

BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND CONSERVATIVE PRESS RELATIONS
DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR 1936-1939

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D
The London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, 2001.

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the relationship between the Conservative dominated National Government and the Conservative Press in Britain during the Spanish Civil War. This thesis takes issue with previous findings that during the late 1930s the government was successful in manipulating the press. By focusing on the civil war however, it becomes clear how limited government influence actually was, even amongst its traditional allies. This was a cause of concern to a government, which realized that improved relations between Britain and the western dictator states depended to a great extent on its ability to influence the way, in which foreign affairs were reported, especially events in Spain. As a result of this study, the following conclusions can be made. Firstly, as already stated, the government was only partially successful in securing the reporting of events in a way that would not undermine appeasement, the central plank of British foreign policy at this time. Quite simply, the dictators failed to grasp the limitations of an accountable government's power in a parliamentary state. Secondly, and paradoxically, the relationship between Britain and the 'New Spain' was poor, even though British policy during the civil war had aided the victory of Franco. The conservative press bore some responsibility for this. Thirdly, the war caused divisions, which cut across established ideological lines within the conservative movement. Since party discipline ensured the support of conservatives within Parliament, it was within the press, with its freedom from government control, that these divisions were most evident. Inevitably, therefore, as the war progressed, conservative papers actually contributed to the growing anti-Franco and anti-fascist sentiment among the British public. The civil war was thus a period during which, far from achieving the support of the press for its policies, the government became increasingly frustrated as it saw its foreign policy being undermined.

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CHAPTER ONE: GOVERNMENT AND MEDIA IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITAIN.

The subject of this thesis is the relationship between the Conservative dominated National Government, in power in Britain during the later thirties, and the conservative press. Particular reference will be made to the way in which the Spanish Civil War of 1936-9 caused that relationship to change. Indeed the Civil War had a tremendously divisive impact on British society, a phenomenon almost unprecedented in modern British history.¹ The divisions provoked by the outbreak of the war cut across traditional party political loyalties, so that by the last months of the conflict the majority of the British public, regardless of political convictions, was sympathetic towards the Republican side. Publicly, on the issue of the Spanish Civil War, the government was committed to a policy of neutrality. It was a cynical policy, aimed at lulling its domestic critics. Yet it failed to convince them and, as we shall see in later chapters, growing popular sympathy for the Spanish Republic would be a cause of poor Anglo-Spanish relations following the final victory of Franco in the spring of 1939. It has been suggested that, both before and after the outbreak of fighting there, class and ideology had a profound influence in shaping the views and policies of the British government towards Spain.² Indeed the election of the coalition under Manuel Azaña in February of 1936 provoked alarm among government and business circles in Britain. These circles were to become increasingly concerned at the threat to private property in Spain. This was especially important given that Britain had very substantial investment in that country.³

The rising tide of Spanish social and economic unrest in the five years preceding the outbreak of the Civil War had made both investors and ministers nervous at the long-term prospects for British interests. Hence the military rising of the Spanish generals in mid-July of 1936 was welcomed in London as a necessary counter revolution which would put an end to what appeared to be the threat of communism in Spain. However, as will be demonstrated, the unity among the British right-wing at the start of the rebellion was to be short lived. The conservative consensus rested on the assumption that the issue in Spain was clear-cut, namely that the Republican regime was clearly unable to contain its radical and revolutionary elements. These left-wing elements defending the Republic were, it appeared, as much opposed to a parliamentary democracy on the British model as the rebel generals. Hence, the insurgents were seen as the lesser of the two evils, for they seemed to pose no threat to foreign capitalist interests in the peninsula. However, the conservative consensus, shaped by a too simplistic ideological perception of the issues at stake, gradually broke down following the failure of Franco to take the Spanish capital in the late autumn, thereby turning what had been an insurrection into a prolonged civil war.

Among the opposition parties in Britain the main issue at stake was that a popularly elected government was confronted with an illegal and therefore treasonable rebellion by its army. Furthermore, the rebels were dependent for support from National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy, at that time the two most dangerous European powers.⁴ Foreign intervention in Spain was both to transform the war and to prolong it. Outside aid to Franco from Germany and Italy was far more substantial than any aid reaching the legally recognised Republican government. Thus, Franco was to be increasingly identified with international fascism, which was to ensure at least a

superficial unity against him among the political opposition in Britain. Moreover, this identification of Franco as the most recent adherent to the club of fascist dictators was progressively to undermine support for him in British society as a whole. This was because the outbreak of the Civil War coincided with a gathering crisis in international relations in Europe. Both Italy and Germany had done much to provoke this by their flagrant breaches of the Paris peace settlements signed after the First World War. Initially, there had been substantial support in Britain for the grievances espoused by Hitler at the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles towards his adopted country.⁵ However, when the dictators moved from mere hyperbole to more aggressive and even militaristic means by which to achieve their goals this caused alarm in Britain, for what was being brought into focus was the potential of Germany and Italy to threaten the world power status of Britain and France. Although opinion polls were still in their infancy, those taken during the later thirties show that there was a progressive swinging around of opinion against the dictators.⁶ German and Italian intervention in Spain served only to encourage this trend. Not just the parliamentary opposition therefore, but millions of ordinary British people sympathised with the Spanish Republic in what they saw as its struggle against international fascism.⁷

The scale of German and Italian involvement in Spain was to have three main effects. Firstly, it kept at the forefront of the political agenda the military and strategic threat posed by fascism to Britain and France in the Mediterranean. Secondly, the use of German and Italian aircraft to bomb undefended towns in Spain greatly influenced British public opinion. Horror at the devastation caused by these attacks also led to increased public sympathy for the Republic.⁸ Thirdly, it was these strategic and

humanitarian concerns provoked by intervention, which fuelled general anti-fascist sentiment in Britain. This was to have important consequences for Britain's relationship with Germany and Italy, both of which the British government was attempting to appease. In order to avoid recourse to war, Neville Chamberlain, even more than his predecessor, Stanley Baldwin, consciously sought a new settlement between the western democratic powers and the fascist dictators. However, as we shall see, fascist intervention in Spain was to hinder the process of appeasement, souring relations between the western democracies and the dictator governments.

German and Italian intervention, precisely because it raised the prospect of a new balance of power in the western Mediterranean, which would be detrimental to Britain and France, meant that the war could no longer be viewed solely in those ideological terms, which had been the basis for the conservative consensus both within Parliament and without. Furthermore, there developed within the liberal and left-wing press, a consensus in support of the Spanish Republic. These newspapers even argued that Non-Intervention, far from being proof of the neutrality of the British government, was actually a means by which the government could prevent aid from reaching the Spanish Government. They also pointed to the failure of the British government to take effective steps to prevent either Germany or Italy from assisting Franco. Moreover, this liberal/left wing consensus was strengthened by the belief that because Franco was so dependent on the support of the Axis, the victory of the Republic was not only desirable on ideological grounds, but also a necessity for the security of both Britain and France.

As we shall see repeatedly in later chapters, among conservatives, the strategic implications of Axis power intervention had the opposite effect of undermining their consensus towards the Civil War.⁹ There was a shift in opinion even amongst those who at the start of the war had been among the most enthusiastic advocates of right-wing, and hence hostile, attitudes towards the Spanish Republic. Winston Churchill, a Conservative Member of Parliament and a journalist for newspapers of Conservative sympathies, clearly demonstrated this shift in his articles on international affairs written in the later thirties and published in *Step By Step*. In the articles written at the beginning of the war, Churchill, by adopting an entirely unsympathetic attitude towards the Republic, was typical of conservative opinion at the time. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, written August 10th 1936, Churchill contrasted the supporters of the Spanish Government: “the passions of a poverty-stricken and backward proletariat [demanding] the overthrow of Church, State and property, and the inauguration of a Communist regime” with the supporters of the rebellion: “the patriotic, religious and bourgeois forces under the leadership of the army, and sustained by the countryside in many provinces.”¹⁰ Later, on October 2nd, Churchill suggested that the atrocities committed in the name of the Republic were far worse than those committed by the rebels, for “they cannot be accused of having fallen to the level of committing the atrocities which are the daily handiwork of the Communists, Anarchists, and the P.O.U.M.”¹¹

Yet by November 1937, Churchill was writing more favourably about the Republic: “it is just as wrong to call the Valencia and Catalonian Governments a mob of savage bolshevists as to dub the Nationalist Movement a mere body of rebels, traitors and reactionaries.”¹² Furthermore, by the end of 1938 Churchill’s opinion had shifted

once again, to what now amounted to a complete reversal of his earlier writings on the war. Churchill, having shifted from his original position of sympathy for the rebels to one of seeing both points of view, had by the latter stages of the war reached the conclusion that the Nationalists posed a serious threat to British interests. Indeed his writings in this period demonstrate actual hostility towards them. Thus, on December 30th 1938, he declared, "it would seem today that the British Empire would run far less risk from the victory of the Spanish Government than from that of General Franco."¹³ In expressing concern at the threat of Axis power intervention in Spain to the long-term interests of both Britain and France in the Mediterranean, Churchill was adopting a position very similar to that of the Liberal and Labour opposition in Parliament and the liberal/ socialist press.¹⁴ As will be shown later, Churchill was one of a number of Conservatives who came to the conclusion that the strategic risks threatened by the victory of Franco far outweighed any threat to foreign investment that would be posed by a victorious Republic.¹⁵

The historiography of government and press relations in the inter-war period in Britain is relatively sparse, a reflection of the scarcity of sources. Indeed much of the contact between ministers and officials on the one hand, and with journalists, proprietors and editors on the other, was of an informal nature and, as a result, went unrecorded. F.R. Gannon's, *The British Press and Nazi Germany 1936-1939* was, therefore, a very important breakthrough in a relatively unexplored area.¹⁶ However, the study is almost exclusively concerned with the reaction of the press towards Germany, with little discussion on either the interplay between government and press or the attempts of the government to influence newspapers to adopt a particular line. Therefore, Cockett's *Twilight of Truth*, published nearly twenty years later, was a substantial development

of the debate, precisely because it undertook an in depth exploration of the means of contact between official/government circles and the press. In so doing, it drew important conclusions concerning the role of British newspapers in their attempts at appeasing Germany. It also drew attention to the implications of a government in a parliamentary state using its influence on newspaper proprietors to persuade them to exert pressure on their editors to damp down the reporting of the actions of those dictators whom Chamberlain was trying to appease. However, in both of these books the focus is almost entirely on Anglo-German relations. Despite its narrow focus, *Twilight of Truth* in its examination of the relationship between the government and the press in Britain in the 1930s arrives at conclusions about the period as a whole.¹⁷ Where the study of government and press relations is concerned, the Spanish Civil War, in sharp contrast to the importance accorded to the reporting of Nazi Germany, has been a neglected area.¹⁸

In recent years there have been a number of new studies on the role of Britain and its government during the Civil War. Two examples are *Neutralidad benévola* and *La perfidia de Albión*,¹⁹ which, to some extent, supported the conclusions made by previous writers on Britain's role in the war. Among historians in general, therefore, there has emerged an agreed opinion that official British perception of the Civil War was influenced by an ideological hostility towards the Republican government in Madrid. This consensus among historians also holds that Non-Intervention concealed a tacit preference in British government circles for the victory of Franco.²⁰ There has, however, been very little consideration in previous studies of the role of the British press. Indeed, Jill Edwards, in *The British Government and The Spanish Civil War*, is very dismissive of the idea that official circles in London paid much attention to the

way in which the press reported on the war. In specific reference to the British press she argues that “[it] could be manipulated without much difficulty when necessary. Often the Government received unlooked-for support, even from the left-wing press”.²¹ The lack of studies specializing in government and press relations is demonstrated in the most recent contribution to the debate, Buchanan’s *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*.²² In its bibliographical survey of the literature on British responses towards the conflict, there are cited only five books dealing with the media. Although four of these focus on the press, only one, Herbert Routledge Southworth’s *Guernica! Guernica! A study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda and Illusion* refers specifically to the Civil War. This last example, albeit an important study on the development of the controversy following the destruction of this Basque town, does not refer to the long-term implications of the way in which British press reporting of this event influenced the relationship between press and government.²³

The lack of attention paid to the relationship between the government and the press during the Civil War is regrettable on several counts. Firstly, the nature of events that unfolded during the Spanish struggle was such as to place the relationship under great strain. Secondly, studies that have concentrated on the impact of the press on Anglo-German relations during the later thirties have, by largely ignoring British press reporting of German intervention in Spain, failed to take into account the considerable impact made on Anglo-German relations by the Civil War. Finally, by ignoring the divisive effect of the Civil War on British society, a division that after all was fuelled by debate within the press, previous studies have arrived at conclusions that suggest the relationship between government and press was much less complex than was actually the case. This study is hence an attempt to redress the balance.

The particular focus of this thesis will be on the conservative press and its reporting of the Nationalist side and its German and Italian allies. It has already been stated that the opposition parties and newspapers broadly supported the Republic. Therefore, among the opposition, differences were confined to debating the extent to which this support should be translated into practical measures to aid the Republic. In sharp contrast to this, the divisions within conservative ranks were over whether to support the Republic or Franco. Therefore, for conservatives, both within the party and the press, the dilemma was whether or not openly to criticize the policy of Non-Intervention, which would mean challenging the Conservative-dominated government. However, divisions were to emerge in the Conservative Party over appeasement and these in turn were to undermine what consensus there was within the conservative press in support of government policy on Spain. After all, the Conservative Party and its supporters were also influenced by the growth of opposition in Britain to what appeared to be the rise of more serious and militant forms of fascism in the later thirties. Thus, a study of government and press relations that focuses on the Civil War must lead to different conclusions from those studies which have failed to take the Civil War into account.²⁴ A variety of evidence from British sources points to the belief that the failure of the government to maintain a consensus of support for its policy on Spain amongst even its nominal allies in the conservative press was to have a direct and damaging effect on its relations not only with the Axis powers, but also with the Nationalist regime, which emerged victorious after the Civil War.

Because this thesis is concerned with government and press relations, it is necessary to consider the role of the press within the mass media in inter-war Britain, and to examine different perceptions of that role within opposing political systems. The function of the mass media in a democracy as opposed to that in a fascist state was, fundamentally, a reflection of these two diametrically opposed systems of government. Whether in a democracy or a fascist dictatorship, newspapers tended to be privately owned, but in any dictatorship all forms of media communications were (and are) subjected to very extensive political control. Through such control, the government could reach out to the masses and also prevent the dissemination of opposing and 'undesirable' opinions, which might threaten the hegemony of the ruling elites.²⁵ Within the democracies, political control of the media such as this was fiercely opposed. There was a great deal of public opposition to any form of press censorship in Britain, and newspapers were keen to defend themselves against the charge that they were bowing to government pressure. It was recognised that in a parliamentary state the press had a particularly important 'social function'. The reader was to be provided with news upon which to form independent views.

During the period of the Civil War, the different perceptions of the media within these contrasting systems of government became a thorn in the flesh of international relations. One reason for this was the availability of British newspapers in Germany and Italy. The dilemma for editors was whether to print articles by resident correspondents publicizing the brutality of the fascist regimes. By raising public awareness in Britain, they risked generating opposition both from the dictators and also towards them. Moreover, British newspapers, precisely because they were available in Germany and Italy, provided a source of independent and critical press

comment unobtainable in the controlled press of these countries.²⁶ Fundamental to the fascist dictatorships was the need to extend their influence beyond their borders. Not content with the high degree of control that they had over the media in their own countries, they sought to rein in the independent press of the democracies. On a number of occasions in the years of the Spanish Civil War, the dictators made it clear to the British government that the stable relations between nations, so desired by Neville Chamberlain, was dependent on his persuading the press to dampen down all criticism of their regimes. The fundamental basis of appeasement was the belief that peace was possible between opposing systems of government. Yet, ironically, in order to achieve success, it would be necessary for the British government to restrict the independent press, thereby emulating the methods of the dictatorship. It was an impossible demand; indeed the debate generated by the Spanish Civil War between the governments of Britain, Italy, Germany and eventually of Franco, served only to highlight the extent of the lack of understanding between these different forms of government.

Technological innovation in the early years of the century had a profound impact on mass communication. Culminating with the advent of television in 1936, the British public was confronted with the variety of media similar to that available today, although, of course, access to television and even to the wireless was much more restricted then. Nevertheless, the evolution of new forms of communication extended the means by which images, news and views could be conveyed. In the thirties, the increase in radio ownership, in particular, created a new phenomenon, the ability of one form of mass communication to reach a huge audience simultaneously. Moreover, the development of radio and newsreel created new responses from the

government. Governments were concerned with the impact of visual and aural forms of the media on the public. If harnessed in the interests of the state, they were a means of promoting social and political stability. Conversely, however, they also had the potential to pose a threat to domestic consensus and political stability. Technological advances within the media brought not only a much larger potential audience but also the power to shape opinion in large numbers of people. The sophistication of these advances spawned a variety of techniques by which public opinion could be subtly manipulated. The inter-war period saw the beginning of attempts to ascertain public opinion in a more scientific way.²⁷ In the years following the First World War, within government and official circles in Britain, the belief was gaining ground that public opinion was a significant factor, which had to be taken into account.²⁸ For example, public opinion was taken into consideration in decisions about rearmament in the thirties²⁹ and also in the formulation of official policy towards the Spanish Civil War. In Moradellios' *La perfidia de Albión*, for example, it has been argued that opposition within Britain to such a move made it impossible for the government to make public its preference for the victory of the Nationalist cause. That is why Non-Intervention had to be the cloak for the real policy of the government, which used its influence to prevent the Republic from securing supplies from abroad, whilst at the same time taking no action to stop British clearing banks from assisting the rebellion.³⁰ In its broadsheet, *How News is Produced*, which appeared in October 1937, PEP highlighted

[the]growing practice of appointing highly-paid public relations officers, mainly in order to keep in touch with public opinion...and in some cases to try to influence the expression of criticisms in the press and elsewhere by discouraging their publication or by prompt and effective reply to possible starting-points of controversy.³¹

The inter-war years saw the beginning of a genuine parliamentary democracy, with the extension, in 1928, of the franchise to women above the age of twenty-one. By claiming the democratic credentials of being the mouthpiece of public opinion, those who claimed to speak on its behalf, such as the writers of leader articles in the press, sought to add an air of authority to their views. Public opinion was exploited as a means of generating support for the views being expressed. Indeed Denys Thompson, formerly news editor of *The Daily Mail*, recognised this when in 1939 he wrote the following:

The newspapers regularly exploit [the] inclination to think and act as others do, in order to bluff their readers into accepting the required opinions. This accounts for the common use of such phrases as ‘public opinion is unanimous’, ‘The nation decides’, ‘The man in the street’.... ‘The vast majority of thinking people’.³²

In spite of the availability of alternative and, perhaps, more accessible forms of mass communication, newspapers were still able to retain a very important hold over British society. The press was recognised as the most important influence on the forming of political opinions.³³ Newspaper circulation also rose substantially in the six years preceding the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The PEP report on the press published in April 1938 pointed out that between “1930 and 1936 the estimated average circulation of all daily newspapers rose by some 1.44 millions, to 19.05 millions, and [at] the same time national Sunday newspapers increased by 0.48 millions to 14.4 millions.”³⁴ The same report concluded, “in 1934 every 100 families bought 95 morning and 57½ evening newspapers every day, and 130 Sunday newspapers every week.”³⁵ The increase in circulation meant that newspapers had the potential to influence the views of the bulk of the population.

The British government recognized the power of the press. Therefore, it sought to influence the line taken by newspapers on a number of issues. For example, it will be shown in succeeding chapters how the government continually urged newspaper proprietors to ensure that their papers displayed greater sensitivity when reporting the actions of German and Italian troops in Spain. Yet not only was this pressure exerted on matters relating to foreign affairs but on domestic issues also. For example, at the outbreak of the Civil War the government was preoccupied with the abdication crisis. Whereas the American press was filled with gossip concerning the relationship between Edward VIII and the American divorcee, Wallis Simpson, the consensus within government and press circles in Britain was that there should be no coverage of this issue. The British press therefore remained silent about the affair until after the abdication in December 1936.³⁶ Regular contact with newspapers was maintained in a variety of ways. More formal contacts were made through the lobby and through ministerial addresses to The Newspaper Proprietors' Association. There were other, less formal but equally important contacts between the worlds of politics and the media that were maintained by ties of family, class and friendship. These contacts were exploited by those in official and government circles who wished to build consensus within the press in support of government policy. A more detailed consideration of these forms of contact will be the focus of the next chapter.

The support of the press, however, could not be taken for granted. Indeed, there were a number of factors that lessened the extent to which newspapers could be controlled by outside agencies. Firstly, newspapers represented one of the largest industries in Britain "with a net output surpassing that of shipbuilding and chemicals."³⁷ Such a powerful and wealthy industry was hardly likely to be easily cowed by the

government. Secondly, in the years after the ending of the First World War, newspapers were increasingly independent of the control of political parties. This was in direct contrast to the dominant trend in the early years of the century when family syndicates closely linked to a particular political party owned the majority of the London based daily newspapers. The reason for this change was the growth of advertising in the newspapers. Total capital spent on advertising in the press trebled between 1907-1938. This encouraged costs within the industry to rise, and in turn made newspapers far too expensive for political parties or their supporters to sustain. Hence, there arose the independent press barons such as Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere. Both of these were nominally 'Tory' in their politics, but nevertheless achieved political independence of the mainstream parties.³⁸ Apart from these factors, the influence of the government on the press was further undermined by the lack of benefit to newspapers themselves in an arrangement that tied them too closely with the government. The government could offer editors advance information on policies and initiatives in return for their support. PEP recognised this in spring of 1938, yet noted that "this is comparatively little done, except in the case of *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*."³⁹ In any case it was in the interests of the government and officials to maintain contacts with representatives from a variety of newspapers, and not just with those whose journals either supported the government line, or whose editorial stance was broadly Conservative. Indeed the lobby was a means by which journalists from newspapers from across the political spectrum could be brought within a more formal relationship with the government. It will be shown how F.A Voigt, diplomatic correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* and also a lobby correspondent, had particularly close access to the Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart.

The government could be very misleading in the information it was willing to disseminate even to its most loyal supporters in the press. This, of course, was a further factor undermining the trust of editors and journalists in news provided from official sources. It will be shown in chapter three that on a number of occasions the government made frequent attempts to manipulate the press by providing selective and thus in a sense 'doctored' information. Journalists working on location could be better informed of the situation abroad than the government. In April 1937, for example, the evidence made available to the government that German aeroplanes had destroyed Guernica was largely due to the accurate reports sent back by *The Times'* correspondent, Steer. In a later episode, in the immediate aftermath of the war, *The Times* correspondent Philby was to write to Ralph Deakin at Printing House Square, of the inaccuracy of the reports sent back to London by British consular officials. In his view the pro rebel bias of the latter led them to gloss over the atrocities committed by the Nationalists.⁴⁰ Given that there was little that it was prepared to offer to newspapers in return for their support, the government hoped to obtain their goodwill by "summoning a conference of editors and explaining its policy to them."⁴¹ Indeed, given the developing international crisis in these years, this was to become a frequent occurrence.

The Government had to compete with a variety of influences in its effort to shape the presentation of news and views in British newspapers.⁴² It must be remembered that the pressure under which newspapers operated was a significant and constant factor. Newspapers operated within a tight time schedule, which imposed additional pressure, the need for selection of news and views to print meant that only a fraction of the

items which came to the newspaper offices could ever be printed. In 1938, it was estimated that about 1 500 000 words came into the offices every day in the form of news or features, yet the total number of words printed in a large quality newspaper each day was 150 000 for *The Times*, and only about 70 000 for other quality newspapers.⁴³ The fact that the main story could break late in the day posed an additional burden, enforcing last minute changes to the layout of the paper: “when a big story breaks late at night the whole aspect of the paper may be changed between the first and later editions.”

The government had to compete with commercial considerations for the attention of newspapers. The high costs of the newspaper industry and the need to attract advertisement revenue meant that proprietors had to be astute businessmen. Indeed because advertising was such an important source of revenue, representing about half the revenue in a popular paper in 1938, advertisers were “in a strong position for exercising pressure if they are so inclined,”⁴⁴ Wickham Steed, formerly editor of *The Times*, went further when, in 1938, he referred to newspapers as units in “vast money making concerns.” In his opinion this was an unwelcome result of the increased influence of market pressures.⁴⁵

The readership of the paper was an additional factor that editors and proprietors had to bear in mind. Indeed, this was noted by writers of a number of treatises on the press in this period. In general, however, there was disagreement over the extent to which the readers of a particular paper could exert influence over it. In March 1938, a PEP broadsheet, for example, concluded that the relationship between the press and the public was reciprocal; they influenced each other. The report stated on the one hand

that “the press, by its selection and treatment of news and features, moulds the opinion of the public”, whilst on the other hand it concluded,

[the]press is a highly competitive industry, run largely with a view to profit, and in some cases dominated by the pursuit of very high rates of profit. It must therefore follow public taste and has a strong temptation to appeal to the middle or lower ranges of public taste rather than take any risks of outstripping it.⁴⁶

That year, PEP also came to the conclusion that there was little difference in the tastes of readers of quality papers compared with those of the more popular publications, even “for the class newspapers the most popular topic was crime and divorce.”⁴⁷

The early years of the century witnessed the spread of consumer affluence in Britain, and, after the First World War especially, an increase in leisure time for the majority of the population.⁴⁸ This, in turn, meant that the majority could not only afford to purchase the products of the media, it also forced changes on the industry itself in order to exploit the demands now being made upon it. Thus, the media industry increasingly felt obliged to respond to what it perceived as changes in public taste. The means by which commercial culture engaged with its audience was done crudely, through the measurement of actual sales. To put it simply, it was a question of providing the public with what media tycoons believed the public demanded. The effect of this was far reaching on newspapers. For example, it altered the presentation of news, and this affected even the ‘class’ papers. Hence, it has been argued recently that far “from dictating the cultural preferences of their public, producers needed to bind themselves to the tastes of a diverse audience.”⁴⁹

At times, the competing pressures on the press led to conflict between the interests of the government and demands from other sources. According to PEP, circumstances

forced newspapers to print reports before their accuracy could be checked. Hence, the “press works at the opposite end of the scale to the scientist, who may hardly care whether an account of his research appears in 1938,1939, or 1940 so long as it is, when published, as completely as possible unassailable by criticism.”⁵⁰ We shall see how, in the case of the Spanish Civil War, coverage in the press of rumours of extensive German military penetration of Spanish Morocco in January 1937, for example, and later of the extent of unrest within Nationalist ranks in 1938, was not only misleading but was to cause considerable embarrassment to the British government in its relations with the dictator powers.

Given the need of newspapers to attract advertising revenue to meet costs, it has been suggested that outside financial and market pressures were so great that they exercised undue influence by encouraging the press to play down the seriousness of the international situation in the later thirties. At the time it was argued that “financially it was unwise or impossible for the British press to adopt a strongly critical line towards Nazi Germany; the readers did not want to read it and the intellectuals did not want to write it.”⁵¹ It has also been argued that the rapid economic recovery, which took place in Britain after the Great Depression at the beginning of the decade, meant “there was a natural desire to foster this recovery by creating a good psychological atmosphere.” Yet the report of the Royal Commission on the press in 1949 found no evidence that newspaper presentation of foreign news during the inter-war period was strongly influenced by commercial forces.⁵² After all, if such had been the case then the relationship between the government and the press during the Civil War would have been less fraught. If businessmen stood to gain from the creation of a sense of optimism about the prospects of peace with the dictators, the same could be said for

the government, wary of the extreme sensitivity of foreign powers to criticism in the British press. Moreover, since there were very substantial investments at stake in Spain, there was the risk that British economic and financial predominance there would be undermined by Nationalist Spain's preference for a stronger economic relationship with its ideological allies, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

In the years immediately preceding the Civil War, it is clear that much of the conservative press reporting of international relations showed scant regard for any impact this might have on Anglo-German or Anglo-Italian relations. One example is the coverage of Italy's invasion and conquest of Abyssinia in 1935-6. Since this was the first successful attempt by a fascist power to use force to expand its territory, it was a significant turning point in international relations. *The Times*, being very critical of the invasion, called upon the member states of the League of Nations to impose sanctions against Italy: "It must be plain to the whole World that Italy has left those nations who honour their word no choice but to take action against her."⁵³ The *Daily Telegraph* echoed the sentiments expressed in *The Times*. Its leader explained that the trouble "with Signor Mussolini [is] that whatever just grievances Italy may have against the League and against Abyssinia, his method of securing their redress has called forth the hearty reprobation of the whole World."⁵⁴ Both of these normally pro-government conservative papers ⁵⁵ were highly critical of the Hoare Laval plan, by which Italy was to be bought off by promises of being permitted to keep such Abyssinian territory as she had overrun, providing she ended hostilities immediately.⁵⁶ The reaction of both newspapers to the publication of this plan was to claim to be representing a public opinion outraged at such a cynical manoeuvre. On December 13th *The Times* leader pointed out that "the Government can hardly have mistaken the

depth and strength of the feeling raised by the general knowledge of the present proposals.” In addition, it warned that any “weakening in the support which this Country has given” towards sanctions, “will entail profound and bitter disillusionment and resentment at home, and lamentable injury overseas to the good repute of British Statesmanship and confidence in British sincerity.”⁵⁷ The *Daily Telegraph*, whilst acknowledging that “the actual terms [of the plan] are not so unfavourable”, nevertheless, condemned them because “they represent such large concessions to the ‘aggressor’,” and “what sticks in the throat, so to speak, is not that Italy will benefit, but that these gains may go to an ‘aggressor’ who has not conquered the Country, but ex-hypothesi cannot be stopped, while the international brigade stood and watched.”⁵⁸

The conservative newspapers could also be critical at the growing restiveness of the National Socialist regime in power in Germany after 1933. Following the German remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, the leader comment of the *Yorkshire Post* was thus, “[the] German military reoccupation of the demilitarized zone has created a situation throughout Europe of the utmost gravity...” and, moreover, “the people of Great Britain cannot look upon the endangering of the peace of Europe as a matter of no concern to themselves.”⁵⁹ Even the right wing *Observer* had, from 1933, taken a hostile line towards the revision of the Treaty of Versailles in Germany’s favour. This was because, as Garvin, the editor, pointed out in February 1936, Hitler was the main cause of instability in Europe. Following the German remilitarization in 1936, Garvin declared that Britain must “consider Herr Hitler’s proposals in a spirit of sympathy and goodwill.” Nevertheless, from the spring of that year, he was to give the theme of British rearmament the highest priority in the paper. Whilst now acknowledging the importance of an accommodation with Germany if possible, he

stressed also that the “first need for Britain is to repair her defences.”⁶⁰ The *Sunday Times* made a more conscious effort to play down the significance of the German action in its leader on March 9th, the title, ‘No real Crisis’, being a clear attempt to diffuse alarm over the issue ⁶¹. Nevertheless, Hadley, the editor, “demanded of Germany proof of her peaceful intentions”, adding that “if such proofs proved unforthcoming”, then “the powers wedded to peace will have to consolidate their joint action for defending it. To stand firmly together may for Great Britain, Belgium, France, Russia or Czechoslovakia be the only alternative to their being shot at singly.”⁶² The stand taken at times by the leader columns in the conservative press on the issue of the militaristic actions of the dictators had long lasting and detrimental effects on international relations. The press campaign in Britain against Italy over Abyssinia, for example, triggered a campaign against Britain by the controlled press of Italy.⁶³

The freedom of the press to report on the international situation in a way that risked undermining public confidence in peace and prosperity, even though this worked against the financial interests of the advertisers, was a freedom not shared by radio and newsreel.⁶⁴ Given its primacy over other forms of communication, the lack of effective constraint on the press was even more significant.

In the mid thirties the nearest rival to the press in the dissemination of news was, of course, the BBC. Each had the capability to reach a large and regular audience on a daily basis. Writing on the merits of the BBC, Wickham Steed noted that “the public appeal of broadcasting lies in its independence of money making considerations.” He was making the assumption that broadcasting, being a public corporation, was

therefore entirely immune from the economic pressures that constrained newspapers and newsreel companies. Yet, financial independence is only one aspect of independence, it was still necessary for the BBC to respond to the tastes of its public in the same way as newspapers and newsreels.⁶⁵ There were other, more serious constraints on its freedom. Although in 1928 the ban, originally imposed in 1926, on BBC broadcasting of controversial matters was lifted:

the BBC had to face continuing government interference in the broadcasting of political issues whilst at the same time it failed to gain reasonable access to politicians because of the inability of the main parties to agree on an equitable means of sharing air time”.⁶⁶

Until 1938, political control over the BBC was reinforced by the power of a government minister, the Postmaster General, to intervene in order to suppress news items and to place a veto on speeches containing statements on topics of political controversy. The correspondence in the files of the Prime Minister’s office relating to broadcasting policy demonstrates that there was reluctance to give the BBC greater freedom to debate foreign policy. From February of 1939, the BBC was permitted to arrange for a microphone to be placed at the disposal of the three main political parties once a month, for a period of forty-five minutes. However, ‘foreign affairs’ was excluded from the list of acceptable topics for these discussions: “on the grounds that broadcasts on this subject in the present state of affairs would be unwise, and that personal subjects in the House of Commons e.g. the Sandys’ case, should also be banned.”⁶⁷ In fact, so tight was the government’s control over the BBC that, in the opinion of the Director General, “it is uncomfortably near the truth to say that the decision who should speak is in the hands of the Prime Minister”. R.C. Norman was here referring specifically to the inability of opposition spokesmen and backbench Conservative critics of the government to voice their opinions on the BBC. The

restrictions on the BBC were such that it was not allowed to broadcast on contentious issues, which “are daily canvassed in the press.”⁶⁸

In official circles, newsreel was considered to be a particularly influential medium. As a result newsreel companies “found themselves in a very different position from their colleagues in Fleet Street. There was great sensitivity about the presentation of *any* political issue through the medium of film.”⁶⁹ Because “the cinema was regarded as an exceptionally potent means of communication and of propaganda for that reason newsreels had to evolve an entirely different pattern of behaviour from the newspaper.” Newsreel companies came under considerable official and commercial pressures to avoid creating the impression of an international crisis. In a competitive market, any newsreel “which could not be absolutely relied upon to provide its customers with the staple items [of] royalty, the annual calendar of the sporting and ceremonial events of British life would rapidly find that the customers had gone elsewhere.”⁷⁰ Moreover, “newsreel companies were run by their parent companies as a break-even advertising unit to keep their names before the cinema goers.”⁷¹ Hence, the commercial pressure “to give the public what it, or rather what the cinema-owners said it wanted” was particularly strong. Throughout the 1930s there were repeated demands for a more formal means of censorship over the newsreels.⁷² This, in turn, made the companies reluctant to do anything that might provide justification for the restricting of their freedom, although a voluntary form of self-censorship was to achieve similar results. Indeed, even without a more formalised form of censorship, “by the 1930s a skilfully constructed and sophisticatedly conducted system of censorship developed under the British Board of Film Censors.”⁷³ Political control by the government was reinforced by the fact that newsreels “unlike newspapers, depended

for much of their news material, the actual news footage, on the active co-operation of various government agencies.”⁷⁴

It is difficult to be precise concerning how far any form of mass media was able to exert influence over the population. Between 1938-9 the circulation of daily newspapers averaged 10.48 million daily, whilst that of the Sunday papers stood at 13.59 million.⁷⁵ Given that in 1931 the population stood at just under 45 million, it would appear that only a minority of the total population bought newspapers.⁷⁶ Even so, the PEP report on the press in 1938 estimated that in London, about 80% of the adult population saw a morning newspaper and approximately half saw an evening paper.⁷⁷ Little is known, for example, of how closely read they were by individuals, although a survey of readers was carried out in London in 1934.⁷⁸ There are also problems in assessing the impact of the cinema. Between 1934-39 the average weekly figure for cinema audiences went up from 18.5 million to between 20 and 23 million.⁷⁹ However, in a survey published in November 1938 in which respondents were questioned on the frequency of their visits to the cinema, only 49% said they went once a week or more, 39% went less than once a week, and a significant minority, 12%, never went at all.⁸⁰ The figures do not assess the actual impact of the films and newsreel footage on those who did attend. An assessment of the impact of radio also presents problems. During this decade radio licences increased to a total of 8.9 million.⁸¹ As in the case of newspapers, it is probable that radio catered for different types of audience; for example, depending on choice, it might be used solely for listening to music. Of all the forms of media communication available, the advantage of radio over its rivals was its potential to reach a very large audience simultaneously. Even so, the BBC was subjected to competition by foreign radio

stations such as Radio Luxembourg, and Radio Normandie. In 1935, Radio Luxembourg claimed it could reach the whole of the United Kingdom.⁸² Thus, despite being a chartered corporation and therefore in possession of a legally recognised monopoly, the BBC had no monopoly of access to the millions of radio sets in Britain. Regardless of the influence which different forms of the media were able to exert, it must also be remembered that in many households people would be subjected to the competing influences of radio, newspapers and cinema. As such, it would be difficult to extrapolate the individual influence of each and, in any case, it is likely that to some extent they reinforced each other.

Ultimately, the development of other forms of mass media in the Twentieth Century would lead to the displacement of the press as the principal means of information by which people formed their opinions. The substantial growth in cinema audiences and that of radio and even the advent of television, all within the thirties, presaged what was the beginning of a new era. Yet at the time of the Spanish Civil War, the press was still a vitally important source of influence and information. Indeed, it was its independence of political control, a freedom denied to its rivals, which made it particularly powerful. It would also appear, from the variety of journals on offer, that the press was better placed than its rivals to cater for tastes across the social spectrum. In contrast, the BBC, by focussing on a more middle class audience, “failed to become the mass medium which in terms of its technology it could have been.”⁸³ Analysis of the correlation between social class and cinema, strongly suggests that the audiences were predominantly working class. The influence the press was considered to have on opinion, both at home and abroad, led the government to cultivate close relations with newspapers, with the aim of building support for its policy on Spain. However, the

aim of achieving general press consensus was to prove unrealistic. The partisan nature of Britain's political culture in this period, when even foreign affairs had become an issue dividing political parties, was to undermine any attempt at achieving general support for government policy towards the Spanish Civil War. Hence, the government was forced to rely increasingly on support from those conservative newspapers which were broadly in sympathy with the outlook of the Conservative dominated coalition government. The next chapter, therefore, will focus particularly on the development of the relationship between the government and the conservative press up to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

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- ¹ “It is, in fact arguable, that nothing since the French Revolution had so tragically divided the British people as the Spanish Civil War”: K.W. Watkins, *Britain Divided* (London, 1963), p.11.
- ² For an exploration of both the ideological and class issues shaping the hostile attitude of the British government towards the Second Republic, see Enrique Moradiellos, *Neutralidad Benévola: el gobierno británico y la insurrección militar española de 1936* (Oviedo, 1990) and Enrique Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión: El Gobierno británico y la guerra civil española* (Madrid, 1996).
- ³ Britain was Spain’s most important customer in world trade, accounting for 25% of all Spanish exports, see *La perfidia de Albión.*, p.20. British investment in Spain represented 40% of all foreign investment in that country, *Ibid.*, p.23.
- ⁴ This is not to say that there was unity in Britain over methods and tactics among the sympathizers of the Spanish Republic. “The Spanish issue became the battlefield in which the right and left contended for control of the labour movement”: Watkins, *Britain Divided*, p.145. For a more recent survey of the impact of the war on attitudes of the parliamentary opposition see Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, 1997), p.78 and p.84.
- ⁵ “By the middle of the 1930s, the Treaty of Versailles itself was a dead letter for the British Press”: F. R. Gannon, *The British Press and Nazi Germany 1936-1939* (Oxford, 1971) p.162.
- ⁶ Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p.24.
- ⁷ “The rise of fascism and, correspondingly of ‘anti-fascism’ was clearly central to the impact that the Civil War made in Britain”: *Ibid.*, p.3.
- ⁸ “The attack on “Guernica accelerated the irreversible shift in British sympathies during the Civil War. It was particularly shocking that its victims, the Basques, were seen in British eyes as uniquely blameless”: *Ibid.*, p.29.
- ⁹ For a fuller consideration of the conservative press and its relationship with the government see chapter two.
- ¹⁰ Winston Churchill, ‘The Spanish Tragedy’ in W. S. Churchill, *Step by Step* (London, 1949), p.38. *Step by Step* is a collection of articles written by Churchill between March 1936 and May 1939.
- ¹¹ ‘An Object Lesson From Spain’, October 2nd 1936, *Step by Step*, p.56.
- ¹² ‘Spain’s Road To Peace’, November 26th 1937, *Ibid.*, p.177.
- ¹³ ‘The Spanish Ulcer’, December 30th 1938, *Ibid.*, p.299.
- ¹⁴ In the spring of 1938, Churchill remarked about the Germans, “[they] possess

a very powerful and efficient air force in Spain. Their air fields lie within easy striking distance of the munitions establishments of the South of France...It would be natural for them to seek to impose upon General Franco the Nazi system and characteristics, and in turn the phalangists will be their instruments": 'Red Sunset in Spain', April 5th 1938, in *Step by Step*, p.218. The extent to which there was a genuine change in Churchill's attitude towards the Spanish Republic has been underestimated. Neville Thompson, for example, suggests that Churchill was only influenced by his strategic concerns for Gibraltar, see N. Thompson, *The Anti- Appeasers: Conservative Opposition To Appeasement In The 1930s* (Oxford, 1971), p.124.

- ¹⁵ The isolation of the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, from the rest of his Cabinet colleagues will be dealt with in succeeding chapters.
- ¹⁶ Gannon in *The British Press and Nazi Germany 1936-1939*, concentrates on how the British press represented the Nazi regime.
- ¹⁷ R.B. Cockett, *Twilight of Truth, Chamberlain, Appeasement and the Manipulation of the Press* (London, 1989). The focus of Cockett's study is on the relationship between the government and the press during the premiership of Neville Chamberlain, 1937-40. My reservations with Cockett's conclusions will be explored in more depth in chapters five and six.
- ¹⁸ For a study which attempts to focus more directly on how the Civil War was interpreted in sections of the British weekly press see Benny Morris, *The Roots of Appeasement, The British Weekly Press and Nazi Germany* (London, 1991). Morris makes some very interesting comments about 'Scrutator', the columnist for the *Sunday Times*. However, the focus of his book is still on how Germany was represented in the British press, and does not explore how the relationship between the government and the press may have affected the way in which Germany was reported.
- ¹⁹ Moradiellos in *Neutralidad benévola*, covers the period from the birth of the Second Republic until the end of 1936. The conclusions of this book are incorporated in *La perfidia de Albión*, a more complete survey of the British government's reaction during the course of the war.
- ²⁰ Fear of the spread of communism was an important factor influencing the formulation of British foreign policy: "while Fascism and Communism were regarded in the Foreign Office as the 'mumps and measles of world society', the former was believed to be an urgent but short term problem, the latter a longer-term one": Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War 1936-9* (London, 1979), pp. 2-3.
- ²¹ *History of The Times*, volume IV, part ii, 1921-48, quoted in Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, p.196

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- ²² “There was a clear division within the press on the Spanish Civil War”: Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, pp.24-5. Yet, it will be shown that this interpretation does not do justice to the very real dilemma within newspapers over official policy on Spain, nor to the opposition of much of the staff of supposedly pro-government journals towards the extent to which their editors were willing to support the official line.
- ²³ Herbert Routledge Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica! A study of Journalism, Propaganda and Illusion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1977).
- ²⁴ The conclusions reached by these studies will be challenged more directly in later chapters.
- ²⁵ An example of how strictly the press was controlled under a dictatorship is the case of Mussolini’s Italy. In Fascist Italy, the state controlled news agency told editors what to print, sending them comments they were expected to make after a speech by the Duce, or in the aftermath of a particular event, see John Whittam, *Fascist Italy* (Manchester, 1995), p.89.
- ²⁶ “People who lived in large towns had been able to acquaint themselves with the contents of such organs of ‘moderate’ foreign opinion as *The Times*, *Le Temps*, and the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, by buying them at kiosks or perusing them at coffee-houses, though to be seen purchasing foreign newspapers was not likely to endear one to the Party or to the Gestapo”: Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of The Third Reich* (Harmondsworth, 1991), p.501.
- ²⁷ Tom Buchanan refers to the origins of the Mass Observation movement in *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, pp.22-3.
- ²⁸ “The old days when the British public felt secure in their island that they were content to leave their external relations to the government of the day are now passed forever. The British public today claim to exercise direct, and not merely indirect sovereign powers in regard to foreign policy. Our external relations have thus been brought down from the Cabinet room to the arena of party controversy; and the press as well as the propagandist have joined in the fray”: Harold Nicolson, ‘British Public Opinion and British Foreign Policy’ in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, January, 1937, pp.53-63. Between 1910-16, Nicolson was Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office. His view concerning the importance of public opinion was shared by James Margach, a lobby correspondent for *The Times* during the 1930s. According to Margach, the power of public opinion “reached a peak during the Spanish Civil War”: James Margach, *The Anatomy of Power, An Enquiry into the Personality of Leadership* (London, 1979)
- ²⁹ “Their [government’s] perception of public opinion was indeed a major determinant in making their policy decisions”: Nicholas Pronay, ‘Rearmament

and the British Public' in James Curran, Anthony Smith and Pauline Wingate (eds.), *Impacts and Influences, Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1987), p.85. For a further example of how public opinion effectively limited the range of options available to the government in its response to Nazi Germany see Gustav Schmidt, 'The Domestic Background to British Appeasement' In Wolfgang Mommsen and Lothar Kettenacker (eds.), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement*, (London, 1983), pp.3-4.

- ³⁰ Enrique Moradiellos, 'British Political Strategy in the Face of the Military Rising of 1936 in Spain', *Contemporary European History*, 1992, p.129.
- ³¹ Political And Economic Planning, 'What is Public Opinion', *The Press and the Public*, broadsheet number 118, October 19th1937, in volume V, April 1937-April 1938 (London, 1938), p.129.
- ³² Denys Thompson, *Between the Lines or How to Read a Newspaper* (Chatham, 1939), p.165. Tom Buchanan argued that in the 1930s "public opinion was conventionally regarded as being the public view of opinion formers, who interpreted the sentiments of their voiceless fellow citizens." He also argued that "considerable power was seen to reside in the editorial columns of leading newspapers, especially *The Times*": Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, pp.119-20.
- ³³ Madge and Harrison, *Britain By Mass Observation* quoted in Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, pp.119-20.
- ³⁴ Political and Economic Planning, *Report on the British Press* (London, 1939), p.3. Hereafter, Political and Economic Planning will be referred to as PEP.
- ³⁵ In 1937, 1577 newspapers and 3119 magazines and periodicals were being published in Britain, see Gannon, *The British Press and Nazi Germany*, p.1. "Most newspapers are seen or read by more than one person. The higher-class newspaper, whose actual sales may be barely a tenth of those claimed by the biggest 'popular' journals, probably pass through more hands than do the 'popular' sheets": H. Wickham Steed, *The Press* (Harmondsworth, 1938), p.149.
- ³⁶ The silence of the British press on a subject "which was, by all accounts, the only topic of conversation in the western world was preserved exclusively by a clandestine system of 'gentlemen's agreements'": Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.14.
- ³⁷ D.L. Le Mahieu, *A Culture For Democracy* (Oxford, 1988), p.12. In 1930, newspapers ranked twelfth among the leading industries of Britain. This position put it ahead of iron and steel, see PEP *Report on the British Press*, p.3.
- ³⁸ In 1916, Beaverbrook and Northcliffe played an important part in the removal of Asquith as Prime Minister. Between 1919-22, the two press barons urged cuts in public spending, an end to war time planning controls, and the sale of public owned enterprises. When the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, refused, Rothermere formed

the 'Anti Waste League', putting up parliamentary candidates. In 1921, they won in a number of by-elections, see Curran and Seaton 'The Era of the Press Barons', pp.49-50.

³⁹ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p.206.

⁴⁰ Towards the end of the Civil War, *The Times* special correspondent in Madrid wrote, "I gravely doubt the adequacy of the reports of the British representatives in view of their notorious prejudices and their methods as I have observed them. For instance after the bombing of Barcelona last March, when more than 1,000 bodies were lying in the morgues, the British legation informed the Foreign Office, and this four or five days afterward, that the death total was some 400. On investigation I learned that no representative of the British legation had even taken the trouble to make inquiries in the proper official quarters": *TNL Archive*, Deakin File: E.G. De Caux to Deakin, February 19th 1939.

⁴¹ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p.206.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp 20-25

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.18

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21

⁴⁵ Wickham Steed, *The Press*, pp.100-103. The following observation was also made, "[t]he newspaper as a giant business concern tends to pursue maximum revenue through non-journalistic types of competition, such as canvassing with free gifts and free reader insurance, with the result that the purely journalistic enterprise is placed at a competitive disadvantage": PEP, 'Conclusions on the Press', broadsheet number 120, April 5th 1938, volume V (London, 1938), p.4.

⁴⁶ PEP, 'The Press and the Public', pp. 2-3.

⁴⁷ PEP, *Report on the Press*, p.251.

⁴⁸ In the Twentieth Century, "working class families began to retain more discretionary revenue...an increase in leisure time contributed to a greater demand for newspapers, film, and other mass media. Shortly after the First World War, the average working week dropped from 55 to 48 hours": Le Mahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p.20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁵⁰ PEP, 'The Press and the Public', p.7.

⁵¹ Gannon, *The British Press and Nazi Germany 1936-39*, p.2.

⁵² "After exhaustive study, the Commission found no solid evidence of this, and

concluded, much to the disgust of the socialist journalists who had called for the Commission, that advertizing pressure on newspapers had been negligible”: Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.1.

⁵³ ‘From Agreement to Action’, *The Times*, October 11th 1935, p.15.

⁵⁴ ‘A World Verdict on Italy’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 11th 1935, p.14.

⁵⁵ In 1935, Ball wrote to Chamberlain that “*The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* are admirable newspapers and give us their full support”: R.B. Cockett, Communication, Ball, Chamberlain and Truth, *The Historical Journal*, volume 33,1990, p.133.

⁵⁶ Neither Britain nor France was willing to “use the forces at their disposal” against Italy, and sought instead, “to bring the conflict to an end by diplomatic means, culminating in the ill-fated Hoare-Laval plan of December 1935. This agreement between the foreign ministers of Britain and France would have handed over the greater part of Ethiopia to Italy, leaving the Emperor, Haile Selassie, with only a small, unviable, independent state. A public outcry in Britain put paid to this agreement”: Mark Robson, *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism 1870-1945* (London, 1998), p.124.

⁵⁷ ‘The Way Out’, *The Times*, December 13th 1935, p.15. Later, on December 17th, the leader argued against those who, in order to avoid alienating Italy, might defend the Hoare Laval plan on pragmatic grounds: “any peace should be founded on justice...it should not put a premium on aggression”: ‘How The War Stands’, *The Times*, December 17th 1935, p.15.

⁵⁸ ‘The Proposed Peace Terms’, *Daily Telegraph*, December 14th 1935.

⁵⁹ The *Yorkshire Post* appreciated the more serious diplomatic consequences of the German action: “Germany’s action is not merely a repudiation of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles, it is a flagrant violation of the Locarno Treaty. This was not imposed by the victors upon Germany, but actually resulted from proposals made by the then German Chancellor, Dr. Stresemann himself”: ‘A Grave Situation’, *Yorkshire Post*, March 9th 1936, p.8. By sending troops into the Rhineland on March 7th 1936, Hitler had violated the Locarno Pact which “he had himself undertaken more than once to observe”: Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Europe Of The Dictators 1919-1945* (London, 1985), p.112.

⁶⁰ “The need to keep one’s powder dry, and to increase its stockpile was to characterize the three years of Garvin’s espousal of appeasement. Unlike Chamberlain, he always considered appeasement as mainly a policy designed to buy time before probably unavoidable conflict”: Morris, *The Roots of Appeasement*, p.97.

⁶¹ “That the German nation could be indefinitely deprived of its full sovereignty over one of its chief provinces was clearly impossible. From the military standpoint the

value to France of the demilitarized zone has been greatly diminished by recent developments. A modern air fleet can fly over it in 15 minutes; a modern mechanised army can cross twice the width of the zone in a few hours. Thus the safety of France is not seriously affected”: ‘No Real Crisis’, *Sunday Times*, March 9th 1936, p.12.

- ⁶² Commenting on the leader article of the *Sunday Times* for March 29th 1936, Morris wrote, “Hadley’s brief sojourn beyond the pale of appeasement proved short lived. But, apparently, existing policy occasionally discomfited him”: Morris, *The Roots Of Appeasement*, pp.104-105.
- ⁶³ In 1937, Vansittart was still writing to Eden about the effects of the 1936 press war between Britain and Italy.
- ⁶⁴ Even so, regarding the reporting of foreign affairs, advertizers did possess some power to influence the press: “Advertisment revenue can only be obtained if consumers are spending freely and they will only do so if they feel cheerful and confident”: St. John Greer Ervine, *The Future of The Press* (London, 1939), p.28. Therefore, “...the Abyssinian War... War in Spain...caused in varying degree, depression, uncertainty and unsettlement which had an adverse effect on the business world, and caused in several cases a cancellation of advertizing”: R.E. Beckett, Chairman of the *Yorkshire Post*, quoted in Ervine, *The Future of The Press*, Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Wickham Steed, *The Press*, pp. 221-2. However, it has also been suggested that, during the course of the 1930s, “the dividing line between commercial and elite culture often became blurred...[the]BBC became more responsive to its growing number of listeners”: Le Mahieu, *A Culture For Democracy*, p.231. According to Le Mahieu, “[a]lthough the BBC continued to further debate on current political and social issues, the bulk of its political output took on the character of education for citizenship, offering elucidation of issues at an abstract level which transcended current controversy”: Cardiff and Scammell, ‘Broadcasting National Unity’ in *Impacts and Influences*, p.159.
- ⁶⁶ In March 1938, the Government lifted this ban and transferred the powers of the Postmaster General to the governors of the BBC, see PRO, PREM, 1/301.
- ⁶⁷ “The Chief Whip mentioned that the Government must be consulted before subjects were decided upon as there were certain issues like foreign affairs which we could not consider advisable for broadcast discussion”: ‘Political Broadcasting’, Note by Chief Whip’s Office, PRO, PREM 1/301. The note refers to a meeting on 19th January 1939.
- ⁶⁸ R.C. Norman letter to G.C. Tryon, April 5th 1939: Ibid. Norman was the Director General of the BBC, and Tryon was the Postmaster General.
- ⁶⁹ Anthony Aldgate, ‘British Newsreels in the 1930s: Their Policies and Impact’, *History*, volume 57, 1972, p.64. An example of how seriously the British

government viewed the impact on British popular attitudes and behaviour is the following comment made in Cabinet, "it was suggested some immediate action might be taken to advise the cinema companies not to reproduce scenes of violence. It was recognised that the usual criticism will be the danger of interfering with the liberties of the people, but the reply to this would be that it was necessary because some sections of the population insisted in abusing their liberty": PRO, CAB 23/85, Cabinet minutes, 14th October 1936. For a detailed survey of the British newsreel industry at the time of the Spanish Civil War, see Anthony Aldgate, *The Cinema and History: British Newreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1979).

⁷⁰ Pronay, 'Rearmament and the British Public', p.73.

⁷¹ Nicholas Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s: 1. Audience and Providers', *History*, 1971, Volume 56, p.416.

⁷² Furthermore, "unlike the newspapers the newsreels had a legal sword suspended over their heads", hence ruling out "any Daily Mirror style, 'publish and be damned'" article "against the government of the day": Pronay, 'Rearmament and the British Public', p.73. The "one newsreel company which was the least amenable to being brought into line, perhaps because it was wholly American, was *Paramount*. Although it could be, and on several occasions was, forcibly prevented from going against government policy, such as at the time of Munich": pp.90-1.

⁷³ Pronay, 'Rearmament and the British Public', p.70.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.73.

⁷⁵ H.E. Butler and S. Freeman, *British Political Facts, 1900-1960* (London, 1968) pp. 213-4 quoted in Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s: 1. Audience and Providers', p.415.

⁷⁶ A.J.P. Taylor, *ENGLISH HISTORY 1914-1945* (Reading, 1982) p.378.

⁷⁷ PEP, *Report On The British Press*, p.238.

⁷⁸ "The average reader of a morning newspaper was found to read four items completely, two partly and four not at all, whereas the average reader of an evening newspaper was more prone to read items partly." *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁷⁹ The first thorough survey of the cinema industry was carried out in 1934, by the distinguished statistician S. Rowson: Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s', p.412.

⁸⁰ British Institute Of Public Opinion, *What Britain Thinks: The Technique Of Public Opinion Measurement* (London, 1939) p.22.

⁸¹ Butler and Freeman, *British Political Facts*, quoted in Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s', p.415.

⁸² Le Mahieu, *A Culture For Democracy*, p.277.

⁸³ Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s', p.415.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS.

For the purposes of both this chapter and the thesis as a whole, the term conservative press includes both those newspapers which were under the direct editorial control of the Conservative Party and those which claimed to uphold conservative principles. In terms of ownership, the latter were entirely independent of the Conservative Party. This chapter will focus on two main areas: firstly, the relationship between the government and the conservative press throughout the period; secondly, the alignment and discourse of the conservative press during the first year of the Spanish Civil War.

In the inter-war period, there was a plethora of newspapers available to the British public. The leading national conservative newspapers, which form the basis of this thesis, were members of large newspaper chains, which included of course the provincial press. The largest of the newspaper chains were those of Baron Beaverbrook and Viscount Rothermere, both of whom were Conservative press barons. In 1938, for example, the daily circulation of the London papers owned by Beaverbrook was as follows; The *Daily Express*, 2,329 000 and the *Evening Standard*, 392 000. Beaverbrook also owned the *Sunday Express* which had a weekly circulation of 1, 337 000.¹ In addition, Beaverbrook owned some provincial newspapers. The nearest rival in the conservative press was Associated Newspapers Limited, owned by Rothermere. Beaverbrook was determined that his *Daily Express* should supersede its rival, the *Daily Mail*. As part of the campaign to encroach upon the latter's market, the *Daily Express* began openly to attack the *Daily Mail*.² In 1929, the *Daily Mail* had the largest daily circulation of all conservative papers

at 1, 954 635.³ However, throughout the decade, the growth in the circulation figures of the *Daily Express* had been more substantial. Between 1922-9, circulation more than doubled, reaching a figure of over 1.5 million. Within the same period, the circulation for the *Daily Mail* grew by less than 200 000. By 1933, Beaverbrook was able to achieve his goal, and by August 1939, the *Daily Express*, with a daily sale of 2 543 000, was substantially the largest British newspaper in circulation.

Rothermere and Beaverbrook had cornered the more popular market; the circulation of their newspapers by far outstripped that of the quality conservative press. However, during the 1930s, newspapers such as *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Observer* were considered to have an influence far above their relatively small circulation. As will be explained later, this was as a result of the intimacy of contact that existed between the quality conservative press and conservative ministers. Therefore, it was to these newspapers, especially *The Times* of London, that foreign governments looked for indications of what the British Government was thinking.

In terms of circulation figures, until January 1937, Associated Newspapers, which included *The Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Financial Times* and *Kelly's Directory*, dominated the quality market. In January, daily sales of the *Daily Telegraph* reached 520 000.⁴ This by far surpassed the highest figure reached by its rival, *The Times*, whose average daily circulation before the Second World War was never higher than 200 000.⁵ From 1922 to 1939 the *Daily Telegraph* continued dramatically to increase its circulation reaching 750 000 by 1939.⁶ Allied Newspapers was predominantly a family

concern, the Berry Brothers, Viscounts Kemsley and Camrose, were in partnership with Edward Illife. When, in January 1937, the partnership was amicably dissolved, Illife acquired 10% of the shares in the *Daily Telegraph*, and became proprietor of *Kelly's Directory*. Viscount Camrose took the controlling interest in both the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times*, whilst his brother acquired the *Sunday Times*, of which he was editor in chief, and also the *Daily Sketch*.⁷ Camrose, therefore, emerged as owner of the leading quality newspaper in Britain. His brother, who was chairman of Kemsley Newspapers, owned the *Sunday Times*, the leading conservative weekly, together with a substantial share of the provincial press. Indeed, by 1947, Kemsley Newspapers had emerged as the largest newspaper chain in Britain.⁸

At best, circulation figures provide no more than a rough guide to the influence of a newspaper. The *Yorkshire Post*, with a very small circulation of less than 30 000, was one of the more influential newspapers of the period, because, in contrast to other mainstream conservative papers, it was prepared to take an independent stand.⁹ Among the business and farming community of the north of England the *Yorkshire Post* was the leading daily newspaper.¹⁰

Collectively, conservative newspapers had a much greater total circulation than journals of either liberal or socialist political affiliations. Taking into consideration national daily newspapers, the total circulation of conservative newspapers per day in 1938 was 6 571 000. The weekly sale of national conservative Sunday papers, for the same year, was 1 826 000. The *Sunday Pictorial*, owned by The Mirror Group [socialist], had a

circulation of 1 400 000. This was a greater weekly sale than that of its nearest rival, the conservative *Sunday Express* [1 337 000]. However, newspapers that either adhered to conservative principles or were owned by proprietors who did so, dominated the newspaper world.¹¹

During the inter-war period, the term conservative was a vague one. Used as a descriptor for a distinct category of newspaper within the British press, it encompassed papers representing a multiplicity of views. This was precisely, because, politically, there was no clear, monolithic definition of what Conservatism was. Indeed, it is not clear if Conservatism has a definite ideological basis. Therefore, conservative newspapers had considerable autonomy in coming up with their own, individual interpretation of conservative principles. Moreover, it was most unusual for a newspaper to have formalized links with the Conservative Party. It was even possible for newspapers to adopt a highly critical view of the policy pursued by Baldwin and later Chamberlain and still be considered as conservative newspapers. This was because there was not a unified conservative view on foreign policy, and as we have seen in the previous chapter, still less on the Spanish Civil War.

As we shall see in succeeding chapters, the conservative press was to remain divided on the issue of the Civil War. A greater degree of consensus within the conservative camp was achieved but, even then, only to a limited extent, in 1937-8, with the incorporation of the *Morning Post* with the, then pro-government, *Daily Telegraph*.¹² The *Morning Post* had been a critic of the government of Baldwin. In the spring of 1937, it had considered

the government's opposition to Franco's blockade of Bilbao as unacceptable intervention on behalf of the Spanish Republic.¹³ In fact, under Baldwin, conservative press criticism towards the government's Spanish policy was to come from those newspapers that were sympathetic to the Spanish rebels. This category included the occasional opposition of the *Morning Post*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Observer*.

The Newspaper Press Directory, an annual publication in which are listed the national and provincial newspapers of Britain, gives a misleading impression of the political principles of many of them. The *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Times* and the *Sunday Times*,¹⁴ for example, are not indicated as holding conservative principles, although of course they did. Apart from the *Daily Mail*, for which no principles are listed, these newspapers are listed as independent. This is accurate only in regard to the ownership. The directory describes the *Daily Telegraph* as holding independent conservative principles, while the *Morning Post* is referred to as 'Conservative'. Gwynne, the editor of the *Morning Post*, defined the principles of his paper as 'independent Conservative'.¹⁵ In terms of its stance on government policy on the Civil War, the *Morning Post* was actually much closer to being independent conservative [with a small 'c'] than the *Daily Telegraph*. A more accurate reflection of the political loyalties of the two leading quality conservative daily newspapers was made by PEP. In its report on the press in 1938, it considered the political affiliations of national newspapers. In its opinion, both *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* were supportive of the National Government.¹⁶ With regard to British policy on Spain 1936-7, the attitude of some conservative papers indicates a rather different interpretation of the partisan attachments

and political allegiances of the conservative press. *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times*, given the consistency of their support to all aspects of government policy towards the Civil War, should be regarded as strongly pro-government. The effect of this was to make them into a form of free propaganda for the government. On the other hand, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, the *Morning Post* and the *Observer*, because of their propensity to criticize government policy, were actually much closer to being independent conservative. They would support the government only in so far as its policy corresponded to their own definitions of conservative principles.

In terms of the standpoint being adopted on the Spanish Civil War, it is possible to divide the conservative press into three broad categories. Given the controversial and divisive nature of that conflict, the boundaries were not static. As we shall see later, it was possible for newspapers to change category in response to their changing perception of the war and in relation to how they viewed British Government policy towards it. However from the outbreak of the revolt until the resignation of Baldwin as Prime Minister, the alignment within the conservative press was relatively constant.

The first of the three categories concerns the one journal that was closely associated with political Conservatism and in effect was a party political publication. This was the *Truth*.¹⁷ The decision to acquire, for the Conservative Party, the control of the shares in The Truth Publishing Company was taken by Sir Joseph Ball, in June 1936. Ball's early career was in British intelligence and then in 1924, the Conservative Party Chairman, J.C.C. Davidson, recruited him to run an intelligence service within Conservative Party

Headquarters, the purpose of which was to infiltrate the Communist Party and Labour Party Headquarters. In 1930, he was to become the director of the newly established Conservative Research Department and from then on he was to become “Chamberlain’s closest and most indispensable political adviser.”¹⁸ Under Ball’s direction, *Truth* was to become the leading Conservative weekly review in the second half of the 1930s.¹⁹ The connection between *Truth* and the Conservative Government under Chamberlain remained unknown even to the board of the National Publicity Bureau whose funds had been used to purchase the shares in the first place. Ball, a close friend of Neville Chamberlain, was to ensure *Truth* was to become the mouthpiece for the expression of Chamberlain’s views, and that it would also be used to discredit Chamberlain’s political opponents.²⁰ The expectation was that the paper would identify closely with current Conservative Party policy.

A second category into which conservative papers could fall was that of conservative by inclination. In reality, these newspapers were almost as closely tied to the Conservative government as the former category. For the government, this was the most important category, precisely because it included influential papers such as *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Sunday Times*. Ties of kinship and friendship played a key role in cementing the bonds between newspapers in this group and the Conservative Party. Until the dissolution of their partnership in 1937, the Newspaper Empire of the Berry brothers in association with Edward Iliffe, dominated this category. Both Berry brothers were closely associated with the leading figures in political Conservatism. Camrose was a friend of Baldwin.²¹ Furthermore, Neville Chamberlain,

whom Camrose first met in 1930, was to become one of his main informants on political affairs.²² Camrose was also a close friend of Sir Winston Churchill, and remained so even when the latter became a fervent critic of Chamberlain's foreign policy.²³ Camrose's friendship with Churchill notwithstanding, the *Daily Telegraph* continued to defend the government line on Spain. Both Berry brothers were members of The Carlton Club, a Tory political club founded in 1832.²⁴ Also a member of this club was the editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, Arthur Watson.²⁵ Kemsley was on close terms with Chamberlain, and so too was the editor of the *Sunday Times*, William Waites Hadley. When Chamberlain became Prime Minister, Hadley saw him on a weekly basis.²⁶

The Astors, a newspaper dynasty of Anglo-American descent, was the other dominant family in this category of the conservative press. John Jacob Astor, was co-proprietor of *The Times*. His elder brother, Waldorf, Viscount Astor, was the proprietor of the *Observer*. J.J. Astor, a member of the Carlton Club, had, since 1922, been Conservative Member of Parliament for Dover.²⁷ The editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson, was especially close to the centre of political Conservatism.²⁸ Even before Halifax's promotion to Foreign Secretary in February 1938, his friendship with Dawson had played an important part in paving the way for close contact between the editor and the government. This was because Halifax, as Lord Privy Seal, had a role to play in policy formulation at the Foreign Office. Halifax also deputized for Eden when the latter was on holiday. Dawson met with Halifax virtually every day. Both men had strikingly similar backgrounds, which helped to shape a common outlook on government and world affairs. Both were old Etonians, both had read 'Greats' at Oxford, were fellows both of All

Souls' Oxford and Eton College.²⁹ The official History of *The Times* refers to the vitally important contact between Dawson and Halifax:

Halifax was a tried and intimate friend of Dawson's, an old member of the circle of imperialist Conservatives in which Dawson had mixed for a generation...contact between the paper and the Foreign Office became as close in the next two years as it had ever been...it was maintained at this personal level by a daily visit to senior officials from the diplomatic correspondent or his deputy.³⁰

It was through his association with Halifax, that Dawson came to know Neville Chamberlain. Dawson was in close contact with Chamberlain during the latter's premiership, and was in agreement with the policy of appeasement so rigorously pursued by Chamberlain at the end of the decade. In return, Chamberlain valued Dawson's opinion and "was strengthened in his own views by the knowledge that Geoffrey agreed with his policy and would support it in *The Times*."³¹ Therefore, it was not always the case that such newspapers were being influenced to support a particular line of policy. In the case of *The Times*, for example, because Dawson shared so much of the world view of senior ministers he was inclined to lend the enthusiastic support of his paper towards advocating the government's position. The ties based on friendship linking Conservative politicians with editors and proprietors of conservative newspapers, in general, helps to explain why a number of privately owned papers, independent of outside political control, became so closely identified with the Conservative Party. Furthermore, conservative newspaper loyalty in defending Non-Intervention, prompted the opposition press to launch attacks against them. In this way the term conservative press became a pejorative term used by the opponents of the government to criticize a press, which seemed to offer unquestioning obedience to the government in "the teeth of the facts."³²

The *Yorkshire Post*, in spite of its tiny circulation of barely 30 000 copies a day, was an important member of the independent conservative press category. Indeed, when, as we shall see, the editor, Arthur Mann, began to use the leader columns as a means by which to launch a sustained attack on the foreign policy of Neville Chamberlain, this caused considerable disquiet in leading conservative circles. The paper was part of a privately owned provincial chain of newspapers, the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Association. Both the *Yorkshire Post* and its sister paper, the *Weekly Post*, were among the oldest surviving newspapers in the country.³³ Personal and family ties reinforced the relationship between the Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Association and political Conservatism. The Beckett family, the largest of the shareholders of the company, formed part of provincial conservatism. Sir Gervase Beckett, the chairman of the company, was a Conservative Member of Parliament and, father-in-law to Anthony Eden. In his earlier days, Eden had even corresponded for the *Yorkshire Post*. He was also a friend of Arthur Mann.³⁴

The third category, the independent conservative press, included newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*. In terms of circulation figures this was, of course, the largest of the three groups. Given the propensity of such papers to offer stinging criticism of the government line this was a problem for the Conservative led government. The more popular newspapers dominated this category. This meant they had an impact on influencing the opinions of the British public at large, rather than aiming almost exclusively at a small, if influential, readership. Beaverbrook and Rothermere, the

dominant personalities in the independent conservative press, were close friends, whose association went back a considerable time before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Rothermere had been Beaverbrook's mentor when the Canadian first decided to become a proprietor of the British press. Over the course of their long association, each helped the advancement of the other's career. During the First World War, probably through the intercession of Max Aitken [Baron Beaverbrook], Harold Harmsworth [Viscount Rothermere] was appointed director general of The Royal Army Clothing Factory.³⁵ Later in 1918, Rothermere was one of the two sponsors who supported Aitken's entry into The House Of Lords. Each had a financial interest in the other's newspapers, and this was despite the competition that existed between the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*.³⁶ In fact, the friendship held in spite of the attacks on the *Daily Mail* by its rival.

Both Beaverbrook and Rothermere were interventionist proprietors. From 1922 until his retirement in 1937, when his surviving son, Esmond, succeeded him, editorial policy of the *Daily Mail* was under Rothermere's direct control.³⁷ Beaverbrook was to exploit certain of his newspapers for his own purposes. The *Daily Express* in particular, was the mouthpiece of the political opinions of its proprietor.³⁸ In his autobiography, the editor of the *Daily Express*, Arthur Christiansen, refers to the dominant role played by Beaverbrook in directing the policy of the paper. Beaverbrook would telephone the editor daily and "used newspapers to further his own beliefs."³⁹ However, neither Beaverbrook nor Rothermere exercised the same degree of proprietorial control over all their papers. In 1936, the *Daily Mirror*, although owned by Rothermere, was, nevertheless, entirely free from his influence on policy. In contrast to the opinions held by Rothermere, this

paper of socialist principles was permitted to be highly critical of Nazi Germany. Similarly, Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard* had greater freedom over the direction of policy than its sister paper, the *Daily Express*.

The politics of both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* placed them as conservative papers. In 1910, Beaverbrook had even entered Parliament as a Conservative Member. In spite of his later opposition to Stanley Baldwin, he was to retain his membership of the Carlton Club. In fact, his opposition to Baldwin's leadership of party and government during the 1930s even led to the *Daily Express* becoming critical of the Conservative administration. Yet, as we shall see in chapter five, during the premiership of Chamberlain, Beaverbrook and hence the *Daily Express* was to become once more closely associated with mainstream Conservatism. Instrumental in ensuring this was Beaverbrook's very close association with Samuel Hoare, a member of Chamberlain's inner Cabinet. In November of 1938, Hoare's wife wrote to Beaverbrook requesting financial support to enable her husband to continue his political career. On 22nd November, the first payment of £2000 was made, and similar payments were made in September and November of 1939.⁴⁰

Rothermere's views were on the far right of the Conservative Party. Until 1934, he had even been an early supporter of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.⁴¹ Rothermere, like many Conservatives, was appalled at communism, seeing it as a greater threat to European civilization than fascism. Like many others on the right, his definition of communism was rather vague, and, therefore, the *Daily Mail's* alarmist interpretation

of left-wing influences in Republican Spain was often hysterical. Rothermere, and, hence, the *Daily Mail*, was unusual in supporting and condoning Nazi Germany.⁴² In this way, Rothermere was isolated from mainstream Conservatism. As S.J. Taylor pointed out in her biography of the Harmsworth brothers, Rothermere was “amongst the ruling classes considered dangerous, unpredictable, a wild card.”⁴³

Within the independent conservative newspaper category, journals that catered for a more influential readership included the *Morning Post* and the *Observer*. However, the *Daily Mail* also had a large readership among the professional classes. Given the relationship between the Astors and political Conservatism, it might seem surprising that the *Observer* should be placed in the independent category. Nancy, wife of William Waldorf, was a Conservative Member of Parliament. She frequently met Chamberlain, Halifax and their colleagues in government.⁴⁴ Waldorf and Halifax, contemporaries at Eton and Oxford, were also close friends. As a result of the connection with Halifax and Chamberlain, “[t]he Astors were never closer to the process of policy making than they were in these crucial years.”⁴⁵ Even so, Garvin, the editor, made the paper an independent one, and during the course of the Spanish Civil War did attack government policy. Garvin was a close friend of Franco’s representative in Britain, the 14th Duke of Alba and 10th Duke of Berwick. Garvin was a Spanish speaker, and like Alba a member of the Spanish Academy. Alba’s influence was strong enough “for Garvin to see Spain largely through Alba’s eyes.”⁴⁶

Although the term conservative press encompasses newspapers of diverse opinions, links between conservative newspapers were formed by journalists who had worked on more than one conservative paper, or who had a shared background as civil servants in colonial administration. The influence of Alfred [Lord] Milner on the previous careers of a number of journalists was very important in this respect. Prior to the First World War, Dawson and Philip Kerr [Lord Lothian] had worked under Milner as civil servants in South Africa. Both men were later associated with the *Round Table*, a quarterly journal founded in 1910. The purpose of the journal was to propagate the virtues of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Kerr, who later worked as a journalist for *The Times*, was the first editor of the *Round Table*. Dawson maintained a connection with the journal, even editing for it after his retirement from *The Times* in 1941. Edward Grigg, who was on the editorial staff of *The Times* before the First World War, was also a contributor. It was he, who, over a lunch in 1913, first introduced the young Barrington-Ward to Dawson.⁴⁷ Indeed after the First World War, when Barrington-Ward worked for the *Observer*, it was through his contacts in the *Round Table*, that Dawson learned of the rising new star in journalism. In 1927, Dawson offered him the post of assistant editor of *The Times*.⁴⁸

In fact, frequent instances of the networking process within the conservative press can be seen in the careers of a number of journalists and editors. Barrington-Ward, for example, had been assistant editor at the *Observer*, where his superior on the editorial staff was, of course, J.L. Garvin. It was whilst he was at the *Observer* that Barrington-Ward first met Captain Liddell Hart, to whom he offered a post as correspondent of lawn tennis and

rugby football.⁴⁹ The two men were to renew their acquaintance in the 1930s, when Liddell Hart resigned as military correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, to take up a similar post for *The Times*. Another example of the networking process is Dawson's early career in London journalism. Dawson had worked for the Harmsworth Press, which before the First World War owned *The Times*. In 1912, Lord Northcliffe, the elder brother of Viscount Rothermere, appointed Dawson as editor, following the latter's return from South Africa.⁵⁰ A further illustration can be seen in the career of W.W Hadley, an acquaintance of Camrose's father. When he was still editor of the *Merthyr Times*, Hadley arranged for the fourteen-year-old William Berry [later Lord Camrose] to be apprenticed as a journalist.⁵¹ Having spent his whole career in the provincial press, Hadley, at the age of 58, decided to take up a career in the national press. He therefore moved to London and worked for the *Daily Chronicle*. When, in 1930, that paper collapsed, Camrose invited him to work for the *Sunday Times*, where first he became assistant editor, and then editor.⁵² Other examples of the networking process between conservative newspapers include Beverley Baxter, the columnist 'Atticus' in the *Sunday Times*. Baxter had previously been editor of the *Daily Express*, where his assistant editor, before eventually succeeding him as editor, was Arthur Christiansen. Finally, as we shall see later, a particularly close relationship existed between *The Times* and the *Yorkshire Post*.

As we shall see, conservative newspapers were willing to be critical of government foreign policy and, on occasion during the Spanish Civil War, to infer and even openly suggest that the government adopt a firmer course of action in defence of the interests of British nationals who, for varying reasons, found themselves victims of that conflict.

However, for all their differences, the conservative newspapers were united in support of the policy of appeasement in the first two years, at least, of the Spanish Civil War. This factor affected the way these papers viewed that conflict. Over and again, the principle of Non-Intervention was defended as keeping war out of the rest of Europe. These newspapers believed that the policy would contain the conflict to Spain, thereby preventing an alignment of the western democracies against the fascist states. The fear of this occurring was, fundamentally, a reflection of the consensus among Conservatives in general that the terrible losses of the First World War should not be repeated. In the case of *The Times*, for example, those who were most influential over the policy of the paper towards international relations in the 1930s were much affected in their outlook by their experiences of the Great War. The proprietor, Colonel J.J. Astor, who had served in the war, was wounded twice. His editor, Dawson, having edited *The Times* during the war, now became one of the most loyal defenders of appeasement: “he too was seeking a way to escape from the catastrophe of any world war.”⁵³ Leo Kennedy, leader writer for *The Times* during the thirties, was another who had been greatly influenced by his wartime experience. He had served on the Western Front between 1914-19.⁵⁴ *The Times* foreign editor during the thirties, Ralph Deakin, had also served in that sector between 1916-18. Barrington-Ward, who had served as an officer in France, was, likewise, deeply moved by the war. He had also served at the battle of the Somme in 1916, the bloodiest battle ever fought by the British army. Thus “the conviction in later years that the fighting had not been worthwhile because the peace had been bungled was burnt deep into him.”⁵⁵ It was on the Western Front in France and Belgium between 1914-1918, that the British Army experienced its highest casualties. Of all those who served in that sector in the years of

the war, a total of 56% were either killed or wounded.⁵⁶ Therefore, it is hardly surprising that such men should take advantage of the opportunity afforded by their positions within *The Times* newspaper to argue strongly for a peaceful settlement with the fascist states.

Such long-term effects of the experiences of the Great War can be detected in other newspapers of the 1930s. Beaverbrook, who attained the rank of lieutenant colonel during the war, also served in the wartime coalition government of Lloyd George. The effect of the war weighed heavily upon him. Thus, the *Daily Express* became a fervent advocate of both appeasement and the isolation of Britain and the Empire from any European conflict. Beaverbrook's friend Rothermere had experienced personal tragedy as a result of the war, two of his three sons having died as a result of the wounds they received. Therefore, he too sought a way out of war.⁵⁷ During the war, Arthur Watson, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, had served with the Royal Field Artillery. As with so many others his experiences of that conflict had made a lasting impression upon his outlook on international affairs.⁵⁸ Therefore, for most of the Spanish Civil War, his paper equalled the enthusiasm of *The Times* in its advocacy of appeasement, and of Non-Intervention. Of course, the conservative press was not alone in its horror of war, or in its experience of war. Yet the sons of the wealthier classes, the offspring of the leaders of conservatism both in politics and in the press, bore a disproportionate share of the casualties of that conflict.⁵⁹ Hence, a consensus born out of a shared experience of the devastation of continental war, offers an explanation of why so many newspapers were willing to support the appeasement policies of the Conservative dominated governments of the

thirties, even in the face of mounting evidence of the insincerity of the dictators regarding the policy of Non-Intervention in Spain.

Consensus on the Civil War, however, depended on the extent to which the government could exploit its contacts with the press, both formal and informal. By the mid thirties, there was a variety of means by which the government could make contact with newspapers, in order to influence the editorial line. As we have already seen, ministers wanted the press to give their policies a friendly reception. Their motives were aimed at winning public support at home and to persuade foreign governments that British foreign policy did, indeed, have the support of public opinion. Newspapers, on the other hand, hoped for official confirmation of rumours and were, at least in part, dependent on official sources of information. They might, for example, find it necessary to obtain statistics on the actual breaches of Non-Intervention.

The oldest of the more formal and institutionalized contacts between government and the press were the Westminster lobby correspondents.⁶⁰ The lobby correspondents, first created in 1885, had special privileges including the right to unfettered access to any Member of Parliament who was willing to speak to a correspondent directly. In the late thirties, there were between fifty and sixty lobby correspondents in the palace of Westminster. A close relationship between the lobby and the Prime Minister's Office was to be developed in the course of the 1930s. Ramsay Macdonald, appointed Labour Prime Minister in 1929, was concerned that the conservative press barons would be hostile towards his administration. Hence, he established the position of a permanent

press relation's officer at 10 Downing Street.⁶¹ Following a civil service career in the Foreign Office, George Steward was to become the first incumbent of this post. He was to exercise greater centralization over the dissemination to outsiders of official news and views, than had ever been exerted previously.⁶² Actually, Steward was no more than a front man for his political master, Neville Chamberlain; "the first Prime Minister to employ news management on a grand scale."⁶³ Indeed, from the beginning of his premiership in May 1937, Chamberlain sought to persuade the press to support his policy of appeasing the dictators. It was Steward, a career civil servant, whose task was to hand out official statements to the press.⁶⁴ Chamberlain's success in managing the lobby encouraged him to look beyond the corridors of the palace of Westminster towards Fleet Street, with the aim of canvassing the support of proprietors and editors.⁶⁵

The post of Prime Minister's Press Secretary was part of a new trend in government and press relations during the inter-war period. It was a reflection of a greater sophistication in the government's management of news. This development spawned the creation of a further position, the public relations' officer. By the middle of the 1930s, these had been appointed by a number of departments. Among those that followed the trend were the Air Ministry, the Ministry of Health, the Colonial Office, the Post Office and also the Home Office.⁶⁶ Modernization of the government's system of news management did not mean more open government however. In fact, the opposite was the case. Public relations officers and the Prime Minister's Press Secretary were middlemen, effectively restricting the access of correspondents to the ministers themselves. One of the tasks of these new officials was the control of information. For example, the Prime Minister's

Press Office released a very selective view of foreign policy, a view not always shared by the Foreign Secretary.⁶⁷

During the inter-war period, an increasingly important source of official contact with the press was the Foreign Office News Department. The origins of this department lay in the news department created during the First World War to act as a means of liaison between the Foreign Office and the press. Its role was essentially that of disseminating publicity and propaganda. When, in 1919, the British government authorized government departments to create more permanent machinery for the management of publicity, only the Foreign Office chose to do so: “its wartime experience of propaganda had shown many Foreign Office officials the potential value of publicity in time of peace.”⁶⁸ However, the department only really began to grow in importance with the arrival of Rex Leeper, who was to become its head in 1935.⁶⁹ Leeper, of Australian descent, joined the News department in 1921, following a career as the Washington correspondent for *The Times*.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the surviving evidence for the operations of this department during these years is sparse. Whyte, however, writing on this institution in the 1980s, gives an insider’s point of view, and thus manages to shed some light on its practices. According to Whyte, what is of great importance in the News Department’s relationship with the press “is the background non attributable briefing.” This was based on individual contacts between News Department officials and journalists.⁷¹ In the 1930s, this department perceived its role as essentially one of providing news and views that would counteract the complacency shown by Chamberlain and Steward towards the gathering international crisis.⁷² According to Whyte, the reputation of the News

Department had been built on a perception of its honesty.⁷³ Clearly, this sentiment reflected a long-standing tradition. In 1938 for example, an internal memorandum read that the “greatest strength of the Foreign Office News Department lay in the fact that it was always ready to give a coolly detached View.”⁷⁴

Reference has been made in the previous chapter to the government’s practice of maintaining contact with representatives from a broad spectrum of newspapers. The purpose behind this was to obtain as favourable a reception for its policies in as many newspapers as possible. However, while criticism was to be expected from opposition papers, the government took very seriously indeed any censure from its ideological allies in the media. These would suggest the existence of a deeper malaise, perhaps even a party out of touch with a significant element of its grass roots supporters. Hence, the seriousness during the 1920s of an attack on the premiership of Baldwin by an alliance of the Rothermere and Beaverbrook owned press. The government could not fail to be aware that the alliance represented the majority of conservative newspapers in circulation. Therefore, there were rewards for newspapers that had shown their loyalty to the government. James Margach, political correspondent for the *Sunday Times*, was one of three or four members of the lobby who, simply because he represented a staunchly pro-government paper in the 1930s, was permitted to attend exclusive lobby briefings at the St. Stephen’s Club. These were arranged by the director of Conservative Central Office. Here, of course, he would meet Conservatives only; these of course included the leading members of the Conservative Party.⁷⁵ Since 1917, Leeper had arranged for the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* to have special privileges in communicating with

the News Department. Even in the late thirties, Iverach McDonald, the diplomatic correspondent for *The Times*, was the only diplomatic correspondent with the right to telephone the department.⁷⁶

In spite of the durability of its representative parliamentary system, Britain has always been characterized by the secretiveness of its government. Unsurprisingly, protocol dictated that secrecy should pervade the relationship between government and press. During the 1930s, the “annual lobby reports complained strongly about the frequency with which the political correspondents were threatened with the Official Secrets Act.”⁷⁷ The rules of the lobby itself reflect the secret culture of government. A very long-standing rule was that the correspondent should refrain from naming his informants, but should instead take personal responsibility for his story and the facts within it.⁷⁸ Hence, there was the development of a tradition in which the official inspiration of a story was indicated in the description of the source from which the correspondent claimed to have obtained his information. Margach, a lobby journalist from the thirties onwards, instances some of the permutations by which the identity of an informant was concealed. Expressions such as ‘I have it on the best authority’; ‘In well informed government sources’; ‘According to the most reliable quarters’; ‘circles close to the Prime Minister’ are all coded references to official or ministerial sources.⁷⁹

Newspapers in the 1930s, particularly conservative ones, became willing partners in the culture of secrecy. In so doing they became part of a system of ‘insiders’. They had to

agree to a policy of self-censorship. This was the necessary price to be paid in order to gain greater access to the corridors of power. It is precisely because of this that Prime Ministers, for example, might speak off the record to journalists, thereby bringing them into their confidence.⁸⁰ As for lobby journalists, then as now, to maintain the confidence and support of their sources necessitated a policy of voluntary restraint. This has led to what has been termed as an “informal conspiracy” among newspapers and politicians.⁸¹ Therefore, instead of being the “watchdogs of democracy”, the advocates of open government, newspapers deliberately agree to neglect certain stories. This is the necessary price of the privilege of being part of this club of insiders. Information becomes the exclusive right of a privileged few, with newspapers acting as brokers between the world of high politics and the general public. What and how news is to be presented is determined by the self-interest of those in control of editorial policy. In the 1930s, even the News Department of the Foreign Office was part of this secret culture. This was in spite of its self appointed mission to puncture the misleading optimism being deliberately fed to the press by sources close to the Prime Minister. Those journalists whom Leeper selected to be the recipients of privileged news were made aware of the existence of a distinction between what could and what could not be placed in the public domain. In fact, most of what McDonald was told was for private information only.⁸² In the 1930s, contemporaries were already aware of problems that could arise from treating newspapers as part of a culture of insiders. By thus compromising themselves, newspapers were colluding in the undermining of responsible government.⁸³

A further means by which official contact with the press could be made was through approaches to The Newspaper Proprietors' Association. It has already been shown that the degree to which proprietors exerted pressure on their newspapers is a matter of some debate. Yet, in the course of 1938 especially, official approaches were made to The Newspaper Proprietors Association. This was done on behalf of the government with the intention of securing the support of newspapers for foreign policy. This suggests that the government assumed that, in general, proprietors were willing to exert influence on their papers. During the later 1930s, the *Daily Telegraph* was a less enthusiastic supporter of appeasement than *The Times*. Therefore, within official circles, an approach to Camrose was considered a useful exercise because he was prepared to intervene in directing the paper.⁸⁴

A very important part of the relationship between the press and the government was that played by the more informal links between individual ministers and newsmen. Since much of the evidence of these contacts was never recorded, the Dawson diary for the years 1936-9 is of prime importance. It provides an insight into the variety of contacts between this particular editor and the government. The diary records the almost daily meetings between Dawson and Halifax. The thirties was still the age of the house party, the more controversial of which were held at Cliveden, the Oxfordshire country home of Waldorf Astor. Such gatherings played an important role in the process of informal contact between government and press. Wilson, in his biography of the Astor dynasty, has made the following comment, "there might be useful opportunities to discuss with well informed people the major items on the government agenda."⁸⁵ Nancy Astor, a

dazzling society hostess, exploited the house parties at Cliveden and at her London home as a means of establishing close contact with the ministers of Chamberlain's government. House parties provided an additional venue for personalities in the media to meet influential people such as government ministers. It is reasonable to assume that discussions at such occasions had some impact on the opinions of the guests. There were other social occasions during which influence could be exerted on the press. Shooting parties were one example. As Dawson's diary illustrates, they provided a valuable opportunity for him to meet ministers, Halifax, for example, when both were on holiday in Yorkshire.

The gentlemen's clubs in London were a very important milieu, a uniquely English institution. They were a central part of the British establishment and London society before the Second World War. There existed a variety of such establishments. There were the political clubs, such as those associated with the Conservative Party, the Carlton, Junior Carlton, Reform Club, Conservative Club, and Constitutional Club. There were also the liberal clubs such as the Devonshire Club and the National Liberal Club. In the course of the Twentieth Century, the demise of the fortunes of the parliamentary Liberal Party greatly loosened the political ties between such clubs and the Liberal Party in Parliament. By the mid 1930s, they were really social clubs. Other types of club included those associated with one or more of the armed services, sports, the arts and the ancient universities.⁸⁶ Membership of a London club conferred a certain social cachet. It would be printed on visiting cards, and be included in the *Who's Who* directory.⁸⁷ The London clubs provided a focus for semi-formal and informal gatherings where the worlds

of media and officialdom could integrate. Importantly, they provided an opportunity for pressure to be exerted out of the glare of the public gaze.

The Beefsteak, founded in 1876, and occupying premises near Leicester Square, was a talking club, in which members could approach and talk to one another without formal introductions.⁸⁸ Barrington-Ward was a frequent visitor. Mclachlan's biography of Barrington-Ward stresses the importance of luncheons and dining out which formed an essential part of his daily routine.⁸⁹ It was part of the process of lobbying, an opportunity for him to gather views and news. He dined regularly at the Beefsteak in order to meet typical and influential readers of *The Times*.⁹⁰ Dawson was also a member. From 1936, Dawson went to the club to obtain information on Spain. In fact, his diary, for the years of the Spanish Civil War, records a number of instances when Spain was a topic of conversation over a meal at the Beefsteak .

The Other Club, founded in 1911 by Winston Churchill and F.E. Smith, had no permanent premises of its own, and was very different from the Beefsteak.⁹¹ This club, with its membership pegged at fifty, was one of the smaller and therefore more exclusive of the London clubs. Colin Coote, a member in the thirties, and a leader writer for *The Times* was emphatic about its importance. During the thirties, the members who were anti-appeasers were in the minority, hence Churchill's influence on the club was limited. However, Coote noted in his memoirs that on September 29th 1938, [Munich night], "advantage was taken of every chance to savage Munichite ministers. Duff Cooper was so roughly handled on Munich night itself that he resigned [as minister] the next

morning.”⁹² Contemporaries of Coote and Churchill in The Other Club included Camrose. From 1926, he was chairman of the club.⁹³ Garvin, Viscount Astor, Viscount Rothermere, and his son Esmond, who became chairman of Associated Newspapers in 1937, were also members. In addition, members included those representing the worlds of business, the arts, politics and the armed services.⁹⁴

As mentioned previously, a number of newspapermen were members of the political clubs associated with the Conservative Party. Within the exclusive world of a London club, they therefore had the opportunity to meet with leading members of the party and government. The *Who's Who* directory for 1936, lists the following newspaper personalities as members of the Carlton Club; Arthur Watson, the Astor brothers, Sir Gervase Beckett, Beaverbrook and Viscount Castlerosse.⁹⁵ Their contemporaries included the following leading personalities of the Conservative Party; Stanley Baldwin and his press advisor, J.C.C. Davidson, Anthony Eden, Viscount Halifax, Samuel Hoare, Sir Robert Topping, Captain Margesson, the Conservative Chief Whip, and Neville Chamberlain.

There were other London clubs that provided opportunities for Conservative politicians to meet informally with men from the conservative press. Stanley Baldwin was a member of the Atheneum, founded in 1824. So too were Liddell Hart, Garvin, Dawson and Camrose. The Travellers' Club members included Baldwin, Orme Sargent [Assistant Under Secretary Of State at the Foreign Office], Gavin Strang [head of the Central Department at the Foreign Office], Aubrey Leo Kennedy, Garvin and Dawson. A further

interesting example is the Marlborough Club, of which Franco's official representative in Britain, the 17th Duke of Alba, the 10th of Berwick, was a member. Here, he had the opportunity to meet the Berry brothers, the Astor brothers and Beaverbrook.

The ties between the conservative press and the Conservative Party were also strengthened by the involvement in Conservative politics of some journalists from conservative papers. One example is Winston Churchill, who besides being a Conservative Member of Parliament, was a journalist for the *Evening Standard*, until he was fired by Beaverbrook, and then for the *Daily Telegraph*. Moreover, as a former member of the Cabinet, and as a founder member of The Other Club Churchill was well placed to exploit contacts with Conservative ministers. Indeed, because he had formerly been First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill had, since 1932, been allowed to see highly secret reports, which were made available to him by the Committee of Imperial Defence.⁹⁶ Thus, he was privileged to receive the same intelligence as Cabinet ministers. Furthermore, Churchill used his contacts with ministers in an attempt to exert influence on government policy on Spain.⁹⁷ On July 23rd 1937, Hore Belisha, the Secretary of War, wrote to Eden concerning a call he had from Churchill, in which Churchill suggested that Britain demand that Franco remove his guns which were threatening the Straits of Gibraltar. Churchill advised that Franco should be threatened with the use of force if he refused to comply.⁹⁸ Churchill was also in possession of a detailed intelligence report sent to him by a Non-Intervention observer on the Franco-Spanish frontier in the summer of 1937. The report gave details of a large smuggling of arms over the French frontier. Such activity was in contravention of the Non-Intervention Agreement. Churchill made

this report available to Eden, but the latter seemed unconcerned.⁹⁹ He also corresponded with the Marques Merry del Val, the Francoist, former ambassador to the court of St. James, and with Azcarate, the Spanish ambassador in London during the Civil War.¹⁰⁰

With his widespread connections, someone like Churchill could be of use in a wider, diplomatic sense. In June 1937, Lord Samuel, leader of the Liberals in the House of Lords, wrote to Churchill, hoping to enlist his support in securing an armistice in Spain.¹⁰¹ Another correspondent for a conservative newspaper whose international connections the British government attempted to exploit was General A.C. Temperley [military correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*]. Temperley was acquainted with the German Minister of War, General Von Blomberg. On October 29th 1937, Eden wrote to Temperley, requesting him to persuade Von Blomberg to use his influence on Franco to desist from mass killings, and to adopt a policy of moderation in the territories under rebel control. Eden at this time was particularly concerned about reports of massacres by the insurgents in Asturias.¹⁰² Temperley agreed to write to Von Blomberg, who replied, that in this matter, he was unable to exert any influence upon Franco.¹⁰³

Men representing the worlds of conservative press and politics moved in a similar social environment. In this way, some degree of consensus was more likely to become established. However, Liberal and Labour politicians, and the proprietors and editors of the journals sympathetic to the parliamentary opposition, operated within a different framework from the conservatives, and also, to some extent, from each other. For the Labour parliamentary party, there was no equivalent of the political gentlemen's clubs,

such as those associated with the Conservative Party, where Labour Members of Parliament could meet with editors and proprietors. In contrast to Labour, Liberal politicians and newspapermen did move in club circles. Sir Walter Layton, editor of *The News Chronicle*, was a member of the National Liberal Club.¹⁰⁴ Hubback, in his biography of Layton, referred to the editor as moving in radical liberal circles. As a result, an alternative consensus to the conservative one on domestic and foreign affairs was formed out of the interaction of another group of like-minded people in Whitehall, Westminster and in clubs to which they belonged. In the liberal circle to which Layton belonged were the following: Cambridge economists J.M. Keynes, Herbert Henderson, Dennis Robertson; ex civil servants such as William Beveridge, Josiah Stamp, Arthur Salter; businessmen such as Ernest Simon, Seebohm Rowntree, Gilbert Murray, Graham Wallace, Ramsay Muir; politicians such as Noel Baker, Charles Masterman.¹⁰⁵

The position of *The Times* of London deserves further attention precisely because, as we shall see later, it was regarded abroad as the semi-official mouthpiece of the government and highly influential. How exactly pressure was directly exerted on a particular paper is not often easy to illustrate, yet one way of exploring attempts at influence can be seen in letters to the editor. Of course, the practice of writing to the editor with a view to having the letter published was not exclusive to *The Times*. However, in that paper, letters to the editor were given particular coverage. Not only were they accorded a full page, but letters were also printed alongside the leader column as well. In addition, correspondence to which the editor wanted to draw attention was printed under a column headed "Points From Letters", and, on occasion, referred to in the editorial itself.

Individuals of influence, or groups representing influential interests wrote to *The Times* on a whole range of issues relating to the Spanish Civil War. For instance, in the summer of 1936, a variety of letters was published concerning the issues at stake in the Civil War. One example was a joint letter, whose signatories included Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, an advocate of the Republican cause. The letter pointed out that the Republican regime was a democratic state “fighting against military despotism and fascism.”¹⁰⁶ An example of a joint letter from an influential economic interest group was that from the ‘Committee of British Ship Owners Trading To Spain’, outlining, in the summer of 1938, the case for the defence of their rights to trade in a war zone.¹⁰⁷

A number of the letters referred to individual articles, thus providing evidence of the influence of the paper on certain individuals, including Spaniards from both sides of the conflict. The leader column “The Spanish Vortex”, which appeared on August 19th 1936, provoked a variety of correspondence, including a letter written by a pro rebel landowner from Andalusia, who felt it necessary to respond to what he interpreted as criticisms about the nature of the insurrection.¹⁰⁸ From the Republican side, a letter written by Jose S. De Lizaso, a representative of the Basque Government, concerning the leading article on the destruction of Guernica, published on May 5th 1937, stated, “[y]our leading article on Guernica today is an effective retort to the allegations of the Nazi press in Germany.”¹⁰⁹

Influence is not easy to assess. What criteria influenced the selection of letters to be published is an important factor in assessing how representative the letters actually were of all the Civil War correspondence which was received by the editorial offices. Indeed, the process of selection involved the judgement of the editorial staff and, on occasion, may have even reflected bias. For example, no letters were published on the subject of the Italian defeat at Guadalajara, in the spring of 1937, nor on the arrival to Britain in late May of 4 000 Basque refugee children from the besieged city of Bilbao. In the priority given to individual correspondence, bias may have been reflected in the positioning of letters on the page. For example, letters on a particular theme were listed under a heading e.g. "BOMBED BRITISH SHIPS."¹¹⁰ Again, the size of headings, and, indeed, which column of the letters' page they appeared were means by which a subtle form of bias could be enacted. A further problem concerning the issue of influence regarding the correspondence to *The Times* is that the motives of the correspondents themselves are not always clear. For example, were they writing to the editor or to other correspondents? Certainly, in the correspondence columns, on one level, it was possible to see a debate between competing influences. Take, for instance, the letters concerning the bombing of British ships. On July 1st 1938, the paper printed a letter on this issue from E.N. Bennett, M.P.¹¹¹ That letter triggered correspondence from a variety of quarters, particularly those offended by his accusations. However, much of the correspondence strayed from the issue of whether or not British registered shipping, engaged in traffic to Republican Spain, had the right to be protected. For example, Lord Cecil, who had been minister for blockade in the First World War, wrote in reply to Bennett, denying the allegation that he was still minister after the signing of the armistice and, therefore, responsible for the continuation

of the blockade conditions against Germany during the armistice period.¹¹² Later, on July 6th, Captain Alfred Dewar, Royal Navy, took issue with Bennett concerning the duration of the blockade imposed against Germany.¹¹³ The correspondence that had been thus generated diverged significantly from the more central question raised by Bennett's letter. This was the Nationalists' right to impose a blockade of Spanish Republican ports, since, in effect, a state of war existed in Spain. After all, the British government had, in the First World War, imposed a blockade on German ports. Indeed, the correspondence, or, rather, that which the editors agreed to publish, failed to address the key question of whether Franco's Spain constituted a legitimate authority rather than merely resulting from an insurrection against the legal authority of the Spanish government.

The focus of the chapter will now turn towards the divergence in the presentation of news by the press. This differed greatly among even conservative newspapers.¹¹⁴ In the national papers owned by the Berry brothers, editorial opinion was expressed less subtly than in *The Times*. In accordance with the custom of quality newspapers at the time, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Times* still reserved the front page for advertisements. Nevertheless, on the top right hand corner of the page there would appear, in bold lettering, the current news item to which the editor wished to draw the attention of his readers. These papers also made extensive use of bold print to draw attention to what the editor considered to be key points. This technique was applied both to the summary of main articles as well as to particular paragraphs within the article itself. An important difference between these papers and *The Times* can also be seen in the space allocated to the leader column. In *The Times* this was officially the only place where opinion was

expressed and, as a result, this occupied virtually the entire page. In the other two papers, however, it was usual for the leader column to be smaller and space would be made for other regular opinion articles written under a pseudonym, for example 'Pertinax' in the *Daily Telegraph* or 'Scrutator'¹¹⁵ in the *Sunday Times*. In fact, articles by 'Scrutator' were always more substantial than the leader comment. In this respect the approach adopted by the Berry owned papers towards leader columns was similar to that of most other conservative papers. In the *Observer*, for example, opinion was also conveyed in a weekly column, 'The World Week by Week', which appeared on the same page as the leader column.

The divergence of *The Times* from the practice of other conservative papers was due to a number of factors. Firstly, the striking similarities among its main rivals in the quality market, the Berry owned papers, was, until 1937, due to the influence of the joint ownership of these papers. Also, Camrose was determined to drive up the circulation figures of the *Daily Telegraph* to make it the leading quality conservative paper. In the drive to increase the circulation of the *Daily Telegraph*, variations in style reflected a conscious attempt to differentiate it from *The Times*. Moreover, it would appear that changes to the style of the *Daily Telegraph* were reflected also in the *Sunday Times*. Fundamental to the uniqueness of *The Times* was the way in which it perceived itself as representing very closely the views of the government.¹¹⁶ This was to have a profound influence on the way in which news and opinion could be presented. Since the tradition of this paper was that opinion could be expressed only in the leader column, space was reserved elsewhere for the presentation of news but not for the expression of opinion.

This imposed constraints on journalists such as Liddell Hart who were denied the opportunity to express their concerns about government policy on Spain. The task of the leader writer was not to express his own, personal view, but that of *The Times* itself. This was because of the paper's role as part of the British establishment. Both at home and abroad, it was perceived as the semi-official mouthpiece of the British government. In practice, the viewpoint of *The Times* had to be defined by the editor or his deputy. The Dawson diary for the later thirties contains a number of examples in which the editor revised and redrafted leader articles written by his subordinates. In fact, from the evidence of his diary, it seems that the editor was more concerned about the leader articles than about any other item in the paper. For this was where his support for appeasement and, therefore, sympathy for the German and Italian perspective was most consistently defended.

In its presentation of news on the Spanish Civil War, *The Times* strove to give the impression that it was neutral. This is because it accepted and supported Non-Intervention as a genuinely neutral policy. However, the neutrality of the paper was a facade. *The Times* was simply more subtle regarding its prejudices. The distinction made by the editors between opinion and news was never hard and fast. Highly opinionated articles were on occasion allowed to appear outside the leader columns, for example, the Guernica articles by George Lowther Steer in April and May of 1937. Thus Barrington-Ward's refusal to print Liddell-Hart's articles in the news columns on the grounds that they were too opinionated was not true.¹¹⁷ The reason why Liddell-Hart's articles on Spain in 1937 were not printed was because they disagreed with the official view of *The*

Times. As in the case of other newspapers, the editor could emphasize the importance of certain themes both by the order in which items appeared and by the space allotted to them. The omission of leader comment on controversial issues in the Civil War was another subtle means by which editorial influence could affect the paper. The number of occasions upon which *The Times* failed to pronounce its opinion, was surprising given its importance to, and resonance with, those sections of the British public most concerned by the Civil War. Just like other papers, *The Times* decided the issues to which it wished to draw attention. The selection of items upon which to comment in the leader column is as clear a reflection of bias as any.

There were clear differences of presentation between the quality newspapers and the more popular press. The *Observer* and the *Daily Mail* were unusual among the conservative papers in that they were open about their preference for a rebel victory in Spain. The overtly subjective standpoint of the *Daily Mail* was indicated not only in the leader comment, but also in the presentation of news within the paper, which, on the issue of the Spanish war, had made no pretence of neutrality. Attention was drawn to the key headline of the day by its inclusion, in block capitals, on the first page. The main article appeared on the same page as the leader column. The by line of the main article in the leader column was, unlike other conservative papers, in very large capital letters. Furthermore, the leader column was entirely devoted to the expression of opinion. The attitude of the *Daily Mail* reflected that of its proprietor and editor in chief, Viscount Rothermere. Rothermere's horror of communism was reflected in the *Daily Mail's* presentation of the Civil War. Since the conflict was reported as a struggle between

communism and civilization, the sympathy of the paper could be for no other cause than with the rebellion. The paper confidently predicted the victory of the uprising long before either the *Morning Post* or the *Observer* was prepared to do so. The headlines in the *Daily Mail* also revealed clearly the partisanship of the paper. On July 27th 1936, the headline “VICTORY OR TERROR” was presented to readers as the stark choice in Spain.¹¹⁸ On page 10 of August 1st 1936, the headline for a series of articles on the Civil War was, “ROUT OF SPANISH RED ARMY.”¹¹⁹ During that month, the paper was concerned with the prospect of the French Popular Front government coming to the assistance of the Spanish Popular Front regime in Madrid. The hostility of the *Daily Mail* towards such a development was clearly shown in the following leader by line, “FRANCE’S RED PERIL.”¹²⁰ Confidence in the early victory of the rebel forces was demonstrated in the following byline for the leader column, “RED ROUT CERTAIN.”¹²¹

The *Daily Express*, influenced by Beaverbrook’s views on isolation, supported the policy of Non-Intervention because it aimed to contain the War to Spain. As in the case of its rival, the *Daily Mail*, its leader columns too were devoted to expressing opinion. Indeed unlike other conservative papers, the leader column was aptly entitled “OPINION”. Again, unlike other conservative papers, in order to emphasize certain points, words in Italics or in block capitals appeared in the leader column. An example of this technique is the following extract in support of Non-Intervention, which appeared in the leader column for August 3rd 1936:

the best thing *you* can do about it [the Civil War] is do nothing - if two countries fight each other in Europe it is their affair. If one European

country divides into two parts, and the parts fight each other it is their affair. Either way, it is not OURS.¹²²

Unlike other conservative papers referred to in this chapter, news articles appeared on the first two pages of the paper. In this way the *Daily Express* was similar to the way news was deployed in papers such as the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald*. The subjective tone of the paper, like that of the *Daily Mail*, was reflected in leader column by lines. Unlike those of the *Daily Mail*, however, they reflected the isolationist views of Beaverbrook towards conflict in Europe. On August 26th 1936, for example, the by line on an article supportive of Non-Intervention was, 'AS FOR US- Keep out!'¹²³ Later, on both August 28th and 29th, the *Daily Express* defended its stand on Spain against those who criticized the paper for not being neutral. 'As We See Things'¹²⁴ which appeared on 28th argued that the paper had reported both sides in the Civil War fairly. In 'What We Think' and 'What We Did' the following day, the paper again defended its neutral stance. Moreover, the paper took exception to the charge being levelled against it by the Labour Party that it was backing the rebellion in Spain.

Whether or not they made clear their preference for a rebel victory, for the duration of the Civil War, all national conservative papers supported the policy of Non-Intervention. In effect, whether intentionally or not, such a stand meant supporting the denial to the legal government in Spain of its right, under international law, to purchase arms abroad. The restitution of these rights was, of course, essential if the Republic was to stand any chance of crushing the insurrection. Although it is true that there were many sympathizers of the Franco cause either working for, or readers of, conservative newspapers, this pro rebel

bias was not reflected equally across conservative papers. This was due to a number of factors. Firstly, the style and tone of the more popular *Daily Mail* meant it could be blatant in expressing its pro-rebel opinion. Secondly, Beaverbrook, who we shall see later, was more sympathetic to the Republican cause, was keen that the *Daily Express* should maintain the appearance of neutrality. Thirdly, the educated readership for which the leading quality papers catered was reflected in the lack of sensationalism in the presentation of news. Unlike the more popular conservative papers, the by lines in the leader columns merely indicated the theme for the following article. In the *Observer* opinion column, 'The World Week by Week', by lines briefly described the theme of the following article. The claims made by quality papers and especially *The Times* that they were impartial prevented them from expressing sympathy for the Spanish Nationalists in a more overt way. It would have undermined the claim made by these newspapers that the policy of Non-Intervention, which they were defending, was as neutral as they maintained. However, as we shall see in later chapters, claims of impartiality in the conservative press were never quite convincing enough for those journalists who became increasingly concerned at the failure of their papers to realize the potential danger to Britain of a Nationalist victory in Spain.

The attitude of the *Morning Post* deserves special consideration. It was misleading to the point of cynicism. H.A. Gwynne, the editor, who had autonomy over editorial policy, maintained the fiction that the paper was neutral even though he was strongly sympathetic towards the rebel cause. On August 3rd 1936, the leader column reiterated its opposition to any outside assistance to the struggle in Spain, including the dispatch of Italian planes

to Franco: "It is therefore most definitely to be hoped that the affair of Italian aeroplanes in French Morocco will prove to be nothing more than the irresponsible escapade of individuals."¹²⁵ However, the dispatch of aeroplanes to the beleaguered rebel forces in Spanish Morocco was vital to secure the transport of the troops across the Straits of Gibraltar, which at the time, were patrolled by the Spanish fleet. The arrival of the troops saved the rebellion on the mainland from certain defeat. At this time Gwynne was corresponding with the Marques Merry del Val, to whom he expressed his support for the rebellion. The Marques also performed a valuable service to Gwynne in getting his correspondents over the French frontier to report from rebel Spain.¹²⁶ Indeed, by the spring of 1937, the attitude of the *Morning Post* was overtly pro-Franco, critical of the British government for refusing to recognize his government as a belligerent power. This was in spite of the fact that at this time Nationalist military success in Spain was heavily dependent on the continued supply of men and material from both Germany and Italy. Such action was, of course, in defiance of the principle of Non-Intervention, which the paper had readily defended in the previous August.

Truth also deserves special consideration because of the partisan stance it took at the outbreak of the war. Alone of the conservative papers, *Truth* was overtly sympathetic towards the Republican cause. This was curious given the financial control of the paper by the Conservative Party. Also, unlike other papers, the main focus of *Truth* was on the presentation of opinion rather than on achieving a balance between opinion and news. The lengthy editorial 'Entrenous' focused on a range of topics and issues. It was always the first article, and covered a number of pages in each edition. As the war progressed

Truth adopted a rather ambivalent attitude towards the Spanish Republic. On July 22nd, for example, the first issue after the outbreak of the war, 'Entrenous' expressed an opinion in favour of the Spanish government. In so doing, it was to turn on its head the Kerensky thesis, used in official Conservative and civil service circles, to justify a hostile attitude towards the Spanish government. Indeed, in *Truth*, the Spanish rebels were compared with the Bolsheviks who, in 1917, threatened the Kerensky regime in Petrograd. As if directly addressing the conservative critics of the Spanish government, Entrenous wrote, "experience should warn professed lovers of order, who think that the overthrow of the Republican moderates is to be desired."¹²⁷ Thus, the right-wing rebellion was portrayed as being as much of a threat to British interests abroad as the Bolshevik overthrow of the Provisional government in Russia had been a quarter of a century previously. Nevertheless, in the following week in a special article, "Hopeless Spain", the opinion expressed was more in tune with the official Conservative view of the war: "it is one of the worst features of this tragical business that there is so little right and so much wrong on both sides."¹²⁸ The ambivalence in the attitude of *Truth* was probably a reflection of the gradual change in editorial policy following Ball's takeover of the publication the previous June. Financial control did not give full editorial control to Joseph Ball, hence the paper retained links with its radical and liberal traditions, and this would account for the sympathy that was expressed for a democratic regime in Spain.

The discussion will now turn more specifically to an analysis of terms of discourse employed by different conservative newspapers, with particular reference to the selection of words and phrases. Not surprisingly, there was a clear distinction between papers of

right wing views compared with those papers which adopted a more moderate position. Newspapers which took a position overtly in favour of the Spanish Nationalist cause denied the legitimacy of the internationally recognized Republican regime in Madrid. The emotive language used to describe both the rebels and the Republican government reinforced this. In such papers the Republican authorities were associated with violence, chaos and the breakdown of law and order, all of which justified Franco's taking up of arms against the lawfully constituted authority of the Spanish government. Take, for example, the *Daily Mail* leader of July 20th titled 'Death Grips Spain'. Paradoxically, the challenge posed to law and order in Spain, by the military rising, was portrayed as an attempt to reimpose law and order, denied to the country by the "weak government of the left".¹²⁹ A further example of the association of the Republic with the collapse of law and order, hence justifying the attempt to overthrow it can be seen in the lead article of the *Observer* for August 30th 1936, which carried the headline 'WOMEN AND CHILDREN BURNT ALIVE'.¹³⁰ In this instance, the absence of the rule of law in Republican held areas being exemplified by an alleged atrocity. These papers also took it upon themselves to challenge those who, quite correctly, held the view that the Republican regime represented the legal authority in Spain. Take, for example, the *Observer* which, on September 12th 1937, argued against what it saw as "[t]he elementary nonsense of still talking of Valencia as 'the government of Spain'".¹³¹

In their discourse concerning the two sides in Spain, ideological labelling played a very important part in the process by which right wing papers continued to deny the legitimacy of the Republican government. The latter was never referred to as the government of

Spain; the term government was always couched in qualified terms such as ‘the Valencia government/ authorities’ or the ‘red government’. Indeed, the reference to ‘red’ was intended to bring it into association with Communist Russian influence. Hence, the rebellion could be further justified as a patriotic uprising against an authority which, effectively, was providing a gateway for the infiltration of foreign, communist menace, firstly into Spain and thence into Western Europe. Commenting on the capture of Malaga by the Nationalist forces, the leader of the *Daily Mail* contrasted the patriots as represented by the forces under Franco, compared with the “murderous barbarians who take their orders from Moscow”.¹³² In its editorial comment on the fall of Malaga, the *Morning Post* also contrasted what it saw as the loyal Spanish cause, represented by the Nationalists compared with the Republicans.¹³³ Indeed, Franco was compared with the crusaders of the reconquista of medieval Spain fighting against a foreign invader represented by the “savage and godless tyranny” of his opponents. Later, on July 19th 1937, the same paper returned to the theme of the reconquista, confident that the modern crusaders would, as their forbears had “rolled back the path of Islam”, roll back the new and, in the eyes of the editorial, more serious threat of ideological communism.¹³⁴ In referring to Franco as a modern crusader, the *Morning Post* but also the *Observer*,¹³⁵ were, in effect, denying the reality that it was Franco who, in the summer of 1936, had participated in an invasion of the Spanish mainland. Ironically, the so-called modern, patriotic crusade in defence of Catholic civilization was, in the first weeks of the war heavily reliant on Muslim troops transported across the Straits of Gibraltar from Spanish Morocco.

Right wing conservative papers entered into discourse with those whom they saw as sympathizing with the Republican authorities. Ironically, given the tone of many of their articles on the Spanish war, these papers were also critical of what they perceived as partisan reporting. On September 27th 1936, the *Observer*, for example, was critical of what it saw as the “obstinate convention which persists of dubbing the one side the ‘Government’ and the other side the ‘rebels’” as being “wholly untrue and unfair to the facts”.¹³⁶ Later, in a lead article written by a Francoist sympathizer, Arthur Bryant, the Spanish Nationalists were referred to as having “been deliberately misrepresented in the press of this country as a gang of blood thirsty rebels”.¹³⁷ Similar sentiments were expressed earlier by the leader column of the *Morning Post* on May 8th 1937. In a clearer reference to the part of newspapers in the propaganda offensive against the Nationalist side, blame was placed on the influence of left wing sympathizers of the Spanish Republic whose alleged ingenuity enabled them successfully to influence public opinion against the Nationalists.¹³⁸

At least in the early stages of the war, papers associated with more moderate opinion within conservative press circles represented both sides as equally to blame for the violence and bloodshed in Spain. On August 21st 1936, for example, *The Times* leader questioned both the democratic nature of a Republican government which failed to prevent the shooting of prisoners by “extra-legal and unofficial organizations” and also the patriotism of the rebels since the latter “brought Moorish troops to Andalusia”.¹³⁹ In fact, newspapers of more moderate views saw the war as being fought between two extremes. This theme is, perhaps, aptly summed up in the *Yorkshire Post* leader for July

21st 1936, which viewed the struggle as “a ruthless clash between two extremes”.¹⁴⁰

However, as we shall see later, from the late winter of 1937, a number of more moderate conservative papers were to adopt a more partisan view in favour of the Nationalists.

As will be shown more clearly in later chapters, what appeared to be a consensus in the conservative press in support of government policy on Spain was an illusion. For newspapers where those in control of editorial policy were especially enthusiastic about the rebel cause in Spain, government policy would be defended as long as it did not appear to harm the prospects of a Nationalist victory. Hence, the *Observer*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Morning Post* cynically defended the neutrality of a policy of Non-Intervention because it hindered the prospects of a Republican victory in Spain. In newspapers which were more closely associated with political Conservatism, the emphasis was on creating the impression that the Spanish Republic was not a sister democracy, and therefore not entitled to the same right of purchasing arms abroad as any other legally recognized government. Most conservative papers clung to the facade that they were upholding a genuinely neutral policy, and were thus less honest than, for example, the *Daily Mail* that had never tried to conceal its partisan viewpoint. However, the development of the Civil War over the course of three years was to place relationships between journalists and editors in pro-government papers under strain, as the genuineness of British neutrality towards the conflict came increasingly under question.

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- ¹ PEP, *Report on the British Press* (London, April 1938), quoted in Cockett, *Twilight of Truth* (London, 1989), p.25
- ² S.J. Taylor, *The Great Outsiders, Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail* (London, 1996), p.285.
- ³ Viscount Camrose, *British Newspapers and Their Controllers* (London, 1947), p.40.
- ⁴ Lord Hartwell, in *William Camrose Giant of Fleet Street* (London, 1992), p.171. Lord Hartwell (Seymour Berry) was the eldest son of Viscount Camrose. During the thirties he was the managing editor of the *Daily Telegraph*.
- ⁵ Viscount Camrose, *British Newspapers and Their Controllers*, p.40. Moreover between 1930-37, circulation of *The Times* increased by only 5 000, see PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p.114.
- ⁶ Camrose, *British Newspapers and Their Controllers*, pp.31-2.
- ⁷ Harold Hobson, Phillip Knightley, Leonard Russell, *The Pearl Of Days*, p.202.
- ⁸ Camrose, *British Newspapers and Their Controllers*, p.65.
- ⁹ PEP, *Report on the British Press*, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.26.
- ¹⁰ *Ninety First Issue Of the Newspaper Press Directory and Advertizers' Guide* (London, 1936)
- ¹¹ Cockett, *The Twilight of Truth*, pp.25-6.
- ¹² The *Morning Post*, the oldest of the conservative London daily newspapers, had been facing financial difficulties for some time. In 1937, Viscount Camrose acquired ownership of the paper. Although for a time he ran it as a separate newspaper, on October 1st of that year it merged with the *Daily Telegraph*.
- ¹³ The *Morning Post* was highly critical of the refusal of the British government to recognize Nationalist Spain as a belligerent, and warned the readers of the danger to Britain in the future: "let us beware that the attempt to make the best of both worlds does not presently recoil against ourselves": 'Fog over Spain', *Morning Post*, April 15th 1937, p.12.
- ¹⁴ *Ninety-First Annual Issue of the Newspaper Press Directory*, pp.69-71.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.70. Gwynne also declared, "[t]he *Morning Post* has always been the Conservative paper, because of our independent attitude, the Central Office

[Conservative Party headquarters in London] some years ago gave us the cold shoulder”: ‘The Policy of the Morning Post’, Gwynne papers; deposit 31.

- ¹⁶ In its report, PEP wrote that *The Times* “generally supports the National government.” In contrast to this, the *Daily Telegraph* was described as “fully” supportive of the government, see PEP *Report on the British Press*, p.114. In fact, as we shall see, *The Times* was to support the government to a greater extent than any other paper.
- ¹⁷ For a full account of how *Truth* was acquired by Joseph Ball on behalf of the National Publicity Bureau, see ‘Communication, Ball, Chamberlain and Truth’. The paper had begun in 1876, as a radical liberal publication. After the First World War, a marked decline in sales made it vulnerable to a takeover bid. Ball saw an opportunity clandestinely to use Party funds to acquire a journal that would become closely tied to the Conservative Party.
- ¹⁸ Cockett, *Twilight Of Truth*, p.9.
- ¹⁹ *Truth* “represented an attempt by a caucus within the British Government to influence events anonymously via the control of a newspaper”: Cockett, *Communication, Ball, Chamberlain and Truth*, p.142. It was not until a private inquiry, instigated by Lord Vansittart, was carried out in 1941, that the connection between the journal and the Conservative Party ceased to be known only to a faction within the party.
- ²⁰ An example of how the *Truth* was used to attack Chamberlain’s opponents is its coverage of the resignation of Hore Belisha. During the weekend before he was due to speak to Parliament, a copy of *Truth* which contained a highly critical article of him was circulated to every member of Parliament, see R.J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore Belisha* (London, 1960), p.287.
- ²¹ During the abdication crisis, because of the friendship of Camrose with the Prime Minister, J.C.C. Davidson chose the *Daily Telegraph* to be the recipient of special conferences. He made it his business to see that the paper was “completely informed of all developments”: Duff Hart Davis, *The House The Berrys Built* (London, 1990), p.83.
- ²² Hartwell, *Camrose, Giant of Fleet Street*, p.212.
- ²³ In April 1938, Churchill was sacked from his post at the *Evening Standard*. He asked Camrose if he could be allowed to write for the *Daily Telegraph*. Camrose agreed that Churchill be permitted to write a fortnightly political article for the paper, see Duff Hart-Davis, *The House The Berrys Built*, p.90-1.
- ²⁴ *Who’s Who 1937* (London, 1937), p.532 and p.832.

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- ²⁵ *Who's Who 1936* (London, 1936), p.3515.
- ²⁶ Hobson, Knightley and Russell, *The Pearl Of Days*, p.192.
- ²⁷ *Who's Who 1936*, p.107
- ²⁸ Looking back on the relationship between Dawson and Halifax during the 1930s, McDonald wrote, "their common environment of Eton, Oxford and Yorkshire squirearchy helped to shape a common outlook on most matters": Iverach McDonald, *A Man of the Times: Talks and Travels in a Disturbed World* (London, 1976), p.51.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.52.
- ³⁰ Stanley Morrison, *History Of The Times, Volume 4, Part Two, 1912-1948* (London, 1952), p.914.
- ³¹ John Evelyn Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson And Our Times* (London, 1955), p.373.
- ³² Churchill remarked about the foreign policy of Chamberlain that he would "battle tirelessly in the teeth of the facts." Later, in the first volume of his memoirs, Churchill again passed judgement on the foreign policy of Chamberlain. He wrote that the Prime Minister was responsible "for grave misjudgements of facts, having deluded himself and imposed his errors on his subservient colleagues and upon the unhappy British public opinion": W. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p.309.
- ³³ Both papers began circulation in 1754. Thus, they are the oldest of the papers which form the basis of this thesis.
- ³⁴ After his departure from the Foreign Office in February 1938, Eden continued to find support from Mann. Indeed, throughout 1938-9, Eden and Mann maintained a correspondence with each other, in which emerged the similarities of their views on foreign policy issues, including their outlook on the Spanish Civil War.
- ³⁵ S.J. Taylor, *The Great Outsiders: Northcliffe, Rothermere and the Daily Mail* (London, 1996), p.228.
- ³⁶ On November 18th 1922, Rothermere bought 49% of Beaverbrook's shares in London Express newspapers, paying him £200 000 and 80 000 *Daily Mail* Trust shares: *Ibid.*, p.229.
- ³⁷ Hugh Cudlipp, *The Prerogative of the Habit: Press Barons and Power* (London, 1986), p.166.

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- ³⁸ Ibid., p.250. However, Cudlipp exaggerates when he suggests that Beaverbrook's "object was to solely use the press for political propaganda to influence the political reader." Beaverbrook owned a great many newspapers, the *Daily Express* was unusual in the degree of proprietorial influence which was exerted over it.
- ³⁹ "[The] telephone constantly rang. Wherever Beaverbrook went the telephone followed...leading articles, features ideas, news stories, gossip paragraphs, criticism and praise flowed over the telephone...": Arthur Christiansen, *Headlines All My Life* (London, 1961), p.122.
- ⁴⁰ Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook A Life*, p.352.
- ⁴¹ "When he founded the British Movement of Fascists in 1922 he [Mosley] was represented to the readers of the *Daily Mail* and other Rothermere journals as a man of sterling character." Yet, pressure on Rothermere from Jews, who provided financial support for the *Daily Mail*, forced the proprietor to abandon his support for Moseley's movement, see Cudlipp, *The Prerogative Of The Habit*, p.168.
- ⁴² Ibid., p.174.
- ⁴³ Taylor, *The Great Outsiders*, p.132.
- ⁴⁴ Derek Wilson, *The Astors: The Life and Times of the Astor Dynasty* (London, 1992), p.273.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., p.267.
- ⁴⁶ David Ayerst, *Garvin of the Observer* (London, 1985), p.260. See also the Gwynne Papers, deposit 24. The letters between the Marques and Gwynne illustrate their mutual respect.
- ⁴⁷ Donald Mclachlan, *In The Chair* (London, 1971) p.40. See also p.42, Barrington-Ward joined *The Times* in 1913, becoming secretary to the editor in February of 1914, Ibid., p.42.
- ⁴⁸ Mclachlan, *In The Chair*, p.66.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p.154.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p.40, Dawson's only previous experience in journalism was as editor of the *Johannesburg Star*. In September 1912, Lord Northcliffe appointed him as editor of *The Times*. McDonald certainly rated Dawson highly: "over all this team of eccentrics and plodders there was never any doubt about Geoffrey Dawson's

supremacy”: McDonald, *A Man of The Times*, p.50.

⁵¹ Hartwell, *Camrose, Giant of Fleet Street*, p.3.

⁵² Hobson, Knightley and Russell, *The Pearl Of Days*, p.192.

⁵³ Dawson was a loyal defender of the government policy of appeasement: “he too was seeking a way to escape from the catastrophe of another world war”: Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and our Times*, p.373.

⁵⁴ Coote was a contemporary of Leo Kennedy at Oxford. Kennedy had a distinguished war record, receiving both the D.S.O. and the M.C. However, according to Coote, “when Hitler marched into the Rhineland and I rushed hopefully into his room expecting that the breaking of the Fuhrer’s own pledges would be castigated, I found him writing a leader himself entitled ‘A Chance To Rebuild’”: Colin R. Coote, *Editorial: The Memoirs of Colin R. Coote* (London, 1965), pp.169-70. Kennedy, who was also assistant Foreign Editor of *The Times*, served with the Scots’ Guards during the First World War. Ralph Deakin, the news editor, served in both France and Belgium between 1916-19, see *Who’s Who 1936*, pages 844 and 862.

⁵⁵ Mclachlan, *In The Chair*, p.47. Eden too had served at the battle of the Somme.

⁵⁶ J.M. Winter, *The Great War And The British People* (Basingstoke, 1987), p.84.

⁵⁷ In 1927, in return for championing the cause of the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, Rothermere was offered the Hungarian crown.

⁵⁸ *Who’s Who 1936*, pp.3515-6.

⁵⁹ For a statistical analysis of the death rate of military personnel from the higher social groups during the First World War see J. Winter, *The Great War And The British People*, pp. 92-99.

⁶⁰ For a copy of the lobby correspondent rules see Jeremy Tunstall, *The Westminster Lobby Correspondent* (London, 1970), pp.124-8.

⁶¹ Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.4.

⁶² For an excellent survey of the formal and informal contacts between the press and the government in the 1930s see Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp. 3-32.

⁶³ James Margach, *The Abuse of Power* (London, 1978), p.50.

⁶⁴ Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp.8-9.

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- ⁶⁵ Margach, *The Abuse of Power*, p.53.
- ⁶⁶ Michael Cockerell, Peter Hennessey and David Walker, *Sources Close to the Prime Minister* (London, 1984), p.37. "Following the appointment in 1931 of George Steward at No.10 Downing Street, similar appointments were made to all other ministries and departments": Margach, *The Anatomy of Power*, p.137.
- ⁶⁷ Evidence of the activities of the Prime Minister's Press Office for this period is sparse "because no files of that office survive": Cockett, *The Twilight of Truth*, p.4.
- ⁶⁸ Philip Taylor, *The Projection of British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda* (Cambridge, 1981) p. 43.
- ⁶⁹ Cockett, *Twilight Of Truth*, p.16
- ⁷⁰ Taylor, *The Projection of British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda*, p.28.
- ⁷¹ W.E.H. Whyte, 'The FCO and the Media' in Annabelle May and Kathryn Rowan, (eds.), *Inside Information: British Government and the Media* (London, 1982), p.194.
- ⁷² For a description of how News Department officials attempted to influence the press see Iverach McDonald, *A Man of The Times*, p.54. Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office shared the concerns of the News Department. Vansittart used Leeper's contacts in the press to place information in the public domain, warning of developments in the Third Reich, see Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.22.
- ⁷³ "You have got to stick to the truth. It may not be the whole – and it certainly won't *always* be the whole truth, but it must if possible be nothing but the truth": Whyte, 'The FCO and the Media', p.195.
- ⁷⁴ PRO, FO 395/562, P2404, August 5th 1938.
- ⁷⁵ Margach, *The Abuse of Power*, p.51
- ⁷⁶ S.J. Taylor, 'Sources close to the Prime Minister', *Inside Information*, p.39.
- ⁷⁷ Margach, *The Anatomy of Power*, p.139.
- ⁷⁸ Tunstall, *The Westminster Lobby Correspondent*, p.124.

⁷⁹ Margach, *The Abuse of Power*, p.3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁸¹ David Mckie, 'The Lobby and other Matters' in *Inside Information*, p.180.

⁸² Iverach McDonald. *A Man of The Times*, p.55.

⁸³ A number of books written by contemporaries either during the thirties or much later, make this point quite clear. As an example, Margach wrote that when correspondents were first admitted to the press gallery of the House of Commons, they became "ex officio members of the political system": Margach, *The Anatomy of Power*, pp.128-9.

⁸⁴ "Camrose would summon any member of staff with whom he wished to confer principally the editor, who would be called up to his first meeting at about midday...Any Project that emanated from Camrose was a 'must', and into the paper it would go": Duff Hart-Davies, *The House the Berry's Built*, p.65.

⁸⁵ Moreover, Cockburn, editor of *The Week*, claimed that on the weekend of 23rd to 24th October 1937, a plot was hatched at Cliveden. It involved sending Lord Halifax to Berlin, to offer Hitler a free hand in Europe in return for Germany's abandoning her colonial ambitions, yet, "there was no Cliveden set": Wilson, *The Astors*, p.272.

⁸⁶ For a comprehensive review of the London club scene in 1963 see Charles Graves, *In Leather Armchairs, The Chivas Regal Book Of London Clubs* (London, 1963) Although it is not a complete guide to the clubs in existence, and does not refer to those clubs which had ceased to exist by the time of publication, it does give an insight into the differences between the clubs.

⁸⁷ Coote, referring to the exclusivity of London Clubs at the time, wrote, "even in 1919 it was not easy to get into the better known clubs": Colin R. Coote, *The Other Club* (London, 1971), p.7.

⁸⁸ Graves, *In Leather Armchairs*, p.110.

⁸⁹ Mclachlan, *In The Chair*, pp.91 & 94.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.91.

⁹¹ Coote, *The Other Club*, p.44

⁹² Coote, *Editorial*, p.173.

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- ⁹³ There was no meeting of The Other Club between 27th July 1922 and 2nd April 1925: “its continuance in life and health owes as much to Lord Camrose as to any other individual member apart from the founders”: Coote, *The Other Club*, p.59.
- ⁹⁴ Chartwell papers; CHAR 2/388.
- ⁹⁵ Castlerosse was director of the following Beaverbrook papers; the *Evening Standard*, *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express*. In addition, both Viscount Castlerosse and Colonel Astor were members of the Beefsteak.
- ⁹⁶ Coote, *The Other Club*, p.84.
- ⁹⁷ Letters August 7th 1936 and November 27th 1936, in PRO, FO 954, series folder 27, Sp/36/8 and Sp/36/22, PRO, FO 954.
- ⁹⁸ PRO, FO 954, series folder 27, Sp/37/7, July 23rd 1937.
- ⁹⁹ Churchill was in receipt of a letter written by Dudley Heathcote (Non-Intervention observer on the Franco-Spanish frontier) to Sir Ormonde Winter. Churchill informed Eden of its contents, but the latter does not appear to have taken the matter seriously. See Heathcote to Sir Ormonde Winter, July 24th 1937; Chartwell papers, CHAR 2/314.
- ¹⁰⁰ Azcarate to Churchill, December 13th 1937; Chartwell papers, CHAR 2/314. The ambassador wrote to Churchill inviting him to visit Republican Spain. Churchill was, however, to decline the invitation.
- ¹⁰¹ Lord Samuel to Churchill, June 1st 1937; Chartwell papers, CHAR 2/314. Lord Samuel was well connected with the political establishment, both as leader of the Liberals in the Lords, and as a former member of the National Government, in the formation of which in 1931, his was an influential role. Furthermore, Chamberlain was to offer him a post as Privy Councillor.
- ¹⁰² PRO, FO 954, folder 27, Sp/37/15, October 29th 1937.
- ¹⁰³ PRO, FO 954, folder 27, Sp/37/16, November 11th 1937.
- ¹⁰⁴ David Hubback, *No Ordinary Press Baron. A Life Of Walter Layton* (London, 1985) p.64.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.64. However, Philip Kerr was also a member of the National Liberal Club.
- ¹⁰⁶ Letter to The Editor, *The Times*, August 19th 1936. p.11.
- ¹⁰⁷ Letter to The Editor, *The Times*, July 12th 1938, p.12.

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- ¹⁰⁸ Letter To The Editor, *The Times*, August 21st 1936, p.6.
- ¹⁰⁹ Letter To The Editor, *The Times*, May 7th 1937, p.12.
- ¹¹⁰ Letters To The Editor, *The Times*, July 2nd 1938, p.13.
- ¹¹¹ Letter To The Editor, *The Times*, July 1st 1938, p.13.
- ¹¹² Letter To The Editor, *The Times*, July 2nd 1938, p.13.
- ¹¹³ Letter To The Editor, 'Points From Letters', *The Times*, July 6th 1938, p.12.
- ¹¹⁴ In the later thirties, *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* were of similar length. In *The Times*, articles on Spain rarely occurred before page nine. In contrast, in the *Daily Telegraph*, articles on the Spanish war occurred prior to page nine with greater frequency. In the Berry owned papers, the earliest page on which articles on Spain appeared was page five. In the leader column of *The Times*, only the by-line for the first item was in capitals, whereas in the Berry owned papers all leader by-lines were in capitals, the first being in a larger size than the others. "Life in *The Times* in those pre-war years, has often been compared to life in the senior common room of an Oxford college", "[t]he rules of style were strict and comprehensive. Headlines had to follow the same strict rules of syntax": McDonald *A Man Of The Times* pp. 48-9.
- ¹¹⁵ 'Scrutator' of the *Sunday Times* was Herbert Sidebothom. He also contributed to the *Daily Sketch* as "Candidus" and to the *Daily Telegraph* as "A Student of Politics". Previously, Sidebothom was on the editorial staff of the *Manchester Guardian* between 1895-1918. After the First World War he joined *The Times*, and from 1922-3, he was political adviser to the *Daily Chronicle*.
- ¹¹⁶ "Indeed throughout the 1930s, it could be said that Dawson was privy to more Cabinet thinking it seems than most members of the government, whether the Prime Minister was Macdonald, Baldwin or Chamberlain. It was not for nothing that *The Times* was thus taken to be the semi-official conduit of British government thinking abroad, and every nuance of its long and elegantly written leaders were scrupulously scrutinized in the chancelleries and embassies of the world": Cockett, *Twilight Of Truth*, pp.12-13.
- ¹¹⁷ In fact, McDonald too, was sceptical of Dawson's distinction between news and views: "never entirely a workable convention": McDonald, *A Man of The Times*, p.53.
- ¹¹⁸ *Daily Mail*, July 27th 1936, p.11.

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- ¹¹⁹ *Daily Mail*, August 1st 1936, p.10.
- ¹²⁰ *Daily Mail*, August 6th 1936, p.6.
- ¹²¹ *Daily Mail*, August 10th 1936, p.8.
- ¹²² *Daily Express*, August 3rd 1936, p.8.
- ¹²³ *Daily Express*, August 26th 1936, p.8.
- ¹²⁴ ‘As We See Things’, *Daily Express*, August 28th 1936, p.8, ‘What We Think/What We Did’, *Daily Express*, August 29th 1936, p.8.
- ¹²⁵ ‘Keep Out Of It’, *Morning Post*, August 3rd 1936, p.8.
- ¹²⁶ The Marques helped two *Morning Post* correspondents to get across the French frontier into Spain. They were Mr. Studdard and Mr. Abbe. Abbe was got across the frontier in time to report on the relief of the Alcazar at Toledo by the Nationalist troops, see Marques Merry del Val to Gwynne, September 28th 1936: Gwynne papers, deposit 24.
- ¹²⁷ ‘Entrenous’, ‘Civil War In Spain’, *Truth*, July 22nd 1936, p.116.
- ¹²⁸ ‘Plain Dealer’, ‘Hopeless Spain’, *Truth*, July 29th 1936, pp.180-1.
- ¹²⁹ ‘Death Grips Spain’, *Daily Mail*, July 20th 1936, p.20.
- ¹³⁰ ‘Eyewitness Tour Of Spain’, *Observer*, July 30th 1936, p.18.
- ¹³¹ ‘The Nyon Plan’ ‘The World Week By Week’, *Observer*, September 12th 1937, p.16th.
- ¹³² ‘Red Murder At Malaga’, *Daily Mail*, February 9th 1937, p.10.
- ¹³³ ‘The Turning point’, *Morning Post*, February 10th 1937, p.10.
- ¹³⁴ ‘Spain’s Year Old Ordeal’, *Morning Post*, July 19th 1937, p.10.
- ¹³⁵ ‘The War In Spain’, ‘The World Week By Week’, *Observer*, September 27th 1936, p.20.
- ¹³⁶ ‘The Truth In Labels’, ‘The World Week By Week’, *Observer*, September 27th 1936, p.20.

¹³⁷ ‘The Threat To Peace’, *Observer*, June 13th 1937, p.18.

¹³⁸ ‘ A Fiction Factory’, *Morning Post*, May 8th 1937, p.10.

¹³⁹ ‘Europe And Spain’, *The Times*, August 21st 1936, p.11

¹⁴⁰ ‘ Intolerance And War’, *Yorkshire Post*, July 21st 1936, p.10.

CHAPTER THREE. GOVERNMENT AND PRESS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE CIVIL WAR.

When news broke in London about the outbreak of the military uprising in Spain the government sought to bring newspapers across the political spectrum into a broad consensus in support of its policy on Spain. As will be shown, this necessitated a manipulation of the press, in the process of which, correspondents were deliberately misled, both about events developing in Spain and the intentions of the government towards her. In a representative political system, the democratic function of a newspaper is to expose policy for public debate and censure. This, however, was undermined in the interest of what the National Government perceived to be the wider national interests at stake, both in the Peninsula and beyond.

Apart from Britain, all of the Great Powers of Europe sent military supplies to either of the two sides in the Civil War and, in the case of Germany and Italy, military units as well. Yet, as has been discussed, in spite of this apparent neutrality on the part of the British government, there was hostility towards the Spanish Republic.¹ By the summer of 1936 parallels were being drawn between contemporary Spain and events in Russia during the autumn of 1917.² However, until the end of the war the most important concern of the British Government was the international impact of the Civil War. It was this dimension which, far more than internal Spanish politics, was to influence and thereby shape British policy. By the early summer of 1936, Neville Chamberlain, one of the most influential ministers of Baldwin's Cabinet, publicly announced the need for

Britain to repair its relations with Italy, following the Anglo-Italian dispute caused by Italy's invasion of Abyssinia.³ On July 22nd, the French Prime Minister, Leon Blum and his Foreign Secretary, Yvon Delbos, arrived in London for talks with their British opposites concerning a new treaty to replace the now defunct Treaty of Locarno. If this were to take place there would need to be a new five-power conference of the former Locarno powers, which were Britain, France, Belgium, Italy and Germany. There was the real risk that the international complications produced by the tumultuous events in Spain, in the summer of 1936, would jeopardize these moves towards concord among the Western European powers. In August 1936 Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, wrote, "I am very unhappy that this terrible Spanish question should now come to complicate our troubles in Europe."⁴ Chamberlain shared Eden's concern over the threat to the prospects for a new Locarno conference now being posed by the Spanish war. In his diary for August 2nd he noted,

the foreign situation has not improved. The Civil War in Spain has provoked dangerous reactions. We have issued invitations for a five power Locarno conference but have hitherto been unable to get the Germans or Italians to announce the date though they have not refused to take part...⁵

The international implications of the Civil War in Spain were to make it the dominant issue preoccupying British diplomacy until the autumn of 1938. It was for this reason that the British government was so concerned at how its Spanish policy was to be presented and interpreted in the press. In its dealings with newspapers in general, the government sought to promote the view that its policy towards the Civil War was genuinely neutral. It was extremely sensitive to any suggestion in the press that its policy was one of malevolence towards the Spanish Republic. When, on August 10th, for

example, the *Daily Herald* published an article by its proprietor, Lord Strabolgi, which suggested this, so concerned was the government that Strabolgi received a letter from Lord Halifax, replying to his accusation. In the letter, Halifax stressed that the purpose of the policy of Non-Intervention, far from being an act deliberately aimed at disadvantaging the Republican cause, was “to prevent outside assistance from prolonging the war.”⁶ What might have appeared as over reaction to an article in an opposition newspaper was, in fact, the response of a government anxious to maintain domestic consensus on the issue of the Civil War. If sections of the British press were to put forward the view that the government was actually in favour of the rebels, this would provoke a reaction among sympathizers of the Republican cause and possibly compromise the government’s relations with the insurgents and their allies.

As has already been shown in the previous chapter, it was not just from newspapers of liberal or left wing sympathies that the Conservative dominated government was likely to face opposition. Then, as now, all newspapers represented a multiplicity of views amongst both their journalists and readership. Even *Truth* occasionally criticized government foreign policy. Thus, on August 19th 1936, when conservative papers were generally supportive of the government’s efforts to secure Non-Intervention, *Truth* was critical of the failure of the government to prevent the export of civil aircraft to Spain.⁷ In fact, newspapers varied in the degree of journalistic freedom that they allowed. Whilst the leader columns of *The Times* almost invariably lent support to the government line on Spain, because of the relative freedom allowed to journalists, articles were printed in the news columns which caused great offence to both Germany and Italy. Such articles had

the effect of undermining the government's policy of appeasement, a policy to which *The Times* was also committed. However, even the support of *The Times* leaders could not always be taken for granted. For example, on August 1st the leader was critical of the government for its past failure to define its foreign commitments more clearly.⁸ As for the *Yorkshire Post*, its support for government policy was clearly conditional on the basis that it was, indeed, neutral. This conditional support was evident in the leader comment of September 14th 1936. Referring to the Spanish Republican authorities, the *Yorkshire Post* pointed out, "it is natural that a certain sympathy of principle should have attached at the outset to a government properly elected, as far as we could judge, on a wide suffrage, and therefore apparently in a position of loyal defence."⁹

It was imperative for the government to conceal its prejudices towards the Spanish Republic; otherwise there was little chance of securing a broad consensus in support of its policy even within the conservative press. In the event, even its closest supporters in the conservative press, including the editor and deputy editor of *The Times*, remained unaware of the actual state of affairs. An example of this deception is that, despite the close contact that existed between the editorial staff of *The Times* and official circles, in August 1936 Barrington-Ward could write the following to Dawson, "the FO view has been hitherto that the insurgents would be beaten in a long war though it might be a very long war."¹⁰ In fact, the Foreign Office neither expected the war to be long, nor saw any possibility that the insurgents would lose. Throughout the war, Barrington-Ward never lost his conviction that the policy of the government was genuinely neutral.

During the summer of 1936, a cause of concern in London was the awareness that the Popular Front government in France was facing persistent pressure from its supporters to assist the Spanish government. When the French Prime Minister and Foreign Minister attended talks on the Treaty of Locarno in London, British pressure was applied on them to reverse the earlier decision of the French government to sell arms to the Spanish government.¹¹ However, both Germany and Italy were determined to assist the rebellion. Clear proof of Italian intervention came on July 30th with news of Italian aeroplane crashes at sea and also in French Morocco. These aeroplanes were part of a shipment of aircraft to Spain following requests made by the insurgents to both Italy and Germany. This development brought with it the danger that the French government might once again reverse its policy concerning the transit of arms across its frontier with Spain. Throughout August, therefore, the British government gave support to a French initiative, which was the setting up of an International Agreement on Non-Intervention in Spain. In spite of initial Foreign Office reservations concerning the French proposal, only two days after receiving it in London, the British government was to give it its full support.¹² After all, Non-Intervention would strengthen the position of Leon Blum in France, and enable him to resist the very strong pressure on his government to intervene in support of the authorities in Madrid. In this way, non-intervention, while it was to work against the interests of the Spanish government, would, it was hoped, serve a more important purpose; namely to prevent the division of Europe into rival blocs, with Britain and France alienated from the axis partnership. Baldwin was to express his fear of this when, on 26th July, he talked with Eden privately concerning the developing civil war crisis in Spain.¹³

Throughout August, Non-Intervention was the dominant issue in the foreign news columns of the national press in Britain. The British government enjoyed a consensus of support for its efforts to achieve all round Non-Intervention, a consensus that cut across partisan lines. In fact at no other point in the Civil War was the government able to secure such broad press support for its policy. There were a number of reasons why, in the first few months of the conflict, so many newspapers of divergent political sympathies were willing to support the government. Firstly, newspapers saw a connection between events in Spain and the developing international crisis in Europe. This, in turn, seemed to justify what was in effect the denial to the Republic of its legitimate rights to purchase arms abroad. Hence, it seemed that Non-Intervention could be justified on pragmatic grounds. It would prevent the division of the European states into rival camps, with each camp supporting either the Government or the rebellion in Spain. After all, such an alignment of powers could lead to the outbreak of the second major European war in less than a generation. Thus, British newspapers that were ideologically sympathetic towards the Spanish Government nevertheless supported Non-Intervention on the grounds that it was in the national interest. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, on August 6th declared itself in favour of Non-Intervention because it was a means of confining the war to Spain.¹⁴ Previously, its diplomatic correspondent, Voigt, had written, “the spread of intervention would be a disaster, for it would mean that the European nations would be divided into partisans of the Spanish loyalists and partisans of the rebels.”¹⁵ Voigt, however, was supporting a policy that placed the Spanish Republic at a disadvantage, and this despite the fact that he, like his paper, was clearly a sympathizer of the Spanish

Government. Contrary to the view that prevailed in official circles, Voigt believed that the victory of Franco would be a disaster for British interests: “such a Spain might easily affect the military balance of power in a manner unfavourable to Britain and France.” The liberal *News Chronicle* was also to write in favour of Non-Intervention. On August 8th, for example, the view of the leader was “it is clear that intervention on *both* sides would almost certainly lead to open war in Europe...plainly therefore the urgent need is to prevent intervention on either side.”¹⁶ Concerning Non-Intervention, the attitude of the liberal/left press was little different from that of the conservative press on this issue. Take, for example, the attitude of the *Daily Telegraph*. It supported Non-Intervention because to contain the struggle to Spain “should be the earnest and prompt endeavour of all governments of good will.”¹⁷ Similar attitudes were expressed in the *Truth*, which believed that “it is only by strict all round non-intervention that the possibility of a more widespread and worse disaster can be avoided.”¹⁸ “Scrutator” of the *Sunday Times* agreed that the urgent task of Spain’s neighbours was to adhere to Non-Intervention “to prevent the struggle from spreading.”¹⁹

A second factor encouraging the broad consensus in the press in support of Non-Intervention was that, initially, there was support for this policy from all the parties in Parliament.²⁰ In the case of the Labour Party, which was the main opposition party, Non-Intervention attracted strong grass roots support, within the Trades’ Union Congress, for example. The General secretary of the TUC, Walter Citrine, “succumbed readily to Anthony Eden’s arguments in defence of non-intervention; Citrine, like many at the time believed that effective non-intervention would help the Spanish Republic.”²¹

There was, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, a variety of means at the disposal of officials and ministers whereby journalists and editors could be brought into the government's confidence and persuaded of 'their duty' to support the official line at this particularly difficult juncture in international relations. The Dawson diary shows how, in the first months of the war, semi-formal gatherings provided opportunities for leading names in newspapers to be informed both of government policy and the importance which ministers and officials attached to the connection between events in Spain and international relations in general. As early as August 5th, Dawson's diary refers to a meeting with Halifax at the Beefsteak during which Spain was discussed.²² That a connection was made between events on the ground in Spain and the wider international concerns of the British government can be seen in a later extract on August 11th. Once again, Dawson refers to lunching with Halifax at the Beefsteak. In this instance, they discussed Spain and, in particular, "Blum's courageous refusal to intervene."²³ Following this particular meeting, Dawson wrote to Barrington-Ward, informing him of the day's discussion with Halifax; emphasizing to his deputy the international complications provoked by the war, especially the attempts which the British government were at present making to secure the support of Germany and Italy for Non-Intervention.²⁴

In the summer of 1936, lobby briefing of journalists was, of course, a very important means by which sources close to the government could provide them with information concerning the official view on Non-Intervention. Within articles written by correspondents at this time, especially diplomatic correspondents, phrases pointing to

official influence are numerous. For example, four days after the British government imposed a unilateral ban on the sale of arms to Spain, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* referred very closely to the statement given to the press by the Foreign Office in the following: “it is hoped, therefore, that the British government’s action in giving practical support to the French lead, in advance of the full assent from Germany and Italy, will have a steadying effect.”²⁵ Similarly, the political correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote in a way which demonstrated official influence: “the announcement by the Board of Trade covers civil ‘planes. Great Britain warmly supported the French proposal from the beginning. She has taken unilateral action, and in doing so, has gone further than any other nation.”²⁶

It is not surprising that journalists were influenced by official sources in the way they reported on government policy. After all, journalists attended briefings in order to obtain news. What is important is that in both of the examples quoted, there is evidence that the briefing was used to mislead the press. Indeed, as has already been shown, contrary to the opinion expressed in the *Daily Telegraph* that from the outset the government was unanimous in support of Non-Intervention, the Foreign Office had initially been sceptical. If correspondents seemed to be over enthusiastic regarding the likely success of Non-Intervention, this is what the government wanted to be conveyed, in order to build support for this policy at home as well as abroad. Vansittart, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, took a keen interest in lobbying the press. Contrary to the official view being given to the correspondents that unilateral British action would influence other more reluctant nations to abide by Non-intervention, his own view was

that, within official circles, there was little optimism regarding this. Vansittart made clear his own scepticism concerning Non-Intervention in a letter to Eden in September. Writing on the issue of German and Italian intervention he commented, "I still don't see what we can do about it. Critics are of course bound to say that the Committee sitting here is ineffectual, but none of us really expected that it would achieve much."²⁷

Britain's unilateral stand on Non-Intervention, which was being presented through the lobby as both a firm indicator of the government's commitment to neutrality and an incentive to other nations to follow suit. Yet, throughout the war, Non-Intervention was to work against the interests of Loyalist Spain. The policy, which succeeded in preventing the Republic from obtaining sufficient supplies abroad, could not prevent the Axis powers from assisting Franco. As for the purpose of the Non-Intervention Committee, this, as Vansittart explained to Eden, was not to make Non-Intervention effective, but to provide a forum for the improving of relations between the democracies and the dictator states: "a real committee would probably achieve no useful purpose and would make still fainter the prospects of the five power conference which are in any case none too bright."²⁸

At the beginning of the war, the prevailing view in the leader columns of the London daily conservative papers was that there was little to choose between the rival sides in Spain. Both were criticized for atrocities. Therefore, the consensus was that whichever side emerged as the victor, there would be a dictatorship, not a parliamentary form of government on the British model. As mentioned in the previous chapter, since they

continued to support Non-Intervention, this limited the extent to which these newspapers felt they could express any partisan view concerning the conflict in Spain. Therefore, on September 22nd, Gwynne, editor of the *Morning Post*, wrote to the Marques Merry del Val: “you will understand that as long as our government takes up the attitude of non-intervention I feel bound to observe and follow more or less, their policy. I need not assure you that my warmest wishes are with the Junta.”²⁹ The *Daily Mail*, avowedly in support of the rebellion, even criticized the British government for what it saw as its failure to protect British nationals in Republican held territory.³⁰ Indeed, on August 26th, *Truth* attacked the partisan reporting of the War by the *Daily Mail*, pointing out its failure to inform its readers of the atrocities committed by the insurgents following the capture of Badajoz.³¹ However, never did the *Daily Mail* actually oppose the policy of Non-Intervention. This was a significant constraint on the freedom of manoeuvre of a paper, which had once been a fierce critic of Stanley Baldwin both as leader of the Conservative Party and as Prime Minister.³²

The broad press consensus that had united liberal, left and conservative papers in support of government policy could not last. None of the powers supporting the rebel cause was enthusiastic about registering support for Non-Intervention. In fact negotiations intended to draw up an international agreement dragged on throughout the month of August. By the time an agreement was reached at the end of the month, Germany, Italy and Portugal had intervened extensively on the side of the insurgent cause. Furthermore, the Non-Intervention Agreement, when it had eventually been drawn up, proved to be inadequate to the task of stopping the flow of supplies and men to Spain.³³ The consensus in support

of government policy began to break down. The first indication of its being under strain became apparent in the middle of August. This was in response to the failure of the British government to prevent the exporting of civil aircraft to Spain. On August 14th, for example, the *Daily Herald* went so far as to accuse the Board of Trade of “deliberately leaving the door open for the sending of planes to General Franco.”³⁴ Indeed, as the quantity of foreign aid reaching the insurgents became abundantly clear, the general delay in completing all round Non-Intervention provoked general exasperation within the liberal/left press. On August 18th, for example, the leader writer for the *News Chronicle* called upon the British and French governments to set a date by which Germany and Italy must accept the French proposals and advocated firmness against the Fascist powers if they continued to delay. The article warned, “[t]he man who runs away knows he cannot run indefinitely. Some time or other he will find himself up against a wall. Democracy stands with its back to that wall at this moment.”³⁵ The nature of the comments being made in the liberal/left press was in sharp contrast to those appearing in the conservative press. Whereas conservative newspapers could express disappointment and even impatience at the delaying tactics of Germany, Italy and Portugal, at no point was there criticism of the stand taken by the British government on this particular issue. Instead, the conservative press continued to be supportive of the ‘efforts’ being made by the government to make Non-Intervention effective.

There is no evidence, during the late summer, that the government was particularly concerned at the breakdown in the press consensus in favour of Non-Intervention. Given the refusal of Franco’s foreign supporters to refrain from helping him, it must have been

expected that such a consensus would be short lived. This, of course, is indicated in Vansittart's letter to Eden on September 30th. Moreover, the government could still count on the continued support of a range of leading newspapers which, like *The Times*, were associated both at home and abroad with the views of the Conservative dominated National Government. Yet as we shall see, there were occasions when the liberal/left press could compromise Britain's relations with the dictators.

By September, the government's difficulties with the press were becoming exacerbated by the continued intransigence of the fascist powers. The most obstinate of the supporters of the rebel cause was the Portuguese dictatorship. The Salazar regime was the last to accept Non-Intervention, and the last to agree to send a representative to the Non-Intervention Committee in London.³⁶ Although at this stage the British government was still anticipating an early victory for the rebellion³⁷, there was, nonetheless, growing concern among official circles in London over the likely impact of Portuguese intransigence upon the attitude of the French government.³⁸ The longer Portugal held out, the more obvious it became that Non-Intervention was not viable. In fact, throughout the Civil War, Portugal was of great use to the insurgents in Spain as a source of foreign aid. Supplies were transported into rebel held territory after having been unloaded at Portuguese ports. There was the danger that the Portuguese attitude would not only encourage French sympathizers of the Spanish Republic to increase pressure on the French government to lift the ban on the export of arms to Spain, but that it would undermine support for Non-Intervention among the Labour party and the Trades' Unions in Britain as well. In spite of this, however, the British government was most reluctant to

alienate Portugal. Her alliance with Britain was of crucial importance to British strategic and imperial interests.

In August/September, much publicity in sections of the French and British press, for example, was given to the role played by the Portuguese authorities in undermining Non-Intervention. The effect of this was to stimulate criticism of Portugal in both countries, and, with regard to Britain, to compromise relations with the Salazar regime. Whereas, in the case of France it has been argued that criticism of Portugal was from the left-wing press, in the case of Britain, criticism included elements of the liberal press, such as the *News Chronicle* and *Manchester Guardian*.³⁹ On August 25th, for example, the headline on the front page of the *News Chronicle* read, "Portuguese Capital As Real Headquarters Of Spanish Rebels".⁴⁰ The leader column for the *Manchester Guardian* for the following day audaciously questioned the point of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance, given Portugal's resistance to diplomatic pressure from Britain. Such resistance was in spite of Britain's promise to defend her against attack from a hostile Spain.⁴¹ Even when Portugal did finally accept the Non-Intervention Agreement, the attitude of the *News Chronicle* to Portugal's acceptance was sceptical. This was because of Portugal's continued reservations towards Non-Intervention. On September 10th, the leader article in the *News Chronicle*, which concentrated on the absence of a Portuguese delegate at the first meeting of The Non-Intervention Committee, was titled "The Wrecker."⁴² Indeed, the article followed the earlier example of the *Manchester Guardian* by questioning the purpose of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance. Clearly, the attitude of the liberal and left

press in Britain played a part in contributing to the difficulties faced by the British government in its protracted negotiations with the Portuguese government.

The view being expressed by the liberal/left press towards the Anglo-Portuguese alliance made it imperative that those papers supportive of the views of the National Government should put forward the official view and, in addition, demonstrate a sensitivity towards Portugal as a 'special case'. This was because the Portuguese government was particularly sensitive towards any criticism of Salazar's regime at a time when Anglo-Portuguese relations were strained because of the Spanish Civil War.⁴³ As an example, when the *News Chronicle* printed articles accusing Portugal of intervening on the side of the insurgents, the Portuguese ambassador felt compelled to issue the British press with a formal denial of these accusations. The Portuguese had taken particular offence at the claims of the *News Chronicle* that Portugal had assisted the Rebels in the bombing of Badajoz, and that Portugal was handing over any refugees from Republican Spain to the insurgents.⁴⁴ During September, pressure from government sources was exerted on the press. After all, the focus of European diplomatic activity for most of this month was on the specific issue of Non-Intervention. Therefore, the Foreign Office News Department would have been preoccupied with putting across the official view both on this matter and on Portuguese intransigence regarding it. When confronted with high-ranking members of the Portuguese embassy, angry at the reporting of their country by British newspapers, British Foreign Office officials could do no other than explain that in a democracy nothing could be done to restrain the press. Behind the scenes though, pressure was being exerted to persuade the press to show tact in its handling of Portuguese affairs.⁴⁵

As in the previous month, an attempt was made to influence reporting through the dissemination of news to diplomatic correspondents. As would be expected, the government was to find more success in persuading those conservative papers, which had most consistently supported it during August, to offer their support to the government's position on Portugal.⁴⁶ As a result, the treatment of Portugal in the pro-government press was entirely different from that in the liberal/left press. The pro-government press sympathized with the difficulties faced by the British government over Portuguese intransigence in the face of intense French and British diplomatic pressure. Yet it never criticized the Portuguese attitude. The inference to be drawn from this is that such newspapers were aware that criticism would have undermined British policy towards the Salazar regime. The *Truth* and the *Yorkshire Post*, for example, expressed the confidence that under diplomatic pressure, the Portuguese would eventually concede to the British requests and send a representative to the Non-Intervention Committee. On September 9th, the day of the first meeting of this committee, the lead article in *Truth* claimed that "[t]he British and French Governments between them ought to be able to obtain the withdrawal of the reservations which she [referring to Portugal] attached to her acceptance to the scheme."⁴⁷ The lead article in *Truth* was still expressing this confidence on September 16th, a week later.⁴⁸

Since there was little positive comment to make about the Portuguese position, Portugal did not feature prominently in the leader articles of the pro-government press in the early months of the Civil War. The general lack of editorial comment on the negative attitude

of Britain's oldest ally was an act of deliberate omission. As we shall see, a policy of prudent omission was practised on several occasions by a number of conservative newspapers during the Civil War. Indeed, in the *Yorkshire Post* Portugal did not feature in the leader columns for September at all. It was a subtle way of registering sensitivity to the government's plea for newspapers to show tact in the way dictatorships were reported. In effect, such newspapers were imposing a policy of self-censorship. Pro-government papers, on those few occasions when they did print leader comment on Portugal, expressed sympathy for her position. As is clearly shown in the tone of the leaders, this was a conscious attempt at countering criticism at home, both of Portugal and of the extreme patience of the British government towards her. On August 26th, there was a deputation to Eden and Halifax led by Walter Citrine, General Secretary of the TUC, and Arthur Greenwood, deputy leader of the Labour Party. The purpose was to discuss with the Foreign Minister the unloading of war material in Lisbon, destined for export to the insurgents in Spain. The next day, the *Daily Telegraph* published a leader on the Portuguese position; expressing sympathy for the Portuguese dilemma created by the Civil War. It seemed to offer a way out of the problem caused by Portugal's continued breaches of Non-Intervention. It suggested that effective Non-Intervention would be possible even without Portuguese co-operation:

if other states of Europe fulfill their obligations faithfully and stop all the export of munitions which might find a way into Spain not only to Spain but to the Peninsula, there is little war material in Portugal itself which could cross the frontier.⁴⁹

Importantly, the solution that it suggested would avoid the need for further pressure being applied by Britain on Portugal, with the inevitable harm to Anglo-Portuguese relations.

In its lead article on Portugal on September 6th, the *Sunday Times* expressed its sympathy for the Portuguese dilemma. It empathized with the Lisbon authorities, arguing that in a country with a poverty stricken working class, it was natural for the government to sympathize with a rebellion against the left-wing government in Spain. According to the *Sunday Times*, this was a pragmatic policy to prevent the spread of Communist propaganda into Portugal from Republican Spain, where it could so easily act as a stimulus for opposition amongst the poor towards the Salazar dictatorship.⁵⁰ In its leader column for September 16th, *Truth* treated sympathetically the Portuguese reluctance regarding Non-Intervention.⁵¹ For good or ill therefore, the pro-government newspapers ably assisted the aims of British foreign policy regarding Portugal, at a time when Anglo-Portuguese relations were particularly strained.

Of course, newspapers make a conscious choice of what to print. The evidence of Portuguese assistance to the Spanish rebels was available to the right-wing as well as the left-wing press. Alpert, in *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, refers to the probability that the British Government was reliably informed of the extent to which the Portuguese were assisting the Spanish rebellion.⁵² There is no reason why the pro government press would automatically sympathize with Portugal, since even papers whose editors or proprietors expressed their sympathy for one or more of the right-wing European dictatorships, could, at times display an ambivalent attitude towards them. As we have seen, Viscount Rothermere, for example, was strongly sympathetic to Nazi Germany. However, he was also an advocate of rearmament especially of Britain's air

defences. He was to write of his fear, during the thirties, of the possibility “that Germany, newly armed with modern weapons, would endeavour by aerial force to re-establish herself in her old position.”⁵³ Even though he was writing following the failure of appeasement, during the first few months of the Second World War, as we shall see later, he allowed, or at least did not prevent, the editorial of the *Daily Mail* from criticizing German planes for their part in the destruction of Guernica. The conclusion to be drawn is that certain papers were persuaded to support the government line. As the press consensus on the Civil War broke down, and the liberal/left press increasingly adopted a line sympathetic to the Spanish government, it was natural for conservative papers to support the British government line on Spain. However, this narrowing consensus still depended on the Civil War being viewed in simplistic, ideological terms, as a conflict between the extremes of left and right.

In the late autumn of 1936, developments on the ground in Spain, in particular the failure of Franco to take Madrid, were to prove a watershed, transforming the rebellion into a prolonged civil war. Furthermore, the recognition of Franco as the legal ruler of Spain by both Germany and Italy was to have a profound impact on the conflict. By their action, the fascist governments had committed their reputations to the success of the Spanish rebels. German and Italian recognition was to lead to increased intervention on their part to secure Franco’s victory. Within Britain, the effect of this was to increase opposition towards the dictators. As far as British interests were concerned, there was a further complication in that the prolongation of the war increased the dependence of Franco on his foreign backers. This threatened Britain’s ability to reassert its status as the dominant

foreign influence in Spain once the war was over. British policy regarding the Civil War had to adjust to the new circumstances. The conflict could no longer be dismissed as a temporary crisis.

During the autumn, the more serious breaches of the Non-Intervention Agreement threatened its survival and opened the first split in the parliamentary consensus on Spain. The government was mainly preoccupied with the international complications of the war. The Spanish conflict was proving to be a source of major disagreement among the European powers. The British government's concern was that disagreement between nations over Spain would jeopardize what it considered to be the far more pressing matter of the signing of a new five-power pact between France, Britain, Belgium, Germany and Italy. The Soviet Union was threatening to intervene on the side of the Republic and, because it made public the extent of fascist power infractions, it stimulated the growing hostility within both Britain and France towards the fascist states. The printing of the Soviet denunciations in the pages of the British and French press came at a particularly difficult time for the British government now faced with the beginnings of a breakdown in the parliamentary consensus on Spain. In an atmosphere of crisis, Prime Minister Baldwin had refused the request made by Attlee, leader of the opposition, for an early recall of Parliament so that Spain could be discussed. Nevertheless, he felt obliged to concede that Spain should be discussed when Parliament did reconvene on October 29th.⁵⁴

The available evidence suggests that Russian sources did, indeed, try to use the foreign press as a means by which to advertise the breaches of non-intervention by those powers

favourable to Franco's cause. Mention has already been made of Koestler who, went to Franco's Spain as war correspondent for the *News Chronicle*. Unknown to the rebel authorities, his brief was to find evidence of German and Italian military intervention. Koestler was employed as an agent of Willy Muenzenberg, head of Comintern's West European AGITPROP department. In this role, Muenzenberg was in charge of the Comintern propaganda campaign in favour of the Spanish loyalist cause.⁵⁵ No doubt it was hoped that by having a correspondent inside rebel territory, evidence could be gathered concerning breaches of non-intervention, evidence that could be publicized outside Spain. There were other means by which sources close to the Soviet government could attempt to influence the British press. In early October, contrary to agreed procedure of the Non-Intervention Committee that its proceedings be kept secret and that only agreed official communiqués be presented to the outside world, the Russian chargé d'affaires in London, Kagan, made a public statement. He condemned the Spanish rebels' use of Portugal as both a base for operations and as a conduit for military supplies obtained from their supporters abroad. Kagan must have been aware that the press would have taken notice of his statement. Indeed, the *News Chronicle* devoted to it, substantial column space on the first two pages of its October 8th issue.⁵⁶ Soviet government circles in Moscow also had the opportunity both to manipulate the foreign press and to break with the protocol of the Non-Intervention Committee. On October 14th, for example, the *News Chronicle* published an article by its Moscow correspondent who had been given access to a note concerning the grievances of the Russian government, which was to be presented to the Committee by Ivan Maisky, the Russian ambassador to London, on his return to Britain. Needless to say, the note should not have been disclosed to the press,

yet this did not deter the Soviet authorities, nor was the *News Chronicle* prevented from printing it either.⁵⁷ The same sources also attempted to undermine the support for the British government. Take, for example the following comment made by the Moscow correspondent of the *News Chronicle*:

Although the closest secrecy is maintained in official circles it is learned that the British government is putting difficulties in the way of all who wish, in respect to the Russian note, to call an early meeting of the committee.⁵⁸

The British government would have preferred for there to be as little publicity as possible to be given to the breaches of Non-Intervention, because of the impact this might have in Germany and Italy.⁵⁹ Indeed, diplomatic considerations were to weigh heavily on the government when it decided how to handle the matter of Italian breaches of Non-Intervention.⁶⁰ In order to deflect attention away from Italy, the British government encouraged counter accusations against Russia. Its strategy was to argue that the real purpose of the Russian government in raising these allegations was malevolent, aimed at preventing a rapprochement among the western powers. The government was assisted in this by the Soviet government's public admission that it was sending arms to the Spanish Republic.⁶¹ Moreover, the intelligence available to the British government concerning foreign intervention in Spain contained very precise details on Russian intervention in particular.⁶²

Whether or not the British government actually believed that the Russian intervention was more extensive than that of Germany and Italy, this was the line that it sought to see

established in the British press. It wished to imply that not only were Russian infractions more serious but that Russia was attempting to break up the Non-Intervention Agreement. In the autumn, the government was especially concerned at the harmful effect that the press might have on Britain's relations with right-wing dictatorships. As for the News Department of the Foreign Office, it was preoccupied with attempting to stop the publication of stories suggesting that Britain's relations with the fascist powers had deteriorated as a result of the war.⁶³ The government, therefore, did what it could to encourage the press to adopt the view that it was Russia, which posed the real threat to European peace. Since from September 13th, the press had ceased to be invited to meetings of the Non-Intervention Committee, correspondents had perforce to rely upon official sources for news about the committee's deliberations.⁶⁴ Thus, there was provided the ideal opportunity for the News Department to manipulate the way in which news was reported. On October 9th, the day the Non-Intervention Committee was to meet to discuss the Soviet allegations against the fascist powers, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* expressed criticism of the way in which the Russian government presented its allegations. He referred to the more sinister political agenda of the Russian government in raising these matters before the committee in the first place. The correspondent wrote, "propagandist considerations are thought to have been the more likely to influence Soviet policy in view of the present discussions of the Labour Party in Edinburgh."⁶⁵ The phrase "are thought to have been" provides a clear example of the oblique way in which official sources were alluded to in the press.

Official circles in London sought to manipulate the British press in other ways. By making public their concerns at foreign assistance to the rebel cause, the Soviet authorities had played into the hands of those in British establishment quarters who saw an opportunity to portray the Russians as being irresponsible in their breach of protocol. In a very lengthy article written by the diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, the influence of ministers/ officials in London is clearly visible:

The threat [Russian military intervention in Spain] is regarded as a political move intended to embarrass Mr. Blum's government and to a lesser extent that of this country....So far as this country is concerned Moscow apparently seeks to embarrass the government by creating fresh difficulties with Labour at a time when the fullest co-operation of industry is essential to carry through the emergency rearmament programme.⁶⁶

In wake of Maisky's publicizing of the note from his government in advance of its discussion by the Non-intervention Committee, official sources in London attempted to influence the press into seeing the reasonableness of the British case. Again, by providing a selective and, perhaps, subjective summary of the British note in reply to the Russian note, there was the opportunity to manipulate the way in which correspondents reported. The article written by the *Daily Telegraph* diplomatic correspondent, following a briefing by British officials is a good example of this.⁶⁷ According to the information received by the correspondent, all of the issues raised in the Russian note were in the process of being dealt with. A further example is the article by the *Daily Telegraph* diplomatic correspondent for the following day. Whereas the day before he only inferred the unreasonableness and possibly malevolent motives of the Russians, these motives were now stated explicitly: "Marked irritation is being freely expressed by ministers at

what is regarded as a mischievous attempt by the Soviet Union to utilize the Non-Intervention Committee for propaganda purposes.”⁶⁸

The impact of lobbying of the conservative press from circles close to the government did not produce uniform reporting, yet it seems unlikely, at this stage at least, that this reflected conflict within government circles concerning Spanish policy. Unlike that of the *Daily Telegraph*, the diplomatic correspondent for *The Times* reflected the views of those in official circles who sought to play down the significance of the harm done by Russia to the international agreement on Spain. In general, the reporting stressed the hope that the Non-Intervention Committee would continue to function: “In London it is hoped that the committee will be able to continue its labours without serious interruption.”⁶⁹ On October 12th, the article written by the correspondent expressed the hope, felt in certain official quarters, of the ability of the London committee to continue: “it is a source of satisfaction to authoritative opinion in this country that the slender structuring of non-intervention should have survived the buffetings to which it was exposed last week.”⁷⁰ In order to downplay the harmful effects of the Russian note, certain quarters were successful in persuading *The Times* to report on it in a positive way, rather than to stress any alleged malicious intent on the part of the Russian government: “The latest Russian note is intended to remedy this [lack of proposals to strengthen Non-intervention] deficiency.”⁷¹ It is possible that the same quarters were instrumental in persuading the diplomatic correspondent to play down the significance of the note when it was published in the paper the next day. This is because, only the text and a description of the note was

published. In complete contrast with the *Daily Telegraph* there was no reference to any disquiet in official circles, nor, interestingly enough was there any editorial comment.⁷²

No doubt the officials who had informed the lobby correspondents had hoped also to influence the editorial line of the paper. There is evidence for the success of this policy in the leader column of *The Times* for October 9th. The leader which referred in detail to the Russian allegations against Italy showed that the writer, in this case Leo Kennedy, had discussed the matter with the diplomatic correspondent, as he made reference to the correspondent's own article also published that day.⁷³ Moreover, the Dawson diary for October/ November shows his preoccupation with Spain. Given his concern with this issue, he could obtain clarification either from discussion with his diplomatic correspondent, or through his contacts within government. Indeed, in the diary entries for October 8th and 9th, specific references are made to the allegations made by the Russians in the Non-Intervention Committee.⁷⁴ Any discussion between ministers and Dawson would be conducted with the knowledge that the editor did, indeed, intervene in the writing of leader articles.

The crisis in the Non-Intervention Committee continued throughout October with the risk that Russia might withdraw her membership. On October 24th, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* whilst acknowledging, perhaps with relief, that the Russian government would continue to play a role in the Committee, nevertheless still pointed out the Russian transgressions of Non-intervention. The information on which his accusations were based had come from official British sources. Indeed, the article

appeared three days after the Cabinet was presented with the British intelligence report concerning Russian aid to the Spanish Republic. Clearly then, the evidence suggests that the government presented this information to the Non-Intervention Committee knowing that this would be picked up by the press during its official briefing. On this occasion, Dawson's own political prejudices would have ensured the co-operation of *The Times* in portraying Soviet motives less than favourably. The way in which officials presented this news to the press indicates that their aim was to create the misleading impression that Russian intervention was more pronounced than that of Italy. The correspondent stated,

this British information based on first hand evidence was circulated to the committee yesterday. It is understood to cover three cases of Russian intervention on behalf of the Madrid government through Spanish ports and, as a fourth case, certain Italian activities in the Balearic Islands.⁷⁵

The provenance which is given for this source is that it is British, and hence, by implication, neutral. In this case, the government was selective in what information it gave concerning Spain. This was done to give newspapers the misleading impression that Italian intervention was insignificant. In actual fact the intelligence report presented to the government had specified not one but a number of cases of Italian breaches of Non-Intervention.⁷⁶ Clearly, the government was concerned at how such breaches on the part of Italy might be reported. The reason for this was its likely effect on the Italian attitude towards the Non-Intervention Committee, and even more importantly towards the proposed five-power conference.

Throughout October, in an effort to discredit the Russian government further, official sources continued to exploit the dependency of the press for information concerning Non-

Intervention. On October 26th, *The Times* published a second article written by its diplomatic correspondent citing further evidence of Russian breaches of Non-Intervention. This article, lengthier than that written on the 24th, was the first occasion on which the journalist gave explicit instances of Soviet transgressions of the Non-Intervention Agreement. Before detailing these, he referred to the “trustworthy first hand evidence” made available to the British government concerning the violations of the Agreement.⁷⁷ Once again, evidence given in the article must have come from the intelligence reports available to the government. As before, the correspondent had been given a completely misleading impression of the extent of Italian intervention in Spain compared with that of Russia. Once again, *The Times* had been duped into giving to its readers an inaccurate view of Italian activity in Spain. The War Office had sent the Foreign Office a detailed report on foreign intervention in Spain making it clear that Italian and German intervention was far more extensive than that of Russia. Yet it was decided that this new and reliable evidence should not be given to the press. In the words of Roberts, an official at the Western department of the Foreign Office, “it is intended solely for our information, not for communication to the Non-Intervention Committee or to any outside persons.”⁷⁸

The pernicious effects of official influence on the press can be seen in the reporting of other conservative newspapers concerning Russian infractions of Non-Intervention. For example, on October 9th the diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, like that of *The Times* for the same day, repeated the view held in official circles that the real

intention of the Soviet government was to drive a wedge between the democracies and the fascist states:

Government circles in London have been unfavourably impressed by Russia's action in making her accusation public...the opinion is held in London that it is a political move, intended to embarrass Mr. Blum's government and to a lesser degree that of this country.⁷⁹

There was a further problem for the British government in Russia's persistent criticism of Portugal. Russia accused her of allowing her ports to be used for the unloading of contraband. On October 14th, the Russian government even called upon Britain and France to impose a blockade of Portugal in order to enforce her compliance with Non-Intervention.⁸⁰ The Russian allegations were raised at the meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee at the end of the month. This, of course, was a further embarrassment for Anglo-Portuguese relations, as were the activities of the unofficial left wing "Committee of Inquiry into the alleged breaches of the Non-Intervention Agreement in Spain." On October 3rd, a report based on British and American newspaper sources concerning German, Italian and Portuguese intervention, was published by this committee.⁸¹ In fact, the longer the war in Spain dragged on, the more the obvious sympathy of the Salazar regime for the insurgents would complicate Anglo-Portuguese relations. As far as the critics of government policy were concerned, the continued reluctance of Britain to apply pressure on Salazar not to assist Franco was further evidence of its malevolence towards the Spanish Republican cause. Hence, the British government applied pressure on Salazar not to follow the German and Italian example of recognizing Franco.⁸² At its meeting on October 28th, the Cabinet discussed the harmful effect of press reporting of Portuguese infractions of Non-Intervention.⁸³ Indeed, throughout October, official sources

had continued in the attempt to influence the way in which Portuguese issues were dealt with in the press, most probably with an eye to how the articles would be interpreted in Lisbon. A clear example of this policy can be seen in the article written by the diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* on October 26th, two days prior to the Non-Intervention Committee enquiry into the Russian allegations against Portugal. In the article, the journalist stated that warm support has been given to Portugal by the British government: "It is satisfied from its own sources of information that there is no evidence that Portugal has not kept to the agreement since she became party to it."⁸⁴ In fact, as we have seen, the British government knew from its own sources of information that since signing the agreement, Portugal was consistently in breach of Non-Intervention. Clearly, one of the government's staunchest allies in the press was being misled. This was, ostensibly, in the interests of national policy, the aim of which seemed to be the prevention, at all costs, of the alienation of the Western dictator states.

As already shown in the leader comment of certain newspapers, there was, within certain conservative press circles, a large degree of sympathy for the Salazar regime. Thus it was hardly surprising that such papers should be willing to offer sympathetic treatment of the Portuguese position. However, regardless of their sympathies, conservative papers catered for a broad constituency. As indicated in the letters to the editor, *The Times*, for example, included among its readers not only those who sympathized for the rebel cause but also sympathizers and even advocates of the cause of the Republic. Such readers most probably would have been disturbed at allegations that Portugal was enabling the Nationalists to secure supplies from abroad thereby undermining the Non-Intervention

Agreement. Throughout the war, *The Times* maintained the illusion of neutrality towards the conflict; active support for the Portuguese position could raise questions as to how neutral *The Times* actually was. As we shall see in the next chapter, in the wake of a press war against Britain by the inspired Italian press, Dawson refused to bow to official pressure to publish leaders, aimed at bridge building in Anglo-Italian relations. It is very plausible that on that occasion Dawson felt that opposition against such a policy, amongst both readers and employees, would have offset any possible good, which might have been done if he had agreed.

There are a number of possible explanations for the willingness of conservative press editors to take the risk of alienating both staff and readers, by advocating the Portuguese position in their leader columns. Firstly, there was the historic link; Portugal was Britain's oldest continental ally and, Britain had pledged herself to defend Portugal in the event of an attack by a hostile Spanish government. Another factor influencing the press was the attitude of the Portuguese government to Russia's persistent criticisms of it concerning the issue of Non-Intervention. Indeed, official Portuguese irritation at the British government for its role in the committee was also being expressed. The Portuguese government criticized the British for violating procedure by bringing the latest Russian allegations to the attention of the Non-Intervention Committee. Diplomatic correspondents were led to believe that Portuguese anger was acute; on October 28th, for example, the article written by the diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* read, "I understand Great Britain is strongly criticized."⁸⁵ On the same day, the article written by the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* referred to the British government being

“strongly attacked” by the Portuguese.⁸⁶ My contention is that because Portuguese anger was being directed against the British government for its actions in the Non-Intervention Committee, official circles sought to manipulate the way lobby correspondents interpreted British actions. This was to create the impression that the government had not acted unfairly. Take, for instance, the article written by the diplomatic correspondent for *The Times*, which appeared on the 29th. Summarizing what he had learned about the British response to the Portuguese allegations, he wrote, “[t]here had been no suggestion that the British government were adding their own weight to the Spanish charges”, inferring thereby the neutral position of the British government.⁸⁷ The line taken might have been the result of collusion between a journalist and an official source. Another possibility is that through the selection of information to be disseminated to the press, an attempt was being made by the government to foster the illusion of British reasonableness. Official concern at the potential harm that could be done by press reporting on Anglo-Portuguese relations was almost certainly influenced by anxiety concerning the use of Portuguese ports to transport supplies to the Spanish rebels. It was feared that the Axis powers would be in a position to take advantage of any opportunity to undermine British influence on the right wing dictatorship in Lisbon. Should a hostile Italy threaten both the safety of British shipping and even of British control of the Suez Canal, then Portugal and her overseas possessions in Africa were of vital importance, since they lay along the alternative Atlantic/Cape route, which connected Britain with her Empire in the Far East. Finally, as already stated, Russian criticism of Portugal provided an opportunity for officials to present ‘evidence’ to show

that Russian intervention on the side of the Republic was greater than support given to the rebels, and that, therefore, her intentions were purely malevolent.

In spite of attempts by official sources to play down the significance of Italian, German or Portuguese infractions of the Non-Intervention Agreement, their intervention in Spain was to take new forms which had the effect of escalating the international crisis caused by the Civil War. Between 9th and 19th November, units of the German regular armed forces were dispatched to Spain. These were to form part of the Condor Legion.⁸⁸ Italo-German assistance to Franco was also to tip the naval balance of power decisively to Franco. With the assistance of both the German and Italian fleets, he was able to disrupt the sea borne trade to the Spanish Republic.⁸⁹ Emboldened by the increase to his international prestige afforded by German and Italian recognition of his government, and the subsequent increase of foreign military and naval aid to his cause, Franco declared a blockade of the Republican port of Barcelona. Since neither of the two sides in Spain had been accorded belligerent rights, any interference with foreign shipping by blockade patrols would be illegal. In fact it would constitute an act of piracy. The situation was especially difficult for Britain, which possessed the largest merchant fleet in the World. It was relatively easy for foreign owned ships to acquire British registration, securing thereby the diplomatic and naval protection of the world's leading sea power. Thus, there was the real risk of an international incident on the seas around Spain, bringing the British government into conflict with either Franco or his foreign supporters.

As the War dragged on into the autumn, the consensus even within government and official circles over the direction of policy was coming under strain. At the outbreak of fighting in July, the Cabinet had agreed that Franco should be recognized as the legal ruler in Spain once he had taken Madrid. However, the blockade issue complicated matters precisely because it threatened to put British ships in conflict with the insurgents. As a result of Franco's declaration, the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Samuel Hoare, felt it imperative that his regime be recognized as a belligerent power. This would make the blockade legal, and would avoid the possibility that Britain would be drawn into conflict with the insurgents, should they attempt to detain British merchant ships. Eden, however, was adamant against the granting of belligerent rights to Franco in advance of his capture of Madrid. In fact, from the late autumn his attitude towards the Civil War was to change. This was a direct consequence of the increased level of German and Italian aid to Franco. Therefore, until his resignation as Foreign Secretary in February of 1938, Eden was determined to make Non-Intervention effective.⁹⁰ At an emergency Sunday Cabinet on the blockade issue on November 22nd, the division within Cabinet appeared to have been healed by a compromise solution. Belligerent rights would not be granted to Franco. To avoid the possibility of a confrontation between Britain and the Insurgent authorities, it was also decided that British registered shipping was not to be allowed to carry arms to Spain from any port. Thus the new legislation, the 'Merchant Shipping, Carriage of Munitions to Spain Bill', would close a loophole left open by earlier Non-Interventionist restrictions on British ships. The earlier restrictions had only prevented the export of war material from British ports.⁹¹

The legislation marked a shift in British policy in the war. Needless to say, it was the subject of much comment in the press. In spite of the compromise reached in Cabinet between the opposing views of Hoare and Eden, the way in which the blockade was discussed in the press illustrated the disunity of the government on the issue of the war. It was becoming increasingly clear that the government was not able to speak to the press with a united voice. Comments made by both the leader articles and the lobby correspondents of a number of leading conservative newspapers gave the impression that the government was considering the granting of belligerent rights to Franco in the near future. Moreover, the same articles were clearly reporting what they had been told in official press briefings. On November 24th, the day after Eden announced to Parliament the measures the government intended to introduce, the *Daily Telegraph* published an article from its diplomatic correspondent, who, quoting from the “best informed quarters”, wrote that, in the near future, belligerent rights would be granted to Franco.⁹² The diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* agreed with that of *The Daily Telegraph* that belligerent rights would soon be granted, and that this had been “semi officially explained last night”.⁹³ However the comments by these correspondents were in sharp contrast to the policy formulated in Cabinet.

Contrasting with reports in the quality conservative press was that of the diplomatic correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* on November 24th. His article made clear the division within official/government circles between those who supported the granting of belligerency rights to Franco and those who were opposed to it. The diplomatic correspondent pointed to the competition between these groups for the support of the

press. Unlike those of either *The Times* or the *Daily Telegraph*, this correspondent was strongly influenced by the Edenite view against the granting of belligerent rights.⁹⁴ Whereas the correspondents for the two conservative papers had suggested that government circles expected belligerent rights to be granted to Franco in the near future, the opposite view was stated by the diplomatic correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*. As to the views of the British government, the opening phrase of the article pointed very strongly to an official source: “the view was taken that to recognize [Franco as a belligerent] so soon after they [insurgents] have been recognized by Germany and Italy, would have led to widespread misunderstanding.”

Why should official sources be giving the press the impression that the government was seriously considering granting these rights? First of all, there was still no real centralization imposed over the dissemination of news and views from official sources to the press; a state of affairs that had been less important when the government had been united over Spanish policy. Yet, the possibility had always existed for ministers to follow their own agenda when briefing the lobby. A notable example of a minister who had occasionally taken advantage of this was Sir Samuel Hoare and he, of course, wanted belligerent rights to be granted to Franco immediately.⁹⁵ Secondly, the issue of the Civil War was progressively to isolate Eden from his colleagues in Cabinet. In the main, ministers were less concerned about the dependence of Franco on German or Italian support than with the need to achieve a more durable understanding with the fascist states. Ultimately, this majority view was to undermine the efforts of Eden to make Non-Intervention more effective. It is conceivable, even at this stage, that in encouraging

rumours among certain newspapers that the British government was seriously considering granting belligerent rights to Franco, those ministers or officials who were their inspiration were thinking of the likely reception of these stories by Germany, Italy and insurgent Spain. After all, as has already been stated, foreign governments looked to British newspapers for coded references to the true intentions of the British government on those matters of policy that could not be made more explicit in public. Meanwhile, Sir Samuel Hoare (albeit unsuccessfully) was to use his influence in Cabinet in an attempt to turn the Merchant Shipping Bill into a malevolent measure with which to strangle the Republican war effort. He wanted it to cut the Republic off from a whole variety of supplies from abroad, many of which could not be classified as war material.⁹⁶

Treatment by the press of the Merchant Shipping Bill highlights some of the difficulties in determining the ways in which newspapers were lobbied. Central to the problem, is that government and press relations were conducted in secret; the rules of non-attribution, of course, obligated journalists not to name their sources. In this secretive world, it was not always clear even to insiders, just who had been the inspiration of particular stories that appeared in the press. Also, in a democratic state where it was not simply a question of newspaper editors being directly informed of what they could and could not print, contact between the media and the government often took a semi-official or even unofficial form. While contact between a correspondent and individuals close to government circles is indicated by phrases in newspaper articles, what is never clear is where that contact took place and whether other journalists were present. Whilst it is clear that on a number of occasions correspondents were being given a misleading version

of events, it is likely that, at least in certain cases the correspondents themselves were willing participants in the deception. Indeed, the strong inference that the evidence came from government sources, added to the supposed reliability of the story being presented in the paper. Finally, editors and indeed proprietors were subject to influence. As mentioned previously, Dawson makes quite clear that, conversations, on the subject of Spain, took place with leading ministers or officials at the Beefsteak, for example. However, the content of the discussion inevitably went unrecorded. It may be that he was being asked to support a line of policy, or an attempt was made to secure his co-operation in the suppression of certain types of news, in view of its possible effects on international relations. As will be shown in later chapters, the editor and his deputy did suppress and even amend certain articles, yet such action may, on some occasions at least, have been prompted by their own interpretation of the effect of the article abroad, rather than due to any outside pressure.

News that first German and later, Italian, units of the armed forces were arriving in Spain had, of course, the effect of increasing the difficulties faced by the government. Indeed, the news reports that appeared in the British press gave very specific details about the actual number of foreign troops arriving in Spain. The dispatch of the Italian units of the CTV in December was conducted without any concern for secrecy, and the build up of Italian forces in Spain was to be far more substantial than that of Germany.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the CTV was very substantially reinforced throughout the Civil War, as a consequence of which, it was to play a key role in the major battles of the war. Press

reports of the arrivals of the German and Italian units would only provoke further anti-German and anti-Italian feeling among the British public, compromising the policy of appeasement. As a result of the arrival of German and Italian troops, British policy towards the conflict underwent a further shift. The Cabinet decided to support a French initiative for a Franco-British appeal to Italy, Germany, Portugal and Russia. The aim was to persuade those powers most guilty of intervening in the Civil War to support an armistice in Spain. Official circles in London did not retain much faith in the French proposal, yet to support it publicly would, of course, divert attention away from the actions of both Germany and Italy in Spain. Furthermore, it would put pressure on the French government to resist calls for the abandoning of Non-Intervention.

In spite of government reservations, when, on December 9th, the Foreign Office News Department informed the press of the armistice initiative, the official sources were deliberately upbeat. The effect of this can be seen in the reception of the news in a number of leading conservative papers. On December 10th the view of the *Yorkshire Post* was that “there is some reason to doubt whether one, at least of the dictatorships is anxious to drive intervention in Spain to the point at which it would involve a European war.”⁹⁸ The confidence expressed in this paper reflected the views of diplomatic correspondents for conservative papers in general. Their articles revealed the official inspiration for both their stories and their confidence in the success of the initiative. For example, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Times* wrote,

if however, non-intervention were to be made binding and effective by agreement between the powers, even at this date however it might be found possible to make a united approach to the two sides in the hope of

arranging an armistice.⁹⁹

The leader article in the *Daily Telegraph* came to the same confident conclusion as that of *The Times*. It emphasized the importance of achieving the agreement of the European powers in order to bring the war to an end. In the leader devoted to this particular issue, the official inspiration for the confidence being expressed was clearly shown in the phrase, "it is felt in London."¹⁰⁰ Even *The Morning Post*, in spite of its desire for an outright victory for the insurgents, betrayed the official influence in its coverage of the initiative: "The action of the British and French governments has nevertheless given much satisfaction in diplomatic circles."¹⁰¹

Reference has already been made to the use of conservative newspapers as an unofficial means of communication with the German and Italian governments. Over the issue of Axis power military intervention in Spain, the evidence strongly suggests that their support, especially that of *The Times*, was being sought by the government. News columns relayed the confidence of official circles of the positive benefits to Germany should she adopt a more neutral policy towards the conflict. No doubt, the editor was concerned that overt fascist military assistance to Franco would encourage the expression of public hostility towards them, thereby provoking the officially inspired German and Italian press into making less than spontaneous reactions against Britain. Indeed, throughout December, *The Times* offered consistent support to the official line that warned those powers that intervened in the war of the likely consequences for international peace. On December 22nd, Barrington-Ward met Eden at the latter's request, in order to discuss Spain. The importance that Eden attached to the way in which

The Times supported the government line was demonstrated by his expression of extreme gratitude to Barrington-Ward. Because of the standing of *The Times* abroad, Eden felt confident that its warnings would give encouragement to the more moderate elements within the German government who would argue against the escalation of German military intervention.¹⁰² The deputy editor was only too willing to continue to lend the support of his paper. For two days after the meeting with Eden, the leader asserted that foreign intervention in Spain threatened to escalate the conflict to other areas in Europe.¹⁰³ This assertion was repeated in the leader for December 28th.¹⁰⁴ The leader of 24th had coincided with a further Franco-British appeal to Italy, Germany and Russia; requesting their co-operation in halting the sending of 'volunteers' to Spain. At their meeting on December 22nd, Eden had expressed his doubts to Barrington-Ward that the moderates could prevail in Germany, and Barrington-Ward shared Eden's misgivings.¹⁰⁵ Such privately held pessimism did not dampen the enthusiasm of *The Times* in its advocacy of the armistice idea. That Barrington-Ward was willing, even at the risk of compromising the integrity of *The Times* itself, to lend his support to the government at a time when it was energetically attempting to secure international co-operation, is a reflection of the especially close relationship which existed between this newspaper and the Conservative dominated National Government. The support of *The Times* was especially important considering the rumours about the rapid German military build up in Spain which were being circulated by other newspapers; a factor likely to be the cause of a press war, even, perhaps, of a diplomatic crisis between Britain and Germany.¹⁰⁶

Some officials, in order to deflect attention away from the German and Italian military presence in Spain, used the opportunity afforded by press briefings to persuade correspondents that the German presence was only at a volunteer and, therefore, unofficial level. Of course, their motivation was the desire to do everything possible to limit potential damage to Anglo-German relations. The success of these attempts can be seen in a number of conservative papers. Consider, for example, the report of the diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Mail* on December 2nd. He confidently declared,

there was no official knowledge that they [German troops] had been transported in bulk or with equipment or arms. It was pointed out that if such had been the case the authorities would certainly have received information of the movement.¹⁰⁷

On the same day, the diplomatic correspondent of the *Morning Post* pointed out that according to “official circles” there was no evidence that the Germans “wore uniforms, or were troops, or showed any military formation.”¹⁰⁸ In fact the information being supplied through the lobby was false. Indeed, nothing could have been further from the truth. The Condor Legion detailed for service in Spain was, after all, a unit of the Luftwaffe. Spain, in fact, would become the laboratory testing ground for the new Blitzkrieg tactics, which the German forces were to employ with devastating effect in Poland, Western Europe and the Soviet Union during World War Two. In order to ensure that senior Luftwaffe officers received combat experience, Goering, Minister for Aviation and head of the Luftwaffe, was deliberately to rotate the command of the legion.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, on the same day that these misleading stories appeared in the British press, the Secretary of State for Air informed his colleagues in Cabinet that it had been known for some time that not only were German aeroplanes being used by Franco’s forces but that these were being

maintained by German personnel. This comment was in sharp contrast to the official line being put out through the lobby that the Germans arriving in Spain were non-uniformed volunteers.¹¹⁰ In fact, from late August, the War Office in London had been aware that as well as bomber aircraft, Germany had sent pilots and mechanics to the insurgents in Spain.¹¹¹

The government, however, continued in its inability to provide a united front in the way in which the news of the German and Italian military intervention was reported to the press. The lack of unity within the government is demonstrated in the response to Eden's extreme concern over the arrival of Italian troops in Spain in mid December. For he nevertheless failed, at the Cabinet meeting on December 16th, to persuade his colleagues to support a stronger line of action against Italy for her part in escalating the crisis in Spain.¹¹² The continued erosion of the united approach in government circles over the Civil War had far reaching effects. The Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, Vansittart, was becoming increasingly concerned at the German activities in Spain. As has been stated previously, he had formed an especially close contact with F.A. Voigt of the *Manchester Guardian*. Voigt was a member of the *Z Organization*. This was an intelligence service run for the benefit of Vansittart. Its purpose was to keep him informed about developments inside Nazi Germany. Far from wishing to downplay the potential threat of Nazi Germany to British interests, Vansittart and Leeper were agreed that its full implications should be publicized in the press. Therefore, both men used the News Department to give journalists their own assessment of conditions in Germany and the state of German rearmament. The aim of their briefings was to encourage a

pessimistic view of Germany. Vansittart was especially open in his communication with Voigt, who wrote a number of articles concerning the German influence in Spain.¹¹³ These appeared at various intervals in the first six months of the Civil War. On December 2nd, for example, in complete contrast to the officially inspired stories appearing that day in the conservative press, Voigt, as diplomatic correspondent of *The Manchester Guardian*, stressed the significance of German military intervention in Spain. He gave very specific details about how both troops and supplies were being exported to Spain, and how the German authorities were at pains to maintain the secrecy of this operation.¹¹⁴ It cannot simply be coincidence that Voigt's article appeared on the same day that the Cabinet received confirmation of the arrival of regular German troops in Spain. Whether Voigt's information came from his own contacts in Germany or was provided by his contacts in the News Department is not clear. What is certain is that he was writing with Vansittart's approval. A serious consequence of this, of course, was the impact of such articles on Germany and Italy. On December 16th, the Home Secretary informed his colleagues in Cabinet of the damage being done to Anglo-German relations as a result of the publicity which was being given to the German military intervention in Spain, one effect of which was to intensify anti-German feeling in Britain.¹¹⁵

The experience of the first six months of the Civil War did not augur well for the government in the future. After all, it was at this, the early phase of the conflict that the government had several advantages in its efforts at building a broad consensus of support for its policy concerning Spain. Firstly, the government could argue, quite convincingly, that Non-Intervention in Spain was indeed linked to appeasement in Europe. Secondly, at

the outbreak of the fighting, Parliament was about to go into recess. Therefore, the essentials of Non-Intervention policies could be drawn up out of the glare of the political opposition. Thirdly, there was widespread support across the country in favour of Non-Intervention. Yet, the press was able to maintain sufficient independence in order to mount an effective opposition to the government. During the parliamentary recess, it was sections of the liberal and left press which pointed out the flaws of Non-Intervention, as being a policy which succeeded in undermining the Republican war effort but which also failed to stop Franco receiving help from abroad.

By the end of the year, it was becoming clear that the Civil War was going to have a continually divisive effect on public opinion at home, and would undermine efforts to appease both Germany and Italy. The failure of Franco to take Madrid, the transformation of the uprising into a civil war caused by this, together with increasing foreign assistance to Franco, forced the British government to reconsider the influence of the press both at home and abroad. By November, the government had specific evidence that press criticism of German and Italian activity in Spain was detrimental to British diplomatic relations. With the collapse of the negotiations for a new five-power conference to replace the defunct Treaty of Locarno, the Non-Intervention Committee in London was to be the means by which Britain would try to improve relations with both Germany and Italy. It was thus symbolic and indeed apt, that the Non-Intervention Committee would meet in the Locarno room of the Foreign Office. Official circles in London came to the conclusion that the press had a part to play in improving international relations. Given that the Spanish Civil War had become an issue dividing the Great

Powers, if the press could be persuaded to express faith in the ability of those nations to refrain from taking sides in Spain, it was hoped this would lessen tension in Europe. Thus, newspapers were being asked to put across an official point of view, a view in which among government circles there was very little confidence.

In a parliamentary state, the ability of the government to secure the compliance of the press was, of course, limited. The first six months of the Civil War had demonstrated the obvious fact that the government was more likely to find support from the ranks of the conservative press. It was in these newspapers that support for the official line was strongest, since they were more willing to co-operate in the broader strategy of the government whose priority was the appeasement of Germany and Italy. Yet, even if editors and proprietors were in general agreement with the course of national policy and, as a result, would suppress certain items of news, such action was, as we shall see later, to provoke criticism from journalists working for those papers who did not share the confidence of their employers in the policy being pursued. Also, all newspapers fell foul of the dictators by printing articles describing their intervention in Spain. Thus, on the basis of the evidence available, it appears that the government saw the value of newspapers as an ally, but also their potential to undermine its support and to mobilize opposition. The British government operated in a closed political system, with power being weighted firmly towards the Conservative dominated coalition government. Even so, such was the divisive impact of the Spanish Civil War on British opinion, that even amongst conservative newspapers there was to be no consistent support for the government line. The independence of the press, combined with the controversial nature

of the Spanish Civil War, had, by the end of 1936, caused the press to be regarded in official circles as something of a loose cannon, which could not be ignored.

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- ¹ Government policy towards the Civil War was influenced primarily by the Foreign Office, where anti-communist feeling was strong. As a result, there was considerable support for the Spanish rebels. Pro-rebel sympathies were even stronger among diplomats in Spain. An example was the British ambassador, Sir Henry Chilton, see Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, pp.39-40.
- ² Within official circles, the 'Kerensky thesis' first emerged during the government of Manuel Azaña, 1931-33, see Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p.96. Official circles in London, concerned with the rising social unrest in the years preceding the Civil War, came to the conclusion that Spain of the Second Republic was not ready for democracy, and that there was the real risk of a communist takeover in Spain, see Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality: The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Ithaca, New York, 1985), pp.184-5.
- ³ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, pp.219-20.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p.36. The date of Chamberlain's statement in Parliament was June 10th 1936. A few days later Eden also announced, in Parliament, the policy of appeasing Italy.
- ⁵ Chamberlain Diary, August 2nd 1936; Chamberlain papers, NC2/23A.
- ⁶ Quoted in Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p.37. The following is an example of how the government felt constrained by popular opinion: David Margesson, leader of the Conservative party in the Commons, informed an Italian diplomat that "[w]e do not wish to leave our neutrality. The government wants to slip away with general declarations of neutrality. It is the only way we can counteract the Labour Opposition": Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p.60.
- ⁷ 'Entrenous', 'The Spanish Tragedy', *Truth*, August 19th 1936, p.295.
- ⁸ 'The Search For Peace', *The Times*, August 1st 1936, p.13.
- ⁹ 'Spain and The Yorkshire Post', *Yorkshire Post*, September 14th 1936, p.8.
- ¹⁰ *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file; Barrington-Ward to Dawson, August 18th 1936. In reality, the British government adopted a series of measures, which were designed to undermine the Republican war effort, thereby increasing the prospects of an early victory for the Nationalist side, see Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, pp.58-9 and pp.88-9.
- ¹¹ Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1994) p.20.
- ¹² Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p.67.

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- ¹³ “I [Baldwin] told Eden yesterday that on no account, French or other, must he bring us into the fight on the side of the Russians”: K. Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin, A BIOGRAPHY* (London, 1969) p.961.
- ¹⁴ ‘The Spanish Tragedy’, *Manchester Guardian*, August 6th 1936, p.8.
- ¹⁵ ‘French Appeal For Non-Intervention’, *Manchester Guardian*, August 4th 1936, p.9.
- ¹⁶ ‘Democracy And The Empire At Stake’, *News Chronicle*, August 8th 1936, p.6.
- ¹⁷ ‘Europe’s Clear Duty On Spain’, *Daily Telegraph*, August 5th 1936, p.10.
- ¹⁸ ‘Entrenous’, ‘The Powers In Spain’, *Truth*, August 5th 1936, p.214.
- ¹⁹ ‘Scrutator’, ‘Arms And The Neutral: The Powers And The Spanish War’, *Sunday Times*, August 9th 1936, p.12.
- ²⁰ The British Labour Party accepted Non-Intervention, agreeing that it would prevent European war over Spain, and because it was a policy which had substantial domestic support. Moreover, it served another purpose. It would allow the party leadership to prevent infiltration by the Communist party into the Labour movement, see Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albi3n*, pp.82-3.
- ²¹ Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p.79.
- ²² Dawson Diary, August 5th 1936; Dawson papers.
- ²³ Dawson Diary, August 11th 1936; Dawson papers.
- ²⁴ Dawson to Barrington-Ward, August 11th 1936; Dawson papers.
- ²⁵ The Diplomatic Correspondent, ‘No Arms For Spain’, *The Times*, August 20th 1936, p.12.
- ²⁶ ‘Lead That Europe Should Follow’, *Daily Telegraph*, August 20th 1936, p.13.
- ²⁷ PRO, FO 954, Volume 10, GE/36/25, letter from Sir Robert Vansittart to Anthony Eden, September 30th 1936. Vansittart also wrote, “I don’t see what good we should do if we bust up the committee by having a stand up row with the Italians and Germans in it. They would certainly go on assisting the Insurgents in Spain...nothing that we could say would stop them, and presumably we are not prepared to do anything which might lead to very serious consequences.”

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Gwynne to the Marques Merry del Val, September 22nd 1936; Gwynne papers, deposit 24.

³⁰ The leader article stated “Great Britain and France have left it to Italy and Germany to champion the cause of order and international security against these ruffians”: ‘France’s Red Peril’, *Daily Mail*, August 8th 1936, p.8. Nearly a week later the leader repeated its support for the actions of both Axis Powers in Spain: “All decent minded Britons would welcome co-operation with Germany and Italy if they take action to stop the murder of men and women in Spain for the satisfaction of the Red blood lust”: ‘Not A Word’, *Daily Mail*, August 15th 1936.

³¹ ‘Entrenous’, ‘The Spanish Struggle’, *Truth*, August 26th, 1936, p.330.

³² The leader supported the government’s refusal to grant belligerent rights to Franco as “sound and wise”: ‘Keep Out Of Trouble’. *Daily Mail*, November 24th, 1936, p.12.

³³ On the August 21st the Portuguese government finally accepted the Non-Intervention plan. However, the Portuguese authorities still allowed two German ships, the *Kamerun* and the *Wigbert*, to dock at Lisbon, in order to unload war material which was to be transported across the country to the Spanish insurgents, see Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p.55.

³⁴ ‘Stop The Planes!’, *Daily Herald*, August 14th 1936, p.8.

³⁵ ‘Zero Hour’, *News Chronicle*, August 18th 1936, p.8.

³⁶ On September 27th, the Portuguese agreed to send a representative to the Non-Intervention Committee in London. This was a month after the Portuguese had originally agreed to be party to the agreement.

³⁷ Under British presidency, the work of the Non-Intervention Committee was slow. The prevailing view in London was still that the war would be short. This was confirmed by military intelligence reports received in London during mid September, see Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, pp.101-2.

³⁸ On September 20th, whilst he was in Paris, Eden was made aware by Blum of the fact that French patience with the Portuguese was running out, see Glyn Stone, *The Oldest Ally: Britain and the Portuguese Connection 1936-1941* (London, 1994) p.26.

³⁹ Stone refers only to coverage of the Portuguese infractions in the columns of the left-wing press in both France and Britain: Stone, *The Oldest Ally*, pp.21-2.

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- ⁴⁰ ‘Portuguese Capital As Real Headquarters Of Spanish Rebels’, *News Chronicle*, August 25th 1936, p.1.
- ⁴¹ ‘Portugal And The Rebels’, *Manchester Guardian*, August 26th 1936, p.8.
- ⁴² ‘The Wrecker’, *News Chronicle*, September 10th 1936, p.10.
- ⁴³ PRO, FO 371, 20511, W14742/403/36.
- ⁴⁴ PRO, FO 371, 20572, W9626/9549/41 – minute, August 27th 1936.
- ⁴⁵ “[T]he fact that we are doing so [approaching the *News Chronicle*] should not, of course be mentioned to the Portuguese chargé d’affaires”: minute by Charles Warner, August 28th 1936, in PRO, FO 371, 20573, W10071/9549/41.
- ⁴⁶ “I don’t think much can be done with the News Chronicle”, Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ ‘Entrenous’, ‘The Spanish Situation’, *Truth*, September 9th 1936, p.402.
- ⁴⁸ ‘Entrenous’, ‘The Conflict In Spain’, *Truth*, September 16th 1936, p.437.
- ⁴⁹ ‘Common Policy On Spain’, *Daily Telegraph*, August 27th 1936, p.12.
- ⁵⁰ ‘Little Europe Beyond Spain’, *Sunday Times*, September 6th 1936, p.16.
- ⁵¹ ‘Entrenous’, ‘The Conflict In Spain’, *Truth*, September 16th 1936, p. 402.
- ⁵² Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.59-60.
- ⁵³ Viscount Rothermere, *MY FIGHT TO REARM BRITAIN* (London, 1939)
- ⁵⁴ Attlee wrote to the Prime Minister, asking for an early recall of Parliament so that developments in the Spanish war could be debated. He was responding to grass roots pressure from within the Labour movement, demanding the restoration to the Spanish Government of its right to purchase arms abroad, see PRO, CAB 23/85, Cabinet minutes, October 21st 1936.
- ⁵⁵ Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* (London, 1969) p.382.
- ⁵⁶ ‘Tonic For Madrid’, *News Chronicle*, October 8th 1936, pp.1-2.
- ⁵⁷ ‘Soviet To Force The Issue On Spain’, *News Chronicle*, October 14th 1936, p.2.

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- ⁵⁸ ‘Russia Demands Control of The Ports Of Portugal’, *News Chronicle*, October 15th 1936, p.1.
- ⁵⁹ Referring to Soviet allegations against Italy, the Foreign Secretary commented that “the moment was peculiarly inopportune for bringing this matter before the committee”: PRO, CAB 23/85, Cabinet minutes, October 14th 1936.
- ⁶⁰ The five power conference was a frequent topic at Cabinet meetings for the autumn and winter of 1936: CAB 23/86, Cabinet minutes of November 4th 1936, conclusion two; CAB 23/86, November 11th 1936, conclusions two and three; CAB 23/86, November 13th, conclusion one, CAB 23/86, November 18th, conclusion two; CAB 23/86, November 25th, conclusion three; CAB 23/86, December 2nd, conclusion one.
- ⁶¹ The Non-Intervention Committee issued a communiqué informing the press of the decision made by the Soviet Union to sell arms to Republican Spain, see ‘Powers And Spain’, *The Times*, October 20th 1936, p.14.
- ⁶² ‘List of Probable Infractions of the Agreement regarding Non-Intervention in Spain based on Evidence supplied by British Official Sources’, in Appendix two of PRO, CAB 23/85.
- ⁶³ In late November, Sir Samuel Hoare, the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, drew the attention of his colleagues to what he regarded as the alarmist atmosphere in the British press on matters relating to the Spanish Civil War. It was agreed that he should arrange for a private notice question to be addressed to him, and that “he should draw attention to the amount of harm that is done by raising these scares”: PRO, CAB 23/86, Cabinet minutes, November 25th 1936, conclusion four.
- ⁶⁴ The diplomatic correspondent explained that because the intransigent attitude of the Portuguese in the Non-Intervention Committee might encourage other nations to break the agreement, it was decided that its proceedings should be kept secret, see ‘London Committee On Spain Secrecy Pledge’, *Daily Telegraph*, September 15th 1936, p.13.
- ⁶⁵ ‘Arms Sent To Spain’, *The Times*, October 9th 1936, p.14.
- ⁶⁶ ‘London View: A political Move’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 9th 1936, p.17.
- ⁶⁷ ‘New Soviet Demands In Spanish War’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 15th 1936, p.17.
- ⁶⁸ ‘Moscow Request Rejected: Lord Plymouth’s Reply’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 16th 1936, p.15.

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- ⁶⁹ ‘Arms Sent to Spain?’ *The Times*, October 9th 1936,
- ⁷⁰ ‘The Powers And Spain’, *The Times*, October 12th 1936, p.14.
- ⁷¹ ‘Non-Intervention In Spain: Another Russian Note’, *The Times*, October 14th 1936, p.14.
- ⁷² ‘Powers And Spain: Representations By Russia’, *The Times*, October 15th 1936, p.14.
- ⁷³ ‘No Intervention’, *The Times*, October 9th 1936, p.15.
- ⁷⁴ Dawson Diary, October 8-9th 1936; Dawson papers.
- ⁷⁵ ‘Arms For Spain’, *The Times*, October 24th 1936, p.12.
- ⁷⁶ PRO, CAB 23/85, APPENDIX 2.
- ⁷⁷ ‘Russia And Spain, Moscow Asked To Explain’, *The Times*, October 26th 1936, p.13.
- ⁷⁸ PRO, FO 371, 20586, W16391/9549/41, note by Roberts, November 23rd. See also ‘Note on the supply of arms to Spain in contravention of the Non-Intervention Agreement’. Moreover, in the view of a War office official, “[a]ssistance [from Italy] has continued entirely without regard to the nominal adherence of the Italian Government to the Non-Intervention agreement”: Ibid., W14003/G, War Office minute, October 19th 1936.
- ⁷⁹ ‘Committee To Meet Today’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 9th 1936, p.16.
- ⁸⁰ ‘New Soviet Demands In Spanish War’, *The Times*, October 15th 1936, p.17.
- ⁸¹ Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p.87.
- ⁸² Ibid.
- ⁸³ “This might easily give the Portuguese Government a push towards the fascist Governments of Europe”: PRO, CAB 23/86, Cabinet minutes, October 28th 1936, conclusion two.
- ⁸⁴ ‘British Plan For Watching Ports’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 26th 1936, p.13.
- ⁸⁵ ‘Portuguese Criticism Of Great Britain’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 28th 1936, p.17

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- ⁸⁶ 'New Portuguese Note', *The Times*, October 28th 1936, p.11.
- ⁸⁷ 'Britain And Portugal', *The Times*, October 29th 1936, p.12.
- ⁸⁸ Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p.86.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.85 and p.94.
- ⁹⁰ The Foreign Secretary argued against the advice of the Admiralty. In his opinion, belligerency rights should not be immediately awarded to Franco; PRO, CAB 23/86, Cabinet minutes, November 18th 1936, conclusion three. In his diary, Eden made clear his own reasons against granting these rights to Franco: "my own feeling is at present against the granting of belligerency rights to Franco for international rather than Spanish reasons. I do not want even to appear to follow Hitler and Mussolini at this moment still less do I want to facilitate a blockade that is intended to starve Madrid": Avon Diary, November 21st 1936; Avon papers, AP 20/1/1/16.
- ⁹¹ "After 2 hours of need for no belligerent rights yet, legislation to stop our ships plying arms trade. Telegraphed Chilton accordingly": Avon Diary, November 22nd 1936; Avon papers, AP 20/1/1/9-16.
- ⁹² 'Belligerent Rights May Follow', *Daily Telegraph*, November 24th 1936, p.17.
- ⁹³ 'Protection For Ships', *The Times*, November 24th 1936, p.14.
- ⁹⁴ 'Madrid's "Foreign Submarine" Charge', *Manchester Guardian*, November 24th 1936, p.11.
- ⁹⁵ "Samuel Hoare fostered excellent relations with the lobby, and it was with some regret that the secretary of the lobby journalists bade him farewell in 1940": Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.6.
- ⁹⁶ The First Sea Lord of the Admiralty had wanted lorries to be added to the list of contraband articles which British registered ships would be forbidden to transport to Spain. However, the following comment was made, "the passage of the bill through Parliament had not been easy, and additions to the list would certainly create difficulties": PRO, CAB 23/86, Cabinet minutes, December 2nd, 1936, conclusion two.
- ⁹⁷ The Italians landed at Cadiz on December 23rd 1936: "taking no precautions to maintain secrecy. By the end of the month there were twenty four Italian submarines operating in Spanish waters": Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p.55.

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- ⁹⁸ ‘Franco-British Effort For Spain’, *Yorkshire Post*, December 10th 1936, p.8.
- ⁹⁹ ‘Mediation In Spain’, *The Times*, December 10th 1936, p.14.
- ¹⁰⁰ ‘Peace Plan For Spain’, *Daily Telegraph*, December 10th 1936, p.15.
- ¹⁰¹ ‘Mediation In Spain’, *Morning Post*, December 10th 1936, p.13.
- ¹⁰² “It seems that a good many Germans are alarmed at the deep waters which they are preparing to enter in Spain and would like to stop before they are too deeply committed”: *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file; Barrington-Ward to G. Dawson, December 23rd 1936.
- ¹⁰³ ‘Mutual Frustration In Spain’, *The Times*, December 24th 1936, p.13.
- ¹⁰⁴ ‘An Appeal To Reason’, *The Times*, December 28th 1936, p.11.
- ¹⁰⁵ “[W]hether Hitler’s honest fanaticism can be constrained or not and whether he and others will give up the idea that they will be able to encircle France by putting an army into Spain and keeping it there is another matter”: *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file; Barrington-Ward to Dawson, December 23rd 1936.
- ¹⁰⁶ Examples of how German military intervention in Spain were reported in the headlines of British newspapers include; ‘6 000 Germans Go To Franco’s Help’: *Manchester Guardian*, December 2nd 1936, p.11. ‘Germans In Spain’: *Daily Herald*, December 2nd 1936, p.2.
- ¹⁰⁷ ‘Spain Britain’s Plea To Powers Today’, *Daily Mail*, December 2nd 1936, p.1.
- ¹⁰⁸ ‘5 000 Germans Land At Cadiz’, *Morning Post*, December 2nd 1936, p.11.
- ¹⁰⁹ Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (Ware, 1998), p.58.
- ¹¹⁰ Early in December, the Secretary of State for Air commented that not only had it been known for some time that German aeroplanes were used by Franco’s Army, but that they were being maintained by German personnel: “[t]he latest information looked like an intensification of this action”: PRO, CAB 23/86, Cabinet minutes, December 2nd 1936, conclusion two.
- ¹¹¹ ‘Note on the supply of Arms to Spain in Contravention of the Non-Intervention Agreement’: PRO, FO 371, 20586, W16391/9549/41.
- ¹¹² PRO, CAB 23/86, Cabinet minutes, December 16th 1936, conclusion three.

¹¹³ Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.22. However, Cockett does not refer to Spain.

¹¹⁴ ‘6 000 Germans Go To Franco’s Help’, *Manchester Guardian*, December 2nd 1936, p.11.

¹¹⁵ PRO, CAB, 23/86, Cabinet minutes, December 16th 1936, conclusion one.

**CHAPTER FOUR: THE STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN A CONSERVATIVE
CONSENSUS IN THE FACE OF GROWING AXIS INTERVENTION IN THE
WAR.**

1937 was a problematic year for government and conservative press relations. The continued and much publicized intervention by both Germany and Italy in the Civil War had a destabilizing effect on official attempts to maintain consensus, such as there was, in the press in support of government policy. Moreover, the ever-growing divisions within government circles regarding the Spanish Civil War exacerbated the difficulty of maintaining consensus. As a result, government press strategy was undermined by the continued inability of official sources to speak with one voice when communicating with the press.

Cockett, in *Twilight of Truth*, claims that the visit of Lord Halifax to Germany in November of 1937 was of crucial importance in the development of government and press relations.¹ According to this view, it was not until then that Halifax, and, as a result, the British government, became aware of the extent to which British press criticism of the dictators could actually harm Anglo-German relations. Thus, on his return, Halifax urged his colleagues in government to persuade the press of the need to damp down criticism of the dictators.² At the time the significance of the Halifax visit was exaggerated. Claud Cockburn, editor of *The Week*, claimed that at Cliveden, on the weekend of 23rd - 24th October, a plot was hatched between the Astors, the proprietors of *The Observer*, and

their guests.³ This involved sending Halifax to Berlin, to offer Hitler a 'free hand' in Europe in exchange for his abandonment of German claims for colonies in Africa.⁴

However, the Halifax visit of November 1937 has to be placed within the wider context of the Anglo-German contacts that preceded it.⁵ As we have already seen, long before 1937, in fact, there can have been no doubt as to the effect of British press criticism of the fascist States. British newspapers, since they had correspondents posted abroad, were well used to the dilemma posed by British journalists, for whom press freedom was the norm, reporting from countries, such as Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy, where the media was heavily censored.⁶ Such juxtaposition was likely to lead to friction between British foreign correspondents and the host country. On April 6th 1934, the right-wing daily the *Morning Post* fell foul of the Nazi authorities. The critical reporting of the Nazi government by its Berlin correspondent occasioned an attack on the paper by the Nazi *Volkischer Beobachter*. This was to lead eventually, in December 1936, to the expulsion from Germany of the paper's Berlin correspondent.⁷

After 1933, contact between the British press and the highest levels of the Nazi government in Berlin had been established through the visits of a number of leading editors and proprietors. The high level of the contacts that the representatives of the British media had managed to establish meant that they must have been aware of the attitude of the German government towards criticism by the British. For example, William Warldorf Astor had visited Germany as part of a Christian Science delegation. Whilst there, he had the opportunity of witnessing Hitler's temper. When the German

Chancellor asked why Britain was so unfriendly towards the Nazis, Astor replied, "it cannot be otherwise as long as you persist in your policy towards the Jews." At this comment "Hitler went literally berserk and had to be calmed down by his aides." ⁸ During June 1936, Barrington-Ward spent four days in Berlin. Here, he had the opportunity of talking with Rudolf Hess, the Deputy Fuhrer.⁹ Viscount Rothermere, with whom Hitler seemed very impressed, made several visits to Berchtesgaden, Hitler's retreat in the Bavarian Alps. The first visit was in September 1936, the second in December 1937, and the final one was in May 1938. Rothermere and his son, Esmond, were two of the only four foreigners invited to attend Hitler's first dinner party as Chancellor at his official residence in Berlin.¹⁰ On this occasion, they had the opportunity to meet leading members of the German political establishment, including Goebbels, Goering, and Von Ribbentrop.

Von Ribbentrop, who became the German ambassador to London, was very confident of his ability to establish close links with the British establishment, in order to facilitate an improvement of the relations between the two countries. Beaverbrook had met both Hitler and Von Ribbentrop during a visit to Germany in 1935. In an attempt to establish friendly relations with Beaverbrook, Von Ribbentrop invited him to visit Germany for the Olympic Games in 1936.¹¹ Von Ribbentrop also attempted to establish a connection with Dawson. In 1936 therefore, he asked Tom Jones, who was accompanying Lloyd George on a visit to Germany, to request Dawson's help in getting his son, Rudolph, into Eton.¹² Dawson met Von Ribbentrop during the latter's capacity as ambassador¹³, and in April 1937 Dawson visited Germany.¹⁴ The inference to be drawn is that there was a conscious

attempt by the German authorities to canvass the support of the British press, which they regarded as an influential British institution. This would offer some explanation as to why access to the highest levels of the Nazi leadership was given to proprietors and editors. The evidence would suggest that long before Halifax's visit to Berlin, there could not have been much room doubt in the minds of the Fleet Street establishment of its own potential for damaging Anglo-German relations.

By 1936, the dilemma facing the press was that while it did not wish to exacerbate tension in Europe between the democracies and the dictator states, editors and proprietors were genuinely appalled by the behaviour of the dictators. It would be very difficult for a newspaper such as *The Times*, with its reputation for the integrity of its journalism, to be consistently sympathetic to the sensitivity of dictators to press criticism. After all, neither Hitler nor Mussolini had any regard for the freedom of his own press, nor for the civil rights of his own citizens. In any case, the anomaly between unstinting praise in the leader columns compared with the evidence of the brutality of their regimes as made available in the news columns would have raised questions concerning the independence and, indeed, quality of journalism in *The Times*. The problem faced by the British press at this time was paralleled in international relations by the difficulties being faced by western democratic governments in dealing with the more aggressive dictator governments of Germany and Italy. The 1930s was a particularly dangerous and uncertain period. The collapse of representative government in Germany and the rise of National Socialism altered the established rules of international relations. Nazi Germany, in particular, showed a blatant disregard for international treaties signed in the twenties and thirties, to

which, unlike the 'dictat' at Versailles, she had been a willing party. It was ultimately to prove impossible for British and French statesmen to find a *modus vivendi* with Fascism. The growing opposition of the press towards both Germany and Italy was to be a constant reminder to the British government of the limited extent to which any effective accommodation could be reached between diametrically opposed systems of government.

From January 1937 onwards, Italian and German intervention in the Spanish Civil War caused further divisions in the British Cabinet, which resulted in the progressive isolation of Eden from most of his colleagues. Eden, unlike most of his ministerial colleagues, was becoming increasingly concerned at the strategic implications of the assistance being given by Mussolini and Hitler to their Spanish protégé. The press realized such implications also. Only the liberal and left press were critical of government policy on the Civil war on the grounds that it was prejudicial to the interests of the Republican cause in Spain. Where criticism now appeared in sections of the conservative press, it was concerned with the military involvement of both Axis powers on behalf of the Nationalist cause. This, in turn, triggered a hostile reaction among the government-controlled newspapers in both Rome and Berlin. In the period leading up to November 1937, there were to be a number of such instances which, in turn were to persuade both government and press of the capacity of an independent press to inflict damage on relations between Britain and the dictator powers.

During January 1937, several articles appeared in the French press on the supposed build up of a German military presence in Spanish Morocco. On January 9th, *The Times*

published an article written by its Paris correspondent, David Scott, which stated, “Ceuta is being turned into a formidable fortress by German engineers and German heavy guns.”¹⁵ The British government, in the hope of being able to refute French press reports, approached *The Times*, requesting that a special correspondent be sent to the Spanish zone in Morocco. It was hoped that the influence of *The Times* would help to ease international tension, especially that between France and Germany, which the reporting of the rumours in French newspapers had provoked. However, the special correspondent sent out by *The Times* did nothing to allay the rumours that were appearing in French newspapers. On January 12th, *The Times* published his article. It referred to Melilla as a German naval base and also mentioned the establishment of a German submarine depot there. This would have obvious and long-term implications for the freedom of French and British traffic through the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, the aerodrome and seaplane station, which it was also claimed that the Germans had established, were, according to the correspondent, occupied by German technical staff. In addition, it was claimed that the aerodrome was used by German Junker and Dornier aircraft and Spanish aircraft. The Germans were also supposed to have established a base at Tetuan.¹⁶ As well as the substantial military and naval activity, the correspondent described the German economic penetration of Spanish Morocco: “The Rif iron mines and the less important iron mines near Melilla are being reorganized by German experts and the bulk of their products, it is believed, is now going to Germany.” In the conclusion of his article, the correspondent referred to attempts made by the Germans to undermine French imperial authority within neighbouring French Morocco because the “Nazis present themselves as true protectors of the Arabs.”

The threat posed by this article to both Anglo-German and Franco-German relations was taken seriously by the Foreign Office in London. The lengthy article, which encouraged the nightmare vision of the French authorities, that the Germans were indeed exploiting Franco's dependence upon their help in order to advance their own strategic interests in North Africa, had come at a particularly unfortunate juncture. The previous day, Hitler had made a public pledge to France promising to respect the territorial integrity of French and Spanish Morocco. The editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* on January 12th was optimistic about Hitler's assurances to France.¹⁷ Moreover, the article of its Paris correspondent for the same day was confident that, following Hitler's assurances to the French, there would now be an easing of the tension between the powers. Yet, despite the much higher circulation figures of the *Daily Telegraph*, the status of *The Times* of London abroad was such, that its lengthy article largely confirming French fears was viewed with great concern by official circles in London. *The Times* article, written by Scott, was reprinted in the French colonial newspaper *Petit Marocain* based in Casablanca. The British Consular General at Tangier sent a copy of it to the Foreign Office News Department in London. Leeper's response was that "*The Times* should not have printed the article."¹⁸ George Mounsey, head of the Western European Department at the Foreign Office, also expressed both concern and exasperation since the article appeared just as tension between France and Germany was easing: "[t]his article was published here first after the final French and German assurances had been exchanged and the atmosphere was slightly improved." Indeed Mounsey, in his memo, concluded that if the French press by contributing to scare stories did not succeed in bringing about a

European war, the English press stood a fair chance of doing so. Even allowing for exaggeration, official circles in London had a clear understanding of the impact of the British press on international relations. Furthermore, the episode was another example of the belief in British official circles that the conservative press could be a useful ally in easing tension between Britain and the dictatorships. After all, the crisis caused by the special correspondent's article had been the result of official lobbying of *The Times* to send out a reporter. The concluding comment of one foreign office official on the affair was, "we shall be very careful of encouraging correspondents in the future if they are going to let us down in this way."¹⁹

Given the closeness of its association with the National Government, it is hardly likely that *The Times* ever intended to compromise Britain's relations with Germany, or to exacerbate Franco-German tension over Morocco. However, the British government acknowledged that even if the stories of German military penetration of Spanish Morocco were exaggerated, there had certainly been considerable German economic activity there. Eden pointed this out to his colleagues during the Cabinet meeting of January 13th. He informed them that large amounts of iron ore required for the German armaments industry were being shipped from Spanish Morocco to Germany.²⁰ Nevertheless, it was an issue that the British government wanted played down and Eden reminded his colleagues that it was the government that had asked *The Times* to send a special correspondent to Morocco. Later, the Nationalist authorities invited both British and French correspondents to visit Spanish Morocco. The intention was to dispel finally the rumours relating to German military and economic activity. The Royal Navy destroyer,

HMS *Vanoc*, called at Ceuta and Melilla and on board were special correspondents from the British press. The reporters from the conservative press concluded that the allegations made against the Germans with regard to Spanish Morocco were false. On January 14th Christopher Martin, the special correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, denied that a German stronghold had been established at Ceuta.²¹

The reports sent back by the special correspondent for *The Times* contrasted with those reports of the German military build up printed in the same paper only a few days before. Having toured both Ceuta and Melilla, the correspondent tempered the allegations made only a few days before by his newspaper. Take, for example, the following statement from a report published in *The Times* on January 15th: “[a] rapid tour of the Tetuan and Ceuta areas confirms the view that no military incursion has been made by the Germans.”²² In a report titled “UNCENSORED”, and published in *The Times* on January 18th, the same correspondent emphasized the freedom he had been granted to travel in the rebel held zone. However, he was not allowed to travel to Melilla, nor were the British officers of *HMS Vanoc*, although they too were invited to inspect Spanish Morocco. Although the correspondent did not actually refute allegations that there had been considerable German activity, he stressed the economic rather than military intervention.²³ The view of some officials in the Foreign Office in London was that *The Times* had not gone far enough in backtracking from its earlier alarmist style of reporting. Yet this was in spite of the fact that on January 24th another correspondent based in Paris had denied there was any evidence of a significant German presence in Spanish Morocco. In fact, the correspondent had largely retracted the allegations that had come previously

from this source. Nevertheless, once again, the British Consul at Tangier questioned the veracity of the article. This was no doubt because the Paris correspondent did not categorically refute all the allegations of significant German activity in Spanish Morocco. Indeed, he advised that the situation in Melilla required careful watching.²⁴

In fact, the government shared the concern of *The Times* regarding the strategic as well as the economic implications of developments in Spanish Morocco. Reports concerning the construction of anti-aircraft and coastal artillery facilities along the Spanish Moroccan coast, which might endanger the freedom of Mediterranean shipping and even the security of Gibraltar itself, were taken seriously by the British authorities in Gibraltar. In the course of 1937-8, it was a matter for repeated discussion in government, and internal government documents reveal that official concern was far greater than the government was prepared to admit publicly.²⁵ Clearly, there were those in official positions such as the British Consul at Tangier who, in view of the delicate nature of international relations in the later thirties, did not want the British press to print a more or less accurate assessment of the threat posed to long term British strategic and economic interests by the German presence in Spanish Morocco.²⁶ There are different possible explanations explaining the change in tack, particularly in the attitude of *The Times*. On the one hand, given the evidence that both official and ministerial circles were concerned at the possible impact the earlier reports might have on Anglo-German relations, it is probable that the editor or his deputy would have been informed of the attitude of the government on this matter, and that pressure was exerted. A further explanation is that the Nationalist authorities sought to diffuse the crisis provoked by the publication of stories concerning

the build up of the German military presence in Spanish Morocco. After all, they invited journalists to visit the area where, ostensibly, they had freedom to write uncensored dispatches. This would have provided the opportunity of reassuring journalists and visiting British naval officers. By restricting access to those areas of Spanish Morocco the rebel authorities wanted them to see, they could also prevent the sending back, to London, of accounts which might indicate a German military presence if, for example, access to Melilla had not been denied.

The Moroccan crisis is significant also as an example of how even the foreign press might create tensions between Britain and Germany. The Paris correspondent of a British newspaper for example, could pick up scare stories in the French press. After all it was the appearance of articles in French newspapers that had initially prompted the government, via *The Times*, to investigate allegations of German intervention in Morocco. The response provoked in the Foreign Office by those first reports is a clear demonstration that, nearly nine months before Halifax's visit to Berlin, official circles were already convinced of the power of the press either to damage or to assist the policy of appeasement.

In the spring of 1937, Italian reverses in battles near Madrid were to be the cause of a serious deterioration in relations between Italy and Britain. As we have seen, the problem for the conservative press was that, publicly, the British government remained committed to Non-Intervention in Spain. The continued presence of Italian and German units fighting on the side of the Nationalist forces was a flagrant breach of this agreement.

Previously, in the late winter of 1937, Italian units of the CTV had played a key part in the campaign to capture the southeastern coastal city of Malaga, held by the Republicans since the beginning of the war. In February the city fell. The confidence brought about by this in Italian military circles encouraged General Roatta, formerly head of Italian Military Intelligence and currently head of the Italian units serving in Spain,²⁷ to demand a bigger role for the CTV in the fighting in Spain in general.²⁸ Franco, while not wishing to relinquish his overall control over military operations, agreed to an Italian led offensive to the north east of Madrid near the town of Guadalajara. The offensive, which began on the 8th March, although successful at first, became bogged down in mud, with the onset of bad weather. The slowing down of the Italian advance made possible a Republican counter- offensive on 18th March. The psychological effect of the victory on the Republic was great. Not only were the crack Italian Black Shirt and Littorio divisions defeated, but also the capture of the town of Brihuega from the Nationalists represented the first Republican victory of the Civil War.

The British press reported on Italian difficulties in great detail. Simply by reporting Italy's breaches of Non-Intervention in Spain, the conservative press was instrumental in undermining any sympathy among its readership for the Italian predicament. On March 11th, Eugene de Caux, *The Times* correspondent in Madrid during the Civil War, estimated that there were 15 000 Italians taking part in the battle of Guadalajara.²⁹ On March 22nd, the headlines in *The Times* on the Italian defeat at Guadalajara read, "MADRID TROOPS PUSH ON "; " ITALIANS RETREAT; and "BIG CAPTURES OF WAR MATERIAL."³⁰ The correspondent also declared,

[t]he defeat at Brihuega was drastic and decisive. The Italian losses out here have been very heavy. The roads and fields round Brihuega are strewn with rifles, gas masks and other war material thrown away.

Yet, from Mussolini's point of view, more serious than the losses of men and material was the damage to his prestige. Earlier, he had boasted of Italian military prowess. Indeed, as *The Times* correspondent pointed out, "[a]fter losing Brihuega the Italian forces it is stated here, did not attempt to make a stand." In *The Daily Telegraph*, the headlines on the Italian defeat were, "BIG CAPTURE OF ARMS BY GOVERNMENT FORCES", and, "RETREAT FROM BRIHUEGA IS THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT RETREAT OF THE NATIONALISTS SINCE THE CIVIL WAR BEGAN." ³¹ Henry Buckley, the Madrid correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, like de Caux, listed the material left behind by the retreating Italians. In addition, he drew attention to the capture by Republican troops of documents in which the Italians admitted to the presence of some 50 000 men in Spain.

In the spring of 1937, the ability of the British government to exert pressure even on conservative papers was, of course, hampered by the too obvious fact that Italy was in clear breach of Non-Intervention. Much to the concern of the British Foreign Office, the continuation of Italian intervention in the Spanish struggle only encouraged further anti-Italian feeling in Britain. Leeper in a memo of April 7th to his colleague, Sir Orme Sargent, showed his awareness of the difficulty of government efforts to persuade the press to show greater sensitivity towards Italy at this time:

What is disturbing about Italy's Spanish policy is that it is being conducted with so flagrant a disregard for feelings aroused in this country that what

originated as anti-Communist policy and not anti-British may develop into a violent and acrimonious dispute between England and Italy.³²

The difficulty that Leeper foresaw, resulting from Italian actions in Spain, was not helped by the refusal of *The Times* to agree to his suggestion that it print articles reviewing the British and Italian outlook on the major questions which divided the two countries, and which “envenom their relations.” Leeper’s motive was to persuade *The Times* to use its influence abroad to improve British relations with a dictatorship.³³ Although hostile towards the Spanish Republic, his main concern in international affairs was how to counter the threat posed by the emergence of Nazi Germany. His solution was to achieve an Anglo-Italian rapprochement, thus driving a wedge between the fascist States, in the process of which Germany would be isolated in Europe. For Leeper, the Spanish Civil War was really a contest between the communists and their opponents in Spain. Therefore, foreign intervention had only muddied the waters. In referring to how the press viewed the Civil War, he wrote that if Non-Intervention had been effective and “the issue were purely between Franco and Valencia [then] the result might be very different.”³⁴ In Leeper’s analysis, the overt support of Hitler and Mussolini for the Spanish Nationalists encouraged a hostile attitude in Britain towards Nationalist Spain and made it difficult for the News Department to cultivate sympathetic treatment for Franco in the British press. Therefore, he wrote, “[i]t will not be easy to get any sympathy for Franco so long as he is backed by the people who are most disliked here [Hitler and Mussolini].”

Those conservative newspapers that had given extensive coverage to the Italian intervention in Spain saw no reason why intervention by either Italy or Germany should be a stumbling block to the policy of appeasement. The entry in Dawson's diary for March 21st, for example, shows that he was dismissive about the Italian defeat at Guadalajara: "No great news -Italian 'volunteers' on the run in Spain." ³⁵ In general his diary in the years of the Civil War reflected his dislike of the Spanish government, to whom on numerous occasions he referred as the "Reds". Clearly, given Dawson's right wing political views, the epithet was meant to be pejorative. Significantly, there was no reference in *The Times* leader columns to the Battle of Guadalajara, nor was there any reference to the Italian refusal to withdraw troops from the Spanish war. Following the defeat, the Italian government publicly announced its refusal to withdraw any troops from Spain. Had the editor or his deputy wanted to express the disapproval of the paper in the strongest possible terms, it would have been delivered in the leader column where the opinion of *The Times* was pronounced. The evidence would suggest, therefore, that the editorial staff were trying to contain the inevitable decline in Anglo-Italian relations, towards which even *The Times* had contributed. The leader in the *Daily Telegraph* made light of the Italian refusal, arguing that far more serious would have been "[r]efusal on the part of Italy to take any further share in the efforts to prevent reinforcements and munitions going to Spain."³⁶ It expressed confidence that Italy would not deviate from international co-operation. This was shown in the following: "[a]s yet the powers have to contemplate no such [change in] attitude on the part of the Italian government." This newspaper's confidence in Italian good faith continued unabated. On March 27th, for example, the leader comment was as follows: "at present no reason exists for believing

that Italy will relax the restrictions which, in common with other powers she has imposed on volunteers.”³⁷ Thus both *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* which had contributed to the crisis in Anglo-Italian relations in the spring, were attempting, albeit in rather different ways, to minimize the crisis. *The Times* editorial policy was based on a policy of omission, with no discussion of Italy in the leader columns, whereas in the *Daily Telegraph*, the emphasis was on ‘talking up’ the prospects of Italian co-operation in the Non-Intervention Committee.

In spite of the efforts made by the editors of *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* to tone down criticism of Italy’s breach of the Non-Intervention Agreement, the effect of British press treatment of the battle of Guadalajara on Anglo-Italian relations was both immediate and of more lasting implication for international relations, than had been *The Times* reporting of German infiltration of Morocco in the previous January. The Italian ambassador to London, Count Grandi, raised the Italian objections with Viscount Cranborne, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Grandi told the minister of Mussolini’s annoyance at British press reporting of the Italian defeat. Indeed the issue was raised in the discussions of the British Cabinet at its meeting on March 24th. This was only two days after the appearance in the British press of the first reports of the Italian defeat.³⁸ Indeed, the discussion was no doubt influenced by the fact that the British ambassador to Rome, Sir Eric Drummond, had recently been informed by Count Ciano, the Italian foreign minister, of the Italian government’s displeasure at the reporting by British newspapers of the recent Italian defeat in Spain.³⁹ As we shall see later in this chapter, the affront to Mussolini’s vanity caused by the Guadalajara articles was to

initiate a crisis in Anglo-Italian relations, which was to fester throughout the ensuing months.

During the spring and summer of 1937, the Nationalists gradually completed the conquest of Northern Spain. The eventual loss to the Republic of the industrial areas of Asturias and of the Basque Provinces was a severe blow to the Republican war effort. Since Britain was dependent on the import of Spanish raw materials for her armaments industry, Nationalist military successes also increased their economic bargaining position in their relations with Britain. The Germans and Italians also continued to play a major role in the campaigns. The German military “seized the chance to use Spain as a living laboratory for their own military programme. Spanish civilians were the first Europeans to suffer the devastating consequences of dive bombing and carpet bombing techniques.”⁴⁰ In the Northern Campaign, such techniques were used to deadly effect against the Basque towns of Durango and Guernica. The bombing of Durango and Guernica provoked a mixed response from the conservative press. George Steer, the special correspondent for *The Times* at Bilbao, placed the blame for the destruction of Guernica on the Nationalists, and referred specifically to the involvement of German aeroplanes. Following widespread condemnation of the attack on Guernica, which Steer’s article had done much to create, the Nationalist authorities began to concoct the story that retreating Basque defenders had destroyed the town.⁴¹ However, on May 6th *The Times* printed a lengthy article by Steer denying this version by the Nationalist authorities. Steer wrote, “the statement issued from Salamanca that Guernica was destroyed by “Red” incendiaries is false.”⁴²

In order to strengthen his initial report, Steer gave specific details of the types of German bomber aircraft that had been used in the attack. Whereas the leader column of *The Times* had been silent about the Italian involvement at Guadalajara, on April 28th, the day of Steer's first article on Guernica, the leader column denounced the German air raid as counter-productive, and likely to stiffen rather than to undermine Basque resistance.⁴³ The *Daily Telegraph*, whilst acknowledging the responsibility of Nationalist planes for the attack, made no specific reference to the role played by German machines. The *Yorkshire Post* was more ambiguous about the causes of the destruction of Guernica. In its first reference to the air raid, on April 28th, it referred to Basque accusations against Germany.⁴⁴ On April 28th and 30th, it reported the Nationalist denial of any responsibility for the bombing. The *Morning Post* acknowledged the destruction of Guernica as an atrocity, but refused to accept that the Nationalists were automatically to blame, and advised "the suspension of judgment until inquiry has established the unquestionable facts."⁴⁵ On April 28th, the *Daily Mail* published an article on the raid, and surprisingly, given the sympathies of the paper, pinned the blame on Germany: "**more than 800 civilians were killed in three and a half hours of bombing by German aeroplanes.**"⁴⁶ Another paper sympathetic to the Nationalist cause, *The Observer*, similarly laid the blame on Germany: "there can be no mincing of words about so horrible and stupid an atrocity. Little doubt remains that it was the exclusive work of German aeroplanes and German bombs."⁴⁷

The varied response of the conservative press to the destruction of Guernica was a further illustration of the dilemma faced by the press in its dealings with the fascist powers. There remained a consensus among conservative papers that the Civil War posed a risk to European peace, and conservative papers wanted to avoid the nightmare scenario of an alignment of Britain and France against Germany. Yet, their perception of the fascist powers was influenced by their distaste for the internal policies of both Italy and Germany, as well as for their external policies as demonstrated in Spain. The conservative press could not refrain from condemnation of the attack on open towns in Spain. After all, since the development of bomber aircraft after 1918, fear of the devastation of such attacks on defenceless civilian targets had taken hold of the popular imagination. Dawson, although in favour of improving relations between Britain and Germany, expressed this dilemma in a letter on May 11th 1937: “The news reported in *The Times* is confirmed in every detail by an independent eyewitness in *The Daily Express* today.”⁴⁸ Later, on May 23rd, whilst acknowledging the annoyance which Steer’s article of April 28th had caused amongst official circles in Berlin, Dawson admitted, “its accuracy has never been disputed.”⁴⁹

The policy of *The Times* was to play down the significance of the attack on Guernica. In this, Dawson was motivated by wider considerations, namely the probable effect on the German government of condemnation of the attack. Therefore, as Dawson explained to Daniels,

there has not been any attempt here to rub it in or to harp upon it. I have always been convinced that the peace of the world depends more than anything else upon our getting into reasonable relations with Germany.⁵⁰

Indeed, only a week after it printed Steer's report, the leader column was lending its support to a policy of building bridges with Germany. On May 5th, therefore, the comment was, "[t]he identity of and nationality of the pilots are not yet known."⁵¹ The *Daily Telegraph* also lent its support to the policy of bridge building. On April 30th, the same day as it printed a page of photos showing the aftermath of the bombing raid, the leader comment focused on a criticism of the Trades' Union Congress for passing a motion condemning Germany for the attack. In the opinion of the leader, such action was a departure from Non-Intervention. Taking advantage of the fact that the same resolution called for a rally in support of the Republican cause, the leader pointed out "that humanitarian protests lose all their value when combined with a passionately expressed desire for the success of one party in the struggle."⁵²

During the course of 1937, the handling of the issue of Guernica by *The Times* is illustrative of its greater concern to avoid offending Hitler as opposed to Mussolini. Hence, in spite of the evidence of German responsibility in the atrocity as presented even by its own correspondent, Steer, and regardless of the impact which the reporting of the attack had on crystallizing anti-German sentiment in Britain, the paper presented a leader article, the clear purpose of which was to repair the breach in Anglo-German relations. In spite of the backtracking by *The Times*, the Guernica articles in the British press provoked strong reaction from the authorities in Berlin. On April 29th, the German press, almost certainly responding to official instructions, replied to Steer's allegations of the previous day by denying that German aeroplanes were responsible for the attack.⁵³ On May 4th, the

British ambassador to Berlin, Sir Neville Henderson, cabled to London, expressing his concern at the effect of Steer's article on Anglo-German relations:

Should it be established that they [*The Times*' editors] have been misled by their correspondents, they would be well advised to make a handsome retraction. Both His Majesty's Government and *The Times* have much more to gain from such an attitude than they can possibly lose.⁵⁴

Daniels, since 1912 *The Times* correspondent in Berlin wrote a series of articles in which he outlined the wave of anger against his paper for the way in which it reported on Guernica. In these, Daniels alluded to the official inspiration for the Anglophobia now appearing in large sections of the German press. For example, on May 4th, he stated that the signal for the campaign of propaganda against Great Britain "had been given by the official German news agency".⁵⁵ On May 6th, the German ambassador, Von Ribbentrop called at the Foreign Office to complain to Eden of the "incorrect and tendentious allegations made in part of the British press with reference to the alleged destruction of Guernica".⁵⁶ A further indication of the official displeasure in Berlin at the way in which British newspapers reported on matters such as the destruction of Guernica or the role of German airmen in Spain, was the involvement of the secret police. They confiscated an edition of *The Times* for a dispatch entitled 'Bombing of Guernica' and editions of the *Daily Telegraph*, *News Chronicle* and *Daily Express* for carrying stories about a German airman who had been captured by the Spanish Republican authorities.⁵⁷

Concern at the deterioration of Anglo-German relations during the previous six months prompted Philip Kerr, later Lord Lothian, to visit Germany. The purpose of the visit was to establish the causes of the deterioration of relations between Britain and Germany.

Therefore, Kerr met with leading members of the Nazi regime, including Hitler. At a meeting with the German Chancellor on May 4th, Kerr took notes and summarized Hitler's observations concerning "the fantastic items in the British press regarding the supposed German actions in Guernica". Kerr also noted, "it was clear that these tendentious reports in *The Times* and other papers greatly upset the Chancellor, and accounted for the rather heavy atmosphere during the first hour of the discussion."

Cornwell-Evans, the interpreter at the interview, made an attempt at reassurance:

the true face of England could not be read in the newspapers. The British people yearned for good relations with Germany. When the situation had so greatly improved, as at the present time, some mischance such as press reports [Guernica] gave certain evil forces an opportunity to check progress.⁵⁸

Kerr, as has been stated before, moved in the same *Round Table* circles as Dawson, for whom he worked as a correspondent for *The Times*. On his return from Germany, Kerr was a guest at a house party at Cliveden, where he had the opportunity to discuss with Dawson his high level talks with Hitler, Goering and Schacht.⁵⁹ Doubtless, Kerr would have made clear to Dawson what he interpreted as Hitler's opinions on the effects of *The Times* reports on Anglo-German relations in general. It is also likely that Dawson raised the matter with Neville Chamberlain, whom he met two days later.⁶⁰ This is indicated by the presence in the files of the Prime Minister's office of a copy of the transcript of Kerr's interviews with the German leadership.

Anglo-German relations continued to be threatened in the course of the year by international crises resulting from the Civil War. In June, both the observation scheme

imposed on the Spanish land frontiers with Portugal and France and the naval patrol scheme broke down. The elaborate schemes, the purpose of which was to stop the flow of men and material from abroad, collapsed on 22nd. Following two incidents in which German warships, engaged on Non-Intervention duties, were subjected to attack by Spanish Republican air and sea forces, both Germany and Italy withdrew from the naval patrol. Of more immediate concern, from the point of view of London, was the impending visit to Britain of the German Foreign Minister, Von Neurath. An invitation had been extended by the British government for the German Foreign Minister to attend talks in London on ways of improving Anglo-German relations. In preparation for the visit, Eden had exerted pressure on *The Times* to avoid printing anything that might threaten its prospects. Lothian had wanted to publish articles on his visit to Germany. Dawson was willing to agree, thinking that the impending visit of the German Foreign Minister would provide a good setting.⁶¹ However, Eden, fearing the possible impact on the forthcoming visit, was most anxious that the articles should not be printed. He therefore requested that Lothian suspend their publication: “the good effects which we hope thus to achieve in promoting Anglo-German relations, however, may be seriously jeopardized if expectations are aroused.” He continued, “whatever may be done to emphasize the personal character of the views expressed by you, they will inevitably be regarded as inspired by HMG. They may lead to a dangerous misconception of the visit.”⁶² Eden made a similar appeal to Dawson on June 18th:

It is very important that we should be able to have fruitful conversations in an atmosphere which is free from controversy... The influence of *The Times* is immense abroad... it is regarded as representing very closely the views of HM Government. I very much hope, therefore that you will see your way to postpone their publication.⁶³

Given the fact that Eden had not seen the articles, Dawson was surprised and not especially happy about the request but nevertheless agreed to suspend publication.⁶⁴

In spite of the government's success in persuading *The Times* to refrain from doing anything that might jeopardize it, the proposed visit was eventually cancelled at the insistence of the German government. As a result, there was further discussion in British government circles of the part played by the British press in intensifying poor relations between Britain and Germany. It was agreed that such poor relations were a direct result of the way in which the press continued to report on German intervention in the Spanish Civil War. On June 23rd, Sir Neville Henderson notified London of the angry reaction in the German press to British press handling of claims that Spanish government submarines had attacked the German warship, the *Leipzig*.⁶⁵ In Henderson's view, the *Volkischer Beobachter* was critical of *The Times*, for its "patronizing advice". The conclusion of the News Department official who read Henderson's telegram was that "the attitude of the British press has undoubtedly helped to embitter the incident". In fact, *The Times*, at least, had attempted to minimize the incident, no doubt in deference to Anglo-German relations already seriously strained by the Civil War. In its leader for June 23rd, *The Times*, although it raised doubts as to the veracity of the German claims that the *Leipzig* had been subjected to a deliberate torpedo attack by Spanish government submarines, was nevertheless muted in its criticisms of the German response, which after all was to withdraw from the Non-Intervention patrol of the Spanish coasts. The effect of German

action was to undermine the control plan to which British officials had devoted so much time. Yet *The Times* leader article offered an olive branch to Germany with the following:

British opinion has not been readier to hear and enter into the substantial case which Germany has to make against Europe, never readier to attempt the practical adjustments necessary to give Germany reasonable satisfaction, Europe a deeper sense of stability, and the world a more settled chance of getting on with the elementary business of earning and bettering its livelihood.⁶⁶

However, this was not enough to appease the anger of the German government towards *The Times*. Its hostility towards the paper continued into the summer. In August, the German government expelled Norman Ebbutt, *The Times* Berlin Correspondent.⁶⁷ This was in spite of the fact that on August 17th, *The Times* leader had made a further attempt to placate Germany. While defending the professionalism of Ebbutt, the leader offered yet another olive branch. The desire of the editors to assist in the appeasement of Germany is reflected in the following: "The notion that there can be no dealings with fascism as with national socialism has found no countenance in these columns."⁶⁸

In the late summer, support grew for stronger representation from official quarters to persuade editors and proprietors of the need for British papers to tone down their criticism of German and Italian activities in Spain. Indeed, so serious was the problem that, in the view of some in official circles, it posed a threat to peace in Europe. On 2nd July the British ambassador to Rome wrote to Sir Robert Vansittart at the British Foreign Office on the subject of the anti-British articles that were appearing in the Italian press during the summer months. The strict control over the press in Italy suggests that the articles were voicing the views of the Italian government. The ambassador wrote,

“Mussolini is now putting out a string of articles which have a strongly anti British basis.”⁶⁹ He commented on the anger that had been provoked in Italy at the Guadalajara articles in the British press: “Italians of all classes including strong anti-fascists feel profound resentment against the accusations of Italian cowardice published in the British press”. The ambassador drew the conclusion that Mussolini’s tactics in the press war were designed to whip up war feeling among the Italian people against Britain noting that “it is unpleasantly reminiscent of the techniques used in the early months of 1935 to bring Italian public opinion up to a pitch for his Abyssinian activities.”

No less an authority than the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey, blamed the British press for what he considered to be the growing belief in Italy that Britain intended to attack her in the near future. On July 23rd he voiced his concerns on this matter to Eden:

The people and even officials of a country that has lived for so many years under dictatorship, with a controlled press, undoubtedly tend to impute more than they should to hostile press articles in foreign countries, and fail to realize how impossible it is under a democratic system to control the press. The Spanish affair has, of course, added to the atmosphere of mutual suspicion.⁷⁰

Hankey also drew attention to the importance of Guadalajara and stressed that the “reckless jibes of the British press and their failure to make allowances for the difficulties that brought about the disaster at Guadalajara must have been most galling to a man of Mussolini’s temperament.” Hankey suggested that there be an agreement between the governments of Britain and Italy “to do their best to put a stop to press propaganda against the other nation, and, whenever possible, officially to repudiate false and tendentious news.”

On August 16th, Halifax issued a draft circular to HM missions abroad, calling for their assistance in ensuring that British correspondents in foreign countries sent “accurate news and views back to Britain.”⁷¹ He suggested that the correspondents be encouraged to consult with HM missions on a regular basis and that these missions be made aware of what British correspondents abroad were reporting,

in order that they may themselves furnish me as early as possible with accurate information regarding important items of foreign news, which are appearing in the British press as being issued by British news agencies...

In issuing this directive, Halifax was demonstrating his own concern at the likely interpretation abroad of the existence of a hostile attitude in Britain fostered by the British press. He was attempting to prevent the escalation of a press war with fascist countries. The extent of his concern may be seen in the following extract taken from the draft circular:

the task of the correspondent abroad is often performed in circumstances of great difficulty particularly in countries under a dictatorship or semi-dictatorship...The journalist is under pressure to be first with the news, and has to take risks.

Concern within British official and ministerial circles regarding what they considered to be the impact abroad of press articles, was not confined to the articles appearing in the conservative press. Indeed, as we have seen, both ministers and officials commented on the impact of the British press in general. However, in the view of leading ministerial and official circles, the role played by conservative papers contributed to a deterioration of relations between Britain and the fascist dictators. The point was that even among its closest allies in the press, the government could not rely on conservative papers not to

offend the dictator governments. The impact abroad of the conservative press was, of course, of particular embarrassment to a Conservative dominated government. The position of *The Times* was especially important given its reputation as the semi-official mouthpiece of the British government. Indeed, on occasion, both *The Times* and its readers were reminded of this by articles that appeared in the controlled press of Germany and Italy. Take, for example, the official German news agency communiqué of May 3rd. Above all the papers which had reported on the destruction of Guernica by German aircraft, *The Times* was selected for special criticism, because it was considered to represent British Government policy “in semi-official form”.⁷² By the late summer of 1937, Halifax, now convinced of the sensitivity of Hitler and Mussolini towards British press criticism of their activities in Spain, was taking what steps he could to bring the press under control.

Coexistent with the difficulties experienced by the conservative press in attempting to diffuse tension between Britain and the fascist states, there was, throughout 1937, growing concern at the prospect of the type of regime which would rule in Spain should the Nationalists succeed in defeating their Republican opponents. Contrary to Leeper’s analysis in the spring of 1937, the conservative press was not against the Spanish Nationalists; in fact the majority of conservative papers either openly or tacitly favoured the rebels. As has been previously mentioned, papers such as *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Daily Express* which consistently proclaimed their neutrality towards the conflict, by defending Non-

Intervention, had, in effect, adopted a position inimical to the interests of the legitimate government in Spain.

As the year 1937 drew on, it became increasingly likely that the Nationalists would win the war. For that reason it would be impossible for editors of conservative newspapers to allow articles to be printed which assumed anything other than cordial relations between Britain and the new regime in Spain. In the main, the conservative press was subtle. The pro-government conservative press, at least, continued in a policy of not publicly stating pro-Franco sympathies. However, sympathy with the Nationalist cause amongst those who controlled editorial policy could still be detected in a number of ways. The terminology used by newspapers was a very important way in which 'their' tacit sympathy for the Spanish Nationalists was revealed. Increasingly, the conservative press referred to the anti-government forces in Spain as the Nationalists, rather than the "rebels" or "insurgents". These were the preferred terms used by the anti-Franco left and liberal press, which, throughout the war, never wavered in their opinion of the Republican authorities as the only legitimate government in Spain. The term "Nationalist" was that adopted by the insurgents themselves as the label for their cause. It conferred a degree of legitimacy on a rebellion, a legitimacy which foreign newspapers could consolidate by agreeing to use it on a more or less continual basis. The *Daily Telegraph*, for example, earlier and much more consistently than *The Times*, referred to the anti-government forces as the Nationalists, and used the term not solely in the news columns but in the leader columns as well. The use by *The Times*, well into 1937, of the term 'insurgents', in leader columns and even in reports from correspondents based with the Nationalist army,

did not reflect an anti rebel bias. Merely, it was the case that the *Daily Telegraph* was more overt than *The Times* in displaying its preference for the rebels. For example, its leader comment on the fall of the city of Malaga in February stated, “ the situation has so dramatically changed within a few days that nothing can now deprive the Nationalists of final victory.”⁷³

In fact, compared with the way in which it had reported on the Nationalists earlier in the war, in the course of 1937 there was a discernible shift in the terms of discourse employed by *The Times*. In short, there was a shift from seeing both sides in the conflict as evenly matched, whether in military resources or the barbarity of the methods used in the fighting. For example, it accepted that the fall of Malaga was significant. In its view, “Franco looks like retaining the initiative which he has not lost since the Civil War began”.⁷⁴ A shift was, however, most discernible in the way both Spanish sides were now being described. As shown in chapter two, *The Times* had, in the first months of the war, failed to see any difference between the two sides, associating each with murder. On May 18th, for example, the editorial now read “[t]he Nationalists, after the first few weeks were able to stop the unauthorized killings, the authorities at Madrid and Barcelona took no steps for months to prevent the nocturnal butchery of men, women and children.”⁷⁵ The phrase “unauthorized killings” could be interpreted as the responsibility of zealots, acting without official sanction, whereas the description of those atrocities committed on the Republican side implies either that the authorities were unable or, more seriously, unwilling to prevent them. The language used to describe the killings on the Republican side becomes more emotive by the use of the term “butchery”. The reader is given no

details of the victims of the Nationalists, but the alleged viciousness and brutality of those who were defending the Republic is emphasized by the inclusion of women and children among the dead.

The supposed brutality of the Republican regime compared with the allegedly more orderly state of affairs in rebel Spain, made possible an advocacy of the rebels as a legitimate cause. On July 15th *The Times* leader argued for the granting of belligerency rights to the Nationalists since “[i]t has been usual to grant belligerent rights to rebels or insurgents when they were in a position to form an organized government and when the rebellion assumed the form of a war”.⁷⁶ The leader also argued that both these conditions applied in the case of General Franco. Two days later, the leader suggested that Franco had far more popular support than did his opponents, and questioned the legitimacy of the Republican regime.⁷⁷ This was significant given its timing, a year after the military rising against the Republican government began in Spanish Morocco.

In their handling of news from those areas of Spain under the control of the Nationalists, newspapers of conservative principles were subjected to various pressures which severely restricted their freedom of action. Editors were aware of the atrocities being committed by the Nationalist forces following the occupation of Republican held territory. For example, in the private and confidential correspondence written from France, special correspondents working for *The Times* informed editors of developments which could not be published in the columns of the paper, lest the correspondent be expelled. Nationalist censorship of the press was very strict, according to Harold Cardozo, *Daily*

Mail special correspondent with Franco's forces, "generally speaking, every conceivable obstacle was placed in the way of the war correspondent in Nationalist territory".⁷⁸ Cardozo referred to the long waiting times he was forced to endure before being permitted an interview with a member of the Nationalist press bureau at Salamanca. According to James Holborn, *The Times* special correspondent with the Nationalist forces, such were the restrictions being imposed upon correspondents during the spring of 1937, that "[f]acilities for obtaining reliable information or seeing military operations are still very poor and no good stories may be expected until this side has a spectacular victory at Bilbao or elsewhere."⁷⁹ In general, the delay in receiving cabled messages from their correspondents based with the Nationalist side provoked an irritated response from *The Times* editors. As early in the war as mid November 1936, Deakin, wrote to William Stirling, the first special correspondent of *The Times* to be stationed with the rebels, expressing his frustration at the delays and pointing out that if the present state of affairs continued it would be necessary for him to be withdrawn.⁸⁰ Of course, the correspondent could attempt to send out an uncensored dispatch from Hendaye, but as Holborn informed Deakin, "I might be asked to leave, and it would be inconvenient to have no correspondent in [the rebel] part of Spain, when something of real news interest occurs."⁸¹ This was no unrealistic fear, the Nationalist authorities were wary about which foreign newspapers they would allow to send correspondents into their territory. For example, they "refused to allow a single correspondent of any left-wing newspaper into their territory".⁸²

The Nationalist Press Bureau forbade correspondents to report that there were German, Italian and Portuguese troops fighting in Franco's armies. A way around this, of course, was to drive to the French frontier, in order to send back to London an uncensored dispatch, taking care to warn the editorial office against publishing the name of the correspondent. However, even this was risky as Noel Monks, *Daily Express* correspondent was to discover when, his name was added to an article he had written on the defeat of the Italians at Guadalajara. He was brought before Franco himself, threatened with the firing squad and expelled from Nationalist Spain.⁸³ Correspondents were forbidden to print news of anything that might be interpreted as an atrocity, even if it was "something the [Nationalist] troops bragged to you they did".⁸⁴ Not only would it have been edited out of the dispatch, but the correspondent would "get a sharp reprimand from the chief censor".

For various reasons, correspondents of conservative papers reporting on the situation following the capture of Malaga and Bilbao, for example, focused on the relief provided by the incoming Nationalist forces to the starving inhabitants, and on the restoration of normality after the fighting.⁸⁵ This, together with the failure of the conservative press in the main to see any threat to Britain of a Franco victory, despite the closer connection between Nationalist Spain and the Axis, is an example of the more sympathetic treatment of the Nationalists by the conservative press.⁸⁶ Apart from any political preferences on the part of editors and proprietors towards the Nationalist cause, given the progress of events on the ground in Spain, this sympathetic attitude seemed to be pragmatic. The fall of Malaga in early February made the chances of a revival in Republican fortunes grow ever

dimmer, a fact recognized by *The Times*, which analyzed the Nationalist capture of the sea port as being of great strategic importance. This was because it strengthened the influence of the Nationalist forces in the Straits of Gibraltar.⁸⁷ With the fall of Gijon in October, the conquest of Northern Spain was complete. The rapid conquest of territory on the mainland within the first year of the war not only deprived the legal government of Spain of its effective authority over most of the country and its inhabitants, but from the autumn of 1937 the Republic was increasingly dependent on what supplies it could import from that part of the Mediterranean coast still under its control. However, both ports and shipping to the Republic were vulnerable to Italian naval and aerial attack.

Important as the effort to develop good relations with Franco's Spain was considered to be, there were, nevertheless, growing misgivings even among government circles regarding the future direction that the Nationalist regime backed by the Axis powers might take. This concern naturally grew with the military balance swinging decisively in favour of the rebellion. Throughout the conflict, both Germany and Italy repeated their assurances that they had no territorial ambitions in Spain or in its overseas possessions. Meanwhile, Franco had on various occasions given his assurances that he would not cede any part of Spanish territory as a result of services rendered to his cause. However, the regime that he was in the process of establishing in the course of the year drew attention to the prospect of close ties between the New Spain and the fascist states once the war was over. In April, Franco adopted the twenty-six-point programme of the Spanish Fascist movement as the manifesto for his government. In effect, this act created a one

party fascist state. In July, Franco publicly announced to the United Press that, like Germany and Italy, Spain would be totalitarian.

Political developments in rebel Spain made it difficult for the conservative press in Britain to write favourably of the development of internal domestic policy in Franco's Spain. This was, inevitably, the result of his regime increasingly resembling those fascist states, which had come under criticism in Britain during the course of the year. Even *The Times* correspondent in Nationalist-held Vitoria voiced his concerns about the April decree: "it is the first step in the creation of a totalitarian state in a country which has always had strong tendencies towards regionalism and where individual independence is a marked characteristic of its citizens."⁸⁸ That this comment was published in *The Times* is significant because it represents the expression of opinion in a news column, something that it was the policy of Dawson and his deputy not to allow.⁸⁹ *The Daily Telegraph* doubted that the decree imposing unity upon the Falange and Carlist political parties in Franco's Spain, in order to create a one party state, would actually promote political unity. The leader declared, "merging the Fascist and Carlist parties is expected to lead to discontent in Nationalist Spain. Already mutinies are reported."⁹⁰ The opinion of the *Yorkshire Post* was likewise sceptical of the ability of Franco to impose a totalitarian regime in the long run.⁹¹ Thus developments in rebel held territory were pushing conservative papers to adopt, against their will, a more critical attitude towards the internal domestic policies of the Nationalist authorities. Correspondents, sympathetic to the rebel cause, who were stationed in the Nationalist zone, complained of their treatment at the hands of the authorities. Journalists reserved sharp criticism for Luis Bolín,

Nationalist press officer at Franco's headquarters in Salamanca: "Bolíín was soon detested by foreign newsmen, even by those who personally sided with the Nationalist cause."⁹² Even Monks, who admitted to liking Bolíín wrote, "[h]e had a cruel streak in him."⁹³ Journalists compared facilities provided for them in the Nationalist zone unfavourably with those enjoyed by their contemporaries in the Republic: "Cables containing red propaganda, from Madrid or Valencia were transmitted with a fairly lenient censorship."⁹⁴ It was not just that correspondents and their editors were frustrated at the difficulty in covering the conflict from the Nationalist side, but the rebel authorities complained to *The Times*, for example, that too little coverage was being given in this paper to their cause. According to Deakin, "The authorities serving General Franco still complain that we publish too little news from their side."⁹⁵ Deakin went on to state that "we want more, but it is apparently not to be had, and every message limps into London a worthless and emaciated apology for news." Yet, in spite of the difficulties and frustrations imposed upon them by the Nationalist authorities, it would appear that editors, mindful of the influence of their papers on international relations, still remained willing to suppress the publication of news and views which would seriously threaten British relations with the 'New Spain' after the war. Hence criticism was restrained.

In April, Franco declared a naval blockade of the coast of Northern Spain. This was a policy designed to starve Bilbao into surrender. This created difficulty for the British government, because it affected an area of trade in which British ships were involved. Since Franco was not recognized as a belligerent, interference with foreign ships by Nationalist vessels, outside the three-mile limit beyond the Spanish coasts, would be an

act of piracy. On April 12th, Baldwin announced in The House of Commons that the British government did not recognize the blockade as legal, but advised British ships that since the waters around the port were mined, they should not proceed. The government had adopted a curious policy; it neither wished to be seen as being forced by Franco to recognize him as a belligerent, nor did it want incidents involving British ships off the coasts of Spain to jeopardize relations with the victorious party there. It was very controversial, and lay the government open to the charge from its parliamentary critics that, by discouraging ships from trading with Northern Spain, it was aiding the starvation of Bilbao.

The support of the traditionally loyal conservative press to what amounted to a change of British policy in the Civil War was once again predictable. In this instance, not only the traditional supporters of the government in the press, but also the overtly partisan journals, such as the *Observer* and the *Daily Mail*, defended the case put forward by ministers in Parliament, that there had not been any change in British policy of neutrality regarding the instructions to British ships. The consensus among virtually all the leading conservative papers was that the information given to them did not in fact constitute a de facto recognition by the British government of the blockade. In this, the attitude of most conservative papers was to identify very closely with government policy.⁹⁶ It was the opposition press that drew attention to the pro Franco implications of the policy. The *Manchester Guardian* leader comment on April 13th, was highly critical of Baldwin's speech in Parliament the previous day: "a rebel leader recognized by us neither as a lawful government nor as a belligerent can with a few mines and some hypothetical

bombs create an 'effective blockade' that is what Mr. Baldwin has now in truth conceded."⁹⁷

In the course of 1937, the failure of the conservative press to point out the strategic threat to Britain of a Nationalist victory was in sharp contrast to the warnings that appeared in the leader columns of the liberal and left press. However, this omission, the conscious policy of those in control of editorial policy, caused conflict among the staff of conservative papers.⁹⁸ Journalists felt that given the editorial policy towards the reporting of the Civil War, it was not possible for them to present the alternative view in their papers. In that way, a policy of censorship was being imposed on staff whose opinions were sharply divided on events which were unfolding in Spain. Thus, whatever the disagreement amongst staff, editorial support for the government line inevitably meant that articles suggesting that Franco might be hostile towards Britain would not be printed. This censure was the catalyst for the early revolt within the conservative press towards editorial constraint on journalistic freedom. It has been pointed out that in his column in *The Sunday Times*, 'Scrutator' did consider the strategic implications of a Franco victory.⁹⁹ However, at no point in 1936-7 did he criticize British policy. A most curious omission given both the publicly stated view of government that Franco posed no threat, and the obvious failure of British policy to contain Axis power intervention anything like as effectively as it had dissuaded France from intervening on the behalf of the Republic. The balance of the evidence would suggest that 'Scrutator's' omission was deliberate. A newspaper whose editor and proprietor were close friends of Neville Chamberlain could do no other than support government policy. On May 2nd, for example, 'Scrutator' whilst

admitting that Italy's intentions in Spain were designed to impose a client state, nevertheless continued to defend British policy as genuinely neutral.¹⁰⁰

Liddell Hart, the military correspondent of *The Times*¹⁰¹, was one of the journalists in the conservative press who, in the course of 1937, came to view the prospects of a Franco victory with increasing alarm. He was one of the first to speak out against what he saw as the failure of the press to point out the dangers to its readership. When the Civil War began, he started an analysis of articles written by British correspondents reporting from each of the sides in the conflict.¹⁰² His own hostility towards the Nationalists developed largely because of the extent of the German and Italian aid reaching the insurgents: “a very ominous development for us, in view of the way that Spain flanked our main sea routes and commanded the western gateway to the Mediterranean.” However, Liddell Hart was also concerned at the internal policies of the insurgents, in particular the “policy of systematic and deliberate terror carried out by the rebellion in those areas of Spain which come under their control.”

In his memoirs, Liddell Hart implied that his hostility towards Franco meant that he was not permitted to write a military review of the war, which as military correspondent, he would have normally expected to do.¹⁰³ Moreover, he noted the consistent support offered by *The Times* leader columns to the policy of Non-Intervention, support that continued despite mounting evidence that the policy was indeed a failure. Liddell Hart, therefore, concluded that the concern of those in control of editorial policy was not to offend either

Hitler or Mussolini, and that they supported the British government stance on Non-Intervention because

Geoffrey Dawson and Barrington-Ward like much of the Cabinet harped on the risk that any action we might take to check German and Italian aid to Franco might involve us in a war with those powers.

At the end of April 1937, Liddell Hart wrote to the deputy editor, “in the hope that it might make some impression on the prevailing practice of *The Times* in turning a blind eye to German and Italian intervention in Spain.”¹⁰⁴ Liddell Hart, in an attempt to persuade Barrington-Ward to adopt a more critical tone towards the Nationalists, was explicit in pointing out the concerns of the journalists at the attitude of the paper towards the conflict:

[Non-Intervention has] been more like non-intervention with those who are intervening...our unwillingness to take a firm line on insisting on genuine non-intervention clears the path for Italy and Germany to establish their position in Spain to our jeopardy.

On May 19th Liddell Hart again wrote to Barrington-Ward concerning the attempt by *The Times* to maintain a ‘neutral’ position in its presentation of the two sides in the Civil War. For Liddell Hart, this attempt at balance was not justified by the facts. It was certainly his view that whereas atrocities committed in the Republican zone were, in essence, spontaneous, those committed by the Nationalists were part of a deliberate policy of terror instigated by the state authorities in Nationalist Spain. Concerning *The Times* he wrote, “in the attempt to maintain the balance it seemed to me a very unfair representation of the balance of evidence.”¹⁰⁵ Barrington-Ward’s reply reiterated what he regarded as the neutral policy of the paper: “up to the present there has in fact been very little to choose

between them [the two sides] in that regard [atrocities]. For my part I refuse to be the advocate for either party.”¹⁰⁶ The correspondence between Liddell Hart and Barrington-Ward, during the spring of 1937, illustrates fundamental differences in the way the Civil War was perceived even within the conservative press. Firstly, they disagreed on the strategic implications to Britain of a Nationalist victory, secondly they disagreed on the respective nature of the atrocities being committed in Republican and Nationalist Spain, and thirdly they disagreed on the neutrality of *The Times*. Whatever the privately held views of the deputy editor, such was his determination to ensure the support of his paper for government policy, that *The Times* could not claim it was neutral. This was the root cause of Liddell Hart’s complaint against the policy of *The Times* towards the Civil War.

Liddell Hart was convinced that a determination on the part of the western democracies to make Non-Intervention a reality would not lead to war with the fascist States. On the contrary, Liddell Hart claimed that Hitler, in particular, was eager to withdraw from his Spanish commitments providing it could be done without loss of prestige. It was on this matter that, at the end of May, Liddell Hart wrote to his deputy editor:

he [Hitler] deplored the stupidity of Franco. The Germans were dismayed by the reactionary tendencies which they found among Franco’s supporters...The inclination in Germany was to withdraw from the business...¹⁰⁷

The military correspondent continued to dispute what was publicly proclaimed by the government and defended in the conservative press, that, whatever its failures, Non-Intervention would prevent the outbreak of a European war. In the course of the year, even Dawson began to show unease regarding Franco. But, in continuance of his defence

of government policy towards Spain, he did nothing consciously to compromise Britain's relations with either Germany or Italy. Hence, he would not allow warnings about their intervention in Spain to be sounded in the columns of *The Times*. Nor was his military correspondent permitted to write about the implications of their intervention.¹⁰⁸

Liddell Hart, however, being a respected writer on military and strategic matters found other means of achieving publicity for his views concerning the Civil War. In 1937, his book *Europe in Arms* pointed out his view:

a new danger has loomed up in the possibility of a militaristic Spain, filled with the desire to renew its imperial role [which] is clearly reflected in some of the interviews given by General Franco, and linked with Fascist Italy by a common ambition...in that quarter too, Nazi Germany might find some scope for developing an indirect leverage on her own neighbours.¹⁰⁹

He envisaged the possibility of the threat to the Western Mediterranean from a Spanish airforce developed with the resources of German aid. Such a force would render Gibraltar "untenable as a base for the British fleet as Malta proved in the last emergency." In view of this, he expressed his disbelief at "the eagerness with which some of the most avowedly patriotic sections of the British public have desired the rebels' success." For Liddell Hart, the strategic threat of a Fascist Spain did not stop at the Western Mediterranean, for the establishing of submarine bases in the Canaries would enable Spain to threaten the Cape route. In the event of the Suez Canal being rendered unsafe for British shipping, this would be the only route connecting Britain with her overseas empire. Indeed, Liddell Hart questioned the promises made by both Franco and the Axis

powers that there would be no cession of Spanish territory in return for their help. He wrote,

[t]here have been reports, formerly denied, of a secret promise of these two strategic points [Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands] to Italy and Germany respectively in return for help rendered... Though the denial may be accepted, this does not remove the potential danger. The availability of bases in these islands for the possible use of a strong sea and air power would be scarcely less ominous than the actual cession of the territory.

Liddell Hart was once again challenging the basis of the consensus in conservative political and media circles, that Franco was a Spanish nationalist who would be able to maintain the territorial integrity of Spain. Indeed, the acceptance of so much Axis power intervention both by Conservative ministers and their press allies relied on the good faith of Hitler and Mussolini. Both dictators had declared that, despite their commitments in terms of manpower and resources, they had no long-term strategic motives in Spain. The confidence of ministers and their supporters within the press resulted from their acceptance, at face value, of the assurances given by both fascist dictators that their interest in the Spanish Civil War was solely to crush Communism. That such assurances were so readily accepted among influential circles in London was, of course, a reflection of their hostility towards the democratically elected republic and further evidence that neither the government nor its allies in the press were neutral.

Liddell Hart, however, was not alone in his condemnation of the government/press coalition regarding Spain. Baron Commander Stephen King-Hall, an influential journalist and lecturer in the inter-war period, took a keen interest in current affairs.¹¹⁰ At least as early as June 1936, he became disenchanted with what he considered as the

failure of much of the press to be sufficiently alert to the rising threat posed by Fascism. Therefore, he undertook to start an independent newsletter to be known as *The King-Hall Newsletter Service*. It was available only to subscribers. In spite of not having the financial support of advertising revenue, the newsletter was very successful. Circulation figures rose very quickly. From an initial six hundred subscribers in 1936, by 1939 it had risen to sixty thousand.¹¹¹ In the same period, this figure was higher than the daily circulation of *The Manchester Guardian*, nearly half the daily circulation figures of *The Times*, and more than three times the daily circulation figures of the *Yorkshire Post*. What *The King-Hall Newsletter Service* offered was an independent and alternative view on international events.

King-Hall's own views on Spain were similar to those of Liddell-Hart, with whom he corresponded. Both felt that a victory for the Nationalists in Spain was a threat to British interests. On August 11th 1936, King-Hall declared,

the great repeated statements which one comes across in the speeches of politicians and leading articles in the press to the effect that the internal affairs of a nation are of no concern to its neighbours is simply nonsense.¹¹²

With the collapse of the press consensus on Spain in the course of the first six months of the war, the newsletter, like the liberal/left press in Britain, adopted an attitude of sympathy towards the plight of the Spanish Republic. King-Hall's analysis of the strategic implications would have made it impossible for him to adopt any other position. Indeed in his letter of August 11th he declared also, "it is idle to pretend that the safety of our communications through the Mediterranean would not be affected by the existence in

Spain of a government collaborating closely with Italy and Germany.” In his views on Spain, King-Hall was largely isolated from the British establishment of which he was a member.¹¹³ Given the willingness of the liberal/left press to oppose government policy on Spain, it is likely that a high proportion of the readership for the newsletter would have come from those traditional supporters of the conservative press who, like King-Hall, did not share the confidence in government policy shown by many proprietors and editors. As will be shown later, King-Hall, and through him his newsletter, maintained contacts at the highest levels of the government. Thus, in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War, a connection was forged between his newsletter and the Conservative establishment.

As long as Eden remained as Foreign Secretary, opposition towards the line being adopted by ministers and editors was limited among both journalists and readers of conservative journals. Because Eden had come to share the concerns of Liddell Hart and Baron King-Hall, the hope prevailed that the Foreign Secretary might use his influence to change the views of his colleagues. It was hoped he might persuade them that rather than continuing to pay lip service to Non-Intervention, it was necessary for the government to adopt measures to restrain the intervention of the Axis powers in Spain. Eden’s concerns at the increasing Axis power violations of the Non-Intervention Agreement throughout the second year of the Civil War were, unsurprisingly, shared by the Permanent Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Vansittart.¹¹⁴ For his part, Eden was determined not only to make the Non-Intervention Agreement effective but to make an agreement with Italy,

which would offer British recognition of the Italian Empire in Ethiopia, dependent upon Italy's full co-operation on the issue of Non-Intervention in Spain.

Unlike most of his Cabinet colleagues, Eden was prepared to use what leverage he had to achieve Italian withdrawal from Spain. As early as December 20th 1936, he had written to Vansittart suggesting that, since Italy was financially dependent on British loans to pay for her commitments in Spain, Britain should refuse to lend her money: "it is not part of our business to provide money for aeroplanes for Franco and subsidies for Rossi to seduce Majorca! That is what a British loan would be used for at this time."¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Eden made clear to Liddell Hart his desire that Franco should not win the Civil War. Liddell Hart met Eden on November 23rd 1937, at the Foreign Office. According to Liddell Hart, Eden "regarded it as a British interest that Franco should not win...He thought that the government [Spanish loyalists] could hold out indefinitely apart from the food situation."¹¹⁶

Eden's new Spanish policy came under threat from Cabinet colleagues, such as Samuel Hoare, who wanted the victory of the Nationalists, but, more importantly, also from the new Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, who wanted to achieve the appeasement of Italy as a priority.¹¹⁷ At the end of July 1937, Count Ciano, the Italian ambassador handed a personal letter from Mussolini to Chamberlain. The letter lamented the poor state of relations between the two nations and reiterated Mussolini's reassurance that Italy had no territorial ambitions in Spain. It referred also to Mussolini's desire for Britain's *de iure* recognition of Italy's conquest of Ethiopia. Chamberlain, without even consulting Eden,

agreed to initiate Anglo-Italian discussions, a proposal, which Mussolini accepted on August 2nd. Eden and Vansittart, through their contacts with the press, particularly the conservative press, aimed to play down the significance of these discussions. Eden wanted evidence of Italian good faith regarding Spain as the prerequisite for improved Anglo-Italian relations. He did not want the conservative press to give Italy the impression that the British government was willing to seek a rapprochement with her regardless of her intervention in Spain. Two days after the Italian government's agreement to open Anglo-Italian conversations, Eden wrote to Vansittart, concerning the way it should be handled by the British press:

I think it important that our press should emphasize connexion between Italians in Spain and Better A-I relations, there must be an end of giving and not getting. I hope that you will keep the News Department up to this. I am still uneasy at the line such papers as I see, except *Times*, which is excellent, are taking today. We shall do ourselves great injury in the world if we do not show firmness in our dealings with Italy now.¹¹⁸

Eden informed Vansittart that he wanted the press to welcome the prospect of the talks, but added that newspapers should stress there were issues to be cleared up including both the Italian presence in Majorca and the Italian troops in Spain. Eden, in fact, was referring to the tendency of newspapers to 'talk up' the prospects of an Anglo-Italian rapprochement, and in this he had to be alluding to specific conservative newspapers. He informed Vansittart of his concern that if newspapers were not more cautious there would be suspicion among a British public, increasingly wary of Mussolini's assurances, that the government was preparing to go too far in its effort to appease Italy. This might trigger a backlash against the government and threaten the talks. Eden's concern had been fuelled by headlines such as those in *The Daily Mail* for July 30th, which had announced the

enthusiasm of the paper for the apparent readiness of Italy to agree to the British plan for the withdrawal of volunteers from Spain. Its headlines read, “FULL AGREEMENT WITH PROPOSALS”, “ITALY’S ENCOURAGING TONE”, and “HOPE OF REAL PROGRESS.”¹¹⁹ The *Daily Express* was also enthusiastic about Italy’s acceptance of the British plan for the removal of volunteers, and advised a reciprocal gesture on the part of Britain: “let us mark Mussolini’s acceptance of the British plan by recognizing the Italian sovereignty over Abyssinia, which is his anyway.”¹²⁰ This was in direct contrast to Eden’s plan to make recognition of Italy’s Ethiopian Empire dependent on proof of Italian troop withdrawal from Spain. Furthermore, *The Daily Express* on August 2nd was very optimistic about the prospects of bilateral talks between Britain and Italy. The opinion was, “[w]e rejoice that Mr. Chamberlain has sent a personal letter of friendship to Mussolini for we should have no quarrel with that Nation.”¹²¹

Meetings were held, on August 3rd for example, between Eden and Vansittart to discuss methods of countering the glowing stories of imminent appeasement of Italy, and to persuade newspapers to adopt a more cautious tone. It was clear that on this issue, as on others, the British government had no common strategy to be adopted towards the press. This lack of consensus is evidenced by a meeting between Charles Warner, a News Department official¹²², and Victor Gordon Lennox, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, the purpose of which was to persuade Gordon Lennox to dampen down his enthusiastic reports of the Anglo-Italian conversations. Warner reported on this meeting to Vansittart, who passed the information on to Eden that Gordon Lennox had been “writing on some kind of information received from a member of the Cabinet but of

course I cannot be certain of this.”¹²³ Clearly Gordon Lennox’s informant had rather different views of how the proposed Anglo-Italian conversations should be handled. As Vansittart reminded Eden, Chamberlain’s own view was different from his. The Prime Minister felt that Britain should press ahead with the negotiations and “strike while the iron was hot.”

Even Eden and Vansittart disagreed on press strategy. Eden was prepared to inform the press a lot more about what the government hoped to achieve from the talks and the difficulties that it felt it would encounter in reaching a satisfactory conclusion. In Vansittart’s opinion, this would create complications with the Italians, and “might lead people to suppose that you and we were going in a different direction from that attributed to the Prime Minister”, which of course they were.¹²⁴ In spite of their differences, the strategy adopted by Eden and Vansittart in persuading the press to damp down its optimism of the Anglo-Italian conversations was successful. Vansittart was later to inform Eden:

a number of papers which you have not seen are spontaneously taking the line that all is not gold that glitters and that the question of Spain will automatically come into the discussions and are in fact showing none of the disposition to rush their fences displayed for example, by Rothermere and *The Daily Mail*.¹²⁵

The firm line followed by Eden on Spain was reflected further in the late summer and autumn of 1937, following the increase of air and submarine attacks on merchant shipping trading in Spanish ports. As part of his strategy to stop the supply of Soviet war material to the Republic, Franco made a secret request to Mussolini for further

assistance.¹²⁶ As a result, there was an increase in Italian naval activity in the Mediterranean Sea, between the Straits of Gibraltar and the Straits of the Dardanelles. Italian planes operating from Majorca in the Balearics intensified their attacks on merchant shipping sailing to Republican ports. From August 1st until September 2nd, thirty merchant ships were attacked. On two occasions, Eden ordered the British ambassador to inform the Italian government that rumours of Italy's involvement in these Mediterranean attacks would have unfortunate consequences for Anglo-Italian conversations. Finally, on September 2nd, the British Cabinet agreed to support the French proposal for a Mediterranean conference of the relevant powers to be held at Nyon. As a further measure, the Cabinet agreed to suspend both the Anglo-Italian conversations and negotiations with the Nationalist government concerning a proposal for an exchange of agents.¹²⁷ The Nyon Conference resulted in the Nyon Agreement, which established a series of routes and maritime ways between the ports trading with Republican Spain and also naval patrols to guarantee the security of these routes. The agreement represented a diplomatic defeat for Italy in particular.¹²⁸ German and Italian refusal to attend the Nyon conference did not prevent the Mediterranean talks and a plan involving international co-operation was forged to deal with the submarine attacks on merchant shipping.

The firm stand taken by Eden at Nyon received almost universal acclaim in the British press. A News Department official commented,

[th]e London and the provincial press are to all intents and purposes unanimous in paying tribute to the success of the negotiations at Nyon... The difficulties in the way of securing Italian co-operation in the plan

are fully realized and the handling of these difficulties comes in for no small measure of appreciation. For once the attitude of the left press is very little different from that of the right and so far as the former is concerned this is largely due to a wholehearted recognition of the diplomatic success shown in the treatment accorded to Soviet Russia and Italy respectively.¹²⁹

Indeed the firm stand at Nyon was defended in *The King-Hall Newsletter*. The comment was, “[t]he great importance of the conference lies in the fact that it was a diplomatic victory for the democracies.”¹³⁰ In the editorial of the same issue, King-Hall described the conference as “swift and effective, Britain and France meant business and it will surprise me if piratical attacks on Spanish ships by submarines whose origin is believed by everyone to be Italian, do not come to an abrupt end.”

The Nyon conference was to be the high water mark of Eden’s influence over his colleagues. By February 1938 his position in Cabinet had become untenable. The cause of this was the growing disagreement between Eden and Chamberlain over how to respond to further Italian intransigence on the issue of foreign intervention in Spain. Initially, at its meeting on October 6th 1937, the Cabinet agreed to Eden’s suggestion to support a French initiative to open tripartite discussions involving Britain, France and Italy, with a view to finding a means of making Non-Intervention effective.¹³¹ Yet hopes were quickly dashed. Given her commitment to the success of the Nationalist cause, Italy’s reply to the proposal was negative. Moreover, it signalled an end to the consensus between Eden and Chamberlain on policy towards Italy. Unlike Eden, Chamberlain was against a firm line and in particular would not support a threat of reopening the Pyrenean frontier to allow the transit of supplies to the Republic.¹³² The Nyon conference of the

previous autumn had isolated both Germany and Italy and resulted in a further strengthening of the Axis partnership. Increasingly, therefore, Chamberlain was convinced of the necessity of appeasing Italy.

The growing divergence between Eden and Chamberlain was to have ramifications on the government's relationship with the press. Both men were in agreement on reopening an effective Anglo-Italian dialogue.¹³³ What divided them was Eden's opposition to the official recognition by Britain of Italy's conquest of Abyssinia prior to substantial Italian troop withdrawals from Spain. Without agreement on this point, there could be no government consensus on how the press should be lobbied on the forthcoming Anglo-Italian conversations. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary lobbied the conservative press from very different angles. An example of their contrasting views can be seen in Eden's response to the way in which *The Times*, as ever the semi-official mouthpiece of the government, talked up the prospects of the forthcoming Anglo-Italian conversations. In October, *The Times* lent its support for the resumption of the Anglo-Italian conversations. On October 21st, the leader column expressed its faith in Italian good intentions. In its view, Italy's acceptance of an international commission to be sent to Spain by the Non-Intervention Committee in order to ascertain the number of volunteers on either side was sufficient proof of Italian goodwill.¹³⁴ Eden reacted by instructing his private secretary, Oliver Harvey, to approach Rex Leeper at the News Department.¹³⁵ Leeper's brief was to advise *The Times* that "the position remained unchanged", that the conversations would only take place once the British government was satisfied that Italian troops had withdrawn from Spain.¹³⁶ Regarding the prospects of

talks with Italy, official sources much closer to the Prime Minister's way of thinking were, nevertheless, able to instil optimism within the conservative press. Eden regarded this as counter-productive. He believed it would make the Italians even more reluctant to co-operate on the issue of troop withdrawal.¹³⁷ In his view, whether or not they intended to co-operate, the Italians would sense in the government-inspired stories in the conservative press, a determination by the British government to come to terms with Italy at all costs. Oliver Harvey noted in his diary,

AE very annoyed at a press campaign bearing all the marks of authoritative inspiration crying up the prospects of early and complete agreement between us and the Italians; this is exactly the way to arouse exaggerated hopes and to make the Italians difficult because they will think we are so eager we will pay anything for agreement.¹³⁸

Harvey and Eden were aware that the Prime Minister himself was in some way involved in this lobbying of the press. Such awareness is indicated in the following comment in Harvey's diary: "according to the News department the campaign [initiated by an article in the *Daily Mail*] can only have come from Number 10."¹³⁹

Ultimately, the divergence of opinion between the Prime Minister and Eden over foreign policy resulted in Eden's resignation from the Cabinet, an event that took place on 19th February 1938. Eden would not accept Mussolini's acceptance of the withdrawal plan of the Non-Intervention Committee as sufficient proof of Italian goodwill, to justify the resumption of Anglo-Italian conversations. In his insistence on the precondition of actual Italian troop withdrawal from Spain, Eden was isolated in Cabinet from most of his colleagues who supported the position of the Prime Minister.

The period from the beginning of 1937 to late February 1938 had been significant in the development of the relationship between the government and the conservative press. It is the case that editorial support for government policy largely held firm. Yet the development of the conflict, and the significance of Axis power intervention in securing the tide of war in favour of the Nationalists produced strains in the conservative consensus on Spain. Increasingly, journalists came to question the consensus being maintained by their editors and proprietors. After all, it was difficult for journalists who were accustomed to reporting the atrocities of the German and Italian governments towards their own peoples, to ignore their brutal actions in Spain. Within journalism, there was an expectation of reporting with openness and honesty. Those who controlled the editorial policy of those newspapers traditionally loyal to the Conservative government did not wish to cause difficulty for the government and yet this could not be avoided. This led to a rather peculiar development in a number of leading newspapers where foreign intervention was criticized but never the government policy that failed to prevent it.

It is quite clear that long before the Halifax visit to Berlin in 1937, the circumstances created by the Spanish Civil War had alerted the British government to the fact that, in the interests of the policy of appeasement, it was necessary for the free press to exercise restraint. The problem that was to dog the government was that in a democracy its ability to influence the free press was limited. It was a limitation of which the dictators, accustomed as they were to strict control over the media, remained unconvinced. Indeed, both Hitler and Mussolini assumed that, given the close contacts binding the conservative

press with ministers, the British government, if it had so wished, could have persuaded the press to tone down its criticism. The German ambassador, Von Ribbentrop, moved in the most influential circles of the British establishment, as did Franco's representative in Britain, the Duke of Alba.¹⁴⁰ In spite of the knowledge of British society that such contacts could give to the dictator governments, the fascist dictators themselves could not accept that the British government was unable to compel the press, especially *The Times*, to co-operate. The irony was that conservative newspapers did what they could to pander to the hypersensitivity of the dictator governments. Yet, the subtle omission of potentially contentious news and the censoring of opinion hostile to the established consensus reached by newspapers and conservative politicians, were lost on the dictators. However, amongst journalists who questioned the wisdom of government policy, there was growing awareness that a form of censorship was being imposed. Liddell Hart and King-Hall, for example, felt that newspapers had a public duty to inform their readers of the strategic threat to Britain and France of a Nationalist victory. In a democracy, there was a limit to the extent to which editorial policy could suppress the publication of alternative views. If Liddell Hart was not allowed to print his warnings in *The Times* he could do so in lectures and books. Furthermore, his reputation as a military historian would undermine further the perception that the staff of *The Times* was united in supporting government policy. The divergence between his views and those of his paper demonstrated to his audience at home and abroad, that the consensus in support of official policy on Spain was a facade. It showed that *The Times*, in pursuit of what Dawson perceived as the interest of national policy, was prepared to suppress alternative views highly critical of government policy towards Spain. Only the continued presence in the

Cabinet of Eden, whose determination was to make Non-Intervention a reality, prevented a more fundamental breakdown in the consensus within the conservative press in the course of 1937.

In retrospect, the renewed press consensus in support of the government policy of firmness adopted at the Nyon conference and which mirrored that broad consensus which had linked newspapers from across the political spectrum in support of Non-intervention in the summer of 1936, was doomed to be similarly short lived. Even within the Conservative Party, the positions of Eden and Chamberlain could not be reconciled in the long term. The developing international crisis strengthened the Prime Minister in his resolve to press ahead with the appeasement of Italy in spite of the objections of his Foreign Secretary. As we shall see in the next chapter the crisis, which resulted in Eden's resignation in 1938, was to have long lasting implications for even conservative newspaper reporting of government policy towards Spain.

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- ¹ Cockett, *Twilight Of Truth*, pp.40-1.
- ² “The Nazi leaders made it plain to Halifax that one of the chief obstacles to better relations between the two countries was the widespread attacks on the leadership, especially on Hitler himself, in the British press”: Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook A Life* (London, 1992), p.350.
- ³ Claud Cockburn had been the New York correspondent for *The Times* before joining the British Communist Party. The journal he edited, *The Week*, was to be the forerunner of a particular type of journal which was to emerge in the last years of peace. Common to all of these publications was a willingness to offer a more critical opinion of government foreign policy than was available in many, especially conservative newspapers.
- ⁴ Among the guests of the Astors at Cliveden that weekend were Halifax, Lord Lothian, Geoffrey Dawson and Barrington-Ward, see Derek Wilson, *The Astors*, p.269.
- ⁵ Halifax was surprised at the seriousness with which Hitler viewed press criticism abroad, see Cockett, *Twilight Of Truth*, p.40.
- ⁶ In Nazi Germany, for example, the Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, issued directives to the German press. In fact, “the directives were minutely detailed and so destroyed all journalistic initiative, that Goebbels, in a moment of candour admitted ‘any person with the slightest spark of honour left in him will take good care in future not to become a journalist’”: Grunberger, *A Social History of The Third Reich*, p.498.
- ⁷ Wilfred Hindle, *The Morning Post 1732-1937. Portrait Of A Newspaper* (Westport, Connecticut, 1937, reprint 1974), pp.237-8.
- ⁸ Wilson, *The Astors*, p.265.
- ⁹ Mclachlan, *In The Chair*, pp.122-3.
- ¹⁰ Taylor, *The Great Outsiders*, p.294.
- ¹¹ Chisholm and Davie, *Beaverbrook A Life*, pp.330-1.
- ¹² Mclachlan, *In The Chair*, pp.125-6.
- ¹³ Dawson Diary, July 1st 1936; Dawson papers.
- ¹⁴ Moreover, “[f]or the rest of 1935 and increasingly in 1936 [Ribbentropp] met whomever he could who had pretensions to influence. The big houses of England where political men were entertained would be open to him in the following year”: Ian

Colvin, *Vansittart In Office* (London, 1965) pp.48-9

- ¹⁵ 'Germany And Morocco', *The Times*, January 9th 1937, p.12.
- ¹⁶ Special Correspondent at Tangiers, 'Germany And Morocco', *The Times*, January 12th 1937, p.12.
- ¹⁷ The leader comment on Spain appeared under the title 'Herr Hitler Talks Peace', *Daily Telegraph*, January 12th 1937, p.14. The Paris correspondent wrote reassuringly about the diplomatic overtures made to France by Germany: "It is hoped that these verbal assurances will be sealed by some form of 'a gentleman's agreement', and thus definitely remove French anxiety concerning Germany's reported activities in Spanish Morocco", *Ibid*, p.15.
- ¹⁸ PRO, FO 371, 21263, W1422/514/28.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*.
- ²⁰ PRO, CAB 23/87, Cabinet minutes and conclusions, January 13th 1937, conclusion 5.
- ²¹ 'British Inquiry Into Morocco Charges', *Daily Telegraph*, January 14th 1937, p.13. The diplomatic correspondent, writing on the same day, reassured his readers that "[t]he French Government feels that, in Herr Hitler's assurance to M. Francois, the French Ambassador in Berlin, it has secured, by diplomatic action, guarantees equivalent to those given to Britain by Italy in respect of Italian activities in the Balearic Islands", *Ibid*.
- ²² 'Tour In Spanish Zone', *The Times*, January 15th 1937, p.12.
- ²³ 'UNCENSORED', *The Times*, January 18th 1937, p.12.
- ²⁴ George Mounsey at the Western Department of the Foreign Office, was of the opinion that the report by David Scott, published in *The Times* on January 12th, could have seriously damaged Anglo-German relations: "the methods employed have been most dangerous and mischievous, and might have led to a very different result": PRO, FO 371, 21263, W1622/514/28.
- ²⁵ Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p.107.
- ²⁶ In fact the German intervention in Spanish Morocco sparked off a scare story. In particular, it was in the interest of the Spanish Republican authorities to do what they could to exaggerate the news of the foreign intervention in aid of the insurgents. In January 1937, the Spanish ambassador to Paris, Luis Araquistáin, and his brother-in-law, the Spanish Republican Foreign Minister, Alvarez del Vayo, were responsible

for circulating the exaggerated stories concerning German penetration of Spanish Morocco, see Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p.106.

- ²⁷ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, 1961) pp. 370-1.
- ²⁸ George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert, *Spain at War, The Spanish Civil War in Context 1931-1939* (London, 1995), p.163.
- ²⁹ '15 000 Italians In The Attack', *The Times*, March 11th 1937, p.16. According to the correspondent, the number of Italian troops in Spain was much higher than that suggested by Esenwein and Shubert. According to their calculations, between December 1936 and February 1937, only 10 000 Italians had landed at Cadiz, Esenwein and Shubert, *Spain at War*, p.162.
- ³⁰ 'Madrid Troops Push On', *The Times*, March 22nd 1937, p.12.
- ³¹ To emphasise the scale of the Italian defeat, the actual quantity of Italian military hardware captured by the Republicans was listed in the introduction. According to the correspondent, 25 000 gallons of petrol, 200 machine guns and 1000 rifles were captured. In addition, the following was highlighted: "**MUSSOLINI HASTENS RETURN TO ROME TO DISCUSS ITALIAN ROUT WITH HIS MILITARY CHIEFS**", see 'Big Capture Of Arms By Madrid Forces', *Daily Telegraph*, March 22nd 1937, p.13.
- ³² PRO, 371, 21158, R2376/1/22 memo by Rex Leeper, April 7th 1937.
- ³³ Leeper was more successful in his effort to persuade *The Times* to print articles on Portugal: "the News Department persuaded *The Times* to publish articles and editorials which were favourable to the Salazar regime. Between September 1937 and August 1939, having previously paid little attention to Portugal, *The Times* published nine editorials and seven leading articles on Portuguese affairs", see Stone, *The Oldest Ally*, p.51.
- ³⁴ PRO, FO 395, 553, P3228/56/150, memo by Rex Leeper, July 16th 1937.
- ³⁵ Dawson Diary, March 21st 1937; Dawson papers.
- ³⁶ 'The Withdrawal Of Volunteers', *Daily Telegraph*, March 25th 1937, p.14.
- ³⁷ 'The Ban On Volunteers', *Daily Telegraph*, March 27th 1937, p.10.
- ³⁸ The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs repeated to his colleagues what he had been told by the Italian ambassador. Concerning the Italian defeats in Spain, the latter had expressed the annoyance felt by Mussolini at the tenor of the British

press reports, see PRO, CAB 23/88, March 24th 1937, minutes of the Cabinet, conclusion three. Furthermore, the Cabinet also discussed the daily bulletins and weekly talks offered by the BBC on the Spanish Civil War. The consensus of opinion in Cabinet was that pressure should be applied on the BBC to drop its nightly statements on the Civil War. This was because ministers believed that the BBC news reporting of the Civil War was encouraging constituents to put pressure on their parliamentary representatives: Ibid, conclusion four. Pressure was also being exerted on the press to pay less attention to Italian intervention in Spain: “we [should attempt to ensure] that the press pays less attention to Mussolini”: comment by Eden on Leeper’s memo of March 20th, in PRO, FO 371, 21158, R 2376.

³⁹ ‘Anglo-Italian Relations: Criticisms In Rome’, *The Times*, March 25th 1937, p.14.

⁴⁰ Esenwein and Shubert, *Spain at War*, pp.199-20.

⁴¹ Herbert Routledge Southworth, *GUERNICA! GUERNICA! A Study of Journalism, Propaganda, and History*. The book focuses on the international controversy aroused by the atrocity, and also the attempts by the Nationalists and Germans to disclaim responsibility for the attack.

⁴² ‘Burning Of Guernica’, *The Times*, May 6th 1937, p.15.

⁴³ ‘Guernica’, *The Times*, April 28th 1937, p.17.

⁴⁴ *Yorkshire Post*: ‘German Airmen Alleged To Have Destroyed Town’, April 28th 1937, p.11; ‘Guernica Mystery’, April 29th 1937, p.11; ‘Reported Fall Of Guernica’, April 30th 1937, p.11.

⁴⁵ ‘Horror And Mystery’, *Morning Post*, April 29th 1937, p.12.

⁴⁶ ‘Air Raid Wipes Out Basque Town’, *Daily Mail*, April 28th 1937, p.13.

⁴⁷ ‘Destruction Of Guernica’, ‘The World Week by Week’, *Observer*, May 2nd 1937, p.20.

⁴⁸ Dawson to H.G. Daniels, May 11th 1937; Dawson papers. Gannon also wrote, “Steer’s original article was, indeed, the only direct accusation against Germany at the time”. It is clear, however, Gannon is not accurate, see Gannon, *The British Press and Nazi Germany*, p.115.

⁴⁹ Dawson to Daniels, May 23rd 1937; Dawson papers.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

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- ⁵¹ ‘The Times Bombs Guernica’, *The Times*, May 5th 1937, p.17.
- ⁵² ‘After The Air Raid On Guernica’, *Daily Telegraph*, April 30th 1937, p.20.
- ⁵³ ‘Bombing Civilians’, *Daily Telegraph*, April 29th 1937, p.16.
- ⁵⁴ PRO, FO 371/21332, W8853/7/41, GUERNICA May 4th 1937.
- ⁵⁵ ‘Through German Glasses: The Bombing of Guernica: Wave of Anglophobia’, *The Times*, May 4th 1937, p.16.
- ⁵⁶ ‘Incorrect Press Reports: German Ambassador’s Protest’, *The Times*, May 6th 1937, p.15.
- ⁵⁷ ‘Bombing Of Guernica: *The Times* Confiscated’, *The Times*, May 19th 1937, p.13.
- ⁵⁸ PRO, PREM 1,215.
- ⁵⁹ Dawson Diary, May 8th 1937; Dawson papers.
- ⁶⁰ “Dawson 10.30”, Pocket Diaries of Neville Chamberlain, May 10th 1937; Chamberlain papers, NC 2/29/1.
- ⁶¹ Kerr wrote to the Foreign Secretary, asking if he would have any objection to articles being printed in *The Times*, see PRO, FO 954, volume 10A, GE/37/14, Kerr to Eden, June 16th 1937.
- ⁶² PRO, FO 954, Volume 10A, GE/37/16, Eden to Lothian, June 16th 1937.
- ⁶³ Eden to Dawson, June 18th 1937; Dawson papers.
- ⁶⁴ Dawson to Eden, June 17th 1937; Dawson papers.
- ⁶⁵ According to the ambassador, “[n]ot only are the liberal newspapers abused but the ‘Times’ is called to account for talking of German opportunism. The attitude of England and the guardians of her public opinion is leading to the disaster desired by Moscow”: PRO, FO 371, 21337 W12097/7/41, June 23rd 1937.
- ⁶⁶ ‘The German Attitude’, *The Times*, June 23rd 1937, p.17.
- ⁶⁷ The following comment was made concerning the attitude of the Berlin press towards *The Times*: “The British Press is represented as an instrument of national

policy, and in the exercise of its freedom of reporting and opinions does not, mistakes apart, go beyond the limits tolerable for English interests”: ‘Germany And The Times’, *The Times*, August 20th 1937, p.10.

⁶⁸ ‘Germany And The Press’, *The Times*, August 17th 1937, p.11.

⁶⁹ The ambassador, Ingram, also wrote, “it is noteworthy [that] the indignation is concentrated entirely on England who is described throughout as responsible for the breakdown”: PRO, FO 954, vol 13, It/36/20, July 2nd 1937.

⁷⁰ PRO, FO 954, volume 13, It/37/12, Hankey to Eden, ‘Marked Secret and Personal’, July 23rd 1937.

⁷¹ PRO, P3328/56/150, August 16th 1937, ‘Draft Circular for HM Missions Abroad.’

⁷² ‘Flesh Creeping Tales’, *The Times*, May 4th 1937, p.16.

⁷³ ‘A Dramatic Change In Spain’, *Daily Telegraph*, February 9th 1937, p.14. From early on in the war, the Nationalist authorities had put pressure on British correspondents: “Any reference to the Madrid Government is resented by the insurgents, and in the military headquarters at Burgos there is a notice addressed to journalists warning them also that if their papers persist in the use of the word ‘Insurgents’ or ‘Loyalist, Patriot or ‘Government troops instead of reds’, they will be ‘seriously dealt with’”. Moreover, “[m]ild criticism from a Right-wing journal is accounted more damaging than the frank and anticipated opposition of the left”: ‘Rebel Attitude To Press’, *Yorkshire Post*, September 12th 1936, p.13. Also, according to the British commercial secretary at Hendaye, C.B. Jerram, “[t]he National Government at Salamanca objects greatly to being called the Insurgent Government; ‘insurgente’ in Spanish means ‘rebel’ and that is all there is to it”: FO 371, 21382, W20044/40/41, memo dated October 29th 1937.

⁷⁴ ‘Fresh Activity In Spain’, *The Times*, February 9th 1937, p.15.

⁷⁵ ‘Tormented Spain’, *The Times*, May 18th 1937, p.13.

⁷⁶ ‘A Workable Plan’, *The Times*, July 15th 1937, p.15.

⁷⁷ ‘A Fair Start’, *The Times*, July 17th 1937, p.13.

⁷⁸ Harold Cardozo, *THE MARCH OF A NATION, My Year of Spain’s Civil War* (London, 1937) p. 221.

⁷⁹ *TNL Archive*, Holborn file: Copy Of a Telephone Message 10.10 p.m. from James Holborn to Ralph Deakin, Saturday, April 18th 1937.

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- ⁸⁰ *TNL Archive*, Stirling file, R. Deakin to W. Stirling November 16th 1936.
- ⁸¹ *TNL Archive* Holborn file, J. Holborn to R. Deakin, 'Hotel Imatz', Hendaye, May 21st 1937.
- ⁸² Arthur Koestler, *SPANISH TESTAMENT* (London, 1937) p.17.
Interestingly, Koestler, working as a war correspondent for the News Chronicle, a paper of liberal political convictions and anti-Franco was allowed into Franco's Spain. His cover story was that he had been forced by financial circumstances to take on the assignment, but was allowed to report the facts as he saw them and, therefore, had been given the opportunity to influence liberal opinion in Britain in favour of the Nationalists: Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* (Hutchinson, 1969) p.384.
- ⁸³ Noel Monks, *EYEWITNESS* (London, 1955) pp.81-2.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.79
- ⁸⁵ In contrast to the reports in the conservative press, it is estimated that in the first week of the insurgent occupation of Malaga, 4000 people were killed, see Esenwein and Shubert, *Spain at War*, p.162. That the conservative papers were being informed by their own correspondents of the atrocities committed on the side of the rebels is indicated in the following: "Executions still take place every day in many towns; there are two a day, morning and evening, at Toledo, but I don't know how many are shot each time": *TNL Archive*, Deakin file; Stirling to Deakin, November 18th 1936, 'Not For Publication'.
- ⁸⁶ The optimism of much of the conservative press towards the Franco regime was in spite of its dependency on its Axis supporters. However, under the influence of Serrano Suñer, brother-in-law to Franco, Nationalist Spain came to resemble more closely the Fascist regimes in Italy and Germany, and this was to cause concern even within the conservative press.
- ⁸⁷ 'Fresh Activity In Spain', *The Times*, February 9th 1937, p.15.
- ⁸⁸ 'Fascist State For Spain', *The Times*, April 22nd 1937, p.16.
- ⁸⁹ *The Times* leader column for April 22nd made no reference to Franco's announcement that he was creating a one party state.
- ⁹⁰ 'General Franco's Blow At Party Friction', *Daily Telegraph*, April 21st 1937.
Even Pembroke Stephens, the special correspondent based at Nationalist Headquarters in Salamanca wrote, "it is as if the commander of the British Army

were to establish dictatorial control in time of crisis and merge the Labour and Conservative parties in one organisation and call it ‘The Conservative Labour Party’”: Ibid, p.15.

⁹¹ ‘Dissension On National Spain’, *Yorkshire Post*, April 22nd 1937, p.10.

⁹² H. Routledge Southworth, *Guernica Guernica*, p.46.

⁹³ Monks, *EYEWITNESS*, p. 73.

⁹⁴ Cardozo, *THE MARCH OF A NATION*, p.221.

⁹⁵ *TNL Archive*, Holborn file, R. Deakin to J. Holborn, March 5th 1937.

⁹⁶ The *Daily Express* was sarcastic of the opposition towards government policy: “the Dean of Canterbury is quite sure that there are no mines off Bilbao because somebody has told him so”: ‘Off Bilbao’, *Daily Express*, April 16th 1937, p.12. In the opinion of the *Daily Mail*, “[t]he supreme necessity for the country is to keep clear of such a struggle”: ‘Stay Out’, *Daily Mail*, April 13th 1937, p.12. Such an opinion was also shared by the *Observer*, see Garvin ‘Keeping Out’, *Observer*, April 18th 1937.

⁹⁷ ‘They Cannot Tolerate’, *Manchester Guardian*, April 13th 1937, p.10.

⁹⁸ Not all conservative newspapers were supportive of the government line over Bilbao. Take for example the attitude of the *Morning Post*: “Are we not establishing a precedent which might some day justify ill-disposed neutral powers in quoting this dictum most inconveniently against ourselves”: ‘Fog Over Spain’, *Morning Post*, April 15th 1937, p.12.

⁹⁹ Herbert Sidebotham, ‘Scrutator’, was acutely aware of the threat posed by Nazi German influence on the Nationalist side to the long-term independence of Spain, see Benny Morris, *The Roots of Appeasement*, p.111. However, what Morris does not point out is that articles by ‘Scrutator’, which appeared on the same page as the leader column, were always expressed in such a way as to avoid any contradiction of the editorial line. It should be noted that the leaders offered consistent support to the policy of the government.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Scrutator’, ‘Neutrality And Peace’, *Sunday Times*, May 2nd 1937.

¹⁰¹ Captain Basil Liddell Hart, a well respected writer on military subjects, was, during the inter-war years, author of a number of books on military history and British defence strategy.

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- ¹⁰² Captain Basil Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs Volume Two* (London, 1965), p.128.
- ¹⁰³ Captain Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs*, p.129.
- ¹⁰⁴ Captain Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs*, p.132.
- ¹⁰⁵ In his letter, Liddell Hart complained about *The Times* leader of the previous day, 'Tormented Spain', *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file; Liddell Hart to Barrington-Ward, May 19th 1937.
- ¹⁰⁶ *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file; Barrington-Ward to Liddell Hart, May 20th 1937.
- ¹⁰⁷ Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs Volume Two*, p.133.
- ¹⁰⁸ At the end of September 1937, the RT. Hon. John Mills, Privy Councillor, wrote to his friend Dawson, to express his concern at the developments in Spain. Hills hoped that Dawson would agree to allow Liddell Hart to write about the implications of Fascist power intervention in Spain. Captain Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs Volume Two*, p.135.
- ¹⁰⁹ Captain Basil Liddell Hart, *Europe In Arms* (London, 1937), p.10.
- ¹¹⁰ Between 1930 and 1937, Commander Stephen King-Hall did a weekly broadcast for the BBC on foreign affairs. By 1935, he was not only a radio celebrity but a widely published journalist. Both at home and abroad, he was in demand as a lecturer. A prolific author, he wrote a total of forty books, see E.T. Williams & C.S. Nicholls, editors, *The Dictionary of National Biography 1961-70* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 614-6.
- ¹¹¹ "[H]is (King-Hall's) touch remained personal, but always with an eye to World horizons. Again and again he returned to the need for preparedness to meet the threat of Hitler": Ibid. *The King-Hall Newsletter Service* also had a German readership.
- ¹¹² *The King-Hall Newsletter*, August 11th 1936.
- ¹¹³ The British Admiralty, in the main, preferred the victory of the Nationalists in Spain. Through his education and career as a Commander, Stephen King-Hall was part of the naval establishment in Britain.
- ¹¹⁴ Vansittart was concerned that the victory of Franco in Spain would lead to the emergence of a third Fascist power in Europe, see 'The World Situation and British rearmament'; Vansittart papers, VNST1/19.

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- ¹¹⁵ Minute by Eden, December 20th 1937; Vansittart papers, R.7366/1/22, 2/30.
- ¹¹⁶ Record of a conversation with Eden at the Foreign Office, November 23rd 1937; Sir Anthony Eden file, Liddell Hart papers, 1/1258.
- ¹¹⁷ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p.187.
- ¹¹⁸ Eden to Vansittart, August 4th 1937; Avon papers, 13/1/58D.
- ¹¹⁹ *Daily Mail*, July 30th 1937, p.9.
- ¹²⁰ 'A Fresh Start', *Daily Express*, July 30th 1937, p.8.
- ¹²¹ 'For Peace', *Daily Express*, August 2nd 1937.
- ¹²² PRO, FO 954 Volume 13, It 37/20, Vansittart to Eden, August 4th 1937. Like Leeper, Charles Warner had serious doubts concerning government foreign policy, see Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.21.
- ¹²³ PRO, FO 954 Volume 13, It/37/20, Vansittart to Eden, August 4th 1937.
- ¹²⁴ PRO, FO 954, Volume 13, It/37/22, Vansittart to Eden, August 5th 1937.
- ¹²⁵ Ibid.
- ¹²⁶ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, pp.200-1.
- ¹²⁷ Initially, the main concern of the British government was to establish the greater influence in Nationalist territory that the exchange of agents could bring. This would secure better protection of British financial and economic interests in Spain, the greater part of which was now in rebel hands.
- ¹²⁸ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p.205.
- ¹²⁹ FO News Department, 'Attitude of the British Press', September 13th 1937, PREM 1/360.
- ¹³⁰ 'The Nyon Conference', *King-Hall Newsletter Service*, September 22nd 1937.
- ¹³¹ PRO, CAB 23/89, Cabinet minutes October 6th 1937, conclusion 4. The Cabinet were also informed of the intelligence provided by Hillgarth, the British Consul at Majorca, concerning the recent arrival of many more aeroplanes from Italy. Therefore, the Cabinet expected increased bombing of Republican targets: Ibid., conclusion two.

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- ¹³² PRO, CAB 23/89, Cabinet minutes and conclusions, October 20th 1937, conclusion 3.
- ¹³³ The Anglo-Italian conversations which had begun the previous summer were suspended as a result of the submarine attacks on merchant shipping trading with Republican Spain.
- ¹³⁴ ‘A Welcome Advance’, *The Times*. October 21st 1937, page 15. In November 1937, the Non-Intervention Committee approved the withdrawal plan for volunteers that had been submitted by the British government.
- ¹³⁵ From January 1936 until February 1938, Oliver Harvey was Private Secretary to Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office. He then continued in the same capacity to Eden’s successor, Halifax, until December 1939.
- ¹³⁶ John Harvey (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries Of Oliver Harvey* (London, 1970) entry November 14th 1937, p.60.
- ¹³⁷ Eden was concerned at the effect British Spanish policy might have on opinion in the United States. In January 1938, President Roosevelt approached the British government with a proposal for a World conference, to discuss the underlying causes of the crisis in international relations. Eden was in favour of supporting the Roosevelt initiative, but Chamberlain was opposed. He feared that American interference would deprive him of a free hand in his appeasement of Germany and Italy.
- ¹³⁸ Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries Of Oliver Harvey*, entry February 6th 1938, p.87.
- ¹³⁹ Eden raised the matter with the Prime Minister who denied that the Prime Minister’s Office had so inspired the *Daily Mail*. However, Harvey remained unconvinced by this reassurance, confiding in his diary on February 14th, “[a] curious story reaches me that the press campaign was given out by Sir Joseph Ball [at] Conservative Head Office NOT from No.10. By whose authority, I wonder”: Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries Of Oliver Harvey*, pp.89-90.
- ¹⁴⁰ David Ayerst, *Garvin of The Observer* (London, 1971) p.260.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE DEEPENING CRISIS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND CONSERVATIVE PRESS.

This chapter will focus on the impact of Eden's resignation on conservative newspaper reporting of the Spanish Civil War. It will also consider why, at a time when there was a new consensus emerging concerning international relations in general, there was still division over the way in which newspapers reported on Spain. Whilst the resignation of Eden removed from Cabinet the most significant opponent of Neville Chamberlain's foreign policy, it resulted also in a weakening of conservative newspaper support for the official line on Spain. Hitherto, historians have neglected this factor. In fact, Eden's departure from office was a watershed not, as Cockett has intimated, because Chamberlain was able to exert greater influence over the press in general, but because it marked a transitional period in the government's relationship with its traditional allies in the press. With regard to Spain, Chamberlain attempted, though with only limited success, to impose a more rigid consensus both upon his party and on the press. The effect of Chamberlain's imposition was to cause divisions both between and within conservative newspapers.

Broadly speaking, in the course of 1938, against the backdrop of a worsening international crisis, two opposing views were to emerge concerning the responsibility of the press in a democracy. Among those papers that still identified with the position adopted by the government on Spain, the opinion held that it was the duty of the newspapers to support government policy, which aimed, through appeasement of the

fascist dictators, to stave off the nightmare of a second general war on the European continent. Because they acknowledged the impact of the press on relations with foreign powers, those in control of editorial policy of these newspapers felt it was still justifiable to dampen down or even suppress the views of their journalists, if they challenged the official view. In the period following the resignation of Eden, the London based conservative newspapers supported the convocation of Anglo-Italian conversations and the signing of the Anglo-Italian Agreement. Yet there were some journalists who were opposed to the level of support being offered by conservative papers towards government policy on Spain. Therefore, within conservative newspapers, the resignation of Eden gave rise to an alternative view on what constituted the responsibility of the press in a democracy.

During the course of 1938, opposition became more pronounced among journalists of those conservative newspapers that were continuing to accept the government line on the war. This can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, the resignation of Eden had ended the uneasy alliance within government of the two opposing views on Spanish policy as advocated by Eden and Chamberlain. Eden's supporters in the press were now left with the dilemma of whether to betray party or principle. In a parliament dominated by the Conservative government, it was only in the free press that conservative opponents of Chamberlain could really make their voices heard. Secondly, for those journalists who questioned the official line on Spain, 1938 added a sense of urgency. They felt the need to redouble their efforts in an attempt to persuade those in control of editorial policy to prevail upon the government to change tack. Liddell Hart, who had questioned the policy

of *The Times* towards Spain during the previous year, remained a leading conservative press critic of official policy on Spain throughout the course of 1938. As mentioned earlier, during the course of the previous year he had come to view Spain as a counter in a strategy of global dimensions being waged by the Axis powers. Throughout 1938 in particular, evidence appeared to mount in support of his theory that the machinations of both Germany and Italy in Spain were part of a wider, more sinister plan to achieve global domination. Therefore, during that year, he was to become increasingly concerned over the prospect for British interests of a Nationalist victory in Spain. His sense of isolation within *The Times*, already apparent in 1937, increased following the resignation of Eden. He was to become increasingly convinced of a hidden agenda by those in control of editorial policy aimed at denying him the opportunity to use *The Times* as a means by which to influence opinion and to challenge the government line.

Throughout 1938, Liddell Hart continued to assert that both Italy and Germany would, as a result of the help rendered to Franco, be in a position to secure an advantageous position in the 'New Spain'. This would allow them to challenge the strategic and economic interests of both Britain and France in the Mediterranean. During March 1938, there was heated correspondence between Liddell Hart, still the military correspondent of *The Times*, and the deputy editor, Mark Barrington-Ward, over the line taken by the paper on the Civil War. Earlier, on February 25th, a leader column had derided the complaint made by the Basques that Franco's offensive against the Republic in Northern Spain had been successful largely because "the Nationalists had been better supplied with war material from abroad."¹ Liddell Hart complained about what he considered to be the inaccuracy of

the paper, pointing out to Barrington-Ward that there had been for Franco “an overwhelming advantage in aircraft provided by Germany and Italy.”² In the same letter, he complained that, despite his position as military correspondent, he had never been consulted about what should appear in leader columns dealing with the Spanish Civil War.

In the middle of March, Liddell Hart sent an article to Barrington-Ward, reviewing the situation in the Western Mediterranean. In it, he reiterated his concern at the likely attitude of a future right wing Spanish government towards Britain, but this time in the light of what had been the generally hostile attitude of the right wing government in Spain towards the allies during the 1914-18 war. Needless to say, Barrington-Ward refused to publish it. A frustrated Liddell Hart wrote again on the 26th, requesting that his article be published as a “letter to the editor”, insisting that it was imperative that the readers of *The Times* be made aware of his views.³ In his reply on the 28th, Barrington-Ward’s defence of his actions merely proved what Liddell Hart had long suspected; that *The Times* was practising a deliberate policy of censorship of views on the Spanish conflict which were not in sympathy with the government version of events, the version defended by the paper.⁴ The reason for Barrington-Ward’s objection to Liddell Hart’s Western Mediterranean article was the military correspondent’s insistence that Franco was bound to be hostile towards Britain. With reference to this he commented, “it can be no more than a presumption and a presumption is not sufficient reason for upsetting the policy of non-intervention.” He also stated that opinion could be expressed in a leader column only and not in other articles. In his view, the Western Mediterranean article was heavily

opinionated. That specific reasons were given why the article could not be printed, particularly that if such an alternative view were to appear in an influential paper like *The Times*, British relations with the new order in Spain might be threatened, made clear to Liddell Hart that a policy of censorship did, indeed, exist.

On March 29th, Liddell Hart wrote again to Barrington-Ward expressing surprise at his objections concerning the proposed Western Mediterranean article: “all I do is to list evidence entirely from the files of The Times itself, which justifies a doubt, of the hope that Franco will be able to be independent of his wartime allies once the civil war was over.”⁵ Liddell Hart’s anxiety to have his views printed in *The Times* was because this alternative view on the Civil War had never been put forward in that paper. For him this was a serious omission on the part of the editorial staff precisely because of the influential readership for which *The Times* catered. The correspondence between Liddell Hart and Barrington-Ward in the spring of 1938 is an illustration of the conflict of opinion that existed within conservative newspapers. So concerned was Barrington-Ward at the possible implications of Liddell-Hart’s views that he refused to allow the article to be published even as a letter to the editor.

Barrington-Ward was no doubt influenced by the development of events on the ground in Spain at this time, which made it prudent policy to avoid offending the likely victors of the Civil War. After the successful Nationalist counter offensive against the Republicans at Teruel in January and February of 1938, the Nationalist armies were able to put into motion a particularly rapid advance into Republican held territory. This, to foreign

observers, appeared to herald the inevitable collapse of the Spanish Republic and the ending of the Civil War. Indeed, pro-government newspapers played down the significance of the Italian assistance to Franco during the winter and spring, in the process of which they gave a very misleading impression of the military situation in Spain. On March 17th, *The Times*, for example, in its leader column, suggested that the claims made by the British Labour Party that Franco had received fresh supplies of men and equipment from both Germany and Italy were an exaggeration.⁶ The leader reaffirmed the confidence of pro-government newspapers that Non-Intervention was a wise policy, and that British neutrality towards the conflict would be an effective guarantor of British interests after the war was over. The leader argued that regardless of the outcome in Spain, the Spanish would look favourably on Britain precisely because of her neutrality during the Civil War. Only two days earlier, Dawson had recorded in his diary that he “had a rather desperate morning keeping rubbish out of the paper of wild measures against the dictator [referring to Mussolini].”⁷ The diary comment was a clear indication of the growing restiveness among his staff concerning his support for the official line.

The misleading impression being given of the military situation in Spain was a feature of conservative newspapers in general. In its leader comment on the defeat of the Republican army at Teruel, the view of the *Daily Telegraph*, like that of *The Times*, was that military assistance from abroad was not the key to Franco’s success. In its opinion, the chief cause was that the Nationalist army was better trained and commanded than its Republican adversaries.⁸ However, less than two months previously, the *Daily Telegraph* had published an article by its special correspondent, H. Buckley. The correspondent,

commenting on the earlier capture of Teruel by the Republicans, referred to the Republican infantry as “better than Franco’s.”⁹ Indeed, in direct contrast to the leader of March 16th, Buckley had referred to both the poor training and the lack of experience of the Nationalist troops. *The Times* also had written previously of what it considered to be the improved military efficiency of the Republican army. On January 11th, for example, the leader commented, “[a]ll that it is safe to say at the moment is that the two sides no longer seem so unevenly matched in military efficiency as they appeared to be a month ago.”¹⁰

The evidence would suggest that the more critical comments being made in March 1938 about the lack of efficiency of the Republican army and which ran contrary to previous statements, were part of a new and deliberate policy by the editorial staff intended to divert attention away from the importance of Italian and German assistance to Franco. The reason for this was the worsening international crisis in Central Europe caused by the expansion of the German Reich. It was in March that the German army crossed the Austrian frontier to complete the Anschluss. Thus, for the first time since the end of the First World War, Germany had expanded its territory beyond the borders of metropolitan Germany, in order to incorporate a previously independent state. This new development in Nazi foreign policy impressed upon the British Cabinet the urgency of the need to conclude an agreement with Italy. The Italian intervention in Spain could not become a barrier to this end.¹¹ Hence, it would seem quite plausible that official pressure was being exerted on newspapers, still loyal to the official line, not to either give a more accurate coverage of the Italian contribution to the fighting in Spain at this time, or to print the

concerns held in official circles regarding the Italian intervention. On March 21st, Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, recorded in his diary his conclusions about a meeting of the Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee that afternoon. The diary extract notes both Chamberlain's awareness of the importance of German and Italian aid to Franco at this time and his concern at the prospect of "Franco winning in Spain by the aid of German guns and Italian planes."¹² It would seem inconceivable that when suppressing the reporting of certain types of news on Spain, editors were unaware of these more pessimistic views within official circles.

Liddell Hart refused to be silenced by the policy of his paper to suppress 'unpalatable news'. He took advantage of the fact that he had an ally in Cabinet in the Secretary of War, Leslie Hore-Belisha. The Secretary of War came to share Liddell Hart's concerns regarding the prospect for Britain and France in the Western Mediterranean in the event of a Franco victory. Two notes written by Liddell Hart provided Hore-Belisha with ammunition for his discussions with his Cabinet colleagues. In the 'Note on the Spanish Situation' written on March 13th 1938, Liddell Hart advised the minister, "German and Italian domination of Spain would place heavy odds against the success of Britain and France in a war with these powers."¹³

Liddell Hart also dissented from the view, then prevailing in official circles in London, that Germany and Italy were better placed than the democracies to send military supplies to Spain. Liddell Hart argued that the geographical position of Britain and France actually put them in a more favourable position. Therefore, if they so desired it would be easier

for them to assist the Republic than for either Axis power to assist Franco. If, according to Liddell Hart, the competition led either to the threat of, or to actual war with the Axis, it would be better to fight now, before they had secured the victory of Franco. He wrote that once that had happened, the democracies would have lost their current geographical advantage in the western Mediterranean over the Axis powers.¹⁴ Therefore, it is not surprising that he should be sceptical of the official view being promulgated by his paper that once the war was over, Britain, as a neutral power, would be in a position to regain its influence in Spain because of the dependency of any Spanish government on financial help from Britain for post war reconstruction. In his second note to Hore-Belisha, 'Note of Warning', written on March 15th, Liddell Hart argued that the second great war of the century had already begun with the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain: "[t]he direct assistance which Italy gave with aircraft, and the indirect assistance which Germany gave with warships in transporting Franco's troops across from Africa to Spain were the first operations of the present war."¹⁵ The note concluded that, to date, the Axis powers had almost succeeded in their plan for global domination without any serious attempt being made to stop them by those powers, which had most to lose from this development:

Hore-Belisha, in Cabinet meetings on March 14th and 16th, attempted to persuade his colleagues to support the French government should the French decide to reopen the frontier with Republican Spain in order to allow supplies of war material to the Republic.¹⁶ Because Hore-Belisha agreed with Liddell Hart that the Axis powers were thinking in terms of manoeuvring for long-term strategic advantage in Spain, he also agreed with Liddell-Hart that Britain and France should allow supplies to reach the

Republic. However, the Cabinet was unmoved by Hore-Belisha's arguments. It considered that the opening of the French frontier would make war with the dictators inevitable.

Although he was obstructed by the editorial policy of *The Times* from expressing his concerns in print, and thwarted in his attempt to influence government policy, Liddell Hart remained adamant. He was determined to express his views by any means at his disposal. On March 17th, the day the British Cabinet rejected Hore-Belisha's advice that the French government be encouraged to reopen the frontier with Spain, Liddell-Hart delivered an address to University College, London, at which foreign ambassadors were also present.¹⁷ A significant part of Liddell Hart's lecture concentrated on a consideration of the meaning of truth. He told the assembled gathering, "the longer I watch current events the more I am driven to see that most of our troubles arise from the habit, on all sides, of suppressing or distorting what we know quite well is the truth."¹⁸ With regard to the latter, it is possible to interpret this as a signal to a wider audience that news and views on Spain, not consistent with the official line, were, in fact, being deliberately suppressed or distorted by the editors of *The Times*. Liddell Hart used the occasion to reiterate publicly his conviction that the second great war of the century had already begun with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and referred to the Italian and German intervention as part of a tactic of a "camouflaged war."¹⁹

The Spanish Civil War was the only issue in current affairs to which he referred in his lecture, the latter part of which focused entirely on Spain. He compared the British policy

on Spain in the 1930s with the policy adopted by the government towards Turkey prior to the First World War.²⁰ His purpose was to show that in both cases the position adopted by the government was, in his view, immoral, that in both circumstances the official justification given for such an immoral policy, that it best served the interests of British foreign policy, was flawed. Before 1914, the British government had refused to support the 'Young Turk' movement and had clung to its age-old policy of supporting the authoritarian regime in power in Istanbul. The Sultan, however, was not grateful for British support and was to take the side of Germany in 1914. Liddell Hart drew a parallel between what he saw as the situation in Turkey in 1914, and that in Spain over twenty years later. In so doing, he implicitly challenged the contention being upheld by the government and championed in his own newspaper that the British government was indeed neutral. In comparing the situations in Spain and Turkey, Liddell Hart was arguing that the government was sympathetic towards the Nationalist cause in Spain in the same way as it had been supportive of the Sultan in Turkey in an earlier period. In Liddell Hart's view, British policy was just as blind to the realities of the situation in Spain, for it was conniving in a rebellion which would result in the emergence of a new regime which would be hostile towards Britain.

In *Through The Fog of War*, published that year, a book that was primarily a work on the First World War, Liddell-Hart once again expressed his concerns regarding the current Spanish situation. In the concluding chapter "Some Lessons from History" he returned to the theme of the 'second European war' now in progress in Spain. Liddell Hart gave a clearer explanation of what he meant by the phrase 'camouflaged war' to which he had

referred in his lecture. According to Liddell Hart, the advantages of such a war were that “only a very small proportion of your resources are needed to ensure the success of the party you choose to back in a particular small country that is of general strategic importance.”²¹ In this, the author was of course making a very explicit reference to the forces engaged in Spain on behalf of both Italy and Germany. Liddell Hart sounded a note of warning with his contention that the methods being practised by the Axis powers in Spain were an imitation of British policy on the European continent in earlier centuries. Here, he again compared British policy towards Spain in the later 1930s with that shown towards Turkey before 1914. However, a repeated error in foreign policy did not result in comparable risks to Britain’s security. He pointed out that given Spain’s more important strategic position for Britain, the consequences of British policy makers favouring Franco were potentially far more disastrous than had been the misguided sympathy for the sultanate in Istanbul before the First World War.²²

Liddell Hart’s thinking on the Spanish Civil War had hardened as a result of the development of events in Spain, which in the spring of 1938 seemed to be pointing towards a collapse of the Republican cause. His concern regarding German and Italian intervention increased during the course of 1938 and this is why he now sought to influence government policy towards the war. Through the expression of his views in lectures, but perhaps more importantly in print, given the wider audience it would reach both in Britain and overseas, Liddell Hart threatened to undermine further the consensus between the government and the conservative press. After all in print he could be more open as to his true opinions. Furthermore, in 1938, George Steer, *The Times*

correspondent whose reporting of the air raid on Guernica, the previous year, had done much to escalate tension between Germany and Britain, fanned the flames of the Guernica controversy by publishing his book, *The Tree of Gernika*. Not only did he reiterate his accusations against Germany for the atrocity, but also was critical of what he considered to be the indifference of the British ruling class to the plight of the Spanish Republic. The latter being an implicit criticism of the sympathy of *The Times* towards Germany. The apparent failure of the paper to publish a review of this book, written by a journalist whose dispatches on Guernica had been the subject of main articles and leader comment the previous year, was yet a further example of a selective policy of censorship aimed, as far as possible, at avoiding the alienation of the Nazi authorities. As with Liddell Hart, it was only by publishing independently that Steer would be able to find a means by which his views could be aired at length.²³

A variety of surviving evidence demonstrates that, during the later thirties, there was a growing number of journalists, particularly from a variety of conservative papers, who were becoming dissatisfied at the support their editors were willing to give to the official line on foreign policy. The closeness of Viscount Kemsley to Chamberlain and the support of Hadley, (the editor of Kemsley's paper, the *Sunday Times*), for government foreign policy caused friction amongst the staff. Richard Keane, the diplomatic correspondent, was an opponent of appeasement and a supporter of Eden against the Prime Minister. Keane and Alexander Werth, the Paris correspondent, tried unsuccessfully to argue with Hadley the case against appeasement.²⁴ Iverach McDonald, diplomatic correspondent of *The Times*, who later corresponded for the independent

journal, the *Arrow*, wrote in his autobiography about his concern regarding the editor of *The Times*. He declared that given the consistent support of Dawson for Chamberlain, “most of the usual channels for expressing political opinion were blocked or led nowhere.”²⁵ This was, of course, an oblique reference to the policy of that paper to impose restriction on the publication of views that challenged the government line on foreign policy and international affairs.²⁶ Colin Coote demonstrated his own opposition to Dawson in chapter twelve of his memoirs. Indeed, the title “The Nightmare Thirties”, aptly describes the author’s frustration over the editorial policy of *The Times* during the period of the Spanish Civil War. In particular, Coote referred to “a cabal which dealt with the abroads”, a direct reference to the small clique who formulated the policy of the paper towards foreign policy and international affairs.²⁷ Such was Coote’s frustration that he solicited the advice of Churchill on whether he should resign from *The Times*. Churchill’s reply, as recorded by Coote, was revealing of the more general frustration felt by journalists who were critical of the support of their editors towards a foreign policy which they considered harmful to British interests abroad: “he [Churchill] would prefer a friend in the enemy’s camp, but I fear that the influence of that friend is zero.”

Clearly, journalists increasingly resented the constraints being imposed upon their freedom. This led to a gradual increase in the number of independent newsletters, in which journalists could express their concerns at what many considered to be the shortsightedness of government policy towards the dictator states. The most influential of these newsletters was the *Whitehall Letter*.²⁸ Tradition has it that this letter emerged in

the wake of the Munich Conference in October 1938. In fact, it actually emerged much earlier, in the middle of February that year.

Eden's perceived determination to make Non-Intervention more effective explains the lack of independent newsletters whilst he was still in office. It is therefore significant that the first issue of the *Whitehall Letter* appeared on February 15th, shortly before Eden's resignation from the Cabinet. The *Whitehall Letter* was co-edited by Victor Gordon Lennox, the diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, and Helen Kirkpatrick, a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News*.²⁹ Previously, Gordon Lennox had supported the firmer line Eden was prepared to take towards Italian intervention in Spain in the course of 1937, and had written to him expressing his confidence that "you have only to stand firm to win all you want."³⁰ It was also to Eden whilst he was still Foreign Secretary, that Gordon Lennox had expressed his opinion that the press was adrift from popular opinion in Britain.³¹ In that particular letter he declared, "it is the greatest mistake to think as so many do here, that the country is behind the 'press', it is not." Quite clearly, this is a reference to Gordon Lennox's dissatisfaction with his paper's support of the government. The papers supporting the government line stressed almost continuously that government policy on Spain had the support of the majority of the British public. However, as we have seen, the diplomatic correspondent of at least one of the leading conservative newspapers did not support such a view.³²

The publication of the first edition of the *Whitehall Letter* coincided with the circulation in Fleet Street of rumours that there was indeed a divergence of views within the Cabinet

over an issue of foreign policy that had profound implications for the development of the Spanish Civil War. According to Oliver Harvey this was “the inevitable result of Whitehall speaking with two voices.”³³ With the division between Eden and Chamberlain becoming public knowledge, conservative newspapers would inevitably support Chamberlain, a reason why Gordon-Lennox, such a strong supporter of Eden’s stand on Italian intervention, should choose this time to begin the circulation of the *Whitehall Letter*. As mentioned previously, Eden’s resignation a few days later removed from the Cabinet the influence of the one man who might have acted as a restraining influence on Chamberlain. The circulation of the *Whitehall Letter* among those circles which might influence foreign policy was thus an alternative means by which Gordon Lennox could hope to influence the direction of policy, albeit in a much more limited way. Oliver Harvey noted in his diary the pressure being exerted on the conservative press from official sources, to secure their support for the position of the government. Note, for example, the following entry for February 27th: “[t]he Government took every possible step to secure the London papers” as a result of which, “the London press is rather rotten. All the London conservative papers have toed the line”. According to Eden’s Private Secretary, Gordon Lennox “was in tears” at the way the *Daily Telegraph* rounded on Eden following his resignation.³⁴

The independent newsletters received contributions from journalists representing newspapers of a variety of political views, but for journalists from conservative papers, these newsletters provided the only outlet for expressing views that were critical of the government line on Spain.³⁵ After all, the conservative press, unlike the left or liberal

publications, was almost unanimous in supporting the Prime Minister both before and after Eden's resignation. However, not all journalists who were critical of government foreign policy were willing to risk contributing to the independent newsletters. Bill Deedes, a contemporary of Gordon Lennox at the *Daily Telegraph*, was considered sufficiently close to the views of the editor of the *Whitehall Letter* to be invited to contribute to the newsletter. Deedes, however, declined the offer because he did not want "to leave mainstream journalism."³⁶

The *Whitehall Letter*, in expressing the views of conservative press critics of government policy on Spain, adopted a position completely at odds with the mainstream conservative newspapers. In contrast to the consensus view on Spain in the pro-government press, the *Whitehall Letter* for March 11th 1938, for example, drew the attention of its readers to the threat to Britain of a Nationalist victory in Spain. It did this by drawing a parallel between Germany's actions in Central Europe and her activities in Spain. The newsletter comment was as follows: "parallel with Hitler's Central Europe plan another is forming the Germanization of Spain, to complete the 'bottling' up of the western democracies."³⁷ The *Whitehall Letter* was concerned much more about German influence in Spain than about the implications of Italian intervention. Indeed there were many references to this in the issues of 1938. For example, on March 11th, the newsletter claimed that reports confirmed by German General Staff officers in Spain showed that "considerable German additions have been made to the air force within the past fortnight." To press home the point of German influence in Spain, the newsletter was not averse to blatant exaggeration, claiming that Franco's Spain was being transformed into a political and economic

satellite of the Third Reich. In fact, the German presence in Spain was to be a recurrent theme in the columns of the newsletter for the remainder of the war and beyond. Therefore, it is not surprising that on April 6th, the newsletter should scoff at the public assurances made by the governments of Germany and Italy that their troops in Spain would be withdrawn once the war was over. The opinion of the newsletter was stressed in the following way: “neither has any idea of losing interest in Spain.”³⁸ On May 3rd, the *Whitehall Letter* reprinted part of an interview with Franco reported by a German newspaper. Here, the newsletter again took the opportunity to draw a parallel between Franco’s Spain and Hitler’s Germany, indeed the following comment: “The political similarity of the two systems of government” is indicative of this. In reprinting a translation of Franco’s words, the opportunity was taken to emphasize the growing alliance between the ‘New Spain’ and the more powerful of its foreign backers: “The fight which we are waging against Communism in the foreground is a further sign of sympathy and reciprocal interest.”³⁹ The use of emphasis by means of underlining phrases to which the editor wished to draw attention was clearly designed to undermine confidence in the view, expressed by the government and defended in the conservative press, that since it would not become closely tied to Italy and Germany, Franco’s Spain did not represent a threat to British interests.

Among official circles in London, the *Whitehall Letter* was regarded as especially influential; indeed it was respected as the most important of the newsletters. Charles Warner, a News Department official, wrote that it catered “for a real desire on the part of a limited and serious public, who do not get what they want from the ordinary

commercially run papers.”⁴⁰ In August 1938, in reply to an inquiry by Sir Percy Lorraine, British ambassador to Turkey, Warner wrote of the *Whitehall Letter*, “we have found its information in general pretty accurate and from time to time it has shown itself surprisingly well informed about matters known to only a small number of people.”⁴¹ In the same letter he noted that the government was unlikely to look upon it “with a friendly eye.” Where the newsletter received its information from is unclear, although as Warner’s letter indicated it is possible that, in part at least, it did come from official sources, possibly from Vansittart. On previous occasions, Vansittart had broken the Civil Service code of neutrality by passing information to sympathetic journalists, in order to put information into the public domain contradicting the optimistic view, generally put out by government circles, of the likelihood of a successful accommodation with the fascist states.

In the course of 1938, Vansittart clearly felt increasingly frustrated with the direction of foreign policy under Chamberlain, which he felt powerless to influence. After all, in the previous December, he had been effectively sidelined with his appointment to the post of Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the government.⁴² Iverach McDonald, in his autobiography, described how officials such as Vansittart, who opposed government foreign policy, could disseminate news to the press, news which the government either would not release in its briefings or which it persuaded editors and proprietors to suppress in the public interest. McDonald wrote, “Sir Robert Vansittart, Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the government, freely gave to others the advice that the government ignored.” He also shed light on how this opposition to the official line was organized within the press.

Journalists from pro-government papers mixed freely with those journalists from liberal and left wing papers.⁴³ Such was the perceived threat to national interests posed by Chamberlain's foreign policy, that national interest took priority over obedience to a particular editorial line.

Journalists who contributed to newsletters attempted to conceal their identity from their readers and of course from the government. In the first two issues of the *Whitehall Letter* Gordon Lennox was listed as the editor, but in later editions no further reference was made either to him or to the name of any contributor.⁴⁴ From the 12th edition, on May 3rd, the newsletter carried the following message: “[t]he material in this letter is not for reproduction in any form.”⁴⁵ Moreover, the publishers also changed, until May 3rd it was published by “Foreign Consultants” 22 Moorgate London EC. From then onwards however it was “THE ANGLO-FOREIGN INFORMATION BUREAU 40 CHANCERY LANE, LONDON WC2.” However, in spite of the attempts to conceal the identity of the editors of this clandestine journal, it is clear that they were known to those in the ranks of the Parliamentary Conservative Party who were in opposition to Chamberlain's foreign policy.⁴⁶ The newsletter was only ever available by subscription. Evidence from the files of the Foreign Office News Department suggests that its readership was influential. Given the fact that it was aware both of the address of the publishers and of the involvement of London journalists, it is surprising that, when replying to inquiries about the newsletter from British embassy officials, the News Department should claim to be unaware of the identity of the authors.⁴⁷

The secrecy that generally surrounded the independent newsletters was in marked contrast to Liddell Hart's open opposition towards government foreign policy on Spain. Liddell Hart was in as much danger of losing his job, as were the contributors to the *Whitehall Letter*. The attempt at concealment strongly suggests the existence of contacts between the newsletter and official sources. The support of News Department officials for the *Whitehall Letter* was made clear in Warner's reply to the British ambassador to Turkey: "We have only too much experience of the impossibility of getting really important matters properly treated in the [mainstream] press."⁴⁸ Thus, Warner had indicated to the ambassador that it was still the policy of the News Department to attempt to influence newspapers to adopt a more critical line towards government policy abroad.

The independence that the News Department managed to maintain meant that, in the press war over Spain, it remained a dangerous enemy to Neville Chamberlain.⁴⁹ It undermined the continued attempts by Downing Street to regain the support of the liberal and left press for the government line on the Civil War. At no point during the Spanish war did Chamberlain enjoy a broad-based support from newspapers across the political spectrum. In this he differed from Baldwin who, during the first few weeks of the war at least, had been able to secure the support of newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald*, which were later to emerge as consistent critics of the government line on Spain. In August 1938, Chamberlain wrote to his sister concerning the reaction of the Italian authorities to the *News Chronicle* report of his public statement on a 'Spanish settlement'. In response to this, Chamberlain had received a visit from Crolla, the counsellor of the Italian Embassy. The Prime Minister

confided in his sister the frustration he felt at the effect of the article on the Italian authorities: “why will the foreigners always pay so much attention to our more irresponsible and uninfluential journals?”⁵⁰ So concerned was Chamberlain at how the press might report Crolla’s visit that, in order to conceal the meeting from the press, on its conclusion the Italian official was “sent away by the garden entrance.”

The part played by the News Department in contributing to the difficulties that the Prime Minister was facing with the press in the last twelve months of the Civil War was illustrated in a letter sent by Barrington-Ward to Dawson on October 13th. Barrington-Ward wrote, “I am more and more of the opinion that the News Department of the Foreign Office is really a centre of anti-government propaganda.”⁵¹ The News Department and the Prime Minister’s Press Department had never been accustomed to coordinating their activities. Therefore, it is not surprising that as divisions within official circles grew concerning the direction of policy under Chamberlain, Vansittart, for one, was prepared to use the News Department to counter the more optimistic world view which the triumvirate of Ball, Steward and Chamberlain were trying to persuade the press to support.⁵²

The development of stronger criticism towards government policy on Spain from some of the journalists working for conservative newspapers had coincided with Chamberlain’s accession as Prime Minister, bringing with it a new development in the relationship between the government and the conservative press in general. It is ironic that outwardly at least, the policy of the Chamberlain government towards the Civil War seemed to

enjoy more consistent support from the national conservative press. Beaverbrook and Rothermere, who had opposed Stanley Baldwin, gave their support to Chamberlain, with the consequence that the largest newspaper chains in Britain swung round in support of the new Prime Minister. Indeed, as early as August 1937, Rothermere had informed a friend of the Prime Minister that he had ordered his papers “to give Neville 100% support.”⁵³ In fact, even though it led to a decline in circulation figures, Rothermere would not allow the *Daily Mail* to condemn the activities of either Germany or Italy.⁵⁴ In September 1938, Beaverbrook wrote to Halifax, asking for guidance because “[t]he newspapers are anxious to help the Prime Minister.”⁵⁵ In another letter, this time to the Prime Minister, Beaverbrook was very specific as to what he meant by guidance, suggesting that his friend, Samuel Hoare, be appointed to the role of minister responsible for informing the press.⁵⁶ Chamberlain acceded to this request.⁵⁷ Only the support shown by Dawson of *The Times* matched the support that Beaverbrook was to give the Prime Minister.⁵⁸

Although Beaverbrook’s own sympathies were for the Republican cause, he refused, even in the face of mounting evidence of Italian and German intervention on behalf of Franco, to oppose the government line. Despite Beaverbrook’s private views, the *Daily Express* continued to support government policy in the belief that Non-Intervention would achieve the more important goal of European peace.⁵⁹ The *Daily Express* leader comment on the parliamentary debate on Spain on March 16th 1938, effectively acknowledged the unfair application of the Non-Intervention Agreement, which prevented the Republic from purchasing war supplies on the international market but which did not stop German

supplies reaching Franco. Nevertheless, it was critical of the demands made by the parliamentary opposition both for the ending of Non-Intervention, and for the sale of arms to the Republic. In the assessment of 'Opinion', victory for Franco would place Italy and Germany in a favourable position once the fighting had stopped. This was a gloomy enough prediction. However, the column continued by deliberately downplaying the significance of this; expressing confidence in the wisdom and good sense of British government policy: "[h]ow great these advantages we've still to know. But they cannot be greater than have been foreseen."⁶⁰

From May 1937, the position of the *Observer* was one of progressive support for Neville Chamberlain's government. By 1939, the paper was supportive of a policy that continued to deny the Nationalist government's demand for belligerent rights at sea. This was in spite of the fact that in February of that year Franco had been recognized by the governments of both France and Britain as the legitimate ruler in Spain. Moreover, this was very different from the opinion expressed in that paper earlier, during the last days of the premiership of Baldwin, when, in April of 1937, 'The World Week by Week', had criticized the government for denying to Franco his demand for belligerent rights at sea.

Such a progressive swinging round of editors and proprietors of conservative papers in general, in support of government foreign policy coincided with and was most likely influenced by the worsening crisis in international relations in the course of 1938 and the perceived urgency to reach an accommodation with the dictator states. The priority was to avoid a repetition of the Great War only a generation before. Given the Civil War's

international implications for the peace of Europe, this trend had an obvious effect on how a number of conservative national papers viewed it. What disappeared in the process was a right wing criticism of the government from newspapers like the *Observer*, and the *Daily Mail*. Previously, Baldwin's refusal to concede belligerent rights to Franco had not only been criticized because they denied to him what the right wing saw as his legitimate rights as ruler of the greater part of Spain, but also because it seemed that the government was in effect intervening indirectly in the Civil War on behalf of the Republic. Increasingly, however, after May 1937, such papers saw nothing to criticize in the policy adopted by the government of Chamberlain. At no point was he accused, as was Baldwin, of pursuing a partisan policy in favour of the Republican cause. The irony was, of course, that Chamberlain was following a policy very similar to that of his predecessor.

In marked contrast to the support offered to the government by the national conservative press was the attitude of the liberal and left-wing press. Indeed, throughout 1938, the papers of liberal and left-wing sympathies were almost consistently hostile towards government policy. They readily pointed out the wider significance of developments in Spain for the balance of power in Europe. On March 17th, the leader in the *Daily Herald*, reporting on the previous day's parliamentary debate, gave a damning indictment of Chamberlain's handling of Spanish policy. It pointed out clearly the strategic risks posed to British interests by the failure of Non-Intervention. According to the leader: "Mr. Chamberlain's premiership has been disastrous...His continuance in office is a danger to this country and to international peace."⁶¹

In their assessment of the long-term risks to national security created by British policy towards Spain, the opposition press often bore a striking resemblance to the views being uttered by Liddell Hart in the course of 1937-8. One example is the leader comment of the *News Chronicle* for March 17th. It was explicit about the strategic implications for the western democracies should Franco win: “[i]f Spain falls into the hands of a hostile power, it may well mean the end of British command of the Mediterranean maintained since the days of Nelson.”⁶² The leader graphically spelt out for its readership, the connection between a Nationalist victory in Spain at the behest of the dictator powers, and the resulting geographical isolation of France, and German domination of Northern Europe. Furthermore, given its large circulation, the *News Chronicle* was in a position to influence a far larger audience than Liddell Hart could ever hope to do.

The *Manchester Guardian* even went so far as to accuse the British government of holding partisan views in favour of the Spanish rebels, and, like the liberal left press in general, saw grave strategic risks to Britain in the intervention by the Axis powers.⁶³ Whereas the conservative press toned down the significance of the additional supply of men and material to the Nationalist cause, the *Manchester Guardian* emphasized the evidence that, in the Spring of 1938, there had been substantial reinforcement from abroad: “there can be no doubt at all that the present rebel offensive is made possible by renewed Italian and German support.”

However, underlying the ideological differences between a conservative press in support of the government and a liberal/left press in opposition, there was in existence a very real conflict within the conservative press over the issue of the Civil War. As we have seen, the rallying of much of the national conservative press in support of Chamberlain was to exacerbate tensions among the staffs of these newspapers. Furthermore, the resentment felt by journalists of conservative newspapers at what they saw as a deliberate policy of censorship on the part of their editors, was doubtless fuelled by the ability of their contemporaries in liberal and left newspapers to publicize their concerns over the strategic implications of government policy towards the Spanish Civil War. In the liberal and left press such concerns were regularly expressed in both editorials and main articles.

During the last fourteen months of the Civil War, there were thus two contrasting and yet related developments within the British press. The rallying round of editors and proprietors in the conservative press in support of Chamberlain's policy on Spain, by provoking stronger opposition among journalists, led to the formation of a new alliance within the press which cut across the political differences. The narrow more ideologically based consensus, which now linked official circles and their press allies was now confronted by a broader opposition consensus where political distinctions were becoming blurred. Of course, the most striking indication of this new left/right consensus on Spain was the contribution to the independent newsletters by journalists from a variety of newspapers. It becomes clear that following the resignation of Eden, his supporters within the conservative press came to adopt a standpoint on the Civil War that closely resembled that of the parliamentary opposition and the liberal and left wing press.

However, whereas the liberal and left view on Spain, whether in Parliament or in the newspapers, tended to have a natural affinity with the Spanish Republic as a centre-left democracy, it was necessary for the conservative opposition to suppress its natural ideological suspicion towards the Spanish Popular Front regime. For these conservatives, departure from the conservative consensus in support of government policy was justified on the grounds that government policy was failing to uphold the interests of British and French strategy in the Western Mediterranean. Thus, for part of the conservative press, and apparently for some Conservative politicians also, 1937-8 brought a change of view towards Spain. The worsening international crisis helped Chamberlain to secure the support of a greater share of the conservative press for his policy of appeasement since it was in the interests of peace. However, the growing prospect of a new European war awakened fears that Spain might be a useful client state for those fascist powers, which, in the event of war, would be the opponents of Britain and France.

A radically different reaction to the resignation of Eden was that of the *Yorkshire Post*, bringing a fundamental change in its relationship with the Conservative Party. Following Eden's resignation, the paper's relationship with the British government underwent a complete reversal. The result was that, unlike the rest of the conservative press in this period, the *Yorkshire Post* openly criticized the Spanish policy pursued by Chamberlain's government. Until late February of 1938 the *Yorkshire Post* had been part of the existing government and press consensus. It, too had argued that the government was genuinely neutral and that Non-Intervention served British interests both within the peninsula specifically, and on the continent in general. However, the editor of the paper, Arthur

Mann, was a very keen supporter of the former Foreign Secretary. He shared completely Eden's growing concerns over developments in the Civil War. He too, during 1937-8, became increasingly wary regarding the long-term prospect for British interests following a victory for Franco. Uniquely among the conservative newspapers at the time of Eden's resignation, the *Yorkshire Post* fully supported Eden against Chamberlain, expressing support for the position adopted by the former Foreign Secretary over the issue of Anglo-Italian conversations. On February 21st, therefore, the comment by the leader column was as follows:

[t]he ill effect of this resignation will be felt, we fear, especially in the United States of America, where already there has been a pronounced tendency to suggest that any understanding with Britain must be undesirable and unsafe because the government have already shown inclination to prefer association with the dictatorships to co-operation with the democracies.⁶⁴

Throughout 1938, Mann and Eden maintained regular correspondence in which Mann offered his support, which was much appreciated by Eden.⁶⁵ Their correspondence demonstrates that, regarding Spain, they were in complete agreement. Thus, having adopted the role of conservative press critic of the foreign policy of the National Government headed by Chamberlain, the *Yorkshire Post* became an advocate of the conservative opposition to the government line on Spain as well. Because the paper identified Franco's association with the Axis powers as a threat to British interests, the attitude of the paper moved away from a position of neutrality towards open sympathy for the cause of the Spanish Republic. The correspondence between Mann and Eden not only revealed their shared perception of the Civil War, particularly their concern at the development of events on the ground in the course of the first half of 1938, but also their

shared antipathy towards Chamberlain. On at least two occasions, Mann had met with either Halifax or Chamberlain, but remained unconvinced of the government's case concerning its justification for its foreign policy. On March 25th, in a letter to Eden, Mann referred to Chamberlain as "living in a fool's paradise", and expected his resignation should it become clear that his policy of appeasement was a failure.⁶⁶ As Eden's disillusionment with Chamberlain grew, he encouraged Mann to continue with his open opposition to the government line. On March 1st, for example, Eden wrote, "I am convinced that the 'Y P', in writing as it did came much nearer to representing the national mood than some other papers which have supported our policy in the past."⁶⁷

Such was Eden's trust in this particular ally in the conservative press that he confided in him his private thoughts concerning the situation in Europe, thoughts which were not for publication. Eden even supplied Mann with confidential information that confirmed the editor's own scepticism regarding government Spanish policy. On March 13th, for example, Eden wrote to Mann concerning the European situation in general. In his letter, Eden also referred to the activities of the Italian forces engaged in Spain: "[i]t is a profound mistake to attempt conversations with totalitarian states who are systematically engaged in the violation of every agreement they have ever entered into."⁶⁸ On April 16th, the day that the Anglo-Italian Agreement was signed, Eden wrote to Mann, again in confidence. On that day, which coincided with the advancing Nationalist forces reaching the Mediterranean coast at Vinaroz, thus cutting the Republican held territory in two, Eden wrote in a disparaging manner about Chamberlain: "it seems that Mussolini is to be allowed to win his war in Spain and afterwards we have to pay him for his victory."⁶⁹ On

May 18th, Eden wrote again encouraging the editor in the independent and critical line adopted in its leader columns by the *Yorkshire Post*. He intimated to Mann the impact that even a small but influential newspaper could have. Eden wrote of the leader columns, “[t]hey have created, I know, a profound impression.”⁷⁰ In fact its opposition to the official line was dangerous because in a paper so closely tied to the Conservative Party, the stance taken by Mann undermined the illusion of a broad conservative press consensus in support of government foreign policy on Spain. Although a comprehensive study has been made of the opposition of the *Yorkshire Post* to Chamberlain’s foreign policy in general, the importance of differences over the Spanish Civil War has been a neglected area. This is a serious omission given the significance accorded to Spain in the leader columns of that paper, in which every opportunity was taken to express the alternative view to the official line. A further neglected area has been the correspondence between Mann and Eden in the months following the latter’s resignation. Indeed the similarity of their views concerning Spain, as revealed in their exchange of letters, and Eden’s encouragement to Mann to continue in his independent line can only have encouraged the editor to continue in his crusade.⁷¹

During the spring of 1938, the rapid advance of the Nationalist forces and the impending collapse of the Spanish Republic were viewed ominously by the *Yorkshire Post*. Indeed, among conservative newspapers, the *Yorkshire Post* was unusual in that it pointed out to its readers the case against the Nationalists. On the day of an important parliamentary debate on the progress of the Civil War, the leader column of the paper stressed the threat of a Franco victory to British maritime routes:

[t]he real territorial, political and military independence of Spain and its complete freedom from control by the Axis powers is of vital importance to every man, woman and child in this country.⁷²

On March 19th, the *Yorkshire Post* again considered the strategic implications of the Civil War, and in its leader column quoted directly from the lecture of Liddell Hart on March 17th, by reiterating his view that the second great war of the century had already begun in Spain with the intervention by the Axis powers.⁷³

The *Yorkshire Post's* concern at the designs of both Germany and Italy regarding Spain in the long term made the paper extremely sceptical of the offers of either German or Italian goodwill concerning their intentions there, and doubtful of the value of any Anglo-Italian agreement. On March 19th, therefore, the leader adopted a very pessimistic view of the Anglo-Italian talks in progress in Rome. The comment was "it would be the height of folly to place any confidence in an agreement which is not preceded by a real Italian evacuation of Spain." On March 25th, the leader questioned the optimism shown by the Prime Minister in Parliament because he had received assurances from Italy that she had no territorial, political or economic aims in Spain or the Balearics. The leader declared, "[t]he Prime Minister will probably appear to most people to have been either almost excessively circumspect in his language or too optimistic."⁷⁴ On April 2nd, the *Yorkshire Post* again took an opportunity to dampen down any enthusiasm over Italo-German assurances that neither had any territorial designs on Spain. In a detailed article outlining the extent of German penetration in Nationalist held Spain in particular, the leader gave a very clear warning: "[i]t would be preposterous not to see now that an effective Nazi

domination of Spain, after the National victory, would serve the purpose of that of the destruction of France.”⁷⁵

In the course of 1938-9, the *Yorkshire Post* did not merely see its role as alerting its readers to the dangers inherent in British policy towards Spain. Faced with pressure upon it to conform to the prevailing orthodoxy, formulated by circles close to Neville Chamberlain, it considered that it had a much wider mission. As editor, Mann like Dawson and Garvin, for example, had a large degree of autonomy regarding the policy of his paper. However, the opposition of the *Yorkshire Post* towards government foreign policy quickly aroused the displeasure of the board of directors of the newspaper, in particular Stanley Pearson. On March 1st, therefore, Pearson wrote to Mann, warning him that the independence of the editor was to be raised at the next meeting of the board of Directors.⁷⁶ Mann, who was jealous of his right to independence, wrote to the proprietor, Rupert Beckett, complaining about the threat to his position implied by Pearson’s letter. Thus, he informed the proprietor, “I regard his intention to comment on YP internal affairs at tomorrow’s meeting as entirely improper.”⁷⁷ On this particular occasion, Beckett was to support Mann. However, even Beckett’s support ebbed away with the repeated hostility of the *Yorkshire Post*’s leaders towards the government and Neville Chamberlain in particular. On March 23rd, Beckett wrote to Mann, criticizing the leaders, which challenged government policy on Spain.⁷⁸

It is clear that Beckett’s letter was an attempt to influence the editor in advance of the Prime Minister’s foreign policy speech in Parliament the next day. He was concerned lest

the *Yorkshire Post* should be seen as arguing for the removal of Chamberlain as Prime Minister. Of course, the irony was that as editor of one of the few newspapers actually owned by the Conservative party he faced far stronger political pressures to fall into line than did editors of other conservative papers. This was especially so in regard to Spain, which was an issue that polarized opinion in Britain along party lines. Mann, however, continued to use the leader columns of the paper as a means of expressing his opposition to government policy. Therefore, in spite of Becket's express instructions, the leader comment on the Prime Minister's foreign policy speech of March 25th, was as follows:

[w]e are to maintain our non-intervention. The Prime Minister warns all whom it may concern that those interests for which we shall fight if they are menaced are 'communications vital to our existence'. We [referring to leader comment on Spain on previous occasions] have recently shown that the domination of Spanish ports and islands by a potentially hostile foreign power would undoubtedly constitute a menace to vital British communications.⁷⁹

The importance which Mann clearly accorded to Spain and the frustration that both he and Eden felt with the apparent blindness of the Chamberlain government to the real risks to British interests, made it virtually impossible for him to be positive towards the Prime Minister's efforts. At best, therefore, the leaders of the *Yorkshire Post* could only excuse Chamberlain for lacking in insight. Even so, when there was a particular reference to the Prime Minister, opposition tended to be expressed in a circumspect manner. For example, the leader comment of April 16th, concerning the Anglo-Italian Agreement, recognized the difficulties faced by Chamberlain in a more difficult international sphere, and declined to offer criticism of the agreement in advance of its terms being made public. This was rather different in tone from the sarcastic and even contemptuous way in which the same newspaper only a month before had generalized about those who

supported bringing the Anglo-Italian Agreement into force. On April 16th, however, the paper offered no more than a cautious warning against seeing the agreement as a watershed in Anglo-Italian relations: “it is impossible not to remember the proverb concerning the cup and the lip has not necessarily lost all its points.”⁸⁰ Even when, on the following day, Mann was in possession of the actual terms of the agreement, and thus in a far stronger position to offer stinging criticism of Chamberlain’s handling of foreign affairs, the leader comment for April 18th was still guarded in its opposition. While on the one hand the terms were condemned, the following caveat was inserted: “if events prove that Mr. Chamberlain’s action has been well judged as it is unquestionably well intentioned, we shall not stint in our acknowledgment to his foresight and statesmanship.”⁸¹ At this stage, Mann was still prepared to be cautious in his public criticism of the Prime Minister. Indeed, as indicated by the evidence of his correspondence with Eden, it was only in private that a truer reflection of his opinion of Chamberlain’s conduct of foreign policy could be detected. As an example, on the same day that the April 18th leader was written, Mann wrote to Eden, expressing, in unambiguous terms, his objections to the agreement on both moral as well as practical grounds.⁸² Thus the mitigating nature of the concluding note of encouragement in the leader is hardly sincere. Indeed, it may have been as much a deliberate ploy to contain the criticism of the board of directors towards the line taken by the *Yorkshire Post*, as a conscious attempt to place Chamberlain’s policy in a positive light. Such ambiguity even suggests pressure was being clandestinely exerted upon Mann to fall into line.

In spite of its choice of language, the *Yorkshire Post* was not generally successful at deflecting criticism from an increasingly perturbed board of directors. Therefore, Mann's continued opposition towards Chamberlain led to further letters from Beckett attempting to persuade him to change tack. On June 11th Beckett wrote in complaint of the previous day's leader on foreign policy:

I take strong exception to the latter part of *The Yorkshire Post* leader on Friday. I think it is most unwise to advocate that we should hitch our wagon to the small states of Europe and thereby risk being dragged into their complications...⁸³

The independent line taken by the *Yorkshire Post* with regard to foreign policy can be seen as a reaction against the renewed pressure from official sources being exerted on the press. The surviving evidence from the Foreign Office files for 1938 points to a much more intensive effort by the government to secure the co-operation of proprietors in the suppression of certain news items. On February 28th, Leeper and Eden's successor as Foreign Secretary, Halifax, discussed possible ways in which the British press in general and also the BBC might be induced to moderate their tone towards the dictator powers. Leeper advised,

the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State [Halifax] might together see the Chairman of The Newspaper Proprietors' Association and make an appeal to do what is possible in the press to avoid provocation against Germany and Italy. Times were difficult, all of us, including the press, should have a sense of national responsibility.⁸⁴

Leeper suggested that Sir Neville Henderson, Ambassador to Germany, and Lord Perth, Ambassador to Italy, should be given copies of what was being said to the press so that they in turn could inform the German and Italian governments. As Leeper had suggested,

Sir Neville Henderson was informed that Halifax was to call a press conference at the Foreign Office to impress upon the gathering the responsibility of the press. The ambassador was apprised of the substance of the statement that Halifax was to make. His intention was “to make an appeal to do what it is possible in the press to avoid provocation against Germany and Italy, and to instil a greater sense of national responsibility at the present time.”⁸⁵ Henderson was also informed that Sir John Reith, Director General of the BBC, was to “bear in mind the extreme sensitivity of Hitler and Mussolini to BBC ‘talk’ and presentation of news.”

In a democracy, such official pressure, especially on the independent media, was highly controversial. The government vociferously denied rumours that the press had been approached to tone down criticism of the dictators. On March 28th, Chamberlain had been asked in Parliament whether since February 21st, “a request/ suggestion had been made to British newspapers to suppress or modify news and comment on government foreign policy.”⁸⁶ Chamberlain’s reply was ambiguous, for while emphatically denying that any such attempt had been made officially, he nevertheless drew the attention of his parliamentary colleagues to “the heavy responsibility, which rests on the press when commenting on international affairs.” The reality was far less ambiguous. Both he and the dictators who were the intended beneficiaries of such a policy were aware that the government had made strong representations towards the media.⁸⁷ On a number of occasions in the course of 1938-9, the *Yorkshire Post*, that vociferous defender of press freedom, made vague reference in its leaders to the government’s attempts to interfere with the policy of newspapers. One such warning read, “[t]here have been some

indications in recent months that some members of our government believe that there should be silence on such matters.”⁸⁸

The *Yorkshire Post* was to cause increasing concern in official circles. As has been previously stated, this was largely because its influence on opinion was far greater than its small readership would suggest. Of particular concern both to official circles and to the board of directors was the effect of the paper’s open attack on government policy, since it drew attention to the limits of the conservative consensus on Spain. As far as government supporters were concerned, the action of the *Yorkshire Post* was to show that the criticism of the opposition press towards government policy on Spain could not be dismissed as merely a knee jerk reaction against the Conservative dominated government of the day. Thus, the opposition of Mann was another reminder that government policy on Spain could be genuinely opposed on grounds of strategic interest. The readership of the *Yorkshire Post* although small had a large postal circulation.⁸⁹ Not only was the attitude of Mann and, of course, Liddell Hart, a reminder that the conservative consensus in favour of Non-Intervention was limited, it also made it more difficult for the government to defend its policy as genuinely neutral. From the determination of certain conservative journalists to highlight the obvious pitfalls and inconsistencies of government policy on Spain, one could easily draw the conclusion that the failure of the British government to work for more effective Non-Intervention in Spain was because it was not neutral but would prefer the victory of the Nationalist side. Such a conclusion would be a cause of embarrassment for the government. Dawson showed his awareness of this fact when, on

February 28th 1939, he wrote the following to Sir Samuel Hoare: “[t]here is no paper that has tried to do Chamberlain more harm in recent months than the *Yorkshire Post*.”⁹⁰

By June 1938, the inability of Chamberlain to rebuild a broad consensus within the press in support of government policy on Spain was clearly in evidence. In February of that year, the Nationalist military command had embarked on a new strategy, that of attacking merchant ships trading in Republican ports. The increasing volume of these attacks was to place the Nationalist authorities in conflict with the British government. This was because the bulk of the foreign shipping engaged in the legitimate trade with Republican Spain was British registered.⁹¹ As virtually all of the contraband or war material being sent to the Republic was carried in either French or Russian vessels, the British ships being attacked were not only engaged in legitimate trade but carried Non-Intervention officials as a verification of the non-warlike nature of their cargoes. Since the Nationalist regime had not been recognized as a belligerent power, under international law, any attack on foreign shipping was an act of piracy. The attacks escalated from the end of May until June, with the biggest losses to merchant shipping being incurred by British registered vessels. Of the total of sixteen British ships lost during the Spanish Civil War, ten were sunk during the period between June 16th and 22nd. A further thirty-seven merchant ships were damaged in air attacks either in Republican ports or on the high seas. The responsibility for such attacks lay with aircraft owned by the German or Italian forces, operating from bases in Mallorca.⁹² The problem for Chamberlain was that these attacks and, in particular, the disproportionate share of British ships and lives among the casualties undermined government policy on Spain still further. Public opinion in Britain

was clearly in favour of reprisals against the Nationalists.⁹³ The British government, however, was most unwilling to take punitive measures. In spite of the overwhelming parliamentary strength of the government, Chamberlain was clearly aware of the effect of the attacks in creating public hostility towards Franco, which in turn might force him to take action that he did not wish to take:

If he [Franco] must bomb Spanish government ports he must use discretion otherwise he might arouse a feeling in the country which would force the government to take action. Such a situation was by no means beyond the bounds of possibility if the sinkings were to reach say one a day.⁹⁴

Given its stance, the government lay itself open to the charge, both within Parliament and without, that once again it was failing to uphold British interests overseas. The government did what it could to secure sympathetic reception in the press for its view on this crisis. On June 9th, for example, Halifax effectively instructed the head of his personal press department to canvass the support of newspaper correspondents.⁹⁵ Indeed, Halifax was acutely aware of the political difficulties facing the government and warned Chamberlain, “it is going to give us all a lot of trouble.” The press was divided in its response towards the government on the bombing issue, providing further evidence of the continued limitations in the ability of the government, in a parliamentary state, to exert pressure on the press. On June 10th, the day after Halifax’s instructions to his press secretary, the *Manchester Guardian* summarized the intensification of the piratical and seaport attacks over the year and was highly critical of the British government: “it looks as though the government had no policy” was the opinion of the leader column.⁹⁶

The opposition press was generally united in demanding much more determined action than the government was in fact prepared to take. Mann was under no illusion as to who was responsible for the attacks from the air; he was convinced it was Italian aeroplanes. In his opinion, this was further evidence that there was no gain for Britain in following a policy of appeasement of Italy, given the patent lack of good faith of Italy towards Britain.⁹⁷ What was particularly important however was the way in which Mann now openly criticized Chamberlain. He became much more willing to argue openly that with regard to Spain, Chamberlain was following a cynical policy. Having staked his political reputation on the success of the Anglo-Italian Treaty, Chamberlain was therefore prepared to be complacent in regard to the current Italian operations within Spain. In fact, Mann came to question publicly whether the continued support of Chamberlain's government for Non-Intervention was indeed a reflection of neutrality towards the conflict. In his opinion: "[Mussolini] seems to have assumed that the British Government might take serious steps to impede action by Italy and Germany to hasten Franco's victory."⁹⁸ Significantly, Mann had moved even closer to the position adopted by the liberal/left press on the Civil War. It would seem that the sustained bombing offensive against British registered vessels encouraged Mann to be bolder and therefore less circumspect in his opposition even towards Chamberlain. After all, such attacks were an affront to British prestige and a threat to British maritime interests in the western Mediterranean.

The failure of the government to secure newspaper support beyond its traditional allies in the conservative press for its policy regarding attacks on British shipping was exacerbated

in the early summer by growing opposition within Parliament. Indeed, as Halifax had pointed out on June 9th, the government would face difficulties in Parliament on the bombing issue when it came to be discussed by members the following week.⁹⁹ His prediction was proved correct for his private secretary later recorded in his diary for June 14th: “the government’s extremely negative statement on bombing in Spain went badly in the Commons today.”¹⁰⁰ After two further debates on the Spanish situation the following week, Chamberlain succumbed to parliamentary pressure and agreed to recall Hodgson, the British representative, from Burgos. Even Chamberlain was forced to admit the difficulties the government faced over the bombing issue. In a letter to his sister, Ida, written on June 25th, he stated, “I didn’t think that we came very well out of the first debate on Spain this week.”¹⁰¹ This makes his confidence regarding British press reception of his speeches on Spain even more surprising, for in the same letter Chamberlain also suggested that the newspapers in general supported him in his speech.¹⁰² According to Chamberlain, Rex Leeper was convinced that among the lobby correspondents there was “nothing but praise and satisfaction” for the way in which the Prime Minister had dealt with the situation in Parliament.

Chamberlain’s optimism was misleading for the reaction of the liberal/left press was predictable. The *Manchester Guardian*, for example, in its leader for the 24th, accused the government of neglect of duty in its failure to provide adequate protection for British ships engaged in lawful trade.¹⁰³ As on previous occasions, the *Daily Herald* emphasized what it interpreted as the ‘malevolent neutrality’ of government policy against the interests of the Republic. In this particular instance, it was represented in the refusal of

Chamberlain to take sterner measures against Franco's regime. The leader column of the paper made clear its opinion that the reason for the government's inactivity on the issue was that it did not want to do anything which might hinder the chances of Franco in the Civil War: "The premier's policy is founded on the principle that nothing must be done to stop General Franco from winning the war. Nothing must be done because Mr. Chamberlain's reputation is at stake."¹⁰⁴ Even more damaging to the government was the view of the *Yorkshire Post* published on June 23rd, in advance of the parliamentary debate that day. In an attempt to influence opinion ahead of the debate, the paper, whilst acknowledging the difficulties faced by the Prime Minister in his earlier attempt to respond to the attacks on merchant shipping, nevertheless stood out against him: "we think that he under-estimates the real strength of public feeling."¹⁰⁵ The latter view was a clear indication as to why the *Yorkshire Post* should be less circumspect than previously in its criticism of the Prime Minister.

The bombing of British ships had represented a serious test of the loyalty of conservative newspapers towards the Spanish policy of the Prime Minister. To a large extent, the manner in which the conservative press in general dealt with the issue was a reflection of the success of Chamberlain's personal touch with individual editors and proprietors over an issue which could have broken the alliance between Chamberlain and his press supporters. After all, in the previous autumn, there had been almost total support from newspapers for naval patrols to protect foreign shipping from submarine attack. Yet over the present crisis, conservative newspapers were asked and indeed agreed to support a completely contradictory policy to the one pursued earlier. In 1937 it had been possible

for both government and conservative newspapers, albeit cynically, to hide behind phrases such as ‘unidentified submarine attacks’ against British shipping when it was common knowledge that the perpetrators were Italian. Over the bombing issue however, the attacks were aerial, and there could be no similar cover up. As both ministers and their press allies admitted, the aeroplane attacks on British registered vessels were deliberate. Given the explosive potential of the issue it is hardly surprising that it should inform discussions between official circles and leading members of the press. Between May 31st and June 30th, when the attacks on shipping were at their height, there are at least eight references to them in the Dawson diary, in fact it was the most common Civil War issue referred to in the month of June. On at least two of these occasions, June 9th and 14th, references to it are related to discussion with the Foreign Secretary, Halifax¹⁰⁶, then a close supporter of Chamberlain’s foreign policy.¹⁰⁷ Given that the government had, on previous occasions during the Civil War, exploited its contacts with its press allies to open up alternative forms of dialogue with the dictator powers, the evidence suggests that, in the summer of 1938, possibly through Halifax’s friendship with Dawson, attempts were being made to secure the offices of *The Times* in a broader diplomatic strategy; namely to bring the present crisis to an end. Furthermore, it makes sense of the ambiguity in the leaders of *The Times*. Take, for example, the leader for June 28th. The desire of the British government to find a peaceful solution of the crisis through joint action with the dictator powers was explained. However, a coded warning was given, implying that if the attacks did not cease, then the advocates of appeasement with the dictators might be forced by the clamour of an outraged public opinion into adopting punitive measures: “[i]t would be the greatest mistake to assume that the government would not act in any

circumstances.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, the manner in which the above terms were couched suggest this was written as much for reception abroad as for the domestic readership. After all, the leaders in *The Times* were very long, often excessively detailed and ambiguous, requiring both time and patience to digest their true meaning. As long as they were willing to comply, newspapers could be used by ministers, albeit in a limited way, as a means of conveying to the dictators those concerns they were not willing to make public. Indeed, the warning implied in *The Times* on June 28th bore striking resemblance to the privately held views of Chamberlain. On June 25th, he had written to his sister, Hilda, of his fears that if the attacks on British ships persisted then it could lead to war between Britain and Franco.¹⁰⁹

While on one level, conservative papers appeared to support the government line on the bombing issue, this did not alter the fact that the Civil War remained a divisive issue. Both the *Daily Mail* and the *Observer*, for example retained their sympathies for the Nationalist cause. The tacit sympathy of the *Observer* even in the light of repeated Nationalist aeroplane attacks on ports condemned elsewhere in the conservative press, was indicated in the use of inverted commas when referring to the distinction which was commonly made between ‘civilian’ as opposed to military targets. Clearly, the paper did not see a clear distinction between the two, thus the attacks on ports were justified as legitimate targets. On June 19th, in a lead article Garvin wrote that it was in the interest of British shipping engaged in trade with Spain that Franco should win the war.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, *The Truth* was becoming increasingly concerned lest the Nationalists should win the war. As early as April 20th, for example, ‘Entrenous’ wrote, “I am still trying to

discover why any sensible or patriotic Englishman should want Franco to win.”¹¹¹ Moreover, the persistence of their partisan attachments to either the Republican or Nationalist sides limited the support most conservative papers were willing to give the government. This was even shown in the way in which a number of these papers dealt with the bombing issue. Even *The Times* implied that the British government was partly to blame for making it too easy for foreign owned vessels to obtain British registration.¹¹² The *Daily Mail* was prepared to be more directly critical of the government for not closing the loophole in current legislation. On July 1st, the leader advised the government to “end a system by which aliens can buy the protective might of the British fleet for £70 or £80.”¹¹³ On June 12th, Garvin criticized the government for failing to grant belligerent rights to both sides in the Civil War. His main concern was Britain’s relations with Franco that, he assumed, would be bolstered by the raising of his international prestige that the granting of belligerent rights would entail. For Garvin, given the progress of events on the ground in Spain, such action was also practical policy: He concluded that with Franco winning the war, “[i]t would be senseless for Britain and France to [have] an unnecessary enmity with the Spain of the future.”¹¹⁴ However, some conservative papers were even moving in the direction of urging the government to adopt a more energetic policy in response to the attacks. Take, for example, the editorial of the *Daily Telegraph* on July 5th 1938. It only accepted in part the warning that the government had issued to British shipping that trading in a war zone was at their own risk. The leader implied that the government should do more to protect British interests.¹¹⁵ Even *Truth* expressed its exasperation at what it saw as the timidity of British policy. At the end of June, in a rather ambiguous statement in which, while Entrenous expressed support for Non-

Intervention for confining the war to Spain, the rider was added that the same policy “has brought us a good many unpleasant and even humiliating experiences.”¹¹⁶ Thus, the attitude of many conservative newspapers towards the bombing crisis was ambiguous. At one level they rallied behind the government, especially in the face of attacks by the parliamentary opposition. Hence, its policy was defended as wise because it prevented the escalation of the Civil War into a wider conflict. But the support was conditional; the protracted bombing crisis in the summer of 1938 strained the alliance that bound these papers in support of Spanish policy. In the circumspect opposition expressed in leader columns, newspapers were entering a semi-secret dialogue with the government, in which they gave indications of the limits of their patience with current policy. Some, such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Observer* were in effect arguing for a change of policy.

However, in marked contrast to the division over Spain was the display of unity among newspapers across the political spectrum in defence of the Munich settlement in the autumn of 1938. On this issue, Cockett, in *Twilight Of Truth*, wrote,

[t]here is no doubt that by reading the press comment on Munich one would have gained the impression that, as W.W. Hadley later claimed, ‘the free press of this Country has never been nearer to complete unity than in the chorus of praise and thanksgiving which followed Munich’.¹¹⁷

Cockett concluded that the unity among the papers, which in fact masked the very real divisions among them regarding appeasement, was achieved through Chamberlain’s “consistent and secret cultivation of the personal touch with the press.”¹¹⁸ Yet the consensus on Munich was brought about not so much by Chamberlain’s cultivation of the press as by the very special circumstances created by the Czech crisis in the summer and

autumn of that year. In the autumn especially, there was the very real risk of an outbreak of war over Czechoslovakia. It is true that there had been similar fears regarding the conflict in Spain, that it too might escalate into a war amongst the European Powers. However, this point was never reached. This was because of the determination of the British government never to allow such a possibility. Indeed, throughout the war, French initiatives to offset the material disadvantages to the Republic, in particular by allowing the traffic of war material across the Pyrenees into Republican Spain, were doomed to fail without British support, which of course was never forthcoming. Furthermore, both the Axis powers and Franco recognized that the British government had no intention of fighting a general war over Spain. Therefore, to ease the political pressure on Chamberlain in Parliament, on June 25th, Franco ordered his fleet and air force to stop the attacks on British vessels.¹¹⁹ Thus, British newspapers could attack the government line on Spain in the confidence that there was no risk of provoking a crisis that could lead to war. Yet Spain was an issue vital to British interests. The opposition press was looking towards a different war in which Britain and France would be allies against the fascist states. They therefore repudiated the Prime Minister's confident belief in the possibility of a long lasting accommodation with Germany and Italy being achieved.

The limited nature of actual support for Chamberlain became very apparent shortly after the Munich conference. He had been confident that the contact established with both Hitler and Mussolini at Munich could be exploited to secure their support for an armistice in Spain that would bring the Civil War to a close. Indeed, Chamberlain expressed this confidence in a letter that he wrote to his sister, Hilda.¹²⁰ However, his optimism

regarding the good faith of the dictators was to be short lived, for in the following week Chamberlain wrote to his sister, Ida, of the threat made by Mussolini, that, unless the Anglo-Italian Agreement was signed immediately, Italy would sign a military alliance with Germany.¹²¹ The Prime Minister confided that political circumstances at home would make it difficult for him to sign the agreement. Nevertheless, taking the token withdrawal of 10 000 Italian troops from the CTV during the previous September as an excuse, the British government allowed the Anglo-Italian Agreement to come into force on November 16th, well in advance of the total withdrawal of Italian forces.¹²² Significantly, the reaction of the British press to this new twist in government policy on Spain was not purely on party political lines. The *Yorkshire Post* referring to the parliamentary debate on November 2nd made the following, predictable comment about the Anglo-Italian Agreement:

We are now to believe without any material evidence that despite all these violated undertakings we need no longer feel in the least concerned lest Spain should be found completely dominated by a Nazi-Fascist government pursuing a policy antagonistic to the democracies.¹²³

By late 1938, even Camrose was demanding a change in policy in order to place the country on a war footing.¹²⁴ However, in spite of the increasing concern of its proprietor over the attitude of the dictators, the *Daily Telegraph* would not move away from defending government policy on Spain.¹²⁵ It was to the *Whitehall Letter* therefore, that Gordon-Lennox, had to resort in order to point out his scepticism regarding the Anglo-Italian Agreement. Indeed, on October 20th, the *Whitehall Letter* explained that the reluctance of Franco to agree to the withdrawal of foreign volunteers was because of his dependence upon the Italian and German troops.¹²⁶ Franco's reluctance to co-operate and

therefore the absence of any effective agreement on Spain among the powers of the Non-Intervention Committee was raised again by this journal on November 3rd, the day Parliament gave approval for the Anglo-Italian Agreement to come into force.¹²⁷ Yet the cracks within the conservative press consensus on Spain were to widen as more of the government's allies began to show reservations towards Chamberlain's policy. The *Observer*, unlike most conservative papers at this time, was not prepared to accept the government's case unreservedly. On November 6th, therefore, even this paper came close to criticizing government policy on Spain, returning to a mocking scepticism of Non-Intervention schemes that had characterized its 'The World Week By Week' column before Chamberlain became Prime Minister. Thus, in the opinion of the paper:

In the technical sense Italy's evacuation of 10 000 volunteers has satisfied the criterion of a 'settlement in Spain'. The plan launched by the Non-Intervention Committee has stipulated a specific degree of evacuations as the condition precedent to the granting of belligerent rights. But General Franco who is the claimant for belligerent rights has not yet accepted the plan, there results the remarkable dilemma that before General Franco can be given what he wants he must first agree to be given it...¹²⁸

As we shall see in the next chapter, reservations among editors and proprietors previously loyal to Chamberlain on the issue of the Civil War were to develop, in the final months of the War, into much more open opposition.

In conclusion, the resignation of Eden in February 1938 resulted in a further realignment of the conservative press on the issue of the Spanish Civil War. The removal of Eden from office confirmed that the government would continue turning a blind eye to the continued involvement of Italy and Germany in the Civil War. It was this that led to the

emergence of a conservative press opposition rather different from the opposition that had been offered by certain conservative newspapers towards the government line in the first twelve months of the war. In terms of circulation figures, this new opposition reached a far smaller audience. However, this alternative view was expressed with a greater sense of urgency as the clouds of war loomed across the European continent during the later thirties.¹²⁹ The tone of the *Whitehall Letter*, for example, was very different from that of the *King-Hall Newsletter*. From the outbreak of the war in July 1936, the *King-Hall Newsletter* had been prepared to be sympathetic towards the government line on Spain. This was in sharp contrast to the attitude of the *Whitehall Letter* whose treatment of the Spanish Civil War was from a consistently pessimistic perspective.¹³⁰ 1938 highlighted the very real limitations on Chamberlain's efforts to build a broad consensus within the press for his policy of appeasement. Spain was too divisive an issue, for what was at stake in the Civil War were not just issues relating to ideology or class but the very security of the British and French Empires. The disagreement between the independent conservative press on the one hand and the government and its conservative press allies on the other was based on a completely different perception of the European situation. Chamberlain defended his policy as pragmatic, his view being that, in the context of the later thirties, Britain had to deal with the dictators. The independents by challenging this were moving towards the unthinkable, the inevitability of a second general war on the continent between the Democracies and the Axis. For them, the conduct of Hitler and Mussolini in the Spanish Civil War demonstrated the impossibility of any real agreement being reached with the Dictators.

As we have seen the resignation of Eden did not lead to the emergence of two stable coalitions within the press on the issue of the Spanish Civil War. That coalition still supportive of the government line became more brittle. From within these newspapers the voices of dissent and criticism may have been more muted than the strident criticism of the *Yorkshire Post*, but the development of circumspect opposition among papers officially supportive of the government, especially in the summer of 1938, pointed to the limited extent of the support upon which the government could rely from any of its ideological sympathizers within the British press.

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- ¹ Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs*, p.144.
- ² Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs*, pp.144-5.
- ³ Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs*, p.146.
- ⁴ *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file; Barrington-Ward to Captain Liddell Hart, March 28th 1938.
- ⁵ *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file, Liddell Hart to Barrington-Ward, March 29th 1938.
- ⁶ 'A Debate On Spain'. *The Times*, March 17th 1938, p.15.
- ⁷ Dawson Diary, March 15th 1938; Dawson papers.
- ⁸ 'Obstacles To Peace In Spain', *Daily Telegraph*, March 16th 1938, p.16.
- ⁹ 'Republican Spain's Strong New Army', *Daily Telegraph*, January 19th 1938, p.13.
- ¹⁰ 'Teruel And After', *The Times*, January 11th 1938, p.13.
- ¹¹ Between 16th – 17th March 1938, Italian air plane attacks subjected Barcelona to the heaviest bombardment of the war. This was in support of a Nationalist offensive begun on March 9th, see Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p.258.
- ¹² David Dilks (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945* (London, 1971), p.65.
- ¹³ Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart Memoirs*, pp.141-2.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.142-3.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* See also Hore Belisha Papers, HOBE 1/5, Typed extracts from diaries, extract from Cabinet Meeting March 14th 1938. The papers are kept in the Churchill Archive Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge.
- ¹⁶ PRO, CAB 23/93, Cabinet minutes and conclusions, March 16th 1938, conclusion 3.
- ¹⁷ Captain Basil Liddell Hart, *What We Learn From History That We Do Not Learn From History*: Oration delivered by Captain B.H. Liddell Hart during the Forty Second Foundation Week Celebrations, Thursday March 17th 1938.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.21-2.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.23-4.

²¹ Captain Basil Liddell Hart, *Through The Fog of War* (London, 1938), p.355.

²² Ibid.

²³ G. Steer, *The Tree of Gernika* (London, 1938), pp. 258-9.

²⁴ Hobson, Knightly, Russell, *The Pearl of Days*, p.47.

²⁵ McDonald, *A Man of The Times*, p.52.

²⁶ Examples of how official influence could be exerted on conservative newspapers to secure their support for the government line can be seen in the Chamberlain correspondence. Joseph Ball wrote to Neville Chamberlain on February 21st 1938, "I need hardly add that I have taken certain steps privately, with a view to getting the [government] point of view over to the whole country [refers to Chamberlain's view of the resignation of Eden]": Neville Chamberlain papers, NC 7/11/38/10.

²⁷ Coote, *Editorial*, pp.170-1.

²⁸ "symptomatic of the growing disillusionment with the damped down organs of the daily press was a sudden growth in private newsletters that occurred in the wake of Munich, these newsletters were written by journalists who could not find expression for their views in their own newspapers": Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.101. Cockett refers to the *Whitehall NewsLetter* as the "most influential of these newsletters, the mouthpiece of the Edenites": Cockett is wrong in referring to the *Whitehall NewsLetter*. He is here referring to the *Whitehall Letter*, which began publication on February 15th 1938, long before the Munich crisis. The *Whitehall News* was a separate independent newsletter, which began publication in late 1938.

²⁹ Deedes refers to Helen Kirkpatrick as "a young American journalist who had been reporting on Europe": W. E. Deedes, *Dear Bill- W.E. Deedes Reports* (London and Basingstoke, 1997), p.63.

³⁰ Victor Gordon Lennox to Eden, November 30th 1937; Avon papers, 'Personal and Political Correspondence', AP14/1/646.

³¹ Ibid.

³² In the leader columns of conservative newspapers, repeated references were made to public opinion on behalf of which the leader writers claimed to speak. References to

the support of the British people for the government line on Spain were designed as much for foreign as for domestic consumption, to demonstrate to influential opinion abroad the existence of a broad consensus at home in support of Non-Intervention.

³³ Harvey, *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, diary entry February 12th 1938, pp.88-9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, entry February 27th 1938, pp.102-3.

³⁵ *The Arrow* was started by Voigt of the *Manchester Guardian* and Peter Grieve, an ex-journalist from the same paper. However, among its contributors were the following from the conservative press; Charles Tower, Diplomatic Correspondent for the *Yorkshire Post*, and Iverach McDonald, Diplomatic Correspondent for *The Times*, see Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.102.

³⁶ Deedes, *Dear Bill*, p.63.

³⁷ *Whitehall Letter*, Number 4, March 11th 1938.

³⁸ *Whitehall Letter*, Number 8, April 6th 1938.

³⁹ *Whitehall Letter*, Number 12, May 3rd 1938.

⁴⁰ PRO, FO 395/362,2508 quoted in Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.102. In fact, the reference is wrong, it should be FO 395/562, 2508.

⁴¹ PRO, FO 395 562, P2508/4/150. However, it seems that not all News Department officials were equally impressed by the quality of the news and views printed in the *Whitehall Letter*. A memo from a News Department official dated July 21st 1939 stated the following: “[t]he *Whitehall Letter* is certainly one of the best of an ever increasing number of independent newsletters...it might be well to warn the head of the press department of the Estonian Foreign Ministry that it is by no means infallible”: PRO, FO 395/636, P3525/18/150.

⁴² For an account of how Vansittart was effectively sidetracked see Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, pp.48-9.

⁴³ McDonald, *A Man of The Times*, pp.54-55.

⁴⁴ No reference was ever made to the co-editor, Helen Kirkpatrick.

⁴⁵ *Whitehall Letter* Number 12.

⁴⁶ Tree was Parliamentary Private Secretary to Robert Hudson, a junior minister for

pensions in Chamberlain's government. Tree was also a supporter of Eden: "we generally met once a week while Parliament was in session usually at my house in Queen Anne's Gate...Helen Kirkpatrick and Victor Gordon Lennox had rented an office across the street from which they were publishing an excellent weekly broadsheet very much in accordance with our views": Ronald Tree, *When The Moon Was High. Memoirs of Peace and War 1897-1942* (London, 1975), p.76.

⁴⁷ PRO, FO 395/636, P3525/18/150.

⁴⁸ PRO, FO 395/562, P2508/4/150.

⁴⁹ Cockett writes that in July of 1938, "Chamberlain had finally gagged the News department, allowing the Downing Street Press Office and the inner Cabinet to monopolize the dissemination of news from Whitehall and to influence the press with their own personal touch": Cockett, pp.66-7. However, the surviving evidence concerning the activities of the News Department during the summer and autumn of 1938 clearly suggests that this was not the case, and that the News Department remained a lively source of opposition to the Prime Minister.

⁵⁰ Chamberlain to Ida, August 6th 1938; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/106.

⁵¹ *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward File; Barrington-Ward to Dawson, October 13th 1938.

⁵² Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.24.

⁵³ Chamberlain to Hilda, August 21st 1937; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1029.

⁵⁴ Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.94.

⁵⁵ Beaverbrook to Halifax, September 16th 1938; Beaverbrook papers, BBK C/52.

⁵⁶ Beaverbrook to Chamberlain, September 16th 1938; Beaverbrook papers, BBK C/80.

⁵⁷ Chamberlain to Beaverbrook, September 16th 1938; BBK C/80.

⁵⁸ "[W]henever an approach was made to him by the government between 1938-1940, Beaverbrook was ever eager to oblige": Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.56. Cockett has done much to shed light on the role played by Beaverbrook during these years.

⁵⁹ Beaverbrook wrote to Lady Maxwell Scott on March 25th 1938: "my sympathies are with the Spanish government, because I am opposed to every form of fascism. And I like liberty" quoted in A.J.P. Taylor, *Beaverbrook A Life* (London, 1972) p.381.

⁶⁰ 'Now Spain', *Daily Express*, March 17th 1938, p.10. The news headline on the front

page reflected the bias of Beaverbook in favour of defending the government line – ‘Premier Says “Britain Will Keep Out If Spain” MPs warned. “DO NOT LET US TRY TO BURN OUR FINGERS” ’.

⁶¹ ‘No Time For Panic’, *Daily Herald*, March 17th 1938, p.10.

⁶² ‘Waiting Jaws, Fascist Grip’, *News Chronicle*, March 17th 1938, p.10.

⁶³ ‘Italy, Austria, Spain’, *Manchester Guardian*, March 17th 1938, p.10.

⁶⁴ ‘Mr. Eden’s Resignation’, *Yorkshire Post*, February 21st 1938.

⁶⁵ Mann wrote that “Neville Chamberlain’s position is much weaker and precarious...in the Spanish debate last night he meandered on in the usual explanatory style as though Spain was a compartment by itself...it is rumoured that there is a cleavage of opinion in the Cabinet, it would be surprising if it were otherwise. Some people think you should return at once. I think you should be ready to return at a moment’s notice”: Mann to Eden, March 17th 1938; Avon papers, AP 14/1/770B.

⁶⁶ Mann to Eden, March 25th 1938; Avon papers, AP14/1/770C.

⁶⁷ Eden to Mann, March 1st 1938; Addenda to Mann papers, part two.

⁶⁸ “Private and Personal, ‘For Yourself Only’, contains Eden’s views of European situation; Germans and Austria, Mussolini and Spain”, March 13th 1938; Addenda to Mann papers, part two.

⁶⁹ ‘Personal and Confidential’, April 16th 1938; Addenda to Mann papers, part two.

⁷⁰ May 18th 1938; Addenda to Mann papers, part two.

⁷¹ Cockett refers only to a private collection of the Mann papers held in the United States: Arthur Mann papers (Mann papers) in the private possession of Mr. Peter Wright, Washington DC. He does not to the papers held in the Bodleian Library. Furthermore, he makes no reference to the Avon papers which contain excellent examples of the collaboration between Mann and Eden in the period following Eden’s resignation. In fact, he asserts that Mann had no political contact with Eden, Cockett, *The Twilight Of Truth*, p.99

⁷² ‘There Is No Other Way’, *Yorkshire Post*, March 16th 1938, p.8.

⁷³ ‘The Vital Importance Of Spain’, *Yorkshire Post*, March 19th 1938, p.12.

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- ⁷⁴ ‘The Prime Minister’s Statement’, *Yorkshire Post*, March 25th 1938, p.10.
- ⁷⁵ ‘The Menace From Spain’, *Yorkshire Post*, April 2nd 1938, p.12.
- ⁷⁶ Stanley Pearson to Mann, March 1st 1938; Addenda to Mann papers part two.
- ⁷⁷ Mann to Rupert Beckett, March 3rd 1938; Mann papers, MS Eng C 3274.
- ⁷⁸ Rupert Beckett to Mann, March 23rd 1938; Mann papers, MS Eng C 3274.
- ⁷⁹ ‘The Prime Minister’s Statement’, *Yorkshire Post*.
- ⁸⁰ ‘The Position In Spain’, *Yorkshire Post*, April 16th 1938, p.10.
- ⁸¹ ‘The Rome Agreement’ *Yorkshire Post*, April 18th 1938.
- ⁸² Mann to Eden, April 17th 1938; Avon papers, ‘Political Documents’, AP/20/16.
- ⁸³ Beckett to Mann, June 11th 1938; Mann papers, MS Eng C 3274.
- ⁸⁴ PRO, FO 371 21709, C1431/1261/18, Leeper note February 28th 1938.
- ⁸⁵ Henderson was instructed to inform Hitler of the pressure which was being exerted by the government on both the Newspaper Proprietors’ Association and the BBC, to persuade them to exercise greater sensitivity in the manner in which they reported on international affairs, *Ibid*. Cockett fails to mention that Leeper had no objection to Hitler being informed of the approaches which the British government was making towards the press at this time, *The Twilight of Truth*, pp.52-3.
- ⁸⁶ PRO, FO 395/562, P1397.
- ⁸⁷ Pressure was also being exerted on the opposition press to toe the line: “I had a word with Layton [editor] about the best way to ‘noble’ the press while in fact the Newspaper Proprietors’ Association is the authoritative body, the representatives appointed to it by various newspapers are not always those who can directly influence editorial policy”: letter from Philip Jordon of the *News Chronicle* to Sir Charles Warner, dated March 1st 1938, PRO, FO 395/598. P1141.
- ⁸⁸ ‘Nazism And The Times’, *Yorkshire Post*, July 28th 1938, p.8.
- ⁸⁹ *Ninety-First Issue of the Newspaper Press Directory*, p.134.
- ⁹⁰ Dawson to Sir Samuel Hoare, February 28th 1939; Templewood papers, TEM X IV

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- ⁹¹ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p.287.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, pp.287-8.
- ⁹³ The British Institute of Public Opinion held an opinion poll in February 1938. 54% of the respondents were in favour of reprisals against those responsible for the attacks on British shipping trading with Republican Spain, quoted in Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, p.288.
- ⁹⁴ PRO, CAB 23/94, Cabinet minutes and conclusions, July 6th 1938, conclusion two.
- ⁹⁵ PRO, FO 800, 323, volume 15, part XXXIV, folio 4, Lord Halifax to Chamberlain, June 9th 1938.
- ⁹⁶ ‘The British Ships’, *Manchester Guardian*, June 10th 1938, p.10.
- ⁹⁷ Avon Papers, 14/1/774 B. Mann sent Eden copies of two articles on the bombing of British ships, both of which were critical of the stand taken by the British government. Mann underlined what he considered key phrases which supported his views. AP 14/1/774 B is an extract from the *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, June 27th 1938. See also *The Daily Advertiser, Wagga Wagga*, June 15th 1938, in AP 14/1/775.
- ⁹⁸ *Yorkshire Post*, June 28th 1938, p.10.
- ⁹⁹ PRO, PREM 1/360.
- ¹⁰⁰ Harvey, editor, *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, June 14th 1938, pp.153-4.
- ¹⁰¹ Chamberlain to Hilda, June 25th 1938; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1057.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, See also the letter dated a week earlier which Chamberlain wrote to his other sister, Ida. He wrote to his sister “we had got ourselves into an illogical position on the bombing”: Chamberlain to Ida, June 18th 1938; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1056.
- ¹⁰³ ‘Neglect Of Duty’, *Manchester Guardian*, June 24th 1938, p.10.
- ¹⁰⁴ ‘To Be Read At No.10’, *Daily Herald*, June 24th 1938, p.10.
- ¹⁰⁵ ‘The Foundation Of European Policy’, *Yorkshire Post*, June 23rd 1938, p.10. The adjournment debate on Spain occurred later that day.

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- ¹⁰⁶ Dawson Diary, entries 9th and 14th June 1938; Dawson papers.
- ¹⁰⁷ Chamberlain wrote to his sister: "I have only got to make a suggestion and he [Halifax] carries it out with sympathy and understanding": Chamberlain to Hilda, July 9th 1938; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/99 July 9th 1938.
- ¹⁰⁸ 'Ships And Bombs', *The Times*, June 28th 1938, p.14
- ¹⁰⁹ Chamberlain to Hilda, June 25th 1938; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1057, June 25th 1938.
- ¹¹⁰ Garvin, 'How To Get Peace', *Observer*, June 19th 1938, p.14.
- ¹¹¹ 'Entrenous', 'Franco's Delayed Triumph'. *Truth*, April 20th 1938, p.524.
- ¹¹² 'Ships And Bombs', *The Times*, June 28th 1938, p.15
- ¹¹³ 'False Colours', *Daily Mail*, July 1st 1938, p.10.
- ¹¹⁴ Garvin, 'Wisdom And Danger', *Observer*, June 12th 1938, p.14.
- ¹¹⁵ 'The Longer View', *Daily Telegraph*, July 5th 1938, p.14.
- ¹¹⁶ 'Entrenous', 'Britain's Patience With Franco', *Truth*, June 29th, 1938, p.866
- ¹¹⁷ Extract from W.W. Hadley, *Munich Before and After*, quoted in Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.83.
- ¹¹⁸ Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.53.
- ¹¹⁹ Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión*, pp.293-4.
- ¹²⁰ Chamberlain to Hilda, October 2nd 1938; Chamberlain papers, NC18/1/1070. The armistice initiative saw new life following the failure of the Nationalist spring offensive of 1938 to bring about a speedy end to the war. Later, the Republican offensive on the River Ebro, which began in July and lasted until November, demonstrated to foreign observers that the Republic still retained an impressive offensive capability.
- ¹²¹ Chamberlain to Ida, October 9th 1938; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1071. See also his letter to Hilda; "I don't believe Spain is a menace to European peace any longer": Chamberlain to Hilda, November 6th 1938, Chamberlain papers, NC18/1/1075.
- ¹²² Alpert sheds some light on why Mussolini decided in the autumn to withdraw

10 000 Italian troops from Spain, the effect of which was to allow the Anglo-Italian Agreement to come into force. According to Alpert, the decision “came not through international pressure, but because of annoyance with Franco. Aircraft, pilots and military hardware, of course, remained. Longest-serving troops were withdrawn, but the CTV still had 35 000 men in Spain”: Alpert, *A New International History of The Spanish Civil War*, pp.166-7.

- ¹²³ ‘An Unsatisfactory Record’, *Yorkshire Post*, November 3rd 1938, p.8.
- ¹²⁴ Oliver Harvey, in reference to demands for a National Register and a Ministry of Supply, recorded in his diary that “DT on Camrose’s orders is now demanding the latter daily and fiercely”: Harvey, editor, *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, November 18th 1938, pp.221-2.
- ¹²⁵ ‘A Step Forward In Spain’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 24th 1938, p.12.
- ¹²⁶ *Whitehall Letter*, Number 34, October 20th 1938.
- ¹²⁷ *Whitehall Letter*, Number 36, November 3rd 1938.
- ¹²⁸ ‘Belligerent Rights In Spain’ in “The World Week By Week”, *Observer*, November 6th 1938, p.16.
- ¹²⁹ Interestingly enough, in spite of his own vociferous opposition towards Chamberlain’s policy on Spain, Mann shows some sympathy towards the “natural feelings of the opponents of the Spanish Republic whose hostility is dictated by a belief that the Spanish Republic is Communist, or Catholics who see in Franco the only chance of restoring the power of the Catholic Church in Spain”: Mann, ‘Britain and the Dictators’.
- ¹³⁰ Compared with the *Whitehall Letter*, the *King-Hall Newsletter* was much more muted in its opposition of the government line on Spain. The issue of November 4th 1938 was supportive of the British government for bringing the Anglo-Italian Agreement into force: “I say quite frankly that if the implementation will prevent Italy from doing certain things she might otherwise do in the Mediterranean and Middle East, I’m for the implementation”. Therefore, King-Hall saw no contradiction in his being hostile towards Franco as a threat to British interests, while at the same time supporting Chamberlain’s Spanish policy, which did so much to contribute to the final victory of Franco in the Civil War.

CHAPTER SIX: THE INTENSIFICATION OF GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO INFLUENCE THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS DURING THE CLOSING STAGES OF THE WAR.

The last Republican offensive of the war had begun in mid July of 1938. This was the battle of the river Ebro that ended in November 1938, after nearly five months of some of the bitterest fighting in the whole of the Spanish Civil War. The offensive had surpassed official British expectations of the fighting capacity of the Republican army following the disaster at Teruel. Within official circles, this was to alter perceptions of the Civil War. Indeed, Chamberlain reached the conclusion that a decisive victory in Spain was unlikely. Therefore, he seriously reconsidered the armistice idea that had been put forward by the British government earlier in the war. Chamberlain's confidence in the prospects of a British peace initiative was bolstered by three main factors. Firstly, as briefly shown in the last chapter, his discussions with Hitler and Mussolini at Munich in late September had convinced him that both dictators were now weary of the war. Therefore, he believed they would be receptive to a negotiated peace rather than holding out until an outright victory for Franco had been achieved. Secondly, in the late autumn and early winter of 1938, reports were reaching the government both of growing war weariness on each side in Spain and of the existence of internal opposition to the Nationalist regime in Burgos. Finally, the failure of the Nationalist high command to take the initiative and launch a new offensive against Catalonia in December, seemed to confirm the view now held in London that a mediated end to the war was a real possibility.

British conservative newspapers were supportive of the efforts of the government to secure international support for a negotiated peace. They showed this by emphasizing the war weariness on both sides. They also deliberately ‘talked up’ the prospects of an armistice in Spain. On December 19th, the Paris correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote the following about the extent of the fraternization between the Republican and Nationalist armies: “ in effect a truce actually exists.”¹ On December 23rd, *The Times* leader pointed out that the expected Catalan offensive was delayed because of two factors: firstly the defection of a Nationalist officer to the Republican side taking with him the plans for the offensive; secondly the mutiny within the Nationalist army. The leader was highly critical of Franco’s intransigence towards any negotiated settlement to the conflict; suggesting that it merely stiffened Republican resistance.² Even the *Daily Mail*, ever sympathetic towards the Nationalist cause, admitted to its readers that there had been a serious revolt against Franco, resulting in two hundred arrests.³ The pro-Chamberlain journal, *Truth*, whilst suggesting that the stories of revolts against Franco may have been exaggerated, accepted that there was an element of truth in them. It suggested, “an army that is composed of different nationalities is always difficult to keep in order, after the first flash of enthusiasm has worn off the various allies usually [get on] fighting terms fairly quickly, especially if the war is a civil war, and most especially of all if Spaniards are involved.”⁴

Plans were afoot for the Prime Minister to visit Rome in the following year, in the wake of the bringing into force of the Anglo-Italian Agreement. The details of the visit were discussed in Cabinet on December 21st. Halifax remarked, “[w]e were not anxious to see

an extreme government of any description in Spain.”⁵ He, like Chamberlain at this time, was confident in the prospect of an armistice because “there was now much in common between the programmes of the two sides.” Chamberlain, expressing his agreement with the Foreign Secretary on this, believed that when the two Prime Ministers met in January, it would be opportune for him to raise with Mussolini the matter of a joint international initiative to secure a cease-fire in Spain.⁶

The peace initiative idea, however, was based upon a misconception of events on the ground in Spain, which had assumed that the end result of the battle of the River Ebro was effectively a stalemate. In fact, the battle ended in defeat for the Republican army, which had exhausted nearly all of its resources. The military hardware abandoned by the retreating Republican army merely exacerbated the shortage of war materiel, which had hampered the Republicans since the beginning of the war. The defeat was also a psychological blow to the Republic, confirming its inability to achieve lasting success in the field.⁷

Most importantly, the loss of materiel at the Ebro was to have more devastating and long-term implications for the Republican army than the losses incurred earlier in the year following the disaster at Teruel. This is because, on that occasion, the Republican war machine had been re-supplied from Soviet sources. This, in turn, enabled the Republicans to slow down the Nationalist advance after the loss of Teruel, thus preventing the expected collapse of Republican resistance in the spring.⁸ However, following the Munich conference, the Soviet Union, convinced that the democracies

would not resist Hitler, determined on a new course of foreign policy. This led ultimately to the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August of 1939. Thus, after the Ebro offensive, there was no further injection of Russian supplies, which were vital for the continuation of the Republican war effort. After all, Soviet help, albeit crucial to the survival of the Spanish Republic, was actually part of a much broader strategy in Soviet foreign policy. In essence, Stalin had hoped that the activities of Germany and Italy in Spain would persuade Britain and France to enter into an anti-fascist alliance with the Soviet Union. Increasingly though, he lost faith in the capacity of the democracies to make an effective stand against Hitler. Stalin came to the conclusion that the way Non-Intervention operated in practice demonstrated the duplicity of the western powers in the face of Italian and German activity in Spain.⁹

When the Nationalist offensive against the Republican positions in Catalonia finally began on December 23rd 1938, the exhausted state of the Republican army quickly became apparent to outside observers. As far as the British government was concerned, the role played by Italian forces in the Nationalist offensive was an impediment to cordial relations between Britain and Italy. It undermined both the credibility of the Anglo-Italian Agreement and any justification for Chamberlain's visit to Rome. As we shall see, for the British Prime Minister the failure of any hope of a negotiated peace in the last months of the Civil War scuppered the last chance that he and his government had of building a broad consensus within the press in support of government policy. A broad press consensus would have been important as part of British propaganda in Spain. It would have presented the Chamberlain government as a true friend of Spain, thereby

allowing Britain to regain its dominant position in the peninsula once the fighting had ceased. The government, no doubt, had hoped that its promotion of an armistice would be seen as a genuinely neutral act, even by those newspapers, which had been so critical of its line on Spain throughout the war.

Of significance, is the misreading of events in Spain amongst even the highest levels of British government circles. Confidence in the possibility of an armistice, in which the moderates of both sides in the Spanish war would prevail, was, in part, fuelled by stories of a widespread plot against Franco, leading to mass arrests and executions. Certainly, there were arrests of suspected spies; the Nationalist authorities admitted this in a press communiqué, the day before the final Nationalist offensive was launched against Catalonia.¹⁰ Yet, in spite of the reports of war weariness in Franco's Spain, allegedly fuelling general discontent against his rule, Franco was not deterred from launching a massive assault; in short he was not forced to accept a compromise peace, as opposed to achieving outright victory in Spain. Indeed, it is at least plausible that the exaggerated stories concerning Nationalist Spain were the result of Republican propaganda, an example of which has been discussed previously in relation to the alleged German infiltration of Spanish Morocco. Reporting from the Republican capital, the correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* referred to rumours that high-ranking Nationalist officers had defected, taking with them the plans for the Catalan offensive. He strongly inferred that this was the only reason for the delay.¹¹ However, it was almost certainly bad weather, particularly "a period of torrential rain" which delayed the offensive.¹²

The misreading of events on the ground in Spain by both the press and official circles in Britain was to have other far-reaching implications. Before the fall of Barcelona, pro-government conservative newspapers, which had printed critical comments about either the Nationalist regime or the fighting capacity of the Nationalist army, were no doubt doing so in the confidence that such comment would not harm British interests in the long-term. This was because there was the expectation that Franco would not achieve outright victory. But there were other factors influencing newspaper opinion on the Civil War. The ferocity with which the war was fought certainly influenced the way in which both sides were viewed. In particular, the continued use of aircraft in the bombing of civilian targets struck a chord in the imagination of the populace, reinforcing the fact that the development of war technology meant that the sea could no longer preserve Britain from the ravages of a continental war. The longevity of the conflict, with the resultant misery it brought to the Spanish people, intensified humanitarian concerns and these, too, found expression in the leader columns of a number of conservative papers. Furthermore, it seemed that the longer the war lasted, the greater the likelihood of a compromise solution that could command the support of a majority of Spaniards. This was, of course, far removed from the opinion that had been expressed in the leader columns of both *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* at the outset of the conflict. Then, the consensus had been that only a dictatorship could emerge out of the Spanish crisis.¹³ Yet, at the end of May 1938, a little over two months after confidently predicting the final victory of Franco, which would, in fact, have led to the imposition of a dictatorship, *The Times* leader declared, "independence is a sign of health and vigour and a necessary condition of liberty. The Spanish people are not in the least likely ever to be battered into drab

uniformity.”¹⁴ This hope and indeed confidence in a democratic solution was to be a recurrent theme in the leader articles until it became obvious in London that the Republic could not fight the war to a situation of stalemate. The *Daily Telegraph*, like *The Times* during this period, hoped for a compromise resolution to the war. As for Scrutator of the *Sunday Times*, such was his confidence of a democratic settlement to the war that, in January of 1939, he was enthusing that even Fascist Italy could assist in a British peace initiative which would result not in a centralized state, but in a federal arrangement for post war Spain.¹⁵ Of course, Scrutator was rather unusual in the columns of the conservative press in that he had never believed that dictatorship was a solution to the Spanish crisis. Therefore, as far as the leader comment for both *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* was concerned, there had been a significant shift in attitudes. Both newspapers had come to the conclusion that the apparent inability of either side to bring the war to an end would result in increasing war weariness. This would, in turn, create the democratic impulse to force leaders on both sides to agree on terms for peace.

Such a misinterpretation of events was to cause difficulty for Anglo-Nationalist relations. Franco was to prove as sensitive as his allies, Hitler and Mussolini, to foreign press criticism. Indeed, this had been made very clear by the Spanish dictator when he had spoken to Francis Hemming, Secretary of the Board of Non-Intervention, in an interview in November 1938. On that occasion, Hemming recorded in his diary that Franco “believed that any misunderstanding between countries was due to ill-advised statements in the press.”¹⁶

Even when, in the New Year, it became clear to foreign observers that the Nationalist offensive in Catalonia would not stall as previous offensives had done, pro-government newspapers continued to criticize the Franco regime. A prime example of this was the attitude of *Truth*. As in the previous summer, this journal, in spite of the particularly close relationship it had with the Conservative Party, was to adopt a hostile line towards the Franco regime. More importantly, the change in attitude was at odds with the new diplomatic offensive of the Chamberlain government during 1939, which sought to improve relations with both the victorious Nationalist Regime and Italy. At the same time as Chamberlain was attempting to improve relations with Italy, *Truth* was becoming increasingly concerned at the long-term threat to British interests of Italian intervention in Spain. Thus, whilst the Prime Minister continued to turn a blind eye on Italian transgressions of the Non-Intervention Agreement, *Truth*, albeit in a small way, was contributing to the undermining of his diplomatic efforts. On December 29th, a few days after the start of the Catalan offensive, *Truth* referred to Franco as a “perjured rebel against the Spanish government”, because of his continued dependency on Italian troops.¹⁷ The caution shown by the journal, only weeks before, concerning the extent of the rebellion in the Nationalist army, was thrown aside. The same journalist now declared that such was the seriousness of dissent within the Nationalist ranks that an assassination attempt had been made against Franco.¹⁸ The journal now expressed nothing but contempt for Franco, who was portrayed as a man who “will lightly break his word and will then attempt to explain his treachery to God and man away as if it were nothing.”¹⁹

In the New Year, *Truth* argued that the presence of Italians in the Catalan offensive meant that the conflict could no longer be viewed as a Civil War, and that “the Empire has nothing to gain and much to lose by the triumph of fascism in Spain.”²⁰ In spite of the rapid Nationalist advance, the journal did not believe that the defeat of the Republic was inevitable. On January 20th, seven days before the fall of Barcelona, ‘Entrenous’ declared, “the government line is still intact. Everybody who has any concern for the integrity of the British Empire will pray that it will remain so.”²¹ A week later, however, ‘Entrenous’ referred to the impending fall of Barcelona, accepting that the war was lost. It predicted that Franco’s Spain would in effect become a satellite of the Axis powers.²²

The Prime Minister was determined that, at all costs, Italy had to be prevented from forming closer ties with Germany. It was clear that Chamberlain was confident of reaching an effective compromise with Italy that would vindicate his appeasement of her.²³ In a letter to his sister, Ida, in January 1939, he expressed his confidence regarding his impending visit to Rome: “I believe that Mussolini is most anxious for Anglo-Italian friendship.”²⁴ A further factor that was influencing Chamberlain’s thinking at this time was the threat to the British Empire should Italy form an alliance not only with Germany but also with Imperial Japan. Therefore, the Prime Minister still clung to the belief that Mussolini was sincere when he had assured Britain that Italy would withdraw her forces from Spain once the war was over, and that Axis power intervention in defiance of the Non-Intervention Agreement, did not represent a long-term threat to British interests.²⁵ Indeed, Chamberlain wrote to his sister Ida, “I have always maintained that when Germany and Italy declared that they had no territorial ambitions in Spain and would get

out as soon as the war was won, they meant what they said and should be believed.”²⁶ Again, on February 19th, Chamberlain wrote to his sister, Hilda, expressing his confidence that Franco posed no threat to British interests: “I think we might be able to establish excellent relations with Franco who seems well disposed to us.”²⁷ Clearly, Chamberlain’s private correspondence demonstrates his optimism regarding the post war situation.

The pessimism now being shown by *Truth* was significant in that it diverged from the government line. How is this difference to be explained? The answer would seem to lie in the fact that the control, which it has been assumed Sir Joseph Ball exerted over the paper, has been exaggerated.²⁸ Following its very pessimistic forecast of the future of Spain, made on the eve of the fall of Barcelona, *Truth* did not cover the Civil War until the middle of the following month. The articles, which then appeared on the Spanish conflict, represented a *volte-face* from those that had appeared only a couple of weeks previously. On February 17th 1939, for example, the journal printed a review of a book on Spain, and was critical of Liddell Hart’s pessimistic prediction that the future policy of Nationalist Spain would be anti-British.²⁹ Later, on March 17th, in a special article, *Truth* journalist Shane Leslie declared, “ Franco will be the strong man of Spain...Neither the Germans nor Italians are likely to make their footing good in Spain.”³⁰ It seems that as far as Spain was concerned, Ball was unable, at least temporarily, to control the editorial line even on this, the one journal over which he was supposed to have had considerable influence. The reversal of attitude on the part of *Truth* in the space of a few weeks, from its view of Franco as a threat to the British Empire because of his dependence on Italian

and German support, to that of a potential friend who would be able to reassert his independence of his former allies, indicates that there was a conflict over editorial policy. It was not until the middle of February that support for the line being adopted by the government re-emerged.

The Foreign Office News Department was still able to maintain its independence of Chamberlain and, as a result, it continued to be a cause of concern for a government clearly unable to centralize the dissemination of news to the press from official sources loyal to the Prime Minister.³¹ Yet, such opposition from the News Department was not new. A more fundamental problem facing the government was the progressive break down in the conservative press consensus in support of the government line. For an increasing number of individuals within the newspaper industry it was becoming increasingly clear, as the war drew to a close, that the continued Italo-German support for Franco was further evidence of the hollowness of the Munich Agreement and indeed of any justification for appeasing the dictators. Cadogan, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, met with Leo Kennedy of *The Times* on February 13th 1939. Although Kennedy held similar views to Dawson on government foreign policy, Cadogan was not completely confident that Kennedy would write a leader favourable to British recognition of Franco as *de iure* ruler of Spain. Although Cadogan recorded in his diary that Kennedy “seems quite sound”, nevertheless he qualified his optimism that the journalist would support British recognition with the phrase: “[he] will write accordingly I hope.”³² In these, more difficult times it seems that even the support of *The Times* could not necessarily be taken for granted.

The *Daily Telegraph* had been a consistent supporter of the government line on Spain up to the end of 1938, yet its editor, Watson, felt that the Rome visit of Chamberlain was premature. On this particular matter, he expressed in private the criticisms that, unlike Arthur Mann, he was not willing to publish in his paper.³³ In fact, the *Daily Telegraph* had always been prepared to be directly critical of what it considered to be the failure of the government to be more energetic in preparing Britain for a state of war. The attacks now being made on the government by both this paper and also the *Yorkshire Post* were a cause of concern in circles close to the Prime Minister. Horace Wilson, Chamberlain's chief adviser on foreign affairs lunched with Dawson at the Travellers' Club, on December 5th 1938. Wilson deplored the attacks made against the Prime Minister in "*The Daily Telegraph* [every other day]."³⁴ The change in the stance of the *Daily Telegraph* reflected the change in attitude of its proprietor, Camrose, who at this time was also expressing reservations about the foreign policy of the Prime Minister. On January 10th 1939, he wrote encouragingly to Mann, showing that he too doubted the wisdom of government policy, and even suggested that there was now a general feeling of unease at the current direction of foreign affairs by the Prime Minister.³⁵

The increasing coolness of both the editor and proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph* towards the government line on foreign policy was reflected in the leader columns on Spain in early 1939. Although the paper did not mirror the strident opposition of the *Yorkshire Post*, nevertheless the opinion of the *Daily Telegraph* was in sharp contrast to that of *The Times*, which, in spite of Cadogan's concerns, continued to offer unstinting support to the

official line on all aspects of foreign policy. As an example, following the declaration by the Nationalists of a blockade of the Republican coast on March 10th, the *Daily Telegraph* leader column stressed that the “sinking of merchant ships is undeniably an infringement of international law unless the crews are taken to safety, and the British government cannot permit themselves a passivity which might be interpreted as creating a contrary precedent”.³⁶ This call for the British government to adopt a stern line on the issue was an implicit criticism of its failure, in the previous summer, to respond assertively when British merchant ships were attacked in Republican ports. Yet, whereas in the summer of 1938 criticism had been more circumspect it had now become direct. The paper called upon the government to adopt a course of action that it considered to be its duty in defence of both British interests and prestige.

The change in the attitude of the *Daily Telegraph*, in particular, regarding government policy towards the Civil War, highlighted the increasing fragility of the conservative consensus on Spain. The policy of the government, especially under Chamberlain, of turning a blind eye to German and Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, relied very much on the prevalence of class interests in influencing editors and proprietors of conservative newspapers. If the Civil War could be viewed in terms of a class struggle then, in spite of Franco’s dependence on the aid of those fascist states which were posing the most serious threat to international peace, the Nationalist cause would be seen as performing an essential service to foreign investment in Spain, in which such a vital part was played by British investors and companies. However, the widespread support of conservative newspapers for Chamberlain had effectively reached its peak at the Munich

conference in September 1938. When, increasingly, the actions of the fascist dictators demonstrated their lack of sincerity towards international agreements, there was increasing demand even among traditional supporters of the government for a clear sign of British firmness towards the dictators. In the final stages of the war connections were now being made between the situation in Spain and with the worsening crisis in international relations on the rest of the continent. Even the *Observer*, which had adopted a partisan position in favour of the Nationalists, was, by early 1939, becoming concerned at the strategic implications of a Franco victory. The editor, Garvin, was making a very clear connection between the continued presence in Spain of large numbers of Italian troops and the long-term threat this implied for both Britain and France. For him, this made the granting of belligerent rights, now being demanded by Franco, impossible on pragmatic grounds. On January 15th 1939, Garvin wrote, “[w]e have to consider the immense combined strength of the new triple alliance in submarines...Spanish harbours might be used for this purpose before the Civil War was declared officially at an end.”³⁷ The article stressed that if belligerent rights were granted just because Franco had demanded them, “Britain and France would appear as having weakened themselves even in the Western Mediterranean and its approaches without any kind of reciprocity.” Indeed, in Garvin’s view, the government must not concede such rights to Franco because “Britain and France would be divided from each other and both from the United States.”

At no point though did the *Observer* actually criticize the government, or require it to tackle more energetically the problem of securing an Italian withdrawal. On January 22nd, for example, it argued, “[i]t is better for us to let the situation develop by itself and refrain

from antagonizing the future Spain.”³⁸ However, the paper did deviate from the opinion of Chamberlain, who did not feel that Italian involvement in the Catalan offensive should pose a problem for a genuine rapprochement between Britain and Italy. Furthermore, Garvin’s attitude on the issue of belligerency rights, as expressed in the *Observer* in January, was very different from that expressed in December 1938, before the final offensive against Catalonia began on Christmas day, an offensive in which Italian troops played such a vital part. On December 11th, Garvin had written that there “is a strong case on its own merits for leaving the Spanish combatants to fight it out and for conceding to General Franco at sea the belligerent rights that cannot be denied to him on land.”³⁹ Again, on December 18th, in ‘The World Week By Week’, the *Observer* had also expressed the opinion that belligerent rights ought to be granted: “equal belligerent rights for both parties on sea as on land would be both logical and fair.”⁴⁰

The leading popular conservative newspaper, the *Daily Express*, added its voice to the concern being felt in much of the conservative press at the prospect of a Franco victory in Spain. One issue that concerned the *Daily Express* was the wisdom of granting loans to assist the post war reconstruction of a potentially hostile power. This attitude was, of course, in complete contrast to that of official circles in London. The issue of a British loan to Franco’s Spain was discussed in the *Daily Express* in ‘Opinion’ on February 14th. The attitude of the leader was clearly against such a loan: “If you don’t want to send any presents to Mussolini and Hitler join the *Daily Express* in the outcry against lending British money to Spain.”⁴¹ On February 28th the lead article wrote disparagingly about Franco whom both Britain and France had recently recognized as ruler of Spain in ‘A

Five Foot Soldier Becomes Dictator By Accident.’⁴² On the same day, ‘Opinion’, whilst acknowledging the logic of British recognition of Franco, since he had demonstrably won the Civil War, nevertheless stated “we prolonged our estrangement from Italy by not admitting she had conquered Abyssinia”. Clearly, this was a criticism of Chamberlain’s government also for the delay in bringing into force the Anglo-Italian Agreement. Moreover, the column referred disparagingly to Non-Intervention: “there was a farce in Spain. We have been saved a farce of non-recognition.”⁴³

The growing divergence of opinion between the government and its press allies highlighted the limits to the official consensus on Spain even more sharply than did the bombing crisis of the preceding summer. Official assurances of the neutrality of government policy with regard to Spain were hard to square with its apparent indifference to the repeated Italian breaches of Non-Intervention and to the renewed pressure on British shipping posed by Franco’s threat to blockade Republican ports. Differences of opinion over Spain revealed growing unease among conservative papers concerning the long-term ambitions of both Axis powers. Thus, those newspapers that, in the winter of 1938-9, expressed hostility towards Nationalist Spain often did so because they detected a strengthening bond between the Axis and Franco. For the *Daily Express*, hostility to Franco was an accurate reflection of Beaverbrook’s long-term ideological aversion to fascism. However, this paper, too, drew the attention of its readership to the connection between Franco and the Axis. A more dramatic shift occurred in the *Observer*. Although ideologically committed to the success of the Nationalist cause since the beginning of the Civil War, Garvin had always been wary of the threat of Germany to British security.

Thus the apparent *volte-face* in the attitude of Garvin in the winter of 1939 was caused by his realization that a victory for Franco would strengthen the ability of Germany to threaten British and French maritime interests in the Mediterranean. Therefore, in the closing months of the Civil War, there was a further blurring of the political differences between conservative papers as well as a weakening of the press support for Chamberlain's Spanish policy. In their assessment of the long-term strategic threat posed by Franco to British interests, newspapers such as the *Observer*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express* were moving closer to the stand taken earlier by the *Yorkshire Post* and even the *Truth*.

In these particularly difficult times, the government, confident that it could exploit its political contacts with the board of directors of the *Yorkshire Post*, stepped up its efforts to stifle the independent line taken by Arthur Mann. In December of the previous year, Mann was informed that Sir Samuel Hoare had been instrumental in persuading one of the directors, Stanley Jackson, to issue a protest about the attitude demonstrated in the leader columns of the *Yorkshire Post* towards Chamberlain's foreign policy.⁴⁴ In spite of this, the *Yorkshire Post* continued to be vociferous in its attacks. The leaders even warned the readers of the paper of the attempts being made to silence press criticism. During a parliamentary debate on December 16th, a Conservative Member of Parliament, Osbert Peake, criticized the stand taken by the newspaper on foreign policy. Peake accused the newspaper of causing national disunity. He argued that through harping on about the mistakes of Chamberlain in the past, it was undermining confidence in the foreign policy of the government. Mann replied to this attack in the leader column of

December 19th. Indeed, he argued that the *Yorkshire Post* had not created disunity, since disunity was already present within the Conservative Party on the issue of foreign policy.⁴⁵ In Mann's view, unity could only be re-established within the Party by a change of foreign policy. Mann also referred to the importance of an independent conservative view that had the right to oppose the line advocated by the Parliamentary Conservative Party. The editor declared,

[as] long as the view is held that for a Conservative to oppose the foreign policy of the government is an act of disloyalty towards his party, the voting in the House can never be a true reflection of national opinion as it should be when the issues involve the security of the state.

In 1939, as in the previous year, Mann perceived that the role of the paper should be to act as the mouthpiece of Conservative opposition to Chamberlain. For Mann, whatever the consequences of maintaining such a line in the leader columns, the issues at stake were too great for him merely to rally round behind the banner of Chamberlain and to suppress his concerns for the sake of the more narrow party political interests of the Conservative Party. This more altruistic view was clearly expressed in the leader comment on January 17th 1939. The leader explained,

[in] this Country we need to have done at last with complacency. We dare not any longer doze under the hypnotic suggestion that the dangers in Europe are aggravated by attempts on the part of the press and public to look them frankly in the face.⁴⁶

During the latter part of 1938 and into 1939, the continued opposition of the *Yorkshire Post* towards the government line on foreign policy was, not surprisingly, the topic of discussion within Conservative circles. For the period 1938-9 the Dawson diary records a number of occasions on which he had raised the issue of the independent line being

taken by the *Yorkshire Post*. On September 4th 1938, for example, Dawson recorded having lunched with Rupert Beckett, the chairman of the *Yorkshire Post*.⁴⁷ When Sir Horace Wilson lunched with Dawson on December 5th, he used the opportunity to draw Dawson's attention to the growing irritation with which the repeated attacks by the *Yorkshire Post* were viewed by the government.⁴⁸ Dawson had various points of contact with that paper; firstly he was a Yorkshireman and therefore part of the constituency for this quality provincial paper; secondly as has already been pointed out, the *Yorkshire Post* was considered as a suitable form of apprenticeship for those seeking a career as a journalist for *The Times*. Since he was a firm supporter of the government line on appeasement, and a believer in the power of the press to exert harm or benefit on diplomatic relations, Dawson's support in bringing pressure to bear on Mann was no doubt being sought by Sir Horace at that December 5th meeting. In fact, throughout 1938-9, Beckett wrote to his editor expressing his increased irritation at the attacks by the *Yorkshire Post* on government foreign policy. On December 8th, for example, Beckett effectively ordered Mann to stop criticizing the Prime Minister.⁴⁹

Stanley Jackson also wrote to Mann urging him to support the foreign policy of the government so as not to compromise the chances of Conservative candidates in forthcoming by-elections: "[i]f the candidates make speeches applauding [the PM] and his efforts and the leaders in the *Yorkshire Post* at the same time condemn him it will be a bit awkward."⁵⁰ Attempts were made at meetings of the board of directors to force Mann to abandon his attacks on the Prime Minister. The board met on December 16th, for example, at which the subject of Mann's independent attitude was to be discussed. In

advance of this, Beckett wrote to Mann, warning him that, among the board of directors, there was a great deal of opposition towards him. As a result his position as editor was at risk.⁵¹

In spite of all the pressure to toe the line being exerted upon Mann, the *Yorkshire Post* continued to criticize Chamberlain's policy towards Italy, and made no secret of its concern for British interests at the prospect of a Nationalist Victory in Spain. On January 9th the leader commented,

it has always seemed to us a grave mistake on the part of the British Prime Minister not to have used Mussolini's desire for an agreement with Britain as a lever to force Italian military withdrawal from Spain.

The following opinion was also expressed:

the vast majority of people in the United States and we believe an increasing preponderance of people in this Country appreciate the fact that the menace to the freedom of the world will be enormously increased by Franco's victory in Spain.⁵²

The extreme pessimism of the paper at the development of events in Spain also found expression in the leader comment on January 19th, which referred to the Anglo-Italian Agreement as a "Mediterranean Munich."⁵³ According to the leader, the agreement was worthless, given the continued importance of the role played by Italian forces in the offensive in North Eastern Spain. By repeatedly highlighting the hollowness of the statements of good faith that were being uttered by the fascist dictators, the *Yorkshire Post* was questioning the whole basis of government foreign policy towards them.

The government now began to respond to the attacks of the *Yorkshire Post* in a more energetic way. It sought to use its contacts on the board of directors to secure the dismissal of Mann when the board next met on February 24th. Even though Beckett had earlier expressed to Mann his growing impatience at the critical line taken by the paper towards government foreign policy, his support for Mann at this meeting was crucial. Indeed, without it, it is hard to see how Mann could have remained as editor. Mann was therefore able to maintain the independent line of his paper concerning government policy towards Spain. Four days after the meeting of the board, the leader comment on government policy was that “it became obvious that short of some miracle we should presently find ourselves recognizing in Spain a government which owed its existence to the support of the Axis powers.”⁵⁴ The newspaper continued to doubt whether either Italy or Germany would withdraw from Spain once the war was over. Thus, far from muting Mann’s criticism of foreign policy, the February meeting of the board only strengthened his determination to pursue an independent line.⁵⁵

The *Yorkshire Post* was now at the centre of the controversy on the role of the free press in a parliamentary state. For journalists of pro-government conservative newspapers who were personally opposed to government foreign policy, the issues at stake in the Spanish Civil War were too important for the security of Britain and France for them to continue to acquiesce in attempts to silence them. This was regardless of the threat to the efforts of the government to improve relations with Germany and Italy. Newspapers such as the *Yorkshire Post* helped to raise the awareness of the British public to the debate about the role of the press in a democratic society, a debate that had largely been confined to the

boardrooms, the clubs and correspondence of the participants. On January 3rd, for example, the paper had attacked the government's denial that official pressure had been applied to persuade newspapers to adopt a particular line on foreign affairs. In its leader column for that day, the paper gave a much more detailed description of how official influence was exerted on the press. It even alerted its readers to the existence of independent newsletters, the demand for which "clearly suggests that the public are not satisfied with the news service of the regular press. They feel uneasily that newspapers are not telling them the whole truth about current events, and especially about foreign affairs."⁵⁶ In the view of the *Yorkshire Post*, "[n]othing- no official pressure or party loyalty should restrain a newspaper from telling the public the full truth about current events to the best of its power." This was because "[g]overnment policy in a democratic country, depends ultimately on public opinion, and public opinion cannot function reliably in the dark. Fearlessly to enlighten public opinion on topics of vital national importance is the first responsibility of newspapers."

On March 1st, in another leader commentary critical of government policy on Spain, the paper defended the independent critical line it had been taking since the previous year.

The leader declared,

we could not be blind to the increased strategic and material hardships to this country and France which seemed bound to accrue alike from developments in Central Europe and from effective domination in Spain by the Axis powers"⁵⁷.

The *Yorkshire Post* disclosed once again that attempts had been made to pacify the dictators in their insistence that foreign governments should suppress the reporting of news that was critical of them:

we urge in particular that the government themselves should not appear to desire to gloss over or to conceal facts dangerous and disagreeable or to encourage an attitude of national complacency...For only so will the people of this country realize the dangers that actually beset us and be prepared to confront them.

The fall of the Republican capital, Barcelona, to the Nationalist forces under the command of General Yague, on January 26th 1939, effectively heralded the end of the Spanish Civil War. From that point, the British government, faced with the imminent and final Republican defeat, made a more concerted effort to improve relations with the victorious Nationalist regime. The task before the government was to secure British recognition of the Franco regime as the legitimate authority in Spain. This would necessitate withdrawing recognition of the Republican government. Unlike the fascist dictator powers who were not troubled by the need to appeal to the sensitivity of public opinion in their own countries, the British government, mindful of the widespread popular sympathy within Britain for Republican Spain, had to endeavour to secure Franco's agreement that there would be no bloody reprisals should the defeated Republicans agree to surrender. The British government also wanted to avoid having to recognize Franco as the ruler of Spain, in advance of the Republican surrender. The force of public opinion was an obstacle to what ministers saw as the more essential task of improving relations between the two countries, which British recognition of Franco would facilitate enormously.

Halifax, who in the course of January, wanted Italy to show evidence of its good faith by withdrawing its troops from Spain, recognized that irrespective of whatever course of action the Italians took, it was vital for Britain to recognize the Franco regime. Only then could work begin on counteracting German influence in Spain, which Halifax believed was very great. Without recognition of Franco, a British diplomatic offensive to counter German influence would be impossible. Halifax's Cabinet colleagues shared his concern as to the extent of the influence of the Axis powers on the Nationalist authorities. Therefore, at the Cabinet meeting on February 15th, they too agreed that it was imperative that Britain should recognize Franco.⁵⁸

Among those conservative newspapers [*Yorkshire Post* excepted] which had until recently been critical of the government line there was, during the final weeks of the Civil War, a change of attitude towards the conflict. By the end of January, the official pressure being exerted on editors to change tack was beginning to take effect. With the collapse of Republican resistance in Catalonia, most conservative newspapers were willing to accept that whatever criticism they may have expressed towards the Nationalist cause from December 1938 up to late January 1939, the fall of Barcelona meant that it was in the interests of British policy that the new regime be persuaded to look more favourably upon Britain. This involved editorial reconsideration of how the Nationalists should be portrayed in the news columns. However, a number of conservative newspapers continued to maintain what was, at best, a cautious optimism towards Nationalist Spain. Nevertheless, a shift in opinion regarding the Nationalist regime can be

detected by comparing those leader columns that had appeared before the fall of Barcelona with the ones that followed it. On January 7th, when the fate of Barcelona still hung in the balance, the attitude of *The Times* was as follows: “[e]ven if General Franco triumphs decisively and soon it may well be asked whether a settlement imposed by the sword can possibly prove durable.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, lamenting the failure of attempts at mediation as a means of bringing a compromise solution to the war, it expressed the opinion that much blood remained to be shed before peace would be restored to Spain. Of course, as we have already seen, the critical attitude of *The Times* towards the Nationalist side in the winter of 1938-9 was based on the misconception held in London that neither side could win. As late as January 17th, the editorial of the newspaper did not believe that the fall of Barcelona was inevitable: “recollection of the Nationalists’ failure to capture Madrid should give pause to confident prophecy.”⁶⁰ However, once the fall of the Republican capital became imminent, *The Times* editorial modified its views on the military skill of Franco, and even went so far as to suggest that British and French appeals to the Nationalists not to carry out wholesale reprisals were unnecessary. Commenting on the stream of Republican refugees in flight from the Nationalist advance into Catalonia, the editorial suggested, “many seem to be in flight from their own fears rather than any maltreatment [from the victors].”⁶¹

Thus, from late January, the reporting in *The Times* editorials regarding the nature both of the Nationalist authorities and of Franco himself was in complete contrast to the manner in which each had been presented earlier in the month. There was now no longer any fear that Franco or his subordinates would carry out reprisals as they had done in the past. In

its leaders, *The Times* expressed its confidence that pragmatism would dictate policy in Franco's Spain. On February 10th, the leader described Franco as a magnanimous victor, temperamentally suited to bring unity to a country divided by civil war.⁶² During the closing stages of the Civil War, a repeated theme in the leader columns was the confidence that the new regime would be friendly towards Britain. On February 15th, in a lead article, the correspondent was confident that in spite of the help given him by Germany and Italy, Franco was likely to be favourable towards Britain because the economic ties binding the dictator towards the democracies were strong.⁶³

A change of opinion towards Franco similar to that demonstrated by *The Times* was shown in this period by other leading conservative newspapers. For example, the *Daily Telegraph* of January 11th had argued that victory had always proved elusive for Franco, and that there should therefore be peace without victory.⁶⁴ Once again, with the fall of Barcelona imminent, the attitude of the leaders changed. On February 20th, for example, the editorial opinion of the *Daily Telegraph* assured its readers that Franco was not a vengeful person and that he would refrain from arbitrary killings of his defeated opponents.⁶⁵ The change in attitude shown in the leader comment of the *Daily Telegraph* is especially important, given the recent willingness of that paper to be critical both of government foreign policy and of Franco.

The surviving evidence of government and press contacts points to an increased number of meetings between the two parties in the final months of the Civil War. Since a great deal of the British press was critical of government Spanish policy in this period, it was

felt that British recognition of Franco, without first gaining his agreement not to carry out reprisals against the defeated Republicans, would only provide further evidence of the duplicity of the government. Yet Franco was unwilling to oblige the British government by making such a public declaration. In spite of this, however, in the opinion of government circles, it was vital for British interests that this should not prevent the recognition of him as the legal ruler in Spain as soon as possible. Yet, the refusal of Franco to issue a proclamation of clemency meant that the support of the press, vital as it was, could not be taken for granted. Thus, even *The Times* was lobbied frequently in order to ensure that the paper did not inadvertently write in such a manner as to risk compromising the government's position in Spain at this particularly delicate juncture in the Civil War.

From the beginning of January until the surrender of Madrid in March, Dawson made a series of high level contacts. Following the return of Chamberlain from Rome, he met the Prime Minister in Downing Street on January 15th,⁶⁶ and again on February 25th, at Cliveden.⁶⁷ Two days later came the Prime Minister's announcement in Parliament that Britain was to recognize Franco. Samuel Hoare who, since the previous autumn, had been minister with special responsibility for press relations, met Dawson on January 16th at the Travellers' Club, during which they discussed the visit of the Prime Minister to Italy. Further meetings between Hoare and Dawson took place on January 24th, February 27th, on March 1st at Samuel Hoare's office, and again on March 27th, the day before Madrid fell. In the same period Dawson's diary records at least six meetings with Halifax. The same source records a couple of meetings with Chamberlain's chief adviser

on diplomacy, Sir Horace Wilson; firstly on January 16th at the Travellers' Club; secondly on March 17th. The venue for the second meeting was not disclosed, but among the topics discussed at this meeting was the Prime Minister's visit to Rome. In his diary for February 11th, Dawson recorded a talk with the ambassador to Berlin, Neville Henderson. The entry for March 28th records a meeting at the Beefsteak with R.A. Butler, a senior official at the Foreign Office. There is mention also of a meeting with Leeper on February 9th. Given the development of events both on the ground in Spain, and in diplomatic circles as a result of the impending triumph of the Nationalists, it is not surprising that issues related to the Civil War were a frequent topic of conversation at such meetings.

In spite of the fact that in the Dawson diary references to events are brief and often only general comments are made, it is nevertheless possible to locate Spain as a particular focus for discussion on a number of these occasions. In fact at no other period in the Civil War does the Dawson diary demonstrate that there was such frequency of discussions relating to Spain as during the final three months of the war. The visit by the Prime Minister to Rome is referred to on January 9th, 15th, and again on the 16th. Of course, all discussions on this topic related to the wider impact of the war on British relations with an Axis power. The Spanish Civil War was specifically referred to in the entries for February 9th, when Dawson met Leeper to discuss developments on the ground in Spain and again on February 25th, during a house party at Cliveden. In the entries for February 27th and for March 28th, Spain is again specifically referred to as a topic of discussion. The European situation in general is referred to in the entries for January 25th

and on March 19th and 20th, and of course it is at least likely that on one or more of these occasions the Spanish Civil War was brought up in the discussions.⁶⁸

The contacts between the government and the press are referred to in other sources. The Prime Minister, in his pocket diary, recorded a number of meetings with newspapermen during this period. On November 22nd, he attended the Press Club Luncheon, and met lobby correspondents on December 16th and on March 19th 1939.⁶⁹ That so much evidence survives, especially in the latter period of the Spanish Civil War, concerning the frequency of contacts between ministers and members of the media, suggests a concerted effort from those in the highest levels of government to secure the support of newspapers, at a time when, as we have already seen, such support could not be taken for granted.

There are other possible explanations for the change of tack among conservative newspapers following the fall of Barcelona. One possibility is a change of attitude on the part of the Nationalist press department towards journalists. Given the tone of a number of the articles mentioned earlier, the Nationalist regime had little reason to feel grateful for the way in which sections of even the conservative press in Britain were willing to report on the Francoist side in the closing months of the Civil War. Indeed, much of the criticism towards the Nationalists was provoked by the tenor of news reporting among correspondents working in Republican held areas, including Barcelona. After the occupation of that city, the same journalists, who had earlier been critical of the Nationalists would have relied upon their co-operation regarding permits and facilities. As has been demonstrated earlier, the Nationalists were quite prepared to expel

correspondents of newspapers, which had offended them. However, in spite of this, the Barcelona correspondents of papers such as the *Daily Telegraph* or *The Times*, for example, were allowed to stay on following the occupation of the city. This, surely, is a possible, additional explanation for the change of tack among newspapers. Indeed, it is even possible to read an expression of gratitude in the way in which the leaders of both papers now described the Nationalist regime. Another important issue affecting newspapers was, inevitably, the worsening of the international crisis in European affairs. Indeed, the ending of the Spanish Civil War coincided with the collapse of the Munich agreement, following the German invasion of the rump state of Czechoslovakia on March 15th 1939. The invasion “spelled the apparent end of Chamberlain’s foreign policy and this was universally acknowledged in the press”.⁷⁰ However, the invasion, by making European war more likely in the long term, also increased the strategic importance of Spain to British interests in the Mediterranean, especially following the extension of Franco-British guarantees on Poland to certain Balkan states.⁷¹ As we have seen on a number of occasions, whilst retaining their independence of government control, newspapers, whether supportive or critical of the official line on foreign policy, claimed to have the best interests of national security at heart. This justified a change of tack in order to entice Franco away from the axis powers. However, the continued close ties between Franco and his Civil War allies was, as we shall see in the next chapter, to be the basis of continued criticism of his regime even from within certain sections of the conservative press.

In effect, the support that both *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* offered to the government line on Spain in 1939 was consistent with the stand taken by these newspapers throughout the war. Although *The Times* had expressed criticism of Franco in the previous December, of much greater significance was that in January 1939 the paper showed no real concern at the role played by the Italian troops in Spain. This was in spite of the fact that the continued Italian presence was in defiance of the Anglo-Italian Agreement so recently brought into force by Britain. Indeed, the editor of *The Times* shared the optimism of Chamberlain that appeasement of the Italians was possible. When Dawson met Chamberlain, following the latter's return from Rome, Dawson remarked to the Prime Minister, "you have evidently impressed your personality on the Italian people."⁷² In January 1939, *The Times* made no reference in its news columns to the reprisals being conducted in the Nationalist held areas of Spain. The reports in that paper were clearly at variance with what was printed in other conservative newspapers at this time.⁷³ As we shall see, the pessimistic views expressed in much of the conservative press that Franco would be a brutal victor proved to be an accurate forecast of the frame of mind of the Nationalist authorities in the immediate aftermath of the war, when thousands of former Republicans were either executed or imprisoned. As Liddell-Hart had attempted to point out to Dawson in 1937, the massacres carried out in Nationalist Spain, unlike those in Republican areas, were part of a deliberate state policy aimed at the systematic terrorizing of the population in order to achieve submission. Dawson, however, continued to remain oblivious to the warnings of Liddell Hart concerning the type of regime that would unify Spain under one type of government. Indeed on February

9th, he wrote in his diary about his discussion with Leeper on the Spanish Civil War, which in the editor's opinion "was visibly improving."⁷⁴

In his autobiography, *The Times* correspondent Iverach McDonald expressed his concern at the support offered by his paper towards government foreign policy in general.⁷⁵ In the course of 1939, McDonald contributed to a new newsletter *The Arrow*.⁷⁶ This newsletter like its forebears, the *King-Hall Newsletter Service* and the *Whitehall Letter* gave considerable coverage to the Civil War in Spain. But, unlike the former newsletters, *The Arrow* was scathing in its criticism of the government. All three of the newsletters were concerned about the intervention of the Axis powers in Spain, which they interpreted as part of a deliberate and long term strategy aimed at securing advantage for Germany, in particular, at the expense of the western powers. On January 20th 1939, *The Arrow* read, "so HUMBLE have our standards become that we must be grateful no British interests have been sacrificed in Rome."⁷⁷ The same issue expressed the hope, rather sarcastically, that "not peace or 'appeasement' highly detrimental to British interests, but the defence *at all costs* of the security and well being of the Commonwealth will be the aim resolutely pursued of our foreign policy henceforth." However, what confidence the newsletter had in Chamberlain was short lived. On January 27th *The Arrow* read,

[t]he Prime Minister remains inattentive to the experts and wraps himself in obstinate wishful thinking. He believes that a German-Italo victory in Spain will not be a menace to the Commonwealth and that Germany will break under the strain of rearmament.⁷⁸

A more damning verdict was delivered against Chamberlain on February 3rd: "NO feature of our public life at the present moment is more profoundly distorting than the reasons

advanced by Mr. Chamberlain's 'machine' why he and his policy should be trusted without question and all criticisms repudiated."⁷⁹ In that particular issue, *The Arrow* made a direct reference to the continued pressure from Downing Street upon the press. On matters relating to foreign affairs, *The Arrow* was avowedly partisan in its views. On January 6th, for example, it had been prepared to support the Foreign Secretary when it believed he was to take a firmer stand towards Italy during the Anglo-Italian conversations in Rome.⁸⁰

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Foreign Office News Department considered the *Whitehall Letter* to be the most reliable and therefore most influential of the independent newsletters. *The Arrow*, being both more easily obtainable and cheaper, had a potentially larger audience.⁸¹ It was available either on a six-month subscription at seven shillings and sixpence, or for a year at fifteen shillings.⁸² Postage of the newsletter to subscribers both at home and abroad was free. The use of italics, of words in block capitals, as well as the more sensationalist tone of the writing set it apart from the more conservative tones of both the *Whitehall Letter* and the *King-Hall Newsletter Service*. From February 10th 1939, *The Arrow* differed from the *Whitehall Letter* in allowing reproduction of any part of its contents, as long as acknowledgment was made to *The Arrow* as its original source. Those in control of *The Arrow* were deliberately aiming at a much wider audience, whereas the higher price of the *Whitehall Letter* would suggest its focus to be on a smaller, though more influential audience.⁸³

Predictably, up until the end of the Civil War, Liddell Hart continued to complain about the leader columns of *The Times*. Therefore, in November 1938 Liddell Hart wrote once again to Barrington-Ward, only this time, unlike his previous communications, Liddell Hart now complained that articles on the Civil War which he had sent in for publication were being amended rather than refused as had formerly been the case. On November 8th, Liddell Hart stated, “censoring without consultation, seemed to me a clear and precise way of describing a recent development of cutting out somewhat important points from my articles without previous reference to me...”⁸⁴ He declared, “in the past eighteen months there have been repeated cases of the omission both of articles and of points in them over Spain...”

Liddell Hart’s doubts concerning the wisdom of government policy towards the Spanish Civil War had progressively increased with the development of the conflict on the ground in Spain: “each time the sequel has brought cause for increased doubts.” He was also confident that “most other members of the editorial staff” shared his doubts. Barrington-Ward also found himself having to face criticism from other influential quarters, and, as a consequence, to defend the support offered by *The Times* for government policy. In a reply to the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, he defended the neutrality of the paper, denying the allegation that it was sympathetic towards fascism, and disputing the existence of a ‘Cliveden set’. Referring to fascism and communism he wrote,

they grow more and more like each other daily and I detest them both equally utterly as systems of government. We here [*The Times*] have tried consistently to avoid being committed to either of them in Spain.⁸⁵

However, in the early months of 1939, the ignoring by *The Times* of the strategic implications of a Franco victory together with the consistency of the support which it was still prepared to offer to the government line on Spain, meant that, both at home and abroad, the paper was still performing the role of sounding board for the government view. At a time when other conservative newspapers were becoming less enthusiastic, this meant that *The Times* was adopting a partisan position. Barrington-Ward's comment to the Master of Balliol on the neutrality of the newspaper was, at the very least, misleading. This was a position which could only prolong and exacerbate the opposition towards its editorial policy that existed amongst journalists of the paper.

Liddell Hart, of course, did not limit himself to written protests on the policy of *The Times* towards the Civil War. In the previous November, he had been invited to join 'The Advisory Committee of The Parliamentary Committee on Spain'. This was a pressure group whose purpose was to bring to the notice of the general public the threat to national interests should Franco win.⁸⁶ This committee was part of a growing movement in Great Britain at this time of like minded individuals, who, being increasingly concerned at what they saw as the threat to British interests of a Nationalist victory, joined together in pressure group activity. The purpose of this, in the last months of the Civil War, was to mobilize public opinion against the policy of Non-Intervention. For example, a "National Emergency Conference" took place at Queen's Hall in London, at which leading figures of the Pro-Republican movement such as the Duchess of Atholl and Harry Pollitt were in attendance.⁸⁷ Liddell-Hart was invited to speak at this conference but indicated his unwillingness to do so. Although Liddell Hart declined the invitation of the Advisory

Committee, he did allow his pamphlet 'The Eleventh Hour' to be read out at its weekend conference. In this pamphlet, Liddell Hart expressed his view that a Franco victory would be a strategic threat to Britain and France. Nevertheless, he was confident, even at this late stage of the conflict, that the Republic could still win the war as long as the food situation improved.⁸⁸ When asked to speak at "The Food And Freedom For Spain Conference", on November 12th 1938, he again refused, although his pamphlet 'Britain and Spain' appears to have been circulated in advance to those who were to attend the conference.⁸⁹ Liddell Hart agreed to act as patron for 'The Westminster And City Food Ship For Spain'. He was also involved in the extra parliamentary pressure to dissuade the government from granting belligerent rights to Franco. In addition, he was a co-signatory of a document on the legal, political and strategic aspects of the Civil War, 'General Franco's Demand for Belligerent Rights.'⁹⁰ This was presented to the Prime Minister on January 7th 1939 by "The Parliamentary Committee For Spain". Liddell Hart's co-signatories were J.L. Brierly, Professor of International law at Oxford University, and J. Emelyn Jones, former president of the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce.

Liddell Hart was active in other ways too; for example, he took exception to the more moderate criticism of government policy on Spain offered by the *King-Hall Newsletter Service*. He had been irritated by the occasional refusal of the newsletter to publish his views on Spain. In the previous September, Liddell Hart had sent an article to King-Hall, which the latter refused to print. In his reply to Liddell Hart, King-Hall pointed out that the government was even putting pressure on his independent newsletter to moderate its criticism of government policy:

I have been in touch on another matter with a member of the government. In view of what I have heard I feel it is impossible, and on every ground of public interest highly undesirable to print anything in any responsible paper which seems to expose our nakedness.⁹¹

Unlike the *Whitehall Letter*, for example, the *King-Hall Newsletter Service* did not attempt to conceal the identity of its authors. Therefore, it was relatively easy for pressure to be exerted on King-Hall. After all he was a well-known public figure. There was also the question of how the newsletter would be received abroad as, in addition to its British following, it also attracted a foreign readership including some German subscribers. Again, on September 13th, Liddell Hart received a letter from King-Hall, justifying the self-censorship: "It would not be policy for us to print anything at the present time which is critical of British defence arrangements."⁹²

In contrast to other independent newsletters, the *King-Hall Newsletter Service* was supportive of the government action in bringing the Anglo-Italian Agreement into force, following the withdrawal of 10 000 Italian soldiers from Spain. King-Hall supported it on the grounds that it might dissuade Italy from threatening British interests both in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East.⁹³ On November 5th, Liddell Hart wrote to King-Hall asking him if he had taken into "account [that while] the difference that what Italy might do in the Eastern Mediterranean or the Middle East could be so much more damaging, the danger from a hostile Spain could be fatal."⁹⁴ Yet King-Hall could not be won over. He refused to accept Liddell Hart's argument that only by refusing to bring the agreement into force until she had withdrawn completely from Spain, would Italy be dissuaded from pursuing foreign ambitions inimical to British interests.⁹⁵ In Liddell

Hart's opinion, King-Hall seemed to be accepting the inevitability of a Republican defeat in the Civil War. On November 9th 1938, Liddell Hart wrote once more to King-Hall hoping to convince him to adopt a more optimistic view of the situation:

even in the past we could easily have restored the situation of the Spanish government without committing ourselves to intervention by playing the German and Italian game in a mild way and ensuring the Spanish government had an adequate supply of munitions.⁹⁶

According to Liddell Hart, if the Republic could be ensured an adequate food supply, then the stalemate on the ground in Spain in the late autumn and early winter could be maintained indefinitely. However, Liddell Hart's interpretation of the development of the Civil War was far removed from the actuality of events on the ground in Spain, especially after the Republican defeat at the battle of the river Ebro. Also, if he had hoped to influence King-Hall to change tack, he was to be disappointed. On February 17th, while acknowledging that the failure of the policy of Non-Intervention had ensured the defeat of the Spanish Republican cause in Spain, King-Hall nevertheless wrote that "the impartial attitude of the British government might well in the long run cause Great Britain to be the nation to whom Spaniards would turn for help when confronted with the immense task of reconstruction."⁹⁷

There were other opportunities available for Liddell Hart to express his concerns in the media. On January 23rd 1939, he wrote in the *Evening Standard* "for us the security of the sea-routes should be a reminder of the importance to us of Spain."⁹⁸ Also on February 4th 1939, *Picture Post* printed an article by Liddell Hart titled 'What Spain Means to

Britain.’⁹⁹ Earlier in October of the previous year, the American magazine *Time* printed his article ‘Spanish War Outlook.’¹⁰⁰

The opposition of journalists towards both government policy and the support given by *The Times* did not, of course, produce a reversal of policy. Nevertheless, it certainly contributed to the growing public awareness of an alternative conservative view on Spain. Moreover, it undermined the strategy of the British government that aimed at improving relations with the Franco regime in the last months of the Civil War. Indeed on December 14th 1938, General Gomez Jordana, head of Franco’s Diplomatic Cabinet had written on this matter to the Duke of Alba, the Nationalist agent in London, asking why the British government allowed agitation on behalf of Republican Spain.¹⁰¹ Reference has already been made to the fact that in spite of the more intense lobbying of the press by the British government, the *Daily Telegraph* continued to hold reservations about Franco. In its leader on March 8th, it viewed with some scepticism the prospects of Franco turning towards the democracies at the end of the war: “the semi-official statements issuing from Burgos are none too encouraging to advice from ‘the democracies’ and their humanitarian manoeuvres.”¹⁰² Furthermore, it continued, “the policy of Non-Intervention however wise and disinterested in intention has not tended notably to earn the gratitude of the victorious side in the Spanish Conflict.” Press scepticism of the official view in London, that excellent relations could be established with the Nationalist regime, was viewed with concern in Burgos. As for the Nationalist authorities, it simply increased their distrust regarding the change of tack, which was evident in much of the British press following the fall of Barcelona. On February 21st, E. Keeling, the British Consul General at

Tangier, sent to the Foreign Office in London a copy of an article written by a journalist in Franco's Spain. In it, the journalist wrote, "[a]ccording to the English newspapers victory is ours, and for that reason they have suddenly changed their tune within a day victory has fallen into the hands of General Franco."¹⁰³ What is significant about the article's criticism of the British press is the specific focus on the conservative press at this time. Take for instance the following: "the *Daily Telegraph* has suddenly awoken from its lethargic slumbers to put its house in order as best they can in order to receive decently the disloyal, insurgent and rebel Spaniard [Franco]." In referring to the *Sunday Times*, the article read, "Scrutator has discovered overnight that his shortsightedness can be remedied by altering the number of his spectacles." For the Spanish journalist the attitude of the British conservative press was cynical:

it was necessary that victory should crown the head of Franco like a visible and tangible aureole for the English nation to discover that Franco's policy as regards Spain was the same as that of 'Scrutator', the *Sunday Times*, Churchill, Duff Cooper and Anthony Eden [i.e.] a strong and independent Spain.

The warning about the harm being done to Anglo-Spanish relations by the attitude of the British press towards the Civil War, was taken very seriously. Two pro Franco Britons, Lord Walker and Wing Commander James M.P., had informed Mounsey that, following the British recognition of Franco, British press announcements to the effect that "his government would of course have to come to England for a loan", had made a very bad impression on him: "our confident assumption that he would have to come to us for money has been enough to make him determined that on no account will he do so."¹⁰⁴ Criticism of the role of the conservative press in the Civil War was also a fundamental

theme in *Observations Past and Present* by Sir Leo Chiozza Money, a Member of Parliament sympathetic towards the Nationalist cause.¹⁰⁵ He wrote disparagingly of what he saw as the cynical change of attitude of the British press. He declared,

[t]hese British and French press stories representing Franco to be in extremity were published one month before the fall of Barcelona, and two months before Mr. Chamberlain rose in The House of Commons to state that the Red 'government' was scattered.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, he added,

[a]fter the conquest of Catalonia, the British press, for the most part, swung round as though at a given signal, and began to praise Franco and suggested what good friends Britain and France could be to Nationalist Spain. Our 'credits' are better than Italian lives, ran the argument.¹⁰⁷

Even *The Times* came under attack, this was due to its failure to record the humanitarian aid sent by Italy to Catalonia, following the Nationalist conquest: "Not even The Times, published the telegram of the Alcalde [mayor] of Barcelona to the Duce thanking him for the ship loads of food, clothing and comforts which were so promptly sent by Italy to suffering Catalonia."¹⁰⁸ In his book, Sir Leo was attempting to explain why British relations with both Italy and Nationalist Spain were poor. His conclusion over and over again was that the press had been responsible. He wrote, "the cost of printing these [stories] must be enormous, but more serious is their effect in preventing a valuable friendship with a noble people."¹⁰⁹

In spite of the partisan views and the simplicity of Sir Leo's analysis of events, his book does throw some light on the dilemma faced by the pro-government press in Britain, especially in the case of the Spanish Civil War. Even supporters of the Nationalist side

regarded the support of pro-government papers for the recognition of Franco as a cynical manipulation of the British press in the closing stages of the Civil War. Moreover, by the end of the Civil War, the conservative consensus on Spain was in serious trouble. The growing concern shown by Garvin, Watson and Camrose towards German intentions in the wake of the Munich Settlement was reflected in the more pessimistic tone of their newspapers regarding developments in Spain. Their support for recognition of Franco, when this was clearly the policy of the government, was as cynical as it was deemed pragmatic

For the duration of the war the fascist dictators had over-estimated the extent to which the British government could exert pressure and control over the press. As we have repeatedly seen, neither the Nazi nor the Italian Fascist governments could understand that the British government simply did not have the power to impose severe restrictions on the manner in which newspapers reported events. The divisions within the conservative press over the Civil War were especially damaging to British relations with Germany and Italy. The reason for this was because it was to the conservative press that official circles in Rome and Berlin looked in order to gauge opinions and attitudes that they believed reflected those held by the Conservative dominated National Government.

A significant impact of the Spanish Civil War upon Britain was the failure of Chamberlain's policy to secure a stable pro-government consensus even within the conservative press. It is true that there were other factors at work during the later thirties, which contributed to the growing crisis in international relations. However, the descent

into European war in 1939 was not inevitable. It was not inevitable that the Spanish crisis should undermine relations between the governments of Italy and Britain. With the removal of Eden from office, Chamberlain was free to pursue his policy of appeasement of Italy, albeit at the expense of democracy in Spain. The governments of the western democracies and the fascist states shared an ideological revulsion towards communism. Indeed, such was the distaste for communism in official circles in Britain, that fascist power intervention in Spain was viewed as far less of a threat to British interests than the fear that Republican Spain would be superseded by a communist state tied to Russia. Yet, in spite of the common ground between Britain and Italy, the impact of the press on relations between them was profound. This was because of the tendency of dictator governments of the period to read into press comment, official attitudes of frustration, even hostility towards them; attitudes that the British government would not make more explicit through the normal diplomatic channels. In this they were mistaken. But in spite of repeated assurances made privately by official circles in Britain, the effect was to increase a sense of isolation from the democracies, and to drive Italy into closer ties with Germany. 1937 was a particularly crucial year. The conservative press reporting of Italian reverses in Spain during the spring accelerated a crystallization of the Axis partnership. Divisions between the western democratic powers and Italy, which the press had exacerbated, prevented the formation of a united front against Hitler. It is no mere coincidence that the second half of the Spanish Civil War coincided with an increasingly expansionist and reckless foreign policy by the Third Reich. In the absence of strong representation from abroad, the counsels of caution within Hitler's Germany were ineffective in their attempts to contain the more radical elements within the Nazi regime.

At the war's end, Germany had emerged as a new super state dominating East and Central Europe. If the Spanish Civil War did not lead directly to the outbreak of the European conflict in September, it certainly contributed very much to the crisis in Anglo-German and Franco-German relations that did. In this, the role played by the conservative press during the Spanish Civil War was significant.

Such was the divisive impact of the Spanish Civil War on government and conservative press relations in Britain that there never was a common policy to which all Conservative politicians and every conservative newspaper could adhere. The geographical location of Spain at the gateway to the Atlantic and Mediterranean sea routes ensured that even within the supposedly pro-government press, the policy of British Non-Intervention could be criticized for failing satisfactorily to ensure the security both of British naval hegemony and of the Empire. In their way, Arthur Mann of the *Yorkshire Post*, and Liddell Hart of *The Times* presented a gloomy, though realistic, assessment of the aims and ambitions of Hitler and Mussolini, an assessment which was based substantially on the unfolding of events in Spain. Spain could not be sacrificed; its strategic importance for the French and the British would be realized in the forthcoming confrontation with the Axis powers. In their refusal to support the government line, these conservative opponents undoubtedly undermined the policy of appeasement, yet they also alerted the public, both at home and abroad, to the dangers posed by the foreign policies of Hitler and Mussolini. Both dictators aimed at altering the balance of continental power to their own advantage. The achieving of such ambitions would pose a clear threat to the predominance of Britain and France in World affairs.

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- ¹ 'Armies In Spain Fraternizing', *Daily Telegraph*, December 19th 1938, p.14.
- ² 'A Pause In Spain', *The Times*, December 23rd 1938, p.11.
- ³ 'Woman Sent Spy Letter In Shirt', *Daily Mail*, December 24th 1938, p.10.
- ⁴ 'Entrenous', 'Rebellions In Rebel Spain', *Truth*, December 26th 1938.
- ⁵ PRO, CAB 23/96, minutes and conclusions of the Cabinet, December 21st 1938, conclusion 4.
- ⁶ It was when he met Hitler and Mussolini at Munich that Chamberlain first raised with the dictators the idea of a four power peace initiative involving Britain, France, Italy and Germany.
- ⁷ Esenwein and Shubert, *Spain At War*, pp.255-6.
- ⁸ By late 1938, the Republic's gold reserves, which had been used to pay for Soviet military supplies were now exhausted. Although some aid was sent, much of it failed to reach Republican Spain, see Alpert, *A New International History of The Spanish Civil War*, p.256.
- ⁹ Stalin's policy towards the Civil War was dictated not by the ideological motive of creating a satellite state in Spain. He seriously underestimated the ideological revulsion of the governments of both France and Britain towards a common anti-fascist front with the Soviet Union, see Denis Smyth, 'Soviet policy Towards Republican Spain 1936-1939' in Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie (eds.), *The Republic Besieged Civil War In Spain 1936-1939* (Edinburgh, 1996) pp.104-105.
- ¹⁰ 'Contents Of The Diplomatic Bag', *Daily Telegraph*, December 22nd 1938, p.11.
- ¹¹ 'Deserters Betray Franco's Plans', *Daily Telegraph*, December 14th 1938, p.13.
- ¹² Paul Preston, *FRANCO* (London, 1993) p. 316.
- ¹³ From the outbreak of the fighting in the summer of 1936, the view of *The Times* was that a dictatorship would emerge at the end of the War. As early as July 29th, the leader column was predicting that "whatever the military outcome of the struggle, ruthless dictatorship seems its inevitable consequence": 'The Spanish Tragedy', *The Times*, July 29th, 1936, p.15. The leader of the *Daily Telegraph* was also expressing the view that in post-war Spain there would emerge a "dictatorship of either the left or the right": 'A Military Revolt In Spain', *Daily Telegraph*, July 20th 1936, p.10.
- ¹⁴ 'War-Ridden Spain', *The Times*, May 31st 1938, p.17.

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- ¹⁵ ‘The Spanish Snag’, *Sunday Times*, January 15th 1939, p.14.
- ¹⁶ Diary entry November 17th, 1938; Hemming papers. The papers of Francis Hemming are kept in the Bodleian Library, Western Manuscripts Department.
- ¹⁷ ‘Entrenous’, ‘Quis Custodiet In Hispania?’, *Truth*, December 29th 1938, pp.880-1.
- ¹⁸ ‘Entrenous’, ‘War In Spain’, *Truth*, January 6th 1939, p.5.
- ¹⁹ The change in the tone of *Truth* reflected the changing situation on the ground in Spain from late 1938. The more cautious remarks made earlier about the difficulties of the Nationalist high command was before the start of the Nationalist offensive in North-Eastern Spain. They were also made at a time when it seemed that a compromise solution to the War was likely.
- ²⁰ ‘War In Spain’, *Truth*, January 6th 1939.
- ²¹ ‘Entrenous’, ‘Franco Nears Barcelona’, *Truth*, January 20th 1939, p.68.
- ²² ‘Entrenous’, ‘Night Falls On Barcelona’, *Truth*, January 27th 1939, p.100.
- ²³ PRO, CAB 23/97, Cabinet minutes, January 18th 1939, conclusion 1.
- ²⁴ Chamberlain to Ida, January 8th 1939; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1081.
- ²⁵ “The old man seems definitely to have given up hope of Germany but clings to the hope of detaching Mussolini”: Harvey (ed.), *The Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, December 25th 1938, p.229.
- ²⁶ Chamberlain to Ida, February 12th 1939; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1085.
- ²⁷ Chamberlain to Hilda, February 19th 1939; Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/1086.
- ²⁸ Even in reference to 1939, Cockett exaggerates the extent to which Chamberlain was able to secure the support of *Truth* as a mouthpiece for his political views, see Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.88.
- ²⁹ ‘Spain-Nation Or Tool?’, *Truth*, February 17th 1939, p.219.
- ³⁰ Shane Leslie, ‘The Future With Franco’, *Truth*, March 17th 1939.
- ³¹ In a diary entry for late January 1939, Cadogan referred to Sir Horace Wilson “who shows signs of scrapping with our [Foreign Office] News Department”: Dilks (ed.),

The Diplomatic Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, p.144, entry for January 26th. Moreover, late in the previous year, Cadogan wrote that “since Anthony’s departure [and before] I have had constant complaints from No.10 of the handling of the press by our News Department. Blame has been particularly attached to Leeper; not I am bound to inform, without some reason”: PRO FO 800/39, minute from Cadogan to Halifax, November 28th 1938, quoted in *The Diplomatic Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan*. Chamberlain also referred to the divergence of views between himself and The Foreign Office concerning Italian intervention in Spain. The Foreign Office did not share the confidence of the Prime Minister that neither Hitler nor Mussolini had any long term strategic interests in Spain: “unless FO are constantly reminded that this has always been our attitude they are tempted to follow the old Eden line. I simply cannot keep their minds fixed on our real purpose, the dislike they have of the totalitarian states is so strong that it will keep bursting out”: the Neville Chamberlain Papers, letter to Ida, February 12th 1939, NC 18/1/1085.

³² Dilks (ed.), *The Diplomatic Diary of Sir Alexander Cadogan*, diary entry February 13th 1939, pp.148-9.

³³ The information was given to Oliver Harvey by Victor Gordon Lennox, over lunch: *The Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, p.236, entry for January 6th 1939.

³⁴ Dawson Diary, December 5th 1938; Dawson papers.

³⁵ Camrose to Mann, January 10th 1939; Addenda to Mann papers, part two. Camrose was clearly concerned at the involvement of Italian forces in the offensive in Northern Spain. It was a flagrant breach of the Anglo-Italian Agreement. He now felt that Chamberlain had been earlier deceived by the Italians into thinking that the withdrawal of 10 000 members of the CTV in November, was sufficient proof of their good faith to allow the bringing into force of the agreement.

³⁶ ‘General Franco’s Blockade’, *Daily Telegraph*, March 10th 1939, p.16.

³⁷ ‘No Worse, Rome And After’, *Observer*, January 15th 1939, p.12.

³⁸ ‘General Franco And The Pyrenees’ and ‘Spain And The Foreigner’, “The World Week By Week”, *Observer*, January 22nd 1939, p.14.

³⁹ ‘Strength And Sense’, *Observer*, December 11th 1938, p.14.

⁴⁰ The World Week By Week, ‘Landmarks In Spain’, *Observer*, December 18th 1939, p.12.

⁴¹ ‘Opinion’, ‘Gifts From Abroad’, *Daily Express*, February 14th 1939, p.10.

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- ⁴² ‘A 5 Foot Soldier Becomes Dictator By Accident’, *Daily Express*, February 28th 1939, p.10.
- ⁴³ ‘Opinion’, ‘Facing The Facts’, *Daily Express*, February 28th 1939, p.10.
- ⁴⁴ Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.88. During the course of 1938, there was a great deal of contact between either Hoare or Halifax and the newspaper proprietors. Hoare used his influence to attempt to secure the removal of Mann as editor of the *Yorkshire Post*.
- ⁴⁵ ‘Foreign Affairs Debate’, *Yorkshire Post*, December 19th 1938, p.8.
- ⁴⁶ ‘Warnings From France’, *Yorkshire Post*, January 17th 1939, p.8.
- ⁴⁷ “Rupert Beckett over lunch and had some talk about ‘YP’”: Dawson Diary, September 4th 1938; Dawson papers. Rupert Beckett succeeded to the chair of the paper on the death of his brother Gervase.
- ⁴⁸ Dawson commented on Sir Horace Wilson’s complaint that the *Yorkshire Post* was attacking the Prime Minister on a daily basis, Dawson Diary, December 5th 1938; Dawson papers.
- ⁴⁹ Beckett to Mann, December 8th 1938; Mann papers.
- ⁵⁰ Stanley Jackson to Mann, December 28th 1938; Addenda to Mann papers, part two.
- ⁵¹ Beckett to Mann, December 14th 1938; Mann papers, MS Eng., C3274.
- ⁵² ‘The Road To Rome’, *Yorkshire Post*, January 9th 1939, p.8.
- ⁵³ In fact, given the strategic importance of Spain to the western democracies, the leader considered the consequences of a Franco victory far worse than those resulting from a split up of Czechoslovakia; ‘A Mediterranean Munich?’ *Yorkshire Post*, January 19th 1939, p.8.
- ⁵⁴ ‘Franco Recognised’, *Yorkshire Post*, February 28th 1939, p.8.
- ⁵⁵ Cockett suggests that the price Mann paid for Beckett’s support at the board meeting was a curb on his “more radical instincts”, see Cockett, *Twilight Of Truth*, p.100.
- ⁵⁶ ‘A Newspaper’s First Duty’, *Yorkshire Post*, January 3rd 1939, p.6.
- ⁵⁷ ‘The War Against Freedom’, *Yorkshire Post*, March 1st 1939.

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- ⁵⁸ PRO, CAB 23/97, Cabinet minutes, February 15th 1939.
- ⁵⁹ ‘Catalan Front’, *The Times*, January 7th 1939, p.13.
- ⁶⁰ ‘Fighting In Spain’, *The Times*, January 17th 1939, p.13.
- ⁶¹ ‘Fall Of Barcelona’, *The Times*, January 27th 1939, p.13.
- ⁶² ‘The End In Sight’, *The Times*, February 10th 1939, p.15.
- ⁶³ ‘Recognition’, *The Times*, February 15th 1939, p.13.
- ⁶⁴ ‘Ebb And Flow Of War In Spain’, *Daily Telegraph*, January 11th 1939, p.10.
- ⁶⁵ The confidence was clearly at odds with some of the earlier reports printed in the same paper which had detailed the repression visited upon Republican towns and villages by the advancing Nationalist Forces, see the *Daily Telegraph*, February 20th 1939, p.10.
- ⁶⁶ Dawson Diary, January 15th 1939; Dawson papers.
- ⁶⁷ Pocket Diaries 1904-40, February 25th 1939; Chamberlain papers, NC 2/29/1.
- ⁶⁸ All of the entries referred to are from the Dawson diary.
- ⁶⁹ Pocket Diaries 1904-40, entries for November 22nd 1938, December 16th 1938 and March 19th 1938; Chamberlain papers, NC 2/29/1. The entry for December 16th also refers to a meeting between Chamberlain and Viscount Kemsley. On February 6th 1939, there is a reference to a meeting with Iverach McDonald, diplomatic correspondent of *The Times*.
- ⁷⁰ Cockett, *The Twilight Of Truth*, p.107
- ⁷¹ On March 31st 1939, the British and French governments, in effect, pledged themselves to defend Poland in the event of a German invasion. Following the Italian annexation of Albania on April 13th, both Britain and France pledged themselves to the defence of Greece and Rumania: Robert Goralski, *World War Two Almanac, 1931-1945* (London, 1981) pp. 82-83.
- ⁷² Leo Kennedy Journal, January 17th 1939; Churchill College Archives Centre. Referring to the Prime Minister, Dawson wrote, “[h]e was amazingly fit, bronzed and cheerful – said he had done all that he set out to do, had found Mussolini easy to talk to [as opposed to Hitler] and had a wonderful and popular reception wherever he went”: Dawson Diary, January 15th 1939; Dawson papers.

⁷³ Unlike *The Times*, other conservative newspapers were prepared to point out the evidence of the atrocities being committed by the Nationalist forces. The Barcelona correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote, “there is scarcely a family in Barcelona which can look with tranquillity to the days ahead if Franco takes the town [and they] must choose between flight...or take unknown risks of death or prison”: ‘Days Of Dread In Barcelona’, *Daily Telegraph*, January 25th 1939, p.11.

⁷⁴ Dawson Diary, February 9th 1939; Dawson papers.

⁷⁵ “He [Dawson] went to them [Halifax and Chamberlain] disposed to agree”: McDonald, *A Man of The Times*, p.51.

⁷⁶ Reference has already been made in the previous chapter to the fact that Iverach McDonald contributed to *The Arrow*.

⁷⁷ ‘Spain’, *The Arrow*, January 20th 1939, Issue 3.

⁷⁸ ‘Spain, Experts Or Amateurs’, *The Arrow*, January 27th 1939, Issue 4.

⁷⁹ ‘Chamberlain’, *The Arrow*, February 3rd 1939, Issue 5.

⁸⁰ *The Arrow*, January 6th 1939, Issue 1.

⁸¹ In the files of the Foreign Office there is very little reference to specific newsletters, for example, there is no reference to *The Arrow*.

⁸² In the first issue, specific details were given on how to obtain subscription.

⁸³ From the sixth issue onwards, the following message appeared on the last page “*THE ARROW* allows reproduction in part if acknowledgment is made”.

⁸⁴ *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file; Liddell Hart to Barrington-Ward, November 8th 1938.

⁸⁵ *TNL Archive*, Barrington-Ward file, Barrington-Ward to the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, October 7th 1938.

⁸⁶ Wilfred Roberts to Liddell Hart, November 10th 1938; “Spanish Civil War Correspondence” Liddell Hart papers, 5/31.

⁸⁷ Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, pp.169-170.

⁸⁸ The Advisory Committee was established to advise the ‘Parliamentary Committee

On Spain'. This had been established in the previous July, "with the object of contradicting the unreliable propaganda circulating, and to try to make clear to the people of this country the danger of a victory by General Franco to our security": Wilfred Roberts, Joint Honorary Secretary of the Parliamentary Committee on Spain, to Liddell Hart, November 10th 1938; the Liddell Hart Papers, 5/31.

⁸⁹ October 25th 1938; "Spanish Civil War Correspondence", Liddell Hart papers, 5/31.

⁹⁰ 'General Franco's Demand For Belligerent Rights'; "Spanish Civil War Correspondence", Liddell Hart papers, 5/31.

⁹¹ King-Hall to Liddell Hart, September 9th 1938; Liddell Hart papers, L.H. 1/424.

⁹² King-Hall's secretary to Liddell Hart's secretary, September 13th 1938; Liddell Hart papers, L.H. 1/424.

⁹³ *King-Hall Newsletter Service*, November 4th 1938.

⁹⁴ Liddell Hart to King-Hall, November 5th 1938; Liddell Hart Papers.

⁹⁵ King-Hall to Liddell Hart, November 7th 1938; Liddell Hart Papers, L.H. 1/424.

⁹⁶ Liddell Hart to King-Hall, November 9th 1938; Liddell Hart Papers, L.H. 1/424.

⁹⁷ *King-Hall Newsletter Service*, February 17th 1939.

⁹⁸ 'Britain Is In Danger', *Evening Standard*, January 23rd 1939; Liddell Hart Papers, L.H. 10/1939/56.

⁹⁹ L.H. 10/1939/6Q, Liddell Hart papers.

¹⁰⁰ 'Spanish War Outlook'; Liddell Hart papers, L.H. 10/1939/10G.

¹⁰¹ Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, p.170.

¹⁰² 'Forbearance For All', *Daily Telegraph*, March 8th 1939, p.14.

¹⁰³ PRO, FO, 371, 24148, W3357/374/41.

¹⁰⁴ PRO, FO, 371, 24117 5033/5/41

¹⁰⁵ Sir Leo Chiozza Money, *Observations Upon Past and Present with Something of the Life and Labours of Sir Leo Chiozza Money* (London, 1939)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp.9-10.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.15-16.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.23.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE IMPACT OF THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS ON RELATIONS BETWEEN BRITAIN AND SPAIN.

One of the major tasks of this thesis has been to take issue with previous thinking concerning the degree of control that the government was able to exert over the press during the late 1930s. In *Twilight of Truth*, Cockett made the assertion that when Chamberlain became Prime Minister in 1937, he was particularly successful at manipulating the press.¹ He suggested also that the consequences of the tight control that Chamberlain was able to exert over the press “was that no alternative policy to appeasement could ever be consistently articulated in the British press.”² Contemporary opinion was certainly that the press was failing in its primary duty, namely to alert the British public to the dangers of the international situation confronting the nation in the later thirties. In his postscript to *The Press*, written in the aftermath of Munich, Wickham Steed wrote bitterly “with one or two notable exceptions [the press] has made further progress on the road that leads to totalitarian servitude.”³ The following year, Denys Thompson was to write in *Between The Lines* “[t]he English Press at the moment is so uniform under the surface that an observer might think a dictatorship was already in being.”⁴

Suggestions have been made also that declining public confidence in the press resulted in a lessening of its influence during the later thirties: “most people soon came to rely on the radio news for a more balanced and authoritative version of World events.”⁵ Yet, it is most unlikely that the BBC or the newsreel were ever in a position to replace newspapers

as more reliable sources of news and views on Spain to the general public. In the spring of 1937, when negotiations between the British government and that of Franco were underway, the suggestion was made in Cabinet that the BBC should be asked to reduce the number of its broadcasts on the Civil War. As a result of official pressure during the last two years of the conflict, BBC coverage of it declined.⁶ The newsreel companies, which covered the war extensively, also bowed to official pressure.⁷ This was significant considering that each newsreel had the potential capacity to reach a very wide audience. About two hundred copies of each newsreel were made and it was expected that each of these would be viewed in four or five cinemas.⁸ Given the close contacts that he had made with important figures in that industry, Sir Joseph Ball was very confident that the government could therefore “count on them [newsreel companies] for full support to a reasonable degree.”⁹

Unlike the BBC, which attempted to display impartiality in its reporting of the war, newsreels that reached a far bigger audience were not impartial. Of course the government, in spite of its claims of neutrality, had no objection to newsreels electing to put across a decided bias towards the rebel cause. *British Movietone News*, owned by Lord Rothermere, is a particularly good example of a newsreel company that consistently over simplified the issues at stake “by dubbing the protagonists as ‘red’ and ‘anti-red’.”¹⁰ Hence, the newsreels, in giving an increasingly biased picture of the Civil War, were able to exploit a misguided faith amongst the populace in the veracity of the moving image over other forms of communication. As we have seen in previous chapters, it was the conflict of views over Axis power intervention in Spain, which was mainly responsible

for undermining the conservative press consensus regarding the Civil War. Yet the Nationalist authorities imposed severe restrictions on what foreign cameramen were allowed to film. This led to a curious paradox where *Gaumont British* filmed the return of a contingent of Italians who had served in Spain, whereas the same company had not filmed the presence of either Italian or German troops in Spain because the Nationalist censors had forbidden them to do so.¹¹ René Brue, a cameraman working for *Pathé Gazette* was arrested and held in Seville prison and threatened with execution by Luis Bolín himself, for filming the massacres at Badajoz in August 1936.¹² Although newspaper correspondents with the Nationalist forces were not allowed to report on the presence of German and Italian troops in Spain, nor on any alleged atrocity by Nationalist troops, unlike the cameramen, as mentioned before, at least they had the option of driving to France, where, free from the gaze of the censors, they could send back their reports.

It is true that there was considerable collusion among ministers, editors and proprietors, based on a shared perception of the need for the British press to act in a more 'responsible manner'. Yet, the extent to which even conservative newspapers were willing to respond to such pressures to tone down the way in which they reported the dictatorships has been exaggerated. This becomes evident when a detailed study is undertaken of newspaper representation of the Civil War in Spain. As we have seen, during the last winter of the Spanish conflict, the failure of the policy of appeasement resulted in a further breakdown in the conservative consensus. Moreover, the variety of pressures impinging upon even pro-government newspapers, such as the requirement to print reports from both sides of the conflict or the difficulty of ensuring accuracy before going to print, meant that they

were apt to fall foul of the governments of Germany and Italy and also of Franco. To put it bluntly, it was not possible to achieve the level of news censorship which would satisfy the dictator governments, without imposing draconian censorship laws on the same level as those which operated in their own countries. On the topic of the Civil War, although the leader columns of *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* especially, attempted to display sensitivity to the dictators, they could not avoid conflicting with the balance of news appearing in the news columns.

Newspapers were, in fact, in a far stronger position to challenge the official line on Spain, than either the BBC or newsreels. Despite the presence of outside, governmental pressure, and notwithstanding the attempts at self-censorship in compliance with government requests, the press was still able to present a far greater diversity of views than either of its rivals. On a number of occasions, discussion in official circles centred on the desirability of the introduction of some form of press censorship. This, however, was always rejected as unacceptable. On March 4th 1939, William Risdale, a News Department official, commented in a memorandum: “newspaper interests would regard with very considerable suspicion any legislation introduced on the lines suggested as liable to interfere with the freedom of the press.”¹³ There was, moreover, tremendous public opposition to any statutory censorship of the British press. An opinion poll survey carried out in November 1938 found that 70% were opposed to the idea of the state imposing a political censorship of the British Press.¹⁴

Popular perceptions towards the Spanish Civil War did change, with a progressive collapse in sympathy for the Spanish Nationalists, bringing a dramatic decline in the number of people who had no preference for the victory of either side. In January 1937, the British Institute of Public Opinion held the first opinion poll on the issue of the Spanish Civil War. A massive 86% were opposed to the recognition of Franco's Government as the legal government in Spain. Moreover, "further polls continued to show a preponderance of sympathy for the [Spanish] government side."¹⁵ For example, in March 1938 the results of an opinion poll on the war were as follows: 57% supported the Republic, 7% Franco, 36% were undecided.¹⁶ Between October 1938 and January 1939 opinion in support of the Republic increased from 57% to 72%. Meanwhile, although by October 1938, support for Franco did rise by 2%, from October until January it remained static at 9%. The number with no preference for either side was to decline slightly by 2% from March 1938, reaching a figure of 34% in October. However, by January of the following year this had sharply declined to 19%.¹⁷ By the latter phases of the War, there was substantial support for the Republic even among Conservative voters. When the results of the British Institute's latest poll were analyzed further, it was found that "a majority of Conservative voters - 76 per cent of those with a preference were on the side of the Spanish government."¹⁸

It has been claimed that newspapers were out of step with public opinion on international affairs, and that the public was not beguiled by the false optimism that was prevalent in most of the press during Chamberlain's premiership.¹⁹ Yet it seems an inescapable conclusion that the shift in opinion on the Spanish Civil War, in particular the rise in

sympathy for the Spanish Republic, was linked to the way in which the media presented the conflict to the British public. In their presenting of the images of modern warfare as it was carried out in Spain, all forms of the media in Britain had an impact in shaping and changing popular perceptions of the conflict. Even though ownership of much of the industry was concentrated in the hands of those who claimed to be either neutral or sympathetic towards the Nationalists, they had little control over the manner in which such images were received. The irony was that media presentation of the war frequently had the unintended effect of increasing popular sympathy for the Republican cause. Of all the forms of media, the press was in a particularly strong position to do this, precisely because of its independence from outside control.²⁰

The conservative newspapers, regardless of whether their editorials promulgated the virtues of non-partisan Non-Intervention, made a significant contribution to this change in popular attitudes. Katharine, Duchess of Atholl, the Conservative MP dubbed the 'red duchess' for her championing of the cause of the Spanish Republic, was, in the early months of the war, very much influenced by what she read in the newspapers. In particular, the reports in the *Daily Telegraph* detailing the arrival of German and Italian aeroplanes to assist the rebels, convinced her that Franco was dependent on the Axis and that a win for him would be a blow to British strategic interests.²¹ Henry Page Croft, the right wing Conservative complained of what he saw as the pro-Republican tendencies of British newspapers regardless of whether they were left, liberal or conservative in outlook.²² It is not surprising, therefore, that there should be increasing numbers of readers of conservative newspapers developing sympathy for the Republic. This was in

marked contrast to the line being peddled in *The Times* leaders of the desirability of neutrality towards the conflict. As for Dawson himself, his privately held sympathy for the Nationalists never wavered. In a letter dated August 1940 he expressed this clearly to the British ambassador to Spain, Sir Samuel Hoare. Dawson wrote, “The Franco regime has always had my sympathy and support.”²³ It would appear that the carefully crafted leaders in *The Times* had only limited influence in moulding the opinion of Conservative voters towards the conflict in Spain. A PEP survey on the press carried out in 1938 would suggest this was indeed was the case. The survey concluded that “the leading article was seen or read by about half the readers of a national morning newspaper, and read completely by about one third.”²⁴ Although it observed that “reader interest was highest in class newspapers”, it would still appear that the overall influence of these articles was limited. Moreover, reader interest declined as the day wore on. The same report concluded that for the London evening press, “more readers ignored the leader and fewer read it completely.” This is especially significant given that the function of the leader column was to express the view of the paper, and attempt thereby to mould public opinion. The findings of the PEP report found some support in a later survey carried out by Mass Observation in 1949. At that time, whilst the readership of *The Times* was considered too small for a statistical result, the survey revealed that few readers liked or even read the editorial column of their paper. In the following list of conservative newspapers the numbers who admitted to reading the editorials are represented as a percentage of the total number of readers: the *Daily Telegraph*, 9%; the *Daily Mail*, 24%; the *Daily Express*, 24%. The same survey found that only 22% of the readers of the *Sunday Times*, and 3% of the readers of the *Observer* liked the editorial.²⁵

This survey, although carried out ten years after the Civil War, throws some light on why, in spite of the intense interest shown in that war, the divergence of opinion between readers and the official view of the paper did not produce a more widespread conflict between the papers and their public. The indications are that the majority of the readership was hardly aware that any difference in viewpoint existed. During the later thirties, the circulation of the leading conservative newspapers continued to increase. In fact, in the course of 1938, the circulation of the quality press grew more than that of other newspapers. At the time PEP concluded, "the continued daily circulation of the eight principal class newspapers during the past few months apparently for the first time in history reached approximately one million."²⁶ When considering this statistic, it must be remembered that the bulk of the 'class newspapers' was, indeed, conservative.

Such was the public perception of the Civil War that it resulted in a great deal of voluntary activity in support of the Spanish Republic. Most of the practical support generated in Britain in aid of the Republic was of a humanitarian kind: "it was to become the most widespread and the most representative mass movement in Britain since the mid-nineteenth century and the most outstanding example of international solidarity in British History."²⁷ 'Aid Spain' Committees dedicated to humanitarian relief sprang up all over the country. The intense outburst of humanitarian sympathy and support in aid of the Republic was, of course, to prove an embarrassment to the British government seeking to improve relations with the Nationalist authorities. The evacuation of Basque children to Britain in 1937, for example, was opposed by the Nationalist Government,

which sought their repatriation. Moreover, at the end of the war, public pressure mounted on the government to rescue large numbers of Spanish Republicans who were at grave risk once Franco had completed his conquest of Republican territory. This again was something, which of course, the British government was most unwilling to do. When the matter was discussed in Cabinet, Chamberlain remarked that “such action would amount to intervention.”²⁸ Although public pressure could not force the government to alter its policy, it did impose difficulties for the government in its effort to improve relations with the Nationalist government after the war. Early in April 1939, Halifax attempted to persuade Clement Attlee, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, to moderate his comments on the situation in Spain. Halifax’s lack of faith in his ability to win over either the political opposition or the press was revealed clearly in the following remark: “we must hope that Spain may gradually become less interesting to politicians and press.”²⁹

As Halifax had hoped, once the Civil War was over, Spanish issues featured less prominently in either the news columns or in the editorials. Particularly striking at this time was the absence of any detailed account of atrocities. On April 12th 1939, Philby, *The Times* correspondent, wrote to Ralph Deakin, his superior at Printing House Square, advising him “it would be best not to refer to police work or other horrors in the headlines or in the cross headings.”³⁰ Philby was thus aware of the atrocities, as also was Eugene De Caux, *The Times* correspondent in Madrid during the Civil War. On February 13th, De Caux wrote informing Deakin of a massacre committed by Nationalist Troops at Sta. Coloma de Queralt, in which 250 men, women and children had been massacred by

machine guns.³¹ The government, too, had clear evidence of the atrocities being committed after the War. On June 6th, for example, the ambassador, Sir Maurice Peterson wrote to Halifax giving details of the number of executions being carried out in various parts of Spain, with the ominous addition that “it is generally agreed that the actual number of executions which have taken place greatly exceeds these figures.”³²

The failure of the British press to refer to the mass executions following the fall of Madrid had as much to do with the difficulties of reporting in Spain as with any desire to dampen down criticism of the Franco regime in the interests of Anglo-Spanish relations. Indeed, Philby, in a letter to Deakin, written on August 1st 1939, summed up the problem for journalists working in post war Spain: “there has been no corresponding relaxation of the censorship. Therefore the scope for journalistic work in Spain has been drastically reduced.”³³ A further factor, which affected correspondents such as Philby, was, of course, the extent of the difficulty being experienced by British residents in Spain. Sir Maurice Peterson, in his autobiography, was to refer to the suspicion of the Nationalist authorities towards the British community: “the mere circumstance of British citizenship was enough to make its holder gravely suspect to the authorities.”³⁴ As a result, British subjects were at risk of arbitrary imprisonment.³⁵

In August 1939 Charles Peake, of the News Department, commended the patience of the press with regard to Spain. He expressed his appreciation of the difficulties which British newspapers faced, confronted as they were by a general lack of co-operation from the Spanish authorities. He commended “the considerable caution and care” demonstrated by

British agencies and correspondents “in the difficult task of handling Spanish news.”³⁶ In reality, Peake’s praise was a misleading assessment of the reaction of the British press as a whole towards the Franco regime in the post war period. Even conservative newspapers could be critical towards the new regime in power, in spite of the difficulties that this would pose for Anglo-Spanish relations. On April 3rd, for example, the *Daily Express* had published, as its main article, a piece written by its staff reporter, O.D. Gallagher, recently expelled for the second time by the Nationalist authorities. It is not surprising, therefore, that Gallagher was to write disparagingly of the Nationalists’ food relief of the capital: “it is not difficult to imagine Madrid’s disappointment when Santa Claus in the face of Franco’s conciliation of the population department brought them [madrilenos] loads of lentils and rice.” Unusual for any British national newspaper at the time, the article was open in its description of the post war terror in Spain: “[d]eath, it was announced, was the penalty for all offences from high treason and insulting the Nationalist military down to listening to broadcasts from countries unfriendly to Franco.”³⁷

In the spring and summer of 1939, confidence began to dwindle in the government’s publicly declared assertions that Franco would be no threat to Anglo-French interests. This deterioration in public confidence was exacerbated by the appearance in the conservative press of articles expressing unease at the new regime. Such articles were written with the expressed aim of influencing opinion. For instance, the lead article in the *Daily Express* on May 4th, raised doubts about the stability of Franco’s hold over Spain. The correspondent, Sir Anthony Jenkinson, went as far as to pose the question,

“will General Franco last for only one year?”³⁸ Within a number of conservative papers, there was unease also at the continued presence of Axis power troops in post Civil War Spain. On May 21st the *Observer* commented, “until it can be supplanted by reason, the essential purpose of Italian troops in Spain is the encirclement of France on each of her three land frontiers.”³⁹ In early June, the editorial of the *Yorkshire Post* concluded, “Spain is being used by the Axis powers as a depot for material to be available to them if they should desire to employ the Peninsula as a basis for warlike operations against France and Britain.”⁴⁰ In expressing their concerns so openly, these papers had abandoned any attempt at restraint and were in fact completely disregarding the likely impact on Anglo-Spanish relations.

The Times, and less consistently, the *Daily Telegraph*, whose leader columns supported the British government line on Spain, were not immune from the charge that, they too, were guilty of undermining Anglo-Spanish relations. On April 12th 1939, the *Daily Telegraph*, for example, printed an article by its diplomatic correspondent, which referred to the irritation in British government circles at the continued delay in the return of Italian troops to Italy now that the war in Spain was over. The correspondent wrote, “[i]t cannot be understood why it should be necessary to retain tens of thousands of troops in the peninsula.”⁴¹ On April 14th, the *Daily Telegraph* reported on the tension between Britain and the ‘New Spain’ over the matter of Gibraltar, as a result of which, according to the correspondent: “[t]he frontier is now manned day and night by British troops in full war kit.”⁴² *The Times*, more so than the *Daily Telegraph*, attempted to play down the significance of political developments in the post war Spain, which were increasingly

turning the Franco Regime away from the democracies and towards the Axis. Nevertheless, it too printed reports in the news columns that made clear the diplomatic tension between the democracies and the new Spanish government. On April 12th, for example, a correspondent stated that Italian reinforcements had been arriving at Cadiz.⁴³ On April 14th, an article appeared, written by the correspondent at Hendaye. He wrote that, in spite of the desire for peace among Spaniards, “report[s] that Spaniards are being enrolled in volunteer camps for service commitments to Italy are perhaps more serious than has been realized.”⁴⁴

The difference between newspapers such as *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* on the one hand, and the *Yorkshire Post* on the other, was that the leader columns of the former made no mention of articles in the news columns pointing to the danger to Britain of the new regime in Spain. In fact, from April 1939, Spain ceased to feature in the leader columns of both *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Thus, it could indeed be argued that these newspapers were, as Charles Peake had noted, exercising a form of restraint in particularly difficult circumstances. However, what was regarded in Britain as a form of self-imposed restraint to please the sensitivities of a dictator government, failed to impress the Nationalist authorities. *The Times*, for example, did not fare well in the 'New Spain'. As Philby was to write to Deakin in April, “[a]s far as can be seen, the acceptance of Spanish censorship conditions by The Times during the last years has not altered the official attitude towards The Times as an institution.”⁴⁵ Indeed, following the end of the war, De Caux was not permitted to return as special correspondent to Madrid. Earlier, in February, he had written to Deakin, referring to the suspicion with which he was held in

Nationalist circles. He wrote that Franco's "police will not favour a correspondent with so many contacts. They will naturally prefer a greener hand."⁴⁶ No doubt the failure of self-imposed restraint to produce any tangible benefit influenced Dawson when he wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare in 1940: "it [Spain] is, unlike Portugal, very difficult for The Times to help. The Franco regime has been extremely short sighted about English correspondents and particularly about De Caux."⁴⁷

Post war relations between Britain and Spain were poor, partly as a result of the way in which British newspapers had reported the war. Yet, the realization of this fact by conservative newspapers in general did not prevent them from continuing to undermine relations once the fighting had stopped. Thus the restraint that was exercised by only a few newspapers such as *The Times* availed little if most other papers failed to refrain from expressing frustration and concern with the new regime. Also, this was to create problems for the British government, in terms of domestic as well as foreign policy. In June, for example, Halifax predicted that press coverage of Italian arms being left behind in Spain was likely to exacerbate the opposition within Parliament towards aspects of Spanish policy.⁴⁸ Thus, the divisive impact of the Civil War on British political opinion was evident even after the fighting in Spain had ceased.

Abroad, in Nationalist Spain, Sir Maurice Peterson was made plainly aware of the irritation of the Spanish Government at the way in which it was being represented in the British press. Concerning an interview he had with Serrano Suñer, Sir Maurice wrote, "[h]is Excellency [gave] lengthy tirade against the English press which, he mentioned,

could not be regarded as uncontrolled in the sphere of foreign affairs and Imperial interests.”⁴⁹ Clearly, the Spanish Minister of the Interior, like Hitler and Mussolini before him, was assuming too much regarding the ability of the British government to control the press. As in the earlier case of Germany and Italy, this lack of understanding was to sour relations between Nationalist Spain and the National Government that, ironically, by its policy of Non-Intervention, had done so much to assist the victory of Franco. The futility of the policy of self-imposed restraint practised by most of the conservative press towards the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath was pointed out by the *Yorkshire Post* leader, ‘Spain And The Axis’ on March 28th 1939. The leader challenged the justification for dampening down criticism of the dictators. In its view such policy did not improve relations but was counterproductive: “we shall recover respect, and may later ensure Spanish good will, by demonstrating now that we never were mere cowards and have ceased to be fools.”⁵⁰

It was because the Spanish Civil War occurred at a time when newspapers were still the most influential form of mass media available, that competition arose between various interest groups seeking to influence the way newspapers reported. As demonstrated so convincingly by Cockett in *Twilight of Truth*, the press was also an arena in which the pro and anti-appeasers vied with each other to win the hearts and minds of the British electorate. Yet, while there was, at the time, general agreement that newspapers were influential, there was a misconception of the ways in which newspapers managed to influence their readers. The notion that it was the leader column, especially in the so called ‘class papers’, which was most influential in forming opinion was a

misinterpretation of the influence which this feature actually had. Although as early as 1938, PEP had published evidence that suggested that leader articles were not as influential as had been assumed, it did not seem to change attitudes. Indeed, this report was given very little consideration in the press.⁵¹ This lack of interest by the newspapers was in sharp contrast to their response towards earlier PEP surveys. When Italy, Portugal, Germany or Nationalist Spain complained at their treatment in the British press, their anger was often directed not at leader comment, but by individual articles in the news columns. In spite of this, and in spite of the evidence of the PEP report, the leader column remained the arena chosen by the supporters and opponents of government foreign policy, in order to promulgate their views to the general public. Clearly, those who wished to use the press to fight the contest over British policy had chosen the wrong arena. Thus conservative papers could not be dismissed as “mere fools and cowards”. This was because these newspapers were able to represent a greater diversity of views than most contemporaries realized. As has been demonstrated in chapter one, a myriad of competing pressures, especially the need to work to a very tight time schedule greatly reduced the ability of editors to oversee the content of their papers. In general, newspapers would become aware of the harmful effect of a particular article on international relations only after it had been printed. There simply was not time, on a continual basis at least, for close inspection before going to print. The pro-government conservative newspapers, since they lacked the consensus maintained by the liberal and left press, fuelled a greater diversity of opinion on Spain. Whereas the opposition press was more or less unanimous in its opposition to the Spanish policy of the National Government, only in conservative papers were readers presented with substantial

evidence upon which to form varied opinions on Spain. Thus from reading the same newspaper, a reader could develop sympathy for either the Republican or the Nationalist cause.

This study of the relationship between the government and the press during the Spanish Civil War demonstrates quite clearly that the press, far from being “a reasonably tame creature which could be manipulated” actually resisted government influence.⁵² This resistance took a variety of forms. The dissidence shown by the opposition press and the independent newsletters represented a conscious attempt to oppose the government. Yet, as far as government and press relations were concerned, this was only a part of the problem. A more serious difficulty was that posed by those newspapers, which were loyal to the government. By simply exercising their democratic right to ‘publish and be damned’, they managed both to incur the antagonism of the dictator governments and to turn British public opinion against them. The irony is that there was no intention of harming Britain’s relations with these regimes. Nevertheless, they unwittingly undermined the government’s efforts at appeasement. In the event, the conservative press, despite its closer links with the dominant party in government, proved to be of only limited malleability. The press as a whole remained a loose cannon that the government, despite its best efforts, was never able to restrain.

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- ¹ Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.186.
- ² *Ibid.*, p.187.
- ³ Wickham Steed, *The Press*, p.249, *Postscript, October 14th 1938*. In fact, as we have seen, during the course of 1938 and 1939, the leader columns of the *Yorkshire Post* both alerted its readers to attempts made by the government to influence the editorial line of the paper, and also condemned such activity.
- ⁴ Thompson, *Between The Lines*, p.1.
- ⁵ Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.188.
- ⁶ PRO CAB 23/88 quoted in Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, p.198.
- ⁷ Furthermore, “to suggest that the newsreels were exclusively trivial in content is unfair. Sport may well have been the most popular newsreel topic by far but a good deal of time was also given to foreign affairs and to war in particular”: Aldgate, *British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War*, p.77.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p.58.
- ⁹ Letter from Sir Joseph Ball to Neville Chamberlain, Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/21/8 quoted in Edwards, *The British Government and The Spanish Civil War*, p.198.
- ¹⁰ This cynical manipulation of the public perception of events was appreciated at the time by contemporaries. “*Gaumont British* newsreel has made a new and very dangerous departure from the rule of impartiality, which we are led to believe they have imposed upon themselves, in its presentation of a victim of the Spanish Civil War”, *World Film News* comment in October 1936 quoted in Aldgate, p.62. This was the organ of the documentary film movement, and it was run by John Grierson, Basil Wright and other distinguished filmmakers.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.63.
- ¹² Koestler, *SPANISH TESTAMENT*, p.220.
- ¹³ PRO, 395, 365, P806/18/150. See also letter by Lady Frances Lindsay Hogg to Lord Halifax, December 26th 1938. Lady Frances was a British resident in Nationalist Spain. She lamented the harm done by the British press to the relations between the government of Franco and that of Britain. She was also concerned at the effect which this had on British nationals in Franco held territory, *Ibid* On March 2nd, the Prime Minister was asked in Parliament whether he would consider the introduction of

legislation which would “impose penalties upon the publication of demonstrably false news and which results in anxiety and loss to the business community, stock exchange and general public”: Ibid. In spite of this, the inability of the government to control the press was borne out in the following comment made by the Foreign Secretary, “it would be more difficult to deal with the general tendency for newspapers to be inflammatory”: PRO, CAB 23/100, minutes and conclusions of the Cabinet, July 26th 1939, conclusion 9.

¹⁴ The British Institute of Public Opinion, *What Britain Thinks*, p.20.

¹⁵ Mass Observation poll quoted in Buchanan, *Britain And The Spanish Civil War*, p.23. There are a number of examples, however, which show that Chamberlain’s handling of foreign policy enjoyed widespread support. Opinion polls carried out by the British Institute demonstrate a high level of domestic support for Chamberlain. People were asked concerning their attitude towards Mr. Chamberlain as Prime Minister on the following occasions: October 15th 1938; November 19th 1938; December 17th 1938; January 14th 1939; February 18th 1939; March 22nd 1939. On each occasion the ‘yes’ vote was higher. On the matter of whether the respondent supported the foreign policy of the government, 74% replied in favour in February 1939. However, in spite of the support for ‘appeasement’, more than half of those in favour believed that it would allow Britain time to rearm. Therefore, in contrast to Chamberlain’s belief, a majority did not believe that it could prevent war in the long term, see *What Britain Thinks*, p.20. Since 1938, the *News Chronicle* had acquired the exclusive rights of publishing the findings of the British Institute. Interestingly enough, “Layton refused to publish in the *News Chronicle* in the wake of Munich [a poll] revealing that 86% of the population did not believe Hitler’s protestations that he did not have any more territorial ambitions”: Cockett, *Twilight of Truth*, p.190.

¹⁶ This statistic is taken from D.P.F. Lancien, *British Left-Wing Attitudes to the Spanish Civil War* (B.Litt. thesis, University of Oxford, 1965), appendix 1, quoted in Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p.23.

¹⁷ British Institute of Public Opinion, ‘What Britain Thinks’, p.19. Buchanan refers to the same poll, however his figures are not accurate. He suggests that in January 1939, the support for the Republic was 71%, compared with 10% for Franco: Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p.32.

¹⁸ Jim Fyrrh, *The Signal Was Spain, The Aid Spain Movement in Britain 1936-39* (London, 1986), p.33. However the figures quoted here are challenged. According to Buchanan, in October 1938 only 48% of the supporters of the Conservative dominated government backed the Republic, but this rose to a striking 64% in January 1939”: Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p.24. Margach, writing from the perspective of someone who had lived during the years of the Civil War, claimed that “this was the first time that these essentially middle class groups and the army of

students had come together with the mass movements of the left in a national rising for a common cause. In social and political terms, this marked a major realignment of class and social loyalties and identities, for here were the new young generation of men from public schools, universities and middle class homes eager to link arms in a shared idealism with the working classes. The scale and intensity of the idealism proved overwhelming, the more so when one realizes that the same forces from the identical class and social backgrounds had eagerly co-operated solidly against the workers in the General strike of 1926 in order to smash trade union solidarity”: Margach, *The Anatomy of Power*, p.100.

- ¹⁹ Opinion polls on Spain would suggest that public opinion was at odds with the view held in governmental circles. However, “[t]he questions posed dealt in generalities of sympathy rather than practical policy, apart from one occasion in February 1938 when 78% supported ‘direct retaliatory measures against Franco’s piracy’. Crucially, there were no polls on the thorny question of non-intervention”: Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p.24.
- ²⁰ McDonald wrote, “[a]t the time it was frequently said, and has often been repeated, that Geoffrey Dawson was intent to cut out anything from foreign despatches which did not fit in with the paper’s editorial commitment to appeasement. My own testimony is that neither before nor after Munich were any of my despatches cut in any way, and they certainly did not bolster the paper’s prestige”: McDonald, *A Man of The Times*, p.38.
- ²¹ Katharine Atholl, *Working Partnership* (London and Edinburgh, 1958), p.208.
- ²² Henry Page-Croft, *My Life Of Strife* (London, 1948)
- ²³ Dawson to Sir Samuel Hoare, August 12th 1940; Templewood papers Volume X111, MISCELLANEOUS. The Templewood Papers are kept in Cambridge University Library.
- ²⁴ Furthermore, “subjective estimates of the number of people who read leading articles need to be treated with especial caution, since many people have the idea that they ought to read leaders, and will say they have even if they have not”: PEP, *Report on the British Press*, p.252.
- ²⁵ Mass Observation, *The Press and its Readers* (London, 1949), p.49, tables 16 and 17. The same survey found, “[t]here is a consistent tendency in every sort of paper for older people to read the editorials more than younger people”.
- ²⁶ PEP, ‘The Press and the Public’, broadsheet number 118, March 8th 1938, p.26. PEP discovered that “[c]lass newspapers as a group sell as many copies

a year as the whole of the British Press sold a century ago, when the population was already nearly half its present size”: *Ibid.*, p.6.

²⁷ For a fuller consideration of the development of the Aid Spain movement in Britain see Fyrth, *The Signal was Spain*.

²⁸ PRO, CAB 23/97, Cabinet minutes, March 8th 1939, Conclusion 3.

²⁹ PRO, FO 371, 24117, W5033/5/41, dated April 8th 1939. Two days previously, Mounsey wrote “there is no doubt in my mind that we are extremely unpopular in Franco’s Spain and will have to be very careful how we deal with that Country during the coming months. Above all we must give up any idea of interfering with Spain’s internal affairs or teaching her lessons in humanity”: PRO, FO 371, 24117, W5033/5/41, dated April 6th 1939.

³⁰ *TNL Archive*, Deakin file; H.A.R. Philby to R. Deakin, April 12th 1939.

³¹ *TNL Archive*, Deakin file; De Caux to R. Deakin, February 13th 1939.

³² PRO, FO 371, 24160, W5056/W5436/5056/41, dispatch from Sir Maurice Peterson, British Ambassador to Spain, June 6th 1939.

³³ *TNL Archive*, Deakin file; Philby to R. Deakin, August 1st 1939. Several months later, De Caux, writing from Biarritz, reported to Deakin a conversation he had had with an American journalist. The American estimated that 6 000 people had been shot in Madrid alone after the War. De Caux wrote that “he had a lot of information which he had no way of conveying to the American public owing to the censorship in Madrid, because if he wrote any uncensored articles in his paper when out, he would surely be expelled on return”: *TNL Archive*, Deakin file; De Caux to Deakin, November 9th 1939.

³⁴ Maurice Peterson, *Both Sides of the Curtain – an autobiography* (London, 1950), p.186.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.187.

³⁶ PRO, FO, 371, 24131, W11367/8/41 – Note by Charles Peake, News Department, August 1st 1939.

³⁷ ‘So They Had To Buy Tube Tickets To Conquer Madrid’, *Daily Express*, April 3rd 1939, p.10. Later, an article titled ‘25 000 Weddings Declared Not Legal’, referred to the annulment of civil marriages carried out under the auspices of the Republic, see *Daily Express*, April 15th 1939, p.1.

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- ³⁸ 'How Long Will Franco Last', *Daily Express*, May 4th 1939, p.8.
- ³⁹ 'The World Week By Week', 'Ceremonial In Madrid', *Observer*, May 21st 1939, p.16.
- ⁴⁰ 'Another Treaty Clause Broken', *Yorkshire Post*, June 6th 1939, p.10.
- ⁴¹ 'Almost An Alliance', *Daily Telegraph*, April 12th 1939, p.13.
- ⁴² 'Franco Troops Arrive Near Gibraltar', *Daily Telegraph*, April 14th 1939, p.15. In fact, there were printed a number of reports which confirmed the continued German influence in post war Spain; 'German Technicians Near Gibraltar Planning Coastal Forts' appeared on April 17th on page 11; 'German Activities Spanish Morocco, Frequent Air Visits By Nazi Technicians' appeared on May 4th on page 1; '10 000 Germans To Stay In Spain, More Arrive This Week' appeared on May 12th on page 15. Henry Buckley, the Madrid correspondent in the years of the Civil War, had been an advocate of the Spanish Republic. Like Liddell Hart, he was critical of the British government for failing to realize how important it was, for British interests, that Franco did not win. It was his view, that the British ruling elite were more concerned with the preservation of selfish, class interests than with national or imperial interests. Regardless of their potential impact on Anglo-Spanish relations, he published his views in a book about his experiences in Spain: Henry Buckley, *Life and Death of the Spanish Republic* (London, 1940)
- ⁴³ 'Anxiety Over Spain', *The Times*, April 12th, p.10.
- ⁴⁴ 'Talks Of Peace In Spain', *The Times*, April 14th 1939, p.14. The next day the Paris correspondent, reporting on both the visit by German warships to Spanish waters and on the reports of Spanish military activity in the areas around Gibraltar, Navarre and Guipuzcoa, wrote that all of these developments "have combined to arouse anxiety": 'Activity In Spain', *The Times*, April 17th 1939, p.12. Also on that day, the diplomatic correspondent wrote, "[e]vidence grows about the large amount of German equipment that has come to naval ports in the north west coast of Spain and to the aerodromes": 'Guards Battalion For Gibraltar', p.12. Just under two months later, the Rome Correspondent wrote that "news suggests that agreement has been reached in principle on the relations to be established by treaty between Spain and the Axis powers": 'Spain And The Axis', *The Times*, June 14th 1939, p.13.
- ⁴⁵ *TNL Archive*, Deakin file; Philby to R. Deakin, April 12th 1939.
- ⁴⁶ *TNL Archive*, 'Internal Memos'; E.G. De Caux to R. Deakin, February 23rd 1939. Moreover, Sir Maurice Peterson was greatly concerned at the decision of the Nationalist authorities to expel De Caux, see Peterson, *Both Sides of the Curtain*, p.184.

⁴⁷ Dawson to Hoare, August 12th 1940; Templewood papers, TEM X111.

⁴⁸ CAB 23/99, Cabinet minutes, June 7th 1939, conclusion seven.

⁴⁹ PRO, FO 371 24160, W708/5985/41, April 20th 1939.

⁵⁰ 'Spain And The Axis', *Yorkshire Post*, March 28th 1939, p.10.

⁵¹ Political and Economic Planning, *How the Press Report was Received*, broadsheet number 120, April 19th 1938, p.12.

⁵² Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War*, p.196. This note has been previously cited in chapter one, see note 21.

Conclusion.

Within the context of the Spanish Civil War, this thesis has aimed to bring together two themes that have been previously separated in the historiography of the British press in the 1930s. The first is the way in which international relations were reported in British newspapers and the second is the pressure exerted upon the press from without. Previous studies have tended to focus on one or other of these. As a result, they have failed to explain why, in the face of so much persistent, often intense official pressure, even those newspapers closely allied to the Conservative dominated government of the day managed, in the view of official and ministerial circles in Britain, to report in a way that acutely irritated the dictator regimes.

Contemporaries who warned the public of the duplicity of much of the press during the later thirties had failed to realise the complexity of the relationship between the government and the press, and the fluidity of newspaper allegiance towards a particular point of view advocated by official sources. Newspapers were not merely the semi-official mouthpieces for the government of the day. Indeed, during the Spanish Civil War, the conservative press engaged in a dialogue with the government. Analyses of the leader columns of these journals suggest that very strongly. It is shown in their often ambiguous or even contradictory nature. On one hand support was being offered to the official line, but what was also being expressed was the limitation of the paper's tolerance towards what it considered to be the inactivity of the government. Even modern historians appear to have taken at face value the damning indictments of the supposedly compliant press made by Wickham Steed in 1938.¹

There is a consensus among historians that the Spanish Civil War had a particularly divisive impact upon British society as a whole. However, there has been no acknowledgement of the destabilising effect of the war on Conservative circles. In fact, it would be quite wrong to assume, as has been the tendency among historians, that opinion was divided along predictably partisan lines. The most detailed study to date of Conservative attitudes was made nearly thirty years ago by Denys Thompson in *The Anti Appeasers*. In the chapter devoted to the Civil War, he asserted that the Conservative parliamentary Party was more united on this than on any other issue of foreign policy.² However, as I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis, conservatism was more than the party in Parliament. It represented a broad-based coalition, of which the extra-parliamentary wing represented in the press and in the constituencies was a vitally important part. In the absence of a coherent ideology binding the various parts of this coalition together, newspapers had a vital role to play in interpreting the Conservative world view, independently of direction from party headquarters. In fact, in the years preceding the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, independent conservatism emerged as a distinct force within the press.

The British Conservative movement was particularly prone to division over the Spanish Civil War, an issue that was as controversial as it was long lasting. As we have seen, the attempt to put pressure on conservative newspapers to adopt the official line on Spain served to sharpen the political debate over what conservatism meant. The greater the official pressure on proprietors and editors to conform, the greater was the likelihood of serious conflict developing between conservative newspapers and the Conservative political hierarchy. That is why, during the course of 1938-9, opposition was particularly strong from those two newspapers that were especially

under pressure to toe a particular line; namely the *Yorkshire Post and Truth*. Yet there has been no previous consideration of how the Civil War highlighted the instability of conservatism as an ideology. From the beginning, ministers and officials realised that any consensus of support for Non-Intervention, even from its natural allies within the press, depended on newspapers upholding the illusion, created in official circles, that Britain was neutral. In short, newspapers were required to down play any partisan attachment they might have for the rival factions in Spain. But, as we have seen, this was not possible even from within the ranks of the conservative press. Moreover, the Civil War had a profound impact on the meaning of independent conservatism. During the premiership of Baldwin, whose political leanings were towards the centre-left of the party, independent conservatism was represented strongly in the right wing press.³ Furthermore, it was ideological; overt support for Franco reflected the hostility of the right towards the supposed communist threat. However, Chamberlain who, as Prime Minister, attempted to impose a narrower, more ideological consensus on the press, was indirectly responsible for a redefinition of independent conservatism. In effect, it lost its ideological identity, as the new opponents found common cause with the liberal/left wing opposition against the policy of Chamberlain.⁴

Circles close to the government's way of thinking had correctly assumed that the way in which British newspapers reported, particularly on the actions of the fascist dictators, had a direct bearing on Britain's relations with them. The relationship between the government and the conservative press during the years of the Spanish Civil War highlights the dilemma faced by the Conservative political establishment. It was not possible to achieve an agreed voluntary suppression of news and views, which would satisfy those governments Britain was trying to appease. The effect of

this on international relations has been a neglected area. In fact, the dictators, used to nothing but unstinting praise from their own papers, could not accept even mild criticism in the British press as anything other than officially sanctioned. In this, of course, the role of conservative newspapers was particularly important, given the widely accepted view abroad that they were particularly close to government circles in Britain. Attempts to influence the media to support what was in effect a partisan line on Spain, favourable to the government of the day, raises issues of the role of the state in a democratic society, where the freedom of expression is a vital component of the open and democratic dialogue between government and people. However, the governments of Baldwin and Chamberlain were not averse to attempting authoritarian methods to bring the media to heel. In the wake of the Munich conference, Central Office, by exerting pressure through the constituency associations, brought pressure to bear on those persistent opponents of appeasement in the parliamentary party.⁵ Therefore, only from within its press could a Conservative critique of national policy be mounted with any consistency. The assumption has been that the level of support that newspapers gave to Chamberlain demonstrated them to be increasingly out of step with their readers. Yet, the persistence of criticism of Spanish policy, even during the months following the ending of the war, suggests this was not the case. Newspapers reflected the shift in attitudes among the conservative constituency as a whole towards the Civil War. Conservative political pre-eminence in the 1930s was based on maintaining its appeal as a party of the centre ground rather than tied to a narrow ideology.⁶ Support for Franco was always associated with factions on the ideological and right wing of the party, which viewed the struggle as another example of the ongoing fight between left and right. Support for the Spanish Republic was to become increasingly acceptable in moderate conservative circles because it was non-

ideological. Yet the survival of the Spanish Republic could even be equated with aspects of British nationalism associated with right wing attitudes, tenets such as defence of national prestige and of maritime supremacy, the security of the Empire and even Britain's status as a great power.⁷ Hence, the consensus maintained by the government and its press allies was attacked precisely because, in the view of the independent conservative press, it failed to appreciate fully the real threat to national and imperial security. Indeed, as a consequence of the Civil War the political division between left and right became blurred. This was because the more strongly pro-Republican liberal and left press also attacked Chamberlain for a weak foreign policy on Spain.

In conclusion, a factor that previous studies have failed to address is the potential for damage possessed by conservative newspapers, for they too managed to offend the sensitivities of the dictators. As Chamberlain himself acknowledged, his policy of appeasement stood far greater chance of success with Mussolini than with Hitler. e, His own political preferences made him confident of establishing very good relations with Franco. Yet, following the end of the Civil War, neither Franco nor Mussolini was well disposed towards Britain. Why should this be so, given Chamberlain's willingness to tolerate blatant Italian transgressions of the Anglo-Italian and Non-Intervention agreements, actions which had done so much to aid the victory of Franco's cause in Spain? The answer would lie in no small part to the role played by the British conservative press and its impact on international relations. Why could not even the conservative newspapers co-operate more effectively in the task of appeasement? Indeed, these newspapers showed less caution, even sympathy towards both Italy, especially in 1937, and Nationalist Spain, than towards either Portugal or

Nazi Germany. But the extent of the military intervention of Italy on behalf of its Spanish protégé and the manner in which Franco fought the war made it much harder for newspapers even to appear sympathetic to either.⁸

Apologists for the role of the British government during the Civil War have asserted that if the Republic had won the Civil War then, after the fall of France, the Germans would have invaded Spain and closed the Mediterranean to British shipping. However, what this argument fails to consider are the potential political ramifications for Italy and Germany in the defeat of the Nationalist cause to which they had committed their regimes. An invading German army would have discovered, as had Napoleon a century earlier, that Spain is a most difficult country to subjugate. If three years of civil war had exhausted that country materially, it had also created a huge number of experienced war veterans. An attempted conquest of Spain would have extended German commitments in the west, thus diverting resources from the central goal in Hitlerite expansionist policy. This was the conquest of the Soviet Union, which by 1939 was surpassing Germany in terms of military-industrial capacity. By June 1940 the implications of the failure of Chamberlain's policy towards Franco and Mussolini were finally being realised. With the fall of France imminent, Italy at last joined the war on the side of Germany. With German domination of continental Europe secure, Spanish neutrality under Franco, even after three years of civil war, was in doubt. The nightmare scenario which had been played out in the leader columns of the *Yorkshire Post* and *Truth*, which echoed the fears expressed earlier by Liddell-Hart and by even the cautious King-Hall, appeared to be unfolding.

¹ Wickham Steed, *The Press*.

² Neville Thompson, *The Anti Appeasers, Conservative Opposition To Appeasement In The 1930s* (Oxford, 1971), p.116

³ The 'New Conservatism' as defined by Baldwin in the mid 1920s reflected the party's traditional late 19th century Disraelian 'one nation' reformist traditions; hence the emphasis was on transcending class differences, see Stuart Ball, *The Conservative Party And British Politics 1902-1951* (New York, 1995), p.80.

⁴ The divisive impact of the Civil War on the conservative press has been considered especially in chapter two.

⁵ The precarious position of the Conservative Members of Parliament who opposed Chamberlain is summed up by Thompson; he asserted that but for the outbreak of war in September 1939, they would have most likely have been deselected by their constituency associations in advance of the General Election that was likely to be held that year; N. Thompson, *The Anti Appeasers*, p.200.

⁶ However, what has not been considered are the implications in the changes to the Conservative constituency in the years prior to 1936 on undermining consensus towards the Spanish Civil War. Historians have tended to assume that conservative attitudes towards the conflict were overwhelmingly dictated by narrow right wing, ideological considerations.

⁷ Within the ranks of the Conservative parliamentary Party, one of the staunchest advocates of the Spanish Republic was the Duchess of Atholl. What made her standpoint surprising was her former advocacy of right wing causes in foreign and imperial affairs.

⁸ Even though, on the whole, the British conservative press treated Germany with more caution. The view of the British ambassador was "it [the press] handicapped my attempts in 1937 and 1938 to contribute to the improvement of Anglo-German relations.": Neville Henderson, *Failure Of A Mission: Berlin 1937-1939* (London, 1940), p.65.

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FO 800, Miscellaneous Correspondence

FO 954, The Avon papers

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(iii) The Bodleian Library, Department of Western Manuscripts.

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The Hemming papers

The Iredell family papers

The Mann papers

(iv) Cambridge University Library

The Baldwin papers

The Sir Leo Chiozza Money papers

The Dr. Helen Grant papers

The Templewood papers

(v) Churchill College Cambridge Archives Centre

The Chartwell papers

The Halifax papers

The Hore-Belisha papers

The Aubrey Leo Kennedy Journal

The Vansittart papers

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Daily Telegraph July 18th 1936 - May 31st 1939

Sunday Times July 19th 1936 - June 11th 1939

Observer July 19th 1936 - June 11th 1939

- (ii) All of the issues for the following newsletters were consulted between the following dates.

Whitehall Letter February 15th 1938 - June 8th 1939 [issues 7, 32, 35 are missing]

The Arrow January 6th 1939 - June 16th 1939

- (iii) Between the dates indicated a selection of issues from the following newspapers were consulted.

Evening Standard July 22nd 1936 - August 22nd 1936.

Daily Express

Over a hundred issues were consulted between the following dates:

July 30th - August 31st 1936
February 16th - 24th 1937
April 12th - 16th 1937
May 7th - 22nd 1937
June 23rd - July 31st 1937
August 2nd - 19th 1937
September 6th - 23rd 1937
October 14th - November 9th 1937
March 16 - 17th 1938
May 12th 1938 - July 6th 1938
August 12th - 23rd 1938
February 14th - 28th 1939
March 9th - 10th 1939
April 1st - 15th 1939
May 1st - June 5th 1939.

Daily Herald

Over a hundred issues were consulted between the following dates:

August 3rd - 31st 1936
February 16th - 20th 1937
April 12th - 16th 1937
May 8th - 25th 1937
June 23rd - 30th 1937
July 2nd - 31st 1937
August 6th - 8th 1937
September 6th - 22nd 1937
October 14th - 28th 1937
November 4th - 9th 1937
March 17th - 26th 1938
June 1st - July 6th 1938
February 15th - March 10th 1939

Daily Mail

Over two hundred issues were consulted between the following dates:

July 20th - August 31st 1936
November 19th - 24th 1936
December 10th - 21st 1936
January 9th - 15th 1937
February 8th - 23rd 1937
March 20th - 31st 1937

April 7th -31st 1937
May 4th - 24th 1937
June 4th - July 31st 1937
August 7th -28th 1937
September 2nd -22nd 1937
October 14th - November 9th 1937
January 8th - 26th 1938
February 1st - 21st 1938
March 16th - April 16th 1938
May 26th - June 30th 1938
July 1st -29th 1938
August 8th -20th 1938
October 5th -November 3rd 1938
December 21st -30th 1938
January 3rd - 28th 1939
February 14th -28th 1939
March 1st - 29th 1939

Manchester Guardian

Over two hundred and ten issues were consulted between the following dates.

July 27th - August 29th 1936
November 18th - 26th 1936
December 10th -15th 1936
January 11th - 13th 1937
February 8th - 20th 1937
March 22nd -31st 1937
April 7th -31st 1937
May 3rd - 24th 1937
June 4th - 30th 1937
July 2nd - 31st 1937
August 18th -28th 1937
November 5th - 9th 1937
January 7th - 26th 1938
February 1st - 23rd 1938
March 16th - April 16th 1938
May 13th - 31st 1938
June 1st - July 28th 1938
August 9th -23rd 1938
October 4th - November 22nd 1938
December 1st - 31st 1938
January 3rd -27th 1939
February 13th - 28th 1939
March 1st - 29th 1939
April 5th -15th 1939
May 3rd - 25th 1939.

Morning Post

Over a hundred issues were consulted between the following dates:

July 18th -August 31st 1936
November 15th 1936 - December 21st 1936
January 9th -15th 1937
February 8th - 23rd 1937
March 20th -31st 1937
April 7th -20th 1937
May 8th -26th 1937
June 4th -24th 1937

News Chronicle

About one hundred issues were consulted between the following dates:

August 20th -31st 1936
February 16th -23rd 1937
April 12th - 16th 1937
May 7th - 24th 1937
June 23rd - 28th 1937
July 2nd - 31st 1937
August 6th - 18th 1937
September 6th - 22nd 1937
October 14th - November 5th 1937
March 17th -25th 1938
June 1st - July 6th 1938
August 12th - 23rd 1938
February 16th -27th 1939
March 1st -10th 1939

Truth

About seventy issues were consulted between the following dates:

July 22nd - December 31st 1936
February 10th - March 24th 1937
May 5th - June 16th 1937
July 7th - 21st 1937
September 8th -29th 1937
October 20th - November 10th 1937
January 12th - February 9th 1938
April 20th - June 29th 1938
June 15th - 29th 1938
August 3rd - 24th 1938
September 7th - 28th 1938
December 21st - 29th 1938
January 6th - 27th 1939
February 10th -24th 1939

March 3rd - 17th 1939
April 14th - June 23rd 1939

Yorkshire Post

About two hundred and thirty issues were consulted between the following dates:

July 20th - August 31st 1936
November 18th - 24th 1936
December 10th - 22nd 1936
January 9th - 12th 1937
February 8th - 20th 1937
March 20th - 31st 1937
April 7th - 30th 1937
May 1st - 25th 1937
June 23rd - July 31st 1937
August 7th - 31st 1937
September 1st - 22nd 1937
October 5th - November 9th 1937
January 21st - 26th 1938
February 1st - 26th 1938
March 16th - 31st 1938
May 20th - June 30th 1938
August 8th - September 7th 1938
November 2nd - 29th 1938
December 6th - 30th 1938
January 9th - 29th 1939
February 14th - 28th 1939
March 1st - 30th 1939
April 6th - 15th 1939
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