

***The Spanish Earth* (1937): The circumstances of its production, the film and its reception in the United States and United Kingdom**

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Abstract

I examine the political significance of the classic documentary *The Spanish Earth* in the context of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, challenging Russell Campbell's argument that it should be considered in the light of 'an overriding need for unity in the face of the enemy'. I argue instead that the film reflected the international Communist agenda. This emphasized defence of the Republic rather than engaging with its political complexities or with the demands of urban workers. I underline the film's rural and Castilian focus, and describe its reception in the United States and United Kingdom, before offering an explanation for its continued currency in those countries, and an overview of the consequences.

Keywords

Spanish Civil War

United States

United Kingdom

Ernest Hemingway

Joris Ivens

Left Politics

This is the true face of men going into action. It is a little different from any other face that you will ever see. Men cannot act before the camera in the presence of death.

(Ernest Hemingway, *The Spanish Earth*)

Introduction

I examine the seminal war documentary *The Spanish Earth* (Ivens, 1937), seeking to explain the politics and immediate impact of a film that presented a very partial view of the Spanish Civil War, and why it continues to attract attention in the United States and United Kingdom. Interest in the film's history, approach, technique and position within the documentary tradition continues to be considerable (Vernon et al. 2014; Olivar 2014). Yet, as Orwell noted (original 1943; 1966: 240), the war's outcome was not decided in Spain but abroad, and the United States and Britain were crucial to the eventual result. This film is manifestly a case of art in the service of politics and, as a consequence, requires the use of a perspective that is political and international in orientation, which will help place the film in its global context. In pursuing my discussion, I challenge Russell Campbell's influential argument (1982: 65) that the movie's simplifications must be considered in the light of 'an overriding need for unity in the face of the enemy'. I suggest rather that unity in the face of the enemy did not necessitate a partial and even impoverished depiction of the war but rather the opposite, and that Campbell's argument serves to obscure the film's characteristically Comintern 'Popular Front' political orientation.

The Spanish Civil War has been the subject of two widely differing schools of political/historical analysis. Early accounts followed the lines promulgated by the Communist Left at the time (see e.g. Jellinek 1938). This is the school to which Campbell is closest.

According to these approaches, the issues were straightforward; the conflict was Manichean.

On the one side stood the legitimately elected Republican government and its allies, aided by the Soviet Union and the International Brigades. On the other stood the 'Nationalist' rebels, the Church, reactionary nobles and landowners, Moorish troops and the German and Italian Fascist governments and their forces. Ultimately, due to the American and British governments' non-intervention policy starving the government of aid, the Republic went down to tragic defeat. In this school's account, the Republican side was portrayed as monolithically united in an essentially military fight against fascism in which the Communists played a leading role.

Quite a different analysis, the essential elements of which had been advanced inter alia by George Orwell in his *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), was developed from the 1970s onwards by both Spanish and foreign historians (the literature is truly vast, but see Claudin 1975; Fraser 1994). In these accounts, urban popular revolution centred on Barcelona and other centres was led by the Anarcho-syndicalists (CNT-FAI: Confederación Nacional del Trabajo-Federación Anarquista Ibérica) and the revolutionary Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM, a largely Catalan party). All were also concerned with an issue debated and contested in Spanish society throughout the twentieth century: the agrarian problem. The appalling conditions in Spain's countryside inflicted by the large landowners had been increasingly contested by the labourers who now sought land reform including the break-up of the large *Latifundias* and radical improvements in earnings and working conditions. Yet the social revolution encompassed seismic shifts in personal relations as well as in the countryside, workplaces and society more widely. Feminism made a major impact on many women's lives, especially in areas where the Anarchists exercised strong influence (Kaplan 1971). Crucial debates of wide resonance raged about how to combine military resistance with social revolution. This revolution was put down by the Republican government in alliance with the Spanish Communist Party (PCE: Partido Comunista de España) in mid-1937

(Graham 1999). George Orwell (1938) described the atmosphere in Barcelona as moving from a celebration of workers' revolution and Catalan nationalism in 1936 to one of restored bourgeois domination facilitated by the Communists and Republican government after May 1937.

The PCE, tiny at the outbreak of war, soon swelled, and organized military defence while simultaneously playing a counter-revolutionary role at the behest of Stalin's Comintern. Selected communist dissidents, POUMistas and Anarcho-Syndicalists, were eliminated by the PCE and by Stalin's agents, being labelled 'pro-fascist' and murdered just as the Moscow show trials started. The PCE's counter-revolutionary role followed Stalin's international 'Popular Front' policy: it strengthened his control over the Western Communist Parties, increased their influence on the Republican government, reassured bourgeois governments that revolution would not be promulgated by those parties, and provided a welcome way of distracting the Nazis. It has also been argued that it weakened popular support for the military battle against fascism (Broué and Témime 2007). Within the relatively limited subgenre of Spanish Civil War movies, the former view is that promulgated by *The Spanish Earth*, largely for American and British audiences; the latter was later to be advanced in Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* (1995).

I draw on Rose's (2012) three-stage film analytic method: a sequential analysis of the circumstances or facts of production, the film as product, and finally audience reception, or the ways in which the work was received. What follows is therefore structured according to these three stages, but I also use the extensive historical literature on the war and on labour history in the United States and United Kingdom to provide a political perspective since this is considered central to all three aspects.

The site of production: The filmic and political contexts

The Spanish Earth must be viewed in its wider international context and in that of the filmic interventions on both sides, which contained significant and threatening elements supporting the Nationalist rebels. In general political terms, American opinion was firmly isolationist and influenced by strong Christian and pro-German lobbies. Similarly in Britain, much public opinion and media coverage was shaped by popular memories of World War I as a disaster and the government's non-interventionist stance. *The Spanish Earth* was designed to counter pro-non-intervention and Nationalist representations of the conflict. Some American documentaries of the era either recommended non-interventionism, demonstrated Francoist sympathies (see Paramount's *The Last Train from Madrid* [Hogan, 1937]) or in at least one case positively glorified the Franco supporter Mussolini (Shull and Wilt 1996: 75). In the United Kingdom, widely viewed Gaumont newsreels were distinctly pro-Nationalist from an early stage, and horror was expressed at Republican destruction of churches (Aldgate 1979: 113–14). American films about the Spanish Civil War made while the conflict was taking place were limited to action-heavy Hollywood B movies such as *Blockade* (Dieterle, 1938) and *The Last Train from Madrid*, films that met with neither broad commercial success nor the critical respect afforded to *The Spanish Earth*. *The Spanish Earth* was conceived in clear opposition to these Right-wing or avowedly apolitical depictions and stands at the centre of a small group of English-language pro-Republic films made during the war. The film's declared intentions are central to any discussion of it: *The Spanish Earth* was explicitly designed as a work of propaganda with the goal of promoting international support for the anti-Fascist forces (Olivar 2014). While not intended purely for an English-speaking audience – a French narration for the film was recorded by Jean Renoir – it was nonetheless conceived with a certain awareness of how American audiences would react to the depiction both of the War and of Spain. These bold intentions added to a production that was fraught

with difficulty from its inception, notably because of tensions between its screenplay's authors.

From the outset, the Comintern was desperate for the Democrat Ernest Hemingway to write the screenplay; this was typical of their policy of mobilizing key cultural figures rather than recruiting them to Communist parties. They were considered more useful outside. The film's initial screenwriter, John Dos Passos, refused to continue work after Stalin's special forces eliminated his friend, the American academic José Robles, who was of Spanish origin (Koch 2006). Hemingway, showing his typically un-nuanced views on courage and commitment, would dismiss Dos Passos's political and personal concerns as a smokescreen for cowardice, and the one-time friends entered a period of animosity from which they would never fully emerge (Koch 2006). The rift reflected a personal clash that also reflected political differences, and played a part in ensuring that *The Spanish Earth* emerged as a wilfully simplified depiction both of events and of their context. Joris Ivens was a pro-Soviet documentarian from the Netherlands. He had made New Deal-era propaganda films for the US government, but also filmed a documentary in Soviet Russia at Stalin's pleasure, eventually finding himself listed by the FBI as a 'dangerous communist' (Harris 2014; Schoots 1995/2000). The team he headed for *The Spanish Earth* did not entirely share his political convictions, but was united in its opposition to fascism – a unity that would be sorely tested by the film's production. *The Spanish Earth* was created by an impressive combination of Left-leaning artists and film-makers, who formed the film-making collective Contemporary Historians Inc. for the purpose (Geiger 2011). In the course of production, a combination of clashing political ideologies, personality conflicts and the circumstances of war created a tense environment, creating many bitter arguments between Welles, Hemingway and the mild-mannered Dos Passos, which led to the long-lasting personal rift mentioned above (McBride 2006; Koch 2006).

The image: *The Spanish Earth*

The Spanish Earth constructs a world where key debates, significant political nuances and contradictions are excluded, through its focus on the countryside and the ‘agrarian question’. The need for improved irrigation, long ignored by the landowners, is addressed. This agrarian viewpoint is, however, exclusive: no sense is given of the urban labour movement centred on Catalonia and the Basque country, which had quite different priorities. Therefore, divisions within the Republican side and, more importantly, vigorous debate about how war and social change should be reconciled are ignored. A broad and diverse set of regional cultures is reduced to an indiscriminate mixture; Catalan protest songs play over footage of a town 24 miles from Madrid. Unity is emphasized, not only among soldiers but more widely between the people of Spain in general, the intention being, in classical Popular Front style, to strike a note of unified solidarity against Fascism. Explicit Communist signifiers are downplayed in favour of others (the visual reference to the socialist union confederation, the Unión General de Trabajadores [UGT], stamped into loaves of bread, is characteristic). Leading figures are presented in such a way as to downplay their Communist political allegiances. Despite rare, emotive and revelatory footage of life in rural Spain and of the aftermath of battle, the reality displayed in the film is conditioned by the highly specific political purpose for which it was conceived.

The film’s screenplay was ultimately attributed to Hemingway, who placed his stamp firmly upon it. Few American artists have a stronger association with Spain and the Spanish Civil War than he. He had written about Spain and Spanish culture previously and had advanced a particular view of it. His 1927 short story collection *Men Without Women* (Hemingway, 1927) features two Spanish stories, the bullfighting tragedy ‘The Undefeated’ and the love story ‘Hills Like White Elephants’, the title of which refers to the beautiful mountains visible

from a rural train station. He would go on to write possibly the most famous novel about the conflict, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940).

Hemingway's voice-over for *The Spanish Earth*, which he not only wrote but also performed (although versions exist with a somewhat truncated voice-over read by Orson Welles), is the second thing we hear after the film starts, the first being a choir singing a Catalan nationalist song. From the outset, the film's voice-over bears Hemingway's authorial stamp just as assuredly as the visuals bear that of Ivens. The voice-over's perspective will shift without warning throughout the film, from the third-person in one sentence to the point of view of a villager or a soldier in the next, but Hemingway begins his narration by assuming a peasant's perspective. Immediately after the opening credits, there is a succession of shots showing the rural landscape. Next, we see a handful of peasants from the village of Fuentedueña de Tajo (referred to throughout the film simply as 'Fuentedueña') while the voice-over tells us, 'For 50 years we've wanted to irrigate but they held us back. Now we will bring water to it to raise food for the defenders of Madrid'.

The issues and allegiances at the heart of the film's story are thus presented in as simple a way as possible: the audience is asked to identify with a 'we' whose intentions are immediately presented. Whilst this voice-over establishes a binary opposition, we are presented with images of a rural, agricultural Spain that recalls that presented in Hemingway's literary work: the remote, picturesque landscape of 'Hills Like White Elephants' from *Men Without Women* (Hemingway, 1927) or the strawberry-selling Spanish maidens described in his work of pictorial journalism *Death in the Afternoon* (Hemingway, 1932). Long shots emphasize a rural landscape indicative of a long history stretching back centuries; the struggle to shape nature is impeded by the reactionary forces that temporarily no longer rule this agricultural society. The rural imagery is dominated by the 'traditional' Spanish (Castilian in this case) landscape of fields (Mitchell 2015: 90; see also Kovács 1991).

It is the same set of reductive signifiers identified by Marta García Carrión (2014), typically used by film-makers hoping to evoke what García Carrión dubs ‘the essence of Spanishness’. The script presently intervenes to assist the visuals in this attempt. ‘This Spanish Earth is dry and hard’, Hemingway tells us, introducing the idea that there is one Spanish Earth, and that the Spain we are currently seeing is, if not the only Spain, the ‘true’ Spain.

It is here, and not on the battlefield, that Hemingway and Ivens choose to begin the film. Although the city will be visited over the film’s course, and key military and political figures will be encountered, it is neither the work of these individuals nor their convictions that will form the movie’s narrative lynchpin. Instead, that is found in the form of the peasants/soldiers and the agricultural tradition that they represent. They are in essence doing what they have done for centuries; growing food and defending their land. To understand this Spain, one need only understand and appreciate tradition; by implication, the current political disputations of the Left appear as distractions. It is a setting familiar from Hemingway’s work and one augmented by a phrase that advances the movie’s political ethos. We are told that this is a town where men – as he puts it in defiance of the powerful trend to feminism during the Spanish Republic – ‘work the land for the common good’. We will be encouraged throughout the film to think in terms of ‘the common good’, and to assume that all of the different Republicans we encounter have the same view of it as that attributed to the peasants. This village-set sequence, which comprises the first reel, is the point in the film where Campbell’s (1982) notion of ‘unity’ may be easiest to subscribe to; it is only later that cracks will show in that façade.

The people of the village and their part in the struggle thus established, the film now shifts focus. At the beginning of the second reel, Hemingway’s voice-over combines with Ivens’ direction and the remarkable cinematography of John Ferno and Ivens himself, to strike another emphatic and accessible emotional note: the immediacy of battle. Impressively

naturalistic handheld camerawork captures a battle from the Republican perspective. Throughout the sequence, enemy artillerymen are seen from a distance, one memorably shaky handheld shot craning upwards to see them aiming their rifles from a roof, evoking the sensation of knowing one's enemy only as an anonymous yet real threat. As is traditionally the case in Hemingway's work, the mortal danger represented by battle is powerfully represented. The voice-over acknowledges the Moorish Fascist troops' bravery before circling back to the point that their fundamental goal is to restrict the freedom of 'the Spanish people' and that the Republican troops 'hate them'. The visuals establish the stakes, through footage of recently killed troops, and the voice-over assures us that the reality is simple: what could be easier to understand than 'the presence of death'. It is a strikingly unvarnished portrayal of the real cost of war and the threat to the peasants. The emphasis here is on the uncomplicated tragedy at the civil war's heart, rather than the contested, tangled and ambiguous circumstances and debates that underlie the conflict.

This theme is examined further in the subsequent sequence, in which political and military leaders address units of the Republican Army and popular audiences, each such person briefly characterized for the audience by Hemingway's voice-over. The emphasis is on leaders addressing others and on the individuals' popular origins rather than on democratic participation. Here, there is less detail. The facts that are omitted or under-emphasized are not historically obscure; a cursory investigation of some of the figures depicted in the film reveals important aspects of their lives that it chooses not to mention. For example, 11th Division Commander Enrique Lister is introduced in a detailed voice-over, but the film neglects to mention his membership of the Communist Party. The film, for all that Hemingway's voice-over proudly endorses the images on-screen as showing 'the true face of men going into action', was not made in the spirit of depicting a difficult, complex situation. The physical reality of war interested Hemingway to the point of infatuation; political

discourse and conflict beyond the theme of defending the peasants were treated as marginal details. Consequently, the film ends with a reminder of the centrality of agriculture to the conflict: the penultimate shot of the film may be a Republican soldier shooting his rifle, but the very final shot is the ‘Spanish Earth’ being covered in water; the attempt to irrigate has been successful and the farmers have triumphed in their battle – as, hopefully, the Republican Army will eventually do.

Reception: The film’s reception and impact in the United States and United Kingdom

The third section of Rose’s framework, reception, allows us to investigate the film’s fascinating and fluid place in critical and cinema history. Counter-revolutionary measures had already begun to manifest themselves just as the film appeared on the international circuit. *The Spanish Earth* appeared shortly after the ‘May crisis’ of 1937, when the Anarcho-syndicalists and Left Caballerist socialists had been expelled from the Republican government; this marked the beginning of the suppression of the revolutionary tendencies in the Republic (Claudin 1975: 233). Some on the American and British Left were already aware of these developments. Labour movement reactions in the two countries must be seen in their national contexts. The important Spanish Anarcho-syndicalists had some, albeit much less significant, counterparts in the United States and Britain. Many more widely on the Left and indeed sections of the broader public were predisposed to sympathizing with the Spanish government. The Republic could be represented as embodying principles that, if not identical to those embraced by New Deal America and the trade union and labour movement in Britain, were at least related to them; in each case, the mood was favourable to social change. The film was much discussed and anticipated prior to its release. Ivens and Hemingway were invited to show the movie at Franklin Roosevelt’s White House a few days prior to its general release (Critchlow 2013). This was perhaps unsurprising given the War’s

international importance and the fact that Ivens had made New Deal-era propaganda for the US Film Service and the Canadian National Film Board (Harris 2014). Although Roosevelt was and would remain avowedly neutral on the Spanish War, the film had an unquestionable impact on its target audience. Hemingway described it as ‘a great success’, further contending that ‘it really did much to influence Roosevelt and others’ (Miles 2010: 274–75). Miles (2010) describes the film as being greatly successful in rallying the limited circles of anti-fascist forces in the United States and Europe; it met with critical acclaim and was well received in political venues and art-house cinemas (Geiger 2011; Waugh 1984). In Britain, it played a part in inspiring those involved in providing material and political aid to Spain (Fyrth 1986). It is therefore hard to regard the film as anything other than a success among those with democratic, anti-fascist and Left concerns; it was conceived with transparently propagandistic intentions, and these were to some extent accomplished.

The Spanish Earth was well received by critics in the United States and United Kingdom, who praised it as a documentary work, with Ivens’ direction meeting with particular approval (see e.g. McManus 1937; Wright 1937; Meyers and Jay 1938). Positive contemporary reviews comment on the sense of immediacy created by Ivens’ technique: ‘Ivens spares us the usual talking head interviews and plunges straight ahead into the action’ (Schwartz 2007). In an age where the catalogue of documentary film techniques grows ever longer, a straightforward narrative augmented by a voice-over was judged effective, even if it was at the expense of richer political and social context. British critics expressed concern that the censored version shown in the United Kingdom had references to Germany and Italy removed, possibly reducing its appeal (Wright 1937).

Miles (2010) believed that one criterion for the success of the film was its ability to raise funds for the Republic. At one Hollywood screening alone, it raised \$13,000. Although refused by mainstream distributors, it was shown at some 300 cinemas and ‘countless’ union

halls across the United States (Critchlow 2013: 33). It is also credited with a positive knock-on effect on other American films such as William Dieterle's *Blockade* (1938). In Britain, the film was also influential in raising aid for the Republican cause among Democrats and Left-Wingers. In a week of screenings in Cambridge (then a centre of Communist Party activity), £1000 (equivalent to about half of the amount raised at the Hollywood meeting) was raised for a food ship destined for Spain (Miles 2010: 279). As in the United States, the film was widely shown to Left audiences. Jim Fyrth (1986: 218) recalls both Ivens' films and those of the Republican-sympathetic Ivor Montagu being shown at union halls throughout Britain and America. A well-established infrastructure of organizations such as the Relief Committee for the Victims of Fascism existed in the United Kingdom to promote it.

The film's broader impact on public opinion, beyond the Democratic/Left Wing constituency, is harder to estimate. In the United States, Roosevelt had made it clear to the film-makers that his isolationist policy would not be affected (Miles 2010: 274), and indeed, despite Hemingway's verdict, it did not alter. American public opinion remained overwhelmingly isolationist. In Britain, the results were, in the 'macro' context, broadly similar. It is clear that the British Communist-oriented Left and the then reviving trade unions were both influenced by the film, and by the Republican cause more widely (Croucher 1982). Yet government policy remained one of non-intervention, part of an attempt to avoid a European war. Despite censorship, the film's wider message may have prepared the British public for war against the Axis powers.

Therefore, the film's most immediate and direct effects on Anglo-American opinion and policy probably did not go far beyond the Communist Party and its Popular Front 'liberal' associates on the Left. There was nevertheless some, albeit limited, scope for addressing an alternative Left audience beyond that mobilized by the CP. The main obstruction to that was the Communists' conscious domination of Left publication and film outlets: no platform was

to be given to those whom they denounced as ‘pro-fascist’, as George Orwell’s difficulties in finding a publisher for *Homage to Catalonia* attest (Miles 2010: 281). At that point, the American Left contained a relatively strong (if, as ever, divided) Trotskyist element in direct contact with Trotsky in Mexico and constituting the largest Trotskyist grouping internationally (Patenaude 2009: 182). This tendency was also influential in some major unions such as the Teamsters (Dobbs 1972), and was very well aware of the POUM and its struggle. Indeed, it identified with it even though it regarded the POUM as ‘Centrist’ in Trotsky’s parlance – in other words, a party that (in common with the British Independent Labour Party, the ILP) fluctuated between revolutionary and reformist positions. The British Trotskyists, the tiny Balham Group, were, by comparison, much smaller and comparatively uninfluential in the trade unions; the ILP was by contrast somewhat stronger with an active membership of a few thousand, and although active in the unions was therefore not much larger than the British Anarchist movement (Jupp 1982; Groves 1974). All of these non-CP American and British groupings had a wider view of the Spanish conflict, one that was hostile to and sharply critical of that of the Communists, and was strongly reflected throughout their political life. The popular appeal of the alternative voice of George Orwell and his eloquent advocacy of a pro-POUM and Catalan position in *Homage to Catalonia* was probably adequately reflected in the sales of that book: less than 1500 by 1951 (Crick 1980: 245). However, from the late 1960s the relative positions of the non-CP Left in the United States and United Kingdom reversed. The British Left beyond the CP became much more influential, eventually displacing the latter, while the American Trotskyists had long been in decline. Ken Loach was a conspicuous product of the revived British extra-Communist Left. The irony was that his voice and his vision could only find expression well after the end of the Civil War; during the War itself the small group of films around *The Spanish Earth* not

only promulgated a narrow Comintern agenda that ignored the social revolution and women's liberation but ensured that alternatives were as far as practicable marginalized or silenced.

It is unsurprising that *The Spanish Earth* garnered the attention that it did at the time, but it is equally noteworthy that it maintains a significant critical and historical standing to this day.

There are numerous different uploads of it on YouTube (darkapitude 2011), one unabridged upload currently boasting in excess of 91,670 views. It has a 42 per cent approval rating on film review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes (Rotten Tomatoes 2015) and a relatively high 6.8 per cent popularity rating on the Internet Movie Database (IMDb, 2015). It features on two courses on the Spanish War produced by leading universities: María Cardalliaguet Gómez-Málaga's course on 'The Spanish Civil War Through Film' at the Yale National Initiative uses it as a key text (Gómez-Málaga 2015), and Harvard University's Department of Visual and Environmental studies lists it with a handful of others among its recommended non-fiction films for students (Denny 2014).

Film history has passed positive verdicts on *The Spanish Earth* more widely (Shull and Wilt 1996: 75). Its visuals, particularly the handheld shots of besieged soldiers or the footage of the Popular Army on the march, remain arresting and evocative. They may therefore have influenced later war films, such as Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), or Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). The involvement of Hemingway himself, as a towering figure in American literature who as I have argued played a major role in the film, is clearly relevant to its continued currency. Likewise, its anti-fascist message, officially considered controversial at the time, may have acquired legitimacy by the prolonged dark years of Francoist dictatorship and Spain's eventual emergence from it. The Franco regime made a very deliberate attempt to obliterate the memory of the defeated side in the civil war, and the film presented an eloquent foreign document that could not be treated in

that way. Notwithstanding the reservations I have expressed, the film was and remains an impressive achievement.

Conclusion

I used Rose's (2012) three-part framework as an analytic tool that encompassed the entire process of filmic production and reception. However, this approach tends to collapse the political context into a wider 'social' category, and therefore provides little guidance in an area central to the film-makers' and audience's concerns (Rose 2012: 20). My argument has not been that the film accomplished nothing in terms of the Republic's defence; it clearly provided a counter to strong pro-Nationalist propaganda and mobilized some support. With Campbell, I also recognize the needs for immediacy in its defence and for promulgation of a strong message. Some might even argue that Loach's film, with its extensive political debates, proves the aridity of an alternative approach. My argument has been that the film's very artistic achievement in the service of the Republic but even more in that of Stalin's policies distorted Spanish realities in ultimately unhelpful ways. Campbell's argument rests on the assumption that non-Spanish audiences would be unlikely to support the elected government if the multiplicity of different strands in its rich polity was acknowledged. Yet this obscures the Spanish Republic's very nature as a democracy operating in a period of heightened political awareness and indeed popular revolution. The film therefore cannot be exempted from the criticism that it purposively eliminated the very significant alternative forces and voices of the Spanish feminists, the Anarcho-Syndicalists, the POUM, Catalan and Basque nationalists and indeed to a large extent the urban workers' movement. It did so because Stalin positively objected to such Left forces that were outside his control and indeed hostile to it. In doing so it downplayed the democratic diversity that could have constituted a part of a wider appeal. The film targeted a United States characterized by the hope brought about by the New Deal and a United Kingdom experiencing mass movements including that

among the unemployed and a revival in trade unionism. Yet the American and British Lefts, as well as their publics more widely, remained ill-informed about central strands in the Republican movement for a long period, as they did about the Republic's vibrant popular democracy. The richness of Left debate was heavily obscured and, given the film's continued currency, it continues to play a similar role in the present.

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