Irish Labour History Society seminar, in partnership with SIPTU, marking the 90th anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War

IRELAND AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR 90 YEARS ON: FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY THEN AND NOW

The Spanish Civil War 1936 – 1939 has an enduring fascination. As an attempt to halt the onward march of fascism it is seen as the epitome of 'the good fight', and the International Brigades are lionized as an exemplar of selfless commitment. Spain has also come to be regarded as a precursor of World War 2 and acquired increasing relevance to today's struggles against the resurgence of neo-fascism.

The Civil War in Spain had a huge impact on Ireland, as it engaged the competing forces of militant clericalism and socialist republicanism, and revealed how European Irish mentalities were in the 1930s. As something of a popular front atmosphere evolved in Dublin, the war emerged as the first rallying point of liberals in independent Ireland, and women were prominent in organising support for the Spanish Republic.

This seminar presentations will explore the motivations and performance of the Irish Volunteers in the International Brigades set against the political and social context of the time here in Ireland. A particular focus will be the role played by women on both sides of the conflict while the personal journey of a volunteer will be viewed through the lens of the wider family's perspective. The relevance of the struggle against fascism in Spain in the 1930's and indeed here in Ireland will be considered in the light of the unsettling images of Far-Right attacks on migrants and the social media spinning of fascist narratives in Ireland today. The seminar concludes with a Panel discussion addressing questions from the audience.

The event will close with the Dublin launch of
'***War to the Death: The Waterford Farm Strikes of 1922 and 1923'*** **(UCD Press)**
by Dr. Emmet O'Connor.

Funded by
An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

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14.00 Registration/ Coffee

14.15 Opening Address: ILHS President, Moira Leydon

14.20 SIPTU Deputy General Secretary, Ethel Buckley

14.25 The road to the Lincolns: the mind and deeds of the Connolly Column

Dr. Emmet O'Connor, Ulster University, describes who went to Spain and why, their arrival and their experiences and performance during the war, the reception back on their return and an assessment of the politics of commemoration.

15.00 In Pursuit of an Ideal

Kate Nugent of *Friends of the International Brigades Ireland (FIBI),* and a relative of Jack Nalty, who died on the last day of the International Brigades involvement in the war, describes a family's perspective on one individual's journey to and through the war.

15.10 Irish women and the Spanish Civil War

Dr. Veronica Barry, University College Dublin, presents an examination of Irish women's responses and contributions to the war, tracing the different political, social and religious lenses through which they understood and framed the conflict. Covering their activities in support of both sides at home and behind the frontlines in Spain the paper also addresses the role Irish Women played in providing neutral humanitarian aid during the war.

15.40 Fascism, Franco and the Irish Far-Right today

Dr. Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc, University of Limerick, discusses Eoin O'Duffy's Blueshirts who fought for fascism in Spain and the threat posed by their modern day successors.

16.15 Panel Discussion: Emmet O'Connor, Kate Nugent, Veronica Barry & Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc

Chair: Eoin Ronayne

17.10 Comfort break:

17.30 Launch of *War to the Death: The Waterford Farm Strikes of 1922 and 1923* (UCD Press) by Dr. Emmet O'Connor.

19.00 Close

During the seminar there will be a display of Spanish Civil War memorabilia and a black and white photo documentary exhibition *'The War in Spain – travelling in the steps of the Waterford International Brigadistas 1936 – 1938'* by Eoin Ronayne at the foyer outside Connolly Hall. ILHS and UCD Press bookstalls will also be present.

CONTRIBUTORS AND CHAIRS

Emmet O'Connor lectures at Ulster University and has published widely on labour history. He co-authored what is seen as the definitive study of Irish involvement in the International Brigades, *'In Spanish Trenches – the minds and deeds of the Irish who fought for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War' (UCD Press).* His *A Labour History of Ireland 1824 – 2000' (UCD Press)* is a standard work.

Kate Nugent has an interest in family and local history, completing the Lord Mayors Certificate in Local History in Dublin in 2023, with her essay "Moving Lines and Changing Shapes - getting to the heart of East Wall" published in the Dublin Historical Record. A committee member of the *Old Dublin Society* and of *Friends of the International Brigades Ireland (FIBI)* she is committed to ensuring that those who left Ireland to fight in the Spanish Civil War are not forgotten.

Veronica Barry is a Research Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow at the School of History and Centre for War Studies, University College Dublin. Her research examines the history of neutrality, propaganda and women's internationalism.

Pádraig Óg Ó Ruairc is a historian, author, archaeologist and political activist. Originally from Clare he lives in Cork, has a PhD in Irish History from the University of Limerick and is widely published on the 1916 Rising, the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. In recent years he has turned his focus to studying the history of fascism and anti-fascism in Ireland with his recent book 'BURN THEM OUT! – a history of Fascism and the Far Right in Ireland' becoming a best seller.

Eoin Ronayne is a member of the ILHS Board, a former senior trade union official with Fórsa, CPSU and the NUJ, he previously worked as a broadcast journalist with RTE News.

Ireland and the Spanish Civil War 90 years on: fighting for democracy then and now

Saturday 5th December 2026, 14.00–17.00
Connolly Hall, Liberty Hall, Dublin 1

Bookings (No Charge) via www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com

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