politics. In the East End of London, Victoria Park became a focal point of political activities. Russell described Victoria Park as 'sort of a Speaker's Corner ... on a Sunday morning, speakers from all sorts of political parties from that area drifted there'⁵⁸. Dave Goodman recalls similar street-side political speakers in Middlesbrough⁵⁹ and Colman described the streets of Cheetham Hill as 'covered in chalk'⁶⁰ [party propaganda written in chalk on the streets]. It is unquestionable that in such an environment some degree of exposure to radical political ideas was unavoidable for working class Jews and non-Jews alike. However, it would be incorrect to regard this turbulent political atmosphere as irrevocably leading to working class support for the CP.

A wide variety of Left-wing parties were in circulation during the depressed 1930s, all competing for the support of the disenchanting. Within Jewish circles an even greater political factionalism existed, as a number of mainstream political parties had exclusively Jewish, non-affiliated equivalents. The CP was but one of these organisations and were largely insignificant since in 1931 it only had 6,000 members⁶¹. This suggests, considering the huge number of unemployed, that poverty did not necessarily lead to working class support for the CP in Jewish or non-Jewish circles.

⁵⁵ Jack Shaw, Oral History Recording 13547/3, 1991, Imperial War Museum

⁵⁶ Ibid. and H.Pollins, *Economic History of Jews in Britain* (Associated Uni Presses Toronto 1982), p.186.

⁵⁷ See biographies.

⁵⁸ Interview with Sam Russell, 6 February 2001.

⁵⁹ Interview with Dave Goodman, 16 December 2000.

⁶⁰ Jud Colman, Oral History Recording 14575/3, 1994, Imperial War Museum.

⁶¹ H.Pelling, *The British Communist Party : A Historical Profile* (Adam and Charles Black London 1958), p. 67.

The final socio-economic factor that requires examining is religion. The influence of Judaism as a way of life, rather than as the cause of persecution, appears to have been largely overlooked by most studies of the British Jewish community. Whilst once accepted suppositions that Judaism, as a messianic religion meant that Jews were more readily amenable to Marxist utopian ideals have, quite rightly, now been dismissed as anti-Semitic propaganda, the wider question of the politicizing effect of Jewish communal life remains unanswered. The fact that it was not uncommon for the same synagogue room to be used ‘for prayer and immediately afterwards for discussions on socialist principles and the organisation of industrial stoppages,’⁶² clearly requires addressing. This is underlined by the example of Dave Goodman who came into contact with the YCL through his Jewish community.

*‘It was a Saturday morning in the synagogue; I knew the kids [YCL members] well enough over the years through the synagogue ... and they said right, Friday night Whitfill buildings, meeting of the YCL, come along, and I went and joined the YCL in February 1937’.*⁶³

Although it is impossible to generalize about the level of religious observance exercised by the different generations, the testimonies of the Jewish brigaders suggest that their émigré parents, were in the main devoutly religious, which would be consistent with the pious Eastern European shtetel life they would have been brought up in. Of the brigaders, there is evidence to support that seven were brought up in religious families and four attended Jewish schools. Colman’s recollections of his religious upbringing that ‘until thirteen the parents were very strict with the boys, but since thirteen they didn’t worry,’⁶⁴ are true of all the brigaders but Russell and Lesser, who remained religious until they were older.

The obvious problem that accompanied Jewish involvement with the communists was the dichotomy between Marxist atheism and the maintenance of a Jewish faith. Colman jokes that he rejected his religion even before his Bar Mitzvah, but Lesser, who was brought up in devoutly religious family became an atheist aged fifteen when he joined the YCL. Garber and Goodman also both rejected their religion outright after joining the communists, and none of the remaining Jewish brigaders mention that they remained as practicing Jews after their Bar Mitzvahs.

⁶² Jewish Socialist *Lines of Dissent* Spring 2000 No. 41, p.21

⁶³ *Dave Goodman*, Oral History Recording 16621/5, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

⁶⁴ *Jud Colman*, Oral History Recording 14575/3, 1994, Imperial War Museum.

Within religious circles the perceived threat of communism was taken very seriously. Lesser recalls,

'a young man, older than myself was beaten in the synagogue, in front of all the people, by his father, because he declared himself a communist ... and there were certainly people whom I knew in the synagogue who were at least as much concerned about the left, and the influence the Left might have upon their children, as they were concerned about the anti-Semitic Right'.⁶⁵

Similarly, Dave Goodman recalls that 'the rabbi used to tear his hair out and complain bitterly to the parents about them allowing their children to give the Jewish community a bad name by their activities in the YCL'⁶⁶.

The reaction of the Jewish brigaders' parents to their offspring's declarations of atheism or involvement in communist activities are unclear. Dave Goodman recruited his father into the CP and recalls that his father

'used to collect funds and sell literature to the Jewish community, with which he never distanced himself. He remained a good synagogue-going member and respected as well, but because of the feelings about fascism he would be able to collect money for the CP, which was seen by the Jewish community as a very staunchly anti-fascist organisation whatever they thought about communism.'⁶⁷

Gilbert simply recalls that Jewish parents implored their children not to get involved in politics but that this advice was 'absolutely ignored'.⁶⁸

It appears that regardless of whether the Jewish brigaders continued to practice their religion, their upbringing in a close-knit community meant that, through friends and often through the synagogue, they were introduced to political activities. In this sense the Jewish brigaders' ethnicity inadvertently played a role in their politicization. It also has been demonstrated that on a number of other levels, including area and type of living conditions, the nature of employment, generational factors and perceived internal community alienation, religion also inadvertently played a role in Jewish politicization. This politicization,

⁶⁵ Frank Lesser, Oral History Recording 9408/7, 1986, Imperial War Museum

⁶⁶ Dave Goodman, Oral History Recording 16621/5, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Tony Gilbert, Oral History Recording 9157/10, date unknown, Imperial War Museum, transcript p.6.

it should be stressed, was by no means guaranteed to manifest itself as support for the CP and significantly, amongst the Jewish brigaders only Kenton, Colman and Garber⁶⁹ had been enticed to join the CP with its utopian ideals of worker redemption, before the rise of fascism. Of these brigaders, Garber's case can be isolated as unique, since his early involvement in the CP clearly originated from being reared alongside his two Bund Party radical uncles. Thus, only two of the researched Jewish brigaders can be regarded as independently joining the Communists before the rise of fascism in Britain, supporting the premise that socio-economic conditions were not the primary motivation for Jewish Communist support.

If economic and social conditions can be accepted as facilitating the politicization of young British Jews, yet be dismissed as necessarily resulting in support of the CP, the question of what motivated these Jews to join the CP still stands. In order to answer this question, and establish why the CP developed such a significant Jewish support base requires an appraisal of the rise of fascism in Britain and a critique of the elevation of the CP to the position of Britain's leading anti-Fascist organisation.

⁶⁹ See biographies.

CHAPTER TWO

The study of British fascism and particularly the activities of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) is a well-documented area of history, supported by a considerable volume of specifically dedicated literature. In contrast, with the exception of the occasional account of the ‘Battle of Cable Street,’ research into the anti-fascist movement in Britain has remained until recently,⁷⁰ a largely neglected history, with still-less published historical analysis of the part played by Anglo-Jewry in combating fascism. Such an uneven distribution of historical attention is unfortunate, as it belies the significant contribution of British Jewry to anti-fascism, a movement in which all of the Jewish brigaders researched were involved.

This chapter seeks to appraise the involvement of the Jewish brigaders in the anti-fascist movement in Britain during the early 1930s, and will attempt to demonstrate that Anglo-Jewish attitudes towards fascism were heavily influenced by the rise of Nazism in Germany. Additionally, the origins and prevalence of anti-Semitism within the BUF will also be explored, along with the Jewish community’s response to the escalating level of anti-Semitic violence in Britain.

It will be argued that the Jewish establishment, as represented by the Jewish Board of Deputies, pursued a largely apathetic and ineffective response to mounting BUF anti-Semitic violence. This apathy will be shown to have alienated working class Jewry, and facilitated the gravitation of previously unpoliticized working class Jews towards the Communist Party, which by 1935, championed pro-active anti-fascism as its foremost concern.⁷¹ This line of inquiry aims to demonstrate that the large Jewish support for the CP in Britain during the 1930s was not due to radical Marxist political convictions but because membership of the CP offered the best possibly means of opposing fascism.

The BUF was not the first fascist organisation in Britain, as it was predated by a number of smaller, politically inconsequential fascist parties established during the 1920s. Rather, the launch of the BUF on 1 October 1932⁷² is significant because it marks the establishment of the first fascist party in Britain to make any real impact upon British politics. As Cross remarks ‘never before in modern British history had the spontaneous idea of one man flowered so quickly

⁷⁰ N.Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Macmillan Press, London 2000), appears to be the first serious scholarly work dedicated to the history of anti-fascism in Britain.

⁷¹ C.Collette & S. Bird (ed.), *Jews, Labour and the Left, 1918-48* (Ashgate, Aldershot 2000), p. 94.

⁷² C.Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (Barrie and Rockliff, London 1961), p. 67.

into a national movement'.⁷³ The exact size of the BUF remains unknown; Oswald Mosley, the BUF's founding member and leader, claimed that the party had 500,000 members in November 1936, although recent research suggests that Mosley's claim is greatly exaggerated and a more likely figure is around 16,000 fully paid-up members.⁷⁴

Regardless of the lack of a definitive figure of BUF membership, the popular interest and allure of fascism in Britain, can be identified as having been linked to the meteoric success of fascism on mainland Europe. Mussolini's rise to power in Italy in 1922 and Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of Germany in January 1933 created an impression in Britain that fascism was in an unstoppable ascent. This mood is reflected in the editorial line of the *Daily Mail*, which openly supported the BUF to facilitate the growth of fascism in Britain. In January 1934, Viscount Rothermere, the owner of the *Daily Mail*, himself wrote, under the headline "Hurrah for the Blackshirts" that,

'Britain's survival as a great power will depend on the existence of a well organised party of the Right, ready to take over responsibility for national affairs with the same directness of purpose and energy of method as Mussolini and Hitler have displayed'.⁷⁵

To many British Jews, the foundation of the BUF in 1932 was the cause of much grave concern. For these Jews, it appeared perfectly logical to equate Hitler's virulent anti-Semitic Nazism with Mosley's brand of British fascism. Such an understanding is exemplified by the testimony of Dave Goodman who recalls that,

'The rise of Nazism and Hitler impacted on Jewish communities in Germany, but also it impacted on Jewish communities in other countries, including Britain, when refugees from Hitler's Germany came to Britain. Some came to the Middlesborough area and so we [the Jews of Middlesborough] were conscious of Nazism, not just as an academic threat but as something real and close to the Jewish community ... The impact of what was happening to the Jews in Germany, on the mind set of the Jews here [in Britain] was very strong and was transmitted down to the children as well. So, we became very conscious of Hitlerism and anti-

⁷³ Ibid., p.86.

⁷⁴ D.S.Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-81* (Manchester, MUP 1987), pp. 71-72.

⁷⁵ *Daily Mail*, 15 January 1934, p.10.

*Semitism, the threat of the rise of fascism, which over a period of years became more menacing.*⁷⁶

Charlie Goodman, who lived in the East End, confirms this perception, attributing ‘the growth in opposition to fascism [in Britain] amongst Jewish people to what was happening in Germany’.⁷⁷

It therefore appears reasonable to surmise that, at least in part, Jewish involvement in anti-fascism in Britain originated in a desire amongst Anglo-Jewry to avenge the mistreatment of Jews in Nazi Germany. W F Mandle in *Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascists* also recognises this trend, but controversially takes matters one step further, suggesting that the BUF was not an overtly anti-Semitic party until 1934, when, in reaction to repeated anti-Nazi (rather than anti-BUF) attacks by Jews on Blackshirts, Mosley adopted an anti-Semitic agenda.⁷⁸

Using the testimonies of the Jewish brigaders as a historical basis, it appears that Mandle’s conclusion is not factually borne-out. Of the Jewish brigaders researched, only three were involved in anti-fascist activities before 1934, which suggests that most Jews became involved in anti-fascism only after the BUF became ‘overtly’ anti-Semitic; an event that coincided with the Nazi’s intensification of Jewish persecution in Germany⁷⁹. Furthermore, although Mandle is quite correct to suggest that it is erroneous to necessarily regard anti-Semitism as an intrinsic part of all fascist models, (a point Mussolini’s Italy in the 1920s clearly illustrates), works by D.S.Lewis⁸⁰ and N.Copsey⁸¹ both indicate that the BUF retained anti-Semitic credentials from the very outset.

Notwithstanding the controversy over the exact origins of the BUF’s anti-Semitism, it is beyond doubt that British Jews were deliberately targeted by the Blackshirts. Fascist attacks against Jews were often very violent, and were designed to install fear into the heart of the Jewish community. Frederick Thomas a non-Jewish brigader recalls that ‘in Hackney ... attacks on Jews were all too frequent. Burning rags were thrown at doors of synagogues and quite a large number of elderly Jewish people were attacked’.⁸² Tony Gilbert also remembers the dangers Jews faced during the 1930s, testifying that,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Charlie Goodman, Oral History Recording 16612/4, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

⁷⁸ W.F.Mandle, *Anti-Semitism and the British Union of Fascist* (Longmans, Plymouth 1968), p5.

⁷⁹ The Nuremberg Laws were enacted in September 1935. R.Wolfson, *Years of Change: European History 1890-1945* (Hodder & Stoughton, London), p.309.

⁸⁰ D.S.Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-81* (Manchester, MUP 1987), p.93.

⁸¹ N.Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Macmillan Press, London 2000).

⁸² Frederick Thomas, Oral History Recording, 9396/8, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

'In Stepney ... the anti-Semitism was so great that you could hardly venture out of your own particular area - for instance, to go to Bethnal Green or to Shoreditch, the Elephant and Castle, Hoxton, anywhere like that, you were entering enemy territory. You could be attacked if you appeared Jewish ... 'they [the Blackshirts] used to use not just knuckle dusters, but they wielded belts which were studded with iron implements in the belt - in other words they became a terrible weapon'⁸³

Gilbert is well positioned to testify of BUF anti-Semitic violence, as he was subjected to a serious anti-Semitic assault by the BUF in London. On the occasion of his attack Gilbert recalls that,

'I reached the turning where my parents lived, which was Bishops Way in Bethnal Green, they had been re-housed in a council flat in Bethnal Green - in other words we were now living in ... enemy territory - and when I reached the corner of Bishops Way, somebody said to me "Have you got a light?" ... and the next thing I heard was "That's him," and I woke up in Bethnal Green Hospital. They had broken my nose, and from that day to this I have had serious sinus trouble because the attack was a very fierce one'.⁸⁴

Collectively the Jewish Brigaders testimonies suggest that British Jewry became involved in anti-fascist activities for two reasons: firstly, because of an awareness of Nazism in Germany, and its immediate equation with fascism in Britain, and secondly because of the very real threat Jews faced of attack from the BUF. However, having established the motivation for Jewish anti-fascism, it is still unclear why the Communist Party became the leading pro-active anti-fascist organisation in Britain, and not, as perhaps could have been expected, a Jewish organisation.

The issue of 'class' is key to understanding why the Jewish community failed to establish a unified response to fascism. The threat of BUF anti-Semitic violence was most acutely felt by working-class Jewry; an occurrence that Lou Kenton attributes to the BUF's method of recruitment, which targeted 'the unskilled unemployed, who were feeling very bitter and resentful'.⁸⁵ This tactic, spurred by BUF anti-Semitic propaganda, facilitated the growth of BUF

⁸³ Tony Gilbert, Oral History Recording, 9157/10, date unknown, Imperial War Museum, transcript, pp.2, 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.4.

⁸⁵ Lou Kenton, Oral History Recording 9374/4, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

strongholds in areas directly bordering impoverished Jewish working-class neighbourhoods, a trend Gilbert mentions in his description of anti-Semitism in the East End of London.

The proximity of BUF strongholds to working-class Jewish areas meant the majority of violent confrontations between fascists and Jews remained contained within these areas. Consequently, middle-class Jewry, who had long vacated such areas, remained largely oblivious to the prevalence of BUF instigated violence that their poorer co-religionists were regularly subjected to. This middle-class ignorance in part explains the Jewish establishment's apathy towards the fascists.

The leading representative body of the Jewish establishment in Britain during the 1930s was the Jewish Board of Deputies (BOD), chaired by Neville Laski. The BOD was a notoriously intransigent organisation, with a membership of 'old men intoxicated with the reactionary values of the British bourgeoisie, almost as afraid of their less wealthy co-religionists as they were of the fascists'.⁸⁶ The growing radical and overt involvement of working class Jewry in the anti-fascist movement was a source of much embarrassment to the BOD, who perceived its primary function as assisting Anglo-Jewry's assimilation into British society.⁸⁷

The BOD, in line with its conservative outlook, advocated a non-interventionist approach to fascism, a decision in tune with the British government's international policy of appeasement. However, the BOD's unwillingness to organise a Jewish defence to BUF violence, was highly derisory causing an internal community split described by Kenton as 'a great struggle amongst the Jews themselves'.⁸⁸ Charlie Goodman similarly recalls that, 'There was a lot of opposition from the Jewish establishment, they always considered us [working class Jewry] to be hooligans because they were completely divorced from the people of the East End'.⁸⁹

The severity of the split in the Jewish community can be gauged by letters published in the *Jewish Chronicle* on the issue. By the summer of 1936, fascist instigated Jew-baiting had reached such intolerable heights that the newspaper dedicated, an often multi-page column entitled, 'The Need for Jewish Defence' (later shortened to 'Jewish Defence,') which documented the BUF's weekly anti-Semitic activities and published readers reactions to the unfolding events. A letter

⁸⁶D.S.Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-81* (Manchester, MUP 1987), p.108.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Lou Kenton, Oral History Recording, 9374/4, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

⁸⁹ Charlie Goodman, Oral History Recording 16612/4, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

from the Council of the United Synagogue, published on 10 July 1936 is typical of many: it

*‘strongly recommend[ed] it’s representative upon the Jewish Board of Deputies to stress the urgent necessity of prompt measures being taken in order to strengthen the Jewish defence against the continuous growth of anti-Semitism in this country’.*⁹⁰

In answer, the BOD’s vice-president, Sir Robert Cohen, emphatically rebuffed the recommendation, citing that ‘it would not be in order to discuss a matter of that kind at a meeting of the Council of the United Synagogue’.⁹¹ Such a response typifies the BOD’s reactionary outlook, a policy, which was officially embraced on 19 July 1936, when the BOD met specifically to consider its reaction towards the BUF. In this meeting the BOD merely decided to establish a committee rather than address the issue directly. The BOD meeting was reported by the *Jewish Chronicle*, which noted that,

*‘The Board of Deputies, which met on Sunday [19 July 1936], devoted a large proportion of its time to the urgent problem of Jewish Defence against the growing political anti-Semitic campaign in this country ... President Laski announced that, “After a long discussion it was decided to recommend to the Board that a co-ordinating committee be formed to unify and direct activities in defence of the Jewish Community against attacks made upon it.”’*⁹²

The BUF’s proposed rally through London’s East End on 4 October 1936, an event popularly remembered as the ‘Battle of Cable Street’, was a pivotal event for the BOD. Despite being aware of the BUF’s aggressive intentions, the BOD maintained its reactionary position and urged Jews not to oppose the march. This decision is recorded in the 2 October issue of the *Jewish Chronicle*, where the BOD published the following warning to Anglo-Jewry,

‘Urgent Warning. It is understood that a large Blackshirt demonstration will be held in East London on Sunday afternoon [4th October 1936]. Jews are urgently warned to keep away from the route of the Blackshirt march and from their meetings. Jews who however innocently, become

⁹⁰ *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 July 1936, p.10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 July 1936.

involved in any possible disorders will be actively helping anti-Semitism and Jew-baiting. Unless you want to help the Jew-baiters KEEP AWAY'.⁹³

The BOD's non-interventionist approach to Cable Street demonstrates how far removed the Jewish establishment had become from working class Jewish opinion. All of the Jewish brigaders involved in the Battle of Cable Street, testify that they believed the purpose of the BUF's planned march through the East End was 'to establish that the Jews were aliens and that the Blackshirts had command of the streets'. It therefore is not surprising that an estimated 100,000 people (of which, an unknown but sizeable proportion were Jewish)⁹⁴ defied the BOD's advice and took to the streets in protest, successfully preventing the BUF march.

In stark contrast to the Jewish establishment's inaction to the BUF, the Communist Party was at the forefront of anti-fascist campaigning. Communism as the very antithesis of fascism meant that the CP naturally pursued an anti-fascist agenda. This officially became the CP's foremost political commitment following the '7th Congress of the International, held in July-August 1935,'⁹⁵ where, in reaction to the growing threat of fascism throughout Europe, it was decided that a pro-active anti-fascist agenda was required. The moderate Left meanwhile adopted an anti-fascist policy more akin to the Jewish Establishment. This divergence in approach is mentioned by Margot Heinemann, who recalls that,

*'As with all anti-fascist activity and anti-Mosley demonstrations at that the time, the advice of the Labour Party was stay away and don't give him [Mosley] publicity. The Communist Party said 'don't allow him to get a hearing with his racists lies. I followed that line and when I got back to Cambridge I thought this [the CP] was the outfit I ought to join'.*⁹⁶

Frederick Thomas a non-Jewish brigader and Labour Party League of Youth member, echoes Heinemann's view, recalling that,

'in the mid '30s when Hitler had come to power and Mussolini was rampant and Mosley in this country, then much of the opposition [to fascism] depended upon the CP. It certainly did in terms of opposition to

⁹³ *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 October 1936, p.10.

⁹⁴ E.R.Smith, *Jewish Culture and History 'But what did they do? Contemporary Jewish responses to Cable Street'* (1998), p.50.

⁹⁵ W.Thompson, *The Good Cause British Communism 1920-1991* (Pluto Press London, 1992), p.53.

⁹⁶ *Margot Heinemann*, Oral History Recording 9239/5, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

Mosley and opposition in London. For that matter the CP were the only ones really pushing, so that, if one felt very strongly indeed, as many of us did, that the threat of fascism internationally and via Mosley nationally, was becoming the vital issue of the age, then one had to look, ... to the Communists because the Labour Party resolutions were insufficient'.⁹⁷

To working-class Jewry, many of whom, (as outlined in chapter one), already held Left-wing sympathies, their abandonment by the Jewish establishment and mainstream political parties meant that to oppose fascism, they, as Kenton recalls, 'naturally gravitated towards the Communists'.⁹⁸ This trend is reflected in CP membership figures, which at the beginning of 1935 stood at less than 6,000 but by the time of the Comintern Congress in July reached 7,700.⁹⁹

For the Jewish brigaders, because of their young age, the Young Communist League (YCL), which was the youth-wing of the Communist Party, was the principal beneficiary of their support. Jud Colman describes the YCL as a 'mainly social not militant [organisation] ... arranging camps, rambles and dances,'¹⁰⁰ but, Colman's recollections should not detract from the YCL's important role in opposing fascism. The YCL operated as a very committed and politically dedicated movement, organising anti-fascist demonstrations and selling *The Challenge* newspaper¹⁰¹.

Of the Jewish brigaders researched, eight joined the YCL before going to Spain whilst Bloom and Russell were members of the CP. Lesser is the one exception to the trend as he joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP), whereas the other Jewish brigaders that weren't officially members of the CP were, at least in some lesser capacity, linked to Communist led activities.

In cities that hosted a Jewish community of any substantial size it appears that the local YCL branches during the 1930s were invariably dominated by a Jewish presence. Colman describes the Cheetham Hill YCL branch as 'mainly Jewish,'¹⁰² a view supported by Walter Greenhalgh a non-Jewish brigader and member of the same Manchester YCL branch who recalls that 'being a Jewish area, Cheetham YCL was very big with between 300-400 members'.¹⁰³ The most striking example of Jewish YCL involvement is mentioned by Maurice Levitas who claims that he was responsible for 'recruiting the whole of the Jewish Lads

⁹⁷ Frederick Thomas, Oral History Recording, 9396/8, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

⁹⁸ Lou Kenton, Oral History Recording, 9722/6, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

⁹⁹ H.Pelling, *The British Communist Party* (Adam & Charles Black, London 1958), p.84.

¹⁰⁰ Jud Colman, Oral History Recording, 14575/3, 1994, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Dave Goodman, 16 December, 2000.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Walter Greenhalgh, Oral History Recording, 11187/9, 1992, Imperial War Museum.

Brigades* Bugle Band into the YCL!’¹⁰⁴ Yet, despite the evident zeal displayed by Jews for YCL led activities, the level of communist ideological commitment held by Jewish YCL members was minimal. This suggests the motivation of British Jews for joining the YCL was anti-fascist rather than class conscious. As Charlie Goodman recalls,

*‘The Jews made the CP very strong, not because the Jewish people understood the theory of communism or even supported the theory of communism, but they saw the Communist Party as the leading organisation in the fight with Mosley fascism. So they [the Jews] gravitated towards the CP and at that time there must have been three branches, 600 members of the CP in Stepney alone and the Young Communist League ... had 50 members made up from the kids from the Jewish Youth Clubs.’*¹⁰⁵

Tony Gilbert verifies this point declaring, ‘I’ve got to admit that when I did join [the CP], it was without any conviction as to the theory, the philosophy of communism, or even an understanding of what socialism was about’.¹⁰⁶ Dave Goodman also recalls that he ‘didn’t know a lot about Communism’¹⁰⁷ when he joined the YCL, as his principal motivation for joining had been anti-fascist. This was equally true of Jack Shaw, who joined the YCL because ‘they were in the forefront of fighting fascism’¹⁰⁸ and Maurice Levitas who was attracted to the Communists because ‘they were the most vigorous opponents of fascism in the East End and a lot of them were Jews’.¹⁰⁹

Although, it appears that the CP and YCL’s new Jewish recruits did not possess any real Marxist ideology, this did not prevent British Jewry from taking an active role in anti-fascist campaigning. The level of the Jewish YCL members’ commitment to anti-fascism is illustrated by the Jewish brigaders’ presence at the BUF’s leading political rallies. The three largest BUF political meetings were held in the Royal Albert Hall in March 1934, Kensington Olympia in June 1934 and Cable Street in October 1936.¹¹⁰ Of the eleven London based Jewish brigaders

* The Jewish equivalent to the Church Lads Brigade.

¹⁰⁴ Maurice Levitas, Oral History Recording, 16358/5, 1995, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁰⁵ Charlie Goodman, Oral History Recording 16612/4, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁰⁶ Tony Gilbert, Oral History Recording 9157/10, year unknown, Imperial War Museum, transcript, p.22.

¹⁰⁷ Dave Goodman, Oral History Recording 16621/5, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁰⁸ Jack Shaw, Oral History Recording 13547/3, 1991, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁰⁹ Maurice Levitas, Oral History Recording, 16358/5, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

¹¹⁰ D.S.Lewis, *Illusions of Grandeur: Mosley, Fascism and British Society, 1931-81* (Manchester, MUP 1987), pp.115-122.

researched, Kenton and Charlie Goodman protested at all three BUF meetings, and Colin, Garber, Shaw and Levitas were present at least one of the rallies. In Manchester Colman protested at the major BUF rally in Belle Vue in 1935 and Dave Goodman was heavily involved in anti-fascist activities in Middlesborough despite the fact that ‘the Blackshirts didn’t pay too much attention’¹¹¹ to the city.

Protesting at BUF rallies was a dangerous pursuit, as the meetings were invariably violent. Anti-fascist hecklers could expect to be manhandled or forcibly removed for disrupting any BUF meeting and many were beaten-up, as John Jones, a non-Jewish brigader was, whilst attending the Palais de Dance meeting.¹¹² The Battle of Cable Street was an equally volatile experience as Charlie Goodman and Jack Shaw discovered as both were arrested and imprisoned for six months, for their part in the disturbances. Yet, the Jewish brigaders’ willingness to risk attack or arrest for opposing fascism should be regarded as an indicator of the severity of the BUF threat to British Jewry and also explains Anglo-Jewish support for the communists.

This chapter has established two crucial factors. Firstly, it has been demonstrated that previously unpoliticized elements of the Jewish working class were motivated to become heavily involved in the anti-fascist movement in Britain because of their subjection to anti-Semitic violence by the BUF and the rise of Nazism in Germany. Secondly, it has also been established that, as a consequence of the apathy displayed by the Jewish establishment and mainstream political parties towards the rise of violent fascism in Britain, this same group of Jews gravitated to the CP. This gravitation has been shown to have occurred not because working-class Jewry shared radical Marxist sentiments, although they did clearly have socialist sympathies, but because the CP were regarded as the leading anti-fascist organisation.

Discerning the initial motivation of working-class Jewry’s involvement in the CP is fundamental to my thesis, since membership of the CP and participation in anti-fascist activities in Britain were (as will be shown to be in the final chapter), pivotal factors in the Jewish brigaders subsequent decision to volunteer to join the International Brigades and fight fascism in Spain. Equally, by appraising the Jewish reaction to the rise of fascism in Britain, it has been demonstrated that elements of Anglo-Jewry, as epitomized by the Jewish brigaders, do not fit the established stereotype of the weak, helpless, persecuted Jew. Rather, some Jews have been shown to have risen to the challenge of fascism, even at the risk of

¹¹¹ *Dave Goodman*, Oral History Recording 16621/5, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

¹¹² See biography.

imprisonment, as exemplified by the ‘Battle of Cable Street,’ and in so doing helped expose the BUF’s inflammatory and racist agenda.

Having established why Jews became involved in the CP and anti-fascist activities in Britain, it is now appropriate to begin to address the central question of this dissertation and appraise what motivated some of these newly politicised young Jews to join the International Brigades in Spain.

CHAPTER THREE

Despite the obvious geographical distance between the Spanish Civil War and the struggle against the Blackshirts in Britain, in the minds of the Jews involved in the anti-fascist movement in Britain, particularly those who had joined the Communist Party, these two events were inextricably linked. The essence of this mentality is encapsulated in the testimony of Margot Heinemann who recalls that,

*‘The slogan raised from the people at Cable Street was “they shall not pass” and we believed what we did there [at Cable Street] was the same as what was being done in Madrid. So everything the Communist Party did, whatever it was about, turned into a solidarity action with Spain’.*¹¹³

The purpose of this final chapter is to attempt to discern the motivation of the Jewish brigaders for joining the International Brigades. The central premise of this dissertation is that for the majority of Jewish brigaders volunteering to Spain was a ‘natural progression’ from their prior involvement in the anti-fascist movement in Britain. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that after the ‘Battle of Cable Street,’ the priority campaign of the CP became supporting the Spanish Republic. It will be argued that through their membership of the CP, the Jewish brigaders became heavily involved in the ‘Aid Spain’ movement in Britain, which served to initially focus their attention on Spain. Additionally it will be shown that the majority of Jewish brigaders decided to join the International Brigades expressly in reaction to German involvement in the war, motivated by a desire to fight the propagators of Nazi anti-Semitism.

For many of the Jewish brigaders that joined or were affiliated to the CP during the 1930s, it was a life changing experience. As has already been established, the majority of Jewish recruits to the CP joined with the explicit aim of opposing fascism, with little or no prior knowledge of Communist or Marxist doctrines. However, as the Jewish brigaders became increasingly involved in the CP they were encouraged to study and discuss Communist texts and their political ignorance was quickly replaced with a solid grounding in the principles of communism. This development is indicated in the testimony of Jud Colman who recalls that, ‘I wasn’t a serious reader before I joined the YCL, the most

¹¹³ Margot Heinemann, Oral History Recording, 9239/5, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

serious books, the old Left Book Club books, came after I joined. The *Daily Worker*¹¹⁴ was our bible'.¹¹⁵

The CP's propaganda appears to have had a particularly strong effect on the Jewish brigaders, many of whom became devoted Communists, totally immersed in activities organised by the Party. Dave Goodman for example recalls that, 'once I became involved in the YCL, I went over the top in relation to the Jewish community. I became a well-read and educated Marxist and a committed atheist'.¹¹⁶

Aside from lecturing the Jewish brigades in the principles of communism, the CP's proxy role as an educator was also instrumental in promoting an awareness of the Spanish Civil War. The war in Spain began on 15 July 1936, coinciding almost exactly with 'Battle of Cable Street'. By September 1936, following Stalin's decision to provide the Spanish government with military support¹¹⁷ and in line with the anti-fascist motion adopted at the 7th Congress of the International in July-August 1935,¹¹⁸ the CP's 'major concern'¹¹⁹ became campaigning in support of the Spanish Republic.

Throughout 1937¹²⁰ the CP devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to organising and running the 'Aid Spain' movement in Britain which raised money, collected food and arranged medical aid to be shipped out to Spain.¹²¹ Lou Kenton recalls that 'there was hardly a weekend that went by without a demonstration or march in London [in support of the Republic],'¹²² a view supported by Heinemann who vividly testifies that,

'There were these great Aid Spain meetings of various kinds, at which Isabel Brown and returned-brigaders would speak, and I remember again and again you would empty out every penny you had in your pocket, and we would go home without the price of a bus fare and have to walk because of the tremendous feeling one had [towards Spain]. Every demonstration, every Communist Party demonstration, every united action,

¹¹⁴ The *Daily Worker* founded in 1930, was the Communist Party newspaper. H.Pelling, *The British Communist Party* (Adam and Charles Black London, 1958), p.52.

¹¹⁵ *Jud Colman*, Oral History Recording, 14575/3, 1994, Imperial War Museum.

¹¹⁶ *Dave Goodman*, Oral History Recording, 16621/5, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

¹¹⁷ H.Pelling, *The British Communist Party* (Adam and Charles Black London, 1958), p.91.

¹¹⁸ W.Thompson, *The Good Old Cause British Communism 1920-1991* (Pluto Press London, 1992),p.53.

¹¹⁹ *Dave Goodman*, Oral History Recording, 16621/5, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ W.Thompson, *The Good Old Cause British Communism 1920-1991* (Pluto Press London, 1992),p.55.

¹²² *Lou Kenton*, Oral History Recording, 9374/4, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

*every meeting this question of Spain would come up, solidarity with Spain!*¹²³

It was precisely at the time that the CP was dominated by the issue of the Spanish Civil War that most of the Jewish brigaders first became party members. Having already established how immersed in CP organised activities many of the Jewish brigaders were when they first joined the CP, it seems perfectly logical to conclude that it was through the CP that the Jewish brigaders first became aware of the Spanish Civil War. Kenton confirms this sequence of events, recalling that before he joined the YCL he, ‘hadn’t taken any interest at all in Spain or Spanish politics.’¹²⁴

All of the Jewish brigaders, with the exception of Charlie Goodman and Jack Shaw who were in prison, mention participating in the Aid Spain movement before joining the International Brigades, suggesting that this acted as a transitory period between the Jewish brigaders involvement in anti-BUF activities in Britain and their decision to go to Spain. In this context it is clear that the Jewish brigaders naturally progressed via the CP to joining the International Brigades and fighting in Spain.

The direct link between the CP in Britain and the Spanish Civil War was finally sealed in November 1936 when the CP decided to step-up its campaign in support of the Republic from merely fund-raising to actively recruiting men to fight in Spain. Kenton recalls this development testifying that, ‘it was the Communist Party that called for the recruitment and then organised recruitment to the International Brigades, which gradually became much more wide spread’.¹²⁵

The CP’s decision to start recruitment followed the establishment of the International Brigades in October 1936 and resulted in the launch of an official mechanism for screening and vetting would-be volunteers to the International Brigades in Britain, under the direction of R.W.Robson.¹²⁶ It should be noted that some British volunteers had already arrived in Spain before the CP officially began recruiting in Britain, among the first of whom, were Nat Cohen and Sam Masters, two Jewish clothing workers from Stepney.¹²⁷ However, of the Jewish brigaders researched, with the exception of Jack Shaw who stowed away on a ship to reach Spain, all joined the International Brigades after November 1936,

¹²³ Margot Heinemann, Oral History Recording, 9239/5, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

¹²⁴ Lou Kenton, Oral History Recording, 9374/4, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ B.Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty Spain 1936-39* (Lawrence Wishant, London 1986), p.44.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.36.

and therefore would have necessarily gone through the official CP recruitment process.¹²⁸

The CP advertised for recruits to the International Brigades, in the *Daily Worker* and by word-of-mouth within the Party.¹²⁹ Would-be volunteers were interviewed in the CP's Headquarters in King Street, Covent Garden, London,¹³⁰ in a process that was designed to weed-out 'adventurers and romantics',¹³¹ and normally required evidence of CP membership and an explanation of motive for volunteering.¹³² The stringent adherence to the rules is indicated by the testimony of Charlie Goodman who recalls that,

*'I didn't join the Communist Party until I went to Spain. When I went to join the Brigade, you had to go to the headquarters of the Communist Party, who were organising the Brigade and they were taking at that time members of the YCL and single, unmarried members of the Communist Party. I was unmarried [but] neither a member of the Communist Party or the YCL ... and they only allowed me to go if I joined the Party first'.*¹³³

Recruitment to the International Brigades, contrary to the assertions of some contemporary right-wing commentators was entirely voluntary. Levitas recalls that, 'there was no pressure [to join the International Brigades] other than the political literature I had read'.¹³⁴ Of the Jewish brigaders researched, Sam Russell is the only example of a brigader who was actually asked if he would volunteer to join the International Brigades. Russell recalls that he was approached 'by Jack Cohen, the National Student Organiser of the Communist Party,'¹³⁵ who, was aware that Russell was a member of the Officer Training Corps and was keen for Russell to share his military knowledge with the International Brigades. Russell, however states that he 'was not pressurised into making any decision',¹³⁶ and was motivated to volunteer after 'meeting John

¹²⁸ See biographies for the exact time of recruitment.

¹²⁹ On 9 January 1937, the British government, eager to maintain its policy of non-intervention, threatened anyone going to fight in Spain with prosecution under the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870. Consequently CP recruitment for the International Brigades was forced underground. B.Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty Spain 1936-39* (Lawrence Wishant, London 1986).

¹³⁰ *Charles Morgan*, Oral History Recording, 10362/2, 1984, Imperial War Museum.

¹³¹ B.Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty Spain 1936-39* (Lawrence Wishant, London 1986), p.44.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Charlie Goodman*, Oral History Recording, 16612/4, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

¹³⁴ *Maurice Levitas*, Oral History Recording, 16358/5, Imperial War Museum.

¹³⁵ Interview with Sam Russell, 6 February 2001.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Cornford who had come back from Spain, and he absolutely convinced me that it was necessary to go to Spain, so I did!'.¹³⁷

The Jewish brigaders' membership of the CP, therefore has been demonstrated to have been crucial on two levels to their decision to join the International Brigades. Firstly in initially focusing their attention on Spain which allowed as Kenton recalls 'a sort of natural movement [of attention] over from Mosley'¹³⁸ and secondly in the actual logistics of joining the International Brigades for which CP membership was treated as a prerequisite.

Having crucially established that recruitment to the International Brigades was conducted on a voluntary basis, it is now possible to address the final issue of this dissertation and attempt to determine the actual motivation of the Jewish brigaders for volunteering to fight in Spain. The overwhelming impression that emerges from examining the testimonies of the Jewish brigaders, is that following their involvement in the anti-fascist movement in Britain their already acute recognition of the international threat of fascism was significantly heightened and radicalised. Charlie Goodman verifies this perception recalling that,

*'When the war broke out [in Spain], it was of interest to me [although] I never thought about going to Spain in July 1936. But, having taken part in the fight against fascism in October 1936, I felt I would like to continue the fight physically against fascism with arms in hand. It would be more practical in my view than just fighting in [the] streets of London'.*¹³⁹

Charlie Goodman's view typifies all the Jewish brigaders' anti-fascist motivations for joining the International Brigades. Indeed, for six of the researched Jewish brigaders it appears that their decision to join the International Brigades was as Levitas testifies because of 'a general anti-fascist feeling'.¹⁴⁰

The Jewish brigaders, however, were by no means unique in realising the international threat of fascism as the testimony of Edward Smith, a non-Jewish brigader indicates. Smith, also through his involvement in the anti-fascist movement, naturally progressed from opposing the BUF in Britain to volunteering to Spain, recalling that,

'we could see then that fascism was advancing and it was necessary to put everything we could into holding them back - 'no pass around' [sic] -

¹³⁷ Sam Russell, Oral History Recording, 9484/6, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

¹³⁸ Lou Kenton, Oral History Recording, 9374/4, 1986, Imperial War Museum.

¹³⁹ Charlie Goodman, Oral History Recording, 16612/4, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁴⁰ Maurice Levitas, Oral History Recording, 16358/5, 1995, Imperial War Museum.

*was a very real thing. It hit us right to the core, the fascists must be stopped, just as they were stopped in Cable Street and Aldgate and consequently, in one and twos, we went off to Spain’.*¹⁴¹

The obvious conclusion to draw from this is that the Jewish and non-Jewish brigaders alike, were motivated to fight in Spain for the same anti-fascist reasons. However, the Jewish brigaders’ testimonies indicate that within their ‘general anti-fascist feelings’ there was a fundamental distinction between the motivations of Jewish and non-Jewish brigaders for joining the International Brigades. Whereas, the non-Jewish brigaders’ involvement can be attributed to politico-ideological reasons, the involvement of the Jewish brigaders was motivated by a desire to fight the perceived propagators of anti-Semitism. As Colman emphatically states, ‘my decision to go to Spain was nothing to do with the revolution, it was to stop fascism’.¹⁴²

The distinction between the motivations of the Jewish and non-Jewish brigaders is more easily understood when it is accepted that for many of the Jewish brigaders the Spanish Civil War, like their struggle against the BUF, was first and foremost about defeating anti-Semitism. It appears that following the Jewish brigaders’ exposure to fascism in Britain they became convinced that the spread of fascism and the rise of anti-Semitism were inextricably linked.¹⁴³ Such beliefs were spurred on by the emergence of Nazi Germany as the dominant representative model of fascism, as Jack Shaw recalls, ‘it annoyed me this fascism business, Hitler was on the march, he had occupied Austria and was marching’.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, the Jewish brigaders’ conception of fascism became blurred with Nazism.

The nature of this confusion is indicated in a revealing article in the *Jewish Chronicle* reporting on a meeting called by the Jewish Labour Council. Under the title “Spain’s fight is your fight” the *Jewish Chronicle* reported that the speaker, Mr. J. Jacobs declared that,

‘Jews in Britain must organise to fight for their co-religionists in Spain. General Franco has threatened to turn the clock back to 1493 - the

¹⁴¹ Edward Smith, Oral History Recording 11304/4, 1987, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁴² Jud Colman, Oral History Recording 14575/3, 1994, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁴³ The Jewish brigaders’ equation of fascism with anti-Semitism is distinct from the assertion of W.F.Mandle as discussed in chapter two, since it followed rather than preceded their involvement in the anti-fascist movement in Britain.

¹⁴⁴ Jack Shaw, Oral History Recording 13547/3, 1991, Imperial War Museum.

time of the Jewish persecutions. Once the international fascists win in Spain, they will march on'.¹⁴⁵

The assertion that Franco harboured secret anti-Semitic intentions is a complete fabrication, since with the exception of one speech on 31 December 1939 (three years after the article was published), Franco showed total indifference to the Jewish Question.¹⁴⁶ Yet, it is clear that the sentiments expressed in the article were certainly shared by the Jewish brigaders, and by virtue of its publication in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the wider Jewish Community in Britain.

The involvement of German military forces almost from the outset of the Spanish Civil War in support of Franco, confirmed in the minds of the Jewish brigaders, that their equation of fascism with anti-Semitism was well founded. Although German military involvement in Spain paled in comparison to Mussolini's commitment of 70,000 troops,¹⁴⁷ all of the Jewish brigaders that cite a desire to combat anti-Semitism as a motivation for joining the International Brigades, state that it was exclusively German involvement in the war that was pivotal to their decision to volunteer. The testimony of Max Colin typifies the motivation of such Jewish brigaders. Colin recalls,

'Being from a Jewish background, what was happening in Germany ... absolutely heartbreaking and atrocious. A friend of mine went over to Germany and tried to pin notices on the trees in the local park, and he got arrested by the Germans. So talking to him and what he saw and what you read; I'd read 'Mein Kampf' you see, these factors came together and that was the time when I decided that I'd volunteer for the International Brigades'.¹⁴⁸

Colin was not the only Jewish brigader to have read *Mein Kampf* and subsequently joined the International Brigades, suggesting that amongst Jewish brigaders there was a distinct Jewish motivation for fighting in Spain, characterised by a desire to oppose Nazism. Further evidence of this specifically Jewish motivation for fighting in Spain is evident in Garber's testimony. Garber makes a direct connection between BUF instigated anti-Semitism in Britain and German involvement in Spain, declaring that he joined the International Brigades because,

¹⁴⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 October 1936, p.12.

¹⁴⁶ C.Shindler, *Jewish Quarterly 'No Pasaran: the Jews who fought in Spain'* (1986 Issue 3), p.36.

¹⁴⁷ F. Ribeiro de Meneses, *Franco and the Spanish Civil War* (Routledge, London and New York, 2001), p.91.

¹⁴⁸ *Max Colin*, Oral History Recording, 8639/6, 1984-1985, Imperial War Museum.

'The Blackshirts were attacking elderly Jewish people around Stepney ... and then the report came through that a German unit had landed [in Spain] via Portugal. They [the Germans] were pouring in. I thought to myself 'now it is my job, I've got to go to'. We can't wait after reading Mein Kampf ... they [the Germans] are going to wipe us [the Jews] out'.¹⁴⁹

The high level of motivation displayed by all of the Jewish brigaders for joining the International Brigades is evidence of a final distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish brigaders. Whilst it has been established that some non-Jewish brigaders such as Smith were highly motivated, albeit for political reasons rather than in reaction to anti-Semitism, to join the International Brigades it is also clear that some non-Jewish brigaders simply drifted to Spain because of economic hardships in Britain. For example Charles Morgan, a non-Jewish brigader from Manchester testifies that,

'I don't make any claims that I went out [to Spain] as any sort of crusader because that would have been hypocrisy. My main idea in going to Spain was to escape from the life of perpetual unemployment, the dole, Parish Relief and no-prospects like in 1936.'¹⁵⁰

That none of the Jewish brigaders, cite economic reasons for joining the International Brigades despite many originating from extremely poor backgrounds is significant. This confirms that the Jewish brigaders, in contrast to Morgan, all deliberately volunteered to join the International Brigades because of concerns greater than their economic plight. Indeed, the Jewish brigaders' decision to join the International Brigades appears to have been based upon a well informed logic that convinced them that fascism posed a real threat to the Jewish community and that by fighting in the Spanish Civil War they were contributing in their own small way to preventing the further spread of fascism. As Charlie Goodman recalls, 'in front of us stood homes of Spain behind us stood our own. We realised by fighting fascism there [in Spain] we were trying to stop it coming to England'.¹⁵¹

The conversion of some of the Jewish brigaders into ardent Communists, which, as has been demonstrated, in many cases resulted in the rejection of their religion, would appear to contradict any suggestion that their motivation for joining the International Brigades was any different from the politico-ideological

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Garber, Oral History Recording, 12291/10, 1991, Imperial War Museum, Transcript, pp. 47-48.

¹⁵⁰ Charles Morgan, Oral History Recording, 10362/2, 1984, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁵¹ Charlie Goodman, Oral History Recording, 16612/4, 1996, Imperial War Museum.

motivation of the non-Jewish brigaders. This is certainly the conclusion reached by most commentators such as Bill Alexander in his work *British Volunteers for Liberty* who emphatically asserts that a brigaders' ethnicity was of no significance to their decision to volunteer to Spain¹⁵².

The historical evidence contained in the testimonies of the Jewish brigaders clearly suggests that such a conclusion is erroneous. Whilst many of the Jewish brigades, such as Dave Goodman and Frank Lesser, did reject their religion and sever their ties with the Jewish community, such behaviour can only be regarded as superficial, as even the communist-converted, atheist, Jewish brigaders acknowledged that they were as likely to be the victims of anti-Semitism as their religious counterparts and as such, were ethnically motivated to oppose fascism and join the International Brigades.¹⁵³ Moreover, to discount the Jewish brigaders' ethnicity as a factor is to completely ignore their initial motivation for involvement in anti-fascism and the CP.

To conclude, the Jewish brigaders' decision to join the International Brigades has been demonstrated to have been the culmination of a complicated process extending back over several years. This chapter has focused upon the final part of this process, and determined that as a consequence of the Jewish brigaders' membership of the CP they naturally progressed from involvement in anti-fascist activities in Britain to focusing upon the Spanish Civil War. The CP has been shown to have been the principal organiser of recruitment to the International Brigades. The Jewish brigaders' membership of the CP was therefore crucial to their decision to join the International Brigades as it both initially drew their attention towards the Spanish Civil War and additionally facilitated the actual mechanism of volunteering to fight in Spain.

The deceptively simple looking second objective of this chapter and the ultimate objective of this dissertation was to determine the motivation of the Jewish brigaders for joining the International Brigades. It has been established that none of the Jewish brigaders simply drifted over to Spain, rather they were all highly motivated by a desire to fight fascist-related anti-Semitism. German involvement in the Spanish Civil War in support of Franco has been demonstrated to have convinced the Jewish brigaders that the spread of fascism and anti-Semitism were inextricably linked. This German involvement has been shown to have specifically motivated the Jewish brigaders to join the International Brigades and fight fascism in a country that none of the Jewish brigaders had previously shown any interest in. The Jewish brigaders' motivation for joining the

¹⁵² B.Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty Spain 1936-39* (Lawrence Wishart, London 1986).

¹⁵³ Interview with *Dave Goodman*, 16 December 2000.

International Brigades was therefore distinct from that of the non-Jewish brigaders, a difference that can be attributed to the Jewish brigaders' ethnically based desire to fight the propagators of anti-Semitism.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction it was declared that the purpose of this dissertation was ‘to examine and where possible discern the motivation of those British-Jews who volunteered to fight with the International Brigades in Spain’. Using a sample of thirteen Jewish brigaders it has been argued that British Jews were motivated to fight in Spain for a distinct set of reasons that can be attributed to their ethnicity. Although it is obvious that not all of the Jewish brigaders were effected by every factor that was researched, it has been demonstrated that there is a clear sequence of events which lies behind the Jewish brigaders’ decision to join the International Brigades.

By examining the Jewish brigaders’ social and economic backgrounds it has been established that the Jewish brigaders all originated from working class, close-knit Jewish communities. The Jewish brigaders’ ethnicity and working-class status were shown to have influenced their place of living and employment; factors which facilitated the development of their early Left-wing sympathies. In addition, it was also established that the Jewish brigaders were all first generation British-born Jews, which it was argued made them less inclined to placidly accept the deprivation and poverty their immigrant parents had tolerated as an unavoidable feature of immigrant life. However, despite the apparent politicalizing effect of the Jewish brigaders’ social and economic conditions, it was shown that even during the Great Depression of the early 1930s, social and economic variables did not necessarily lead the Jewish brigaders’ to join the CP, which remained a small insignificant party.

The launch of the BUF in Britain was shown to have resulted in a marked intensification of violent anti-Semitism in Britain. It was argued that as a result of an internal class-based split in Anglo-Jewry, the Jewish establishment failed to appreciate the severity of the threat working-class Jewry faced from the BUF, and remained unwilling to implement measures to protect the Jewish community from attack. Driven on by their exposure to BUF anti-Semitic violence in Britain and in the context of Hitler’s rise to power in Germany, the Jewish brigaders were shown to have naturally gravitated towards the CP despite having little or no appreciation of the principles of communism. The CP was demonstrated to have been the leading anti-fascist organisation in Britain, filling the political vacuum left by the inaction of the Jewish establishment and the mainstream political parties. Through the CP, even at the risk of attack or arrest, the Jewish brigaders became deeply involved in the anti-fascist movement in Britain, demonstrating at the leading BUF rallies, including the ‘Battle of Cable Street’.

Once the Jewish brigaders had joined the CP they were shown to have immersed themselves in Communist led activities and in some cases become ardent Communists. It was argued that through their membership of the CP, the Jewish brigaders naturally progressed to taking an interest in the Spanish Civil War, which after the 'Battle of Cable Street,' became the CP's major concern.

The CP's commitment to Spain began as a fund-raising campaign for the Spanish Republic, before evolving into a drive that actively sought and recruited volunteer soldiers to fight in the International Brigades. It was argued that membership of the CP was treated as a prerequisite to joining the International Brigades and therefore the Jewish brigaders' natural gravitation towards the CP for anti-fascist reasons was a crucial precursor to their later decision to fight in Spain.

The Jewish brigaders' motivation for joining the International Brigades was shown to have been distinct from the motivation of the non-Jewish brigaders. It was argued that the Jewish brigaders decision to fight in Spain was in reaction to German involvement in the Spanish Civil War in support of Franco. German intervention was shown to have convinced the Jewish brigaders that the rise of fascism and the spread of anti-Semitism were inextricably linked. In contrast the non-Jewish brigaders were demonstrated to have joined the International Brigades for politico-ideological reasons or as means of escaping unemployment in Britain.

By isolating anti-Semitism as the primary catalyst behind both the Jewish brigaders initial involvement in anti-fascism in Britain and their later decision to join the International Brigades in Spain, it is possible to conclude that there was a distinct ethnically based motivation for Jewish involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Such a conclusion answers the initial task of this dissertation, which began as an investigation as to why British Jewry was disproportionately over-represented amongst British brigaders.¹⁵⁴

It is important to consider the reliability of the oral testimonies, which have constituted the backbone of my thesis. A common charge levelled against using oral testimonies as a historical source is that their reliability can be tarnished through the contributors' desire to conform to a wider historical picture.¹⁵⁵ As the oral testimonies used in this dissertation were all made fifty or more years after

¹⁵⁴ As a previously unresearched area of Jewish history, the question of Anglo-Jewry's contribution to anti-fascism in Britain and the Spanish Civil War clearly requires a more in-depth study which unfortunately could not be completed due to the confines of this dissertation. It would have been for example interesting to extend the research of Jewish brigaders' support for the CP until after the Spanish Civil War, as it appears that following the Nazi Soviet Pact (1939) there was a mass-exodus of Jewish support from the CP.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Bill Williams, 13 January 2001.

the Spanish Civil War, this is a point that requires serious consideration, as it is clear that all of the contributors testified with the benefit of hindsight.

Despite the forementioned problem associated with using oral testimonies, it is possible to regard the brigaders' testimonies as an accurate reliable and insightful source of historical material for two reasons: Firstly there is an otherwise unexplainable level of consistency in the brigaders' accounts, which often questions, rather than conforms to the established history of the period. Secondly, all of the testimonies that have been used were either recorded or collated by the Imperial War Museum, an established and well-regarded institution, or based upon interviews conducted by the author.¹⁵⁶

By establishing that the Jewish brigaders were motivated to fight in Spain expressively to fight fascist related anti-Semitism and equally, by revealing the Jewish brigaders' significant contribution to the anti-fascist movement in Britain, it is hoped that this dissertation leads the reader to question the established modern historical assumption which stresses the passivity and submission of European Jewry towards fascism. The popular image of the pale-faced timid Jew being shepherded into trains and sent to their deaths in Nazi concentration camps without putting up the slightest resistance is all too familiar. The actions of the Jewish brigaders both from Britain and also from across the rest of the world, demonstrate that some elements of the Jewish community realised the threat of fascism and Nazism, and bravely took up arms in Spain to defend themselves and their co-religionists from persecution. Therefore, this dissertation is written as a testimony to the Jewish brigaders' commitment to anti-fascism in Spain, and in particular in memory of the author's Great Uncle, Samuel Bagon, who was killed in Spain, fighting as a Polish-Jewish volunteer.

¹⁵⁶ Additionally, it is also important to note that in the absence of any specific written or documentary evidence on British Jews and the Spanish Civil War it is clear that in order to write this dissertation there was no alternative but to use the brigaders' testimonies as the main source of primary evidence.

Appendix

Abridged Biographies of Characters

As the main documentary sources of this dissertation are personal accounts of both, contemporaries involved in the fight against fascism in Britain and International brigaders, it is hoped that it will be of some assistance to offer short biographies of the pre-Spanish Civil War lives of the more heavily depended upon personalities. The following biographies are based upon the individual's own testimonies and are collated alphabetically. If available, the principal motivation of each brigader for joining the International Brigades is also stated. The reference number against each name is the Imperial War Museum's cataloguing code. Names in inverted commas denote a change in name or the adoption of a nickname.

Bloom, Charles Sewell

[992/6]

Charles Bloom was born in 1902 to a Russian father and a French mother and lived a typical working class Jewish childhood in Shoreditch, East London. Bloom left school aged fourteen and enlisted, under-age, to join the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in 1917 from where he was discharged when his true age became known. Between 1918-21 he served in the Royal Garrison Artillery and thereafter worked as a commercial traveller. He joined the Communist Party in 1935 and the International Brigades in December 1936 citing 'anti-fascism and an awareness of the international situation' as his main motivation for going to Spain.

Colin, Max

[8639/6]

Max Colin was born in 1912 to émigré parents. Colin lived a very poor Jewish life in Stepney, East London and left school with only elementary education to become a mechanic. Although his father was a communist, Colin remained disinterested in politics until his friend took him to an anti-Mosley rally at Kensington Olympia in 1934 where he was subjected to an anti-Semitic attack by the police. Following this incident Colin joined the YCL and subsequently the International Brigades in January 1937, citing 'being from a Jewish background ... and having read Mein Kampf' as his chief motivations.

Colman, Julius 'Jud'

[14575/3]

Jud Colman was born in 1915 to émigré parents in Cheetham Hill, Manchester. Colman was brought up as a strict practising Jew and attended the Jewish School Derby Street until, when aged fourteen, he left for economic reasons. Colman was introduced to politics whilst working in the textile industry by Maurice Levine and subsequently joined the union. In 1932 Colman, already a member of the JLB, joined the YCL, and recalls that joining 'just came natural'. Shortly after joining the YCL Colman rejected his religion and became heavily involved in anti-fascist activities, which included several confrontations with the BUF. Colman joined the International Brigades in November 1936 'to stop fascism and to defeat Franco' dismissing any notion of fighting for 'the [Communist] revolution'.

Frankford, Frank

[9308/5]

Frank Frankford was born in 1913 as the illegitimate son of Jewish father and non-Jewish mother. Frankford ran away from his home in Slough to Hackney, East London, where he joined the YCL whilst unemployed. Whilst in London, Frankford was beaten-up by the BUF in an anti-Semitic attack. Frankford left the YCL and joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and as an ILP member joined the International Brigades in January 1937 to 'oppose fascism but also as an unemployed worker'.

Garber, Joseph

[12291/10]

Joseph Garber was born in 1911 to a Lithuanian Jewish father (mother unknown) and was immediately placed in a religious Jewish foster house in Whitechapel, East London, as his father was too poor to bring him up. Garber was exposed to radical politics from an early age through his foster home and joined the YCL in 1921. Garber attended the Jewish Free School until aged fourteen and was also a member of JLB. Garber acted as a militant in the 1926 General Strike, before serving in the Merchant Navy between 1927-30. Upon his return to London Garber became a cabinet maker and recalls regularly fighting his fascists colleagues and renewing his involvement in union and Communist activities. Garber demonstrated at Cable Street, where he clashed with the police, and also went to Olympia. Garber although 'sympathetic with the Zionists 'couldn't stomach their representatives'. He joined the International Brigades in December 1936 'after reading Mein Kampf' and 'decided to go [to Spain] as I thought the Jews were going to get massacred.'

Gilbert, David 'Tony'

[9157/10]

Tony Gilbert was born in 1914 to Jewish émigré parents and lived in Stepney, East London. Gilbert attended school until aged fourteen, when he left, to become an apprentice furrier. From a young age Gilbert recalls the ever-presence of anti-Semitism in London and ‘suffered with sinus trouble’ throughout his life after been viciously attacked by the BUF’ in the early 1930s. Gilbert’s parents advised him to stay out of politics but he ignored their advice and became involved in a range of anti-fascist activities including attending a meeting of the Blue and White Club and Cable Street. Gilbert formally joined the Bethnal Green Branch of the Communist Party in 1936 and volunteered to fight in Spain in March 1937 after ‘following the situation [in Spain] closely’ and attending a Communist Party meeting on the crisis.

Goodman, Charlie

[16612/4]

Charlie Goodman was born in 1915 to Polish Jewish émigré parents and was brought up living in the East End of London with his two political-refugee uncles. Goodman’s uncles were Polish Bund Party activists and they ‘used to drag him’ as an infant to political meetings on an almost daily basis. Goodman attended St Matthew’s Christian school, and as the only Jew there, recalls that ‘every day was a battlefield’. Aged nine, Goodman’s mother took him back to Poland for a year where he remembers attending *cheder* (religious school) and being treated like royalty. Goodman’s political independence began aged twelve, although he never belonged or joined a political party because he was ‘a bit of an anarchist’. Goodman was active in both Jewish and Communist circles, organising resistance against the BUF. He demonstrated at Olympia, the Albert Hall and Cable Street and knew Phil Piratin (the Communist Party leader and later British Communist Party MP) personally. Goodman was imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs between 1936-37 for hitting a policeman at Cable Street and recalls serious internal tensions within the Jewish community. Goodman volunteered to Spain in January 1937 following his release from jail eager to ‘continue the fight against fascism physically, with arms in hand’ rather than ‘just fighting in [the] streets of London’.

Goodman, Dave

[16621/5]

Dave Goodman was born in 1915 to a Polish Father and a Russian Mother who settled in Middlesborough. Goodman was brought up as an orthodox Jew ‘very much part of the Middlesborough Jewish Community’. Goodman’s father was a ‘committed Liberal’ and hence Goodman’s upbringing ‘was not labour, it was very much Liberal’. Goodman recalls that the Jewish community ‘were very conscious of being a vulnerable minority’ and that it didn’t take much ‘before

there would be some manifestation of anti-Semitism'. Goodman was aware of Nazism as 'not just an academic threat but as something real and close to the Jewish community' following the arrival of some German Jewish refugees to Middlesborough who had fled from the Nazis. Goodman joined the Left Book Club in 1935 and finally the YCL in 1937 following an introduction to some YCL members whilst in synagogue. 'Right from the word go' Goodman became 'a very active and committed member of the YCL' and a Marxist atheist. Goodman was involved in the Middlesborough Aid Spain Movement before joining the International Brigades in January 1938 having become immersed in YCL activities.

Greenhalgh, Walter

[11187/9]

Walter Greenhalgh was born in 1914 in Manchester. Although Greenhalgh was not from a Jewish family he lived in Cheetham Hill, a predominately Jewish area and consequently attended the Manchester Jewish Central School. Greenhalgh became interested in local politics 'because of the poverty near by'. Greenhalgh recalls that 'the craze in those days was hiking in the Derbyshire hills' and it was through his involvement in the Kinder Trespass that he was first introduced to the YCL. Greenhalgh was a member of the Cheetham Hill Challenge Club (YCL branch) 'which was very big, being a Jewish area, with 300-400 members'. Through the YCL Greenhalgh became involved in anti-fascist activities in Manchester. These experiences convinced Greenhalgh to join the International Brigades in December 1936.

Heinemann, Margot

[9239/5]

Margot Heinemann was born in 1913 to German émigré Jewish parents. Heinemann's father emigrated to Britain to work in the family bank and Heinemann lived a comfortable middle class childhood in Hampstead North London, attending Roedean and King Alfred Schools. Heinemann owed her socialism to her mother who was a 'pacifist and drawing room socialist'. Heinemann went up to Newnham College Cambridge and recalls that it wasn't until Hitler came to power in 1933 that the whole situation began to seem more urgent ... as Jewish people we were particularly conscious of the menace of fascism'. Heinemann became involved in the Cambridge University Socialist Society and the CP and participated in numerous anti-fascist rallies. Through the CP, Heinemann met and became engaged to John Cornford who was later killed in Spain. During the Spanish Civil War Heinemann organised Aid Spain initiatives and worked in an Aid Spain charity shop in Birmingham. Heinemann recalls, 'I remember again and again, you would empty out every penny you had got in your

pockets, and we would go home without the price of a bus fare and have to walk because of the tremendous feeling one had.'

Jones, John 'Bosco'

[9392/6]

John Jones was born in 1916 and lived in Finsbury, North London. Upon leaving school, Jones embarked on a career in the Jewish dominated fur trade believing he got the job because his name was misheard as that of a Jew. As 'one of the only gentiles in the fur trade' Jones acquired a group of Jewish friends and, along with his recruitment into union politics, became aware of the threat of fascism and anti-Semitism. Whilst observing a BUF meeting, Jones was attacked for aiding a girl who had been beaten-up by a blackshirt for heckling; 'I got a punch in the mouth which made me an anti-fascist for life because I haven't forgotten!' Jones subsequently demonstrated at the Royal Albert Hall, Olympia and Cable Street as an anti-fascist, finally joining the YCL in 1936 before volunteering to Spain in November 1936.

Kenton, Lou

[9374/4]

Lou Kenton was born in 1912 to Jewish Russian émigré parents. He was brought up in Mile End East London and recalls in the East End there was 'a natural radical [political] element' throughout his whole youth and he 'naturally gravitated towards the Communists'. Kenton became involved in the YCL through rambling and he cites that 'the rise of Mosley fascism was the big influence in his life'. Kenton demonstrated at the Royal Albert Hall and Cable Street and recalls the internal tensions over a response to the BUF within the Jewish community. Kenton was outraged by the British and French position of non-intervention towards Spain and this combined with his realisation of the threat posed by fascism across Europe, led him to join the International Brigades in June 1937, following involvement in the Aid Spain movement in Britain.

Lesser, Ephraim 'Frank'

[9408/7]

Frank Lesser was born in 1916 to Polish Jewish émigré parents. Lesser's father was a grocer in Hackney, and the Lesser family were brought up in Victoria Park affording Lesser a middle class childhood and allowing him to remain in school until aged eighteen. Lesser was brought up as a traditional orthodox practising Jew, indicated by his *Yeshiva* (religious seminary) attendance, a commitment he kept until, when aged fifteen, he became an atheist. Lesser recalls that during his childhood, exposure to politics was unavoidable, 'it was impossible not to be interested in politics'. Lesser was aware of anti-Semitism and under his father's influence joined *Habonim* (a Zionist Youth Movement). He also remembers

tensions within the Jewish community and even one of his peers being chastised in Synagogue for declaring to be a communist. Lesser became a member of the Left Book Club and subsequently gravitated towards the ILP. As a Labour Party member Lesser joined the International Brigades in August 1937.

Levine, Maurice

[9722/6]

Maurice Levine was born in 1907 in Manchester and grew up in the Cheetham Hill area. After leaving school Levine worked for a limited period in the textile industry in Manchester before emigrating to Australia to start a new life. Levine arrived in Australia in 1928 and worked as a garment cutter but in the wake of the Great Depression was made redundant. Levine was imprisoned in Australia in 1931, during the depression, and was only able to return to Manchester with money his parents sent him. Levine, now politicized, found employment in the garment trade and joined the Cheetham CP where he was involved in a range of anti-fascist and union activities. Levine joined the International Brigades in November 1936.

Levitas, Maurice

[16358/5]

Maurice Levitas was born in Dublin to Jewish Lithuanian émigré parents. In 1931 Levitas' entire family moved to Stepney, East London because of the depression, which Levitas recalls as 'one of the most poverty stricken phases of [my] life'. Levitas attended the Jewish Free School and, because of his mother's orthodoxy, also *cheder*. Aged sixteen, Levitas joined the Stepney YCL branch, 'at that time quite a large organisation'. Levitas was asked to develop a new YCL branch in Bethnal Green, which was 'a hotbed of fascism' and successfully built a strong anti-fascist movement, 'as there were a lot of Jews in Bethnal Green'. Levitas joined the Jewish Lads Brigade as a means of recruiting more Jews into the YCL and found 'a number of people who were willing to participate in the anti-fascist activities of the YCL'. Levitas' father was an active trade union member but it was Hitler's rise to power in 1933 'when I was sixteen that I joined the YCL as they were the most vigorous opponents of fascism'. Levitas joined the International Brigades in December 1937 because of 'nothing more than a general anti-fascist feeling'.

Morgan, Charles

[10362/2]

Charles Morgan's date of birth and early life is unknown. He served for a period in the French Foreign Legion and lived in Manchester during the great depression. Morgan was unemployed in Manchester and 'hung on to the fringes of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, mainly for the dances and to get a cup of tea'. Politically Morgan professed to have been 'a nitwit' and recalls going to Spain 'not as a crusader but to escape from the life of perpetual unemployment, the dole and parish relief'. Morgan was not a member of a political movement although he 'was aware of the political uprising in Spain'. Morgan ended up going to Spain because he was asked 'as the only person with a driving licence,' to drive a van of volunteers down to King Street (the Communist Party offices for International Brigade Recruitment). Whilst in London, Morgan decided that as he had military experience, he would volunteer to join the International Brigades.

Lesser Manassah 'Russell Sam'

[9484/6]

Sam Russell was born in 1915 to Polish Jewish émigré parents. Russell was brought up as a strictly observant Jew in South Hackney, East London as the eldest of eight children. Russell's father worked as a Singer sewing machine mechanic before he set up his own shop and consequently Russell had a comfortable childhood. Russell attended George Green's school until he was eighteen and then won a scholarship to University College London. Russell attributes his politicization to his study of social history and 'the environment of living in South Hackney'. Russell recalls the events of the Great Strike and particularly the rise of the BUF as 'intensifying his whole awareness of political issues'. Whilst studying at UCL Russell joined the CP and became an active member. Simultaneously, Russell joined the Officer Training Corps, justifying his decision on Leninist lines stating that 'a working class that doesn't learn the use of arms deserves to be slaves'. Russell as a CP activist with military experience was asked by John Cornford to volunteer to the International Brigades, which he did in November 1936.

Shaw, Jack Louis

[13547/3]

Jack Shaw was born in 1917 to Russian Jewish émigré parents. Shaw lived in Whitechapel East London. Shaw was educated at Jewish schools and recalls that there was a widespread opinion among young Jews that 'Russia [the Soviet Union] was the utopia'. Shaw had little time for Zionist youth movements and joined the YCL 'in the event of Mosely [sic] because they [the YCL] were the only organisation fighting fascism'. Shaw also shunned the Blue and White club

as 'too Jewish for me' believing his political beliefs were shaped by his revulsion for the Jewish establishment. Shaw became very involved in anti-fascist activity and was arrested at Cable Street. Shaw was subsequently tried and imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs, where, he was branded 'a hooligan' by the visiting Jewish magistrate Sir Basil Henriques. Shaw reacted angrily to this slur and as a consequence, was transferred to Bristol prison. Upon his release Shaw joined the International Brigades in April 1937, citing that 'this fascism business annoyed me and Hitler was on the march'.

Smith, Edward

[11304/4]

Edward Smith's date of birth is unknown. Smith lived in Central London and came from a middle class background. Smith although not a Jew, attended a predominately Jewish school and it was a combination of his father's socialism and through his relationship with his Jewish peers at school that he became interested in politics. Smith joined the ILP aged fourteen and the YCL a year later and recalls that it was 'the intellectual stimulation the YCL sparked, particularly from the Jewish kids and also from the Jewish people generally' that attracted him to join. Through the YCL Smith became involved in anti-fascist activities; including demonstrating at Cable Street and support of the Aid Spain Movement. Smith joined the International Brigades in April 1938 citing that he was motivated by the belief that 'the fascist must be stopped in Spain as they were stopped in Cable Street'.

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