

En relació a la nota publicada a la pàgina de l' ACS, "Setting the record straight on John Langdon-Davies: The Joan Gili Memorial Lecture 2002", signada per membres de la família Langdon-Davies, i en la qual se m'acusa de diverses males intencions i d'haver fet afirmacions "incorrectes, deshonestes i ofensives" al voltant de les posicions polítiques de l'escriptor respecte als Fets de Maig de 1937 que l'escriptor va presenciar a Barcelona voldria afegir els següents comentaris:

- 1) Celebro que els assistents o lectors d'aquella conferència puguin disposar gràcies a la pàgina de l' ACS dels comentaris i apreciacions de la família Langdon-Davies sobre la qüestió que enriqueixen, sens dubte, la visió global sobre una personalitat tan interessant, apassionada i rica i que –en el marc i la temàtica de la meva conferència- era difícil de ponderar en tots els seus aspectes. Qualsevol persona interessada en el tema pot acudir a la meva extensa biografia de l'autor, "John Langdon-Davies: una biografia anglo-catalana (1897-1971)", ed. Pòrtic, 1991, obra guardonada amb el Premi Fundació Congrés de Cultura Catalana de Biografia i Estudis Històrics l'any 1989, o a la meva edició dels escrits de Langdon-Davies sobre la guerra civil, "La Setmana Tràgica de 1937", Edicions 62, 1987.
- 2) Vaig intentar fer tots els aclariments possibles a la senyora Langdon-Davies i al seu fill Andrew Langdon-Davies sobre les meves afirmacions a la conferència en un intercanvi de correspondència privada. Donat que han decidit fer-ne aquesta nota pública em permeto, a tall de contesta, reproduir tot seguit els fragments de les meves cartes que fan referència a aquesta desavinença:

(...) I thought that, after all, the Orwell polemic about the Events of May was a rather remote historical episode to which I had referred in detail in the biography (I was not adding anything new in the lecture) and that it could be seen as a particular "moment" in the ideologically rich life of a man always concerned with the social and political issues of his time. The whole biography could not be compressed in that part of my lecture but I think I gave enough background about JLD before and after the war, mentioning also his efforts on humanitarian causes during the conflict. Obviously, historical considerations of this type are always arguable but I was careful to quote, both JLD and Orwell's own words. The story unfolds itself though I admit that, were I to write it again, I would not use a couple of adverbs (my own) which "qualify" his words. That was careless of me and perfectly unnecessary (...)

You seem to have taken particular offence to my stating that JLD became a "fervent antistalinist" in 1939 because you infer that this is a way of calling him a "Stalinist". But, as you know, I only refer to him in the lecture as a "fellow-traveller" of the Communist Party and I quote amply from his comments on Roldán Cortada's funeral which show –to any intelligent reader- that his views on the situation were quite sophisticated and that if he was a fellow-traveller there were sound reasons to take that stand in the circumstances or, as you put it, it was "a reasonable inclination for any intelligent left-winger at that time". I quite agree with you on that, but that does not change the nature of the polemic. And this polemic (and Auden's) are, in my view, absolutely substantial to what "Homage to Catalonia" is all about and very relevant to many of the things Orwell's work has come to represent. For better or worse, JLD happened to be very sympathetic to the Communist Party in that period and, quite legitimately,

he used his influence to help in what he considered a good cause then. Manent mentions him broadcasting from the Casal Carlos Marx (the headquarters of the Catalan Communist Party). In his personal notes, with many interesting and detailed descriptions of the situation in the streets of Barcelona during those days, there is not a single reference to the POUM (That, I did not mention in the lecture), and yet his article for "The News Chronicle" begins declaring the whole tragedy "a frustrated putsch by the Trotskyist POUM". And, of course, his review of Orwell's book for "The Daily Worker", in 1938, is consistent with that view.

There is now conclusive evidence about the way the Spanish communists were led to act following instructions from Moscow and how deliberately planned the elimination of the POUM was carried out. But this, of course, you know. And it was, for this and other reasons, that John Langdon-Davies changed his views on Soviet communism and wrote so many strong and vigorous denunciations of that kind of policy and became, politically, the kind of man you got to know. It is, indeed, because there is so much more about JLD than that particular polemic that I believed he deserved a full-scale study and, as you are well aware, I have done my best to make known his interesting life and work. You know all my writings and references and I am sure that, precisely because of my work, his figure has come to be seen in a broader context (I have, in the past, written to scholars like V. Cunningham and P. Davison correcting them on the reductionist view of JLD which sprang from Hugh Thomas first edition of his history of the Civil War

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(...) I don't portray him as a Stalinist but as someone who, at the time, was openly sympathetic with the politics of the Communist Party. To say, as you do, that since I wrote that he "became a fervent Anti-Stalinist" I am suggesting he was previously a Stalinist is your own guess. One can –in view of some developments- "become" anti-francoist or anti-pujolista without having previously been in the Falange or a militant of *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya*... You and I could go on and on about the whole affair but the facts speak for themselves. Some amount of conjecture, though, is inevitable since JLD himself –as far as I know- never answered Orwell's direct criticism of his reporting on the May Events of 1937 in *Homage to Catalonia*. My "conjecture", of course, is that his silence for so many years was related to the fact that he was not proud of it and felt he had been helping a cause he came to loathe heartily. The German-Soviet Pact was "la gota que va fer vessar el got" and, from then on, he became a formidable critic of Stalin's policy.

This is but an episode in JLD's extraordinarily rich life but its main interest, in the context of my lecture, is that illustrates a "moment" in history which was crucial in the development of the Spanish war and which is obviously significant in connection with Orwell's experiences in Spain.

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(...) I realize, to my great dismay, that you are entirely dismissive about all my explanations in connection with that lecture. I believe you have always approved of my JLD biography, my introductions to new Catalan editions of his writings and the various articles in the press. I offered a public note in order to make

sure my points in the lecture concerning JLD are read without historical or semantic misunderstandings... But, in spite of all that, you seem to have decided I'm not a person to be trusted. I can't do anything against that. So, let me just say in answer to your letter that I'm totally in favour of your making your own statement in the ACS.

- 3) Crec que el text de la conferència i les consideracions que uns i altres hem exposat són suficients perquè els membres de l' ACS es facin una composició de lloc sobre la qüestió i que aquesta controvèrsia esperoni el seu interès per la figura de l'autor britànic que més va escriure sobre Catalunya durant el segle XX i que, com afirmo a la introducció de la biografia, va construir una obra que “Tenyida de militàncies ideològiques –el quàquer pacifista, el “company de viatge” del partit comunista, el patriota antifeixista, el liberal antiestalinista, o l'humanista que es retroba amb la tradició del socialisme d'arrels britàniques-, juntament amb la versatilitat dels seus registres –periodista, conferenciant, pedagog, activista, polemista, divulgador del pensament científic, historiador...-, constitueix una crònica d'excepció de l'època que li tocà viure”.

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