

The Formation of Foreign Public Opinion in the Spanish Civil War: Motives, Methods, and Effectiveness

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BOSTON COLLEGE
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**The Formation of Foreign Public Opinion in the Spanish
Civil War:
Motives, Methods, and Success**

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Who Will Write?

While victors generally disagree, common wisdom holds that it is they who write the history. The Spanish Civil War, however, had no conclusive winner. While Francisco Franco ousted his opponents and clung to power for nearly four decades after the end of hostility, the international movement for which he stood was discredited within six years. Following their military defeat, Franco's enemies moved into exile and became the heroes of anti-Fascism when it had become a universal value. While Franco controlled the archives and presses in Spain, his enemies could not be silenced. Though the military phase of the war ended in 1939, the fight for 'hearts and minds' continued for decades. Ironically, when the *Caudillo* finally died in 1975, the people of Spain tacitly agreed to a *pacto de olvido* (pact of forgetfulness), ignoring the legacy of the war, and Franco, entirely.¹ In Spanish political life it appeared for a time that no one was to set pen to paper at all. While debate about the Spanish Civil War is still somewhat taboo on the peninsula, it has raged for decades in the forum of foreign public opinion.

In the mid-1930s, before the Spanish war began, all of Europe awaited the impending showdown between Communism and Fascism, the two poles of the ideological spectrum.² The origins of that conflict can be found in the 1920s

¹ When Franco died only one head of state, Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, attended his funeral despite the fact of Spanish membership in most important international organizations.

² Josef Stalin hoped to see Capitalism and Fascism fight it out but the two were just slightly less at odds than he had hoped.

following the Bolshevik triumph in Russia, Stalin's consolidation of power, and the establishment of the Communist International (Comintern). Many in the West considered Communist subversion to be a real and immediate threat. In the United States, the House Committee on Un-American Activities held hearings about the Communist menace during the 1920s and the Dies Committee continued such investigations in the 1930s.³ In reaction to the perceived Communist danger, among other factors, significant fascist parties formed in Germany, Italy, France, Austria, and other democratic nations.⁴ Under Mussolini, Hitler, and Dollfuss these parties seized power in Italy, Germany, and (eventually) Austria during the years preceding the Spanish Civil War.

The accession of Fascist dictators to power in Europe, especially Germany where the Communist party had previously enjoyed its strongest following, alarmed the Comintern and Josef Stalin. The tactics of the so-called '3rd Period', attacks against Socialist leaders as obstructers of the working class and efforts to undermine Socialist organizations from within, had failed miserably and, with the rise of Nazism in Germany, had placed the first 'workers' state' in geo-political jeopardy. Communist leaders in France, Spain, and Britain took some initiative to heal the rifts between themselves and the Socialists but could not act officially without the

³ It should be noted that Martin Dies, the chairman of the committee sought to examine rightist organizations such as the German-American Bund as well.

⁴ See Peter H. Amann, "A 'Dog in the Nighttime' Problem: American Fascism in the 1930s," *The History Teacher*, 19:4 (August 1986): 559-584. Amann provides a cogent analysis of the many organizations considered 'proto-fascist' which failed or turned away from outright Fascism in the United States. He extends the argument to include Britain and other countries with 'deeply rooted liberal or democratic traditions'. For a competing, contemporaneous view, see Raymond Gram Swing, Forerunners of American Fascism (Books for Libraries Press: Freeport, NY 1935).

approval of Moscow.⁵ Eventually the Soviet Union and Comintern resolved to offer alliances to all leftist parties so as to create a common, ‘popular’ front against the Fascist threat.⁶ In France the first of the Popular Front governments took power under the leadership of Léon Blum in 1934. Though suspicious of the suddenly cordial Communists, the new government succeeded in seeing off an overblown threat from French Fascists and providing an example for leftists across Europe.

In February of 1936, as we will see in Chapter 3, the leftist parties in Spain formed a Popular Front similar to that of their French comrades and won a significant majority in the *Cortes*, Spain’s legislature. For several months, tensions around the country simmered as rightist factions weighed their options. A sputtering rebellion by the potential insurgents might have, in a sense, vaccinated the Republic against further unrest but the political right still felt too weak to risk a coup and so tensions continued to mount.⁷ Those strains erupted in a wave of church burnings which destabilized Madrid and its southern environs. The government acted tardily in suppressing the attacks and youth organizations of the left and right began street fighting. Political killings immediately followed.

On July 13, 1936, several Socialists and sympathetic members of the Assault Guards, a paramilitary unit created by the Republic as a counterweight to the

⁵ See Jonathan Haslam, “The Comintern and the Origins of the Popular Front 1934-1935,” *The Historical Journal*, 22:3 (September 1979): 673-691. Haslam offers an interesting perspective on the manner in which the national parties outside of the Soviet Union contributed to the eventual formulation of the Popular Front strategy. He maintains that Moscow retained final decision on the subject but clarifies some of the program’s origins in France, Austria, and Spain.

⁶ For information on the ‘Popular Front’ see: Helen Graham and Paul Preston, eds., The Popular Front in Europe (St. Martin’s Press: NY 1987), François Furet, The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century (University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1997, and Martin S. Alexander and Helen Graham, The French and Spanish Popular Fronts: Comparative Perspectives (Cambridge University Press: NY 1989).

⁷ Ronald Fraser, Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War (Penguin: London 1979), 90

traditional *Guardia Civil*, kidnapped and murdered the monarchist parliamentary leader Calvo Sotello. While arguably a response to the earlier murder of an Assault Guards lieutenant, the assassination pushed forward the timetable of a conspiracy previously organized by monarchists, military officers, and various right-wing politicians. Four days later, on the evening of the 17th, the military rose against the Republic in the provincial city of Melilla in Morocco.⁸

The next day officers and troops in the major peninsular garrisons also rose and quickly seized power in the cities of Cadiz, Granada, Burgos, and Seville as well as large rural regions. Police, Assault Guards, and, in some cases, *Guardia Civil* combined with militant workers to suppress the mutiny in the industrialized regions of the country including Madrid, Catalonia, and Valencia. When sailors mutinied against their rebellious officers, the insurgents lost command of the navy and were thus unable to link their initial gains in Spain with their base in Morocco. With its most powerful combat units, the Army of Africa, blockaded in Morocco and the industrial centers outside its control, the rising seemed destined to fail.

Within days, however, aid arrived from Italy and Germany in the form of nine transport aircraft which began history's first airlift, ferrying troops over the Straits of Gibraltar.⁹ These forces had immediate impact and the insurgents began driving on Madrid, Teruel, and the supply lines around the capital. The democracies, as will be seen in Chapter 2, chose to avoid confronting the Fascist powers and attempted to

⁸ For information on the military rising and the military conduct of the war see: Blood of Spain, Paul Preston, Franco: A Biography (Basic Books: NY 1994), Michael Alpert, A New International History of the Spanish Civil War (St. Martin's Press: NY 1994), and Burnett Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill 1991).

⁹ Mussolini originally sent 12 planes but three crash landed in French Algeria and were discovered immediately.

isolate Spain by implementing a “Non-Intervention Pact” overseen by a toothless and ineffective Non-Intervention Committee based in London. While virtually every nation in Europe signed on to the agreement and the United States agreed in principle, Hitler and Mussolini continued to supply the rightist uprising.

German and Italian aid increased in the early fall and seriously improved the strategic situation for the insurgents who, having chosen Franco as commander-in-chief in late September, were within miles of the capital. In October, however, Josef Stalin and the Soviet leadership decided to intervene, unofficially, on the side of the Republic. Sending munitions and food to Madrid in exchange for Spanish gold, the Soviet Union attempted to counter the intervention of the Fascist dictators. The Comintern also aided the Republic by recruiting, equipping, and training the famed International Brigades which first appeared in combat as the Moors and Foreign Legion reached the gates of Madrid. With the arrival of the *brigadistas* and the commencement of Soviet support, the Republican resistance stabilized and the conflict ground into a war of attrition which would continue until April of 1939.

Having described the basic course of the conflict it is important to discuss the terminology to be used in naming the combatants. During the war those favoring Franco, who established his capital in Burgos, described his forces as Nationalists, patriots, or insurgents while labeling the government forces as reds, Communists, Bolsheviks, radicals, or leftists. Those supporting the government in Madrid referred to the forces they backed as Loyalists, Republicans, patriots, and democrats while describing their opponents as Fascists, Francoists, rebels, reactionaries, and

militarists. The phrases used in describing each side are a sensitive issue given that each name has historic, often negative, connotations. This paper will confront the difficulty by following the lead of one of the foremost scholars in the field, Paul Preston, who refers to the forces of Burgos as 'Nationalists' and those of Madrid as 'Republican'.

The term 'Nationalist' is most appropriate because the forces supporting Franco were not originally Fascist or revolutionary in nature. They were, in fact, the traditional monarchist, Catholic, and conservative interests which had ruled Spain for centuries and which saw his movement as a counterbalance to the radical left. 'Republican' is virtually the only label suitable for those fighting for Madrid as the need to maintain the Republic, at least in the short-term, was the only principle holding Communists, Socialists, Anarcho-Syndicalists, Basques, Catalan Nationalists, and liberals together in an alliance. While occasionally confusing (Basque nationalists fought for the Republic) these terms will be used as consistently as the dictates of readability and precision allow.

Many individuals outside of Spain were electrified by the fact that the war appeared to pit Communists against Fascists, Catholics against atheists, and democrats against totalitarians. While these impressions certainly found some substance in the reality of the war, the conflict was primarily local. Much as nationalism became confused with Communism during the cold war, the ideologies which international observers saw motivating the conflict were not the actual roots of the conflict. British historian Ronald Fraser, along with the majority of the field,

identifies land ownership, the role of the Church in education, Basque and Catalan nationalism, Anarcho-syndicalist agitation, economic stagnation, and the frustrations of the army as the prime 'points of rupture' in pre-war Spain.¹⁰ The international public however, did not comprehend such niceties in 1936 and the perceived conflicts mentioned above drove them to choose for the Nationalists or Republicans. The esoteric and negative nature of that international support is the basis of this investigation.

In 1937, after the first full year of the conflict, the newly founded Gallup Poll asked Americans to rate the ten events of the past twelve months which "interested you most." The population as a whole did not even place the war on the list and for male respondents it slipped in only at number ten (immediately after the Windsor Marriage).¹¹ Two weeks later a full sixty-six percent of Americans were either unaware of the conflict or did not feel strongly either way.¹² Even in the following year the war still did not figure into the most interesting events for Americans.¹³ British polls did not begin until 1938 but in that year a relatively respectable sixty-seven percent of the population held an opinion.¹⁴ While the British public clearly followed the war more closely than Americans, this is unsurprising given the relative proximity of Britain to Spain, the nations' historic connections, Britain's base at Gibraltar, and the general tension in Europe. Given these national interests, the fact

¹⁰ Blood of Spain, 513.

¹¹ George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971 (Random House: NY 1972), 80.

¹² *Ibid.*, 80.

¹³ "American Institute of Public Opinion Surveys," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 3:4 (October 1939), 603.

¹⁴ Hadley Cantril, Public Opinion, 1935-1946 (Princeton University Press: Princeton 1951), 808.

that a full third of the public in the United Kingdom held no opinion is as surprising as America's underwhelming apathy.¹⁵

That disinterestedness, however common, was certainly not universal. For many, the Spanish Civil War was *the* event of the 1930s and a central feature of their emotional and political lives. Simply listing titles of the secondary literature conveys some sense of the war's effect: *Blood of Spain*, *The Last Great Cause*, *Spanish Tragedy*, *The Wound in the Heart*, *Today the Struggle*, *The Passionate War*. The following chapters will detail the efforts of those involved in supporting both the Nationalists and the Republicans. Those groups acted in Spain not because of the local concerns which ignited the conflict but rather because they saw the war in Spain as analogous to their own struggles at home. The blows being struck in Spain were blows for left and right-wing activists everywhere. While the majority of the public may not have been watching, the eyes of Catholics, Communists, Progressives, and others were riveted on Spain.

¹⁵ For more information on American apathy see Richard P. Traina, *American Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1968), 106-108.

The Case for Burgos

The idyllic scenes of trout fishing, fiestas, and bull fights described in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* provide a fair representation of Spain in the eyes of most Americans (and many Europeans) during the early inter-war years.¹ Seen as a quaint and romantic backwater of Europe, studded with ancient castles, monasteries, and churches, Spain merited little attention from a world absorbed in the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. Because of its apparent unimportance, few newspapers or radio networks maintained correspondents in Spain, relying instead on a scattered handful of independent journalists and the wire services. Newsreel companies, the infants of the media business, covered Spain only infrequently and, when presenting the nation to their viewers, focused primarily on its scenic views and political instability.²

For these reasons the beginning of the Civil War on July 17, caught the international press unprepared. Newspapers reacted by interviewing diplomats and businessmen who had even a vague familiarity with the country while hastily dispatching journalists to Madrid. The lack of an independent press at the outbreak of hostilities meant that vague and anecdotal reports provided by tourists and

¹ For relatively balanced American views on Spain during the interwar years see Hemingway's works as well as Matthew Josephson's memoirs, *Infidel in the Temple* (Alfred Knopf: New York, 1967) and former US ambassador Claude G. Bowers' *My Mission to Spain* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1954). For a contemporaneous academic perspective read *The Spanish Tragedy, 1930-1936: Dictatorship, Republic, Chaos* by E. Allison Peers (Oxford University Press, 1936).

² Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema and History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Scolar Press, 1979), 102. In addition to patchy coverage, the reporting itself was often less than professional. British viewers were treated to a newsreel in which "President Manuel Azana Diego Martinez Barrio" reviewed a parade of troops. In fact, Manuel Azana would not be elected President until seven days after the release of the newsreel and Diego Martinez Barrio was the Speaker of the Cortes.

businessmen who happened to witness “revolutionary incidents” constituted the bulk of “news” about the conflict available to the outside world. Dispatches quickly improved as professional journalists arrived in Spain and began trying to objectively sketch the scene for their audiences back home. As information filtered in, foreign opinion and policy began to coalesce and in several constituencies that opinion came to favor the Nationalist forces commanded by Francisco Franco.³

The first nations to take any positions in the new conflict were the Fascist powers- Italy and Germany.⁴ The two dictators in charge of these countries did not need to consult public opinion or a divided government, and within days of the rebellion German and Italian planes were flying the Army of Africa, Spain’s elite corps of Moors and Foreign Legionnaires, over the Straits of Gibraltar and into combat with Republican forces. As the war progressed, Mussolini dispatched an entire army corps to the Iberian Peninsula as well as large portions of the Italian Air Force. Hitler’s Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht contributed men, weapons, and expertise to Franco’s infant air force but did not participate heavily in ground combat. Both nations opened their armories to the Nationalists and extended large lines of credit to Franco’s regime despite the theoretical restrictions imposed by the Non-Intervention Committee.⁵

³ Originally Franco was not intended to lead the rebelling forces but a series of accidents resulted in the death or capture of several more senior officers while Franco’s influence with Germany and position in the army (particularly with the Foreign Legion) cemented his position at the head of the Nationalists.

⁴ For information regarding the entry of Italy and Germany see A New International History of the Spanish Civil War by Michael Alpert (St. Martin’s Press: New York, 1994 as well as chapter XV of Paul Preston’s definitive Franco: A Biography (Basic Books: New York, 1994).

⁵ Norman J. Padelford analyzes the many shortcomings of the Committee’s agreements in his article “The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War,” *The American Journal of International Law*, 31:4 (October, 1937): 578-603.

Britain and France reacted more cautiously to the Spanish Crisis.⁶ Reports indicate that the Popular Front government in France originally intended to sell arms and supplies to Madrid but changed course following consultations with Britain. In these talks, Foreign Minister Anthony Eden reminded Prime Minister Blum about German troop movements along the Rhine and the danger of provoking an international conflict.⁷ Following such subtle British threats to leave France alone in the face of a Continental war, Blum's government proposed an arms embargo out of which was born the Non-Intervention Committee. After quick negotiation, all the major European powers agreed to Non-Intervention along with twenty three of the smaller states.⁸ While officially a perfectly impartial act, the decision to prevent the importation of arms dramatically weakened the position of the Republican government, which did not have a regular army to compete with the rebels or, as yet, a powerful and cynical patron willing to flout the Committee's restrictions. To this

⁶ Preston's Francisco offers excellent insight into the reactions of these two nations. Enrique Moradiellos provides a well-researched explanation of British policy towards Franco in "The Gentle General" in Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie, eds., The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain, 1936-1939 (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1996). For a cynical and condemnatory analysis of British policy read Britain, Italy, Germany, and the Spanish Civil War by Will Podmore (Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston, NY, 1998). Anthony Eden's memoirs Facing the Dictators (Houghton Mifflin: Boston, 1962) includes primary source analysis of Britain's policy.

⁷ Richard P. Traina, American Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1968) 34.

⁸ Traina, 38. Salazar's Portugal initially refused to join the embargo, which would have rendered the plan stillborn. Following serious pressure from London, however, the Portuguese saw the benefits of joining and agreed to the embargo though they thumbed their noses at Britain by refusing to attend the first meeting of the Committee.

extent, Britain and France⁹ can be placed in the same pro-Nationalist camp as Germany and Italy.¹⁰

Their effective support of the Nationalists, though always cloaked in Non-Intervention, did not especially trouble the democracies in the early years of the war. An analysis of British Foreign Office records indicates that despite the Falangist influence on the rebellion, “it seemed clear [to London] that this Nazi-Fascist help was in no way modifying the nature of the insurgent camp.”¹¹ The British believed, until late in the war, that Franco was simply the latest in a long line of secular military dictators who periodically stepped in to “protect” the Spanish state. While missing the rapid move towards Fascism within the Nationalist organization, the democracies also assumed that the Nationalists would be more friendly to private business interests than their Republican adversaries. Surprisingly, however, the Nationalists were probably more protectionist than the “Reds” whom they were fighting given that, “the advocacy of free trade- to make possible cheaper food for the working classes... was standard on the platforms of most Republican parties.”¹² In the general fear of

⁹ For a brief period in 1938 France reopened its borders with Republican Spain but this window quickly shut with a string of Nationalist victories in the North and the reversal of French policy in the fall. Britain remained the strongest proponent of Non-Intervention throughout the conflict, going so far as to prevent the Republican navy from using port facilities at Gibraltar in its blockade of the Straits.

¹⁰ For information regarding the negative impact of the embargo on the Republican war effort see Douglas Little, Malevolent Neutrality: The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1985).

¹¹ Enrique Moradiellos, “The Gentle General: The Official British Perception of General Franco During the Spanish Civil War,” in Ann L. Mackenzie and Paul Preston, eds., The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain, 1936-1939 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 12.

¹² Shlomo Ben-Ami, “The Republican ‘take-over’: Prelude to Inevitable Catastrophe?” in Paul Preston, ed., Revolution and War in Spain, 1936-1939 (New York: Methuen & Co., 1984), 17-18.

Communism, such subtle positions went unnoticed and the democracies remained anti-Republican for virtually the entire conflict.¹³

Official American reaction to the War was largely pre-determined.¹⁴ The year before, Congress passed the landmark Neutrality Act of 1935 which effectively tied the hands of the State Department and preemptively announced America's position in any foreign crisis to the rest of the world. This legislation proved inadequate in the new conflict, however, as the Act referred only to wars "between or among nations" and not to civil conflicts.¹⁵ To resolve this difficulty President Roosevelt requested that the legislature revisit the issue and, on January 6, 1937, with a unanimous vote in the Senate and a 406 to 1 vote in the House, the Neutrality Act was amended to prohibit the sale of armaments or raw materials to any parties engaged in military action. From this point on, the continued enforcement of the embargo became the prime objective of Nationalist sympathizers in the United States.

The most vociferous of these groups was the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁶ While the Church had legally existed in the colonies since the grant of Maryland's charter in 1632, it was not until the early twentieth century that Catholicism became socially

¹³ For an explanation of American obsession with Anti-Communism during the interwar years, see Douglas Little's "Anti-Bolshevism and American Foreign Policy, 1919-1939: The Diplomacy of Self-Delusion," *American Quarterly*, 35:4 (Autumn, 1983): 376-390.

¹⁴ A former United States ambassador to Spain offers an intriguing view of American policy in Carlton Hayes, *The United States and Spain: An Interpretation* (Sheed & Ward: New York, 1951).

¹⁵ Phillip C. Jessup, "The Spanish Rebellion and International Law," *Foreign Affairs* 15:1/4 (January 1937): 263. Professor Jessup continues in a fascinating discussion of the legal principles surrounding the recognition of belligerent status, the recognition of a government, and the blurry boundaries between disturbances, insurrections, rebellions, and revolutions. He concludes that law and precedence did not justify any intervention in Spain at the time.

¹⁶ For an excellent analysis of American Catholic opinion regarding the Spanish Civil war see J. David Valaik, "Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Civil War, 1937-1939," *The Journal of American History* 54:1 (June 1967): 73-85 as well as Donald F. Crosby's "Boston's Catholics and the Spanish Civil War: 1936-1939," *The New England Quarterly* 44:1 (March, 1971): 82-100.

accepted in Anglo-Saxon America. Before that time “Nativist” parties had decried the influence of “popery” in the United States and convents were regarded with suspicion and disgust. Even in the 1930s Catholics still faced discrimination though in heavily Irish cities such as New York, Boston, and Chicago it was possible for them to hold positions of power.¹⁷ Al Smith, a Catholic, even mounted a Presidential campaign in 1928. In 1936 Catholics made up a substantial portion of the population, numbering around twenty million, and had begun to amass considerable political power, in part due to the mistaken impression among Protestants that they represented a monolithic mass.¹⁸

That mass appeared squarely behind the Franco government when the Civil War began. Catholics were instrumental in the campaign to promote Franco’s image in the United States with leaders of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) taking charge of public relations for the general.¹⁹ As will be seen, the Catholic Press began churning out leaflets, periodicals, and books all praising the Nationalist cause and extolling the personal virtues of the *Caudillo*.²⁰ Catholic newspapers engaged in debates with their secular and Protestant competitors, arguing that the non-Catholic press was biased and misinformed about events in Spain. A representative headline from the Archdiocesan paper in Boston reads:

¹⁷ Boston College was forced to found its Law School in 1926 because of the difficulties experienced by Irish Catholics in gaining admittance to the legal profession.

¹⁸ Valaik, 84. See also: McGreevy, John T., “Thinking on One’s Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928-1960,” *The Journal of American History* 84:1 (June 1997): 97-131. for a discussion of the mistaken impressions of Protestant thinkers and John P. Diggins, “American Catholics and Italian Fascism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 2:4 (October 1967): 51-68. for perspectives on American Catholic political allegiances.

¹⁹ Traina, 193, argues that this was the most important task facing the pro-Nationalists, and perhaps the one in which Spanish officials helped their supporters the least. See Crosby, “Boston’s Catholics” for an excellent account of NCWC efforts throughout the war.

²⁰ For a particularly fawning example see: Georges Rotvand, *Franco Means Business* (Devin-Adair: New York, n.d.). From textual analysis it appears the book appeared some time in the spring of 1937, early enough in the conflict to significantly affect public opinion.

Condemns Secular Reports of Spanish War Crisis
Catholic Editor Charges Sins of Omission and Commission²¹

The body of the article continued to dispute allegations of a Nationalist atrocity and claimed that, “hundreds of similar instances of distortion, exaggeration, and misrepresentation could be given.”²² This sort of article speaks to the fear among American Catholics that Protestant journalists were slandering their co-religionists in Spain.

Catholic organizations acted in more concrete ways by vigorously lobbying their representatives in Congress. As part of the campaign to keep the embargo, the NCWC organized a petition with over 1,750,000 signatures which was delivered to Congress along with letters from influential Catholics.²³ The “Keep the Spanish Embargo Committee,” founded in 1938, boasted over four million members from twenty of the most influential Catholic organizations in the nation. This organization, along with similarly interested groups, managed to prevent pro-Republican factions from removing the embargo and possibly resuscitating the fortunes of the Republic.

Catholics also mobilized against issues that Washington policy makers believed to be less explosive than the embargo question. In April of 1937, the public learned of a Red Cross plan to ship five hundred refugee children to the United States.²⁴ Unfortunately for these children, their parents were Basque Catholics who fought for the Republic, making them the darlings of the international Republican movement and important propaganda symbols. In addition to being a potential public

²¹ “Condemns Secular Reports of Spanish War Crisis,” *The Pilot*, 3 July 1937, 1. Incidentally, the report of an atrocity at Badajoz proved to be accurate though the magnitude of the killing was less than originally reported.

²² *Ibid.*, 1.

²³ Valaik, 80.

²⁴ Crosby, “Boston’s Catholics” includes a lengthy discussion of Cardinal O’Connor’s reaction to the program.

relations embarrassment, the proposal reminded American Catholics of a similar effort to relocate Basque children in England. In that experiment, several thousand children were shipped to temporary camps in the British countryside before placement in private homes. The fact that some of the homes happened to be Protestant was an affront to Catholic pride and led many to believe that the program amounted to little more than cloaked evangelism.²⁵ When Nationalist forces overran and ‘pacified’ the regions from which the children had been evacuated, Republican sympathizers in Britain obstructed their repatriation, ostensibly for humanitarian reasons. The American committee organized to oversee the transport and settlement of the children failed to address concerns raised by the British experience and neglected to include any prominent Catholics among its members. Following the refusal of Catholics to accept the organization and its leadership, the program was quickly scuttled, leaving several hundred Basque children in danger of starvation.

Perhaps more tragically, the Catholic lobby also intervened in another purportedly humanitarian mission in 1938.²⁶ During the summer of that year the State Department approached the American Red Cross with the information that Republican Spain was likely to experience a massive grain shortage during the coming winter. Working with the Department of Agriculture and the (Republican)

²⁵ “Despoliation,” *The Pilot*, 14 August 1937, 4. bemoans the spiritual condition of the Basque children in England. The author referred to reports that only twenty of 350 children attended Mass in the weeks after their departure from Spain. Attempting to explain this, “poor showing”, the author proposed that, “the children may not have been told in time or they may have been at a loss in a foreign land they did not understand.” Eventually the author concluded with the improbable assertion that the children lapsed from their religion not because of any anti-Catholic feeling in the Basque country but because of a fear to express their faith resulting from the atrocities they must have seen committed against their fellow Catholics in Spain.

²⁶ Traina, 200-202 relates the story succinctly. A slightly different set of figures appears in, “Extra U.S. Wheat Will Go to Spain,” *The New York Times*, 22 December 1938, 1. Traina does not include much of the detail and political analysis present in the *Times* article but it is likely that his figures, compiled in the course of historical research rather than journalistic investigation, are more accurate. For this reason the figures cited above are those provided by Traina.

Spanish Ambassador, the Red Cross discovered that the Federal Surplus Commodities Commission had in its possession 250,000 barrels of flour that it was willing to donate to the cause along with the promise of 100,000 barrels a month to follow. Furthermore, the United States Maritime Commission agreed to ship the flour *gratis* in unused cargo space to Bordeaux or Le Havre where it would be received by the American Friends Service Committee for free transport to Spain.²⁷ To avoid the appearance of partiality, exactly half of the barrels were to be allocated to each of the warring regions despite the fact that the Nationalist regime was actually known to enjoy a wheat *surplus* during 1938. Roosevelt was accused of starting the program merely as an attempt to keep the Republican government alive through the winter, part of “a steady stiffening United States attitude toward totalitarian powers.”²⁸ An intensive letter writing campaign and a fundraising failure eventually brought a halt to the flour donation after only 60,000 barrels were shipped.

American Catholics’ ability to influence foreign policy indicates both the strength of their organization and their political importance within the United States. It does not seem immediately obvious, however, that an organization comprised largely of Irish and Italian immigrants would feel so strongly about events in Spain but the propaganda aimed at Catholics worked very effectively. This publicity campaign organized by the Church worked through three main channels, the pulpit, the radio, and the press.

²⁷ Ibid. 200-202. Traina reports that the committee estimated total costs of \$1.20 per barrel to get the grain from Federal warehouses to Spanish mouths. The Red Cross could not offer the necessary \$300,000 and President Roosevelt attempted to organize a charitable foundation to raise the money. In circumstances similar to those which killed the effort to relocate Basque children, the wheat fundraising committee failed miserably, not even earning a donation from the committee’s chairman.

²⁸ “Extra U.S. Wheat Will Go to Spain: No Political Aim is Claimed,” *The New York Times*, 22 December 1938, 22.

In the 1930s every Catholic theoretically attended Mass weekly and on the Holy Days of Obligation. At each of these Masses the parish priest delivered a homily on a topic of his own choosing and read dispatches from the Church hierarchy. Encyclicals from Pius XI as well as letters from the archbishops and cardinals served to inform and exhort Catholics about their duties in the world. Special collections and petition drives were other means by which the parish priest might educate and engage his congregation. The experience of Mass, shared by Catholics around the globe, was an important tool of the Church in encouraging an emotional connection between American Catholics and their Spanish co-religionists. This connection was later used to motivate the grassroots political pressure already seen in the termination of wheat shipments and the retention of the arms embargo.

The 1930s also witnessed the novel phenomenon of the “radio priest,” typified by the outspoken Father Charles E. Coughlin of Detroit.²⁹ Described alternately as a saint and a proto-fascist, Coughlin’s weekly addresses reached over eight million homes in 1938, which was not even the peak of his popularity.³⁰ During holidays, such as Christmas of 1939, Coughlin could be heard on the radios of over fifteen million Americans.³¹ Not all of Coughlin’s listeners were Catholic or even religious,

²⁹ Louis B. Ward offers a shining image of Coughlin in Father Charles F. Coughlin: An Authorized Biography (Tower Publications: Detroit, 1933) published by the priest’s own press. A highly critical account of Coughlin’s rise to power can be found in Forerunners of American Fascism (Books for Libraries Press: Freeport, NY, 1935) by Raymond Gram Swing. For more recent interpretations of Coughlin see Alan Brinkley, “Comparative Biography as Political History: Huey Long and Father Coughlin,” *The History Teacher* 18:1 (November 1984): 9-16.

³⁰ Dr. George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971 (New York: Random House, 1972), 100.

³¹ Gallup, 134.

but the large majority were and, according to a Gallup poll, over 80 percent of his audience approved of his messages.³²

On January 15, 1939, rather late in the conflict, Coughlin devoted an entire program to discussion of the embargo question. The priest had earlier touched on the subject but this address was his first major treatment of the war. He informed his listeners that no fewer than 200 groups supporting “Loyalists-Communists” were actively lobbying in Washington to remove the embargo. Calling Franco “a rebel for Christ, a rebel for humanity’s sake” the priest blamed the Republicans for the destruction of every church and chapel in their territory, the murder of 12,500 religious (surprisingly close to an accurate number), and 300,000 women and children. If one includes the eight million subscribers to Coughlin’s magazine with his then three million listeners, this speech explains some of the power behind the lobbying campaign which Catholics brought to bear on Congress.³³

The Catholic Press is the most historically accessible means by which the Church reached its members.³⁴ In the 1930s every archdiocese in the nation published its own newspaper, a copy of which was delivered weekly to the vast majority of Catholic homes. The diocesan newspaper was often the primary source for news for members of the older generations.³⁵ Two major national publications, the Jesuit

³² Gallup, 100.

³³ For an analysis of Coughlin’s political power see: James P. Shenton, “The Coughlin Movement and the New Deal,” *Political Science Quarterly* 73:3 (September, 1958): 353-373.

³⁴ Heinz Eulau, “Proselytizing in the Catholic Press,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 11:2 (Summer, 1947): 189-197. describes the states of the Catholic Press during the 1930s. In addition to newspapers, this article describes the many magazines published by the Church to reach specific constituencies and communities.

³⁵ The two most important papers in the United States were *The Tablet*, published by the Archdiocese of Brooklyn, and *The Pilot*, published in Boston. These were intended as supplements to secular newspapers and were regularly cited by their bishops as an “indispensable” source for news which no Catholic home should be without. Based on the distribution of advertisements and articles in *The Pilot*,

magazine *America* and the more liberal *Commonweal*, supplemented the diocesan newspaper and offered more analytical essays on the war and politics.³⁶ The Catholic Press provided the devout with information and opinions which they considered to objective and theologically safe.

Aside from Fr. Coughlin's fiery orations, Catholic propaganda regarding the Spanish Civil War was primarily reactionary. The speakers on weekly radio programs (whose transcripts were published weekly by the Catholic Press) and authors for the Catholic press generally sought to redress what they considered misperceptions of the war in Spain. Their main concerns were with a perception of the Nationalists as aggressors, the belief that the Church and Francoists were anti-democratic, and the assertions that the Catholic Church oppressed the Spanish peasants and dominated Spanish life.

To counter the Republican argument that war guilt rests with Franco due to the army's attempted coup of July 17th, the proximate cause of the war, the Catholic hierarchy pointed to the persecution of the Church under the Republic. In articles published throughout 1936, including some written before the rebellion, *The Pilot* described "Churches, convents, monasteries, religious schools, and private chapels [going] up in flames in one of the most tremendous holocausts of religious edi[fi]ces known in history."³⁷ American Catholics were also graphically told of the disinterment of bodies in religious cemeteries, the killing of priests and bishops, the

it seems that the paper was geared primarily to an audience consisting of married women, retired men, and the Knights of Columbus.

³⁶ John P. Diggins, "American Catholics and Italian Fascism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2:4 (October 1967): 51-68. This essay offers an excellent analysis of the editorial lines taken by the national Catholic magazines regarding the Fascist dictators and the Spanish Civil War. *America* was openly supportive of Mussolini while *Commonweal* vacillated somewhat but generally supported him following the Concordat with the Vatican.

³⁷ "Church and Clergy Suffer Violence in Spain Revolt," *The Pilot*, 8 August 1936, 1.

rape and murder of nuns, and the desecration of religious artifacts. Americans also reacted strongly to news about the suppression of the Jesuits; the curtailment of religious education; and the confiscation of Church lands, buildings, and endowments.

In the United States and abroad, Republicans argued that their opponents, the Nationalists and the Catholic Church, were anti-democratic and frankly Fascist in nature. This charge could have badly damaged opinion in the Irish Catholic community which was just beginning to taste political power and which still bore many memories of anti-Catholic bias in Ireland. Representative government was seen as a bulwark against such discrimination and Irish Catholics would be unlikely to support a regime believed to be anti-democratic. The Church refuted such claims by arguing that an erroneous impression had been created. William Montavon, an officer in the NCWC and a leading American Catholic, corresponded frequently with Nationalist officials and responded indignantly to their critics:

My own personal knowledge of Spanish conditions, acquired through personal contacts extending over a period of years leaves no doubt in my mind but that men like Gil Robles [head of CEDA, a conservative Catholic party] and even General Franco, who is Commander-in-Chief of the opposition in the present civil war, are sincerely of the conviction that a republic is the most desirable form of government for Spain. The civil war in Spain is not due to any opposition to a republican form of government, but to abuses which were rapidly leading to chaos in Spain under a form of government which was in no sense democratic or republican.³⁸

Catholic writers continued to argue that the republic had been “in no sense democratic” by analyzing its electoral system, which granted victory to an entire

³⁸ “Interpretations of Spanish Civil War are Refuted,” *The Pilot*, 3 October 1936, 1.

ticket if a single parliamentary candidate won over 80 percent of the popular vote.³⁹ This measure had been designed to create stable majorities in the parliament but opposition to it caused widespread frustration and alleged election boycotts. *The Pilot* observed that, “this does not look like a ‘properly elected government,’ not at least as we Americans understand that term.”⁴⁰ By impugning the credibility of the Madrid government the Catholic press hoped to establish Franco’s regime as a palatable alternative.

This effort was hamstrung somewhat by Franco’s refusal to bow to foreign sensibilities; many of his statements were less than helpful in courting international public opinion.⁴¹ An excerpt from Franco’s address following his proclamation as head of state in 1936 included a passage that read in part, “We do not believe in government through voting booths. The Spanish national will was never freely expressed through the ballot box.”⁴² Statements such as these, though accompanied by denunciations of the political corruption which surrounded previous Spanish elections, seriously damaged the effectiveness of pro-Nationalist propaganda.

The final concern of the Catholic Church was its image as an oppressor of the Spanish peasantry and proletariat. Detractors claimed that the Church owned up to one third of the arable land in Spain and that the cost of supporting the hierarchy was breaking the backs of the landless poor. In defense of the Spanish clergy, American Catholics were told that, “Catholics in Spain certainly did not seek any property rights

³⁹ This measure was used to swing elections in subsequent rounds. Parties could ascertain their strength without compromising in the first ballot then close rank in the second.

⁴⁰ “The Catholic Question Box: Questions on Religion and Spain Answered,” *The Pilot*, 10 October 1936, 6.

⁴¹ See Preston’s [Franco](#) for further gaffes by the general.

⁴² “Spanish Ballots,” *The Pilot*, 31 October 1936, 4.

or authority which in the United States would be held to be excessive.”⁴³ Additionally, the American hierarchy went to great lengths to explain that the Spanish Church did not in fact possess massive sums of money and that those funds it did administer were for the provision of public services such as hospitals, schools, and universities. The unwavering faith and support of Spanish Catholics was also highlighted as evidence that the Church was not oppressive. In an open letter to diocesan newspapers, William Montavon claimed that, “when it became apparent that [the Republicans] were bent on uprooting religion, Spanish Catholics in great numbers and with the approval of their priests, joined in the ranks of the Nationalists in defense of the Church.”⁴⁴

The hierarchy attempted to motivate its members through emotional outrage, recall the continuous horror stories splashed across the pages of the Catholic press, and through comparison between America and Spain. In responding to criticisms that Spain was overrun with churches and chapels a radio priest responded by noting that:

There was one Methodist church in the U.S. for every 211 Methodists; one Presbyterian Church in North America for every 148 Presbyterians; but only one church for every 874 Catholics in Spain. For comparison it will be well to remember that... [in the US the ratio is] one for every 1097 Catholics.⁴⁵

While the numbers given appear to support the priest’s claim, it should be noted that the geographical frame of reference switches from the United States to North America, altering the sample significantly. The figure on Catholic Churches in America is also puzzling because, assuming the United States was properly served, Spain would appear over-burdened. The Spanish figure itself is misleading as it

⁴³ “Conditions Surrounding the Church in Spain Reviewed,” *The Pilot*, 17 October 1936.

⁴⁴ “Attitude of Catholics in Spain Told,” *The Pilot*, 20 February 1937, 5.

⁴⁵ Transcript reprinted in “Question Box,” *The Pilot*, 15 August 1936, 6.

includes only “chapels and churches” but does not account for Spain’s particularly numerous monasteries and convents. In this same address, the priest responded to allegations that the Church in Spain received a large portion of its funding from a tax collected by the state, arguing that, “it is part of the general taxation, much as the school tax in American cities is included in the general tax rate.”⁴⁶ This analogy cannot be dismissed immediately as Catholic parishes provided schools in much the same manner as an American school district. The Spanish tax, however, amounted to forced tithing, a practice with which few Americans would agree. Other authors made comparisons between the Spanish Church and Anglo-American examples, correlating the governmental role of the Church in Spain with that of the Church of England, equating Spanish rioters of 1931 with Boston strikers of 1919, and the likening the holdings of religious orders with the endowment of Harvard University. While the appropriateness of the analogies must often be questioned, the intention of the writers was clearly to make American Catholics sympathize with their Spanish brethren.

These comparisons generally bear favorably on the role of the Church in Spain and often serve to clarify legitimate misconceptions. On occasion, however, the attempted explanations serve to condemn the Church, if only in hindsight. While attempting to explain away Spain’s illiteracy rate of over 45 percent (incidentally congratulating the Church on bringing it down from 75 percent half a century earlier despite the fact that education was under Church control at both points) an unidentified radio priest drew an analogy with the American South:

No one would be justified in pointing to this high percentage of negro illiteracy and saying that it was due to the desire of the American people to keep the negro in ignorance, overlooking all the other possible and actual

⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

factors. Similarly, no one is justified in citing the high percentage of Spanish illiteracy as proof that the Catholic Church wished to keep the Spanish peasant ignorant and did nothing to help him to acquire an education, overlooking the political and economic causes of this illiteracy.⁴⁷

Today few would argue that “negro illiteracy” was not an intentional result of Southerner’s desire to exercise control over former slaves. The priest cannot have recognized this analogy as a condemnation of his Church’s role in Spain but such remarks do point to American’s real ignorance of the situation in Spain (not to mention their own country) and the socially accepted racism of the era.

American isolationists and pacifists represent the second group of major importance in the pro-Nationalist camp. These were two potent political movements, at times virtually indistinguishable from one another, whose ideas held currency from George Washington’s farewell address to the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 30s they were both particularly popular and exercised their influence by securing the defeat of the Versailles treaty, preventing American participation in the League of Nations, engineering the Neutrality Act of 1935, and spearheading the international disarmament movement.⁴⁸ Pacifism grew so strong that by 1935 a large grassroots movement had sprouted which demanded that the Constitution be amended to require a plebiscite before Congress could declare war.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Transcript reprinted in “Question Box,” *The Pilot*, 12 September 1936, 6.

⁴⁸ A brief, dated, but comprehensive study on American isolationism can be found in Bruce Fensterwald, Jr.’s, “The Anatomy of American Isolationism and Expansionism: Part I,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2:2 (June, 1958): 111-139. For more recent analysis see, Little, “Anti-Bolshevism and American Foreign Policy”. For a study of the movement’s philosophy, see “Conservatism in the USA,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13:4 (October, 1978): 635-652.

⁴⁹ Gallup, 3. A poll conducted on November 17, 1935, which asked “To declare war, should Congress be required to obtain the approval of the people by means of a national referendum?” found that 75 percent of Americans supported such a measure. By September of 1936 this number had dropped to 71 percent but rose to 73 percent a year later, apparently reflecting the small effect which the Spanish

The isolationists became pro-Nationalists for two reasons. Their support of Non-Intervention made them at the very least anti-Republican, which, in such a polarized environment amounted to support for Franco. In this position, the American isolationists found themselves in the novel position of supporting French and British foreign policy. Secondly, most American isolationists were also strong nationalists of the conservative variety. In much the same manner as Catholics, their fervent anti-communism disposed them to support the Spanish Nationalists, especially if this fit their autarkic philosophies.⁵⁰

Interestingly, the isolationist lobby achieved most of its objectives in the Spanish Civil War well before the conflict began. In an excellent analysis of the European diplomatic climate leading up to the non-intervention decision, Richard Traina argues that, “The European democracies would be highly unlikely to permit American initiative in Europe for fear that the Americans would back out and leave them alone to face any resulting crisis. During the Spanish Civil War the British made their feelings on this point quite clear.”⁵¹ Since the overriding objective of the isolationist policy was to prevent “foreign adventures” it appears that their obstructionist work in the 1920s and 30s effectively prevented such adventures from occurring in the future.⁵² Additionally, the Neutrality Act of 1935 committed the United States to the embargo even before Britain suggested it and, as the war

Civil War had on American attitudes towards a European war. The House of Representatives determined not to abrogate its power to declare war by voting down the Ludlow Amendment, as the act was labeled, by a mere twenty-one votes.

⁵⁰ See Noble, “Conservatism in the USA” for analysis of isolationist philosophies. The author makes persuasive arguments regarding the limited and pragmatic nature of American isolationism which aimed not to seal the United States from the rest of the world but to preserve its independent traditions from foreign influence.

⁵¹ Traina, 15.

⁵² See Fensterwald, “Anatomy of Isolationism” for further information on isolationism during these decades.

continued, isolationists such as the influential Senator Gerald Nye used all their political skills to keep the embargo in place. As we will see, they enjoyed several distinct advantages over their adversaries in the pro-Republican camp which led to the continuation of the embargo.⁵³

The isolationist message was delivered through the political organizations set up over the preceding decades.⁵⁴ The regular party organizations played an important role in drumming up popular support and developing a substantial literature on the subject. Often these were books published by travelers in Spain who claimed to have witnessed the horrors of war and wished to save their country from the same fate. These generally included somber warnings of impending “Red” contamination and prescriptions for its avoidance.

America Look at Spain, by Merwin Hart, is probably the most widely known and cited book of this genre.⁵⁵ The author described himself as a concerned citizen whose interest had been piqued by the propaganda of the Communist International. He related his travels through Nationalist Spain (he believed that a trip through the Republic would be superfluous) and attempted to debunk the myths surrounding the Madrid government’s war effort which he believed obscured the Republicans’ essentially anarchist and communist nature. Hart established his isolationist credentials by pragmatically arguing that the best policy was, “let the Germans have their Nazism in Germany, if they wish; let the Italians have their Fascism. But let us

⁵³ While not germane to a discussion of public opinion, the fact that neutrality laws were the status quo at the time of the Spanish Civil War cannot be disregarded as an important advantage. The difficulty of changing or removing an existing law is significantly greater than that of enacting a new provision, especially in the American political environment. The entrenched position of the pro-embargo forces granted them a tremendous procedural advantage.

⁵⁴ For information regarding this period see Noble and Fensterwald.

⁵⁵ Merwin Hart, America Look at Spain (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1939).

Americans preserve our democratic Republic for ourselves.”⁵⁶ The avowed purposes of the book were to illustrate the parallels between the United States and Spain, to warn Americans of the Comintern’s intention to draw their nation into the Civil War, and to call attention to dangers of Communist agitators in America. After “objectively” describing the situation in Spain and exposing as false the “Red propaganda” which he saw flooding the United States, Hart warns that were America to join any European war, “we would unquestionably emerge under the control of a dictator.”⁵⁷

These sorts of works operated by convincing people of beliefs and fears they already held. The Dies Committee, forerunner of Senator McCarthy’s Committees, and the intermittent Red scares worried many Americans that subversive elements might be present in their own neighborhoods. The books written by the isolationist, American-nationalist camp played on this fear by explaining how the Comintern in Spain quickly captured control of the Republic through its operatives already in place. Isolationists struck a second chord by reawakening American memories of the First World War. In the 1920s and 30s many Americans became convinced that the nation had entered the war because the public had been misled by British and “big business” propaganda. Reports of the “Rape of Belgium” and the atrocities perpetrated by blood-thirsty Huns sounded eerily similar to Spanish Civil War news about the bombing of Guernica and the massacre at Badajoz. Many Americans refused to let themselves be duped again and subscribed to Hart’s beliefs that such reports were mere Communist propaganda.

⁵⁶ Hart, ix.

⁵⁷ Hart, 218.

The Irish were the final group that created an effective and popular pro-Nationalist program. Interestingly, Ireland was the only country which provided volunteers and funds for the Nationalists⁵⁸ and it was also, therefore, the only country which sent troops to both Burgos and Madrid.⁵⁹ On August 10, 1936, the *Irish Independent* ran an open letter from reactionary politician General Eoin O’Duffy on the front page. In his letter, O’Duffy suggested the recruitment of an Irish Brigade to fight in an “Anti-Red Crusade” and called for volunteers.⁶⁰ The organizational details presented in the article were sketchy but that merely reflected the total lack of planning behind the proposal.⁶¹ After several months of negotiating with Franco, his fellow Irishmen, and the authorities in Dublin, O’Duffy succeeded in transporting almost seven hundred men to fight for Franco.⁶² These troops formed their own battalion in the Spanish Foreign Legion under command of Irish and Spanish officers and, though their record in battle was unexceptional, their story as the only Nationalist volunteers is no less fascinating as a result.

⁵⁸ Here I discount Italy and Germany because though they supplied large contingents in the Republican International Brigades, those men were exiles seeking to resist their native regimes by fighting them in Spain. Also, the “volunteers” for the Nationalist side cannot be considered to truly represent a movement of public opinion as they were serving soldiers and airmen ordered to Spain.

⁵⁹ For a brief time in 1937, the two Irish contingents were actually dug into trenches opposite each other in the lines on the Jarama front. Loudspeakers were used both to trade insults and share feelings of Irish pride. The two battalions never fought and there are no records of an Irishman killing his countryman in Spain.

⁶⁰ “Irish Brigade for Spain Suggested by General O’Duffy,” *Irish Independent*, 10 August 1936, 1.

⁶¹ Robert A. Stradling *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) 8. In fact, after publication of the letter, O’Duffy immediately departed on vacation to the Netherlands for two weeks, merely asking his deputies to get the project moving.

⁶² Stradling, 23. Up to 20,000 troops were envisioned but Franco proved either unwilling or unable to provide them with transportation to Spain. On several occasions troopships were promised and recruits concentrated only to find that Franco’s ship never arrived. One contingent of the Irish Brigade, traveling incognito, found itself onboard the same liner as the Irish International Brigade then heading for Madrid.

Ireland, perhaps even more than Spain, was deeply Catholic in 1936 and Irish Catholics responded strongly to reports of anti-Catholic atrocities. They also shared many of the same anti-communist sensibilities as the American Catholics though, unlike the Americans, the Irish were willing to enlist in military support of the Nationalist cause. The history of Ireland in the early twentieth-century explains much of this enthusiasm.

In 1921, following World War I and the Anglo-Irish war, the Irish Republic won Home Rule (*not* independence) from the British Crown and the right to self-government for the first time in centuries. Immediately the country collapsed into civil war as factions supporting the peace treaty with Britain fought those who opposed it. Eventually the anti-treaty faction won but found itself stuck accepting the same terms from the British which the treaty had imposed. Many veterans of that conflict, as well as men unhappy with unsuccessful careers in the army or police, saw the Spanish Civil War as an opportunity to revive their military careers and reputations. By some estimates, as many as one third of the Brigade's recruits came from this sort of frustrated military background.⁶³

Another large body of troops enlisted following membership in General O'Duffy's Blueshirt organization. Founded in 1932, the Blueshirts resembled the NSDAP and PNI of Germany and Italy in their colored uniforms, mass meetings, furious oration, and conservative, ultra-nationalist tone. Additionally many of the organization's leaders espoused positions sympathetic to fascism and totalitarian government. It should be noted however that the general members of the organization joined largely out of opposition to Eamon de Valera and the Fianna Fail party and not

⁶³ Fearghal McGarry, Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 31.

from fascist political beliefs.⁶⁴ Those Blueshirts who traveled from Ireland to fight with O'Duffy have been described as Fascists, however this term dismisses the complexity of their motivation and the principled nature of their choice to volunteer.

The remainder of the recruits were motivated largely by a Catholic, anti-communist fervor, religious conviction, and a sense of adventure.⁶⁵ At the time of O'Duffy's letter a fortuitous series of events occurred which dramatically helped recruitment. Two movies entitled *The Crusades* and *The Castles of Spain* began screening, a book describing the exploits of the "Wild Geese" (sixteenth-century Irish mercenaries who fought in Spain) gained popularity, and newsreels showing nun's desecrated corpses aroused outrage across the country. These images and stories captivated the imaginations of many young men and influenced their decisions to enlist.⁶⁶ Finally, the priesthood acted as unofficial recruiting sergeants, exhorting young men to do their Christian duty and protect the faith from atheistic communism. Their influence on impetuous young farmers probably accounts for the overrepresentation of rural Irish in the Brigade.

The existence of an international volunteer contingent in Franco's army presented the Nationalists with an obvious propaganda opportunity. Displaying courageous young Catholics risking death to defend their faith and political beliefs might have played well in the international press. The Irish Brigade, however, never gained the notoriety enjoyed by the Republican International Brigades and coverage

⁶⁴ An excellent examination of this question can be found in Mike Cronin's essay "The Blueshirt Movement, 1932-5: Ireland's Fascists?" *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30:2 (April, 1995): 311-322.

⁶⁵ An interesting personality among these recruits is Irish poet Roy Campbell. His literary importance cannot be ignored though scholars struggle to separate it from his reactionary political views. An excellent analysis of his life, work, and experiences in Spain can be found in "Roy Campbell: Outsider on the Right," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2:2 (April, 1967): 133 -147 by Bernard Bergonzi.

⁶⁶ Stradling, 30.

of their actions was quite sparse. This omission may have resulted from the fact that O'Duffy's troops were not involved in any decisive engagements but it more likely stems from the Nationalist's wish not to draw any more attention to their other 'volunteers' from Italy and Germany. Following the war the Irish Brigade returned home without fanfare and was rapidly dismissed from public memory.

The forces which rallied to the pro-Nationalist standard during the Spanish Civil War did not do so out of any particular appreciation for Franco's policies. Instead they saw themselves largely as anti-Republicans and looked to the Nationalists as allies only so far as they served in the struggle against the "Communist" Republican forces or to protect the Catholic Church. International public opinion supported Franco in his main foreign policy goal- the blockade of the Madrid government- but with the disappearance of his enemy, the *Caudillo* found himself totally alone in the world. Only the arrival of a new Communist threat in the Cold War saved him, and Spain, from total irrelevance in the decades that followed.

The Case for Madrid

The success of Manuel Azaña's Leftist coalition in the 1936 elections surprised the many international political observers who had expected a mild victory for the right. In a well-reasoned and researched electoral analysis, a correspondent for *The Economist* predicted that Calvo Sotello's rightist coalition would probably win a twenty-five seat majority in the approximately 500 seat Cortes.¹ The actual returns, however, gave 278 seats to the Left coalition, fifty-odd seats to the center, and 138 to the Right despite a margin of only five percent in the popular vote.² While these results outraged Sotello's supporters, they electrified Leftists around the globe. Spain had followed France to become the world's second nation governed by the Popular Front.

When the military rising began, prematurely due to Sotello's assassination, the shaky Popular Coalition faced and failed a severe test. The cabinet proved indecisive and President Azaña was forced to appoint three premiers within twenty-four hours before José Giral, a chemist and virtual political unknown, formed a stable cabinet and distributed weapons to the workers. That distribution reflected the government's inability to maintain order and placed power in the hands of the militant CNT (Anarchist) and UGT (Socialist) trade unions. The workers managed to overwhelm

¹ "Spain: Sunday's General Elections," *The Economist*, 15 February 1936. The writer based his electoral prediction largely on the fact that, "money talks in some lands; it shouts in Spain." In addition to being dead-wrong in his prediction, the correspondent ironically continued that, "the prospect of grave civil conflict has so far been mitigated".

² Robert A. Rosenstone, *Crusade of the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War* (Pegasus Press: NY 1969) 79.

the rebellion in Madrid, Barcelona, Albacete, and Valencia and their government-issued weapons granted them effective control over both the streets and local authorities. In the areas where the CNT held a majority, primarily Barcelona, this led to the sort of proletarian revolution about which Leftist utopians dream. Money was abolished, workers seized their factories, the words ‘señor’ and ‘usted’ disappeared, and a perfectly egalitarian society seemed at hand.³ However, the “workers’ patrols” and property seizures which followed these reforms terrified middle and upper-class Spaniards. As it would have been impossible for them to create any sort of moderate or right-wing political party given the radical unions which controlled the streets, tens of thousands of the *petite bourgeoisie* instead chose to join the relatively organized and predictable Communist Party which loudly called for the retention of the Republic.

The Spanish Communist Party (PSUC) played an almost insignificant role in the February elections and boasted only 40,000 members by mid-summer of 1936.⁴ Immediately following the rising, however, the party’s rolls more than quadrupled in size. While these converts were not ideologically committed Communists, their membership and money put significant weight behind the voice of the leadership.

³ For discussions of this phenomenon see Homage to Catalonia by George Orwell (Harvest/HBJ: NY 1952), Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War 1936-1939 by Ronald Fraser (Penguin Books: London 1979), and The Grand Camouflage: The Spanish Civil War and Revolution 1936-39 (Praeger: NY 1961) by Burnett Bolloten. Fraser’s text is a magnificent oral history which unfortunately lacks comprehensive historical analysis but remains a must-read on the topic. It should be noted that Bolloten’s text falls somewhat outside the widely accepted interpretation of the early revolution by shrilly condemning the Communists to the exclusion of almost all other arguments.

⁴ Burnett Bolloten, The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill 1991) 83.

That influence, combined with the fact that the PSUC was the only political organization with a positive program, ensured the Communists' rise to power.⁵

The CNT and UGT were organized solely as opposition parties.⁶ The parties, which were trade unions, had evolved under the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera during the 1920s and early 30. Deprived of any voice in government they had developed into parties of pure protest, unconstrained by the need to implement or elaborate their ideas. While they demanded land redistribution, collectivization of factories, and the suppression of the Church, the CNT and UGT had formulated no actual plans for these policies and believed somewhat naively that 'revolution' alone would solve all their socio-economic problems. In Catalonia, a region dominated by the CNT, the party actually refused to join the government due to the anarchist belief that the issuance of orders was in itself demeaning. Likewise in Madrid, the revolutionary parties were unable to formulate a program of government and abdicated this role to the Communists and moderate Socialists. Most of the radicals believed that real power resided in the streets rather than in the government and were therefore happy to concede ministerial posts to the PSUC. The largely illiterate and uneducated anarchists failed to understand the importance of bureaucracy and threw that power away in disgust.

As the war continued, the organizational strength of the PSUC coupled with the backing of the Soviet Union made the Communists indispensable to the Republic's war effort. The Party controlled the new-model "People's Army", the

⁵ Michael Alpert's A New International History of the Spanish Civil War (St. Martin's Press: NY 1994) and Blood of Spain offer excellent descriptions of the balance of political power, especially in Catalonia, during this period.

⁶ For explanation of the CNT and UGT political outlooks see Ronald Fraser, Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War 1936-1939 (Penguin Books: NY 1979).

police, the economy, and foreign policy. In its Popular Front spirit, however, the PSUC continued to allow non-Communists to hold titular positions and constantly stressed a non-revolutionary vision of the Republic.

Much as the PSUC and Comintern steered the actual war effort, the Communist parties abroad became involved behind the scenes in almost all aspects of the pro-Republican movement. According to historian Tom Buchanan, “the Communist Party made the Spanish Civil War uniquely its own... the war united the Communists and convinced them not only that their strategy was correct, but that their cause was just.”⁷ The influence of Communists, generally in an unofficial capacity, was felt in virtually every pro-Republican campaign. The Trojan-horse policies of the party during the ‘3rd Period’ had not been forgotten and there was a common fear within the non-Communist left that Bolshevik subversion remained a continuing risk. At the height of the Popular Front, especially in regards to Spain, this fear was groundless.⁸ It was true, however, that the pro-Republican movement was ‘riddled with Reds’. In virtually all of the political camps which provided important material support for the Republic, the Communist influence was powerful if not overriding.

The International Brigades are unquestionably the most famous and important example of pro-Republican support. Between 35,000 and 45,000 men from 53 countries enlisted in these units, though probably no more than 10,000 were active at

⁷ Tom Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War (Cambridge University Press: NY 1997) 69.

⁸ It was, in fact, the Communist party which, “strove to keep the revolution within strict bounds.” A New International History, 73. This point is uncontested by scholars and falls outside the scope of this paper. Any work written after the Second World War will concur but for particulars see Orwell, Preston, or Bolloten.

any one point.⁹ Some historians, such as Dante Puzzo, argue that the Brigades included “some mere adventures and many Communists” but that, “the greatest number appear to have been young men of liberal sentiments”.¹⁰ In fact, the vast majority of members were committed Communists and those who were not joined the party nominally as a pre-requisite to enlistment. Robert Rosenstone writes that:

Communist publications of the period liked to give the impression that there were hordes of regular Republicans and Democrats in the ranks, but this seems little more than wishful thinking. For the vast majority of the troops were political radicals, formally enrolled in or sympathizers with America’s most left-wing political parties.¹¹

Such a view is not isolated or, indeed, even controversial. When George Orwell considered transferring to the International Brigades from his anarchist militia, the author sought out a recommendation from Communist acquaintances as a matter of course.¹² Buchanan describes the British International Brigade as the only twentieth-century instance in which an English political party fielded an army.¹³ In the United States, Britain, and Ireland, volunteers usually registered to join the Brigades at the actual party offices.¹⁴ Why then did the Communist party choose to downplay its control of an apparently popular organization which it so successfully managed?

The crucial factor lies in the nature of the Popular Front. The Communist party, having decided on a course of collective security, needed to create a less Bolshevik image and was therefore looking to “localize” its organizations. The

⁹ Virtually every book on the war includes some estimate of the total number with 42,000 being the most popular. Oddly, every account I have read specifies exactly 53 countries, a consistency which actually tends to undermine belief. Such an agreed upon number indicates that individual authors did not make their own count and simply accepted a number published by either the Republican government or the Brigades themselves, two notoriously unreliable sources.

¹⁰ Dante A. Puzzo Spain and the Great Powers: 1936-1941 (Columbia University Press: NY 1962) 140.

¹¹ Crusade, 112.

¹² Homage to Catalonia, 145.

¹³ Britain and the Spanish Civil War, 121.

¹⁴ Hank Rubin Spain’s Cause Was Mine (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale, IL 1997) 18.

intention was to make the American party more American, the British party more British. Party organizers sought to achieve this goal by appropriating the history and symbols of their respective cultures. In one instance, the Young Communists' League of New York celebrated the 162nd anniversary of Paul Revere's ride, which the Daughters of the American Revolution somehow overlooked, by sending a costumed horseman down Broadway with a sign reading, "The DAR Forgets but the YCL Remembers".¹⁵ Presumably, any organization more in touch with the minutiae of American history than the DAR could not possibly threaten that heritage.

In Britain, the Party sought to link the Brigades not with the Comintern but with the "grand tradition" of enlightened British interventionism. Leaflets compared the volunteers in Spain with the reputed heroics of Lord Byron in Greece and with the Englishmen who fought alongside Garibaldi's Redshirts.¹⁶ Similarly, Irish recruits were reminded of Wolfe Tone's alliance with French Revolutionaries during the 1790s, the involvement of Irish insurrectionists in the Paris uprising of 1851, and O'Donovan Rossa's support of the Poles in 1863.¹⁷ One Communist writer went so far as to excuse Spanish church burnings (in which he had participated) by describing them as a physical break with the past similar to Protestant "purifications" during the Reformation.¹⁸ It may stretch credulity too far to equate the actions of atheistic Anarchists with those of Oliver Cromwell, but the author's point cannot be missed. Under the Popular Front program, the Communist Party was to redefine itself as an

¹⁵ Irving Howe and Lewis Coser The American Communist Party: A Critical History (Praeger: NY 1957) 341.

¹⁶ Britain and the Spanish Civil War, 121.

¹⁷ Fearghal McGarry Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War (Cork University Press: Cork 1999) 51. While I am unsure of the 1851 uprising to which McGarry refers, it seems probable that it is the coup d'état of Louis Napoleon, the future Emperor Napoleon III.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

organic part of every nation in which it operated. Were the Party to publicly recruit volunteers in violation of government policy and overtly maintain an armed force, its political efforts towards a coalition of the left would be damaged.

While the organization of the Brigades may have been a rather cynical attempt by the Soviet Union to present a concrete example of idealistic anti-fascism, the recruits themselves were often motivated as much by personal as by party reasons. Indeed, the Party often discouraged its most committed members from traveling to Spain as it could ill afford to thin the ranks of its more effective operatives. The Party preferred to send non-members whenever possible, though always under strict Communist control, and volunteers were most likely to be accepted if they were demonstrably committed to leftist ideals (union organizing experience, run-ins with strike-breaking police, membership in radical organizations) and had military experience or specific skills.

The basic motivation for these volunteers was almost invariably an intense hatred of Fascism.¹⁹ In his frequently quoted explanation for volunteering Orwell writes:

When the fighting started on 18 July it is probable that every anti-Fascist in Europe felt a thrill of hope. For here at last, apparently, was democracy standing up to Fascism. For years past the so-called democracies had been surrendering to Fascism at every step.... It seemed- possibly it was- the turning of the tide.²⁰

The far-left's implacable hatred of Hitler and Mussolini was, at the time, rather out of step with public opinion which still considered it possible to negotiate with the

¹⁹ The Premature Anti-Fascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War 1936-39 (Praeger: NY 1986) by John Gerassi and "The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion," *The Journal of American History* 54:2 (September 1967): 327-338 by Robert a Rosenstone are two excellent sources for information on the anti-Fascist motivation of volunteers.

²⁰ Homage to Catalonia, 48.

dictators. The *brigadistas* therefore saw themselves as rather visionary, a view with which history has largely agreed.

Describing the volunteers as anti-Fascist really implies very little as such a broad category encompasses men from Martin Dies to Josef Stalin.²¹ The men who enlisted did so for more specific reasons. Sailors, students, and miners were the three groups most likely to enlist in the Brigades because these were the professions which, at the time, were generally the most radicalized.²² The British miners' unions in particular were heavily influenced by the Communist party while sailors tended quite frequently to be among the foremost anti-Fascists.²³ Men who had participated in violent labor demonstrations were also over-represented in the Brigades. Several American members had been injured by the National Guard during a San Francisco waterfront strike while others had been wounded when the Guard and police fired on Teamsters in Minneapolis. Rosenstone writes that, for these men, "the news of the workers of Spain being armed by the government must have brought a thrill of envy."²⁴

Many of the Irish volunteers were also members of the IRA despite an official ban on their enlistment. Almost twenty percent of the Irish contingent was affiliated with the IRA and the commander, Frank Ryan, observed that enlistment could have been greatly increased without the restriction.²⁵ Perhaps this inherent conflict within the "Connolly Column" explains the unit's inability to achieve unit cohesion or

²¹ A point brought home by Rosenstone in *Crusade*, 113.

²² The figures for enlistment by profession come from "The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion" 331 while the rationale about radicalization can be found in Chapter IV of *Crusade* and Chapters 2 and 3 of *Premature Anti-Fascists*.

²³ *Premature Anti-Fascists* contains several very entertaining anecdotes regarding the anti-Fascist activities of radical sailors, 56-62.

²⁴ *Crusade*, 30.

²⁵ *Irish Politics*, 59.

operate independently. Indeed, the disruption became so serious that the Irish volunteers were eventually rolled into the American Battalion, popularly known as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (ALB), after a disastrous attempt to attach them to the British command.

Minorities enrolled in the Lincoln Brigade though generally not in demographic proportion. Jews were over-represented in the Brigades, making up approximately 30%, for a variety of reasons.²⁶ New York City is home to a large Jewish population and the state of New York accounted for more than four times as many recruits as California, the second largest recruiter.²⁷ In the United States the YCL was seen as fighting Anti-Semitism, especially in New York. Few of the recruits actively practiced their religion though several claimed that Zionism was the philosophy which had originally radicalized them. Additionally, many of the Brigadiers saw the struggle in Spain as one for an egalitarian society in which race and religion would be ignored in favor of class solidarity.

While they made up only a small percentage of the ALB, it is interesting to note that over fifty of its members were black. The Communist Party had, during the Depression, made a serious effort to mobilize blacks in the United States. With the League of Nation's failure to support Abyssinia against Mussolini, the Communist party found a means of reaching out to black activists. In 1937 the Party used the slogan, "Ethiopia's fate is at stake on the battlefields of Spain" to energize

²⁶ *Crusade*, 110.

²⁷ "Men of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade," 336.

“internationally-minded” blacks in Harlem.²⁸ In *The Daily Worker* one writer editorialized that:

The Negro people, earnestly desiring the defeat of Italian Fascism in Ethiopia, can best help their magnificently heroic brothers in the African country by throwing all their support to the Spanish people... A defeat for Mussolini in Spain will rebound immediately to the great advantage of the Ethiopian people.²⁹

The campaign appears to have worked as several nurses and doctors volunteered for the ALB along with the fighting men and, according to one historian, “support for Spain had assumed an almost fashionable air, becoming a symbol of sophistication and political awareness among Harlem’s intelligentsia.”³⁰

While the activity of the Communist Party in Harlem was certainly positive from the perspective of race relations, some writers have argued that the Republican effort as a whole often less enlightened.³¹ The prominent Spanish Civil War historian Tom Buchanan suggests that in Britain and the United States, outside of the Northeast, some Republican supporters chose to emphasize the role of Franco’s Moorish troops in the Civil War. Raising the specter of black soldiers marauding through white Spain would certainly have undermined support for the Nationalists in many constituencies. Such reports would also have reminded the public that the soldiers carrying out Franco’s “Catholic Crusade” were actually African Muslims. While the New York edition of *The Daily Worker* strongly supported blacks in Harlem and expressed outrage over lynching and Jim Crow laws, it is entirely

²⁸ Mark Naison Communists in Harlem During the Depression (University of Illinois Press: Urbana 1983) 196.

²⁹ “Ethiopia’s Heroic Fight- Closely Bound to Spain’s,” *Daily Worker*, 23 February 1937, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 197

³¹ Britain and the Spanish Civil War, 28.

possible that other supporters of the Republic chose the low road in seeking support for Madrid.

The American Socialist Party was the only non-Communist organization which attempted to field an independent body of troops in Spain. Displaying considerably less subtlety than their Communist rivals, the Socialists launched a campaign to equip a 500 man “Eugene V. Debs Column” by notifying the *New York Times* and placing advertisements in leftist papers such as *The Nation* and *The New Republic*.³² It was claimed that the unit was already “over-subscribed by many hundreds,” and that a drive for \$50,000 to underwrite transportation was well underway. Other American leftists quickly condemned the proposed column saying that it would “open a breach [in the veneer of neutrality] through which American reactionaries can pour a flood of money, munitions, and recruits to General Franco’s aid.”³³ When the FBI and US attorney’s office announced that they were to begin an investigation of the column and the Socialist party in general, the proposal was allowed to fade from public notice.³⁴

The foreign press first reported on the International Brigades in connection with the defense of Madrid. The reports generally described a jaunty column of idealists marching through the boarded up streets of Madrid, singing the *International*, and arriving at the outer gates of the city just in time to single-handedly slam them shut on the advancing Nationalists. While over a third of the Internationals involved in that first confrontation were killed, Spanish soldiers, officials, and

³² “Socialists Here Would Aid Spain,” *The New York Times*, 24 December 1936, 8 and “The Shape of Things,” *The Nation*, 30 January 1937, 1.

³³ “Socialist Move Deplored,” *The New York Times*, 11 January 1937, 2.

³⁴ “Recruiting Report Sifted,” *The New York Times*, 17 January 1937, 32.

journalists whose countrymen had shouldered much of the fighting naturally found such an interpretation frustrating. In the interest of promoting further support however, such objections were generally muted and the foreign press was encouraged to report on the Brigades.³⁵

The International Brigades, by keeping the public's attention focused on the trenches around Madrid, proved highly effective propaganda instruments. Citizens of the United States and Britain who had not committed to either side read about their countrymen fighting and dying in Spain and must have been influenced by the romanticism of the struggle. By appearing to stand up for the underdog the International Brigades appealed, in a way, to the Anglo-Saxon sense of sportsmanship and helped to make the pro-Republican case much more effective.

In New York, *The Daily Worker* tended to focus on the fact that it was *Americans* who were fighting in Spain, not Communists, leftists, or comrades. Headlines such as "24 Yanks Captured by Spanish Fascists," "Yanks in the Thick of It in Spain," and "Yankee Squadron Bombs Fascist Lines" served to indicate that the members of the Lincoln Brigade were real, patriotic Americans.³⁶ Similar coverage of British *brigadistas* was reported in the London edition of *The Daily Worker*. When discussing the general conduct of the war, the Communist press made efforts to minimize its domination of the Republican military and promote the concept of a united front. Headlines described Spanish Communists "leading" and "spearheading"

³⁵ For more detailed information see "The Defense of Madrid: Mysterious Generals, Red Front Fighters, and the International Brigades," *Military Affairs* 43:4 (December 1979): 178-85 by R. Dan Richardson as well as *A New International History, Franco* (Basic Books: NY 1994), and *The Grand Camouflage*.

³⁶ Headlines from 16 October 1937 (pages 1 and 6) and 22 December 1936 editions of *The Daily Worker*(NY)

Republican efforts but always trumpeted the militias and Socialists fighting alongside them. *Daily Worker* articles mentioned the “effectiveness of labor unity [in the] miracle of Spain’s fight on Fascism,”³⁷ and advised that “unity of action is the burning need of the hour. Socialist and Communist effort for Spain can move mountains.”³⁸

Many groups which could or would not offer military support to the Republic still provided material aid to the cause. First among these was the British labor movement. Following its disastrous 1926 general strike, the leadership of the Labour party was disinclined to confront government policy in any radical way.³⁹ Additionally, the Labour party feared losing the support of Catholic workers who sympathized with Franco and therefore chose not to discuss the war publicly. The refusal of the leadership to advocate “extra-parliamentary action”, i.e. strikes and protests, led to frustration in the lower tiers of the hierarchy and among some of the workers themselves. These feelings were particularly pronounced in the miners’ union (MFGB), in which there was then a strong Communist presence, and the Aircraft Shop Stewards National Council (ASSNC) which was likewise subject to a, “strong Communist influence.”⁴⁰ These two unions agitated within their umbrella organization, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), for action to be taken in regards to the situation in Spain while working independently to raise funds for the cause.

³⁷ “Labor Unity is Key to Spanish Victory,” *The Daily Worker*, 6 February 1937, 1.

³⁸ “United Front Needed,” *The Daily Worker*, 31 October 1936, 6.

³⁹ For analysis of this situation see Britain and the Spanish Civil War chapter 3 and the official history of the Miners’ Federation, R. Page Arnot The Miners in Crisis and War (George, Allen, & Unwin: London 1961).

⁴⁰ Tom Buchanan, “The Politics of Internationalism: The Amalgamated Engineering Union and the Spanish Civil War,” *British Society for the Study of Labour History* 53:3 (Winter 1988): 48.

The MFGB put forward numerous propositions at every TUC meeting calling for an end to the embargo, League of Nations action to end the war, measures to “suppress piracy in the Mediterranean,” and the withdrawal of Italian and German troops.⁴¹ The miners also declared their solidarity with the people of the Republic, particularly their fellow miners in the Asturias region, and called the TUC’s attention to the “class war on the soil of Spain.”⁴²

The union took more practical measures to support the Republic by sending a commission to report on the needs of refugees and Spanish miners. Upon that commission’s return, and a consultation with the Miners’ International, the union donated £70,000 to the Spanish Workers’ Fund⁴³ and agreed on a levy of 2s. 6d. per member to aid the Spanish people⁴⁴. It should be noted that such a levy was more than ten times that which was generally organized in support of fellow British workers during a strike. The MFGB also undertook a rather creative “Milk for Spain Fund” which sold tokens through the union’s Co-Operative shops, raising significant funds for food assistance.⁴⁵ As Nationalist forces over-ran the Basque region, home to many Spanish miners, the MFGB volunteered to support some of the nearly 4,000 children shipped to Britain⁴⁶ as well as providing bond for refugee miners who were awaiting visas and asylum hearings in Britain.⁴⁷

The engineering shop stewards were also involved in agitation within the TUC and made demands similar to those of the miners. The mechanics organized the

⁴¹ The Miners, 257 and 260.

⁴² Ibid., 258.

⁴³ Britain and the Spanish Civil War, 100.

⁴⁴ The Miners, 267.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 261.

⁴⁶ This shipment of children inspired the abortive attempt to move refugees to the United States which was discussed in Chapter 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 274.

Voluntary Industrial Assistance movement which refurbished vehicles, equipment, and machines which were then sent on to the Republic free of charge.⁴⁸ In addition to refitting vehicles, the aircraft workers also purchased nine ‘lorries’, packed them with food and medical supplies, and shipped them to Barcelona despite the protestations of the union executive. Most visibly, the ASSNC organized an unofficial demonstration in front of Parliament in the closing weeks of the war.⁴⁹ The demonstration, though involving only 1,200 aeronautical workers, garnered widespread attention because the production of aircraft was vital to the nation’s re-armament program. Had the workers maintained their efforts, the government would have faced tremendous political pressures due to the necessity of catching up to Hitler’s Luftwaffe. As it happened, the Spanish Civil War ended shortly after the first demonstration, mooting the disagreement.

Aside from the aircraft workers’ strike, which was not sanctioned by the local union representatives, supporters of the Republic in the British labor movement faced serious difficulty in making their views known to the general public. The leadership, which controlled the unions’ relationship with the press and government, refused to follow the line demanded by many workers whose voices were therefore muted. Though the MFGB and ASSNC were motivated internally, they could not make their views known more widely and were therefore relatively unimportant in the formation of public opinion.

⁴⁸ “The Politics of Internationalism,” 48.

⁴⁹ Buchanan, “Politics of Internationalism,” 52.

In the United States, organized labor remained relatively quiet on the question of the Spanish Civil War. As in Britain, concern about the loss of Catholic members quieted the leadership. Instead of war coverage, discussions of the New Deal and Social Security tended to cover the pages of labor publications.⁵⁰ Members of America's non-Communist left, (Progressives, for want of a better term), however, were quite vocal in their support of the Republican government for a number of reasons, particularly because of class considerations, a sense of fairness, and fervent anti-Fascism.

In the 1920s and 30s the only recognized parties to the left of the Democrats were the Communists and the Socialists. The Communist Party's political line has already been examined in regards to the International Brigades and, as their ineptitude in establishing the "Debs Column" indicates, the Socialist Party was far from effective at the time. Indeed, in the 1930s the Socialists were, according to most historians, a political non-entity.⁵¹ Progressive radicalism was not extinguished however, it merely lacked a party. In the United States several voices spoke to this political wilderness, chief among which were *The New Republic* and *The Nation*. Claiming to view the news, "through the cold, hard eye of the militant Progressive,"⁵² *The Nation* can be taken, without too much license, as a representative publication. *The Nation* maintained several correspondents in Republican Spain, including past

⁵⁰ The AFL's weekly newsletter, *The American Federationist*, hardly mentioned the conflict between 1936 and 1939. Indeed, articles about international affairs in general were very rare. Those which did appear focused entirely on issues of trade and labor practices.

⁵¹ Before even beginning his text, Frank A. Warren, author of *An Alternative Vision: The Socialist Party in the 1930's* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1974) apologizes in the acknowledgements that he is writing a study of, "a lost cause."

⁵² Advertisement for *The Nation*, 10 April 1937, 390.

Socialist and future Princeton historian Louis Fischer, and accepted contributions from leftist authors as diverse as Leon Trotsky, Thomas Mann, and Norman Thomas.

In its first editorial about the Spanish Civil War, *The Nation* offers some insight into non-Communists' major reasons for its support of the government, "this revolutionary outburst [the military rising] comes not from communists or other left-wing radicals, or from the land-hungry peasants, or the organized workers, but from the military men sworn to uphold the existing government."⁵³ American Progressives were angered by the nearly feudal social system in Spain with its massive class distinctions between the "land-hungry peasants", "organized workers", and the privileged military caste which has turned on them. The author also betrays his anger at the inequality of the struggle between the betrayed workers and the trained soldiers. Various writers return to the same point by describing the tremendous technological advantages enjoyed by Nationalist pilots and troops who have access to German and Italian weapons⁵⁴ and the *de facto* invasion of Spain by Italian and German troops.⁵⁵ As with Orwell, an outraged sense of fair-play made many non-Communist liberals sympathize with the Republic.

The question of class returns when an editorialist argues that, "If there is one thing more striking than any other about this extraordinary war, it is the lack of individual heroes. The hero is the mass, the mass that mobilizes itself, arms itself, feeds itself, and hurls itself against the insurgents in a great, irresistible wave."⁵⁶ American Progressives clearly found themselves among those who, "must support the

⁵³ Oswald Garrison Villard, "Issues and Men," *The Nation*, 1 August 1936, 130.

⁵⁴ "The Shape of Things," *The Nation*, 23 January 1937, 88.

⁵⁵ Norman Thomas, "Spain: A Socialist View," *The Nation*, 19 June 1937, 700.

⁵⁶ "Drunken Dictators," *The Nation*, 8 August 1936, 144.

gallant resistance of the workers” in a conflict which, “matters profoundly, not only for Spain but for mankind.”⁵⁷ While not crying out for revolution, in fact *The Nation* in particular spoke out against revolution in the midst of war, the Progressives’ solidarity with the laboring classes clearly led to sympathy with the Republic.

Combined with an intense anti-Fascism, which this essay will avoid belaboring, the sense of fair-play and class-consciousness made American Progressives highly visible supporters of the government in Madrid. They worked to shift public opinion by constantly reminding the reader that it was the Nationalists who began the war and who therefore deserve the public’s opprobrium.⁵⁸ In addition to assigning war-guilt, the non-Communist press resorted to the same sorts of atrocity stories so frequently found in the Catholic Press with headlines such as “Fascist Terror in Majorca”, “Under Fire in Madrid”, and “General Franco’s Deathlist”.⁵⁹

Such articles were accompanied by the inevitable apologies for Republican atrocities. Following the August church burnings in Catalonia a correspondent remarks that, “No one denies that excesses occurred in the first flush of victory, but they were speedily terminated” and that anyway, “civil war naturally carries a certain danger with it.”⁶⁰ Two weeks later the same correspondent notes that, “All churches except the cathedral had been destroyed, and their ruins in some instances were still smoldering.”⁶¹ While such a self-contradicting report displays journalistic integrity,

⁵⁷ Norman Thomas, “The Pacifist’s Dilemma,” *The Nation*, 16 January, 1937, 66.

⁵⁸ “Issues and Men” provides only a single example of a type too widespread to catalogue.

⁵⁹ Found respectively in *The Nation* issues from 5 December 1936, 12 December 1936, and 15 May 1937.

⁶⁰ Maxwell S. Stewart, “Catalonia in Revolution,” *The Nation*, 15 August 1936, 173.

⁶¹ Maxwell S. Stewart, “Inside Spain,” *The Nation*, 29 August 1936, 234.

the next lines go on to discount the importance of the damage and to insist such incidents were highly localized.

More interestingly perhaps, writers for *The Nation* consistently worked to link events in Spain to the United States and to American history. An editorial discussing whether to award belligerent rights to the Nationalist forces reminds the reader about the *Alabama* incident of the American Civil War in which the South attempted to claim the right to purchase, arm, and refit blockade runners in British ports.⁶² To familiarize the readers with the situation faced by Barcelona and Valencia following the establishment of Italian forces on Majorca, an author compares it to the Royal navy seizing Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard during the American Civil War and, "supposing aviation to have been then developed", using the two islands to bomb New York and Boston.⁶³ The analogy serves relatively well and drives home the outrage felt by Republicans and their American sympathizers following German and Italian interventions. More importantly it translates and makes concrete for the American mind, which understandably knows little of Spanish geography, the importance of seemingly minor shifts in the fortunes of war in Iberia.

The Nation did rather less well in analyzing the effects of those changes. Throughout the conflict journalists in Spain and their editors in New York proved incapable of admitting to their readers that the war was being lost. When considering the probable loss of Madrid in 1936, which surely would have been a tremendous blow to the Republican cause, Louis Fischer notes that, "damaging though it would be, [the loss] might indeed release that burst of energy and determination which the

⁶² "Civil War and Intervention," *The Nation*, 29 August 1936, 228.

⁶³ Norman Thomas, "Spain: A Socialist View," *The Nation*, 19 June 1937, 700.

Spanish revolution has thus far lacked.”⁶⁴ The most breathtaking denial of reality by *The Nation*’s correspondents can surely be found in a dispatch describing the fall of the Basque region which opines that, “the fall of Bilbao has been skillfully use by the Negrin government to stimulate enthusiasm at the front and the rear. This is less strange than would at first appear...[given] an unbroken chain of Loyalist defeats.”⁶⁵

Beyond such wild optimism and the understandable biases already discussed, only one serious complaint can be lodged against the Progressive coverage of the war. Aside from Norman Thomas, sometime correspondent for *The Nation* and head of the essentially defunct Socialist Party, the major organs and personalities of the American leftist press refused to cover the Stalinist purges then occurring in Spain.⁶⁶ *The New Republic* and *The Nation* remained perfectly silent on the topic as an editorial decision. Their boards, as well as most other leftists, felt that discussion of such tragedies would only weaken support for the overriding objective of defeating Franco and the Nationalists. The same logic prevented many from speaking up on the issue. Sam Baron, treasurer of the Socialist party and some-time correspondent in Spain, provided a lonely exception by, over the condemnation of his colleagues, testifying to the hated Dies Commission about the Stalinist repression.

American Progressives offered more than mere moral support; they were also active in providing material assistance to the Republic. In 1937 *The Nation* published an appeal for donations to furnish a “food ship” for Spain. Following the initial announcement in February of 1937, readers supplied over one quarter million pounds

⁶⁴ Louis Fischer, “On Madrid’s Front Line,” *The Nation*, 24 October 1936, 469. One finds it difficult to imagine what popular energies and determination might be lacking from a struggle in which unarmed laborers were known to rush Nationalist machine guns during street fighting.

⁶⁵ Louis Fischer, “Loyalist Spain Gathers Its Strength,” *The Nation*, 3 July 1937, 7.

⁶⁶ An Alternative View, 58.

of flour, 75,000 tins of sardines, 88,000 cans of evaporated milk, many tons of corned beef and beans, and \$27,000 to pay for transport.⁶⁷ At a cost of three cents on the dollar these supplies were sent to Spain where they joined contributions from humanitarians around the globe including the flour shipments discussed in the previous chapter.

In addition to food, which was sent frequently from Britain in similar “food ships”, humanitarians in America, England, and Scotland sent significant medical support to the Republic. The Communist party established several hospitals behind the front lines including two intended solely for the International Brigades. Americans contributed large sums of money, nearly one million dollars, to the Medical Bureau/North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.⁶⁸ Spanish Medical Aid, a British organization, also sent doctors, nurses, and ambulances to the Republic. While this organization was heavily influenced by Communist members, it retained enough independent initiative to be considered more than a front organization for the party.⁶⁹

While most support for the Republic originated on the left side of the political spectrum, one important lobby was rooted firmly on the right. During the Great Depression many Britons came to appreciate the importance, and vulnerability, of the British Empire more than ever before. With foreign trade down, high unemployment, and political instability in Europe, the existence of the Empire as a captive market,

⁶⁷ “Food for Spain,” *The Nation*, 1 May 1937, 497.

⁶⁸ State Department report printed in *The New York Times* 22 December 1938, 18.

⁶⁹ Britain and the Spanish Civil War, 95-98.

socio-economic release valve, and totem of national pride became increasingly important to many British Conservatives.

It would be expected that British business interests and the Foreign Service would look quite favorably on Franco and his avowedly capitalist supporters at the outbreak of the conflict, especially given reports of Anarchist and Communist revolutions occurring along Spain's Mediterranean coast. Italian intervention, however, changed the diplomatic calculus significantly. A pro-Empire faction of British conservatives began to consider the strategic implications of a Nationalist victory and tentatively threw their weight behind the Republican government.

The maintenance of communications with Egypt, Suez, South Africa, and India was the factor of prime concern to the pro-Empire faction. In Parliament the Duchess of Atholl rose to note that, "if General Franco should gain the victory in Spain he would owe it very largely to the assistance he had from Germany and Italy, and... may find himself obliged to transfer to either of those countries some of the outlying possession of Spain, such as the Balearic Islands, or the Canaries."⁷⁰ Such a situation would place in serious jeopardy not only Britain's sea lanes around Africa and through the Mediterranean, but also its relationship with France. The French plan for war with Germany, a possibility which grew more likely with every month, included the shipment of colonial troops from North Africa, across the Mediterranean to Europe. Were Italy or Germany to possess bases straddling this route, such a transfer would be impossible and France would be seriously deterred from war with either nation and might very well leave Britain alone against the Continent.

⁷⁰ Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 25 March 1937, 3140.

Beyond concern about the colonies themselves, the same faction was concerned about the war's effects on old-fashioned balance of power calculations. As an article in *The Economist* during the early weeks of the conflict warned its readers, "this country... may have to reckon with a Spain which forms a third military dictatorship on the third frontier of France and the second military dictatorship in the Mediterranean."⁷¹ Continuing the argument some months later a writer noted that, "France's strategic position in Europe will become damaged, perhaps beyond all repair, if Germany or Italy, or a combination of both, becomes established in Spain."⁷² Simultaneously the pro-Imperialists saw, "yet another opportunity for British, French, American, and other democratic statesmen to resume the international leadership that is fast slipping from their hands."⁷³ Not without reason, therefore, a significant body of the British establishment found itself promoting the interests of "red" Spain to the British public and government.

The pro-Imperialists generally deployed rather subtle arguments. They stood back from the nasty details of the conflict and sought to observe the Civil War from a relatively distant perspective. Downplaying atrocity accusations from both sides with an almost stereotypical British coolness one correspondent reports that:

It is accepted as a commonplace that [Nationalist airmen] bombarded at sight Red Cross hospitals and trains, so the Red Cross sign is no longer displayed on the Government lines.

On the other hand quite irresponsible and poisonous stories are being sent out about "red" atrocities... [a less objective correspondent] reported that 100 persons had been thrown from windows at Malaga... In a panic, the Government supporters threw several persons- certainly not more than ten-

⁷¹ "The Spanish Cauldron," *The Economist*, 8 August 1936, 256.

⁷² "Mr. Eden Hopes On," *The Economist*, 23 January 1937, 158.

⁷³ "British Statesmen and Democracy," *The Economist*, 3 October, 8.

out of windows... there are plenty of business and professional men at Malaga carrying on as usual.⁷⁴ Following the bombing of Guernica this aloof attitude was momentarily dropped but the pro-Imperial faction refused to become emotionally involved in the Spanish Civil War. Instead they repeatedly questioned the security of Gibraltar and cited reports of German or Italian gun emplacement being constructed in Morocco.⁷⁵ While such arguments may have lacked the emotional power of articles written in *The Nation*, *The Daily Worker*, or *The Pilot*, their measured and rational approach was quite effective in moving important segments of British public opinion towards the Republic.

Possibly the most important group of Republican supporters, at least in regard to historical opinion, were the intellectuals. While such a category is hopelessly broad, including thinkers from Orwell and Picasso to Albert Einstein, it must be defined that way in order to capture the diverse artistic and intellectual community which supported the Madrid government. In one historian's opinion, "only two figures of any significance wrote on the side of the Nationalists, Wyndham Lewis and Roy Campbell."⁷⁶ Some, such as T.S. Elliot and Ezra Pound, declared themselves neutral, while a few Catholics such as Evelyn Waugh and C.S. Lewis remained silent. C.S. Forester traveled to Spain with the intention of writing in support of the Nationalists but returned from his trip appalled by the upper-class Spaniards who he had encountered who, he claimed, hoped to restore the Inquisition.⁷⁷ While noting

⁷⁴ "Notes," *The Economist*, 14 November 1936, 309.

⁷⁵ "Guns on the Moroccan Coast", *The Times*, London, 29 June 1937, 8.

⁷⁶ *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, 160.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

such exceptions, it can be fairly argued the entire intelligentsia of the West strongly favored the Republic.

Given support from such a wide range of independent individuals it is important to determine at least a handful of the ideas which drew them together. Anti-Fascism and the growing acceptance of a united front⁷⁸ against the dictators clearly provided the major motivation for pro-Republican intellectuals. Even Ernest Hemingway, long derided as the most politically unconscious of thinkers, re-wrote the climax of his novel To Have and to Have Not after his experiences in Spain. Following Hemingway's revision, the dying protagonist chokingly mutters, "No matter how, a man alone ain't got no bloody fucking chance."⁷⁹

While virtually all intellectuals at the time, and certainly all today, believed that the political systems in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were anathema to freedom and the artistic process, it was not entirely clear in 1936 that this would be the case in Spain. However, the wanton murder of the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca by Nationalist sympathizers combined with the destruction of Guernica and the suppression of dissent rapidly convinced those few undecided that the Nationalists were the enemy of free thinking and culture in general.

Supporters of the Republic received very little positive news from the fronts. After successfully quelling the revolt in Madrid, Barcelona, and other industrial centers, the government's war effort slowly sank into a strategic quicksand from which no cabinet could escape. Despite, (perhaps because of), the fact that the

⁷⁸ I shy away from using the word Popular in this instance, many of these thinkers were staunchly anti-Communist but still saw themselves as standing up to Fascism.

⁷⁹ Ernest Hemingway To Have and to Have Not (Scribner: NY 1996) 225.

Republic seemed destined to lose, its supporters were active and vocal throughout the conflict. While foreign public opinion barely registered support for either side in 1936, by the time Madrid finally fell a clear majority in the Western democracies favored the Republic. While ineffective at the time, the durability and importance of this opinion has had great significance since.

History's Verdict

Given that nearly fifty years have elapsed since the American Institute of Public Opinion last asked the question, it would seem foolish to hope that modern pollsters would frequently receive a positive reply to the question, "Will you please tell me who General Franco [was]?"¹ Even in 1945, only six years removed from the end of the Spanish Civil War, only fifty-three percent of the public could identify the *Caudillo* and a full quarter of those held no opinion regarding his policies or personality. Today the average American, at least in the author's experience, believes the Spanish Civil War to be vaguely connected with Cuba and yellow journalism.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that most students first encounter the Spanish Civil War through their study of art, language, or literature. Indeed, few high-school students fail to find Picasso's *Guernica* in at least one of their textbooks. While teachers may described the impact of strategic bombing on public opinion or the artistic merits of the painting, a nuanced discussion of the war and its political ramifications is unlikely to follow such a lesson. Therefore, most lasting impressions of the conflict probably result from reading the most famous novel of the war, Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.² While an excellent book³, Hemingway's treatment of the war itself is best summed up in the common criticism to the effect

¹ Hadley Cantrill and Mildred Strunk *Public Opinion 1935-1946* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1951) 163.

² British students may be more likely to read *Homage to Catalonia*, a novel which offers an incisive, if overtly biased, analysis of the war.

³ In her review of the work (*PM*, 20 October 1940), Dorothy Parker writes, "I think that what you do about this book of Ernest Hemingway's is point to it and say, 'Here is a book.' As you would stand below Everest and say, 'Here is a mountain.'"

that it is, “Less a book about the Spanish War than a book about Spain.” Indeed, most literary critics note the lengths to which the author goes to dissociate his hero from the actual political meaning of the war. Aside from these two works and an offhand mention in *Casablanca*, few contemporary Americans are aware of the conflict which electrified activists around the globe.⁴ While the Spanish Civil War may not be the stuff of mini-series, its influence on English-speaking thought and culture none-the-less remains important.

After the concerted efforts made by both sides to swing foreign public opinion it must surely be important to ask, “Who won the war abroad?” Less than a quarter of Americans supported the Loyalists in early 1937 but that number rose to over seventy percent in late 1938 before declining again as interest waned.⁵ Though public opinion polls were not conducted in Britain until late 1938, a solid fifty-seven percent supported the Loyalists at that time and the number continued on a positive trend throughout the conflict.⁶ Clearly then, the supporters of the Republic were more successful than their rivals in winning public opinion.

The previous chapters have sought to explain the commitment certain political constituencies either for or against the Republic. For those with only a passing interest in the conflict, the majority in the United States and a significant minority in Great Britain, traditional Anglo-Saxon sympathy for the underdog combined with the tragic heroism of an impossible defense to create a feeling of support for Madrid.

⁴ It turns out that the protagonist, Rick, had smuggled guns to the Loyalists in Spain before losing his idealism.

⁵ Public Opinion, 807-808.

⁶ Ibid, 808.

Additionally, the threat posed by Italy and Germany increased significantly during the war with Berlin's acquisitions of Czechoslovakia and Austria. These factors combined with the propaganda efforts of the Comintern, Progressives, pro-Imperialists, and Intellectuals to eventually cause a majority of British and American citizens to prefer the Loyalists.

The majority's passive support and expressions of concern, however, proved of little value to the Republic whose war effort, coincidentally, entered a terminal phase just as the foreign public began to back it. The International Brigades were of immense tactical importance in actual combat but their contribution appears infinitesimal compared to the strategic benefits the Loyalists might have enjoyed without Non-Intervention. Had the factories of America, France, and Britain supplied Madrid with tanks, guns, and airplanes to match those provided by the Fascists, the war might well have ended differently. The ability of Burgos' supporters to retain Non-Intervention, their sole objective, indicates a victory for their efforts during the war. Because Republican sympathizers were unable to convince enough of their fellow citizens to *actively* support the cause, Franco could conduct a war of attrition in which the isolated Loyalists could not compete. While the conflict lasted, the Republic lost the contest for public opinion in the only critical battle.

The propaganda war, however, did not truly end in 1939. Loyalists such as "La Pasionaria", (Dolores Ibàrruri), and President Azaña fled to London and the former colonies, especially Mexico which provided asylum for many Leftists during the 1930s. From exile they wrote countless memoirs, histories, and letters but these

lacked scholarly rigor and too often became bogged down in assigning blame for defeat. To counteract these dissident voices, Franco's government established a ministry of history which, through its monopoly on all archives in Spain, dominated all interpretation of the Civil War.⁷ Largely as a result of these efforts, independent Spanish-language study of the war virtually ceased from the 1940s until the late 1970s when the regime fell.⁸ Filling this gap, Anglo-American historians such as Bernard Bolloten, Paul Preston, Allen Guttman, and Herbert Rutledge Southworth wrote about the war from abroad and from the few Spanish archives to which they were granted minimal access. With scholars subject to unequal archival access, conflicting interpretations of events often became enmeshed with personal differences to the detriment of discourse.⁹ While Franco's *Movimiento* may have distorted scholarly study for most of the century the eventual victor of the struggle for history's decision is not in doubt.

Robert Stradling illustrates the Loyalists' victory in the picturesque opening to his 1999 study of the Irish volunteers. He describes two plots in the same rural cemetery; "One of these graves is often decorated with flowers and other favors of public esteem. The other is overgrown with bushes, almost impossible even for the determined visitor to find."¹⁰ The first tomb belongs to Frank Ryan, commander of the Irish contingent of the International Brigade, the second to his rival, Eoin O'Duffy, who raised the Irish Column to fight alongside Franco. In Ireland, as

⁷ For examples see works such as Historia Secreta de la Segunda Republica and La Dominación Roja en España.

⁸ Paul Preston *War of Words: The Spanish Civil War and the Historians* in Revolution and War in Spain Paul Preston, ed., (Methuen & Co: NY, 1984) 9.

⁹ The competing analyses of Southworth and Bolloten take a particularly nasty turn with *ad hominem* attacks substituting for reviews in several instances.

¹⁰ Robert A. Stradling The Irish and the Spanish Civil War (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1999) 1.

elsewhere, support for the Loyalist cause is unchallenged. Even in Spain few profess sympathy for the Nationalists and those groups which favored him in the 1930s are loath to do so today. While foreign public opinion never appeared to back Franco, powerful historical trends must be at work to so completely shift the judgment of those who had previously supported the Nationalists.

American Catholics were among the loudest groups supporting Franco in his struggle against the Popular Front government in Madrid. As seen previously, the hierarchy exhorted its members to lobby their representatives in favor of non-Intervention. Even humanitarian aid which might have benefited Republican forces was squashed by Catholic pressure on Congress and the Administration. The level of Catholic support, however, was never quite as deep as it may have appeared.

Though millions may have listened to Fr. Coughlin and sent letters to their Congressman, history records no American Catholic volunteers and concrete aid to the Nationalists was minimal. *The Tablet*, mouthpiece of the Brooklyn archdiocese, ran a collection in 1938 described as, “the only distinctively Catholic organization receiving contributions for the sufferers in Spain.”¹¹ Collecting over \$5,000 in the summer of 1937, the newspaper forwarded all but \$113 of that to Spain. *The Pilot* proudly compared this ratio to that of the pro-Republican organizations but neglected to extend the comparison to size rather than efficiency.

During the period from May of 1937 until the end of 1938 *The Tablet*'s fund collected over \$30,000 but this is pittance compared with the nearly \$2 million dollars

¹¹ “Find Funds for Spain Leftists Expended Here,” *The Pilot*, 11 September 1937,8.

amassed by pro-Loyalist organizations.¹² While almost twenty-five percent of that money was spent on “advertising and administration” in the United States and therefore never reached Spain, the fact that such sums were raised indicates that enthusiasm for the Republic was quite significant. Though it organized some impressive letter-writing campaigns, in fundraising, the Catholic lobby simply did not have mass appeal on the same level as their opponents.

The failure to provide funds for the Nationalists clearly did not affect the success of their war effort and it should not be forgotten that the real aid for Franco came from Italy and Germany. In continuing the advantage created by Non-Intervention, pro-Nationalist Catholics succeeded in the short term. The shortcoming, in regard to the Nationalist legacy, lies in their inability to sustain any popular support for the *Caudillo* following the end of the war. That support had rested largely on American Catholic’s association with their Church rather than with society in general.¹³ The existence of a strong Catholic Press, Catholic trade unions, Catholic schools and universities, and Catholic youth organizations all indicate this divide. While the obedient mass which Protestant America envisioned did not exist in the 1930s, there was still a strong feeling of ‘otherness’ amongst Catholics which unified them and allowed them to identify closely with their co-religionists in Spain.¹⁴

When the Cold War reached its peaks in the 1950s and 60s, American Catholic support for Franco and the nationalists waned as Catholicism became an

¹² “24 US groups collect \$1,916,431 for Spain with \$436,204 Spent for Administration,” *The New York Times*, 22 December 1938, 18.

¹³ For discussions of Catholic ‘otherness’ see, among many others, “Boston’s Catholics in the Spanish Civil War”, “Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Civil War”, “Proselytizing in the Catholic Press”, and “The Coughlin Movement and the New Deal”.

¹⁴ See John T. McGreevy, “Thinking on One’s Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imaginaton, 1928-1960,” *The Journal of American History* 84:1 (June 1997): 97-131.

accepted part of mainstream American culture.¹⁵ During those decades the fear of Communism and a competition with the Soviet Union became two of the key features of the American thinking. Because being Catholic was almost synonymous with being anti-Communist, Catholics were considered solid and dependable Americans. Following the election of JFK, First Communion became as American as Little League and the importance of distinctly Catholic institutions, such as *The Pilot*, decreased. With American Catholics no longer on the fringe of society, their feeling of kinship with Spanish Catholics faded, and with it, their memories of pro-Franco agitation.

Catholic support also diminished in the decades following the war as the nature of the Franco regime became more obvious. Most American members of the Church were staunch democrats who thought that Franco was fighting merely for the rights of religious freedom which they themselves enjoyed, a sort of “American way of life” for Spain. The hierarchy fostered this belief through the Spain/America comparisons described previously and by ‘clarifying’ Nationalist speeches and press releases. According to some historians, as it became clear that “General Franco was *not* fighting for this kind of Catholicism compatible with liberal democratic ideals,” American Catholics abandoned his camp.¹⁶

Catholics outside the United States, even in Spain, began to reconsider their support for General Franco during the 1960s. In the decades following World War II Pope Pius’ silence in the face of Fascist atrocities became a source of embarrassment

¹⁵ For a fascinating analysis of this transformation within the intelligentsia see, John T. McGreevy, “Thinking on One’s Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928-1960,” *Journal of American History*, 84:1 (June, 1997): 97-131.

¹⁶ Allen Guttman *The Wound in the Heart* (Free Press of Glencoe: NY, 1962) 203.

for the Church. In 1965 the church removed much of that embarrassment, and the central rationale for support of Franco's *Movimiento*, by formally disavowing the union between Church and State as part of the second Vatican Council. Following the council, the Spanish hierarchy began calling for greater civil liberties and began to reject the government's interference in its internal affairs. The Church's decision to refocus on service and relief for the oppressed cemented Catholics' rejection of the Nationalist cause.¹⁷ With their motivations for support removed, it is understandable that Catholics ceased to argue in favor of Franco's regime.

Isolationists, pacifists, and anti-Communists in Britain and the United States were also *de facto* supporters of the Franco regime. By refusing aid to the Republic and allowing Italian and German intervention, they effectively doomed the Popular Front government. As support for Franco had been purely incidental, (provided the owner kept his finger in the dike they did not care what armband he wore), they, like the Catholics, reevaluated their support for Franco and began to step back from their previous positions following the Second World War.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent experience of total war convinced most Americans that isolationism was untenable in the age of the airplane and atom bomb. In a break with tradition, the United States maintained its armed forces at a high level of readiness rather than cutting back to a skeleton force. America built bases and maintained troops around the globe, refusing to accept that

¹⁷ I believe there to be strong links between the Central American diaspora of Spanish priests (who had witnessed the consequences of divorce between poor laborers and the hierarchical Church) and the formulation of Liberation Theology. The term appears suspiciously often in studies of the Church and the Civil War but I have found no formal study of the subject.

the Atlantic and Pacific alone could protect the homeland. Simultaneously, the theory of containment replaced the pacifism and isolationism which had previously guided American foreign policy.

America and Britain's first serious thoughts about "intervention" occurred during the Spanish Civil War. Supporters of the Republican government saw Italy, Germany, Abyssinia, Spain, and Czechoslovakia fall under control of Fascism without the democracies firing a shot and made a powerful case to the public. Though the pro-Republicans were ineffective at the time, the 'domino effect' and resulting Truman Doctrine clearly stem at least in part from America's experience with that conflict.¹⁸ When many who had previously been strong isolationists became advocates of 'containment' they ceased making a case for the Nationalists.¹⁹

The Irish who fought with Eoin O'Duffy returned home quietly and they and their supporters were quickly forgotten. Though his men had volunteered intending to fight for the Church and anti-Communism, the unit was still tainted by association with dictatorship and Hitler's horrors. These memories did not sit well with the twentieth century Irish emphasis on liberty and anti-imperialism. In the 1960s, as the Free State began to campaign on behalf of oppressed peoples around the world, establishing a deservedly high reputation for humanitarianism, the Irish Brigade was

¹⁸ For analysis of intervention in general see James N. Rosenau's, "Intervention as a Scientific Concept," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 13:2 (June, 1969): 149-171.

¹⁹ While the United States did reach out to Franco in the 1950s so as to build SAC bases in Spain as part of the Cold War, this was not enough to regain the sympathy of the American people.

quietly forgotten.²⁰ When the Church itself turned away from Franco's junta, the last vestiges of pro-Nationalism vanished in Ireland.

While the issues which had motivated pro-Nationalist opinion lost influence in the latter decades of the century, most bases of pro-Republican opinion continued to strengthen. This may merely reflect the fact that, having been defeated, the Republican administration existed only in rosy hindsight, a vague and Romantic imagination. Attributing the positive image of the Republic to faulty collective memory, however, does little to advance the historical understanding of the war's effects and the success of the combatants' propaganda.

The Radicals who enlisted in the International Brigades and those men and women who supported their units did not disappear in 1939 but joined in the general anti-Fascism surrounding World War II. The silence of the far left on domestic matters during the war, which had not been a hallmark of their campaign in 1936, resulted both from the Anglo-American alliance with the Soviet Union and from the need to unite against the Nazi menace, even at the expense of deferring the class struggle. Following the war, the CPUSA and CPGB emerged from their self-imposed silence but quickly faced persecution by Red-hunters such as Joseph McCarthy. The Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade was declared a Communist front-organization and duly investigated and harassed. Those who had volunteered in Spain were often considered subversive and those who had donated to Republican causes, (even Shirley Temple), were regarded with suspicion.

²⁰ Robert Stradling's conclusion to [The Irish and the Spanish Civil War](#) offers a rather poignant description of the Conolly Column and Irish Brigade's later years.

While the witch hunts of the 1950s forced leftists of all stripes underground, the ideas themselves remained potent. During the mid-to-late 1960s, as Radicalism once more began to flourish, the concept of “political awareness” which had been so important to the Brigadiers became popular once more.²¹ Poems, novels, and plays emerged which referred to the Spanish Civil War as a touchstone of the popular conscience.²² The existentialist Albert Camus observed, “It was in Spain that men learned that one can be right and yet be beaten, that force can vanquish spirit, that there are times when courage is not its own recompense.”²³ That knowledge was shocking to the idealists of the 1930s and tempered the future expectations of those who had experienced the war. The same frustrations felt by returning *brigadistas* may be seen in post-1968 idealists of the next generation.²⁴

Less radical supporters of the Loyalists government from the non-Communist left actually came to speak more openly for the Republic following its demise largely due to the Madrid government’s non-existence. The weight of Stalinist repression which had privately bothered the pro-Republicans was removed by Franco’s victory. The exiled Spanish leaders, no longer reliant on Soviet goodwill, were able to downplay the importance of Russian arms and advisors and successfully improve the Republic’s international image. Free to shed the ally who had become a public

²¹ Histories of the Brigades written by veterans or based heavily on interviews tend to include “awareness” as a central feature of recruiting. For particulars see The Premature Anti-Fascists (Praeger: NY, 1986) by John Gerassi and Crusade of the Left (Pegasus: NY, 1969) by Robert A. Rosenstone.

²² See The Wound in the Heart for specific works.

²³ As quoted in Stanley Weintraub The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War (Weybright and Talley: NY, 1968) 3.

²⁴ Perhaps there is a link between the clenched fist of the Popular Front (placed across the chest) and the clenched fist of Black Power (raised above the head). It seems likely that there is a continuity in the symbolism of the two causes.

relations liability, Republic no longer needed to apologize for Stalin's show trials and the suppression of the anarchists in Barcelona.

Progressive voices gained power as the anti-Fascism which had motivated their opposition to Franco became a universal value following the start of the Second World War. As early (non-Communist) opponents of anti-Fascism, the Progressives and their cause gained currency in popular culture, especially in Europe. Enjoying a "first mover" advantage of sorts, the Progressives were able to resurrect much of their political program. The same concerns for class and fairness which motivated Progressive writing on the Spanish Civil War might well be traced to the Great Society reforms of the 1960s.

The pro-Imperialists who had prophesied grave dangers in a Nationalist victory were partially vindicated by the Second World War. After 1940 some French politicians and soldiers claimed that a friendly Spain might have provided enough defensive depth to save France from blitzkrieg. These arguments smack of scapegoating and can be dismissed but the fears of German influence in Morocco and the threat to British shipping were both partially correct. The Germans did exercise considerable influence in Morocco through the Vichy French and managed to control much of North Africa through late 1943. Additionally, had the Allies gained the use of air bases in the Canaries the shipping lanes through the North Atlantic might have been considerably safer during the critical months of 1942.²⁵ It must be concluded, however, that the Nationalist's victory in Spain did not shut the Mediterranean and did not result in German dominance of the Empire's supply lines. Additionally, at the

²⁵ The same has often been alleged of Ireland and DeValera's refusal of the Treaty Ports.

end of the Second World War British Imperialists were more concerned with the imminent independence of India (1947), war in Palestine (1948), and disorder in Egypt (1951) than with protecting the good name of Francisco Franco. These facts diminished the historical voice of the pro-Imperialists who, anyway, had supported the Republic merely as a matter of practicality.

Intellectuals, such as Camus cited above, were deeply wounded by the defeat of the Republic. Having believed whole-heartedly that their cause was just and right, the shock seriously damaged the idealism of many thinkers in the United States and Britain. The sense of lost innocence, resulting both from the defeat and the realization of Soviet machinations, made the Spanish Civil War doubly romantic in hindsight. Intellectuals and idealists continued an interpretation of pro-Republicans as “premature anti-Fascists”, Cassandras of the democratic cause, who fought against a clearly “evil” opponent without the support of their countries. Writing after the Second World War, playwright John Osborne speaks through one of his characters, “I suppose people of our generation aren’t able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and forties, when we were still kids... There aren’t any good, brave causes left.”²⁶ This is surely the popular interpretation, such as it is, of Anglo-American and Irish involvement in the Spanish Civil War. While it neglects the brutal and Stalinist tendencies of the Madrid government, it recalls enough of the truth to satisfy the historian, scholar, and political activist.

²⁶ Quoted in The Last Great Cause, 2.

There is a feeling that, for pro-Republicans, the Spanish Civil War was indeed an unambiguously good cause. Perhaps this results from comparison with the seeming pointlessness of Vietnam or perhaps from the faults of popular memory, which has forgotten the repression of Barcelona and the 'Trotskyists'. It may be a much happier conclusion to think that the Spanish Civil War was a struggle in which idealistic supporters of both sides forgot their differences and pulled together in what both sides termed "a crusade". Perhaps the fact that neither the Republicans nor the Nationalists were angels allows backers of both sides to claim they were fighting totalitarianism, surely a noble goal. Perhaps it could be agreed that in 1936 activists of all stripes recalled John Donne and remembered that no man, or nation, is an island and worked to stem the rising tide of darkness which threatened to wash Spain into the abyss.

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