

During the Spanish Civil War, among the volunteers who flocked to Spain to fight in the International Brigades in defense of the Republic, were five thousand Polish anti-Fascists, from Communists to liberals, who formed the Dabrowski Brigade. The survivors who made their way back home were often persecuted by the Stalinist Soviet regime, who had become Hitler's ally, and later by the Communist government of Poland. Some of them joined the Communist apparatus. When Stalinism ended in 1956, they were gradually rehabilitated, granted war veteran status, and had streets and schools named after their Brigade; the names of their battles were inscribed on the walls of Warsaw's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, alongside other Polish feats of arms.

After the fall of Communism in 1989, the memory of their struggle again fell prey to changing political winds. The names of their battles were removed from the Tomb, Dabrowski Brigade streets and schools were renamed, and an attempt was made to strip the few surviving veterans of their pensions, and war veteran status and rights. That attempt was then defeated, thanks to people like the late Jacek Kuron, political prisoner of the Communists for many years, who was outraged by the attempt to tar these pre-war anti-Fascists with the Stalinist brush. Today, the right-wing government has renewed the assault on the handful still alive, and on the memory of the Brigade. The last remaining Dabrowski Brigade street, in Warsaw, has been singled out for renaming. Veterans, of whom only one lives in Poland today, and but a few abroad, are to be stripped of their veteran status and rights. A draft law denying pension rights to former functionaries of the Communist secret police would also affect those Brigade soldiers who would be so designated.

These old men cannot defend themselves, nor can the dead. But we – their children and grandchildren, and others who remain true to the Brigade's anti-Fascist ideals – do raise our voices in protest. We are grateful to the parliament of reborn democratic Spain, which has granted them all Spanish citizenship, and has expressed outrage against this attempt to rewrite history. We believe, however, that the men and women of the Dabrowski Brigade have earned with their blood the right not only to be left in peace, but indeed to enjoy the respect and gratitude of later generations, for having stood up against evil when so many were willfully blind. Nor do we trust fanatic right-wing ideologues to be fair judges of those who had combated an ideology kindred to the one which today fuels the witch-hunt. Poland, which bravely broke off the shackles of Communism, cannot deny these freedom fighters of an earlier generation their legitimate place in history.