

Surrey Unison - Organize

Solidarity Park in Malgrat de Mar.

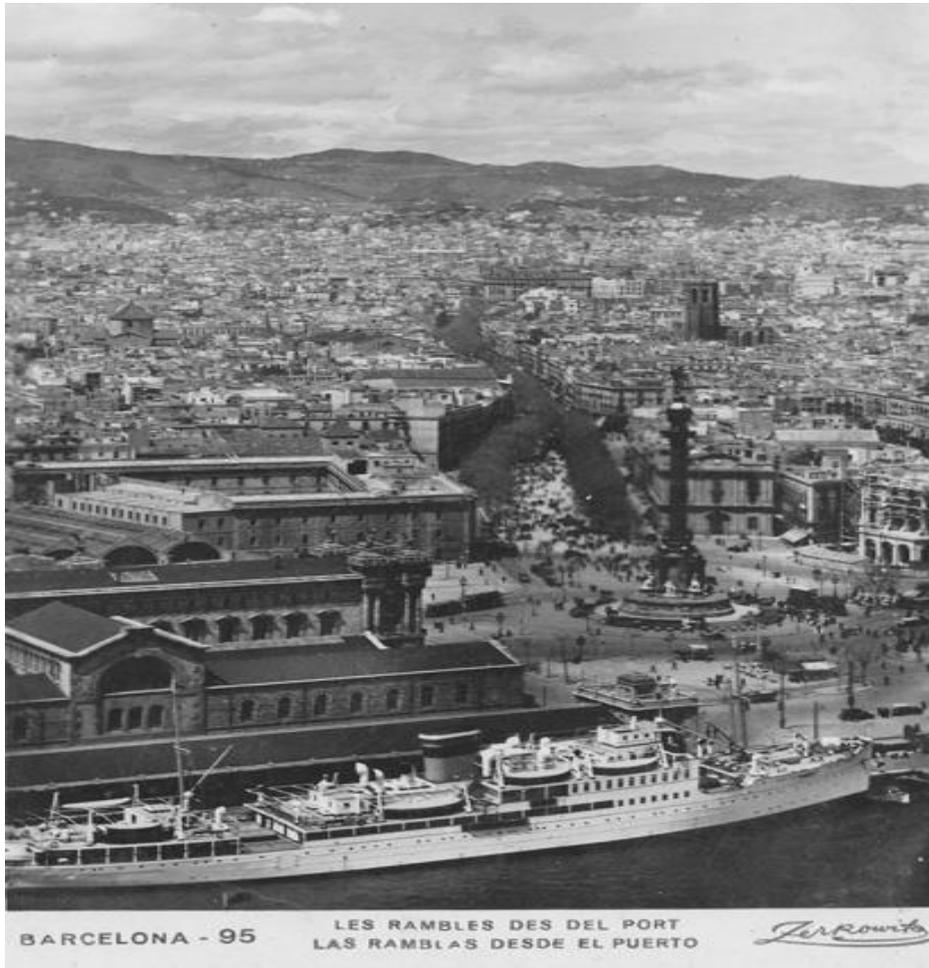


Surrey Unison have raised £2000 through fundraising to donate to the Solidarity Sculpture park in Malgrat de Mar near Barcelona. This is being built to commemorate the sinking of the Ciudad de Barcelona (see the story below) during the Spanish Civil War. It will open next year in 2020 and Surrey Unison will be sending a representative to attend the opening ceremony on Saturday 30th May 2020. If you are interested in being Unison's rep at the opening email the branch office for details.

The Sinking of the Ciudad de Barcelona (City of Barcelona) and the Spanish Civil war.



The ship 'City of Barcelona'.



Moored at the bottom of 'Las Ramblas' in Barcelona in 1936. (If you've been to Barca you will recognise the Christopher Columbus statue at the bottom of Las Ramblas)

Although it's now over 80 years since the start of the Spanish civil war it still represents a key moment in international trade unionism and the struggle of working people for decent working and living conditions and the fight against fascism, racism and for democracy. Many of these struggles of course still exist in their different forms today.

The remarkable thing about the Spanish civil War is how many trade unionists from all over the world volunteered to travel to Spain to support the republican movement. They came from Australia, America, New Zealand Canada as well as Britain. They travelled huge distances far from family and friends because 'they went because their open eyes could see no other way'. Some 2500 volunteers went from Britain and Ireland over 500 of whom (more than 20%) gave their lives.

As trade unionists we are all sometimes called to stand up against a more powerful foe and to commemorate the bravery of the International brigades Surrey Unison has made a donation to a memorial being built in Spain to remember the Brigadiers on board the ship the 'City of Barcelona' torpedoed by a Fascist submarine on 30th May 1937.

In the age of comfortable sea going liners the City of Barcelona started life as a luxury liner ploughing between Mediterranean ports. It had first class compartments and the sort of oak panelled dining rooms we associate today we associate with the luxury liners of the 30's. At 4,000 tones and just over a 100 metres in length it was a reasonable ship of it day. (For example the Titanic was 46,000 tonnes and 300 metres in length).



On 29 May in Marseilles under conditions of some secrecy the City of Barcelona boarded 250 volunteers. On the afternoon of Sunday 30 May, *Ciudad de Barcelona* was off the coast of Malgrat, about 60 kilometres north of Barcelona. She was spotted by the Italian submarine *General Sanjuro*, which launched two torpedoes. The first missed, the second hit the engine room exploded and the Barcelona sank in 4 minutes. Jack Freeman a brigader recounts the sinking in a letter to his younger brother Herb;

“Every once in a while it strikes me that my being alive at all at present is just a pretty damn lucky accident. My cabin on the boat was in the rear part, just aft of the engine room. Our usual orders were to stay below deck all the time, either in our cabins or in the passageways. But this Sunday afternoon shortly after dinner I had begged and gotten permission to go to the middle section of the boat where most of my American friends were quartered, to attend a meeting of the English-speaking comrades. After the meeting I stayed to schmooze around with a few of the guys. We were leaning over the railing, three of us, looking at the shore, not more than a mile away, and the water of the Mediterranean. which is every bit as blue as it's cracked up to be. This was well within Spanish waters, not more than 60 kilometers from Barcelona as a matter of fact. Every once in a while we would pass a fishing village with the boats drawn up on the beach. From a distance the boats looked like fish lying out in the sun. Some of the hills came rolling right down to the water. Everything looked bright

and completely peaceful. We were feeling quite happy at finally being practically in Spain after so much delay in New York and in France.”

“Suddenly we heard a dull thud—not a bang, not sharp at all, like a heavy push. The boat shook and threw me from the railing against the cabin wall. The people started running from the back of the boat towards me. I don’t know what I thought had happened—hit a rock probably—but I certainly wasn’t thinking of a torpedo, because even then I wasn’t thinking war. Anyway I started yelling, “Don’t get excited. Don’t get panicky.” I had yelled this 3 or 4 times when I saw dense brown smoke all around the deck toward the back end of the boat. Then I figured the trouble for sure & somehow I got into a lifeboat which was about 10 ft away. I’ve never been able to recall whether I jumped, hopped, crawled, or climbed into that life-boat, but I got in. Somewhere around this time I bruised my leg, how I don’t know. This was the only casualty I suffered, and I didn’t discover the scab until several hours later. I was one of the first in the boat but it filled up very rapidly, since it was right amidships & most easily reached. The damned ropes were tied with wires but there were two American sailors (not crew members) in it and they freed us with hatchets.”

About 65 brigadiers drowned on the City of Barcelona, Jack Freeman, the letter’s author, died fighting for the republicans some 6 months later.

Spanish Civil War memorials;

Surrey Unison donated £XXXXXX to the solidarity park in Malgrat de Mar. When finished, the Sculpture will consist of 60, half-metre tall sculpted figures, carved in local limestone. The figures, representing the brigaders will be portrayed singing aboard an abstract interpretation of a ship which has seating designed as waves and will be situated on top of a stone patio map of the world. Spanish civil war. There are many memorials to the women and men who fought in the Spanish civil war ranging from small plaques to dramatic works of art. One of the most significant is the bronze statue in Jubilee gardens by County hall and the London Eye.



'They went because their open eyes could see no other way'

Inscription on Spanish Civil War memorial in Jubilee park London