

Revolutionary Socialism and the Home Guard

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On 14 September 1939 the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) declared the new Second World War as an imperialist conflict rather than a continuation of the anti-fascist struggle fought in Spain. They later instructed their members not to cooperate when the Home Guard (Local Defence Volunteers) was formed in May 1940, deriding it as a tool of the capitalist state. *The Daily Worker* on 29 May 1940 described the Home Guard as 'A means of establishing an armed force directly under the control of the hunting-shooting-fishing oligarchy'. In June 1940, after the fall of France, the Communist *Labour Monthly* went further and denounced the principle of national defence as the 'mutual extermination of the workers for the profit of the shareholders'. Members of CPGB were therefore instructed not to join the Home Guard and this policy was followed by its surrogate, the International Brigade Association (IBA), representing veterans of the Spanish Civil War. The Independent Labour Party (ILP), which had sent a small contingent to the POUM militia during the Spanish Civil War, also took an anti-war stance. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 there was an immediate *volte face* within CPGB and IBA, declaring the war once again an anti-fascist crusade (although the ILP retained its anti-war position). A collective amnesia began to develop in the CPGB and IBA over past opposition to the war effort and the Home Guard; after the war the legend grew, amidst a sense of righteous indignation, that members had been banned wholesale from the Home Guard and the forces. As memories faded further, the Home Guard was even presented by some as a triumph of socialist leadership, centred around the innovative training school established at Osterley Park in June 1940 by former members of CPGB and the International Brigade – ignoring the fact that at the time they were regarded as renegades and shunned by former comrades.

The LDV/Home Guard is often presented as the 'People's Army' in a 'People's War' and much was made at the time of its egalitarian nature. Examples of workers holding superior rank to their peace-time managers were well-publicised. Caught up in the propaganda, General Sir Hubert Gough fumed in *Soldiering On* (1954) against what he saw as communist tendencies at the heart of government, claiming that 'Whitehall tried to pretend that we were all equal and could do what we liked'. Falsely crediting Tom Wintringham for this, he went on: 'These unreal and utterly anarchistic ideas

emanated chiefly from various vocal gentlemen who had been fighting in Spain on the side of the Reds, even though their views do not seem to have achieved much success for the Spanish cause.’ There were undoubtedly some moves towards democracy at a local level where some platoons even elected their own officers, particularly in factory units where trade union organization was strong. But such appointments were usually still based on social hierarchy, not least because officers were expected to have access to a telephone and motor car which, at that time, created an inevitable bias towards the wealthier classes. It was only from November 1940 that formal selection boards were established to try to ensure officers were appointed on merit, but this was not always successful. NCOs and officers of one Scottish company threatened to resign in December 1941 when a rather useless private was commissioned, allegedly purely on the basis of his social status. But the most significant problem lay in the structure of the higher command and in May 1941, as his swan song before resigning in frustration, Wintringham tabulated in *Picture Post* how senior command lay in the hands of elderly gentry and aristocracy – the ‘blimps’ of David Low’s cartoon from the *London Evening Standard*. Three of the Area Commanders were titled; of the 109 Zone Commanders, 22 were titled and 9 of the 134 Group Commanders; 20 of the Zone Commanders and 33 of the Group Commanders were company directors. To Wintringham, such men were out of touch not just with military strategy but also with a changing modern society and were at odds with the otherwise youthful nature of the Home Guard. George Orwell agreed, commenting in the *Partisan Review* of August 1941 ‘A respectable proportion of the officers are too old to have caught up with the 1914 war, let alone anything subsequent’. John Langdon-Davies also took up this theme in *The Sunday Pictorial* of July 1941 complaining of a battalion officer who ordered that volunteers should not drink in the same bar as officers. ‘This sort of thing has been the curse of the Home Guard from the beginning – cocks determined to crow on the dunghill of discarded social and military ideas.’ For General Gough the most important qualification of an officer was that he be a ‘gentleman’. For others it was to be run as a social club. On 29 July, *The Daily Worker* reported that some of his fellow Home Guard in Gloucestershire had asked for the expulsion of the Hon. Wogan Philipps, a member of the Communist Party but also the Labour Party candidate for South Oxford, who had driven a republican ambulance in Spain, attached to the International Brigade. When asked to justify this they explained ‘when one expels a fellow from a West End club one does not have to give reasons’. Philipps was, nonetheless, reinstated to the Home Guard on 3 August.

As the debate over the democratic nature of the Home Guard proceeded, the concept of the ‘People’s Army’ was most strongly resisted in 1940 by the organizations that had supported the Spanish republic against the fascist coup. The Communist

Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had abandoned the principle of the 'popular front' and now took cover behind the dogma of demanding a people's government before supporting the war effort. *The Daily Worker* of 13 November 1939 dismissed the 'current propaganda that the present bloodstained scramble for colonies is a "People's War"'. The Home Guard was later derided as a fascist organization, founded by the capitalist state to suppress workers' movements. Not all socialists or veterans of the Spanish Civil War shared this view but without the support of the CPGB or ILP they lacked a focus, as the Labour Party (led by Clement Atlee, who had given his name to No.1 Company of the British battalion of the International Brigade) was now part of the government of national unity and was reluctant to engage in anything that seemed like political campaigning). George Orwell, who had served with the POUM in Spain and was now a sergeant instructor in the Home Guard, had left the ILP at the start of the Second World War because of its pacifist stance. He felt frustrated by the Labour Party, CPGB and ILP alike but believed 'That rifle hanging on the wall of the working-class flat or labourer's cottage, is the symbol of democracy. It is our job to see that it stays there.' His goal was clear:

Only revolution can save England, that has been obvious for years, but now the revolution has started, and it may proceed quite quickly if only we can keep Hitler out. Within two years, maybe a year, if only we can hang on, we shall see changes that will surprise the idiots who have no foresight. I dare say the London gutters will have to run with blood. All right, let them, if it is necessary. But when the red militias are billeted in the Ritz, I shall still feel that the England I was taught to love so long ago for such different reasons is somehow persisting. (*Evening Standard*, 8 January 1941)

Despite initial disquiet in the Executive Committee about abandoning what emotionally seemed to be a continuation of the anti-fascist struggle of the Spanish Civil War, Orwell's vision of revolution was not acceptable to the leadership of the CPGB, who diligently followed the Moscow policy that the over-riding priority was to protect the existence of the Soviet Union, which had recently signed a non-aggression pact with the Nazis. On 2 October 1939 the General Secretary of the CPGB Harry Pollitt, who had initially supported the war, declared 'If there is one thing that is clear it is that the fight against Fascism has disappeared and Fascism has now, because of its non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, taken on a progressive role.' In August 1940 the CPGB was even instructed by Moscow to follow the theory of 'revolutionary defeatism' by which 'no steps should be taken to oppose a German landing in this country since a short period under a Nazi regime would be the quickest way of bringing about a Communist revolution' (TNA KV 4/186).

Whatever the twists and turns of CPGB policy, the government were well aware of the possibility of infiltration and subversion in the Home Guard from both communists and any fascist 'fifth column'. Sir Edward Grigg (Under-Secretary of State for War), hinted at the political risk in the House of Commons on 22 May: 'As to the supply of rifles, there are plenty of rifles in the country, but it is not desirable for more reasons than one to issue rifles promiscuously to all members of the Volunteers unless special reasons exist'. The concern was shared beyond Parliament. Even as demands to arm the LDV became more insistent, the Home Intelligence Reports for 19-20 May reported worry in the general populace that arms distributed indiscriminately might end up in the hands of the 'fifth column'. Prospective volunteers were vetted, somewhat inconsistently, by the local police and an order of 27 May 1940 equally banned active fascists and communists from joining. Membership alone of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) and the CPGB was not an automatic bar to service, but it did lead to additional vetting to establish if the person was actively working to subvert the war effort. With a membership of around 20,000 and its influence extending into the 90,000-strong mass circulation of *The Daily Worker*, the CPGB was seen as a particular threat. The CPGB was loyal to the instructions of Moscow and this was concerning when the War Office assumed that the country would soon go to war with the Soviet Russia as well as Germany.

Fear of Bolshevism had long been the pre-occupation of British Intelligence and this was not stopped by the war on Fascist Germany, leading to some strange bedfellows in British Intelligence. The Military Intelligence (Research) department (MI(R)) sent Colin Gubbins (future head of SOE) on a tour of Europe in June - August 1939 to build links with White Russian groups and then recruited William Allen, only recently the banker to the BUF, because of his contact with anti-Soviet opposition groups in the Caucasus. Another of MI(R)'s officer was Peter Kemp, described by MI5 as 'extremely anti-semitic' who had fought on the side of the Nationalists in Spain and was implicated in the execution of unarmed International Brigade prisoners of war (TNA KV 2/4418). When Gubbins asked about Kemp's service in Spain the latter remarked 'he at least didn't seem to disapprove of the side I had chosen' and noted that they had friends in common from there.

Not all the British volunteers in the International Brigade had been members of the CPGB, but the Brigade had been organized proprietorially by the Communist Party and consequently MI5 regarded any former Brigader as a potential agent of the Comintern (Communist International). This was not least because *The Daily Worker* had openly promoted the selection of some International Brigade members for training in subversion prior to their return from Spain. Sam Lesser (Russell) later admitted that Soviet Intelligence used the International Brigade as a recruiting ground as well as using passports of International Brigade volunteer (which had to be

handed over when they arrived in Spain), as a valuable source of cover documents. SIS were equally well aware of the usefulness of former volunteers for espionage and it seems likely that they had recruited former Brigadier Alexander Foote, who became wireless operator to the Lucy spy ring in Switzerland, as a double agent to feed information to the Soviets.

The IBA, under the leadership of former British battalion CO and prominent CPGB organiser Sam Wild (who had taken part in the Invergordon mutiny in 1932), followed the Party lead and the July 1940 issue of its journal, *Volunteer for Liberty*, disparaged comrades who sought to work with the Home Guard as 'helping the ruling class'. The Osterley Training School had recently opened under Tom Wintringham and publisher Victor Gollanz asked a former member of the International Brigade whether he and his comrades would help to train LDVs, but the reply was 'No, we don't support the war yet'. A despairing Tom Wintringham later wrote in *The Politics of Victory* (1941)

Because revolutionaries had the experience of Spain they had an opportunity that is not likely to recur of proving themselves better, and better because of their politics, at doing a job that millions of people wanted done. The British Communists turned down this opportunity, refusing to allow Party members who are Brigadiers to work at Osterley when they were invited to do so and offered a 'free hand'.

He concluded his book saying

We should be much readier for this [the Second Front] if, during the past year, those who fought alongside me in Spain had been allowed by their leaders to help in the effort to make the British army more democratic and therefore more efficient, and to help in teaching it the tactics we learned in the laboratory of Spain'.

The official position of the IBA in 1940 was uncomfortable even to some of its leadership. Malcolm Dunbar, former Chief of Staff of XV International Brigade and Vice-President of the IBA occasionally lectured at Osterley whilst on leave from the Honourable Artillery Company (which he joined in June 1940). After the war, the early opposition of the IBA to the Home Guard was embarrassing and its leadership tried to present themselves as victims in the story. Bill Alexander, former CO of British Battalion (and a wartime captain in the Reconnaissance Corps) greatly simplified matters when he wrote in 1982 'there was official opposition to the employment of Brigadiers in the forces' (*British Volunteers for Liberty: Spain 1936-39*, p.246). The legend grew that there was a wholesale ban of International Brigade veterans from joining the forces and Home Guard. This perspective was assisted by most of the published memoirs being from CPGB members, and the main media source being

the reports contained in *The Daily Worker*. In fact, the *Volunteer for Liberty* regularly reported on the progress of former Brigaders in the services, their complaint being that those accepted were not necessarily commissioned into the rank that they believed they deserved from their service in Spain.

The government repeatedly insisted that veterans of the International Brigade were not banned *per se* from joining the forces and none had been dismissed simply for having served therein. But under a secret instruction of January 1939, International Brigade veterans wishing to join the forces did have to undergo additional vetting from MI5 to establish that they were not intending to carry out subversive activities on behalf of the CPGB. It was, however, stressed 'it is not desired to prejudice any recruit who may have merely gone to Spain out of a sense of adventure and not become imbued with revolutionary doctrines' (TNA KV 2/609). The concern of MI5 seemed justified when, in April 1939, the document was leaked to the CPGB by a former Brigader. This was accompanied by secret material relating to the expansion of the Territorial Army, of clear value to a potential enemy state. Ted Edwards was the former British battalion secretary and a CPGB activist who, in March 1939 (without revealing his political background) had obtained a job as a civilian clerk with the Territorial Army in Sheffield. A neighbour reported that Edwards was removing secret documents and copying them in the local CPGB office; the incriminating documents were found in his home. Edwards was sentenced to 18 months hard labour in Wakefield prison with a recommendation that he should not then be accepted into the armed forces (TNA KV2/609). Upon release, Edwards became a full-time official for the CPGB in Manchester but, reflecting the somewhat haphazard vetting process, also managed to join the local Home Guard. Once MI5 discovered this, they initially recommended that Edwards simply be kept under surveillance, but it was then pointed out by senior officers that MI5 had better things to do and he was dismissed. There was little 'joined-up thinking' and in November 1942 Edwards was conscripted into the Pioneer Corps. He was discharged as soon as MI5 became aware of the situation but, undaunted, Edwards volunteered for the Royal Engineers. His presence at the Transportation Training Centre at Longmoor was only discovered through an intercept of correspondence with Sam Wild. Edwards was discharged in May 1943 and *The Daily Worker* tried to make him a cause célèbre, professing outrage at his dismissal whilst carefully failing to mention Edwards' earlier conviction under the Official Secrets Act. Nothing if not determined, by September 1943 Edwards had managed to join the Manchester Home Guard by the simple expedient of lying on his Ministry of Labour and National Service form. He was once again expelled and after causing further consternation briefly working in a dockyard, he ended the war as a bus conductor.

Although many CPGB members and International Brigade veterans were prepared to ignore Party policy, the public opposition of the CPGB and IBA to the war in 1939-40, fear that any intelligence they gathered would be passed by Soviet Intelligence to the Nazis and the embarrassment of the Edwards case, made the government, and particularly MI5, distrustful of the motivation of any potential recruit. Yet many of the British veterans of the International Brigade had returned from Spain already disillusioned by the Stalinist discipline of the Communist Party and only twenty-five per cent had joined the IBA. Nonetheless, MI5 considered that some of these apparently disillusioned individuals might possibly be sleeper agents of the Comintern. One former Brigadier under suspicion was Sam Lesser (Russell). Lesser was late in registering for call-up in March 1940 because he had been sent to France and Belgium after the Spanish Civil War as a correspondent of *The Daily Worker*, with instructions to liaise with the French Communist Party and an agent of the Comintern in France. His orders were undoubtedly known to MI5 and this was unlikely to inspire confidence in Lesser's motivation for now wishing to join-up.

The air of mistrust was increased by the fact that veterans of the International Brigade were not obliged to declare their service in Spain on the Home Guard enrolment form (as this only asked for details of service in the British army), which nonetheless appeared suspicious if later discovered. The routine interception of correspondence of CPGB activists, particularly Sam Wild, could identify contacts with Brigadiers in the forces and this was enough to warrant further investigation. George Fletcher had been adjutant and one-time CO of the British Battalion and was wounded three times. In July 1940 he joined the Crewe factory Home Guard and the cursory inspection of his enrolment form (which contained no mention of his Spanish service) raised no objection from the local police. He was promoted to sergeant but eventually MI5 caught up with his application. He had been a CPGB member since 1935 and alarm bells rang when it was discovered he was still in contact with Sam Wild. Fletcher was dismissed in March 1941 as 'services no longer required' but by November 1941 he was no longer a member of the IBA and in March 1943 he was recorded as a second lieutenant in the factory Home Guard. Another Brigadier who became a Home Guard officer was Welsh miner Tom Jones. He had fought in Spain with the anti-tank battery and machine gun section but was badly wounded and captured in 1938, eventually being repatriated. His injuries left him ineligible for call-up, but he joined the Rhos LDV, eventually being commissioned as a second lieutenant. Most curiously, Jimmy Perry, the creator of *Dad's Army* recalled a 'Major Strong' in the Watford Home Guard, who claimed to be a 'seasoned guerrilla fighter' who had fought in Spain. He has not been identified and the story cannot be confirmed. By June 1943 the Under-Secretary to the War Office, the Labour MP Arthur Henderson confirmed to Parliament 'a considerable number of those who

served in the International Brigade are serving satisfactorily in the British Army, and that, indeed, some of them have received commissions’.

Most significant of the former International Brigaders who rejected the policy of the IBA and the CPGB in 1940 were Tom Wintringham, Hugh Slater and Yank Levy. As high-profile instructors at the Osterley Home Guard Training School, they (together with George Orwell) created the short-lived spectre of a revolutionary socialist influence in the Home Guard beyond anything the rhetoric of the CPGB could achieve, all the time facing criticism from their former comrades. Tom Wintringham had been a founder member of the CPGB and was a former editor of *The Daily Worker*. He had been arrested for seditious libel and incitement to mutiny in 1925 and in 1936 he had been a pioneer of the concept of the International Brigades in Spain. He was an instructor and then briefly CO of the British battalion, leading it at the battle of Jarama where he was wounded. Wintringham’s writings on the Home Guard are overtly political with a focus on enlarging, and fully-arming, the Home Guard to create a ‘People’s Army’ of up to four million men. He hoped this would form the basis for a future revolutionary militia. MI5 took the risk of a socialist infiltration into the Home Guard using the Osterley Training School seriously, but given the lack of organised countrywide political support, the supposed threat relied almost entirely on Wintringham’s personal profile. Wintringham had already drifted away from the CPGB after the latter abandoned the ‘popular front’ concept and was expelled from the Party in 1938 (the excuse being his refusal to put the party above his then mistress, the American journalist Kitty Bowler). Nonetheless, Wintringham remained a Marxist, differing only tactically from the CPGB. In *How to Reform the Army* (April 1939), he had accepted the need to work for ‘defending British democracy, in something like the shape it is, against Fascism, by means of an efficient army’ and also proposed a small Home Guard-type organization. The booklet was largely ignored until his profile rose in 1940 – selling 10,000 copies in June 1940 alone. While his political views hardly endeared him to the traditional officer class, he was not the outcast as sometimes imagined. Immediately before war broke out, Wintringham was commissioned to write articles for the officially-approved serial publication *Battle Training in Word and Picture*. Although MI5 blocked his appointment to a post in the Transport, Mechanical Section of the War Office during September 1939 (on the grounds that it might give him access to confidential information), during Summer and Autumn 1940 Wintringham was engaged on official War Office lecture tours and Wintringham’s best-selling *New Ways of War* was one of the few Home Guard books on the recommended by the War Office reading list (Home Guard Instructions Nos 26 and 38, 1941). The book combined inspiring and practical advice sandwiched between sections arguing the case for socialist change –

but any specific impact of the latter in the shift of the country towards the left during the course of the war is difficult to assess.

The fear of MI5 was that, despite his public expulsion from CPGB, Wintringham might have remained a deep cover agent for the Comintern. MI5 reported 'There is always the possibility that Wintringham might like to build up something in the nature of a future Red Army' (TNA KV 4/186). MI5 kept Osterley under surveillance, but other branches of the intelligence services may have looked more positively at the guerrilla warfare training. The wealthy publisher of *Picture Post*, Edward Hulton, funded the training school and also worked closely with Wintringham on the scheme to import privately donated weapons from the USA. Hulton also worked with Section D of SIS which was organizing the guerrillas of the secret Home Defence Scheme and SIS probably used Hulton to make discrete suggestions for the Osterley syllabus.

The political contribution of the other two International Brigade veterans at Osterley was more limited. Hugh Slater had been a promising avant-garde artist, but he joined CPGB in 1933 and became a journalist. He was repeatedly arrested for obstruction of police and wilful damage during anti-Nazi protests in England and was also involved in street fights with the Nazis in Berlin during a visit in 1932, as well as being arrested in France for contravention of the policy of non-intervention in Spain. His thick MI5 file runs to two volumes. Slater went to Spain as a journalist for the communist monthly *Inprecor* in August 1936 and then served with the International Brigade until October 1938, becoming the Chief of Operations. He was described in Soviet files as 'a leader almost of genius' but by the time he left Spain, like Wintringham, he may also have been disillusioned by the repressive discipline of the Stalinist Communist Party. In 1939, the Air Ministry briefly employed him as an Aerial Survey Officer to advise on camouflage but, unsurprisingly, he failed his MI5 vetting and was dismissed. In August 1940 Slater became an instructor at Osterley and moved to the Denbies training school in September, with MI5 still regarding him as an 'active and ardent communist' (TNA KV 2/2325). Slater was, however, expelled from the CPGB on 7 January 1941 for being 'actively associated with the Wintringham group' (TNA KV 2/2325). MI5 remained suspicious and later explained 'we thought the expulsion might be a blind and that both he and Wintringham might be working underground for the party' (TNA KV 2/2326).

Despite MI5's concerns, in December 1940 Slater was conscripted into the Royal Artillery. Wintringham was as angry as MI5, believing being conscripted as a private was a waste of Slater's talents; he did not realize this was a device of the Directorate of Military Training (who evidently did not share the worries of MI5), as the first stage in arranging a commission for Slater as an army instructor. MI5 at least wanted Slater confined to working with the Home Guard and he duly returned as an instructor to Denbies (as a second lieutenant in the Border Regiment) but to MI5's

further dismay, he was later posted (at the specific request of General Thorne who had visited Osterley and was impressed by Wintringham and Slater), as an Instructor at the Company Commander's Training School of Scottish Command and was promoted captain. Their final horror came when Slater was recommended for a transfer to the Intelligence Corps, carrying the rank of major. The Director of Military Intelligence raised no objection but Slater failed the interview and one must wonder if MI5 did not bring some influence to bear on the selection board.

Bert 'Yank' Levy was a Canadian who had moved to the USA and became a professional boxer. How far his colourful career was directed by intellectual Marxist analysis as opposed to a desire for adventure is debatable. He took part in the Mexican revolution and briefly became a gun-runner for the Sandanista in Nicaragua but then served five years imprisonment for a bank robbery in the USA before becoming a leader of the Canadian unemployed workers' movement. His service in Spain was more limited than his legend suggests: not long after arriving in Spain he was captured in February 1937 at the Battle of Jarama. He was eventually released in a prisoner exchange and returned to Canada. On the outbreak of the Second World War, he worked his passage to England on a merchant ship and then lectured at Osterley on unarmed combat and knife fighting, subsequently touring Britain giving lectures and demonstrations. His best-selling *Guerrilla Warfare* was published in 1941, with the political content provided by Wintringham. Levy then returned to Canada and the USA where he helped train OSS in guerrilla warfare.

The fourth socialist activist at Osterley was Wilfrid Vernon, whose presence seemed clear proof to MI5 of the potential risk of communist subversion. Vernon had pre-war links to Wintringham and had been convicted, whilst working for RAE Farnborough, for improper possession of secret documents. Earlier, he had been implicated in attempts to spread sedition at Aldershot camp. Despite this evidence, Vernon continued as an instructor at Denbies until December 1942, albeit under MI5 surveillance. He became Labour MP for Dulwich from 1945 to 1951 but in 1952 he finally admitted having been a pre-war Soviet agent. In addition, Malcolm Dunbar, formerly Chief of Staff of the International Brigade occasionally lectured at Osterley when off duty from the Honourable Artillery Company. Dunbar refused a commission in order to follow his regiment overseas and in 1944 was awarded the Military Medal.

These socialists were outnumbered by less-famous, non-political, instructors at Osterley and they lacked any organized left-wing support. MI5 concluded that, with only a weekend course, there was no evidence of political indoctrination. Direct political content usually only appeared in the closing questions and answers part of the course. Although irritated by Wintringham's frequent public pronouncements telling them how to do their job, the War Office was less suspicious of the School than MI5 or some of what Orwell termed the elderly 'blimps' commanding London Home

Guard. The main complaint of the War Office was one of control and what they viewed as an over-emphasis on harassing tactics, which while a recognised function of the Home Guard, was over the summer of 1940 increasingly labelled as 'guerrilla warfare'. This risked compromising the strategic need for the Home Guard to defend fixed 'nodal points'. But as a measure of acceptance, both *New Ways of War* by Tom Wintringham and *Home Guard for Victory* by Hugh Slater were part of the select War Office approved Home Guard reading list. After the closure of Osterley and the effort to bring the syllabus under direct War Office control, Wintringham, Slater and Vernon all transferred as instructors to the new official training school at Denbies but Wintringham no longer had the freedom to propound his ideas in the press. Slater increasingly took the lead in lecturing at the school over a frustrated Wintringham.

The CPGB and IBA had a complete about turn following the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, when the war could once again be classed as part of the anti-fascist struggle. Wintringham took pleasure in pointing out that the defenders of Leningrad used methodology taught earlier at Osterley Park, whilst again bemoaning the lack of interest from the British left (*Tribune*, 19 September 1941). The February 1942 issue of the IBA's *Volunteer for Liberty* highlighted its new-found support for the Home Guard with a photograph on its cover, as the CPGB sought to take advantage of the new pro-Soviet atmosphere in the country. In November 1942 Special Branch reported that secret instructions had been issued by the CPGB for its members to 'permeate' the Home Guard to obtain military training and weapons and MI5 worried that some on the short exclusion list of CPGB activists were now being admitted to the Home Guard. (TNA CAB 93/5). However, by now the left had lost its most fervent voice for a socialist Home Guard and the latter remained apolitical. Reined in by military discipline at Denbies, by May 1941 Wintringham had become intensely frustrated by his inability to effect change in the structure of the Home Guard and confused by the conscription of Slater, he resigned. Ironically, Wintringham was unaware that the War Office was in the process of commissioning him as a Major in the Home Guard, but his resignation made this impossible.

Wintringham never received any official recognition of the huge contribution that he made to the development of the Home Guard. John Langdon-Davies, former relief worker in Spain who had founded the Burwash Training School and who took-up the mantle of Home Guard publicist after Wintringham resigned from Denbies, was made a major in the Home Guard. Other officers of the International Brigade were given better official recognition. The most senior was Len Crome, who had gone to Spain with the Scottish Ambulance Unit, joined the International Brigade and later served as Chief of Medical Services to 15th Army Corps of the Republican army. He joined the Communist Party after returning from Spain and became a GP, but was

commissioned into the RAMC in 1941, won a MC at Monte Cassino, ending the war as a lieutenant colonel. Of the members of the British battalion, Hugh Slater became a captain in the Border Regiment and nearly a major in the Intelligence Corps. Alan Gilchrist, Commissar of the A/T battery and Secretary of the IBA in 1940 when it was vilifying Wintringham, was conscripted into the Royal Artillery in November 1940 and was commissioned in April 1941. Ironically, he was later awarded the MBE for his military service. To become a 'Member of the British Empire' was perhaps a strange honour for an ardent communist. Of the other COs of the British battalion, George Fletcher became an officer in the Home Guard; Bill Alexander (who wrote in 1982 on the opposition to International Brigade veterans in the British forces) was indeed initially refused a commission but in 1940 was admitted to Sandhurst Royal Military College and served as a captain in the Reconnaissance Corps. Another former CO, Paddy O'Daire (a former member of the IRA), became a major in the Pioneer Corps. Alun Menai Williams served with the RAF police. After service with the ARP, Miles Tomalin, playwright, poet and recorder player, another member of the A/T battery, found a home in the Play Unit of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) – an army educational unit set up in 1941 to raise morale among troops, to provide educational material for lectures and encourage debate on current affairs. It was a concept earlier championed by Wintringham and was heavily influenced by socialists, including members of the CPGB. Times had changed and its second issue in October 1941 contained an article 'Our Ally Russia'. Unsurprisingly, ABCA was greatly disliked by Churchill, and was scapegoated by the Conservative Party for influencing an increased Labour Party vote in the services, and so contributing to its landslide defeat in 1945.

Wintringham achieved international fame in 1940 as the chief publicist of the Home Guard and did much, at a crucial time, to engender a fighting spirit in its ranks. Yet he faced opposition from both the government and his former comrades in the CPGB and IBA. His death in 1949 passed with barely a mention in the media and it seemed that his participation in the development of the Home Guard in 1940 had become uncomfortable on all sides. By the time of the TV *Dad's Army* series in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the midst of an IRA bombing campaign, the idea of the Home Guard being taught ruthless techniques of guerrilla warfare at Osterley by a revolutionary socialist was unpalatable and a much more cosier vision of the Home Guard entered the national psyche.

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