

80 years after the start of the Spanish civil war  
Vince went to visit his great aunt to discuss the  
small part she had played in the seige of Madrid

# MY AUNT: AN ANTI-FACIST

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The Spanish civil war was one of the most important conflicts of the last century. On the 17th July 1936 the Army, headed by General Franco, revolted and attempted to stage a *coup d'état* in response to the recent elections and the formation of the second republic, headed by a centre left Republican party. The last thing many people wanted was a totalitarian regime, so they organised against Franco. The fascists had the support of the church and the bourgeoisie, whereas the workers and antifascists were supported by left wing parties and unions. Contrary to bourgeois historians, the majority of workers in Spain didn't rally to defend the 2nd republic as their "legally elected government" they fought to defend democracy itself, true democracy, of which fascism is the antithesis. They waged a war of revolution on the fascists, collectivising farms, and organising the workers' running of factories as they went.

It's hard to set the scene in a few paragraphs. The left were organised in a popular front of parties, the Anarchist CNT-FAI, the Socialists, the Marxist POUM and the Stalinist PCE/PSUC and left bourgeois democratic parties. Although the Stalinists were the smallest party and had the least support, they had the might

of Stalin's Communist Party behind them. As Russia was the only country willing to supply the republic arms, they used this leverage to increase their party's control of the front. They purposefully sabotaged the campaigns of the POUM and CNT by withholding arms.

Stalin did this because the USSR and the Communist Party (whose will in Spain was expressed through the Spanish Communist Party PCE) had long since deviated from the communism they were supposed to represent. He wanted Franco defeated, but not with the workers in control. This was because he was more interested in signing treaties with France and Britain and a rogue workers state on their borders was the last thing they wanted.

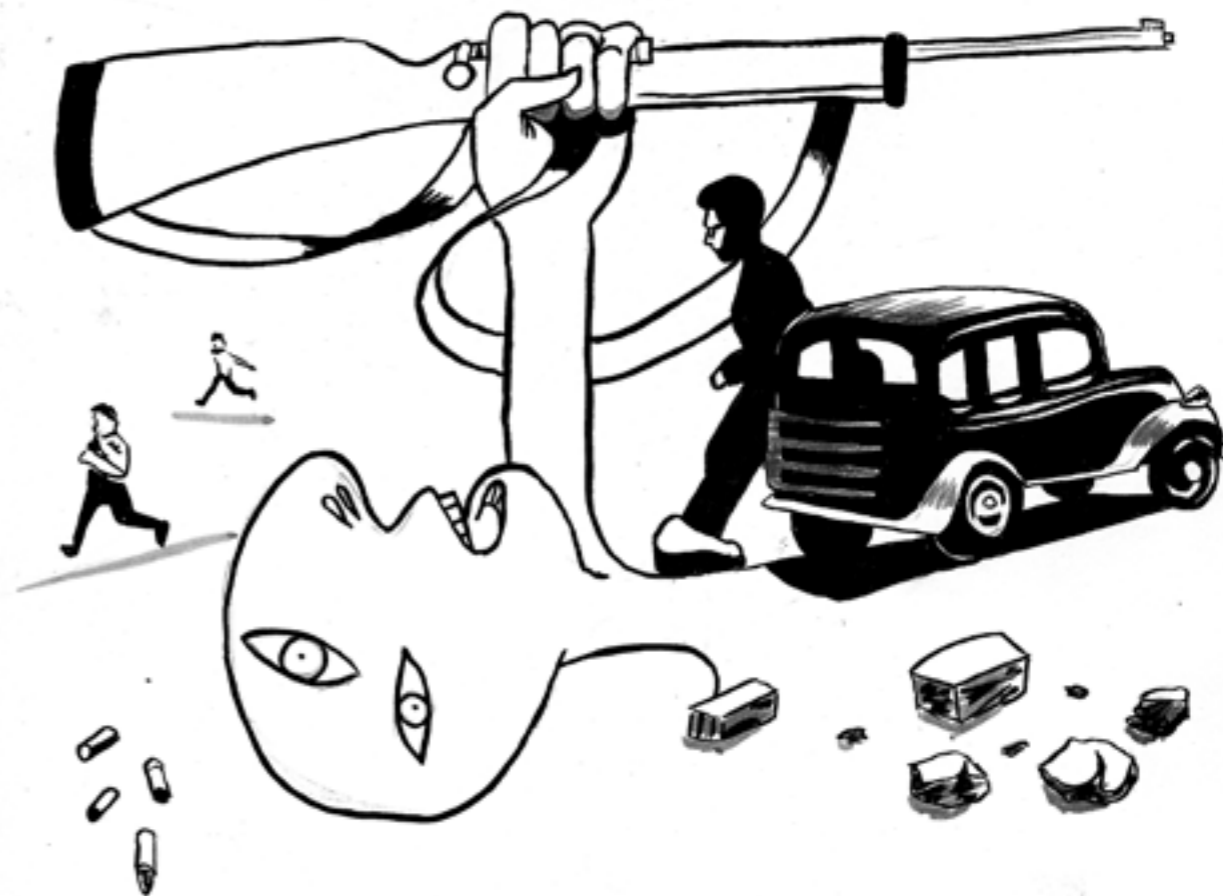
This interview is with Daniella, who was 18 at the time of the siege of Madrid. She, like many people, believed the communist party were the party that represented the people (N.B. Stalin's atrocities in Russia didn't become well known till the 50s).

Madrid was a special case, it became besieged in October 1936, and even though Stalin didn't want the revolting workers to succeed, the loss of Madrid would have been a blow. Franco wanted to take Madrid quickly, as the country's

capital would give him credibility in the eyes of Hitler and Mussolini.

Madrid didn't fall quickly; it was reinforced before encirclement was complete, and even though the counter revolution was in full swing in the rest of "Republican Spain" the Stalinists halted it in Madrid, and even allowed their hated POUM to continue fighting. In Madrid the workers were armed and organised. The city was held by over 100,000 militia men and soldiers.

But as time passed the counter-revolution crushed the spirit of the working class, and the Stalinists persecuted all dissenters ruthlessly. Madrid finally fell in March 1939. Dolores "La Pasionaria" Ibárruri (who first said "It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees,") is mentioned by Daniella later within the interview, she was a leader of the communist party in Spain and a talented public speaker earning her the nickname *La Pasionaria* or the passionate one. But she was a leading member of a party which murdered thousands of workers, and helped kill the Spanish revolution. Despite this *La Pasionaria* is still held in esteem by many who fought with her, Daniella included.



LH: OK Daniella, tell me about how you came to know Dolores *La Pasionaria* Ibárruri?

Daniella: First my sister Concha and I joined the Women's Anti-Fascist Committee. The secretary was Encarnacion Fuyola. There was also a German woman. I don't know her name, but she was a good woman. There were lots of other girls, but now I don't remember their names.

We worked there. Each woman had her job. Our job was to make the macutos, kits of clothes for the boys on the front, the soldiers, and every week Dolores, *La Pasionaria*, would come for them in her car, a big car to carry the parcels.

She called me *ojos bonitos* (pretty eyes). She would say: "Ojos bonitos, where are you?"

And I would say: "Here I am."

And one day she said: "Would you like to come with me?" And I said: "Yes, wait Dolores, I am coming with you," and I got in her car with her and the chauffeur and we left.

We were going to the front, to take the parcels, to distribute them, but we passed by the Communist Central Committee offices and there was Vicente, my

brother [who was a soldier], and he saw me. He said: "Where are you going, dirty face?"

I told him: "I am going to the front, to take the parcels to the boys."

"You're not going anywhere. You get down from there at once! If dad could see you..."

"I am not getting down. I am waiting!" because she went to get something which she had forgotten. I said: "If she comes down and I am not here..."

He said: "Yes, when she comes down you won't be here. Get down at once and go to your committee." And I got down and I went to my committee.

A week later Dolores, *La Pasionaria*, came back and she says: "Ojos bonitos where are you?"

And I say: "Here I am."

"Aah. Were you scared?" She asked.

"No. I wasn't scared. Do you know what happened? My brother was there and he threw me out of the car, but next time, when you don't have to stop off at the Committee offices, I will go with you." But

the time passed and I didn't go.

We worked hard, very hard. We worked in a big room. We put in all the clothes they [the soldiers] needed, socks, underwear and everything. In summer I washed summer clothes, in winter, winter clothes.

LH: And how old were you?

D: I was eighteen, nearly nineteen. Then they began to say that Franco's troops were coming [the city had fallen]. So we burnt the personnel files, we were all listed there, and because of that I have no record. I searched for Fuyola, the secretary, for a long time, and I didn't find her. Then my brother Vicente told me she had died.

When *La Pasionaria* came back from Russia [after Franco died in 1975] I wanted to go and see her. I was older then, of course, and she, much older. I wanted to go, and she wouldn't have recognised me, but I would have looked at her and said: "Do you know me, I am the one with the *ojos bonitos*?" Then she would have soon known me.

She was a very good woman. The way she treated people was very good, very good. In discussions she was strong, energetic, very strong [belief] in her... her communist thing. But in the way she treated