



### Scientific Panel: "La Desbandá: The Literature"

Rapporteur: Francisco Jesús Martín Milan

This panel sought to present the historiography of La Desbandá, as part of an interesting and fruitful session in which both the participants and the attendees, in-person and virtual, were enriched by all the contributions made, and the subsequent discussion.

In the morning Eusebio Rodríguez spoke to us about international aid to the refugees who travelled from Málaga to Almería. We must bear in mind that before Málaga fell there were already 90,000 refugees arriving from the provinces of Western Andalusia. He explained to us the international solidarity efforts of the English in Almería, represented by the International Red Cross, the Quakers, Gota de Leche, and the donations made in the United Kingdom to help refugees in the region from 1937 onwards. Eusebio stressed the solidarity towards a population that, ultimately, was overrun by the madness of the conflict after that flight, unprecedented at a quantitative level, though there had been other diasporas, such as the "Column of the Eight Thousand", which left the northern part of the province of Seville and Huelva to seek refuge in republican Badajoz in September 1936.

A massive flight of the dimensions of La Desbandá, from Málaga, was unprecedented, and would only be exceeded by the final exile from Catalonia to France in February 1939. Eusebio named those people who carried out this humanitarian work and did their parts through international solidarity efforts for the people of Almería.

Secondly, Fran Martín provided a brief synthesis of what the bombings in the city of Almería and the province entailed, seeking to contextualize them in relation to the arrival of the refugees from Málaga in February 1937. We learned about the reasons for these air attacks in Almería province, and that the planning and techniques orchestrated by Captain Carlos Haya were not the result of chance or improvisation. Rather, there was methodical preparation prior to the attacks by the uprising's aviation and army forces. The rebels' objective was to weaken the Republican rearguard and undermine their adversary's ability to react.

The bombings were a consequence of these plans, attacking Almería from the air and from the sea, first targeting military objectives, but then devolving into total war. We learned, for example, about the atrocious bombing of Adra on 7 February. But, before that, the refugees on the road of death had been hit by land with the Italian columns under Mancini; by sea, by the *Canarias*, the *Baleares*, and the *Almirante Cervera* vessels; and by air with low-level flights by Italian and German aircraft, which machine-gunned the road, killing and maiming thousands. We may never

know the figure, but I agree with Rafael Quirosa that this constituted one of the greatest human tragedies in the civilian population in the framework of the Spanish Civil War.

The next talk was given by Ana Mata, who detailed all the objectives, activities, laudable intentions and great work that is being done by the La Desbandá Hiking Association. She told us about the systematic growth that it is seeing year after year, with an increase in participation by people from both Spain and various foreign countries. In addition, she encouraged us to experience this event for ourselves, undertaking, if not the whole hike, at least some of the itineraries, stages or routes, to experience at least one day and take in the collective atmosphere that is enjoyed on the way from Malaga to Almería. Personally, I am eager to do at least one stage, or a section of one of them, because it must be very exciting to share that camaraderie in the group that Ana Mata described so well during her talk. Every year we see it in the media, and the buzz, year after year, is increasing, as the speaker pointed out. In the last edition media coverage reached national television, featured on La Sexta and *El Intermedio*. And this should continue, as this initiative is supported by a large number of people who are marching for our historical memory, freedom and democracy.

Gonzalo Acosta then spoke to us about other groups of exiles in an interesting presentation given to turn our attention to events in parallel to La Desbandá that went in other directions during the War in Spain. Apart from the mass exodus through the Pyrenees in February 1939 about which the most has been written, Gonzalo talked to us about the exiles who fled to Portugal, highlighting the solidarity work of the people of Barrancos, despite the fact that they lived under another dictatorship, that of Salazar. This is a commendable effort, as these facts should be known by young people today.

He also covered the Spanish exiles in North Africa, and the internal exiles produced by the circumstances of the conflict. Almost from the very outset of the war, it produced refugees, generating a large number of them. And we should not focus exclusively on the final exodus, headed for the Americas, Mexico and Latin America, as there were many "internal exiles" within Spanish territory too. Finally, Gonzalo stressed the inclusion in the exhibition of some significant coverage of those Spaniards who participated in the construction of the Trans-Saharan railroad.

Finally, Rafael Quirosa spoke on the social and political repercussions in Almería in 1937, after providing a brief, general rundown of the existing historiography and literature on this topic, from Antonio Nadal down to the present day, pointing to Wagner Wolten as key to understanding the reasons for the fall of Málaga. He then narrated the refugees' arrival to Almería, at least doubling the population already existing in the city in February 1937, with all the food and health problems that this event entailed, and related the incidents involving the anarchist Francisco Maroto del Ojo and the Governor of Almería, Gabriel Morón Díaz. Finally, he stressed the need for these events to be covered and taught, and for us to uphold historical memory, dignity, democracy and solidarity as human values.