

# CINEMA AS A POLITICAL PROPAGANDA DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR: *ESPAÑA 1936*

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*A Republican soldier during an attack. All pictures of this article have been taken from the documentary film España 1936. Courtesy by Filmoteca Española.*

## Resumen

El documental *España 1936* ha pasado a la historia tanto por sus valores cinematográficos —está considerado uno de los primeros ejemplos de cine de montaje de guerra— como por el grado de participación que Luis Buñuel, uno de los más famosos directores españoles, tuvo en el mismo; un trabajo que, incluso hoy en día, continúa provocando varias hipótesis.

**Palabras clave:** Buñuel, Cine, Le Chanois, Propaganda, Filmoteca Española.

### Abstract

The documentary film *España 1936* has passed into history for its strictly cinematic values —being one of the first examples of a cinematic montage of war— and for the degree of participation that Luis Buñuel, one of the most famous Spanish film-makers, had in the documentary; a work that, even today, continues to provoke various hypotheses.

**Keywords:** Buñuel, Cinema, Le Chanois, Propaganda, Spanish Film Archives.

### Buñuel's cinematic career up until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War

A few days before the Second Republic was proclaimed (14 April 1931), Luis Buñuel returned to Spain after living in Hollywood and Paris. Thanks to a donation of 20,000 pesetas given to him by the artist Ramón Acín, Buñuel made a documentary in 1933 about one of Spain's poorest regions, *Las Hurdes/Tierra sin pan*. Finally, the Republican government of Alejandro Lerroux banned the film (a version in French was made in 1937 and titled *Terre sans pain*) because it reflected the extremely difficult way of life in that county in the province of Cáceres: without electricity and running water its inhabitants knew nothing of bread, people suffering from malaria and so on. The idea of making this documentary was born after Buñuel read the doctoral thesis of the director of the *Instituto Francés* in Madrid, Maurice Legendre, in which he had made a physical and human study of Las Hurdes.

In 1933, Buñuel voluntarily left the surrealist movement and intended to make a cinematic adaptation of André Gide's *Les caves du Vatican*, and another of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. In 1934, he worked for Warner Brothers in Madrid as dubbing supervisor. That same year he married Jeanne Rucar and a few months later their first child, Juan Luis, was born. In 1935 he accepted an offer from Ricardo Urgoiti, head of the *Filmófono* film company, to supervise the production of a series of commercial films. Although Buñuel's name never appeared in the credits, it is known that he controlled the shooting and carried out various duties: script supervision, studio work, sound recording, keeping the film

within the budget... and even directing some scenes. The films in which he 'participated' were: *Don Quintín el amargao* —directed by Luis Marquina and released in 1935—, *La hija de Juan Simón* —directed by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia and [uncredited] Nemesio M. Sobrevila and released in 1935—, *¿Quién me quiere a mí?* —directed by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia and released in 1936— and *¡Centinela, alerta!* —directed [uncredited] by Jean Grémillon in 1936. During this period Buñuel was thinking of adapting some of the novels of Benito Pérez Galdós and Pío Baroja's trilogy *La lucha por la vida*.

### The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War

The rising took place on the evening of 17 July 1936 in Spain's Moroccan colony and in the peninsular itself on the next morning. The outbreak caught Buñuel by surprise in Madrid. He had planned to buy the old monastery of *Las Batuecas* —which included the convent, the orchards, the chapels, medicinal springs, etc.— for 150,000 pesetas. On 14 July he went to Salamanca to close the deal with the owner. He returned to the Spanish capital so that his mother could give him the money just as the military uprising took place. In his memoirs the protagonist himself states that “if I had bought Batuecas and the war had taken me by surprise in Salamanca, one of the first cities that fell into the hands of the Fascists, it's probable that they would have executed me immediately”.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that when wri-

1. BUÑUEL, L. (1982): *Mi último suspiro*, Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, p. 139.

ting this sentence he would remember what happened to the poet Federico García Lorca and to the cinema critic Juan Piqueras Martínez. They were murdered by the Fascists. When the coup d'état against the Republic was being planned, it was decided that the repression of the civilian population should be particularly severe. In the instructions written in April 1936 General Emilio Mola talked specifically of the need for political terror: "It should be remembered that the action must be extremely violent, in order to bring down the enemy as soon as possible, because they are strong and well-organized. Of course, all the leaders or political parties, societies and unions that do not support the Movement shall be imprisoned, and exemplary punishments shall be meted out to these individuals, so as to stamp out any attempts at rebellion, or strikes".<sup>2</sup> General Francisco Franco also instinctively justified the use of violence. The US journalist Jay Allen interviewed him on 27 July. When asked how long the violence would last once the coup was failed, the General replied "I will save Spain from Marxism at any price". Allen pressed the point "Even if it means killing half of Spain?" Franco answered "I repeat, at any price".<sup>3</sup>

Buñuel, in fact, advised his friend García Lorca a few days before the start of the fratricidal conflict, that, owing to the social unrest in the country, he shouldn't return to his native Granada as he would be better off in Madrid. Finally, the poet was murdered on 19 August.

The cinema critic Juan Piqueras Martínez, a member of the Spanish Communist Party, was a friend of Buñuel's. In mid-July 1936 Piqueras was travelling by train from France to Oviedo. On the way he began to vomit blood due to a stomach ulcer and he had to interrupt his journey in Venta de Baños (Palencia). He was there when the Civil War began and was arrested and shot on 28 July. Among his papers confiscated by Franco's men were two letters; one he had written himself in Paris, to Luis Buñuel, dated 13 November 1935, and another from Antonio del Amo, a cinema critic and Communist Party militant, dated 16 July 1936. In the first, Piqueras tells Buñuel he had been living with workers who had left Spain after the revolution of October 1934, and that a French firm was interested



At the beginning of November 1936, Franco's African columns converged on Madrid but the Republicans resisted.

in three films: *Un chien andalou* (1928), *La Âge d'or* (1930) and *Las Hurdes/Tierra sin pan*. The letter ends with warm regards "to all our friends and comrades".<sup>4</sup>

In the letter from Antonio del Amo, the writer tells Piqueras that on hearing of the latter's illness "I immediately telephoned Buñuel, to ask him to lend me his car since I could not leave for Venta de Baños without any money. Buñuel calmed me down. He told me that you had written to Urgoiti telling him that you were better. He sent you a telegram, which I assume you received because he advised me not to go to Venta de Baños before you had told us whether or not it was necessary ... I am entirely at your disposition and will travel to Venta de Baños in Buñuel's car, or anywhere else for that matter, as soon as I hear from you. Take heart! Warmest regards from your dear comrade".<sup>5</sup>

2. IRIBARREN, José María (1937): *Con el general Mola: escenas y aspectos inéditos de la guerra civil*. Zaragoza: Librería General, p. 47

3. *The News Chronicle* (29 July-1 August 1936).

4. Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española de Salamanca (AGGCE), Político Social, Bilbao, Caja 30, Expediente 6, nº 17. This document, and all the others in which Luis Buñuel is mentioned in this archive, were provided by the researcher Policarpo Sánchez. I am very grateful to him for his kindness.

5. AGGCE, Político Social, Bilbao, Caja 30, Expediente 6, nº 25.



Dolores Ibárruri, know as La Pasionaria, was a charismatic leader of the Spanish Communist Party.

In the summer of 1936 Luis Buñuel signed the manifesto of the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals for the Defence of Culture.<sup>6</sup> This organization had been set up in April of that year to bring together intellectuals who supported the Popular Front and was largely the work of the Spanish Communist Party. The idea for such an alliance dated back to the First International Congress of Writers in Defence of Culture, held in Paris July 1935 on the initiative of the Communists. Throughout the war Luis Buñuel made no attempt to hide his sympathy for the Spanish Communist Party and participated, secretly, in various political actions related to the left. For example, a little after his wife and son left for France, Buñuel started attending meetings of the *Liga de Escritores Revolucionarios* (The League of Revolutionary Writers) with José Bergamín, Corpus Barga, Rafael Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre, and foreign intellectuals who, like André Malraux, supported the republican cause.

In any case Buñuel, who had suggested subversion in films such as *L'Âge d'or* in 1930, confessed that the chaos of the first months of the war in the republican zone disgusted him. In this respect he wrote, as proof of his contradictory character, recalling that time: "Within me, as always, the theoretical and sentimental attraction towards disorder was always fighting against

the fundamental necessity for order and peace".<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he managed to save the life of José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, Spanish filmmaker arrested for being the first cousin of the founder of the Spanish Falange, José Antonio Primo de Rivera and also brother of a Falangist killed by left-wing gunmen in a notorious incident. Finally, thanks to Buñuel's intervention, he was freed.

The republican government created the Ministry of Propaganda in January of 1937. This Ministry had under its control all the publicity and advertising services, information and propaganda both in Spain and abroad, and had available different communication media, including film.

Buñuel never had to set foot in the trenches because at the end of September 1936 he was summoned by the Minister of State, Julio Álvarez de Vayo, who advised him to go to Paris and put himself under the orders of the new ambassador in the French capital, Luis Araquistain. He was sent as cultural *attaché* to the Spanish Embassy in Paris, where he was placed in charge of all activities related to cinema.<sup>8</sup>

### Luis Buñuel and Jean-Paul Le Chanois

Against this background, Luis Buñuel was sent by the republican government to the Paris embassy as *attaché* to the information services. There, according to Buñuel's own words, "I was working with cinematic material filmed in Spain and I even ordered a film montage to be made, the title of which I don't remember".<sup>9</sup> Buñuel was possibly referring to *España 1936*. The historian J. F. Aranda, Buñuel's first biographer, asked him if he took part in the editing of this film to which he responded "I'm not so frivolous! I supervised the editing in the working copy stage, in positive,

6. *Verdad*, nº 2 (1 August 1936), p. 2 and *Frente Rojo*, nº 343 (1 March 1938), p. 10. See the Luis Buñuel file produced by staff at the Delegación del Estado para la Recuperación de Documentos, at the AGGCE, Fichero General Político Social.

7. BUÑUEL, L. (1982): *Ibid*, p. 150.

8. Telegram from the Spanish Embassy in Paris to the Minister of State, dated 4 July 1937. AGGCE, Político Social, Madrid, Caja 2760.

9. ARANDA, J. F. (1969.) *Luis Buñuel. Biografía crítica*, Barcelona: Lumen, p. 179.

and in the sound recording".<sup>10</sup> *España 1936* was edited from cinematic material from various sources: images filmed by the Soviets Roman Karmen and Boris Makaseiev, newsreel sequences, and republican documentaries. The biographer John Baxter thinks that *Espagne 1936* was realised with money from the French Communist Party.<sup>11</sup>

Aranda states that *España 1936* was shown in Spain under Buñuel's name while in France it was shown anonymously. Aranda doesn't back up this affirmation with any evidence and the name of the director of the film does not appear in the press of that time. For example, the magazine *Mundo gráfico* reports that "the exciting popular film *España 1936*" was to open at the Cine Actualidades in Madrid on 8 June 1937" but makes no mention of the author's name.<sup>12</sup> Nor did the review published in the Madrid paper *El Sol* two days before the film was released in the capital of Spain. The review said: "There is nothing comparable to this film in terms of emotion; the scenes shot on the battle fields are an admirable reflection of a part of our fight for the independence of Spanish soil".<sup>13</sup> Some authors have suggested that the object of the *El Sol* review was in fact another documentary also entitled *España 1936*, directed by Fernando Gutiérrez Mantilla and produced by the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals in 1937,<sup>14</sup> but judging from the scenes it describes it is clear that it is referring to the film in which Buñuel was involved. An example: "Among the unique scenes in this film, special mention should be made of the following, due to their value as historical documents: the speech of Álvarez del Vayo at the League of Nations, the speech of La Pasionaria in Paris, the defence of Irún and San Sebastián by the Basque militiamen and the battles in the streets of Carabanchel, Casa de Campo, Parque del Oeste and Somosierra. In all of them the heroism of the soldiers of the people reaches levels of unparalleled bravery. Never before have scenes of such realism been shown on the screen as in *España 1936*, the most authentic and realistic documentary made of this war".<sup>15</sup>

For his part, the historian Carlos Fernández Cuenca explained that "in the copy I saw the name of Buñuel appeared in large letters, but it ap-



The Spanish anarchist militant Buenaventura Durruti formed his own column in July 1936.

peared to be that abroad the most outstanding contribution was made by Jean-Paul Le Chanois and the Spaniard only appears as supervisor and chief of production".<sup>16</sup> But this commentary isn't totally reliable if we bear in mind that Fernández Cuenca himself admits that he has no documentary proof of these credits.

A complete French version was discovered by the researcher and film historian Jay Leyda in the Film Archives of West Berlin in 1966. Without doubt, this copy was moved during the German occupation of France in World War II. Unfortunately, in *Espagne 1936*—title of the French version—there are no credits. Jay Leyda contacted Luis Buñuel who confirmed to him in 1967 that Jean-Paul Le Chanois did the editing while Buñuel was the chief of production, supervisor,

10. ARANDA, J. F. (1984): "La etapa española: 1932-1937", *Luis Buñuel*, Venecia: XLI Mostra Internazionale del Cinema, p. 51.

11. BAXTER, J. (1994): *Buñuel*, London: Fourth Estate, p. 163.

12. *Mundo gráfico*, nº 1335 (Madrid, 2 June 1937).

13. *El Sol* (Madrid, 6 June 1937).

14. AMO, A. Del. with the collaboration of IBÁÑEZ, M.<sup>a</sup> L. (Eds) (1996): *Catálogo general del cine de la Guerra Civil*. Madrid: Cátedra/Filmoteca Española, p. 427.

15. *El Sol* (Madrid, 6 June 1937).

16. FERNÁNDEZ CUENCA, C. (1972): *La guerra de España y el cine*, Madrid: Editora Nacional, p. 154.

and co-writer of the commentary.<sup>17</sup> Leyda commented that not only had he found the French version but also the Spanish one and in both versions the content was the same. Today, it hasn't been found a complete Spanish copy of *España 1936*.

If Jay Leyda states that the editing of the Spanish and French versions was the same, this would contradict the opinion of Carlos Fernández Cuenca who recalls plenty of differences between the two. For example, according to the Spanish historian, there was a sequence which showed "peasants pleading to the Virgin for rain to save the threatened harvest intercut with a workers' march to demand the building of a dam".<sup>18</sup> The French version contains none of these images.

For his part, J. F. Aranda points out that in 1938 Pierre Unik —author, with Luis Buñuel, of the commentary of *España 1936* and who had already worked with Buñuel as writer and screenwriter of the commentary of *Las Hurdes/Tierra sin pan*— sued Jean-Paul Le Chanois in the Paris courts over the latter's attempt to monopolise the credits of the later documentary. The courts found in favour of the Bunuel-Unik team.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the historian Román Gubern points out that on two different occasions he asked Luis Buñuel about the authorship of *España 1936* and the latter always responded that "categorically [the film] had been edited by Jean-Paul Le Chanois".<sup>20</sup> Likewise, when Tomás Pérez Turrent and José de la Colina interviewed the Aragonese director, between 1975 and 1977, while working on their biography —*Buñuel por Buñuel*— the filmmaker's response to their questions about his work in the Spanish Embassy was: "Among other things, in the embassy I was put in charge of cinematic propaganda. Le Chanois edited a film with material that I received and supervised. Some books record the film as being mine, but that's not the case".<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, no documentary evidence of that period currently exists which could certify any of the existing hypotheses. Furthermore, the confusion is even greater when the film has been referred to under different titles. For example, Carlos Fernández Cuenca refers to it as *Madrid 1936* or *España leal en armas*, despite the fact

that when it was first shown at the *Actualidades* cinema in Madrid in June 1937 it was under the title *España 1936*.

At any rate, regardless of whatever the real collaboration of Jean-Paul Le Chanois (whose true name was Jean-Paul Dreyfus) was in *España 1936*, it was not the only documentary on which he worked which had the Spanish Civil War as the main theme. The other films were *ABC de la libertad*, in 1937, about the troops' 'cultural apprenticeship'; *S.O.S. Espagne*, in 1938, which tried to impress on international public opinion that help was needed for republican Spain to be able to win the war; and *Un peuple attend*, in 1939. Issue 138 of the Spanish journal *Dirigido por*, published in August 1986, contains an interview given by Jean-Paul Le Chanois to Esteve Riambau and Mirito Torreiro in which the French filmmaker states that the documentary *Un peuple attend* contained images of the exiled Spanish republicans who lived in really difficult conditions in the refugee camps in Argelès. The editing of *Un peuple attend* was banned by the French authorities and the negative was destroyed, but a copy remains which was intended to be shown in the United States —entitled *People Is (sic) Waiting*— recovered, according to Le Chanois, by former members of the International Brigades. One part of the material filmed by Jean-Paul Le Chanois is contained in *Refuge*, filmed in 1939, a documentary edited by Irving Lerner in which *Ciné-Liberté* and the American Medical Bureau participated.

### *España 1936*

Returning to the documentary *España 1936*, the following analysis is based on the French version, *Espagne 1936*, and the Italian, *Spagna 1936*, both preserved in the Spanish Film Archi-

17. ARANDA, J. F. (1969): *op. cit.*, p. 181.

18. FERNÁNDEZ CUENCA, C. (1972): *op. cit.*, p. 154.

19. ARANDA, J. F. (1969): *op. cit.*, p. 182.

20. GUBERN, R. (1986): *1936-1939: La Guerra de España en la pantalla*, Madrid: Filmoteca Española, p. 25.

21. PÉREZ TURRENT, T. and COLINA, J. (1993): *Buñuel por Buñuel*. Madrid: Plot Ediciones, p. 41.

ves.<sup>22</sup> Both versions have highly dramatic images which play a leading role in symbolizing the Spanish tragedy.

*Espagne 1936* opens under a title in French while *Els Segadors*, the national hymn of Catalonia. We can be read:

“The following documents have been filmed on the Spanish fronts by different operators, always in difficult conditions and often in fear of their lives.

We have wanted objectively to present the facts about what public opinion calls ‘rebels’ and ‘pro-government’, ‘nationalists’, and ‘reds’.

In 1937 the cinema should follow world events, reproduce them and broadcast them to the people of all countries. This documentary on the Spanish war, a unique cinematic report, has no other motive than to serve the cause of history”.

With this supposed impartiality *Espagne 1936* opens with the disappearance of the monarchy, in April 1931, symbolised by the inversion of a frame from the film showing an equestrian statue.

To illustrate the general elections on 16 February 1936 we see posters placed in various Spanish cities, the distribution of propaganda in Madrid,



General Émil Kleber, real name Lazar Manfred Stern, was a brigade commander.

and the population queuing in the polling stations. Later we see Francisco Largo Caballero, Spanish socialist, in a demonstration after the electoral victory of the Popular Front; images of a meeting in the *Las Ventas* bullring in the Spanish capital; and images of harvested fields and schools. The Catalans cheer Lluís Companys. Manuel Azaña, president of the 2nd Republic, presides over a military procession in Madrid, before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, in which the appearances of Generals José Moscardó and Gonzalo Queipo de Llano are highlighted.

The title “et... le 17 juillet (1936)” cuts to a military rising. On a schematic map of Europe the position of Spain is superimposed with explosions, flames and the faces of some Nationalist Generals: Francisco Franco, Miguel Cabanellas and Gonzalo Queipo de Llano. Animation is used to show the advance of the nationalist troops across the map. A march-past of nationalist forces is cheered on by people using the fascist salute. The Falangist Joaquín Miranda is saluted by his sympathisers. General Queipo de Llano hoists a flag in the Seville city hall. Various military bodies leave for the front.

In *Espagne 1936* shows the uprising is quickly suppressed in Madrid and Barcelona. The recruitment call from the republican government is shown with scenes of volunteers under training and heading for the front. The navy remains loyal to the republic while images of naval units are shown.

To gain control of the Spanish border with France, General Emilio Mola decided to attack Irún. We see in *Espagne 1936* some scenes in which the Basque people escape from the advancing enemy while the French Police check their papers. The entrance of the pro-Franco soldiers is shown with a fictitious montage of executions

22. Technical Notes of the film. - *ESPAÑA 1936* (1937). Executive Producer: Undersecretariat of Propaganda of the Republican Government (Spanish Republic). Direction (attributed): Jean-Paul Le Chanois. Producer and materials selector: Luis Buñuel. Screenplay: Luis Buñuel and Pierre Unik. Editor (probable): Jean-Paul Le Chanois. Black and white. Running time of Spanish version (estimated) 35 minutes. Title of French version: *Espagne 1936*. Commentator: Gastón Modot. Running time: 35 minutes. Title of Italian version: *Spagna 1936*. Running time: 35 minutes.

and people escaping from repression. Pictures appear of two dead French journalists: the narrator comments that one was shot and the other was cut down by shrapnel from an Italian plane. After pointing out that Largo Caballero's government counted on the support of communists, socialists, trade unionists and Basque and Catalan nationalists in September 1936, we see a series of sequences on life in the rearguard: uniform making, field work, arms manufacture, control of communication, people seated in a cafe terrace, people in a market, cattle being shipped to the slaughterhouse, the treatment of the wounded, children in a school playground, the safeguarding of works of art, soldiers receiving instructions and troops marching in Madrid's Puerta del Sol.

In the League of Nations, in Switzerland, the Spanish socialist Julio Álvarez del Vayo, Minister of State, protests in September 1936, on air, against the violation of the 'No-Intervention' policy and to follow up we see shots of the German and Italian armies and of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.

A title and an animated sequence signal a pair of pliers closing over Madrid. A poster hangs in a Madrid street which reads "¡No Pasarán!" (They shall not Pass!). Dolores Ibárruri, *La Pasionaria*, member of the Spanish Communist Party, speaking live, makes a speech in which she thanks the French for their solidarity: "May the French people never forget that the struggle which the Spanish people are bearing is the struggle for peace, the struggle for freedom, the struggle for democracy". Later, the narrator points out the arrival of the first troops of the International Brigades in October 1936, here to fight alongside the republicans —photos are shown of various famous members of the International Brigades such as Pavel Lukacs and Émil Kleber, as well as some volunteers marching through the streets of Madrid—. We also see General José Miaja consulting a map of the Spanish capital. Largo Caballero and Álvarez del Vayo visit the front. The commentator points out that Madrid has become the Spanish Verdun. Suddenly, the air force appears over the city and begins bombing. The people run for the shelters. Bombs explode leaving victims. Later, the people come out to the

street, look at the damage and pick up the dead while fire engines and ambulances drive around. Close-ups of dead children are shown in order to move the audience. The narrator comments "when will this monstrous war ever end!".

*Espagne 1936* ends with a series of images on the republican resistance against the pro-Franco threat, while the pro-republican *Himno de Riego* is heard: soldiers fighting in the open fields, the navy on the coast, troops marching, close-ups of soldiers, a soldier waving his rifle, a trench, kilometres long, full of armed men and, to conclude, a woman holding a republican flag bearing the coat of arms of Madrid. In the closing scenes of *Espagne 1936*, now kept in the Spanish Film Archives, the words "Contrôle, L. Maurice C.T.M., Gennevilliers, France" can be read.

As can be seen, the documentary's message is directed at French public opinion and is the following: the Spanish Republic, democratically elected, defends the bloody struggle against the military uprising supported by Hitler and Mussolini. The 'Non-Interventionism' of the western democracies in favour of a republican Spain makes the war much more difficult, but the republicans carry on with their struggle. Obviously, the documentary doesn't comment on divisions within the republican ranks. On the contrary, it shows the social achievements of the Republic and the civilian victims of the enemy bombings, and devotes some time to the transformation of the popular militia into a conventional army, disciplined, and with faith in victory.

The Paris International Exhibition of 1937, brought together under the motto 'Art and Technology in Modern Life', offered the republicans a privileged space to display and defend their ideology, political as well as cultural, before foreign public opinion. The Spanish Republican Pavilion was designed by Josep Lluís Sert and contained, among other works, Picasso's famous *Guernica*. The Spanish Pavilion was one of those which attracted a lot of attention, along with the German pavilion —designed by Speer and crowned by a Prussian Eagle— and the Soviet —by Iofan, finished off with a popular sculpture by Vera Mukhina 'Industrial worker and collective farm girl'—. On 12 July 1937 the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris International Art and Technical Exhibition was

opened. At the film sessions organized in the Republican Pavilion it was agreed that two one-reel films would be shown each week, one a news bulletin and the other a documentary. Longer films might also be shown, generally of two or three reels. During the first two weeks Buñuel was responsible for the choice of the films to be shown, but later a commission headed by Manuel Villegas López, Juan Manuel Plaza y Rodolfo Halffter took over this task.<sup>23</sup> The sessions took place on the patio on the first floor, next to Picasso's *Guernica*. The program could be altered if a special event was to be held, such as the presentation of a dance group from Segovia on 14 August 1937: *Ejército Popular* (1937), *La ruta de Don Quijote* (Ramón Biadiu, 1934), *Actualidades*, *El tribunal de las aguas* (Ángel Villatoro, 1937) and *Niños de hoy, hombres de mañana* (1937).<sup>24</sup> *Actualidades* may have been a Spanish newsreel.

### Spagna 1936

*Spagna 1936*, the Italian version of *España 1936*, was edited after World War II but has a very similar structure to *España 1936*, although the section dedicated to the International Brigades is more extensive.

*Spagna 1936* opened with the following titles:

"This cinematic document was filmed on the Spanish fronts during the civil war 1936-1939 by newsreel cameramen, always in difficult conditions, including the risking of their own lives".

To follow, there is a brief historical review of the Second Republic to focus on the Spanish Civil War. At a particular moment the commentator says: "What did the democracies do for Spain and what are they doing today? The tragic period which began with the pro-Franco revolts in 1936 continues and the people continue their struggle and as in 1936 seek our support".

The narrator comments, a little after Ibárruri's speech, that "thousands of combatants from different countries were assembling in the ranks of the International Brigades. They are antifascists of all countries and nationalities: French, English, Americans, Poles, Hungarians, Italians,

Soviets... The Spanish people welcome with enthusiasm the arrival of new combatants". From this moment the intervention of numerous Italians "who participate in the antifascist struggle" is highlighted, using photographs of every one of them: Vittorio Vidali, Luigi Longo—in the company of André Marty—, Palmiro Togliatti, Pietro Nenni and Randolfo Pacciardi, among others. The narrator points out that first they came to fight fascism in Spain and later in Italy during World War II.

### Buñuel's later activities until 1939

It is possible that *España 1936* was not the only war documentary about our civil war in which Luis Buñuel took part during his stay at the Spanish Embassy in Paris, but Buñuel himself never had any interest in making this point in his life too specific. During the war, the Aragonese director came to Spain on various occasions bringing propaganda or carrying documents, or helping those who were filming in Spain. It is also noted that he worked in the republic's counterespionage service, travelling to different European cities. On one occasion Buñuel received an incredible offer from Edward James, a British millionaire. James would provide the republican government with an air raid if the Spanish authorities would transfer to him some works of art from the Prado Museum. With these works they would make an exhibition in various European cities. At the end of the war there were two possibilities: if the republicans won, the works would return to the Prado, while if they lost they would remain the property of the republican government in exile. Buñuel informed Alvarez del Vayo of the proposition, which the latter refused.

Buñuel's activities in France did not pass unnoticed in Franco's Spain. The Police Commission of La Coruña issued a report, dated 16 May 1937, describing him as a "morphine addict and alco-

23. Report by José Gaos, general commissioner of the Spanish Pavilion, 21 June 1937. AGGCE, Político Social, Madrid, Caja 2760.

24. Report by José Gaos, general commissioner of the Spanish Pavilion, 23 August 1937. AGGCE, Político Social, Madrid, Caja 2760.



*The siege of Madrid saw heroic efforts by the entire population.*

holic who has spent the last few years in Paris at the service of the Red propaganda . . . He was the author and director of a film on Las Hurdes, which was a discredit to Spain”.<sup>25</sup> For his part, the Falangist Ángel Baselga —head of the National Section of Cinema of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army— branded Luis Buñuel as an undesirable— “at the service of the Surrealist/Jewish/Soviet group in Paris where, with Dalí and others, he received his artistic training.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1938 the republican government sent Buñuel to the United States as cinematographic supervisor. He introduced himself to Frank Davis, ideologically progressive, as supervisor of the films which had as their theme the Spanish struggle. Davis accepted but in the end Buñuel ended up without work when the Association of North-American Producers decided not to make any films on the subject, neither for nor against the Spanish Republic. For example, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer had planned to film *Cargo of Innocents*, which dealt with the Spanish children who we-

re arriving in the USA by boat from Bilbao. During the war, Hollywood produced only three films which had the civil war as their subject matter: *The Last Train from Madrid* —directed by James Hogan and released in 1937—, *Love under Fire* —directed by George Marshall and released in 1937— and *Blockade* —directed by William Dieterle and released in 1938—. In fact, in the first two films mentioned the Spanish war merely provided the background. In contrast, Dieterle gave his film an ideological significance by denouncing the military blockade which the republican government was suffering.

In this situation, Luis Buñuel wrote a letter to the Spanish ambassador in Washington, Fernando de los Ríos, putting himself at his disposition to go to the front when called up, but the Spanish Civil War ended before the reply arrived. Buñuel was in

New York and decided to remain there. He got a job in the film department of the Museum of Modern Art, but accusations of being a communist obliged him to leave this post in 1943. Between 1944 and 1946 he lived in Hollywood working for Warner Brothers and as commentator for the Spanish versions of American army documentaries. In 1946 he accepted an offer from the producer Oscar Dancigers to direct a film in Mexico. Luis Buñuel didn't return to Spain until 1960, to film *Viridiana*.

25. Fondo Contemporáneo. Ministerio del Interior. Policía. Expediente 13719 del Archivo Histórico Nacional del Ministerio de Cultura (Madrid). On the reprisals against Republican film-makers under Franco dictatorship see DÍEZ, E. (1998): “La represión franquista en el ámbito profesional del cine”, *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, nº 30, pp. 52-90.

26. *Memoria sobre el establecimiento de una Sección Nacional de Cinematografía*, dated 25 November 1937. Archivo General de la Administración de Alcalá de Henares, Sección Cultura, Caja 1.



DELEGACIÓN DE ORDEN PÚBLICO  
DE  
LA CORUÑA Y SU PROVINCIA  
SECRETARÍA

Número 3633

DA. N.º 3603  
L. 24 MAYO 1937 <sup>179</sup>  
213  
55 109

~~176~~ ~~178~~ Viva España!

El Excmo. Sr. Gobernador Civil de la provincia en escrito del Negociado 52., número 226, de fecha 14 del actual, me dice lo que sigue:

"El Ilustrísimo señor Jefe Superior de Policía, en comunicación de 20 de los corrientes, me dice lo siguiente: - Excmo. Sr., - Se informa a esta Jefatura Superior, que LUIS BUÑUEL, sujeto morfinómano y alcohólico, que durante estos últimos tiempos ha estado en París al servicio de la propaganda roja, se dice intenta penetrar en nuestro territorio. Dicho sujeto fué autor y Director de una película sobre Las Hurdes, que era un verdadero descrédito para España. - Lo que tengo el honor de participar a V.E. para su conocimiento, rogándole ordene a todos los Agentes dependientes de su Autoridad, la práctica de gestiones para proceder a la detención del citado sujeto, caso de ser visto en nuestra zona, dando cuenta."

Lo que tengo el gusto de trasladar a V. para su conocimiento y efectos interesados, sirviéndose darme cuenta del resultado de las gestiones que con este motivo se lleven a cabo.

Dios guarde a España y a V. muchos años.  
La Coruña, 26 de Mayo de 1937.  
El Delegado de Orden Público,



*May Jotz*

*Excmo. Sr. Jefe Superior de Policía*

Sr. Comisario-Jefe de Investigación y Vigilancia de

LA CORUÑA.

Buñuel's file. Courtesy by Archivo Histórico Nacional del Ministerio de Cultura.

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