Contemporary European History (2022), page 1 of 17
doi:10.1017/S0960777322000376

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Sketches of Spain: The Role of the Left-Wing Press in Britain, the Netherlands, and amongst Exiled Germans in Recruiting Volunteers for Republican Spain during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939

Samuël Kruizinga and Miriam van der Veen

Universiteit van Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands
S.F.Kruizinga@uva.nl
Universiteit van Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands
m.m.vanderveen2@uva.nl

This article investigates how, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–9), left-wing British, Dutch and German-language newspapers 'recruited' their readers to the cause of the Spanish Republic. Recruitment could consist of donating time, money, social and political capital, or, in extreme cases, actually joining the fighting in Spain. It employs a double comparative approach, analysing recruitment messages attuned to readers in three different national political contexts and cultures produced on behalf of socialist and communist organisations. It argues that different 'sketches of Spain' co-existed, aligned to different domestic political and popular cultures and through different ideological lenses. These different sketches, in turn, were vital in shaping people's expectations of the Civil War, circumscribed the scope for and content of anti-fascist transnational connections made in Spain, and helped foster new understandings of social and political circumstances at home.

Recruiting for the Spanish Second Republic

The uniquely charged global responses to the Spanish Civil War (1936–9) continue to fascinate historians. Exactly why and how support for the Spanish Republic, beleaguered and eventually defeated by a Rebel army supported by Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, materialised, has been the subject of significant debate. This debate has, for decades, focused first and foremost on those who physically joined the war effort from outside of Spain. Members of the Republic's International Brigades (IB) have been described as either far-sighted heroes desperate to stop the rise of fascism before it was too late, or as 'useful idiots' exploited and then abandoned by the Stalinists who headed their ranks and were sent and controlled by the Soviet Union.[1] Most more recent works on the IB and on inter- and transnational solidarity with Spain, however, hold that debates over whether those who supported the Spanish Republic were heroic anti-fascists or agents of Stalin merely rehashes civil war-era propaganda by both belligerent parties. New research has therefore branched out into four areas. Firstly, the

[1] Tony Judt, 'Rehearsal for Evil', *The New Republic*, 225, 11 (2001), 29–35. For a brief overview of historiographical debates on the International Brigades' character and cause, see Ruth MacKay, 'History on the Line: The Good Fight and Good History: The Spanish Civil War', *History Workshop Journal*, 70 (2010), 199–206; Richard Baxell, 'Myths of the International Brigades', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 91, 1–2 (2014), 11–24; Helen Graham, 'Spain Betrayed? The New Historical McCarthyism', *Science & Society*, 68, 3 (2004), 364–69; Robert Stradling, *History and Legend. Writing the International Brigades* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, n.d.), xii–ix.

(long-debated) question of why men and women chose to volunteer has been replaced by a more prosopographic and/or data-driven quest to uncover the salient characteristics of the various national contingents of the International Brigades (e.g. age, Communist Party membership, military experience).[2] Secondly, historians have increasingly analysed the Spanish battlefields as sites of transnational connection and solidarity, as well as strife and conflict, both amongst the different contingents of IB volunteers and between the IB and the Spanish troops, impacting personal trajectories and often producing political and/or strategic effects.[3] Thirdly, historians of North and South American political culture in the 1930s and beyond have pointed to the Spanish Civil War as providing models for a culture war in which proponents of conservatism, strong government, order and traditional values identified with the Rebels, whilst those who argued for renewal, (radical) democracy, separation of church and state, and a more radical socio-economic policy aligned themselves politically and culturally with the Second Spanish Republic.[4] Finally, the history of the International Brigades has been incorporated in analyses of wider transnational volunteering, in which historians as well as political and social scientists try to find commonalities amongst the complex interactions of push-and-pull factors involved in each individual foreign fighter's decision to join the fighting. Historian Nir Arielli, for one, has argued persuasively that central to any foreign fighter's decision to join a far-away war is a quest for meaning: an honest belief that (s)he can and therefore should try to make a real difference.[5]

This article builds on all these four strands of recent research. It argues, generally, that in order to understand why people outside Spain took *concrete* steps to support the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, such as donating their time and money, or even making the decision to travel to Spain and fight, we need to better understand the background of their decisions. As Arielli has argued, these decisions are not made in a vacuum. In order for a prospective supporter to 'find meaning' in taking an *active* – potentially dangerous and life-altering – role in a war, conditions need to be met. These conditions are, on the one hand, emotional and personal.[6] But that is not enough. The Spanish Civil War also needed to present itself as a worthy cause, one worth taking risks and sacrificing for. In a sense, potential volunteers needed first to be recruited to the Republican cause, in the hopes that mere sympathy would be transformed into some sort of political, financial, and/or material support. This process, we argue, consisted of several steps. First people needed information about the war in Spain, the Spaniards, the Republic and the International Brigades. Likewise, they needed to define the enemy that the Spaniards and their allies in the International Brigades were

[2] Examples include Nic Ulmi and Peter Huber, *Les combattants suisses en Espagne républicaine (1936–1939)* (Lausanne: Ed. Antipodes, 2001); Rémi Skoutelsky, *L'espoir guidait leurs pas: les volontaires français dans les Brigades internationales 1936–1939* (Paris: Grasset, 1999); Richard Baxell, *Unlikely Warriors. The British in the Spanish Civil War and the Struggle against Fascism* (London: Aurm Press, 2014).

[3] E.g. Fraser Raeburn, '"The Surest of All Morale Barometers": Transnational Encounters in the XV International Brigade', *Contemporary European History*, 31, 1 (2022), 85–99; Samuël Kruizinga, '"For Your Freedom and Ours!": Transnational Experiences in the Spanish Civil War 1936–39', in Robert Gildea and Ismee Tames, eds., *Fighters across Frontiers. Transnational Resistance in Europe 1936–48* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 12–30; Jorge Marco and Maria Thomas, '"Mucho Malo for Fascisti": Languages and Transnational Soldiers in the Spanish Civil War', *War & Society*, 38, 2 (2019), 139–61; Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War. Solidarity and Suspicion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[4] Kirsten Weld, 'The Spanish Civil War and the Construction of a Reactionary Historical Consciousness in Augusto Pinochet's Chile', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 98, 1 (2018), 77–115; Kirsten Weld, 'The Other Door: Spain and the Guatemalan Counter-Revolution, 1944–54', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 51, 2 (2019), 307–31; Ariel Mae Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

[5] See e.g. Nir Arielli, *From Byron to Bin Laden: A History of Foreign War Volunteers.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Marcello Flores, 'Foreign Fighter Involvement in National and International Wars: A Historical Survey', in Andrea de Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen, eds., *Foreign Fighters Under International Law and Beyond* (The Hague: T.M.C. Asser, 2016), 27–47; David Malet, *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civil Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Roberts, *'Freedom, Faction, Fame, and Blood': British Soldiers of Conscience in Greece, Spain and Finland* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

[6] Arielli, *From Byron to Bin Laden*, 67–92.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fighting. Since Spain was a country spoken of, in most other countries, only in the broadest of strokes and cliches, stressing the urgency of the conflict was no mean feat. This urgency also needed to be immediate. Therefore, a connection needed to be forged between 'them' in Spain and 'us', bridging the considerable physical and emotional distances that separated the Spanish Civil War and its participants from the locales where their supporters could be found. This was done by placing the civil war in a 'glocal' explanatory framework incorporating both the war, wider European and international events, and the political, social and cultural environments of the readers, as well as the reciprocal relationships between them.[7]

Newspapers played vital roles in this process. As David Deacon and Tom Buchanan have argued, newspapers infused their reports on the Spanish Civil War with 'deeply politicised views of the conflict and its wider significance'. The socio-political leanings and the 'mental framework' of the newspapers' intended audiences affected the ways the conflict in Spain was presented.[8] Building on their work, we argue here that newspapers are prime sites for recruitment messages, but that these messages needed to be attuned to the various audiences they aimed to reach. This article specifically looks at recruitment messages in various left-leaning newspapers in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, as well as in materials printed for the benefit of the German exile community in Paris, a key destination for those who had fled political persecution at the hands of the Nazi government, in order to study what recruitment messages reached different audiences. We employ a double comparative approach, focusing not only on different glocal frames employed to stress the connection and the urgency between readers in three very different national political contexts and cultures, but also on written sources produced for or on behalf of different political audiences or parties, all with subtly different agendas when it came to soliciting support for Spain.

For the United Kingdom, we have studied the 1936–9 editions of the *Manchester Guardian*, a liberal-leaning paper friendly to the Republican cause; the Labour-supporting *Daily Herald*; and the *Daily Worker*, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). For the Netherlands, we have read through the Spanish Civil War years editions of the Communist Party of the Netherlands newspaper *De Tribune,* renamed *Het Volksdagblad* ('The People's Newspaper') in 1937; *Het Volk* ('The People'), closely affiliated with the Dutch Social Democratic Worker's Party; and the biweekly *Afweerfront* ('Defence Front'), published by a pro-Republican, anti-fascist organisation secretly affiliated with the Communist Party but addressing a different sector of the public than the Dutch CP's official outlets. For Germany, we looked at the *Neuer Vorwärts*, a Paris-based weekly newspaper affiliated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany, as well as the *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, printed in Paris and Prague by the German Communist Party; the *Deutsche Tage-Buch*, a liberal anti-fascist newspaper published in the Netherlands but distributed in France; and the *Socialistische Warte*, printed in Paris by the *Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund*, a left-wing socialist party. In most cases, we have searched for relevant articles in digital newspaper repositories that have been made machine-readable through OCR using the keywords 'Spanish Civil War' OR Franco OR 'International Brigades' (or their equivalents in Dutch and German), and the date range 1 July 1936–30 April 1939. In cases where digital and/or machine readable versions were not available (e.g. *Afweerfront*, *Neuer Vorwärts* and the *Deutsche Volkszeitung*) we have manually selected relevant articles. The resulting corpus of materials we have read through in its entirety, selecting therefrom examples (or 'sketches') we felt best exemplify the themes, languages and images found in the newspaper coverage of the entire Spanish Civil War period.[9]

[7] Our use of the term 'glocal' is inspired by Robert Gildea and Andrew Tompkins, 'The Transnational in the Local: The Larzac Plateau as a Site of Transnational Activism since 1970', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50, 3 (2015), 581–605.

[8] David Deacon, *British News Media and the Spanish Civil War: Tomorrow May Be Too Late* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 1–2 ('deeply politicised…wider significance'); Tom Buchanan, '"A far away country of which we know nothing"? British Perceptions of Spain and Its Civil War, 1931–1939', in Tom Buchanan, ed., *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2007) 1–22, there 1.

[9] Cf.: for a comparable methodology focused on understanding the Jewish press in Paris's framing of the Spanish Civil War see Gerben Zaagsma, *Jewish Volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 61–73.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Dramatis Personae

To begin our efforts to compare and contrast recruitment messages, interpreted broadly, on behalf of the Spanish Republic, this section will highlight how Spain, the Spaniards, the civil war and the various actors involved in it were introduced to various audiences.

In all the newspaper accounts that we have examined, Spain emerges first and foremost as a country out of focus. Readers are afforded glimpses via descriptions and photographs of usually nondescript landscapes as well as photographs in which the picturesque and exotic are often contrasted with scenes of death and destruction. Precise details about where and when battles were fought are surprisingly rare, and when they are given, such information is usually related in some way to what was apparently believed to be the central conflict: the continuing siege of Madrid by the Nationalists and its defence by the Republicans. This emphasis on the situation in and around Madrid has the odd effect of compressing the Spanish Civil War into a single battle for Spain's capital – albeit with several 'sideshows', nearly always explained as relating, in some important way, to the Madrid siege.[10] This might be due, in part, to the fact that most foreign journalists reporting on the war were in Madrid, and it may also have had the effect – desired or not – of making the geography and topography of the conflict significantly easier for their readers to digest.[11] Even those actors we now understand as key individuals in the Spanish Civil War are sketched in broad strokes. A cartoon printed in the *Deutsche Volkszeitung* (see Figure 1) several weeks after the conflict erupted is supposedly a portrait of Rebel *generalissimo* (and future dictator) Francisco Franco, but the man portrayed looks nothing like Spain's future dictator.

Although the Civil War took place in Spain and was fought primarily by Spaniards, the contemporary accounts we studied understand the Spanish not as the protagonists of the story but as bit players. Spanish people, if mentioned at all, usually assume one of two roles. Sometimes, Spanish civilians and soldiers on the Republican side are portrayed as stoic in the face of the horrible violence visited upon them – something the *Neuer Vorwärts* attributes to their 'strong revolutionary temperament', and *Daily Worker* reporter Tom Wintringham to Spain's long history of oppression and violence. But much more frequently, they appear simply as victims. Often the descriptions of Spaniards being victimised by violence seem designed to provoke the reader's outrage; their helplessness reinforces the message that aid and support are urgently needed.[12] The *Volkszeitung*, for example, reports on 23 July 1937 of the 'thousands of women and children' who have already fallen victim to the enemy: they have been 'massacred, maimed, burned alive'.[13] The plight of women and children, specifically, served as a key element in pro-Republican 'atrocity propaganda'. But Spanish men also are denuded of agency: they come across as dedicated and affectionate figures, but mostly lack a understanding of war – an image in keeping with widespread stereotypes casting the Spaniards as an overly emotional, backwards and uncultured people.[14]

Spain, in short, needed help: their women and children needed protection, and their men guidance. Their predicament was all the more important because, as the *Neuer Vorwärts* put it, 'the Spanish people fight not only for themselves, they fight also for the English and French people, they fight for the freedom of Europe'.[15] A uniform interpretation that the Spanish Civil War was a key episode in a

[10] *Neuer Vorwärts*, 13 Dec 1936, 1. See also: Louis Fische, *Why Spain fights On* (London: Union of Democratic Control, s.d.), 26–27.

[11] Lodewijk Petram and Samuël Kruizinga, *De oorlog tegemoet. Nederlanders en de strijd om Spanje 1936–1939* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Atlas/Contact, 2020) 76–82; Buchanan, '"A far away country of which we know nothing"?', 1–22, 4–9; Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil* War (London: Constable, 2008), 25–71.

[12] *Neuer Vorwärts*, 26 July 1936, 2 and 4 Sep. 1938, 2; Tom Wintringham, *English Captain* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., n.d. [1939]), 55.

[13] *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 29 Nov. 1936 5. Cf. *Manchester Guardian*, 23 July 1937.

[14] Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez, 'Introduction: On Hispanophobia and Hispanophila across Time and Space', in Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez, ed., *Literary Hispanophobia and Hispanophilia in Britain and the Low Countries (1550–1850)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 11–45. For a concrete example see William Rust, *Britons in Spain: The History of the British Battalion of the XVth International Brigade* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd. 1939), 19.

[15] *Neuer Vorwärts*, 22 Jan. 1939, 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

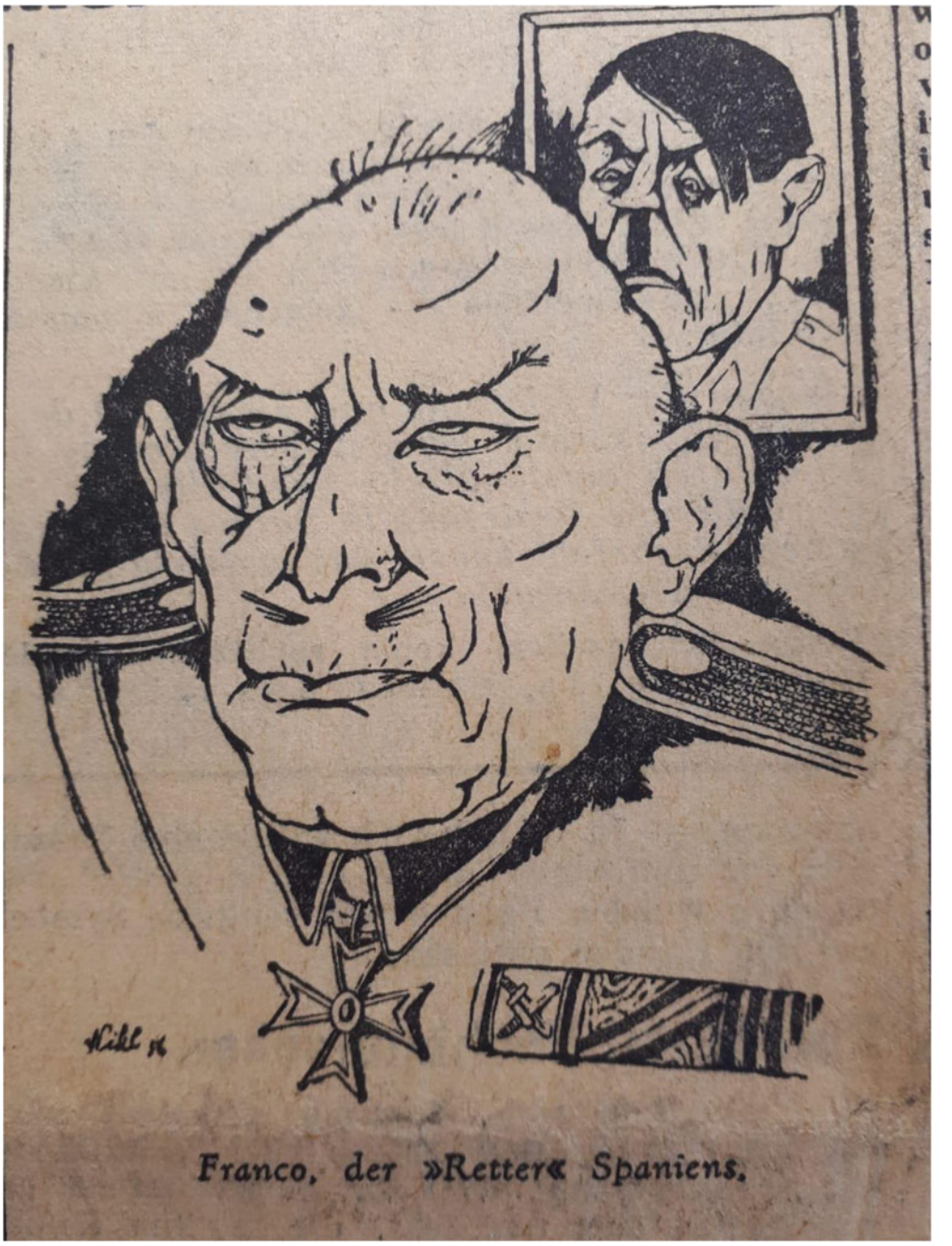

Figure 1. *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 16 August 1936, 1. IISG, DVZ: *Deutsche Volkszeitung* (ZF 1086). 'Franco, the Saviour of Spain', wearing a German uniform, is watched carefully by a picture of Adolph Hitler.

European or even a global fight against fascism permeates nearly every article, brochure and image put out by pro-Republican outlets, parties and newspapers. That the war was taking place in Spain itself was therefore more or less accidental. What was important was the assertion that General Franco and his fascist allies abroad would not win. Moreover, further underscoring national and gender stereotypes was the frequent portrayal of Franco and the entirety of the 'Nationalist' faction as mere

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pawns at the mercy of and beholden to fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Tellingly, the *Deutsche Volkszeitung* cartoon of Franco referred to above (see Figure 1) depicts him wearing a German uniform and an iron cross, a portrait of an approving Hitler visible behind him. But it was not just Franco: Nationalist successes in the field are commonly credited directly or indirectly to German and Italian soldiers, advisors, weaponry and leadership.[16] Italian and German support led to 'the preponderance of arms [being] weighed in favour of the Franco party', writes *Das Neue Tage-Buch*.[17] These arms, which thanks to dedicated foreign technical support could be used with higher levels of technical skill, were unleashed on both the opposing Republican army and the civilian population alike, with devastating effects.[18] Descriptions of the misery thus inflicted by 'German air squadrons'[19] and 'German gas, courtesy of I.G. Farben',[20] resonated especially achingly in the German exile press.

The Italian and German presence was joined by another 'alien' influence active amongst the Nationalists: the Moroccan units of the Spanish 'Army of Africa' fighting alongside Franco. Descriptions of these Moroccans run the gamut: sometimes, they are cast as victims of colonialism, 'deluded' by Franco into Rebel service against their real interests.[21] But more often they appear in racialised stereotype, as hired guns devoid of intrinsic political motivations, or as barbarians let loose to loot, rape and kill as they pleased.[22] Their presence heightened the impression that the conflict had more in common with a foreign invasion than a civil war.[23] In late 1936 the *Neue Tage-Buch*, for example, hailed the role played by the Republican defenders of Madrid against 'the Italian-German-Moroccan onslaught'. In fact, the vast majority of Franco's troops were Spanish; by the end of the war, some 1.2 million Spaniards had volunteered or had been conscripted in his armies, which were supported by some 80,000 Italians, 20,000 Germans, 10,000 other volunteers from elsewhere in Europe and 75,000 troops from Spanish Morocco fighting with Franco's forces.[24]

Another commonality amongst all the publications we examined, but most evident in the leftist newspapers, is a notable drop-off in articles about the Spanish Civil War from about mid-1937 until January 1939. The weekly *Neuer Vorwärts*, for example, dedicated forty-two articles to reporting on and editorialising about the war in the twelve months following July 1936, compared to only eighteen from July 1937 up until the end of the war. Similarly, the Dutch communist daily *De Tribune*/*Het Volksdagblad* carried 462 articles on the Spanish Civil War during the second half of 1936,[25] 782 during the first half of 1937[26] and a comparatively paltry 347 during that year's second half. For the Labour-supporting daily *Het Volk*, the article count stands at 552 for the second half of 1936, 182 for the first half of 1937, and 83 for its second half, and for the *Daily Worker* 231, 488 and 284 respectively. This reduction can be explained by the framing of the conflict in all these newspaper. During its first year, it was portrayed as the story of the Republic's unexpected resistance against an all-out assault by the insurgents, as epitomised in the continuing defence of Madrid. What followed was described as a period of Republican consolidation and the build-up of a proper military force during a time when

[16] Example: *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Oct. 1937, 17.
[17] *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, 2 Apr. 1938, 3.
[18] *Daily Herald*, 14 Aug. 1936, 1.
[19] *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, 8 May 1937, 15.
[20] *Deutsche Volkszeitung*, 11 July 1937, 1.
[21] *Daily Worker*, 22 July 1938, 2.
[22] Jef Last, *Brieven uit Spanje* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact 1936), 10.
[23] E.g. *Daily Worker*, 25 Sep. 1936, 1; *Daily Herald*, 22 Aug. 1936, 8.
[24] James Matthews, '"Our Red Soldiers": The Nationalist Army's Management of its Left-Wing Conscripts in the Spanish Civil War 1936–9', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45, 2 (2010), 344–63, 346–47; Ali Al Tuma, 'Franco's Moroccans', Contemporary European History, 29, 3 (2020), 282–84; James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 152–53. On Franco's foreign volunteers, see Christopher Othen, *Franco's International Brigades: Adventurers, Fascists, and Christian Crusaders in the Spanish Civil War* (London: Hurst & Company, 2013) and Judith Keene, *Fighting for Franco: International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War 1936–39* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001).
[25] From 1 Aug. 1936 up to and including 31 Dec. 1936.
[26] From 1 Jan. 1937 up to and including 31 July 1937.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the insurgents were making real but ultimately unimportant military gains. In combination with the rather vague interposition of battles and skirmishes onto the real geography of Spain, this characterisation of the latter phase of the war gave the impression that the conflict had become stalemated, which lent the articles written about the war an air of repetitiveness. Only during the war's final months, and especially after the failure of the 1938 Republican offensive at the Ebro, did the war regain a more dramatic quality – the fall of Barcelona on 26 January 1939 in particular highlighted that the Republic was now in dire straits.[27]

Key differences amongst the publications we have analysed – and the way they inform different audiences about the Civil War – emerge, above all, with regard to the importance accorded the Soviet Union. Publications by (crypto-)communists, Communist Party officials and outlets stress the Soviet Union's critical role in the war. As part of the Popular Front strategy devised and promulgated by the Communist International (Comintern), headquartered in Moscow, Soviet-affiliated parties pursued a course aimed at forming or joining broad anti-fascist coalitions in order to prevent Hitlerite takeovers – a tactic presented internally as a necessary, intermediate step to establishing classless societies.[28] Publicly, the Soviet Union was hailed as a natural and loyal friend to Spanish democracy, supplying the Republicans with critical aid and assistance. Often such support flagrantly violated the Non-Intervention Agreement of 15 August 1936, which had been signed by most European governments, including the Western democracies, the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy. The accord had been designed to localise the conflict and therefore sought to prevent weapons shipments to any of the belligerent parties.[29] But the agreement was either ignored outright or its breach was rationalised as a necessary response to earlier German and Italian violations or to Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar's decision to allow weapons to be shipped to Franco through Portugal. Non-communist pro-Republican sources adopt a much more critical view of the Soviet Union, suspecting that Stalin had ulterior motives in sending assistance to Spain or that, conversely, his interest in aiding a democracy was half-hearted.[30] As the Dutch socialist daily *Het Volk* opined: 'If the Soviet Union was really that concerned over the fate of the Spanish Republic, she would send massive arms shipments. But she does not.'[31]

Another major difference we find in the treatment of Spain and the Spanish Civil War involves the portrayal of the International Brigades, which, though an integral part of the Spanish Republican Army, had been set up and was led by prominent communists. Naturally, in communist publications, the International Brigades are afforded pride of place. In fact, perusing communist periodicals, one walks away with the impression that the International Brigades were the primary fighting force opposing Franco and the Italian, German and Moroccan forces in Spain – further heightening the impression that the Spanish were bystanders in their own civil war. What is more, these International Brigades are consistently portrayed as consisting of committed anti-fascists from all walks of life (including, but not exclusively consisting of, communists) fighting 'shoulder to shoulder', 'marching together for the same cause'.[32] 'By her composition and her goal', gushes the Dutch *Volksdagblad*, the International Brigades are said to form 'the Brigades of the Popular Front of Europe', fighting on behalf of all its peoples for 'bread, peace and honest labour'.[33] Most anti-communist, majority

[27] *Neuer Vorwärts*, 19 Feb. 1939, 1 and 19 Mar. 1939, 1.

[28] Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 131–42.

[29] Ignacio de la Rasilla del Moral, *In the Shadow of Victoria: A History of International Law in Spain* (Leiden/Boston: Brill Nijhoff, 2018), 224–25.

[30] *Sozialistische Warte*, 1 Jan. 1937, 3–6.

[31] *Het Volk*, 13 Oct. 1936.

[32] *Daily Worker*, 22 July 1936, 1 ('shoulder to shoulder') and 11 Nov. 1936, 1, 5 ('marching'). Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War. Solidarity and Suspicion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 78, suggests that this sense of personal agency in bringing about a better world was, in a sense, a way to recapture something of the idealism and the internationalism of the Russian Revolution.

[33] *Het Volksdagblad*, 3 Dec. 1936.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

socialist periodicals, by contrast, scarcely mention the International Brigades – fearful, perhaps, that an overt focus on illegal transnational volunteering and a fighting force under the formative and continuing influence of the Comintern would tarnish the case of Republican Spain. When the International Brigades are mentioned, as in an interview with one of their members in a September 1937 issue of the *Manchester Guardian*, pains are taken to avoid showing even a hint of sympathy for Stalin or the Communist International. 'I am not a Communist', prefaces the interviewee, 'nor have I any sympathy with the aims and ideals of that party, but I do object to the fascist movement in any shape or form, and, prompted by anti-fascist motives, I decided that I would go to Spain and fight on the side of the Government'.[34]

When it comes to describing the 'what', the 'where' and the 'who' of the Spanish Civil War, the periodicals we have analysed paint a remarkably uniform picture that remains mostly static throughout the entire 1936–9 period. Spain emerges only in soft focus, a place of exotic mystery whose hapless inhabitants are fighting a great and foreign evil. In a very real sense, it mattered little that the Spanish Civil War was being fought *in Spain*; what mattered was that the world had arrived at a chance to stop fascism before it was too late. Two armies do battle: one an invasion thinly disguised as a domestic uprising, the other consisting of mostly faceless Spaniards fighting to preserve their government – in communist variants of the tale, they were led or at the very least were inspired by a mass of international volunteers (in reality, only about 35,000 International Brigades personnel served in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, supporting some 750,000 Spanish troops).[35] In nearly all the periodicals we studied, the stakes are clear: a fascist victory would spell disaster. But how to motivate people to contribute their time, money and/or effort into preventing this disaster from happening, when other matters of concern – nearer and quite possibly dearer to their hearts – also vied for their attention?

Closing the Gap

The previous sections have highlighted how Spain was framed as the almost accidental site of a larger conflict between international fascism and the forces opposing it. But to get people to spend time or money on the Spanish Republican cause, to advocate on its behalf, to participate in clothing or medicine drives, to provide humanitarian relief *in situ* or to volunteer for the Republican army, the Spanish Civil War had to be presented as having immediate, urgent resonance. Within the Dutch and British publications advocating most strongly for support for the Republic via all available means, the danger posed by the victory of Franco and his allies was therefore brought as close to home as possible.

The Dutch pro-Republican magazine *De proletarische vrouw* ('The proletarian woman'), for example, impressed on its readership that '[w]e know the Fascists will not stop with Spain, they will move on to France and then to Holland'.[36] The *Daily Worker*, too, spelled out what was at stake – in less emotive but equally pressing terms. Since Franco's victory would give the fascists a chokehold on the Mediterranean and access to vital raw materials to fuel their future war against the democracies, the defence of Madrid was 'strategically and geographically inseparable from the immediate defence of London'.[37] Exiled Germans, of course, needed no reminders of the threat of fascism. Their homeland was already lost to it, and Spain was now also in danger of becoming a Nazi *Zuchthausstaat* ('prison state').[38] Instead, pro-Republican German publications such as the *Sozialistische Warte* emphasised that a Franco victory in Spain would embolden the Hitler dictatorship at home and place the Axis powers in a position allowing them to start and then to win a Second

[34] *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Sep. 1937, 4.
[35] Daniel Pastro García and Antonio R. Celeda, 'The Victors Write History, the Vanquished Literature: Myth, Distortion and Truth in the XV Brigade', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 89, 7–8 (2012), 307–21, there 311–12; Richard Baxell, 'Myths of the International Brigades', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 91, 1–2 (2014), 11–24, there 11.
[36] Cited in Rob Hartmans, 'Misbruikt idealisme', *Groene Amsterdammer*, 130, 27 (2006), 22–26, 24.
[37] *Daily Worker*, 28 Nov. 1936, 3.
[38] *Neuer Vorwärts*, 13 Dec. 1936, 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

World War.[39] Interestingly, the *Warte* drew parallels between Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland and his support for the Spanish insurrectionary forces: both were supposedly designed to tie down French forces in border regions, making it more difficult for the French to come to the aid of Central European allies, chiefly Czechoslovakia, when Hitler launched plans to conquer *Lebensraum* to Germany's east.[40]

Another crucial difference between Dutch and British pro-Republican outlets on the one hand, and the German *Exil* press on the other, is that amongst the former the intensity of the support for the anti-Franco forces in Spain was bound up with the position taken vis-à-vis the country's own government. In both Britain and the Netherlands, communist outlets scolded their own respective governments for signing and supporting the Non-Intervention Agreement of 1936, which withheld from 'the lawful government of Spain all weapons for its defence' while papering over the reality that 'Germany, Italy and Portugal, despite their signature on the neutrality agreement, continue to send arms to the rebels'.[41] In their unwillingness to force a break with the dictatorships, they saw evidence of incompetence or, worse, a willingness to turn a blind eye towards fascism. In the Netherlands, the communist daily habitually lambasted the country's right-wing coalition government as crypto-fascist, while the *Daily Worker* typified the ruling Conservatives as 'the friend of profiteers and fascists'.[42]

> *The enemy are outside and inside. The sabotage and treachery in Madrid by Fascist officers and others in high places make a sufficiently startling and disgusting story. But they look quite small in comparison with the similar acts of treachery being committed by the British Government and the British ruling class.*[43]

Mainstream socialist parties in both Britain and the Netherlands had a tougher line to walk. In Britain, Labour, despite pressure from a significant number of its (institutional) members, did not denounce non-interventionism, fearing that to do so would play into the hands of communists and would put the party in the same camp as the Soviet Union. In the Netherlands, the Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij*, SDAP) was still feeling the political effects of its failed 1918 attempt to follow the Russian and German examples by starting a revolution. Its party executives argued that its effort to return to the political mainstream would be fatally hampered by undermining the country's support for non-intervention, especially since doing so might be construed as a break with the widely-supported Dutch policy of neutrality. Labour changed its stance in 1937, chiefly due to pressures from below, but the change was also buoyed by Franco's naval attacks on British merchant shipping and by atrocities committed during the Nationalist invasion of the Basque Country. An 8 January 1937 article in the Labour-supporting *Daily Herald*, for example, denounced non-intervention ('the farce of official neutrality towards the civil war in Spain') as 'a scandal and a positive danger to the peace of the world',[44] but its official editorial line on the Non-Intervention Agreement would shift only in autumn 1937, following Labour's about-face. Similarly, the *Manchester Guardian* would occasionally print articles critical of non-intervention, but only officially changed tack in spring 1938, after the Liberal Party altered its position.[45]

In the Netherlands, *Het Volk* more closely toed the party line, echoing the SDAP's position that had the democracies been genuinely serious about stopping Hitler and Mussolini, they would have taken a

[39] *Neuer Vorwärts*, 17 July 1938, 2; 22 Jan. 1939, 1.
[40] *Socialistische Warte*, 15 Aug. 1936, 321–23.
[41] *De Socialistische Gids*, Oct. 1936.
[42] *Daily Worker*, 8 Jan. 1938, 5.
[43] *Daily Worker*, 28 Nov. 1936, 3.
[44] *Daily Herald*, 8 Jan. 1937, 2.
[45] Hugo García, *The Truth about Spain! Mobilizing British Public Opinion 1936–1939* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 204.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

real stance towards Italy's invasion of Ethiopia or Germany's re-militarisation of the Rhineland.[46] While sympathising with the Spanish people, who wanted nothing more than 'peace and democracy',[47] *Het Volk*'s sister magazine, *De Socialistische Gids* ('The Socialist Guide'), argued that their defeat 'would be a new disaster for the cause of democracy, but an ever greater one would be war. That disaster the world would not recover from'.[48] Moreover, the 'leading role' the communists had taken in organising the International Brigades, turning it into a 'gigantic propaganda machine for their cause', meant that armed interference in Spain not only endangered world peace but might also play into the hands of Stalin, an avowed enemy of social democracy.[49] It took until March 1938 for the party to withdraw its support for non-intervention, but only when the International Brigades were withdrawn from Spain in late 1938 did it show any measure of support for those who fought fascism in Spain.[50]

Dutch and British representations also differ in the connections drawn between the Spanish Civil War and issues related to the respective countries' political specificities and histories. In the United Kingdom, for example, reports and editorials on the civil war frequently reference the Great War. They liken the siege of Madrid to that of Verdun in 1916 and hear in the Spanish Republicans' famous rallying cry *¡No pasarán!* an echo of General Robert Nivelle's *Ils ne passeront pas*. More importantly, left-wing representations of the Spanish Civil War invoke the notion, increasingly widespread over the course of the 1930s, that the Great War had been a betrayal. On the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the Armistice in 1938, the *Daily Herald* lamented:

> *Twenty years ago the Great War was raging. Mother's sons from nearly every European country were on the battlefield, or on the high seas, or in the air. (…) It was said to be 'a war to end war' and a war to 'make the world safe for democracy'. (…) It culminated in a disastrous peace, which bore within it the seeds of further war. Not least of the results from the Peace Treaties was Fascism, unscrupulous in opposition and ruthless in power. Democratic Europe has watched the jack-boot of Fascism stride across Europe. It has witnessed the Italian conquest of Abyssinia; Germany's repudiation of the Treaties; and now it sees an engineered revolt by Fascists in Spain.*[51]

A cartoon printed in the *Daily Worker* on Armistice Day (11 November) 1936 was even more sanguine in its suggestion that the rise of fascism and Nazism in Italy, Germany and Spain was the ultimate betrayal of working men's sacrifice during the Great War (see Figure 2). But the communist daily also offered a more positive take on the connection between the Tommys of 1914 and those that were fighting in Spain. While the former had been duped by press barons and government elites, their hearts had been in the right place. Their spiritual successors could finally finish their fight and 'make the world safe for democracy', by halting the fascists before they could start and possibly win a new world war, thereby securing a 'victory for the democratic peoples of the world which would last for all time'.[52]

[46] The League of Nations did impose economic sanctions on Italy, but their half-hearted implementation by several League member states, including Britain and France, fatally undermined their coercive effects. See G. Bruce Strang, '"The Worst of all Worlds": Oil Sanctions and Italy's Invasion of Abyssinia, 1935–1936', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19, 2 (2008), 210–35.

[47] *Het Volk*, 9 Dec. 1936, 2.

[48] *De Socialistische Gids*, Sept. 1936. On Abyssinia and the Rhineland, ibid., Oct. 1936.

[49] *Het Volk*, 22 July 1937.

[50] Pim Griffioen et al., *En gij… wat deed gij voor Spanje? Nederlanders en de Spaanse burgeroorlog 1936–1939* (Amsterdam: Stichting Verzetsmuseum, 1992), 17–18; Margreet Braams, 'Linkse partijen in Nederland en de Spaanse burgeroorlog', in Maarten-Piet van den Berg, Eelco Beukers and Karin van Lierop eds., '*Wat dunkt U van Spanje?*' *Nederlanders en de Spaanse Burgeroorlog 1936–1939* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Skript 1984), 43–66, 44–47; Koen Vossen, 'Nederland en de Spaanse Burgeroorlog', in Hub. Hermans et al., eds., *Een Nederlandse blik op de Spaanse Burgeroorlog/Una mirada holandesa sobre la Guerra Civila española* (Utrecht: Instituto Cervantes, 2006), 20–33, 26–27.

[51] *Daily Herald*, 22 Aug. 1936, 8.

[52] *Daily Worker*, 1 Aug. 1938, 3; *Daily Worker*, 25 Mar. 1937, 3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

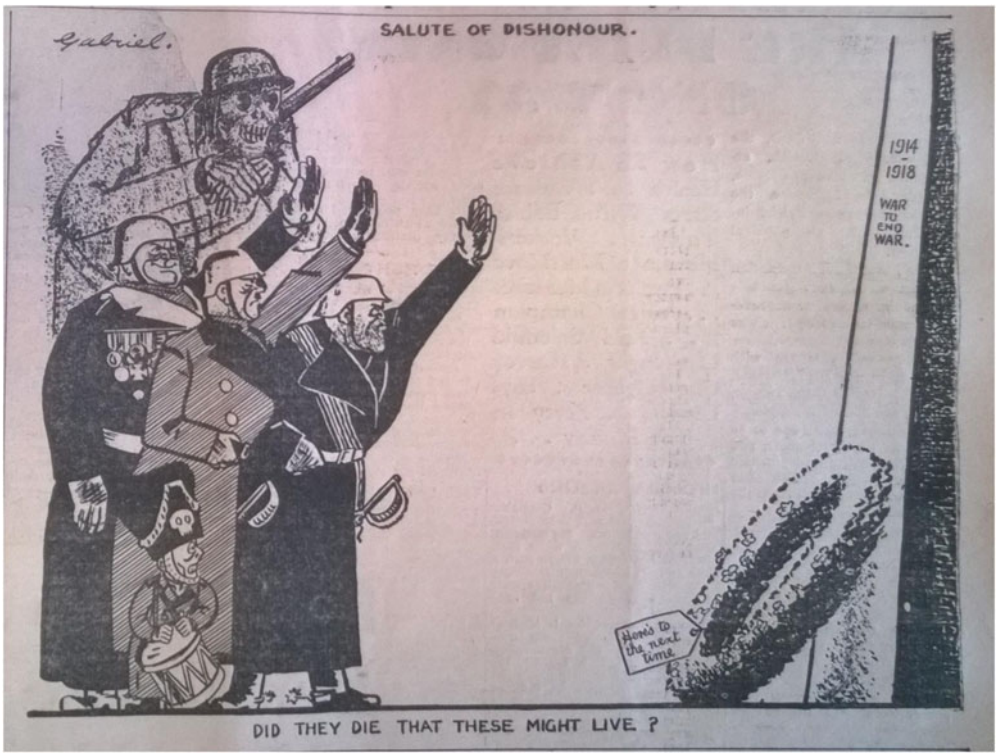

Figure 2. *Daily Worker*, 11 November 1936, 5. 'Did they die that these might live?' Nazis, fascists, Franco-ist rebels and 'death' ironically salute a monument to the Great War dead.

In the Netherlands, meanwhile, the First World War lacked the emotional resonance it possessed in Britain, as the country had not been a belligerent. However, a conflict from a more distant past struck a chord with readers: the Dutch War of Independence (1568–1648) fought against the Spanish Habsburgs, the prime foundational myth of the Netherlands. Since the nineteenth century, popular memory of this war had turned into a righteous crusade of freedom-loving Dutchmen against their backwards, monarchical, cruel Spanish overlords. The Dutch Communist Party – which even before the Spanish Civil War's outbreak had been counselled by Moscow to align itself more closely with Dutch political culture so as to make its Popular Front strategy more palatable – lost no time in presenting the war in Spain as a spiritual successor to the War of Independence. The monthly *Afweerfront* was the first to make the connection. When (rhetorically) asking its readers what came to mind when thinking of Spain, the first response was: 'The Eighty Years' War! Now, it is our turn to fight the invaders [sic!] *in Spain*'.[53] The poet and novelist-turned-propagandist Jef Last explicitly compared the Dutch members of the International Brigades to the famed *Geuzen* ('Beggars'), the name assumed by some of the most noted fighters in the War of Independence. Just like the *Geuzen*, Last claimed, the International Brigades were made up of volunteers fighting alien tyranny; support for the Spanish Republic was painted in the same idealistic terms used to characterise the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.[54]

German newspapers, meanwhile, naturally looked to their own country's recent history to underscore their readership's responsibilities vis-à-vis Spain. They highlighted the incursions of the German (and Italian) war machines and personnel into Spain seeking to crush yet another democracy.

[53] *Afweerfront*, Apr. 1938.
[54] Jef Last, *Over de Hollanders in Spanje* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact 1937), 3. See also *Het Volksdagblad*, 10 Dec. 1937.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Moreover, Spain represented a second chance to contest fascism before it came to power. Whereas in Germany the coalition of anti-Hitler forces had crumbled before it had even had a chance to fight, the Spaniards, stated the *Neuer Vorwärts* in July 1938, had taken a stance and 'sacrificed themselves', even when the fight seemed hopeless, for the cause of their own freedom and for 'European culture and civilization'.[55]

In their attempts to close the gaps between their readerships and 'Spain', periodicals of different political stripes pursued varying aims, with different goals in mind. For socialist parties and the newspapers and periodicals supporting their position, a key factor determining how much intervention on behalf of the Republic they would advocate was the domestic situation. In the Netherlands, the Labour Party could not bring itself to associate with communists, and its efforts to promote itself as a reformist party rid of revolutionary tendencies and ready for government made it difficult to attack non-interventionism. What's more, the obvious compatibility between longstanding Dutch neutrality – which had evolved from merely a foreign policy choice to a constituent element of Dutch political culture in the 1930s – and the Non-Intervention Agreement made it hard, even when the Labour Party decided to oppose it for its obvious one-sided application in favour of the Nationalists, to advocate any sort of intervention. Communists, on the other hand, advocated intervention as a position in line with an (imagined) venerable Dutch tradition: a love of justice and freedom supposedly dating back to the War of Independence of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the United Kingdom, the First World War emerged as a historical point of reference, and Labour-supporting newspapers – albeit hesitantly at first – and communist periodicals alike used non-intervention as a club with which to beat the ruling elites. Moreover, arguments in support of the Republic, whatever shape or form they took, were often couched in the language of geopolitics and empire: the call to protect the country's European and especially their Mediterranean interests was even more prevalent than more emotional appeals to 'finish the fight' of '14–'18 or to protect innocent victims of war either abroad or at home. Finally, the German newspapers' appeals are tinged both with shame at Germany's role in the war as well as their own failure to prevent the rise of fascism in their own country, and with hope at the prospect of dealing Hitler the blow he should have received in 1933, if not before. What is also quite evident is that not everyone who advocated the cause of Republican Spain did so with the aim of recruiting fighters for the Republican Army: Dutch socialist newspapers, up until the final months of the war, advocated for supporting the Republic only in the widest, vaguest sense, whereas their British counterparts went much further. Communist or Popular Front-supporting periodicals, meanwhile, argued more often and much more loudly for far more concrete forms of activism.

'Everything Is Great'

In addition to explaining *why* it was so important to lend aid to the Spanish Republican cause, there was also the question of *how* to render the necessary assistance. There were legal ways to support the enemies of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini in Spain, all of which required investment in terms of time, money, and/or some form of social or political capital. One could show one's political support for the Spanish Republic by voting for a political party that supported it at the ballot box; one could participate in clothing and medicine drives to benefit the Rebels' victims, send care packages intended for civilians suffering under the onslaught and Republican soldiers, or even volunteer for hospital duty in Spain under the auspices of either the Red Cross or the International Red Aid, an organisation established by the Comintern. But joining the International Brigades was illegal in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France: their governments had introduced and subsequently tightened directives outlawing 'foreign volunteering' during the nineteenth century.[56] However, in the early

[55] *Neuer Vorwärts*, 17 July 1938, 2. See also *Neuer Vorwärts*, 22 Jan 1939, 1.

[56] On the legality of foreign volunteering and various government's reactions to recruitment for the International Brigades, see e.g. S. P. Mackenzie, 'The Foreign Enlistment Act and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10, 1 (1999), 52–66; Catherine Fussinger, 'L'attitude des autorités vaudoises à la lumière des dossiers de la police

months of the Spanish Civil War, communist newspapers in Dutch, English and German took advantage of the relative obscurity of legal obstacles to foreign enlistment and skirted the edges of the law. In an article published on 16 August 1936, a *Deutsche Volkszeitung* reporter wrote that, after meetings held in Marseille and Paris in support of the Spanish Republic, '75 volunteers approached me to ask me how they might join the antifascist militias'.[57] And the *Daily Worker* published, on 21 October 1936, a call for a 'British Labour Legion', which might comprise 'tens of thousands' and perhaps even 'millions' of British volunteers, to join the Republican Army and help it achieve 'glorious victory'.[58] However, the British, Dutch and French governments introduced new laws between late 1936 and early 1937 in response to reports of a groundswell of volunteers joining the International Brigades, and as part of their official commitment to the Non-Intervention Agreement. To suggest people join up or to provide instruction how to do so even in the vaguest of terms was now equally illegal as the act of volunteering itself.[59] Nevertheless, communist or Popular Front newspapers and publications in Britain and the Netherlands launched what we might call a surreptitious recruitment campaign. Their key tools were interviews with members of the International Brigades, reportage and letters sent to or from the front, and obituaries of fallen soldiers.

After the ban on all forms of direct recruitment, newspaper articles and other publications on and in support of the International Brigades served a dual purpose. Of course, they informed the reader of the critical role these fighters played in safeguarding democracy and stopping fascism, underscoring the pan-European and even the global aspects of the civil war. But they also underscored the need for getting personally involved, often without specifying exactly how. A poster by a Dutch pro-Republican organisation, for example, depicted a Republican soldier dying of his wounds, using his last breath to point an accusatory finger at the onlookers and asking of them: 'What did *you* do for Spain?' (see Figure 3). In this none-too-subtle effort to shame supporters of the Spanish Republic into action, one might read both a call for political and financial support and a call to arms.

Quite a different tack was the often-made suggestion that the opportunities and benefits of service in the International Brigades extended beyond direct participation in a good cause. Reports from the front as well as printed letters by members of the International Brigades – some of whom were also journalists[60] – speak of the truly transnational friendship bonds amongst the various individuals assembled in Spain to fight Franco and Hitler. 'Never have I seen such spontaneous geniality as amongst our comrades-in-arms, even though we do not even speak the same language', reported the Dutch propagandist Jef Last from Spain.[61] Making friends was easy, and life in Spain was cheap and filled with abundant pleasures, thanks in part to the gratitude the Spaniards were showing to their foreign saviours. 'Everything is great, the food is good, and we don't have to pay for the cinema because everyone is so grateful for our service', added a Dutchman serving in the International Brigades via a letter printed in the *Tribune*.[62] Letters and first-person reportage were widely seen to be powerful and relatively recent modes of persuasion, since they lent an air of authenticity to reporting: because other, more mainstream newspapers had a much harder time getting access to the front,

de Sûreté', in Mauro Cerutti, Sébastien Guex and Peter Huber, eds., *La Suisse et l'Espagne de la République à Franco (1936–1946)* (Lausanne: Éditions Antipodes, 2001), 153–89; Nir Arielli, Gabriela A. Frei and Inge Van Hulle, 'The Foreign Enlistment Act, International Law, and British Politics, 1819–2014', *The International History Review*, 38, 4 (2015), 636–56; Tyler Wentzell, 'Canada's Foreign Enlistment Act and the Spanish Civil War', *Labour/Le Travail*, 80 (2017), 213–46.

[57] *Deutsche Volkszeitung,* 16 Aug. 1936, 5.

[58] *Daily Worker*, 21 Oct. 1936.

[59] Ben Koolen, '¡No pasarán! – de brigadisten', in Maurits S. Berger, ed., *Nederlanders in de heilige oorlog: zoeaven, brigadisten en jihadisten* (Den Haag: Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2015), 39–66, 47; James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 168; Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 35.

[60] Deacon, *British News Media*, 45–51.

[61] Jef Last, *Brieven uit Spanje* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact 1936), 4.

[62] *De Tribune*, 8 Mar. 1937, 5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

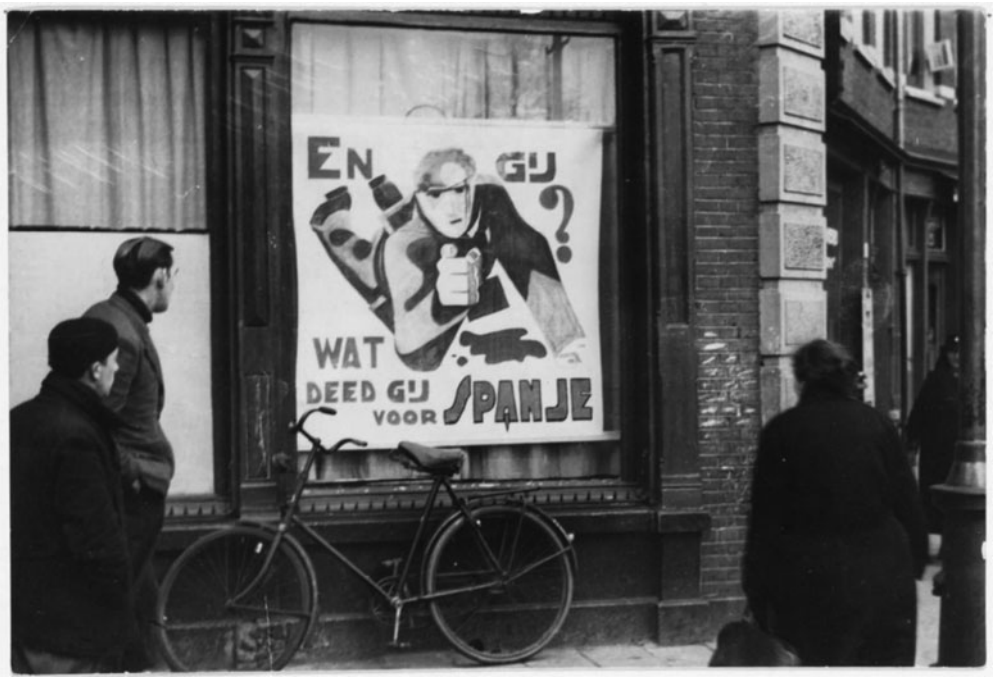

Figure 3. Beeldband Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Collectie C.A.J. van Angelbeek, 010013000383. 'And you? What did you do for Spain?', enquires a poster depicting a dying Republican soldier of Amsterdam passers-by. The poster was published by the Dutch Aid Spain Committee ('Hulp aan Spanje'), ostensibly an unaligned pro-Republican organisation but one whose board was composed solely of 'crypto-Communists', who kept their membership of or affiliation with the Communist Party a secret.

communist and Popular Front publications could claim that they were the only outlets able to get the 'real story' out – even though their accounts were frequently ghostwritten by journalists far, sometimes very far, away from the front lines.[63] These letters and reportage were therefore the tools of choice dedicated to undermining the narrative that the International Brigades were wholly made up of communists out to establish a Red Spain, and to suggesting that anti-fascism, a love of freedom and patriotism – expressed in its members' collective desire to spare their homelands the (further) horrors of fascism and Nazism – were its core values.[64] These values, in turn, gave the International Brigades an edge over their enemies.[65] Even the technological superiority of the Nationalists and their German and Italian supporters could be nullified by the 'indescribable enthusiasm and heroism' of the International Brigades.[66] For, wrote *Der Neue Vorwärts*, 'in war higher morale always wins, […] successes on the battlefield are achieved through courage and a warrior's mentality [*Kampfbegeisterung*]'.[67] This line of thinking, however ridiculous it might seem now, echoed contemporary notions that the only way to overcome the massive firepower of an enemy barrage was through sheer force of will. It also serves to bridge the gap between two very different narratives characterising Spain: one highlighting the violence committed by the Nationalists and their allies – which served as 'atrocity propaganda' – and one highlighting the easy-going comradeship experienced by those serving

[63] See e.g. Petram and Kruizinga, *De oorlog tegemoet*, 140–47 on the differences between actual letters written by International Brigades and those printed in Dutch newspapers.
[64] William Rust, *Britons in Spain: The History of the British Battalion of the XVth International Brigade* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd. 1939), 17.
[65] *Daily Worker*, 26 Sep. 1936, 2.
[66] *Daily Herald*, 14 Aug. 1936, 1.
[67] *Neuer Vorwärts,* 5 Sep. 1937, 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the International Brigades. After all, who would sign up for the International Brigades if one did not stand a fighting chance?

Nonetheless, despite all their conviviality and bravery, fighters in the International Brigades did die in combat while fighting the supposedly soulless Nationalists. And when they did, printed obituaries were used not only to honour those who had given their lives for the cause of democracy but also to highlight their heroism – and thereby make conspicuous the opportunities for personal heroics that could be found in Spain. '[T]heir actions will be recalled, their names honoured', wrote *The Daily Worker* after reporting on the death of a British International Brigade soldier.[68] Occasionally the dead were summoned as calling out to those left behind, whose duty it was now to take up their task and 'to win a victory for the democratic peoples of the world which would last for all time'.[69] Sometimes attempts are even made to quantify the benefits of their sacrifice. In one such case, an obituary of several fallen International Brigades fighters is accompanied by the suggestion that their '[b]rave actions' had caused several Nationalist planes 'on a punitive expedition, killing civilians', to be diverted from their mission.[70]

It is telling that an emphasis on personal heroics infuses much of the reporting on the International Brigades. Stories of men fighting off tanks, of defending Spanish civilians against all odds, of a man 'who went out as a pilot, single-handed, took up a plane, brought a Fascist bomber to the ground, and drove off two others before he crashed with five bullet wounds in his leg'[71], served to highlight that in Spain a man could make a stand against evil and win the day for democracy. If these fighters died, eternal glory would be theirs, and if they were wounded they would receive the best of care. One telling example is the tale of a British hero who, despite his body having been 'riddled with bullets', is nevertheless 'extremely comfortable' in a 'private ward', where he spends his time 'learning Spanish from a buxom Spanish nurse'.[72] Fighting in Spain, is the barely veiled suggestion, offers opportunities on and beyond the battlefield.

Thus the communist-affiliated newspapers, books, and brochures that were printed for Dutch and British audiences served up recruitment campaigns that suggested to their readers that service in the International Brigades would bring opportunities for glory, for lasting friendships, for exotic fun (!), and, most importantly, it would allow the recruit to personally help bring about the defeat of soulless fascism. Of course, there were the risks of injury and death – tellingly, hardly any attention is paid to the possible *legal* consequences of breaking the laws against foreign enlistment – but these threats only underscored the vastness of the prizes to be won. In printed material directed towards the German exile community in France, however, such reporting is comparatively rare. This might seem odd; in contrast to the left-wing press in the Netherlands and in Britain, German-language newspapers and periodicals were united in their support for Republican Spain, the International Brigades, and anti-fascism. But amongst German-language publications of social-democrat and communist leanings alike, we find mostly calls to support the Republic financially for their procurement of food, medicine and/or weapons. Direct calls to arms are rare, much more so than in the Dutch and British communist press. The difference might be explained by the particular vulnerability of the presses serving the German exile communities to legal action by the French authorities, which were suspicious of the hundreds of thousands of exiled Europeans now making Paris their temporary home. But conversely, it might also be due to the fact that most German exiles who were politically active in either the German Communist or Social Democrat parties – who, despite continuing political differences, were united in their support for Republican Spain – formed a more closely-knit community than their compatriots in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

[68] *Daily Worker*, 18 Aug. 1938, 4.
[69] Ibid., 25 Mar. 1937, 3.
[70] Ibid., 20 Aug. 1936, 5.
[71] Ibid., 31 Oct. 1936, 5.
[72] Ibid., 4 Sep. 1936, 3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Conclusions

Before we summarise and contextualise our findings, it bears repeating that analysing the framing of the Spanish Civil War in pro-Republican outlets cannot, by and of itself, explain the various forms of global activism that sprang up during 1936–9 on behalf of those defending Spain from a Rebel takeover. What it can do is get us as close as possible to contemporaries' understandings of Spain, the civil war, and its significance to them. More importantly, it focuses on understandings in the plural, to drive home the notion that the framing of the Spanish Civil War was not only mediated by ideology, but also attuned to different (national) political cultures. Therefore, German exiles, British communists and Dutch social democrats were presented with different 'sketches of Spain' in the newspapers and magazines they read – which were, in the 1930s, by far the most pervasive form of media. These sketches, in turn, interfaced with privately-held ideas and socially-formed beliefs.

This article has highlighted some of the commonalities, but also key differences, in the 'sketches of Spain' presented to Dutch, German and British communists and social-democrats in their news media. In many of the reports across all the print media we have studied, Spain remains vague and out of focus, with only the emphasis on the battle for Madrid giving the conflict concrete spatiality. Other commonalities we found are the lack of agency accorded to Spaniards and the conflict's cause as an attempted fascist takeover ballooning into a protracted civil war due to the outside assistance provided to the Rebels. Our double comparative approach, however, has focused on differences, firstly between mainstream Labour- or left-liberal outlets and those supporting communism or the Popular Front strategy: the former held that communist interference had made a bad situation worse, and the latter argued that communism stood at the forefront of a fight for democracy. Mainstream Labour press outlets did argue for supporting the Spanish population and, during 1937–8, began shifting its stance away from supporting non-intervention to sharp criticism. In its publications the emphasis is firmly on the war's humanitarian disaster, using 'atrocity propaganda' to highlight the immense suffering caused by the Rebels and their non-Spanish allies and (supposed) overlords. Another key difference between mainstream Labour and the communist or Popular Front left was that the much greater tendency amongst the latter to connect criticism of political elites at home to the Spanish Civil War, lumping in their governments and their supporting interests with Franco and denouncing them either as crypto-Nazis or as their enablers. Amongst the German exiles, normal political processes were, of course, suspended, and exiled groups worked together and organised collaboratively – not without difficulty, but to a degree that those advocating for a Popular Front in the Netherlands or Britain could only dream of.[73]

In addition to ideological differences, presses supportive of the Republic also aligned to domestic political and popular cultures. Communist and Popular Front-inspired outlets and publications in Britain stressed the immediacy of the danger posed by a Rebel victory in Spain by playing up the danger to the empire and to the country's interests in the Mediterranean, while in the Netherlands they stressed the risk of German invasion or aerial bombardment. Naturally, amongst German exiles in France the effects a victory in Spain might have on Hitler's regime at home were foregrounded. These outlets also drew inspiration from different defining events in the history of each of their respective national and/or political communities: the First World War (Britain), Hitler's rise to power (Germany), and the Dutch Wars of Independence (the Netherlands) – allowing them to cast Spain, its inhabitants and those who would come to the Republic's aid in well-known archetypal roles.

Finally, our article has stressed that actual calls to armed service were illegal, and therefore rare. In fact, most calls to action were general, and did not specify the exact nature of the service the cause of Spain required. Nevertheless, British and Dutch (crypto-)communist outlets did contain references to the benefits of armed service: they played up the potential to make a difference and suggested that in Spain a fighter was surrounded by thankful natives, top-notch medical care and, most importantly, by

[73] See e.g. Georg Schwinghammer, 'Im Exit zur Ohnmacht verurteilt. Deutsche Politiker und Parteien in der Emigration', in Richard Albrecht and Otto R. Romberg, eds., *Widerstand und Exil, 1933–1945* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1986), 239–54.

friends from his own country. Germans evidently needed no such priming: the highly organised and politically active German exile community apparently needed less prompting.

Our analyses of the Spanish Civil War's framing will allow us to better contextualise the motivations of those individuals who heeded the recruitment message. Since expectations of the conflict were shaped at home, this adds an important new dimension to research into Spain as a site of transnational connection and strife. But it also helps us better understand the characteristics of 'national' contingents of volunteers for the International Brigades: provided data on recruitment is available, it will be possible to (help) explain spatial or temporal shifts in volunteering in various countries. Even more importantly, we have shown that images of 'home' not only were mapped unto images of 'Spain', but that the reverse was also true: people, events, and ideas in both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were likened to situations in Spain in order to make a political point. This 'culture war', inspired by the Spanish Civil War, remains largely unexplored outside of the Americas. Finally, our article points to a largely unexplored theme in transnational history: the connections between its violent and non-violent forms.[74] Our article suggests that there is a large overlap in recruiting messages for violent service in Spain, and service on behalf of Spain generally – and therefore ends with a call that the histories of Spanish aid movements and commitments, raising awareness, money, and goods for Spanish Republicans, be more closely aligned to that of the International Brigades – who, in the end, only formed a small part of a global engagement on behalf of the Second Spanish Republic.

Acknowledgement. The authors would like to thank the organisers and participants of the workshop 'Le Champ de bataille après la bataille. Mémoires et Usages' at the Université de Lille (6–7 December 2018), James Gibbons, the editorial board of this journal and the anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

[74] This is also mentioned as a key theme for future transnational activism research in Fraser Raeburn, *Scots and the Spanish Civil War: Solidarity, Activism and Humanitarianism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), esp. 10–11.

Cite this article: Kruizinga S, van der Veen M (2022). Sketches of Spain: The Role of the Left-Wing Press in Britain, the Netherlands, and amongst Exiled Germans in Recruiting Volunteers for Republican Spain during the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939. *Contemporary European History* 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777322000376