

***Antifa* Author Mark Bray Meets the Professors**

Paul Walker (Peter Werbe)

2018

Related: see “Anti-Fascism 101,” FE #400, Spring, 2018.

About 100 people filled a small auditorium at Detroit’s Wayne State University, October 17, to hear a talk by Mark Bray, a Dartmouth College lecturer on human rights and author of *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*.

Bray’s lecture followed the lines of his book, that fascism was and is an authentic threat which should be confronted by means appropriate to the dangers it poses. Tactically, he advocates alliances between anarchists, a tradition with which Bray identifies, and sectors of the left, without consideration of their authoritarian nature.

The event was an odd venue for an anarchist. It was organized by the Stalinist apologist Abraham Lincoln Brigade Association (ALBA) and its Spanish Civil War Scholarship Committee at the university. The ALBA never uses the term Revolution to describe the sweeping changes in Spain that occurred during the 1936–9 events since the Brigade veterans they celebrate were part of the process of destroying what the anarcho-syndicalist CNT implemented during those years.

The U.S.-based Brigade consisted of men who went to Spain to fight fascism, mostly under the auspices of the Communist Party. Anarchists were urged by their Spanish counterparts to stay home and organize against a blockade of arms imposed by the U.S. which left their militias outgunned by the fascists who received support from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy and Portugal.

Bray’s lecture was an interesting historical account of anti-fascism from the 1920s to today’s antifa confrontations with neo-Nazis and the alt-right.

Addressing the question of employing violence against fascists to give them no safe space to gather, Bray posed the debate in these terms, “When would it have been OK to have used violence against the German Nazi party; 1924? 1928? 1932? How about 1936; would it have been OK then?”

As occurs in academic settings, the ALBA had two “discussants” reply to Bray although it quickly turned into a fiery debate about free speech and violence. Two ALBA supporters from the university, Ronald Aronson, a history professor, and Brad Roth, from the Political Science and Law departments, answered Bray.

Aronson criticized Bray’s position by contrasting it with that of the late Saul Wellman, who was an Abraham Lincoln Brigade veteran, a Communist Party member and a political commissar in the Brigade. Wellman once bragged to Fifth Estate staffers, “I killed more anarchists and Trotskyites in Spain than fascists.”

Looking sour beyond description, Aronson responded to Bray’s remarks by stating that “Saul Wellman would be turning over in his grave if he had heard Bray’s talk.” A *Fifth Estate* staff member shouted out, “That’s a compliment, Mark!”

Aronson branded the antifa fight against fascists in the U.S. a “spectacular sideshow,” and said the important organizing against the far right is being currently led by Indivisible, a liberal grouping within the Democratic Party.

Roth is a Palestinian rights supporter, but also has advised the Taiwan government. He suggested not giving “bad ideas oxygen” to let them expire on their own. He didn’t mention whether he would have supported this as a tactic in Europe against the rise of 20th century fascism.

The audience was overwhelmingly sympathetic to Bray and gave Aronson and Roth, at best, polite applause. A more interesting discussion took place when the audience was invited to participate.

Paul Walker is a long time contributor to the Fifth Estate in Detroit.



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