

ANGLO-SPANISH RELATIONS AND THE RECOGNITION OF SPANISH AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE *

When the revolutions which eventually culminated in the independence of Spanish America broke out in 1810, Britain adopted a policy of neutrality between Spain and her colonies. She interpreted this as obliging her to refrain from recognising the regimes set up in South America and from establishing official relations with them, as long as the outcome of the conflict was uncertain. Although the Liberal Revolution of 1820 put an end to any hopes of Spanish reconquest of the colonies (at least in the opinion of British observers), the new constitutional regime appeared prepared to negotiate with the insurgents; and it would not have been appropriate for Britain to make any move towards recognition, while attempts at a settlement were in progress. However, by 1822 all of the mainland colonies, except for some parts of Peru and adjacent territories to north and south, had clearly achieved their independence, and the United States had decided on recognition. It then appeared that, unless Britain followed suit, her already extensive commercial interests in Spanish America would be threatened by exclusive arrangements between the new states and the U.S.A.

Britain therefore responded in June 1822 by taking her first important step towards recognition — the admission to British ports of ships under insurgent flags. Although Spain was relieved that this measure was purely commercial, and did not involve political recognition, Britain also made it clear that she would not commit herself to waiting indefinitely for the mother country to reach an agreement with the colonies, and that if Spain could

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not restore her control over Spanish America's international relations, these relations would, sooner or later, have to be established directly. This warning was repeated and notified to the other European powers at the Congress of Verona in November 1822. However, the Congress showed more interest in denouncing the Spanish government and threatening a French invasion of the Peninsula. As Britain did not wish to appear to be associated in any way with reactionary coercion of the Spanish constitutional regime, further action on Spanish America was delayed, while Britain attempted to influence the Spanish government to make the constitutional reforms demanded by the Congress powers. She hoped in this way to avert the French intervention, which she knew she could not prevent by military means; but the effort was unavailing, and France invaded Spain in the spring of 1823.¹

This was a serious diplomatic setback for Britain, for, as the French armies proceeded across the Peninsula, Anglo-Spanish relations diminished (and even ceased to exist for a while, when the embattled liberals placed King Ferdinand VII under duress, and the British Ambassador withdrew to Gibraltar); and when in October 1823 the King was restored to absolute power by French military success, it was natural for him to establish close relations with his liberators. Britain, it appeared, had lost the power to influence Spain for the foreseeable future, and now, whatever her preferences may have been, had perforce to concentrate her attention on Spanish America. As the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, put it at the time: «...I am as glad as any one that we have left the Spaniards and French to themselves, but we must not overlook the circumstance that the influence of France in Spain is for the present triumphant, greater perhaps than ours ever was at any period of the late war. Be it so — we can not help it. But let us at least take care of our interests in other quarters,

1 For a more detailed account of these developments see Waddell, D. A. G.: *Anglo-Spanish relations and the 'Pacification of America' during the 'Constitutional Triennium', 1820-1823*, «Anuario de Estudios Americanos», tomo XLVI, Sevilla, 1989, págs. 455-486.

and more particularly of those interests which are connected with our commerce and maritime power». ²

The British Foreign Minister, George Canning, had already begun to look to the preservation of British interests across the Atlantic. In a dispatch sent to Paris on the eve of the French invasion, he invited France to match Britain's disavowal of any territorial designs on Spanish America, as the only source of possible Anglo-French conflict that might arise from the Franco-Spanish war. ³ No such disavowal was forthcoming, however, and, in face of rumours that France planned to follow up her success in Spain by assisting in the recovery of Spanish control over the colonies, ⁴ he sounded the United States on the possibility of a joint declaration to the effect that they believed the recovery of the colonies by Spain to be hopeless, and that they would object to the transfer of any of them to any other power. The Americans, however, having already recognised some of the new states, were not prepared to cooperate with Britain unless she also recognised them. They eventually went their own way, and in December 1823 President Monroe made the unilateral statement of opposition to European interference of new colonisation in the western hemisphere that came to be known as the Monroe Doctrine. Meanwhile, Canning had turned back to France; and in a conference with the French Ambassador, Prince Polignac, early in October 1823, he obtained the French disavowal of any intention to act against the Spanish colonies by force of arms, which he had been seeking for the previous six months. ⁵

² British Library, Manuscripts Division. London (B. L.). Loan 57, (Bathurst MSS), vol. 14, núm. 1726. Liverpool to Bathurst. Private, 16 October 1823.

³ Canning to Stuart. 31 March 1823, printed in Webster, C. K. (ed.): *Britain and the Independence of Latin America, 1812-1830*, 2 vols. London, 1938, vol. II, págs. 111-112.

⁴ Stuart to Canning. 23 June, 22 September 1823, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 112-113; Canning to Wellington. 25 September 1823, printed in *Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of the Duke of Wellington* (ed. Wellington, 8 vols. London, 1867-1880), vol. II, págs. 139-140. For divergent views on whether there actually were such intentions, see Temperley, H.: *French designs on Spanish America, 1820-1826*, «English Historical Review», vol. XL, 1925, págs. 34-53, and Robertson, W. S.: *France and Latin American Independence*. Baltimore, 1939, págs. 253-295.

⁵ Kaufmann, W. W.: *British Policy and the Independence of Latin America, 1804-1828*. New Haven, 1951, págs. 150-163.

Simultaneously, on 10 October 1823, Canning took a major step towards recognition by naming commissioners and consuls to go to Spanish America. The decision to send commercial agents had been taken almost a year earlier, but its implementation had been deferred.⁶ In July and August 1823 various groups of merchants from different parts of the country were urging the appointment of consuls,⁷ though it is difficult to say how much influence this may have had on the Foreign Minister's activities over the next few weeks in finding suitable nominees for the various posts and preparing their instructions.⁸ But Canning's action went beyond the simple sending out of commercial agents. The idea of broadening the scope of the missions to Spanish America to include political matters may have originated in June, when Liverpool, alarmed by news that the republican government in Mexico was seeking some connection with the United States, suggested to Canning that some reliable emissary should be sent to indicate Britain's readiness to recognise Mexico on certain conditions.⁹ It could well have been in response to this that Canning in July started to draw up instructions for a special commission

6 Canning later claimed that this was a considerate gesture towards Spain (see Polignac Memorandum, October 1823, and Canning to A'Court, 30 January 1824, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 116, 414).

7 Public Record Office, London (P. R. O.), FO 72/283, fols. 24-55.

8 This was a troublesome task, as he told one of his Cabinet colleagues. B. L., Loan 57, vol. 14, núm. 1.716. Canning to Bathurst. 9 October 1823. He had to consult the King's wishes — he asked the King on 23 August if he had any names to suggest (West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds (W. Y. A.), Canning MSS 100), and to consider the claims of patronage — most of the appointees are to be found in the list of applicants for consulships and their patrons, drawn up apparently soon after Canning took office in 1822 (printed in Jones, R. A.: *An early nineteenth-century patronage list: George Canning and the consular service, 1822*. «Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research», vol. LVI, núm. 134, 1983, págs. 232-238). For details of the appointees and their posts, see Humphreys, R. A. (ed.): *British Consular Reports on the Trade and Politics of [Latin America], 1824-1826*. Camden Third Series, vol. LXIII, London, 1940, págs. xviii-xix.

9 W. Y. A., Canning MSS, 70. Liverpool to Canning. Secret, 9 June 1823. Canning had already sent a secret agent, Dr. Patrick Mackie, a personal acquaintance of its ruler, Iturbide, to Mexico in December 1822. It was evidently intended that Mackie should only gather information, though this did not prevent him from entering into unauthorised dealings with Iturbide's successors (see Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 431-434, 438-442, 450-452), Liverpool's proposal appears to have been for a rather more formal mission than Mackie's.

to Mexico.¹⁰ The commissioners were to report on whether the country had established its independence, and if so, whether it was determined to and capable of maintaining it, and whether its government enjoyed the confidence of the people. If these conditions were met, the commissioners could invite the government to send a representative to London, to discuss the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations.

Rumours of the appointment of the Mexican commission leaked out, and were published in the press in mid-August, much to Canning's annoyance.¹¹ For Mexico was not the only cause for concern and candidate for recognition: similar commissions were being prepared for Colombia and Buenos Aires (though in the latter case it was finally left to the consul-general to act as commissioner as well).¹² Canning presumably wished to be in a position to announce all the appointments of both consuls and commissioners at the same time (they were all dated 10 October), so as to emphasise that a major diplomatic step was being taken; and it is probably no coincidence that the announcement was timed so that it could act as a riposte to the news of the final surrender of the Spanish constitutionalists, and the complete triumph of the French in the Peninsula.¹³ The missions appointed in October 1823 clearly foreshadowed political recognition. But the procedure

10 For dating of the instructions, which were finally issued on 10 October, see Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, pág. 433. The original draft, as discussed in Cabinet and criticised by Wellington, apparently made a considerable commitment towards British recognition, and included some reference to the dangers of French control or United States' influence as possible grounds for such action while the final version placed more emphasis on enquiring into the actual state of Mexico. *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1820-1832*. Ed. Bamford and Wellington, 2 vols. London, 1950, vol. I, pág. 248 (entry for 1 August 1823); Wellington to Canning, 31 July 1823, and enclosed memorandum, printed in *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 108-110).

11 W. Y. A., Canning MSS 151. Canning to Liverpool, 16 August 1823.

12 Regarding alarm about possible French intentions in Colombia and conditions there, see Lowe to Canning, 3 July 1823. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 132; *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 116-126. Regarding the mission to Buenos Aires, see Shuttleworth, N. L. K.: *A Life of Sir Woodbine Parish*. London, 1910, pág. 252. The instructions are printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, I, págs. 433-436, 351-352.

13 As suggested by, for example, Rolo, P. J. V.: *George Canning: three biographical studies*. London, 1965, pág. 228, and Kaufmann, *British Policy...*, pág. 158.

adopted meant that any definite decision would have to wait several months — until the commissioners had reached their destinations and made their investigations, and their reports had been received in London.¹⁴

The increased attention given by Britain to her direct relations with Spanish America was balanced by the virtual absence of discussion on the subject with the restored absolutist government in Spain. The despatches of the British minister in Madrid, Sir William A'Court, recorded much talk of grandiose schemes for the restoration of Spanish rule in the colonies by means of a commercial company, or through allied arms or mediation, but no direct approach to him; although he did report that those concerned in such plans recognised that British acquiescence would be essential to their success. Canning meanwhile contented himself with keeping A'Court informed about developments, by sending him copies of the Polignac Memorandum and the instructions to the commissioners to Spanish America. Eventually on 2 December, A'Court reported that the Secretary of State had told him that Spain was anxious to come to an understanding with Britain over the colonies. His government had realised that no arrangement with any other powers would be of much value without British involvement, and it was, therefore, proposing to convene an international conference on the question. A'Court had replied that he had nothing to add to the Polignac Memorandum, which embodied Britain's views on the matter; and at the end of the month he duly forwarded the invitation to the conference to London. This took the form of a circular to France, Austria, Russia, Prussia and Britain. It stated that the King of Spain, restored to his throne after three years of civil war, was distressed to find that the insurrection in Spanish America had spread, but con-

¹⁴ The caution implied by this delay contrasts with Canning's apparent willingness to recommend immediate recognition in November 1822 (see Waddell, *Anglo-Spanish relations...*, págs. 481-483). But the decision not to proceed then, together with Wellington's reservations over the instructions in July 1823 (see núm. 10 above), may have convinced Canning that the Cabinet would not approve recognition without solid evidence based on reliable reports from official British observers.

soled by the thought that most of his subjects remained loyal. He looked to his allies for support in upholding order and legitimacy, and invited them to a conference in Paris, to discuss how the rights and interest of the Spanish crown might be reconciled with those of other nations, in the light of the altered state of affairs in the colonies.¹⁵

The idea of a conference of the European powers on Spanish America seems to have originated with the French, who, by the end of their campaign in Spain itself, had abandoned any thought of assisting in the reconquest of the colonies. Rather they wished for commercial reasons to establish relations with the new states, but were inhibited from doing so by their commitment to legitimacy and close amity with the King Ferdinand VII. Accordingly they wished to bring the combined pressure of the powers on the Spanish King, to persuade him to negotiate with the colonists, and felt that this could best be done in a European congress.¹⁶ Canning had already decided on his attitude towards the conference. The matter had been raised in his discussion with Polignac, who had failed to persuade him to commit himself to participate. Indeed Canning had said that because of Britain's special interests in Spanish America, she could not enter a conference on the same footing as other powers; and he added that did not see how the United States, with its close interest in the area, could be left out of any discussions — a suggestion which he knew would be unacceptable to the reactionary monarchs.¹⁷

15 P. R. O., FO 72/723. A'Court to Canning. Núms. 137, 138, 142, 145, 147, 150, 166 dated 8, 19, 23, 27 November, 2, 30 December 1823 (parts of núm. 138, núm. 142, núm. 147 printed in Webster: *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 405-410); P. R. O., FO 72/268. Canning to A'Court. Núm. 64, 13 October 1823.

16 Kaufmann, *British Policy...*, págs. 157, 167-170; Temperley, H.: *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827*. 2nd. edn. London, 1966, págs. 132-137; Robertson, *France...*, págs. 275-277, 280-288, 296-304. A congress would have had the additional advantage from the point of view of the continental powers, of giving them an opportunity to flatter and cajole Canning into falling into line with their reactionary policies, in the way they had done with his predecessor, Castlereagh. Temperley, H. W. V.: *Canning, Wellington, and George the Fourth*. «English Historical Review», vol. XXXVIII, 1923, págs. 215-216.

17 Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 117-119. Before he had even received the formal invitation he had told A'Court, in a private letter, that there would be no congress on Spanish America, and that President Monroe's

Canning replied to Spain's invitation to the conference on 30 January 1824 with a brutally frank statement of Britain's position. He pointed out that Britain had always been prepared to mediate to put an end to the dispute; but that there was now no hope of successful mediation except on the basis of independence. Britain's trade with the territories that had effectively separated themselves from Spain had grown to the point where consular agents had had to be sent out. Further steps towards diplomatic recognition would be taken as and when necessary, in the light of reports received. Recognition could not be delayed much longer, but Britain would much prefer it if Spain were to act first. She would still be prepared to assist in the negotiation of a settlement, which could include preferential terms for the mother country in her trade with her ex-colonies. However, if Spain did not take appropriate action, Britain would feel free to take her own course, after giving Spain advance notice of her intentions. She saw no point in participating in a conference, as she had no intention of changing the policy which she had already made clear to Spain and the other European powers — that she would recognise when circumstances dictated, and would do so immediately if there was any attempt to exclude her from trade with South America, or if any other power gave armed assistance to Spain against the colonies.¹⁸

A'Court reported that Spain had opened up trade with South America, hoping that this would cause the British to reconsider their decision about the conference. The Spaniards did not believe that the recovery of the colonies was hopeless, and were relieved that British recognition was not to be immediate. But they had

pronouncement had given it the *coup de grace*. Canning to A'Court. 31 December 1823, printed in Stapleton, A. G.: *George Canning and his Times*. London, 1859, págs. 394-396.

¹⁸ Canning to A'Court. 30 January 1824, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 412-416. Canning's original draft was toned down on the suggestion of Wellington (see *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 188-192; *Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot*, 21 January 1824, I, págs. 282-283), but, even before its discussion in Cabinet, Canning was sufficiently confident to assure his ambassador in Russia that there was no question of Britain participating. Canning to Bagot. 22 January 1824, printed in Bagot, G.: *George Canning and his Friends*. 2 vols. London, 1909, vol. II, págs. 21-22.

no plan for the colonies, and were playing for time, by delaying a response until they learned of the British reaction to the free trade decree, and until they had received the replies of the other powers to the invitation to the conference.¹⁹ Evidence of Spain's temporising attitude, and an explanation for it, can be found in communications of the same date from the Secretary of State to his diplomatic representatives in London and Paris. These made clear that Spain was determined not to follow Britain's advice to recognise colonial independence. Not only was the King not prepared to abandon his legitimate rights, and the welfare of his subjects both in Spain and America, but he was convinced that most of the inhabitants wished to return to royalist rule, and that the territories in rebel hands were in a state of anarchy. The chargé in London was therefore to work to prevent British recognition, in conjunction with the French, Russian and Austrian ambassadors; and even if the British persisted in their refusal to attend, the conference would go ahead, despite the risk that it might provide Britain with an excuse to precipitate her recognition.²⁰ Thus it was not surprising that the formal reply to Canning's note was held back until 23 March, and that when it came it was evasive.²¹

Canning, however, was anxious for something more definite. The matter had already been raised in Parliament, and he had defended the government's position by making public extracts from the Polignac Memorandum, the Spanish invitation to the conference, and his reply. There was some disposition to give Spain time to respond, but it was obvious that there would be further pressure for action.²² In late March he had also received a report from

19 P. R. O., FO 72/285. A'Court to Canning, núms. 24, 27, 29, 41, 44, 52 dated 10, 12, 17, 28 February, 6, 21 March 1824; núm. 29, 17 February printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 417-490.

20 Archivo General de Simancas (A.G.S.), Estado 8.185. Ofalia to Páez de la Cadena, and to Ambassador in Paris. 23 March 1824.

21 P. R. O., FO 72/285. Enclosed in A'Court to Canning, núm. 54. 27 March 1824.

22 Great Britain, Parliament: *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*. New Series, vol. X, cols. 3-28, 53-76, 105-106, 157, 708-719, 752-755, 970-1.009; see also *Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot*, 3, 6, 12 February, 8, 17 March 1824, I, págs. 283-286, 292-293.

the commissioners that Mexico met the conditions for recognition.²³ After discussion in Cabinet, it was agreed that Canning should ask A'Court to warn Spain formally that Mexican recognition was not far off, and to give her a final chance of negotiations through British mediation; and this was followed up with a secret offer of a British guarantee to defend Spain's continued possession of Cuba against external attack, if Spain recognised the independence of the mainland colonies.²⁴ Spain, however, did not feel that the guarantee of Cuba could compensate for the sacrifice of the rest of the empire, and replied on 30 April declining the British proposals, principally on the grounds that Britain was misinformed about the true state of affairs in the colonies. A'Court felt that Spain was acting very much under the influence of the ambassadors of the other powers, who had their own motives for opposing Britain's line, but added that if Spain really believed in the reports she was receiving from Spanish America, her attitude was not surprising. It only remained for A'Court to ensure that Spain fully understood that Britain was now free to act without further reference to Spain.²⁵

The conference proposal had played into Canning's hands. He had been able to ignore Spain for three months after the Polignac Memorandum of October 1823. Spain had had to approach him

23 Hervey to Canning, 18 January 1824, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, I, págs. 442-445. Unfortunately this was written very soon after the commissioner's arrival, and contained some details that seemed at variance with its conclusions. Neither Wellington nor Bathurst considered that it provided a defensible basis for recognition. Wellington to Canning, 28 March 1824, printed in *Despatches...*, of Wellington, II, págs. 240-242; W. Y. A., Canning MSS 106, Bathurst to Canning, 29 March 1824; *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*, 24, 26, 29, 31 March, I, págs. 294-297, but the imminent arrival of a Mexican representative meant that some decision had to be taken soon.

24 W. Y. A., Canning MSS 71. Liverpool to Canning, 24 March 1824; Wellington to Canning, 4 April 1824, printed in *Despatches...*, of Wellington, II, págs. 246-247; W. Y. A., Canning MSS 101. Canning to George IV, 2 April 1824; Canning to A'Court, núms. 13, 14, 31 March, 2 April 1824, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 421-424.

25 P. R. O., FO 72/286. A'Court to Canning, núms. 70, 78, 95, dated 24 April, 3 May, 4 June 1824; P. R. O., FO 72/284. Canning to A'Court, núm. 18, 17 May 1824 (A'Court's, núm. 78 and Canning's, núm. 18 printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 424-427). See also Canning to Bagot, 29 May 1824, printed in Bagot, *Canning and his Friends*, II, págs. 239-241.

(though the manner in which the invitation was couched suggests some reluctance on Ferdinand's part),²⁶ and this had enabled him to give the impression, for the benefit of Parliament, the Cabinet, and the allied powers, that he had shown Spain every possible consideration, and given her every opportunity to reach a favourable settlement in advance of further action by Britain. How genuine his efforts were may be doubted, especially over the Cuba guarantee, which he privately admitted, could have involved Britain in great difficulties if it had been accepted.²⁷ Moreover, opening the question to the influence of public opinion by laying papers before Parliament could scarcely be regarded as considerate towards Spain. The Duke of Wellington pointed out that the Spaniards were well aware that the British government did not normally involve Parliament in this way, and would infer that the ministry was prepared to yield to the popular pressure for recognition, and was insincere in its claims of impartiality.²⁸ But the unquestionable result of Spain's entirely predictable refusal of Britain's offers was the freeing of Britain from any international commitments on Spanish America; and, after the issue had been debated again in the Commons, following petitions in favour of immediate recognition from commercial interests in London and Manchester, the Prime Minister was able to close the session on 24 June by assuring Parliament that the government was under no obligation to delay, but was only awaiting reports from its own commissioners.²⁹

But though all external constraints had been removed, and Parliamentary support had been mobilised, there remained much internal opposition to be overcome in the Cabinet, particularly

26 Kaufmann: *British Policy...* pág. 169.

27 Canning to Bagot. 29 May 1824, printed in Bagot, *Canning and his Friends*, II, págs. 239-241.

28 Wellington to Liverpool, 5 March 1824, printed in *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 228-289 (Liverpool disagreed, see his reply *Ibidem*, págs. 242-243). For a general account of these negotiations see Temperley, *Canning*, págs. 137-140.

29 *Hansard* NS II, 1824, cols. 1.344-1.406, 1.476-1.482; Temperley, *Canning*, págs. 142-144.

from Wellington.³⁰ Moreover, King George IV was strongly against recognition, and was involved in an intrigue with representatives of the European powers and some of the more reactionary of his own ministers to get rid of Canning.³¹ At this point, Mexico was no longer under consideration for immediate recognition. In April Canning had inquired whether the Mexicans might be willing to try to obtain prior Spanish recognition through commercial or financial concessions, and time had to be allowed for an answer. Then in May new doubts arose about the stability of the political situation there.³² Peru, where the war was still going on, was also ruled out and there was insufficient information on Chile. Canning was thus concentrating on Colombia and Buenos Aires as candidates for recognition, but when the matter was considered in full Cabinet, some members felt that Colombia's stability might be adversely affected by its involvement in the war against Spain in Peru. Canning and his supporters decided not to press for a favourable decision on Colombia, and contented themselves with an agreement to negotiate a commercial treaty with Buenos Aires, which, when ratified, would constitute diplomatic recognition.³³

George IV very much regretted the Cabinet's decision, which he felt was unnecessary and premature, and likely to en-

30 Wellington to Canning, 12 June 1824, printed in *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 277-278; Arbuthnot to Bathurst, 11 July 1824, Historical Manuscripts Commission: *Manuscripts of Earl Bathurst*. London, 1923, pág. 571; *Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot*, 19 July 1824, I, págs. 328-329.

31 See Temperley: *Canning, Wellington...*, págs. 218-219.

32 See Canning to Hervey, núm. 3. 23 April 1824; Canning to Morier, núm. 4. 30 July 1824; Canning to A'Court, núm. 18. 17 May 1824, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, I, págs. 446-450, 457-458; II, págs. 426-427; *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*. 10 Juna 1824, I, págs. 322-323.

33 Cabinet Minute, 23 July 1824, printed in Stapleton: *Canning...*, págs. 397-400. A copy in W. Y. A., Canning MSS 131 lists those attending. See also *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*. 25 July 1824, I, pág. 330. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 74. For a discussion with another Cabinet colleague, see Harrowby to Canning, 5 July 1824; Canning to Harrowby. 7 July 1824. Harrowby pointed out that, thought it would be difficulty over agreeing to Buenos Aires before information had been received; and equal difficulty over recognising Colombie first, and separately, as it was the country in which British volunteers had been most involved. Canning was able to assure him that a very satisfactory report had been received from Buenos Aires.

danger the peace of Europe because of the opposition of the continental powers. But he did not oppose it.³⁴ Wellington was also very unhappy with the decision, and tried to postpone its implementation by suggesting that Canning should ascertain that the government of Buenos Aires had the authority to negotiate for the whole of the United Provinces of Río de la Plata, before sending powers to make a treaty. Canning, who was already aware of the problem as a result of a visit of an emissary from Buenos Aires, considered that this would produce an unacceptable delay. Instead, when sending his envoy full powers on 23 August, he insisted that he should ensure that those he dealt with were empowered to act for the entire confederacy. These instructions were received two months later, but it was a further two months before the Buenos Aires government obtained the necessary authority, and not until January 1825 that the commercial treaty was signed.³⁵

Although the Cabinet decision of 23 July was the vital step in British recognition of Spanish America, it had no immediate repercussions on Anglo-Spanish relations, because the Cabinet had decided that it should be kept secret for a time, and it was not communicated to Spain, the other powers or the public.³⁶ Indeed, there was some improvement in relations with Spain as a result of the brief mission of Francisco de Zea Bermúdez, who arrived as minister in London on 13 July (taking over from the series of *chargés* who had done no more than keep the legation ticking over since the restoration of Ferdinand VII the previous October), only to learn a week later that he had been recalled to Madrid to become Secretary of State.³⁷ Zea found the diplomatic corps full

³⁴ *The Letters of George IV, 1812-1830*. Ed. A. Aspinall, 3 vols. Cambridge, 1938, vol. III, pág. 97, núm. 1.187.

³⁵ Metford, J. C. J.: *The recognition by Great Britain of the United Provinces of Río de la Plata*, «Bulletin of Hispanic Studies», vol. XXIX, 1952, págs. 217-221; Ferns, H. S.: *Britain and Argentina in the nineteenth century*. Oxford, 1960, págs. 123-130; *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*, 9 August 1824, I, pág. 331; *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 297-298; P. R. O., FO 6/6 fols. 51-65, 71. Shutleworth, *Life of Parish*, págs. 282-283.

³⁶ Canning to George IV, 1 February 1825, printed in Stapleton, *Canning*, pág. 425.

³⁷ For evidence of the limited activity of the London embassy, see Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (A.H.N.), Estado, 5.475 *passim*.

of rumours about the impending British recognition of some Spanish American state, but in his first interview with Canning on 17 July was told that there had been no developments since the discussions in Parliament in June. He complained that British policy showed little consideration towards Spain, and argued that total pacification of the colonies would not be difficult, if the British joined with the other allies in a combined effort to restore legitimacy. Canning agreed to discuss the matter further on another occasion, and at a meeting on 4 August he reiterated the British views that an allied conference would be futile; that each of the powers had to follow its own interest; and that Spain would do better to abandon any attempt at a general solution, and to make the best deal she could with each of the new states individually — in which endeavour Britain's good offices would be available. In informing A' Court of what had transpired, Canning summed up Zea's view as amounting to the wish that Britain should take no account of the actual state of independence of any part of Spanish America, so long as there was any royalist resistance in any other part.

Canning did not, however, reveal that a decision had already been taken over Buenos Aires; and when Zea reported home four days later he optimistically believed that his conversations with Canning and other members of the Cabinet, including Wellington, had undermined the resolution of the British ministers, and that the danger of recognition had passed for the moment — a view, which he said, was shared by the allied ambassadors, through they may well have been influenced by the hopes George IV had been expressing to them that he would be able to get rid of Canning.³⁸ Before Zea left in August to take up his new post in Madrid, Canning suggested that Liverpool should invite him to dinner, along with Frederick Lamb, the intended replacement for A'Court, who was being transferred to Lisbon, as the

38 A.G.S., Estado, 8.185. Zea to O'Falia, núm. 8, 19 July, to Salazar, núm. 33, 8 August 1824; P. R. O., FO 72/295, fols. 34-39. Memorandum of conference between Zea Bermúdez and Canning. 4 August 1824; Canning to A'Court, núm. 27. 7 August 1824, printed in Webster: *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 427-429; Temperley: *Canning, Wellington...*, págs. 218-219.

opportunity of «getting at a Spanish minister directly» should not be missed. It may well have been on this occasion that Zea was given to understand that Spain would be allowed a «limited interval» to make some arrangement with South America, the specific measure in mind being the attempt to place a Spanish prince on the throne of Mexico or Peru.³⁹

This Anglo-Spanish rapprochement, such as it was, did not outlast Zea's month-long stay. A successor was named, but Spain wished him to have ambassador rank. Canning refused to reciprocate, as he considered it inappropriate to maintain a senior diplomat in a «kingdom occupied by a foreign force», and the appointment was cancelled. In September Canning wrote to Zea Bermúdez, in his new capacity as Spain's foreign minister, that, in view of the long period when Spain had maintained no minister in London, he would not send Lamb as minister to Madrid until the early arrival of an opposite number was assured. This left Britain with a problem over representation there, as the only man on the spot, George Bosanquet, was very young and inexperienced. For a time Canning appeared prepared to manage without any diplomatic representative, and, although after some hesitation he promoted Bosanquet to secretary of legation and chargé d'affaires, he clearly gave Anglo-Spanish relations a very low priority at this point.⁴⁰

39 Canning to Liverpool, 30 July 1824, printed in *Some Official Correspondence of George Canning*. Ed. E. J. Stapleton, 2 vols. London, 1887, vol. I, pág. 151; Lamb to Canning, núm. 5, 20 June 1825, printed in Webster: *Britain and Independence...*, II, pág. 443. This idea was also being discussed in Paris at same time. Stuart to Canning, 27 August 1824, *Ibidem*, II, págs. 161-162. Canning had earlier shown sympathy for such a plan. A preference for monarchical institutions had been expressed in the Polignac Memorandum. Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 118-119, as a result of which Canning had accompanied the instructions of October 1823 to the commissioners to Mexico with a separate dispatch authorising them to welcome, but not to initiate, any proposal to place a Spanish Prince on the Mexican throne. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 70. Canning to Liverpool, 11 October 1823 and Canning to Hervey, núm. 5 Secret. 10 October 1823, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, I, págs. 436-438.

40 Canning to Granville, 17 August 1824, printed in *Official Correspondence*, I, pág. 154; P. R. O., FO 72/295 fols. 44-48. Canning to Zea Bermúdez, 11 September 1824; Planta to Bosanquet, 9 August; Canning to Bosanquet, núm. 1. 25 October 1824, P. R. O., FO 72/288, fols. 1, 5; Canning to Liverpool, 17 October, 13 November 1824, printed in *Official Correspondence*, I, pág. 179, 192-193.

There was more activity in other directions. Mexico was assuming some urgency. The situation had stabilised, and its government was responding, through a representative in London, to Canning's offer of April to mediate with Spain.⁴¹ Moreover, a favourable report had been received from the commissioners to Colombia.⁴² But Canning and Liverpool were still concerned about what might happen in Colombia, if Bolívar was defeated in Peru; this had been the reason for delay on Colombia in July, and still applied in November. If necessary, Canning argued in a secret memorandum for Liverpool, it could be publicly stated as a reason for delaying action on Colombia.⁴³ The pro-ministry newspaper, the «*Courier*», outlined this as the government's thinking on 29 October, but, in forwarding a copy of the article to Madrid, the Spanish chargé argued that the arrival of news from Peru favourable to the royalist cause was the real reason for British holding back on recognition. However, a month later he passed on the view of one of his informants, that the government had now decided to recognise both Colombia and Mexico, and that general credence was being given in London to news that Bolívar had won a great victory in Peru.⁴⁴

41 P. R. O. FO 97/270. Memoranda of 22 September, 11 October 1824, latter printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, I, págs. 458-459; Rodríguez O., J. E.: *The Emergence of Spanish America. Vicente Rocafuerte and Spanish Americanism, 1808-1823*. Berkeley, 1975, págs. 92-107; Canning to Liverpool, 17 October 1824, printed in *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, pág. 324; Liverpool to Canning, 24 October 1824, printed in Yonge, C. D.: *The Life and Administration of the 2nd Earl of Liverpool*. 3 vols. London, 1868, vol. III, págs. 296-297.

42 On 23 October 1824. Temperley, *Canning*, pág. 145. But Canning was highly dissatisfied with its brevity, and insisted that the commissioner who had brought it should prepare a more detailed account. Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, I, págs. 379-381, and P. R. O., FO 18/3.

43 Liverpool to Canning, 24 October 1824, printed in Yonge, *The Life...*, vol. III, págs. 296-297, Canning to Liverpool, 13 November 1824. *Official Correspondence*, I, págs. 192-193. B. L., Add. MS 38370, fols. 339-341. Most Secret and Confidential. Mr Canning. South America &c. undated (later dated 1823 in another hand, but clearly October of November 1824 from internal evidence). It was not until 10 December that Canning received his commissioner's final report, which contained the reassurance that he did not believe that a possible defeat of Bolívar could lead to a royalist reconquest of Colombia, or a pro-Spanish uprising there. P. R. O., FO 18/3, fols. 176-189. Enclosure to Campbell to Canning. 10 December 1824.

44 A. H. N., Estado, 5.475. Castillo to Zea, núm. 49. 1 November 1824; y 3 December 1824, A.G.S., Estado, 8.186.

On the European side, the French had at last admitted in August, what Canning had known for some time, — that they had commercial agents stationed at various points in Spanish America. This, in Canning's view, vindicated arguments he had used in July,⁴⁵ about the need for Britain to anticipate the possible threat of French recognition.⁴⁶ More disturbing was news of French actions in the Peninsula. Although Ferdinand VII's absolutist regime had been restored for a year, the French had found that they could not withdraw all their troops without imperilling its stability. They therefore began to concentrate on holding Spanish fortresses, in what was beginning to look like a permanent military occupation. This was a violation of one of the understandings on which Britain had based her neutrality when France invaded in 1823, and threw continued doubt on the independence of Spain's international relations. In November Canning circulated a memorandum embodying these points,⁴⁷ and after discussion in Cabinet on 1 and 2 December, it was agreed to ask France to set a definite date for complete withdrawal of its army from Spain.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Liverpool had related the issue of the French occupation to the Spanish American question in an important «Memorandum on our relations with the Spanish American Provinces» dated 30 November.⁴⁹

This document noted that the first step towards the political recognition of Buenos Aires had already been taken, and that it was now necessary to make decisions regarding Mexico and Colombia, with a view to reporting to Parliament when it reassembled

45 W. Y. A., Canning MSS 101. Canning to George IV. 24 July 1824. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 74. Harrowby to Canning, 5 July 1824; Wellington to Canning, 26 July 1824, printed in *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 294-295.

46 B. L., Add. MS 40311, fols. 73-74. Canning to Peel, 15 August 1824; He also thought it ought to quiet the King's fears of continental hostility towards further moves.

47 W. Y. A., Canning MSS 131. Memorandum on the proposed withdrawal of the French army from Spain.

48 *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*, 4 December 1824, I, págs. 358-360.

49 Printed in *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 354-358, and also in Yonge: *Liverpool*, III, págs. 297-304, where it is stated that it was drawn up by Liverpool in his own handwriting. Temperley, however, thinks Canning probably also had a hand in its composition. Temperley, *Canning*, págs. 498-499.

in early February. It pointed out that recognition was an essential preliminary to establishing proper international relations, and so could not be long delayed by a country such as Britain, with extensive interests in the new states. Indeed, these states could at any time force Britain to recognise, or risk losing all its trade to the United States, by the simple expedient of commercial discrimination in favour of states that had recognised. It then went on to argue that Britain ought not to delay her recognition on account of the reluctance of the major European powers. The delay could not harm them as, unlike Britain, they had few if any real interests in the area; and their objections, which were based on the legitimate rights of Spain, could not be overcome until Spain herself recognised. There was no point in waiting for this, because she would not recognise as long as Britain hesitated, whereas British recognition might lead Spain to accept that the fate of the colonies was effectively decided. The memorandum finally turned to wider issues. In relation to France, it argued that the Family Compact between the Bourbon monarchs of France and Spain, which had been highly disadvantageous to Britain in the eighteenth century, had been broken by the Anglo-Spanish alliance during the Peninsular war, but had now been restored by the French occupation. Spain could no longer be regarded as a free agent in foreign policy, and in these circumstances it was important for Britain that Spanish America should not be in the same state of dependence on France as the mother country. In relation to the United States, it suggested that the failure to recognise could result not only in serious commercial rivalry, but also in a consequential challenge to Britain's naval supremacy. And it concluded that the new states were at the moment favourably disposed towards Britain, and that it was important to take advantage of the opportunity to consolidate Britain's position.

The memorandum was discussed in Cabinet on 7 December, but its arguments were apparently not convincing enough, for all that was agreed was that the recognition of the Spanish American countries should be decided in the light of the situation of each state and of Britain's own interests, and that no further reference

need be made either to Spain or to the European powers.⁵⁰ On the same day Wellington wrote to Liverpool, expressing his objections to any further moves on Spanish America. In his view, Canning was the only minister interested in pressing the matter. If his dissent was inconvenient, he was quite to resign. The Prime Minister replied the following day saying that he very much wanted Wellington to remain in the Cabinet, but was himself convinced of the necessity of recognition, especially because of the danger of an association between the new states and the U.S.A.⁵¹ On 9 December Canning received the expected evasive answer from France on the duration of its occupation of Spain,⁵² consulted with Liverpool,⁵³ and then drew up a further paper. This emphasised that Britain should not appear to acquiesce in the continued French occupation of Spain, and that the most effective way of countering the increased power of France that it implied would be by separating the resources of Spanish America from Spain. Fortunately this could be readily done by recognising Mexico and Colombia, though there might be something to be said for delaying action on Colombia until there was more definite news from Peru. Mexico, however, was an obvious case, both because of the extensive British interests there, and because of the desirability of placing a barrier in the way of the extension of the influence of the U.S.A.⁵⁴

At the decisive meeting on 14 December, there was much opposition from the conservative element. But the threat of resignation from Liverpool and Canning brought about agreement

50 Stapleton, *Canning*, págs. 405-406.

51 *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 364-366. See also *Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot*, 6 December 1824, I, págs. 362-364.

52 Temperley, *Canning*, pág. 146; Kaufmann, *British Policy*, pág. 177. The Cabinet found this unsatisfactory, and decided to consider the matter further. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 101. Canning to George IV. 9 December 1824. See also *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*, 10, 16 December 1824, I, págs. 364-366, who suggests that Canning knew that he could have obtained satisfactory assurances from the French Ambassador, but deliberately chose a more provocative procedure.

53 W. Y. A., Canning MSS 71. Canning to Liverpool. 11, 12, 14 December 1824 (those of 11 and 14 printed in *Official Correspondence*, I, págs. 212-213).

54 Printed in Temperley, *Canning*, págs. 550-554.

to recognise both Mexico and Colombia, though, as Canning later revealed, he and Liverpool would have been prepared to settle for only Mexico. However, the French argument enabled them to carry Colombia as well. This was reflected in the Cabinet Minute, in which Canning reported the outcome to the King. It made only a brief reference to the growing influence of the United States in Mexico and Colombia, before fully rehearsing the need to react to the indefinite French military occupation of the Peninsula, by means of preventing Spanish America from being brought under French influence, through the recognition of Mexico and Colombia.⁵⁵ The King highly disapproved of a decision which he considered derogatory to the rights of monarchy, and offensive to his European allies, and he later showed his displeasure by refusing to open Parliament in person, so as to avoid announcing the hateful step in the King's Speech. But however great his reluctance, he could not avoid the acceptance of his Cabinet's decision, as there was no real possibility of constructing a viable ministry without Canning and Liverpool.⁵⁶

Canning's immediate comment on his achievement: «Spanish America is free; and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly, she is English...»⁵⁷ epitomises the significance of the step. If the second part of the statement reflects a perhaps exaggerated

55 Canning to Granville, 17 December 1824; Cabinet Minute, 14 December 1824, printed in Stapleton, *Canning*, págs. 411-413, 407-411; Greville, C. C. F.: *The Greville Memoirs. A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV, and Queen Victoria*. Ed. H. Reeve. 8 vols. London, 1888, vol. I, págs. 107-108 (entry for 9 August 1827). See also *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*, 18, 27, 29 December 1824, I, págs. 366-370. who gives Wellington's view that Canning sought an angry response from France as an excuse for recognising Spanish America, and had tricked the Cabinet into agreeing to that policy. Canning, however, thought that those in the Cabinet who tried to separate the French question from that of Spanish America were being dishonest. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 71. Canning to Liverpool, 14 December 1824.

56 Stapleton: *Canning*, págs. 415-426; *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, págs. 368-369, 373-374, 377-378, 385-386, 394-395, 401-404; Arbuthnot to Liverpool, 29 December 1824, printed in Aspinall, A. (ed.): *The Correspondence of Charles Arbuthnot*. Camden Society, Third Serie. Vol. LXV, London, 1941, núm. 63, págs. 70-72; Temperley, *Canning*, págs. 147, 151-152; Temperley, *Canning, Wellington...*, págs. 219-221; Hinde, Wendy: *George Canning*. London, 1973, págs. 367-370.

57 Canning to Granville, 17 December 1824. Stapleton, *Canning*, págs. 411-413.

fear of the danger of United States rivalry,⁵⁸ the view in the first part, that recognition by the world's leading naval and commercial power set seal on independence, was endorsed by Latin American opinion. As a contemporary Colombian historian put it, the people were overjoyed, as they knew it meant the end of the war.⁵⁹

Spain had not been considered at all in the final discussions over recognition. Indeed, since the departure of Zea in August, there had been no inter-governmental communications between Britain and Spain on Spanish America, and low level diplomatic representation in both capitals. In a sense this was not surprising, for one of the principal arguments for recognition in the final discussions was that Spain was not a free agent, and that her ex-colonies should therefore be removed from potential French influence. Britain was, however, a free agent in the matter, as Canning had been at pains to ensure over the previous year, and it was of course this, and not her relationship with France, that Canning pointed out to Spain in the dispatch (dated 31 December 1824) in which he announced the decision. This communication, which Canning also read to the ambassadors of the major powers in London, called to mind that Britain had repeatedly explained that she would take further steps in the light of reports of the situation in Spanish America and of British interests there. It had become clear that Mexico, Colombia and Buenos Aires had attained sufficient stability, and their commerce with Britain had developed to such an extent, for the negotiation of commercial treaties, ratification of which would constitute diplomatic recognition, to be appropriate.⁶⁰

58 For another expression of this, see Canning to Frere, 8 January 1825, printed in Festing, G.: *John Hookham Frere and his friends*. London, 1899, págs. 267-268; and for a discussion, see Humphreys, R. A.: *Anglo-American rivalries and Spanish American emancipation*. «Transactions of the Royal Historical Society», Fifth Series, vol. XVI, 1966, págs. 150-156.

59 Restrepo, J. M.: *Historia de la Revolución en la República de Colombia en la América meridional*. 8 vols. Bogotá, 1942-1950. Vol. VI, pág. 337. See also the report of a British observer when the news reached Bogotá, that the people were rushing about the streets shouting: «We are now an independent nation!». Hamilton to Planta, 8 March 1825, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, I, pág. 385.

60 Canning to Bosanquet, núm. 7, 31 December 1824, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 429-431; W. Y. A., Canning MSS 102. Canning to George IV, 1 January 1825.

Bosanquet read this dispatch to Zea Bermúdez on 10 January 1825. The Spanish Secretary of State reacted with shock and horror, professing to be quite unprepared for such an announcement. He said that Britain was completely misinformed about the true situation in Spanish America, and that, by encouraging rebellion, she was undermining the basis of all European governments. The British chargé believed that both Zea and the ministers of the other powers in Madrid, with whom he immediately consulted, had been taken completely by surprise by the British action. Zea replied with a note of 21 January, in which Bosanquet detected the influence of the Russian and other allied emissaries. This started by bemoaning the fact that just when Ferdinand VII, restored after three years anarchy under the liberal regime, was beginning to reestablish order in his dominions, both in Europe and America, Britain had destroyed all his efforts by recognising the rebels. The note went on to accuse Britain of inconsistency, of denying Spain's legitimate claims, of placing unacceptable terms on mediation proposals, of acting against her own interests, and of violating her treaty obligations; and it concluded by requesting Britain to reconsider, as the Crown of Spain could never abandon its rights. An accompanying private letter from Zea to Canning expressed the wish for good relations between the countries, and asked Canning to use his influence to have the decision reversed. Canning had no difficulty in defending Britain against the various accusations, annotating Zea's communication with counter arguments; but at first he contented himself with acknowledging the private letter, and saying that the only point he found objectionable was the allegation of treaty violation, which he strongly denied.⁶¹

Meanwhile, the long awaited Spanish minister, Camilo Gutiérrez de los Ríos, had at last arrived in London. In his first interview early in February, which involved Liverpool as well as

61 P. R. O., FO 72/299. Bosanquet to Canning, núms. 11, 14 (enclosing Zea's note of 21 January and translation), núms. 18, 20, dated 22, 27 January 1825 (most of núm. 11 and extracts of translation with Foreign Office annotations printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 431-437); P. R. O., FO 72/307. Zea to Canning, 21 January; Canning to Zea, 8 February 1825.

Canning, the arguments in Zea's note were the main subject of discussion. But, while Los Ríos got the impression that the British ministers agreed that a grave injustice was being done to Spain, they were insistent that the decision could not be modified, far less reversed. Los Ríos thought this was partly because it had already been publicised (he had earlier reported that the only criticism of the announcement at the opening of Parliament had been that the government had waited too long before acting), but also because Canning, who was in office against the wishes of the King, had to court public opinion by furthering the nation's commercial interests. Thus the underlying reasons were the extensive British capital investments in loans and mines, and the need to combat the commercial rivalry of the United States, which had already recognised Spanish America. In the face of such material interests, he felt there was little hope of Spain's arguments prevailing.⁶²

The allies also found Canning equally immovable, when early in March they added their protest to those of Spain, and lectured him on the principles of legitimacy.⁶³ This so annoyed Canning that in his formal reply to Zea's note he cited instances where all the allies and Spain herself had acted against these principles. This reply, which argued that the separation of the colonies from Spain was neither Britain's work nor her wish, but a fact to which she had to adjust her policy, Canning deliberately delayed until 25 March, explaining to Los Ríos that as Zea's arguments were based on an optimistic view of the situation in Peru, he wished to wait for definite news of the royalist defeat there. Los

62 A.G.S., Estado, 8.187. Los Ríos to Zea, núms. 2, 3, 4. 9 February 1825. This defeatist attitude of Los Ríos is consistent with the view of Mme. Lieven in a letter of 25 March 1825. She found him entertaining, but felt that «the Good God did not put him into the world to represent Spain». *The Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 1820-1826*. London, 1937, pág. 348.

63 Temperley, *Canning*, págs. 151-153; Canning to Granville, 9 March 1825, and enclosures, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 167-174. France appears to have tried to revive the idea of independent Bourbon monarchies in South America, but Canning felt such a suggestion would have to come from Madrid. Canning to Granville, 18 February 1825, printed in *Official Correspondence*, I, págs. 245-259.

Ríos had, however, deduced that Canning (as he privately admitted) was equally concerned with awaiting the response of the allies. Canning also told Zea, in a confidential letter of 30 April, that he had only included contentious points because of the intervention of the allies, and went on to say how much better off Spain could have been if she had accepted British mediation the previous years, rather than heeded the impractical advice of the continental powers, to adhere to legitimacy and hope to restore her authority. She could have been at peace with Mexico and Colombia, and enjoying special commercial advantages, instead of still at war, and in danger of losing her principal remaining possession, Cuba. And he again offered mediation.⁶⁴ But he already considered the question of Spanish American independence as closed,⁶⁵ and any possibility of mediation with the independent states disappeared when Zea revealed to Lamb that the King regarded it as his religious duty not to alienate any part of the Spanish dominions.⁶⁶ In fact no step was taken towards Spanish recognition until after the death of Ferdinand VII, and this would appear to vindicate the judgement of Canning and Liverpool that there was no point in waiting for Spanish action. As was pointed out in the Memorandum of 30 November 1824, if Spain took as long to recognise the independence of Spanish America as she had in the case of the Spanish Netherlands, Britain might have to wait for sixty years.⁶⁷

64 P. R. O., FO 72/309. Canning to Los Ríos, 25 March 1825 (part printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence*, II, págs. 438-440; A.G.S., Estado, 8.187. Los Ríos to Zea, núm. 54, 24 March 1825; Canning to Granville, 25 March 1825, printed in *Official Correspondence*, I, pág. 260; Canning to Zea, 30 April 1825, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence*, II, págs. 440-442.

65 P. R. O., FO 72/299. See instructions to Bosanquet, núms. 7, 9, 29 March 1825; to Lamb, núm. 2, 2 May 1825, P. R. O., FO 72/300, part printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, pág. 442. Canning showed anxiety, in these and other communications, to try to restore good relations with Spain as soon as possible. He also showed consideration for Los Ríos by sending him unwelcome news about Peru, so that he would not learn about it first from the press. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 132. Canning, to Los Ríos, 2 March 1825.

66 See Lamb to Canning, núm. 5, 20 June 1825, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 442-447. Lamb did not reach Spain until early June, his departure having been delayed, first until the arrival of Los Ríos, and then because of a long illness.

67 *Despatches... of Wellington*, II, pág. 357.

British recognition was not official until ratification of the commercial treaties.⁶⁸ The first to be completed was that with Colombia on 7 November 1825, and two weeks later the Colombian minister had an official audience with George IV — the first occasion on which a Spanish American minister was received at a European court. «Behold! the New World established...!», declared Canning.⁶⁹ In contrast to the decision of December 1824 to negotiate the commercial treaties, the actual conclusion of the first passed without protest and virtually without comment. Canning's words on this occasion merely underlined the point that the real significance of recognition did not lie in the establishment of a proper legal framework for British commercial relations with Colombia (though that was not without importance). Trade had, after all, been going on for years, and continued to go on with Mexico (although the Anglo-Mexican commercial treaty was considerably delayed for a variety of reasons), and with Chile, Peru and Central America (which were not involved in the first round of treaty-making at all). What was important was the establishment of the principle of independence, which put an end to un-

68 Temperley questions the validity of this precondition, and suggests that willingness to negotiate probably constitutes recognition (see his *Canning*, pág. 504). The Cabinet, however, in the case of Buenos Aires, did not wish to be committed to recognition without seeing the terms of the treaty, and the Lord Chancellor tried to give effect to this in his advice on drawing up the full powers. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 75. Eldon to Canning, 16 August 1824.

69 Canning to Granville, 21 November 1825, printed in Stapleton, *Canning*, págs.445-447. Canning was anxious to get the presentation of the Colombian minister over as soon as possible. Canning to Liverpool, 14 October 1825, printed in *Official Correspondence*, I, pág. 302. The King behaved impeccably, although a year earlier opponents of recognition had argued that he would never receive Spanish American diplomats (see Canning to Granville, 21 October 1825, printed in *Official Correspondence*, I, pág. 309). Canning, who had been on much better terms with the King since about March 1825, had placed the monarch in his debt, by doing him the favour of sending his rival for the affections of his mistress to a diplomatic post in South America. In return the King withdrew his objections to receiving envoys from that continent. *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*, 31 July 1825, I, pág. 410. The treaty had been brought to England in June, and Colombia's ratification arrived in October. W. Y. A., Canning MSS 102. Canning to George IV, 29 June, 14 October 1825. Although the Buenos Aires treaty had been signed in January, and communicated to Parliament in May, it turned out that the Buenos Aires representative did not have the correct credentials. A.G.S., Estado 8.187. Los Ríos to Zea, núm. 97, 18 May 1825.

certainty about the future of Spanish America. Until Britain proclaimed her intention to recognise, there was always the remote possibility that some change of circumstances in Europe or America might lead to further attempts at reconquest by or on behalf of Spain. With British recognition, the Spanish Americans, and no doubt also those who dealt with them, felt much more secure. It is this perhaps more than anything that explains Bolívar's tribute on the occasion of Canning's death, that the British statesman was responsible for the triumph of his cause.⁷⁰

It was not until two years after the British decision to recognise that Canning made his most famous statement on the subject. In December 1826, a pretender to the Portuguese throne, aided and abetted by Spain, invaded Portugal in an attempt to take over its government. Britain had long-standing treaty obligations to defend her Portuguese ally. When Canning announced to the House of Commons on 12 December that Britain was sending troops to Lisbon, it was universally welcomed. But two opposition members took the opportunity to ask why he had not acted similarly when France invaded Spain, and what he proposed to do about the continued occupation. Thus provoked, Canning admitted that this had been an affront to British pride; but he argued that it did not call for military intervention, for without her empire, Spain was a harmless and valueless prize. «If France occupied Spain, was it necessary in order to avoid the consequences of that occupation that we should blockade Cadiz? No. I looked another way. I sought materials of compensation in another hemisphere. Contemplating Spain, such as our ancestors had known her, I resolved that if France had Spain, it should not be Spain 'with the Indies'. I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old». This brilliant peroration «electrified» the House, though some of his colleagues took exception to his use of the first person singular, and an unsympathetic obser-

⁷⁰ «La América no olvidará jamás que Mr. Canning hizo respetar sus derechos. Yo mismo me siento reconocido particularmente por el triunfo que ha dado a la causa que he defendido». Bolívar, S.: *Obras Completas*. 3 vols. Habana, 1950, vol. II, pág. 702.

ver found his belligerent bombast «abominable». ⁷¹ Beneath this rhetoric about the balance of power, in which in fact Latin America never figured, either in Canning's day or subsequently, lies an important assertion of motive, which Canning repeated in a letter three weeks later, apparently in response to attempts by French ministers to dispute the causal connection between the occupation and the recognition: «The French occupation was not the sole reason, nor perhaps in some quarters the most potential and reconciling reason for [the decision on recognition], but it was emphatically mine». ⁷²

But this is not the whole story. It can certainly be said that the successful conclusion to the French invasion in October 1823 gave a strong impetus to the British recognition process, and also that the continued French occupation was the main consideration in the final case put to the Cabinet in December 1824. But to link these as direct cause and effect is to overlook both the antecedents, and the unfolding of events in the interim. The process had started in June 1822 with commercial recognition by Canning's predecessor, who had made it clear to Spain that further action would necessarily follow in due course. There were mercantile interests involved, and public and parliamentary support. Canning himself had proposed recognition in November 1822, ⁷³ before the French invasion, which «certainly hastened, but did not produce that measure». ⁷⁴ There was only a passing reference to the French occupation of Spain in the report of the discussion in July 1824, leading to the decision to recognise Buenos Aires; and even in

⁷¹ Kaufmann, *British Policy*, pág. 220; Hinde, *Canning*, pág. 422; Bethell, L.: *George Canning and the independence of Latin America*. London, 1970, págs. 12-13; Greville, *Memoirs*, I, págs. 85-86; *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*, 15 December 1826, II, pág. 64.

⁷² Canning to Granville, 2 January 1827, printed in *Official Correspondence*, II, págs. 242-244.

⁷³ Waddell, *Anglo-Spanish relations...*, págs. 473-483.

⁷⁴ According to the recollection of his wife, see Temperley, H.: *Joan Canning on her husband's policy and ideas*. «English Historical Review», vol. XLV, 1930, pág. 413. She added: «— for the year before Mr C. had declared to Spain that such an event must soon take place», possibly with reference to the warning given in Canning to A'Court, 18 October 1822, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, págs. 390-393.

Liverpool's Memorandum of 30 November, it was given less consideration than developments in Spanish America itself and the threat from the United States. The danger of American rivalry seems throughout to have been the main concern of the Prime Minister, who, of course, fully shared the responsibility for the measure. Only when the arguments in the memorandum seemed insufficiently effective was the French threat stressed. No doubt the anti-French drum was a good one to beat in post-Napoleonic Britain. And the possibility that this was essentially a tactical argument, deployed in the hope of swaying waverers in the Cabinet, rather than the principal motive, is supported by the feeling of some of its members that they had been duped.⁷⁵

There is no real reason to doubt that Britain desired recognition for its own sake, and that she would have preferred to follow rather than to precede Spain in this action. In the parallel and contemporaneous case of Portuguese America, where the mother country showed some disposition to negotiate, Britain did in fact delay her recognition of Brazilian independence until the mother country had herself acknowledged it in 1825. Spain was given similar opportunities to come to terms, though Britain had every reason to be sceptical about her willingness to give serious consideration to the offers made to her. For there was no real possibility of Anglo-Spanish agreement, with Spanish recognition out of the question in the face of Ferdinand VII's religious scruples. As Zea put it to Lamb, when he suggested that if Spain was the last to recognise, she would not reap any benefit, «if such were to be the result... he would not swerve one step from the path of honor and conscience to aver it, in the confidence that if these losses and sufferings were imposed from on High, human endeavours were inadequate to avert them».⁷⁶

D. A. G. WADDELL

⁷⁵ *Journal of Mrs Arbuthnot*, I, pág. 370; Aspinall, *Correspondence of Arbuthnot*, pág. 71.

⁷⁶ Lamb to Canning, núm. 5, 20 June 1825, printed in Webster, *Britain and Independence...*, II, pág. 444.