

**BRITISH PERCEPTIONS OF SPAIN DURING THE 1930s,  
AND THEIR USE IN THE INTERPRETATION OF THE  
EVENTS OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR**

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## Abstract

On 11 September 1936 a *Times* editorial made reference to the 'clamorous partisanship' that had been brought about by the civil war in Spain. In literature since the war this polarisation of opinion has been central to representations of British responses to the conflict. Much attention has focused on the divergent British political responses, and particularly on those of the left, responses which became increasingly bitter as Spain became a 'distorting mirror in which Europe [could] see an exaggerated reflection of her own divisions'. Yet, as *The Times* editorial continued at the time, in spite of all 'incitements the great mass of public opinion (remained) firmly opposed to any taking of sides'. This public resistance to the 'clamorous' efforts of supporters of the Republic or advocates of the Nationalists has been noted in subsequent literature but has not been explored in any depth, explanation generally centring around the policy of appeasement. While not ignoring such explanations, this study argues that the imagery and language employed in the various contemporary interpretations of events played a significant part in distancing events.

The study, then, aims to add a cultural perspective to the more widely examined political understanding of British responses to Spain during the 1930s. Through an analysis of representations in mass culture, and through an examination of the experiences of the growing numbers of British visitors to the Peninsula, the study first seeks to identify the expectations of Spain and the Spanish people most commonly held in Britain of the 1930s. It then goes on to examine how, during the life of the Republic and especially throughout the Civil War, supporters of both sides, in every form of mass media available, repeatedly referred to this framework of preconceived notions as they endeavoured to interpret issues and events for their British audiences. Particular attention is given to differing portrayals of the Spanish political scene and the Catholic Church, to the representations of the two sides and what they reportedly stood for. Finally, by looking at reactions to events in the Basque provinces, examining responses to humanitarian aid appeals and once again assessing the attitudes found in fictional representations of the war the study offers some measure of the impact of the war on the wider British public.

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Brian Shelmerdine

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

During the 1920s popular British impressions of Spain were in large part conditioned by exotic clichés of flamenco dancers and matadors, ‘flowing robes, flashing swords and fluttering fans’.<sup>1</sup> Most visitors sought out the ‘pomp and tradition of religious ceremonies’, enthused over the artistry ... of the far away past and were enchanted by ‘the accumulated workmanship of many generations’.<sup>2</sup> Lying at the edge of Europe, on the periphery of world affairs, indeed neutral during the recent World War, and economically backward, for most, the Peninsula seemed very much at the margin of the modern world. ‘The Englishman’s attitude toward Spain’, declared the writer and *Daily Mail* gossip columnist Charles Graves, was dictated by the realisation that, ‘though once our equal and superior ... she has now come down in the world. ... a great lady in reduced circumstances’.<sup>3</sup> However, events in the 1930s raised Spain’s profile. The deposing of Alfonso XIII and the birth of the Second Republic saw British interest take on a political dimension, one which gathered pace among the politically aware throughout the next five years and exploded following the rebellion of the Spanish military on July 17, 1936.

In an article which inspired this project, Tom Buchanan contends that as the British people were not so ‘ignorant’ about Spain, her people, history and customs as they were about Czechoslovakia then it is ‘inconceivable’ that British politicians or journalists could have attempted to dismiss the war in Spain as ‘a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing’.<sup>4</sup> Given the direct involvement of volunteers and the public response to humanitarian aid appeals this would seem to be the case. Yet, during the course of the conflict many activists and partisan commentators complained of public disinterest in the causes they were espousing. George Orwell, for instance, famously concluded that ‘the

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<sup>1</sup> Matt Marshall, *Tramp-Royal in Spain* (Edinburgh, 1935), p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Helen Cameron-Gordon, *Spain As It Is* (London, 1931), p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Graves, *Trip-tyque* (London, 1936), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Buchanan, “‘A Far Away Country of Which We Know Nothing’? Perceptions of Spain and its Civil War in Britain, 1931-1939, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 4, No.1, 1993, pp. 1-24.

working class of the world ha[d] regarded the Spanish war with detachment'.<sup>5</sup> This seeming paradox was the result of a number of factors, most particularly a consensus in support of appeasement which prevailed throughout the Civil War. However, it is the contention of this thesis that representations of Spain during the Second Republic and especially during the Civil War served in no small measure to ensure that in the public mind Spain did indeed remain 'a far away country', one whose war was of little concern to Britain. It is the argument here, that although overstated, Orwell's dismay, like that of many other commentators, was in no small part the result of the general and continuing British perception of Spain in the 1930s.

As Buchanan's article points out, although not 'ignorant' of the Peninsula and its people British expectations remained largely confined within a framework of long-established, often crude, stereotypes. Importantly, this was a framework to which commentators, journalists and politicians repeatedly referred in their efforts to explain issues and events to the British public. This study will explore the contention that in this way even the most reasoning of observers managed to perpetuate popular preconceptions of Spain. It will show that while British commentators did not ignore the Spanish roots of the war they did usually interpret them within the context of a wider political ideology and explain them in terms of Spanish national character and custom. For Buchanan the most significant stereotypical references employed were those which portrayed the Spanish people as, 'first incompetent and lazy; second, cruel and violent; and, finally, highly individualistic'.<sup>6</sup> These assumptions of Spanish national character, as demonstrated in the following chapters, were certainly commonplace in the various contemporary representations of Spain during this period. As this study also makes clear, though, they formed only part of the picture. In the first place, they were assumptions which commentators progressively sought to refine and reshape in order to best represent their chosen side. As is shown, this was a process which was informed by notions of 'Englishness' as much as by any understanding of 'Spanishness'. Further, in presenting their respective cases, both the pro-Republican and pro-Nationalist camps offered very different interpretations not only of Spanish character but also of Spanish history, cultural heritage and customs.

<sup>5</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (London, 1986, first published 1938), p. 212.

<sup>6</sup> Buchanan, "'A Far Away Country'", p. 5.

Largely, these too were founded in popular British conceptions of Spain. However, as Alicia Alted has outlined and as is made evident here, such interpretations also increasingly reflected the representations being advanced by the opposing forces in Spain, each side seeking to interpret Spanish history and culture as a means of legitimising their respective causes.<sup>7</sup>

It is this process - the continued use by commentators of established notions of national character to explain Spanish behaviour, and of Spanish culture and history to reinforce and advance either the Nationalist or the Republican cause - that is examined in this project. In a series of overlapping but loosely chronologically ordered chapters the study analyses British attitudes and responses to events in Spain during the 1930s, from the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera through to the end of the Civil War. The effectiveness of the various interpretations offered is traced against the pattern of events and judged by public responses. While during the war it was the pro-Republic message that became the most dynamic the study recognises that in significant sections of British society the pro-Nationalist voice was equally vigorous. Indeed, given subsequent events, the continuing and enhanced strength of the pro-Republic message has been such that the forceful opinions expressed within the British Catholic community, among those with commercial interests in Spain and among Tory members of the National Government, both mainstream and the more committed, have been somewhat marginalised. This study aims to correct that balance.

The project, then, first examines the structure of thoughts and understanding of Spain as witnessed in popular fiction and travel experiences, and moves to show how these surfaced in more politically directed commentaries. Here the study examines the stereotypes evident in the differing interpretations of the Spanish political landscape during the pre-Civil War years and analyses the opposing views of the role of the Catholic Church. Both of these introduce the polarised positions adopted by commentators at the onset of the war; positions which saw the right identify the Republic with communism and anarchy, and the left bracket the Nationalists with fascist-led repression. Depictions of the two sides, extended to

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<sup>7</sup> Alicia Alted, 'The Cultural Politics of the Civil War: The Republican and Nationalist Wartime Cultural Apparatus', Helen Graham & Jo Labanyi, *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 152-161.



include the nationalities of other participants in the war, are further examined in the context of class, ethnic and racial stereotypes. The study also looks closely at how commentators attempted to project their differing versions of the 'new Spain' that would emerge after the war. Here, attitudes regarding Spain's cultural inheritance, the structure of Spanish society, the importance of education and the role of women are among the issues considered.

Also evident throughout the study is a pattern in which the Basque provinces were regarded and depicted as largely distinct from the rest of Spain. As is demonstrated, this was a pattern already established at the onset of the civil war. The project, then, investigates the religious and political anomalies brought about by the war in the north and the efforts of both sides to exploit, accommodate or explain these in their various interpretations of events. As a means of assessing responses to events, particular attention is paid to representations of, and public reaction to, the blockade of Bilbao, the bombing of Guernica and the plight of Basque refugee children. All these were issues which raised media attention and heightened a growing public sympathy for the Republic. The study seeks to further measure the development of that sympathy through an assessment of responses to the numerous humanitarian appeals. As is demonstrated, here again notions of Spain and the Spanish had a role to play, though not so transparent a role as in the fictional representations that were spawned by the war. Finally, therefore, the study returns to the fictional portrayal of Spain. Here, an analysis of the films and books which, during its course, used the war as a setting, suggests some evidence of a reflection of changing public sympathies. However, the study also reveals the cautionary tone which served to limit fictional responses, and the continued recourse to stock stereotypes, and argues that both served to reinforce public ambivalence toward the war.

Reaction to events in the Basque provinces, responses to humanitarian appeals and the representation of the war in fiction, together with a number of contemporary surveys, help determine the direction of public sympathy. It is universally accepted that during 1937 pro-Republican observers were more in accord with the popular mood, public sympathy shifting decisively in favour of the Republic during the course of the war. What this study charts is the process by which pro-Republic

commentators gained that support and pro-Nationalists lost it. What the study makes clear, however, is that, with the notable exception of responses to events in the Basque provinces, pro-Republic activists failed to transform public sympathy into a demand for positive action. This study contends that this, if not passive then detached response, was one largely encouraged in the mass media and in fictional accounts of the war. Moreover, it argues that the conflicting versions of events offered in more partisan commentaries did little to counter this, indeed they merely encouraged ambivalence. The study shows that while it can be argued that the efforts of both sets of supporters to ameliorate preconceived notions met with some success, clichéd impressions of the Spanish were so deeply entrenched in British culture that even recourse to refined stereotypes did little to convince the British public of a need to get involved in what remained an essentially alien and 'distant' war. In Britain of the 1930s most people continued to regard Spain as the land of *Carmen* and the Inquisition. For them, the Spanish political scene remained comic and incomprehensible, a landscape inhabited by bomb-throwing anarchists and pistol-waving generals all readily disposed to revolution.

### **The Study in the Context of Current Literature.**

It is almost seven decades since the start of the Spanish Civil War and yet, as its repeated use as a signifier of idealism in fiction illustrates, impressions made during, or arising from, the conflict continue to resound. Enduring interest in the war is evidenced by the stories of long past personal tragedies which still surface in the media, by exhibitions of art and memorabilia and by the continually expanding wealth of historiographic material.<sup>8</sup> While amongst this material there are a number of important publications which consider the impact of the war on Britain, apart from the articles of Buchanan and Walton already mentioned, little regard has been given to the imagery and language employed by British commentators in their representations of events in Spain during the years of the Second Republic. The value of such an approach, however, has been demonstrated in papers by

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<sup>8</sup> E.g. 'This is what he gave me just as he stepped into the yard to be shot', *The Guardian*, 22 March 1999; 'Victims beatified', *The Times*, 12 March 2001; 'The Spanish Civil War: Dreams and Nightmares', Imperial War Museum, 20 October 2001 - 28 April 2002. Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1996), p. 1, notes that, internationally, the war had already generated over 15,000 books when last counted in the 1970s.

Angela Schwarz on contemporary British perceptions of Nazi Germany.<sup>9</sup> In an assessment of the impact of events in Spain on Britain during the 1930s, the origin and strength of preconceived ideas about Spanish society, customs, and politics, the use of these in accounts of the Second Republic and especially the Civil War, and how such notions may have affected public responses are important considerations.

Clearly such a study must draw from the many other approaches to British responses to events. Accounts of British political stances, volunteer participation, humanitarian responses, and the involvement of intellectuals and their contemporary and subsequent artistic and literary output are all essential to the structure of this project, and all have been the subject of extensive research. Recently, Tom Buchanan's examination of *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* has drawn many of these aspects into one incisive volume.<sup>10</sup> At the core of all such studies is an emphasis on how events in Spain fractured British political and ideological opinion. Politically, the war not only accentuated differences between the right and left but also within those groups. Here, Kenneth Watkins' *Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion* provides a comprehensive overview of 'the depths of division which existed in the country during the second half of the 1930s'.<sup>11</sup> As studies of political responses make clear, though, the divided responses were not even, nor were they static. Much attention has been focused on the particularly fluid and splintered responses of the left. Here, C. Fleay and M.L. Sanders have analysed the formation of the Labour Spain Committee, while Tom Buchanan has examined the changing positions adopted within the mainstream Labour Movement, concluding that a weakened Labour Party passed responsibility to the trade unions who in turn treated the Spanish problem with an 'ingrained caution and hostility' whilst actively promoting relief work.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Angela Schwarz, 'Image and Reality: British Visitors to National Socialist Germany', *European History Quarterly*, Vol.23, 1993, pp. 381-406; 'British Visitors to Nazi Germany: In a Familiar or a Foreign Country?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 28, 1993, pp. 487-510.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth W. Watkins, *Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Political Opinion* (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> C. Fleay & M.L. Sanders, 'The Labour Spain Committee: Labour Party Policy and the Spanish Civil War', *Historical Journal*, Vol.28, No.1, 1985, pp. 187-197; Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge, 1991).

The Communist Party's more positive and direct role in the conflict has, unsurprisingly, permeated through most analyses of events, most notably in the many accounts of the part played by the International Brigades. Several histories written during the war are significant for their contemporary insights.<sup>13</sup> A number of additions to this canon have added important reflective and analytical perspectives. Most recent of these is James K. Hopkin's *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, 1998), but other earlier works, notably those by Bill Alexander and Hywel Thomas remain essential to understanding the passion of British volunteers in Spain.<sup>14</sup> To such works must be added the wealth of individual perspectives. Published memoirs, autobiographies, diaries, letters and oral testimonies have all contributed to the picture of the anti-fascist idealism of the far-left in the late 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Less has been said about the part played by the Independent Labour Party, though here contributions by Buchanan and by Peter Thwaites provide some valuable background.<sup>16</sup>

Although the participation of Britons in the Spanish Civil War - as volunteers or aid workers - was overwhelmingly in support of the Republic there were, nonetheless, a small number involved directly on the side of the Nationalists. While publications of their experiences remain limited, those there are add a valuable pro-Franco perspective.<sup>17</sup> What such works evidence is the presence of an often overlooked strength of belief in the Nationalist cause, one which equalled the more usually acclaimed passion of those who supported the Republic. This is a point made clear by Robert Stradling in his study of the part played in the conflict by Irish

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<sup>13</sup> William Rust, *Britons in Spain: The History of the British Battalion of the XVth Brigade* (London, 1939); Frank Ryan (editor), *The Book of the XVth Brigade* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1938, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Bill Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty: Spain 1936-39* (London, 1982); Hywell Francis, *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1984), updated in ' "Say Nothing and Leave in the Middle of the Night": The Spanish Civil War Revisited', *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 32, Autumn 1991, pp. 69-76.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Walter Gregory, *The Shallow Grave* (London, 1986); Fred Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills: A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War* (Michigan State Univ., 1996); Judith Cook, *Apprentices of Freedom* (London, 1979); Ian McDougall (edit.) *Voices From the Spanish Civil War: Personal Recollections of the Scottish Volunteers in Republican Spain, 1936-39* (Edinburgh, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> Tom Buchanan, 'The Death of Bob Smilie: The Spanish Civil War and the Eclipse of the Independent Labour Party', *Historical Journal*, No.40, June 1997, pp. 435-461; Peter Thwaites, 'The Independent Labour Party Contingent in the Spanish Civil War', *Imperial War Museum Review*, No.2, 1987, pp. 50-61.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble* (London, 1957); C.E. Lucas Philips, *The Spanish Pimpernel* (London, 1960); Priscilla Scott-Ellis (Raymond Carr, edit.), *The Chances of Death: A Diary of the Spanish Civil War* (Norwich, 1995); Frank Thomas (Robert Stradling, edit.), *Brother Against Brother: Experiences of a British Volunteer in the Spanish Civil War* (Stroud, 1998).

volunteers.<sup>18</sup> More generally, though, passions on the right were less forceful, the British government's unwavering support for non-intervention serving to dissipate tensions. Nonetheless, there was a distinct contrast in the views expressed by the body of Nationalist supporters and the small number of Tory dissidents. These have received little specific attention. However, pro-Franco responses have been considered in the context of wider right-wing attitudes during the 1930s as have the positions adopted by Conservative dissidents.<sup>19</sup> The considerations which directed British policy and the problems which the conflict created for Anglo-Spanish relations are among the issues considered by Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London, 1979). More recently, publications like those by Douglas Little and Enrique Moradiellos have focused more on the National Government's ideological hostility towards the Republic.<sup>20</sup>

The most evident of public responses was the humanitarian aid effort. The effectiveness and extent of British aid appeals have been most thoroughly analysed by Jim Fyrth, though Buchanan has debated Fyrth's assertions regarding the political significance of the Aid for Spain Movement.<sup>21</sup> Here a local perspective of the aid movement in Battersea suggests that, at least on a local scale, sympathisers of all political inclinations were able to accommodate ideological differences and work together, most notably communists and activists of the mainstream-left.<sup>22</sup> However, related studies of the responses to the plight of the

<sup>18</sup> Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War. 1936-39 : Crusades in Conflict* (Manchester, 1999), p. 203.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (London, 1980); G.C. Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right, 1918-1939* (London, 1986); Neville Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality: The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985); 'Red Scare, 1936: Anti-Bolshevism and the Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.23, No.2, April 1988, pp. 291-311; Enrique Moradiellos, 'The Origins of British Non-Intervention in the Spanish Civil War: Anglo-Spanish Relations in Early 1936', *European History Quarterly*, Vol.21, No.3, July 1991, pp. 339-64; British Political strategy in the Face of the Military Rising of 1936 in Spain', *Contemporary European History*, Vol.1, Part 2, July 1992, pp. 123-137; 'The Gentle General: The Official British Perception of General Franco during the Spanish Civil War', in Paul Preston & Ann L Mackenzie, *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939*, Edinburgh, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936-39* (London, 1986); Tom Buchanan, "Britain's Popular Front? "Aid Spain" and the British Labour Movement", *History Workshop Journal*, Vol.31, Spring 1991, pp. 60-72; Jim Fyrth, 'The Aid Spain Movement 1936-1939', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol.35, 1993, pp. 153-164.

<sup>22</sup> Mike Squires, *The Aid to Spain Movement in Battersea, 1936-1939* (London, 1994).

Basque refugee children in the summer of 1937 illustrate some of the tensions present both amongst relief bodies and the general public. Here, again, Buchanan has examined the role of the Labour Movement in the organisation of relief. Attitudes towards the refugees, though, have been most closely scrutinised by Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War* (Nevada University, 1984), while, once more, a number of local histories have added some interesting detail.<sup>23</sup>

A significant volume of work has also examined the motivation and involvement of intellectuals in the war. The vast majority, though not all, of these were vociferous in their support of the Republic. For poets and writers like Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender, John Cornford and Christopher Caudwell, Spain became the rallying point for their opposition to the reactionary forces gathering in Europe. While the responses of intellectuals to events in Spain are to be found in broader analyses of the literary landscape of the inter-war years, there are a number of accounts which address the Civil War itself.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, the personal involvement of these literary leftists, the 'martyrdom' of several and the sheer volume of their literary and artistic work influenced attitudes during the war and have shaped impressions of it since. For example, barely a publication issued fails to make reference to W.H. Auden's poem, *Spain*.

While the contribution of intellectuals to the forming of attitudes to Spain should not be underestimated, for the vast majority of the British public access to events and the consequent shaping of attitudes would have been in the form of media representation. Here, Anthony Aldgate's meticulous scrutiny of newsreel coverage of the war offers an important insight into one widely accessed medium.<sup>25</sup> Press reporting of the war has received less attention. While some studies have examined aspects including the reporting of Britons caught up in the war and

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<sup>23</sup> Tom Buchanan, 'The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Origins and Work of the Basque Children's Committee, 1937-39', *European History Quarterly*, Vol.18, No.2, April 1988, pp. 155-174; Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation* (Univ. Nevada, 1984; Adrian Bell, *Only For Three Months: The Basque Children in Exile* (Norwich, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Katharine Bail Hoskins, *Today the Struggle: Literature and Politics in England During the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1961, 1986); Peter Stansky & William Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier: Two Roads to the Spanish Civil War* (Univ. Chicago, 1966); Frederick Benson, *Writers in Arms: The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1968).

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema & History: British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1979).

responses in the Catholic weeklies,<sup>26</sup> generally, consideration of press attitudes toward Spain form part of wider analyses of the 1930s.<sup>27</sup>

As this project makes clear attitudes towards Spain were also informed through fictional representations. Most of the public would have been informed by popular rather than the high culture with which the war has become identified. This is an area which has received relatively little attention. In a wider account of the Civil War in film, a study by Marjorie A Valleau provides a detailed analysis of some theatrical film releases. More general works by Bernard Dick, and Leif Furhammar and Folke Isaksson add useful insights into Hollywood's portrayal of the war.<sup>28</sup> Even less regard has been given to the representation of Spain in contemporary popular fiction, consideration confined in the main to the works of Ralph Bates and Ernest Hemingway.

It is evident from this essentially brief review of the literature that has examined Spain and her civil war from a British perspective that events have been most considered in terms of the political atmosphere of the 1930s. The all-embracing notion of the war as a conflict of European ideologies, as the first barricade against fascism or the last stand against the spread of communism, was forwarded at the time and has been much examined since. British responses have been largely considered within a framework of political divisions, government policy, aid movements, volunteer actions and the reaction within the intellectual community. However, little attention has been directed towards the way in which the issues raised by the war were conveyed to the wider British public. As this survey has illustrated, with the notable exception of Aldgate's analysis of the newsreels, specific studies of media and fictional representations of Spain during the Second Republic are absent. Within such representations, evidence of preconceived notions of Spain and the Spanish people informed the contemporary debate as

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<sup>26</sup> Brian Shelmerdine, 'Britons in an "UnBritish War": Domestic Newspapers and the participation of UK Nationals in the Spanish Civil War', *North West Labour History*, Issue No.22, 1997/98, pp. 20-47; Thomas R. Greene, 'The English Catholic Press and the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-1936', *Church History*, Vol.45, 1976, pp. 70-84.

<sup>27</sup> Mario Mazzarella, *The British Weekly Press and the Rise of Nazi Germany 1933-40* (Michigan, 1977); Benny Morris, *The Roots of Appeasement: The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany During the 1930s* (London, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Marjorie A Valleau, *The Spanish Civil War in American and European Films* (Michigan, 1978); Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Univ. Kentucky, 1996), Ch.2; Leif Furhammar & Folke Isaksson, *Film and Politics* (London, 1971).

they were employed both consciously and unconsciously to advance alternative viewpoints. In a war noted for its propagandist reporting an examination of the use of such preformed notions would seem particularly relevant.

### **The Origins of the Civil War.**

Although this study is concerned with British interpretations of events in Spain during the 1930s those interpretations were inevitably rooted in an understanding of recent Spanish history. British ideas of Spanish life, customs and politics were based upon layers of past observations. Furthermore, the polarisation of British opinion during the Civil War was in large part a reflection of the divisions that were apparent in Spain. It is the intent here to set British perspectives in context by tracing the pattern of social and political divisions which, over time, became increasingly evident in Spain, and finally culminated in July 1936 in bloody civil war.

The political hatreds that built up during the Second Republic and spilled into war in 1936 were in fact a reflection of deep-rooted conflicts in Spanish society. Since the first Cortes in 1808, long periods during which reactionary forces held back social progress through the use of political and military power had been punctuated by brief revolutionary outbursts. Efforts to introduce social reform, however, inevitably provoked reactionary efforts to reimpose the old order. Moreover, a numerically small, regionally centred and politically insignificant bourgeoisie, a consequence of Spain's slow and uneven industrial development, meant that there was little force for political revolution. As reactions to the short-lived First Republic of 1874 demonstrated, fear of the consequences of proletarian disorder only added to the industrial and commercial classes' acquiescence to the political status quo. However, although in early twentieth century Spain the structures of the old order - the monarchy, landed nobility and the Church - remained intact, challenges to the political status quo were becoming increasingly evident, most notably from the emergent industrial proletariat of Catalonia and the Basque region, and more especially from the rural poor of the South where the iniquities of the *latifundio* economy were encouraging anarchist convictions.

This was a challenge exacerbated by events. The political power-sharing



arrangement between the Conservative and Liberal parties agreed after the fall of the First Republic was first rocked by Spain's defeat in 1898 at the hands of the USA. The consequent loss of colonial markets had a catastrophic impact on the Spanish economy and led to a spate of strikes and riots, most especially in Catalonia. Although Spain's non-belligerent status during the First World War led to a revival of her economic fortune, this, too, had political and social consequences. The boom in production experienced by Basque ship-builders and iron producers, Catalan textile factories and Asturian coal mines encouraged the industrial bourgeoisie in their challenge to the dominant agrarian political voice. At the same time, proletarian demands for social change were growing ever more loud. While the landed grandees and the industrial owners were profiting from exports to both the Entente and the Central Powers their workers were suffering. In the south, much of the rural population lived in desperate poverty with low wages and high unemployment.<sup>29</sup> In industrial northern Spain it was the industrial workers who most suffered social and economic inequalities. The boom from which industrialists profited brought with it high inflation, wages that failed to keep pace, and periodic unemployment. Rural workers seeking work in the booming towns added to a rapid urban expansion and to the social problems associated with such growth.

As the war in Europe reached its final year the division between workers and landless labourers and industrialists and grandee landowners had become more stark than ever.<sup>30</sup> Failed efforts to organise a general strike in 1917 were followed by three years (*trienio bolchevique*) of anarchist organised strikes in both the rural south and the industrial north, most notably in Barcelona. The use of the Civil Guard to crush the rural protest and hired gunmen to intimidate striking workers in Barcelona led to a spiralling of violence as acts of savage provocation were met by equally fierce retaliation. This was a crisis with which the false structure of consensus politics was unable to contend, and which, in September 1923,

<sup>29</sup> For a survey of Spain's agrarian problems see Gerald Brenan, 'The Agrarian Question', *The Spanish Labyrinth: an account of the social and political background of the Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990 edition, first published 1943) Part 2, Ch.VI, pp. 87-131.

<sup>30</sup> For an account of the rise of anarchism in Barcelona see Angel Smith, 'Anarchism, the General Strike and the Barcelona Labour Movement, 1899-1914', *European History Quarterly*, Vol.27, No. 1, January 1997, pp. 5-40. For a picture of localised strike action in the normally quiescent San Sebastián and Guipúzcoa province see John K. Walton & Jenny Smith, 'Pleasure: the San Sebastián Waiters' Strike of 1920', *International Review of Social History*, Vol.39, Part 1, April 1994, pp. 1-31.

ushered in the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera. Under the dictatorship, martial law subdued the rash of political violence, anarchist organisations were banned and seemingly mutually beneficial agreements were reached with the socialist *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT). An economic upturn enabled the dictatorship to preside over an impressive programme of public works, most evident in the building of a network of highways which was to impress British and other travellers during the coming decade. Fortune also assisted in resolving the war in Morocco, Franco-Spanish military co-operation leading to the defeat of the rebel forces. Although these successes were later to be presented as proof of Spain's need of an 'iron hand' and evidence of a golden age, especially by Spain's reactionary right, by 1930 most sections of Spanish society, and crucially the army, industrialists and land-owners, had become hostile to the dictatorship. Alongside this alienation of the right, popular support for the parties of republicanism was making headway among the liberal professional classes, who regarded it as the means of asserting political independence, and among other sections of society who saw in it the promise of a remedy to a range of social and economic grievances.<sup>31</sup>

Following the collapse of the dictatorship in January 1930 Spain moved inexorably toward republicanism. The municipal elections of 12 April 1931 saw the Socialist and Republican parties sweep to overwhelming electoral success. Unsure of the loyalty of the army or the Civil Guard, Alfonso XIII, without formally abdicating, relinquished the throne and left the country, leaving behind a people enthused by hopes of a new progressive, reforming and modern Spain. In the meantime, those sections of the right whose natural allegiance was to the monarchy remained quiet in the hope that sacrificing the King would serve to moderate the nature of the new government and to temper the desire for change. The hopes of both groups, those who aspired to a new modernising Spain and those who sought to protect the old order, were to be the source of growing tensions throughout the life of the Republic, and lead ultimately to civil war.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Shlomo Ben-Ami, 'The Republican "take-over": prelude to inevitable catastrophe?', Paul Preston (editor), *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (London & New York, 1984), pp. 14-34.

<sup>32</sup> For analysis of the revolutionary nature of the Second Republic see Tim Rees, 'Battleground of the Revolutionaries: the Republic and Civil War in Spain, 1931-39', Moira Donald & Tim Rees (editors), *Reinterpreting Revolution in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 113-139.

The broad coalition of liberal and socialist parties which formed the first Republican government introduced during 1931-1933, the first *bienio*, a series of reforms which seemed to address many of the grievances that had built up under the dictatorship.<sup>33</sup> However, a series of decrees aimed at alleviating the plight of the rural poor, improving the rights of urban workers and the position of women served to alarm the rural aristocracy and industrialists who saw their power and profits eroded by what they regarded as dangerously socialistic reforms. Reforms which restricted the size and influence of the Army's officer class and limited the power and privileges of the Church, both symbols of inequality and injustice, were greeted with equal hostility by those institutions. Within weeks the proposals of the new government were attacked by Cardinal Segura, the primate of the Spanish Church, while the granting of autonomy to Catalonia in September 1932 brought to a head the anger of an officer class who, regarding themselves as guardians of what they saw as the unifying traditions of Spain, were vehemently opposed to the decentralising of power.

While the measures introduced during the *bienio* helped forge an alliance between Spain's various Conservative forces, they also unwittingly unleashed other forces which had been suppressed during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Once again industrial action spiralled. In much of the countryside, rural workers looked to the Republic not merely for palliative measures but also for rapid land redistribution. Slow progress served to encourage anarchist led unrest, especially in Andalusia and Catalonia. Reforms which proclaimed freedom of religion, restricted the Church's landholdings, and secularised education stoked the long-standing hostility between the Church and Spanish anti-clericals and saw a recurrence of church-burning incidents. Moreover, the alliance of parties which brought in the Republic began to break up as individual members sought to advance their particular agendas. Socialist efforts to process reform more rapidly, for instance, were stifled by more cautious elements. These expressions of disillusionment allowed the right to present the Republic as presiding over

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<sup>33</sup> For analyses of the reform projects of the Republic see Stanley Payne, *Spain's First Democracy: The Second Republic, 1931-1936* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1993); Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1994, 2nd. edition); For a survey of the ideological background to the Second Republic see Enrique Montero, 'Reform Idealized: The Intellectual and Ideological Origins of the Second Republic', in Graham & Labanyi [editors]. *Spanish Cultural Studies*, pp. 124-133.

economic failure while cultivating godless, even Soviet inspired, mob violence.

The elections of November 1933 saw a disunited left defeated by the alliance of right wing parties, most notable in the newly formed *Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas* (CEDA), a predominantly Catholic organisation funded in the main by the large landowners. The new government immediately reversed much of the legislation previously enacted to protect workers' rights and conditions, evicted those rural labourers who had benefited from land redistribution, and moderated anti-clerical laws. As wages fell, rents increased, unemployment rose, and employers took advantage of the new political climate, working class protest escalated, often into violence. Government response was to use troops and the Civil Guard to restore order, a ruthless exercise which in turn encouraged violent reaction. At the same time factions of the far-right, unconvinced by the democratic process, and fundamentally opposed to the Republic, increasingly saw violence as the best means of achieving their aims. The two years of the *bienio negro* (black two years) saw clashes between the right-wing extremists and anarchist, socialist and communist organisations become increasingly common.

October 1934 saw this hatred spill over into uprising. Sparked by the inclusion of three CEDA ministers in the Radical dominated government cabinet (seen by the left as a step on the road to a fascist state) the UGT called for a pacific general strike. While the strike was a failure in most parts of Spain it had some brief success in Barcelona and exploded into revolution in the mining areas of Asturias. Here, the union of the left was better organised and the miners were only forced into submission when the government unleashed Moorish troops and the Spanish Foreign Legion. In demonstrating the potential of proletarian brotherhood, the Asturian rebels not only showed the way forward for the parties of the left but also made real the worst fears of the wealthy classes. This was a polarisation which was to develop and find final expression twenty-one months later in civil war. The savage actions of the army, both in subduing the October uprising and in the aftermath, set the tone for the way that conflict would be conducted.

The election of the Popular Front in February 1936 saw efforts to reverse the repressive measures introduced during the previous two years. As a

consequence, right-wing groups of the right who had long determined that Spain needed a return to authoritarian rule turned again to violence as the means of achieving that end. On the other hand, supporters of the new government were disappointed by the slow speed at which expected change was taking place. In Extremadura, peasant farmers, impatient for promised land reform, occupied designated estates. In the towns industrial disputes proliferated as did street violence between the party militias. In the Cortes the monarchist leader José Calvo Sotelo warned of the threats of communism and separatism and called for counter-revolution. In the barracks, the military began to plot in earnest. On 13 July Sotelo was assassinated, four days later the military rebellion began in Morocco.

On the mainland the rebellion met with mixed success. In the streets of the major cities the masses prevented the military from taking control. However, with the aid of Italian and German aircraft, General Franco's army of North Africa was rapidly deployed in southern Spain and soon made headway against the untrained and ill-equipped loyalist militias. In the chaos that followed, both sides were marked by a savagery in which atrocities committed in the government zone against the clergy and those with right-wing sympathies were matched by the brutality of Nationalist reprisals. On 21 September Franco was appointed commander-in-chief of the Nationalist forces, soon after Chief of State, and by November his army of North Africa was besieging Madrid. Although the capital, its defences bolstered by the arrival of the Comintern organised International Brigade volunteers and Soviet equipment, remained defiant until the end of the war, the rebel armies, with massive support from Italy and Germany, gradually eroded government resistance. In the South Málaga fell in February 1937 and in the North General Mola's army crushed resistance in the isolated Asturias and Basque provinces by the autumn of that year. Throughout the following year the Nationalists advance was inexorable and in January 1939 Barcelona fell. Finally, in March, Madrid capitulated, Franco announcing the end of the war on 1 April.

During the course of the war both sides became involved in a struggle to consolidate power. However, while Franco succeeded in rapidly assuming control of the factions supporting the Nationalist rebellion, on the Republican side the various elements of the left clashed as to the priorities of the war. As Soviet aid

began to arrive in mid-October 1936 so the previously small Communist party began to exert its will, destroying the Trotsky-influenced POUM (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*) and thwarting the revolutionary ambitions of the anarchists.<sup>34</sup> In Catalonia and the Basque provinces considerations brought about by regional autonomy made internecine political struggles regarding the direction of the war effort even more complex. While these divisions within the ranks loyal to the government were at least a contributing factor to the Republic's eventual defeat, arguably the greatest deciding influence on events was the response of the international community.

Although the origins of the war were peculiarly Spanish, the active involvement of Italy and Germany, and later the Soviet Union ensured that it was soon internationalised, the war rapidly coming to symbolise the ideological divisions which were shaping within Europe and convincing much of the left to relinquish their pacifist ideals and call for rearmament. For some this shift extended to active participation. This was a stance, however, which did little to challenge the direction of policy which sought to appease the belligerent nations while speeding the process of rearming. In the face of massive (and in terms of fighting effectiveness, decisive) German and Italian support for Franco, Britain and France adhered to a policy of non-intervention, which, while not weakening loyalist resolve, enfeebled the Republic's war effort. Events in Spain were increasingly regarded as the first round in a new European conflict and the conduct of the war alerted many observers to the probable nature of future warfare. However, the Anglo-French response, an extension of the policy of appeasement, helped to convince Hitler of the reluctance of those countries to intervene on behalf of democracy elsewhere. If many saw that a wider war was inevitable few felt moved to make a stand in Spain.

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<sup>34</sup> Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (Yale, 2001), offers a condemnatory account of Soviet influence based on Moscow archives. For an anarchist interpretation of events see Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution* (London, 1983, first published 1953); Trotskyist view: Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain* (New York & London, 1974); For revolutionary polemic see Noam Chomsky, 'Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship', *American Power and the New Mandarins*, (London, 1969); see also, Chris Ealham, "'From the Summit to the Abyss": The Contradictions of Individualism and Collectivism in Spanish Anarchism' & Helen Graham, 'War Modernity and Reform: The Premiership of Juan Negrín, 1937-1939', both in, Paul Preston & Ann L. Mackenzie (editors), *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939* Ch.6 & 7.

## British Perspectives.

There can be little doubt that the Spanish Civil War generated considerable passions amongst the politically aware which have had little equal since. From its onset in July 1936, the conflict aroused intensive media attention in Britain and brought about an instant polarisation of political interpretation. Indeed, at the time, Robert Graves was the first of many to contend that 'never since the French Revolution had there been a foreign question that so divided intelligent British opinion'.<sup>35</sup> In the same decade as the Spanish war, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and subsequent aggression in China, and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 were largely treated as distant events and attracted relatively little attention from the press and stirred only limited protest, this being directed in particular at the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations. Recently, the world-wide demonstrations witnessed during February and March 2003 against American and British action in Iraq perhaps offered a short-lived impression of the passionate response associated with the Spanish war. However, of the many conflicts since, only the United States' engagement in Vietnam stands out as having generated a similarly prolonged 'deep commitment and violent partisanship',<sup>36</sup> and as having left a comparable political, social and enduring cultural legacy. In the late sixties and early seventies, though, even the passions aroused by that war failed to be as all embracing as those stirred by Spain in the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> While British disquiet over Vietnam was most memorably expressed in the Grosvenor Square demonstrations, over 2,000 Britons joined the 40,000 volunteers from some fifty-three nations who fought for the beleaguered Spanish Republic, more than a quarter of them making the ultimate sacrifice. Hundreds more joined non-combatant agencies under the auspices of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee (SMAC), and thousands of local activists endeavoured to raise humanitarian support through a myriad of aid groups. Direct support for the Nationalists rebels, though less considerable, was nonetheless evidenced by similar responses, whilst a wider support for Franco's forces was expressed through the hierarchy and press of the Catholic Church, a number of Tory politicians, and the right-wing media. For many,

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Graves & Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend*, [London, 1941], p. 333.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-maker, From the Crimea to Kosovo* ( London, 2000 edition, first published 1975), p. 207.

<sup>37</sup>Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 1.

then, what was essentially a Spanish domestic conflict took on an international significance, the warring sides coming to symbolise the rival ideologies which were dividing Europe and seemed to threaten world peace.

In Britain a multiplicity of issues acted throughout the war to shape and to moderate public and political reactions. Divisions were not limited to those between the left and right of the political spectrum, but also within those groups. From the onset, discord was particularly evident in the Labour Movement. The Labour Party's initial endorsement of the National Government's policy of non-intervention, and the failure of trade union leaders to mount any serious challenge - refusing, for instance, to countenance any industrial action in support of the Republic - were greeted with dismay by many of the rank-and-file members. With only 154 MPs it is doubtful that the parliamentary Labour Party could have influenced Government policy should it have tried. The unions were likewise emasculated, in part held back by the legal measures introduced after the 1926 general strike. The mainstream-left were also wary of the far-left's immediate call to arms, rejecting outright the Communist Party's unity campaign. Moreover, any advocacy of direct action in support of the Republic clashed with the, albeit declining, pacifist convictions of much of the Labour membership. The frustration caused by the leadership's vacillation led to a myriad of localised initiatives, especially in the urban and industrialised areas. Here though, while Jewish workers were keen to side with a Republic which was standing against fascism, Catholic workers were faced with the dilemma of equating political and class loyalties with support for a regime which had apparently endorsed the murder of priests and nuns. For the British right there were fewer considerations and divisions were less critical. Nonetheless, even here the pro-Nationalist sympathies of a vociferous group of right-wing Conservative politicians and commentators contrasted sharply with those few on the right who shared concerns regarding a potential threat to British trade routes through the Mediterranean from a fascist axis. Moreover, commentators of all political shades worried over the ramifications of the various European alliances and the possibility of the war in Spain developing into a wider European conflict. So, despite the call of the far-right and, with different reasoning, the eventually unified voice of the left, to end non-intervention, for many it was favoured as a policy which reduced that possibility.



These then were among the issues which influenced British political perspectives during the war. And, although the origins of the war were in fact rooted in a complex of internal issues - Basque and Catalan calls for regional autonomy, feudal landownership and unfulfilled promises of reform, an independent military with a tradition of political involvement, politically unsettled industrial areas, and widespread anti-clericalism were among the issues which contributed to the ferment of Spain in the thirties - the course of the war saw these issues transmuted to represent the wider ideological struggle taking place during the 1930s between communism and fascism. A war in which the Spanish left and right were best encapsulated within the unique extremes of anarchism and Carlism came to be translated into the more readily understandable European ideologies lodged in the less significant Spanish Communist Party and the fascist Falange. Within Spain the propaganda emanating from both sides accentuated this perception, and in Britain, and indeed across the world, both pro-Republican and pro-Nationalist supporters were quick to advance the same characterisation. Confirmation came in the shape of Italian and German intervention on the side of the old order and Russian support for the Republic. The result was that the war came to be portrayed by both sides in terms of a Manichean struggle, the left interpreting issues as democracy under threat from the evil forces of fascism, and the right seeing Christian civilisation crumbling before barbaric communism. These headline orders embraced a range of associated representations. For the left the struggle was one of reaction versus reform and repression versus freedom, the one side standing for the long-suffering peasants and workers, the other, their long-time exploiters, the Church, landowners, aristocracy and the wealthy, backed by the military. For the right the conflict was one of Catholicism versus atheism, order versus anarchy, and culture versus barbarism, the higher values seen as rooted in a traditional Spain and the ungodly disorder identified with the 'red rabble' and the Popular Front Government. On the one side the common people were depicted as heroically resisting the fascist heel, on the other the crusader was again fighting the infidel, the Virgin Mary facing down the 'Red Whore'. Both sides claimed to stand for a 'new Spain' and both claimed to be guardians of the past.

## Theoretical Context

The literary output inspired during the Second Republic and the Civil War has been the subject of much historical study. Indeed the conflict has commonly been labelled the 'poets' war'.<sup>38</sup> However, such study has concentrated on works of high culture and has given little regard to the arguably more pervasive, and perhaps more immediately persuasive effects of popular, mass culture. The assumption seems to have been that the most historically significant reflections of the war are to be found in the poems and prose of the likes of Auden, MacNeice, Spender or Cornford.<sup>39</sup> Without disputing the legitimacy of this perspective, it is the contention here that valuable insight into how the period was commonly presented for a wider contemporary public consumption can be gleaned from more general fictional and media representations.

It is widely accepted that the mass media composite of film and literature, press and broadcasting provide a window into the mindset of the nation. The popular media serves to order, confirm and legitimise ways of seeing the world. It feeds a collective understanding of national identity and acceptable social values. It also helps to establish as true or genuine, popular expectations of alien cultures, a process which cultivates notions of the 'other' and so serves to reinforce the invariably superior notions of 'self'. Moreover, the stereotypes which emerge from this process then act as short cuts, their readily accepted connotations enabling them to condense and convey otherwise complex information and making them capable of legitimising particular viewpoints.<sup>40</sup>

Cultural historian Jeffrey Richards is one who has demonstrated the ways popular fiction and film 'both reflect popular attitudes, ideas and preconceptions and ... generate support for selected views and opinions'. Likewise, John MacKenzie, has argued that popular culture in general and juvenile literature in particular can be seen as 'instrumental in the dissemination and perpetuation of particular clusters of

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<sup>38</sup> E.g. 'British Responses to the War' in Alun Kenwood (edit.), *The Spanish Civil War: a Cultural and Historical Reader* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 163-198.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Peter Stansky & William Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*; Frederick Benson, *Writers in Arms*; Katherine Hoskins, *Today the Struggle*.

<sup>40</sup> See Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London, second edit. 2002), Ch.3.

ideals, assumptions and ambitions'.<sup>41</sup> Most notably, as these historians and others like them have shown, literature written for the young is particularly useful in identifying the collective assumptions that inform society at any given time.<sup>42</sup> It is in books and film that the child finds some explanation of the relative meaning of the normal incidents of his or her own life and learns their relationship with what happens in other parts of the world.<sup>43</sup> Simply, ideas conveyed in childhood when the mind is most impressionable and responsive are likely to endure into adulthood. Here, George Orwell's much quoted analysis of 'Boy's Weeklies' for the literary monthly *Horizon* in April 1940 remains particularly insightful. In it, Orwell posited the view that 'most people are influenced far more than they would care to admit by novels, serial stories, films and so forth ... usually the ones that are read earliest in life'. 'It is probable', he added, 'that many people who would consider themselves extremely sophisticated and 'advanced' are actually carrying through life an imaginative background which they acquired in childhood ...'.<sup>44</sup> The writer, Isabel Quigly's reflections on her own 1930's childhood add substance to Orwell's view: 'Books mattered, when I was a child', she recalled, 'They were central to our lives: they created our culture, our interests, our outlook ... They influenced our talk and our feelings about the world, they were pervasive, sought for, discussed'.<sup>45</sup>

However there can be little quantitative measure of such assertions. It can be reasonably argued that the number of books or comics read by children during a given period only indicate the popularity of certain titles or genre and that quantity and popularity do not reveal how such literature affected attitudes. Equally, recollections like those of Quigly are in substance self-selecting. Nonetheless, in its repetition of, albeit in simplified form, the sets of values and ways of looking at the world that are apparent across the popular media such fiction acts to continue and

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<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey Richards (editor), *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester, 1989), p. 1; John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1984), p. vii; See also Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-39* (London, 1984) & *Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction* (London, 1988).

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> D.R. Barnes, 'Captain Johns and the Adult World', Boris Ford, *Young Writers, Young Readers* (London, 1963), pp. 115-122, 116.

<sup>44</sup> George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', 'Horizon', March 1940 (written 1939), in Sonia Orwell & Ian Angus (editors), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell: Vol. 1, An Age Like This* (London 1970), p. 528.

<sup>45</sup> Isabel Quigly, 'A Catholic Writer of the Thirties', *Approaches to Children's Books: Signal*, No. 70, January 1993, pp. 5-12 (p.5).

reinforce those patterns. As Richards' account of the popularity of public school stories demonstrates, acceptance of these social constructs does not depend upon experience.<sup>46</sup> While, any combination of differing regional, gender, class or race perspectives may mean that experiences of the common culture vary, nonetheless, the elements of that culture continue to provide a widely accepted frame of reference. Richards' profile of the ways by which the mass media help shape and ensure compliance to the dominant ideology is useful here.<sup>47</sup> The mass media, he argues, serves to transmit and reinforce the dominant ideology in a number of interdependent ways. First they identify and order the various groups in society. These are assigned a position in a hierarchy determined by compliance to those attitudes and values deemed to be the most acceptable in society as a whole. In this way the media acts as a forum in which members of society continually construct and are in turn instructed by a model of what is right and decent and what is not, a process which again confers status on certain groups while isolating dissident elements. In all these ways the mass culture tends to encourage a standardisation of behaviour and a consensus as to how the world should be viewed.

This structure follows the hegemonic model proposed by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci argued that popular culture serves to promote a set of views based on the ideas of the ruling classes, and that culture is therefore bound up with leadership and inseparable from politics. In this process the subordinate classes, while maintaining their own distinctive patterns of life, appear to support or at least conform to the values and ideals of the dominant classes. However, this does not mean that there is no conflict, indeed the hegemonic process is fluid in that it involves constant negotiation between competing interests. Nor is it essentially a conscious endeavour. Nonetheless, in the hegemonic model the mass media are seen to indoctrinate people with certain ideological views and, more subtly, to shape the way people see themselves and the rest of the world.

One challenge to this Gramscian approach is that it fails to acknowledge the commercial considerations of the various media. Market pressures, Claudia Nelson argues, serve to push editors, publishers and therefore authors (and by extension,

<sup>46</sup> Richards, *Happiest Days*.

<sup>47</sup> Richards, *Happiest Days*, pp. 3-4.

filmmakers) into 'seeking a delicate balance between what the dominant culture ratify as acceptable and what the subordinate culture - be it the working class or the young - consider appealing'.<sup>48</sup> Profit, in other words, is a more important consideration than any endeavour to impose the ethic of the dominant ideology. In pursuit of profit, therefore, producers of popular culture forward the values and view of the world they consider will be most acceptable to the majority of their intended audience. However, as Richards points out, in the most part, these values undoubtedly equate to and reflect 'the dominant world view, and the effect is likely to be hegemonic anyway'.<sup>49</sup>

In 1930s Britain the hegemonic values to be found across the popular media were still very much informed by imperialist notions which suggested certain ways of understanding the world and one's place in it. Here, drawing on the political philosophies of Foucault and Gramsci, Edward W. Said's influential study *Orientalism* is instructive.<sup>50</sup> While in his examination of the West's construct of the 'Orient', Said is concerned with the extent to which European colonialism created a way of seeing the world his model has many parallels with the way Britain regarded countries beyond her boundaries, Spain in particular. Said contends that far from learning from the peoples they encountered, Western travellers merely based their observations on commonly-held assumptions about the Middle-Eastern countries they visited, so perpetuating the West's largely fabricated construct of the Orient and reinforcing stereotypical notions of Oriental character. These assumptions Said divides into two categories; latent - those notions of the Orient that remain relatively constant over time; and manifest - the seemingly variant observations brought about either by historical circumstance or by individual perspective. Said's contention that even the most diverse manifestations of Orientalism share the same latent assumptions is one explored in this project, where it is argued that while supporters and opponents of the Republic offered widely differing interpretations of events in Spain both continued to rely on underlying, or latent, suppositions.

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<sup>48</sup> Claudia Nelson, 'Mixed Messages: Authoring and Authority in British Boys' Magazines', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Vol.21, No.1, January 1997, pp. 1-19.

<sup>49</sup> Richards, *Happiest Days*, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* ( London, 1978, 1995 edition).

In its broad sweep of history and use of wide-ranging sources Said's approach has been charged as being 'essentially ahistorical', with failing to consider how the impact of particular historical moments might challenge or bring about some modification of enduring notions of the Orient.<sup>51</sup> The validity of this criticism is not discussed here. However, the process whereby observers continue to draw from the same stock of preconceived ideas but are forced by circumstances to rethink and modify those ideas is particularly pertinent to this study. As Said makes clear, it would be wrong to assume that all such expectations were based upon a foundation of myth and fabrication.<sup>52</sup> However, what is relevant here is not so much the credibility of common British expectations of Spain but, rather, how convincing they were to British audiences.

## **Methodological Considerations**

Accepting, then, the premise that popular culture 'holds up a mirror to the mind set of the nation', reflecting both what a society wishes to be seen as, and, in turn, how it sees others, this study examines a wide range of source material.<sup>53</sup> This includes popular fiction and film, travel literature and newspapers and periodicals. In these media the popularity of particular themes, plots, authors and genre and the repeat of particular forms of representation indicate not only their commercial viability but, importantly, their widespread acceptance by audiences. While, in this study, perceptions of Spain and the various interpretations of events presented to the British public are built around these media, a number of other sources are also employed. Examples from politically produced literature and film, diplomatic papers, memoirs, autobiographies and oral testimonies are used to illustrate how endemic the notions of Spain evident in more general media were and how they were manipulated for political purpose.

The study first sets out to establish the values and attitudes evident in juvenile and popular literature, and shared in film entertainment, during the period. A broad analysis of how other nationals were seen takes particular note of the

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<sup>51</sup> John MacKenzie, 'Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts' (1995), p. 11, cited in John MacLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester, 2000), p. 47.

<sup>52</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> Richards, *Happiest Days*, p. 1.

representation of Spain and her people and considers some of the themes which informed popular media and were to gain in significance during the civil war - the threat to peace posed by Bolshevism and fascism and a growing fear of air attack. This approach is returned to in the final chapter where the transmutation of fact into fiction is examined in the context of stories written, and theatric film produced, during the war. Here, fictional interpretation is measured against actual events and issues, and attitudes expressed are gauged against changing public and political responses. It is not the claim that popular literature and film necessarily had any direct impact on public opinion regarding the issues arising from the conflict, rather that the notions of foreigners established in such media provided both a convenient frame of reference for explaining issues and a basis for the manipulation of public responses to the war.

Expectations of Spain are further considered through examination of guide-books, travelogues and the personal experiences of expatriate residents. Although individual traveller's impressions of the particular may have varied, all tended to subscribe to a more universal picture, one founded in preconceived expectations and one, therefore, readily recognised by their intended readers. Here, a wide range of contemporary literature, from the tourist guide to the academic account, is analysed both to assess its part in the construction of the imagined Spanish culture and as a means of determining the roots of attitudes which were to help shape British responses to events in Spain. Although politics were never a key concern of travel literature, events during the life of the Second Republic led to many writers offering some view of the Spanish political scene. Not only do these views indicate the political polarisation which would become manifest after July 1936, they also demonstrate the range of preconceptions which were later drawn on to explain the situation during the civil war. It is recognised that it may be argued that the views expressed in travel literature and expatriate accounts were those of a relatively narrow social group, however, it was this group and their views who were to play a significant role in the effort to shape opinion during the reporting of the war to the wider British public. Moreover, it was this same body's view of the world which informed and set the tone of much of popular fictional representation.

School, juvenile and popular fiction, and film representation give a good idea of the

nature and form of commonly held perceptions of Spain during the inter-war years. The expectations carried by visitors to Spain, as evidenced in guide-books, demonstrate the strength of those perceptions, as do the accounts written by travellers and expatriate residents. Their experiences also offer some clues both to the shaping of opinions regarding events in Spain during the 1930s and to the generally passive acceptance of the military rebellion. During the same period, though, Spain had also become a focus for more overtly political commentators who expressed their interpretation of issues from the nature of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, through the fall of the monarchy to the election of the Popular Front, in a range of publications. After the military uprising this interest heightened and the number of accounts proliferated. Correspondents covering the war for their newspapers also wrote their own often extensive accounts; deputations of MPs and religious delegations produced reports; student and trade union bodies published pamphlets; the birth of Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club coincided with the start of the war, and the Right Book Club was born of it. Throughout the war the left produced propaganda films, and correspondents of all political and religious denominations produced literature and bombarded the press with their personal views. Analysis of this wealth of material shows not only how the propaganda war over Spain was fought and how the high ground shifted from the right to the left, but also reveals how universally accepted notions of Spain were massaged to provide two totally different interpretations of events. Supporters of both sides used clichéd references as a short-cut, as a means of ordering and condensing complex issues for public consumption. This process - the forms of explanation offered by the various commentators and the imagery used to portray the supposed ideals of the opposing sides - underscored as it was by a framework of stereotypical references, again offers some explanation of public responses to the war.

For the most part, however, the public understanding of events during these years would have come from the press, newsreels and radio broadcasting. Of these, participants in a Mass Observation survey of August 1938 felt newspapers to be most significant in shaping opinion, though they added the interesting rider that they



distrusted the press anyway.<sup>54</sup> While taking note of other news media this study focuses on the presentation of events in the national press, with some further reference to local newspapers. Equally, given the constant undertone of religious conflict which marked the Second Republic, the response of the Catholic press has not been ignored, the *Catholic Herald* and the *Tablet* together with references from other weeklies used particularly to illustrate the shaping of the pro-Nationalist interpretation of the Spanish Church's role in events. The impact of these relatively low circulation weeklies on the general view of events, however, would have been far less significant than that made by the national dailies. Indeed, even most of those who subscribed to the Catholic papers would have also bought or had access to a daily newspaper.

Throughout the life of the Republic, and especially after July 1936, much of this press adopted notably partisan stances. *The Times*, its influence far greater than its circulation, attempted to maintain a balanced view, but fully endorsed the British Government's policy of non-intervention. The *Daily Mail*, *Morning Post* and *Sunday Observer* were particularly anti-Republic and unquestioningly championed Franco's cause. The communist *Daily Worker*, with arguably greater sway than its mere one per cent of the total daily newspaper circulation would suggest, offered unhesitating support for the Republic and the most vehement censure of the Spanish right.<sup>55</sup> Labour's organ the *Daily Herald* reflected the mainstream-left position, welcoming the new Republic, condemning the military uprising and, once early endorsement of non-intervention had been overturned, becoming totally supportive of the loyalist Government. Although expressing some reservations regarding the ousting of the monarchy, the weekly *Co-operative News* and other Co-operative journals were also supportive of the Republic. The liberal daily the *News Chronicle*, too, welcomed the new Republic and its support throughout the war was uninterrupted, as was that of the influential provincial paper, the *Manchester Guardian*, both condemning non-intervention from the start. Other large circulation dailies, the *Daily Mirror* and the isolationist *Daily Express* were less clear in the direction of their support, concerned rather with keeping events distant

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<sup>54</sup> Tom Harrisson & Charles Madge, *Britain by Mass Observation* (London, 1986, first published 1938), p. 30. 35% of those polled regarded newspapers as most influential in shaping opinion, 17% friends, 13% radio, 8% travel, & 5% books.

<sup>55</sup> James Curran & Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London, 3rd edition, 1988), p. 67.

and political content to a minimum, Spanish affairs often dealt with in terms of human interest, and in Beaverbrook's *Express* stable from the perspective of empire interests.

As Orwell later observed of this coverage: 'no event is ever correctly reported in a newspaper, but in Spain, for the first time, I saw newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in a pure lie'.<sup>56</sup> Clearly the propagandist trilogy of fabrication, exaggeration and omission are evident in much, if not all, of the press reporting, and, indeed, in other accounts and political expressions of events in Spain. In this instance, the process by which in the interpretation of events the media rely on the assumed values and cultural perceptions of their intended audience was, in many instances, stretched to the limit. The interest here, then, is how efforts were made to enhance political and ideological stances through the use and elaboration of popular preconceptions of Spanish history, customs and national character. The view of events taken by the various newspapers was of course moderated by political sentiment and by commercial considerations. Cecil King, the advertising director of the *Daily Mirror*, for instance, declared that in order 'to appeal to young working class men and women' that newspaper's 'politics had to be made to match' their interests.<sup>57</sup> Newspapers, then, would most often have been preaching to the converted. However, working from the premise that propaganda is 'no more than the communication of ideas designed to persuade people to think in a desired way',<sup>58</sup> analysis of the press serves to identify not just the arguments that were being offered for public consumption but also, once again, the efforts to manipulate opinion through references to symbols of 'Spanishness', a process which sought to reshape those symbols in order that they fit with the range of beliefs, values and expectations believed to be held by the various newspapers' readers.

This study, then, undertakes a detailed analysis of the range of sources from which the British public acquired their understanding of Spain and examines the way in which that understanding was called on by the politically articulate in order to colour

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<sup>56</sup> George Orwell, 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', *England Your England and other Essays* (London, 1953, written 1943), pp. 161-162.

<sup>57</sup> Curran & Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Era* (Manchester, 1990) p. 6.

explanations of the issues and events arising from the internal frictions of the Second Republic. The study also takes account of the personal attitudes of the political élite as evidenced in their contributions to the press, in speeches and in diplomatic correspondence. The question remains of how such expressions were received by the public at whom they were aimed. While measuring opinion, especially the view with most widespread tenure, is an elusive endeavour, the effect of these various efforts to sway the public view is here assessed through an analysis of correspondence columns in the national and local press, through published diaries and memoirs, contemporary letters, and subsequent oral testimonies. One difficulty here, of course, is that for the most part those who voiced their opinion were the politically partisan. Letters to newspapers, for instance, reveal responses to issues of most immediate concern, make visible attempts to influence opinion, and delineate the parameters of any debate. However, their impact on wider public opinion cannot be quantified. They can, though, provide a guide, their sheer volume in the 'letter to the editor columns' suggesting wider interest. Memoirs and oral testimonies present a further set of problems.<sup>59</sup> Here the efforts of an individual to relate past events inevitably invites distortion, not least through the vagaries of memory. Factual recollection may be coloured by self-serving perspectives or subsequent influences, and recalled events may become telescoped by time so that boundaries between them become confused. Nonetheless, such material does provide an insight into responses, the specific perspective balancing and illustrating, and sometimes challenging the general view.

The study also calls upon other evidence to indicate the effectiveness of the various representations of events. Opinion polls were introduced to Britain during the war and, whilst limited in nature and range of questions asked, nonetheless, offer some additional indication of public feeling, both regarding where sympathies lay and how people saw events in Spain in relation to British interests and foreign policy. Though limited, these surveys can also be gauged against public responses and the level of contribution made to the various humanitarian aid organisations. Finally, just as an examination of popular fiction and film reveals how

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<sup>59</sup> For a comprehensive examination of oral testimony as a source see Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past : Oral History* (Oxford, 1988); J. Fentress & C. Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Oxford, 1992).

Spain and her people were perceived before the war, so a consideration of the body of literature and film produced during the conflict serves as a reflection of the most commonly promoted and generally held attitudes during it. More than this, with authors and film-makers seeking to respond to public interest and to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, contemporary fictional representations, while seeking to avoid controversy and censure, were forced to take account of any shifts in the popular view of events.

As is evident from the synopsis above, in the endeavour to examine British representations of, and attitudes towards Spain during the 1930s this study employs a wide range of source material. Much of this is coloured by the extreme partisanship of its various authors. This bias, of course, is itself historically informative. Not least because what is of interest here, is the ways in which politically or ideologically motivated commentators used and manipulated preconceived ideas of Spain and the Spanish to promote the cause of their chosen side. The endeavour to determine the origins of such ideas, their nature and their propagandist interpretation, and to assess public responses to their use requires a systematic search through the wide range of media through which the public would have been informed. Whilst, given the vast volume of material produced, especially after July 1936, this study undoubtedly omits some useful sources, those examined do provide an representative picture of how the Spanish Civil War was portrayed in Britain.

## **Chapter Outline**

In determining British attitudes towards Spain it is recognised that stereotypical representations of that country, its people, and the issues brought to the fore during the 1930s were only a part of a wider construct of the popular British view of the world. In chapter two, then, an initial and general analysis of popular fiction, especially juvenile literature, provides insight into the most widely promoted notions of Britain's place in the world during the inter-war years. Here, the impact of the Empire in the shaping of attitudes, fear of the 'other', most specifically in the form of Bolshevik intent, notions of 'Englishness and impressions of foreigners are all considered. Within this general framework, a more specific examination of Spain

and the Spanish in such fiction reveals the most commonly held impressions of that country and its people.

In chapter three, the ubiquity of such stereotypes of the Spanish in British culture is made more evident in an examination of the expectations and subsequent experiences of various visitors to, and expatriate residents of, the Peninsula during the 1930s. This last theme is one referred to by Buchanan, given more concerted attention by John Walton and since expanded by myself.<sup>60</sup> Here, the project looks still more closely at the ways in which tourism and tourist literature may have contributed in the shaping of opinion, especially during the early months of the war. It also examines in detail the attitudes held by travellers in Spain, their written accounts revealing the writers' social and political stances and indicating attitudes that would be expanded upon by political commentators after July 1936. British attitudes, cultural, social and political, are also revealed in an examination of the experiences related by expatriates; both retired residents and those who were employed in British-owned or British-managed enterprises in Spain. Apparent throughout much of the literature produced for and by these groups are references to Spain before April 1931. Hence, by taking analysis back beyond the birth of the Republic, the project considers the ways in which British perceptions of the Spanish royal family and of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship may have influenced British attitudes to Spain and swayed opinion during the years following their fall.

Taking up this last theme, chapter four examines the most commonly advanced representations of the Spanish political scene. Here, the study first gives regard to the nature of political commentary in travel accounts and traces the attitudes expressed against the shaping of political opinion in Britain. It then looks closely at the increasingly contrasting interpretations of the Spanish political landscape as offered by the British right and by supporters of the Republic during the pre-Civil War years. The study examines differing attitudes towards the old régime of Alfonso and Primo de Rivera and the formation, reforms and progress of the Second Republic. It also demonstrates the polarisation of opinion that took shape during these years with the Republic increasingly linked to anarchy and to

<sup>60</sup> John K. Walton, 'British Perceptions of Spain and their Impact on Attitudes to the Spanish Civil War: Some Additional Evidence', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.5, No.3, 1994, pp. 283-99; Brian Shelmerdine, 'The Experiences of British Holidaymakers and Expatriate Residents in Pre-Civil War Spain', *European History Quarterly*, Vol.32, No.3, 2002, pp. 367-390.

communist revolutionary design, its political opponents with fascism. The study, however, also shows how all such interpretations continued to be framed within preconceived, often patronising or comic notions of Spanish politics.

Chapter five looks at the ways in which the two sets of supporters presented contrasting representations of the part played by the Catholic Church in Spain. While overlapping chronologically with the previous chapter, here particular attention is directed at the responses brought about by the Church's sanctioning of the rebellion as a 'Christian crusade'. The study examines the Pro-Nationalist endeavour to link the formation of the Republic with a supposed degeneration of moral standards and republican politics with 'Godless atheism'. Conversely the project looks at how supporters of the Republic countered by ridiculing the idea of a Christian crusade that enlisted the help of 'heathen' Moors, and dismissed charges of atheism by pointing out that the pious Basque had remained loyal to the government. In considering these representations of events their likely impact of these on the British public is also assessed. Here, the study once again examines the ways in which, in their efforts to make their case more convincing, the respective sets of commentators attempted to variously appropriate, manipulate or reconstruct popular perceptions of the nature and of the historic role of the Church in Spain.

Moorish involvement in the war is taken further in chapter six. Here, the representation of wider foreign involvement is also considered. The study sets out to show how, in their depiction of the two sets of combatants and in their explanation of the foreign presence, both pro-Nationalist and pro-Republican commentators referred to a framework of racial, ethnic and class stereotypes. It also shows that while these depictions were often reflections of the contentions being advanced by the two régimes they were also informed by commonly held notions of the nationalities involved and by ingrained ideas of class structure. The project looks further at the difficulties such representations presented. In the first place, it looks at the class characterisation of the two sides. This links with the ways in which commentators dealt with the presence of British volunteers. The depiction of other nationalities raised other problems. In a civil war where not only Spaniards faced Spaniards but where foreign combatants often also faced fellow countrymen

preconceived notions of national character provided easy points of reference but, as the study shows, commentators needed to modify these in order to suit their respective stances.

While chapter six gives regard to the various representations of the two sets of combatants, chapter seven looks at what they were depicted as fighting for. Here the study shows that while both sets of commentators subscribed to a vision of a 'new Spain' emerging from a feudal past, both envisaged very different routes. This chapter looks at how commentators sought, through the use of imagery and historical association, to make their British audiences identify with either the Republican or the Nationalist cause. It looks also at how pro-Republicans and pro-Nationalists, alike, attempted to highlight the supposed 'English' values of their respective sides, Nationalist sympathisers going so far as to 'Anglicise' members of the Spanish élite. Two aspects of the differing visions which, for commentators, seemed to best characterise the liberalism of the Republic and the traditionalism of the Nationalists were their respective attitudes towards culture and education and to the role of women. This chapter, then, goes on to examine how both sets of supporters sought to claim the cultural high ground, viewed the educational needs of ordinary Spaniards and finally considers their often contradictory and changing perceptions of the part to be played by women in the 'new Spains'.

Chapter eight considers how the impressions of the war offered acted to moderate British public responses to Spain. While the general pattern was to treat Spain and her people as an homogenous entity, occasionally perceived regional differences were enlisted for propaganda purposes. Here, then, the study first examines in more detail a theme evident throughout the project, the tendency to treat the Basque provinces as distinct from Spain as a whole. During 1937 the involvement of British merchant-ships in running the naval blockade of Bilbao, the bombing of Guernica, and the evacuation of Basque children ensured that the provinces became central to portrayals of the war. This chapter looks at how significant events in the north were in shaping the popular view of the war and in eliciting pro-Republic sympathy. It also looks at how commentators responded to events in the Basque provinces paying particular attention to the language in which reports were couched and the historical references used. In the spring-summer of 1937,

reaction to the plight of the Basques made clear the direction of British public compassion. However, it is through a wider examination of responses to humanitarian aid appeals that the study seeks, next, to assess the limits, and trace the changing patterns, of sympathy throughout the war. Finally, in attempting to determine the influences that may have had some bearing on public attitudes, the chapter returns to the fictional representation of Spain by examining the contemporary portrayal of events in film and popular literature. Here, the study examines texts for both the continuation of stereotypical assumptions and for any evidence of political preference. The chapter concludes with a brief assessment of the portrayal of the conflict in post-civil war fiction.

Finally, the concluding chapter seeks to draw together the essential elements of the platforms posited by the two sides. At the same time it summarises the major concerns that served to moderate and influence the attitude of the British public towards events in Europe in general and Spain in particular. However, it also argues that the representations of events offered by commentators of both sides, littered as they were with assumptions of national character weaknesses and cultural 'peculiarities', only reinforced a consensus that Spain's civil war was no concern of Britain.



## Chapter 2

### POPULAR FICTION AND THE BRITISH WORLD VIEW

The classifications by which people commonly define themselves, and are in turn defined - gender, class, religion, status, place of birth - are all, for the majority, secondary to a shared sense of national identity. In inter-war Britain this was particularly so. The anxious concerns of those who now, six decades later, seek to define a distinct English national identity as devolution separates out the elements of that 'Britishness' were nowhere to be seen in pre-war Britain. Then, the idea that British sovereignty might be subsumed in European federalism was unimaginable. Then, the world maps in schools proudly marked out in red a British Empire at its zenith. At that time few cinema-goers would have thought not to stand dutifully as the national anthem was played at the close of the show. For the majority living in this period, Britain, or England, for the two were synonymous, remained unquestionably the England described by the dying John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's *Richard II*:

... this scepter'd isle,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise;  
This, fortress, built by nature for herself,  
Against infection and the hand of war;  
This happy band of men, this little world;  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
Or, as a moat defensive to a house,  
Against the envy of less happier lands;  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, ...<sup>1</sup>

During the early decades of the twentieth century the notions evoked by such imagery were not only intact but had been repeatedly confirmed both in historical event and in the popular reinterpretation of those events. Moreover, since the defeat of the Armada, the 'moat' which defended British shores had also become the means of accumulating the world's largest empire and of exporting British values.

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Act 2, Scene 1.

The comfortable insularity afforded by geography and empire had helped encourage a national feeling of superiority and varying levels of distrust and disdain toward foreigners.

Accepting cultural historian Jeffrey Richards' proposition that 'the study of a nation's self-image is crucial in understanding its actions both at home and abroad', this chapter seeks first to identify how the British saw themselves and their foreign neighbours - with especial focus on the Spanish - during the inter-war years.<sup>2</sup> Subscribing further to Richards' argument that 'national character is a cultural construct which changes to suit new conditions, the intent here is to first identify the commonly advanced ideas of 'Englishness' and of foreign national character commonly repeated in the media of popular culture. Particular attention is given to the presence of these notions in stories written for the young, literature which, as John Mackenzie and others have shown, also provides a valuable insight to social attitudes and a simplified version of the generally accepted contemporary view of the world.<sup>3</sup> Adult audiences reading the daily press or watching the cinema newsreels were likely to have absorbed the same impressions during their own youth, to have subscribed to the same ethnocentric outlook and to have responded to such signifiers when used by commentators in their interpretation of issues. As George Orwell suggested in 1940, stories written for the young provide 'the best indication of what the mass of English people really think'. Moreover, as he went on to contend, boys weeklies:

were read by a very large proportion, perhaps an actual majority, of English boys, including many who will never read anything else except newspapers; and along with it they were absorbing a ... conviction ... that foreigners are unimportant comics and that the British Empire is a sort of charity concern which will last forever.<sup>4</sup>

The view conveyed in juvenile literature of Britain's place in, and relationship with, the 'Other' of the rest of the world is, then, considered next.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to 'Dad's Army'* (Manchester & New York, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*; Richards, (editor) *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, & *Happiest Days*.

<sup>4</sup> Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', *Collected Essays*, pp. 505 & 528.

While throughout the inter-war years Britain's formal and informal control of the globe was at its peak, the same years witnessed struggles in the protectorates and colonies, from Egypt and Palestine to the Indian core of the Empire, struggles which presented a continual challenge to die-hard British imperialism. During the 1930s a series of other foreign issues raised further concerns. The German expansion into the Rhineland, Austria and the Sudetenland, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), Japanese expansion in Manchuria and China, and the civil war in Spain were issues the significance of which was largely measured by their potential impact on Empire interests. Where such events were introduced into literature for the young they continued to be couched in the imperialist language of pre-World War One stories. Following the Russian Revolution, the theme of a threat to empire extended, with Bolshevism depicted as both stirring discontent among the less grateful subjects of the Crown and feeding on the innate failings of envious foreigners. Fascism, on the other hand, was generally treated more favourably. Only as the war in Spain continued did the threat of 'foreign' ideologies expand to include fascism.<sup>5</sup> This chapter, then, considers also the extent to which these ideologies influenced popular literature during the years before the Civil War began and so may have coloured public reception of early accounts of events. Finally, in a review of the fictional representation of Spain during this period, the chapter assesses the picture painted of that country and the likely impression made upon by readers.

As already noted, popular literature is a relatively under used source. Yet as a means of determining commonly promoted perspectives and evaluating popular mood it is an especially fruitful one. Moreover, the inter-war years were marked by a rapidly expanding market for such literature. During these years children gained more leisure time as the school-leaving age was raised to fourteen and exploitative child-labour practices were minimised. Income levels grew and even the Depression failed to curb the demand for both juvenile and popular fiction. Books were no longer limited to a small, relatively affluent audience. Indeed, as publishers recognised the profit potential, and responded to the growing demand, the 1930s became notable as the most productive decade for the publication of books for the

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<sup>5</sup> Kirsten Drotner, *English Children and their Magazines, 1751-1945* (London, 1988) p. 231, notes that stories suggesting a Nazi threat begin to appear during 1936.

young.<sup>6</sup> Cheap 'Reward' editions, published as school and Sunday-school prizes also appealed to adults looking to buy Christmas and birthday presents. The prolificacy of writers like Percy Westerman, W.E. Johns and Frank Shaw bears testament to the demand for such literature, Westerman alone writing in excess of eighty books between the wars.<sup>7</sup> One survey in 1938 found that 'the number of books read out of school' by twelve to fourteen year olds averaged between 3.9 and 6.5 per child per week depending on age group and gender.<sup>8</sup> Many of these stories were also serialised in the growing number of low-priced comic magazines like *Boy's Own*, *Chums*, *The Wizard* and *Hotspur*, which, being commonly swapped among friends, reached an even wider readership than their anyway buoyant circulation figures suggest (over 800,000 per week for *The Wizard* alone)<sup>9</sup> Adult demand was equally healthy. The mid-'thirties saw publishers rise to demand with low-priced paperbacks, local lending libraries increase both in number and popularity, and a proliferation of low-subscription corner-shop and travelling book-clubs. This growth of fictional output, matched as it was by an upsurge in readership, makes an examination of the attitudes being preached and the world-views being promoted all the more significant. That the same period also saw the number of households licensed to receive radio broadcasts rise to nine million and witnessed the 'golden age of cinema', where admissions reached 903 million by 1934 and rose to 990 million in 1939, only adds further to the potential of mass entertainment to shape common perceptions during these years.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Marcus Crouch, *Treasure Seekers and Borrowers* (London, 1962), pp. 38-85, gives a useful overview of children's books during this period; Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture* (London, 2000), also, 'A Different View of the Trenches: Juvenile Fiction and Popular Perceptions of the First World War, 1914-1939', *War Studies Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1997, pp. 32-46, examine the theme of warfare in popular literature.

<sup>7</sup> Prolific output was in part driven by the low payment most authors could expect. According to one contemporary expert, the writer of juvenile novels was lucky to earn £20 from a first novel and seldom likely to make more than £100 out of his fortieth. Christine Chaundler, *The Children's Author: A Writer's Guide to the Juvenile Market* (London, 1934), p. 49. Between 1908 and 1959, Percy Westerman wrote some 178 books with sales in excess of 1.5 million. Many were, of course, also serialised in the weeklies. Dennis Butts, 'Percy F Westerman', *Book Collecting & Library Monthly*, October 1968, pp. 186-188; 'Percy Westerman Pulls It Off', 'Guardian Weekend', *The Guardian*, 30 January 1982.

<sup>8</sup> 'Jenkinson's Survey in Great Britain, 1938', in Frank Whitehead, A.C. Capey, Wendy Madden, & Alan Wellings, *Children and Their Books* (London, 1977), pp. 7-11. Although the authors point to some weaknesses in methodology, the survey nonetheless represented the reading habits of some 2,900 schoolchildren.

<sup>9</sup> See, Drotner, *English Children and their Magazines*, Ch. 11 & 12; Paris, *Warrior Nation*, p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes, 1918-1990: A Social History* (London, 1991), p. 54; 'Kinematograph Year Book' 1939, p. 9, cited in, Richards, *Age of the Dream Palace*, p. 11.

## Englishness and Empire.

in large part, literature for the young during the inter-war years continued to carry those values and representations of 'Englishness' and the 'Other' evident in late nineteenth century fiction. As MacKenzie and Richards have demonstrated, the heroes (and most usually they were male) who inhabited the fictional adventures of the nineteenth century from Frederick Marryat through Kingston and Ballantyne to G.A. Henty were invariably imbued with attitudes of devotion to, and sacrifice for, England, (seamlessly interchangeable with Britain), the Crown and Empire.<sup>11</sup> Henty was not alone in his open intent to 'inculcate patriotism' through his chosen medium, and, as Bob Dixon has pointed out, in his later works the author felt no need to justify the ideology of empire and simply took it for granted.<sup>12</sup> A letter to a boys' periodical in 1908, supposedly written by a Dutch reader, summed the cumulative effect of such entrenched assumptions. With undisguised scorn the writer claimed that there could be

no doubt that the immortal Henty and his host of imitators have made the British nation the most conceited people on this earth ... after fourteen or fifteen years perusal of piffle written for his edification, the young Englishman leaves home and country with the very firm idea in his head that he, personally, is equal to two or more Frenchmen, about four Germans, an indefinite number of Russians, and any quantity you care to mention of the remaining scum of the earth.<sup>13</sup>

The editor's confidence in publishing such a vitriolic attack in a boys' comic suggests that he had no doubt but that his readers would hold just such a view and simply treat the writer's comments as no more than the amusing ravings of some envious foreigner. In large part such unshakeable certainty in an innate British superiority can be seen as being located in two factors: the country had not been invaded for almost nine-hundred years - and in children's tales the Normans still had not been forgiven for that catastrophe; and secondly a racial arrogance which had evolved

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of the depiction of masculinity in such literature see Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> G.A. Henty, 'The Boys' Own Paper' December 1902, quoted in Margery Fisher, *The Bright Face of Danger: An Exploration of the Adventure Story* (London, 1986), p. 350; Bob Dixon, *Catching Them Young 2: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction* (London, 1977), p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> R. van Eeghan, 'The Captain', May 1908, Quoted in Margery Fisher, *Bright Face of Danger*, p.351.

alongside imperial ambitions and success. This self-belief remained at the core of popular fiction. Henty's declared purpose was more generally subscribed to, and continued to be so during the inter-war years. Alfred Harmsworth's dominant publishing house, Amalgamated Press, for instance, continued to regard 'the encouragement of physical strength, of patriotism, of interest in travel and exploration, and of pride in our Empire' as paramount considerations<sup>14</sup> and although during the period the Dundee publisher, D.C. Thomson's so called 'Big Five' (*Adventure, Rover, Wizard, Skipper, and Hotspur*) introduced a new and popular format, storylines continued to uphold the same values.

Clearly juvenile literature was not operating in a vacuum in the promotion of such values. The concept of 'a spirit that dictated honest spade-work on the borders of Empire' was further encouraged by organisations like the Boys' Brigade and the Boy Scouts and in celebrations like Empire Day.<sup>15</sup> At cinema clubs, performances were accompanied by the singing of the national anthem and club song, and children repeated pledges to be honest and obedient, loyal to country and kind to animals.<sup>16</sup> The mantra was also reinforced through education. 'In the farthest corners of our vast and wonderful Empire', one typical 1930s encyclopaedia proudly informed, 'you will find men and women who still call England, Scotland, Wales and the Irish Free State, *home*'.<sup>17</sup> The content of English readers, as Stephen Humphries has noted, frequently 'contained passages that glorified monarchy and celebrated Britain's commercial wealth and progress',<sup>18</sup> and the historical approach employed by geography texts focused on empire self-sufficiency.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, history textbooks stressed the grandeur of British dominions.<sup>20</sup> Young readers were taught that while Spain's empire had crumbled and France's colonial development had faltered, Britain continued to preside over 'lands that unite[d] to span the

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<sup>14</sup> MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 205; also Patrick Howarth, 'Play Up and Play the Game', cited in Dixon, *Catching them Young 2*, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> R.L. Archer, 'The Teaching of History in Elementary Schools' (London, 1916), cited in MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 178.

<sup>16</sup> Drotner, *English Children and their Magazines*, fn. 4, p. 185. In this author's experience the same practices continued throughout the post-war years and until the early 1960s.

<sup>17</sup> John R. Crossland & J.M. Parrish (editors), *The Wonder Encyclopaedia for Children*, (London, 1933), p. 59. Italics in original.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels: An Oral History of Working Class Childhood and Youth, 1888-1939* (Oxford, 1981), p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, pp. 187-189.

<sup>20</sup> See Valerie E. Chancellor, *History for Their Masters* (New York, 1970) Ch. 5, for analysis of changing emphases in history teaching at end of the nineteenth century.

earth'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, they learned, it was only with British investment and expertise that Spain had managed to develop her own ore mining potential, a factor that, as we shall see in the next chapter, was to influence attitudes towards the Second Republic, especially in the business sector, and to shade opinion during the Civil War.<sup>22</sup> Such learning added to notions of British supremacy and underscored a world-view in which Spain remained associated with the singeing of 'his Catholic Majesty's beard' and humiliation at the hands of Drake, Grenville and Raleigh. (Referring to the English goalkeeper, David Seaman's penalty save against Spain in the Euro '96 football championships the *Sunday Telegraph's* headline 'Spain still can't beat an English Seaman' bears testimony to the enduring strength of this particular concept.)

Fiction emphasised such a view. Although it has been argued that following World War I 'a spate of novels and memoirs in which the authors' days as schoolboys and subalterns were recalled in a jaundiced frame of mind' meant that 'honour and idealism were depicted as floundering in the filth of the Western Front',<sup>23</sup> this was not the case in popular, especially juvenile literature. Adventure tales did move away from the historical backgrounds made popular by authors like Henty, Herbert Strang (actually a pseudonym used by two authors), and W. Gordon Stables, toward stories with more contemporary settings, but attitudes did not change. A new generation of story writers continued to sing from the same hymn sheet as Henty. Some, like Percy Westerman and Major Charles Gilson, began their careers in the years before the war and helped bridge the transition, a shift evident in Westerman's own evolution from his tale of the Restoration, *A Lad of Grit* (1908), to his topical tale of the Spanish Civil War, *Under Fire in Spain* (1937). In these tales the attitudes, persuasions and prejudices evident before the war continued after it. Stories filled with the chauvinism which supported imperial ambitions and littered with jingoistic stereotype continued to influence young readers, both informing them of their own duties and persuading them of their natural racial superiority. On the shoulders of young British officers, readers were reminded, there rested the not

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<sup>21</sup> Crossland & Parrish, *The Wonder Encyclopaedia*, p. 49; Muriel Masefield, 'The House of History' (1931) cited in Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 190.

<sup>22</sup> *Geography: the World and its Peoples*, (London, undated), p. 151.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Parker, 'The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos', quoted in Winifred Whitehead, *Old Lies Revisited* (London, 1991), p. 49.

'inconsiderable burden ... of maintaining the prestige of the Empire'.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, contrary to the conclusions of academics who have concentrated on 'high' literature,<sup>25</sup> these stories continued to promote participation in warfare as exciting and glamorous, provided that it was fought in a 'just cause', usually the protection of mother-country and empire. Interestingly, the lasting influence of such notions was acknowledged by International Brigade volunteer Tom Wintringham who, on being referred to as the 'English Captain', realised that 'the half-formed feeling that had been aroused by those words' was rooted in his ecstatic boyhood reading of stories like Fitchett's *Fights For the Flag* and *How England Saved Europe*. Although the communist Wintringham's 'just cause' was the defence of democracy in Spain he still saw himself as continuing in the tradition of leading 'sturdy English riflemen, musketeers and archers'.<sup>26</sup> Between the wars fiction maintained such imagery. If the Great War was acknowledged as having been a 'physical and mental hell' for those involved, then writers were quick to claim for their heroes that 'if they had to start all over again, they'd do it'. Authors consistently had their fictional heroes promote the conviction that 'war was a matter of patriotic duty',<sup>27</sup> and the idea that 'its just because any Britisher would do what we've done that the old Empire goes on'.<sup>28</sup> In the 1930s, W.E. Johns, author of the Biggles stories, spoke for almost all, and certainly for all the most popular authors, when he, like Henty before him, stated his desire to teach through his tales 'sportsmanship according to the British idea ... that decent behaviour wins in the end ... and the 'spirit of team work, loyalty to the crown, the Empire and to rightful authority'.<sup>29</sup>

What constituted 'decent behaviour' was made clear in story after story and invariably distinguished Englishmen from foreigners. Readers were repeatedly reminded of the virtues associated with 'being British' and taught to despise, dismiss, or at best patronise, those unfortunate nations who were not, and could not be, blessed with the same virtues. British heroes were expected to follow a code by which they would behave 'decently', demonstrate self-control, play by the rules and be

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<sup>24</sup> Percy Westerman, *The Terror of the Seas* (London, 1927), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> Tom Wintringham, *English Captain* (London, 1941, first published 1939), p. 73.

<sup>27</sup> Percy Westerman, *The Salving of the Fusi Yama* (London, 1920), p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> W.E. Johns, *Biggles in Spain* (London, 1992, first published 1939), p. 208.

<sup>29</sup> W.E. Johns, quoted in Geoffrey Trease, 'Tales out of School', in Peter Beresford Ellis & Piers Williams, *By Jove Biggles: The Life of Captain WE Johns* (London, 1981), p. 218.



fair to defeated enemies. That they would be courageous and tenaciously determined, honest, tolerant and fair, and display common-sense was a given. That other nationalities could never match such qualities was equally accepted. Thus, the 'stolidity and grim courage [shown by] British crews when disaster, sudden and unexpected, stared them in the face', contrasted starkly, but not unexpectedly, with the 'panic stricken clamour of white livered dagoes' confronted with the same circumstances.<sup>30</sup> On the occasion when characters of other nationalities were congratulated for a display of bravery it was made clear that in no way could they match the coolness in the face of danger associated with British heroes: '... though they lacked the calm deliberation of the British seamen, the men were not deficient in courage'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as reporting from the war in Spain would repeatedly claim, the courage of foreigners was inevitably flawed in some way by failings of national character, not least lack of direction, indiscipline and an irrational fatalism.<sup>32</sup>

Along with British courage and composure ran quiet determination and resolve, in adversity Britons would 'grin and bear it'.<sup>33</sup> The notion of an embattled people prevailing against overwhelming odds was one deeply entrenched in the British psyche (and still is). 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers', the rallying call of Shakespeare's Henry V, was one familiar to most.<sup>34</sup> History, after all, focused on the successes of the few at Crécy and Agincourt; on the victory of Drake's bantams over the leviathans of the Spanish Armada; and on the heroic stand made against the Napoleonic war-machine at Waterloo and Trafalgar. History which concentrated on Rorke's Drift and not Isandhlwana, glorified the charge of the Light Brigade rather than victory at Sebastapol, and which placed the sieges of Lucknow, and Ladysmith and Mafeking at the apogee of British involvement in India and South Africa, meant that readers expected their heroes to display 'that queer British spirit which refuses to admit defeat, even when matters are at their worst'.<sup>35</sup> This fostering of a 'David and Goliath' mentality was one which melded easily with the promotion of

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<sup>30</sup> Percy Westerman, *The Wireless Officer* (London, 1922), pp. 164 & 170.

<sup>31</sup> Percy Westerman, 'The Flying Submarine', cited in Cedric Cullingford, "'The Right Stuff': The Boys' Stories of Percy F Westerman", *Children's Literature in Education*, Vol.24, No.1, March 1993, pp. 53-71 (p. 56).

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Percy Westerman, *Terror of the Seas*, p. 197.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. John Mowbray, *Barkworth's Last Year* (London, 1925), p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act 4, Scene 3.

<sup>35</sup> Captain Frank H. Shaw, 'The Red Deluge', 'Chums', reprinted in Philip Warner (editor), *The Best of Chums* (London, 1978), p. 140.

sympathy for the underdog, both, as will be seen, concepts evident in the interpretation of events during the Spanish war, first by supporters of Franco who portrayed the siege of the Toledo Alcázar in such terms and then more consistently and successfully by the left in their picture of besieged democracy.

Integral to conveying these convictions was the notion of gentlemanly behaviour, a notion which included fair-play, abiding by the rules, and respect for your opponent. Whether in sport or in warfare, British participants could be relied upon to 'play the game', other nationals could not. Thus, while one contributor to the boys' weekly, *Chums*, considered the presence of referees at football matches to be a 'pure cheek' which questioned 'our own sense of fair play', he nonetheless recognised their value in international football where 'some players endeavour[ed] to cheat'.<sup>36</sup> In battle, too, the same code of fair play and decency applied. It was accepted that foreigners 'couldn't play fair', would resort to 'low-down trickery' and 'shoot first and ask questions later'.<sup>37</sup> British protagonists, on the other hand, would 'hesitate to fire again' on a weakened enemy, unhesitatingly 'jeopardise their own chances' to rescue a fallen foe, and 'feel so rotten' at having to leave a wounded enemy in the field.<sup>38</sup> These were attributes often appreciated by opponents; even pirates admired the 'fair play' and 'stolid determination' of 'young Britons',<sup>39</sup> and universally, people realised that when 'in the power of the British, their lives were safe',<sup>40</sup> after all, 'generosity to the vanquished had always been a Briton's strong point'.<sup>41</sup> Moreover they were attributes that other nations were being taught to emulate by example and through participation in the games Britain had made popular. As we shall see in chapter three, this 'positive trend' was one noted by British visitors to Spain. In literature for the young, 'factual' features painted the same picture. Things had improved, readers of *Chums* were told, since an early football match which had seen a victorious Raith Rovers stoned from the field by hostile Spanish spectators. That 'was a few years ago', and both 'the players and spectators on the Continent had learned differently since those days', thanks to the

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<sup>36</sup> Hylton Cleaver, 'Football - Are Referees Necessary', *Chums*, (1936-37), p192.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Wood *Rebel Skies* (London, 1937), p. 151 also J.C. Hutcheson, *The Penang Pirate* (London, undated), p. 49; Percy Westerman, *Salving of the Fusi Yama*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>38</sup> Percy Westerman, *Terror of the Seas*, p. 151; J.F.C. Westerman, *John Wently Wins Through* (London, 1938), pp. 112 & 124.

<sup>39</sup> Percy Westerman, *Terror of the Seas*, p. 74.

<sup>40</sup> Percy Westerman, 'The Dreadnought of the Air', cited in Cullingford. 'The Right Stuff', p. 65.

<sup>41</sup> Percy Westerman, *Salving of the Fusi Yama*, p. 201.

effort and perseverance of British coaches.<sup>42</sup>

This code of virtues carried with it more than a basic assumption of Anglo-Saxon ethnic superiority. Almost without exception the heroic protagonists of popular literature were 'gentlemen' from the English upper or upper-middle classes, had had a public school education of some fashion, were independently, though not ostentatiously, wealthy, and had 'the right connections'. More often than not they were assisted in their empire-saving exploits by 'other rank' characters who, while displaying occasional glimpses of working-class wit and guile, remained subservient and dutiful, always respectful of the wisdom and intellect of their 'betters'. Typical of this supporting role is the W.E. Johns' character 'Ginger' Hebblethwaite, who first appeared in *Biggles and the Black Peril* (1935), as a run-away sixteen-year old miner's son with an ambition to fly. While Ginger's courage and determination are never in question, it is only through the example of the well-placed Biggles and his cousin Algernon Lacey, 'Algy', that he learns to control, at least most of the time, his working-class exuberance and lack of direction. When depicting other nationals, authors interleaved this assumption of an accepted and 'natural' class structure with notions of an ethnic and racial hierarchy. Their unfaltering belief that Britons should head such an hierarchy is evidenced by the way in which foreign characters are often portrayed as willingly accepting it. Typically, in one Percy Westerman story, while the leader of salvage mission cheerfully acknowledges the 'British' credentials of a Barbados born cook, the cook, equally cheerfully accepts his place as 'dis niggah'.<sup>43</sup> In Biggles' Spanish Civil War adventure, *Biggles in Spain* (1939), Spaniards are depicted as responding positively to the confident smile and calm authority of the British, the discovery that Biggles and his cohort are British sufficient to calm the nerves of 'gesticulating frontier guards'.<sup>44</sup> While such responses might have been no more than fictional myths, their repetition helped to reinforce views which informed interpretations of world events during the thirties, and, as will be seen, not least events in Spain.

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<sup>42</sup> 'England Teaches Football to the World', *Chums*, (1936-37), p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> Percy Westerman, *Salving of the Fusi Yama*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>44</sup> W.E. Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 206.

## **'Funny Foreigners'<sup>45</sup> : The Depiction of Other Nationalities in Fiction.**

This racial hierarchy which placed Anglo Saxons above all other and saw the English as the flower of that particular race was made more clear by a general denigration of other peoples. Simply, races 'north of the forty-fifth parallel' were superior, 'a better strain', than those south of it.<sup>46</sup> Nor were such simplicities confined to fiction for the young. Examples abound in which worth is measured by race. When, in his novel *The Battle of London*, Hugh Addison maintained that the world's people could be divided 'into two groups - Anglo Saxons and Dagoes' and determined without fear of contradiction that 'the only people who mattered were those who belonged to the "Breakfast-Eating Union" (in other words the British and Americans)', he was voicing a view which was at the very least implicit in much popular literature.<sup>47</sup> Extreme views, not unlike those voiced by far-right anti-immigrationists seventy years on, extended to warn of the threat posed by 'The Alien Menace' to the jobs of honest British seamen. The Board of Trade offices in Cardiff were, according to one right-wing zealot, awash with 'Spaniards, Italians, Greeks, Arabs and other aliens posing as British subjects, securing employment ... who are as grave a danger to public health and morals as they are a continuous cause of unemployment among our own seamen'.<sup>48</sup> As the British economy slipped further into recession such opinions would surely have found some fertile ground, if not in recruiting large numbers to the pro-fascist lobby then at least underlining 'Little Englander' notions and reinforcing ideas of the inferiority of other nationalities.

Literature which resulted in youngsters growing up with the attitude that foreigners were 'like a load of rubbish. ... Froggies and Eyties and Dagoes and things like that ... the only way you'd describe them was they were beneath you,' prepared the way for such views.<sup>49</sup> As Orwell argued with clear dismay in March 1940 in his celebrated 'Horizon' article, 'Boys' Weeklies', the portrayal of foreigners had not altered in the thirty years since van Eeghan's caustic observations, they remained 'exactly the same figures of fun that they always were', a contention happily con-

<sup>45</sup> See fn. 50.

<sup>46</sup> Percy Westerman, *Captain Cain*, (London, 1924), p. 147.

<sup>47</sup> Hugh Addison, *The Battle of London* (London, 1924), p. 68.

<sup>48</sup> Lieut. Col. A.H. Lane, *The Alien Menace* (London, 1929, first published 1928), p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Transcript of Fred Mattock, quoted in Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels*, p. 43.

ceded by the prolific story writer Frank Richards (Charles Hamilton). 'I must shock Mr Orwell by telling him that foreigners *are* funny', he asserted in a reply two months later.<sup>50</sup> Writers like Richards continued to draw from a glossary of supposed national and racial characteristics which 'assumed that foreigners of any race [were] all alike' and could 'be classified in much the same way as insects'.<sup>51</sup> Foreigners were identified by appearance, behaviour, habits and attitudes, and categorised according to gradations of national character. Most usually, colour of skin decided the basic categorisation, the darker the hue the less civilised the race, though 'natives' of the Empire, having benefited from British 'disciplining', were not so savage as those in other parts of the world. British influence meant that characters called 'Snowball' could rise beyond their normal childlike nature to make valiant contributions, usually because of their animal strength. Moreover, they were grateful, the same 'Snowball' overwhelmed when trusted by his English master with the task of to 'hoist[ing] the Union Jack'.<sup>52</sup> Away from such influence, however, stirred by agitators and 'maddened by unlimited quantities of rum', blacks reverted easily to barbarity.<sup>53</sup> Dyaks and Lascars, too, were the epitome of primitive savagery, their sinister Chinese masters 'superb liars', and the Arabs and the Afghan tribesmen who inhabited the glut of Foreign Legion and North West frontier tales were invariably marked by their treachery and cruelty as well as by their tendency to smell noxiously.<sup>54</sup> Nationalities south of the forty-fifth parallel, notably South American republics and those countries bordering the Mediterranean, were, according to writers like Westerman, 'all tarred with the same brush ... a dirty crowd of Dagoes'.<sup>55</sup>

Contempt for foreigners was not confined to colour of skin. Physical appearance, clothing, speech and mannerisms all emphasised alien qualities. 'Foreigners [were] obvious at a glance' and if readers needed further proof, illustrations by the like of

Edward Hodgson, W.E. Wigful, R.H. Brock, Terence Cuneo provided it. English

<sup>50</sup> Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', *Collected Essays, Vol. 1*, p. 524; & Frank Richards, 'Frank Richards Replies to George Orwell', 'Horizon', May 1940, loc.cit., p. 538. Richards (Charles Hamilton) was author of the Greyfriars & St Jim's stories in 'Magnet' and 'Gem' weeklies. Italics in original text.

<sup>51</sup> Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', *Collected Essays, Vol. 1*, pp. 516-517, 524.

<sup>52</sup> Hutcheson, *Penang Pirate*, pp. 47-58.

<sup>53</sup> Percy Westerman, *Captain Cain*, p. 248.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. see W.E. Johns, *Biggles and the Secret Mission* (London, 1994), first published as *Biggles, Air Commodore*, 1937; Major Charles Gilson, 'The Secret Society of the Tortoise Mask', *Chums*, serial (1921); Percy Westerman, 'The Gate of Kwei -Nan', serialised in *Chums*, (1933-34); 'The Wolf of Kabul' series in *The Wizard*; Robert Harding, 'Christmas on the Frontier', *Chums*, (1933-34); Alan Western, *Desert Hawk* (London, 1937), p. 163.

<sup>55</sup> Percy Westerman, *Leslie Dexter, Cadet* (London, 1930), p. 113.

characters were easily identified by their upright stance, square jaw, 'natural elastic stride', 'clean looks' and the unmistakable London cut' of their clothes.<sup>56</sup> European characters, on the other hand, were typically stout with square heads and cropped hair and wore black overcoats with astrakhan collars, or were hunched individuals with thin faces, lank hair and drooping moustaches, who dressed in tight-fitting continental look clothes and wore 'aggressively foreign' hats.<sup>57</sup> The addition of 'little bead-like eyes with a venomous glint', or thick skull and dusky complexion served to define the rest of the world.<sup>58</sup>

Appearance, though, was only one aspect of the typecasting employed. Writers all subscribed to a catalogue of generalisations associated with national character and custom, all of which served to place them somewhere below the British. Even those nationalities regarded as closest to the British, Americans (contrary to Orwell's findings) and 'our German cousins' betrayed flaws of character. Americans, according to more than one author, were less honourable than the British, and were poor sports who believed that winning was everything and that money could solve anything. Young readers would not have been surprised when in an Alan Western tale, *Desert Hawk* (1937), an army P.E. trainer suggested to the young English hero that 'the more "e" [an American youth] tries to copy you the better it'll be for "im", a piece of advice from a working-class member of the chorus clearly targeted at more than one level.<sup>59</sup> Attitudes toward Germans varied from the uncompromising dislike displayed in Percy Westerman's tales to the more charitable stance adopted by W.E. Johns. All writers, though, applied the same typecasting. The 'Hun' was simply an untrustworthy, bullying, vulgar and fiendish enemy. Even in peacetime tales, Westerman had demobbed British naval and flying officers relishing the 'chance of coming up against "Fritz" again, not with steel or bullet but in a contest of wills and skill', a contest which had 'the almost certainty of a lavish display

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<sup>56</sup> Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 26. For illustrations see e.g. E Hodgson 'The Germans Were Dumbfounded', in Percy Westerman, *Salving of the Fusi Yama*; R.H. Brock, 'This is Baron Selen-ski ...', *Chatterbox*, No.2, p. 13; Terence Cuneo, in J.F.C. Westerman, *Menace From the Air* (Oxford, 1938).

<sup>57</sup> W.E. Johns, *Biggles and the Black Peril* (London, 1985, first published 1935), p. 53; *Biggles in Spain*, p. 26; J.F.C. Westerman, *Menace From the Air*, p. 92; Frances Cowan, 'The Royal Handicap', *Chatterbox*, No. 2, 1928, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> Major Charles Gilson, 'The Pink Jade Button', *Chums*, (1933-34), p. 58.

<sup>59</sup> Alan Western, *Desert Hawk* pp. 23 & 175; similarly, David T. Lindsay, *The Flying Armada* (London, 1938), p. 192.

of low-down trickery on the side of their opponents'.<sup>60</sup> Johns, too, despite his portrayal of aerial chivalry in his tales of World War One air combat and disclaimer regarding his use of the term 'Hun', slipped easily into similar language. Germans were still 'sausage eating square-headed son[s] of ... Bavarian offal-merchants' who easily forgot how to behave like gentlemen and tended towards 'the methods of the original Huns'.<sup>61</sup>

Attitudes toward other nationalities were even more disparaging, and often more dismissive. The Spaniard, according to popular typecasting, was volatile and prone to violence, cruel and devious, idle and ignorant in equal measure, as Orwell observed, 'a "dago" or a "greaser" who rolls a cigarette and stabs people in the back'.<sup>62</sup> These stereotypes barely needed including, so firmly fixed were they in the popular understanding of Spain. Cruel and treacherous Spaniards had, to their cost, come up against British heroes since Frederick Marryat's *Midshipman Easy* (1836), a tale brought to a wider audience as a film release in October 1935. Other British film productions like *Drake of England* (1935) and *Fire Over England* (1937) and comic book stories like the 'Red Falcon' and 'Terror Island' continued the theme of British nautical success over cruel but ill-disciplined, 'sallow-faced', and 'dirty-looking little dagoes'.<sup>63</sup> Tales with a more contemporary setting referred to the same catalogue. Without exception Spaniards, and other Latin peoples, were portrayed as voluble, ill-disciplined, indolent procrastinators with a compulsion to gamble. W.E. Johns, who had some knowledge of Spain and wrote more enthusiastically and with more sympathy elsewhere, still subscribed to the same list of stereotypes when writing fiction.<sup>64</sup> Spain, he declared derisively, was a country where 'one half of the country live[d] by selling lottery tickets, and the other half spen[t] their time listening to the results on the wireless'.<sup>65</sup> Predictably, readers learned that 'with the Spaniard it is always mañana', that Spanish sentries were either over-excited and irrational or asleep, and that Spanish bank clerks would swindle you if they

<sup>60</sup> Percy Westerman, *Salving of the Fusi Yama*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>61</sup> W.E. Johns, *The Camels Are Coming* (London, 1993, first published 1932), p. 15, Johns states that his use of the term 'Hun' is intended in a familiar rather than derogatory sense and points out that the word was also used for pupils at the RFC training school. W.E. Johns, *Biggles in France* (London, 1993, first published 1935), pp. 32 & 195.

<sup>62</sup> Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', *Collected Essays Vol. 1*, p. 524.

<sup>63</sup> 'Red Falcon', *Chums*, 1936-37; Barton Furze, 'Terror Island', *Chums*, (1933-34), p. 220.

<sup>64</sup> W.E. Johns' articles written for 'My Garden' magazine during 1936-37, see Ellis & Williams, *By Jove Biggles*, Ch. 11.

<sup>65</sup> Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 25.

could. Spaniards were inherently cruel and 'relentlessly vindictive', to the extent that they continued to 'revile' even the memory of their enemies.<sup>66</sup> While prisoners of the British could be assured of fair treatment, it was accepted that if 'the Spaniards have you, their way is either the quick exit or the very slow one.'<sup>67</sup> The depth of Spanish depravity, however, was made most clear in their treatment of animals. More than one writer wrote of the 'horror' felt by British onlookers at the 'frequent sight of mulateers unmercifully flogging their animals' and their frustration at realising 'you'll see plenty of this in Spain'.<sup>68</sup> Couched in such comments was not only the belief that Spaniards were less civilised, with habits and practices which fell far short of British standards, but also the idea that character traits such as irrationality, inability to compromise and cruelty were so much a part of the Spanish disposition that any attempt to understand, let alone temper, them was futile, a notion which after July 1936 fitted neatly with popular interpretations of events in Spain.

The degree of contempt for foreigners and other races evident in the tales of many writers cannot be over stressed. Writers like Percy Westerman thought little of declaring that 'fair play' was unlikely in those 'dead-and-alive ports ... [where] the British vice-consul is often a Dago'.<sup>69</sup> Where writers introduced exceptions to this derogatory portrayal of foreigners they usually offered a particular explanation. Foreign characters who displayed qualities outside of those deemed typical of their race were invariably found to have British connections which explained their 'improvement'. Education at an English public school or 'a place at Oxford', or both; an English parent or an English spouse, usually a mother or wife, were typical ruses by which foreign protagonists could be endowed with better qualities. Thus, a Spanish muledriver who had been brought up in England did not use his whip so liberally; a Spaniard with an English wife was more courageous and self-sacrificing; and a young Balkan prince educated in England learned how to remain cool in the face of danger, wishing only 'that father had been an Englishman'.<sup>70</sup> This idea that 'better' foreigners aspired to English qualities and acquired them either through British parentage or institutions was, as will be shown in a later chapter, another which

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<sup>66</sup> Percy Westerman, *Captain Cain*, p. 106.

<sup>67</sup> Lindsay, *The Flying Armada*, pp. 173 & 177; Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, pp. 22, 126 & 206.

<sup>68</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, (London, 1937), p. 55; Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 69.

<sup>69</sup> Percy Westerman, *Leslie Dexter, Cadet*, p. 115.

<sup>70</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, p. 186; Frances Cowan, 'The Royal Handicap', *Chat-terbox*, No. 1, 1928, pp. 2-3.



informed Civil War propaganda. The opposite side to this coin depicted British villains as having been 'tainted' by foreign blood. Those who plotted against the Empire or threatened English thoroughbred heroes were invariably exposed as having foreign antecedents: a 'Mexican peon' for a father, a mother who was a 'quadroon from Jamaica', 'Spanish blood in his veins' or 'the dark curly hair and sal-low features' which pointed to 'Iberian' ancestry.<sup>71</sup>

## Enemies of the Empire

In using this range of national and racial stereotypes in their fiction authors emphasised the privileges of being British, sanctioned actions toward foreigners and reinforced an attitude of empire isolationism. They also defined the likely enemies against whom young British heroes would pit their wits. Enemies within the Empire provided one common theme. Stories of conflicts with the 'wild' but 'brave' inhabitants of the Indian north-west frontier were particularly common, with tales like 'Outlaws of the Hills' and 'Belbin of the Police' serialised in *Chums*.<sup>72</sup> Francis Yeats-Brown's, hugely successful autobiographical account *Bengal Lancer* (1930) (the book ran to nine impressions within six months of publication), further popularised the same themes and Hollywood capitalised on them.<sup>73</sup> The box-office success of films like *King of the Khyber Rifles* (1929) and *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935), one of the most commercially successful films of the thirties, and reportedly a favourite of Franco, testify to the popularity of this sub-genre.<sup>74</sup> British duties elsewhere in the world provided similar material. Typically, authors like Percy Westerman, informed that 'we British, as usual, are the first to carry out international obligations'.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in Westerman's *Desert Hawk*, a story set in Palestine with overtones of Lawrence of Arabia, Britain is shown as responding responsibly to

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<sup>71</sup> Lindsay, *The Flying Armada*, pp. 203 & 52; Percy Westerman, *Captain Cain*, p. 106; 'Dreadnought of the Air' cited in Cullingford, 'The Right Stuff', p. 57.

<sup>72</sup> Walter Bury, 'Outlaws of the Hills', *Chums*, (1936-37), pp. 197-8; Robert Harding, 'Belbin of the Police', *Chums*, (1932-33), p. 455.

<sup>73</sup> Francis Yeats-Brown, *Bengal Lancer*, (London, 1931, first published 1930).

<sup>74</sup> Francis Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle* (London, 1939), p. 289. *King of the Khyber Rifles* (1929); *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935). Others in the same genre and equally popular include *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), with the story beginning in NW India, *The Drum* (1938) and *Gunga Din* (1939). See e.g. Jeffrey Richards, 'Censorship in Operation: Imperial Policy', *The Age of the Dream Palace*, Ch. 8. Claim made by the author of *Bengal Lancer*, Francis Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle*, p. 289.

<sup>75</sup> Percy Westerman, *The Red Pirate* (London, 1936, first published as a serial in *Chums*, 1933-34), pp. 18-19.

the League of Nations' request that she act once again as 'the policeman of the world'. Again Britons are depicted as risking life 'to keep two excitable people from slitting each other's throats', but the message of duty is nonetheless overriding: 'From father to son the great tradition of service is passed on ... the risks are terrifying; the reward is small; but the tradition of service remains an ideal of all who wish to see the name of England to be coupled with peace'.<sup>76</sup> England and the Empire were the bulwarks of peace and 'out there' were any number of devious foreigners whose spiteful envy of British standards and the British Empire caused them to plot its downfall:

Strange as it may seem, to some people this rag (the Union Jack) is sacred - a thing to die for. But to me it is the emblem of all that is hateful. You boast you English, that you have an Empire on which the sun never sets. But the day will come when that Empire will be rent asunder. ... And that day is fast approaching. Bowed, broken and beaten, her glories gone forever. Then this filthy rag will be a thing for the nations of the world to mock at and jeer.<sup>77</sup>

Commonly the source of such menace proved to be a cunning individual who had duped or bribed foreign hordes to carry out some plan to destroy Britain, and by extension achieve world domination. Beyond the borders of the empire such conspiracies were thwarted by the superior intellect and courageous determination of young British spies and adventurers who usually had the use of a private aircraft, were frequently sponsored by some high placed government official or military contact, and often aided by some new, as yet untried, weaponry. In these stories old enemies continued to threaten and new ones appeared. Mysterious Eastern Europeans, conniving Orientals and vengeful Huns all sought to conquer the world but recognised that to achieve that end they had first to destroy Britain.<sup>78</sup> In such tales the force driving the villains is often left unexplained, beyond a blind hatred of Britain, usually born of some past, and of course unfounded, sleight. However, in the years following the Great War authors did increasingly identify one particular

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<sup>76</sup> Western, *Desert Hawk*, pp. 21-22 & 288.

<sup>77</sup> George Rochester, 'The Flying Beetle', 'Boys' Own Paper', October 1926, reproduced in Philip Warner, *The Best of British Pluck* (London, 1976). This story was re-published in 1935 as a novel. See also George E. Rochester, *The Scarlet Squadron* (London, this edition 1939), pp. 9, 85, 97. Here, while the author locates the threat to empire in China, the shadowy architects of the plot have Russian and central European sounding names.

<sup>78</sup> E.g. J.F.C. Westerman, *Menace From the Air*, p. 175.

menace - 'the bugbear of Germany was replaced by a spectre more terrible' - Bolshevism.<sup>79</sup>

The identification of Russia as the chief threat to British interests and world peace became widespread throughout popular adventure fiction, and a glut of stories reflected real fears of a communist inspired, workers' revolution taking place in British cities. Titles such as *The Red Fury* (1919), *London Under The Bolsheviks* (1919), *The Red Tomorrow* (1920), and *Against a Red Sky* (1922) tell their own story.<sup>80</sup> Discontented veterans and the growing strength of the Labour Party seemed proof enough of latent revolution. Authors like H. Addison declared openly that fascism seemed a real alternative to the 'catastrophe of a Labour Government'. *The Battle of London* (1924) was written, the author claimed, 'with the frank intention of shocking what the friends of Red Russia call the "*bourgeoisie*" into a realisation of the only means of meeting revolution if and when it should arise'. 'Pernicious doctrines', spread by 'swarthy wild-eyed emissaries', had corrupted the more gullible in Britain's cities. The presence of character failings, 'foreign to the temperament of Old England', like 'fatalism' and 'lassitude', marked out those who had succumbed to the Bolshevik menace. 'At least half ... [were] dagoes of one kind or another' and all had 'the venom of class hatred in their veins' having 'learned selfishness rather than sacrifice'.<sup>81</sup> This fear of a British working class susceptible to revolutionary design was made the more real, at least in some quarters, by events. In the right-wing press the Zinoviev letter scare of 1924 (alluded to by Addison as the 'Zadoff letter'), the General Strike of 1926, and the hunger marches organised by the National Unemployed Workers Movement were all presented as evidence of Bolshevik intent - 'Hunger March Backed By Red Gold' warned a typical headline.<sup>82</sup> As we shall see in later chapters, this atmosphere and the fictional clichés that reinforced it were often repeated, before July 1936 by those who had commercial in-

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<sup>79</sup> Addison, *Battle of London*, p. 258.

<sup>80</sup> See I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984* (London, 1966) esp. Ch. 5, for review of anti-Bolshevik novels in this period.

<sup>81</sup> H. Addison, *Battle of London*, pp. 6, 14, 19, 89 & 109. In a foreword to the novel Addison notes that having written the story in 1920 his own position preceded and therefore owed nothing to the fascist movement in Italy, p. 5. Interestingly, however, in the novel, published in 1924, the author introduces the 'Zadoff' letter as evidence of Bolshevik intent, a clear reference to the Zinoviev letter published in the *Daily Mail* on the eve of the October 1924 General Election, pp. 218-219.

<sup>82</sup> 'Sunday Dispatch', in Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles: My Life and Struggle amongst the Unemployed, 1919-1936* (London, 1977, first published 1936).

terests in Spain and during the war by those who despised all that the Republic stood for.

Similar anti-Bolshevik sentiments appeared in literature for the young. Young heroes uncovered Bolshevik efforts to bring about strikes and thwarted Russian invasion plans. In stories like Frank Shaw's *The Red Deluge* (1922), writers warned against the 'muddle-headed' pacifism of an 'England [where] the war idea is sneered at today' by pointing to the threat posed to 'civilisation' by 'the blood-mad mob of ... countless millions' who blindly followed Bolshevik leaders who believed that only by destroying every existing thing could the world be made ready for the amazing new edifice of successful Bolshevism'.<sup>83</sup> This was a theme which reappeared throughout the period in stories like Rowland Walker's *Captain McBlaid of the Air Police* (1932) and in 'factual' articles like a *Chums* illustrated piece on life in 'Red Russia'. There, readers learned, even with 'a different type of rule achieved, the work of the agitator still goes on'. Furthermore, as one picture in the montage 'proved', 'in the destruction of the old system, Russia did not spare her churches', a reference to the atheistic practices of communism which was soon to become a familiar theme in anti-Spanish Republic propaganda.<sup>84</sup> In fiction, intrepid young flyers defended Britain's shores against such barbarous practices. Johns' *The Winged Menace* (reissued as *The Black Peril* in 1935), has Biggles and his cohorts prevent a Russian invasion of Britain. Likewise, in Jack Hemming's *The Air Spies* (1936) the hero, youthful aviator Bill Smith, foils a Soviet plan to stir British working-class discontent by distributing large quantities of cocaine.<sup>85</sup> Elsewhere, Bolshevik plots to overthrow the empire whether by supplying arms and financing uprisings on India's north-west frontier or by encouraging trouble in Egypt were uncovered and frustrated by other like heroes.<sup>86</sup> In all such stories writers presented communism as a threat not only to world peace but to British values and the civilising progress they saw as being brought about within the empire. Readers were reminded, if they needed to be, that 'the soul of England is the mightiest force for good in the world to-day', but were also warned that while 'its a long way from Russia to here' it

<sup>83</sup> Frank F. Shaw, 'The Red Deluge', *Chums* (1922), cited in Philip Warner, *Best of Chums*, pp. 135-140; Paris, *Warrior Nation*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>84</sup> 'Red Russia', *Chums* (1933-34), p. 726.

<sup>85</sup> See, Dennis Butts, 'Imperialists of the air-flying stories, 1900-1950', Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism in Juvenile Literature*, pp. 126-143.

<sup>86</sup> See e.g., Robert Harding, 'Christmas on the Frontier', *Chums*, (1933-34), p. 193; J. Railton Holden, *Wings of Revolution* (London, 1934).

was 'not too far for a high efficiency bomber'.<sup>87</sup>

During the late 1920s and first half of the 1930s, as the ideological divide of fascism and communism came to dominate the European political scene, so authors came to locate stories in both real and imagined trouble spots on the Continent. Such tales, however, continued to focus on the perceived Bolshevik threat, the menace posed by fascism only entering the literature after Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Even then, adherents of fascist ideology tended to be treated in comic terms, Malcolm Shard's *Flying For Ethiopia* (1936) providing an early example. In this novel, unusual for its reversal of the racial norm, Shard limits his attack on fascism to the amusing image of an Italian officer who, 'evidently thinking himself no end of a fine fellow' ... 'clad in the fascist black shirt', carried a frown on his brow for the enemies of the Duce'.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, authors like Percy Westerman and W.E. Johns made no secret of their anti-Soviet feelings. 'Bolshevism', declared Johns in an early response to the civil war in Spain, 'reminds me of a mad dog. It must bite somebody, even those who have befriended it. There is only one thing to do with a mad dog. Shoot it.'<sup>89</sup> For Westerman, the villainous ideology of Bolsheviks was central to a number of tales. Readers of *The Terror of the Seas* (1927), for instance, were told that communism threatened to destroy 'sane and orderly government', while in *The Red Pirate* (1933) they were warned that 'proletarian Russia' was engaged in a war against 'the bourgeoisie and capitalists of the rest of the world, especially the English'.<sup>90</sup>

These sentiments, with varying conviction, were repeated in a significant number of adventure stories, and, as discussed later, in Percy Westerman's story of the Spanish Civil War, *Under Fire in Spain*, transferred easily to the author's interpretation of events. Left-wing perspectives, on the other hand, were few and were poorly received. Geoffrey Trease was exceptional in his 'revolt against the Henty values' and in his challenge to the tradition which expected readers to 'side with the Cavaliers against the Roundheads and the French aristocrats against the howling mob'. Trease's interpretation of the Robin Hood legend, *Bows Against the Bar-*

<sup>87</sup> George Rochester, 'Captain Robin Hood - Skywayman', *Chums*, (1932-33), p. 712; Johns, *Biggles and the Black Peril*, p. 75

<sup>88</sup> Malcolm Shard, *Flying for Ethiopia* (London, 1936), p. 190.

<sup>89</sup> Johns, 'Popular Flying', January 1937, in Ellis & Williams, *By Jove Biggles*, p. 158.

<sup>90</sup> Percy Westerman, *Terror of the Seas*, p. 24; *Red Pirate*, p. 10.

ons (1934), in which the outlaws are depicted as revolutionaries who regard all 'masters' as oppressors of the common man, offered a perspective not unlike the left's view of the situation in Spain. However, the book, which can be seen as a rare example of 'proletarian' writing for the young, failed to make any impression in Britain. Indeed, it sold more copies in Russia than in England, a success which subjected the author to 'ill-natured gossip about ... "Moscow Gold"'.<sup>91</sup> When, later, a friend of Trease serving in the International Brigade, found a copy of the book in Barcelona it came as no surprise that it was a German translation of the Russian edition.<sup>92</sup>

### Spain and the Spanish in Popular Literature

While the left-wing message failed to penetrate literature for the young it must be noted that it found a degree of success in the 'proletarian' literature of authors like Ralph Bates, Lewis Jones and James Barke. The communist writer Bates' semi-autobiographical novels *Lean Men* (1934) and *The Olive Field* (1936) offered those interested a sympathetic view of the politics of the Spanish poor, as did the translation of Ramón Sender's *Seven Red Sundays* (1936). Less overt but similarly sympathetic was Kate O'Brien's *Mary Lavelle* (1936). Here, again drawing upon personal experiences of life in Spain, the Irish traveller and writer presented a more subtle understanding of the roots and nature of Spanish political tensions. However, the appeal of such works would, in large part, have been to readers of similar outlook, while the vast majority of the reading public would have continued to digest the conservative sentiments embodied in the bulk of popular literature. The old Spanish Empire, although remaining the legitimate target of dashing English privateers in film and literature, had, in tales with more contemporary setting, been reduced to a 'practically worthless ... flood of yellow sand'.<sup>93</sup> Most writers continued to portray Spaniards as indolent, uncompromising and excitable 'dagoes', incapable of organisation or rational thought, characteristics which, as we shall see later, were used, particularly by those commentators hostile to the Republic, to explain the Spanish political landscape. For Percy Westerman and others like him, Spanish

<sup>91</sup> Geoffrey Trease, 'Sixty Years On', *Children's Literature in Education*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1996, p. 132-133.

<sup>92</sup> Geoffrey Trease, *Bows Against the Barons* (London, 1966, first published 1934), 'Author's Note', p. 152.

<sup>93</sup> Lindsay, *The Flying Armada*, p. 166.

republicanism simply equated to invidious communism. 'The Spanish are republicans ... and are therefore inclined to the tenets of communism' explains a British protagonist in *The Red Pirate*,<sup>94</sup> while in *Under Fire in Spain* another argues that a country 'reasonably well governed under King Alfonso' had, since the King's removal, been 'grossly misruled by Communists working under direct orders from Soviet Russia'.<sup>95</sup> For others, Spain's problem was simply inept government and the Spaniard's volatile character. 'If ... Government men had governed the people properly [and] kept glibly made promises, all this blood-bath would not have flowed', argues the central character in Eric Wood's Civil War tale, *Phantom Wings Over Spain* (1938). In Britain, readers were smugly reminded, political disputes were settled in a much more reasoned fashion: 'jolly old Socialists ... don't want to go round knocking other fellows' heads off because they don't agree' ... 'Thank God we settle our political differences in a different way'.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, few countries were considered able to meet British standards of law and order or reasoned democratic government. When even the court proceedings of the neutral and peaceful Swiss could be regarded as 'unreal when compared to the British idea of justice', the efforts of Spanish institutions were easily dismissed.<sup>97</sup>

One exception to the stance typified by Westerman is worth noting. Immediately after the abdication of Alfonso in April 1931, an introduction to an extract from *Don Quixote* in the periodical *Our Circle*, a Co-operative publication for the young did offer a synopsis of events unusual for its sympathetic approach:

Spain, is a land which will probably be unknown to most Circle readers, yet a revolution has taken place in this southern-most part of Europe, and King Alfonso has been forced to abdicate and leave the country, where a Republic has been declared and a President will be set up in place of a king. Meanwhile, what were the Royal palaces and parks have now been turned over to the people. Because of these happenings, we felt it would be useful to introduce our readers to a writer of Spain who will be remembered and loved when kings are forgotten. 'Don Quixote' is the story which Cervantes wrote about Spain as he knew it in the sixteenth cen-

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<sup>94</sup> Percy Westerman, *Red Pirate*, p. 189.

<sup>95</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, p. 97

<sup>96</sup> Eric Wood, *Phantom Wings Over Spain* (London, 1938), pp. 84 & 192.

<sup>97</sup> J.F.C. Westerman, *John Wently Wins Through*, p. 110.

ture. Then there were the people poor: they could not read or write; villages were built of mud; the streets reeked of bad drainage. This is the Spain Cervantes knew, and it is because conditions are no better to-day that the people have revolted. It would seem that of all the glory that belonged to Spain in the past, nothing has survived except one thing - a book.<sup>98</sup>

Recognising that to most young readers Spain was remote and 'unknown', this introduction to a 'safe' example of Spanish culture clearly sought to present news of the formation of the Second Republic in a favourable light, a position adopted across Co-operative publications at the time. However, even this rare sympathetic view could be seen as reinforcing more typical notions. In offering an unflattering glimpse of social conditions and of squandered greatness, and in implying that these were the result of centuries of inadequate rule, the author also unconsciously underlined notions of British superiority. British readers of the article were clearly literate and didn't live in mud-built homes. The British Empire, unlike the Spanish, was still great, and in Britain, where royalty was loved and democratic government served the best interests of the people, revolution was unnecessary.

Such a view was more emphatically stated elsewhere. Readers of *Chums*, for instance, were introduced to 'Contrasts in Revolution', a 'factual' article which included photographs of the burning Reichstag - 'fired by Red incendiaries', street fighting in the 'revolutionary volcano' of Brazil, striker's sabotage in Greece, and a monarchists car set ablaze by the Republican mob in Spain. In contrast, 'Parliament was immune from such criminal folly' and together with 'the wise and powerful reign of our gracious King and Queen' prevented such scenes being repeated in Britain. The caption to an accompanying picture of the rural tranquillity of an English village reassured that 'while the rest of the world seethes, Britain carries on peacefully. Thrones may totter, but nothing disturbs the calm of the British countryside'. Spain, on the other hand, had overthrown her monarchy and ushered in instability, the 'Republican mob' even 'sacking and looting convents and monasteries'.<sup>99</sup> The interpretations offered in these two features can be seen as reflecting the contemporary attitudes of the left and right toward the new Republic in Spain, the Co-opera-

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<sup>98</sup> 'The Life and Adventures of Don Quixote, the Knight Errant of La Mancha', *Our Circle*, May 1931, p. 114.

<sup>99</sup> 'Contrasts in Revolution', *Chums* (1933-34), p. 743.



tive publication portraying a people's republic throwing off the shackles of the past and leading Spain into the twentieth century, the *Chums* feature painting a picture common in fictional representation of the political turmoil and civil strife which could be expected when legitimate rule was overthrown. Both views, though, added to the 'inward looking' attitude which pervaded British society at the time, maintaining and reinforcing the belief that Spain was a backward, less civilised and inferior country, liable to revolution and deserving of only scant attention.

For writers of juvenile literature, revolution and uncivilised 'dagoes' were synonymous. 'A revolution' in a Latin country, 'even if successful will usually cause less disturbance than a general election in Britain', young readers were typically informed in yet another reminder of British natural superiority.<sup>100</sup> However, although the theme of revolution in Spain and its likely consequences made appearances in fiction for the young, after April 1931 it was one given more substance in a number of novels written for an older market. In Arthur Behrend's novel, *The House of the Spaniard*, published in 1935 and transferred to film the following year, a young Liverpool clerk, David Grey, uncovers the plans of his Spanish employer and becomes embroiled in the ensuing attempted revolution in Catalonia. It is made clear though, that the Englishman's motive is non-political, his only desire being to win the hand of the revolutionary leader's daughter. While Behrend's plot clearly borrows from recent events in Spain - a revolution against the monarchy fused with the risings of October 1934 - the author does not attempt historical authenticity. Rather he weaves a story in which any vague appreciation of recent events in Spain is put in the context of innate Spanish revolutionary temperament and inept government: 'My country Spain is not like England. In England you have plenty political parties and all work for England. In Spain we have plenty political parties too - comunistas, sindicalistas, republicanos, separatistas - but none work for Spain. We are quite hopeless', confides a hapless Spanish protagonist. And again the idea is advanced that revolution is commonplace in Spain, 'nothing more sensational than the latest fútbol or pelota match'. Such observations fed yet again into the smug self-satisfied Little Englander view of a world in which British standards were those to which foreigners could only aspire. Spain, on the other hand, was a country riven by revolutionary factions and prone to violence. As Behrend's returning hero enthusiastically de-

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<sup>100</sup> J. Gordon Robinson, *Wings Beyond Rio* (London, 1941), p. 252.

clares, 'Thank God for England'.<sup>101</sup>

All such authors used the familiar preconceptions which associated volatile Latins with revolution, but a few made some attempt if not to justify then to explain the causes of such fervour. Thus, while the wealthy artist and socially well-placed English hero of Jan Gordon's romantic tale, *Beans Spilt in Spain* (1931), comes to note the poverty suffered by many Spaniards he also makes clear that the solution to such poverty does not lie with the 'blood and thunder communists'.<sup>102</sup> In another tale of romance, Elizabeth Sprigge offered more extensive views. *Castle in Andalusia*, published in February 1935, tells the story of a young Englishwoman's marriage to a Spanish aristocrat. Sprigge's heroine not only awakens to the parlous conditions suffered by the common people but recognises the part played by landowners and the Church in creating those conditions. Her ensuing attraction to the grandee's young gardener serves to parallel her awakening to the political tensions building in Spain. So, the gardener expresses socialist ideals and hopes for a better more equitable future under the Republic yet fears the intransigent nature of the forces of reaction. The aristocratic husband, appalled at the idea of being 'governed by a bunch of men who can't read and don't work', stores arms for a coming right-wing rebellion, and anticipates that 'of course the Church [will] stand by us'.<sup>103</sup> Sprigge clearly demonstrates an approval of a Republic which 'had seen ... the chains of monarchism and clericalism ... snapped and Spain set free'. Again though, despite her sympathies and an acknowledgement that the old order still represented a very real threat to this hopeful vision, the author stops short of condoning, or even understanding, direct action. The 'bloodless revolution' of April 1931, was to be welcomed, and since then 'demonstrations against the interference of the Church' were understandable, 'but now all the rabble ... ha[d] joined in', and under a 'damned Bolshevik influence ... the place [was] full of Communists'.<sup>104</sup> In this way, even a novel which set out to champion the aspirations of the Republic added to the picture most commonly held on the eve of the Civil War. Spain, despite the laudable ambitions of the Republic, remained a semi-feudal country in which the uncivilised 'mob' resorted easily to violence and succumbed just as easily

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<sup>101</sup> Arthur Behrend, *The House of the Spaniard* (London, 1935), pp. 149, 239 & 254.

<sup>102</sup> Jan Gordon, *Beans Spilt in Spain* (London, 1931), p. 251.

<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth Sprigge, *Castle in Andalusia* (London, 1935), p. 68.

<sup>104</sup> Sprigge, *Castle in Andalusia*, pp. 209, 225, 234 & 305.

to the revolutionary ferment being stirred by Bolshevik agitators, a portrayal which gave convenient context to the reports of atrocities committed in the Government held zones during the opening phase of the war.

The Spaniard's supposed 'natural' inclination to resort to revolution as a means of resolving political differences was not the only stereotype resorted to. Sometimes these typecasts were more subtly delivered than in juvenile literature but on other occasions they were just as crude. Authors like Behrend, for instance, repeated imagery common in literature for the young and did not hesitate to assume that readers would quickly associate 'shabby guards' whose breath was 'a vapour of stale wine and garlic', with Spaniards.<sup>105</sup> Neither Sprigge's sympathy for the ideals of the Republic nor Gordon's extensive travels in Spain did much to prevent their referring to the catalogue of preconceived notions of Spain and Spanish practices. Not all such notions, of course, were defamatory. These authors, for example, had their English protagonists note Spanish hospitality and good humour, and even proffer patronising admiration of the 'easy-going, laissez -faire temperament of the Spaniard'.<sup>106</sup> However, such positives were invariably countered by other more derogatory comments. Readers of Gordon's novel, for example, were reminded that Spaniards 'who hesitate[d] [were] liable to do nothing', and that despite their 'love of babies' they held life cheaply and were resigned to high infant mortality, a perception commonly applied to the poor of so-called lesser nations and one used in the prejudiced reporting of the Civil War. Moreover, the Spanish typically showed a 'strong reluctance to make the law prevail against ... individual desires', a failing of national character which, as we shall see later, some political observers pointed to as a flaw in the Republican democratic model.<sup>107</sup> Sprigge presented a similar, if more considered, picture. Contrasts in national temperament traits meant that for Spaniards 'uncalculating generosity' combined readily with 'unflinching cruelty' and a 'worship of children' was matched by one 'of suffering'. These 'primitive' characteristics lent themselves easily to the supposed lifestyle of Spanish peasants: 'warm-hearted people with their smiling faces and child-like enjoyment of song and wine and food and sleep, whose faces were nonetheless hardy and stoic in privation', a view of rural simplicity, as will be demonstrated, repeated in travel lit-

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<sup>105</sup> Behrend, *House of the Spaniard*, p. 103; Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> Gordon, *Beans Spilt in Spain*, p. 63; Sprigge, *Castle in Andalusia*, p. 49.

<sup>107</sup> Gordon, *Beans Spilt in Spain*, pp. 139-140 & 251.

erature, and elevated to near mythical status by pro-Nationalist commentators.<sup>108</sup>

In the world view reflected in British popular literature, then, Spain occupied a very lowly position. Still tainted by her Catholicism and its 'dark' medieval associations, at her most significant she was an old enemy to be defeated over again by Elizabethan sea-dogs. At her least, she was portrayed as a comic nation of strutting generals and shabby sentries with no empire of any consequence left to defend. Recent events only encouraged tales which called on ideas of a supposed Spanish revolutionary disposition. Across the fiction, Spanish customs were described at best as exotic and colourful, more usually, as risible and uncivilised. Ordinary Spanish people were most commonly depicted either as warm-hearted, unsophisticated and therefore easily-led peasants or as dangerous, cruel and irrational revolutionaries. Whichever, they displayed a gamut of national character failings and bad habits which furthered them from the civilised standards associated with Britain and justified their being labelled 'dagoes'. Weaknesses of national character were reflected in the shortcomings of Spanish government. Few foreigners, least of all Spaniards, could hope to emulate the qualities of honesty, straightforwardness, tolerance, deliberation, and overriding sense of 'fair-play' inherent in the English character, qualities, not surprisingly, deemed essential to a successful liberal democracy. While many writers remarked on the poverty endured by many ordinary Spaniards, few viewed the Republic as a government likely to improve the situation. Authors who smugly asserted that 'you could not better the British Constitution' readily dismissed Spain's 'myth of democracy', painted a picture of a country in the grip of anarchy and, or, Bolshevism and recommended a return to authoritarianism.<sup>109</sup>

Such observations added further to the imagined distance between Spanish standards, attitudes and values and those of the English. They also confirmed already exaggerated ideas of the physical distance of Spain from England. It was 'better to submit to the local customs, ridiculous though they may seem to us more ... civilised people', was the typical conclusion. Indeed, so different was the environment that the travelling heroes of fiction repeatedly found it 'impossible to realize we

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<sup>108</sup> Sprigge, *Castle in Andalusia*, p. 180.

<sup>109</sup> Dennis Wheatley, *The Golden Spaniard* (London, 1967, first published 1938), p. 186.

were within three days journey of England'.<sup>110</sup> Only a few hundred miles separated the two countries yet they seemed several centuries apart. While the degree to which such fictional representations influenced readers is unquantifiable, notions of the cultural and physical divide that supposedly separated Britain from Spain were also found elsewhere. As already noted, it was a picture advanced in schooling. The poet and writer Laurie Lee, for example, reflected that his 'small country school, always generous with its information as to the exports of Queensland and the fate of Jenkin's ear, had provided [him] with nothing more useful about Spain than that Seville had a barber, and Barcelona nuts'.<sup>111</sup> Fiction happily reflected this situation, W.E. Johns' working-class youth, Ginger, for instance, also making the association between Barcelona and nuts while admitting that he had 'eaten thousands, not having the remotest idea where Barcelona was'.<sup>112</sup> The climate of empire isolationism which pervaded the British world-view and which such literature both reflected and helped to promote, meant that while outposts of empire, particularly the 'white' Dominions, were regarded as extensions of 'home', Spain, though a close European neighbour, was seen as distant and alien.

Few outside those who visited the country, and certainly few working-class men or women, had the opportunity to form a view of Spain other than that offered them at school or in popular fiction and film. That picture was one which underscored the 'inward-looking', island mentality advanced in much of the right-wing press and the Conservative vision of Little England. Maintaining peace, protecting the Empire and preserving England's Arcadia were the priorities. As one fictional defender of the realm enthused, the England, where 'rain-drops gleam in the luscious green of English meadows [and where] the broad yellow cornfields sway gently in the breeze that bends the silvery willow branches', was a land worth fighting for.<sup>113</sup> 'Remote' and alien lands like Spain where 'funny foreigners' lived, on the other hand, were outside that remit, unless or until events there threatened Britain or her empire interests. As Orwell observed at the time, 'ordinary people, especially the huge untouchable block of the middle class and the better-off working class ... do not feel that what happens in foreign countries is any of their business. When Eng-

<sup>110</sup> Gordon, *Beans Spilt in Spain*, p. 94; Sprigge, *Castle in Andalusia*, p. 89.

<sup>111</sup> Laurie Lee, *As I Walked Out One Summer Morning* (London, 1992, first published 1969), p. 260.

<sup>112</sup> Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 111.

<sup>113</sup> Major Helder, *The War in the Air* (London, 1932), p. 244.

land is in danger they rally to its defence as a matter of course, but in between times they are not interested. After all, England is always in the right and England always wins, so why worry?<sup>114</sup> Writers and commentators had yet to convince that the 'mad dog' of Bolshevism unleashed in Spain had any real relevance in England. Notions of anti-fascism had yet to be formed. The revolutionary chaos that was Spain was best avoided.

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<sup>114</sup> Orwell, *Collected Essays, Vol. 1*, p. 518.

## Chapter 3

### BRITISH HOLIDAYMAKERS, TRAVELLERS AND EXPATRIATE RESIDENTS IN PRE-CIVIL WAR SPAIN.

There was a significant minority of British subjects for whom Spain of the 1930s was not so distant. During the first three decades of the century the Peninsula had already attracted a growing number of travellers, and, in the words of one travel guide, had been "discovered" by holidaymakers from England and America'.<sup>1</sup> Further contact was made through various British enterprises in Spain, which offered employment to numbers of engineers and managers, and through the colonies of retired expatriates to which the country was host. At least, for this band of visitors and residents it would seem that there was the opportunity to overcome cultural ignorance and to redress stereotypical preconceptions. Experiences clearly varied according to the nature and duration of contact, holidaymakers plainly having less opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture of Spain than travellers. Similarly, whilst the outlook of the colonies of wealthy retired expatriates and their working compatriots had much in common their responses to certain issues varied, especially before the outbreak of the war. It is the intention here, developing a theme opened up in the mid-1990s by Tom Buchanan and subsequently expanded by John Walton,<sup>2</sup> to examine the expectations and experiences of these groups, and to offer some further suggestions as to how their responses contributed to the shaping of British attitudes during the Civil War: most particularly, or at least most effectively during the conflict's early months.

Evidence of the attitudes and expectations of these British visitors can be gleaned from large number of contemporary accounts, memoirs, travelogues, guide-books, and newspaper and magazine articles which proliferated as Spain became a favoured destination. The measure of the impact of such material on a wider public in the years before the war raises questions of readership: who were the readers and what did they take from the texts? To what degree did travel literature influence the outlook of those who did read it, or indeed determine the agenda of those who subsequently holidayed abroad? Nevertheless, even though the readership of

<sup>1</sup> Trevor C. Smith, *San Sebastian and the Basque Country*, (Liverpool, 1935), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Buchanan, ' "A Far Away Country"? ' also *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* ; Walton, 'British Perceptions of Spain'; Shelmerdine, 'Experiences of British Holidaymakers and Expatriate Residents'.

travel literature may have been relatively narrow - although a wider interest is suggested by the appearance of travel accounts in popular periodicals - the attitudes commonly expressed throughout the bulk of the literature do help to illustrate the framework which informed British understanding of, and responses to, the issues and events during the conflict. This is particularly true of the many of the expatriate residents, travellers and writers who lived and visited Spain during this period and submitted to paper the impressions they had formed during their stay. The view of Spain gained by the larger number of holidaymakers, however, was one usually limited to discussion with immediate friends and family and inevitably involves some degree of informed speculation. As will be seen, impressions of holidaymakers were more prevalent than holidaymakers' impressions.

### **Spain as a Destination**

By the turn of the century, a small number of more adventurous British travellers had already added Spain to their list of destinations, and following the First World War this number had risen. Although foreign travel undoubtedly felt the impact of the Depression,<sup>3</sup> as the 1920s gave way to the 1930s 'Blackpool and Brighton ... ceased to suffice' for some Britons. As the decade advanced, Spain increasingly became a destination for a new breed of 'sightseers, people who travel[led] with no motive but to peer about them.'<sup>4</sup> In the north of the country, Santander and the Basque resort of San Sebastián benefited from relatively easy access and from a close proximity to the firmly established French resort of Biarritz. In the south, Seville witnessed greater numbers of British visitors and on the Mediterranean coast the 'Spanish Riviera' from Málaga to Almería was beginning to attract increased attention.<sup>5</sup> By the mid-1930s, with what proved to be unfortunate timing, one enterprising British couple, Nancy and Archie Johnstone, had opened a hotel at Tossa del Mar on the Catalan coast and reported being overwhelmed with bookings.<sup>6</sup> In the south, a British presence had been longer evident in a number of holiday enterprises, with British-owned pensions in Málaga and Granada, and Brit-

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Piers Brendon, *Thomas Cook: 150 Years of Popular Tourism* (London, 1991), Ch. 14.

<sup>4</sup> H.M. Tomlinson, *South to Cadiz* (London, 1934), p. 217-220.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Hessel Tiltman, *European Excursions* (London, 1936) p. 256.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy J. Johnstone, *Hotel in Spain* (London) 1937, an account of the author's hotel enterprise in Tossa de Mar, Catalonia.



ish-owned luxury hotels in Algeciras, and in Ronda.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, amongst the pensions listed in the 1929 *Blue Guide to Southern Spain* were such comforting names as Miss Laird's in Granada, and the very English Spragg's and Slee's pensions in Santa Cruz de Teneriffe. As this guide advised, Thomas Cook, Pickford's, Sir Henry Lunn and George Lunn Tours were only the most prominent of many tourist agencies who by the turn of the decade were offering 'tours to suit all purses' on the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>8</sup>

Surveys conducted in the late 1930s seem to confirm the growing interest in foreign travel, a surprising twenty-five per cent of respondents in 1937 claiming to have already travelled on the continent.<sup>9</sup> While the upper middle-class profile which delineated earlier visitors had by this time begun to be diluted by the increasing number of relatively low-cost tour holidays, the extent of this process should not be exaggerated. For example, one London-based coach company, Motorways Ltd, took advantage of the country's improved road network and by 1929 was offering 32-day package tours of Spain. While these tours took place every three to four weeks from October through to April, the cost of an 'all inclusive, first-class throughout' trip was a limiting 98 guineas ( £102 18s or £102.90 [over £3,000 in today's money]) per head.<sup>10</sup> However, other more affordable holidays were also becoming available. Travel guides, advised prospective holidaymakers on how to spend a fortnight in Spain for only £10, while in 1932, two thirds of the 2,000 passengers who embarked on one of the Workers Travel Association's (WTA) more exotic holidays, two weeks aboard the cruise-ship *Esperance Bay*, did so for £12.<sup>11</sup> Yet even at £10 or £12, the take up of such holidays would have been limited to relatively affluent middle-class holidaymakers, a class which was

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<sup>7</sup> Charles L. Freeston, *The Roads of Spain: A 5,000 Miles' Journey in the New Touring Paradise* (London, 1930), pp. 174, 144, 163, 279 & 231.

<sup>8</sup> Findlay Muirhead [editor], *The Blue Guides: Southern Spain and Portugal* (London, 1929) pp. 94, 308, & cvii.

<sup>9</sup> George H. Gallop, *The Gallop International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937-1975, Vol. 1, 1937-1964* (New York, 1976), p. 5. In December 1937, 25% of respondents replied yes to the question 'Have you ever travelled to the Continent?'; Hadley Cantril & Mildred Strunk (ed.), *Public Opinion 1935-1946* (Connecticut, 1978 edit.), pp. 991-992. A BIPO survey in 1939 determined that of the 59% of respondents able to afford a holiday that year, 10% intended going abroad with another 2% embarking on cruises.

<sup>10</sup> Muirhead, *Blue Guides: Southern Spain & Portugal*, p. xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Sydney Clark, *Spain on £10* (London, 1935); Advertisement in *The Illustrated London News*, April 30 1932; Francis Williams, *Journey Into Adventure: The Story of the Workers' Travel Association* (London, 1960), p. 122.

predominantly conservative in attitude and Conservative in political leaning.<sup>12</sup> Organisations such as the WTA and the Co-operative were active in bringing trips abroad within the reach of more holidaymakers but the 'door to door vacuum cleaner salesman' was still the noted exception amidst the more usual 'hunting, fishing crowd' who stayed at the Johnstones' hotel near Gerona. Furthermore, the total number of those for whom Spain was the choice of destination needs to be kept in perspective. For example, it is helpful to compare the 1,205 British nationals who registered in the top hotels of San Sebastián during 1933 with the 190,000 rail tickets collected from trippers to Blackpool during one August week in 1931. While the Spanish resort's statistics do not include those visitors who stayed in cheaper accommodation neither do the Blackpool figures include the many thousands who would have travelled there by means other than the railway.<sup>13</sup> However, with these caveats the fact remains that during the 1930s, holidays abroad were an increasing option for the moderately wealthy.

At this time, the most established holiday resorts in Spain were those of the Biscayan coast, a process well documented by Walton.<sup>14</sup> San Sebastián and El Sardinero, the seaside suburb of Santander, had long been fashionable seaside destinations, thriving not on the spending power of foreign visitors but rather on a domestic demand for the more bracing atmosphere of the northern Atlantic coast. San Sebastián, in particular, had blossomed, attracting royal patronage, notably that of the Queen Regent, later Queen Mother, María Cristina who made annual visits between 1887 and 1928, and becoming the summer seat of government. By the 1930s, however, these Biscayan coast resorts were more than a summer retreat for wealthy *Madriileños*, with visitors from beyond Spain's borders responding to guide literature which recommended among other attractions, 'the attractiveness of the shops and theatres and the excellence of the hotels'. British travel guides ob-

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<sup>12</sup> Noreen Branson & Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Thirties* (London, 1971) p. 136, note that at their peak white-collar earnings amounted to no more than £211p.a.

<sup>13</sup> J.M. Sada, 'Anuncios en San Sebastián', 1885-1950', cited in John Walton, 'British Perceptions of Spain', p. 288; B. McLoughlin, *Railways of the Fylde* (Preston, 1992), p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of the development of San Sebastián and Santander as seaside resorts see John K Walton & Jenny Smith, 'The First Century of Beach Tourism in Spain: San Sebastián and the *Playas del Norte* from the 1830s-1930s', in M. Barke, J. Towner & M.T. Newton, (eds.), *Tourism in Spain: Critical Issues* (Wallingford, 1996), pp. 35-61; John K. Walton & Jenny Smith, 'The First Spanish Seaside Resorts', in *History Today*, Vol. 44, No. 8, August 1994, pp. 23-29; also John K. Walton, 'The Seaside Resorts of Western Europe, 1750-1939', in Stephen Fisher, *Recreation and the Sea* (Exeter, 1997), pp. 36-56.

served that visitors to the Basque country were arriving not only by Rolls Royce but also by Austin Seven. If some journeyed 'de luxe in the Sud-Express' others 'came down third-class from Paris'. With single rail fares from London Victoria at £6/14/3 (£6.72) for first class and £4/13/7 (£ 4.68) second, San Sebastián, it was stressed, was no longer 'merely the haunt of the indolent and wealthy. Nearer to London than any other large town in Spain, it [could] welcome the humblest visitor', although English speaking visitors were noted as most usually 'frequenting the listed Deluxe and First Category hotels', a detail which points to the middle-class disposition of those visitors.<sup>15</sup> Even second-class hotels were deemed acceptable for those 'unexacting travellers prepared for Spanish dishes and cooking', a qualification which perhaps gives some indication of the limited desire of the majority of holidaymakers to experience aspects of a culture other than their own.<sup>16</sup> In a 1935 travel guide, Sydney Clark recommended San Sebastián as 'a little Rio' with its 'crescent beach, giant waves, and mountains'.<sup>17</sup> Six years previously, the travel writer, Charles Freeston had similarly saluted San Sebastián and El Sardinero, praising the improvement of local roads, the hotels and their facilities, and making particularly favourable comment on the telephone service. Access in both towns to a golf-course (deemed an essential pre-requisite for English and American travellers), lawn-tennis courts and a polo club all added to the enjoyment of wealthier visitors such as Freeston.<sup>18</sup> Charles Graves, brother of the author and poet Robert Graves and gossip columnist for the *Daily Mail*, also applauded the geographical and architectural setting of San Sebastián, although his observations of Santander and neighbouring Sardinero were far less complimentary - in no small part because of the inaccessibility of the golf course. For Graves, however, evidence of the new popularity of the Cantabrian coast with British holidaymakers was to be found in those Spanish restaurants where customers were entertained by 'dreamy tangos' transmitted by the BBC.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Smith, *San Sebastian and the Basque Country*, pp. 22 & 10-11. Smith was a part of the Liverpool University Summer School, Spanish studies programme of Allison Peers. Richard Viner, *Twixt France and Spain* (London, 1932, first published 1931), p. 16. At this time, (1931) San Sebastián listed 28 hotels in the Deluxe, First or Second Class categories, with 2,113 rooms. The nine Deluxe and First class hotels recommended to British tourists offered some 1,090 rooms, p. 107. Only single fares were available from Victoria.

<sup>16</sup> Findlay Muirhead (ed.), *The Blue Guide to Northern Spain with the Balearic Islands* (London & Paris, 1930), p. cix.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, *Spain on £10*, pp. 118 & 120.

<sup>18</sup> Freeston, *The Roads of Spain*, pp. 24-37.

<sup>19</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 42 & 58.

Spain was deliberately courting this popularity. Visitors were invited to enjoy 'the charm of the East with the comfort of the West'.<sup>20</sup> By 1934 San Sebastián's advertising committee was spending almost as much on advertising in Britain as in neighbouring France, while according to Graves, the Republic was spending over £100,000 a year in other parts of Spain on the chain of *paradores*, or state hotels, with the specific intent of encouraging foreign visitors.<sup>21</sup> Although the northern coast continued to attract the bulk of holidaymakers from the UK, 'English visitors [were discovering] the glories of Granada, Seville, Córdoba, Toledo, Taragona, and a score of other cities equally beautiful, equally historic'.<sup>22</sup> Even the unrest following the election of the Popular Front Government in February 1936 failed to dampen this growing enthusiasm, some parts of Spain continuing to attract British visitors right up to the rebellion in July. Indeed, in the spring of 1936, the Royal Automobile Club's advice against travel in Spain was dismissed as overly circumspect, both by the British chargé d'affaires in Madrid and by the Foreign Office Assistant Under-Secretary, Sir George Mounsey.<sup>23</sup> Even as news of the rebellion in Morocco on 17-18 July was filtering through, two WTA groups were departing for Barcelona and San Sebastián,<sup>24</sup> and as early as September 1936 the Canary Islands (seized and secured immediately by the rebels) were again considered a safe enough destination for the passengers of the *Esperance Bay*. Apparently their 'Ringside Seats at a Revolution', with tales of the 'shootings of Communists and ... of machine gun nests in the tops of buildings', merely added to the excitement of their holiday itinerary,<sup>25</sup> an account which demonstrates the voyeuristic aspect of tourism and suggests the congenital self-belief of the British abroad: a cruise into the fringes of a civil war regarded as offering a comfortable and relatively safe opportunity of adding a *pronunciamento* to their list of Spanish experiences.

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<sup>20</sup> International brigader, Sam Russell recalled the incongruity of this tourist poster on the wall of the besieged Faculty of Philosophy & Letters during the battle for Madrid. *The Times, Weekend*, 2 November 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Walton, 'Perceptions', p. 288. In 1934 the San Sebastián Advertising Committee spent c 12,000 pesetas promoting the resort in the UK. C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 44 & 125.

<sup>22</sup> Tiltman, *European Excursions*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Basingstoke, 1994) p. 17. For other local perspectives see eg. Bernard Newman, *I Saw Spain* (London, 1936) p. 151; Johnstone, *Hotel in Spain*, p. 245.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Journey into Adventure*, pp. 122-124.

<sup>25</sup> *Co-operative News*, 19 September 1936. These same passengers encountered more direct action in Lisbon harbour when the *Esperance Bay* sailed into an action between local shore batteries and mutinous Portuguese warships.

Indeed, there is little to suggest that holidaymakers were at all constrained by political considerations. Tourists, it would seem, were not dissuaded by the political scene of the countries they visited,<sup>26</sup> and guide-books, as opposed to travelogues whose authors often shared political observations with their readers, rarely broached the topic other than to dismiss any possible fears in terms of mild condescension. So, for instance, in 1937, the year which witnessed the shelling of Almería by German warships and the bombing of Guernica by the Condor Legion, some forty per cent of holidays abroad booked through the WTA were to Germany, guide-books complacently reassuring those intending to holiday there that 'the Germans;' love of uniforms ... has nothing to do with the militarism of old times' and that of more concern was the fact that 'they hardly play cricket at all'.<sup>27</sup> Similar words of comfort were offered to those British tourists who visited Spain in the years before the civil war. Not surprisingly, guides made no direct reference to political disturbances. Even following the violent unrest of October 1934, unrest which was widely covered in the UK domestic press, guide literature continued to treat such events as no more than another 'old Spanish custom'. In an echo of the sentiments found in popular literature, those prospective visitors who might have had any doubts regarding the volatility of Spanish political scene were simply assured that 'revolutions, riots and elections' were no more than interlinked 'manifestations of political excitement in *España*'. Even during the turbulent months of 1936, guide-books continued in their endeavour to persuade potential holidaymakers that the Spanish only 'indulge in revolution every now and then because it is fun. It wakes them up a bit, if only for a while'.<sup>28</sup>

It would seem, then, that the Spanish political scene was of little concern to British holidaymakers, unrest simply an expected manifestation of Latin behaviour. Moreover, the circumstances of the holiday experience offered little opportunity of modifying any other of the preconceptions that tourists may have carried. WTA holidaymakers and their like gave little regard to that organisation's lofty aims of

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<sup>26</sup> An exception here was the low holiday bookings to Italy during 1936-1937, a fall which appeared to reflect public disquiet following that country's invasion of Ethiopia. See Williams, *Journey into Adventure*, p. 116.

<sup>27</sup> Eugene Fodor (ed.), *Aldor's 1937 in Europe* (London, 1937), pp. 601 & 597. For an analysis of the attitudes of British travellers in Germany during these years see Angela Schwarz, 'Image and Reality: British Visitors to National Socialist Germany'.

<sup>28</sup> Tiltman, *European Excursions*, p. 119; Eugene Fodor, *On the Continent ... 1936*, (London, 1936), p. 225.

'destroying the myths that divide us from other lands.'<sup>29</sup> Tourists were encouraged to seek accommodation in hotels where English was spoken, which had adopted English meal-times, served English meals and provided comforts such as an English billiard table and English newspapers and periodicals. Guide writers reassured visitors that English was now spoken in most of the sixty - seventy offices of the *Patronato Nacional del Turismo*, and even pointed out such 'developments' as the local donkey-hire in Ronda being advertised in English, whilst in Málaga, 'probably the best garage in Spain' was one owned by English brothers.<sup>30</sup> For some, like the Irish journalist and novelist, Kate O'Brien, this endeavour to accommodate visitors had perhaps gone too far. The inn of Le Page's Gil Blas, in Santillana del Mar, though still recommended, had, in her view, become so refined that 'you'd almost believe you were having tea in Granchester, honey and all'.<sup>31</sup>

Some visitors, of course, did not fit this pattern. Those who took part in organised cultural visits, such as the WTA study tour bound for Barcelona at the outbreak of the war, were actively seeking a better understanding of their host country. Under the auspices of leading Hispanist, Allison Peers, the University of Liverpool Summer School of Spanish had been organising residential courses in San Sebastián since 1920 and by the mid-1930s was attracting up to one hundred and fifty students each summer. However, these were an exception. Most holidaymakers were concerned only with having a good time in a more exotic location. Indeed, when Charles Graves' path crossed that of one group of hedonistic east London holidaymakers in San Sebastián he felt compelled to comment disparagingly on their loud, drunken state as they staggered through the streets singing 'It's a long way to Tipperary'. To Graves, who was travelling in his chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce Corniche, such 'a bunch of really shocking English trippers' were an unexpected embarrassment.<sup>32</sup> Nor was this an exception. Coruña, a port of call for many of the low- cost cruise ships, was labelled by guide books as 'a kind of Spanish Blackpool', and, according to Graves (who had previously written of the intoxicating atmosphere of the English Blackpool) was 'a town full of cheap tourists, both English and Spanish,' and therefore was a place to be avoided by the more

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in Williams, *Journey into Adventure*, p. 117.

<sup>30</sup> Clark, *Spain on £10*, pp. 26-29; Freeston, *Roads of Spain*, pp.145,161,164 & 174.

<sup>31</sup> O'Brien, *Farewell Spain* (London, 1985, first published 1937), p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, p. 43.

discerning traveller.<sup>33</sup>

In all probability few holidaymakers would have been seeking much beyond the sights recommended in guidebooks. Here, itineraries, surely beyond all but the most determined, set out to help the visitor to cram as much as possible into a short time. Those holidaymakers who attempted to follow the guide which suggested that it was possible, from Madrid, to 'do' Segovia and La Granja in a day, allowing four hours to visit the Alcázar, Roman aqueduct, and Gothic cathedral of Segovia, and one and a half hours to absorb the splendour of the royal palace, gardens and fountains of La Granja were likely to have been either exhausted or disappointed.<sup>34</sup> The Irish novelist Kate O'Brien, who had spent some time in Spain, including a year as a governess, was another who noted with sinking heart the 'babble of excited English speech' in Santander, as yet another batch of hard up and innocent trippers [were] ... dumped on to the dripping wet Paseo de Pereda'. However, O'Brien's despair was aroused more by pity than embarrassment. For her these 'thirteen-day' holidaymakers were asking for admission into the poster world ... of gamboge and cerulean blue, of singing and lounging and carnations in the mouth', and were likely to be disillusioned. As she pointed out, within the time limits of a brief holiday, visitors had little chance of redressing misinformed preconceptions leave alone discovering the 'deep dimensions' of the 'true' Spain. 'They will only have time in this holiday to lose their poster world, and find nothing more real to put in its place'.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, for those unfortunate enough to experience poor weather on the Biscayan coast, perhaps notions of 'sunny Spain' were the ones most likely to be challenged.

Away from the popular northern coast, holidaymakers were less likely to be disappointed by inclement weather and more likely to find their expectations of the 'poster world' rewarded, especially those wealthy enough to enjoy months rather than weeks holidaying. However, the 'holiday behaviour' of visitors intent on sight-seeing and a good time was often seemingly more consistent than the climate. As British hotelier Nancy Johnstone rather disparagingly remarked of some of her

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<sup>33</sup> Eugene Fodor, [ed.], *On the Continent ... 1936*, p. 205; C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, p. 82; Charles Graves, *And the Greeks* (London, 1930), pp. 187-191.

<sup>34</sup> Clark, *Spain on £10*, pp. 175-181.

<sup>35</sup> O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, pp. 21-25.

guests: 'It is extraordinary how perfectly normal people, holding, very often, jobs that show they must be intelligent at times, seem very stupid when they are on holiday'. The recorded comments of some her guests regarding Spanish temperament, character and customs serve only to indicate the cultural chasm which a few weeks or even months in Spain were unlikely to dent. 'They do look Spanish, they really do', observed one bemused visitor. 'You never know, not in these Latin countries', warned another. 'It's in their blood, the tango is!', declared a third. Such comments give some idea of holidaymakers' attitude towards, and expectations of their Spanish hosts. Apparently, when holidaymakers did mix with the local people they usually 'came to see the funny natives', although Johnstone did note that the locals in their turn 'came to look at the comic foreigners'.<sup>36</sup> Reference by holidaymakers to popular guidebooks and travelogues served largely to endorse stereotypical views. Lawrence Wolfe's contribution to Fodor's 1936 guide opened with the recognition that for the average Englishman, the very name Spain was no more than 'the first link in a chain of ideas comprising bull-fights, castanets, mantillas and onions'. If the writer set out to enlighten his readers and point them to 'a great many other things in Spain', his intentions were soon buried beneath the usual collection of preconceptions.<sup>37</sup>

The crowded itineraries recommended to holidaymakers and observations of their behaviour suggest that most would have returned to Britain with their expectations of Spain unaltered. Few ventured beyond the bounds of the small number of holiday centres, where they were directed to English speaking hotels and treated to an English menu, and most were chaperoned around local places of interest by tourist organisation couriers or by English speaking guides. More than one contemporary observer remarked caustically that 'they might as well be in London or Montreux for all the local colour they are getting'.<sup>38</sup> Even those more intrepid tourists who ventured beyond the confines of the resort towns were directed toward English owned or managed hotels and pensions and advised where to find English operated services. Any interaction with their hosts was therefore minimal, most contact being with hotel staff who, in their efforts to serve and to please, simply conformed to preconceived notions of Spanish hospitality. Political unrest was similarly catego-

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<sup>36</sup> Johnstone, *Hotel in Spain*, pp. 196, 198, 199 & 211.

<sup>37</sup> Fodor, (ed.), *On the Continent ... 1936*, p. 205.

<sup>38</sup> Bessie Beckett, *Memories of Mallorca* (Edinburgh, 1947), p. 95.



rised as no more than another Spanish custom. Understanding of Spain was, for the most part, confined to an appreciation of local heritage with a focus on the splendours of the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, visitors were deliberately shielded from any more recent intrusions into this cultural legacy, a recently built biscuit factory enough to remove one Basque town from a guide-book itinerary.<sup>39</sup> Given such circumstances, it is hardly likely that the cultural bubble from within which visitors viewed their surroundings was in any danger of being punctured. Travel writer, Nina Murdoch's rather patronising assessment of returning visitors serves to illustrate:

Oh, we visited the Alhambra, of course, and went over to the cathedral, and then we drove out to a place where some monks had painted pictures all over the walls. Hadn't they John? What was the name of that place? ... Would you like to see some postcards of it? I bought some lovely postcards as souvenirs. They help you to remember. It's so easy to forget what was where when you're visiting so many new places, don't you think so?<sup>40</sup>

As O'Brien articulated, for most of those 'thirteen day trippers' more used to holidaying in Broadstairs, brief contact with an alien culture would have served only to reinforce the perceptions of Spain formed during their childhood and sustained since in popular culture, a 'fantasy which they had in childhood and which [had] never died.'<sup>41</sup>

## **Spain in Travel Literature**

It would seem fair to assume that the baggage of expectations carried by holiday-makers would have been informed in part by the travel literature available. The very consistency in that literature of certain views of Spain, the 'Spanish character' and Spanish customs, provides a distinct picture of what those expectations were, while the volume of literature and the apparent demand for it reinforces the view that holidaymakers would have formed at least a part of its interested readership. For example, the five shilling (25p) guide-books of Thomas Cook sold upwards

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Spain on £10*, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Nina Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone in Spain* (London, 1935), p. 74.

<sup>41</sup> O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 24.

of 10,000 copies annually while Aldor's 1937 guide sold out within two weeks of publication, despite an additional 15,000 copy print run. Nina Murdoch's 1935 travelogue went to two reprints the same year and several earlier published books, such as Jan and Cora Gordon's, *Poor Folk in Spain* (1922), and Charles Freeston's *The Roads of Spain* (1929), were republished to meet the wave of interest in travel in the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, such interest was not confined to would-be holidaymakers. Those travellers who wrote accounts of their journeys around Spain, whether on foot, donkey or bicycle, or by bus, train or Rolls Royce were plainly responding to a wider interest. Travel writer Michael Mason, for instance, declared that his 'diary of trivial adventures' was also 'published for people who would have liked to travel but never had the chance'. His correspondence list, which included letters from 'country doctors, widowed ladies in the provinces, retired civil servants, clerks in the City and farmers in the Highlands', gives some idea of who those readers were.<sup>43</sup> Whether the readers of such literature were 'armchair dreamers' or were intending visitors, it would seem fair to assume that many would have accepted the images of Spain portrayed. Travel writers were, after all, by their vocation experts. To readers they not only represented an escape from the mundanity of every-day life but confirmed the belief in British superiority and foreign inadequacies taught from school and evident in popular fiction. So, for example, a common theme was that of intrepid and phlegmatic British travellers overcoming the obstacles created by idiosyncratic and incompetent foreign bureaucracy. Most readers, then, probably picked up travelogues in order to share the travel writer's freedom and were ready to accept his or her view of a country. When turning to literature on Spain such readers would have related effortlessly to a subtext, evident in many guides and travel accounts, which praised the achievements and stability brought about during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), while implying that a deterioration of standards was the consequence of subsequent weak republican government (1931-1936). That the Republic had been established following the enforced departure of an essentially Anglophile king simply reinforced the message. An improved road network, a chain of government-financed hotels, a string of effective tourist information offices, public telephone boxes and the in-

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<sup>42</sup> Brendon, *Thomas Cook*, p. 269; Fodor, *Aldor's 1937 in Europe*; Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone in Spain*; Jan & Cora Gordon, *Two Vagabonds in Spain* (London, 1931) was a more romantically and less ambiguously titled republication of *Poor Folk in Spain*, originally published in 1922; Freeston, *Roads of Spain* republished 1936. Many other titles were similarly republished.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Mason, *Trivial Adventures in the Spanish Highlands* (London, 1932), p. vii.

stallation of water closets all established under Primo de Rivera's rule were deemed essential considerations for British potential visitors.

Although writers sometimes announced their intention to correct stereotypical impressions of Spain, most in fact resorted to some amused reference to them. Still others made no attempt to see beyond such notions. As late as 1929 one writer still considered it fair to convey a view of Spain in the same terms as nineteenth century Africa, entitling his account, *In Darkest Spain* and claiming that in some parts of the country people were 'ignorant of the wheel'.<sup>44</sup> Others may not have seen the Peninsula in quite such terms but made references which hinted at a similar attitude. Those who read of the splendours of Spanish heritage, of the alcázar and cathedrals, the Prado and the Alhambra were also treated to a catalogue of references to 'old Spanish customs'. Charles Graves, for example, had a clear itinerary and distinct preconceptions. Planning to visit 'the Prado, the Escorial, the caves of Alta Mira (sic) and the wondrous city of Santiago' it was the sight of 'women with a week's washing on their head' and policemen 'directing traffic as they nonchalantly smoked cigarettes' which were sufficient to remind him of how far he had travelled from the familiar streets of London.<sup>45</sup>

Certain themes recur throughout the literature. Would-be visitors were warned of the presence and persistence of beggars, boot-blacks, eager guides and hopeful vendors of lottery tickets. Men gathered at street corner roulette wheels and a profusion of 'wrinkled old women selling lottery tickets' were evidence of the national obsession with gambling so often pointed to in popular fiction. Spaniards, observed Bernard Newman in 1936, would 'bet on anything', for 'nowhere in Europe [was] the cult of something for nothing so strongly developed as in Spain'. That a Spanish football journal should be entitled "Free Kick" had induced similar sardonic comment from Jan and Cora Gordon in 1922, while others commented on the irrationality of 'a country whose chief national amusement is the lottery' banning gambling at San Sebastián's Grand Casino.<sup>46</sup> The increase in the number of beggars was, for some writers during the 1930s, just one more proof of the failings of the

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<sup>44</sup> Alexander Stewart, *In Darkest Spain* (London & Edinburgh, 1929, first pub. 1926), p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 12 & 149.

<sup>46</sup> Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone*, p. 119; Newman, *I Saw Spain*, pp. 154 & 156; Jan & Cora Gordon, *Poor Folk in Spain*, p. 102; Smith, *Spain on £10*, p. 25.

Republic. They noted that under Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, such a nuisance had been curbed. Inevitably all writers, those of guidebooks and travelogues, turned their attention to the bullfight. Most railed against its cruelty, especially as it resulted in the deaths of so many horses, though here some Primo de Rivera apologists praised the introduction of protective padding during the dictator's regime. Lauding notions of English compassion and condemning Spanish callousness, guides warned that 'the average Englishman would refuse to attend a bullfight' and, in a foretaste of later right-wing propaganda, observed that the behaviour of Spanish women at these events was worse than that of their menfolk.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, many of the same writers, without reaching the enthusiasm of Ernest Hemingway, tempered connotations of cruelty by recognising the courage and skill of the matadors and the spectacle and tradition of the event, typically concluding that that 'it is wonderful if one can harden one's heart and freeze all pity for the beasts, to watch the toreros at their graceful, clever, bloody games'.<sup>48</sup> The bullfight was not the only reference to congenital Spanish cruelty. Allusions to the Inquisition were sufficient to arouse readers' enduring notions of Spanish barbarity. 'Something of their old-time cruelty remains', announced Charles Graves. Likewise, writers regularly commented on the Spaniard's callous treatment of animals, disturbed by the sight of overloaded mules or casually treated chickens. Spaniards were a 'callous race' and 'life [wa]s cheap in Spain' was the common conclusion, a contention, as we shall see, given particular attention during the conflict to come.<sup>49</sup>

Travellers were also consistent in praising Spanish hospitality. As more than one guide book noted, traffic policemen (in San Sebastián, comfortingly noted as 'practically indistinguishable from the English "bobby"') were likely to forgo their immediate duties in order to help the tourist. In hotels, 'the chambermaids, waiters and porters, and not least the proprietor [would] take a kindly interest in their welfare'. Even the most 'dirty and illiterate old man' was likely to help the traveller with his or her luggage.<sup>50</sup> Spaniards were 'Easy-going. Lackadaisical. [and] Good-natured always.'<sup>51</sup> Against this, would-be visitors were warned of 'Spanish dilatori-

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<sup>47</sup> Fodor, *On the Continent ... 1936*, pp. 229 & 232.

<sup>48</sup> Muirhead (ed.), *Blue Guides: Southern Spain ...* pp. cxii - cxiii.

<sup>49</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 6, 92 & 149.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Spain on £10*, p. 11; O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 47; Tiltman, *European Excursions*, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Tiltman, *European Excursions*, pp. 105-106.

ness' and tendency to the cult of *mañana*.<sup>52</sup> Lost baggage was one likely consequence of an inherent Spanish apathy, trains notoriously failing to run to timetable another.<sup>53</sup> Although many travel writers declared that, contrary to popular belief Spaniards were not lazy, they inevitably contradicted themselves. Bilbao, one guide observed, was notable because 'there a large number of Spaniards actually work'. Barcelona, too, was singled out as a town of 'industrious, determined, hard-headed inhabitants ... laggards not wanted'.<sup>54</sup> Charles Graves, displaying his *Daily Mail* credentials and English arrogance, declared Spaniards to be 'the Irishmen of the South', sharing a capacity to combine brilliance with laziness and hospitality. Having 'more holidays than any other country in Europe', Spain, he went on, had 'always been run by a very few people who work eighteen hours a day. The others ... [were] already graduates in the Honours School of Leisure'. Working days in Spain, explained a popular guide, were designed 'to afford a change' from the numerous Spanish holidays.<sup>55</sup>

A further theme common to the literature revolves around the notion of a social harmony based upon classlessness and mutual respect. All Spaniards, regardless of birthright, were seen as sharing common virtues. To the acknowledged characteristics of courtesy, hospitality and courage were added individual and national pride, and personal honour and collective respect. Typically, Tiltman remarked on the 'complete absence of snobbery and ... of class distinctions' amongst Spaniards, irrespective of status. 'The *hidalgo* or prosperous farmer, greeted by a labourer' would, he claimed, 'return the salutation with all the grace he could muster in greeting a king'. 'Each poor man is a *caballero* - equal in blood to any king', observed another admiring traveller.<sup>56</sup> The Irish writer and academic Walter Starkie, whose many visits to Spain were related in his popular accounts of Spanish gypsy life, also commented on the 'proud, chivalrous, loyal' qualities shared by all Spaniards, and O'Brien, repeated the theme remarking that there was none of that 'Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady embarras that goes on in other parts of the world'. However, whilst admiring these qualities Starkie and O'Brien were among those who saw

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<sup>52</sup> Jan & Cora Gordon, *Poor Folk in Spain*, p. 101 & 151.

<sup>53</sup> Eg. Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone*, pp. 193-198.

<sup>54</sup> Fodor, *On the Continent ... 1936*, p. 213; Cameron - Gordon, *Spain As It Is*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>55</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 3-6, 60 & 123 -124; Fodor, *On the Continent ... 1936*, p. 228.

<sup>56</sup> Tiltman, *European Excursions*, pp. 118-119; Mason, *Trivial Adventures in the Spanish Highlands*, p. 105.

here a potential danger in contemporary Spain. Pride in a shared birthright and individual honour went some way to explaining why the poor endured their parlous circumstances, argued Starkie. However, the more fortunate in society should be careful not to abuse such traditions. There might be an absence of class-distinction but there was nevertheless a class-war, warned O'Brien, it simply did not impinge on the Spaniard's natural traits of individual pride and courtesy.<sup>57</sup> During the Civil War these two would adopt opposing views as to which side best offered to resolve this abuse of national character; the Catholic Starkie identifying with Franco's mandate, O'Brien with the aims of the Republic.

Writers, then, portrayed Spanish character in a series of conflicting dualisms. Spaniards were represented as idle and dilatory yet courteous and generous, reserved but cordial, callous, cruel and fatalistic but proud, dignified and courageous. These 'conflicting tendencies' were shown as being evident throughout all aspects of Spanish life. Thus, the 'best troops in Spain' were nonetheless notable for their sloppiness, innovative auto-mechanics were remarkable both for their technical ability and for their tendency to *mañana*, hoteliers were hospitable but also lazy, and invariably, Spanish drivers were celebrated not only for their skill but for their recklessness. Charles Graves was one who remarked on the moral and legal contradiction which on the one hand imposed strict codes of dress on the bathing beaches of San Sebastián yet, on the other, allowed nude dancers to perform at the town's nightly cabarets and prostitutes to 'parade the cafes' under the watchful eyes of the local police.<sup>58</sup> Such amused commentaries served to strengthen the notion of Spain as a backward, less civilised country. Readers learned from 'informed' sources the supposed incongruities which shaped Spanish national character, incongruities which would provide for commentators a framework from which to explain the events of the civil war.

The backward nature of the country was an aspect repeatedly referred to. Even sympathetic writers reflected that in Spain 'a feudal feeling had lingered on from remote times'. For another traveller, the journey from a French to a Spanish village in

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<sup>57</sup> Walter Starkie, *Spanish Raggle Taggle: Adventures with a Fiddle in Northern Spain* (Bath 1974, first published 1934), pp. 459 & 260; O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 46. Also see Starkie, *Don Gypsy: Adventures with a Fiddle in Barbary Andalusia and La Mancha* (London, 1936).

<sup>58</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 24, 46-48, 70, 80 & 153; Johnstone, *Hotel in Spain*, pp. 43, 194-195 & passim.

the Pyrenees seemed 'to span five centuries of time' giving the impression of travelling back in the middle ages.'<sup>59</sup> Such imagery, however, was not as condemnatory as it may seem. Travellers who searched for the 'real' Spain often took with them a view of the country that was coloured by nostalgia and which reflected their élitist notions. For travel writers the persistence of traditional customs and the supposed benefits of uncluttered rural life were an essential part of Spain's attraction. Wondering 'if civilisation has anything to offer to these people' who 'live simple, straightforward and pleasant lives', the Gordons voiced the position of most. The wistful tone of their conclusion, expressed, of course, from the security of a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, was also typical: 'it would be a rash man', they asserted, 'who would promise them (the peasants) a greater store of valuable things than they already have'.<sup>60</sup> In the eyes of travel writers, Spain's appeal, aside from, though complementary to, her high cultural heritage, was the country's rustic character. Travellers enthused over the persistence of primitive harvesting methods in Andalucia, found the sight of the 'rough hewn wheels of ox-carts, beehives and doors ... refreshing to English eyes', and encouraged tourists to observe the 'pastimes, dances, musical festivities and athletic contests associated with peasant life'.<sup>61</sup>

This interpretation of Spanish life and character also emphasised perceived contrasts between the old Spain and new, the traditional and the modern, the cultured and the brash. Again, as we shall see, this was a theme made much of in pro-Nationalist commentaries. In the travel literature of the 1930s any indication of change, of integration into the modern world, was often mocked, even regretted, as likely to spoil the beauty of the past. Hollywood films, American motor-cars or even street boot-blacks using 'Uncle Sam boot-polish' were treated as undesirable cultural intrusions.<sup>62</sup> The 'progress of modern commerce' equated to 'smoke, screeches and lousy crowded slum-dwellers', and as such had no place in the portrayal of Spain forwarded in travelogues.<sup>63</sup> 'Picturesque and ancient towns' were being ruined by

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<sup>59</sup> Gerald Brenan, *South From Granada* (London, 1963, first published 1957), p. 60; Becket Williams, *The High Pyrenees: Summer and Winter* (London, 1928), pp. 20-21.

<sup>60</sup> Jan & Cora Gordon, *Poor Folk in Spain*, p. 228.

<sup>61</sup> Mason, *Trivial Adventures*, p. 40; Tiltman, *European Excursions*, p. 111; Smith, *Spain on £10*, pp. 77.

<sup>62</sup> Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone*, p. 128; Henry Albert Philips, *Meet the Spaniards* (London, 1931), pp. 130 & 228.

<sup>63</sup> Mason, *Trivial Adventures*, p. 153.

the 'octopus-like embrace of modern factories'.<sup>64</sup> It was not signs of a 'new Spain' which interested travellers, rather it was the 'old Spain' of tradition. It was unfortunate, yet peculiarly 'Spanish', decided the Scottish journalist Matt Marshall, that Leon should boast an American Bar as well as its cathedral.<sup>65</sup> It was Toledo, with its 'thirty ... major sights and many a glimpse of past splendour' and its association with the 'old noblesse', which represented the 'very essence of historic Spain against modern Spain'.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, repeated references to Toledo as the embodiment of 'the heroic spirit of Spain'<sup>67</sup> could be seen as going some way toward explaining British fascination with the siege of the Alcázar (21 July - 27 September 1936) while the no less impressive defence of Oviedo (20 July - 15 October 1936) attracted comparatively little attention.

Although this blend of heritage, tradition and rustic imagery was undoubtedly a valid attraction, and, of course, is still a promoted charm of Spanish holidays,<sup>68</sup> it was an image which in the 1930s remained associated with quaint uneducated peasants, the 'sturdy splendid types of Old Spain at her best'.<sup>69</sup> At its complacent extreme this view encouraged the belief that the poor peasants who lived in caves were fortunate to have rent-free homes which, as a tourist attraction, offered both roof and income.<sup>70</sup> Travellers who wrote of Spanish peasants as being 'inured to hardship and kept alive by the sun', added to the impression of a benign medievalism where progress was dependent upon a deference to the traditional hierarchy and to maintaining long accepted values'.<sup>71</sup> Romanticised imagery in which contented 'sun-burnt and dusty peasants leisurely conjur[ed] grain, oil and wine out of the marl of a shadeless land' clearly owed something to nostalgic notions of Britain's own pre-industrial scene.<sup>72</sup> Writers wistfully reflected that 'as in England also, the farmers and labourers were busy at country occupations ... beat[ing] their har-

<sup>64</sup> Lady Sheppard, *A Cottage in Majorca*, (London, 1936), p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Marshall, *Tramp Royal in Spain*, p. 46.

<sup>66</sup> Clark, *Spain on £10*, pp. 170 & 194; Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone*, p. 215; Cameron-Gordon, *Spain As It Is*, p. 89.

<sup>67</sup> Tiltman, *European Excursions*, p. 126.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. 'A kid's eye view of Cantabria', *The Times, Weekend*, 17 July 1999. 'a fairy-tale land away from the coast' where, '... it is hard to believe you are still in the European Union.'

<sup>69</sup> Mason, *Trivial Adventures*, p. 96.

<sup>70</sup> Cameron-Gordon, *Spain As It Is*, p. 49.

<sup>71</sup> Tiltman, *European Excursions*, p. 112.

<sup>72</sup> Tomlinson, *South to Cadiz*, pp. 125-26.



vested sheaves ... in the golden light'.<sup>73</sup> Such connections would have appealed particularly to those right-wing ruralists who denounced urban lifestyles as encouraging moral instability and linked rural traditions to the spiritual health of the nation.<sup>74</sup> As will be shown later, they were also associations made much of in pro-Nationalist propaganda, the Republic seen as the embodiment of urban depravity, the *Movimiento* as the incarnation of national virtues rooted in rural tradition.

Despite recognising that iniquities existed in Spanish society all travel writers subscribed to this notion of a southern rural idyll. Even those who condemned the disparity between Spain's poor majority and wealthy few ('the half-starved women with filthy children ...' and the 'fat wives ... complacently chewing chocolates') nevertheless enthused over the peasants' 'humble houses ... fenced about with hedges'.<sup>75</sup> Few saw reason to echo Bernard Newman's warning that these were 'contrast[s] of which revolution is born'.<sup>76</sup> Most travel writers simply excised poverty from their picturesque rural imagery. While such a stance may not be totally surprising in literature of the genre it was one which again reinforced the view of Spain as a backward but essentially contented nation. For travellers, Spain was primarily a retreat from the 'urgent and alarming affairs of the world'.<sup>77</sup> Integral to this picture of bucolic bliss was an implicit understanding that the chivalrous and refined Spain of alcázar and cathedral was the inheritance of the ruling classes. In the eyes of the world 'the Marquis represent[ed] the pageant of Spain', even if, in British eyes, even the spectacle and ritualism of these classes remained distinctly inferior to the 'English ... genius for pageantry'.<sup>78</sup> If some writers warned that such a social structure was 'doomed ... in a world which has outstripped the aristocratic principle', most were less critical.<sup>79</sup> Even travellers who were sympathetic to the Republic's efforts at land reform felt compelled to warn that while 'it should be true that democracy makes for greater happiness than feudalism ... it isn't always so. If a landlord fulfils his real obligations, and is a father to his people, then they can be happy'. Responsible paternalism rewarded with industrious loyalty was seen as a

<sup>73</sup> Gertrude Bone, *Days in Old Spain* (London., 1942, first published 1938), p. 187.

<sup>74</sup> See David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone*, pp. 105 & 116.

<sup>76</sup> Newman, *I Saw Spain*, p. 180.

<sup>77</sup> Tomlinson, *South to Cadiz*, p.127; nb. Philips, *Meet The Spaniards*, p. 251, & Cameron-Gordon, *Spain As It Is*, p. 231, make almost identical comment.

<sup>78</sup> Walter Starkie, *Spanish Raggle Taggle*, p. 30; O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, pp. 167-169.

<sup>79</sup> O'Brien, *ibid.*, p. 122.

pattern suited to feudalistic Spain. Spanish peasants may 'miss out on the things which we consider in England as essentials' but they were unlikely to attain them even if they were freed of subservience.<sup>80</sup>

## British Residents in Spain

Whilst the experience of holiday-makers and travellers was limited by length of stay, expectations, and a determination to 'enjoy the moment', Spain was a country which also played host to a number of semi-permanent visitors and supported a significant expatriate community. Among these were numerous British writers. Somerset Maugham, Robert Graves, the leftist author Ralph Bates, the poet and novelist Gerald Brenan, and the young Laurie Lee were just some of those who spent significant periods working, living and travelling in Spain during this period and who chose to write of their experiences either at the time or later. For some this experience translated into political idealism. Notably, Bates used his fiction to express sympathy with left-wing movements in Spain, later took part in the defence of Madrid, and edited the International Brigade publication *Volunteer for Liberty*.<sup>81</sup> However, few Britons living or working in pre-civil war Spain, responded with such personal involvement. Unlike many of the visiting literati, most were staunchly Conservative, in both political inclination and in social attitude ( a pattern still evident in May 2001 when the Costa del Sol Conservative Clubs registered a membership 15,000 against the local International Labour Group's total of 40).<sup>82</sup> As will be argued, for most of these individuals, contact with Spanish political issues was at best ground for amusement, at worst a source of tension. The largest number of expatriates comprised of those comfortably-off people who had congregated in colonies, notably on the Mediterranean coast and on the island of Mallorca. As an American traveller, the writer Henry Philips, observed in 1931, the island had long since been discovered as an ideal winter resort by the English and they were now being joined by increasing numbers of Americans'.<sup>83</sup> Nowhere in the world are there greater possibilities for a delightful and inexpensive existence

<sup>80</sup> Newman, *I Saw Spain*, pp. 90-93 & 158.

<sup>81</sup> Ralph Bates, *Lean Men* ( London, 1935) & *The Olive Field* (London, 1936). Fictional tales based on Bates' experience of, and sympathy with, radical political movements in Spain during the early thirties. Between 1923 & 1929 Bates worked first in the Barcelona docks and then as a travelling mechanic.

<sup>82</sup> Tim Reid, 'Costa vote is a ray of sunshine for Hague', *The Times*, 28 May 2001.

<sup>83</sup> Philips, *Meet the Spaniards*, p. 129.

than on this idyllic island', enthused one English resident.<sup>84</sup> In 1935, Charles Graves estimated the Anglo-American presence in Mallorca at approximately 4,000 ( his more famous brother Robert, one of these) and noted the publication of an English language twelve page newspaper, the *Palma Daily Post*, to serve this colony.<sup>85</sup> A year later, Fodor's guide, referring to the 'many Aunt Matildas' of Mallorca observed that Palma had not only a British vice-consul but 'English church services, and English teashop, an English circulating library, and a social club'.<sup>86</sup> As one titled resident purred, in Palma 'all the amenities of civilisation were at hand. Cinema, bridge, tea-shops, a club and a library', her only regret being that 'shooting was hard to come by'.<sup>87</sup> The same pattern was under way on the mainland Mediterranean coast with Málaga's 'fairly large English colony' boasting an English Church and cemetery, British consulate and club, and a resident English doctor, whilst Valencia at least offered English church services. The Canary Islands, too, had already become home to considerable numbers of expatriates whose facilities, besides English Churches and medical services, included a health resort, lending libraries and games clubs, with tennis, croquet and bowling grounds.<sup>88</sup>

The degree to which these expatriate groups sought to replicate the comfort of familiar institutions suggests that life, for most, remained distinct from the influence of Spanish culture. Certainly this was the experience reflected in many contemporary commentaries - and interestingly, as recent research concludes, this was a pattern still evident in the 1990's, Fuengirola area alone host to over fifty British clubs.<sup>89</sup> In 1936, with some sardonic exaggeration Tiltman remarked that 'Torremolinos has been developed as a suburb of London ... where you can buy an ice-cream as easily as in Tooting' but the model was emerging.<sup>90</sup> That a few months later the majority of the Anglo-American residents of Torremolinos, on their way to evacua-

<sup>84</sup> Nina Larrey Duryea, *Mallorca the Magnificent* (London, 1927), p. 275.

<sup>85</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, p. 222.

<sup>86</sup> Fodor, *On the Continent ... 1936*, pp. 268 & 252.

<sup>87</sup> Lady Sheppard, *Mediterranean Islands* (London, 1954, first published 1949) p. 81.

<sup>88</sup> Fodor, *On the Continent ... 1936*, 266; Muirhead, *Blue Guides: Southern Spain*, pp. 308-312. British 'colonies' included some 200 plus in Santa Cruz, Teneriffe, and 600 plus in Las Palmas, Grand Canary.

<sup>89</sup> Karen O'Reilly, *The British on the Costa del Sol: Transnational Identities and Local Communities* (London & New York, 2000). E.g. O'Reilly notes that the clubs in the Fuengirola area support activities such as Scottish country dancing, Brownies & Guides, bowls, cricket, bridge, an arts centre and a theatre. pp. 76-78.

<sup>90</sup> Tiltman, *European Excursions*, p. 108.

tion, could be transported in just two, admittedly crowded, local buses, both demonstrates the extent of Tiltman's exaggeration and suggests the tendency of travellers to attach an inflated significance to the discovery of fellow-nationals abroad. Nevertheless, at least some one hundred Britons, Americans and Australians were resident in the area before the Civil War and other sources suggest four times that number.<sup>91</sup> According to the socialite Nancy Ford-Inman, the main interests of this 'English' colony were pseudo-intellectual chatter - 'setting the world to rights (by peaceful means)' - and an 'immense interest' in each other's affairs. In Ford-Inman's experience, the favourable exchange rate, artistic inspiration and for some, 'a search of sun', were the prime attractions for the British expatriate community around Málaga.<sup>92</sup>

However, any contact between the expatriate community and the indigenous population was defined by inherent social and cultural attitudes. In general, British residents reflected the country's long established ambivalence toward the people of the other countries. Apparent in their attitude were the legacy of the Empire and notions of class superiority. Ordinary local people were generally treated with amused condescension, the middling bourgeoisie with a degree of scorn, and the aristocratic few with an admiration tempered only by notions of English superiority - 'Carlo is a true aristocrat ... he's never done a thing in his life, but he does nothing ten times more charmingly than anyone else'.<sup>93</sup> Even enthusiasts such as Robert Graves, who had made Mallorca his home since 1929, 'confessed' to 'having few Spanish friends', citing as reasons, the incompatibility of Spanish mealtimes, the 'formality of Spanish households' and Spanish patriarchal strictures.<sup>94</sup> For many Britons living in Spain, immediate concerns were largely restricted to the hiring and firing of cooks and maids; servants who could not tell the difference between silver and aluminium spoons were clearly an annoyance to Mallorcan resident, Bessie Beckett.<sup>95</sup> Complaints, such as those voiced by Málaga villa owners Bill and Ada Locke, that Spanish servants, unlike their English counterparts, were 'impossible to

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<sup>91</sup> See M. Barke & L.A. France, 'The Costa del Sol', in M. Barke, J. Towner, & M.T. Newton (eds.), *Tourism in Spain*, p267; Ruth Kedzie Wood, 'Tourist's Spain and Portugal', cited in Walton, 'Perceptions', p. 295.

<sup>92</sup> Nancy Ford-Inman & Marion L Nutting, *Spinsters in Spain* (London, 1938), p. 94.

<sup>93</sup> Ford-Inman & Nutting, *ibid.*, pp. 121 & 130.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Graves & Paul Hogarth, *Majorca Observed* (London, 1965, first pub. 1954), p. 33.

<sup>95</sup> Beckett, *Memories of Mallorca*, p. 12.

train' on account of their poor memories, led both to frustration at perceived Spanish failings and to seemingly irrational confrontations with local *sindicatos* (trade unions). The reaction of the Lockes to a strike action which involved their own domestic staff served only to confirm the attitude adopted by many expatriates:

[T]he part that annoys me is to be forced to concede to the demands of a lot of servant girls and boys ... can't anything be done about Britishers being insulted like this? I mean they might be polite about it.

Such behaviour could only be faced with British resolve, the 'British Lion' and the 'British Bulldog' standing firm against the boisterous Spanish mob. For temporary resident Ford-Inman, the minor triumph of obtaining a hot bath in face of a local fuel strike was enough for her to claim to have 'kept up the prestige of the British Raj', a claim which serves admirably to highlight the mix of home counties smugness and imperial superiority with which the attitudes of many expatriates were imbued.<sup>96</sup>

For the majority then, the experience of living in Spain, sheltering behind a self-imposed structure of familiar institutions and stubbornly adhering to ideas of empire and a 'British way of life', would have done little to alter preconceived expectations of Spain and her people. Experience of industrial or rural unrest for this group was viewed in the context of endemic Spanish idleness and political mayhem. While throughout the 1930s expatriates were clearly aware of reports in the British press of Spanish civil unrest, the general feeling was that such reports were grossly exaggerated. For example, first hand experience of revolution in October 1934 did not lessen the enthusiasm of would-be hoteliers Nancy and Archie Johnstone nor deter the retirement plans of Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell. To the Johnstones, troops guarding the local station seemed less than threatening, for although they had bayonets fixed they also reclined in deck-chairs and abandoned their posts during the siesta. For Mitchell, who had planned retirement in Spain since 1928, 'London reports of violence and killings in the streets of Seville' were overstated or the result of inadequately examined hearsay. Indeed, following the election of the Popular Front Government, Mitchell was co-author of a letter to *The Times* con-

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<sup>96</sup> Ford-Inman & Nutting, *Spinsters in Spain*, pp. 62, 124-130, &160.

demning what he saw as press mis-representation of events in Spain.<sup>97</sup>

Intent on enjoying their comfortable surroundings and insulated by national and class convictions it is not surprising that after the July 1936 rebellion many British residents attached more sinister overtones to the local incidents that they had witnessed, or at least had been told about. Like Ford-Inman, Málaga resident, Chalmers Mitchell, attached little significance to the local strike action in that area. The early months of 1936 saw members of Málaga's expatriate community 'playing bridge at the club', golf on 'an inefficient but beautiful course', motoring in the neighbourhood and making 'mutual visits for luncheon, dinner or tea'. To this 'colony', Spanish politics and the election campaign were of 'no special interest'. Two years later Chalmers Mitchell, whose sympathies lay with the loyalists, was to reflect that 'it was odd ... how much of all the ferment I failed to notice, and how blind I was to the perils awaiting Spain'.<sup>98</sup>

The day-to-day lifestyle experiences of those Britons working in Spain were similar in many ways to those of their more leisured compatriots, although, as we shall see, their interpretation of political unrest was more acute. Although some employment was on an individual basis (for example, Ralph Bates spent some years working in the Barcelona dockyards and then as a travelling mechanic), most expatriate employees worked for British concerns operating in Spain. According to Harry Gannes and Theo Repard almost 2,000 Britons were employed in the country in 1933. A number of these worked as engineers and managers in the British owned copper and sulphur mines of Rio Tinto and Tharsis.<sup>99</sup> Others were similarly involved across a range of commercial and industrial enterprises, notably the huge British interests and investment in the Orcanera Company mines near Bilbao, and the Barcelona Power, Light and Traction Company. Indeed, it has been estimated that at the outbreak of the Civil War some 40 per cent of foreign invest-

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<sup>97</sup> Johnstone, *Hotel in Spain*, p. 30; Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, *My House in Málaga*, (London, 1938), p. 40; *The Times*, 25 February 1936, co-authors, Mitchell, Herbert Baker & George Young.

<sup>98</sup> Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, pp. 79 & 87.

<sup>99</sup> Harry Gannes & Theo Repard, *Spain in Revolt* (London, 1936), fn.1 p. 175.

ment in Spain was British.<sup>100</sup>

However, again the opportunity or desire to form contact with Spaniards in other ways than work-based relationships appears to have been limited. The position and income of expatriate employees often meant that they imposed a form of 'industrial imperialism'. Nowhere was this more manifest than in the British quarters at Rio Tinto. Here, in the hill-top village of Bella Vista, expatriates endeavoured to recreate the surroundings with which they were familiar. Driving through the area in 1929, Charles Freeston (just one of many automobile enthusiasts who praised Primo's programme of road building) recorded his astonishment at coming across 'a group of men in white flannels standing at various points on a green sward.' However, in a demonstration of English self-belief, the discovery of a cricket match in progress in southern Spain was 'no longer mysterious when [Freeston] learned that the famous copper mines were owned and mined by Englishmen'.<sup>101</sup> Away from work the members of this British community worshipped in their own church, played croquet and cricket, and relaxed in their own seaside holiday retreat at Punta Umbria. Here, the only Spaniards permitted entrance were maids, and their quarters were set apart from those of the relaxing Britons. This tradition of segregation and paternalism in the mining areas of Rio Tinto and Tharsis was only just coming under serious challenge during the years of the Second Republic. As S.G. Checkland has concluded, the largely Scottish contingent of engineers and managers at Rio Tinto 'seem to have taken little intellectual or emotional interest in Spain or its peoples.'<sup>102</sup>

Nor was this a pattern unique to the mining areas of the south. In Bilbao, O'Brien observed 'it was expatriate directors and engineers who inhabited the 'ostentatious luxury of the new part of the town'.<sup>103</sup> Commenting on the behaviour of his compatriots residing in Spain, Charles Armstrong, a Briton who had lived and worked in Madrid and Barcelona throughout the 1920s, caustically observed that 'their life is,

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<sup>100</sup> Charles E. Harvey, *The Rio Tinto Company: an economic history of a leading international concern, 1873- 1954* (Penzance, 1981), notes that two British companies, Guest, Keen & Nettlefolds and the Consett Iron Company owned 80% of the Orconera Mines. Jill Edwards, *The British Government & the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London & Basingstoke, 1979) p. 65.

<sup>101</sup> Freeston, *Roads of Spain*, p. 135.

<sup>102</sup> S.G. Checkland, *The Mines of Tharsis: Roman, French and British Enterprise in Spain* (London, 1967) pp. 176-177.

<sup>103</sup> O'Brien, *Farewell Spain*, p. 202.

of course, very similar to that of the English the world over'. Armstrong, a part-time teacher at the English school in Barcelona and a forceful advocate of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, went on to note that British parents 'generally object to their children mixing with the "native" children' on the irrational principle that 'foreign children are immoral', a notion apparently shaped by the failure of Spanish children to use euphemisms when asking to use the toilet.<sup>104</sup>

Far from absorbing Spanish culture, evidence suggests that expatriates endeavoured to impose their own upon their hosts. This was, however, a selective process. Residents, for instance, feared that the 'Ford car' might drive the picturesque ox-carts from Castilian streets and that 'jazz dances' might 'kill the old style'.<sup>105</sup> Yet, British residents who enthused over local practices and who were quick to castigate the superficial behaviour of holidaymaking fellow-countrymen - 'the "Golden Mile" clique' -<sup>106</sup> often seemed unaware of their own insensitivity. Few thought it odd to demand that shopkeepers should add pudding-basins to their stocklist and most were amazed that local Mallorcans should express annoyance when, during Christmas celebrations, their 'ardently patriotic' British guests insisted on toasting King George V and singing the British national anthem.<sup>107</sup> British residents and employees alike took particular pride in having introduced the indigenous population to association football and local youth to the stimulating joys of scouting, this latter considered a means of cultivating a degree of self-discipline regarded as absent in their elders. It followed, then, that a young guide seen wearing a boy-scout belt was likely to be more trustworthy than his associates. Echoing the tone of boy's weeklies, football and scouting were seen by several British commentators as a hopeful sign of cultural improvement. As one observer disdainfully remarked: 'up to the present the Spaniard has rarely taken physical exercise of any sort.'<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere, growing participation by all classes in these activities, and of some of the upper classes in tennis, was seen by some Britons as 'a hopeful sign' that the indolent Spaniard was at last recognising the need to keep fit. And 'civilisation' was

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<sup>104</sup> Charles Wicksteed Armstrong, *Life in Spain Today* (Edinburgh, 1930) pp. 73 & 168.

<sup>105</sup> Gertrude & Muirhead Bone, *Days in Old Spain*, (London, 1942, first published 1938), p. 137; Beckett, *Memories of Mallorca*, p. 107.

<sup>106</sup> E.g. R. Graves, *Majorca Observed*, p. 25; Beckett, *Memories of Mallorca*, p. 95.

<sup>107</sup> Beckett, *ibid.*, pp. 62 & 34.

<sup>108</sup> Newman, *I Saw Spain*, p. 260; David Avery, *Not on Queen Victoria's Birthday: The Story of the Rio Tinto Mines* (London, 1974), p. 289; Armstrong, *Life in Spain Today*, p. 92.



clearly on the horizon when, at least 'with the rich', 'the custom of afternoon tea [was] becoming general'.<sup>109</sup>

For most of the British employees in Spain, perhaps their most potent experience, and the one most likely to colour their judgement after July 1936, was contact with industrial strife. More directly affected by strike action than the villa dwellers, British employees and investors offered increasingly more apocalyptic interpretations of industrial and political unrest. At the mines of Huelva province a series of confrontations with both the anarchist and 'communist-led' (actually socialist) unions, frustrating disputes between rival union confederations, and often expensive negotiations (both in taxes and concessions) with government bodies, constituted a pattern which British investors felt the Republic had only exacerbated. At least, they felt, under the auspices of Primo de Rivera - termed the 'Great Dictator' - there had been public order. Strikes proliferated throughout the country during the 1930s, and following the election of the Popular Front Government in February 1936 the situation seemed even more volatile. For example, Sir Auckland Geddes, in his annual chairman's address, described the situation at Rio Tinto as one of 'ceaseless political unrest based on the expectation of ... a coming socialist revolution', a period of 'political turmoil, strikes [and] increased expenses'.<sup>110</sup> For those Britons with financial and economic interests in Spain, the period was one of trepidation. For British investors the Republic became synonymous with a fear of communist aspirations; for British employees the period represented increasingly fractious and complicated local labour relations and a growing threat to personal safety. At the outbreak of the Civil War, such experiences and fears were prominent in shaping attitudes and allegiances. The sympathies of most the Britons involved in Spanish enterprises lay naturally with the rebel Nationalists who seemed to represent 'order'. In contrast, the proliferation of collectives and reports of 'red reprisals' in the Republican zone served only to confirm the fears shaped over recent years. Many British residents and employees, then, lived and worked under a form of apartheid. The only Spaniards they treated as anywhere near equal were those of their own social class. At best ordinary Spaniards were regarded with patronising amusement. Many expatriates openly doubted the wisdom of deposing a legiti-

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<sup>109</sup> Armstrong, *ibid.*, pp. 92 & 65-66.

<sup>110</sup> Sir Auckland Geddes', Rio Tinto company annual report and chairman's address, 1936, cited in Avery, *Not on Queen Victoria's Birthday*, p. 354.

mate monarch, who, after all, represented all that they held dear, and regarded Primo de Rivera's rule as representing 'the golden years' of improved standards and relative peace. On the other hand, by the end of 1931 life in the Republic had already gone to the devil. Why, complained one English resident, taxi drivers no longer removed their caps, and ticket collectors no longer bowed.<sup>111</sup> More serious to British business interests was the increasing perception that Spanish political and industrial turmoil was associated with bolshevism and anarchy. Since, broadly speaking, Franco and the Nationalist Movement seemed to represent the old pin-ed-for standards and best hope of stability the likely direction of this body of British sympathy following the summer of 1936 is clear. If following the rebellion British residents in government held areas were observed 'turn[ing] out Spanish friends who had taken refuge with them during the early disturbances', they were also noted to be 'wholly out of sympathy with the legitimate Government of Spain'.<sup>112</sup> And, simmering antipathy toward the Republic became even more evident as expatriates and other Britons, only rescued from the 'red hell' by the 'merciful intervention' of Royal Navy, recounted tales laden with stereotypical imagery to an eagerly awaiting British press.<sup>113</sup>

As we have seen, in the years before the military rebellion British expatriate residents and visitors to Spain, with few exceptions, shared expectations of the country which their stay, however long, did little to change. Travel did little to destabilise preconceived notions of Spanish life, customs and culture. For thirteen-day trippers intent on enjoyment and guided by travel literature itineraries a brief contact with Spanish culture was, perhaps, never likely to do other than reinforce fixed notions. However, even those who lived in the country for considerable lengths of time showed limited will to integrate with the communities in which they had chosen to live. Indeed, it would seem that the identities of those who travelled or lived in Spain became more self-consciously British, or, indeed, 'English', through their experience. This was a process which heightened a sense of national belonging, of what being 'English' meant, and so invited comparisons which denigrated notions of Spanish character and culture. It was also a process which, for many, encouraged sympathy with the professed ideals and values of the Nationalist Move-

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<sup>111</sup> Beckett, *Memories of Mallorca*, p. 141.

<sup>112</sup> Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, p. 126.

<sup>113</sup> Mitchell, *ibid.*, p. 209; Johnstone, *Hotel in Spain*, p.277.

ment. For most visitors to Spain, then, the experience was one which strengthened pre-existing expectations of the country. Those expectations, as we shall see next, were carried by some travellers into preliminary political observations and were repeated and variously reshaped by political commentators of all shades as they endeavoured to interpret and simplify events in Spain for British audiences.

## Chapter 4

### BRITISH PERCEPTIONS OF THE 1930's SPANISH POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

#### Political Comment in Travel Writing

Although the writers of travel literature often determined to avoid reference to the political scene in Spain some comment was inevitable. In part this was because notions of comic-book government and *pronunciamento* were essential elements of the popular concept of Spain and as such were expected by readers. Moreover, the first sixteen months of the 1930s made some degree of comment unavoidable. The end of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship in 1930, and the removal of the monarchy and the formation of the Second Republic the following year, served to generate in Britain a flurry of interest in Spanish politics. This interest heightened as the decade progressed, the failed Asturian rising in 1934 and the election of the Popular Front in 1936 attracting especial attention. Although such interest was most particularly articulated by political observers, many of the travel writers were also moved to respond. As we have seen, holidaymakers' interest in Spanish politics was largely confined to comic imagery, while expatriate interpretations were essentially coloured by the inconvenience or threat to profit caused by local unrest. Travel writers, despite professed indifference, were often moved to offer their views. As one writer conceded, however regretful it was, 'a book about present-day Spain without politics ... would be fantastic'.<sup>1</sup> It is the intent here to first examine the interpretations offered by such travellers and to gauge their contribution to the politicised picture of Spain which emerged during the same years, and to the polarisation of opinion which reached its apogee during the Civil War. As will be seen, this was a two way process. Travelogues reflected the views being expressed by political commentators, most particularly those of the British right, while at the same time reinforcing the framework of stereotypical imagery from which such commentators presented their own views.

Given events in Spain during these years, it is not surprising that political observa-

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<sup>1</sup> Newman, *I Saw Spain*, p. 9.

tions appeared even in the travel guides. As has been already shown, these were most usually represented in mocking tones as old Spanish customs. However, more direct references became evident as the decade advanced. One 1935 guide, for example, observed that 'The date of the dawn of New Spain is hard to set, but April 14, 1931, is one date worth knowing, for then the Republic was born and all sorts of things began to happen'. The following year, another warned that Oviedo was 'an unholy mess' since 'the last revolution'(October 1934).<sup>2</sup> Passing comments were also made regarding Spanish regionalism. The guide writer, Clark, noted that 'Catalonia is autonomous and vastly conscious of it', whilst a fellow writer observed that 'no doubt, sooner or later the aspirations of Basque nationalism will be more satisfied.'<sup>3</sup> In fact, by the time Clark's guide was published the Catalan autonomy statute had been suspended and President Companys sentenced to thirty years imprisonment, consequences of the failed rising of October 1934. However, for those readers or intending holidaymakers alert to events this served only as a further illustration of the chaotic and fast changing face of Spanish politics.

Political observations did appear more regularly in the accounts written by British travellers. As has been shown, many of these believed that the monarchy of Alfonso XIII and the rule of Primo de Rivera had been the blend most suited to Spain. Spain had 'improved beyond all recognition within the last six years', declared one champion of the régime in 1930. His contention that it was a falsely held belief in Britain that 'because a country is under a dictatorship there can be no personal liberty' was one repeated throughout the following decade by supporters of the Spanish right.<sup>4</sup> For most, Alfonso represented the chivalry of old Spain. Few shared Scottish journalist, Matt Marshall's, contemptuous view of the 'vanity' of Spanish royalty.<sup>5</sup> More typically, readers were reminded of Alfonso's links with the British monarchy and his part in improving the lot of British prisoners-of-war during the Great War. It had been the Spanish king who, 'actuated solely by reason of his sympathy for Great Britain, the birthplace of his Queen', had intervened 'for our British soldiers' during the Great War.<sup>6</sup> Another an avid champion of the monarchy,

<sup>2</sup> Clark, *Spain on £10*, p. 14; Fodor, *On the Continent ... 1936*, p. 215.

<sup>3</sup> Clark, *Spain on £10*, p. 15; Smith, *San Sebastian*, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong, *Life in Spain Today*, p. xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall, *Tramp Royal in Spain*, p. 119 & passim.

<sup>6</sup> Cameron-Gordon, *Spain As It Is*, p. 230.

Henry Philips, travelling through Spain during the fifteen months sandwiched between the resignation of Primo de Rivera and the fall of Alfonso, paid tribute to what he saw as the dictator's achievements and warned against any challenge to the monarchy. 'The Spanish people without a king, divested of Royal majesties, are unthinkable', he asserted. For Philips and many other travellers, the Monarchy coupled with 'Holy Mother, the Church' were the fundamental elements of the Spanish hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> Charles Freeston was even more laudatory of the 'advances' made under the dictatorship. The development of a high quality road network, excellent hotels and helpful PNT offices were all improvements associated with the controlling hand of Primo de Rivera.<sup>8</sup> As we have seen, other references added to that view. Compulsory padding of the picadors' horses was held as evidence of the steps taken to 'civilise' Spain, as was Charles Graves' erroneous observation that the dictator had presided over a 'hygienic revolution' which had seen a water-closet installed in every house.<sup>9</sup> Observations that the dictatorship had been effective in 'the suppression of mendicancy' ( a practice which travellers reported as once again widespread under the Republic) and, even more importantly, had 'completely terminated ... Anarchist and Communist intrigue ... outrages and revolution', added to the picture of a 'golden age' under Primo de Rivera. For many the Republic marked the end of such 'progress'. Later, Nationalist sympathisers would claim that Franco represented a return to the strong leadership that had made such an age possible.<sup>10</sup>

Following the fall of the monarchy, travel writers, almost without exception, reported evidence of communism increasing in parallel with the new Republic. Responses to the justice of the demands made, or fears of the threat posed, by radical political influences varied, but most writers agreed in identifying young idealists as communist proselytes thriving in a new found political freedom. The birth of the Republic had been marked, they declared, by the 'revolt of flaming youth'. 'Excited young men' filled with 'revolutionary spirit' adopted the *Marseillaise* as an anthem and sought to 'sweep away the crumbling relics of the old world'.<sup>11</sup> As the decade pro-

<sup>7</sup> Philips, *Meet the Spaniards*, p. 77, & pp. 87-92.

<sup>8</sup> Freeston, *Roads of Spain*, pp. 125, 127, 136, 137, 146 & 176

<sup>9</sup> Philips, *Meet the Spaniards*, p. 240; C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, p. 135.

<sup>10</sup> Freeston, *Roads of Spain*, p. 201.

<sup>11</sup> Philips, *Meet the Spaniards*, p. 87; Richard & Phyllis Pearsall, *Castilian Ochre* (London, 1935), pp. 33 & 134; Starkie, *Spanish Raggle Taggle*, p. 266 & pp. 229-230; Beckett, *Memories of Mallorca*, p. 139.

gressed, a number of writers identified in such fervour a dangerous Soviet influence. Students, they warned, were returning from International Congresses carrying copies of the works of Lenin and Marx in the pockets of their dinner-jackets.<sup>12</sup> Occasional guarded approval of the aims of such young radicals was submersed in more scornful comment. Young socialists were considered remarkable for their contributions to the Poor Relief Fund but more remarkable for their hidden supplies of weapons. Likewise, while young communists were acknowledged for some noteworthy, if misguided, aims, of more concern was their violent revolutionary intent.<sup>13</sup>

However, many of such observations fell into what Walton has aptly termed a 'knock-about political comedy'.<sup>14</sup> Every warning that 'communist Spain will be ruthless' was countered by an observation that 'revolution [in Spain] was nothing. It was not bloody. It was only like an orange, which falls when it is very ripe'.<sup>15</sup> For many British travel writers, the Republican government simply heralded a return to excitable Spanish politics and encouraged 'all the silly stuff of People's politics'.<sup>16</sup> The masses had simply voted in the Republic on the promise that 'everyone would have three pesetas a day for life', a promise which, some travellers supposed, accounted for a brief baby-boom.<sup>17</sup> Disquiet over evidence of communist influence, too, was often treated less than seriously. Following the October 1934 troubles, Charles Graves declared that Asturias was now remarkable for being where 'Russian influence is very strong', Oviedo for being 'where the last revolution started and where the next is predicted, and Salamanca's ancient university for graffiti which proclaimed '*Viva el Marxismo*'.<sup>18</sup> Other travellers remarked on the anti-clerical and pro-communist slogans observed in towns like Córdoba and Ronda.<sup>19</sup> For Graves and those like him, though, Spanish politics remained a source of mirth.

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<sup>12</sup> E.g. Pearsall, *Castilian Ochre*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone*, pp. 55-58; Starkie, *Raggle Taggle*, p. 392.

<sup>14</sup> Walton, 'Perceptions', p. 293.

<sup>15</sup> Pearsall, *Castilian Ochre*, p. 157; Tomlinson, *South to Cadiz*, p. 171.

<sup>16</sup> Philips, *Meet the Spaniards*, p. 226.

<sup>17</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, p. 52; Fodor, *On the Continent ... 1936*, p. 216; Beckett, *Memories of Mallorca*, pp. 138-143, Similarly reported 'that peasants believed that the Republic would mean that a worker would earn 700 pesetas a month - the same as a Bishop.' According to one expatriate, the typical pay of a cook at this time was 70 pesetas a month, 60 pesetas if they 'lived in' :- Duryea, *Mallorca the Magnificent*, p. 272.

<sup>18</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 76, 113, & 132.

<sup>19</sup> Tomlinson, *South to Cadiz*, p. 128; Ford-Inman & Nutting, *Spinsters in Spain*, pp. 106-107.

In Spain, 'revolutions [were] ... more a sport than anything else', political unrest a 'national pastime' encouraged by the 'national vice', of 'cafe gossip' and by political firebrands such as 'Una Muno' (sic), who Graves curiously believed to be preaching 'ludicrously destructive ideas'.<sup>20</sup> Primarily concerned with leisure facilities, good food and accommodation, such travellers, found the most serious consequences of Republican government in such trivia as the alteration of street and hotel names, the abandonment of the New York and the Plymouth to Santander yacht races, and a belief that hotel standards 'were feeling the pinch of Republican times'.<sup>21</sup>

For most travellers, then, fears of communist revolution were soon obscured by the belief that anarchic and revolutionary behaviour was simply part of the Spaniard's 'natural' make up. 'Spaniards like noise,' readers of travelogues were told, 'give them a gun and they can't resist letting it off'. Strikes and political assassinations were likewise no more than a meaningless Spanish practice, 'a sort of you strike today and I'll strike tomorrow' and 'tit for tat' process.<sup>22</sup> The idea that the 'innocence' of the Spanish disposition to localised riot was being subverted by a pernicious foreign communist influence was raised briefly by some. As we shall see, though, this was a notion mooted more forcefully by right-wing political observers and made much of by those who sympathised with the Nationalist cause. However, among even the most Conservative-minded of travellers such concerns were invariably moderated by other observations. Thus, while Charles Graves predicted that 'thousands would die in the flames' of a communist revolution he added the complacent reassurance that 'revolutions do not seem to really affect the old families'. It was with admiration and not foreboding that Graves observed that 'rich Spaniards live as the Russian royalty used to do in the days of the Grand Dukes'. For such travellers, political and civil strife were simply 'natural' phenomena in Spain. The only problem was that the level had been raised by the vague promises of reform from a weak Republican government. A return to the 'old order' was the best solution and that order was still very firmly in place.<sup>23</sup>

Inept Republican government was similarly linked to the question of regionalism.

<sup>20</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 114, 133, 134, & 141.

<sup>21</sup> C. Graves *ibid.*, p. 60, 123 & 135; e.g. Pearsall, *Castilian Ochre*, p. 81; Freeston, *Roads of Spain*, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup> Ford-Inman & Nutting, *Spinsters in Spain*, pp. 118, 159, 202, 209 & 211.

<sup>23</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 107-108 & 133.



Basque, Gallegan and Catalan nationalist aspirations had already been the subject of some foreboding during the 1920s. The Gordons, for instance, using language guaranteed to stimulate a feeling of repugnance in their conservative readers, regarded those regions' objections to 'the domination, laxity and misrule of the Madrid Government' as nurturing a 'Catalonian Sinn Fein', 'socialistic propaganda' and communism.<sup>24</sup> For other travellers regionalist aspirations were also seen as a challenge to the monarchy. On such grounds Philips had little sympathy with Basque or Catalan claims for autonomy. Likewise, the ardently pro-monarchist Lady Russell (Helen Cameron-Gordon), despite her admiration of Catalan industriousness, noted with scorn Catalonia's reputation of disloyalty to the Crown and asserted that 'every true-born Catalan ... is a malcontent and a separatist'.<sup>25</sup> During the 1930s a number of travellers took up these lines and were quick to blame what they saw as dangerous demands for regional autonomy on the misguided indulgences of the new Republic. At least, they argued, Primo de Rivera had constrained regional aspirations and curbed any associated unrest. Now the 'red corrosion' had taken hold.<sup>26</sup> True, in Catalonia and the Basque provinces, the two regions most commented upon, the workers were to be admired for their diligence and industry. However, the combination of 'the excitable nature of the Spaniard with the organisation of a working community' provided the very circumstances which fostered political strife and encouraged unreasonable demands.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, even in those provinces which under the Republic were most eagerly seeking autonomy, the demand was not so uniform as commonly supposed. Thus, the Irish author Walter Starkie, an admirer of Mussolini, observed that while 'the people of Bilbao [were] socialist and anti-clerical ... those of Guipúzcoa and Alava [were] religious to the core', the inference being that it was only the lawless minority of the anti-clerical left that sought autonomy. The true Basque, Starkie concluded, was the one who refused 'to sacrifice [his] universal heritage for any regionalism.'<sup>28</sup>

As will be seen, such views sat closely with the stance taken by right-wing commentators during the same period and by the pro-Nationalist faction during the Civil War. However, it is worth noting that on the eve of the conflict a few writers did of-

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, *Two Vagabonds*, p. 279.

<sup>25</sup> Philips, *Meet the Spaniards*, pp. 91 & 106 108; Cameron-Gordon, *Spain As It Is*, p. 104.

<sup>26</sup> Lady Sheppard, *A Cottage in Majorca*, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon, *Two Vagabonds*, p. 279.

<sup>28</sup> Starkie, *Spanish Raggle Taggle*, pp. 97, 119 & 135.

fer very different interpretations. Whilst most travellers subscribed to the view proffered by the right which equated landed rights, tradition and heritage with the ability and duty to rule then at least some forwarded the concept favoured by the left whereby the forces of democratic freedom and equality were seen to be standing against the controlling forces of fascism and dictatorship. Writing of their travels in the months before the outbreak of civil war, Bernard Newman and Kate O'Brien were two who were more sympathetic to the aspirations of the recently elected Popular Front government. Whereas Charles Graves had been dismayed by the graffiti in Oviedo which proclaimed 'Death to the Legion!' and 'Death to the Civil Guard' for Newman it was an understandable reaction, for 'when your brothers and friends have been massacred, you do not lightly forget'.<sup>29</sup> Such diametrically opposing interpretations anticipated the direction of the propaganda of both sides during the coming war and heralded the respective stances of the *Daily Mail* and the *News Chronicle*, the newspapers to which the writers were attached. Articulating the position adopted by the mainstream-left, Newman denounced the notion that the Popular Front was communist dominated and declared that he was 'not concerned with Fascists or Communists' but was 'desperately anxious for that vast inarticulate body of Spaniards who want to go neither to the Right nor to the Left, but who, after standing still for so many centuries, want to go straight ahead'.<sup>30</sup> In the same way, O'Brien stated emphatically, 'I am not a Communist, but I believe in the Spanish Republic and its constitution'. In a chapter tellingly entitled 'No Pasarán', the author went on to condemn the Nationalist cause as 'the enemy of all that is individualistic, free and libertarian'.<sup>31</sup> For such writers, whilst the communist presence was anathema, egalitarianism as embodied in the Republic was laudable. The Popular Front represented an endeavour to emerge from the past, from the 'reactionary policy of previous regimes' and 'to build up Spain'. In July 1936 that endeavour was under threat from a reactionary alliance. The military's loss of privileges, the Church's loss of political power and the erosion of the feudal rights of 'the nobles and the rich', declared Newman, were the real causes of the military revolt.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Newman, *I Saw Spain*, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> Newman, *ibid.*, pp. 12, 294 & 304.

<sup>31</sup> O'Brien, *Farewell*, pp. 123, 150 & 222.

<sup>32</sup> Newman, *I Saw Spain*, p. 303.

The travel literature of the 1930s, then, reflected in some measure both the increase in interest in the Spanish political scene and the partisan positions that were taking shape. The plight of working-class peasants and industrial workers - low wages, feudal land-ties, poor accommodation and inadequate education - was recognised, at least by some travellers, in a political context. Most though continued to couch such observations in a fanciful vision of bucolic bliss and countenanced a 'natural order' which relied on the duty, ability and 'rights' of Spain's ruling classes. The position of travellers who complacently advanced the belief that 'the peasant recognises without rancour or envy the superiority of his overlord and accepts it with gratitude' is clear, and is one which would have been accepted without second-thought by the predominantly Tory readership of such literature.<sup>33</sup> For many travellers, government under the joint auspices of Primo de Rivera and Alfonso XIII was regarded as having been the model most suited to this ideal and best fitting to the Spanish temperament. The Republic, on the other hand, threatened the status quo. The impossible promises of reform ushered in after April 1931 had simply led to increasingly irrational demands from the expectant masses. For such writers, 'the vision of old Spain had faded ... into the light of common day when Alfonso was handed a single ticket and warned that he would be unlucky to miss the next train'.<sup>34</sup>

### **The British Right and the Shaping of Pro-Nationalist Interpretation.**

While references to the Spanish political scene in travel literature and in much of the popular media tended to be obscured by comic observations, at core they underscored the British right's view of the Republic and interpretation of the Civil War. However, a number of factors have meant that the voice of the right during these years has been somewhat eclipsed. During the Civil War the sheer volume of pro-Republic rhetoric - especially after the mainstream-left's early uncertainties regarding non-intervention were removed - far outweighed that of Nationalist sympathisers. This, together with the numerous predominantly pro-Republic humanitarian and aid appeals, and the even more loudly broadcast reaction and activities of the far-left seems to have had a greater and more positive effect on British public opinion at the time and on attitudes to the conflict since, not least in fictional repre-

<sup>33</sup> Duryea, *Mallorca the Magnificent*, pp. 154 & 156.

<sup>34</sup> Tomlinson, *South to Cadiz*, p. 33.

sentations, to which we shall return in a later chapter. Moreover, as Tom Buchanan has pointed out, there has been little attention paid to the attitudes of the right in historiography.<sup>35</sup> Simply, the effectiveness of the message of the left, the apparent fruition of its warnings with the outbreak of the Second World War, and the legend of a 'lost though glorious cause' have served to obscure the volume and vehemence of the views expressed by those commentators who advocated support for the Nationalist Movement. Their views can further be seen to have been made somewhat redundant by the mainstream-right's political response during the conflict, reaction rendered unnecessary by the stance adopted by the Conservative dominated National Government. As both Buchanan and Neville Thompson have demonstrated, Conservative back-benchers were generally content with the adopted policy of non-intervention, the more so when it became clear that the implementation of that policy favoured the insurgent forces.<sup>36</sup> With few exceptions Conservatives, both in and out of government, favoured the Nationalists throughout the war.<sup>37</sup> Those who opposed the parliamentary position, most notably the Duchess of Atholl and, later, Winston Churchill, did so not from ideological grounds but from growing fears of Germany's intent and a perceived threat to Empire interests. For most, though, the fear that the conflict might escalate into a European conflagration was reason enough to support non-intervention, and the dread that Spain would prove to be the springboard for Bolshevik expansion was sufficient to regard the Nationalists and their supporters as the most favourable alternative. As Kenneth Watkins has shown, the interests of those on the right were in the main served by supporting the Government's policy of appeasement.<sup>38</sup>

Nonetheless, a significant number of MPs on the Conservative right were more fervently vociferous in their support. Conservative members of the Foreign Affairs Committee which met on 15 July 1937, for instance, were noted to be 'passionately anti-(Spanish) Government and pro-Franco', and from the outset the

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<sup>35</sup> Buchanan, 'A Far Away Country?' fn.1, p. 2. Buchanan has gone some way to addressing this in *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*. The attitude of the right toward the Republic before the Civil War receives scant attention elsewhere, whilst responses to the conflict itself are limited to brief overviews within various broader analyses. For instance: Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-1939*; G.C. Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right, 1918-1939* (London & Sydney, 1986).

<sup>36</sup> Buchanan, 'A Far Away Country?', pp. 1-24; Neville Thompson, *The Anti -Appeasers*, Ch.6.

<sup>37</sup> Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler: British Politics and British Policy 1933-1940* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 266.

<sup>38</sup> K.W. Watkins, *Britain Divided*, pp. 94-95.

views of Tory MPs like the monarchist Sir Henry Page Croft, Alan Lennox-Boyd, Alfred Denville and Victor Cazlet were evident in the pages of the press.<sup>39</sup> Several, including Croft, R.T. Bower, Anthony Crossley, R.T. Eckersley and Harold Mitchell, claimed first-hand experience, having visited Nationalist territory where, typically, they were 'much impressed with the ordered civil government'.<sup>40</sup> Right-wing organs such as the *Morning Post*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Sunday Observer*, the journal *English Review*, and the 'Right Book Club', together with most of the Catholic press, further encouraged the most ardent voices of pro-Nationalist support, eagerly publishing the views and first-hand accounts of those Catholic and Conservative commentators who reported from behind the Nationalist lines. The strong Catholic lead of this body was further bolstered by support from other Christian denominations. Not surprisingly, the pro-fascist lobby, too, backed Franco. Here, while support was particularly strong among those who favoured the Italian model, several MPs who were outspoken admirers of Nazi Germany and members of the Anglo-German Fellowship were also actively pro-Nationalist.<sup>41</sup> Further support was found in an academe not as totally pro-Republic as often portrayed. If fewer in number than their pro-Republic counterparts, right-wing intellectuals such as university professors the Catholic and monarchist Robert Sencourt and Charles Sarolea, and the author Wyndham Lewis were equally as vocal in their anti-Republic convictions. The voice of this alliance, though most clamorous during the war, had been evident since the Republic's inception. Class attitudes mixed with a combination of pro-monarchism, pro-dictatorship, pro-fascism, and a signifi-

<sup>39</sup> Harold Nicholson, 'Diary', 15 July 1937, quoted in Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, pp. 262-263. Buchanan lists the following MPs as notably pro-Franco: Henry Page Croft, Anthony C. Crossley, Cpt.. Victor Cazalet, Cpt.. A.H.M. Ramsay, Wing-Comdr. James, Harold Mitchell, Patrick Donner, Sir Nairne Stewart Sandeman, Alfred Denville, Alan Lennox-Boyd, Sir Arnold Wilson, Charles Emmott, Henry Channon, George Balfour, Patrick Hannon & Alfred Knox. In addition to these, Mario Dominic Mazzerella, *The British Catholic Press and the Rise of Nazi Germany*, has identified R.T. Bower, N. Grattan-Doyle, David Logan & E. Wickham in the Commons and the Lords Strickland, Rankeillour and Denbigh in the House of Lords. Others include the Earl of Home, Lord Phillimore (chairman of the 'Friends of National Spain'; other members included Lennox-Boyd, Victor Cazalet, Alfred Denville, Grant-Ferris & Sandeman) J.H.F. McEwen (together with Ramsay, McEwen & Kerr, members of the United Christian Front) Viscount Wolmer, Viscount Castlereagh & Robert Grant-Ferris. Others who visited Nationalist Spain with Crossley and Mitchell in late 1936 are E.H. Keeling, P.R. Dunne & R.T. Eckersley. See also Simon Haxey, *Tory MP* (London, 1939).

<sup>40</sup> *The Times*, 'Letters to the Editor', 21 December 1936, following a visit to Salamanca and Toledo.

<sup>41</sup> Cmdr. R.T. Bower (Cleveland), Wg.. Cmdr.. A.W.H. James (Wellingborough), Maj. Gen. Sir Alfred Knox (Wycombe), all connected with the Anglo-German Fellowship. Sir Henry Page Croft (Bournemouth) & Cpt. A.H.M. Ramsay (Peeble & Southern), were contributors to the *Anglo-German Review* which regularly advocated Nazi policy and the benefits of dictatorship over democracy. See Haxey, *Tory MP*, pp. 205-208.

cant degree of self-interest fed a determined anti-Republic opinion throughout the period. The fears expressed in the Rio Tinto Mines 1936 annual report, for instance, had particular import for those Tory MPs, like Viscount Woolmer, Captain D.E. Wallace and Colonel Henry Guest who had direct and indirect commercial interests in Spain.<sup>42</sup>

By 1936, the platform from which the right could advance their position was already substantially in place. Throughout the 1930s commentators on the right added an edge to the convictions found in travel accounts and in popular media, and predicted that political instability in Spain after April 1931 was inevitable. They subscribed wholeheartedly to the view that removal of the 'iron hand' of Primo de Rivera and the enforced departure of Alfonso XIII, and their replacement by a Republican government, democratically elected or not, had allowed chaos back into Spanish politics. In Britain the initial reaction to the speed with which Spain's political landscape changed in the spring of 1931 was, as Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell later recalled, 'one of surprise'.<sup>43</sup> Certainly the Foreign Office was caught off guard. Advised by Ambassador George Grahame that the royalists would likely prevail, and by Arthur Wiggin, Whitehall's Spanish expert, that 'the spectre of republicanism [would] rally many elements to the monarchy' they were somewhat disconcerted by the outcome of the elections and the speed of subsequent events.<sup>44</sup> The shock created by the abrupt collapse of the monarchy was a theme very evident throughout the British press. *The Times*, for instance, found the 'breathless rapidity with which a Monarchy fifteen centuries old [had] been swept away ... nothing short of amazing'.<sup>45</sup> This sense of shock was particularly felt by one section of British society. As Mitchell continued, 'King Alfonso had been a frequent visitor to England and was popular personally. The Queen was a member of our own respected Royal Family. Primo de Rivera had ... been civil to British journalists and many Spanish aristos had personal relations with the corresponding classes in England'.<sup>46</sup>

From its inception, much of the British right anticipated the failure of the Second Re-

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<sup>42</sup> Haxey, *Tory MP*, pp. 108-110, lists Conservative Mps' familial connections with British concerns in Spain, most notably Rio Tinto Company and the Orconera Iron Ore Company.

<sup>43</sup> Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Grahame and Wiggin both quoted in Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality*, p. 60.

<sup>45</sup> *The Times*, editorial, 15 April 1931.

<sup>46</sup> Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, p. 27.

public. Spain had not appreciated the 'sad mess' of Republican institutions fifty-seven years ago so why should it now? reasoned Sir Sidney Low.<sup>47</sup> There was now a 'fearful menace of anarchy and chaos ... hang[ing] like a crimson shadow over once bright and sunny Spain,' declared an observer in the Catholic weekly, the *Tablet*.<sup>48</sup> The *Daily Mail*, whose predominantly middle-class readership profile was much the same as that of the travelogues, expressed particular dismay, a stance maintained unabated until the eventual fall of the Republic.<sup>49</sup> Were 'so great and proud a people as the Spaniards ... willing to take a step backwards in their political life?' worried a typical *Mail* editorial. Echoing the sentiments of travellers like Freston and Charles Graves the paper reminded readers that 'under the late Marquis de Estella Spain had made great progress. Public order was maintained. Bribery and corruption ... put down... . Roads built and industry flourished'. 'What [had] Spain to gain by becoming Republican?'<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in deposing the King the country had lost 'almost the only man ... who understood' Spain's chaotic 'political patchwork quilt'.<sup>51</sup> That a king so well respected in 'England' should be forced from his throne was barely comprehensible to the British right and to pro-monarchy Catholics, his manner of leaving the only aspect meriting praise.<sup>52</sup> Articulating the response of many on the right, the *Mail* dismissed the democratic choice of the Spanish people with the 'hope that they will attain prosperity by the ways that they themselves prefer'. That this was unlikely was made clear in an editorial which, in 1931, had obvious domestic connotations: 'It is not only in Spain that the victims of hard times are apt to think that the best way of restoring prosperity is not any irksome labour on their part but some quick and simple operation by somebody else in a Government Department'.<sup>53</sup>

According to observers, both before and during the war, this upheaval in Spanish politics could be explained, at least in part, by aspects of Spanish national charac-

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<sup>47</sup> Sir Sydney Low, *Daily Mail*, 18 April 1931.

<sup>48</sup> *Tablet*, 12 December, 1931.

<sup>49</sup> For detailed analysis of the *Daily Mail*'s readership see Tom Jeffery and Keith McClelland, 'A World fit to live in: the *Daily Mail* and the middle classes 1918-1939', in James Curran, Anthony Smith & Pauline Wingate, *Impacts and Influences* (London & New York, 1987), pp. 27-52.

<sup>50</sup> *Daily Mail*, editorial, 14 April 1931.

<sup>51</sup> G. Ward Price, *Daily Mail*, 15 April 1931.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. *Tablet*, 18 April 1931; Pro-monarchy sentiments were evident across the mainstream press with a general consensus that, in giving up his throne voluntarily, Alfonso acted with courage and wisdom to avoid bloodshed and civil war.

<sup>53</sup> *Daily Mail*, editorial, 15 April & 17 April 1931.

ter. Alfonso's fall from grace was the result of 'a curious twist of Spanish psychology that must remain obscure to foreigners', declared a *Times* editorial at the time.<sup>54</sup> Later, in their efforts to sully the idea of democracy in Spain, pro-Nationalist commentators adopted and developed the same tack. For example, Bernard Wall, Catholic intellectual and founder of the *Catholic Worker*, argued that it was innate qualities of independence and individualism which led 'Spaniards [to] revolt easily against laws, if they take any notice of them at all'.<sup>55</sup> Weak government encouraged such disregard. Other, seemingly contradictory, national characteristics accounted for the replacement of a strong effective government with a series of ineffectual ones under the Republic. '[I]n spite of their strong conservatism and traditionalism, they [Spaniards] are great procrastinators, unpunctual and as great lovers of change in some things as they are unchangeable in others', explained businessman Arthur Loveday. As one-time chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce in Madrid, Loveday felt qualified to conclude that it was 'this love of change that was perhaps the chief factor in bringing about the fall of the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera'. It was, he suggested, 'because Spaniards love change and become restless without it, even under prosperity' that the dictator's fall had been inevitable'.<sup>56</sup>

For many on the right, both inside and outside Spain, other Spanish characteristics had also been evident in the failure to establish a suitable government following the fall of the dictatorship. At the time, the settled nature of Primo de Rivera's period of rule was seen as having induced those Spanish characteristics of apathy and procrastination amongst royalist supporters which had resulted in the election of the Second Republic.<sup>57</sup> During the Civil War this was a notion taken up and extended. British commentators who condemned the failure of the ruling classes to 'discharge their social and political obligations' lauded Nationalist vigour in re-establishing the pattern of historic responsibilities.<sup>58</sup> The very nature of the Spaniard, commentators argued, demanded a strong lead, and in 1931 there had not been 'among the Spanish political classes ... any single group with a conscientious desire to play out the political game' or to continue 'the task, already well begun, of turning Spain into

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<sup>54</sup> *The Times*, editorial, 15 April 1931.

<sup>55</sup> Bernard Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards* (London, 1938) p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Arthur F Loveday, *World War in Spain* (London, 1939), p. 2 & pp. 26-27.

<sup>57</sup> Alvaro Alcalá Galiano, *The Fall of a Throne* (London, 1933), see Ch.8.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Sarolea, *Daylight on Spain: The Answer to the Duchess of Atholl* (London, 1938), p. 3; for Nationalist attitude see eg, Luís Bolín, *Spain: The Vital Years* (London, 1967) p. 60.



a new and efficient twentieth-century state'.<sup>59</sup> In an account of events from the dictatorship to the Civil War, the leading Hispanist of the day, E. Allison Peers, of Liverpool University, similarly warned of the consequences of weak leadership in the context of Spanish character. It was common knowledge amongst British travellers, he remarked, that Spanish workmen 'tend to follow individuals rather than principles'. The Spaniards, he expanded in a warning against federalism, 'have a passion for individualism, and when they attempt to co-operate do so badly or fail altogether'.<sup>60</sup> Peers' influential account ran to six editions between October 1936 and April 1937 and he has been hailed as 'the one dispassionate, reliable guide and mentor of the English-speaking world amidst a welter of confusing emotionalisms'.<sup>61</sup> However, although Peers purported to adopt a neutral stance - 'let us cease taking sides in the conflict and try to understand,' he pleaded - his analysis clearly deemed the Second Republic a failure and cast particular doubt on the legitimacy of the Popular Front government. It is not surprising that Peers' conclusion that the supporters of the Popular Front were 'violently impatient', while, on the other hand, the demands of the opposition were 'quite reasonable', was seized on by right-wing commentators as a means of justifying their own more overtly partisan conclusions.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly, Spanish character was not identified as the sole determinant of political change. Writing in 1933, Alvaro Alcalá Galiano, the Marqués de Castel Bravo, a correspondent for the monarchist Madrid newspaper *ABC* who was later to become a victim of political assassination, blamed self-serving politicians and a middle class envious of 'the privileges, royal splendour and the grandeur of the nobles'. These privileges, he contended, had wounded the 'vaguely democratic sentiments', of the 'Revolutionary Vanguard' of republicanism. Similarly, Spanish intellectuals were regarded as subversive elements, with universities seen as preaching republicanism, anti-clericalism and anti-monarchism, and encouraging Bolshevism. University professors, it was argued, had exercised a real influence over

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<sup>59</sup> Douglas Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure*, (London, 1937), p. 356.

<sup>60</sup> E. Allison Peers, *The Spanish Tragedy, 1930-1937: Dictatorship, Republic, Chaos, Rebellion, War* (New York, 1937, first published 1936), pp. 90, 116 & vii.

<sup>61</sup> William C. Atkinson, 'In Memoriam', 'Memorial Number, Bulletin of Hispanic Studies', 1953, No. 117, pp. 1-5, at p4, cited in Paul Preston & Ann L. Mackenzie, *The Republic Besieged*, p. iii.

<sup>62</sup> Peers, *Spanish Tragedy*, pp. 192 & 206. E.g. Francis Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle* (London, 1939), p. 292 asserts his belief that Peers was 'a supporter of the Nationalists'. Buchanan confirms this in 'A Far Away Country?'

youth, 'incessantly pass[ing] on new ideas with a social spirit that was anti-religious and iconoclastic'.<sup>63</sup> Ironically it was a professor of the University of Edinburgh, the monarchist Charles Sarolea, who, five years later was to repeat this view. Summing up the view of most contemporary right-wing commentators, Sarolea scornfully concluded, that 'like the Bolshevik Revolution, the Spanish Revolution of 1931 was the achievement of half a dozen intellectuals'.<sup>64</sup> To such a perspective other writers added the financial speculations of Jewish bankers, the machinations of Oriental Freemasonry and the intrigue of the Comintern. And finally, the Spanish left-wing press, freed from the censorship enforced under the dictatorship, were charged with having carried the message of dissent to a wider audience, so completing the call for 'revolution'. Overall the picture increasingly painted during the years before the military rebellion was one in which 'true Spain' was in danger of disintegrating. In the eyes of monarchist supporters at the time, 'religion, morality, family, property, rank, patriotism and respect for the past', those values so cherished in Britain's Tory heartland, had all become 'phantoms of the past'.<sup>65</sup> As the war escalated it was but a short step for right-wing sympathisers to associate the safe restitution of those values with the success of General Franco and the Nationalist movement.

For supporters of the Nationalists, then, the Spaniard's inherent 'desire for political change', seemingly justified by the actions of a 'farrago of jealous politicians', encouraged by cosmopolitan professors, exploited by the new bourgeoisie, fed by the left-wing press and the intrigues of dangerous foreigners, and manifested in the actions of revolutionary youth, had resulted in a government which challenged the values they held dear. Furthermore, they argued, it was a form of government unsuited to the Spanish temperament. If Spanish commentators like Alcála Galiano considered that 'the system of representative government ... which ... worked reasonably well in ... Anglo-Saxon countries' to be 'totally unsuited to the habits and mentality of Latin countries',<sup>66</sup> then British observers happily expanded the argument. Popular notions of the comic character of Spanish politics continued along-

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<sup>63</sup> Galiano, *The Fall of a Throne*, pp. 7, 169, 43 & 60; also, 'Anonymous' (Luís Bolín, Marquis del Moral & Douglas Jerrold), *The Dawn of the Republic: A Survey of two Years of Progress* (London, 1933), Ch. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Sarolea, *Daylight on Spain*, p. 99.

<sup>65</sup> Galiano, *The Fall of a Throne*, p. 61.

<sup>66</sup> Galiano, *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

side allusions to the dangerously chaotic nature of Spanish democracy. Recording the deposing of Alcalá Zamora from the presidency in April 1936, Peers observed, that 'as so often happens in Spanish politics, the proceedings, conceived with all proper dignity, were enlivened with a touch of unintended humour'.<sup>67</sup> In the same month, in an unofficial report to Stanley Baldwin, the historian and Conservative Party representative, Arthur Bryant, offered the conclusion that Spain was simply unsuited to democratic government and the Popular Front government was no more than a vehicle for communist subversion, a view Bryant expressed publicly in the *Sunday Observer* the week-end before the military rebellion.<sup>68</sup>

This was a theme maintained throughout the war with commentators regularly denouncing representative government in Spain as no more than a 'grotesque caricature of the British system of parliamentary government', and one totally unsuited to the 'aggressively individualistic temperament of the Spanish people'.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, it was claimed that the Spanish understood this themselves. According to *Daily Mail*'s Catholic and particularly partisan correspondents, William Foss and Cecil Gerahty, 'the ordinary Spaniard ... [was] *not* passionately attached to democracy'.<sup>70</sup> British commentators who held such views had little difficulty in sympathising with General Franco's condemnation of Spain's 'inorganic democracy'. For them the Decree of Unification on April 18 1937, which marked the final outcome of Franco's deliberations on the undesirability of party politics in Spain, was understood, at least in part, in terms of national character. As the Catholic intellectual, Arnold Lunn explained in terms resonant of *Chums or Boy's Own Paper* 'democracy is possible in England because the English play cricket, and they carry into practice the philosophy of cricket'. Democracy in 'England' was possible because of compromise and 'fair play'. Democracy for individualistic, uncompromising and irrational Spaniards simply 'degenerated into Red Revolution'.<sup>71</sup>

More worrying still for right-wing commentators, was the belief that inappropriate government and Spanish national character provided the ideal conditions for dan-

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<sup>67</sup> Peers, *Spanish Tragedy*, p. 200.

<sup>68</sup> Bryant cited in Douglas Little, 'Red Scare, 1936'; also Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p45 & 89; Arthur Bryant, *Observer*, 11 July 1936.

<sup>69</sup> Sarolea, *Daylight on Spain*, p42; Loveday, *World War in Spain*, pp. 27-29, 41 & passim

<sup>70</sup> William Foss & Cecil Gerharty, *The Spanish Arena* (London, 1938), p.16. Emphasis added.

<sup>71</sup> Arnold Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal* (London, 1937), p. 79.

gerous foreign influences. Commentators happily subscribed to the notion that 'Latin' nature lent itself to short-lived political unrest. However, under the Republic the innocent Spain that had always been 'content to pursue its happy, carefree way; have its occasional revolution, and then settle back to a period of calm,' had been violated by more ruthless forces.<sup>72</sup> Thus, political commentaries expanded the foreboding of those travellers who saw in the uprising in Asturias the 'Black Death' of Bolshevism.<sup>73</sup> 'Spain's bloodstained week-end', warned a *Daily Mail* editorial in October 1934, was but 'the latest exhibition of a Terror which has made the name of Russia a by-word among civilised nations'.<sup>74</sup> From the birth of the Republic references to the insidious influence of 'foreigners of disquieting aspect' had become standard. 'Agents of the Revolutionary International and emissaries from Moscow, ... financed by Jewish and Communistic gold', were seen to threaten the very existence of 'true Spain'.<sup>75</sup> Sections of the right, both in Britain and in Spain, subscribed to the notion of an international Jewish conspiracy intent on overthrowing the western world. During the Civil War such views were expanded in Nationalist propaganda - cheap editions of the spurious *Protocol of the Learned Elders of Zion* appearing in early 1937 - and were readily expounded by some British sympathisers.<sup>76</sup> Foss and Gerahty, for instance, barely qualified the anti-Semitic tone of their rhetoric - 'we must draw the distinction between Red Jews and White Jews' - to warn of the Jewish "inspiration" and "energy" behind the 'Spanish Revolution'.<sup>77</sup> The anti-Semitic tone of Nationalist propaganda which, for example, sought to persuade that 'an enormous part of the Catalan population is Jewish', even induced Priscilla Scott-Ellis - a British volunteer nurse serving in the Nationalist zone and whose own mother was half Jewish - to declare that it was the 'Jews [who had] sworn to have a European war this spring' [1939].<sup>78</sup>

<sup>72</sup> H. Edward Knoblauch, *Correspondent in Spain* (London & New York, 1937), pp. 1 & 130.

<sup>73</sup> Matt Marshall, *Tramp Royal in Spain*, p7; C Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 76-77. The analogy of the 'Black Death' was one frequently used. E.g. 'The Red Death which is spreading like the plague over modern Europe, is far more devastating than the Black Death of the fourteenth century': Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 245.

<sup>74</sup> *Daily Mail*, editorial, 8 October 1934.

<sup>75</sup> Galiano, *The Fall of a Throne*, p. 171.

<sup>76</sup> 'Domingo' (San Sebastián) 21 March 1937, cited in Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, 1977 edit.), pp. 760-761.

<sup>77</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 150.

<sup>78</sup> Scott-Ellis, (Raymond Carr, editor), *The Chances of Death: A Diary of the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 198-199.

This notion of foreign communist infiltrators was expanded. For example, Florence Farmborough, an avid Francoist who broadcast to English speaking countries for the National Broadcasting Station of Salamanca during 1938, was one who claimed to have recognised 'the insidious treachery and rapidly growing influence of the Red Agents of Soviet Russia' during the ten years she had lived in Valencia.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, 'the traffic of agitators, propaganda and ideas between Moscow and Barcelona' was a process which Arthur Loveday recalled having witnessed first-hand during the early 1920s. Naming, amongst others, Durutti, Maurin, Prieto and García Oliver, the writer declared acidly, that those 'agitators ... became big men behind the scenes after the revolution of 1931 and the open leaders after the victory of the Popular Front'.<sup>80</sup> That victory moved the *Daily Mail* to employ scare mongering hyperbole with a wider appeal, G. Ward Price reporting of 'Actress Agents' and 'Thousands in Soviet's Pay'.<sup>81</sup> During the weeks following the onset of war this was a view voiced by many leading figures of the right. For them the Franco-Soviet Pact, the presence of communists in the recently elected French Popular Front government, and France's early provision of material support to the Spanish government provided convincing evidence of a threatening Bolshevik expansion.<sup>82</sup> Feeding from such fears, vocal advocates of Franco's cause such as Bournemouth's MP, Henry Page Croft, warned that 'large numbers of agents imported from Moscow before the election took place' had organised the 'terror' in Spain which had proliferated since. Subscribing to the commonly advanced argument that the military rebellion had merely pre-empted a planned communist revolution, Croft remarked that 'the news that Moscow had organised a Bolshevist coup to take place by August 1 was widespread throughout business circles in Spain'. Such observations served both to justify the actions of the Spanish military as counter-revolutionary and, for appeasers like Croft, to endorse the British government's policy of Non-Intervention.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Florence Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain* (London, 1938), p. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, pp. 147-151; Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p. 98.

<sup>81</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 February 1936.

<sup>82</sup> See eg. Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-38* (Cambridge, 1988). For Spain see pp. 190-214.

<sup>83</sup> Sir Henry Page Croft, MP, *The Times*, 12 October 1936. E.g., Croft spoke at Friends of Nationalist Spain meetings - Queen's Hall 23 March 1938; Contributed to the Nationalist periodical *Spain* - 9 February 1939; and was prolific in the press letters columns, eg. *The Times*, 23 February 1937, 31 May 1937.

Demands for regional autonomy were likewise linked to foreign meddling. Commentators argued that weak Republican government had allowed separatist demands to flourish, especially in Catalonia, the Basque provinces and Galicia. In these areas, it was claimed, Soviet financed revolutionaries had actively encouraged the process in an endeavour to 'dislocate the old state' and 'disintegrate the existing order'.<sup>84</sup> Once again it was contended that aspects of Spanish character had made this possible. 'The volcanic element in the Spanish nature, the native insubordination of the people and their poverty, [had] made an obvious soil for the leaders of anarchism to throw their fatal seed'. Catalonia where 'poverty [was] associated with greed' was deemed to have been particularly fertile ground.<sup>85</sup> Notably, whilst the privations suffered by the Spanish working classes were seen as contributing to social unrest they were regarded as secondary to facets of national character. As the war escalated, Allison Peers warned that any legitimacy that Catalonia's claim to autonomy may have had had been hijacked by the revolutionary left. In Peers' opinion, the collapse of the military rebellion in Catalonia, meant that all that stood in the way of anarchist and communist revolutionary designs was the extent to which 'most Catalonians were ... wedded to the stupid bourgeois scheme of self-government.' This obstacle, Peers predicted, would soon be overcome.<sup>86</sup> Basque aspirations attracted similar condemnatory comment. Thus, when, in April 1937, *The Times'* correspondent George Lowther Steer famously reported that it had been Franco's forces which had bombed Guernica, pro-Nationalists dismissed his accusation as no more than the 'writing [of] a partisan of the Separatists'.<sup>87</sup> However, the pious and conservative Basques did not fit neatly into the right's standard imagery of 'rampaging reds' and, as we shall see later, representation of the Basque provinces created particular problems for British pro-Nationalist commentators.

The idea that the chaotic Spanish political scene could rapidly descend into anarchy and violent communist revolution was not new. British observers had long con-

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<sup>84</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 120: GM Godden, *Conflict in Spain 1920-1937: A Documented Record* (London, 1937), p. 37.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Sencourt, *Spain's Ordeal: A Documented Survey of Recent Events* (London, 1938), p. 29.

<sup>86</sup> Allison Peers, *Catalonia Infelix* (Westport, Connecticut, 1970, first published, 1938), pp. 248-249.

<sup>87</sup> Sencourt, *Spain's Ordeal*, p. 247. For biography of Steer, see Nicholas Rankin, *Telegram from Guernica: The Extraordinary Life of George Steer, War Correspondent* (London, 2003).

cluded, that Spain needed authoritarian rule and not perverted experiments in liberal democracy. Indeed, in 1874 the *Illustrated London News* had welcomed the demise of the short-lived First Republic rejoicing that 'the resistance of the ... Red Republican insurgents of Spain' and their 'preposterous exhibition of party strife' was 'now an affair of the past'.<sup>88</sup> Sixty years later, little seemed to have changed. So, for example, in 1933, the Anglo-Spanish co-authors of one account (sub-titled with heavy irony 'a survey of two years of progress'), voiced the view that in Spain 'people of moderate tendencies and simple minds' had forgotten the 'disastrous venture embarked on sixty years before'. 'It was not without reason,' they contended, 'that in idiomatic Spanish, the word Republic [had become] synonymous with chaos'.<sup>89</sup> Throughout the life of the Second Republic, and gathering especial momentum after the election of the Popular Front in February 1936, British right-wing political observers compared this 'chaos' with the 'mild and constructive Dictatorship' of Primo de Rivera. Their increasingly apocalyptic view of the Republic was one in which weak and fragmented government was encouraging revolutionary fervour and divisive separatist aspirations. Although the victory of the right-wing alliance in November 1933 had offered two years of 'comparatively sane' government, even this had failed to 'meet the difficulties confronting it'.<sup>90</sup>

These views were fundamental to the platform of British Nationalist sympathisers who were faced with justifying their support for the rebel forces who had unleashed a civil war. The argument ran that the Republic had failed, its promise of reform simply a case of words without deeds. Gradual paralysis of industry, increased unemployment, even the presence of street-beggars were all cited as evidence of failed reform. Strikes, riots and, most of all, the revolt in Asturias, and the street violence after February 1936, were proof of the breakdown of order. Unfortunately, the Spanish national character lent itself to such ferment. Observations that had been treated as an amusing diversion by British travellers were given a more forceful meaning by Nationalist sympathisers who saw them as contributory factors to Spain's dangerous descent into anarchy. Spain may have been 'content to pursue its happy, carefree Spanish individualism, love of change and tendency to procrastinate' but these aspects of national character provided a poor basis for

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<sup>88</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 28 February 1874.

<sup>89</sup> 'Anonymous', Bolín, Moral & Jerrold, *The Spanish Republic: A Survey*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>90</sup> Bolín, Moral & Jerrold, *ibid.*, p. 3; Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 166.

democratic government and offered fertile ground for radical discontent and for the machinations of insidious foreign agencies. Given these circumstances, a rebellion which sought to restore order and a respect for the traditional values of the 'true Spain' was justified. Simply, Franco offered a return to the form of government best suited to Spain and to the Spanish temperament.

### **Pro-Republic Interpretations.**

Whilst sections of the right vehemently expressed their misgivings at the new democratic Spain and went on to say 'I told you so' throughout the civil war, the birth of the Republic stimulated a more positive interest from the British left. Even here, though, initial response was sometimes moderated by mixed reaction to the downfall of Alfonso XIII. Nonetheless, the democratic election of a reforming government was welcomed as taking the first steps in bringing Spain into the modern world. In the following years, the growing efforts of Spain's reactionary forces to thwart this movement stimulated further interest in the Spanish political scene, most notably the crushing defeat of the parties of the left in November 1933 and the ruthless suppression of the Asturian uprising the following year. And, in February 1936, the election of the centre-left Popular Front put Spanish politics high on the British left's agenda, not only reviving hopes of progressive reform but also coming to symbolise a stand against the rise of European fascism. Although this was not a new interpretation of events in Spain - the association of the Republic with anti-fascism was one which had been developing for some time, particularly following the Lerroux / Robles coalition in November 1933 - it was one which came to be at the core of support for the Republic throughout the Civil War.

In arriving at the platform of anti-fascism, the British left offered very different interpretations of the issues which concerned supporters of the Alfonsine regime. In presenting those interpretations, however, they had first to overcome the British public's 'natural' bond with royalty. In contrast to the affection afforded to the departing monarchy, the new 'republican leaders were in general practically unknown' in Britain,<sup>91</sup> and, in overthrowing the comfortable symbols of the old order, their motives and intent were, at best, only vaguely understood. At the time, the response

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<sup>91</sup> Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, p. 27.



of those left-wing and liberal organs sympathetic to the new Republic was to emphasise what they saw as the fundamental differences between the two regimes. In typically vivid hyperbole, the communist *Daily Worker* heralded the formation of the Republic as a blow against the 'medieval state structure ... the old corrupt regime of church, army and bureaucracy'.<sup>92</sup> An editorial in the trades union organ, the *Daily Herald* was no less enthusiastic. That paper invited its readers to rejoice that Spain, having 'at last' rejected 'Don Alfonso's long fight to impose ... the political ideas of the eighteenth century', now had 'her chance to take her place among the free and progressive nations of Europe'.<sup>93</sup> The general perception advanced by the left at this time, and one much elaborated later, was of a new democratic Spain at last breaking free from the injustices imposed by the old feudal Spain. Moreover, the process of change had been set under way peacefully, 'no other, not excepting our own "glorious revolution" of 1689, (sic) having been conducted with more order or less bloodshed'.<sup>94</sup> However, despite shared enthusiasm for the establishment of a new Spain, left-wing responses to the fate of Alfonso were mixed. For some, the overthrowing of any monarchy created conflicts of attitude, and the British link through marriage to this royal family caused some commentators to temper their response. As recently as February 1931 the British born Queen Ena had received a resounding public welcome in London. Thus, although offering a cautious welcome to the new Republic, some on the left felt advised to ponder 'how long it will last nobody knows', a caution based on presumptions of an Iberian tendency to revolution. It was conceded, that 'as Kings go he [Alfonso] had quite a good reputation'. He was courageous, as proved by his reactions following an assassination attempt, and he was honourable, as shown by his 'creditable ... recognition of the will of the people'.<sup>95</sup> Others, however, were less complimentary. W.N. Ewer, writing in the *Herald*, for example, saw Alfonso as the 'Last of the Despots' whose rule during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in many ways 'imitated the régime of Mussolini'. Editorial in the same newspaper, anticipating the responses of the right, declared the king to have been the 'idol of reaction' and poured scorn on those 'superficial observers' who were now dutifully 'impressed by his ability, his astuteness, [and] his personal courage.'<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> *Daily Worker*, 15 April 1931.

<sup>93</sup> *Daily Herald*, 15 April 1931.

<sup>94</sup> *News Chronicle*, 17 April 1931.

<sup>95</sup> *Co-operative News*, 18 April 1931.

<sup>96</sup> *Daily Herald*, 15 April 1931.

For the left, then, despite some grudging acknowledgement of the King's personal qualities, the fall of Alfonso was presented as the final chapter in what was seen as the repressive partnership of the dictatorship and the crown. The achievements of that partnership, held by the British right as proof enough that such government was best suited to the temperament of the Spanish people, were discounted by left wing commentators in 1931 and were repeatedly dismissed by them throughout the Civil War. At that time a link was made between that dictatorship and other more ominous ones. Typically, it was held that Alfonso had 'ruined his chances' of becoming a 'good king' by handing government to the military dictatorship in 1923.<sup>97</sup> At best, Primo de Rivera had been a 'well-intentioned individual' who proved to be no more than a 'second edition of a questionable product', Mussolini.<sup>98</sup> The Anglican writer and Labour parliamentary candidate, Henry Brinton, was even less accommodating. The dictator's rule, he scornfully suggested, could be equated to that of the queen in *Alice in Wonderland*, his efforts to modernise Spain, extravagant and inefficient. The prime qualification of this 'pompous and long-winded muddler' had been to make 'the trains run on time', a service, Brinton caustically noted, which had been sufficient to make grateful British travellers who were blind to the social and political injustices suffered by Spanish people.<sup>99</sup> The dictatorship had served only to strengthen the power enjoyed by that triumvirate of the army, landowners and clergy. In an early Left Book Club response to the Civil War, American correspondents Gannes and Repard (Draper) summed the view developed by the left, claiming that under Primo de Rivera the army had become a 'great cancer upon the country, bartering the freedom of the people for the status quo in the commanding staff', the dictator had only gone 'through the motions' of agrarian reform and had 'leaned upon the Church as much as the Church [had] on him'.<sup>100</sup> It was this last relationship, argued the one time Labour MP, Leah Manning, which had done 'more than anything else to foster revolutionary sentiment' and demand for constitutional change.<sup>101</sup>

For most of the British left, then, Alfonso had been the manifestation of the old feu-

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<sup>97</sup> Henry Brinton, *Christianity and Spain* (London, 1937), pp. 18-19.

<sup>98</sup> Raymond Douglas, 'All Eyes on Spain', *The Millgate*, September 1936, Vol. XXXI, Pt. 11, No. 372, p. 672.

<sup>99</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 19.

<sup>100</sup> Harry Gannes & Theodore Repard (Draper), *Spain in Revolt*, pp. 216 & 231.

<sup>101</sup> Leah Manning, *What I Saw in Spain* (London, 1935), p. 26.

dal Spain and his fall offered hope of freedom and social progress for the long oppressed Spanish people. Early declarations of intended reform by the new government were greeted with optimism, not least the separation of the State from that symbol of Spanish reaction, the Church. Newspapers gleefully reported that priests had been warned 'not to meddle with politics'.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, the transfer of annuities previously paid to members of the royal family towards the relief of agricultural depression in Andalusia met with common approval.<sup>103</sup> The appointment of Victoria Kent as Director General of Prisons in Spain offered an opportunity to raise the profile of at least one Spanish politician and was thus lauded on three counts: her gender, her intentions and her British roots. The new government's courage in appointing a woman to such a high profile position was praised as evidence of the 'Transformation of Spain' whilst her plans to reform prison life so that prisoners could 'redeem themselves through work and ... self-help' and so 'become useful members of society' could not be faulted by socially minded commentators. However, what made Kent's appointment all the more interesting to British observers keen to find a member of the new government to whom their readers could relate, was the fact that Spain's first woman barrister was 'a Malaga girl of British descent'. This was an angle which Kent herself undoubtedly played on, announcing to her audience on one occasion that she had 'inherited from [her] Anglo-Saxon ancestors, earnestness, purpose, and energy in action', a declaration eagerly repeated in sections of the British press.<sup>104</sup>

Far, then, from the depressing picture painted by the right, of a government which having usurped firm rule and the steadying hand of a monarch was altogether incapable of maintaining order let alone implementing reform, the British left saw the new Republic and its programme of reform as a much needed challenge to the Spanish forces of reaction. At the time of the abdication the continued threat of these forces was at least recognised by some. The *Daily Worker*, for instance, warned that Spain was still 'dominated by parasitical castes of the feudal type'.<sup>105</sup> During the ensuing years of the Republic, just as the right attributed social unrest and ineffective reform to the failings of 'decrepit politicians', the invidious influence of

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<sup>102</sup> *Daily Herald*, 18 April, 1931; *News Chronicle*, 17 April 1931.

<sup>103</sup> *Co-operative News*, 25 April, 1931.

<sup>104</sup> *News Chronicle*, 18 April, 1931; *Co-operative News*, 25 April 1931.

<sup>105</sup> *Daily Worker*, 15 April 1931.

liberal intellectuals, and the ambitions of the new bourgeoisie, the left increasingly identified the power still wielded by the Church, army and large landowners as the principal obstruction to legitimate progress. Although during the Civil War this platform gave way to anti-fascism as the left's main line of attack, it nonetheless remained a key element for many observers whose sympathies lay with the Republic. Commentators like Brinton argued that during the *bienio* (the period between April 1931 and November 1933) the new government's programme of reforms had been obstructed by the resistance of the Church and the great landlords. Free and compulsory secular education, reorganisation of the judiciary, the separation of the Church from the State, efforts at agrarian reform and land resettlement, and the granting of limited autonomy to Catalonia were all measures of good intent which were less than successful in implementation. The reason for this, observers explained during the war, was over cautious government in the face of the powerful opposition of vested interests. The 'feudal layer' had long been 'pulling the rest down, throttling free industrial development, the past asphyxiating the future'.<sup>106</sup> The 'Old Régime' had obstructed the Republic in the Cortes, condemned it through Church propaganda and in August 1932, in the person of General Sanjurjo, had swung briefly into open insurrection, explained the Marxist and *Manchester Guardian* correspondent, Frank Jellinek.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, sympathisers pointed out, success in the November 1933 elections had enabled the CEDA dominated right to unleash reactionary policies which effectively revised previous religious legislation and emasculated labour and agrarian reforms.<sup>108</sup> Whilst anti-fascism was to become the foremost rallying call of the left, the notion of a 'war between the grantees and the people' was to remain essential in identifying the interests of those bodies with interventionist foreign fascism.<sup>109</sup>

However, during the early years of the Republic any continued British interest in events was generally limited to reports of strikes, civil unrest and church-burning events which, as we have seen, the British right and pro-monarchy sympathisers seized upon to demonstrate the failings of Spanish democracy and the invidious influence of communism. The left's response was to argue that the extent of such

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<sup>106</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, p. 203.

<sup>107</sup> Frank Jellinek, *The Civil War in Spain* (London, 1938), p. 134.

<sup>108</sup> E.g. Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 20.

<sup>109</sup> Frank Ryan (editor), *XV International Brigade*, p. 258.

actions was greatly exaggerated in the first place, that some unrest was hardly surprising in the circumstances, and that any there was was linked rather to Spanish character and tradition than to foreign ideology. Returning to Spain in March 1932 Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell was one who was somewhat perplexed that conditions were not as portrayed in the British press.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, the American Ambassador to Spain, the pro-Republican but anti-communist, and self-styled 'Jeffersonian democrat', Claude Bowers, recalled that 'nothing more serious than a waiters' strike was sufficient to induce the London newspapers to write of a 'day of terror'.<sup>111</sup> The increase in the number of strikes in the years before the war, loyalist sympathisers later contended, had anyway been no more than a manifestation of a 'labour movement [that] was beginning to prosper and to demand a place in the sun'.<sup>112</sup> Those labelled 'revolutionaries' contended American expatriate Eliot Paul, would have been the 'first to join ranks with General George Washington'. For such men, he argued, the Republic aspired only to that which any 'American patriot' would demand: 'freedom of thought and expression, freedom of action within reasonable social limits, separation of church and state, re-division of idle land, abolition of special privilege and the poor old brotherhood of man - nothing more'.<sup>113</sup> Given the level of poverty, illiteracy and near starvation long endured by the Spanish people some expression of discontent had been inevitable. To this reasoning pro-Republic commentators added their own interpretation of volatile Spanish politics. In Spain outbreaks of 'civil strife were the legacy of established practice'.<sup>114</sup> Spanish reactions, it was explained, were quite distinct from those which might be expected in Britain. 'In Spain "order" was a comparative word' and 'lawlessness and bloodshed' were no more than 'symptoms of the disease of ... a feudal state society'.<sup>115</sup>

The threat of 'red revolution' and a communist domination of Spain, dismissed before the onset of war, was vigorously discounted after the military rebellion. For one thing, it was argued, Spanish individualism meant that communism could not

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<sup>110</sup> Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, p. 35.

<sup>111</sup> Claude Bowers, *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (London, 1954), pp. vi & 58. Bowers was US Ambassador to Spain from 1933-1939.

<sup>112</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, p. 57.

<sup>113</sup> Elliot Paul, *The Life and Death of a Spanish Town* (New York, 1942, first published 1937) pp. 47-48 & 22-23.

<sup>114</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 17.

<sup>115</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 22.

'take root in Spain'.<sup>116</sup> Writing of the first months of the conflict, Mitchell declared that none of the perversions of fact that have left Spain was more fantastic than that "Malaga was in the hands of the Communists"<sup>117</sup> At the time of the military rebellion the Spanish Communist Party had only 50,000 members, Geoffrey Brereton, sometime correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*, *Daily Herald*, and *New Statesman*, pointed out, and was, therefore, simply 'quite incapable of planning or even contemplating a revolution'.<sup>118</sup> Atholl, whilst suggesting 83,000 members, called attention to the fact that in the February elections Communists had been returned in only 16 of the 473 seats of the Cortes.<sup>119</sup> The notion 'of a 'Moscow menace' was, in these circumstances, no more than the re-surfacing of a 'favourite red-herring' of the right. Moreover, the communists had supported the Government against the rebels, a cause almost lost at the beginning owing to a shortage of arms. Surely, argued observers like Brinton, if revolution had been planned it would have been better prepared. Clearly it had been the military and not the Spanish communists who had made ready for an uprising.<sup>120</sup>

It followed, such commentators argued, that it was 'ludicrous to speak ... of Spain being under Communist domination', rather, it was the doctrine of anarchism that was 'the type of left extremism ... most congenial to Spain'.<sup>121</sup> 'By temperament and tradition' the Spanish were 'strongly individualist', and 'it was probably this trait which had brought the Spanish working classes so deeply under the spell of Bakunin'.<sup>122</sup> Poverty and despair had served only to exacerbate this 'natural tendency'.<sup>123</sup> An anarchist workers' movement had indeed been in existence in Spain since 1869, but in Britain anarchism was little understood and Spanish anarchists were seen only in a mix of slightly comic, slightly threatening, but distinctly 'foreign',

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<sup>116</sup> Bowers, *My Mission to Spain*, p. 317.

<sup>117</sup> Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, *My Fill of Days* (London, 1937), p. 389.

<sup>118</sup> Geoffrey Brereton, *Inside Spain* (London, 1938), p. 155.

<sup>119</sup> Duchess of Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* (London, 1938), pp. 74-76 in a chapter devoted to 'The Alleged Communist Plot'. Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, fn. 4 p. 9, citing Miguel Maura ( 'El Sol' , 18 June 1936) suggests membership of 130,000 in June 1936. Brennan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, calls this an 'absurd exaggeration' and suggests that the figure of 3,000 card carrying members as given by General WG Krivitsky, ( 'I Was Stalin's Agent', 1939 ) was more accurate.

<sup>120</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>121</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, pp. 75 & 76.

<sup>122</sup> Manning, *What I Saw in Spain*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>123</sup> *The Millgate*, May 1937, Vol. XXII, Pt.2, No.380, p. 454.

stereotypical images.<sup>124</sup> This is perhaps not surprising for, as Chris Ealham has succinctly stated, ‘there was no single “anarchist spirit” and Spanish Anarchism was as convoluted as it was kaleidoscopic’.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, fiction both informed audiences that Spanish idealism loaned itself to anarchist doctrines and typically depicted anarchists as ‘ravenous wolves in human guise’.<sup>126</sup> As Brereton, and others like him realised, British readers were ‘determined to think of an Anarchist as a desperado with a bomb in his pocket’.<sup>127</sup> However, despite this realisation, and in some cases an endeavour to correct misconceptions, commentators continued to reinforce the popular view. Spaniards were ‘naturally’ inclined to acts of anarchic violence and the rebellion had simply aroused Latin passions. Typically, the hotelier Nancy Johnstone, who was more sympathetic to the Spanish way of life than most observers, decided, that whilst ‘the same happenings in London would fill one with horror ... somehow hot-blooded killings in street battles do not seem so appalling in Spain’. Even amidst the killing, she wryly observed, there existed a ‘mad chivalry’. Two hour breaks in fighting during the morning and evening, she reasoned, were agreed simply because Spaniards realised that ‘man must eat and women must do the shopping’.<sup>128</sup>

The commonly promoted contention of the right that agents of ‘French liberalism and Russian Marxism had ... beguiled Spain’ and fomented unrest among the ‘ignorant’ peasants and workers,<sup>129</sup> was also energetically rebutted by observers sympathetic to the Republic. Confidently, Paul declared that the ‘Spanish Reds’ of his acquaintance had ‘scarcely heard of Moscow, [and] had never slit a throat’.<sup>130</sup> Contrary to the alarmist proclamations of the right, it was not Soviet and French agitators who were responsible for the social unrest and outbreaks of violence occurring in Spain, rather, it was the series of right-wing plots, from the failed Sanjurjo coup-d’etat of August 1932 to the ‘more subtle, crafty and cunning’ political manoeuvres of ‘shrewd rightist leaders... to facilitate fascism’, as manifest in Gil Robles’

<sup>124</sup> See for example, Haia Shpayer-Makov, ‘A traitor to his class: the anarchist in British fiction’, *Journal of European Studies*, Vol.26, Pt.3, No.103, Sept. 1996, pp. 299-325.

<sup>125</sup> Chris Ealham, “From the Summit to the Abyss”: The Contradictions of Individualism and Collectivism in Spanish Anarchism’, in Preston & Mackenzie (editors), *The Republic Besieged*, p. 157.

<sup>126</sup> Wheatley, *The Golden Spaniard*, pp. 25, 133.

<sup>127</sup> Geoffrey Brereton, *Inside Spain* (London, 1938), p. 73.

<sup>128</sup> Johnstone, *Hotel in Spain*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>129</sup> Sencourt, *Spain’s Ordeal*, p. 31.

<sup>130</sup> Paul, *The Life and Death of a Spanish Town*, p. 23.

CEDA.<sup>131</sup> Nor, in the view of pro-Republic commentators, were such machinations limited to internal Spanish interests. Dismissing the 'usual Russian communist plot propaganda', they purported that it had been German agents who had been involved in gun-running and who had been in 'intimate contact' with the Nationalist Generals, Goded and Millán Astray, well before the outbreak of war. Since 1934, representatives of the 'old traditional obstacles to reform' had maintained a close liaison with both Germany and Italy.<sup>132</sup> This was a message which also alerted some on the British right. From the early months of the war the Duchess of Atholl identified Germany as the source of agitation. Staunchly anti-communist she nonetheless determined that the greater threat to Spain, and ultimately to British Empire interests, lay in the fascist powers. Germany, she purported, had previously meddled in Spanish industrial relations during the Great War. Even before Hitler's rise to power, she contended, a branch of the German National Socialist Party had been actively engaged in smuggling propaganda and in influencing the politicians and the press of the right.<sup>133</sup> During the civil war such a standpoint was understandable, given the continued flaunting of the terms of non-intervention by the fascist states. However, whilst Gil Robles was undoubtedly influenced by his attendance at the 1933 Nuremberg rally, and although the Catholic press were clearly impressed by the Nazi demolition of the left in Germany, the largest number of Germans in Spain during the years following Hitler's rise to power were in fact left-wing political refugees from that country. Nonetheless, the speed with which Mussolini and Hitler provided material and personnel to the Nationalist cause in the summer of 1936 seemed to make the claims of prior collusion at least as credible as the charges of Russian communist agitation made by the British right.

For many pro-Republic commentators the connection between Italy and Germany and the Spanish right was one particularly associated with the Lerroux / Robles government. 1934 was identified as the year when 'the disloyal generals and the archbishops ... decided to let the army rule, and Hitler and Mussolini had offered

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<sup>131</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>132</sup> Geoffrey T. Garratt, *The Shadow of the Swastika* (London, 1938), pp. 182-183; also eg. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain*, p. 74 details visits made by reactionary politicians to Italy and Germany, notably the monarchist, Antonio Goicoechea's meeting with Mussolini and the founder of the Spanish Falange, José Primo de Rivera's visit to Berlin.

<sup>133</sup> Duchess of Atholl, *Searchlight*, pp. 34-35. Bowers, (*My Mission*, p. 177) also noted the number of articles in sections of the Spanish press which 'glorified' Hitler.



them support'.<sup>134</sup> The appointment of three members of the CEDA to key ministerial posts on October 3 that year seemed to the left to be the first step towards the imposition of fascism. Already reeling under the regressive measures of the Lerrox government, leaders of the Spanish left denounced the move and called for a general strike. Intended as a peaceful warning of popular discontent this response faltered rapidly as the government imposed martial law. Although there was a more determined protest in Barcelona, where Companys proclaimed Catalonia as an independent state 'within the Federal Republic of Spain', the much heralded revolt against the fascist threat met with total and rapid failure except in the province of Asturias.<sup>135</sup> In Britain the lefts' responses to these events were mixed. For the editor of the *Co-operative News*, the primary significance of the unrest in Spain was that it 'brought anxious hours to the CWS representative arranging for the season's supply of raisins'.<sup>136</sup> More typically, the liberal and left press hailed Spanish 'organised labour' as the 'standard bearer of civil and political liberties' and saw events as a struggle to prevent free democracy from 'lap[sing], like Italy, Germany and Austria into fascism'.<sup>137</sup> The brevity of the struggle was met with dismay and foreboding. The early capitulation of Companys was declared by the *News Chronicle* editorial to be 'The Tragedy of Spain', 'the big guns ... hav[ing] won once more'. Readers of the *Herald* were informed that 'Spain [was] in Agony', the fascists having 'plunged a peaceful country in blood'.<sup>138</sup> In the same newspaper the message was made even more immediate through a Dyson cartoon captioned 'Putting the Clock Back' and depicting bloated military and clerical figures forcing the hands of a clock back to the sixteenth century.<sup>139</sup>

Press interest, however, was short-lived. The brutal suppression of the Asturian

<sup>134</sup> Paul, *Life and Death of a Spanish Town*, p. 186.

<sup>135</sup> For the best detailed contemporary accounts see Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, Ch.III, and Manning, *What I Saw in Spain*; see also, Adrian Shubert, 'The Asturian Revolution of 1934', in Paul Preston (editor), *Revolution and War in Spain*, pp. 111-136. Nb. Asturias had been noted for strike action throughout the Republic, with the highest number of actions in the country during 1932 and second highest in 1933. However, only one of these previous strikes had been politically motivated compared to eight during the first nine months of 1934, an indication of the hardening attitude that year. See George Eisenwein & Adrian Shubert, *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context* (Harlow, 1995) pp. 82-83.

<sup>136</sup> *Co-operative News*, 27 October 1934.

<sup>137</sup> W Horsfall Carter, *News Chronicle*, 8 October 1934; *Daily Herald*, editorial, 'The Republic at Bay', 6 October 1934.

<sup>138</sup> *News Chronicle*, editorial, 'The Tragedy of Spain', 8 October 1934; *Daily Herald*, editorial, 'Spain in Agony', 9 October 1934.

<sup>139</sup> Dyson, *Daily Herald*, 9 October 1934.

miners by Foreign Legionaries and Moorish troops drew surprisingly little attention. Once again media interest in events in Spain waned almost as soon as it arose. Newsreel coverage was limited to one release by *Universal News*, a report on the rising in Asturias concocted entirely from stock-shot footage which was confined to the 'News in Brief' summary.<sup>140</sup> In the press, just two days into the rising, reports of the assassination in Marseilles of King Alexander of Yugoslavia removed the situation in Spain to the inside pages. In a lament that would later become common, one commentator remarked that 'it is a tragedy that Spain is just far enough away from England for the sufferings of her people to be too easily forgotten'.<sup>141</sup> A handful of observers did endeavour to arouse greater interest. A party of MPs, including Labour's Ellen Wilkinson, visited the province in November 1934. Though given short shrift by the Spanish authorities and subsequently censured for her unauthorised action by the National Executive, Wilkinson was nevertheless loud in her condemnation of the actions of the Spanish army and the victimisation of the Asturian miners and left-wing journalists.<sup>142</sup> As part of an official delegation, another Labour activist, Leah Manning, made even more extensive observations, refuting reports of supposed Asturian rebel atrocities whilst denouncing the excesses of the 'mercenary' Foreign Legion and 'bloodthirsty' Moors.<sup>143</sup> In the Asturian rising, she contended, 'organised workers' had fought 'for economic freedom and liberty of conscience' and against 'a savage capitalist system reinforced by the iron hand of the Church'.<sup>144</sup>

As Kenneth Watkins has suggested, it was the events in Spain in October 1934, which 'brought home and highlighted the Spanish situation for politically interested sections of the British people'.<sup>145</sup> The British right saw the Asturias rising as a communist inspired outbreak of Spanish fanaticism and enough to confirm their worst nightmare, a repeat of the Russian Bolshevik revolution in Spain. Unsubstantiated, reports of atrocities, the immolation of priests and rape of nuns acted both as evi-

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<sup>140</sup> Anthony Aldgate, *British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 95.

<sup>141</sup> D.N. Pritt introduction to Manning, *What I Saw in Spain*, p. 9.

<sup>142</sup> Betty D. Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson, 1891-1947* (London, 1982), pp. 162-163.

<sup>143</sup> Manning, *What I Saw in Spain*, pp. 96-97 & passim.

<sup>144</sup> Manning, *ibid.*, p20-21. Manning reported of some 2,000 executions and as many as 38,000 imprisonments, p140. According to Hugh Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, pp. 143-144, the best estimates suggest that some 1,500-2,000 people were killed (including c320 from government forces), and perhaps as many as 30,000 were imprisoned.

<sup>145</sup> Watkins, *Britain Divided*, p. 25.

dence of this and to set a pattern which, as we shall see, would be applied in explanation of later events. For the left, the rising was the latest and most heroic manifestation of the struggle of the Spanish working classes against agrarian-clerical reaction and fascism. Here, it was the employment of Spain's colonial Army of Africa in the 'pacification' of a civilian population which was condemned both for its use of the 'infidel Moor' and for its excessive brutality. During the coming months the courage displayed by the Asturian miners was made legend by left-wing observers and correspondents who sought to link their 'blood and dynamite' actions to the past.<sup>146</sup> It was claimed that as far back as the Roman conquest and the Moorish invasion' the Asturian people had been noted for their bravery. Significantly, it was pointed out that Asturias was 'that one sacred corner of Spain where the Crescent had never flown'.<sup>147</sup> From there the reconquest of Spain had begun twelve centuries before, now, with tragic irony, a right-wing Spanish government was encouraging the Moors to take their revenge.<sup>148</sup> As will be shown in the following chapters, for pro-Republic observers during the Civil War these were elements on which to build. The miners of Asturias had been heroic in the defence of their independence, the fundamental rights for which they had fought could only be regarded as reasonable by any fair-minded person, and they had been subjugated only by the collusion of Spain's reactionary forces with the nation's traditional enemy.

However, even commentators passionate in their support of the Republic, revealed many of the cultural assumptions which coloured the British understanding of events. Manning, for instance, confessed to possessing 'several preconceived notions of Spain'. Novels, plays and schooldays history, she admitted, had led her to expect a land of afternoon sunshine, orange groves, and bullfights ... languorous ladies in mantillas and shawls ... fierce gypsy-girls ... [with] stilettos in their garters. ... a Spain that specialised in torture and inquisitions and *autos-da-fé*'. If experience led her to conclude that of such expectations only ideas of the Spaniard's 'taste for torture and inquisition' remained intact, Manning nonetheless continued to employ stereotypical references as a means of explaining the Spanish political scene.<sup>149</sup> She repeated the common view that it was the traditional individualism of

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<sup>146</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 173.

<sup>147</sup> Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 288.

<sup>148</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 179.

<sup>149</sup> Manning, *What I Saw in Spain*, pp. 20-21.

the Spaniard which accounted for the influence of the anarchist ideal on the Spanish working classes. Similarly, as she cogitated as to whether a Madrid waiter might be a pro-monarchist or 'an anarchist with a bomb under his napkin' she simply decided that it was 'dreadfully difficult to distinguish between them in Spain'.<sup>150</sup> Such conclusions were not isolated and would have done little to encourage British readers to abandon long held stereotypical impressions.

However successful supporters or opponents of the Second Republic were in gaining sympathy for their respective positions, their repeated recourse to type-cast images of Spain and her people served only to distance events. Explanations of the Spanish political landscape struggled to overcome preconceived notions. The impression encouraged by travellers like Charles Graves, of a country 'two hundred years behind the rest of the world', if extreme, was one replicated even in accounts of those political observers whose sympathy lay with the Republic.<sup>151</sup> Repeated references to Spain's feudal hangover may have been intended to emphasise that the new Spain represented no more than the reasonable aspirations of ordinary workers, aspirations any 'Englishman' would take for granted or, indeed, any 'American patriot would demand', but they also strengthened the view that Spain was essentially different to Britain. Efforts to legitimise expressions of public disorder, whether they be industrial actions or rural disturbances, political demonstrations or church-burnings, or indeed the risings of October 1934, had the same effect. Sympathetic reporting was tempered by the understanding that while 'in England four assassinations would be front page; in Spain they were no novelty'.<sup>152</sup> Spanish peasants may have been moved to action by their hopes of 'the Spain that might be' but outbreaks of anti-clericalism and civil strife could also be explained in terms of traditional practice and the Spaniard's anarchic disposition. Observations like these served to weaken the left's portrait of the Republic as a legitimate and unthreatening, reasoned and modernising body determined only to bring Spain into the twentieth century. The events of July and August 1936 made this position even less tenable. For most of the British public the prevailing perception of the Spanish political scene remained one of a tendency toward chaotic government, of wild strike action and street violence, and of

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<sup>150</sup> Manning, *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41 & 32.

<sup>151</sup> Charles Graves, *Trip-tyque*, p. 219.

<sup>152</sup> Newman, *I Saw Spain*, p. 193.

shadowy anarchic assassins, an impression which, in July 1936, lent itself more to the foreboding of the right than to the optimism of the left.

## Chapter 5

### PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE SPANISH CHURCH DURING THE SECOND REPUBLIC

A core element of British popular perceptions of Spain, and one which informed British interpretations of events from the very birth of the Republic, was the nature of the Spanish Church; what it was perceived as representing, its relationship with the new regime, the sentiments it engendered amongst its flock, and the position it took during the Civil War. The Republic's early programme of secularising reform was most commonly seen by British conservative commentators as undermining the established hierarchy and creating a licence for debauchery, prostitution and pornography. For their more liberal counterparts the reforms simply represented a welcome and long overdue increase in personal freedom for ordinary Spanish people. The Spanish Church was portrayed, on the one hand, as the bedrock of tradition, a foundation of education and an essential component of Spanish life, its architectural and art treasures a heritage of all that was great in Spain. On the other hand, it was depicted as a reactionary force which had long milked the lifeblood of the workers whilst suppressing their least ambitions, its treasures no more than a constant reminder of this. Throughout the life of the Republic reports of anti-clerical activity were a focus of interest amongst British observers. The wave of church-burning which followed the military rebellion and the murder during the civil war of almost 7,000 members of the clergy in the Republican zone ensured that this was an issue which dominated early press reports and figured throughout the war in the partisan accounts of commentators.<sup>1</sup> Anti-clericalism became either evidence of 'red' inspired atheism or a 'natural' response to the pervasive and repressive influence of the Church. During the war, as both sides struggled to claim the right to label their cause a 'crusade', once again, British commentators sought to advance their argument by reference to preformed notions of the role of the Church in Spain.

Here, though, a number of domestic factors also influenced the various stances adopted by British commentators during the war. The mainstream left, for instance,

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (London, 1993 edition) p. 93, gives a figure of 6,832 members of the clergy and religious orders as murdered or executed during the war.

had to endeavour to interpret events in a way which might satisfy its Catholic constituency, a seemingly impossible task given the widespread reporting of anti-clerical outrages occurring in the Republican zone. Pro-Nationalists, on the other hand, were faced with the problem of how to overcome the disquiet felt at the Spanish Church's support for a rebellion against a democratically elected government. In the religious communities response varied. Whilst the Church of England sought to remain impartial - with Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury and close friend of Neville Chamberlain constant in his support of non-intervention - some elements endeavoured to swing opinion to one side or the other.<sup>2</sup> Two cross-denomination deputations reported extensively and favourably from the Republican zone in early 1937 but many in the Church of England and in the Free Churches voiced similar support for Franco, especially in the press. For instance, Arnold Lunn's father, Sir Henry Lunn, a Methodist, and a key figure in the travel industry, joined forces with Tory MPs, notably Captain A.H.M. Ramsay and Henry Page Croft, to found the pro-Nationalist, United Christian Front, and frequently voiced anti-Republican sentiment in letters to *The Times*.<sup>3</sup>

It was amongst the British Catholic community, however, that the position of the Spanish Church carried most resonance. As Douglas Woodruff, editor of the Catholic weekly the *Tablet*, later recalled, 'from a Catholic point of view the Spanish Civil War was fundamentally about religion'.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the war, Catholic commentators such as Bernard Wall, convert, Arnold Lunn, and Douglas Jerrold were particularly outspoken in their support of the Nationalists, Wall so enamoured with the cause that he named his eldest daughter Alcázar in commemoration of the siege of Toledo.<sup>5</sup> Equally ardent were a number of Catholic Tory MPs.<sup>6</sup> For the most part the Catholic clergy were in accord, any doubts regarding the Nationalist régime secondary to the perception of Franco as the defender of the faith and a stalwart against communism. This was the view which was generally reflected in the Catholic press. The *Tablet*, the *Universe* and the *Colosseum* were, with minor

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Buchanan, *Britain & the Spanish Civil War*, Ch. 7.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. *The Times*, 31 May 1937; 23 June 1937; 23 July 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Benny Morris, *Roots of Appeasement*, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Wall, 'Colosseum', December 1936, cited in Mazzarella, *The British Catholic Press and the Rise of Nazi Germany, 1933-1940*, p. 131

<sup>6</sup> MPs RT Bower, A Crossley, Alfred Denville, Patrick Hannon, N Grattan-Doyle, David Logan & E. Wickham, together with Lords Strickland, Rankeillour and Denbigh, cited in Mazzarella, *ibid.*, p. 92.

reservations, particularly pro-Nationalist from the outset. After initial equivocations regarding the legitimacy of a military revolt the *Catholic Herald*, too, decided that Franco represented the best interests of the Spanish Church. There was some dissent. The Dominican journal *Blackfriars*, for instance, condemned the Spanish Church's neglect of working-class rights and the Nationalist Movement's association with fascism. However, by August 1938 even this periodical had joined the consensus which saw the Nationalists as fighting a just war for the restoration of religious freedom.<sup>7</sup> For the Catholic hierarchy and its organs, the consensus was that Franco represented the best option for the Spanish Church. Responses among the Catholic flock, however, were mixed. Support for Franco was most vocal among middle and upper-class Catholics, with the body of the working class displaying much more ambivalence. Responses, then varied, from those who favoured the Nationalist cause, through the many who simply decided that Franco was preferable to the alternative, to those who determined to remain neutral. Although, during the war, hostility to the Republic was widespread amongst British working-class Catholics, aversion to the Republic, despite the best efforts of the hierarchy, did not necessarily translate into support for the Nationalists.<sup>8</sup>

### **Pro-Nationalist Interpretations of the Church's Role in Spain.**

Responses to the Civil War amongst British Catholics were, in fact, coloured by a number of issues. Before the rebellion, those who had any interest in Spanish politics generally subscribed to the view that conditions in Spain were unsuited to parliamentary democracy and were in accord with the idea of an authoritarian state which embodied Catholic social principles. The wave of anti-clerical violence of May 1931 had shocked Catholic circles in Britain and had served to generate dark suspicions of government links with atheistic communism.<sup>9</sup> Hopes, during the Second Republic, lay with restoration of the monarchy and with the possibility of a new

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<sup>7</sup> Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 182.

<sup>8</sup> For analyses of British Catholic responses see e.g. Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, Ch.7, pp. 169-188, also *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, Ch. 5, pp. 167-195; Joan Keating, 'Looking to Europe: Roman Catholics and Christian Democracy in 1930s Britain', *European History Quarterly*, Vol.26, 1996, pp. 57-79; Andrew Flynn, 'Irish Catholics in South East Lancashire: A Conflict of Loyalties?', *Manchester Region History Review*, Vol. XIV, 2000, pp. 79-90; Mario Mazzarella, *British Catholic Press*, pp. 125-140.

<sup>9</sup> *Tablet*, 16 May 1931. For an analysis of Catholic responses to the Republic prior to the Civil War see Thomas R Greene, 'The English Catholic Press and the Second Spanish Republic, 1931-1936', *Church History*, Vol.45, 1976, pp. 70-84.



Christian order promised in the agenda of CEDA, the confederation of Catholic right-wing parties formed in 1933. However, that option seemed to close with the defeat of the right alliance in the February 1936 election. The success of the Popular Front served only to rekindle fears that the Republic would again countenance the persecution of the Church and invite the spread of atheistic communism.<sup>10</sup> The alternative offered by the Nationalist Movement, however, had its own problems. Early uncertainties resulted from the use of Muslim Moroccan troops, the presence of an atheistic element within the Falange, and from a disapproval of the Spanish Church's close alliance with the privileged classes. Problems also arose in explaining why the devout Basques remained loyal to the Government. Indeed, following Mola's conquest of the North, stories of Nationalist reprisals and maltreatment of Basque priests caused such disquiet that several previously ardent pro-Nationalists cooled their support.<sup>11</sup> Foreign intervention added further to these concerns. Although Italy's support created few problems - Mussolini's Concordat with the Vatican in 1929 making him an acceptable ally - as with other denominations, for many Catholics the presence of German forces on the Nationalist side created difficulties, most notably in view of the repressive attitude to religion in National Socialist Germany. Moreover, as Buchanan has argued, the credibility of the stance taken by the Catholic newspapers was somewhat undermined by its similarity to that adopted by a Rothermere press little respected amongst the working classes for its support of Hitler and endorsement of Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, recognising this, Catholic weeklies frequently attempted to distance themselves. An early editorial in the *Catholic Herald*, for example, professed not to 'relish' Rothermere's support while *The Tablet* was 'mortified' that 'it had been largely left to Lord Rothermere ... to refute the misrepresentations' of the Church in Spain.<sup>13</sup> However as stories of 'Red atrocities', murdered clergy and church burnings proliferated, in general, the British Catholic community rapidly united, if not in supporting the Nationalists then in seeing Franco as the lesser of two evils. Memories of the destruction of holy relics during the rebellion in Asturias during October 1934 pro-

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. *Catholic Herald*, 24 July 1936.

<sup>11</sup> Marie Woodruff, whose husband Douglas was editor of the *Tablet*, recalls creeping disillusionment, which was epitomised in Evelyn Waugh's declaration that 'I don't think it'll be a crusade for much longer'. Marie Woodruff, oral testimony, Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, 12927/3 (2). This change of attitude was most notable amongst foreign Catholics, most notably the French Catholics Jaques Maritain and Georges Bernanos.

<sup>12</sup> Buchanan, *British Labour Movement*, Ch. 5 at p. 171.

<sup>13</sup> *Catholic Herald*, editorial, 21 August 1936; *Tablet*, 29 August 1936.

vided a ready frame of reference which led easily to the view that the Popular Front government had been merely a Trojan horse for a renewed communist offensive.<sup>14</sup> Against such a background the military rebellion was swiftly represented by Catholic commentators as a struggle between 'the soul of old Spain' and 'the new deliberate godlessness that calls itself communism'.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout its life, and most especially throughout the years of the Civil War, those who opposed the Second Republic sought to counter commonly held and damaging perceptions of the Spanish Church. Particular efforts were made first to dispel misgivings concerning the Church's wealth in the face of widespread poverty, and later to justify its association with what was widely seen as a fascist supported rebellion against a legitimate government. For some, many of such charges could not be outrightly denied. It had to be first admitted that in the past there had indeed been 'too much formalism in religion, and too many plausible excuses afforded for identifying religion with privilege, and too much oppression by landlords and masters'. However, that had been in the past and now it was the Church which was being persecuted and was facing the very real threat posed by the 'Red Terror'.<sup>16</sup> The idea that the Church continued to preside over great wealth was misguided and out of date. Indeed, several commentators made the claim that 'compared to the Church of England ... the Church of Spain was unquestionably very poor indeed'.<sup>17</sup> The belief that it was 'rich, corrupt and the friend of reactionaries', they argued, was one founded upon the groundless and defamatory propaganda of the 'Godless'.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, whatever resources the Church possessed had for centuries been used primarily to benefit Spain's poor and to provide relief for the unemployed, duties sorely neglected under the Republic.<sup>19</sup> Arnold Lunn's claim that Church endowments had not profited the clergy but had provided education for the poor, 'hospitals and other works of charity on a nation-wide scale' was typical. Spanish ecclesiastics, he argued, should be seen as 'trustees of national charity', individually, no more than 'over-worked, underpaid members of the prole-

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<sup>14</sup> E.g. S.F.A. Coles, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Times*, 3 October 1934.

<sup>15</sup> G.L. Garvin, 'The World Week by Week', *Observer*, 20 September 1936.

<sup>16</sup> *Catholic Herald*, editorial, 31 July 1936.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 22 & 30.

<sup>18</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 226.

<sup>19</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 38.

tariat'.<sup>20</sup>

Republican reform had, in fact, given some credence to such contentions, with State abrogation of clerical salaries, monitoring and taxing of Church investments, and restrictions on property ownership all serving to limit the wealth of the Church. However, whilst most sympathisers drew attention to, and condemned, what they saw as the legislative 'attack' on the Church they concerned themselves more with the 'unofficial' assault which, 'under cover of anti-clericalism and criticism of evils, ... largely invented, ... set out to ridicule not merely the doctrines or dogmas of the Church, but the principles which underlay them'. Secularising reform was, in an ardently religious Spain, 'anti-Spanish', but worse, it was symptomatic of a revolutionary movement which sought to overthrow traditional values and to impose atheistic communism. Thus, commentators set out to prove that efforts to maintain 'the fiction' that the Church had enormous wealth and that the clergy were the allies of feudalism and the privileged were ultimately no more than the left's effort to justify a long held 'intention to cut the throats of nearly all the clergy who could be found'. This, they concluded, was a typically Spanish 'solution'.<sup>21</sup>

This stance, though of particular significance to the Catholic interpretation of events, was not confined to that community. From its inception, the Republic had been commonly identified as atheistic by many in both the Catholic and Conservative communities. Reforms which saw the separation of Church from the State, expulsion of the Jesuits and the cropping of education from the religious Orders were widely regarded as an attack on a pillar of the old order. A neutral response to the outbreak of church-burning during the summer of 1931 confirmed for many, their fears of the left wing credentials of the new government.<sup>22</sup> As early as October 1931 the British right-wing press was thus warning that constitutional reform in Spain had already become a matter of the 'Cross versus the Hammer and Sickle'. The 'vast majority of the Government Ministers of the new Cortes were ... bitterly anti-clerical and strongly anti-Christian' it was claimed.<sup>23</sup> An editorial in a December 1932

<sup>20</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 232 -234.

<sup>21</sup> Foss & Gerahy, *Spanish Arena*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>22</sup> For analysis of these reforms see Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, ch.XI; also Shlomo Ben-Ami, 'The Republican 'take over' : prelude to inevitable catastrophe?' and Frances Lannon, 'The Church's crusade against the Republic', both in Paul Preston (editor), *Revolution and War in Spain*, Ch. 1 & 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Morning Post*, 20 October 1931.

edition of the *Morning Post*, exclaimed in horror, that following twenty months of Republican mis-rule 'the religious' had been compelled to 'disguise themselves to avoid persecution'.<sup>24</sup> It was hardly surprising, given such a climate, that the Spanish Church, which some sympathisers dubiously claimed to have been 'strongly in favour of the Republic' in the beginning, should in 1936 see the military rebellion as the means of survival.<sup>25</sup> By then, commentators argued, the 'gospel of communism', had been forced upon a devoutly religious Spain by an anti-Christian government intent on persecuting the true Church, and by university professors who 'taught anti-clericalism alongside republicanism and the doctrines of Karl Marx'.<sup>26</sup>

This interpretation followed closely that of the Spanish Church itself, although, as Frances Lannon has shown, to all purposes the Church was 'essentially concerned with its own institutional survival and vigour ... [and] ... The cost of its survival was the destruction of the Republic'.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the relationship between the Republic and the Church during the 1930s was not that of wanton aggressor and innocent victim. However, that was the picture that both the Spanish Church and British pro-Nationalists endeavoured to project. Accordingly, every opportunity was taken to suggest a correlation between the Republic's erosion of Church powers and a growing communist inspired atheism accompanied by a collapse in Christian moral standards. The orgiastic violence of the summer of 1936, it was argued, had been caused by the reforms, introduced during the first *bienio* and the under Popular Front. Specifically, it had been the Republic's attack on the Church which had led to the social degeneration most notable in urban areas. As 'the initiative had passed from the priest to the profiteer', prostitution and pornography had flourished, ran the typical contention.<sup>28</sup> 'The bookstalls of Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao ... were full of communist literature ... together with the pornographic and anti-Christian literature that always accompanies it', claimed the Anglican, and lay member of the Church Assembly, Arthur Loveday.<sup>29</sup> And when such a renowned and respected Hispanist as Peers added his assertion that pornographic and Marxist literature had even been on sale at 'very the entrances of the churches', it was a reference seized

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<sup>24</sup> *Morning Post*, 21 December 1932.

<sup>25</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 86; Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 228.

<sup>26</sup> Galiano, *Fall of a Throne*, p. 61; *Morning Post*, 20 October 1931.

<sup>27</sup> Lannon, 'The Church's crusade against the Republic', pp. 48 & 54.

<sup>28</sup> Sencourt, *Spain's Ordeal*, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p. 58; Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, pp. 86-87.

on by Nationalist sympathisers and gleefully quoted in subsequent condemnations of Republican values.<sup>30</sup> Marxist literature was associated with pornography, pornography with anti-religious attitude and all were interpreted as evidence of the 'alien' degeneracy which had pervaded the Republic. The frequent references of British travellers to what they regarded as the unfortunate impact on Spanish life of foreign cultural intrusions were given more import by right-wing correspondents and observers both before and during the war. 'Exotic dances, American films and literary "vanguardism"' were among the 'frivolities' associated with the relaxed values of the Republic.<sup>31</sup> However, if Hollywood was undermining standards through 'silly and demoralising pictures', it was the lessons being learned from 'Soviet films, banned elsewhere in Europe', which commentators deemed the more sinister. 'Five years of this visual instruction [had] borne their fruit in the cities towns and villages of Spain in 1936: What was seen in the cinema was done in the churches'.<sup>32</sup> In this atmosphere, it was suggested, it had been a simple matter for 'destructive intellectuals' to subvert the traditional and stabilising role of the Church. These false prophets preaching 'utopian dreams' were responsible for having 'spread an intellectual and spiritual poison amongst the young'.<sup>33</sup> From the premise that 'European civilisation stands or falls with the Church', traditionalists like Douglas Jerrold, a right-wing, Catholic who helped organise the flight by which Franco decamped from Gran Canaria to Morocco in July 1936, claimed that under the Republic unwanted cultural and ideological influences had undermined Spain's 'unchanging principles of Christian morality'.<sup>34</sup> As a result, middle-class girl students had abnegated their traditional role to become instead 'arrogant, independent, painted and dressed up like

<sup>30</sup> Peers, *Spanish Tragedy*, p97-98; for references see e.g.. Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 185; Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle*, pp293-294; Godden, *Conflict in Spain 1920-1937*, p. 26; & Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p. 58.

<sup>31</sup> Galiano, *Fall of a Throne*, p. 62.

<sup>32</sup> Cpt. Francis McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain* ( London, 1937), p. 256; Godden, *Conflict in Spain*, p. 81. Soviet films were widely shown. 'October', 'The Fall of St Petersburg', 'The Land', 'The Blue Express', 'The New Babylon' were among those screened to Spanish audiences before the Civil War. During the conflict some twenty Soviet films were shown in the Republican zone including 'Battleship Potemkin' and the 'Sailors of Kronstadt'. See José María Caparrós Lera, 'The Cinema Industry in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', *Film and History*, Vol.16, No.2, May 1986, pp. 35-47.

<sup>33</sup> Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure*, p. 384; Archibald Ramsay MP, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 4 December 1937. To enable Franco to fly to Morocco, Luís Bolín, London correspondent for the monarchist daily *ABC* chartered a De Havilland Dragon Rapide in Croydon in early July 1936, and with the help of Jerrold enlisted a pilot, Hugh Pollard, and two female companions to act as cover. Jerrold's anti-Republic feelings had been long evident as demonstrated in his 1933 collaboration with Bolín and Moral in the condemnatory, *The Spanish Republic: A Survey of Two Years*.

<sup>34</sup> Sarolea, *Daylight on Spain*, p. 32; Jerrold, *Georgian*, p. 384.

a cinema stars.' Furthermore, in the unconstrained atmosphere of the Republic, they had become attracted to communism largely 'because it puts no bar on free love.'<sup>35</sup> American writer, Helen Nicholson, despairingly observed that the decadence which was so evident 'elsewhere' was now prevalent in Spain, as proven, she claimed, by the increase in homosexuality during the life of the Republic. For the right, the Republic had been responsible for weakening the steadying hand of the Church, for lessening respect for tradition and family values and for the corruption of accepted standards - simply for the gradual erosion of the values of 'true Spain.'<sup>36</sup> The notion that the Nationalist forces represented a just endeavour to re-establish these fast eroding values formed the platform of support increasingly posited by all Nationalist sympathisers during the early months of the war. The Church, once 'strongly in favour of the Republic', had been forced by circumstances into supporting those who were fighting to save Christian Spain.<sup>37</sup>

This justification of the Spanish Church's position was one which informed much of the Catholic press. Although several of the journals recognised the failings of the Church in Spain and some, most notably *Blackfriars* and *The Sower*, pointed out that these had led to the enmity of so many of the Spanish people, all the most significant weeklies sought to justify the siding of the Spanish Church with the Nationalist Movement. The *Catholic Herald*, whilst fearing Catholics would be made scapegoats should the rebellion fail, remained initially uncertain in its support and warned against the potency of the 'widespread picture, and partial fact, of the black cassock sheltering behind White terror'. Early defence of the military's 'unconstitutional' action was limited to arguing that the 'alternative was the forcing of a Red republic on a still predominantly Catholic people', and, in an echo of right-wing 'Little England' rhetoric, to reminding readers that 'constitutionalism in the English sense [was] a conception with little meaning in Spain'.<sup>38</sup> Within weeks, however, an editorial in the same weekly was declaring that 'one side through a diabolical hatred for God and the Church, [had] steadily grown more evil and the other steadily more noble'.<sup>39</sup> And this, the argument ran, was clearly evident in the moral attitudes displayed by the respective sides. At its most ideologically simplistic it meant that on

<sup>35</sup> Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p. 58

<sup>36</sup> Helen Nicholson, *Death in the Morning* (London, 1937), p. 71.

<sup>37</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p86; Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 228.

<sup>38</sup> *Catholic Herald*, editorial, 21 August & 24 July 1936.

<sup>39</sup> *Catholic Herald*, editorial, 9 October 1936.

the one side were 'poor deluded anarchists with ... their distorted view of human dignity', on the other existed the 'perfection of Christian life and Christian charity'.<sup>40</sup> Translated into everyday imagery it meant that in the Republican zone 'the dress and conduct' of loyalist militiawomen were a cause for shocked condemnation - their attire deemed as making the 'recent controversy about shorts in sport ... seem a trifle less important'. In the areas 'liberated' by the Nationalist forces, on the other hand, the fact that crowds were once again 'flocking to communion' was a cause for celebration and evidence enough of the intensely religious 'true' nature of the Spanish people.<sup>41</sup> Writing in the *Catholic Herald*, Bernard Wall summed this stance in terms of Spain's supposed 'natural order'. Misplaced support for Republican values, he argued, came from those who simply failed to 'understand the nature of peasant culture or the loyalty of the compact masses of the people to tradition'.<sup>42</sup>

At the heart of this argument lay the notion that the Church represented the traditional soul of Spain. However, for sympathisers wishing to convince the British public, one blemish on this association which had to be excised was the identification of the Church with Torquemada and the Inquisition. Recognising that 'in every Englishman's mind [was] the legend of a Spain that [was] inquisitorial, ignorant and fanatic', commentators contended that this was a 'false picture' which ignored the ordinary Spaniard's 'intense religious faith'. It was, they argued, 'a deep Christianity and devotion to the Christian Church' which was 'the most dominant of the Spaniard's characteristics'.<sup>43</sup> The religion of the country was 'so much a part of its life that words based on biblical incidents' had become 'part of the normal vocabulary'. Spain and Christianity were indivisible, the Inquisition an aberration given too much attention and too often mis-interpreted by anti-Catholic lobbies.<sup>44</sup> Listing the contribution made by clerics to the canon of Spanish literature and that of the Church to Spanish architecture, Wall was moved to conclude, that 'if the Spanish Church is an evil, then Spanish culture is an evil'.<sup>45</sup> For the British pro-Nationalists, then, Spanishness, *Hispanidad*, was in large part conceptualised through Spanish Catholicism. Sympathisers stressed that Spain, more than any modern European country [had]

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<sup>40</sup> Raymond Lacoste, 'The Spain I Saw', in *Tablet*, 12 September 1936.

<sup>41</sup> *Catholic Herald*, front page, 7 August 1936; 4 September 1936.

<sup>42</sup> Bernard Wall, *Catholic Herald*, 11 September 1936.

<sup>43</sup> Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p3 & 6; also Sencourt, *Spain's Ordeal*, p. 139.

<sup>44</sup> Loveday, *ibid.*, p3.

<sup>45</sup> Sarolea, *Daylight on Spain*, p. 30; Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, pp. 28-29.

welded religion and the people's culture into one, and they stand or fall together'.<sup>46</sup> Christianity, along with 'chivalry, conservatism and traditionalism' were the 'finer qualities of Spanish character' and these were the qualities which through Franco would provide an 'antidote' to the 'poison' of anti-religious ideas.<sup>47</sup>

This view of the role of religion and the Church in Spain not only matched British preconceptions of the country but also fit neatly into the image projected by the Nationalists. From the onset Franco claimed to be representing the interests of *Patria*, religion and the family, a stance which was to continue to underwrite his régime after the war's end.<sup>48</sup> 'The Republic had sought to annihilate the ... soul of immortal Spain', declared Quiépo de Llano in a Seville Radio broadcast in August 1936.<sup>49</sup> By September the Spanish Church was openly endorsing the rebel cause in similar language, Enrique Pla y Deniel, the Bishop of Salamanca, the first to baptise it as 'a crusade against communism to save religion, the fatherland and the family'.<sup>50</sup> Throughout the war Nationalist propaganda sought to promote Franco as a religious crusader, heir to El Cid and Don Juan de Austria, and to revive notions of the link between such warrior heroes and the Catholic Church.<sup>51</sup> Taking up the theme sympathisers like Ulsterman, Francis McCullagh, writer and sometime correspondent for the *New York Herald*, argued that Franco's Christian qualifications were indeed superior to those of the Cid, the modern champion of Christianity displaying none of his predecessor's less than edifying faults.<sup>52</sup> Adding further to the symbolism, commentators pointed out that throughout the centuries Spain had been the bulwark of the Christian faith, playing a key part in the crusades and proving a barrier to the ambitions of Islam.<sup>53</sup> It was, they reminded, Spain which 'had saved Western Europe from the Moors ... taken Christianity to ... the New World [and] was once more fighting Western Europe's battle against the Asiatic menace'.<sup>54</sup> Ignoring the

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<sup>46</sup> Wall, *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p. 2; also *Tablet*, 24 October 1936.

<sup>48</sup> See Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence: Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco's Spain, 1936-1945* (Cambridge, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> 'Radio Seville', 3 August 1936, cited in Richards, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> See Mary Vincent, 'The Martyrs and the Saints: Masculinity and the Construction of the Francoist Crusade', *History Workshop Journal*, No.47, Spring 1999, pp. 68-96.

<sup>51</sup> The title *Caudillo* represented a further effort to forge this link. In the late twenties a local priest had prophesied that Franco would 'repeat the epic achievements of El Cid and the great medieval kings of Asturias'. See, Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (London, 1993), p. 187.

<sup>52</sup> McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain*, p. xix.

<sup>53</sup> Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Sencourt, *Spain's Ordeal*, p. 139.



obvious irony, the *Tablet*, ardently pro-Franco from the outset, declared, that just as El Cid Campeador had saved his country from the Moors so Franco and 'patriotic Spaniards' were today 'saving Europe from the New Barbarism'.<sup>55</sup> 'This is not an army', gushed the enthusiastic McCullagh, 'it is the Church Militant on the march. It is Catholic Action personified. This is not a Civil War: it is a Holy War, a Crusade. These are not soldiers; they are fighting monks, Knights Templar'.<sup>56</sup>

This reinvention of the link between the Church and past Catholic heroes as a means of validating the current position of the Church and justifying support for Franco was one which would have appealed to British sympathisers inured in notions of tradition, and was one which, as will be shown in chapter seven, gained wider application. It also served to further establish the right's preferred concept that the war in Spain was between Christianity and atheism, civilisation and barbarism not, as supporters of the Republic would have it, between fascism and democracy. For the pro-Hitler, *Daily Mail* such symbolism served to endorse German support. Only two weeks into the conflict, the paper's editor G. Ward Price enthusiastically proclaimed, that 'like Lucifer before the Fall, Stalin may mobilise the powers of Darkness, but the German Michel is also fast preparing to take the field'.<sup>57</sup> As a justification of the Spanish Church's position, commentators continually revisited the notion that if Franco was not quite the equal of Christ, God was very much on the side of Franco's Christian crusade. Reports which told of Saint Teresa's timely intervention against the advancing red columns on the road to Avila may have been received with some scepticism among non-Catholic readers. Nonetheless, in echoing the still fresh British legend of the Angel of Mons they may, if only temporarily, have touched off wider sympathies.<sup>58</sup> More readily accepted would have been the religious references which littered the right's many reverential accounts of the defence of the Toledo Alcázar. Filtered in among the tales of stubborn heroism appropriate symbols served to reinforce the 'natural' association of Christianity and the Nationalists. Thus, for sympathisers, the many fine qualities of Colonel Moscardó, the garrison commander, were underlined by his deeply religious nature; prayer meetings in the cellars evoked imagery of earlier

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<sup>55</sup> *Tablet*, 12 September 1936.

<sup>56</sup> McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain*, p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> G. Ward Price, 'The New Line up in Europe', Editorial, *Daily Mail*, 2 September 1936.

<sup>58</sup> Harold G. Cardozo, *March of a Nation: My Year of Spain's Civil War* (London, 1937), p. 64.

Christian gatherings in the catacombs; a statue of the Holy Virgin, 'miraculously' undamaged amidst the rubble, both interceded on behalf of the besieged and represented the inevitability of Christianity's triumph over red atheism; and the birth of two infants in the ruins offered closer parallels with the Madonna and child.<sup>59</sup> The 'miracle' of the successful defence of the Toledo Alcázar was, according to sympathisers like Arnold Lunn, 'the Lord's doing', and 'a symbol of that spirit which was saving Spain'.<sup>60</sup>

Through such imagery commentators sought to depict the war in Spain as one of Christianity versus atheism. Nothing, however, provided material more likely to engender sympathy with that position than the outbreaks of anti-clerical violence which had occurred throughout the years of republican government. Anti-clerical sentiment had in fact long been widespread amongst the Spanish lower classes, and the burning of Church properties a common expression of that feeling.<sup>61</sup> The problem, according to, sympathisers, was that what in the past could have been regarded as an old Spanish custom had, like the Spanish fondness of revolt, under the Republic, been exploited by 'Godless' forces. Again citing Peers as an authority, commentators such as Arnold Lunn declared, that what had been no more than a Spanish 'idiosyncrasy' had developed, first into a 'tendency' and finally into a 'movement'.<sup>62</sup> Thus a dangerous progression could be traced from the church-burnings in Madrid in May 1931, through the more ominous outrages in Oviedo in October 1934, to the barbarous murders of clerics and wholesale destruction of church properties which began in February and gathered pace in July 1936. And, according to sympathisers, the party encouraging and financing this escalation of a Spanish 'hobby' into an 'anti-religion, anti-God Movement' was Moscow with its 'Red gold'.<sup>63</sup> As one English visitor to the territory recently 'recovered' by Franco's

forces lamented: 'orders from Moscow to "destroy the past" had been most faith-

<sup>59</sup> Geoffrey McNeil-Moss, *A History of the Siege of the Toledo Alcazar* (London, 1936), p. 41; Cardozo, *ibid.*, p. 130. Rodolphe Timmerman, *Heroes of the Alcázar*, (London, 1937), pp. 90, 110-111 & 212. The Madonna imagery, implied in British accounts, (e.g. Cardozo in *Daily Mail*, 19 Sept. 1936) was used more directly in the Italian film 'L'Assedio dell' Alcázar', 1939, (released as 'Alcázar' in Germany, and 'Sin novedad en el Alcázar' in Spain). For analysis of the film see Valleau, *The Spanish Civil War in American and European Films*, pp. 92-104.

<sup>60</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 106 & 107.

<sup>61</sup> For example, in Barcelona, during the 'Tragic Week', 26 July -1 August 1909, more than fifty Church properties were burned.

<sup>62</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Mail*, 20 February 1936; *Catholic Herald*, 28 August 1936; Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 228.

fully carried out in regard to the churches'.<sup>64</sup>

The result, it was proclaimed, had been the 'martyrdom' of the Spanish Church'.<sup>65</sup> Here, Catholic commentators, especially, saw an opportunity to challenge what they saw as 'anti-papist prejudice going back to Elizabethan days'.<sup>66</sup> The English, they proclaimed with some justification, had 'not yet rid their minds of the old anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic prejudices [found] in *Westward Ho!* and *The Bible in Spain*'.<sup>67</sup> The unhappy result, it was argued, was that much of the British public held to an attitude of 'whatever the Catholics do is wrong and what *they* suffer "serves them right"'.<sup>68</sup> Now, though, those who supported the Republic and questioned the Church of Spain's position were faced with explaining that support when confronted by what Arnold Lunn termed, the 'inconvenient dead'. It was not enough, he argued, to mis-represent or dilute a 'hatred of religion' to one of anti-clericalism. The gruesome stories of the atrocities carried out against Spanish ecclesiastics, particularly when placed within the context of historic Christian suffering, challenged such a stance. 'Radiance and joy [had been] the hallmark of martyrdom from the days of Trajan and Nero, through the centuries, down to the martyrs that we are privileged to stand beside ... in Soviet Spain', effused one commentator.<sup>69</sup> In the Catholic press readers were similarly reminded of a link between Spanish victims and the early Christian martyrs, most effectively, perhaps, when reminded of 'when Beckett under sharp swords fell'.<sup>70</sup> Typifying the response of Catholic sympathisers, Arnold Lunn announced, that in Red Spain his co-religionists had 'died like heroes', preferring 'death to the denial of Christ', the moving tales of their persecution enriching 'the Christian martyrology' which had 'come down from the first century of the Christian era'.<sup>71</sup> Through such references commentators clearly sought to convey a sense of the 'true' Christian worthiness of the Spanish clergy and by association the Nationalist Movement, the martyrdom of clerics and the sacrifice of Nationalist 'crusaders' uniting religious and military values and aspirations. With its fo-

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<sup>64</sup> Eleonora Tennant, *Spanish Journey: Personal Experiences of the Civil War* (London, 1936), p. 85.

<sup>65</sup> For detailed analysis see, Mary Vincent, 'The Martyrs and the Saints'.

<sup>66</sup> Sarolea, *Daylight on Spain*, p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain*, p. x; Sarolea, *Daylight on Spain*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>68</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 244. Italics emphasis in original.

<sup>69</sup> Godden, *Conflict in Spain*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>70</sup> *Tablet*, 12 September 1936.

<sup>71</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 231-232.

cus on Catholicism, the appeal of such imagery to the wider British public is questionable, particularly as people began to receive reports of atrocities with more scepticism. Nonetheless, in the context of the early months of the war it did add to the pro-Nationalist platform, convince wavering Catholic periodicals, and help to shroud, at least temporarily, charges made regarding the reactionary nature of the Spanish Church. It was imagery which, even if it did not win over active support for Franco, brought about some, albeit varying, measure of sympathy for and added some substance to the contention, that 'whatever mistakes the Church of Rome may have made in Spain, it surely never deserved such treatment at the hands of the anti-Christ'.<sup>72</sup>

Pro-Franco commentators further endeavoured to unravel the enigma of a supposedly religious populace turning against its own Church in terms of national character, or at least the character of the masses. Spain, Arnold Lunn explained, was 'a country of extremes ... great sanctity and violent sin', where ordinarily, 'the Spaniard steers a middle course with difficulty'. Unfortunately, in 'practising what sinners preach[ed]' the Spanish masses had degenerated very rapidly into the sort of 'thug[s] who murder[ed] priests and rape[d] nuns'. In encouraging the 'orgy' of anti-religion violence which had created so many Christian martyrs, not only had 'red' agitators managed to exploit the extant Spanish practice of anti-clericalism but they had been helped by traits of Spanish character! Only Spain, Lunn continued, could have produced such a 'host of heroic martyrs' and such 'tales of Satanic atrocities'.<sup>73</sup> There was, reflected one traveller, a 'mysterious madness which ... attacks the Spanish, driving them to these strange pyrrhic frenzies! ... the reverse side of religious devotion'.<sup>74</sup> However incomprehensible by British standards, in Spain it was normal that villagers should genuflect to the altar before setting their church afire.<sup>75</sup> In this way, Spanish volatility and peasant ignorance served to explain the paradox whereby the Church had become the target of its communicants. It also explained how the naïve and misguided masses could be so easily directed into more violent activity. Mob behaviour, particularly when blended with Latin volatility, offered further explanation: 'it was being done everywhere else and we had to do it too', was

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<sup>72</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 87.

<sup>73</sup> Arnold Lunn, *Come What May* (London, 1941), pp. 343-344.

<sup>74</sup> Rose Macaulay, *Fabled Shore: From the Pyrenees to Portugal* (London, 1949), p. 18.

<sup>75</sup> Lunn, *Come What May*, p. 359.

the reasoning of the mob as reported by the British manager of the Tharsis mines.<sup>76</sup> Flaws in Spanish character, it was reasoned, also explained why the Government of the 'Spanish Reds' had failed to make a case excusing the 'wholesale massacre of priests': not only did they endorse the actions of the murderous masses but, true to their 'careless and lazy' Spanish nature, 'they just wouldn't take the trouble' to justify them.<sup>77</sup> All such observations were clearly intended to add to the general picture of an ill-conceived republican Spain whose supporters were a guileless, badly led, and therefore dangerous mob. In this pro-Nationalists may well have had some success. However, such contentions also served to confirm the alien nature of the war and so did little counter the view identified by the sympathiser who complained, that 'the Englishman does not lose the impression made on his boyish mind by Borrow and Charles Kingsley, [and] consequently he is never very indignant when the victims of a massacre are merely Spanish ... Catholics'.<sup>78</sup>

Flaws of character were, of course, confined to the Spain of the Republic. Indeed, for many British sympathisers they were particularly limited to urban Republican Spain. With most of Spain's major towns and cities remaining loyal to the Republic, that element of British support which believed that society's salvation lay in a return to rural values made further distinctions between the two sides. For ruralists like Francis McCullagh, supporters of the 'Christian insurrection' were 'the farmer, the shepherd, the woodsman, [and] the villager', whilst the 'anti-Christian forces' were comprised of the 'townsman, the factory-hand, the sailor, [and] the miner'.<sup>79</sup> As we have seen, such attitudes echoed those found in travel accounts. They were now in accord with those elements of the Nationalist Movement (most notably the Falange) which sought to eulogise the Spanish peasantry as the epitome of religious values. 'Christian tradition', declared Arnold Lunn in a repeat of Franco's own dogma, favoured 'the economy of the farm, the village and the small town against the megalopolitan civilisation of giant cities'.<sup>80</sup> This was a stance which provided sympathisers with some resolution of the Basque paradox. As we have seen,

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<sup>76</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 86.

<sup>77</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 225-227.

<sup>78</sup> McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain*, p. 18

<sup>79</sup> McCullagh, *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 7-8. A paradox of the National Movement in Spain, like the National Socialists in Germany and Fascist Movement in Italy, was that it advanced the mythical values of rural life whilst at the same time promoting the importance of industrial development.

travellers like Walter Starkie had earlier contended that the Basque drive for autonomy was located chiefly in the towns. Now, pro-Nationalists adopted the same line. Support for the Republic was only strong in urban areas, they pointed out. So, whilst industrialised Bilbao was a hotbed of anarchy, the rural provinces of Navarre and Alava had been 'solidly behind Franco' from the start.<sup>81</sup> The Basque nationalists of Vizcaya had made a bargain with the devil which had set them 'side by side with the church-burners' and against their staunchly Catholic Carlist brothers.<sup>82</sup> Agriculture equated to honest industry, faith and tradition.<sup>83</sup> It was Franco who was reasserting the 'traditional virtues of religion'. His support lay in rural Spain; his National Movement was 'rooted in the Spanish soil' and in the 'universality of Catholicism'.<sup>84</sup>

British sympathisers, then, offered an interpretation of the religious connotations of the war which closely followed that claimed by the Nationalist Movement. The Church, they argued, had been persecuted throughout the years of the Second Republic. Republican reform had led to social and moral degeneration, a break down in those Christian values so essential to the make up of Spanish national character. The charges made by critics, of the Church's excessive wealth and of its ignoring the needs of the common people, were unfounded. Those who sought to denigrate by evoking connotations of the Inquisition were guilty of ignoring the Church's true historic role, that of protecting the borders of Christendom. Now, a new, 'red', heathen was threatening, corrupting the urban worker and mis-leading the guileless peasant, and once again the Church of Spain was essential to the bulwark preventing the overrun of Europe. It followed then, ran the argument, that the military rebellion should be redefined as a new crusade and Franco should be seen as the latest in a long line of Spanish, Christian warrior heroes. Duly sanctified, his ambitions for a new order based on the moral values of the old, and on a recognition that those values were embodied in the rural and Catholic essence of Spain, were deemed laudable. The dangerous exploitation of the volatile character of the

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<sup>81</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 231. For an analysis of the situation in Navarre see Martin Blinkhorn, 'War on two fronts: politics and Society on Navarre 1931-6', in Paul Preston [edit.], *Revolution and War in Spain*, pp. 59-84.

<sup>82</sup> *Tablet*, 7 November 1936. Interestingly, in March 2001 the Pope used the beatification ceremony of 233 clerical victims of the war to call for an end to Basque separatist violence.

<sup>83</sup> E.g. Harold Cardozo, *The March of a Nation: My Year of Spain's Civil War* (London, 1937), p. 240.

<sup>84</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 64.

Spanish, manifest in the escalation of anti-clericalism from harmless 'idiosyncrasy' to outrageous barbarity, served to spell out the alternative.

### **Pro-Republican representations of the Church in Spain.**

For the left, representations of the Spanish Church and religion remained consistent throughout the life of the Second Republic. The new Government's proposed programme of secularising reform, as detailed in article twenty-six of the constitution, was welcomed by left-wing and liberal commentators. It was contended that as only some six million Spaniards were 'professing Catholics' laicising education was an action that was clearly justified.<sup>85</sup> An editorial in the *Daily Herald* which lauded the Republic's promise of an 'absolute freedom of religious thought' was representative of the optimistic tone adopted in the secular press.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the relatively peaceful change of régime induced favourable editorial in even the more circumspect dailies, *The Times* noting, somewhat scathingly, that 'those timid ecclesiastics who jumped into civilian clothes when the Republic was proclaimed have returned to their cassocks'.<sup>87</sup> However, if neutral organs were relieved at the lack of evidence of 'red revolution' those of the left remained suspicious of what they regarded as the precarious endorsements offered by the Spanish Church. The Church's natural allegiance, they cautioned, was with the Monarchy and with landed interests. 'The Vatican is alarmed and will intrigue' warned one observer, a warning given validation when barely two weeks after the proclamation of the new régime, Cardinal Pedro Segura, Primate of the Spanish Church, 'attacked the Republic from the pulpit'.<sup>88</sup> Writing in the summer of 1933, four months before the electoral success of the right wing coalition, Sir George Young, an ardent supporter of the Republic who had retired from his post of Secretary of the British Embassy in Madrid to live in Torremolinos, summed up the caution felt by those who felt favourably disposed to the Republic's reform programme: 'The success of the revolution and

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<sup>85</sup> Sir George Young, *The New Spain* (London, 1933), p. 29. Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, p. 53 details decline of attendance at Mass and in the use of the Confessional.

<sup>86</sup> *Daily Herald*, 17 April 1931; *News Chronicle*, 17 April 1931. Article 26, approved by the Cortes in October 1931, and to be completed during the following two years, among other restrictions, ended government financial support of the Church, disbanded the Jesuits, secularised education, & monitored, taxed and limited the Church's investments.

<sup>87</sup> *The Times*, 20 April 1931.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph McCabe, *Spain in Revolt: 1814-1931* (London, 1931), pp. 237-239. Segura denounced the government's religious policy from Rome. On his return to Spain he was arrested and subsequently deported.

the survival of this Republic', he declared, 'depend[ed] on whether the parliamentary party system [could] finally deprive the Roman Catholic Church and the Religious Orders of their privileged position and political power'.<sup>89</sup>

For such observers the line was drawn. On the one side, the modernising, reforming Republic of the 'New Spain', on the other, a coalition representing the interests of the 'feudo-clerical' 'Old Régime'.<sup>90</sup> This alliance of Church, landowners and the army was one seen as continuing to frustrate the long-denied and justified hopes of ordinary Spaniards. For some like Orwell, 'it was well understood that the Church in Spain' had also become 'part of the capitalist racket'.<sup>91</sup> While many on the left held the same view, efforts to dispel any doubts amongst those who may have been uncomfortable in admitting sympathy for seemingly anti-religious views meant that commentators stressed, rather, the outdated and alien nature of the Spanish Church. The 'medieval' nature of the Church in Spain, it was declared, was indeed 'odd to English eyes'.<sup>92</sup> It was a 'plague' which for over 'two centuries had ceased to play a prominent part in English history'.<sup>93</sup> If Dyson's cartoon image of a bloated cleric helping to force back the hands of time illustrated the point graphically,<sup>94</sup> continuing references to the 'parasitic power of the Church, the Monarchy and the grandees' served to reinforce the picture of a morally corrupt Church out of touch with the ordinary people and ignoring their needs in order to further its own wealth, power and political influence.<sup>95</sup> The result, sympathisers felt able to contend, was that the 'type of religion taught in Spain [had] ... failed to give any help' to those who 'had most need of it' and in consequence the ordinary Spanish people had developed a 'real contempt for the priests'.<sup>96</sup>

In advancing this view commentators were helped by popular perceptions of the Spanish Church. As right wing commentators bemoaned, British understanding was, indeed, in part informed by notions of Catholic wealth and the Inquisition. In this way, the earlier dubiously documented claims of zealous British evangelicals

<sup>89</sup> Young, *The New Spain*, p. 35.

<sup>90</sup> Jellinek, *The Civil War in Spain*, p. 163.

<sup>91</sup> Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Appendix 1, p. 194.

<sup>92</sup> Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, p. 21.

<sup>93</sup> Edward Conze, *Spain To-day: Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (London, 1936), p. 8.

<sup>94</sup> Dyson, *Daily Herald*, 9 October 1934.

<sup>95</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, p. 203.

<sup>96</sup> Geoffrey Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 91; Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, p. 21.



which spoke of 'the immoralities of life in the cloisters'<sup>97</sup> were given new life as a number of the more avid sympathisers enthusiastically depicted the corruptness of the Church in Spain. From the convents and churches, it was claimed, 'a whole fetid, ingrowing sexual system [had been] dragged out into the daylight'. A widespread misuse of monies given to charity was supposedly uncovered, relics were exposed as fake, and instruments of punishment and self-penance were 'discovered'. In such ways, 'the whole practice of the Church was shown to be the one thing that no Spaniard will stand: an insult to human dignity'.<sup>98</sup> It followed, then, that pro-Nationalist efforts to establish links between the Spanish character and the Spanish Church were spurious and unfounded. The Constitution of Spain had indeed been the work of Church and Crown, declared loyalist sympathisers, but the culture and character of the Spaniard had been formed long before.<sup>99</sup> Christian virtues might be considered integral to the national character but those virtues were absent in the behaviour of the Spanish Church. The Church, then, far from being the pure driving force of Franco's crusade against a discredited, atheistic and communist Government, was an affront to the natural dignity of the 'true Spaniard'. In such circumstances it was hardly surprising, argued Jellinek, that church-burning had once again proved the 'necessary' 'vent for ... popular indignation'.<sup>100</sup>

Deep-rooted impressions of the Spanish Church also provided some validation of the left's picture of an archaic institution intent on suppressing the masses. Not only through 'Big Business and the benefactions of the rich' had the wealth of Spain been 'drawn into the lap of Mother Church', it was asserted, but also through 'medieval means of 'indirectly taxing the poor'.<sup>101</sup> The result of this, they maintained, was everywhere evident. The Church was the wealthiest of landowners, came the common claim,<sup>102</sup> and church buildings towered above the towns and villages they were supposed to serve. The military significance of this - as dominating rebel fortifications - was clear. However, more obvious, for commentators, was the bricks and mortar evidence of a long-existing disparity of condition between the priest

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<sup>97</sup> Stewart, *In Darkest Spain*, p. 229.

<sup>98</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 323.

<sup>99</sup> Young, *The New Spain*, p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 324.

<sup>101</sup> Young, *The New Spain*, p. 24.

<sup>102</sup> E.g. Joan Beauchamp, 'Spanish Workers Wanted "The English Week": The Real Causes of the Conflict', *Woman's Outlook*, 19 December 1936.

and his flock. 'Spires [that] rose splendidly over scenes of unforgettable squalor' helped the American journalist Virginia Cowles, and presumably her readers, 'to understand the grievance against the Church'.<sup>103</sup> The rural village of Fuentidueña was typical, asserted Brereton, in the way that its 'tall church contrast[ed] with its earth-blown humble houses ... its cave dwellings testifying to an almost animal poverty,' imagery conveyed with greater effect and to a wider audience in *Spanish Earth* (1937), the Joris Iven's film set partly in the same location.<sup>104</sup>

As has been shown, such observations were not new. In the years preceding the war British travellers had often drawn attention to rural poverty, though usually in terms of rough rustic contentment. Now, however, some sympathisers drew upon their own earlier experiences as a means of denouncing the iniquities associated with 'old Spain', and particularly with the Catholic Church. Tourists might now recall that 'the bigger the cathedral the filthier the slums', suggested one.<sup>105</sup> Another, William Holt, who had briefly lived and worked in Spain during the 1920s, recalled his profound disquiet at realising that the men, 'bare-headed, perspiring and choking with dust', who carried the biers during a Holy Week procession in Seville, were 'poor men who had to live by earning an odd peseta as best they could.' Holt, who later became a communist councillor in Todmorden, Yorkshire, was careful not to deny the faith of such men. Rather, by suggesting that 'like Christ ... these poor men were carrying the Cross through the streets', he condemned by implication the Church that was supposed to serve them.<sup>106</sup> The conclusion readers were invited to draw was that the Church's present plight was not Government inspired but the result of its own past reprehensible disregard of the people.

Images which seemed to confirm popular impressions of the wealth of the Spanish Church and to substantiate accounts of the methods used, particularly by the expelled Jesuit order, to circumvent efforts to curb its wealth would clearly have been received sympathetically by some sections of the British public.<sup>107</sup> For those who

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<sup>103</sup> Virginia Cowles, *Looking for Trouble* (London, 1946, first published 1941), p. 40.

<sup>104</sup> Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 33; Joris Ivens (producer), *Spanish Earth*, 1937, dialogue written and narrated by Ernest Hemingway. For analysis of this film see Leif Furhammer & Folke Isaksson, *Film and Politics*.

<sup>105</sup> Conze, *Spain To-day*, p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> William Holt, *I Haven't Unpacked* (London, 1939), pp. 94-95.

<sup>107</sup> See, e.g. Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, pp. 45-46.

were familiar with evangelical Protestant 'missionary' experiences in Spain, from George Borrow's efforts to '*... circulate the Scriptures in the Peninsula*' to Alexander Stewart's more recent evangelist endeavours *In Darkest Spain*, such imagery would have found particular appeal. However, this group was only small in number. Although many pro-Republicans adopted the vitriolic tone of Stewart's attack on the Spanish Church, linking growing wealth to increasing 'greed, voluptuousness, idleness and other vices' amongst the clergy,<sup>108</sup> open hostility toward the Roman Catholic Church was not a common response, and clearly was not as widespread as pro-Nationalist campaigners would have believe. On the other hand few Protestants felt predisposed to defend the Church in Spain. As Orwell mischievously noted, his own local vicar 'cheered up a lot' when he realised that the churches under attack were 'only Roman Catholic churches'.<sup>109</sup>

However, references which linked the Inquisition to more recent events would, in all likelihood, have had a greater impact on the wider public. Some commentators clearly recognised this and made some telling allusions. As early as 1933 Sir George Young was suggesting that the 'Black Legend' had metamorphosed into the unfounded but 'persistent press propaganda' of the right which had been 'painting in lurid light the persecution of the Church and the proscription of the Ruling Class'.<sup>110</sup> After July 1936 government sympathisers made more pointed references. The Inquisition and Torquemada were the 'legacy of a Church which had persecuted Protestants', reminded one left wing pamphlet.<sup>111</sup> As recently as the 1860's the Spanish Church had been responsible for sending Protestants to the gallows, proclaimed another.<sup>112</sup> Such references were clearly designed to elicit the sympathy of British Protestants. The Spanish Church was the enemy of religious tolerance as much as it was the enemy of the Spanish masses. Typically, Frank Jellinek, firmly placed the Inquisition with its associated evil as the antecedent of the Nationalist Movement, and the victims of the Inquisition as the forebears of those who now 'burned the churches, [and] desired to found a juster, more vigorous and

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<sup>108</sup> George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain: Or the Journeys, Adventures and imprisonments of an Englishman in an Attempt to Circulate the Scriptures in the Peninsula* ( London, 1843); Stewart, *In Darkest Spain*, p. 228.

<sup>109</sup> M Sheldon, 'Orwell: The Authorised Biography', p. 308, cited in, Buchanan, *Britain*, p. 169.

<sup>110</sup> Young, *The New Spain*, p. 2.

<sup>111</sup> Lumir Soukup, 'Jesus in the Spanish Church', in Student Delegation to Spain, *Spain Assailed* (London, n.d.), p. 16.

<sup>112</sup> H.N. Brailsford, *Spain's Challenge to Labour* ( London, c.1936), p. 5.

more enlightened society'. The concession that 'pure sadism' did not 'entirely explain the *autos-de-fé* of the Inquisition' merely added to a negative impression of the Spanish Church. And the acknowledgement that the *autos-de-fé* were not solely 'responsible for the Spanish hatred of the Church' any more than a 'repulsion from the horrors of castor-oil and concentration camps' provided a complete explanation of the anti-fascist movement, both defined the two camps and suggested that the Church and fascism were linked by their inhumanity.<sup>113</sup>

The Inquisition and notions of excessive wealth provided republican propagandists with easy points of reference from which to demonise the Spanish Church. Anti-clericalism, they could argue, was a product of Spanish history, not, as Franco apologists would have it, the manifestation of communist inspired atheism.<sup>114</sup> Other episodes from the past were used to demonstrate this further. The Carlist wars, it was argued, had been marked by clerical-inspired barbarity, a phenomenon now being repeated as Carlist priests encouraged the massacre of fellow Basques. Moreover, anti-clericalism did not equate to anti-God, even among Spanish communists. Indeed, it was pointed out, placards had been raised in Asturias during October 1934 proclaiming, 'Long live the Red Christ'. And, in 1936, during the Holy Week festival in Seville communists had proudly and protectively 'paraded a famous Virgin'.<sup>115</sup> Pro-Nationalists saw such incidents as evidence of the Spaniard's innate Catholic culture and argued that subsequent events proved the corrupting influence of Soviet bolshevism.<sup>116</sup> Pro-Republicans, on the other hand, offered them as proof that, in Spain, communism was no bar to Christian belief. Those who saw the 'red hand of Moscow' in the anti-clericalism of today', they argued, were simply ignorant of Spanish history. The feeling was not 'a new thing born of Communist propaganda or "modern irreligion"', it was simply that for 'the average Spaniard, Church spell[ed] "Oppression"'.<sup>117</sup> Church burning, like other forms of civil unrest, was merely a response to that oppression, albeit a peculiarly Spanish response, and it was one which predated Karl Marx.<sup>118</sup> As one sympathiser dramatically

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<sup>113</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, pp. 42-43. Emphasis in original.

<sup>114</sup> Eg. Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 17

<sup>115</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 42.

<sup>116</sup> Lunn, *Come What May*, p. 359. Lunn here makes use of the same Holy Week incident as Jellinek, though with a different slant on interpretation.

<sup>117</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 17; Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 156.

<sup>118</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p. 236.

claimed: 'Were I a Spaniard living under the harrow of an exploiting Church, I should hurl the faggots with the best of them'.<sup>119</sup>

In the second half of 1936, arguments and imagery which depicted the Church in Spain as standing aloof from, and dismissive of, the ordinary people went only part way to calming the British public outrage caused by reports of the atrocities being carried out against the clergy in the Republican zone. For the left, the most negative aspect of the early months of the war was not the violence so much as the object of that violence. Seemingly endless eyewitness accounts which told of church-burning and the torture and murder of ecclesiastics could not be countered simply by explaining the causes of mob fury and rationalising fears of the influence of Soviet communism. The Church might be responsible for alienating much of its flock, and Spanish communists and anarchists might remain instinctively Catholic, but priests were still being massacred and nuns were still being outraged. Here, again, supporters of the Republic developed and made additions to old arguments. So the claim was that incidents had been exaggerated and anyway should be examined in the context of both present events and past practices. Churches had been burned but not to the extent claimed. The 'unhappy' excesses brought about in the chaos of the rebellion had been curbed. After all, 'even in law-abiding London', there existed those 'wild elements capable of gross excesses'. (As we shall see in the next chapter, this was an observation given a more ominous reading by pro-Nationalists). Pro-Republicans stressed that in Spain anti-clerical sentiment was nothing new.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, even in the present climate, the attack on the Church was not total. As most commentators were keen to make clear, the Church in Spain was not uniformly iniquitous nor was it wholly pro-Franco. After all, as Atholl and others pointed out, 'the Basque clergy [had] stood by their Government [and] not one of them [had been] harmed'.<sup>121</sup>

This contention was one given particular support by a small but significant number of British clergymen. In the late autumn of 1936, the Spanish government, anxious to counter the damage done to its reputation by the anti-clerical outrages, had invited a deputation of British clerics to report on the situation as they found it. In re-

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<sup>119</sup> D.R. Davies, *In Search of Myself* (London, 1961), p. 171.

<sup>120</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, pp. 24, 59 & 66; Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 33.

<sup>121</sup> Atholl, *ibid.*, p. 98.

sponse a group of Anglican and Free Churchmen, led by Henry Brinton and the Dean of Chichester, visited Spain between 29 January and 9 February 1937 and their subsequent report confirmed left-wing claims of the part played in the rebellion by the Church.<sup>122</sup> Significantly, although this group did not in fact visit the Basque country, they drew attention to the lack of anti-clericalism in those provinces proclaiming that :

In the Basque country, where the clergy ... lived in close sympathy and contact with their people and where a vigorous effort [was] being made to build up a society on the principles of Catholic social justice, anti-clericalism [was] a negligible force It is noteworthy that this democratic Catholic people is fighting on the Republican side.<sup>123</sup>

The Basque response, the group felt able to claim, provided incontrovertible evidence that in Government Spain anti-clericalism did not equate to an anti-God movement.

A later deputation drew similar conclusions. In the Spring of 1937 Hewlett Johnson, the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury, was one of a group of clergy of mixed denomination organised by the Marxist, Reverend E.O. Iredell, who visited a number of Government areas, including, this time, the Basque country, where some members witnessed the bombing of Durango.<sup>124</sup> Iredell's political sympathies were no secret. The clenched-fist salute, collections to buy arms for the Popular Front, special addresses on Marxism and Christianity, and renditions of the 'Red Flag' and the 'Internationale' were all part of the Barnsbury vicar's religious repertoire.<sup>125</sup> Johnson, who held the view that the brutal response of the masses in Spain was an unfortunate but necessary process in the shaping of the Republic's new order, was also

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<sup>122</sup> Members included Brinton, A.S. Duncan-Jones (Dean of Chichester), Francis Underhill (Dean of Rochester), Methodist Rev. Henry Carter, Quaker, Percy W. Bartlett & Rev. Philip Usher.

<sup>123</sup> 'Report', Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 75.

<sup>124</sup> Group included: Hewlett Johnson (Dean of Canterbury), D.R. Davies (former Congregational minister), Revd. E.O. Iredell (Vicar of St Clements, Barnsbury), Professor John MacMurray (University of London), Kenneth Ingram (a prominent left Christian) Hannah Laurie (Anglican), and Monica Whatley (a Catholic, & Labour, London County councillor), Mrs Beer (Catholic) & Miss O. Levertoff (Anglican) : *Report of a Recent Religious Delegation to Spain April 1937*, (London, 1937).

<sup>125</sup> Davies, *In Search of Myself*, p. 164.

adamant that that order would be 'more fundamentally Christian in essence'.<sup>126</sup> Accordingly, a group of British volunteers who arrived in error at the Dean's hotel room in Madrid were treated to an impromptu homily on the Christian virtues of the cause for which they were fighting.<sup>127</sup> Religion and the Republic were not at all incompatible, declared the Dean, once again repeating the reasoning that 'the Basques who fought in the republican ranks were Catholics'.<sup>128</sup> The published findings of Johnson's group reinforced this position. Praising, among other things, the Republican Government's endeavour to impose order and its treatment of prisoners of war, it made particular point of contrasting the harmonious relationship that existed between the clergy, people and Government in the Basque provinces and the antipathy felt toward the Church elsewhere. Significantly, though, the report pointed out that, unlike the Church in the rest of Spain, the Basque Church had never been subjected to the Inquisition, and consequently was not swayed by political tendencies.<sup>129</sup> For some members of the deputation such distinctions were undoubtedly reinforced by a personal hostility toward what they saw as the nature of Catholicism throughout the rest of Spain. In declaring that the 'mumbo-jumbo' of 'Roman worship ... still leaves me cold', two members of the group, D.R. Davies and Professor MacMurray, were undoubtedly expressing the aversion felt by some sections of the Anglican community to what they regarded as 'that muttering and genuflecting and bead counting religion'.<sup>130</sup>

The experience of the Basque country offered proof that the Republic was not hostile to Catholicism. For British audiences this added to a special and sympathetic view of the Basque provinces, one which, as will be shown in chapter eight, would gain momentum after the bombing of Guernica. 'Priests and nuns in any of the Basque towns were as safe as if they were in the Vatican City itself - until Franco moved in', asserted Noel Monks, a Catholic correspondent for the *Daily Express*, listing the clerical casualties which had resulted from the Nationalist assault

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<sup>126</sup> Lambeth Palace, Lang papers, Ms. 149, 24 April 1937, Johnson to Lang, cited in Buchanan, *Britain*, p. 172.

<sup>127</sup> Sefton Delmer, *Trail Sinister: Vol. 1* (London, 1961), p. 318. Seemingly the Dean's room had previously been occupied by two prostitutes, the real reason for the brigaders' visit.

<sup>128</sup> Cited in Carmel Haden Guest (editor), *David Guest: A Scientist Fights for Freedom, 1911-1938* (London, 1939), p. 172.

<sup>129</sup> *Report of a Religious Delegation*, p. 17.

<sup>130</sup> Davies, *In Search of Myself*, p. 170.

on Durango and Guernica.<sup>131</sup> The problem for Republican sympathisers, however, was that the Basque provinces had long been promoted as being distinct from the rest of Spain, and therefore religious toleration in that area could easily be regarded as part of that Basque singularity rather than Republican uniformity. As readers of travel literature had often been informed, the Basque inheritance included 'a constant mingling of religion and pure democracy'.<sup>132</sup> Efforts were therefore made to widen and to make more credible the picture of religious tolerance. In this, the observations of Catholic sympathisers were often seen as being particularly valuable. As early as September 1936, Monica Whatley, a Catholic, Labour candidate for Clapham and subsequently a member of the Dean of Canterbury's delegation, was claiming that priests and nuns were walking freely about the streets of Barcelona. Sympathisers eagerly reported the accounts of other Catholics who, 'with an open mind', added to the picture of religious tolerance with tales of visits to churches and of returning 'triumphant' from attending Mass in Barcelona.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, unlike in the Nationalist held areas, in the Republican zone it was claimed that there was an open tolerance of Protestants, who were reportedly 'treated everywhere with respect and, in some cases, with special favour'.<sup>134</sup>

It followed, then, argued commentators like Gannes and Repard, that it was not religion itself that was being targeted. Church-burning was not simply the result of 'the hatred felt by ... people who have freed themselves from religious prejudices'. Some expression of fury at a Church which sided with the anti-Government forces and openly encouraged acts of ruthless repression was inevitable. Add to this the fact that many Churches had been revealed as having been the 'organisational centres of the fascists ... stores for fascist weapons, sanctuary for fascist murderers and the wrath of the masses against the churches - but not against the Catholics' was 'understandable'.<sup>135</sup> The sympathetic press, also, made much of reports which told of rebels, and indeed priests, using church buildings as vantage points from

<sup>131</sup> Noel Monks, 'I Hate War', F.C. Hanghen, *Nothing But Danger: Thrilling Adventures of Ten Newspaper Correspondents in the Spanish War* (London, Toronto, Bombay & Sydney, 1940) p. 79.

<sup>132</sup> Katherine Fedden, *The Basque Country* (London, 1921), p. 15.

<sup>133</sup> Monica Whatley, 'A Catholic Looks at Spain', *Nelson Gazette*, 1 September 1936; Nancy Johnstone, *Hotel in Flight* (London, 1939), pp. 204-209.

<sup>134</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, pp.252-253 & 233; *Report of Religious Delegation*, p. 16; R.A. Capo, Methodist Minister, Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 6 December 1937.

<sup>135</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, p. 135; also, Paul, *Life and Death of a Spanish Town*, p. 67; Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 64, et. al.



which to fire on the loyalist militia. 'Eyewitness' accounts, like that of an eighty-six year old expatriate who told of priests firing machine-guns and hurling hand-grenades, were seized upon as irrefutable evidence of the Church's alliance with fascism.<sup>136</sup> Undoubtedly some such incidents did occur, but for many commentators the correspondence of such claims with the truth mattered little anyway. Quick to question the accuracy of 'first-hand' accounts of violence in the Republican zone, they were less than zealous in questioning similar sources of evidence if they offered some justification of that violence.<sup>137</sup> Anyone looking for the antichrist need look no further than the 'priest, arms in hand', became the common claim.<sup>138</sup>

In the same vein, the Church was condemned for encouraging the excesses of the rebels, 'greedy savages' who were fighting with the 'blessing of the Church'.<sup>139</sup> The ferocity of the 'reprisals' carried out by the Nationalist forces as they attempted to terrify the working classes into submitting to the new order, and the condoning of that action by a clergy for whom all that mattered was that those executed should be offered confession has been well documented.<sup>140</sup> For pro-Republicans at the time such an attitude provided further proof of the Church's continuing history of clerical-inspired barbarity. In Asturias in October 1934, 'the clerical terror had tried to outdo brown brutality'.<sup>141</sup> Two years later it was being claimed that the vengeful nature of the Church was nowhere more evident than in Navarre. There, the 'savagery' displayed during the Carlist Wars by 'clerical commanders such as the priest Merino' was being repeated, as Navarrese priests purportedly encouraged and participated in the massacre of fellow Basques.<sup>142</sup> 'The extremism of their single passion takes away the foreigner's breath', remarked one commentator, in a tone which mixed admiration with abhorrence and alluded to the alien nature of the

<sup>136</sup> Account of Elizabeth Sophia Rayment, *Co-operative News*, 22 August 1936.

<sup>137</sup> E.g. Keith Scott Watson, *Single to Spain* (London, 1937), p. 35; Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 94; Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 306.

<sup>138</sup> Soukup, *Spain Assailed*, p. 17.

<sup>139</sup> Mitchell, *My Fill of Days*, p. 404.

<sup>140</sup> E.g. Preston, *A Concise History*, pp. 146-147 notes that in Navarre, where 'the left barely existed', estimates of victims of the right's purges vary between 1,950 and 7,000.

<sup>141</sup> Conze, *Spain To-day*, p. 102.

<sup>142</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 17; John Langdon Davies, *Behind Spanish Barricades* (London, 1937), p. 207. Raymond Carr, *Spain, 1808-1975* (Oxford, 2nd. edition, 1982), p. 188, notes that by 1834, during the first Carlist War, 'Merino the priest guerilla of the War of Independence could not control his men who were "making him hateful to the people"'. For analysis of Carlist political and social aspirations during the Republic see Martin Blinkhorn, 'War on two fronts: politics and society in Navarre 1931-6', Preston (editor), *Revolution and War in Spain*, pp. 59-84.

conflict.<sup>143</sup> The news that the Bishop of Pamplona was granting indulgences to anyone who killed a Marxist would have been equally foreign to British sensibilities.<sup>144</sup> Intended as conclusive evidence of the Spanish Church's contempt of the masses, such anecdotes also reaffirmed notions of the savagery which historically the Spanish clergy had employed to 'force upon heathen and heretic alike the faith of the Holy Catholic Church'.<sup>145</sup> For less partisan observers it was an evocation which fed into the idea that, in terms of cold brutality, both sides were as bad as each other. In this way, the impartial felt able to conclude, that whilst the savagery of the Carlist Wars had indeed 'aroused the indignation of every civilised country ... there is some comfort in the reflection that the atrocities perpetrated by both sides in the present struggle do not necessarily indicate a general breakdown of moral standards, but only a perpetration of a Spanish tradition'.<sup>146</sup>

The effectiveness of such justifications and arguments on popular opinion is difficult to measure. Reports such as those made by the Church deputations not only antagonised British Catholic opinion but stirred a long-lasting torrent of abuse from other quarters. Early censure of Brinton's delegation included that of the Anglican Bishop of Gibraltar and Henry Page Croft, who demanded to know if 'such behaviour would be excused in Great Britain ... if the Conservative counties of Kent and Sussex had unpopular socialist clergy'.<sup>147</sup> Nine months later, in December 1937, critics were still pouring scorn on the judgement of those 'deans who [had] enjoyed a Spanish holiday'.<sup>148</sup> The poor response to the 'Christian Committee for Food for Spain', initiated on the return of the delegation which had been led by the Dean of Canterbury, suggests that their account made little impression on a public already inundated with calls to support other humanitarian aid appeals.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, with 2,500 invited, an attendance of only twelve members of the London and the Home Counties at the initial meeting of the Committee demonstrates that the delegation's account failed to impress the inherently conservative Anglican clergy.

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<sup>143</sup> G.L. Steer, *Tree of Gernika: A Field Study of Modern War* (London, 1938), p. 20.

<sup>144</sup> Davies, *In Search of Myself*, p. 208; Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 38.

<sup>145</sup> W. Somerset Maugham, *Don Fernando* (London, 1990, first published 1935), p. 70.

<sup>146</sup> C.F. Russell, Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 7 May 1937.

<sup>147</sup> Henry Page Croft, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 23 February 1937. Bishop of Gibraltar, Letters to the Editor, *The Times*, 2 March 1937.

<sup>148</sup> Rev. Archibald Ramsay MP, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 4 December 1937.

<sup>149</sup> The appeal raised no more than £1,000 throughout its duration. Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 174.

Nonetheless, the accounts offered by the Church deputations did serve to endorse those of other pro-Republic commentators. Atrocities, they all concluded, had certainly taken place but 'refugee psychosis'<sup>150</sup> and pro-Franco propaganda had exaggerated their extent. Attacks on the clergy should be understood in terms of the Church's association with a military whose reprisals were far more calculating and ruthless in nature. A corrupt and hypocritical Spanish Church, in supporting its reactionary historic allies was an understandable target. Indeed, in the Basque provinces, where the Church was rightly respected, there had been no assault on the clergy, proof also that the Republic was not essentially antagonistic to religion. Moreover, anti-clericalism should be seen in the context of Spanish character and custom. The Church in Spain had long represented an affront to the dignity of the ordinary Spanish people and outbursts of anti-clerical activity had long been the typical response. Anti-clericalism therefore did not equate to anti-God.

On the eve of the Civil War, then, both British observers opposed to and those in favour of Spain's new government had, to a large extent, already put in place their understanding of the relationship between the Spanish Church and the Republic. For the one side, all arguments distilled into supporting the concept of a Church which was integral to the very essence of Spanish life and culture, *hispanidad*. Attack the Church, as the reforming *bienio* and the Popular Front had done, and not only was the moral character of the country threatened but an escalation of Bolshevik disruption was invited. In reply, efforts at reform were welcomed (even if generally considered to be too meekly implemented) as necessary to a modernising democracy. Pro-Republicans did not deny the profundity of the relationship between the Spanish people and their religion but did increasingly attack a Church which they saw as corrupt and representing the interests of the reactionary old order, a charge given credibility by events in Asturia after October 1934. It was not religion which stirred the hostility of the people but a venal clergy. Nonetheless, the outrages committed against the clergy in many parts of Spain in the early months of the conflict provided pro-Nationalist commentators with an effective justification of their support for a military rebellion. Pro-Republicans on the other hand were forced to defend the seemingly indefensible. Thus, as the Catholic weeklies grew ever more confident in endorsing Franco's crusade, the mainstream left and

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<sup>150</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 325.

their organs, anxious not to antagonise their Catholic constituents, were conspicuous in their confusion and were slow to challenge the pro-Nationalist platform, as we shall see, only gaining momentum during the siege of Madrid and seizing the high moral ground following the bombing of Guernica. The issue of anti-clericalism, or rather its extent, became central to the arguments of both sides. For the right it was evidence of pernicious and atheistic Bolshevism, and all that was anti-Spain. For the left it was the understandable, if unfortunate, explosion of pent up indignation against a Church which had failed and had exploited the people for its own ends.

In advancing these views, both sides drew on references to the Church's role in the past and again endeavoured to explain current events in terms of Spanish character and custom. A use of historic and cultural references - often an echo of the propaganda advanced by the warring factions themselves - appealing, as they did, to long-held notions, served to help sympathisers in their respective, and contrasting, constructions of the Church's role in Spain. However, whilst such devices gave graphic meaning to events they also served to perpetuate less than helpful popular perceptions of Spain. Notions of Catholic heroism and martyrdom generated some fascination but, as many commentators themselves recognised, tended to colour present events with past prejudices. Accusations and counter-accusations which evoked imagery of the Inquisition, of Church wealth, or of past Catholic 'crusaders' may have appealed to advocates of the opposing sides but would have done little to make the war less remote for the dispassionate majority. Neither, the pro-Nationalist notion of Nationalist Christian morality nor the pro-Republic picture of a religiously tolerant, reforming, forward-looking democracy, was enhanced by references which explained that the brutalities carried out by both sides 'were no new phenomenon in Spanish history'.<sup>151</sup> Equally unhelpful was the commonly expressed qualification that care should be taken not to judge such actions by British standards but in the context of Spanish customs. Pro-Nationalists who urged that pre-Republic anti-clericalism should be viewed as a Spanish idiosyncrasy and pro-Republicans who reminded that 'the burning of churches in one country may be the most common and traditional channel of popular resentment while in others it may amount to the most horrible kind of desecration', may have intended to convey very different interpretations but through their efforts to explain the rela-

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<sup>151</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 72.

tionship between the Church and the opposing sides in such terms they also managed to confirm further, for the uncommitted majority, the 'unBritish' nature of the war.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, p. 165.

## Chapter 6

### THE TWO SIDES DEPICTED IN TERMS OF CLASS, RACE AND ETHNICITY

While the role of the Spanish Church in events remained a point of reference throughout the conflict its significance was gradually eclipsed by other issues. Pro-Nationalist efforts to depict the circumstances of the war as those of Christianity versus Godless Bolshevism continued but with gradually fading force as the public memory of the early months of vengeful violence was clouded by accounts of equally horrific reprisals carried out by the Nationalist 'crusaders', reprisals which forced some Nationalist sympathisers to reappraise their position. During 1937, the siege of Madrid, the bombing of Guernica and the conquest of the North became the events which dominated the popular media and around which commentators focused their respective interpretations of issues. Not least of these was the nature and make-up of the forces involved. From the onset pro-Republic commentators had pointed in horror at the involvement of Moorish troops. By August they were expressing further fears as German and Italian support became ever more evident. Equally voiced was the consternation of pro-Nationalists aghast at evidence of Soviet support and of international Bolshevism in the form of the volunteers of the International Brigade. Such intervention was held as proof by partisan commentators of either the spread of communism or of fascism and was seen by many, irrespective of any allegiance, as threatening a wider European conflagration. Indeed, in this latter context, a number of commentators visited Spain in order to observe the effects of a 'modern' war in which the bombing of civilian targets had become the norm. Foreign involvement, then, provided both sets of sympathisers with support for their notions of a war involving, if not between, dangerous ideologies. While the right insisted that it was a Christian not fascist alliance that was resisting the ambitions of Soviet communism, the left sought to mollify fears by establishing the concept of an anti-fascist, pro-democracy popular front.

In advancing these stances both sides offered a diet of stereotypical imagery. To the class characterisation of the two sides, which reduced the conflict either to one of

Moorish troops and foreign intervention added elements of race and ethnicity. This chapter explores how each set of sympathisers, through reference to a framework of perceived class, racial and ethnic qualities sought to strengthen their case, both defending their favoured side and demonising their adversaries. Briefly, in terms of class, pro-Nationalists argued that those Spaniards fighting for the Republic were, in the large part, dangerously misguided peasants and working-class dupes who were under the influence of 'criminal' ideologues. These terms of reference were further extended to help explain the involvement of members of the International Brigade, most especially British volunteers. On the other hand, for pro-Republicans, the reactionary nature of the Spanish élite was the problem. For many, Spain in the 1930s became what France had been for Thomas Paine in 1790. It was not the Spanish worker or the International Brigader who was a dupe, but the Italian soldier tricked into fighting for Franco by his fascist masters. Franco's use of the Army of North Africa presented those who portrayed the war as a 'Christian crusade' with an obvious challenge, one which pro-Republicans exploited, not only in the sense of the obvious contradiction of Muslims enlisted to fight a Christian cause but also in crude terms of race. Similarly, though less overtly, efforts to deride the Italian, German and Irish troops in the Nationalist ranks included references to ethnicity and national character. However, whilst those nationals were particularly associated with the Nationalists, the presence on the Republican side of considerable numbers of volunteers from the same countries presented an interesting dilemma for all commentators, a dilemma which the right sought to resolve in terms of class and the left in terms of character: those Italian and German volunteers fighting for the Republic displaying only the best of national characteristics, those fighting for Franco only the worst.

### **The Spaniards of the Two Sides: Class Envy or Class Struggle?**

For Nationalist supporters the spiral of violence unleashed after July 1936 seemed to confirm their predictions of the failure of the Republic. Republican reform had undermined the progress made under the auspices of Primo de Rivera, had attacked the Christian essence of Spain and had invited revolutionary discontent. Moreover, a class-based assault in the shape of catastrophic land reforms had resulted in 'wealthy landowners ... like the rest of their class, hav[ing] been reduced to

poverty.’<sup>1</sup> The July military rebellion therefore was no more than a reasserting of ‘the historic spirit of national Spain’. Franco’s forces were confronting a ‘creed based on class hatred and civil strife’, and fighting ‘a class war’ in which were mingled ‘the racial forces of disruption’.<sup>2</sup> For pro-Nationalists, the unfortunate failure of the military rebellion to effect complete control had meant that the ‘Vandals and Visigoths’, who lacked respect for the values of ‘true Spain’, had gone on a rampage, wantonly destroying the possessions ‘of every old family in Spain’.<sup>3</sup> Nationalist apologists seized on the lurid tales of ‘red’ atrocities brought by refugees from Republican Spain - each trying to outdo the other, and all probably anxious to establish political *bona fides* in the process - and embellished them with casual references to the lowest supposed aspects of Spanish character. ‘How very Spanish’, declared Helen Nicholson on hearing a tale of an alleged beheading, adding the crude explanation that ‘a Spaniard’s actions ... always, in the last instance, hinge on whether he likes your face’.<sup>4</sup>

Such horrific yet childlike traits were, of course, associated with the uneducated and easily-led lower classes. Only they could be induced to dress in looted women’s clothing and behave like fiends.<sup>5</sup> ‘After half a century of good terms’, explained one observer, ‘estate workers had been influenced by a lot of aliens’.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in the towns, that ‘gangster and hooligan element which disfigures all industrial cities’ had subverted the honest but easily misled workers.<sup>7</sup> For the right-wing press it was class-rooted envy, stirred by the ‘scum of the Red population’, that lay behind Republican support.<sup>8</sup> Across popular literature, where any form of socialism was commonly equated with base envy, writers like Dennis Wheatley and Percy Westerman took the opportunity to denounce the ‘criminal and sadistic lunatics’ who preached the Marxist ‘doctrine by which the mobs had been taught they would

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholson, *Death in the Morning*, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Garvin, ‘Lessons in Spanish’, *The Observer*, 11 April 1937; Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Nigel Tangye, *Red White and Spain* (London, 1937) pp. 39 & 111; Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholson, *Death in the Morning*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> Cecil Gerahty, *The Road to Madrid* (London, 1937), p. 63.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Jerrold, ‘Spain: Impressions and Reflections’, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, No. DCCXXII, April 1937, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Nigel Tangye, ‘A 3,000 mile Tour of Spain’, *Observer*, 10 January 1937.



achieve riches and contentment'.<sup>9</sup> Whilst it was sometimes conceded, that 'doubtless many (of those loyal to the Republic) ... believed that they were fighting for a great cause', the motive of most was declared to be greed, no more than an expectation of 'a new world where everything would be free and easy and to their liking'.<sup>10</sup> It was hardly surprising then, concluded observers, that, in their flight from the advancing, ordered Nationalist army, the priority of this ill-disciplined, murderous and criminal, red rabble should be ensuring the safe loading of their vehicles with looted liquor.<sup>11</sup>

The lawlessness of the masses, it was claimed, had been further encouraged by the release of criminals, armed and formed into militias by a panicking government. 'Professional criminals' were by nature the 'soul-mates' of the Communist party, *Daily Mail* correspondent, Cardozo typically declared.<sup>12</sup> The mobilisation of this 'militant manpower', announced the American journalist Edward Knoblauch, had been the Republican government's answer to 'the traditional apathy of the masses'.<sup>13</sup> The result, for one observer, was that 'normal', 'honest' Spaniards were now to be found only in the ranks of the Nationalists whilst all 'the abnormal Spaniards were on the side of the Reds'. For another, it meant that through no fault of their own the misguided 'common people ... [had] sunk lower than Chinamen'.<sup>14</sup> The only course open to those wishing to restore the 'true values' of Spain, argued the Nationalist hierarchy, was to expunge all traces of the scourge which had corrupted so many ordinary Spaniards and to introduce 'to a new life' those who had been tainted and had genuinely seen the error of their recent ways. British sympathisers agreed without question. Writers dismissed stories of Nationalist reprisals or excused them as being 'in accordance with any normal laws of war', no more than those 'which would be exercised by any British officer in command in similar circumstances'.<sup>15</sup> Where reprisals were reported they were phrased in language which reiterated the notion of simple-minded peasants, sadly unredeemable since falling

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<sup>9</sup> Wheatley, *The Golden Spaniard*, p. 166; Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, pp. 238-239.

<sup>10</sup> Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p73; Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, pp. 82, &113.

<sup>12</sup> Cardozo, *ibid.*, pp251-252; McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain*, p. 121.

<sup>13</sup> Knoblauch, *Correspondent in Spain*, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 252; McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain*, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> Cardozo, *ibid.*, p73; Jerrold, 'Spain: Impressions and Reflections', p. 17; Sarolea, *Daylight in Spain*, p. 78; Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 88-89.

under the spell of evil revolutionaries:

perhaps peace had come at last to hearts which had only throbbed to wicked and foolish passions, sown in their foolish brains by the wickeder and more intelligent brains of those who day by day are escaping punishment'.<sup>16</sup>

Pro-Nationalist commentators and observers were quick to use the Spanish example to point out the danger of being blind to the dangers of working-class agitation at home. Not surprisingly, given the strong ruralist disposition of many commentators, such dangers were largely associated with urban workers. With an implicit warning of 'Spain today Britain tomorrow', Major J.F.C. Fuller, who had joined the British Union of Fascists in 1934, reported that the result of arming 'the denizens of the underworld' had been that 'the "East Ends" of the cities' had gone 'roaring red.'<sup>17</sup> The General Strike and the more recent Hunger Marches served to remind comfortable middle-class readers that what had happened in 'the less happy parts of Spain' might happen in Britain, especially if the distressed areas were subjected to 'the hopelessness of a new slump and an active alien propaganda'.<sup>18</sup> This fear of the contagion of class unrest permeated the anti-Republican stance. Moreover, it was a fear evident in the reports of a number of British diplomats in Spain. The sympathy of most, though not all, British diplomats in Spain lay with the Nationalist Movement. Britain's Ambassador, Sir Henry Chilton, safely ensconced across the French border in Hendaye, was notable in condemning the Republic's failure to 'control the masses'.<sup>19</sup> In the Foreign Office, although his stance would shift as his consternation regarding the involvement of Italy and Germany increased, Anthony Eden's early response included making favourable links between the potential régime of Franco and that of Primo de Rivera.<sup>20</sup> Many of the early communications received at the Foreign Office encouraged such a view. The British consuls in Bar-

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<sup>16</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, pp. 83, 63 & 96.

<sup>17</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *The Conquest of Red Spain*, [London, 1937] p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p212.

<sup>19</sup> Sir Henry Chilton (Hendaye) to Eden, 17 December 1936, *DOBFP*, Second Series, Vol.17, note 491, p. 706.

<sup>20</sup> Eden to Sir E. Drummond, 8 December, 1936, *DOBFP*, Second Series, Vol.17, note 456, pp. 663-664. It is worth noting that George Ogilvie-Forbes, chargé d'affaires, Madrid, whilst opening the doors of the Embassy to a number of anti-Republicans during the first six months of the war, nonetheless became increasingly sympathetic to the Government. Consul Stevenson in Bilbao, also, came to identify with the Basque cause.

celona and Bilbao, Norman King and R.C. Stevenson, for instance, were notable for their scathing, class loaded assessments of the situation in their respective areas. Although, in an exception worth noting for the image it conjures, King was moved to concede that the 'Anarchist Association' who had taken control of the Barcelona Yacht Club had proved 'friendly and helpful' to members of the British community, more usually his reports were loaded with undisguised contempt. The 'common people', he reported, were encouraging 'disgusting atrocities', talking 'openly and ignorantly of their scheme for overthrowing the well-to-do', indeed had 'exterminated' 'practically all the property-owning class'.<sup>21</sup> For Stevenson, the corruptness of working-class organisations was clearly demonstrated in the way the FAI (*Federación Anarquista Ibérica*) in Bilbao 'operat[ed] on the "Cheka cum Chicago gangster" system'. 'These men', he declared, who committed 'the most execrable crimes in the name of liberty and progress' represented 'the worst type of human specie'.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, diplomats in areas held by Franco reported with enthusiasm that the perverted aspirations of the workers had been suppressed and there had been 'a rapid return to normal life'.<sup>23</sup> Many of those whose appointments remained in the Republican zone, though, made clear that what they were witnessing was violent 'class warfare'. They were equally clear in their belief that 'those responsible for it ... hope[d] to carry it to other countries, including of course, Great Britain'.<sup>24</sup>

Pro-Nationalist commentators, then, advanced the argument that in the Government held areas the masses and their foreign supporters had been duped by the promise of easy gain into fighting a class war. By contrast, they asserted that in the Nationalist zone there was no sign of the 'bolshevist ... creed of class hatred' that was 'rife in the Republic'. On the contrary, there, 'people of different classes' were able to 'speak to one another with a greater frankness'.<sup>25</sup> In Franco's Spain, you could 'go where you like[d]; say what you like[d]' was the optimistically blinkered conclusion of Douglas Jerrold. An attitude that the recent editor of the High Tory journal

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<sup>21</sup> N. King to F.O., 2 August 1936, *DOBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 17, note 46, pp. 50-51 & p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> R.C. Stevenson to Sir Henry Chilton, 25 Sept. 1936, *DOBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 17, note 247, p. 340;

<sup>23</sup> F.G. Coultas (Seville) to Eden, 20 October 1936, *DOBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 17, note 304, p. 434.

<sup>24</sup> N. King to Eden, 26 August 1936, *DOBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 17, note 120, pp. 144-146.

<sup>25</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p125; J.L. Garvin, *Observer*, 11 April 1937.

*English Review* attributed to the 'unshakeable conviction that all classes of Spaniard are wholly, solidly, behind the generalissimo'.<sup>26</sup> Franco represented a welcome return to the Spain in which 'each man is a caballero ... and he knows it'.<sup>27</sup> In Seville and in Salamanca, where 'normality' had returned, 'people of all classes were sharing the little restaurants'.<sup>28</sup> Franco's support was 'drawn from all classes', Eleonora Tennant observed in November 1936. They were simply Spaniards united in their 'belief in law, order and decency'.<sup>29</sup> Nationalist Spain was 'nothing if not democratic', at least in the 'social sense', was the somewhat obscure contention of apologists. However, in an aside to Spanish character, they also warned that the excessive nature of Spanish classlessness was not conducive to discipline when it carried into the relationship between officers and men.<sup>30</sup> The breakdown of respect for authority had proved the undoing of the Republic, and classlessness, it was stressed, should not be confused with respect for the established hierarchy. What was needed was a return to the respect admired by travellers like Nina Duryea whereby the 'peasant recognised without rancour or envy the superiority of his overlord'.<sup>31</sup>

Republican sympathisers, on the other hand, maintained the concept of workers struggling for 'economic freedom and liberty of conscience' against the 'iron hand' of the old order which had gained particular favour in the aftermath of the Asturian rising.<sup>32</sup> 'In recent times', proclaimed one local Labour owned newspaper, 'a struggle has been going on between those who held the wealth of the country and those who produce it'.<sup>33</sup> However, before pro-Republicans could develop the legitimacy of such ideological arguments, the wave of violence which engulfed much of the government held zone in the wake of the rebellion meant that they were at first faced with a struggle to counter the pro-Nationalist imagery of 'red rabble' and class hatred. Early efforts argued that evidence of disorganisation disproved the right's accusations of revolutionary intent. Yes, prisoners had been released, but these were not criminals let loose to cause havoc, rather they were political victims, jailed

<sup>26</sup> Jerrold, *Impressions*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Tiltman, *European Excursion*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>28</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, pp. 125 & 103.

<sup>30</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, pp. 16-17; Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 140.

<sup>31</sup> Duryea, *Mallorca the Magnificent*, p. 154.

<sup>32</sup> Manning, *What I Saw in Spain*, p. 20.

<sup>33</sup> 'The Struggle in Spain', *Nelson Gazette*, 25 August 1936.

without charge.<sup>34</sup> Certainly atrocities had been committed, sympathisers conceded, for 'even the best causes have their rogues and bullies', but order was being restored.<sup>35</sup> 'Moreover, it was pointed out that 'men on average do not behave like brutes unless they are treated like brutes'.<sup>36</sup> The military rebellion, argued sympathisers, was the latest manifestation of the forces in Spain which had long treated men like brutes. The reprisals carried out in the areas under Nationalist control were evidence of the continuation of that process and were far more ruthless in nature than any of the 'instinctive' actions of workers who saw their very freedom threatened. As Brinton summarised, 'a sharp distinction exist[ed] between the cruelties of a mob infuriated by betrayal and, for the moment, subject to no authority, and the deliberate acts of responsible military commanders'.<sup>37</sup>

In a further attempt to counter the negative images conjured by atrocity stories, commentators also went on to stress the ordinariness and courage of the people who were involved in the stand against Franco's rebel forces. Typically, in an early account written under his own name, Claude Cockburn ( otherwise Frank Pitcairn of the *Daily Worker* ) invited his readers to admire the ordinary men and women who, led by a 'white-haired communist woman' and armed only with 'sporting guns and two airguns', had attacked the Army Command building in Barcelona, 'not grasping that such things are impossible'.<sup>38</sup> Following a visit to Madrid in November 1936 an all party delegation of MPs felt able to agree, however briefly, that 'the Civil Government seems to be in the hands of mostly working class lads who appear honestly and energetically to be doing their best'.<sup>39</sup> George Steer's sympathies were more pro-Basque than pro-Republic but he subscribed to the same picture of a brave, if naïve, people prepared at all costs to protect the hopes raised by the 'new' Spain of the Popular Front. Describing the early atmosphere in the Basque provinces of Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya, he observed that following early uncertainty the 'Frente Popular in San Sebastián had recovered its nerve' and the revolt had been quickly suppressed. The result, claimed Steer, was that 'very few took the

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<sup>34</sup> *Daily Herald*, 18 February 1936.

<sup>35</sup> Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 151.

<sup>36</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Brinton, *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>38</sup> Frank Pitcairn (Claude Cockburn), *Reporter in Spain* (London, 1936), pp. 35-36.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from F. Seymour Cocks (Lab.), D.R. Grenfell (Lab.), W.P. Crawford Greene (Con.), Wg. Cmdr. A.W. James (Con.), Captain. I.R.J. Macnamara (Con.), Wilfred Roberts (Lib.), *The Times* 19 December 1936.

rebellion seriously' and life seemed 'like a grand holiday ... for all classes, except the Castilian rights'. Far from being violent and practised revolutionaries, he argued, most of the ordinary Basque people's notions of war were ones moulded by 'dear old Westerns.' Steer's picture of militiamen wearing 'devil-may-care' slouch-hats, obligatory red bandanas and battling with cigarettes in their mouths was one more of comic bravado than 'red savagery'.<sup>40</sup>

Such bravado was of course deemed typical of the Spanish. Actions which called upon the Spaniard's congenital qualities of courage were also noted as being inhibited by his individualism and tempered by his irrationality. More than one commentator was bemused when the troops of both sides insisted on continuing to observe the siesta during this period, a practice which, for a British audience, could only have added to the 'unreal' quality of the war.<sup>41</sup> The many accounts of government troops, particularly the anarchist militias, singing flamenco love-songs in the trenches and hurling insults as well as hand grenades at their nearby enemies would have merely encouraged the same view.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless the central picture of an unkempt, untrained, ill-armed and undisciplined people's army holding at bay the well armed and organised 'old army' and their mercenary cohorts remained predominant. Moreover, sympathisers pointed out, this was a position which called up historical precedent. It had been the ordinary Spanish people who had risen successfully against Napoleon on May 2, 1808, commentators frequently reminded, information which served both to add legitimacy to the actions of the militia and to infer where British sympathies should lie.<sup>43</sup> Cowles view that 'no one who saw the Republican troops could fail to be moved by the odds against which they fought', was typical of sentiments clearly intended to play on the supposed tendency of the British to sympathise with the underdog.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> GL Steer, *Tree of Gernika*, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Steer, *ibid.*, p. 24; Elsa Behrens, Imperial War Museum (IWM) Sound Archives, 9601/4, recalls hiding behind a barricade in Barcelona in July 1936 until at 'half past two ... they ... had a truce' and prepared lunch. A BIPO poll in February 1939 indicated 74% of respondents still thought that Chamberlain's policy of appeasement would 'lead to enduring peace' or at least 'keep us out of war. Cantril & Strunk, *Public Opinion 1935-1946*, p. 275.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, p. 42; Delmer, *Trail Sinister*, p. 302.

<sup>43</sup> *Co-operative News*, 22 August 1936, front page.

<sup>44</sup> Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, p. 42.

## Representations of Foreign Involvement.

While the early responses to the war saw the left struggling to neutralise the lurid imagery of anti-clerical atrocities, events rapidly provided them with an effective platform of their own. In deploying the Army of Africa, Moors and the Foreign Legion, and by enlisting the help of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany the Nationalists could be charged with a ruthless disregard for their fellow countrymen and with designs for a fascist Spain. Calculating that the war would be over in a matter of weeks both Hitler and Mussolini committed to supporting the Nationalist insurrection, recognising Franco's government as soon as 18 November 1936.<sup>45</sup> Such immediate involvement added substance to the left's fanciful claims that Germany and Italy had been directly involved in the generals' conspiracy.<sup>46</sup> While such claims had little foundation, early support rapidly escalated into large-scale involvement, as Italy and Germany, with Portugal serving as a conduit for the importation of arms, cynically exploited the machinery of non-intervention. On the other hand, French material support for the Republic had ceased by August 9 and Russian arms supplies did not start to arrive until the war was three months old, by which time the extent of the Axis involvement was well known. In terms of fighting effectiveness these circumstances favoured the Nationalists. However, in terms of propaganda, they offered the left a means of enlisting support for the Republic. A young, legally elected democracy, sympathisers argued, was being besieged by an alliance of rebellious generals, heathen moors, criminal legionaries, and foreign fascist powers whose very presence underlined the failings of non-intervention.<sup>47</sup>

These arguments, then, formed the crux of a pro-Republican campaign which gained in effectiveness as the shock of early atrocities faded. Republican sympathisers repeatedly advanced the idea that true Spaniards were to be found only on the side of the Republic. The peasants, miners, workers, and that section of the army that had chosen to stay loyal to the Government were facing an 'invading

<sup>45</sup> Mussolini, who saw opportunities to reinforce Italy's military and political presence in the Mediterranean, began sending support on 28 July 1936. Hitler, believing that victory for the Insurgents would deny the Franco-Soviet bloc an ally, agreed in principle as early as 25 July when, he launched the Wagnerian sounding 'Operation Magic Fire'. For a detailed examination of the support given see, Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain, The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g. Otto Katz, *The Nazi Conspiracy in Spain* (London, 1937).

<sup>47</sup> E.g. 'From a Downing Street Window', *Manchester and Salford Monthly Herald*, December 1936.

army' of 'Mohammedan Moors, Foreign Legionaries recruited among the lowest strata of a dozen nations, and some thousands of that Spanish aristocracy ... the most retrograde and corrupt ... in Europe', supported by national and foreign fascists.<sup>48</sup> The vast majority of the people of Spain, claimed sympathisers, remained loyal to the Republic. Only a few groups, out of warped ideology or perverse self-interest, supported Franco. The Duchess of Atholl was not alone in pointing out that the only Spanish troops fighting for Franco were the fascist Falange and the Carlist Requetés of Navarre.<sup>49</sup> For commentators of the left these last could be dismissed as no more than the misguided supporters of the failed nineteenth century cause of Spain's own 'Pretender Charles'.<sup>50</sup> A claim in the *Daily Telegraph* that the presence of Carlist detachments amongst the Moorish tabors and the legionaries besetting Madrid gave Franco's forces a 'truly national character' was scornfully dismissed by pro-Republicans as proof only of the right's desperation to bestow dubious Spanish credentials on the insurrection. As *News Chronicle* correspondent, Geoffrey Cox declared, the 'Moors, legionaries and fascists' who were carrying death and destruction to the ordinary people of Madrid were anything but Spanish.<sup>51</sup> Others announced that the Spanish Foreign Legion had always been 'most notorious for its riff-raff and common criminals', while the Carlists were 'a colourful lot' whose cause was 'touched with the fantastic', and the Moors were no more than 'imported heathens'.<sup>52</sup>

Of the troops which formed the Nationalist army, those whose presence made the most immediate impact on British popular feeling were the Moroccan *Regulares*.<sup>53</sup> Franco's use of Moorish soldiers was a propaganda opportunity which the left, anxious to counter the image of an atrocity-ridden Republic, eagerly grasped. Here it was pro-Nationalists who were forced to defend the seemingly indefensible. The Moors were Spain and Christendom's traditional foe. Such was the Spaniard's dread, that a Moorish effigy, its mouth operated via the organist, had

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<sup>48</sup> Letters to the editor, *Daily Herald*, 1 September 1936.

<sup>49</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, pp. 86, 184 & 202.

<sup>50</sup> *Co-operative News*, 22 August 1936.

<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey Cox, *Defence of Madrid* (London, 1937), pp. 53 & 72.

<sup>52</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>53</sup> For Moroccan involvement see Maria Rosa Madariaga, 'The Intervention of Moroccan Troops in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939: A Reconsideration', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1, January 1992, pp. 74-97.



long been used in the cathedral at Barcelona to scare unruly children.<sup>54</sup> Now, as one Trades Council publication exclaimed in outrage, the 'priests of the Catholic Church [were] in arms with Moslem Moors'.<sup>55</sup> Republican sympathisers pointed out the irony of Franco employing Spain's historic enemy to fight a Christian crusade against fellow Spaniards. The cynicism of Muslim troops fighting under a Christian banner was a charge made repeatedly and was one notably voiced by British volunteers. The communist academic, David Haden-Guest (volunteer, and son of the Labour MP for North Islington) articulated the thoughts of many when he asked why, if Franco was professing to protect the Church, did he need Moors? Since when have they been good Christians?'<sup>56</sup> Another brigader, a Catholic, was reported as both despising the reactionary forces with which his Church was associated and with feeling 'more bitterly than anyone the irony of bringing in the Moors to restore Christianity'.<sup>57</sup> Nor, if the testimony of Seamus MacKee is to be accepted, were such feelings restricted to the volunteers fighting for the Republic. According to MacKee, one of Eoin O'Duffy's Irish *bandera*, he, and his fellow Irish volunteers serving in Franco's ranks, soon came to realise the 'absurdity' of 'regular Nazi officers sent by a regime that persecutes Catholics in Germany, and Moors hired by the Spanish reactionary monarchists and aristocrats fighting to defend Christianity'. If, during the 'heated' discussions which reportedly took place on the issue, one of the Irish volunteers in his naïvety confused the Moors with Mormons, the terse enlightenment which followed led him to exclaim, 'Be the Holy! And we're fighting for the faith alongside these heathens!' Such conclusions, added to MacKee's revelation that 'the Spanish people didn't seem to be behind Franco's army, clearly suited the pro-Republican cause'.<sup>58</sup> Indeed evidence suggests that if MacKee's account was not the product of left-wing propaganda it was used as such, copies be-

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<sup>54</sup> Lorna Wood, 'Correspondent's Wife', in Hanighen (ed.), *Nothing but Danger*, p. 190.

<sup>55</sup> London Trades Council, *The Truth Behind the Spanish Rebellion* (London, August 1936), p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Carmen Haden-Guest (editor), *David Guest: A Scientist Fights for Freedom* (London, 1939), p. 203.

<sup>57</sup> Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, p. 149.

<sup>58</sup> Seamus MacKee, *I Was a Franco Soldier* (London, 1938) pp. 18-20.

ing sold by leftist organisations as a means of raising aid for the Republic.<sup>59</sup>

Not only did sympathisers condemn the hypocrisy of enlisting 'heathens' to fight in the name of a Christian cause, they also pointed out that in doing so Franco had invited, worse still coerced, Christendom's historic enemy back to European shores. Addressing the Labour Party Conference at Edinburgh in October 1936, Isabel de Palencia, who had a Scottish mother and spoke English with a Scottish accent, passionately reminded her audience that it had taken eight centuries to free Spain of the Moors 'and now they (the Nationalists) are bringing them back to kill us'.<sup>60</sup> Reversing the Christian associations requisitioned by the Francoists, pro-Republicans went on to point out that it was those Basque and Asturian provinces, now loyal to the Government, which in the past had 'never lowered the Cross to the Crescent'. Asturias, it was emphasised, having suffered in the aftermath of October 1934 the 'rapes, the assassinations, and the tortures of the Moors', had particular cause to despise the Moorish troops.<sup>61</sup> So too had the loyalist stronghold of Catalonia, whose conscripts had particularly suffered during the Moroccan conflicts of the early 1920s. Indeed, sympathisers maintained that Spanish hatred of the Moors was so ingrained that their presence 'inevitably rouse[d] counter-sentiments' even among the Nationalists themselves, Spaniards having 'been taught to regard the Moors as fit only for slaughter', a claim which seemed to have some justification as Franco used these troops both as shock troops and as cannon fodder.<sup>62</sup> It was the Moors, Spain's historic enemy, who were the Anti-Christ, pro-Republicans contended, and 'it was not the proletarians but the *señoritos* who [were] helping the Moors bring "civilisation" back to Spain'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Letter from Arthur Kirkwood, Hn. Sec. Horwich Foodship Appeal, to United Editorial, January 1939, ordering 'a further two dozen copies' of *I Was a Franco Soldier* and one dozen copies of the *Voice of Spain*, as a means of raising funds. Working Class Movement Library, Salford (WCML), 76/S/F3 - S/F17, no115. MacKee's animosity to the Moorish troops clearly extended to fabrication. As Robert Stradling has pointed out, MacKee's claim that fighting between the groups followed a heavy drinking spree was less than credible, the Moors as strict Muslims observing abstinence and their part in any such disturbance punishable by death. Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, f.n. 45, p. 223.

<sup>60</sup> *Labour Party Conference Report*, 1936, p. 214.

<sup>61</sup> Bowers, *Mission to Spain*, pp. 105 & 338.

<sup>62</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, p. 155. Madariaga gives Moorish casualties, killed or wounded at c 31,000, approximately 50%, with fatalities of 11,000, some 17-20%. Also, the treatment of casualties reveals a general indifference toward the care of Moorish troops. See e.g. Scott-Ellis (edit. Raymond Carr), *The Chances of Death: A Diary of the Spanish Civil War*.

<sup>63</sup> Davies, *Behind Spanish Barricades*, p. 46.

Interestingly, sympathisers offered conflicting impressions of the willingness of Moorish conscripts to take part in this process. Frequently making reference to the legend of the key to Granada and the Moors' promise to one day reassert themselves in the Peninsula, commentators also reported stories of conscripts being lured by the promise of good pay and other rewards. Equally regular, though, were tales of less than eager troops being forced to embark at Ceuta or Tetuán by whip-wielding Spanish officers.<sup>64</sup> Both portrayals had some element of truth.

Franco's military forces in Africa in July 1936 included a large number of Moroccan regulars and, at first, further recruitment was encouraged by seemingly generous offers of pay and provision. However, as, increasingly, early promises proved empty and early conscripts failed to return, Nationalist recruitment techniques became more coercive. Pro-Republic commentators sought to exploit this, particularly those of the far left. Stories of mutinous Moorish recruits contributed to a picture (albeit a less than convincing one) of dissent in the Nationalist ranks. Moorish conscripts were being forced into battle having been first 'dosed with liquor', was one unlikely claim.<sup>65</sup> For film-maker Ivor Montagu, though, footage of an emaciated Moorish prisoner receiving care for his wounds in a Madrid hospital yet refusing food because 'the fascists' had warned it would be poisoned, provided an ideal, and perhaps more convincing, means of contrasting the values of the two sides.<sup>66</sup>

The vague proposition that Moorish forces were only in Spain under duress and the improbable notion that they had to be drunk to go into battle were, however, only supplementary to pro-Republic sympathisers' core line of attack. This was a picture of mercenary heathen 'savages' unleashed to engage in an orgy of destruction and violence, massacre and rape, and it was one which could be guaranteed to outrage a British public long familiar through the medium of popular entertainment with the Arab's potential for bestial cruelty. It was also one which reinforced negative views of Arabs drawn from Britain's experiences in the Middle East. Actions which could be regarded as 'normal' when carried out in the deserts of North Africa took on a different complexion when they took place on the European mainland. Reports listing the savagery visited upon the loyalist workers in the bullring at Ba-

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<sup>64</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 326.

<sup>65</sup> *Daily Worker*, 27 July 1937; MacKee, *Franco Soldier*, pp. 18-19, reports being involved in a drunken brawl with Moorish troops.

<sup>66</sup> Ivor Montagu ( Director) *Defence of Madrid* ( filmed October 1936, released c New Year 1936-37).

dajoz, and on the wounded in their hospital beds at Toledo by the savage *Moros* and the 'criminal' Legionaries gave particular meaning to the Nationalist's boast that they would crush the 'slave stock of Madrid in the way they had at Irun'.<sup>67</sup> At Badajoz, the *Manchester Guardian* reported, journalists had been warned against entering the town, as the 'Moors were very excited'.<sup>68</sup> Commentators sought to encourage sympathy for the Republic through accounts which played on popular expectations, detailing how, following the capture of a village or town, the Moorish troops were allowed to 'rape the women and girls before their menfolk', then encouraged to indulge in wholesale slaughter and were finally given license to loot and burn the shops and houses of their unfortunate victims.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, in a reversal of the right's condemnation of the Republican anti-clericalism, commentators were able to point out that the rampaging Moors and Legionaries had little respect for the Catholic Church, religious sensibilities proving no barrier to the wanton plundering of church properties. For Republican sympathisers, the stories of refugees whose brothers had been murdered, sisters raped, or whose wife or children had been turned insane by their experiences at the hand of Moors would have proved at least as effective in shaping sympathies as the tales of red atrocities bandied by Francoist supporters.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, given the racial connotations involved, the actions of 'half-civilised' Moors would probably have been the cause of greater revulsion than those of 'misguided' Spaniards, a factor exploited in the left's propaganda.

The outrage at 'Moors, the Foreign Legion and the foreigners' indulging in an 'orgy' of 'libertinage ... ravaging and rapine'<sup>71</sup> was for a period given additional impetus in some quarters by specific, though ill-informed, references to Moorish race and ethnicity. Presumably in the belief that a simplistic portrayal of the Moors as black invaders would serve to create a more immediate public revulsion a number of sympathisers launched into an attack loaded with racial associations. This particular approach was not emphasised in the later publications of pro-Republic observers but was evident in the columns of some sections of the press, especially prior to Christmas 1936. Writing to the *Daily Mirror* as early as August that year, one Bromley correspondent voiced the irrational, and inaccurate, horror of many when

<sup>67</sup> Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, p. 19; Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 123.

<sup>68</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 August 1936.

<sup>69</sup> Watson, *Single to Spain*, p. 154.

<sup>70</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 282.

<sup>71</sup> Atholl, *ibid.*, p. 268.

he asked fellow readers to 'suppose that England had been invaded by black troops led by an English general'.<sup>72</sup> Four months later, the veteran war correspondent Henry Nevison was still asking readers to imagine their reaction if the British Union of Fascists should 'import into this country a drilled armed force of Zulus to overthrow our Constitution'.<sup>73</sup> Similar deliberate misrepresentations were expressed in a series of Dyson cartoons for the *Daily Herald*. In the first, published less than two weeks into the conflict, an Italian trooper on his way to 'spread civilisation in Africa' is depicted passing a black recruit on his way to do the same in Europe. A second refers disingenuously to 'Mussolini's enormous black army' and contrasts the part being played by 'black' troops in the 'Disunited States of Europe' to that of black voters in the US.' A third depicts a black soldier, complete with halo, raining death on 'little Dolores and little Juan', whilst a fourth has a black Francoist soldier - 'in the service of European culture and civilisation' - cry 'Yow hi! Brudder Europeans'.<sup>74</sup> Again, early coverage of events in the *Co-operative News* included condemnation of Franco's 'sending black forces to crush his fellow whites'. The *News*, whilst subscribing to the same false representations of ethnicity, was, however, careful to give some impression of even-handedness. Pointing out the continuity of its stance, the paper reminded that it had similarly 'deprecat[ed] the fact that France had imported black troops from Africa to fight a white race in Europe' during the Great War.<sup>75</sup> For others the use of colonial troops in that war had been against a 'common enemy', different entirely from Franco's use of 'coloureds against his own people'.<sup>76</sup> The occasional moderating voice which reminded that black soldiers had also fought alongside the British in that same war<sup>77</sup> was, in these sections of the popular press, somewhat overwhelmed during the early months of the war by the hysterical rhetoric of those who charged Franco with unleashing 'the savage hordes' to practise 'bloodthirsty and shameful abominations ... upon Spanish men and women', especially upon Spanish women.<sup>78</sup>

The idea that 'black' savages and their 'criminal foreign' cohorts of the Legion should

<sup>72</sup> K. Conyers, letters, *Daily Mirror*, 4 August 1936.

<sup>73</sup> Henry W. Nevison, 'This Crime Calls to High Heaven', *Daily Herald*, 1 December 1936.

<sup>74</sup> Dyson, *Daily Herald*, 30 July, 16 September, 10 & 27 November 1936.

<sup>75</sup> *Co-operative News*, 8 August 1936.

<sup>76</sup> Nevison, *Daily Herald*, 1 December 1936.

<sup>77</sup> Letter to 'The Bank Officer' cited in Buchanan, 'Far Away Country?', p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> Nevison, *Daily Herald*, 1 December 1936.

have been 'let loose among the white women of Spain' was undoubtedly one which provided the left with a particularly potent message. The myth of black unrepressed sexual potency and unbridled savagery was one well established in popular fiction.<sup>79</sup> Speaking at Lewisham Town Hall, Labour MP, William Dobbie felt particularly bound to inform the women in his audience 'something of the horrors' being inflicted upon their European sisters.<sup>80</sup> Such unashamed, even deliberately inaccurate, use of racial stereo-types was clearly intended to stir moral outrage amongst a British public still mindful of past imperial incidents such as the 'treachery' at Cawnpore during the 'Indian Mutiny'. Typically, readers, many of whom would have recently absorbed the racial notions carried in the film version of Edgar Wallace's *Sanders of the River* (1935),<sup>81</sup> were informed that through contact with African tribes and the Berbers, the Moors had lost all semblance of civilised standards. They had 'degenerated' until they could 'not be distinguished from those Turks and Arabs who committed bestial crimes upon our captive soldiers on the retreat from Kut'.<sup>82</sup> This was a process of defamatory racial associations which offered a successful counter to the 'red' atrocity platform of the right - the actions of 'black savages' perhaps more readily understood than those of 'red savages'. By creating the impression that a handful of malcontent aristocrats and generals had enlisted the support of 'black', heathen and mercenary hordes, Republican sympathisers both undermined the Francoists' claim to legitimacy and reinforced the Government's own claim. The portrayal of African 'invaders' in 'white' Spain challenged the idea of a Nationalist Cruzada and reminded audiences that it was a part of Europe which was being threatened. As it was the Nationalists who had enlisted Moorish support, it followed that it was the Republican Government which best represented 'civilised' European standards.

### **The Pro-Nationalist Defence of Moorish Involvement.**

Just as pro-Republicans struggled to counter the early negative public reaction caused by stories of the wave of atrocities in the Government areas, so, for pro-

<sup>79</sup> Eg. Percy Westerman, *Captain Cain*, pp262-281.

<sup>80</sup> William Dobbie MP (Labour) *Daily Herald*, 24 November 1936.

<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, the staunch republican supporter and communist Paul Robeson was a seemingly unwitting star of this Zoltan Korda film, playing the part of the 'civilised' deferential local chief. Significantly, Robeson refused to attend the film's premiere and reportedly never watched the final product.

<sup>82</sup> Nevison, *Daily Herald*, 1 December 1936.

Nationalists seeking to win over British public opinion, Franco's Moorish *tabores* presented a series of problems. Resolving these was not helped by the class and racist attitudes displayed by some key Nationalist figures. For instance, Franco's press officer Captain Gonzalo de Aguilera openly declared that in his view it had been the past interrelationships of the Moors and Spanish peasantry which had 'begat the proletariat' who had lately 'been converted to the 'Oriental doctrine of Marxism' and was 'now trying to conquer Spain'.<sup>83</sup> Such attitudes did little to help sympathisers in their efforts to rationalise the Nationalist claim to be defending the Catholic faith with the involvement, by April 1937, of over 50,000 Moroccan Muslims who were supposedly the historic enemy of that faith. Their initial response was to play down the role played by Moroccan troops. Jerrold, for example, related the account of a friend who during some 1,400 miles motoring through Francoist Spain had encountered only 'a handful of Moorish troops'.<sup>84</sup> As denial became untenable commentators developed a range of explanations. In part they were assisted by the often overtly racist propaganda of the left.

The argument that 'black heathens' were being employed against 'white Spanish Christians' was one countered in several ways. Firstly the crude aspect of race was challenged, though only in terms which themselves subscribed to entrenched notions of a racial hierarchy determined by shade of skin. Tennant, for instance, observed pointedly, that 'the Moors of Africa are not a black race, and have no connection whatsoever with the Abyssinians or Negroes'. Indeed, she added, 'nearly all Spanish families have Moorish blood and are proud of it'.<sup>85</sup> This was an observation frequently and vehemently repeated. 'The racial differences between the people of Andalucia and Morocco are slight,' exclaimed Wall. 'Moors are not "black". They are as white as the Syrians or Jews'. Besides, he continued, in a tacit recognition of British racial prejudices, unlike Northern Europeans, Spaniards did not subscribe to the sentiment of racial exclusiveness.<sup>86</sup> Others, too, noted that the Spaniard had 'not the colour feeling of the American and the Englishman' and drew attention to the specious nature of leftist propaganda which sought to use race in

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<sup>83</sup> Captain Aguilera quoted in E Taylor, 'Assignment in Hell', Hanighen (editor), *Nothing But Danger*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>84</sup> Douglas Jerrold, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 5 December 1936; Again in *Nineteenth Century and After*, April 1937, p. 12.

<sup>85</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>86</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 105.

Spain whilst at the same time 'seeking to persuade the American black man that communism is the enemy of all racial distinctions'.<sup>87</sup>

The second frequently employed response was one which drew parallels between Franco's use of Moroccan troops and the part played by colonial soldiers during the Great War. Moroccans had enlisted in Franco's army voluntarily and so were a legitimate part of the Spanish army. Moreover, it was asserted, this was no more than a continuing tradition. 'Moors had fought with the Cid' and had sided with Ferdinand and Isabella, 'just as in our own time they have fought with England against the Turks'.<sup>88</sup> The French had not hesitated to use Moors, Algerians and Senegalese, and the British had fought alongside Sikhs and Pathans during World War One, contended commentators. Indeed, the French had even employed Senegalese 'natives' to police the Rhur in the aftermath of that war.<sup>89</sup> Coloured soldiers were to be found in the American army during the same conflict claimed Tangye, conveniently ignoring that they had served only in racially segregated units. Others gleefully pointed out that 'the Bolshevik Russians [had] used Tartar Mohammedan troops against White Christian Russians'.<sup>90</sup> Unqualified as they were such observations added a degree of credibility to the justification by Nationalist supporters of Franco's use of Muslim troops. Even at the end of September 1938, Arthur Loveday was responding in these terms to pro-Republic comments made by the Bishop of Chelmsford. In an open letter to the *Essex Weekly News*, reprinted in the Nationalist publication, *Spain*, Loveday again reminded readers of the part played by Moslem soldiers in the Great War. 'That war', he argued, 'unless our countless war memorials are hypocrisy, was considered by all true Englishman to have been a war in which they were fighting for God and civilisation. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander'.<sup>91</sup>

A third, and key, rationalisation was one which actively sought to locate the Moors within the Nationalist's religious 'crusade'. From the onset recruitment propaganda

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<sup>87</sup> McNeil-Moss, *The Epic of the Alcázar*, p. 133; Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 66.

<sup>88</sup> Sencourt, *Spain's Ordeal*, p. 114.

<sup>89</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 208.

<sup>90</sup> McNeill-Moss, *Epic of the Alcázar*, p. 133; Tangye, *Red White and Spain*, p. 46; Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 117.

<sup>91</sup> Loveday, 'The Attitude Towards Religion in Spain', 'Essex Weekly News', 23 September 1938, reprinted in *Spain*, No. 55, 18 October 1938.



encouraged Moroccan tribesmen to rally to Franco's holy cause against the unbeliever. However, as Maria Rosa de Madariaga has shown, the early enthusiasm of Moroccans to enlist was motivated, rather, by a number of other factors, most economic.<sup>92</sup> A series of poor harvests from 1934 to 1937 made already difficult living conditions even more precarious. In these circumstances it was hardly surprising that, given the promise of advance pay and continued support for their families, thousands flocked to join the Nationalist ranks. Where any resistance to recruitment did occur it was met with ruthless suppression, dissidents jailed, and known Republican sympathisers killed. However, for British Nationalist sympathisers economic factors and evidence of coercion did not have the same appeal as the notion of the Moorish soldiers willingly fulfilling a sacred duty and taking part in a holy crusade against the 'red infidel'. Lunn spoke for all when he argued that as both the Spanish Catholic and the Moor believed in God it was not unreasonable that they should 'fight side by side against militant atheism'.<sup>93</sup> The Moors despised bolshevism, observers claimed, and so their natural allegiance was to the Nationalist cause. If the '*rojos* ... burn Christian churches today, they will burn Moslem mosques tomorrow' was the logic offered. Moors could not be charged with 'degrading the White Race' when their 'adversaries ... though starting life white [were] now stained a bloody red'.<sup>94</sup>

Commentators employed a range of reasoning to reinforce these arguments. True, on occasion the reasons given for Moorish participation were extended to encompass less worthy motives; money, honour, a simple desire to fight, and even 'the hope that their victims may turn out to be Jews'.<sup>95</sup> As we have seen, for many pro-Nationalists the Republic's supposed degenerate qualities were in part the result of Jewish financed plotting, so, while the 'Moors were sincerely for Franco', for some commentators, their 'hatred of Jews' also made them 'natural' allies of the Nazis.<sup>96</sup> This ominous connection, however, was not commonly made. The element returned to again and again, was a shared hatred of bolshevism. The famed ruthlessness of the Moorish troops during and after battle was explained in these terms. Commentators claimed that 'led by European officers' the Moroccan

<sup>92</sup> Rosa de Madariaga, 'The Intervention of Moroccan Troops', pp. 78-79.

<sup>93</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 67.

<sup>94</sup> Wall, *World War*, p. 77; Tangye, *Red White and Spain*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>95</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 194.

<sup>96</sup> T. Phillips, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Times*, 4 December 1936.

soldier behaves irreproachably'. 'It was true that they 'did not often take prisoners ... but they have never massacred them or even molested them' was one seemingly contradictory conclusion.<sup>97</sup> The experience of Frank Thomas, a Welshman who served in the Legion, certainly countered such an observation, the practice of shooting prisoners dismissed as simply being in accordance with yet another 'old Spanish custom.'<sup>98</sup> In fact, the savage conduct of the Moroccan troops was deliberately encouraged in the hope of demoralising the Republican soldiers who faced them. However, for observers, acts of savagery and looting were explained as anti-red retaliatory actions because, as one observer remarked, 'those miscreants do not hesitate to commit sacrilege'.<sup>99</sup>

The Moroccans, once depicted as the barbarous cut throats of the Rif wars, were now transformed by sympathisers into Franco's one time 'wily and brave Moorish enemy', their respect for their old adversary such that they were 'now one hundred per cent loyal to him'.<sup>100</sup> Conscious of the effectiveness of Republican propaganda, however, pro-Nationalists endeavoured to bestow Franco's Moorish allies with measures of respectability, gallantry and honour with which British audiences might readily relate. Widely reported accounts of rape were thus denied on the basis that such behaviour was contrary to Moorish culture and religious teachings. 'Those who know Arabs know that their treatment of women is ordered by their religion, and this lays it down as a crime to maltreat women', Tennant asserted confidently. Indeed, it was suggested that the Moors were so deeply inured with such noble sentiments that they even 'objected to firing on the battalions of Red women fighting for the Madrid Government'.<sup>101</sup> Such efforts to counter the more lurid picture painted by the left were not repeated in the media and probably made little impression on audiences other than those already sympathetic to the Nationalist cause. However, references to the Moors' reputed respect for women did add to a more general effort to portray the Moorish troops as the inheritors of a chivalrous and more gallant past, a past which represented the values lost under the Republic. Thus, Francis Yeats-Brown, a militarist who occupied the grey area between conservatism and fascism and regarded dictatorship as a means of ensuring

<sup>97</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 208; Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 115.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas (edited by Robert Stradling), *Brother Against Brother*, p. 55.

<sup>99</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 115.

<sup>100</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 158; Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 194.

<sup>101</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 118.

'efficiency and stability',<sup>102</sup> wrote with zeal of 'the Moorish cavalry in their white robes of ceremony, riding splendidly caparisoned stallions'. 'It was', he enthused, 'a scene of pageantry straight from the story of Leon and Castile'.<sup>103</sup> Coming from the pen of the author of the best-selling book *Bengal Lancer* (1930) such romanticised imagery is not surprising but would perhaps have proved all the more effective for that reason. In this representation Franco, 'the St. George of Spain' and his gallant Moorish warrior knights were depicted as part of the Spanish history and tradition they were assumed to be restoring.<sup>104</sup> On occasion, allusions to similar British traditions of pageantry carried this further. References to the 'beautifully turned out' Moorish guards, who with their 'slow dignified movements' were 'reminiscent of Buckingham Palace' were clearly intended to elicit public sympathy by challenging the preconceived ideas played on by the left. The Moors, pro-Nationalists endeavoured to show, were not uncivilised, savage heathens, nor had Franco reopened Europe's door to the invading infidel, both were worthy allies in a religious crusade against bolshevism.<sup>105</sup> As a *Daily Mail* correspondent remarked, the resplendent Moorish Guards would have delighted any British Guards' sergeant-major.<sup>106</sup>

### **Foreign Intervention, the View from the Left.**

If the left's assault on Franco's use of Moorish troops against fellow Spaniards did not succeed in diverting attention away from the early atrocities carried out in Republican Spain then at least it was a line of attack which, in its play on prejudices and preconceived notions, forced Nationalist sympathisers onto the back foot. However, both the pro-Nationalist focus on red outrages and the pro-Republican exploitation of the Moorish presence during the latter months of 1936 served largely to add to the growing public perception that in terms of savagery there was little to choose between the two sides. In their efforts to gain support for their respective causes, then, the sponsors of both sides turned their attention to the part being played by other European nations, both materially and ideologically. As Italian and German involvement escalated so the focus of pro-Republic observers swung in-

<sup>102</sup> Webber, *The Ideology of the British Right, 1918-1939*, p. 98.

<sup>103</sup> Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle*, p. 277.

<sup>104</sup> Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain*, p. 20.

<sup>105</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 139.

<sup>106</sup> *Daily Mail*, 18 January 1937.

creasingly toward the platform of anti-fascism. Similarly, Soviet support for the Republic and the positive world-wide response to the decision of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in late September 1936 to organise recruitment to the International Brigades encouraged pro-Nationalists to elaborate notions of communist complicity.

In Britain, fears regarding the long-term intentions of Italy and Germany provided unlikely allies with a common platform. Thus, in one of the most widely read pro-Republic analyses of the war, *Searchlight on Spain*, (100,000 copies sold in the first week) the Conservative MP, the Duchess of Atholl, barely wavered from the official Communist Party interpretation of events. Whilst some questioned the Duchess' application,<sup>107</sup> her presence in Spain alongside the Communist MP William Gallacher and the Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson was eagerly reported, especially in a far-left press keen to promote the Communist Party's United Front agenda.<sup>108</sup> The prospect of a United Front was one resisted by the Labour Party and the TUC but the banner of anti-fascism was one which transcended the left's political divides. And, by fuelling fears of the possible motives behind the Italian and German support, and by drawing attention to their continued and blatant disregard of the Non-Intervention Pact, sympathisers endeavoured, with some success, to make anti-fascism a platform with which increasing numbers of the British public could relate. Brinton spoke for many when he declared that the 'invasion of Spain' by Italy and Germany outraged 'all moral sense of justice'. Those nations were 'bullies and gangsters' who, if they were allowed to dominate Spain would make Britain's 'strategic position ... almost hopeless'.<sup>109</sup> To make matters worse, in a claim guaranteed to disturb British sensibilities, General Quiapo de Llano was reported as having 'openly declared that Gibraltar would soon be incorporated into Spain'.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the same commentators who argued that Spanish national character could be relied on to insure against Soviet domination were less certain of the pervasive influence of Italy and Germany. Those who argued that 'race' or Spanish

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<sup>107</sup> Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, famously commented on Atholl's failure to 'see anything outside the smart hotels'. p. 152; Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, pp. 30-31, made similarly cutting observations, recording the special fare provided for the Duchess 'while the people of Madrid starve'.

<sup>108</sup> Frank Pitcairn, 'Gallacher in Madrid's Trenches: Duchess and Party Under Fire', *Daily Worker*. 19 April 1937.

<sup>109</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>110</sup> *The Times* 1 March 1938

national character would prove a block to any domination by *those* two countries should be aware that an affinity between Italy and 'fascist Spain' was 'natural', warned Republican sympathisers. Anyway, differences in national temperament had proved no barrier to the alliance of Italy and Germany. The danger to British interests of Spain's inclusion in that alliance was clear, it was reasoned: Italy's occupation of the Balearics would give her control of the Mediterranean trade routes and German bases on the Canary Islands would place the Cape route in jeopardy.<sup>111</sup>

For some, the idea of Italian domination of the Mediterranean presented the greatest threat to British interests.<sup>112</sup> For others, it was the German influence which was the most ominous. The *Manchester Guardian* announced at the beginning of 1937, the presence in Spain of some 14,000 members of the Condor Legion, figures given seeming credibility in that they were based on the estimates of Anthony Crossley, an ardently pro-Nationalist Tory MP.<sup>113</sup> Some saw in German involvement evidence of German expansionism, the possibility that Spain would be converted into 'a sort of German industrial colony'.<sup>114</sup> Hitler, it was argued, was taking advantage of the Spanish war to establish German interests in Morocco and to take advantage of Spanish mineral resources. Increases in favourable trade agreements proved that Germany not Italy had taken over 'the real direction of affairs'.<sup>115</sup> However, whilst sympathisers' repeated emphasis was on the number of men and the volume of war material supplied by both countries, they also drew attention to the character of the forces involved. Most implied that the quality of the Italian forces was less than ideal. Allusions to accepted notions of Italian national character painted a picture of a leadership and core of political ideologues whose bravado was marked by comic blundering and a lack of military skill. At best these were described as chivalrous and disciplined, at least in comparison to the unpromising and savage Requetés. References to the bulk of volunteers, however,

<sup>111</sup> Geoffrey T. Garratt, *The Shadow of the Swastika*, p. 190; Atholl, *Searchlight*, pp. 317-319; Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, p. 168; Dean of Canterbury, cited in Haden-Guest, *David Guest*, p. 171.

<sup>112</sup> For a contemporary account of the fears raised by Italian involvement see Henry Blythe, *Spain Over Britain: A Study of the Strategical Effect of Italian Intervention on the Defence of the British Empire* (London, 1937).

<sup>113</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 2 January 1937. A report based on estimates provided by Crossley on his return from Nationalist Spain, December 1936.

<sup>114</sup> 'A German "Terror"', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 December 1936.

<sup>115</sup> Garratt, *Shadow of the Swastika*, pp. 203-206. For an analysis of German economic involvement see Christian Leitz, 'Herman Göring and Nazi Germany's Economic Exploitation of Nationalist Spain, 1936-1939', *German History Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1996, pp. 21-37.

emphasised aspects of their Latin nature. Following their 'ignominious flight' at Guadalajara, in March 1937, they were mocked as an ill-led, bewildered and disorganised rabble, which lacked any military skill, a caricature which encouraged the claim that 'both sides in Spain were laughing at the Italians'.<sup>116</sup> Testimony from prisoners-of-war, no doubt anxious to appease their captors, was seized on to support the argument that on leaving Italy most had not even been aware that Spain was to be their destination, let alone that they would be expected to fight for Franco. Some, it was reported, had even believed that they were to be extras in the film *Scipio in Africa*.<sup>117</sup> Some, however, did appear as unwitting players in two 1938 Republican propaganda films, *Testimony of Non-Intervention* and *Prisoners Prove Intervention in Spain*. Italian participation was also highlighted in the more widely distributed, Joris Ivens' film *Spanish Earth*, though pointed reference in Ernest Hemingway's commentary - 'these dead came from another country ... the Italians lost more killed and wounded in this one battle of Guadalajara than in all the Ethiopian war' - was cut by the British censor.<sup>118</sup> Apart from the farcical bluster of the fascist fanatics in the Blackshirt divisions, the picture of the Italian volunteers tricked or bribed into serving in Spain was one made up of the despairing unemployed, of desperate criminals escaping justice, or of hen-pecked husbands escaping from domestic travails, anything but eager idealists fighting for a just cause.<sup>119</sup> Curiously, this was a picture remarkably similar to that offered to the Foreign Office in January 1937 by their representative in Naples, who also commented on the general lack of desire to go to Spain.<sup>120</sup> As far as Republican sympathisers were concerned, such testimony not only provided proof of Mussolini's disregard for the Non-Intervention Agreement but also suggested that volunteers and regular Italian troops alike had only been induced to join the Spanish campaign through outright lies.

Although some effort was made to apply the same template to German partici-

<sup>116</sup> Mitchell, *My House in Malaga*, pp. 305-306; Garratt, *Shadow of the Swastika*, p. 203.

<sup>117</sup> Hugh Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 597; Ernest Hemingway, 'The Spanish War', *Fact*, no. 16, 15 July 1938.

<sup>118</sup> Joris Ivens (Director), *Spanish Earth* (Contemporary Historians, July 1937); 'Censorship', *Daily Worker*, 6 November 1937.

<sup>119</sup> Eg Atholl, 'Dangerous for Us', in Jim Fyrth & Sally Alexander, *Women's Voices From the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1991), p. 251; Brereton, *Inside Spain*, pp. 1-3. Filmed by hidden camera, an interrogation of captured German and Italian officers was again used as evidence of the intervention of those two countries in 'Interrogation of Prisoners', Spanish Government c1939, Imperial War Museum (IWM) ref. MGH 227.

<sup>120</sup> G.A. Fisher, Naples, memo to FO, *DOBFP*, 1919-1939, Second Series, Vol. 18, note 90, p. 118.

pants, more usually German involvement was seen in more sinister terms. References to the 'blonde Moors' or the 'blonde men of the North' conjured their own images of barbarous hordes.<sup>121</sup> However, it was more recent characterisations which dominated. Pro-Republican commentators made particular use of the range of anti-Prussian stereotypes; a passion for all things militaristic, a manic love of order, brutal indifference to the suffering of others, and a master-race mentality which was now manifest in Nazism. It was not surprising, claimed some, that the 'rigid and robcund, robots' who were Franco's 'natural' allies had taken control in Nationalist Spain.<sup>122</sup> German prisoners - 'square-headed, unrepentant Teutans' - were marked as being less contrite than their Italian counterparts, showing no remorse for their part in the bombing of defenceless civilians.<sup>123</sup> The German presence was deemed more calculating and deliberate, German field-gunners were particularly efficient and accurate, and German pilots were notably cold-hearted and ruthless. Thus, according to Irving B. Pflaum, the recent editor of the Anglo-American expatriate newspaper the *Palma Post*, the bombing of Barcelona was executed with 'such machine-like precision' that he and fellow correspondents 'called them German long before Field Marshall Goering (sic) admitted the presence of his men in Franco's army'.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, unlike the duped Italians, German 'volunteers' were reported as having eagerly accepted not only the fiscal reward offered for service in Spain but also the opportunity for military adventure. Ominously, the 'volunteers', particularly the airmen, were from an early date seen by some to be in accord with those of the German military hierarchy who regarded Spain at war as 'an excellent training ground', a view later to be given more particular attention in the months following the bombing of Guernica.<sup>125</sup>

Views of national character when applied to members of the International Brigade, were, not surprisingly, amended to offer a very different picture. Fighting on the side of democracy and against fascism the character of such men was beyond

<sup>121</sup> Cox, *The Defence of Madrid*, p. 220; *Manchester Guardian*, 14 December 1936.

<sup>122</sup> 'German Troops in Spain', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 December 1936. The newspaper saw fit to note the subjectivity of this article by 'a special correspondent'.

<sup>123</sup> Keith Scott Watson, 'Escape From Disaster', in Hanighen (ed.) *Nothing But Danger*, p. 268.

<sup>124</sup> Irving B. Pflaum, 'Death From the Skies', Hanighen (ed.), *Nothing But Danger*, p. 197.

<sup>125</sup> Frederick Voigt, diplomatic correspondent, 'Training Ground for German Airmen', *Manchester Guardian*, 20 November 1936; Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain*, p. 184; Bill Forrest, IWM, 12416/4. For the Condor Legion perspective see the testimony of Alfred Lent, 'The Blond Moors are Coming', Philip Toynbee, *The Distant Drum: Reflections on the Spanish Civil War* (Abingdon, 1976), pp. 95-104.

question, as was their status as volunteers. Thus, Geoffrey Cox's impression was one in which 'the Germans, left wing though they might be, [were] extremely disciplined ... and almost psychologically click[ed] their heels, the French rather slapdash ... reeking of Gauloise tobacco ... but very dashing and gallant ... and the British settl[ed] down to endure it in a remarkable way'.<sup>126</sup> Cox, like others, added more pointedly positive qualifications: the 'Italians, scorned by many as bad fighters in the Great War [had] proved some of the staunchest soldiers on the Government side'. As proof, commentators pointed to, and often exaggerated, the part played by the volunteer Garibaldi battalion in the 'rout' of Italian fascists and regulars at Guadalajara. Likewise, in propagandist film and literature the Germans in the Thaelmann and Edgar André Battalions were declared to have formed one of 'the most determined sections in the Column'.<sup>127</sup> Here, though, the determination was not that associated with the uniformed, cold, sadistic, Prussian brutality of Franco's German troops, rather it was that of men who, despite their 'tattered khaki and rope-soled sandals', maintained 'perfect order' as they fought for liberty.<sup>128</sup> German character was thus reinterpreted according to circumstance. Those fighting for the Republic, it was pointed out, were refugees from a Germany where Nazism was exploiting the worst features of the German people. These men had not responded sheeplike to Hitler's call. They may look like the 'tall fair-haired, blue-eyed ... Aryans of the Nazi ideal' but these were men who refused to bow to fascism.<sup>129</sup> The militarism, and order so despised when it directed the shelling of Madrid or the bombing of Durango, was deemed a valuable asset to the volunteer brigades. Here it was harnessed for a just cause. The 'Thaelmann Centuria in steel helmets, each man a born soldier,' introduced a discipline 'welcomed' by British observers and volunteers.<sup>130</sup> It was the mix of German discipline with the 'characteristic grit' of British volunteers and the 'fire and recklessness' of their Spanish comrades which sympathisers saw as making victory certain.<sup>131</sup> Significantly, the quality of discipline was one particularly attributed to the International Brigade, whose example, it was deemed, should be used as a model in building the communist inspired Spanish People's Army. British commentators were not alone in declaring that the Spanish militias,

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<sup>126</sup> Geoffrey Cox, Imperial War Museum (IWM), Sound Archives, 10058/9 /03,1987.

<sup>127</sup> Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, pp. 164-165; Joris Ivens [director], *Spanish Earth*, 1937.

<sup>128</sup> Watson, 'Escape from Disaster', Hanighen (ed.), *Nothing But Danger*, p. 265.

<sup>129</sup> Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, p. 85.

<sup>130</sup> Eg., unnamed International Brigader, testimony 5076, North West Sound Archive (NWSA).

<sup>131</sup> Rust, *Britons in Spain*, p. 163.



'individualists all, from the step they took to the variations they tried to introduce into their uniforms', needed organising.<sup>132</sup>

Commentators made much of the mix of nationalities who found common cause in fighting for the Republic, and of their collective spirit.<sup>133</sup> Whilst Franco's Moors were subject to racial slurs, the presence of black volunteers from countries including the United States, Britain, Cuba and Ethiopia was taken only as proof of the universality of the response to the Republican cause.<sup>134</sup> Volunteers to the cause of Spanish democracy, it was pointed out, had arrived from across the world, from the 'émigré cafés of the Latin Quarter, from the poor streets in Switzerland, from offices and even country homes in Britain'.<sup>135</sup> Although, as James Hopkins has demonstrated, British working-class militants, with their background of strikes, hunger marches and the means test, were sceptical of the middle-class intellectuals who rallied to Republican Spain's cause, this was not reflected in pro-Republic literature.<sup>136</sup> Doubtless many working class volunteers saw a synonymy between fascism and class privilege which meant that 'the face of the enemy' was not only that of Hitler, Mussolini or Franco but also 'the mask of the fine English gentleman' whose 'smooth manners and charm' merely hid the 'savage ruthlessness' with which he would 'defend ruling-class profit and power'.<sup>137</sup> The fictional volunteer in James Barke's revolutionary novel *Land of the Leal* (1939) perhaps spoke for such men: 'The old folks lived a life of slavery - I'm not. They didn't understand: I do. And when I get out there and get a gun in my hands I'm going to wipe off a few scores on their behalf'.<sup>138</sup> However, commentators sought to move the focus away from class rivalry to one of men 'united in the struggle against fascism', men 'fighting against a

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<sup>132</sup> Watson, *Single to Spain*, pp. 87 & 106.

<sup>133</sup> Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, famously sums the 'special atmosphere of that time'.

<sup>134</sup> For account of black participation see Robin DG Kelley, "'This Ain't Ethiopia But It'll Do": African Americans and the Spanish Civil War', *Race Rebels: Culture Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, 1994), pp. 123-158. Some volunteers have recorded experiencing incidents of racism, notably from some Southern USA whites to black compatriots. Such behaviour, however, was actively condemned. See eg. John Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists: An Oral History. North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (New York, 1986) pp. 66-67; James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford, 1998), pp. 172-173; J.R. Jump, 'International Brigader', Toynebee, *The Distant Drum*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>135</sup> Cox., *Defence of Madrid*, p. 68.

<sup>136</sup> Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, passim.

<sup>137</sup> Welsh veteran Dai Llewellyn, cited in Hopkins, *ibid*, p. 99.

<sup>138</sup> James Barke, *Land of the Leal* (Bath, 1969, first published 1939), p. 608.

common enemy whom they felt must be crushed if civilisation were to continue'.<sup>139</sup> These men, commentators stressed, came from across the social classes, as shown, not least, by their occupations. 'Men who had been seated before a lathe in an Edinburgh metal works' or 'had been pulling sugar beet on an English farm' were now fighting alongside research scientists; miners alongside actors and poets.<sup>140</sup>

The pro-Republic mainstream press, however, was generally cautious in its endorsement of active British involvement.<sup>141</sup> The *Daily Herald*, especially, whilst promoting the call to allow the Spanish Government to acquire war materials offered only grudging admiration of British volunteers, recognising the 'strong working class affection that exists in this united struggle against fascism'.<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, with the arrival in Spain during the winter of 1936-1937 of large numbers of British volunteers, some correspondents did seek to add a particularly British perspective to this message of internationalism and anti-fascist class unity. Cox, in his capacity as the *News Chronicle* correspondent in Madrid, heralded British volunteers as 'Soldiers of Democracy', theirs the latest example of 'British heroism'.<sup>143</sup> His report of the British part at Jarama, in which he referred to the 'six hundred men upon whose broad shoulders the weight of battle has rested' evoked memories of Tennyson's earlier 'six hundred'. If that reference was missed, then no one could ignore the link made to past British stoic courage when informed that these 'singing ragamuffins' went into battle singing 'songs of another war - "Tipperary" and "Mademoiselle from Armentieres"'.<sup>144</sup> Even the most cautious sections of the pro-Republic press, without openly endorsing the involvement of British volunteers in an 'unBritish war',<sup>145</sup> extolled the character of such men. They were not in Spain as mercenaries seeking financial reward nor as dupes lured by promises of work in the sun, as Nationalist sympathisers claimed, these men were there as part of international effort to defend democracy against fascism, men willing to 'offer their lives for

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<sup>139</sup> Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, p. 87; *Daily Herald*, 26 February 1936.

<sup>140</sup> Cox, *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>141</sup> For an analysis of press responses to British participation see Shelmerdine, 'Britons in an "UnBritish" War'.

<sup>142</sup> *Daily Herald*, 26 February 1937.

<sup>143</sup> 'Soldiers of Democracy', *News Chronicle*, 9 December 1936.

<sup>144</sup> *News Chronicle*, 20 February 1937.

<sup>145</sup> *Daily Herald*, 15 March 1937.

an ideal'.<sup>146</sup>

## The Pro-Franco Perspective of Foreign Involvement

Just as the Moorish presence caused propaganda problems for pro-Nationalist commentators so did the thousands of Italian and German 'volunteers' who swelled the rebel ranks.<sup>147</sup> Initially numbers were played down<sup>148</sup> but as evidence of their part became irrefutable commentators changed approach, hailing the 'volunteers' as an inevitable response to the 'vast' numbers of foreign communists who were swelling the Republican ranks. The French, who with a total of some 10,000 volunteers formed the largest contingent to fight for the Republic during the war, were regarded with particular contempt but it was the presence of some 2,000-3,000 Russians that Nationalist sympathisers seized on with most enthusiasm. Letters from indignant readers who cited 'expert' eyewitness reports of uncivilised Russian troops ruthlessly plundering the civilian population, helped to conjure notions of marauding Mongol hordes, while in fiction references were made to the Mongol features which betrayed supposedly Spanish officers.<sup>149</sup> Observations of the Russian presence, however, were marked not so much by defamatory allusions to national character but by references to atheistic, revolutionary 'Red' credentials and their supposedly huge numbers. Commentators returned to the contention that an invidious Soviet influence had long been evident in Republican Spain. 'Russian intervention antedated German and Italian intervention by many years', Lunn typically contended.<sup>150</sup> In late November 1936 one right-wing editorial excitedly declared that Madrid had become an enemy fortress in the hands of a foreign army'.<sup>151</sup> With blatant exaggeration, another claimed that 'there were some '35,000 fully equipped Russian troops and 25,000 French Communist volunteers concentrated on Madrid' and asked: 'Can it be any cause for astonishment, therefore, if as a re-

<sup>146</sup> *Daily Herald & News Chronicle*, 8 December 1938.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, estimates foreign support for the Nationalists at c. 17,000 German & 75,000 Italian 'volunteers'. Beside these and the 75,000 Moroccans, other nationalities include c. 650 Irish, a number of White Russian exiles and Latin Americans. British & USA volunteers Thomas puts at c. 12 & 4 respectively, though it is possible that, given ensuing events, some Nationalist volunteers would have been less than forthcoming about their exploits.

<sup>148</sup> E.g. Jerrold, *Nineteenth Century and After*, p. 12; Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle*, pp. 312-313.

<sup>149</sup> W.H. Lloyd, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Times*, 9 December 1938; Wood, *Phantom Wings Over Spain*, p. 26.

<sup>150</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p.179, Fuller, *The Conquest of Red Spain*, p. 7.

<sup>151</sup> *Observer*, 29 November 1936.

sult, German and Italian volunteers are arriving to aid General Franco and defend the cause of Civilisation and humanity'.<sup>152</sup>

The right's platform, however, was not restricted to supposed imbalance of numbers or the potential ideological menace of Republican support. Francoist commentators also endeavoured to point out the fundamentally 'decent' character of the foreign nationals fighting for Franco. 'Those Britons who enlist[ed] with General Franco's anti-Red forces', the *Mail* pointed out - whilst conveniently ignoring the small number - were 'purely volunteers' who had made 'their own way to Spain at their own expense'.<sup>153</sup> Such men had not merely chosen the 'right side' but could afford to pay for their principles, a model which, interestingly, mirrored the heroes of popular literature, typically, Dennis Wheatley's hero, the Duc de Richeleau funding his own anti-Republic machinations in *The Golden Spaniard* (1938). Commentators like Lunn made similar claims of the Italian 'volunteers'. These were, in the main, from the upper and middle classes, 'inexperienced amateur soldiers for the most part, with more gallantry than skill', was his unlikely assertion.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, for some it was this very lack of experience and overzealous, though admirable, gallantry which accounted for the 'tactical reverse at Guadalajara'.<sup>155</sup> Those young Italians who had previously fought in Abyssinia were, according to Gerahty, now finding 'it disconcerting to be up against Europeans instead of blacks.' Furthermore, he added with unintentional irony, they were deserving of sympathy for the unfortunate dilemma of having to fight against those of their own countrymen who were serving in the International Brigade.<sup>156</sup> Similar references were made regarding the 'fair stocky' German 'technicians' who, 'impatient of the dilatoriness of the Nationalist command' and the 'celebration of too many Masses' were typically depicted as having introduced some order into the Latin chaos.<sup>157</sup> Here though, the potential conflict of German volunteers for Franco facing fellow nationals fighting for the Republic received less sympathy from some observers. In the flush of anti-Semitism which

<sup>152</sup> *Daily Mail* 16 December 1936.

<sup>153</sup> *Daily Mail*, 1 January 1937. There were approximately 12 Britons fighting for Franco. Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, p. 980, lists four Americans and names Englishmen Peter Kemp, Patrick Campbell, Rupert Bellville; Stewart and Little; deserters from the Royal Marines; Wilson & Yarlett deserters from HMS Barham.

<sup>154</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 180.

<sup>155</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 315.

<sup>156</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 227.

<sup>157</sup> Wilfred Hindle (editor), *Foreign Correspondent: Personal Adventures Abroad in Search of the News* (London, 1939), pp. 255 & 265.

marked a number of accounts, Foss and Gerahty argued that as the predominantly German Thaelmann Battalion was officered entirely by Jews and was largely manned by Jewish or part-Jewish volunteers who 'had been called upon to fight for an anti-Hitler' homeland then Germany had no option other than to help the Nationalists.<sup>158</sup>

Similar, and perhaps more immediate, associations were those made with the Irish volunteers who arrived in Spain during the last seven weeks of 1936. Recruits to General Eoin O'Duffy's Catholic Brigade were in the main responding to calls to join the 'Last Crusade', calls reinforced by rhetoric which recalled 'how Spain [had] sent us ships and armies and gave colleges to educate our priests ... in our darkest hour'.<sup>159</sup> Later events - O'Duffy's own political machinations, the chaotic failure to tranship the bulk of volunteers, the limited involvement of those who arrived in Spain, and their brief skirmish with Spanish troops of their own side - all conspired to belittle their effort, often in the stereotypical terms applied to the Irish. Before such events, however, commentators such as Cardozo and ex-Royal Navy officer Nigel Tangye, had offered a very different perspective. References to the 'fighting Irish' were perhaps inevitable, however, the overriding view of O'Duffy's volunteers was as 'defenders of the faith'.<sup>160</sup> One English volunteer, Peter Kemp, who fought for Franco in the Spanish Foreign Legion, made clear his dislike of O'Duffy - 'General O'Scruffy' or 'Old John Bollocks' - and happily related tales of 'typical' Irish drunkenness, but was nevertheless impressed by Irish volunteers whom he considered to be 'truly inspired with the ideal of fighting for their faith'.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, efforts to promote notions of the Christian motivation of these Irish 'deliverers', who would 'if necessary lay down their lives' for the 'Crusade', was such that some observers sought to associate their action with Britain, the *Observer* correspondent Tangye asking tellingly, 'Can I call them so? My fellow countrymen from across the sea ...'<sup>162</sup> While the foreign elements in Franco's forces were portrayed by sympathisers as honourable and valiant defenders of Christian values, those who chose to fight for

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<sup>158</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, pp. 315-318.

<sup>159</sup> Aodh de Blacam, 'For God and Spain', September 1936, cited in Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, p10. For Irish involvement see also, Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin, 1970).

<sup>160</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 115.

<sup>161</sup> Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble*, pp. 86-88.

<sup>162</sup> Tangye, *Red, White and Spain*, pp. 52-53.

the Republic were depicted as an unsavoury mix of communists, criminals, and unemployed dupes. Although some grudging concessions were made to their courage and discipline, especially in the battles around Madrid during the winter and spring of 1936-1937, these were submerged beneath vitriolic references to their class, background and politics. As British involvement became increasingly evident so, for the pro-Nationalist lobby, the fear of the conflict in Spain spawning working-class discontent in the 'East Ends' of British cities seemed more real. During the early months of the war, when most of the media were eagerly recounting the heroic behaviour of British teachers, chartered accountants, ballet dancers or daughters of Admirals who had been caught up in the meleé of Spanish barbarism, stories of workers seeking to join the ranks of the Republic were treated with amused condescension.<sup>163</sup> In this way the aircraft rigger who intended to pack corn beef sandwiches, steal an aircraft and 'fly due south ... until he hit Spain', or the Welsh workers who returned with souvenirs from a fascist held church, provided humorous copy which embraced the notion of 'what else can you expect?'<sup>164</sup>

However, Franco's failure to capture the capital, attributed as it was to the arrival of Russian troops and the communist volunteers of the International Brigade, marked a change of approach. As the numbers of British recruits to the International Brigade increased, the non-interventionist British Government became more concerned, and the right-wing press and Nationalist sympathisers increasingly adopted a more condemnatory position with a distinct class undertone. In February 1937, the First Secretary at the Paris Embassy informed the Foreign Office that in his opinion the British volunteers travelling through France appeared to be 'suspicious-looking individuals' travelling on 'third-class ... tickets'.<sup>165</sup> The right-wing press took up this line and blended it with communist-menace rhetoric. Volunteers for the Republic were labelled either as militant communists or as criminals, misfits or dupes.

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<sup>163</sup> British Gaumont 13 August, Aldgate, *Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War*, pp113-120; *Daily Mail*, 20 July & 31 July 1936; *Daily Mirror*, 6 August 1936; See Shelmerdine, 'Britons in an "UnBritish War"' pp. 30-34.

<sup>164</sup> *Daily Express*, 21 August 1936; *Daily Mail*, 4 September 1936; *The Times*, 3 September 1936, reports that the two workers involved received sentences of four months. 'Western Mail', cited in Hywell Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 98. The *Western Mail* was from the same stable as the *Daily Telegraph* & *Daily Sketch* among others. The early ambivalence of the left-wing organs is perhaps evident in that the ILP paper, 'South Wales Voice' and the Trade Union organ the *Daily Herald* carried similar accounts and gave them similar treatment.

<sup>165</sup> J.V. Perowne to Western Dept. FO, 17 February 1937, *DOBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 18, note 187, p. 261.

Throughout early 1937 the *Daily Mail*, in particular, fed its 1.6 million readers with stories of the nefarious means by which communist recruiters were luring unemployed workers to Spain with promises of 'good pay for working in vineyards' then forcing them to become 'Red cannon fodder'. On the promise of pay of '£1 per day' together with 'generous allowances' for their families, the unemployed were being 'tricked like cattle driven to the slaughter'.<sup>166</sup> In similarly loaded language, British volunteers captured by the Nationalists were described in a Gaumont newsreel as appearing 'strangely criminal with their cropped hair',<sup>167</sup> imagery reproduced throughout the right-wing press and repeated in the accounts of pro-Nationalist commentators.<sup>168</sup> Clearly such observations satisfied the anti-Bolshevik agenda of this group. They also, however, projected the impression that British volunteers, like their Spanish counterparts, were venal, stupid, and criminal - unemployed stooges easily enticed into fighting for a cause of which they had no understanding, and in which they had no real belief. As such they were a manifestation of the mechanism by which communist inspired working-class unrest might take hold in the streets of Britain's depressed areas, as we have seen, a fear long held by many on the right.

The make up of the two sides, then, came to dominate the interpretations of both pro-Republic and pro-Nationalist commentators. However, while during the early weeks of the war the many lurid accounts of the horrors being committed in the Government held areas added credibility to the interpretations offered by those who supported the rebellion, reports of the part played by foreign troops in what was largely seen as an essentially Spanish affair both galvanised the left and increasingly favoured their interpretation of events. The contention that Franco was heading a 'Holy Crusade' was clearly undermined by the presence of Moorish and German troops. Moreover, the British public was more open to the salacious stories of the unbridled savagery being committed by 'black heathens' than the picture of noble warriors fighting a just cause. Similarly, as the conflict centred on Madrid in late 1936, the involvement of Italian and German forces helped pro-Republican commentators to alter perceptions of the Government militias. Admitting to the

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<sup>166</sup> *Daily Mail*, 1 January, 15, 18 & 20 February 1937.

<sup>167</sup> 'Gaumont British News', 2 June 1937, cited in Aldgate, *Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 158.

<sup>168</sup> E.g. Jerrold, *Impressions*, p. 10.

horror of early atrocities while at the same time stressing the return of order, sympathisers painted a picture of ordinary people heroically defending themselves not only against Franco's Army of North Africa but also against the fascist powers. If commentators could not help themselves but depict the Italian forces in less than complimentary terms they nonetheless made much of the part being played by Italian aircraft in the bombing of Madrid. German involvement offered even more opportunities. Not only were sympathisers able to exploit the growing worry about the possible expansionist ambitions of the Nazi regime but they were able to call upon established notions of German military character, notions reinforced by the images coming from that country throughout the period. Faced with coldly ruthless German military automatons, indiscriminate Italian bombers and rapacious Moorish savages it is hardly surprising that the people's militia gained a more heroic image and the Republic won increasing sympathy from the wider British public.

This was a pattern which the pro-Nationalist portrayal of the combatants did little to counter. Spaniards who had remained loyal to the Government they continued to depict as dupes, a rabble led by political chancers and criminals. Those volunteers of other nations who chose to fight for the Republic in the International Brigades were more of the same. On the other hand, every effort was made to pay tribute to those who joined the Nationalist ranks, especially the officer class who were depicted as possessing the valourous and chivalrous qualities which purportedly characterised the Francoist regime, a theme given more attention in the following chapter. However, a portrayal which assumed an acceptance of a natural hierarchy and saw demands for reform as class-envy was one which would have appealed only to a relatively narrow like-minded audience. Indeed, the barrage of derogatory class allusions used to condemn all those fighting on the side of the Republic would have served to alienate large sections of the British public, including much of the Catholic working class, from the Nationalist cause, if not necessarily to rally them to the pro-Republic ranks. Equally, efforts to exploit the Russian and French communist presence by focusing on exaggerated numbers and the potential of a repeat in British cities, would have proved less than convincing to a public for whom the mounting threat of fascism seemed more real, with, at one point, even an unfounded report of Japanese volunteers arriving at Cadiz in support of Franco.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 11 January 1937.



For most, the part being played in Spain by Italy and Germany was increasingly seen as more ominous than that of Russia, and not solely in terms of ideology. The left's anti-fascism representation of events was boosted by widespread repugnance at the civilian casualties which had resulted from German and Italian air-raids, by fears, in some quarters, of German ambitions to supplant British business interests in Spain, and by speculation as to Hitler and Mussolini's territorial intentions. References which lauded the military attributes of the Francoist forces, their soldierly pageantry and martial prowess, and praised the enthusiasm with which their Axis allies were rallying to Franco's 'crusade' may have served commentators in their efforts to portray the Nationalist Movement as the defenders of the traditional values of old Spain but they did little to address such concerns and much to endorse the left's portrayal of a beleaguered citizen army defending democracy. However, with the war reaching a critical point with the siege of Madrid, supporters of both sides shifted the emphasis from the make up of the warring factions to what the respective sides were fighting for. As we shall see, both the Nationalists and the Republicans claimed to be striving to create a new and progressive Spain but both had different views of the past and both offered very different routes forward.

## Chapter 7

### 'TWO IRRECONCILABLE SPAINS' : DIFFERING VISIONS OF A 'NEW SPAIN'

Writing in the *Observer* in October 1936, Spanish intellectual and avowed neutral, Salvador de Madariaga despaired of the 'two irreconcilable Spains'. The right who did not 'want Spain to change'. The left who did, but could not 'organise the change of Spain'.<sup>2</sup> As the war progressed, however, more partisan commentators attempted to give their respective sides a more positive image. Whilst attempts to depict what each side was fighting against did not abate, increasing effort was made to explain what they were fighting for - what each side represented, their aspirations and their achievements. Here, supporters of both the Nationalists and Republicans saw Spain as leaving her feudal past, though by different routes. On the one hand, Spanish peasants and workers in the Nationalist zone were depicted as flocking to accept the reassurance of reform rooted in past patterns. In Nationalist Spain, it was claimed, all worked in determined and harmonious unity under the firm guiding hand of Franco. On the other hand, the pro-Republican picture was one in which rural and urban workers, released from the indignities and brutalities of the past and stoically resistant to the hardships of the present, were seen as determined to take the future into their own hands and defend the liberalising reforms promised by the Popular Front. Pro-Nationalist and pro-Republican commentators, alike, presented positive visions of life in the 'two irreconcilable Spains' and in the process addressed issues including education, the role of women, and regionalism. As we have seen, the secularisation of education had proved a contentious and defining issue before the war. During the war, the Republic's efforts to promote schooling was made much of by pro-Republicans and scorned by pro-Nationalists who gleefully associated the Government side with illiteracy and ignorance. Intrinsicly linked to these standpoints was the dispute as to who best respected Spain's cultural legacy. Here, pro-Republicans strove to challenge the Nationalists' claim to be the 'natural' representatives of the cultural heritage of Spain. The social upheaval brought about by the Civil War also served to accelerate the change of attitude toward the role of women in Spanish society already evident in

<sup>1</sup> Salvador de Madariaga, 'Spain's Ordeal', *Observer*, 11 October 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Salvador de Madariaga, loc. cit.

Republican reform. Women's suffrage, maternity insurance plans, divorce rights, labour legislation and education reforms were among measures introduced during the Republic which seemed to constitute advances in the situation of women. However if such measures were regarded by sympathisers as defining the modernising liberalism promised by the Republic, then, for pro-Nationalists they were seen, in the main, as hasty and ill-conceived challenges to the moral traditional standards of Old Spain. In the environment of war both sides were caused to reassess their respective attitudes as they strove to relate immediate demands to the place of women in their particular visions of the 'new' Spain. This chapter examines the interpretations offered by the two camps and gives regard to the way both used language, imagery and historical analogies in an endeavour to persuade British audiences to sympathise with their respective causes. As will be seen, this was an endeavour which saw the right seek to establish common links between the Nationalist ideals and character and those of the British, while the left sought to stress shared social and political ambitions.

### **The Republican 'New Spain'.**

For some pro-Republic commentators the promise of a 'new Spain' lay in the revolution which was sparked by the military rising. Famously, George Orwell enthused that in Aragon he 'was among tens of thousands of people, mainly, though not entirely of working class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality'. 'The thing that happened in Spain, he observed, was, in fact, not merely a civil war, but the beginning of a revolution'. However, as Orwell despairingly attested at the time, the revolution, and indeed its subsequent suppression, were aspects played down or even ignored by the majority of British observers.<sup>3</sup> Harnessing the collective spirit was deemed necessary for the war effort and so early instances of social revolution were most usually treated with gentle amusement, participants portrayed as simple peasant enthusiasts indulging their new freedom with childlike efforts at organisation. In this tone Brereton recorded the notice found in hotel bedrooms requesting occupants to 'maintain in the rooms a state

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<sup>3</sup> Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, pp. 83-84 & 192. For a polemical analysis of the extent and impact of the revolution which took place during the early months of the war see Chomsky, 'Objectivity and Liberal Scholarship', *American Power and the New Mandarins*. For a contemporary Trotskyist perspective of the social revolution of 1936 and its subsequent liquidation see Morrow, *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain*.

of due cleanliness, remembering that this hotel belongs to your brothers'. Geoffrey Cox, too, recounted amusing anecdotes. A weary militiaman defying the crowd and refusing to stand to the 'Internationale' at the end of a film performance was, for Cox, a humorous example of 'Spanish individualism reacting to the collective atmosphere of the Civil War'.<sup>4</sup>

The few, largely confined to the ILP, who subscribed to Orwell's particular glimpse of social revolution and shared in his disenchantment following the suppression of the POUM in May 1937 were voices largely unheard at the time. Indeed, Orwell's own account, *Homage to Catalonia*, was rejected by the author's regular publisher, Victor Gollancz, and failed to sell even the limited run of 1,500 copies eventually printed in April 1938.<sup>5</sup> The approach which most commentators adopted was not one which called for revolution but one which called for party and class collaboration in a common front to defend Spanish democracy, the Republican 'new Spain', from the forces of international fascism. As Gannes and Repard summarised: 'The choice lay between the brutalising and violent enslavement of fascism and the liberating, progressive developments which a democratic victory would bring'.<sup>6</sup> According to Cox, the working classes of Madrid were holding out against the 'subservience' of the past and holding on to the 'self-expression, self-respect' and the 'fuller, richer life' they had known in the months since the military's rebellion.<sup>7</sup> Such reasonable aspirations served to reinforce the message that the Republic's cause was just and deserving of the support of the fair-minded British public. Even more pragmatic reasons, which insisted that far from fighting for 'the sake of ideas' Republican militias were fighting for 'fair pay and life ..., pay that meant you could

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<sup>4</sup> Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 109; Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, pp. 134-136.

<sup>5</sup> Orwell's publisher, Victor Gollancz, subscribed to the common view of the left that the social revolution should be sacrificed in order to create a common front against fascism and so rejected the author's account of his experiences. As it was, many of the 1,500 copies of *Homage to Catalonia* eventually published by Martin Secker & Warburg in April 1938 still remained unsold when a second edition was published in 1951. Gollancz's nervousness regarding any reference to Trotsky also brought about amendments to Geoffrey Cox's initial draft of *The Defence of Madrid*, IWM, 10059/04. Most observers adopted the Communist Party line regarding the POUM without giving the issue extensive attention. For example, Brereton, *ibid.*, p. 15, listed the 'silencing' of the POUM as one of Companys' great victories, whilst Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 171, followed the 'fascist plot' line, treating the issue as one of 'another' troublemaking element having been brought under control. For an account of the ILP's part in Spain see Peter Thwaites, 'The Independent Labour Party Contingent in the Spanish Civil War', pp. 50-61.

<sup>6</sup> Gannes & Repard, *Spain in Revolt*, p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, pp. 131-132.

live ... like a human-being,' helped further to distance the Republic from dogmatic ideology.<sup>8</sup> The message conveyed, then, by most observers at the time was that the Republic was striving to establish those values of reason, order, and equity with which Britons could readily equate.

As the Nationalists besieged Madrid in the winter of 1936-37, pro-Republican commentators were able to develop the impression of victim and aggressor. The seemingly indiscriminate bombing and the daily shelling of the city added a new dimension, that of innocent civilian casualties. Typically accounts told of the women and children 'who perhaps had never heard of General Franco and his ambitions', and who were now being starved, mutilated or killed because of them.<sup>9</sup> The protracted nature of the siege ensured that such imagery persisted, in the process both demonising the person of Franco and acclaiming the courage of the ordinary *Madriños*. The fascist assault had brought out the 'unsuspected capacities of the Spanish people', declared one admiring observer,<sup>10</sup> a stance given graphic substance in the opening section of the Progressive Film Institute (PFI) film, *Defence of Madrid* (1936). The captions of this silent film made clear to audiences the human cost of the war. This was an 'Assault on the People' but these were a people prepared to endure the misery of war in order to throw off a past of 'peasant misery and oppression'.<sup>11</sup> First shown in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, in December 1936 and at hundreds of venues arranged by local activists after that, this film alone raised over £6,000 for Spanish relief.<sup>12</sup> Although such screenings were organised by local left-wing activists the views expressed were not the sole province of the far-left. The *Daily Express* correspondent, Sefton Delmer, who had a declared 'antipathy to Marxism' and had earlier reported from the Nationalist side, admitted to having been 'swept along in the exhilaration of Madrid's refusal to abandon the fight'. Describing life in the city whose 'courage and stubbornness ... excited the world's applause and admiration' he recalled how:

The whole of Madrid seemed determined to carry on its life as usual. The rickety

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<sup>8</sup> Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Pitcairn, 'Women and Children Blown to Bits', *Daily Worker*, 2 November 1936.

<sup>10</sup> Jellinek, *Civil War in Spain*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Montagu (Director), *Defence of Madrid*, (Progressive Film Institute), 1936.

<sup>12</sup> Bert Hogenkamp, 'Film and the Workers' Movement in Britain, 1929-39', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 45, Spring 1976, pp. 69-76 (p. 74).

old trams were still running ... right up to the front line. ... When the shelling started mothers would call their children in from playing in the streets, and when it stopped they sent them out again. From the way they behaved it might just have been a shower of rain.

On the pelota courts white shirted, white trousered Basque professionals played ... while bookies shouted the odds ... . And while Franco shelled they went on playing and betting.<sup>13</sup>

This picture of determined resistance acquired the mantle of legend. British volunteers wrote home telling how Madrid's busiest cinemas and cafes were those situated 'very close to the fighting', and sympathisers enthusiastically recounted, and no doubt elaborated or invented, stirring anecdotes.<sup>14</sup> In typical fashion, the volunteer turned correspondent Scott Watson reported witnessing an 'old peasant woman' adding the 'bed on which her sons were born' to the barricades with the shout: 'I did not give birth to slaves. ¡No Pasarán!' <sup>15</sup> Such poignant rhetoric, inspired and encouraged by communist orators, most notably Dolores Ibárruri, *La Pasionaria*; found its way into fiction, as in Upton Sinclair's *¡No Pasarán!* (1937); was repeated in the letters home of International Brigaders; and filtered into the accounts of all pro-Republic sympathisers, and so consolidated a vision of determined resistance which could only appeal to British audiences.<sup>16</sup>

However, whilst such commentary clearly carried that appeal, it continued, through reference to common stereotypes, to distance events. Encouraged on the one hand to applaud the heroic response of the Spanish people as they resisted the bombs of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, British readers were also informed that such responses were in fact peculiarly Spanish. While one enthusiastic and motivated volunteer saw the women who queued for rations as the shells rained down as representing the courage and 'spirit of co-operation that [would] ultimately win the war,'<sup>17</sup> other observers saw them as an example of 'true Spanish fatalism' or in

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<sup>13</sup> Delmer, *Trail Sinister*, pp. 292, 299, 302-303.

<sup>14</sup> Letter, Albert Charlesworth, International Brigader, March 1937, WCML, F67, box 12.

<sup>15</sup> Watson, *Single to Spain*, p. 219.

<sup>16</sup> See Dolores Ibárruri, *They Shall Not Pass: The Autobiography of La Pasionaria* (London, 1966); Upton Sinclair, *¡No Pasarán! A Story of the Battle of Madrid* (London, 1937).

<sup>17</sup> Letter, Ralph Cantor, International Brigader, 12 March 1937, WCML, F67, box 12.

terms of the Spaniards' tendency to 'bear their burden patiently'.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, for some commentators at least, Spanish courage and resilience were more to do with a resigned fatalism and were not to be confused with those British qualities of cool-headedness and stiff-upper-lip. Other 'unsuspected capacities' were similarly explained. 'Spanish courage and stoicism were simply rooted in an 'indifference to danger [that] was almost a matter of honour to a nation that had long worshipped the courage of the bull-fighter'.<sup>19</sup> The behaviour of Spanish civilians who carried on daily life undaunted by shells and bombs could, therefore, be explained in the same terms as that of the Spanish troops who frustrated officers of the International Brigade with their reckless disregard for danger, reportedly arguing that it was 'part of their morale, ... their courage, to take risks when bored'.<sup>20</sup> Whilst the authors of such colourful references undoubtedly intended them as meaningful insights, by placing the courageous conduct of loyalist civilians and troops in the context of supposed Spanish fatalism their effect would have been more likely to undermine than to reinforce the argument that the war in Spain directly concerned Britain.

More effective perhaps would have been the admiring accounts of the measures which had already been introduced by the Republican government. Here commentators returned to the model formed after 1931. The Popular Front Government had taken up the fallen reins of reform. Even in time of war, they pointed out with undisguised admiration, the Republic was making marked advances in addressing women's rights, in tackling illiteracy, instituting land reform and in ensuring cultural security. What was more, they added, in the optimistic atmosphere of loyalist Spain, industries vital to the war effort were increasing output, advances were being made in medical care, both for troops and civilians, and scientific developments were improving agricultural yields. The Popular Front was even tackling the thorny issue of regionalism, recognising Basque and Catalan demands for autonomy. Of these issues, the Government's dedication to education received particular attention. 'The Republic believes firmly in education,' enthused Brereton, recording how one school, despite 'suffering bombardment', still managed to give 'lessons to two hundred and fifty children in the morning, another one hundred and

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<sup>18</sup> Kanty Cooper, 'With the Rearguard', Jim Fyrth and Sally Alexander (edits.), *Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, p. 233; Cowles, *Looking for Trouble*, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> Cowles, loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Wintringham, *English Captain*, p. 20.

fifty in the afternoon and to soldiers at night'.<sup>21</sup> Even in time of war expenditure on education was ten-fold that of 1931 and sixteen times that spent under the right-wing government of 1935 claimed one teachers' journal.<sup>22</sup> In similar glowing tone, Atholl, listed the measures undertaken to 'stamp out illiteracy'. Teachers were being recruited in number to teach the children, whilst free matriculation was being provided for workers aged between fifteen and thirty-five. At the front no less than 75,000 soldiers had learned to read and write, she claimed, and for the troops, time in reserve now meant a period of both rest and study.<sup>23</sup> This particular scenario was one regularly elaborated in dramatic anecdote. Cockburn, for instance, recounted how in the midst of a German air-raid a 'communist poet' continued to distribute pamphlets, books and bullets with equal enthusiasm.<sup>24</sup>

Education, commentators sought to show, was at the heart of the new Spain of the Republic. Significantly, the only Spanish war film produced by the left-wing Progressive Film Unit (PFI) to be registered commercially, receiving a U certificate, was *Spanish ABC* (1938). If this twenty-minute celebration of the Republic's determination to remedy the past failure of education in Spain had little commercial appeal to distributors, its content was unlikely to offend any section of an audience. 'The Republic says knowledge is strength', intoned the narrator. Claiming that even in the midst of war the Republic had opened almost 10,000 schools, the film went on to praise the provision of lunch-time lessons for munition workers in Madrid and textile workers in Barcelona. Scenes showing Republican militia receiving trigonometry lessons while in trenches 'only 300 yards away from the fascist lines' and claims that the Jesuit operated observatory at Tartossa had only been forced to halt operations by German air bombardment served to suggest, none too subtly, which side should be seen as the enemy of learning. In the Republican zone, the film claimed, even Jesuit priests were being given support where they were prepared to contribute in the advance of knowledge and understanding, a claim which not only backed the government's dedication to education but contradicted the impression of unreasoned hostility toward the clergy.<sup>25</sup> Such accounts of eagerly embraced learning may at least have gone some way to raising questions in the minds

<sup>21</sup> Brereton, *Inside Spain*, pp. 10-11 & 49-50.

<sup>22</sup> *The Teacher's International Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 1938, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Atholl, *Searlight*, pp. 224-227.

<sup>24</sup> Cockburn, *Reporter in Spain*, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> Ivor Montagu (producer), Thorold Dickinson (director), *Spanish ABC* (registered July 1938).



of some of those members of the British public whose previous perceptions of ordinary Spaniards fitted more with the right's view of simple peasants, incapable of organising themselves and in need of the firm guiding hand of the traditional hierarchy. Even so, the occasional condescending comment, such as Atholl's observation that women's organisation 'Flying brigades' were visiting the rural villages 'to give them some rudiments of culture', served to reinforce old expectations and would, unintentionally, have ensured that such questions were not considered for too long, other than by committed government supporters.<sup>26</sup>

### **Life in Franco's 'New Spain'.**

The pictures offered by commentators of everyday life in the Nationalist held zone differed dramatically. While pro-Republicans focused on the privations suffered by civilians under siege and the horrors of daily bombardment, Nationalist supporters emphasised the order, tranquility and normality of life under Franco. As Wall, drawing from the range of preconceived notions of Spanish character failings, declared, in those areas 'rescued' 'Roman law ha[d] once again reasserted itself against the squalor, treachery, avarice, anarchy, theft and lying into which Latins fall so readily'.<sup>27</sup> Franco's 'New Spain' which was 'bound to arise from the present struggle', offered both the authoritarianism regarded as necessary to constrain such national character weaknesses and a return to 'the primacy of (those) traditional virtues ... which foreign educated intellectuals had endeavoured to destroy'.<sup>28</sup> For many pro-Nationalists the symbolic birth of this new Spain had been occasioned by the defence of the Toledo Alcázar:

Toledo, whose heroic defence will live for ever in epic story, had become an emblem ... a wave of patriotic enthusiasm swept over the country, the new Spain was born, and Franco acclaimed as her Chief. ... religion was restored and order re-established; class hatred disappeared, and the truly democratic feeling that is typical of Spain where differences of rank and fortune are considered accidental, revived after five years of social strife.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Low, in Fyrth & Alexander, *Women's Voices*, pp. 258-260.

<sup>27</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 97; Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup> Duke of Alba, preface to Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 9.

As Tennant euphorically announced, 'in Nationalist Spain one feels one is in at the birth of a nation ... it is a new Spain and once Spain starts there is no knowing where she will stop'.<sup>30</sup> In this 'liberated' Spain, commentators asserted, not only had order been re-established but life was rapidly returning to normal, a normality only made possible by the revival of the style of government best suited to Spain. Franco offered a new 'iron hand' in the manner of Primo de Rivera, a rule which would defend Spanish tradition whilst introducing social reform.<sup>31</sup> In response to the left's charge of fascism pro-Nationalists were insistent that such aspirations were not fascist in nature, simply, they marked a return to the progressive authoritarianism that had produced impressive results between 1923 and the end of that decade.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in this, sympathisers claimed, Franco represented the will of the 'great mass of the people - workers, middle class and aristocrats alike'. Through his inclusive policies of social reform it was 'as if he were encouraging all that is best in Spain to declare itself and lend itself to the moulding process of forming the new State'.<sup>33</sup>

How then did pro-Nationalists see life unfolding in this 'new State'? Evidence of the effectiveness of Franco's 'flexible' approach, they claimed, was to be witnessed throughout the Nationalist zone. For the supposedly impartial Governor of Gibraltar, General Sir Charles Harrington, normality simply meant the welcome return in 1937 of the Royal Calpe Hunt, though the wearing of red ribbons was regarded as ill-advised.<sup>34</sup> Other Franco apologists, too, had their own reasons for welcoming the new order. Loveday, for instance, was one who declared that British commercial interests were better served by Franco, a view shared by those pro-Franco Tory MPs who had either a direct or family interest in Anglo-Spanish trade.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>31</sup> Eg. Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> A view voiced in Parliament, eg. Lennox-Boyd in 'Hansard', 2 March 1937 (321) cols. 274-5, cited in Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Hitler*, fn. 58, p. 496.

<sup>33</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, pp. 59 & 150-153; also Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure*, p. 374.

<sup>34</sup> General Sir Charles Harrington, *Tim Harrington Looks Back* (London, 1940), pp. 194 & 186. Despite claiming to be impartial, Harrington, like most of the colonial officials was privately sympathetic to the Nationalists. See Joseph Espana-Guerrero, 'British Policy at Gibraltar at the Beginning of the Spanish Civil War: July-September 1936', *Iberian Studies*, Vol. XIV, Nos. 1-2, Spring -Autumn 1985, pp. 3-10.

<sup>35</sup> Loveday, 'Letters to the editor', *The Times*, 14 January 1937; Simon Haxey, *Tory MP*, pp. 109-110 & 159, gives an admittedly partisan account of the connections between Tory MPs and the Rio Tinto Ore Co. & Orconera Iron Ore Co.; see also Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 98-99.

In this same vein, in a report which must have pleased British investors, Tennant enthusiastically recorded that, according to the manager of the Tharsis mines' manager ('an intelligent Scotsman'), early Nationalist control of Huelva province had encouraged the mine labourers to work 'better than they have for years'.<sup>36</sup> In Franco's new Spain 'the labourer's worthiness is recognised', Fuller enthused, though warning that such recognition was only given 'provided he (the labourer) does not adopt the methods of class war'.<sup>37</sup> For most admirers of Nationalist Spain, though, such provisos were redundant, as under Franco 'all the traditional pride of the *hidalgos*' had returned.<sup>38</sup>

In language which repeated the earlier admiration of pro-Primo de Rivera expressed by many travellers, Franco sympathisers eagerly reported that in Jerez the 'beggars had disappeared from the streets' and praised the efforts undertaken there to build low rent accommodation for the displaced. They enthused that throughout Nationalist Spain such re-building programmes were being undertaken, the fields were once again being cultivated, food was plentiful, the bedrock of religion was being restored and a new social framework which guaranteed work and justice to all was being put in place.<sup>39</sup> It was 'sufficient' wages and decent housing rather than access to state education which would bring an end to the poverty which had driven men to become 'habitués of clubs where subversive doctrines are taught', was the claim advanced in one Nationalist publication.<sup>40</sup> Advocating a return to Church control of education, other commentators were notably patronising in their dismissal of the efforts made by the Republic. Florence Farmborough's observations were representative of those who saw little promise and much danger in educating 'beyond their needs' peasants who displayed the 'absurd antipathy of the uneducated towards education' anyway. Senseless and disruptive reforms had done nothing to redress the peasant's 'hereditary pride in [his or her] illiteracy'.<sup>41</sup> Such notions seemed to fit more closely with the idealised ideas of past rural contentment found in travel literature than with visions of a dynamic new order. Yet

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<sup>36</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, pp. 15 & 17.

<sup>37</sup> Fuller, *Conquest of Red Spain*, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 103.

<sup>39</sup> Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain*, p. 5 & passim; Loveday, *World War in Spain*, pp. 147-149; Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, pp. 212 & 237'; Col. RG Dawson, 'The Outlines of the New Spain', *Spain* vol. 5, no. 65, 22 December 1938.

<sup>40</sup> 'Spain's New Working Class Dwellings', *Spain*, vol. 5, no. 58, 8 November 1938.

<sup>41</sup> Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain*, p. 146.

pro-Nationalist commentators happily subscribed to the Francoist agrarian understanding of the Fatherland and saw no difficulty in associating the two. Typically, Farmborough suggested that no more noble and emblematic a figure could be desired 'to represent and to interpret the New Spain' than "The Man with the Plough", 'his ploughshare smoothly upturning the redeemed soil'.<sup>42</sup> As the Nationalist area of control increased, then, sympathisers eagerly reported that crops, which had been ignored by peasants who, under their 'Red' masters, had lacked direction and had had access to unlimited liquor, were once again being eagerly harvested from the 'redeemed soil'.

Furthermore, under the auspices of the Nationalists these same peasants not only reassumed the better qualities associated with Spanish national character but acquired new ones. In this way, those manning the road blocks in Nationalist southern Spain now displayed 'a vigilance and thoroughness not expected of Spanish peasants', characteristics considered the herald of a 'new spirit in the country [and ones] which ... had not interfered with their old time courtesy'.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand the 'chief characteristics' displayed by the workers' committees in Madrid were 'ineptness and insolence'.<sup>44</sup> Under the Nationalists not only were the best traditional qualities seen to return but they were so fervently embraced that commentators often seemed to challenge long established comic notions of indolent and incompetent Latins with stories of the enthusiasm and efficiency displayed by newly restored municipal and social services.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, observers repeatedly contrasted the hospitality they received in the villages and towns recently captured by the Francoist forces with the supposed loss of that aspect of Spanish character in the mayhem of the Republican zone. It must be noted, though, that for many such observers the measure of Spanish hospitality was most often defined by the content of the menu and access to suitable accommodation, criteria which varied little from those of pre-war travellers like Charles Graves. Although in the Nationalist zone 'prawns and cockles might be substituted for shrimps and mussels', and 'silk stockings were hard to come by', in general 'food was no object' and weary visitors could seek rest and recreation in the various 'English' clubs and in the better hotels,

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<sup>42</sup> Farmborough, *ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

<sup>43</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, pp. 111 & 15-16.

<sup>44</sup> Knoblaugh, *Correspondent in Spain*, p. 149.

<sup>45</sup> Tangye, *Red, White and Spain*, p. 35.

those 'civilised establishments where waiters spoke languages other than Spanish'.<sup>46</sup>

### **'People Like Us': The Characterisation of Republican Values**

As the war progressed, both camps of supporters sought increasingly to define their sponsorship through references which stressed the 'English' values of their respective sides. As will be seen, for pro-Franco commentators this process drew heavily on historical analogy and on the identification of character traits which it was claimed the Nationalist hierarchy shared with their British counterparts. Intrinsic to this stance was the conviction that Spanish cultural heritage was represented by and could only be safeguarded by the Nationalist Movement. Pro-Republic commentators, on the other hand, offered a more internationalist interpretation which stressed shared social and political ambitions, a picture which sought sympathy for fellow workers. At the same time they, also, were careful to note a respect for Spain's cultural heritage. Whilst the right argued that it was the Nationalists who were striving to protect Spanish tradition and culture, the Government happily presiding over the destruction of such symbols of civilisation, the left argued the reverse. If Nationalist supporters argued that the 'Red's problem was that instead of their intellectuals taking command, they had capitulated to the rabble',<sup>47</sup> then government supporters could point to the many Spanish intellectuals who championed their cause, and to the brutal fate meted out by the Francoists to the poet Federico García Lorca.<sup>48</sup> Pro-Republic commentators were, therefore, keen to inform that the pictures of the Prado, manuscripts and books of the National Library and the Escorial, and other valuable tapestries and works of art, including religious art, had been carefully inventoried and stored for safe-keeping. Moreover 'scrupulous care' was being taken in the houses commandeered for Government use. The charge that Spain's national treasures and historic properties were being vandalised by an uncontrolled 'red' mob was unsustainable, argued commentators like Atholl and Cox.<sup>49</sup> The truth was that the greatest threat to the national heritage came from

Franco's indiscriminate shells and bombs. Graphic film footage offered irrefutable

<sup>46</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, pp. 219-220; Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain*, p. 5; Tangye, *Red, White and Spain*, pp. 84 & 89.

<sup>47</sup> Fuller, *The Red Conquest of Spain*, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 233.

<sup>49</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, pp. 231-232 & 140; Cox., *Defence of Madrid*, p. 121.

proof that German incendiary bombs had destroyed the palace and treasures of the Duke of Alba, not, as the Francoists claimed, the depraved workers of Madrid.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, government militia, sometimes commanded by English speaking and educated officers, had been charged with the protection of such properties.<sup>51</sup> 'Franco contributes to Civilization!' whilst 'The militia strive to rescue its [the Palacio de Liria] contents' ran the acerbic captions in the film *Defence of Madrid*, the clear inference being that it was the Nationalists rather than the loyalists who represented philistinism. It was ordinary workers who were risking their lives to rescue national treasures and it was not only the Nationalists who could boast of officers educated in England.

This particular line was deliberately furthered, notably by communist propagandists. Thus, the Second Congress of the International Association of Writers, held in Madrid and Valencia in July 1937, was intended to demonstrate the extent of international intellectual support for the Republic, although for some of those attending, notably Stephen Spender, the event served also to generate some disillusionment with the Soviet Union.<sup>52</sup> In Britain a survey published the previous month in the *Left Review* pamphlet, *Authors Take Sides*, similarly seemed to indicate an overwhelming support for the Spanish Republic amongst the British liberal and left-wing intelligentsia.<sup>53</sup> Although the loaded nature of questions asked, the suspiciously limited range of authors approached, and the dubious selection process of the replies given, led Orwell, in a letter to Spender, to dismiss the whole operation as 'bloody rot', a publication which listed 127 intellectual respondents 'For the Government', sixteen as neutral, with only five 'Against' sent a clear message to less critical readers: the doyens of British culture supported the Republic.<sup>54</sup> And indeed,

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<sup>50</sup> Montagu (Dir.), *Defence of Madrid*; Ivens (Dir.), *Spanish Earth*.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. Watson, *Single to Spain*, p. 201, informs that the officer in command at the palace of Alfonso XIII had been educated at Imperial College London.

<sup>52</sup> Spender, whilst remaining an ardent supporter of the Republic, broke with communism after attending the Congress which he saw as a platform used by Soviet delegates to denounce André Gide for his attack on the Soviet Union in his recently published 'Retour de l'URSS'.

<sup>53</sup> 'Left Review', *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War*, June 1937.

<sup>54</sup> S. Orwell & Angus (eds.), *George Orwell, The Collected Essays*, p. 346. For an analysis of the publication see Valentine Cunningham, 'Neutral? 1930s Writers Taking Sides' in Frank Gloversmith, *Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s* (Sussex, 1980), pp. 45-69. Question asked by Nancy Cunard: Are you for or against the legal Government and the People of Republican Spain? Are you for or against Franco and Fascism? For it is impossible any longer to take no side. Writers and Poets, we wish to print your answers. We wish the world to know what you, writers and poets, who are among the most sensitive instruments of a nation, feel.

despite the flaws in this particular survey, such an impression was not unfounded. Although the part supposedly played by some has since been questioned<sup>55</sup> the undoubted participation in events of a number of noted intellectuals reinforced the view that the Republic represented civilised ideals. The death in action of such British notables as Ralph Fox, John Cornford, Julian Bell, Christopher Caudwell (St John Sprigg), Jason Gurney and David Haden Guest, provided the left with victims who could be portrayed as Byronic martyrs willing to die in the defence of those ideals. As Hugh Thomas has demonstrated, Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the CPGB, was almost obsessive in evoking Byron as the precursor of those willing to die for a foreign cause, eulogising the death of Ralph Fox in those terms and encouraging Spender 'to go and get killed, comrade, we need a Byron in the movement'.<sup>56</sup> It was in this tone that the first of this set to be killed, the communist artist, Felicia Browne was remembered, her obituary in the *Daily Worker* celebrated her for having 'died as she lived - a courageous fighter for the cause which she knew was that of all suffering and oppressed peoples'.<sup>57</sup> The call was to change from one which revelled in high profile sacrifice to one which proclaimed: 'we do not want martyrs, history has given us more than the Christian Church already'.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the focus was to shift; moving to devote greater attention to the part played by those who lay down their spanners rather than their pens in order to take up Spain's 'fight for liberty'. The 'just causes' of 'Byron, Kosciuskos and Garibaldi' were to be joined by evocations of the Tolpuddle martyrs and the Chartists. As volunteers from the working classes of some fifty-three nations flocked to fight for the Republic so observers emphasised that the cause that they were fighting for in Madrid was one relevant to all ordinary people throughout the world. British volunteers were 'inheritors of an English tradition' of internationalism, declared Tom Wintringham, *Daily Worker* correspondent and 'English Captain' in the International Brigade.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Notably Laurie Lee's participation has been questioned. See Simon Courtauld, 'Not a Very Franco Account' in *The Spectator* 3 January 1998. More significantly, doubt has been raised in a biography by Oliver Todd regarding the active part actually played by André Malraux. See 'Malraux the Fantasy Hero', *The Sunday Times*, 29 April 2001. Also Geoffrey Harris, 'Malraux, myth, political commitment and the Spanish Civil War', *Modern and Contemporary France*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1997, pp. 319-328.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, fn. 2, p. 491.

<sup>57</sup> *Daily Worker*, 4 September 1936.

<sup>58</sup> Watson, *Single to Spain*, p. 253.

<sup>59</sup> Wintringham, *English Captain*, p. 16.

However, almost without exception, observers continued to contribute to the hegemony in which particular significance was attached to the participation of Cambridge educated volunteers; David Mackenzie, notable because his father was a Rear Admiral, and John Cornford, a courageous poet in the same ilk as Rupert Brooke.<sup>60</sup> It was as the 'well-connected' son of a 'pretty important man' that McKenzie was sent back to Scotland to promote the Republic's cause, John Tunnah, a communist volunteer from Edinburgh, recalled.<sup>61</sup> Republican sympathisers desperately seeking to convince the British public of the worthiness of their cause, pointed to part being played by the likes of Giles and Esmond Romilly, and Wilfred Macartney. Serving as 'Soldiers of Democracy' such individuals helped to substantiate the claim that intellectuals and 'people of substance' were siding with the Republic.<sup>62</sup> Esmond Romilly, the 'shy, sincere, nephew of Winston Churchill', was one particularly hailed for having served the 'cause with as much courage as any of his forebears could have demanded', an exaltation which happily ignored his uncle's antipathy toward the Republic at this time and one which, ironically, would be repeated some sixty years later in the columns of a *Daily Mail* anxious to seek some safe angle in reporting the commemorations of the part played by the International Brigade.<sup>63</sup>

The emphasis placed on the part played by such people, and the claims to the support of the intellectual community were clearly intended as a means of legitimising the Republican cause. The active involvement of so many people of renown and their outspoken support for the aims and achievements of the Spanish Government was clearly at odds with the picture of disorder and unbridled depravity being presented by Nationalist sympathisers. Although, as James Hopkins has demonstrated,<sup>64</sup> the efforts of much of the intelligentsia to take up an essentially proletarian cause often resulted in no more than an 'arranged', frequently strained, marriage, their presence and backing added strength to the impression that the Republic represented cultural values as well as social aspirations. It was the Republic,

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<sup>60</sup> Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, pp. 169 & 145-148.

<sup>61</sup> John Thomas McKenzie Tunnah, Imperial War Museum (IWM), Sound Records, 840/09, reel 1.

<sup>62</sup> *News Chronicle*, 9 December 1936.

<sup>63</sup> Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, p. 146; Watson, *Single to Spain*, p. 104; 'Aristocratic Cousins Who Defied their Families and Found Love in a Brutal War', *Daily Mail*, 16 July 1996.

<sup>64</sup> Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, especially Part 1.



Atholl endeavoured to convince, that was 'fighting against desperate odds for liberty, culture and social betterment,' causes which any Briton could surely understand.<sup>65</sup> It was the Republic, Brinton declared, which was 'fighting for a chance to bring the life of the people to a higher standard, to give them education, social services, land, and above all, freedom'. Those, as he passionately proclaimed, were 'all objects of which Christians ought to be able to approve'.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, as Atholl summarised for all, it was the Francoists who stood for 'the end of liberty, justice and culture, and the merciless extermination of all suspected of caring for these things', an interpretation which in the late 1930s fed into growing trepidation regarding the potential consequences of the spread of the fascist and Nazi doctrines in Europe.<sup>67</sup>

### **People Like Us: Franco's 'Spaniards of Integrity'.<sup>68</sup>**

In their representation of the values of the Nationalist movement, sympathisers set out to claim that *Hispanidad*, the 'soul of things Spanish' and the quality responsible for the past glories of the Spanish empire, was the creed which defined the 'true Spaniard of today'. Christian belief and practice, as has been shown, were regarded as fundamental to this 'soul'. So also were 'chivalry, conservatism and traditionalism ... physical courage, individuality and kindness'. Commentators repeatedly endowed Nationalist soldiers with the mythical qualities of the past. Thus, Helen Nicholson saw in one fascist soldier 'the gentle expression, considerate manners and ... air of dedication to the cause' that might have been found 'in some young knight of old'.<sup>69</sup> These, the finer qualities of Spanish character, were qualities which were only associated with the 'spirit' of the Nationalist movement, sympathisers contended with no little passion. Moreover, Franco was their personification.<sup>70</sup> In a list of virtues which could not fail to impress British Conservatives, readers were told that 'Franco stands ... for decent family life, private property and enterprise, religious freedom', and importantly, 'Spain for the Spaniards'.<sup>71</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>65</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 336.

<sup>66</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 42.

<sup>67</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 316.

<sup>68</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 102.

<sup>69</sup> Nicholson, *Death in the Morning*, p. 123.

<sup>70</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, pp. 103 & 29; Loveday, *World War in Spain*, p. 1-5.

<sup>71</sup> Gerhaty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 249.

he was 'fighting for a State which will be like one great family, without overlords, serfs, plutocrat or proletarians', a 'conquest of Red Spain' and of 'Old Spain'.<sup>72</sup> This, they contended, was not the self-serving warmonger Republican sympathisers portrayed, rather a 'gentle general' forced into action by circumstance. Thus, for Cardozo, Franco was a 'reluctant rebel' who gave 'the single impression ... of a man of peace, of contemplation, perhaps slightly romantic, certainly highly chivalrous', a family man who even in war found time to make paper hats for his twelve year old daughter.<sup>73</sup> Francoists, however, were also careful to note the General's qualities of leadership, pointing out that his 'gentle and apologetic manner' did not in any way interfere with his 'certain "definiteness" of idea and decision.'<sup>74</sup>

The Conservative readership who were the targeted audience of such literature were offered other sympathetic references. The association of cultural heritage and the identification of inherited qualities of leadership with the Nationalist élite conformed to hierarchical values most such readers would have accepted without question. To the generic references which noted the 'generous hospitality of the Spanish soldier' or 'the honest smile and courteous greeting of a simple sergeant'<sup>75</sup> were added 'higher' qualities of character and culture. Thus, Nationalist officers were frequently referred to in terms which linked Spain's future under Franco to the greatness of her past. Interestingly, for many commentators, often themselves confirmed imperialists, that greatness was best encapsulated by Spain's own blood-thirsty imperial adventures in the New World. 'The urge of the Conquistadores is once again abroad, it is a proud, valiant and all conquering spirit', enthused Major J.F.C. Fuller; 'Captain Melendez was the very picture of some fifteenth century soldier of fortune. Pissaro (sic) or Cortes must have been of similar type', intoned Cardozo; Quiapo de Llano was 'obviously ... a descendant of the men who carried the banners of Spain to the New World', enthused the author Francis Yeats-Brown; the men of the Legion were 'tough adventurers who looked exactly like ... the conquistadors of Cortes and Valdivia', Catholic journalist, Raymond Lacoste informed readers of the *Tablet*.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, such men were portrayed as embodying the

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<sup>72</sup> Fuller, *Conquest of Red Spain*, p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, pp. 150, 141 & 148.

<sup>74</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 26.

<sup>75</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, pp. 49 & 29.

<sup>76</sup> Fuller, *Conquest of Red Spain*, p. 15; Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 13; Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle*, p. 278; Raymond Lacoste, 'The Spain I Saw', *The Tablet*, 26 September 1936.

best traditional qualities: 'Don P. - is a splendid specimen of the old Spanish gentleman, full of charm, hospitality and humour', Gerahty asserted, whilst Nigel Tangye, air correspondent for *The Observer*, and the *Evening News*, claimed to recognise in a representative of Franco 'the breeding and culture that somehow one expects of the Spanish aristocracy'.<sup>77</sup> The inference was clear: in Franco's Spain the natural hierarchy was, thankfully, re-establishing itself. With such leadership 'the op-purtenances [sic] of civilised living, the appearance of public order and the decent conduct of public affairs' were only to be expected, declared Jerrold. Rather, he concluded, it was the degree of 'elementary virtue, integrity of purpose and self discipline' displayed by the Nationalist leaders as they strove to achieve those standards which deserved greatest recognition.<sup>78</sup>

In their eagerness to identify with the Francoist crusade, observers extended this approach. The correlation of the better facets of Spanish character with the Nationalist élite was one frequently developed further by references which conferred upon its members qualities of 'Englishness'. This practice was not entirely confined to observations of the character of the higher-class officers. Less well-placed or distinguished officers were typically introduced as men 'whose circumstances were as near as possible those of a normal middle-class English family man'.<sup>79</sup> Other ranks, too, received similar attention. Tennant, for example, ignoring mounting evidence to the reverse, suggested that no 'Britisher could take exception' to the actions of the Spanish Foreign Legion. Indeed, in her eyes, their 'dignified and considerate behaviour' accorded them the status of 'Spanish Tommies'.<sup>80</sup> The better class, therefore Nationalist, Spaniard 'no more counts his change than an Oxford undergraduate', readers were told, and many must have been intrigued to learn that the 'colours of Nationalist Spain are the same as those of the MCC'. Among such men even previously derided weaknesses of national character could be reassessed, the Spaniard's supposed obsession with gambling reduced now to a harmless English fondness for betting.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 62; Tangye, *Red, White and Spain*, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Jerrold, *Georgian*, p. 379.

<sup>79</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 178.

<sup>80</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 36.

<sup>81</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 30; Lunn, in postscript to *Spanish Rehearsal: An Eyewitness in Spain During the Civil War, 1936-39* (Connecticut, 1974, first published as *Spanish Rehearsal*, 1937, from which other references taken), p. 222.

Such standing, however, was more usually directed at the upper-middle class and aristocratic members of the Nationalist hierarchy. At times this even extended into bestowing honorary English status. Using devices, which, as we have seen in chapter two, were common in juvenile fiction, commentators sought to identify English connections and supposed character traits in the Nationalist élite. For instance, Tangye introduced the Nationalist press officer, the Marques Merry del Val, as 'a delightful man, whom you could not possibly tell from an Englishman either by speech or looks'.<sup>82</sup> That the man who had acted as Spanish Ambassador to Britain from 1913 until his resignation in 1931 (in protest at the formation of the Republic) should have had command of the English language should perhaps not have been such a surprise to Tangye. Nonetheless such unconsciously patronising and racially assumptive references were replete. Nationalist press officers Captain Gonzalo de Aguilera, otherwise the Conde d'Alba y Yeltes, and Captain Luís Bolín, organiser of Franco's transit from the Canary Islands to Morocco, were both noted to have English mothers and so it seemingly followed that they were Spaniards who 'could be taken anywhere for Englishmen'.<sup>83</sup> Reflecting a device which, as we have seen, was common in fiction, commentators also found in such Spaniards some of the favourable qualities commonly associated with the English. Aguilera, observed Lunn, was a lover of antique books and was compassionate to dogs in distress, observations which ignored some of the press officer's more reactionary views regarding the 'slave stock' of the Spanish working classes.<sup>84</sup> It was these 'higher class Spaniards of integrity', who, according to Tennant, had long admired and endeavoured to emulate those British qualities 'the love of freedom and fair-play, the traditional kindness and hatred of cruelty'.<sup>85</sup> The cause of Spaniards who had been educated at Stonyhurst and enquired of the outcome of the Boat Race was, for such commentators, clearly one beyond question.<sup>86</sup>

Nor did sympathisers limit themselves to identifying shared qualities of character. In

<sup>82</sup> Tangye, *Red, White and Spain*, p. 135.

<sup>83</sup> H.R. Knickerbocker, *The Siege of the Alcazar: A War Log of the Spanish Revolution* (London, 1937), p23; Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 72-73. Aguilera offered extreme views such as the notion that increased life expectancy in the cities, brought about by improved sanitation, had resulted in the increase of 'slave stock' and the unwanted survival of 'red' leaders. Similarly he advocated the shooting of boot-blacks on the basis that 'someone who kneels to clean your boots is bound to be a communist'. See Paul Preston, *Concise History*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>85</sup> Tennant, *Spanish Journey*, p. 102.

<sup>86</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, pp. 118-119.

their efforts to forge sympathetic links with the Nationalist movement they sought to employ a whole gamut of emblematic and historic references. Fuller, for instance, drew upon the pronouncements of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, Lord Bryce and John Locke to justify Franco's rebellion. Quoting Jefferson, and apparently oblivious to the underlying irony, he declared that 'the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants'.<sup>87</sup> Others quoted Shakespeare or offered analogies which compared the resoluteness of Franco to St. George and the rhetoric of Mola to that of Nelson.<sup>88</sup> Tennyson's poem *The Defence of Lucknow* was quoted in descriptions of the siege of the Toledo Alcázar, and the same reference, together with Ladysmith and Mafeking appeared in the Percy Westerman tale of the war, *Under Fire in Spain*.<sup>89</sup> Several Catholic commentators saw events in terms of the English Civil War and Restoration: the 'symbolical situation of Salamanca, as capital of the Nationalist administration,' was considered by one enthusiast to be comparable to 'that of Oxford during the English civil war'. Another declared that in restoring 'the historical traditions of Spain', Franco was emulating the 'glorious conduct of General Monck, who restored Charles II in England'.<sup>90</sup> In part such references can be seen as being merely automatic reflections of their authors' own innate social and class attitudes. On the other hand, they were also deliberate devices designed to evoke sympathy for the Nationalist cause. By conferring qualities of English character, most particularly on the Nationalist élite, commentators were attempting to overcome some of the less favourable impressions of Spaniards that they anticipated among their readers. By associating Nationalist officers with heroic icons of the past, and Nationalist actions with key moments of British history they were seeking to elevate the military's action and to legitimise the Francoist crusade. The action taken 'reluctantly' by Franco's Spain was no more than Englishmen sharing the same values would expect. As Lunn exclaimed, 'they had risen, as every decent Englishman ... would rise if the Red Terror crossed the English Channel'. Such men, declared Jerrold, were simply and justly 'fighting and dying in Spain for every decency of civilization which Englishmen regard[ed] as their birthright'.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, readers were frequently reminded, Britain

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<sup>87</sup> Fuller, *Conquest of Red Spain*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>88</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 131; Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain*, pp.20 & 103.

<sup>89</sup> Sencourt, *Spain's Ordeal*, p. 168; Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, p. 305.

<sup>90</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 31; Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 315.

<sup>91</sup> Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 28; Jerrold, *Impressions*, p. 24.

had recently fought for just such a principle. In rhetoric which ignored the subsequent disenchantment and anti-war backlash, commentators like Jerrold enthused that 'this was England again, ... the same humour, the same courage, the same queer, heroic ... characters, the same passions which had been evident in England during 1914'.<sup>92</sup>

### **Perceptions of the Role of Women in the 'New Spains'**

As we have seen, pre-Civil War travel literature commonly offered two contrasting images of Spanish women. The first was the reserved and obedient wife or daughter always accompanied by a servant or by 'chaperons in black flounced dresses'. The second was that of the 'simple minded servant and stoic rustic'.<sup>93</sup> Both fitted into the 'traditional' portraiture of Spain, one in which women accepted their subservient role. Although a few travellers, notably Walter Starkie, encouraged ideas of hot-blooded gypsy flamenco dancers, most dismissed 'the bold, bad, dagger-flashing vampire' as a 'libellous caricature' of fiction and film and praised rather the modesty, reserved manner, and passivity of Spain's 'old-fashioned girls'.<sup>94</sup> Those travellers like Nina Murdoch who were critical of a role which saw women treated as 'no more than minors', and condemned the way in which a middle-class woman was kept 'almost as much a prisoner as in the days when she saw the world through the fretted screens of her window' were the exception.<sup>95</sup> For most, evidence of emancipation was either cause for amused and patronising comment or further evidence of growing and unfortunate tensions between old Catholic traditions and the influence of a more modern world.<sup>96</sup> During the war these views were developed. British perceptions of the role of women in the respective 'new Spains' seemed to divide along similar lines to other issues, the one side lauding evidence of liberalisation and increased emancipation, the other advocating a return to past patterns.

As already noted, during the Second Republic issues affecting women's lives had

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<sup>92</sup> Jerrold, *Georgian*, pp. 378-379.

<sup>93</sup> C. Graves, *Trip-tyque*, pp. 58 & 59; Mason, *Trivial Adventures in the Spanish Highlands*, pp. 74-81 & 89.

<sup>94</sup> Marshall, *Tramp-Royal in Spain*, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> Nina Murdoch, *She Travelled Alone in Spain*, pp. 229-230.

<sup>96</sup> Richard & Phyllis Pearsall, *Castilian Ochre*, p. 154 & pp. 182-3.

begun to be addressed. Co-education, civil marriage and divorce were made possible as a result of the separation of the Church and State. The process of women's suffrage, tentatively started under Primo de Rivera, was completed, and the concept of equal pay for equal work was accepted in theory if not necessarily in practice. This brief glimpse of liberation was rapidly subsumed within the process of 're-Catholicisation' in the Nationalist controlled zones. Here women were expected to return, unconditionally, to their traditional domestic roles. Within the Republican zones, however, especially in Madrid and Barcelona, aspects of women's liberation seemed to continue apace. Birth control, legalised abortion and centres for unmarried mothers were representative of some of the more radical developments, especially when measured against age-old gender prejudices. The communist-inspired Antifascist Women's Organisation, *Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas* (AMA) founded in 1933, the anarchist, *Mujeres Libres*, the youth organisation *Unión de Muchachas* and a number of regional offshoots sought to give women a voice both in political and social spheres. Exceptional women leaders such as the anarchist Federica Montseny, who as Minister of Health became Spain's first female government minister, the communist Dolores Ibárruri, and socialist Margarita Nelken were the face of that voice.<sup>97</sup> As Mary Nash has shown, during the war 'shared interests in community survival gave new legitimacy to women's demands for an acknowledged social role beyond the confines of the home'.<sup>98</sup> As she has also shown, this was an endeavour which, despite the language of liberation and revolutionary zeal, struggled against entrenched gender codes.<sup>99</sup>

However, the image and more especially the perceived role of women in Republican Spain was one which altered as the conflict progressed. During the early months, in the poster and pamphlet propaganda of the Republic, in sympathisers' rhetoric and particularly in the sympathetic press, the figure of the blue-overalled, gun carrying *miliciana* came to symbolise the courageous resistance of the Spanish people. Left-wing organs like the *Daily Worker* eagerly reported the sad but he-

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<sup>97</sup> See, Dolores Ibárruri, *They Shall Not Pass*; For a biography of Margarita Nelken see Paul Preston, *Doves of War: Four Women of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 2002), ch. 4.

<sup>98</sup> Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver, 1995), p. 180. Nash has identified some 255 women's antifascist groups in Republican Spain.

<sup>99</sup> See also, Frances Lannon, 'Women and Images of Women in the Spanish Civil War', *Transactions of The Royal Historical Society*, 1991, pp. 213- 228;

roic death in action of 'one young girl' member of the Mangada Column as evidence of the determined resilience being displayed by loyalist militias, and only weeks after the rebellion a photographic tribute to the women defenders of Madrid appeared in the *Daily Herald*.<sup>100</sup> Even at this time, however, the gender attitudes which were to colour interpretation were evident. Another *Herald* photograph, for instance, softened any belligerent inference by depicting a 'Loyal Woman Soldier' sewing a button on a male comrade's tunic.<sup>101</sup> Inevitably, perhaps, these *milicianas* were commonly labelled as Amazons - although connotations varied according to the political stance of the commentator. Moreover the part they were playing was overstated. Even *The Times* succumbed to the mood, reporting that so many girls 'have offered themselves that the 5th Militian Regiment is forming an Amazon battalion' while ignoring that their role was to be one of support.<sup>102</sup> Another report in that newspaper, which worried that the organisation of 'armed and aggressive' *milicianas*, meant that 'all that womanhood traditionally stands for is rapidly disappearing', betrayed the alarm felt, particularly in middle class quarters.<sup>103</sup> In fact, the part played by women in front-line fighting was relatively limited. Nonetheless, the thousand or so militiawomen who served in the front-lines during the late summer of 1936 and the several thousands who took part in the defence of Madrid, though small in number, were a highly visible group, whose presence for the left served propaganda purposes, both as an early emblem of loyalist solidarity and to muster men to the Republican cause.

This early anti-traditional image was, however, short-lived. The portrayal of women as valiant defenders of democracy turned from the front-line 'Amazon' of the early months to the more traditional and supposedly gender appropriate role of essential home-front supporters. The *milicianas* were discredited, their presence at the front regarded as only encouraging foolhardy displays of bravado among the men and increasingly associated with prostitution. Unfounded tales that venereal disease was causing 'more casualties ... than enemy bullets' formed a part of the campaign which called for the withdrawal of women from the frontlines and in the proc-

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<sup>100</sup> 'With Men and Women Fighters in the Front Line', *Daily Worker*, 13 August 1936; 'Women of Madrid', *Daily Herald*, 4 August 1936.

<sup>101</sup> 'Loyal Woman Soldier', *Daily Herald*, 10 August 1936.

<sup>102</sup> *The Times* 27 August 1936.

<sup>103</sup> *The Times*, 4 August 1936.



ess provided a propaganda opportunity for Nationalist sympathisers.<sup>104</sup> The role of women was still seen to include encouraging men into taking up arms in the fight against fascism - 'better the widow of a soldier than the wife of a coward', ran the slogan - but the enactment of that role altered to accommodate a more traditional understanding. By the late autumn of 1936 the Communist Party, in the endeavour to 'win the war before attempting to win the revolution' and therefore anxious to accommodate traditional middle-class sensibilities, both in Spain and in non-belligerent European countries, was promoting the slogan 'men to the front, women to the homefront'.<sup>105</sup> As Temma Kaplan has shown, in the anarchist ranks the priorities were little different, with women rarely challenging masculine supremacy in the conviction that their liberation was secondary to the war effort.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, Spanish conceptions of gender roles were deeply entrenched and not easily overturned. The lack of change dismayed British volunteer Nan Green. Visiting an anarchist commune she was bemused to note that women still believed that they had no 'right to take part in anything', accepted that they should eat only after their menfolk had finished, and aspired only for the freedom to buy 'ready-made frocks'.<sup>107</sup> Another volunteer serving with the Spanish Medical Aid Committee, Winifred Sandford, was equally set aback when in a Republican club she was permitted to sit with the men only on the grounds that she was an Englishwoman and was therefore 'educated like a man'.<sup>108</sup> There was, then, little resistance as the portrayal of women in the Republican zone rapidly moved to one which showed them as being most effective when 'knitting jerseys and scarves', helping orphans and the homeless, working as cooks, housemaids and nurses. They were praised for taking on 'civilian posts left vacant by men going to the front' and helping to maintain the war effort.

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<sup>104</sup> Prostitutes were present at the front, some of the women fighting at the barricades in Barcelona in July 1936 came from the red light district of Barrio Chino. However, the general association of women of leftist sympathy with prostitution was one successfully advanced by Franco's propaganda machine during the war and one which lodged firmly in the Spanish post war psyche. See eg. Shirley Mangini, *Memories of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (Yale, 1995), ch. 8.

<sup>105</sup> JSU member, Justina Palma, quoted in Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1994 edition), p. 286; Catherine Coleman, 'Women in the Civil War', *Heart of Spain: Robert Capa's Photographs of the Spanish Civil War* (New York, 1999), pp. 43-51.

<sup>106</sup> Temma, E Kaplan, 'Spanish Anarchism and Women's Liberation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1971, pp. 101-111. It must be noted that women's responses varied from a frustration that 'there was too much talk and too little action' to active resistance to change. See e.g. Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p. 354-362.

<sup>107</sup> Nan Green, IWM, Sound Archives, 000815/04.

<sup>108</sup> Winifred Sandford, IWM, Sound Archives, 816/6.

'Those who wish[ed] to be near the fighting line [could] actually go to the front with the men', commentators pointed out. Once there though, it was made clear that their duty was to 'cook the food and wash the clothes so that the men ... are free to fight'.<sup>109</sup> Some observers, like the Australian poet and POUM sympathiser Mary Low, treated the transition with caution, advancing the not unreasonable contention that 'women should be properly equipped for defence when they are likely to be attacked'. Low conceded that the Republic's intent to shape a 'new society' in which women would have their 'own status and earning powers' and no longer need the 'protection' of men should be praised. In a country where women had been 'closed up and corseted so long' any expression of their new found liberty should be encouraged. However, like Nan Green, she too saw the danger that women 'anxious to grab their liberty' would be content with 'the little scraps which answered their first call'.<sup>110</sup>

The more general position of pro-Republican commentators, however, was less critical. Summarising the view of the majority of government supporters, Ann Stansfield, correspondent for *Woman's Outlook*, optimistically declared that the 'old prejudices of Spanish society against women doing anything in public' had been overcome. Similarly, Atholl extolled the fact that 'in spite of the sheltered position which their sex had hitherto occupied', women had 'responded to the call' as energetically as men.<sup>111</sup> 'If the war [had] done nothing else, it [had] at least provided scope for the organising ability of the Spanish women', announced Brereton.<sup>112</sup> Women's organisations were congratulated for encouraging women volunteers to work not only as nurses, but also in the factories and offices and 'even' for manual work. However, care was taken to note that 'woman's progress outside the domestic circle' was made only 'at the price of losing brothers, sons, and sweethearts in the infernal machine of civil war'.<sup>113</sup> In language which defined the limit of any challenge to established gender conventions, Stansfield announced that in their response, the women of the Republic were 'blossoming forth into a new, responsi-

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<sup>109</sup> Frances Drew, 'The Women and the War', *Spain Assailed*, pp. 14 & 15.

<sup>110</sup> Mary Low, in Alexander & Fyrth, *Women's Voices*, pp. 258-260.

<sup>111</sup> Ann Stansfield, 'Women's Work in Spain Today: How the War Has Overcome Old Prejudices', *Woman's Outlook*, June 1938; Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 93.

<sup>112</sup> Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 37.

<sup>113</sup> A Lois Wyburn, 'Women of Spain: Some Unknown Heroines', *Woman's Outlook*, 17 October 1936.

ble, serious type of womanhood, with a sense of duty, not only to their families, as was the case in old Spain, but to the community'.<sup>114</sup> Such convictions helped to re-define the role of women in Spanish society, however, they also set that new role within parameters thought acceptable to middle-class sensibilities. Women's liberation amounted to the acceptance of new 'duties' which should be directed to supporting the war effort on the home front. As Atholl ardently asserted, 'nothing could better illustrate the determined spirit in which loyalist Spain [was] facing tremendous odds' than the women who had volunteered to take the places of those men called up to the army and who had then helped to increase the output of the factories.<sup>115</sup> Such sentiments were soon to be echoed in Britain, but at this time they added to the left's composite picture of a newly liberated people mobilised to resist the subjugating forces of fascism.

### **Women in Nationalist Spain**

Whilst the effectiveness of Republican efforts toward equality was moderated by entrenched attitudes their very concept was anathema to the Nationalist movement and was regarded by right-wing observers as a dangerous break with established mores. The Nationalist belief that 'the selflessness of woman' was a 'high virtue' and that, therefore, 'woman was at her noblest and best when carrying out with dignity and beauty her true office of home-maker in the family circle' was one which commentators applauded and one with which large sections of the British public would have sympathised.<sup>116</sup> Accordingly, the pro-Nationalist media conformed, offering romantic images of women in traditional Spanish attire, and advancing notions of 'ideal womanhood', with immaculately dressed women pictured carrying out domestic tasks.<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, recognising that 'the emancipated women ... in London or New York would feel stifled in Nationalist Spain', commentators set about rationalising the Francoist position. In the process Nationalist women became symbols of morality, Republican women a metaphor for degeneration. Firstly, commentators argued that the role expected of women in the new Spain was one born

<sup>114</sup> Stansfield, *Woman's Outlook*, 17 October 1936.

<sup>115</sup> Atholl, *Searchlight*, p. 232.

<sup>116</sup> Proclamation by José Antonio de Rivera, cited in Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain*, pp. 170-171.

<sup>117</sup> Aldridge, *Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 116-117, notes that such imagery was recurrent in the newsreels, highlighting in particular British Paramount, issue 572, 20 August 1936.

of traditional values. For example, the 'code of old Spain' simply required that unmarried girls of good families were accompanied by a chaperon, reasoned H.R. Knickerbocker, Staff Correspondent for the International News agency, and this 'was a code the Whites intend[ed] to preserve'.<sup>118</sup> For the Spanish, 'the traditional segregation of women and the ideal of chivalry' were no more than essential controls of sexual desire, explained Wall. The 'liberal and revolutionary idea of sex ... suddenly introduced' into such a country, as it supposedly had been under the auspices of the Republic, had only led to 'widespread prostitution'. On the other hand, 'in White Spain', he proclaimed, there was a 'relative absence of prostitution' (though the legionary Peter Kemp and free-lance journalist Archie Lyall had little difficulty in locating the brothel quarter in Salamanca).<sup>119</sup> Some minor changes were evident, 'women now smoke in the cafes without attracting attention', Wall observed, but as he and others pointed out, without any hint of censure, Spanish men were not so liberal minded as the British or French and so insisted on the family life.<sup>120</sup> Simply, the patriarchal structure was so firmly rooted in Spain that it was unreasonable to compare the expectations of Spanish women with those of their more liberated sisters. Furthermore, commentators patronisingly purported, the Spanish woman was content with her situation, she did not feel 'relegated, rather the opposite ... she was bright ... laugh[ed] most of the time, usually displaying pretty white teeth and she appear[ed] to take good care that her husband pays her the necessary attention'.<sup>121</sup>

Secondly, observers contended that the outcome of too rapid a process of emancipation was only too evident in the behaviour of women in the Republican zone. The respectable codes of old Spain so integral to Franco's vision of the new Spain were not the custom of the Popular Front. That government had 'introduced divorce and encouraged ... liberal habits'.<sup>122</sup> And it was the women who had succumbed to such notions who had taken part in street violence during the months following the February election and who had been eager participants in the 'Red Terror', particularly in Madrid and Barcelona. Stories which told of mobs of workers' wives wreaking havoc were related with disgust, though often questionable sub-

<sup>118</sup> Knickerbocker, *The Siege of the Alcazar*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>119</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, pp. 69-70; Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble*, p. 107.

<sup>120</sup> Wall, *ibid.*, p. 5; Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, p. 253.

<sup>121</sup> Cardozo, *loc. cit.*

<sup>122</sup> Knickerbocker, *The Siege of the Alcazar*, p. 52.

stantiation. One such report involved the brief involvement of British schoolteacher, Phyllis Gwatkins-Williams. Supposedly forced to witness 'red outrages', and coerced into posing with loyalist militia, armed with a gun in one hand and a bayonet in the other, Gwatkin-Williams was hailed in the press and newsreels as the 'Blonde Amazon'. However, as the media were quick to point out, Gwatkin-Williams was the civilised English antithesis of the uncouth Spanish, 'red Amazon'; an English rose who 'prefer[ed] kittens to bayonets'. On the other hand, as she herself attested, in Republican Spain, the 'women-fighters were the worst'.<sup>123</sup> 'Women and girls stood about laughing' as religious icons were vandalised, lamented one dismayed *Times* correspondent.<sup>124</sup> Only a week into the war the author Ferdinand Tuohy, writing in the *Daily Mail* with typical characterisation, was evoking imagery of the 1871 Paris Commune to denounce the part played by 'Spain's Red Carmens'; 'Les Petroleuses' who could be found wherever there is a question of burning a convent, church or monastery ... handing on the tin of petrol if not actually tipping their contents over sacred relics'. These 'factory types' had 'become quite Western' and had 'thrown off religion; formal restraint, more or less everything *that was*' he declared, and now not only formed the vanguard of the 'red looters' but also led the assault on civilization.<sup>125</sup> As the war progressed such accounts increased, inviting the inference that, in contrast to the refined, dignified homemakers of the Nationalist regime, Republican working-class women were fundamentally savage and uncivilised.

The pro-Nationalist response to the *milicianas*, in particular, was disproportionate to the part they played. To some extent this was because of the novelty aspect of the participation of women in what was seen as a male domain. However, as the invective used makes clear, responses were overwhelmingly governed by opportunities to denounce the Republican cause. Within the first week of the rebellion pro-Nationalist organs were publishing photographs of women in 'army boots and red shirts', and of 'armed girl communists ... wearing steel helmets and carrying bayonets',<sup>126</sup> and reporting with somewhat salacious innuendo of 'Red Amazon

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<sup>123</sup> *Daily Express*, 10 August 1936; Gaumont British newsreel, Issue 274, 13 August 1936, cited in Aldgate, *Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 113-117.

<sup>124</sup> *The Times*, 25 July 1936.

<sup>125</sup> Ferdinand Tuohy, 'Spain's Red Carmens', *Daily Mail*, 27 July 1936.

<sup>126</sup> *Daily Express*, 24 July 1936, *Daily Mail*, 24 July 1936; *Catholic Herald*, 7 August 1936.

prisoners', captured 'clad in nothing but a mechanic's overall'.<sup>127</sup> These 'Amazons in blue overalls' were typically regarded as being 'more fanatical than their men'.<sup>128</sup> They were also denounced in particularly perjorative terms. For instance, using language which betrayed the Spanish right's contempt for ordinary peasants and workers, Queipo de Llano described one 'so called militiawoman' as a 'mulatta, with thick lips and a pug nose' and dismissed her as 'utterly repulsive'.<sup>129</sup> For readers of travel literature such derogatory descriptions were not new. The Gordons, for instance, had informed their readers that Murcian women were 'thick-set and useful looking, with muscular necks and ankles ... their eyes ... domesticated in expression'. The Cantabrian countryside, too, was reportedly populated with 'ox-like women'. And, for travellers, the clothes of this 'bovine' peasantry served only to 'emphasise their defects'.<sup>130</sup> British pro-Nationalist observers readily took up the theme. Sympathisers derisively claimed, that 'The women, especially the peasants' wives ... were the worst. They were ferocious, like wild beasts', no more than 'stout harridans who loved a fray'.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, the participation of an 'Amazon battalion' in the fighting at Segovia Bridge, saw them denounced as 'blood-crazed and hysterical creatures such as the French Revolution had produced'.<sup>132</sup> That such women had loose morals was a given for Nationalist sympathisers, the Republic had after all unwisely introduced liberalising reforms and the communists openly encouraged free-love. Allegations that 'most of the young women who donned pistols ... were volunteers from the capitals 30,000 registered prostitutes' clearly fitted this pattern, and the lack of any leftist challenge to the contrary merely helped to add credence to such claims.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, here, there was a convergence of the Communist Party inspired rhetoric employed in the effort to dissuade women from participating in front-line action and the Nationalist propaganda which set out to denigrate their involvement, both subverting, though for different reasons, the part played by the *milicianas*, and both defining the role women could play in the conflict in more acceptably conventional terms.

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<sup>127</sup> *Daily Express*, 7 August 1936.

<sup>128</sup> Rodolphe Timmerman, *Heroes of the Alcazar*, p. 132.

<sup>129</sup> Mangini, *Memories of Resistance*, p. 93.

<sup>130</sup> Jan & Cora Gordon, *Two Vagabonds in Spain*, p. 88; Marshall, *Tramp-Royal in Spain*, p. 17; Mason, *Trivial Adventures*, p. 41.

<sup>131</sup> Knickerbocker, *The Siege of the Alcazar*, p. 87; Sencourt, *Spain's Ordeal*, p. 105.

<sup>132</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 304.

<sup>133</sup> Knoblaugh, *Correspondent in Spain*, p.38.

On the Nationalist side such terms were clear. In contrast to the 'stout harridans' of the Republic the women of the Nationalist zone were depicted in more flattering characterisation, whether as the 'golden-haired, blue-eyed' heroine with a 'lissom figure' who emerged from the ruins of the Alcázar, or the 'raven-haired' girl with 'flashing eyes' who cooked and mended for the Legion.<sup>134</sup> Although, here also, a number of women's organisations undertook to mobilise women to the war effort their role was one which did little to challenge traditional Spanish mores. Whilst a significant number of women did don the uniform of the Falange in the *Sección Femenina* or join the Carlist *Margaritas* their role was strictly limited to administrative and social work and to medical support. As Pilar Primo de Rivera continued to maintain even fifty years later, 'war was for men and women were for helping men.'<sup>135</sup> At the time, this was a view enthusiastically endorsed by commentators eager to strengthen the idea that the Nationalists best represented 'normality'. While the promiscuous Republican *milicianas* were represented as the very worst of womanhood, women members of the Falange were depicted in gender acceptable roles. They did not behave like 'whores' rather they were like 'elder sisters' or 'mothers' to Franco's forces.<sup>136</sup> If war had brought Nationalist women more attention than they were used to, such attention was confined within the parameters of polite Spanish custom.<sup>137</sup> Nationalist women were content to knit, sew and crochet garments for the troops, 'knowing there is someone in the trenches whose life will be made a little more comfortable by this - the tangible result of her labours'. As Farmborough declared, in the Nationalist zone a woman accepted that 'her place is in her home' even though 'her heart is in the trenches'.<sup>138</sup> The contribution of those who moved beyond the home was hailed in the same terms, with glowing accounts of the young women of the *Sección Femenina* 'knitting and reciting the rosary'. More than this though, these 'young girls' were involved in the reconstitution of true Spanish values. In the 'Social Aid' kitchens they were dutifully reforming the orphaned or abandoned children of 'Reds', those 'wild woodland creatures ... many of whom have the seeds of class-hatred within their young hearts'. Similarly, the women who manned the children's dining halls and schools and provided peasants with mothercraft and domestic science classes were glowingly considered

<sup>134</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, pp. 129 & 213; *Daily Mail*, 19 September 1936.

<sup>135</sup> Mangini, *Memories of Resistance*, p. 92

<sup>136</sup> Cardozo, *March of a Nation*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>137</sup> Knickerbocker, *Siege of the Alcazar*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>138</sup> Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain*, pp. 32 & 30.

to have 'render[ed] a tribute of sisterly love and fulfil[ed] ... the social duties laid by the New State upon its womenfolk'. For Farmborough and her co-sympathisers, that young women should perform such 'public duties' on behalf of the 'New Spain' was evidence enough of a positive shift of attitude. 'These', she declared with unshakeable conviction, 'are the women of the New Spain'.<sup>139</sup>

The contrast in the roles and expectations of women on either side of the two Spains, pro-Nationalist commentators held, was proof enough of the need to restore traditional values. The relaxation of those values under communist influenced Republican rule had resulted only in degradation, debauchery and social disintegration. The Nationalists, on the other hand represented, the return of morality and established standards. Such standards, they accepted, might have seemed somewhat limiting to readers in London but, commentators reminded, they were standards with which Spanish women were as yet content. Too much stress, they contended, had been laid on aspects such as 'the hitherto segregated life' of Spanish women, complacently pointing out that it should be remembered that chaperoning was a custom respected in Spain, especially by middle class women.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, 'most Spanish women ... had no knowledge of politics', 'could not even read', and therefore could have no understanding of current events.<sup>141</sup> Clearly it was in this latter vein that American, Helen Nicholson, travelling in Nationalist Spain with her English maid during the late summer of 1936, viewed ordinary Spanish women. Using language laden with class overtones she remarked, with amused derision, that a Spanish servant who thought Russia to be a northern province of Spain was 'no more ignorant than the rest of her class'.<sup>142</sup> Whatever element of truth they may have held, the elaboration and repetition of such anecdotes conformed with the Nationalist platform. The argument that women had been content with their position and wise in their ignorance before they were corrupted by the reforms and promises of an atheistic, 'Red' government was one regularly advanced by Nationalist press officers. Not surprisingly it was one eagerly endorsed by sympathetic commentators whose views were coloured by their own politics and class proclivities,

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<sup>139</sup> Farmborough, *ibid.*, pp. 40, 41 & 32; 'The Great Work of "Social Aid"', *Spain*, No. 55, 18 October 1938, p. 48. See also biography of Mercedes Sanz-Bachiller, a central figure in the *Sección Femenina* and Social Aid, see Preston, *Doves of War*, Ch. 3.

<sup>140</sup> Tuohy, *Daily Mail*, 27 July 1936.

<sup>141</sup> Knoblaugh, *Correspondent in Spain*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>142</sup> Nicholson, *Death in the Morning*, pp. 84-85.



and by their preconceived notions of the role of Spanish womanhood.<sup>143</sup>

The role of women along with access to education and respect for culture were all issues significant in defining what the two 'irreconcilable Spains' represented. The pro-Republican image of ordinary people who endured the horrors of war in order to protect their cultural heritage, and who enthusiastically seized new educational opportunities and endeavoured to revolutionise the role of women in Spanish society, albeit within acceptable parameters, was clearly calculated as one which would appeal to as wide a British audience as possible. References which placed the struggle of the Spanish Republic alongside episodes of British working class history were balanced, indeed at times swamped, by others which stressed a tradition of 'higher' support for just causes. Pro-Nationalists countered, arguing that Spanish workers and peasants, once freed from red coercion, were eagerly embracing the security of old traditions and the new social order that Franco's new Spain promised. The Republic's claim to be honouring Spanish cultural heritage, they argued, was risible, its headlong effort to educate the illiterate was ill-directed and unnecessary, its emancipation of women a dangerous challenge to Spain's long-established traditions. On the other hand, Francoists welcomed in Nationalist Spain the return of agrarian contentment and lauded new housing programmes and promises of full employment. Importantly, alongside this the traditional values best suited to Spanish society had returned and the better qualities of Spanish character had been brought to the fore. Even though, as observers kept reminding, Spanish practices should not be judged by 'civilised' British standards, the 'traditional pride of the *hidalgos*' was back, and women were happy to reassume their assigned and 'selfless' gender appropriate role.<sup>144</sup>

Such a picture took as accepted that Spain was best ruled by the traditional Spanish hierarchy. It was, then, perhaps natural if ill-advised that pro-Nationalist commentators endeavoured to associate the spirit of the Francoist crusade with that of the conquistadores. Moreover, unlike the Spanish masses the Nationalist élite did display some of the most admirable qualities of Britishness. The appeal of such a stance, however, would have been limited. Clearly the values represented and the qualities of character identified were ones with which the more conservative-

<sup>143</sup> Knoblaugh, *Correspondent in Spain*, p. 38; Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p. 59.

<sup>144</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 103, Farmborough, *Life and People in National Spain*, p. 170

minded could readily relate. However, events challenged even this group. As the picture of a besieged Republic, beset by savage Moors and bombed by Franco's fascist allies came to dominate, notions of Nationalist gallantry and honourable purpose were undermined. The war in the north weakened the position further. As has been noted, pro-Nationalists had since the outset struggled to deal with the enigma of Basque support for the Republic. However, a position which decried the malevolent influence of workers from outside the provinces and reproached ill-conceived demands for regional autonomy - a position already challenged by notions such as Basque piety and industriousness - was further eroded by the form the war took in the north. As we shall see in the following chapter, as supporters of both sides sought to fit the Basque country into their respective representations of a promised new Spain they continued a process which had come to regard the provinces as being distinct from the rest of Spain. In doing so they brought the war as close as it would get to Britain.

## Chapter 8.

### BRITISH PUBLIC RESPONSES.

#### Reaction to Events in the Basque Country: The Third Spain.

Demands for regional autonomy which had been a significant factor in domestic Spanish politics during the years prior to the war were a deciding influence in allegiances during it, the rigidly centralist Nationalists rejecting outright the autonomy granted under the Republic to Euzkadi and Catalonia. While British commentators of both sides usually tended to characterise Spain and her people in sweeping terms they did on occasion highlight regional differences as a means of explaining Spanish responses to the war. Thus, as we have seen, pro-Nationalists painted a picture in which the rural workers of the South were supposedly eager to return to the bucolic contentment of romantic travel literature. Pro-Republicans, on the other hand, argued that the resigned 'backwardness' of the peasants of Extremadura and Andalusia was the result of years of suffering at the hands of oppressive landlords. For the right, Catalan claims for autonomy were in large part the result of the province's urban and industrial proletariat proving a predictable breeding ground for the Spanish tendency toward anarchy. Conversely, Republican sympathisers repeated the notion that 'Barcelona [was] not typically Spanish', and asserted that the Catalans, together with the Basques, were 'the Yankees of Spain, dynamic, pushing, acquisitive ... happiest in the factory, the counting room or the emporium'. It was, therefore, not surprising that they showed 'a lack of respect for central government' and a desire for autonomy.<sup>31</sup>

Most attention, however, was directed towards the Basque provinces. Most observers represented the provinces as a 'third Spain', one distinct from either the Spain of the Republic or of the Nationalists. In part this was founded on already forged links. The provinces had long-established commercial connections with Britain, especially South Wales, and Basque ships had continued to brave the German blockade during the First World War in order to bring supplies to Britain, an action reciprocated during 1937. Industry and entrepreneurialism were seen to distin-

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<sup>31</sup> Bowers, *My Mission to Spain*, p. 41; Johnstone, *Hotel in Flight*, p. 94.

guish the provinces from the torpor which gripped much of the rest of Spain. Likewise, Basque farmers and fishermen had long been portrayed in more favourable light than their supposedly more languid and slow-witted southern and Mediterranean counterparts. As we have seen, travel writers usually represented the provinces in a more romantic light and frequently set the Basque people apart from other Spaniards. 'There is nothing "dago-ey" about their appearance or manner, nothing greasy or suggestive of olives and unwasheness'[sic], reported one such traveller.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Basque characteristics were often likened to British: loyalty and rectitude, dignity and reserve, 'independence and ... a serious outlook tempered by a marked sense of humour' among the qualities identified. Simply, the Basque character was 'utterly foreign to the Latin temperament'.<sup>33</sup> As letters to the press suggest, the experiences of holidaymakers and expatriates in the years prior to the war added to a general sympathy for the people of the Basque country. Correspondents with no apparent political platform pointed enthusiastically to often tenuous British and Basque connections. The Basque flag was thus notable for its Tudor colours and for the 'black cross of St. Devi of South Wales ... . The design is British; the colours are Cymric', proclaimed two such contributors.<sup>34</sup> These were views often expressed in political quarters. Ralph Stevenson, the British consul in Bilbao, was pro-Basque if not pro Republic. Significantly, Eden shared a similar stance, regarding the Basque Government as more closely resembling British notions of democracy than either Franco or the Republic.<sup>35</sup> That the Basques had sided with the Government also challenged Francoist notions of the Republic representing godless atheism. Such impressions were difficult to counter. Pro-Nationalists claimed that only a minority of the Basques, most of whom were 'left-wing extremists, were fighting against Franco, and that the 'dissident Basque priesthood' was 'in no way representative of Basque Catholicism'. Those who sought regional autonomy represented only a minority, their ambitions for 'a new country in Europe about the same size as Herefordshire', were derisory.<sup>36</sup> However, such contentions carried little conviction and many pro-Nationalist observers were simply left wondering 'how the Basques, however great their desire for "home-rule", [could

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<sup>32</sup> Mason, *Trivial Adventures*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Rodney Gallop, *Book of the Basques* (Reno, Nevada, 1970, first published 1930), pp. 52-53 & 65.

<sup>34</sup> 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 8 & 20 April 1937.

<sup>35</sup> Hansard, Vol. 322, col. 1712, 20 April 1937, cited in Bell, *Only For Three Months*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>36</sup> Foss & Gerahty, *Spanish Arena*, p. 279.

have] come to ally themselves with the Anarcho-Syndicalists of Madrid'.<sup>37</sup> As the war in the North gathered momentum the challenge to the pro-Nationalist position on the Basque provinces mounted. Coverage of the the efforts of British ships to run the Nationalist blockade of the Biscayan coast, the bombardment of Guernica and the plight of Basque refugee children ensured that during 1937 British public attention was directed toward events in Northern Spain.

In the spring of 1937 this interest was first centred on the the attempts of a number of British merchant ships to run the Nationalist blockade of Bilbao. Despite an on-going debate as to the legality of their efforts, the role of the Royal Navy and the pecuniary motives of the owners, captains and crews of these vessels,<sup>38</sup> their involvement provided observers with an opportunity to add a particularly British perspective to the war. The shared surname of three of the captains of these merchant ships resulted in them being labelled by their cargoes; 'Potato Jones', 'Corn-cob Jones' and 'Ham and Egg Jones'. However, this light-hearted approach was from the first balanced by references to the sea-faring abilities traditionally associated with British sea-captains. As one Reuters correspondent reflected, 'the spirit of Drake and Grenville was not dead: it stirred again in the breasts of many weather-beaten British skippers'.<sup>39</sup> Thus, Captain 'Potato' Jones' failed effort to run the blockade in the 'Marie Llewellyn' was deemed to have 'earned no dishonourable place in the record of British mercantile Marine,'<sup>40</sup> while Captain (Earthquake) Roberts', who had more success, his ship *Seven Seas Spray* reaching Bilbao on April 20, was noted for having 'turned the historical blind eye' to the Morse light instructing him to return to St Jean de Luz.<sup>41</sup> This was a slant which the captains themselves warmed to, Captain Russell of the 'Backworth', for instance, radioing to London that 'our enterprise is in the best tradition of Captain Blood'. It was 'Potato Jones', though, who articulated the impact these episodes were having on the popular view of the war: 'Spanish Navy? Never heard of it since the Armada ... It makes me sick thinking of these Spanish Dons strutting about their quarter-decks of

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<sup>37</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 245.

<sup>38</sup> See e.g., 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 21 & 23 April 1937. The debate resumed during 1938, e.g., 'Letters', *The Times*, 2, 5, 11, 12, 15, 23, 28 July 1938.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Swire, 'I Cover the Waterfront', Frank C Hanighen, *Nothing But Danger*, pp. 119-10.

<sup>40</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 17 April 1937.

<sup>41</sup> *The Times*, 21 April 1937.

their miserable ships intimidating the British Navy and interfering with shipping'.<sup>42</sup>

At one level such views helped to demonise the Nationalist forces, British sea-dogs were, after all, once again 'successfully' thwarting the might of the Spanish Navy, this time in a laudable attempt to relieve the suffering of the beleaguered Basques. On a more political level, they condemned non-intervention, locating in the ineffectiveness of that policy the misery being endured by the Basque people. Not surprisingly, 'Potato Jones' own efforts as a blockade runner became the subject of one such line of propaganda, his naval exploits once more linked to the Nelson tradition and featuring in the appropriately named film *Britain Expects*.<sup>43</sup> This film, although registered for theatrical release, would have reached a limited audience with predisposed sympathies. However, the part played by blockade runners was also central to the fictionalised Hollywood production, *Blockade* (1938) and in the box office success of this film<sup>44</sup> the Progressive Film Institute saw an opportunity to reach 'the enormous numbers of the yet inactive or unconverted cinema-goers' by persuading cinema managers to screen propagandist productions as part of the programme.<sup>45</sup> As film historian Bernard F. Dick has pointed out, although *Blockade* contains no direct reference to Bilbao and the Basque country, it does make clear that the beleaguered civilians are both Republican and Catholic, a relationship already associated with the Basque people.<sup>46</sup> While Dick contends that the arrival of the supply ship owes much to Eisenstein's *Potemkin* (1925), and that this together with the imagery of 'comrade helping comrade' give the film a Soviet iconography, this was not how the film was generally received at the time. Accounts of the courageous captain Roberts and his daughter sailing triumphantly into Bilbao aboard the *Seven Seas Spray* would have been fresh enough in the minds of British audiences for there to be no mistake as to the nationality of the real nautical heroes. Moreover, by the time of the film's British release in the summer

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<sup>42</sup> Cited in PM Heaton, *Welsh Blockade Runners in the Spanish Civil War* (Newport, Gwent, 1985), pp. 39 & 51.

<sup>43</sup> Rachel Low, *The History of British Film, Vol. VI, 1929-1939: Films of Comment and Persuasion of the 1930s* (London, 1997 edition), p. 189. Other films attempted to involve British public opinion in the matter of fascist intervention. The PFI's *Behind Spanish Lines* (1937), for example, included the confession of German aircrew purportedly involved in the bombing of British shipping off Spain's Mediterranean coast.

<sup>44</sup> Furhammer and Isaksson, *Film and Politics*, p. 53.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Ivor Montagu. PFI, 19 November 1938, WCML.

<sup>46</sup> Bernard F. Dick, 'The War that Dared Not Speak its Name', *The Star Spangled Screen*, pp. 17-20.

of 1938 other events in Northern Spain, and indeed in central Europe, had shifted the focus from Soviet aid to the Republic to the part being played by the fascist Axis and the implications for Britain. As one contemporary review informed its readers, *Blockade* made picture-goers 'realise the horrors of aerial bombardment, ... how a conflict that has been worked out in cold-blooded theory, reacts on ordinary men, women and children'.<sup>47</sup> These were realisations which had taken ominous shape more than twelve months previously with the bombing of Guernica.

Condemnation of the destruction of Guernica on April 26 by aircraft of the Condor Legion was widespread, not only in the sympathetic but also in much of the purportedly neutral press. Fears regarding the possible future nature of warfare, with the bombing of civilian targets, had already been raised following the aerial attacks on Madrid and Barcelona, however Guernica added a new dimension. As an editorial in *The Times*, whose special correspondent George Lowther Steer broke the story,<sup>48</sup> contended, this 'pitiless bombardment of ... the centre of Basque tradition and culture' by Franco's German allies had, as might be expected of that nation's military, been 'murderously logical and efficient'.<sup>49</sup> Unlike the reports of the earlier aerial strikes on the Basque towns of Eibar and Durango, the bombing of Guernica prompted Steer and other sympathetic commentators to draw upon popular understanding of Basque life and values. Thus, Steer's account emphasised the significance of the oak of Guernica and of the oath taken by Spanish kings to respect the democratic rights of Vizcaya. Readers were told, or if familiar with travel literature, reminded, that the Basques had 'always cherished a strong attachment to their traditions, their unique language, their religion and their customs'. They were 'proud democrats' and their clergy 'a ray of humanity in a tale of ruthless mechanical destruction'. The news that this proud people had been slaughtered on market day and then forced to retreat from such mechanised havoc 'in antique solid-wheeled ... farm carts drawn by oxen' confirmed expectations of Basque life, underlined the disparity in arms, and reinforced the left's charge that non-intervention favoured

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<sup>47</sup> 'In War Torn Spain', *Woman's Outlook*, 27 August 1938.

<sup>48</sup> Steer, a South African writing for *The Times*, Noel Monks, an Australian writing for the *Daily Express*, Christopher Holme, of Reuters news agency, and Mathieu Corman, a Belgian correspondent for *Ce Soir*, were the first foreign journalists on the scene, reaching Guernica only hours after the attack and filing their stories in Bilbao on 27 April.

<sup>49</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 28 April 1937.

Franco.<sup>50</sup> The outrage was thus deemed all the greater because it had been carried out against a people whose traditional values could only be respected. Moreover, these were values which the Nationalist crusade was supposedly fighting to uphold.

Whilst the left eagerly took the opportunity to condemn the 'merciless and inhuman spirit' of the fascist assault on the 'liberty loving Basques',<sup>51</sup> the pro-Nationalist lobby vociferously refuted the accusation (as, initially, did Ambassador Sir Henry Chilton<sup>52</sup>). Often conflicting responses ranged from outright denial of the event and attempts to discredit Steer's account, through charges that the retreating Basque, or even more likely, 'red' Asturian forces had themselves destroyed the town, to accusing Basque arms dealers of having invited Nationalist wrath.<sup>53</sup> 'Autonomy for the Basques', proclaimed one Nationalist sympathist, 'simply meant sales of arms without control'. 'They [were] simply reaping what they [had] sown', and, having supplied weapons to the 'terrorists in India and Egypt', were undeserving of British public sympathy; a line of logic which suggested that, in bombing Guernica, Franco and his German allies had in some measure helped Britain maintain order in her empire.<sup>54</sup> The continued efforts of sympathisers to debunk the 'legend of Guernica', however, made little impression other than on other Nationalist apologists. The bombing clearly heightened the level of public interest in the war, raising sympathy for the Basques, and through them the Republic, and bringing home the implications of aerial bombardment. 'This was a city and these were homes, like yours', the one newsreel to cover the air raid pointed out forcefully to British audiences.<sup>55</sup> A similar attack on Britain could see 'the blotting out of Hull', Steer warned.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, as an opinion poll in May 1937 suggests, the majority of British people feared

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<sup>50</sup> Editorial, *The Times*, 28 April 1937; G.L. Steer, 'The Tragedy of Guernica', *The Times*, 28 April 1937.

<sup>51</sup> Joint statement from the TUC and National Executive of the Labour Party, *The Times*, 29 April 1937.

<sup>52</sup> Sir Henry Chilton to Eden, W 8602/7/41, sent 28 April 1937, *DBFP*, Second Series Vol. 18, note 448, p.686.

<sup>53</sup> For the definitive contemporary account of the bombing of Guernica see G.L. Steer, *The Tree of Gernika*; for the most comprehensive and detailed analysis of the event and subsequent responses see Herbert R. Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica! : a Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda and History* (Berkeley, L.A. 1977).

<sup>54</sup> Hugh B.C. Pollard, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 2 May 1937.

<sup>55</sup> *Gaumont British News*, 6 May 1937.

<sup>56</sup> Steer, *The Tree of Gernika*, p. 258.



just such a scenario.<sup>57</sup> Guernica, then, made real the newspaper reports which during 1937 increasingly told of the strategies to defend Britain's shores from just such air attacks, and it made tangible the popular fictional tales of aerial attack which had proliferated since the Great War.

The saturation bombing of Guernica added urgency to the efforts already being made by the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJC) (later the Basque Children's Committee), led by Atholl, and by consul Stevenson, to persuade the British Government to permit the evacuation of Basque refugees.<sup>58</sup> As Baldwin offered objections which varied from the claim that such aid would compromise Britain's non-intervention stance to the more novel contention that the British climate would be unsuitable for Spanish children, the public responded to a NJC appeal with donations of over £12,000 in less than ten days.<sup>59</sup> In the event some 4,000 refugee children were accepted, Baldwin's more conventional objection overcome by agreement that the refugees should be cared for by charitable organisations.<sup>60</sup> However, his concerns regarding the incompatibility of Basque children and English climate were shared to by other anti-Republic critics who, in adding their own often equally obscure objections, demonstrated both the limit of their knowledge of their guests and the extent of their xenophobia. Fears expressed varied from the re-introduction of the degenerative eye disease, trachoma, to the spread of revolutionary doctrines.<sup>61</sup> UK nationals, evacuated during the early months of the war, complained that the 'Spanish refugees from Spain were receiving better treatment than the British refugees from Spain'.<sup>62</sup> The presence of Basque Catholic priests did not stop others from worrying that the Catholic upbringing of the children was being ignored, while still others argued rather that they were children of dangerous 'reds'

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<sup>57</sup> The Gallup International Opinion Polls: Great Britain Vol. 1, 1937-1964 (New York, 1977), May 1937. To the question, 'If another European war breaks out do you think GB will be drawn into it?', 83% of respondents replied yes.

<sup>58</sup> For a contemporary account of the experiences of Basque children in Britain see Yvonne Cloud, *The Basque Children in England: An Account of their Life at Stoneham Camp* (London, 1937). For detailed account of Basque refugees in Britain and in other countries see, Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*. Also, Bell, *Only For Three Months*.

<sup>59</sup> Appeal in *The Times*, 1 May 1937; Bell, *Only for Three Months*, pp. 29-30. The TUC also promised an additional £5,000.

<sup>60</sup> Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, p. 224, gives figures as 3,861 children, 95 women teachers and 120 women helpers and priests.

<sup>61</sup> *The Times*, 26 May 1937.

<sup>62</sup> 'Refugee', Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 1 & 10 June 1937.

who might later cause an electoral upheaval.<sup>63</sup> Playing to this last claim, and to popular perceptions of knife-wielding Spanish peasants, an incident which saw some tents slashed was translated by some into panicky rumours of throat-cutting.<sup>64</sup> In the right-wing press, stories told of villagers living in 'bodily fear' of the Basque boys and of being 'afraid to go to bed at night'.<sup>65</sup> For some in the Catholic press such stories provided proof that the evacuees were 'divided between Catholics and hooligans', and, with 'the Catholics behaving themselves and the hooligans a danger to life and property, they furnish[ed] an apt picture of what is happening in Spain today'.<sup>66</sup> Such fears and objections were fostered by ardent pro-Nationalists who, regarding the whole exercise as no more than socialist propaganda, organised themselves into the Spanish Children's Repatriation Committee presided over by the Duke of Wellington and including Douglas Jerrold. Following Mola's conquest of the North this organisation clamoured for the return of the refugee children, as did sections of the Catholic press.<sup>67</sup> While humanitarian reasons were usually to the fore, the group made no effort to trace lost parents of the children nor did it offer any financial assistance for their repatriation. Indeed, for most, the aim was simply to remove responsibility for a costly, alien and potentially dangerous nuisance. From the outset Henry Page Croft, whose general anti-alien credentials had long been in evidence, objected to the 'feeding of Red children'.<sup>68</sup> And it was in a similar vein that Sir Nairne Sandeman, the Conservative MP for Middleton and Prestwich, Lancashire, reported to a meeting of his constituents in January 1938: 'I don't mind telling you', he thundered, 'I am on the Repatriation Committee about these little Basque devils, and it is very difficult to get them back ... they are a pretty expensive cup of tea'.<sup>69</sup>

Given the general public reaction to the destruction of Guernica and the massacre of its civilian population, and to the part played by British seamen in trying to alleviate

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<sup>63</sup> P.E. Byrne, 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times* 26 June & 'Letters', *The Times* 26 May 1937.

<sup>64</sup> *The Times* 11 August 1937.

<sup>65</sup> 'Basque Boys Attack Police', *Daily Mail*, 24 July; 'Basque Children Must Go', *Sunday Dispatch*, 25 July 1937.

<sup>66</sup> *Catholic Times*, 30 May 1937.

<sup>67</sup> E.g., *Catholic Herald*, 25 June 1937, *The Universe*, 2 July, 20 August 1937.

<sup>68</sup> Sheila Hetherington, 'Katharine Atholl 1874-1960, Against the Tide', cited in Tony Kushner & Katharine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide* (London, 1999), p. 105. See also pp. 74-75 for references to Croft's specifically anti-Semitic and general anti-alien attitudes.

<sup>69</sup> Reported in the 'Middleton Guardian', 29 January 1938 & 'Manchester Guardian', 21 February 1938, cited in Haxey, *Tory MP*, p. 215.

the suffering being endured by the Basque people, the objections raised by this section of the pro-Nationalist lobby would have done little to advance their cause. If Sandeman worried about the cost of the refugees' upkeep, large numbers of voluntary donations, both in cash and kind, continued to flow in from people from all walks of life who responded to the appeals made by politicians of all parties and clergy of all denominations. Concerns within the Labour movement that the Basque refugees were being given privileges denied to children from the Distressed Areas were quickly dismissed.<sup>70</sup> The plight of the Basque children personalised the issues of the war, at least the war in the northern provinces, and stirred the sympathy of all but avowed xenophobes, the most rabid pro-Nationalists and most alarmist sections of the right-wing press. That these refugees were Basque and that they were children undoubtedly helped. Youngsters, separated from their parents and homeland, dressed in home-made costumes and performing traditional Basque songs and dances in fund-raising concerts could only have elicited sympathy from the vast majority.<sup>71</sup> It is not surprising that the PFI, alert to this swell of sympathy, used a backing choir of refugee Basque children in the films *Spanish ABC*, and *Behind Spanish Lines* (1938). The very real presence of these innocent child victims of the war served to reinforce the pro-Republican picture of a blameless people being crushed by a ruthless military alliance. These were simply children who had 'ready smiles' and who 'liked to go for walks in English lanes and gather wild flowers, and ... play as other children do', stressed one left-wing publication, which went on to remind its readers 'that these are the lucky ones of Spain to-day', they had left 'their brothers and parents to die at the hand of German bombers'.<sup>72</sup>

### **Humanitarian Aid Appeals and Responses.**

That the conduct of the war in Northern Spain aroused the most interest and induced the greatest reaction from the British public is a contention given some weight both by the response of government and by the surge in donations made

<sup>70</sup> For Labour movement and Basque evacuees see Tom Buchanan, 'The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Origins and Work of the Basque Children's Committee, 1937-9', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, April 1988, pp. 155-174.

<sup>71</sup> These concerts were often reported on, not only in the local press but by *The Times* critic also. See Bell, *Only for Three Months*, p. 78. *Spanish Relief*, Bulletin No. 10, December 1937 & No. 17, December 1938.

<sup>72</sup> Cloud, *The Basque Children in England*, pp. 39-40 & p. 47.

to aid appeals.<sup>73</sup> Firstly, the acquiescence of the British government to Franco's blockade of Bilbao, based on the inaccurate and prejudiced reports of Ambassador Chilton and Royal Navy officers on the spot, broke down as it became clear that the blockade was less than effective, a fact made all the more evident with the arrival in Bilbao of 'Earthquake' Roberts and the *Seven Seas Spray*. Vacillations over high-sea legalities and whether or not action would contravene the terms of non-intervention were swept aside as the pressure of public opinion and a large number of MPs obliged government to stand behind Eden's increasingly less conciliatory stance toward Franco and allow naval protection for British merchant ships in the Bay of Biscay. Less than a week after *Seven Seas Spray* berthed in Bilbao, the bombing of Guernica on the 26 April raised even more vehement anti-Franco feeling. As Eden noted more than once in his immediate responses to the bombing, 'public opinion in this country [had] been deeply stirred by the destruction of Guernica', not least because of a recognition of the 'terrible fear for Europe which [had] resulted'.<sup>74</sup> This growing public sympathy with the plight of the Basques helped bring about the British government's decision to join with the French in escorting Basque refugee ships (several of which were British merchant vessels) once outside Spanish territorial waters. And, finally, Guernica added impetus to the call of the NJCSR for the British government to agree to the evacuation of Basque refugee children to Britain.

In part these excursions from government's position of determined neutrality can be seen as being influenced by British perceptions which distinguished the Basque people from the rest of Spain. Popular impressions of the Basque country together with commercial connections meant that in general the British public were able to empathise and sympathise more readily with the Basques than with other Spaniards. Efforts of avid pro-Nationalists and hostile sections of the press to represent the refugee children in a less than favourable light were largely unsuccessful. Support and contributions for the relief and maintenance of these children came from all sections of society irrespective of religious denomination or political viewpoint. Members of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief included

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<sup>73</sup> For British government responses see Michael Alpert, 'Humanitarianism and Politics in the British Response to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-9', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 4, 984. pp. 423-40.

<sup>74</sup> Eden to Chilton, 30 April 1937, 8623/1/41, *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. 18, note 452. p. 690; House of Commons Debate, 6 May 1937, cols. 1378-1379.

Quakers, Catholics, the Salvation Army, Trades Union Congress as well as MPs from all parties. People local to the camps and homes set up for the evacuees contributed by providing bread, haircuts or by opening their homes to children for baths and afternoon tea.<sup>75</sup> Church and political dignitaries got behind appeals as did international figures like Paul Robeson, Virginia Woolf and Pablo Picasso.<sup>76</sup> Although Catholic responses were mixed even the more hostile sections of the press organised appeals. Perversely, despite headlines which declared 'These "Basque Babies" are Red Terrorists' and a support for repatriation, by the end of 1937 the *Catholic Times* own appeal had raised almost £3,800 for Basque children's funds, more than fifty-five per cent of the total donations made through that paper since the beginning of the war.<sup>77</sup> In May 1937 the TUC made a donation of £5,000 and by the 8 June the TUC-sponsored 'Save the Basque Children Fund' had raised a further £2,840. By the end of 1937 the monies received by National Joint Committee from the multifarious locally organised appeals amounted to more than £36,000, more than the £30,000 estimated as necessary and an indication of the interest and support generated, an interest which would be maintained by many even after the end of the war in Spain.<sup>78</sup>

In isolation this response, both government and public, can be seen as having been significantly motivated by generally sympathetic attitudes toward the Basque people and, as has been argued here, such attitudes were clearly a determining factor. Certainly the Nationalist assault on Málaga and bombardment of that town's fleeing civilians in February the same year had not stirred any such response. However, in terms of public feelings toward the wider war, reactions to events in the north of Spain can also be seen as a continuation of a developing mood of sympathy with the Republic. The proliferation of organisations set up during the war in order to 'Aid Spain' has been seen on the one hand as being as close as Britain got to forming a popular front and on the other as little more than the re-

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<sup>75</sup> E.g., NWSA, tape 88B, the testimony of an unnamed Bolton woman relates how a number of Basque children were housed at Watermillock, Bolton, their upkeep maintained by local donations and by 'adoption', the Bolton Weavers and Winders Union 'adopting' some three or four in this way.

<sup>76</sup> See Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, Ch. 15.

<sup>77</sup> *Catholic Times*, 30 May 1937; Catholic aid raised by the *Universe* amounted to £12,503 with a further £1,463 for the Basque children; *Catholic Times*, £6,898 and £3,786.

<sup>78</sup> Buchanan, 'British Labour and the Basque Children', pp. 159 & 161; Alpert, 'British Humanitarianism in Spain' p. 431.

sponse of disparate and disunited, often apolitical groups who shared only a preference for the Republic over the Nationalists.<sup>79</sup> Certainly, British public responses to events were marked by their *ad hoc* character, most notably in the months before Christmas 1936. However, with the Spanish Medical Aid Committee (SMAC)<sup>80</sup> coming to represent some 200 local SMACs, and the National Joint Committee (NJC) acting as an umbrella organisation for another 180 bodies by 1938 and being involved in some way with 850 other local, regional and national groups by the end of the war, it is clear that large numbers of people were involved in raising aid for Spain.<sup>81</sup> Many of those who contributed to such organisations would have done so for purely humanitarian reasons and would have had little understanding of, or even interest in the issues. Nonetheless, many of the groups organising collections were politically inspired and, inevitably, contributors were exposed to political messages. Anti-fascism and a call to end non-intervention were two particularly potent messages which became closely linked with the left's appeal to 'Aid Spain'. Anti-communism remained at the core of pro-Nationalist fundraising. For example, the Catholic weekly, *The Universe*, its own appeal standing at £8,084 in December 1936, warned its readers against contributing to Spanish Medical Aid Committee as all that money would go to the 'Reds'.<sup>82</sup> That by far the greatest part of the estimated £2,000,000 of cash and goods contributed during and immediately after the conflict was collected on behalf of the Republic gives some indication of the effectiveness of the left's campaigning, both in directing and harnessing public feeling.<sup>83</sup>

However, with the exception of those of the far-left, who were more successful from the start, early appeals on behalf of the Republic were often guarded and responses poor, in part because of the position taken by the Labour executive. For example, the TUC and National Council of Labour solidarity fund collected less

<sup>79</sup> Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*. For an exchange of views on this position see, Buchanan, 'Britain's Popular Front?' and Fyrth, 'The Aid Spain Movement in Britain'.

<sup>80</sup> Spanish Medical Aid, an initiative set up in July 1936 by among others the communist Isabel Brown and Dr. Charles Brook, was one of the most successful channels of fund raising, supplying 72 ambulances and helping staff 19 hospitals in the Republican zone. Although professing impartiality SMAC effectively became a medical division of the Republican army.

<sup>81</sup> Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, pp. 199 & 203.

<sup>82</sup> Alpert, 'British Humanitarianism', p. 429.

<sup>83</sup> Alpert, 'British Humanitarianism', p. 437, considers the widely quoted estimate of £2,000,000 of relief raised on behalf of the Republic as somewhat high, though still reckons the figure to be 'in excess of £1,000,000'. Here, then, a gross of £2,000,000 seems a reasonable estimate of all relief collected for both sides, particularly as some organisations did effect a degree of neutrality.

than one penny (0.5p) per member during the first two months.<sup>84</sup> At the beginning of August, leading figures of the Independent Labour Party, James Maxton and Fenner Brockway pleaded with readers of the *Co-operative News* that, 'surely the least we can do is to supply the workers of Spain with food'. However, by mid-September the Co-op's own appeal had raised less than £900. Comparison with the newspaper's Wharnccliffe, Woodmoor Colliery disaster fund which had raised nearly £4000 during the same period gives some idea of the lukewarm early response of *Co-operative News* readers. This was in part a reflection of the Co-operative Movement's own uncertainty. Anxious to maintain its peace platform and not to antagonise its Catholic membership (dismayed, for instance, when one Catholic, Labour council-candidate resigned because he objected to the local Co-op organising an aid collection) the Co-operative Movement's appeal was at first less than dynamic. However, as the growing strength in public support became clear - the CWS board reportedly 'inundated with requests ... to render assistance ... to loyal workers in Spain' - appeals for contributions became more sure, and by early December donations had risen to almost £6000.<sup>85</sup> Although, the organisers of the Co-operative collections still felt it necessary to continue to stress the impartiality of the fund, and whilst the sum collected pales when compared to the average of between £3,000 and £4,000 per month raised by readers of the *Daily Worker* during the same period,<sup>86</sup> the increase in interest and in the amount donated both serve to suggest that early revulsion at events had been supplanted by sympathy for the plight if not the cause of the Republic.

This swing became increasingly marked after November 1936. For example, only £5,000, or 8 per cent, of the £60,000 collected during the course of the war by SMAC had been donated before December 1936. At the beginning of that month, however, over £2,400 was raised in one evening meeting at the Albert Hall.<sup>87</sup> Appeals which asked contributors to 'give until it hurts' and informed that 'just

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<sup>84</sup> TUC General Council, *The Spanish Problem: Speeches at the Trade Union Congress, Plymouth* (London, 7 September 1936), p. 6, reports an average collected of 7/8th of one penny per member.

<sup>85</sup> *Co-operative News*, 8 August, 19 September (fund stood at £888 10s 6d, ie. £888.52), 7 November, 5 September & 12 December 1936. The CWS continued in its efforts to appease its Catholic constituency throughout the war, see e.g. 'CWS Reply to Catholic Press on Grants to Aid Spain', *Co-operative News*, 12 December 1938.

<sup>86</sup> Hywell Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 158.

<sup>87</sup> Alpert, 'Humanitarianism and Politics', pp. 424 & 429.

£1 will keep two operating tables at work for a whole hour, 'helped stir the public conscience. The rider which implored that as 'every minute helps. Buy your minute if you can give no more than 4d., but make it a minute every week', made sure the appeal embraced everyone.<sup>88</sup> If such terminology is familiar today, in 1936 it was both innovative and effective. In part the increased response was a result of such inventive approaches and of improved co-ordination, the report of a cross-party delegation of MPs who visited the Republican zone in November 1936 leading to the formation of the NJCSR. However, the success of both relied on the public understanding of events as they happened in Spain. During the winter of 1936-37 growing public sympathy with the Republic was encouraged by accounts of the defence of Madrid. Pro-Nationalist reports of the 'Fall of Madrid' proved presumptive. During November British newsreels portrayed a seemingly inexorable Nationalist advance. December and January, however, saw the focus switch to images of a city defiant in the face of ruthless aerial bombardment and by March headlines had changed to 'Madrid Defies Franco'.<sup>89</sup> As already shown, Madrid's resistance was made legend through the left-wing media, pamphlet campaigns<sup>90</sup> and through propagandist films like Ivor Montagu's *The Defence of Madrid*. Madrid also gave pro-Republicans the opportunity to associate the need for humanitarian aid appeals with the iniquities caused by non-intervention and fascist aggression. Thus, those who attended a 'Spanish Cabaret', bazaar and fun-fair in Battersea were told that they were helping to 'save London and Madrid from fascism'.<sup>91</sup> In this, Madrid's defiant citizens were seen as demonstrating 'British spirit'. Returning from Spain in December 1937, Clement Attlee, the only leading figure of the mainstream Labour movement who seemed in touch with rank-and-file attitudes to Spain, appealed to readers of the *Daily Herald* not only to contribute aid but to put pressure on the National Government to alter the policy of non-intervention. Emotively, Attlee went on to suggest that in their struggle against Franco's tyranny the 'new citizen army' of the Republic was displaying a spirit not unlike that of 'our own

<sup>88</sup> SMAC, *The Story of the British Medical Aid Unit in Spain*, (London, nd., c. late 1936), p. 19.

<sup>89</sup> Aldgate, *British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War*, 'Filmography', pp.205-222. Gaumont British News, 'Fall of Madrid', 9 November 1936; British Paramount, 'Madrid Defies Franco', 4 March 1937. Some 33 Newsreels specifically featured Madrid during the period 29 October 1936 to 4 March 1937: Gaumont British, 7; British Paramount, 7; British Movietone, 10. Universal News, 3; Pathé Gazette, 6.

<sup>90</sup> E.g., John Gollan, Phil Gillan, JL Douglas, *The Defence of Madrid*, Young Communist League, London, 20 March 1937.

<sup>91</sup> Advertisement in the 'South Western Star', 19 February 1937, reproduced in Mike Squires, *The Aid to Spain Movement in Battersea*, p. 16.



new army of 1914'.<sup>92</sup> For the far-left the connections went further and were more class-distinctive. In 1937 a May Day demonstration in London saw a cardboard effigy of a Basque nationalist patriot carried alongside those of left-wing icons John Ball, Winstanley of the Diggers and Tolpuddle Martyr, George Loveless. That the 'large numbers of girls selling literature' and collecting for the Republic at this rally were dressed as Spanish militiawomen is indicative of the persistence of this powerful early image of the war.<sup>93</sup>

Images of the civilians of Madrid doggedly resisting the worst the martial forces of Nationalist Spain could throw against them combined easily with humanitarian aid appeals. The assault on the Basque provinces during the summer of 1937 maintained the connection and ensured the direction of public sympathy. The process was continued throughout the rest of the war, the focus switching during 1938 to the bombing of Barcelona and Nationalist advances in Valencia and Catalonia. Robert Capa's harrowing images of refugees fleeing the Nationalist advance during the winter of 1938-1939, published in the recently launched *Picture Post* was but one means by which sympathy with the plight of the Republic was maintained.<sup>94</sup> The caption which asked readers to 'Remember this (Spain) is not China or Turkey or South America. Somewhere we can easily say is far away,' was clearly targeted at Chamberlain's response to the Czech crisis but also says much about the contemporary British view of the world. British policy was also the mark of a caption which pointed out that 'to the old women and the children on the roads "non-intervention" seems hard to understand'.<sup>95</sup> Not surprisingly, such imagery was deliberately put at the centre of pro-Republican relief appeals, the death and destruction visited on the innocent by the Nationalist military contrasted with the succour provided by left-wing aid.<sup>96</sup> Images of the child victims of Nationalist air-raids provided violent contrast to the pictures of scrubbed young children drinking the milk supplied through the purchase of 6d and 3d 'Milk for Spain' tokens. Women were the particular target of such imagery with a NJCSR film, *Modern Orphans of the Storm* (1937), ap-

<sup>92</sup> 'What Spain Means to You', *Daily Herald*, 13 December 1937.

<sup>93</sup> Testimony of International Brigader Tony McLean, in Colin Williams, Bill Alexander & John Gorman, *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1996), p. 112.

<sup>94</sup> E.g., *Picture Post*, 3 December 1938; 4 February 1939.

<sup>95</sup> 'Tragedy of Spain', *Picture Post*, 4 February 1939.

<sup>96</sup> E.g. 'Publicity and Propaganda', *Spanish Relief*, Bulletin no. 10 of the NJC, December 1937 stresses the need to 'keep the children ... in the public eye'.

pealing for their help with refugee children and women's guilds being asked to 'Adopt A Spanish Child', or to 'Knit For Spanish Children'.<sup>97</sup>

However, that relief organisers felt it necessary to try and convince potential donors that 'these Spanish kiddies are as lovely as ours' says much about British expectations of Spain.<sup>98</sup> Aid for Spain appeals endeavoured to alter such expectations.

The Republic was, therefore, deemed notable for having acquired qualities not normally associated with the Spanish temperament. Like Attlee, Liberal MP, Wilfred Roberts also noted that the Republicans had adopted a British 'never say die' attitude.<sup>99</sup> Enthusiastically, the Labour MP, Philip Noel-Baker claimed that in the Republic, the 'kind of standards expected of ... Mediterranean lands' no longer applied; 'Do it now' had 'replaced the "mañana" of days gone by'.<sup>100</sup> Aid appeals also added to efforts to counter the negative view of the Republic's attitude to Christian belief. For example, in 1938 Christmas cards, illustrated by David Low, whose antipathy toward non-intervention and appeasement was made clear in a scathing 'Colonel Blimp' series of cartoons for the *Evening Standard*, took the opportunity of the Christian festival to add a religious connection. Picturing a mother and child and carrying lines which read 'Bring the dark Madonna no more myrrh / Bring to her child / No gold or frankincense ... But to them bring / Lavishly gifts of milk ...', the card appealed not only for aid but claimed Christian iconography for the Republic. While the appeal effected impartiality few who bought or received the card could have mistaken the direction of its sympathy, nor the location of 'the dark mother' who feared that Christmastide would see 'not the Christ new-born / But Christ crucified'.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Launched November 1937 the Co-operative Society's 'Milk for Spain' campaign raised £31,177 by the time it was wound up at the end of March 1939. 3d tokens were not introduced until October 1938. *Co-operative News*, 20 November 1937, 8 October 1938, & 25 March 1939. E.g.. Picture montage in pamphlet, 'The Labour Party', December 1938, SCW/1/24, National Museum of Labour History (NMLH); *Woman's Outlook*, 8 October 1938 & 12 November 1938.

<sup>98</sup> *We Saw Spain*, Labour Party pamphlet, December 1938.

<sup>99</sup> Wilfred Roberts (Lib. MP), *Spanish Relief*, Bulletin 18, March 1939.

<sup>100</sup> Philip Noel-Baker (Lab. MP), 'The Fascist Cannot Win Now', *We Saw Spain*.

<sup>101</sup> Card illustrated by David Low with a poem by Eleanor Farjeon, December 1938, SCW/1/24, NMLH. For Low's non-intervention / appeasement cartoons see e.g.. *Evening Standard*, 26 June 1937, 4 January 1938, 26 February 1938 & 4 June 1938. The most famous of Low's comments on this issue was his cartoon 'Non-intervention Poker' which pictures British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden with his hands tied playing poker on a Spanish beach with Léon Blum, Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. *Evening Standard* 13 January 1937.

Despite such emotive appeals, the £200,000 anticipated if every co-operator could be persuaded to purchase just one 6d token was far from realised. During the sixteen months it ran, the heavily publicised Milk for Spain fund raised only a little over £31,000.<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, this was only one of many appeals to which large numbers of people did respond in cash or kind and equally evidently the greatest number of those came to be moved most by the plight of the Republic. However, as many commentators despairingly observed at the time, the increasingly sympathetic mood of the British public did not translate into a demand for action. The hopes of those on the far-left, that the success of the aid for Spain appeals would cultivate support for a powerful United Front and in turn force a change in the National Government's policy, were not realised. The CPGB identified in the aid movement a unity of purpose which it sought to harness in order to 'clear the air of this "neutrality" poison'. However, only activists responded to the Party's belief that 'British workers [were] determined to answer the call of Spain's people with something more than ... the collection of funds, and good wishes and expressions of sympathy' offered by Labour's leadership.<sup>103</sup> Those volunteers who wrote home encouraging local activists to become involved in the aid movement, in the belief that the 'main usefulness of collections' was to make 'the masses ... feel solidarity with the Spanish people', or that aid committees 'would draw in broader sections of the British people in active support of the fight against fascism' were soon disappointed.<sup>104</sup> Reginald Saxton, a doctor who served with the Republican medical unit from September 1936 until October 1938, expressed the frustration of many when he observed that British opinion was not so much divided between support for the different factions but between those who were politically motivated and those who felt that the conflict was simply 'six of one and half a dozen of the other'.<sup>105</sup> Government hyperbole encouraged such sentiments as did news editorials which declared that 'in their violence' both sides were 'the negation and ruin of all that we value in England'.<sup>106</sup> Whilst the left succeeded in shifting public sympathy in

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<sup>102</sup> 'Help For Famine Stricken Spaniards', *Co-operative News*, 20 November 1937.

<sup>103</sup> CPGB, *Save Peace! Aid Spain* (London, May 1937), p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> Joe Fellingham, letter to secretary of Manchester CP, 11-12 October 1937, F67, Box 12, WCML; Bob Condon, letter to Sec. Aberdare CP, 25 January 1937, reproduced in Hywell Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, p. 270. Fellingham, from Bury, Lancashire, was killed at Teurel in January 1938. Condon returned to become a miner's agent in Staffordshire.

<sup>105</sup> Dr. Reginald Saxton, letter to Annette Saxton, 18 March 1938, cited in Mike Cooper & Ray Parkes, *We Cannot Park on Both Sides: Reading Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. 1936-39* (Reading, 2000), p. 100.

<sup>106</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 6 August 1936.

favour of the Republic, by the time it had raised a more concerted voice in the call for an end to, or at least an even imposition of, non-intervention that sympathy had been channelled into aid appeals.<sup>107</sup> The early position which argued that if agreement could not be reached on non-intervention then there was 'a special responsibility to help towards providing some help and solace' set a pattern which suited the non-committed majority.<sup>108</sup> For many of them, Spain remained the distant country of popular fiction and school texts<sup>109</sup>, and while aid Spain organisations satisfied the need to do something, eased the conscience of those who were sympathetic to the Republic, they were never likely to commute into direct action in a country, in which, as Benny Morris has shown, growing disquiet at non-intervention was balanced by the continuing consensus in support of appeasement.<sup>110</sup>

### **Responses in Fictional Representations of the War.**

The range of British attitudes were also reflected in the popular fiction representations of the war. As discussed in chapter two, in fiction the involvement of Britons in foreign wars beyond the boundaries of the Empire was rare. The many tales which featured the Bolshevik threat or focused on the likely nature of future war, though often located in Europe, usually owed less to actual events than to imagined fears. In juvenile literature, Malcolm Shard's *Flying for Ethiopia* (1936), was, as we have seen, notable as the first tale which placed a British hero in a contemporaneous war in which the UK had no direct involvement. Shard, and later David Lindsay in *Wings Over Africa*, recognised and reflected the swell of public sympathy for Ethiopia and, to a lesser degree, antipathy towards Italy.<sup>111</sup> (Notably, this was a sympathy which pro-Republic commentators attempted to access. Brinton, for example, con-

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<sup>107</sup> For the first five weeks of the war the Labour Movement upheld the Republic's right under international law to purchase arms. As German and Italian involvement became clear, creating a 'new and immediate danger of war', mainstream policy shifted, the joint conference of 28 August deciding it expedient to support the Non-Intervention Agreement. Although voices of dissent gradually grew louder it was only in the autumn conferences the following year that the mainstream-left officially changed this policy and pledged to throw its weight behind a campaign to raise public awareness.

<sup>108</sup> 'Our Women's Pages', *Co-operative News*, 19 December 1936.

<sup>109</sup> E.g. at one political meeting in Bolton 1936 a local councillor, Martha Blunt, has been quoted as declaring, 'Oh this is a far away country. I don't know what far away countries have to do with us'. NWSA, tape 88B.

<sup>110</sup> Morris, *The Roots of Appeasement*, p. 106.

<sup>111</sup> Shard's story seems to owe much to the reporting of *Times* correspondent, George Lowther Steer, whose own account *Caesar in Abyssinia* was published the same year.

tended that Britain had 'betrayed' Abyssinia and was again failing to stand up to fascist aggression in Spain).<sup>112</sup> The war in Spain saw this change of pattern continue, with a number of stories and films using the conflict as a setting. Some of these were clearly propagandist in nature - and in the English-speaking world these were largely pro-Republic.<sup>113</sup> As already noted, Herman Kesten's novel, *Children of Guernica*, keyed into pro-Basque sentiment. More overtly ideological was American author Upton Sinclair's warning of fascist ambitions in Europe, *¡No Pasarán! A Story of the Battle of Madrid* (1937). To these were added political films like *Crime Against Madrid* (1937), distributed on 16 mm by Kino, Joris Iven's *The Spanish Earth* (1937) and the growing catalogue of the Progressive Film Institute, notably, *Defence of Madrid* (1936), *Spanish ABC* and its intended companion film *Behind Spanish Lines* (1938).<sup>114</sup>

To these openly prejudiced representations of the war and the ideologies they had come to represent was added the output of the literati. That the conflict has been labelled 'the poets' war' is guide enough to the response in 'high' literary quarters. Much has been written about the participation of writers like Orwell, John Cornford, Ralph Fox and John Sommerfield, and of the writings on Spain by such as W.H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, and Sylvia Townsend Warner, and indeed of Orwell's own autobiographical account (*Homage to Catalonia* [1938]) and Sommerfield's (*Volunteer in Spain* [1937]).<sup>115</sup> Although, here, most writers favoured the Republic some voices of dissent were evident, Wyndham Lewis, for example, in *Revenge for Love* (1937) offering a mocking indictment of what he regarded as the naïvety and falsity of both working-class and intellectual pro-republicanism.<sup>116</sup> The intellectual bias, however, was toward the Republic. Politically motivated commentators

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<sup>112</sup> Brinton, *Christianity and Spain*, p. 67.

<sup>113</sup> See José María Caparrós Lera, 'The Cinema Industry in the Spanish Civil War', *Film and History*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, May 1986, for an overview of films produced during the war. Italy produced fourteen, and Germany, five, pro-Franco films.

<sup>114</sup> The British Film Industry catalogue lists ten PFI films on Spain: In the 'Spain Today' series, 'The Government of Spain' (1936) & 'Here is Fascism's Work' (1936); the first civil war coverage, 'News from Spain' (1936), then, 'Defence of Madrid' (1936), 'Madrid Today' (1937), 'Mr. Atlee in Spain' (1938), 'Non-Intervention' (1938), 'Prisoners Prove Intervention in Spain' (1938), 'Behind Spanish Lines' (1938), 'Spanish ABC' (1938).

<sup>115</sup> E.g. Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, Hoskins, *Today The Struggle*; Benson, *Writers in Arms*; John Miller (editor), *Voices Against Tyranny: Writing of the Spanish Civil War* (New York, 1986).

<sup>116</sup> See, Wyndham Lewis, *The Revenge for Love*, (London, 1937), also *Count Your Dead They Are Alive, or, a New War in the Making*, (London, 1937).

attempted to capitalise on the sympathies expressed by pro-Republican authors, both in their literature and, as we have seen, through publicised events like the poll 'Authors Take Sides', published in June 1937, and the meeting of the Second Congress of the International Association of Writers which took place in Madrid and Valencia in July the same year. However, while much has been made since of this support, and of the creeping political disillusionment or dismayed realisation of the reality of warfare which dulled the enthusiasm of many intellectuals, the impact their writings had at the time would have been limited to a relatively narrow and generally sympathetic readership. This does not deny the significance of literary contribution. The cumulative effect of such literature cannot be ignored, and many of those who read stories like communist author, Sylvia Townsend Warner's tale of eighteenth-century Spain, *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938), would have recognised the author's intent to write an 'allegory of the political chemistry of the Spanish war, with Don Juan developing as the fascist of the piece'.<sup>117</sup> However, it was not from this body of literature that the largest part of the reading public would have added to their understanding of events in Spain.

The war in Spain stimulated a number of fictional accounts targeted at a wider audience. Perhaps most surprisingly, four authors of juvenile literature abandoned the usually circumspect approach of the medium toward foreign events and used the conflict as a setting for adventures. Literature aimed at an older market followed the same pattern and Hollywood released three films with the hope of profiting from public interest. Intent on providing entertainment that had wide appeal, the authors and producers of this catalogue were more likely to reflect popular mood. Even those writers who made no secret of their political inclination sought to accommodate as wide a range of views as possible. Moreover, their body of fiction shows some correlation with the progressive shift in public sympathies already identified. This is particularly evident in the stories written for younger readers. Given the overwhelmingly conservative disposition of the authors of juvenile literature it is not surprising that an early Percy Westerman tale, *Under Fire in Spain* (1937), featured the heroic defence of the Toledo Alcázar and made little effort to disguise pro-Nationalist sympathies. Drawing on early impressions of the war, Westerman, who, as already noted, despised communism and held a negative view of the Republic,

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<sup>117</sup> Sylvia Townsend Warner, *After the Death of Don Juan* (London, 1989, first published 1938), p. v.

used his story to justify this loathing. For Westerman, the war was evidence of Bolshevik depravity. Littering the text with shocked references to atrocities, anti-clericalism and church desecration, and with repeated allusions to the robberies and rapes carried out by red bandit gangs, the author adopted the moral stance taken by the right-wing and Catholic press and with pointed irony suggested to his readers that they should 'have no truck with [an] "organised democracy" that maltreats and kills priests and women'.<sup>118</sup> A year later, in 1938, the Eric Wood tale *Phantom Wings Over Spain* carried the same sentiments. Here, though, the author was more determined to adopt a less partisan stance and one more suited to popular feeling at the time. Atrocities, he pointed out, were 'dreadful tokens of unbridled cruelty bred of internecine war' and while the communist influence on the Loyalists was deplorable so too was the fascist support for the Nationalists.<sup>119</sup>

Probably the most definitive change of stance recorded among authors of juvenile literature was that of W.E. Johns. While in January 1937 Johns was wishing that 'the Russians would keep their dirty work in their own country', by 1939 he was identifying with the anti-fascist platform:

The Spanish Government - by which I mean Republican Spain - is as democratic as a government can be. It was elected by the vote of the people. That it was a Left-Wing government makes not the slightest difference. It was the will of the people, and the soul of democracy lies in the simple fact that 'the people are always right'. But our government, being Right Wing, does not hold that view. So it prefers to see Spain slaughtered by its own sworn enemies rather than lift a finger to save it.<sup>120</sup>

Although the author avoided expressing such forthright views in his fiction, the absence of anti-communist rhetoric or references to red atrocities in a story written in an increasingly pro-Republican climate is worth noting. In the spy story around which *Biggles in Spain* (1939) revolves, the hero's adversary, the devious and disfigured Juan Goudini, is exposed as a fascist agent, and a British operative attempts to denounce a duplicitous official 'to the Bolshevik leaders'.<sup>121</sup> In this last of the juve-

<sup>118</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, p. 119.

<sup>119</sup> Eric Wood, *Phantom Wings Over Spain*, p. 131.

<sup>120</sup> W.E. Johns, Editorial, 'Popular Flying', January 1937 & March 1939, cited in Ellis & Williams. *By Jove Biggles*, pp. 158 & 157.

<sup>121</sup> Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 165.

nile stories written during the war, even such tepid expressions of pro-Republican feeling were far removed from Westerman's earlier undisguised denunciations.

However, if Johns used the editorial column of *Popular Flying* to condemn the 'lie called non-intervention', he did not advocate active involvement. In *Biggles in Spain*, the author makes clear that it is 'curious[ity] as to how the war's going on' which accounts for Ginger's participation in events, and only his instinct for survival which explains the character's treatment of Franco's forces as 'the enemy'.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, British involvement is regularly explained throughout the literature either as accidental or as misguided. Westerman's mix of Anglo-Irish, Nationalist volunteers, blinded by idealism and seeing themselves as 'modern crusaders', eventually realise that 'the struggle between Christianity and Atheism had become ... one between Fascist and Communist and [that they] ... had no use for either'.<sup>123</sup> As Westerman makes clear to his readers, given the circumstances in Spain the 'humane' part played by the British Navy and the British government's 'willingness to mediate at the request of both contesting parties' were reasonable limits to Britain's involvement and an adherence to the policy of Non-Intervention was 'the only judicious course' open.<sup>124</sup> Similar convictions are common. Early in the text of *Phantom Wings*, the hero, Harvey Lingard, manager of the 'Rio Pinto' mines turned 'pimpernel' rescuer of British expatriates and foreign innocents, advises, that 'as neutrals' the British will 'not be able to take sides' and must try 'to hold a candle to both devils'.<sup>125</sup> In such views there is a clear mirroring of the perspective promoted by sections of the media and a reflection of the consensus that the war in Spain was beyond British understanding and that sympathies with either side should not be confused with a need for direct involvement. As Ginger is made to realise in the *Biggles* story:

he hardly knew what the war in Spain was about. It had never interested him. He

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<sup>122</sup> Johns, *ibid.*, pp. 9 & 81.

<sup>123</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, pp. 216 & 260. Westerman's tale has a group of seven English and three Irish Free State volunteers fight for the Nationalists. Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, fn. 2, p. 980, estimates that twelve Englishmen fought for Franco, though a survey of war-time records of the Nationalist Foreign Office has recently revealed several new instances: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid, Archivo de Burgos, Carpeta R1059, cited in Stradling (editor), *Brother Against Brother* fn. 2, p. 28.

<sup>124</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, p. 286.

<sup>125</sup> Woods, *Phantom Wings Over Spain*, p. 12.



had a vague idea that it was a civil war in which certain other countries had taken sides but since he did not even know the original cause of the quarrel he had no sympathies with either side. In fact, it made the whole idea of taking part even more repugnant.<sup>126</sup>

Outside juvenile fiction the message was the same. In *Spies in Spain* - a J.M. Walsh espionage story which like *Biggles in Spain* makes clear that the only valid British involvement is that of agents attempting to protect British interests, in this instance against 'foreign' designs on Gibraltar - the central character declares that he is 'not in the country to take sides with either party'.<sup>127</sup> Dennis Wheatley repeats the sentiment in *The Golden Spaniard* (1938). In this story of a race to recover the missing treasure of a Spanish aristocrat, the sympathies of the core characters are divided and the story is threaded with argument and counter-argument regarding the relative failings and merits of the two sides. In fact, Wheatley manages to summarise almost every point of view common at the time, dealing in turn with the Spanish political scene, the role of the Church, class divisions, regional separatism and the social aspirations of the two sides. Although the central protagonist, the Duc de Richleau, seems to voice the author's own pro-Nationalist leanings, both sets of characters are marked by a creeping disillusionment, and early outright support fades into a weary indifference whereby neither 'give[s] a cuss which side wins ... as long as it gives the other a fair deal'.<sup>128</sup>

Hollywood's treatment distanced the war even more. Although the politically aware in the audience might have noted a vague pro-Nationalist tone in Paramount's *The Last Train From Madrid* (1937) and in Twentieth Century-Fox's *Love Under Fire* (1937), both were deliberately ambiguous, not least because the studios were concerned more with US domestic opinion and commercial viability than with European politics. The studios' fear of offending the Production Code Administration (PCA) headed by Joseph Breen further determined Hollywood's equivocal treatment of stories linked to the war. Indeed, in the final release of the Fox production all direct references to the two sides were eliminated on the instructions of Darryl F. Zanuck, head of production. Caught up in 'a revolution' the film's hero and heroine,

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<sup>126</sup> Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 75.

<sup>127</sup> J.M. Walsh, *Spies in Spain* (London, nd. c.1937), p. 120.

<sup>128</sup> Wheatley, *The Golden Spaniard*, p. 334.

a Scotland Yard detective and a wrongly accused Spanish jewel thief, wish only to be on the 'safe' side, though which side that is is not made clear. Likewise, in the opening titles of the spy story and love drama, *The Last Train From Madrid*, the film's producers made clear that in this 'account of fictional characters caught in beleaguered Madrid ... We neither uphold nor condemn either faction in the Spanish conflict. This is a story of people not causes'.<sup>129</sup> To reinforce this aim, the film's characters are again evenly divided in their political allegiances. Furthermore, those allegiances are deliberately confused and misleading, individuals with Nationalist credentials portrayed as Republicans and those whose loyalties would naturally incline toward the Government turning out to be Nationalists. In this way *The Last Train From Madrid* simply uses the war in Spain as an exotic setting for a conventional story and, as Marjorie Valteau has concluded, the film manages to 'conform to Hollywood's goal of treating controversial topics non controversially'.<sup>130</sup>

Much the same treatment was intended by United Artists in the most widely received of the Hollywood films, *Blockade* (1938). Restrictions imposed by the studio and by the PCA ensured that the screenplay of communist John Howard Lawson avoided explicit identification with either side. The film's publicity pointedly maintained that the story did 'not attempt to favour any cause in the present conflict'.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, although less confused than the other Hollywood productions, the political message of *Blockade* was further muted by the movie's conventional romantic melodrama and spy story formula. The use of Italian-sounding place-names, Castelmare and Montefiore, added to the lack of certainty. An anonymous 'enemy' and no direct reference to fascism left audiences to make their own associations. However, given the story's setting, these were not difficult to make. As shown earlier, although ostensibly another spy film, the movie's central theme of a naval blockade, and its loosely disguised Basque setting with scenes of starving children, and bombarded civilians betrayed its pro-Republican feeling. The film's appeal to 'Lift the embargo' and the peasant turned militiaman hero's final cry:

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<sup>129</sup> See, Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen*, p. 6. For detailed analysis of 'Last Train From Madrid' and 'Blockade' see, Valteau, *The Spanish Civil War in American and European Films*, pp. 9-29; also Clayton R. Koppes & Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (L.A. 1990), pp. 24-26.

<sup>130</sup>Valteau, *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>131</sup> Valteau, *ibid.*, p. 23. Lawson served as treasurer to the Medical Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy and a decade later was black-listed by the US film industry and denounced as one of the 'Hollywood Ten'. *Blockade's* director, William Dieterle, also had left-wing sympathies.

'Where is the conscience of the world'? were clearly pleas to reverse the policy of non-intervention.<sup>132</sup> For a film released in the summer of 1938 these were pleas which would have had some meaning both for American and British audiences already sympathetic toward Basques and increasingly so toward the Republic.<sup>133</sup> However, although such messages were seized upon by pro-Republic activists and caused some indignation among pro-Nationalists they served once again to channel pro-Republican sympathies toward humanitarian relief.

The depiction in *Blockade* of the effects on a civilian population of a barely disguised fascist military assault did, however, carry a secondary message, a visual realisation of the devastation that a wider war could bring to the cities of Britain and America. As previously noted, Spain made real fears of high-explosive and incendiary bombing. This was reflected both in Civil War fiction and in other novels such as A.O. Pollard's, *Air Reprisal*, and Shaw Desmond's *Chaos*, both published in 1938.<sup>134</sup> Indiscriminate bombing, as Herman Kesten made clear in *Children of Guernica* (1939), meant 'whimpering sounds from smoking houses. And corpses everywhere, of cats and dogs and cattle and men and women and children crouching or sprawling or sitting dead. And screaming wounded'.<sup>135</sup> Fiction also suggested that the Spanish war could escalate. In a story for young readers Percy Westerman's quite remarkable explanation and support of non-intervention in *Under Fire in Spain* was founded on a fear of 'international complications and the consequent result - another European and perhaps world-wide war'.<sup>136</sup>

As already shown, before 1936 this threat had most commonly been linked to communist ambitions, especially in juvenile literature. However, as the conflict in Spain dragged on, so increasingly was the old menace of Russia and bolshevism

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<sup>132</sup> Valleau, *ibid.*, p. 27; Furhammer & Isaksson, *Film and Politics*, p. 49.

<sup>133</sup> While in May 1937, 79% of Americans polled by the American Institute of Public Opinion expressed no sympathy with either side, a survey in February 1938, admittedly 'loaded' in phrasing, placed support at 75% for the 'Loyalists' and 25% for the 'Rebels': Cantril & Strunk (ed.), *Public Opinion 1935-1946*, pp. 807 & 808.

<sup>134</sup> Cpt. A.O. Pollard, *Air Reprisal* (London, 1938) Britain's enemy here, the fictional 'Vandalia', bears all the characteristics of the totalitarian threat. Moreover the author scathingly refers to Italy's 'national conceit' after the invasion of Abyssinia, and to the presence of 'a fearful curiosity as to what bold stroke she (Germany) would attempt next. p. 79. For an analysis of the genre see 'Martin Ceadel, 'Popular Fiction and the Next War, 1918-1939', Frank Gloversmith (edit.), *Class, Culture and Social Change*, pp. 161-184.

<sup>135</sup> Kesten, *Children of Guernica* (London, 1938), p. 160.

<sup>136</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, p. 286.

replaced, at least by implication, with the new threat posed by Italy and Germany. References in the Biggles' story to 'Franco's Italians' and to the fact that 'even British ships' were being sunk in the Mediterranean reflected the growing concern being expressed in sections of the media.<sup>137</sup> Although, in *Menace from the Air* (1938), a story advocating Britain's need for an increased air deterrent, John F.C. Westerman fails to identify the force planning to invade Britain from civil war torn Spain his cartoon of totalitarian facets leaves little doubt. A chief labelled 'The Leader', a lieutenant called Carl, and followers described as 'a crowd of automatons' who 'raise[d] their right arms in salute' create a recognisable spectre of Nazi menace.<sup>138</sup> More specific anxieties were voiced concerning Axis ambitions in the Mediterranean. Eric Wood warned that; 'To Italy especially, Spain is a country of strategic importance - after the Abyssinian adventure. If Italy can get a Fascist state set up in Spain, she herself won't be long before she has a grip which may well upset British calculations. An alliance with Germany might follow - and, well you can see the implications'.<sup>139</sup> This comment can be seen as a reflection of the debate surrounding Chamberlain's efforts to broker the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April 1938, the terms of which led to the resignation of Foreign Secretary Eden and saw Churchill rage at Britain's 'cordial acceptance of his (Mussolini's) fortification of the Mediterranean against us'.<sup>140</sup>

However, while accounts of civilian devastation, and worries that the Mediterranean might become an 'Italian sea' permeated the popular fictional versions of the war, and in doing so acknowledged current interest in events, they remained incidental to what were essentially adventure stories. British novel writers made more use of references to actual issues and episodes of the war than Hollywood's film-makers but only in the context of conventional storylines, and always as a means of warning against British involvement. This extended beyond the accidental or secret agent reasons given for the participation of fictional heroes, or the odd acknowledgement that 'irresponsible, cheerful Cockneys' and 'wild Scotsmen from Glasgow' were actually taking a misguided part in the fighting.<sup>141</sup> So, for example, in his stirring account of the besieged Alcázar, while Percy Westerman happily applauds

<sup>137</sup> Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>138</sup> J.F.C. Westerman, *Menace from the Air*, pp. 164 & 243.

<sup>139</sup> Wood, *Phantom Wings Over Spain*, p. 93.

<sup>140</sup> Cited in Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 822.

<sup>141</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, p. 227, Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 82

the heroism of the 'fighting men' and 'daughters of Old Spain' who stood against an 'innumerable and bloodthirsty mob', he also makes clear that the British tendency to defend the underdog (in this instance the Nationalists) was misplaced in the case of Spain.<sup>142</sup> Other commonly expressed notions, used to explain the various protagonists' actions and to move the plot along, distanced events further. Thus, in *The Golden Spaniard*, the political differences of the central characters, demonstrated, for instance, in a repeat of the debate regarding the form of government most suited to Spain, act as a means of weaving complications into the plot while at the same time repeating the idea that in Spain there could only be 'dictatorship or anarchy', and reminding readers that 'You couldn't better the British Constitution'.<sup>143</sup>

The proposition that Spain was inferior to Britain and that her war should be kept at arm's length was further reinforced by a continued recourse to stock stereotypes. Storylines, though set amidst real events, did not stray from the tested formula which, as already demonstrated, had long depicted Spain as backward and Spanish national character as decidedly inferior. In this way the very outbreak of war could be reduced to interfering extremists having exploited the Spaniard's 'natural' inclination to fight. 'Trust a Spaniard to say yes if someone offers him a lethal weapon at a time like this', intoned Wood.<sup>144</sup> Equally, shooting prisoners out of hand could be explained as no more than another 'old Spanish custom'.<sup>145</sup> More sympathetic explanations similarly borrowed from the combined observations of travel writers and political commentators. Thus, it was suggested, the ordinary simple Spanish workers, courteous and generous and possessing humour and 'almost unbelievable fortitude' had been led astray by the 'subtle tongues' and wild promises of 'criminal and sadistic lunatics'.<sup>146</sup> Other writers added more comic notions of Spanish character, pointing out, for instance, that even in wartime the lackadaisical Spanish temperament was evident. Spanish sentries, it was commonly suggested, 'took their duties easily'.<sup>147</sup> And several stories included the widely reported anecdote that 'both sides had tacitly agreed from the very beginning of

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<sup>142</sup> Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, pp. 257 & 277.

<sup>143</sup> Wheatley, *The Golden Spaniard*, p. 186.

<sup>144</sup> Wood, *Phantom Wings Over Spain*, p. 98.

<sup>145</sup> Walsh, *Spies in Spain*, p. 47.

<sup>146</sup> Wheatley, *Golden Spaniard*, pp. 32, 208 & 166.

<sup>147</sup> Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, pp. 126 & 187.

hostilities that the war should be called off each day during the siesta hours'.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, some authors offered the view that the majority of participants were themselves ignorant of issues and indifferent to either cause and had 'only the vaguest idea of why they were fighting their fellow countrymen'. The repetition of such amused and dismissive observances helped to reduce the significance of the conflict for British readers. After all, if 'half these dons [didn't] know what side they [did] want to fight on',<sup>149</sup> then why should British interest extend beyond natural curiosity and donations to humanitarian relief?

It is testimony to the impact of and assumed interest in the Spanish Civil War that, in period when the tendency in the popular media, most especially in literature for younger readers, was to set stories of present-day wars in vague invented states, a number of authors and film producers chose to make the conflict a setting for their tales of melodrama, romance and adventure. However, such stories did not add to the polarisation of opinion identified since in historiography. Rather they added to the overwhelming consensus in support of neutrality. It is only in the light of subsequent events that in popular fiction the war has come to be depicted as the 'last great cause', with those who fought on the losing side accorded moral victory. The Second World War justified the anti-fascist clarion of the Spanish Civil War and not surprisingly popular fictional representations have reflected this. In *Arise My Love* (1940) Hollywood began the process, an American 'soldier of fortune' declaring that his efforts in Spain had been 'palooka preliminaries ... for the main event'.<sup>150</sup> Similarly, the 1943 film adaptation of Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1941), while excising most of the book's political reference did emphasise anti-fascism. Similar feelings are central in contemporaneous popular fiction, Ann Bridge's *Frontier Passage* (1942) and Paul Pettit's *The Spaniard* (1953) typifying the tendency to focus on and demonise Nazi Germany's part in events in Spain. Since, fiction like Alexander Cordell's *To Slay the Dreamer* (1980) and James Watson's tale for younger readers, *The Freedom Tree* (1978), have largely elaborated and romanticised the pro-Republican images of the war. Other stories like Alan Fisher's *Madrid! Madrid!* (1980) and Betty Burton's *Not Just a Soldier's War* (1996) have paid tribute to those who took part as medics or as combatants. A

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<sup>148</sup> Wheatley, *The Golden Spaniard*, p. 323; Percy Westerman, *Under Fire in Spain*, p. 163.

<sup>149</sup> Percy Westerman, *ibid.*, p. 221; Johns, *Biggles in Spain*, p. 140. Emphasis in original.

<sup>150</sup> Dick, *The Star Spangled Screen*, p. 20.

return to the Orwellian perspective in the Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* (1995) may have invited the scorn of International Brigade veterans but has not reduced the notion of volunteers fighting for a just cause.<sup>151</sup> Even as Cold War and anti-Soviet paranoia gripped the United States and Hollywood's treatment of the war returned to confused ambiguity, that deliberate confusion did not extend to those who had volunteered to fight for the 'last great cause'.<sup>152</sup> If producers have been cautious not to sanction a cause which could be linked to communism they have been happy to promote the notion of a romantic and heroic idealism which fired volunteers. In fictional representations, involvement in Spain has become a signifier of idealism rather than ideology.<sup>153</sup> When, in *Casablanca*, Rick Blaine, the character played by Humphrey Bogart, was revealed to have been 'in Spain for the same reason as most volunteers were: for the sake of an ideal, no matter what motive prompted them to seek one', the screenwriter was introducing a concept which would gain momentum throughout the coming decades.

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<sup>151</sup> International Brigade veterans took exception to this portrayal, walking out of the film's premiere. *The Guardian*, 29 September 1995.

<sup>152</sup> Hollywood representations have usually maintained the ambiguity found in films released during the conflict. Some, like MGM's *The Angel Wore Red* (1960), an adaptation of Bruce Marshall's *The Fair Bride* (1953), reflect Cold War attitudes.

<sup>153</sup> There are, of course, notable exceptions, particularly in US fiction. William Herrick, *Hermanos!* (1969) is particularly condemning of communist political machinations. Others like Derek Lambert's *The Gate of the Sun* (London, 1990) deal both with the conflicting ideological positions during the war and with their seeming irreconcilability in the years after. Nonetheless, across literature, authors make the assumption that even a casual reference to a character's participation in Spain will be sufficient to evoke particular notions of heroic idealism. E.g. in John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (1956), Act 2, Sc. 1, the central character, Jimmy, recalls how as a youngster he had watched his father slowly die, after returning from Spain where 'a certain God-fearing gentlemen had made such a mess of him'.

## CONCLUSION

The Spanish Civil War has been the subject of a volume of literature exceeded only by that concerning World War II. The conflict's political and ideological context, wider European ramifications and the part played by Italy, Germany, the Soviet Union and International Brigade volunteers are among the perspectives of the war which have been examined extensively. From a British view the part of volunteers has received particular attention. Other studies of the aid movement, the responses of the British government and the Labour Movement, even the part played by British merchant ships have all contributed to an in depth understanding of events from a British perspective. This study has sought to extend that understanding by giving regard to the language and imagery employed across the mass media as a means of explaining events to the wider British public. This is an aspect which has until now received only brief consideration. Yet, as has been argued here, it is one which goes some way toward explaining the generally passive response of the British public to a war which so divided political opinion. Moreover, the popular view of events since the war has remained firmly rooted in the interpretations offered during it, especially those of the left. As the cursory outline of post-conflict fictional representations offered here suggests, there is ample scope for a full-scale analysis of how the left-wing portrayal of events has been sympathetically accommodated both during World War II and throughout the Cold War. It is also an approach which might be usefully applied in the consideration of how other conflicts have been presented for public consumption. A clear candidate, perhaps, and one already the focus of some attention, would be the Falklands war with its Churchillian connotations and revival of imperial will.<sup>154</sup> Others might include the changing representations of the wars in Afghanistan, or the shifts in attitude toward the Balkan nations, from humanitarianism and determined non-intervention in Bosnia to the humanitarian justifications for intervention in Kosovo. Even a superficial glance at the mass media representations of these conflicts reveals a use of stereotypical references in the moulding of the public view of events, a pattern that is worth exploring.

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<sup>154</sup> E.g. Robert Harris, *'Gotcha': The Media, the Government and the Falklands* (London, 1983); J. Horsley & K. Bryan (editors), *The Falklands Factor: Representations of a Conflict* (Manchester, 1988).



In examining the use of stereotypical notions in the various British representations of the Spanish Civil War this study has sought to show how, in their reliance on such ideas, supporters of both sides reinforced the notion that events in Spain were not a British concern. The study set out first to establish the framework of deeply rooted stereotypical notions which informed British understanding of events in Spain during the 1930s. From this base it has endeavoured to illustrate the ways in which those preconceived ideas were adopted by political commentators and activists, journalists and politicians, as a means of simplifying and explaining otherwise complex issues. What has become clear here, is that the most commonly held expectations and understanding of Spain were in large measure shaped by a wider British view of the world, one informed by Britain's imperial heritage. The importance of the Empire and the public school ethos, taught at school, reinforced through pageant and emphasised throughout the popular media, encouraged a belief in English superiority over all others. While this was on occasion a deliberate undertaking, as the stated intent of authors like W.E. Johns and publishers like Harmsworth attest, it was also one so ingrained that it met little resistance.

As has been shown here, Spain figured particularly low on the British hierarchical scale of other cultures. Indeed, so entrenched in the public mind were derogatory and comic notions of Spain that first hand experience did little to alter and much to elaborate them. British visitors to Spain merely built on the existing base of myth and expectation while expatriates generally treated their hosts in much the same way as their compatriots in the colonies treated the indigenous peoples of the Asian sub-continent. In Ford-Inman's terms, they upheld the British Raj.<sup>155</sup> While it has not been the claim of this study that British visitors and residents regarded Spain as colony (although the British employees at the Rio Tinto mines came very close), it is evident that most did display attitudes born of colonialism; in turn, frustrated by, patronising toward, and dismissive of supposed aspects of Spanish national character, Spanish traditions and customs. All such impressions of Spain served only to reinforce presumptions of the superior and more civilised qualities of Britain.

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<sup>155</sup> Ford-Inman & Nutting, *Spinsters in Spain*, p. 160. See, here Ch.3.

These, then, were the ideas and attitudes that were carried into the political discourse concerning Spain during the 1930s. This study has demonstrated how clichéd ideas about Spanish character, customs and history permeated political thinking, news reporting and commentaries. However, the effort to put issues during the Second Republic into a more easily understood frame of reference was one which in turn reinforced commonly held preconceptions. As reporting of the war became more partisan so stereotypical imagery became more fluid. As has been shown here, both sets of supporters set out to acclaim the merits of the 'new Spain' that they claimed their chosen side embodied. In the process each faction tried to reinterpret notions of Spain in ways that they believed would appeal to British audiences. Both laid claim to Spanish tradition and culture, emphasised the heroic, and stressed political virtues. Interestingly, many went beyond this and attempted to change or at least redefine even the more basic, underlying ideas of Spanish character. This, however, was an endeavour which served only to further reinforce impressions of the war's alien character. However convincing, attempts to overturn or reinterpret preconceived ideas in order to favour one side and denigrate the other only added to the stock of stereotypes which marked Spain as a distant and exotic land barely attached to Europe. Paradoxically, in their efforts to enlist public sympathy supporters of both sides portrayed the Civil War as a typically Spanish affair and reduced the likelihood of any real challenge to the line adopted by the British government.

In addressing public indifference to the civil war it has not been the intent of this study to deny the commitment shown by idealists and activists, nor is it claimed that the use of stereotypical reference was any more than a contributory factor to that indifference. Clearly large numbers of ordinary people were moved by events in Spain and undisputedly many were stirred into action. The contention that the issues of the Spanish Civil War 'bitterly divided' British opinion holds true for the politically aware and some sections of religious communities. Alongside providing a focus for the ideological extremes, the conflict created divisions within the Labour Movement, amongst the Catholic community, between intellectuals, and even among the right. However, few other than those on the far left advocated any form of direct action. The Labour Party and the TUC's early support for the National Government's Non-Intervention Policy delayed any unity in challenging the increas-

ingly apparent iniquities of that policy. The question of non-intervention, still evident pacifist ideals, the united front debate and the reaction of the Catholic constituency were among the concerns which moderated the response of the mainstream-left. On the other side, even ardent pro-Nationalists were satisfied that the National Government's policy of non-intervention was most beneficial to Franco and calls for the granting of belligerent rights were less than determined. Measures which included invoking the somewhat unworkable 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act, in February 1937, and the appointment of a British representative to Burgos in November the same year, served to curb some of the disappointment expressed at British reluctance to formally recognise the Franco government. Indeed, that consternation was itself less than convincing, being rather more a reflection of the dismay voiced by the Nationalist régime than an effort to put pressure on the British government. Overall, the thrust of government policy was such that the need for the right to promote their cause was unnecessary.<sup>156</sup>

Nonetheless, respective commentators did commit themselves to champion either the Republican cause or the Nationalist crusade with a passion which often disguised or ignored the inconvenient. During the early months of the conflict, the reports of 'red revolution', mayhem and murder, anti-clerical outrages and religious desecration which filled the pages and screens of the British media added credibility to the pro-Nationalist lobby. However, the public's horrified fascination with events at this time was probably fed as much by morbid curiosity and a smug assuredness that such things could not happen in Britain than in any rallying-call of pro-Nationalist sympathisers. Once this public shock subsided (a process hastened by growing scepticism regarding the exaggerated claims of commentators) fervent pro-Nationalists were left with a dwindling constituency of the like-minded. As responses to humanitarian aid appeals suggest, after Christmas 1936 and especially during the summer of 1937, popular sympathies fell increasingly behind the Republic. Sales of partisan literature reflected this. For example, the pro-Nationalist polemic *Daylight on Spain*, Charles Sarolea's reply to the Duchess of Atholl's hugely successful *Searchlight on Spain*, had to be subsidised and distributed

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<sup>156</sup> For an analysis of the effectiveness of the 1870 Foreign Enlistment Act see S.P. Mackenzie, 'The Foreign Enlistment Act and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 52-66; For examination of British government recognition of Franco see Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, Ch. 6.

free.<sup>157</sup> A limited number of polls conducted by the British Institute of Public Opinion, and published in the *News Chronicle*, showed the same pattern, with sympathy for the Republic rising from fifty-seven per cent of respondents in March and October 1938 to seventy-two per cent in January 1939, while the pro-Franco support remained static at between seven and nine per cent. Most notable, however, was the continuing large number of respondents who expressed no opinion.<sup>158</sup> Even at the beginning of 1939, as the desperate plight of fleeing republicans was made vividly clear, notably in Richard Dimbleby's on the spot broadcasts for the BBC and in Robert Capa's photographs for *Picture Post*, almost one in five of those questioned feigned indifference.<sup>159</sup> Nor, despite the largely local nature of Aid for Spain campaigns, was Spain an issue in by-elections.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, putting Spain high on the agenda in October 1938, after the Munich Agreement, failed to help the Duchess of Atholl retain her seat for Kinross and West Perth.<sup>161</sup> As Harrison and Madge noted in their Mass Observation analysis, ordinary people were increasingly dismissive of world affairs. A typically expressed view was that 'There's always some crisis. If its not Spain it's Japan'.<sup>162</sup>

The ubiquitous 'Little England' mood encouraged such thinking. Newsreel accounts of the horrors of the war in Spain were followed by commentary which spoke of a 'Fortunate Britain, still with its tradition of sanity, the rock of steady influence amidst the eddying stream of world affairs ... a sure fortress against the social ha-

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<sup>157</sup> Sarolea Papers, Edinburgh University, cited in Alpert, 'Humanitarianism and Politics', p. 436.

<sup>158</sup> British Institute of Public Opinion, responses to the question: In the present war in Spain are your sympathies with the government, with Franco, or with neither? March 1938, pro-govt. 57%, pro-Franco, 7%, neither, 36%; October 1938, pro-govt. 57%, pro-Franco, 9%, no opinion, 34%; January 1939, govt. 72%, Franco, 9%, no opinion 19%. Interestingly, a Dec. 16 1938 poll saw Catholic support still behind Franco: 58% Franco, 42% Loyalists. Cantril & Strunk (editors), *Public Opinion 1935-1946*, p. 808.

<sup>159</sup> Paddy Scannell & David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting: Volume One 1922-1939: Serving the Nation* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 132-133; Eg. 'This is War', 'Tragedy of Spain', & 'The Forgotten Army', *Picture Post*, 3 December 1938, 4 February, 15 April 1939. See also, *Heart of Spain: Robert Capa's Photographs of the Spanish Civil War*, from the collection of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (New York, 1999).

<sup>160</sup> E.g. *Mass Observation* report by Alfred L Mayfield on the Ilford by-election, 27 June 1937, p. 8. Here the issue of Spain was raised only very briefly by the Conservative candidate (Hutchinson) who contended that the Labour Party's position on Spain and would lead to a wider European war.

<sup>161</sup> Atholl's high profile campaigning on behalf of the Republic created divisions with her local party and caused her to resign the Tory whip for a second time in April 1938 (the first in May 1935 over the Government of India Act) and to force a by-election the following October.

<sup>162</sup> Harrison & Madge, *Britain by Mass Observation*, p. 27.

treds that foster revolution'.<sup>163</sup> While Spanish violence rages, 'Aren't You Glad You Live in England?', demanded one newspaper.<sup>164</sup> Such understanding fed into the view of the world noted by Orwell whereby 'the huge untouchable block of middle class and the better off working class' gave little regard to events beyond Britain's shores.<sup>165</sup> Fiction recognised this. As the Republican agent of Graham Greene's popular tale *Confidential Agent* (1939) observed, in 'peaceful preoccupied' London 'the shop windows [were] full of goods, [there were] no ruined houses anywhere, women [were] going into Buzzard's for coffee' and the only plane in the sky was one trailing the slogan 'Keep Warm with Ovo'.<sup>166</sup> If the situation of the vast majority of the less well off working class was less complacently comfortable then attitudes were little different. For this group, only just recovering from the mauling of the Depression, it was their day-to-day existence - a weekly wage, the health of their children, even an annual day-trip to Blackpool or anticipation of the next night out at the cinema - that mattered more than any events happening in Spain.<sup>167</sup> The idealism which inspired many from the Distressed Areas to fight in Spain, whilst often admired, was unfathomable to the vast majority concerned only with more immediate struggles. Again this was a mood reflected in fiction, even in that which commended the Republican cause. 'Why should they be rushing over to another country to fight when there's all the fight they need here?' asks an unemployed Welsh miner in James Hanley's social comment novel, *Grey Children* (1937). 'Democracy is fighting for its life on Spanish soil, but it is to be wondered if he (the communist volunteer) looks twice at the figure of the harassed and poverty-ridden woman dragging her tired feet up her own street ... he cannot see that the struggle about which he raves and rants is a living issue on his own doorstep'.<sup>168</sup> Similar observations appeared elsewhere. While Jock MacKelvie, the fictional leader of unemployed Scottish miners, in James Barke's *Land of the Leal*, expresses a belief that the British public must soon awaken to the threat posed by fascism and recog-

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<sup>163</sup> 'Britain's Trade Recovery and Prestige', Gaumont British 278, 27 August 1936, cited in Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 102-103.

<sup>164</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 5 August 1936.

<sup>165</sup> Orwell, *Collected Essays*, p. 518.

<sup>166</sup> Graham Greene, *The Confidential Agent* (London, 1971, first published 1939), p. 52.

<sup>167</sup> Aid appeals for Spain competed with others for more local needs. E.g. appeals for cash, and clothing and food parcels for 'Children and Old folks' Christmas Treats', *Nelson Gazette*, 1 December 1936.

<sup>168</sup> James Hanley, *Grey Children: A Study in Humbug and Misery* (London, 1937), pp. 106 & 167.

nises that general sympathy lay with the Republic, he nonetheless bemoans that 'the war in Spain and in China means no more to them than the Agony of the Cross. It is remote from them'.<sup>169</sup>

This distancing was not merely the figment of fiction writers' imagination. Graham Greene's brother Hubert, whose own secretive missions to Spain included packing such essentials as 'cricket and hockey gear', noted that 'even for an agent in the Spanish Civil War, when in England playing cricket on Saturdays while awaiting recall for their subterfuge, the war seemed far away'.<sup>170</sup> This was an attitude that commentators of both sides largely failed to dispel. As one Nationalist supporter observed on his return, 'the British public, on the whole, were frankly uninterested in the antics of the rival factions ... or in what they stood for', moreover, they were simply confused by 'the various labels' used to distinguish one from the other.<sup>171</sup> Supporters of both sides were complaining that the British public regarded Spain as a 'romantic country, far away, where funny things happen to funny people' well before Chamberlain dismissed Czechoslovakia in similar terms.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, it was the fate of Czechoslovakia rather than Spain which began to convince that 'Civilization was suddenly confronted by a new menace ... Hitler ... an arch-gangster; a thug who points a machine-gun at a crowd of men, women and children and says: "give me what I want or I'll riddle the lot of you"'<sup>173</sup>

Despite their different interpretations of events and various efforts to overcome such perceptions, in many ways both the mainstream left and ultra-right Tories fed into the consensus which regarded Spain as no direct concern of Britain. What this study has shown is that in part this was a consensus born of the common view of Spain. Throughout the life of the Second Republic and especially throughout the civil war, commentators, wittingly or unwittingly, framed their explanations of Spanish issues in terms which had been made familiar through schooling and fiction. That

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<sup>169</sup> James Barke, *Land of the Leal*, p. 632. For an examination of 'working-class' literature see David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth Century British Novel* (London, 1978), esp. Ch. 6.

<sup>170</sup> Hubert Greene, *Secret Agent in Spain* (London, 1938), pp. 155 & 193. Interestingly, Hubert uses initials to refer to contacts in Spain, a device adopted by Graham Greene in *Confidential Agent*.

<sup>171</sup> Nicholson, *Death in the Morning*, pp. 146 & 147.

<sup>172</sup> Jerrold, *Georgian Adventure*, p. 363.

<sup>173</sup> Johns, 'Popular Flying', 29 October 1938, cited in Beresford & Williams, *By Jove Biggles*, p. 168.

such impressions remained unchallenged, indeed were often elaborated, by British travellers and expatriate residents and workers is testimony to their pervasive power. It is not surprising, then, that in their expositions on the Spanish political scene and role of the Church, the make up of the opposing sides and what they purported to represent, commentators frequently made reference to the most commonly held notions of Spain and expectations of Spanish behaviour. International involvement saw the process extend to include participants from other countries. Preconceived notions provided observers with an easily accessible means of ordering events, while differing stresses enabled them to associate their own political, religious and social values and beliefs with their respective sides. At times this took the form of a deliberate effort to denigrate the position of the opposing side. On other occasions it was more defensive, with commentators attempting to overturn or at least refine preconceived ideas. What is clear is that during the conflict views of Spain and the Spanish were not immutable. Thus, the use of stereotypical references to Spanish character was extended to define the 'social type' of the two sides. Just as pro-Nationalist commentators attempted to associate the most base of qualities with the red, urban malcontents of the Republic while seeking to 'Anglify' the Nationalist élite, so Republican supporters saw in the arrogance of the Spanish hierarchy a natural leaning to fascism and in the aspirations of the Spanish masses the reasonable hopes of workers everywhere. However, while the endeavour of commentators to invest their chosen side with the most positive aspects of Spanish character and by turn associate the worst with their opponents was understandable, it was one which served less to redefine established notions than reinforce them. Thus, accepting without question the popular conviction that Spaniards were by nature cruel, pro-Republicans typically contended that while 'a Spanish civil war might be expected to be more than usually cruel and ferocious', it was the Nationalists who had made cruelty systematic.<sup>174</sup> Such refinements, however, would have done nothing to change established notions. For British audiences notions of Spanish cruelty remained intact.

Despite their efforts to assign national qualities according to political preference and class prejudice, commentators of both sides were still prone to lapse into more general mockery of 'latent' notions of 'Spanish customs' and behaviour. So, even

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<sup>174</sup> W. Roberts MP, House of Commons debate 18 December 1936, quoted in *The Times*, 19 December 1936.

in the midst of a civil war pervaded by spy mania and in which unguarded remarks often had fatal consequences, supporters of both sides reported with amusement that Spanish volubility continued unrestrained.<sup>175</sup> In similar fashion, among the pro-Nationalist plaudits for Franco's forces, comic references regarding the behaviour of Spanish troops still surfaced. Images of soldiers chasing turkeys, riding children's bikes and carrying umbrellas were at odds with those of disciplined well led Legionaries and Moors but in keeping with more popular perceptions.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, while those who espoused the Republican cause constantly reminded British audiences that Spain was a country still struggling to escape from 'the Dark Ages',<sup>177</sup> pro-Nationalist commentators even more frequently pointed out that standards in Spain should not be compared directly with those expected and enjoyed in Britain. As one blithely proclaimed, the 'Spanish ... ascetic philosophy of life ... [made] so many Spaniards, whether rich or poor, insensitive to material discomforts which would seem a bane in life to Frenchmen and Englishmen'.<sup>178</sup> Such observations were clearly intended as a means of rationalising positions held, but at the same time they could not have helped but reinforce the public perception that Spain was a more backward, less civilised country than Britain and that events there were of little immediate concern.

It is not surprising that while aware of events in Spain most of a British public keenly supportive of appeasement held on to the notion that the conflict was taking place in a distant country in which Britain had little direct interest. The vast majority were informed by a daily popular press which gave increasingly more space to sport and entertainment than to foreign issues, and by politically ambiguous fictional representations. Both reiterated established stereotypes and stressed the war's alien nature. Importantly, those who sought public support for their respective sides followed the same pattern. And, in their continual recourse to clichéd notions of Spanish character and custom as a means of explaining the complexities of the conflict, journalists and commentators of all political shades helped only to confirm popular expectations of the nature of a Spanish war, and to reinforce the stock of 'public ignorance' of which they complained. As many recognised, 'in presenting a picture of

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<sup>175</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 14.

<sup>176</sup> Gerahty, *Road to Madrid*, p. 31

<sup>177</sup> Student Delegation, *Spain Assailed*, p. 30.

<sup>178</sup> Wall, *Spain of the Spaniards*, p. 6.



a foreign country the chief difficulty is dealing with the fixed ideas that are ineradicably associated with it in the reader's mind'.<sup>179</sup> Few overcame this difficulty. Pro-Nationalists gradually limited the numbers likely to be receptive to their views. Key here was the continued focus on religious aspects, a platform which lost mass support as the notion of 'worthy victim' was transferred in the public mind from murdered clergy to bombed civilians. Moreover, in grading national characteristics to define the Nationalist hierarchy these supporters also defined their own class proclivities and ran the risk of disaffecting their Catholic working-class constituency. Their attempts to reshape established notions and conjure support for Franco's 'New Spain' failed to effect a positive public response. Supporters of the Republic clearly reached a wider audience and gradually enlisted public sympathy. How far such sympathy extended to the left's vision of a Republican 'New Spain' is questionable. The picture of a besieged civilian population clearly inspired compassionate responses but, with the brief exception of the treatment of the Basques, failed to convert that sympathy into pressure to change government policy. Indeed, the fact that in their efforts to appease as wide a constituency as possible many aid organisations found it necessary to stress their impartiality could be seen both as a mark of, and adding to, public ambivalence. As one pro-Republican commentator noted, the typical British response remained one of distant interest: 'Oh yes but that happened in Spain, didn't it? It always strikes me as such bad form to get hysterical about foreigners'.<sup>180</sup>

This study has shown that, for much of the British public, the brutality of the war in Spain and the human misery which resulted were seen as 'other' to civilised British life. Spain in the 1930s clearly stirred great passions among the politically aware, but, for all their efforts, activists failed to mobilise public support beyond donations to medical aid or the purchase of a milk token. The focus on aid appeals directed popular attention away from government inaction in much the same way as humanitarianism later served to disguise official responses to the Bosnian crisis during the 1990s, when, as one commentator observed: 'For us, these people are far away, beyond the firewall that divides the world of misery from Marks and Spencer. Let them stay in the Balkans, we say. We'll send a cheque'.<sup>181</sup> In the late 1930s, Ran-

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<sup>179</sup> Young, *The New Spain*, p. xii.

<sup>180</sup> Brereton, *Inside Spain*, p. 150.

<sup>181</sup> Isabel Hilton, 'We Imagine War as a Hollywood Film', *The Guardian*, 5 April 1999.

dolph Churchill's acerbic observation that only 'A few excitable Catholics and ardent Socialists think this war matters, but for the general public it's just a lot of bloody dagoes killing each other', may have displayed a degree of exaggerated cynicism but was one recognised by supporters of both sides.<sup>182</sup> It was also one which those supporters' dependence on preconceived notions and expectations of Spain, Spanish character and customs to interpret events unwittingly encouraged.

As this study has demonstrated, the deep-rooted nature of such ideas and their readily recognisable connotations are capable of providing commentators with convenient short-cuts in their efforts to explain complicated issues. Equally they are capable of creating barriers, of limiting the will for a deeper understanding, of defining areas of sympathy and of keeping issues safely distant, beyond the boundaries of direct interest. Just as, at the start of the twenty-first century, British sympathies for the displaced peoples of the Balkans turned easily into antipathy towards asylum seekers so in the 1930s public sympathy for the besieged Spanish Republic was conditional on the conflict remaining a Spanish affair. Given a public mood which broadly subscribed to 'little Englishness', supported appeasement and distrusted all outside the boundaries of the Empire, it is perhaps not surprising that on her return from Catalonia in the summer of 1938, hotelier Nancy Johnstone, should have despairingly observed, that the people she met in London were only slightly more interested in the bombing of Barcelona than in the bombing of Canton, and then only on the basis that 'Spain was nearer than China' and that 'Spaniards while only just removed from negroes, were Europeans'.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Arnold Lunn, *Spanish Rehearsal*, p.43. Interestingly in the 1974 edition the language is toned down somewhat, 'dagoes' becoming 'foreigners'. (Connecticut, 1974, p. 20)

<sup>183</sup> Johnstone, *Hotel in Flight*, p. 165.

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