

**Reactions in British and French Universities  
to the Spanish Civil War**

**A Comparative History**

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**Laurence Hugh Brown**

**D.Phil.**

**University of York  
Department of History**

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## Abstract

In both Britain and France, the international impact of the Spanish civil war and the history of intellectuals during the 1930s have excited considerable academic and popular interest. Yet surprisingly few works have looked beyond their own country's historiography to examine in detail the experiences of others during the period. A conscious comparison between events in Britain and in France sheds new light on the reactions in both countries to the Spanish civil war, questioning the assumptions of existing histories which see the war as an international conflict between anti-fascist and anti-communist coalitions. This thesis is also a social history of intellectuals, treating their politics not as the pronouncements of independent individuals, but as formulated within distinct professional and personal milieus, political organisations and university institutions. Academics and students in Britain approached politics in a different way to their French peers, and these differences significantly shaped their reactions to the Spanish civil war. This thesis therefore compares the repertoires of political organisation and political activity which developed within British and French universities, and then examines how these effected particular reactions to the civil war in Spain; from volunteering to fight, appeals for humanitarian aid and refugee relief, to debates over non-intervention and domestic politics. Within each of these reactions political commitments combined with other motives. What has been lost within the political rhetoric over the civil war, which has continued long after 1939, is the extent to which reactions to the conflict were always changing with the fortunes of battle in Spain, and the variety of perceptions which co-existed within political coalitions and the parties themselves.

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## Preface

Before beginning my postgraduate studies, I had lived all my life outside of Europe. This background made me strongly aware that I was studying not only a particular country, but also an intensely diverse continent. It was the desire to balance both local idiosyncrasies and national currents within a wider context which has fuelled this study. I am particularly grateful to the friends from Britain, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and France whom I have been fortunate enough to know during my three years of research. They, much more than any research trip or secondary reading, have helped me to appreciate the distinctive national cultures and local identities of the continent. Their hospitality and their friendship, not only facilitated this research, but also made my travels so enjoyable.

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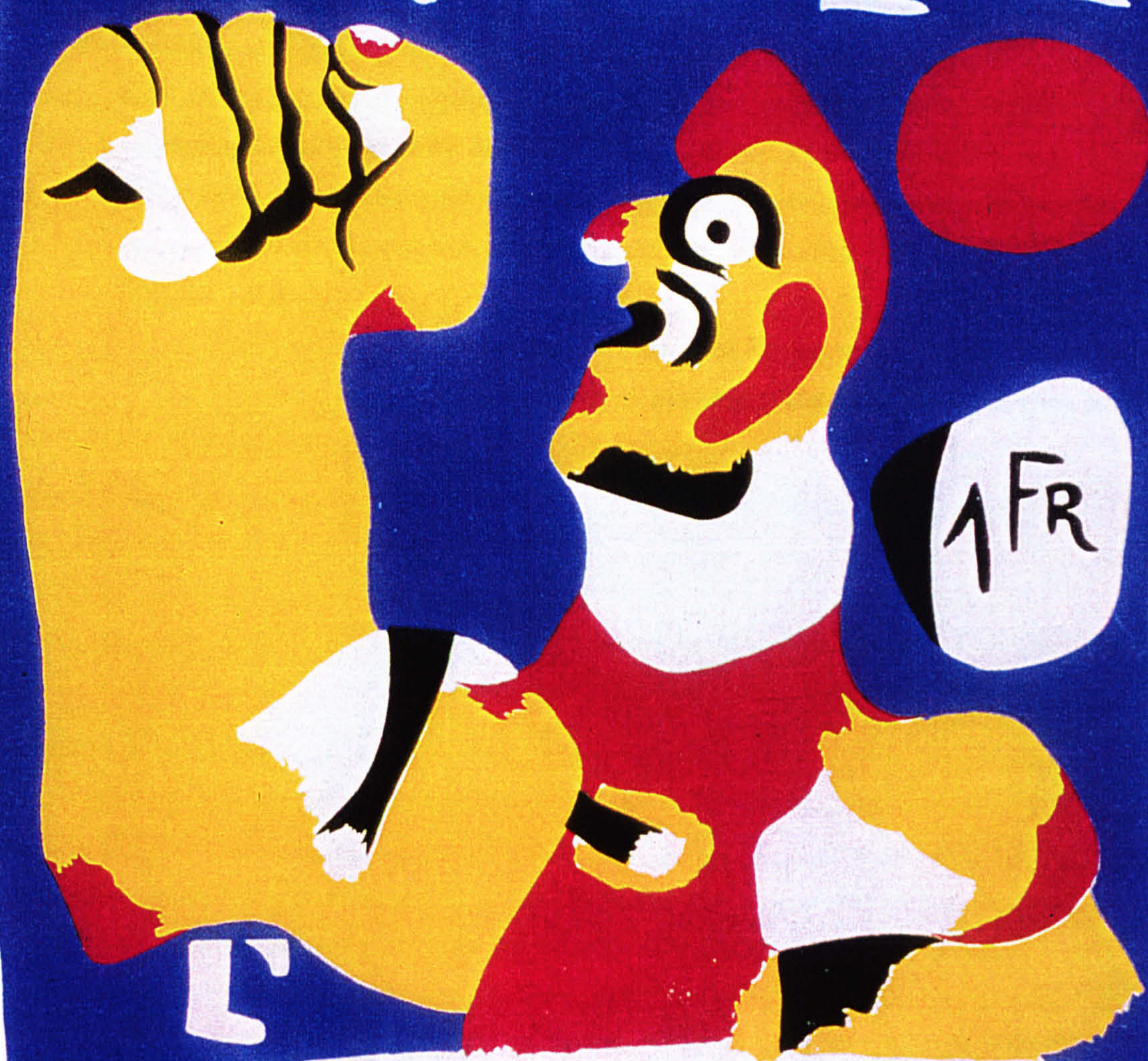
Richard Symonds, Rachel Makinson, Allison Duke, Michael Thwaites and Lord Healey graciously agreed to be interviewed and each provided me with a stimulating vision of student life in the 1930s. I would also like to thank Eric Hobsbawm, John Saville, and Françoise Basch for their informative letters.

Finally, this work would neither have been started nor completed without the ever-present support and encouragement of my family.

## Abbreviations

AAC	Academic Assistance Council
AG	Association Générale des Étudiants
AUT	Association of University Teachers
BUF	British Union of Fascists
BYPA	British Youth Peace Assembly
CAEE	Comité d'Accueil aux Enfants d'Espagne
CASPE	Comité d'Action Socialiste pour l'Espagne
CEDA	Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas
CICIAER	Comité International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Republicaine
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CNC	Comité National Catholique d'Aide aux Réfugiés d'Espagne
CPGB	Communist Party (Great Britain)
CSAWG	Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group
CVIA	Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Anti-fascistes
FIL	For Intellectual Liberty
FNES	Fédération Nationale des Étudiants Socialistes
FSS	Federation of Student Societies
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ISS	International Student Service
LAURS	Ligue d'Action Universitaire Républicaine et Socialiste
LSI	Labour and Socialist International
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
NJCSR	National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marista
PSF	Parti Social Français
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière
SMAC	Spanish Medical Aid Committee
SPSL	Society for the Protection of Science and Learning
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UCL	University College London
UFE	Union Fédérale des Étudiants
UIF	Union des Intellectuel Français
ULF	University Labour Federation
UNE	Union Nationale des Étudiants
USE	Union Syndicale des Étudiants

AIDÉZ



L'ESPAGNE

Initially, perhaps rightly, the gallant figure becomes a symbol, which the man of flesh and blood might hardly recognise, or, if he did so, might contemplate with healthy derision. Yet this is not an illusion to be dispelled... The praise should be no less, but greater, if anyone could unravel the tangle of weakness not wholly overcome, of conflict not wholly resolved, that lay behind.

Cambridge Professor of Philosophy, Francis Cornford,  
on the death of his son in the Spanish civil war, 1937.

## INTRODUCTION

The 1930s have long been mythologised as a unique decade of politicisation in Western Europe, as an age when ideological divisions and mass politics cut across the continent. Implicit in this view is the reductionist assumption that certain political activity was the inevitable result of the global economic crisis of 1929 and the rise of a European-wide fascism. This explanation proffered by political activists at the time has formed the framework for historians wanting to link the political changes which were occurring throughout the continent. For both contemporaries and historians, the nodal point for these transnational currents between 1936 and 1939 was the civil war in Spain. The Spanish civil war has commonly been seen as a confrontation between the international forces of anti-fascism and anti-communism, or as part of the developing conflict between the emerging fascist regimes of Central Europe, Communist Russia and the stagnant liberal democracies of Western Europe.<sup>1</sup> Despite the shared intensity with which many non-Spaniards viewed Iberian events, the civil war itself stirred very different reactions in countries such as Britain and France. These national differences reveal that to the extent to which there was a distinct spirit of the 1930s, it was made by people within and against their existing political environments, not imposed from outside by the logic of events.

The Spanish civil war occupies very different positions in the historiography of Britain and France during the 1930s, due to both their divergent domestic politics at the time and the differing concerns of their historians afterwards. In Britain, where parliamentary politics was overwhelmingly dominated by Conservative rule throughout the decade, histories of the left have argued for the importance of the popular campaigns in support of the Spanish Republic. Appeals for humanitarian aid and opposition to non-intervention have been seen as fuelling a broad coalition outside the established Labour Party, and against the Chamberlain Government's policy of appeasement.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, humanitarian aid for Spain in France has excited little academic interest. While historians have recognised that the Front Populaire possessed a triple character as a government, political coalition and mass movement, rarely has French historiography examined the impact of the Spanish civil war on

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<sup>1</sup> While recent historiography has stressed the indigenious origins of the civil war, the two most common explanations for the Republic's defeat focus on foreign intervention, either by Italy and Germany in supplying military material and men to Franco, or by the USSR for its manipulation of Spanish domestic politics - see George Esenwein & Adrian Shubert, Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context, 1931-1939, Longman, London, 1995, pp 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Fyrth, The Signal Was Spain: The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain 1936-39, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1986.

these three levels, focusing instead on domestic political conflicts and industrial militancy.<sup>3</sup> Rather than marking the birth of a broad reaching coalition, the Spanish civil war is seen as causing the first significant ruptures within the government of the Front Populaire over non-intervention, while there has been little exploration of the war's broader impact after 1936. Despite the large number of works on the effects of Spanish refugees on France and a number of studies on the civil war's effects on individual parties, unions, or regions, there have been few attempts at a national history of French reactions to the Spanish civil war apart from David W. Pike's examination of public opinion through the press.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, there is no French parallel to Tom Buchanan's recent work Britain and the Spanish Civil War which surveys the differing reactions of various political, humanitarian, intellectual and religious groups to the war.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the only area where historical accounts of British and French reactions to the Spanish civil war have come together is in study of the respective foreign policies of their governments during the 1930s. The international interaction between politicians, diplomats and civil servants of both countries has been well mapped, especially with respect to their cooperation in establishing the Non-Intervention Agreement over the war.<sup>6</sup> Pasión y Farsa by Juan Avilés Farré is a synthesis of established work on the diplomatic policies of both countries, though it also examines some of the domestic political movements which form the focus of this thesis.<sup>7</sup> This dissertation intends not merely to present the history of two countries side-by-side, but to intertwine them to the extent that the reader 'lives' in both countries at once. This conception of a comparative approach is more than merely a literary device, for it seeks to use comparison between the two countries to redirect our attention to the precise historical context and conditions in which politics was being acted out, thought through and lived.

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<sup>3</sup> Julian Jackson, The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy 1934-1938, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. xii.

<sup>4</sup> David W. Pike, Les Français et la Guerre d'Espagne, Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997;

The only equivalent survey is the unpublished thesis of Richard Alan Gordon, "France & the Spanish Civil War", PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> Alpert's work despite its title seems to generalise British attitudes onto other countries, especially in assuming French distance and ignorance of Spanish events - Michael Alpert, A New International History of the Spanish Civil War, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1994, pp. 1 & 13.

<sup>7</sup> Juan Avilés Farré, Pasión y Farsa: Franceses y Británicos ante la Guerra Civil Española, Eudema, Madrid, 1994;

Reviewed by Jacques Maurice in Mouvement Social, 181, Oct.-Dec. 1998, p. 135.

## Approaches to Comparative History

A comparative history of interwar Europe is particularly appropriate for it was during these years that French historian Marc Bloch championed the use of comparative methodology in history. In January 1934, at the same time as Paris simmered with anti-parliamentary demonstrations, Bloch unsuccessfully sought appointment to the Collège de France, the pinnacle of French higher education, as Professor of the Comparative History of European Societies.<sup>8</sup> Bloch's commitment to comparative history has excited very few followers, despite the international prestige which his pioneering use of the social sciences attracted after his tragic death in 1944. While comparative research has become well established in economics, political science, anthropology, and sociology, it has been far less accepted in history.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this is because historians have sought to differentiate their concern for specific events and particularities from the general hypotheses and models of social scientists.

Bloch argued that comparison was a valuable tool for the historian.<sup>10</sup> His conception of comparative history as a scientific methodology has lost much of its force today when the nation-orientated, high-politics histories he was attacking no longer dominate the field. Still, Bloch's underlying ambition of extending the boundaries of historiography by using comparison as a way of seeking new evidence, questioning existing assumptions and attempting new explanations remains strikingly powerful.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the true value of comparing the histories of two countries is that the comfortable assumptions of national histories lose their explanatory power when applied to another country. Comparative history fuels a reconsideration of the Spanish conflict by concentrating on the complex differences between the political climates and cultures of Britain and France.

In the essay "The Peculiarities of the English", E.P. Thompson delivered a devastating critique of the assumption that the British and French shared the same

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<sup>8</sup> Carole Fink, Marc Bloch: A Life in History, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 177-182,

<sup>9</sup> Charles Tilly, Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons, Russell Sage, New York, 1984, p. 84;

Raymond Grew argues that historians already use comparison in their work subconsciously - Raymond Grew, "The Case for Comparing Histories", American Historical Review, 85, 1980, pp. 768, 776-777.

<sup>10</sup> Marc Bloch, Land and Work in Medieval Europe, trans. J.E. Anderson, Routledge, London, 1967, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 48;

George M. Fredrickson, "From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History", Journal of American History, 82, Sept. 1995, p. 587;

Moore, Barrington, Jr., Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy, Allen Lane, London, 1967, p. xii.

political culture or experience.<sup>12</sup> He argued that it was futile to look at one country as a model for the other as politics had developed one way in France and another way in Britain. Underlying this seemingly simple statement was the recognition of the complex differences in forms of political organisation, types of activity, social membership, and collective *mentalités* between the two countries. Rather than assuming a single model of political participation, Thompson argued,

So let us look at history as history - men placed in actual contexts which they have not chosen, and confronted by indivertible forces, with an overwhelming immediacy of relations and duties and only a scant opportunity for inserting their own agency - and not as a text for hectoring might-have-beens.<sup>13</sup>

Contrasting the political life of the two countries, therefore, provides a valuable way of marking out the differing opportunities and constraints which faced activists in Britain and France. Rather than generating general models, this thesis adopts a comparative approach to more precisely define the nuances of national contexts, and the political activity and participation which was formed within them.

One basis for comparison between the two countries is the concept of a political repertoire, which was defined by Charles Tilly as the accepted forms of public activity and organisation in his comparative examination of political struggle over different periods of French history.<sup>14</sup> The significant advantage of this comparison of political repertoires is that it does not assume that the existing political parties of Britain and France are the primary point of comparison between the two countries. Though there were strong similarities between the major parties of the left in the two countries - between the Labour Party and the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO), as well as between the British Communist Party (CPGB) and the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) - which were reinforced by their international connections, they assumed different forms due to their national setting.<sup>15</sup> The parliamentary supremacy of the National Government in Britain after 1931 encouraged extra-parliamentary politics which drew on the participation of new groups alongside the established parties.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, French parliamentary politics was far more fluid and evenly contested, with parties of both the left and the right

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<sup>12</sup> E P Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English", *Socialist Register*, 1965, p. 333.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French: Four Centuries of Popular Struggle*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Fundamental to the difference between the two countries was the respective relationships between the industrial and political wings of their labour movements. The close collaboration of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Labour Party, contrasts to the syndicalist independence of French trade unions - John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-1918*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 38.



gaining increasing support during the mid 1930s. Equally the relationship between conservatism and the extreme right differed markedly between the two countries, and there was no British equivalent to the anti-parliamentary politics in the streets of the nationalist leagues. Perhaps the greatest advantage to not focusing specifically on comparing the reactions of the parties themselves has been to avoid the partisanship with which the historiography of the civil war has been repeatedly refought by the left and right. A study of political repertoires enables us to gauge the different support, activities and aims of the established political parties and other groups which chose to align themselves with political debates. This foundation should be flexible enough to allow for meaningful comparison between the forms of political activity and organisation which had developed within British and French universities, and how these shaped their members' reactions to the war in Spain.

The first three chapters of the thesis concentrate on mapping the character of the national political repertoires as they developed during the early 1930s within particular university structures, claiming differing traditions and forms of expression, and being shaped by nationally distinct political campaigns and coalitions. The opening chapter examines how the institutional structure of universities in the two countries could encourage different reactions to the same event, such as the crisis of German academic refugees in 1933. The reaction in British and French universities to the Nazification of German education provides a revealing contrast between the two countries, as the problems of German academic refugees were a specifically university-based issue. The success of a non-partisan coalition of professional relief for their German peers by British academics and students was an influential predecessor for the later humanitarian campaigns over Spain and other international events. Equally the limitations of university-based relief efforts in France, reflected not only institutional restrictions, but also the differing conception of politics held by French academics and students which was centred on public engagement rather than campus-centred activity.

The historical development of the distinctive national approaches to politics in British and French universities is discussed in Chapter Two, which traces the respective national traditions and political repertoires which were claimed by university members in Paris and London. The Dreyfus Affair at the turn of the century established accepted forms of political activity in France for both academics and students, and for the left as well as the right. There was no British equivalent to the Dreyfus Affair as a reference point which could legitimise particular forms of politics for those in universities. Rather, students and academics in London found that their escalating political activity during the early 1930s led to conflict with university

authorities, who successfully sought to confine student activity within campus boundaries, while academics focused their political energies through established political parties, professional or social groups.

Chapter Three considers how these national repertoires were put into action during the mid 1930s, and particularly how they were affected by the contrasting coalitions on the left which developed within the two countries. The differing political landscapes of Britain and France before 1936 are crucial to understanding their later reaction to the civil war in Spain, as almost from its outset, the war was fitted into pre-existing domestic perceptions, debates, campaigns and coalitions.

The remainder of the thesis is divided into chapters which each compare a specific reaction to the war in the two countries. From volunteering to fight, the collection and shipping of humanitarian aid, debates over non-intervention, to the provision of refugee relief, these reactions each assumed their own nationally distinct character and forms. Despite its thematic focus, the thesis also seeks to stress the extent to which particular reactions or forms of politics were interconnected with others, and the extent to which they all changed over the course of the war. Chapter Four examines why British students were more prominent in volunteering for the International Brigades than their French counterparts, and how this has been treated by later historiography. The volunteers 'internationalised' the civil war in a profoundly personal as well as political sense, especially for the communities they left behind.

Chapter Five focuses on the organisations, coalitions and campaigns which developed to send humanitarian aid to Spain during war's first ten months. In Britain, humanitarian aid was able to mobilise a broad range of supporters, although co-existing within the various coalitions and the separate aid appeals were a variety of perceptions of the war and its politics. Given that there has been relatively little work on French humanitarian aid, the dual focus on both countries breaks new ground by highlighting the extent to which aid efforts in France were far more party-focused than its neighbour's. As reflected in the way aid was organised in the two countries, the Spanish civil war was a much more politicised issue in France than in Britain, partly because of the extreme polarisation of French politics which preceded 1936.

Overlapping and reinforcing the appeals for humanitarian aid for Spain were political critiques of the non-intervention policy initiated by the French and British governments, which are considered in Chapter Six. While pro-Republican historiography has overwhelmingly portrayed non-intervention as hypocritical and illegitimate from its birth, this ignores the strong support for the policy amongst

committed Republican supporters in both countries, including those in the forefront of organising humanitarian aid for the Republic. The role of students and academics in the national debates over non-intervention, reveals both the importance of domestic politics in shaping the tone of those debates and the growing support for the Communists' absolute rejection of the policy.

The Nationalist offensive in the Basque country marked a new phase of the civil war, in creating the conflict's first mass refugee crisis which touched Britain and France differently. As refugee relief was organised along similar lines to humanitarian aid, Chapter Seven contrasts the more politicised relief efforts in France with the broad support which refugees received in Britain.

Equally, the Northern offensive intensified appeals for aid, revealing the growing tensions between the parties of the Front Populaire and the success of non-partisan campus coalitions in British universities. Chapter Eight also stresses the importance of the connection between the concerted campaigns for humanitarian aid and the muted reaction to the May Days conflict in Barcelona. Aid efforts for Spain were linked to different issues in both countries; to non-partisan relief for Chinese universities in Britain and to the changing face of French domestic politics.

Chapters Nine and Ten consider the debates and divisions which developed on the left and right in both countries during 1938. While German expansion into first Austria and then Czechoslovakia was a major factor in fuelling changes in the political landscape, these shifts were first expressed over Spain. In Britain, the emergence of a more defined pacifism and the debate over Air Raid Precautions, though motivated by events in Central Europe, focused on events in Spain as embodying the horrors of war. While 1936 and 1937 had largely been dominated in both countries by the left's campaigns in support of the Spanish Republic, the right had been fairly inactive in the face of the civil war. This contrast between left and right politics was partly due to dissolution of the leagues in France and to the rejection of activism by British Conservatives. In late 1938, the shifts in national debates encouraged a more active engagement for the students of the right, and some in Britain found themselves sharing common political positions as well as activism with the left.

In both countries the last months of 1938 and the first months of 1939 marked the culmination of political campaigning over the civil war. The severe food shortage in Eastern Spain, the Republic's increasingly fragile military position after April 1938, and finally the massive flood of refugees from Catalonia in late January 1939 all evoked major relief campaigns in both Britain and France. Significantly, the

unavoidable involvement of the French State in providing for refugees in 1939, encouraged in France a university-based aid campaign to parallel those that had developed throughout the war in Britain.

## A Social History of Intellectuals

Western intellectuals were central figures in the Spanish civil war and in its history.<sup>17</sup> Most work has focused on the experiences of well-known writers and poets such as Hemingway, Orwell, Malraux, Auden, Spender and Bernanos, and on their novels, plays, poems or paintings which were inspired by the war. Such studies have often assumed a particular definition of the intellectual, as an independent individual, a creator of culture choosing between their disinterested art and political engagement. These themes have been central to several major studies on Communist intellectuals in Britain and France, which have argued there is a fundamental contradiction between an intellectual's independent identity and their membership of a Stalinist party.<sup>18</sup> With the recent collapse of the Soviet Communism, these arguments were restated by Tony Judt and François Furet who have attacked the moral blindness of French intellectuals whose public commitment to the PCF and the USSR was unaffected by Communist repression in Eastern Europe.<sup>19</sup> However, while assumptions of independence and detachment are central to so many theoretical definitions and justifications of intellectual identity, this distance was rarely part of real experience.

Recent French historiography has reversed this definition of the intellectual, from an identity rooted in the individual to that of a collective group, which has encouraged a rapid growth in the social history of intellectuals.<sup>20</sup> As Christophe Prochasson has argued,

A history of intellectuals cannot be written if it excludes either an element of social history (the history of individuals located within a particular social

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, Journey to the Frontier: Julian Bell and John Cornford - their lives and the 1930s, Constable, London, 1966;

Stanley Weintraub, The Last Great Cause: The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War, W.H. Allen, London, 1968.

<sup>18</sup> David Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals 1914-1960, Andre Deutsch, London, 1964, pp. 34-48;

Neal Wood, Communism and British Intellectuals, Victor Gollancz, London, 1959, pp. 17 & 30.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Jennings, "Of Treason, Blindness and Silence: Dilemmas of the Intellectual in Modern France" in Jeremy Jennings & Anthony Kemp-Welch, Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie, Routledge, London, 1997, pp. 67-68.

<sup>20</sup> Jeremy Jennings, "Introduction: Mandarins and Samurais" in Jeremy Jennings, ed., Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurais, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, pp.8-11.

environment, the history of their practices and... the history of their behaviour) or a history of their ideas.<sup>21</sup>

At the forefront of this new approach has been the work of Christophe Charle, who has argued that the image of the intellectual as a detached individual, which has been derived from writers or artists, obscures the extent to which other intellectuals, such as those in universities, intervened collectively in French politics drawing on shared backgrounds of social, professional, religious, personal and other networks.<sup>22</sup> Charle has sketched this social framework of family, career and politics in his series of collected biographies for Paris academics during the Third Republic, covering the Collège de France and Sorbonne.<sup>23</sup> By shifting the focus away from independent intellectuals, social history offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between intellectuals and established political parties, and a broader vision of politics.

Tony Judt at his more tendentious describes the Communist Party intellectual as an oxymoron.<sup>24</sup> The assumed contradiction between intellectual integrity and party discipline also underlines the work of David Cauter.<sup>25</sup> Intellectuals often acted as outside supporters for established parties, yet it is to miscast their collective history to see them as either hypocritical fellow-travellers or naively manipulated.<sup>26</sup> The focus on Communist intellectuals from the 1930s onwards, ignores the actual circumstances of the Dreyfusard crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century which is seen as giving birth to intellectuals as an independent force in French political life. In fact, many Dreyfusard intellectuals were from the first closely aligned with French socialists, and either became members of the party or committed supporters during the crisis. It was not independence, but rather their relationship to existing parties which differentiated intellectuals in Britain and France. Either as experts within the party or outside patrons who gave it committed support, intellectuals maintained a distinct political identity,

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<sup>21</sup> Christophe Prochasson, "Intellectuals as Actors: Image and Reality" in Jeremy Jennings, ed., *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurais*, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> Christophe Charle, *Les Naissances des "Intellectuels", 1880-1900*, Minuit, Paris, 1990, p. 7; Jennings argues that this sociological definition of intellectuals developed at a time of debate over the disappearance of intellectuals in France - Jennings, "Of Treason, Blindness and Silence: Dilemmas of the Intellectual in Modern France", p. 73.

<sup>23</sup> Christophe Charle & Eva Telkes, *Les Professeurs de la Faculté des Sciences de Paris: Dictionnaire Biographique 1901-1939*, INRP/CNRS, Paris, 1989.

Christophe Charle & Eva Telkes, *Les Professeurs du Collège de France: Dictionnaire Biographique 1901-1939*, INRP/CNRS, Paris, 1988.

Christophe Charle, *Les Professeurs de la Faculté des Lettres de Paris, Dictionnaire Biographique 1909-1939, Vol 2.*, INRP/CNRS, Paris, 1986.

<sup>24</sup> Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992, p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> Cauter, *Communism and the French Intellectuals 1914-1960*, passim; David Cauter, *The Fellow-Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, passim.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Winock, *Le Siècle des Intellectuels*, Seuil, Paris, 1997, p. 229.

which self-consciously claimed legitimacy for political engagement by reference to their occupational role as society's 'thinkers'. Academics and students in Britain and France saw themselves as a distinct social and occupational group, yet while they largely engaged in politics with distinct organisations, forms and objectives, these were rarely intended as absolutely separate from the party politics of the 1930s.<sup>27</sup>

A second valuable element of social history's conception of the intellectual is that it also allows for the recognition that political engagement developed within a personal, social and professional matrix which included many non-political factors such as personality, religion, social milieu and career. Gary Werskey, in his study of the British scientists who most prominently committed themselves to the left during the 1930s, stresses the extent to which their professional and political lives interconnected as marxist materialism seemed to offer a scientific understanding of politics consistent with their own academic research.<sup>28</sup> Equally, Jean-François Sirinelli in his study of French academic elites has stressed the importance of sociability and the connections of friendship, in shaping small political groups.<sup>29</sup> The importance of these non-political factors within the university environment in shaping opportunities for political activity by academics and students forms the focus for the first third of the thesis. Politics developed within the university as a structural and social phenomenon that was formulated and expressed within the limits of immediate environments. Differences between institutions in political organisation, activity and consciousness were encouraged by divergences in the ways universities taught and organised. However, politics was also a social phenomenon - individually expressed, often reacting to mentors, peers, current concerns or traditional assumptions. The place of religion, gender and class in shaping the social milieu of institutions also encouraged, or reinforced, political differences. The university was both a structural institution and a social milieu, and these two elements powerfully effected the place of intellectual politics during the 1930s.

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<sup>27</sup> Despite the growing youth movements of the 1930s, especially in France, students maintained their own distinct identities and organisations - Remi Fabre, "Les Mouvements de Jeunesse dans la France de l'Entre-Deux-Guerres", *Mouvement Social*, 168, July-Sept 1984, pp. 9-30.

<sup>28</sup> Gary Werskey, *The Visible College: A Collective Biography of British Scientists and Socialists of the 1930s*, 2nd ed., Free Association Books, London, 1988.

<sup>29</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, "The Concept of an Intellectual Generation" in Jeremy Jennings, ed., *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurais*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 90.

## Universities in the 1930s

To the outsider, the intellectual, social and political life of a university seems to constitute a unified community distinct from its surroundings, yet from within, university life often seems comprised of a diffuse milieu of sub-cultures, groups and individuals.<sup>30</sup> Equally the insider is highly sensitive to the distinctive identities and characters of the various institutions, be they residential colleges, faculties, or departments, which those outside the university see as merely common components of the whole. To survey the different character of universities within each country, seven British and eight French institutions were selected to be studied. In Britain these were the universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Oxford, as well as the London School of Economics and University College London which were both part of the federal University of London. In France, research was focused on the universities of Bordeaux, Lille, Marseille, Montpellier, Toulouse and Paris as well as two French institutions with no British parallel, the *École Normale Supérieure* and the *Collège de France*.

Perhaps the most significant contrast between the system of higher education in the two countries was that in France, universities were state institutions whereas in Britain, despite their reliance on government funding following the First World War, they remained largely independent. As a result, there was a stronger interconnection between French universities and the other levels of state education than in Britain where the university tended to stand as largely distinct. The head of each French university, the Rector, exemplified this integration of the state system, for he was responsible to the Minister of National Education for primary, secondary and higher education in his region. Equally the words *étudiant* and *professeur* covered both those in universities and those in secondary schools and *lycées*, as compared to the far more distinct meanings of undergraduate, don, lecturer and professor in Britain. The career paths of many French academics often began at a *lycée* and could extend to university appointments across the country. Despite this contrast between a highly centralised state system in France and the independent universities of Britain, there were many similarities between their institutional structure and social milieu.

University students in both countries were almost definitionally part of their society's upper ranks, although as Zeldin notes "the relation of class and education was complex and not automatic".<sup>31</sup> In both countries the expansion of higher education at

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<sup>30</sup> Raymond Williams, *What I Came to Say*, Hutchinson, Radius, London, 1989, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945, Vol 1: Ambition, Love and Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1973, p. 18.

the turn of the nineteenth century, had increased student numbers and accessibility.<sup>32</sup> Still universities remained institutions for a privileged minority, and perhaps more significantly, the massive growth of higher education produced a fragmented structure, which entrenched a bifurcation between 'elite' institutions and their 'civic' counterparts, who differed significantly in resources, student composition, teaching and prestige.

In both countries the apex of higher education, was occupied by elite-forming institutions which largely controlled access to the higher professions and public office. With the expansion and reform of the universities these had "moved from monopoly to pre-eminence", largely maintaining their prestigious status.<sup>33</sup> Institutions such as the *École Normale Supérieure* and the specialised *grandes écoles* in France as well as the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in Britain, were "at the head of the academic hierarchy of prestige, achievement, and reputation known to every academic, professional, and businessmen".<sup>34</sup> Significantly, the Collège de France, the *École Normale Supérieure* and the *grandes écoles* formed a distinct and largely autonomous sector outside the state system of universities.<sup>35</sup> Unlike Britain, the highest levels of research, as well as technical and professional teaching often lay outside the French universities, which "never became the true apex of the educational system" though this separation was lessened by the personal interaction between the different institutions.<sup>36</sup> Universities in Britain and France developed along divergent lines, though they were both components of a highly stratified education system.

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<sup>32</sup> In 1896 the existing regional Faculties in France were amalgamated into 15 universities, while the number of French students rose throughout the Third Republic, from 11,200 in 1876 to 81,000 by 1935. In Britain, 6 new universities were built from metropolitan technical colleges at the turn of the century which allowed the student population to increase from 16,735 students in 1899 to 50,000 students during the second half of 1930s - Joseph K. Moody, French Education Since Napoleon, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1978, pp. 113 & 143; Harold Perkin, Key Profession: The History of the Association of University Teachers, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1969, pp. 23 & 57; Fritz K. Ringer, Education and Society in Modern Europe, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1979, p. 229.

George Weisz, The Emergence of Modern Universities in France 1863-1914, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983, pp. 225 & 242.

<sup>33</sup> A.H. Halsey, Decline of Donnish Dominion: The British Academic Profession in the Twentieth Century, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 60.

<sup>34</sup> Harold J. Perkin, "The Academic Profession in the United Kingdom" in Burton R. Clark, ed., The Academic Profession: National, Disciplinary & Institutional Settings, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1987, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> Erhard Friedberg & Christine Musselin, "The Academic Profession in France" in Burton R. Clark, ed., The Academic Profession: National, Disciplinary & Institutional Settings, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> Theodore Zeldin, "Higher Education in France 1848-1940", Journal of Contemporary History, 2, 3, July 1967, p. 69.



The unique character of the *grandes écoles* and Oxbridge was reinforced by their selective admission of students, their closely supervised teaching environment, and for the latter, its residential nature. Selective admission was based on a combination of financial and academic constraints, such as the requirement of an entrance exam in classics, which privileged students from the *lycées* and the public schools.<sup>37</sup> Admission automatically made the student part of a well defined elite, physically as well as intellectually. The *École Normale Supérieure* took in only fifty students a year, while at Oxford and Cambridge students joined a similarly small cadre through their membership of a residential college. Within Oxford,

The tightness of the college community owed much to a shared educational and social background. Inter-war Oxford was overwhelmingly middle-class in its composition. Oxford undergraduates were instantly recognisable by their gowns, accents and clothing: grey flannel trousers, tweed jacket, collar and tie for ordinary occasions, white flannels and blazer for sporting functions. Yet within this middle-class collegiate world there were many gradations of status and marked contrasts in income.<sup>38</sup>

In both countries class and gender were powerful markers of the separation between 'elite' and 'civic' universities.

For those who went up to Oxford or Cambridge from working class backgrounds, there was a feeling of incredible distance from the upper class public school culture which set the dominant tone.<sup>39</sup> In France, the Republican concept of meritocratic opportunity was partly undermined by the education system's reliance on rigorous exams which made a student's cultural capital crucial to their chances of success. Family background therefore played a large role in preparing students for the arduous *concours* of the *École Normale Supérieure*, or the entrance exams for the *grandes écoles* or Faculties of Law and Medicine.

Like class, gender differentiated elite institutions from the civic universities in both Britain and France. Throughout the inter-war period, women were not only a small minority of the university population of Oxford and Cambridge, but they were formally "half-in and half-out of the university".<sup>40</sup> These restrictions encouraged the

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<sup>37</sup> Daniel I. Greenstein, "The Junior Members, 1900-1990: A Profile" in Brian Harrison, ed., *The History of Oxford, Vol III: The Twentieth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 47; T.E.B. Howarth, *Cambridge Between Two Wars*, Collins, London, p. 65.

<sup>38</sup> Brian Harrison, "College Life, 1918-1939" in Harrison, ed., *The History of Oxford, Vol III: The Twentieth Century*, p. 94

<sup>39</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*, New Left Books, London, 1979, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Rita McWilliams-Tullberg, *Women at Cambridge: A Men's University - Though of a Mixed Type*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1975, p. 208;

women to work to a higher academic standard than their male peers and perhaps also increased their willingness to engage in political activity.<sup>41</sup> The male residential colleges dictated the dominant ethos of Oxbridge, for as Margaret Cole remembered of her exclusion from the college Senior Common Room enjoyed by her husband, "later generations can have little idea how *male* was the adult life of intellectual Oxford".<sup>42</sup> Equally, the most prestigious French *grandes écoles* remained all-male.<sup>43</sup> By 1935 there were over 20,000 women studying at French universities, representing a quarter of the total student population. However, most of this number were concentrated in studying for lower level degrees and located in particular faculties.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps most significantly, their restricted access to elite institutions meant that there was a dearth of female academics, especially in France. It was their professional exclusion from the higher ranks of learning and teaching rather than their political disenfranchisement which was the main factor responsible for making intellectual a male identity.<sup>45</sup>

Reinforcing these social differences between the universities, were structural differences which affected how teaching and campus life were organised. Teaching was predominantly on a smaller scale in the 'elite' institutions, allowing for more personal supervision. While the students of the *École Normale Supérieure* and Oxbridge attended lectures within their respective universities, the primary form of teaching was through individual tutorials or in small group seminars.<sup>46</sup> This intimate style of teaching encouraged a unique ethos, an emphasis on discussion and much closer relations between students and academics. These close contacts were reinforced in Oxbridge, though not in France, by the collegiate residence of students and academics together. The collegiate environment was an influential frame in which

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Oxford had admitted female students as full members of the university following the First World War, but had imposed a quota on their numbers in 1927, while Cambridge refused to grant them full membership of the university - Janet Howarth, "Women" in Harrison, ed., The History of Oxford, Vol III: The Twentieth Century, pp 349-350.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 366;

Gary Wersky describes the numerically small contingent of female students and academics in the science labs of Cambridge as by almost be definition a "gifted *and* suppressed minority" - Werskey, The Visible College, p. 221.

<sup>42</sup> Margaret Cole, The Life of G.D.H. Cole, Macmillan, London, 1971, p. 145.

<sup>43</sup> Weisz, The Emergence of Modern Universities in France 1863-1914, p. 243.

<sup>44</sup> In 1935, 46% of French students in the Faculty of Letters and 43% of those studying Pharmacy were women, while they were only 15% of the student population in the Faculty of Law and 23% of those in the Faculties of Medicine and Science - Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>45</sup> Christophe Charle, La République des Universitaires 1870-1940, Seuil, Paris, 1994, pp. 217-222.

<sup>46</sup> Robert J. Smith, L'École Normale Supérieure and the Third Republic, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1982, pp. 18 & 74.

undergraduates experienced university, and while they never dictated the attitudes of their diverse membership, they provided opportunities for organisation and contact.<sup>47</sup>

In both countries civic universities followed a different educational model that reflected their expansionist backgrounds. This allowed them to admit more students, as did the lecture structure of their courses. Their largely local student intake and the more applied nature of their courses, gave them a more regional nature than their 'elite' peers.<sup>48</sup> The non-residential character of British civic universities was perhaps the most significant factor that made separated them from their elite counterparts. Not living on campus removed a potential focus for group activity or identity, while it meant students and academics were automatically more involved in activities outside the university. As the student magazine of the University of Edinburgh recorded,

A large number of students have lived in Edinburgh all their lives, and to them the University with its three classes a day is only an incident.. The average Arts Class is not conducive to the evocation of that shy spirit called corporate. A few score of mildly bored and harassed people walk in, write hard for an hour, snap their books shut, and hurry on to do it all again round the corner... There are, of course, the Athletic Club and some seventy societies... Society meetings are generally rather like Tutorials, but they last longer and fewer people are present.<sup>49</sup>

University life was not only organised on a different basis at civic institutions, but it was also seen as a less overwhelming experience.

Interestingly, in British 'civic' universities there was still an emphasis on campus clubs and societies on an Oxbridge model, whereas in France these internal organisations were largely non-existent. As a visiting commission of British academics representing the Association of University Teachers reported in 1930 that at French universities,

Instruction is largely on formal lines and there is little intimate contact and certainly no continuous contact between professor and student.... Corporate student life is self-organised and self-governed, and has grown up alongside of, rather than within, the universities.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Another difference between the two countries was the professional specialisation of French studies, while at Oxbridge notions of a balanced general 'gentleman's education' strongly persisted. Significantly the study of economics and politics developed within the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques in Paris and the Faculties of Law which were seen as largely conservative institutions, while at Oxbridge they were taught as "Modern Greats" or PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) which meant they developed next to the humanities.

<sup>48</sup> Halsey, *Decline of Donnish Dominion*, p. 61.

<sup>49</sup> *The Student*, Jan. 1936, p. 159.

<sup>50</sup> *The Universities Review*, 3, 1, Oct. 1930, p. 52;

University life was therefore more self-contained and campus-focused in Britain while in France, politics for academics and students was centred on public activity and organisation rather than within the university. To an extent, this distinction was encouraged by the way the historical record has been preserved, for British universities have devoted considerable resources to recording their own internal activities. For French education, the historian is frequently reliant on other sources, particularly the press and police, which give an external view and emphasis to university activities.

This contrast in sources has significant consequences in the way university politics are recorded. They are described as part of a milieu of campus social, cultural, sporting and political activities in Britain, whereas in France they are seen as occurring outside the university. Charle writes that the two main sources for the political attitudes of students are the press, which is frequently unreliable and imprecise, or police reports, which are often biased and contain significant gaps.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps more importantly than these criticisms, this focus on activity *dans la rue* ignores the stratum of sub-political informal meetings, discussions and activities which are visible in British student publications. For example, the dissolution of the nationalist leagues in 1936 means that French students of the extreme right largely disappear from the historical record. While it is harder to find evidence for their politics during the second half of the 1930s, it is fairly certain that dissolution had also produced a transformation of their activities for despite increased police scrutiny they no longer had a public face.

The contrast in sources available in Britain and France reinforces, rather than undermines this dissertation's central contention that political activity developed within British universities during the 1930s in a more broad-reaching and non-partisan way, facilitated by its enclosed environment, whereas in France, students and academics remained more strongly divided by party politics. Consciously comparing the different character of archival material which has been preserved in the two countries, gives the historian a wider awareness of what may have been left unrecorded, of where there may be silences or gaps in the sources.

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Weisz, The Emergence of Modern Universities in France 1863-1914, p. 303.

<sup>51</sup> Charle, Les Naissance des "Intellectuels", p. 62.

David Berry is equally critical of police reports as sources, which he argues miss the nuances of labour movement and confuse subtle differences and tendencies, however these are defended as a source for political history by Robert Soucy - David Berry, "The Response of the French Anarchist Movement to the Russian Revolution (1917-24) and to the Spanish Revolution and Civil War (1936-39)", D.Phil, Sussex, 1988, p. 15;

Robert Soucy, French Fascism: The Second Wave 1933-1939, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995, pp. 323-324.

This thesis seeks to use comparative history and social history to give a deeper and more nuanced understanding of interwar politics. By examining the political repertoires adopted by different groups at different times, we obtain a clearer image of how forms of activity and organisation shaped their reactions to specific events. Equally, social history offers an understanding of how politics was influenced by other factors, including personal and professional concerns. Adopting both these approaches demystifies and contextualises the political engagement of British and French intellectuals during the 1930s. Both academics and students reacted to the civil war in Spain through diverse organisations with a variety of means and motives. In examining how they approached politics through the 1930s it becomes clear that not only were the university members of France and Britain participating in different political climates, but that the nature of political activity itself was very different between the two countries.

## Chapter 1

### 'A Crisis in the University World': German Academic Refugees

#### The Nazification of German Universities

The birth of the Nazi Reich in 1933 directly touched the international university community. As part of the new government's policy to racially and politically 'purify' all state institutions over a thousand German academics were dismissed or forced out of their university positions.<sup>1</sup> The exodus of these academic refugees overseas evoked significantly different responses from Britain and France due to their distinctive university systems. The campaigns to aid German academics which developed within British and French universities registered the differing political opportunities and limitations in the two countries. These diverging reactions to the same event also established campaigns, coalitions and perceptions which shaped the responses of academics and students to other international events later in the decade.

In mid-March 1933, the Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), William Beveridge, received a letter from his university contacts in Vienna detailing the establishment of a committee to aid the refugees from German universities by Paris academics. Given Beveridge's leadership role in similar relief efforts in Britain, it suggested "that it would be of great importance if a contact between English and French personalities could be established before a definite scheme will be adopted by the French Committee".<sup>2</sup> Beveridge therefore wrote to Sylvain Lévi of the Collège de France, who had been identified as the "*spiritus rector*" of the whole work", including details of his School's relief fund and the national appeal launched by the newly-formed Academic Assistance Council (AAC).<sup>3</sup> Yet despite this early contact between academics in the two countries, British and French responses to events in Germany followed distinct paths. In Britain, the AAC, supported by a broad coalition of professional and political groups, successfully coordinated a national campaign that funded positions for the refugees at universities across the country. The state structure of French universities militated against such a campaign, as did the character of the refugee influx from

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<sup>1</sup> Academics were only one group amongst the mass exodus from Nazi Germany, which between 1933 and 1941 totalled an estimated 300,000 refugees - Gerhard Hirschfeld, "Introduction" in Gerhard Hirschfeld, ed., Exile in Great Britain: Refugees from Hitler's Germany, Berg Publishers, Leamington Spa, 1984, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 17/3/1933, Mss SPSL 144, Bodleian Library.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 22/5/1933, Ibid.

Germany which made refugee relief a more politicised issue in France. In both countries, academics and students found their efforts shaped by the opportunities afforded by their own universities and the contours of national politics.

By early May 1933, all non-Aryans and political opponents of the Nazi regime had been excluded by law from the civil service, including the state universities.<sup>4</sup> Legislation was also enacted which limited the number of Jewish students to 1.5% of the total student body in German higher education. These accumulating legal restrictions were paralleled by widespread intimidation and anti-semitic violence on the streets and within universities.<sup>5</sup> Amongst the books burnt on 10 May 1933 were those of some current German academics.<sup>6</sup> Within a year of the Nazis coming to power, an estimated 1,100 German university academics were forced out of their positions, representing 15% of the nation's teaching body.<sup>7</sup> Many of these "displaced scholars" were senior figures with international reputations; the average period of teaching for the refugees was 22 years and a quarter were full professors. This radical transformation of German universities by the Nazi state aroused international concern, especially amongst academics who had known as colleagues and friends those who were being forced to the margins of the new Reich.

### **'Contre l'Antisémitisme': A Parisian Protest**

On 22 and 27 April 1933, Le Temps carried a petition against the growth of anti-semitism in Germany signed by almost 200 Paris academics.<sup>8</sup> The petition was sponsored by the newly formed Comité d'Accueil et d'Aide aux Victimes de l'Antisémitisme Allemand, led by a former Prime Minister (Paul Painlevé) and a former Minister of Public Instruction (Senator André Honnorat).<sup>9</sup> Significantly the wording of the petition treated German anti-semitism as a moral issue, and explicitly claimed its signatories to be representatives of the national conscience. Such a role harked back to that which French academics had most publicly claimed

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Burleigh & Wolfgang Wippermann, The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Dietrich Bracher, The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure and Consequences of National Socialism, Penguin, London, 1970, pp. 335-339

<sup>6</sup> Burleigh & Wippermann, The Racial State, p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> AAC Annual Report, 1/5/1934, p. 12 in Mss SPSL 1, Bodleian Library; SPSL Annual Report, 22/7/1937, p. 6 in Mss SPSL 1.

<sup>8</sup> Newspaper clippings of 22/4/1933 & 27/4/1933 in BA 1814, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>9</sup> The committee also included Senator Justin Godart, Edmond de Rothschild and the Grand Rabbi of France.

as *intellectuels engagés* during the Dreyfusard crisis of 1898.<sup>10</sup> Though the signatories of the Le Temps petition had been overwhelmingly drawn from the academic institutions of Paris, their conception of intellectual identity meant that they had acted in the name of general principles rather than over the specific repression of the German universities. This stance contrasts to that adopted during the following month by British academics, who choose to deliberately down-play the impact of anti-semitism on events in Germany and focused instead on academic refugees as a professional issue when they formed the AAC.<sup>11</sup>

It was not only the sheer number of signatories to the Le Temps petition that was impressive, but also the professional titles that accompanied these leading names. Of the 60 signatories of the first instalment of the petition, two thirds were members of the Institute, 16 belonged to the Académie de Médecine, and two to the Académie Française. Their prestige probably facilitated the second list of signatories five days later, which was drawn almost exclusively from within the University of Paris. The petition was so successful in mobilising the elite of French academia that it reached across political, religious and institutional boundaries.<sup>12</sup> Jews and Catholics, partisans of the left and the right, and many who abstained from public politics all came together in a petition which explicitly described itself as above considerations of politics. Amongst the signatories were several academics who would later find themselves on opposing sides over the Spanish civil war.<sup>13</sup>

The elite support and the breadth of the non-partisan appeal of the Le Temps petition represented the high watermark of its genre during the 1930s.<sup>14</sup> Given the emphasis in French historiography on the structural divisions between

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<sup>10</sup> The Dreyfus Affair and the political traditions it defined will be discussed in Chapter 2. Sudhir Hazareesingh argues that the politics of French intellectuals have traditionally focused on universalist arguments of abstract truth, moral justice and universal reason - Sudhir Hazareesingh, Political Traditions in Modern France, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Beveridge had been discouraged by the Royal Society from seeking a Jewish Honorary Secretary in the formation of the AAC, and ultimately only one British academic of Jewish faith was included amongst the 43 signatories to its initial appeal - William Beveridge, A Defence of Free Learning, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> The personal, professional and political biographies of many of the signatories are detailed in the following works - Charle & Telkes, Les Professeurs du Collège de France, passim;

Charle & Telkes, Les Professeurs de la Faculté des Sciences de Paris, passim; Charle, Les Professeurs de la Faculté des Lettres de Paris, passim.

<sup>13</sup> In 1936, germanist Victor Basch & physicist Paul Langevin emerged as two key figures championing the cause of the Spanish Republic while in the Faculty of Law, Louis Le Fur played a similar role for the Nationalists.

<sup>14</sup> Bertrand Laguerre, "Les Petitionnaires du Front Populaire 1934-1939", Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine, 37, 1990, p. 506.



Faculties and the centralisation of higher education around Paris, it is not surprising that over half of the petition's signatories were concentrated within the politically prominent Collège de France and the Sorbonne. Yet the support from the Faculties of Medicine and Law was also significant, given the less prominent role their members played in later, more political, petitions in the 1930s.

TABLE 1.1 ACADEMIC SIGNATORIES OF THE LE TEMPS PETITION<sup>15</sup>

Institution	22/4/33	27/4/33	Total
Collège de France	14	21	35 (16.2%)
Sorbonne	21	52	73
Sorbonne (non-professorial)	-	5	5 (36.1%)
Faculty of Medicine	4	5	9
Faculty of Medicine (non-professorial)	-	15	15 (11.1%)
Faculty of Pharmacy	-	4	4 (1.9%)
Faculty of Law	2	19	21 (9.7%)
École des Hautes Études	2	26	28 (13.0%)
Other	17	9	26 (12.0%)
Total	60	156	216

Perhaps what is most striking about the 216 names is the extent to which this mobilisation of France's university elite was exclusively Parisian. A handful of academics in provincial universities did take public positions against German anti-semitism, but they did so within their local communities rather than on the national stage.<sup>16</sup> At the University of Bordeaux, mass meetings against fascism were

<sup>15</sup> Newspaper clippings of 22/4/1933 & 27/4/1933 in BA 1814, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris;

In 1936-37 the professorial staff of each institution numbered: 42 at the Collège de France, 139 at the Sorbonne, 50 in the Faculty of Medicine, and 44 in the Faculty of Law - Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale: Tableau de Classement du Personnel Enseignant 1/1/1937, 2 T 665, AD Nord.

<sup>16</sup> In late April 1933, Rector Chatelet of the University of Lille was invited by the Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme at l'Anti-Semitism to support a local meeting which was attended by 1,200 people - Letter of 21/4/1933, 2 T 747, AD Nord; Report of 28/4/1933, M155-38, AD Nord.

organised by the left-wing students' group the Ligue d'Action Universitaire Républicaine et Socialiste (LAURS) in early April and mid-May 1933.<sup>17</sup> Rather than motivated by events in Germany these were directed against their fellow students of the extreme right, who violently interrupted the second meeting, causing several injuries. On 24 May 1933, LAURS organised a meeting in Bordeaux on "*Le Fascisme en Allemagne*" which attracted an audience of around 600 people, whom police identified as mostly students.<sup>18</sup> Following the main speaker from Germany, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Bordeaux, Henri Daudin, appealed to the meeting to establish a local section of the Comité d'Aide aux Victimes du Fascisme Hitlérien. Given Daudin's pro-communist political commitments, it is probable that the committee to which he referred was an offshoot of the PCF.<sup>19</sup> Strikingly, unlike the campaigns within British universities to aid German refugee scholars, it was political parties and not professional groups which were able to establish in France the organisations which most successfully mobilised academics and students on a national basis.

### **British Refugee Relief and the Academic Assistance Council**

Though there was no British petition which paralleled that in *Le Temps*, a similar array of leading academics came together to organise relief funds and university positions for their German counterparts.<sup>20</sup> Beveridge was on a visit to Vienna in late March 1933 when he first heard of the dismissal of leading German academics on racial and political grounds by the new Nazi regime.<sup>21</sup> Responding to the fears of continental colleagues, he returned to Britain committed to organising assistance. By mid-May 1933, his initiatives within the London School of Economics had established an Academic Freedom Committee which sought to fund research and teaching positions at the LSE for the German refugees through staff

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<sup>17</sup> Report of 7/4/1933, 1 M 525, AD Gironde;

Report of 17/5/1933, *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Report of 24/5/1933, *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Daudin's political position is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3;

The British parallel of this committee, the Relief Committee for the Victims of German Fascism was seen by the Labour Party as a Communist front organisation - see footnote 44.

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, 26/4/1933, contained a letter to the Editor from 18 academics at Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh and Bangor protesting the dismissal of Dr Bernhardt Zondek from his position in Germany.

<sup>21</sup> Beveridge, *A Defence of Free Learning*, p. 1;

Ralph Dahrendorf, *LSE: A History of the London School of Economics & Political Science 1895-1995*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 287;

R.M. Cooper, ed., *Refugee Scholars: Conversations with Tess Simpson*, Moorland Books, Leeds, 1992, p. 31.

donations.<sup>22</sup> Professor of Economics Lionel Robbins had recommended a scaled voluntary contribution scheme for staff (ranging from 3% of professors' salaries to 1% for lecturers) to raise 1,000 pounds a year for three years.<sup>23</sup> This provided the basis for an initial appeal at the LSE which raised 1,100 pounds, with a further 600 pounds conditionally promised for the following two years.<sup>24</sup> LSE's commitment to the social sciences may have encouraged these efforts to welcome refugee academics, as the School was more suited than other British institutions to the theoretical nature of German scholarship.<sup>25</sup> Over the next six years LSE's Academic Assistance Account raised 3,141 pounds which provided grants to 26 academic refugees.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time as initiating the development of LSE's Academic Freedom Committee, Beveridge was also active in the formation of a national Academic Assistance Council to organise a similar provision of professional aid across British universities. The first public appeal of the AAC on 24 May 1933 was in Beveridge's words "as impressive as any such list could be".<sup>27</sup> Besides Beveridge, the AAC's sponsors included the Provost of University College London (Dr Mawer), the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford (A.D. Lindsay who was also Master of Balliol College) and prominent professors from Cambridge and Oxford (such as F.G. Hopkins and physicist Lord Rutherford).<sup>28</sup> Like the signatories of the Le Temps petition, these names were not only leaders in their academic fields but drawn from a variety of institutions and political groups.<sup>29</sup> Unlike their Paris counterparts, the academics of the AAC focused specifically on actions against German universities, thereby seeking to avoid any wider debate over the legitimacy or merits of the Nazi government. The AAC's initial appeal argued that the crisis

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<sup>22</sup> The Committee included the Director, Dr Dalton and Professors Laski, Parry, Power, Robbins and Webster - Statement, Coll Misc 22/10, LSE Archives.

<sup>23</sup> Minutes of Professorial Council 17/5/1933, Coll Misc 349/A, LSE Archives.

<sup>24</sup> The efforts by their teachers, were paralleled by LSE students whose Union established a German Refugees Scholarship Fund which quickly raised 160 pounds - Clare Market Review, Spring Term 1934, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Hoch argues that the secondary migration of German academic refugees from Britain to the US was fuelled by the intellectual differences between scholarship in the two countries, which ignores the powerful financial constraints which faced British universities - Paul K. Hoch, "No Utopia: Refugee Scholars in Britain", History Today, 35, Nov. 1983, pp. 54-55.

<sup>26</sup> Report of 7/6/1939, Coll Misc 349/B, LSE Archives.

<sup>27</sup> Beveridge, A Defence of Free Learning, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

List cMay 1933, Mss SPSL 1, Bodleian Library.

<sup>29</sup> Hopkins and Rutherford were active adherents of the Labour Party and the Conservative Party respectively, while Beveridge was a supporter of the Liberal Party - Gary Werskey, The Visible College: A Collective Biography of British Scientists and Socialists of the 1930s, 2nd ed., Free Association Books, London, 1988, p. 222.

was not merely a Jewish issue or a German one, but a matter of academic freedom.<sup>30</sup> Distinctively, the AAC saw itself as a national organisation to coordinate support from institutions and individuals across the country for the provision of academic positions for the German refugees.

Within a matter of weeks the AAC's first appeal had raised 10,000 pounds.<sup>31</sup> Only a quarter of this total had come from large donations.<sup>32</sup> Though Beveridge sought funds from private foundations and other charitable institutions, he noted that British universities were the strongest financial supporters of the AAC's efforts.<sup>33</sup> Part of this success was due to large donations from the residential colleges of Oxford and Cambridge which were institutions with their own financial resources and administration. The individual colleges within the University of Cambridge contributed 1,025 pounds to the first appeal. Paralleling this effort was the support of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) whose membership was largely drawn from universities outside Oxbridge. In the spring term of 1935, an appeal was made directly to the 1,500 members of the AUT which raised 1,481 pounds.<sup>34</sup>

Though the leaderships of both the AAC and the AUT disavowed political positions (defined in their minds by party or ideology), their professional concerns forced them to take public positions over events in Germany. As the AUT's journal, The Universities Review, stated over recent Nazi policy, "the Association of University Teachers has always stood aloof from party politics, but the present persecution of the Jews is something more than party, something more than a difference of political opinion".<sup>35</sup> After receiving resolutions from its Leeds branch, from Beveridge and from the Association of Science Workers over the issue of German refugees, the AUT Central Council released a public statement stressing "its continued adherence to the fundamental principle of freedom of opinion and teaching in academic life".<sup>36</sup> The AUT Executive established an Academic Hospitality Committee to provide aid for German refugees and to co-operate with other groups, such as the AAC.<sup>37</sup> The head of Academic Hospitality Committee

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<sup>30</sup> Beveridge, A Defence of Free Learning, pp. 4-5.

Cooper, ed., op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Beveridge, A Defence of Free Learning, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> A donation of 2,500 pounds had come from Central British Fund for German Jewry - AAC Annual Report, 1/5/1934, p. 3, Mss SPSL 1, Bodleian Library.

<sup>33</sup> Beveridge, A Defence of Free Learning, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> AAC Second Annual Report, 20/7/1935, p. 5, Mss SPSL 1.

<sup>35</sup> The Universities Review, 5, 2, April 1933, p. 91.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of 26/5/1933, Mss 27/1/1/5, AUT Collection, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of 14/12/1933, Ibid.

(who also sat on the AAC) was keen that the AUT should encourage local fundraising committees to provide positions at their own universities.

One such local committee to aid displaced scholars was established at the University of Leeds following a meeting sponsored by the university's Vice-Chancellor on 27 June 1933.<sup>38</sup> Though the Vice-Chancellor refused to join the academics who formed the local committee of the AAC, the branch was able to gain the patronage of the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Ripon. By the opening of the academic year in October 1933, they had collected 30 subscriptions totalling 107 pounds.<sup>39</sup> During the following month this total increased to 192 pounds. In March 1934 the Leeds AAC launched a public appeal to 2,000 leading local citizens, including 400 senior members of the university and 240 members of the Jewish community.<sup>40</sup> Its aim was to raise 2,000 pounds to support three German academics at the University of Leeds over a two year period. In fact, the appeal only raised a quarter of the total which organisers had hoped for; receiving 119 pounds from university donations, 242 pounds from the Jewish community and 184 pounds from the general public. While the funds were much less than those raised at the resource-rich universities of Oxford and Cambridge, they did provide temporary funding for three academic refugees at the University of Leeds.

In mid-1935 the AUT's review carried an article which recorded that 4,000 pounds had been raised by the local AAC committees in Manchester and Leeds.<sup>41</sup> The same article recorded that 650 academics had been forced to leave Germany since 1933. Its writer noted that "nearly one third of the scholars in emigration have found hospitality in British Universities while seeking positions elsewhere".<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, he argued (appropriately for a trade union paper), that the work of the AAC had not injured the professional interests of British teachers.

Another 'non-political' body which joined the AUT in the relief efforts for German refugees was the Royal Society, whose early support was instrumental in the AAC's foundation.<sup>43</sup> The AAC, AUT and Royal Society each claimed to be non-partisan organisations and justified their activism in solely professional terms. Their combined efforts were therefore qualitatively different from politicised left-wing

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<sup>38</sup> Letter of 5/7/1933, Ms 415 LAAC, Special Collections, Brotherton Library.

<sup>39</sup> Note, *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Note of 13/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *The Universities Review*, 7, 2, April 1935, p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p 128.

<sup>43</sup> Beveridge, *A Defence of Free Learning*, p. 3.

organisations such as the Relief Committee for Victims of German Fascism.<sup>44</sup> Academic refugees from the Nazis' new Germany made anti-fascism a professional cause as much as an ideological one. The AAC's widening base of support was encouraged by a 'softening' of the political issues involved. Engagement was fuelled and facilitated by the mixing of political considerations with moral, humanitarian and professional motives. The AAC was therefore based on the extension of the boundaries of political involvement to previously non-political groups and individuals.

### The Comité des Savants

The closest French counterpart to the humanitarian fundraising efforts of the AAC to aid German refugee scholars was the Paris-based Comité des Savants. This committee, which was formed at a meeting in the Sorbonne on 13 May 1933, paralleled the British efforts in its elite support and its ambition of providing professional aid for academic refugees.<sup>45</sup> Despite the early contact between Beveridge and his French peers over the organisation of British aid, academic assistance in France was shaped by a different set of indigenous imperatives. The structure of French universities, the restricted resources available and considerations of national politics limited the relief that the committee could provide.

The president of the Comité des Savants was André Honnorat, who was one of the patrons of the Le Temps petition as well as president of the newly-built student housing project in Paris, the Cité Universitaire. He was joined on the committee by several other signatories to the Le Temps petition including Sylvain Lévi and physicists Paul Langevin and Jean Perrin. The Comité des Savants drew far less support from academics in the Faculties of Medicine and Law than the earlier petition, perhaps because of the controversy created in France by the arrival of high numbers of refugee doctors and lawyers. The Comité des Savants, like the petition which preceded it, drew exclusively from a Paris academic milieu. While

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<sup>44</sup> The Leeds AAC declined to participate in a joint meeting with the Relief Committee for Victims of German Fascism as the Leeds academics felt that the latter "was definitely associated with certain political interests" - Minutes of 2/5/1934, Ms 446 LAAC. In Cambridge Professor Francis Cornford noted of a petition by the Relief Committee for Victims of German Fascism for the release of Comintern delegate Dimitrov held by the Nazis that "others might sign if the Communist origins of the movement was sufficiently suppressed" - Letter of 6/12/1933, K 71, Needham Papers, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>45</sup> Report, Ms SPSL 145, Bodleian Library; Report of 19/5/1934, BA 1814, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

the AAC had sought to coordinate university efforts across the country, the Comité des Savants was the creation of a Parisian elite.

In one respect, at least, it was impossible for Comité des Savants to pursue a campaign similar to the Academic Assistance Council in seeking permanent and temporary positions for German academics, as French law imposed strict nationality requirements on university employment. Lévi wrote to his AAC colleagues across the Channel, "I hope that through our cooperation it will be possible to secure for them positions which they cannot, unfortunately find in this country".<sup>46</sup> This legal barrier powerfully shaped French academics' conceptions of their efforts. As Canadian scientist Louis Rapkine noted of the French relief efforts of 1933,

before the hopelessness of not being able to find permanent positions for the foreign scholars and scientists in State universities (where one must be French) nothing serious was undertaken even in the way of helping these foreign savants.<sup>47</sup>

Rapkine's judgement was overly harsh given that the Comité des Savants was able to temporarily place 23 refugee academics in Paris institutions.<sup>48</sup>

The legal constraints faced by the Comité des Savants were reinforced by the increasing financial pressures on French universities during the early 1930s. Facing an international financial crisis and a stagnant domestic economy, the French government focused its financial policy on drastically reducing state expenditure including that on higher education.<sup>49</sup> These cuts forced many universities into a significant reduction of their teaching staff. Even at the pinnacle of the state education system, the Collège de France was reduced from 47 professorial chairs in 1930 to 42 chairs in 1936.<sup>50</sup> With such pressure on teaching and research opportunities for French academics, even temporary places for the German refugees required substantial external funding.

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<sup>46</sup> Letter of 9/2/1935, Mss SP5L 145, Bodleian Library.

<sup>47</sup> Letter of 8/7/1936, Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Of these half were concentrated in the laboratories of Perrin, Langevin, and Mayer - Letter of 15/4/1934, Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Julian Jackson, The Politics of Depression in France 1932-1936, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 54-58 & 220.

This contrasted to Britain where there was a gradual expansion of government expenditure on higher education during the interwar period, as state funding rose by over 90% between 1924 and 1937 to 9.8 million pounds - John Stevenson, British Society 1914-45, Penguin Books, London, 1984, p. 252.

<sup>50</sup> Theodore Zeldin, "Higher Education in France", p. 77;

Jacques Cavalier, "L'Organisation de l'Enseignement Supérieur en France" in L'Organisation de l'Enseignement Supérieur, Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, Société des Nations, Paris, 1936, p. 140.

The difference between France's highly centralised, state system of education and Britain's independent, self-regulating universities was not only in terms of financial resources, but how these were sought. Mass fundraising for the AAC had been a vital tool in generating interest and support amongst British academics and students. The structure of the French system, where there remained strong divisions between the Faculties, *grandes écoles* and research institutions seemed to discourage such a national campaign. Despite public appeals for support, the Paris Comité des Savants did not adopt the mass fundraising employed by the AAC either on a national or local basis. Its original funds of 640,000 francs were primarily based on large bloc donations, and for the academic year of 1934-35 it sought a League of Nations grant.<sup>51</sup> The contrast in fundraising not only stemmed from different university structures, but perhaps also from the different attitudes they encouraged.<sup>52</sup> As an AUT delegation to France in 1930 commented,

We received the impression of a slight stiffness of outlook regarding the work of the regular *Facultés*, as distinct from the *Instituts*, and we may permit ourselves a doubt as to whether the system proves as readily comfortable at heart to changing demands as our own less highly-organized one.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps some of these structural and financial limitations on French relief efforts might have been overcome if German physicist Albert Einstein had accepted the offer of a chair at the Collège de France in mid-1933.<sup>54</sup> Such a public success might have freed resources and encouraged more pro-active efforts for other refugees. Significantly, it was not until the reforms of the Front Populaire government in 1936 which reorganised academic research in France and increased its state funding, that French aid for refugee academics became more like its British counterpart.

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<sup>51</sup> Report of 19/5/1934, BA 1814, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>52</sup> There were some British complaints that the French Comité des Savants did not do enough of its own fundraising - Letter of 8/10/1934, Ms SPSL 145, Bodleian Library.

<sup>53</sup> "The French University System, Report of the AUT Commission of Investigation, 1930", *The Universities Review*, 3, 1, Oct. 1930, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1994, p. 283;

Andre Langevin, *Paul Langvin, Mon Père: L'Homme et l'Oeuvre*, Français Reunis, Paris, 1971, p. 146.



## Relief Campaigns in British and French Universities

The publication in 1935 of the pamphlet A Crisis in the University World provided a basis on which to assess the international impact of the German academic refugees.<sup>55</sup> The pamphlet estimated that 252,605 pounds had been raised worldwide to assist the refugees. This included 69,672 pounds donated by the Rockefeller Foundation, which was larger than any national total. Britain emerged as the leading country in fundraising to assist academic refugees, narrowly followed by the USA. Its total of 68,903 pounds, which included 28,142 pounds collected directly by the Academic Assistance Council, represented 27.3% of the funds collected internationally. The amount raised in France was 14,384 pounds, or only 5.6% of the international total.

A comparison of the temporary and permanent positions found for the refugee academics reinforces this contrast between Britain and France.

TABLE 1.2: INTERNATIONAL PLACEMENTS FOR ACADEMIC REFUGEES, 1934-1937<sup>56</sup>

Country	1934	1935	1937
UK (Permanent)	-	57	101
UK (Temporary)	178 (48.5%)	155 (34.0%)	127 (29.0%)
France (Permanent)	-	11	16
France (Temporary)	41 (10.5%)	35 (7.4%)	27 (5.5%)
USA (Permanent)	-	76	117
USA (Temporary)	58 (14.9%)	68 (21.5%)	76 (24.6%)
International Total	389	623	785

In terms of fundraising and the provision of positions for refugee academics during the mid-1930s, Britain emerged as the leading nation, especially due to the AAC's early efforts. Aware of its own success, the Academic Assistance Council consciously took the lead in internationally co-ordinating and organising

<sup>55</sup> A Crisis in the University World, Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, 1935 - Ms LAAC 415, Brotherton Library.

<sup>56</sup> AAC Annual Report, 1/5/1934, p. 13;  
AAC Second Annual Report, 20/7/1935, pp. 10-13;  
SPSL Annual Report, 22/7/1937, pp. 16-18.

humanitarian aid for academic refugees.<sup>57</sup> Despite the increasing importance of the USA in providing permanent academic positions, it was Britain which remained at the forefront in providing relief. By comparison, the numbers of refugee academics able to secure positions in France remained remarkably low. This was even more striking, given that the exodus of German refugees impacted upon France with a far greater magnitude than the rest of the world.

**TABLE 1.3: ESTIMATED INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF GERMAN REFUGEES, 1933-1939<sup>58</sup>**

Country	Dec. 1933	June 1935	Dec. 1937	Aug 1939
Britain	3,000 (5.1%)	2,500 (3.1%)	5,500 (3.6%)	56,000 (14.0%)
France	25,000 (42.6%)	10,000 (12.4%)	9,500 (6.2%)	40,000 (10.0%)
Europe	52,600 (88.7%)	43,700 (54.3%)	58,200 (37.8%)	144,000 (36%)
International Total	59,300	80,500	154,000	400,000

There were two key factors which encouraged different reactions over the new Nazi state and the persecution of German academics within French universities compared to those in Britain. Firstly, the structure of the British university system encouraged a broad non-political campaign of professional relief for the refugees within the universities. In France, financial and legal restrictions on university employment limited the opportunities for professional relief similar to that in Britain. Secondly, reactions within the universities were also shaped by national politics. The 1936 debate over the 550th anniversary of the University of Heidelberg revealed some of the political tensions which the refugee relief efforts by British academics had successfully by-passed in 1933. In contrast, the character and magnitude of the refugee influx into France made it a more controversial issue than in Britain, both in national politics and within the universities.

### **The 550th Anniversary of the University of Heidelberg**

The political currents underlying the various British relief efforts for German academic refugees were most clearly exposed in early 1936 over the celebration of

<sup>57</sup> AAC Second Annual Report, 20/7/1935, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Claudena M. Skran, *Refugees in Inter-war Europe: The Emergence of a Regime*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 50.

the University of Heidelberg's 550th anniversary. Representatives of universities from around the world had been invited to the elaborate celebrations in Germany. Yet for some, participation in such an event raised the wider considerations of the changes in German universities and of Nazi policy generally. Though British academics had publicly united to aid their German colleagues, they adopted disparate positions over the more controversial issue of whether official recognition of Heidelberg's long history would legitimate recent Nazi policy.

The debate over the Heidelberg celebrations revealed the limitations in the Academic Assistance Council's ability to publicly engage in political controversy. The AAC was divided over whether delegates should be sent to Heidelberg, however it was not this split that kept most of the leading names of the AAC out of the public debate on the issue, but rather their personal conceptions of professional responsibility.<sup>59</sup> Oxford scientist A.V. Hill, who was one of leading figures on the AAC, felt unable to publicly commit himself against the recognition of Heidelberg, in spite of his strong distaste for Nazi Germany, because of his position in the Royal Society.<sup>60</sup> The sense of professional duty which had encouraged many leading academics to support the relief efforts of the AAC, encouraged them to shy away from public controversy over Heidelberg. This tension was perhaps strongest in historian Walter Adams, who was unable to allow the Heidelberg celebrations pass unchallenged, yet felt constrained by his position as the AAC's Secretary.

In his private correspondence, Adams opposed the Heidelberg anniversary, because "the real truth being that the German Universities are, at present, the negation of all that a University ought to be".<sup>61</sup> In early February 1936, Adams made several efforts to solicit letters to continue a public debate in The Times over the celebrations.<sup>62</sup> Adams, with Hill, wrote to several prominent academics, such as Oxford classicist Gilbert Murray, "suggesting that he might take up the cudgels".<sup>63</sup> Initially, Adams felt that "the Heidelberg discussion is going extremely badly", and hoped that the AAC's list of 44 refugee scholars dismissed from Heidelberg could be used to encourage the boycott of the celebrations.<sup>64</sup>

By the end of March 1936 public pressure had led the University of Oxford to reject sending a delegation which caused the German authorities to withdraw its

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<sup>59</sup> Letter of 12/2/1936, Mss SPSL 53, Bodleian Library.

<sup>60</sup> Letter of 10/2/1936, Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Letter of 12/2/1936, Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Letter of 8/2/1936, Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Letter of 10/2/1936, Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

invitations to British universities. Adams had played a key role in keeping the debate going and hailed the decision as an "immense success".<sup>65</sup> For some, the existence of the debate itself was probably a strong enough disincentive to sending representatives. Herbert Loewe declined Adams' suggestion that he canvass the Council of the University of Cambridge against supporting the Heidelberg celebration, noting that because it was divided on the issue, the Council was unlikely to take any action.<sup>66</sup> Adams also had more practical objectives in championing the debate over the University of Heidelberg, for he hoped that it would raise public awareness of the issue of German academic refugees which could be channelled into future AAC fundraising.<sup>67</sup>

The Heidelberg celebrations also generated heated controversy within the Association of University Teachers, as the clear professional concern which had fuelled refugee relief in 1933 was invoked by both sides of the debate over Heidelberg. The AUT found itself in a highly uncomfortable position when the 1936 Third International Conference of Universities was scheduled for Heidelberg to coincide with the anniversary celebrations. The British union had been the driving force and first host of the International Conference of Universities in 1934, so that given its commitment to fostering international connections between universities, the AUT's executive committee was unwilling to support a boycott to prove a political point.<sup>68</sup> Still, within local branches of the union there was committed opposition to sending an official delegation to Heidelberg. An AUT representative at University College London complained that one of his local members was "after my blood" because of the decision to send an official delegation to Germany, but he had managed to quieten things by saying "we had to go".<sup>69</sup> At the LSE, after a "very animated discussion" the local branch sent a resolution to the AUT executive disapproving of the delegation and requesting an official statement dissociating the trade union from the Heidelberg celebrations.<sup>70</sup> For LSE's Professor of Political Science Harold Laski, this dissent did not go far enough, and he resigned from the branch.<sup>71</sup> There was enough pressure from its membership that the AUT was keen

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<sup>65</sup> Letter of 24/3/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Letter of 6/2/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Letter of 24/3/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *The Universities Review*, 8, 2, April 1936, p. 100.

Similar considerations may have played a role in the discussion of Academic Freedom being dropped from the schedule of the 1934 Conference in Britain - A14.3 Box 1, Mss.27, AUT Collection, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>69</sup> Letter of 30/6/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Letter of 24/5/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Michael Newman, *Harold Laski: A Political Biography*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1993, p. 154.

to publicise that its delegation had only attended the international conference and had left before the anniversary celebrations.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, perhaps to placate opponents of the delegation, the AUT's journal carried a forceful article by the Academic Assistance Council's A.V. Hill, F. Gowland Hopkins and F.G. Kenyon detailing the scale of persecution at German universities.<sup>73</sup>

The debate over the University of Heidelberg's anniversary celebrations did not generate the same intensity in France, partly because the decision to attend was left to individual faculties, rather than to the universities as a whole.<sup>74</sup> Efforts by the Communist groups to stir a nation-wide debate to parallel that which had occurred in Britain seem to have been largely unsuccessful, although they did secure the personal condemnation of the anniversary by several leading academics.<sup>75</sup> More importantly, while British academics were protesting against the persecution of their German colleagues, the members of French universities had other concerns, as students were demonstrating over the influx of refugees from Germany into their courses.

### *L'Invasion des Étrangers*

Academic relief campaigns in France were partly stifled by the magnitude of the refugee influx across the border and the heated political debate this stirred. During 1933, approximately 25,000 German refugees rushed into France.<sup>76</sup> Of these, probably at least half were concentrated in and around Paris.<sup>77</sup> Amongst this overwhelming deluge, the specific problems of German academics and students were largely lost on the periphery of such immense numbers.<sup>78</sup> Significantly, in

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Laski's brother, Neville Laski, was one of leaders of British Jewish community and involved in organising an international conference on refugee aid in London in October 1937- Report of 29/11/37, BA 1814, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris;  
Isaac Kramnick & Barry Sheerman, *Harold Laski: A Life on the Left*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1993, pp. 15 & 317.

<sup>72</sup> *The Universities Review*, 9,1, Nov. 1936, p. 101.

<sup>73</sup> *The Universities Review*, 8, 2, April 1936, p 103.

<sup>74</sup> Letter of 20/4/1936, 2 T 752, AD Nord.

<sup>75</sup> The included Professors Zoretti (Caen), Guignbert (Paris) and Chapelon (Lille) - *La Voix des Étudiants*, June 1936, p. 5 in Collection: Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants, 5, International Institute of Social History.

<sup>76</sup> Skran, *Refugees in Inter-war Europe*, p. 50;  
Weber, *The Hollow Years*, p. 104.

<sup>77</sup> Paris police noted 10,000 declared refugees from Germany within the Department of the Seine - Report of 30/10/33, BA 1814, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>78</sup> For example, amongst the 2,647 German refugees in Paris known to police in mid-June 1933, only 169 were students, while academics were included amongst the 96 refugees from liberal professions - Report n.d., BA 1814, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

France the magnitude of the refugee problem made the issue far more politicised than it was in Britain.

Drawing on its traditional anti-German rhetoric, the press of the French extreme right labelled the foreigners as "*l'invasion*". Richard Millman has argued that the massive influx of German Jews in 1933 fuelled a marked increase in anti-semitism which had previously been a secondary consideration in the rhetoric of the nationalist leagues.<sup>79</sup> However, as Eugen Weber points out, it was not merely the numbers of refugees in 1933 that generated the controversy, but rather their visibility which made them the scapegoats for both France's domestic ills and the international economic and political crises of the 1930s.<sup>80</sup> Against this background of xenophobic nationalism and anti-semitism, the Le Temps petition by French academics was as much for local consumption as it was directed at Germany.

The German refugees largely felt shut off from Paris society. Writer Arthur Koestler noted that in spite of the provision of aid, the French largely kept their distance from the newcomers.<sup>81</sup> These experiences seem to have been shared by the groups of refugee German students who gathered in the cafés of Montmartre and St-Germain. As a police report noted of the refugees in the Dôme café,

L'attitude de ces étudiants est très réservée en ce moment; ils ne conversent en général qu'avec des amis sûrs et seule est à craindre la proximité de groupes d'étudiants français appartenant aux partis de droite ou la présence de quelques étudiants hitlériens fréquentant nos Facultés.<sup>82</sup>

Given the strong appeal of the nationalist leagues amongst university students, the Germans had reason to be wary.

Unlike the relief efforts by British universities for German academics and students, the larger influx of refugees into France and the strength of the nationalist leagues fuelled a more antagonistic response amongst French students.<sup>83</sup> In January

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<sup>79</sup> Richard Millman, La Question Juive entre les Deux Guerres: Ligues de Droite et Antisémitisme en France, Armand Colin, Paris, 1992, p. 125;

Robert Soucy, French Fascism, p. 26.

<sup>80</sup> Weber, The Hollow Years, pp. 104 & 106

<sup>81</sup> Herbert R. Lottman, The Left Bank: Writers, Artists & Politics from the Popular Front to the Cold War, Heinemann, London, 1982, p. 40.

<sup>82</sup> "The attitude of these students is very reserved at the moment; they generally only converse with their trusted friends and if alone fear contact with groups of French students belonging to the parties of the right or the presence of some pro-Nazi German students who attend our Faculties" - Report of 24/10/33, BA 1814, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>83</sup> An example of British student efforts took place at UCL, where the College and Hospital Music Association and the Jewish Students' Society co-operated in organising a concert to

1935, the student sections of the nationalist leagues and 'non-political' corporate groups joined together in protests against the arrival of German refugees on their courses which combined xenophobic nationalism with claims of students' rights.<sup>84</sup> Their fundamental grievance was the preferential treatment given to the German students - the waiving of course requirements and tuition fees as well as the provision of scholarships - which they feared would ultimately allow the Germans to practice professionally in France.<sup>85</sup> To maintain a strict enforcement of nationality restrictions on the medical profession, French universities had historically awarded two types of medical degrees, the Diplôme d'Etat for French students and the Diplôme d'Universitaire for foreign students. With growing numbers of German students on their courses, French medical students mounted an active campaign against any lessening of the nationality bar, culminating with their called for a national strike in early 1935.

The hostility of French students to the newcomers was partly because of the strained resources which already existed in the universities. Government cuts meant that students competed with each other for space in libraries, laboratories and lecture theatres.<sup>86</sup> The journal of the extreme right group Étudiants d'Action Française, recounted to its readers how fifth year medical students were unable to find seats in the over-crowded amphitheatre for their lectures. "*N'y a-t-il donc plus de place ici pour les Français?*", it asked.<sup>87</sup> While conditions within the university did play an important part in the strike, socialists, communists and other students of the left criticised their opponents of the extreme right as motivated more by xenophobic nationalism than corporate concerns.<sup>88</sup> Statistically, the number of foreign students studying in French universities had peaked in 1930 before the crisis in Germany, but as the following table shows, foreign students had always been concentrated in particular institutions.<sup>89</sup> By examining the demographics of several Faculties of Medicine for the following academic year, we see the importance of the corporate

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benefit the International Student Service Fund for German refugee students - University College Annual Report 1936-1937, London, 1937, p. 88.

<sup>84</sup> The two leagues with the largest student followings were the Action Française and the Jeunesses Patriotes (whose student section was called the Phalange Universitaire). The political organisations adopted by French students will be considered in detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>85</sup> L'Echo des Étudiants de Toulouse, Jan. 1935, pp. 5-6;

L'Echo des Étudiants de Toulouse, Feb. 1935, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> This strain on resources was spread across the French Faculties, as in 1930 the law library in Paris had only 765 seats for 19,000 registered students - Zeldin, "Higher Education in France 1848-1940", p. 64.

<sup>87</sup> L'Étudiant Français, 10/1/1935, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> L'Étudiant Socialiste, March 1935, p. 15;

L'Université Républicaine, March 1935, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> George Weisz, The Emergence of Modern Universities in France 1863-1914, p. 258.

Union Nationale des Étudiants (UNE) in nationalising grievances that were felt more strongly in some Faculties than others.

TABLE 1.4: STUDENT REGISTRATION IN FRENCH FACULTIES OF MEDICINE, 1936-1937<sup>90</sup>

University	Diplôme d'Etat (for French students)	Diplôme d'Universitaire (for foreign students)
Bordeaux	616	40
Lille	266	-
Montpellier	301 (+35 foreign students)	145
Paris	2,219 (+376 foreign students)	778
Toulouse	309	-

The strike on 31 January 1935 was most energetically pursued in those universities where the leagues' student sections were strongest, such as Montpellier, Bordeaux and Paris. The call to strike was issued across the nation by Montpellier students through the columns of *Action Française*.<sup>91</sup> The day before, 400 students attended an afternoon meeting in Bordeaux at which the strike motion from Montpellier was read out.<sup>92</sup> It was passed unanimously and sent to the Prefect and Dean. Later in the day, sixty students assembled outside the Prefecture chanting the nationalist rallying call "*La France aux Français*". On 31 January 1935, a meeting at Bordeaux's Athénée Municipal was estimated by police as numbering 800 students.<sup>93</sup> Supporting the protests of their peers in Montpellier and Grenoble, the students demanded the strict enforcement of nationality bars on professional employment.

The Rector of the University of Lille informed the Minister of Education that were it not for the position of the UNE over the strike, medical students in his university would probably abstain.<sup>94</sup> On 31 January 1935, pickets were established at different hospitals in Lille though there were few confrontations.<sup>95</sup> The President of the local medical students' group noted that,

<sup>90</sup> "Statistique des Étudiants 1936-37", AJ63-135, Archives Nationales;

The category of foreign students includes other not only Germans, but large numbers of students from Eastern Europe and other nationalities.

<sup>91</sup> *Action Française*, 31/1/1935, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Report of 31/1/1935, 1 M 605, AD Gironde.

<sup>93</sup> Letter of 31/1/1935, 1 M 605, AD Gironde.

<sup>94</sup> Letter of 23/1/1935, 2 T 1116, AD Nord.

<sup>95</sup> *L'Echo du Nord*, 1/2/1935, p. 4.



A Lille la grève s'est passée dans le calme et la dignité. Aucun chahut n'est venu troubler les abords de notre faculté.<sup>96</sup>

In Toulouse, on the same day, the strike stopped four courses in the Faculty, with only two others taking place; one course was attended by 25 out of its 70 students, and the other by 30 out of 80 students.<sup>97</sup> In both Toulouse and Lille the strike reflected the strong solidarity of corporate groups, yet it also had a far less confrontational face than the demonstrations in Montpellier or Bordeaux, perhaps because of the relative absence of foreign students in the local Faculty and the strength of local left-wing students' groups.

The day after the strike had spread through France's provincial universities, it reached the nation's capital.<sup>98</sup> In Paris, the strike in the Faculty of Medicine was launched on 1 February 1935 under Action Française's banner of "*Contre l'invasion des métèques*".<sup>99</sup> That afternoon the strikers formed pickets and engaged in recurrent clashes with left-wing students groups and the police. After a series of speeches by student leaders of the leagues and corporate groups, the strikers marched along the Boulevard St-Michel where they were eventually dispersed by police. The following day, the strikers returned to the streets where they were joined by students from the Faculties of Law and Science numbering by their own estimates between three to four thousand. However, after negotiations with the government, the Union Nationale des Étudiants called an end to the strikes.

The strike revived two months later, but with a stronger political face. In Lille, a meeting of the Phalange Universitaires on 18 March 1935 discussed the possibility of another strike. The 100 students present were mostly drawn from the private Catholic Faculties in the town (rather than the state university) and speeches supported the recent strike by the Phalange in Paris' Medical Faculty.<sup>100</sup> At the end of the month, 200 students from the Catholic Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy held a strike against "*l'invasion des étrangers*".<sup>101</sup> An afternoon march numbering between 60 to 100, carried both a tricolour and the sign "*La France aux Français*" through the streets. At the same time in Marseille, 100 medical students met outside their Faculty to vote a motion protesting against the intrusion of foreign students in

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<sup>96</sup> Lille-Université, Feb. 1937, p 7.

<sup>97</sup> Report of 3/2/1935, 1303 W 13, AD Haute-Garonne.

<sup>98</sup> Strikes occurred on 31 January 1935 in Montpellier, Grenoble, Bordeaux, Toulouse, Lille and ten other universities. Students of Aix/Marseille, and Lyon voted motions of solidarity to the Paris strikers - L'Echo des Étudiants de Toulouse, Feb. 1935, p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> L'Étudiant Français, 10/2/1935, p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Report of 19/3/1935, M154/244, AD Nord.

<sup>101</sup> Report of 29/3/1935, M154/120, AD Nord.

their courses.<sup>102</sup> This was followed by a march to the Faculty of Science. The demonstration was enough to provoke a counter-demonstration on the 1 April 1935 by workers of the Syndicat Régional des Métaux (CGTU) which led to the arrest of several unionists.<sup>103</sup> The union justified its actions as seeking to protect foreign students from the fascists of the extreme right who sought to interrupt their studies.

## Conclusion

The 1933 wave of German refugees was the first of four mass movements of population spurred by the initiatives of the Nazi state. The Nuremberg Laws of September 1935 which made Jews non-citizens forced more refugees out of Germany, as did the occupation and rushed Nazification of Austria in early 1938 and the anti-semitic riots of *Kristallnacht* in November 1938.<sup>104</sup> The rallying to aid academic refugees in 1933 through the AAC and ISS is fundamental to understanding the development of politics within British universities in the late 1930s. The continuing campaigns to provide relief for German academic and student refugees had a three-fold significance which shaped later political campaigns within British universities. Firstly, they legitimised and were the predecessors of later relief and humanitarian campaigns both for universities in China and Czechoslovakia, or over the civil war in Spain. More broadly, they represented a softening of politics in Britain and the acceptance of non-party and non-partisan forms of campaigning and coalitions. Thirdly, they gave British universities a distinctive perspective on fascism as a direct threat to intellectual freedom internationally. Of primary significance for some British academics, anti-fascism was as much a professional issue as a political one. The early protests against the racial cleansing of German academia established the key elements that were the basis for the increasing activism of the mid-1930s.

In France, reactions to the events in German universities took different forms, sparking a petition on general principle by Paris intellectuals and a national strike by medical students over corporate rights. Though the former was able to claim non-partisan support, the latter fitted easily into a polarised political arena, despite its corporate rhetoric. The 1935 strike provides one of the keys as to why there was never any French equivalent to the AAC's national humanitarian fundraising. Refugees had a far greater impact in French politics, which combined

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<sup>102</sup> Report of 30/3/1935, M6 8294, AD Bouches-du-Rhône.

<sup>103</sup> Letter of 5/4/1935, M6 8294, AD Bouches-du-Rhône.

<sup>104</sup> Skran, *Refugees in Inter-war Europe*, p. 49.

with legal and financial restrictions on academic employment severely curtailed French opportunities for a non-partisan, humanitarian response. Together, the structural differences between university systems and the impact of the refugees themselves meant that, despite efforts to co-ordinate British and French responses, this international crisis stirred distinctively national political campaigns.

## Chapter 2

### National Traditions & Political Repertoires: The Universities of Paris & London

Political activity and organisation within the university developed very differently between Britain and France. Within each country students and academics approached politics from their own nationally-distinct *mentalités*, traditions and histories. These national repertoires of political action were fuelled by common experiences and shared perceptions as well as shaped by institutional constraints and wider political currents.<sup>1</sup> This fundamental contrast between the ways in which those at university conceived of, and acted in politics, was best embodied by the capitals of the two countries, Paris and London.

The Universities of Paris and London occupied very different positions in national life during the 1930s and its subsequent historiography. Not only did almost half of France's university students study in Paris, but the capital also claimed the country's leading elite-forming institutions, including the Collège de France, École Normale Supérieure and other *grandes écoles*.<sup>2</sup> The prestige and resources of Parisian institutions were reinforced by their centrality in the national education system.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, though the University of London, was larger than those of Oxford and Cambridge combined, its federation of academic colleges which included the LSE and UCL, lacked the elite standing of the 'ancient' universities.<sup>4</sup> In both capitals, the proximity of the national political stage encouraged academics and students to fashion their own repertoires of participation. These evolved at different times, so that while in 1930s France certain forms of political activity and organisation had become accepted as long standing traditions, in Britain these were still being developed and contested.

#### The Mixed Legacy of the Dreyfus Affair

The Dreyfus Affair which dominated French political life at the turn of the twentieth century, established a legacy which fundamentally shaped the ways

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<sup>1</sup> Tilly, *The Contentious French*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Lottman, *The Left Bank*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945, Vol. 2 Intellect, Taste & Anxiety*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, p. 332.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Truscot, *Red Brick University*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1951, p. 28; Halsey, *Decline of Donnish Dominion*, p. 61.

French academics and students approached politics in the twentieth century. Obviously there were deeper origins for such a political culture, yet the Affair of 1898 marked for contemporaries and historians the birth of a distinctive approach to politics, that of the *intellectuel*. Academics and students were at the forefront of the violent controversy over Dreyfus's guilt or innocence, and these experiences later became the commonly invoked source for a political repertoire of familiar forms of organisation, activity and perceptions.<sup>5</sup>

In late 1894 artillery captain Alfred Dreyfus had been arrested and condemned to deportation for life for passing French military secrets to the Germans.<sup>6</sup> Just over three years later, the acquittal of another officer and probable culprit of similar charges, provoked a storm of protest from those who felt Dreyfus had been wrongly convicted. It was the violent eruption of this controversy in January 1898 that turned the legal case for revision into an affair which dominated French political life.<sup>7</sup>

### The Dreyfusard *Intellectuels*

On 13 January 1898, the journal L'Aurore printed novelist Emile Zola's polemical open letter "J'Accuse!", in which he accused the government and military of conspiring against the innocent Dreyfus. A day later, the same newspaper printed a petition calling for a legal revision of the two trials in the Dreyfus case. The petition has become known as the "Manifeste des Intellectuels" for it is widely seen as marking the involvement of a new group in the politics of the trial.<sup>8</sup> The petition was headed by writers Zola and Anatole France, but its main body of supporters were concentrated within certain sections of the University of Paris.<sup>9</sup> Of the 1,482 names who eventually signed the petition, 22% were academics or teachers while 18% were students.<sup>10</sup>

Christophe Charle's detailed demographic study of the Affair argues that the Dreyfusard cause found some of its most committed advocates amongst younger

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<sup>5</sup> Hazareesingh, Political Traditions in Modern France, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive survey of the Affair see Eric Cahm, The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics, Longman, London, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> Eugen Weber, Action Française: Royalism & Reaction in Twentieth Century France, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1962, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, Intellectuels et Passions Françaises: Manifestes et Pétitions au XXe Siècle, Fayard, Paris, 1990, pp. 25-26.

<sup>9</sup> Cahm, The Dreyfus Affair in French Society & Politics pp. 68-69.

<sup>10</sup> Christophe Charle, Naissance des "Intellectuels", p. 242.

academics.<sup>11</sup> The violent crisis of 1898-1899 was a profoundly personal, and formative experience for a generation who were just beginning their teaching careers at the turn of the century. For those who came of age politically in the Affair, they retained not only a lasting loyalty to republicanism but a certain conception of political participation.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, many of these Dreyfusards such as physicists Jean Perrin and Paul Langevin, psychologist Henri Wallon and historian Lucien Febvre, would continue their political engagement throughout the interwar period.<sup>13</sup> Dreyfus was therefore much more than an idealised tradition, but represented a very real reference point as the Third Republic seemed to be entering a new period of crisis in the mid-1930s.<sup>14</sup>

In late 1899, as the revisionist cause gradually gained momentum and thereby provoked more intransigent opposition, both Wallon and Febvre commenced their studies at France's elite teaching institution, the *École Normale Supérieure*.<sup>15</sup> The school focused on intensive preparation for the *agregation*, which was the qualification required for teaching positions at universities and *lycées*. Once admitted, *normaliens* entered a unique teaching environment, which placed an emphasis on discussion and on much closer relations between students and academics.<sup>16</sup> Its elite ethos meant "that graduates of ENS seemed a race apart", not only academically, but also politically.<sup>17</sup> During the Dreyfus Affair, the school's librarian Lucien Herr was one of the earliest activists in the cause for revision, becoming a leader for both past and present students of the school. The school became a head-quarters for Dreyfusard campaigns and half of its students signed the petition of early 1898.<sup>18</sup>

As Dreyfus shaped the lives of individual *normaliens*, it also shaped the *École Normale Supérieure*'s conception of itself as an institution. The Affair legitimised a political role for the *École* on the national stage, both through the petitions of teachers and the street fighting of students. The acceptance of this distinctive

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Charle, *Naissance des "Intellectuels"*, p. 222.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Racine, "Références Dreyfusiennes dans la Gauche Française de l'Entre-Deux-Guerres" in Michel Leymarie, ed., *A Postérité de Affaire Dreyfus*, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, Paris, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics*, pp. 120 & 132.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération Intellectuelle: Khâgneux et Normaliens dans l'Entre-Deux-Geurres*, Quadrige, Paris, 1988, pp. 41-66;

Smith, *The Ecole Normale Supérieure & the Third Republic*, pp. 18 & 74.

<sup>17</sup> Lottman, *The Left Bank*, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Robert J. Smith, "L'Atmosphère Politique a l'École Normale Supérieure a la fin du XIXe Siècle", *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 20, 1973, p. 255.

political role was reflected in a 1929 controversy over military service. When a *normalien* petition drew official reprimands from the school's authorities the incident produced expressions of concern in the Chamber of Deputies.<sup>19</sup> The Director of the ENS replied that:

La liberté des élèves de l'École Normale Supérieure d'exprimer publiquement leur opinion est limitée, - comme l'exercice général de la liberté dont ils jouissent dans l'École, et hors de l'École -, par la réserve que leurs devoirs d'élèves de l'École doivent leur imposer.<sup>20</sup>

There were limits on the public commitments *normaliens* could make, though the authorities seemed rather more concerned with those that were close to the parties of the left than those that were independently assumed.<sup>21</sup> Despite these limitations, the Director's defence of his actions reveals the extent to which the rights of *normaliens* to a political voice were accepted, not only by the administrators of the school but even by the politicians of the Third Republic.

Perhaps the most profound legacy of the Dreyfus tradition was the conception of the politically engaged intellectual as an individual distinct from established political parties. This independent identity was embodied in the formation of a separate organisation for intellectuals of the left, the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, in February 1898.<sup>22</sup> Paralleling the political intensity of their peers in Paris, young academics like Victor Basch in Rennes and sociologist Célestin Bouglé in Montpellier established local sections of the Ligue.<sup>23</sup> By the 1930s, the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme provided the exemplar for those who sought to establish new intellectual groups, especially as these efforts were led by the politicians, writers and academics who had joined the league during the Affair. The Affair was not simply a party contest between the left and right, but was fought in general terms between ideals of justice and patriotism.<sup>24</sup> Part of the legacy of the Affair was therefore in the political language of intellectuals, as academics and others gained a special confidence to invoke general values and abstract ideals over political

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<sup>19</sup> Sirinelli, *Génération Intellectuelle*, p. 533.

<sup>20</sup> "The liberty of students of the Ecole Normale Supérieure to publicly express their opinion is limited - that is the general freedom which they enjoy within the school and outside the school - by the reserve which their duties as students of the school impose" - Director's Report, p. 8. in AJ16-2895, Archives Nationales.

<sup>21</sup> Police seemed particularly concerned about any pro-Communist activities by *normaliens* - Letter of 14/3/1935, AJ16-2895, Archives Nationales.

<sup>22</sup> Weber, *Action Française*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Françoise Basch, *Victor Basch: La Passion de la Justice*, Plon, Paris, 1994, pp 30-54.

<sup>24</sup> Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower: A Portrait of the World Before the War, 1890-1914*, Macmillan, New York, 1966, p. 198.

issues.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, Dreyfusard revisionists cast themselves as defenders of the young Third Republic from the nationalist, clerical, and military forces of reaction. It was a language which was to be echoed by the left in mid-1930s.

## The Nationalist Reaction

As Michel Winock has written, the Dreyfus Affair not only gave a particular meaning to the word *intellectuel* but also to the *nationalisme* of their opponents as well.<sup>26</sup> As the campaign for the revision of Dreyfus's conviction gained strength, a second campaign developed to combat revision by all possible means. In reaction to the public commitment of academics at the forefront of the Dreyfusard cause, large numbers of students took to the streets or signed petitions against revision.<sup>27</sup> It is significant that both academics as independent intellectuals and students in nationalist (or anti-nationalist) groups were inaugurated as major participants on the national political stage at the same time and on opposing sides of the same political contest.<sup>28</sup>

In reaction to Zola's "J'Accuse!" the committee of the Association Générale des Étudiants (AG) in Paris published an attack on the author for undermining the Army and national honour.<sup>29</sup> Though corporate groups formally denied their political motivations in opposing the left, their defence of student conditions and welfare possessed a far more ambiguous political identity. This ambivalence was reinforced as student corporate groups became dependent on state recognition and financial support, which involved their registration by the police and therefore formally depoliticised their identity.<sup>30</sup> Yet, the Dreyfus Affair marked an early alliance between corporate students groups and the nationalist right, which also formed their own separate student sections. Both groups shared memberships and the claim to defend the nation and the university from the politics of the left.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Pascal Ory & Jean-Francois Sirinelli, Les Intellectuels en France: De l'Affaire Dreyfus a nos Jours, Armand Colin, Paris, 1986, pp. 9-10;

Judt, Past Imperfect, p. 252.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Winock, La Fièvre Hexagonale: Les Grandes Crises Politiques 1871-1968, Seuil, Paris, 1987, pp. 158 & 166.

<sup>27</sup> A. Belden Fields, Student Politics in France: A Study of the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France, Basic Books, New York, 1970, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Claude Singer, Vichy, l'Université et les Juifs: Les Silences et la Memoire, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1992, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Fields, Student Politics in France, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> The national federation of corporate groups, l'Union Nationale des Étudiants (UNE), was founded in 1907 and recognised by law in 1929.

<sup>31</sup> Action Française recruited from corporate groups in the early 1900s, and corporate rights formed an important part of the rhetoric of students in the league. For example a flyer in



Central to both the repertoire of leagues and of corporate groups was the *chahut*, the deliberate disruption of lectures or classes which blurred a rejection of their teacher's politics with 'non-political' corporate claims.

At the forefront of the reaction to the Dreyfusards' campaigns for revision was the league Action Française which was formed in 1899.<sup>32</sup> From an early stage, the league found its purpose, support and publicity through attacks on those public figures who were active in the revisionist cause. Given the prominence of academics in the Dreyfusard campaign, the university became a frequent battleground for the nationalists. A standard pattern of *chahuts* and challenges by students of the extreme right against academics of the left developed at universities across France. These clashes encouraged state authorities to formally ban politics from the inside of the university, though disorder would sporadically reappear inside the Faculties fuelled by corporate or political motives.

In 1905 the league organised its students support into a distinct section, *Étudiants d'Action Française*.<sup>33</sup> More significantly for the politics of Action Française was its establishment of a newspaper in 1908, which soon became the dominant focus of its activity.<sup>34</sup> As René Rémond has written,

This nationalism had no theory, scarcely a program. It had powerful antipathies, vigorous aspirations; it was instinctive, passionate, shaken with furious gestures...

Words divided, action united, force brought together. This anti-parliamentism [sic] had two outlets: street demonstrations and polemics by a newspaper press lying in wait for scandals, prompt to exploit them, and ready if necessary to invent them.<sup>35</sup>

The hawking of the league's newspaper by students and its supporters was partly about public propaganda and partly about asserting physical control of the streets. Vendors were accompanied by escorts, which frequently led to violence between the Action Française and its opponents of the left and the right.

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1935 proclaimed "*Étudiants! Soucieux de sauvegarder vos droits les plus élémentaires. Lisez chaque jour l'Action Française*" - M154/241(A), AD Nord;

Nicolas Portier, "L'Action Française à l'Assaut de l'Université Republicaine", *La Revue Universelle*, 163-164, July-Oct 1991, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> Weber, *Action Française*, p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38 & 64.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Rémond, René, *The Right Wing in France: From 1815 to de Gaulle*, 2nd ed., trans. Jones Laux, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1969, p. 215.

The opening editions of Action Française denounced Sorbonne professor Charles Andler, marking the first of many attacks on academics for their pro-Dreyfusard or left-wing politics.<sup>36</sup> These polemics could also spark physical battles for control over university space. In March 1925 the Faculty of Law in Paris was disrupted by clashes between Action Française students and police which were so severe they caused the temporary closure of the faculty. The violence had been triggered by the appointment of Georges Scelle to teach international law. Scelle was an adviser to the Cartel des Gauches government, so his selection was seen by those in the league to be a case of left-wing political favouritism.<sup>37</sup> The students downplayed their political motivations, arguing that they were defending university traditions from a political appointment. The real spur to violence was the existence of the Cartel des Gauches itself, as the extreme right were quick to seize on the opportunity to attack the government and its supporters.

Yet despite its success in disrupting Scelle's course which was suspended after a month, 1925 also represented the peak of Action Française's influence. By the early 1930s, it is generally argued that the leagues' membership and readership were marked by declining support.<sup>38</sup> This decay was partly due to the league's loss of official Catholic support and the challenge of other groups from the right. One of its strongest competitors was the Jeunesses Patriotes which was founded in December 1924 in reaction to the national election of the Cartel des Gauches.<sup>39</sup> Robert Soucy has argued that the new league "was fascist in its anti-liberalism and anti-socialism, in its cult of the leader, paramilitary organisation, and political authoritarianism".<sup>40</sup> Soucy's label would have been rejected by the student section of the Jeunesses Patriotes, the Phalange Universitaire which mixed corporate and political rhetoric. The Phalange described their objective as "*de défendre le intérêts corporatifs de leurs membres, d'intervenir dans les conflits purement universitaires et de propager dans les milieux étudiants les idées du programme des Jeunesses Patriotes*".<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Weber, Action Française, p. 52

<sup>37</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, "Action Française: Main Basse sur le Quartier Latin!", L'Histoire, 51, Dec. 1982, pp. 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> Weber, Action Française, pp. 260 & 365-366.

Serge Berstein "La Ligue" in Jean-François Sirinelli, ed., Histoire des Droites en France, Vol 2: Cultures, Gallimard, Paris, 1992, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> Report of Jan. 1929, F7/13232, Archives Nationales.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Soucy, "Centrist Fascism: The Jeunesses Patriotes", Journal of Contemporary History, 16, April 1981, p. 350.

<sup>41</sup> "To defend the corporate interests of their members, to intervene in purely university conflicts and to propagate in the student milieu the programme of the Jeunesses Patriotes" - Report of Jan. 1929, F7/13232, Archives Nationales.

By 1929, the Jeunesses Patriotes had become the first league to claim a membership of over 100,000 nationally.<sup>42</sup> At that time, the Phalange Universitaire had an estimated 4,000 members nationally, of which 800 were university students in Paris.<sup>43</sup> According to police reports, the Phalange had 250 members amongst students in the Paris Faculty of Law, of whom 50 were very active. The new league drew support from a Catholic constituency which had been distanced from Action Française after its condemnation by the Vatican in December 1926. In Lille the massive decline of the Action Française's student section and the subsequent increase in strength of the Phalange in the local Catholic faculties suggests the importance of the papal condemnation in shifting support on the right.<sup>44</sup> Such a hypothesis reveals the extent to which French students, by choosing to organise as sections of nationalist leagues, submerged themselves within political currents outside the university. Despite the rivalry between the leagues, students of both often engaged in common action against those of the left who were becoming increasingly more organised, if not numerous, during the late 1920s.<sup>45</sup>

### Students and the French Left

Also originating in the violence of the Scelle *chahut* of 1925, students opposed to the nationalism of the leagues began to create their own political organisations. The extreme right's physical dominance of the streets, profoundly shaped the tone, style and political repertoire adopted by their opponents.<sup>46</sup> Significantly, it was within the École Normale Supérieure that the left-wing opposition to the leagues first emerged, encouraged by the school's elitism, Dreyfusard heritage and intimate environment.<sup>47</sup> *Normaliens* formed the core of a small group of left students who established their own league, the Ligue d'Action Universitaire Républicaine et Socialiste.

The birth of LAURS within such a small institution as the École Normale Supérieure allowed for a mixture of left-wing political positions within the new

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<sup>42</sup> Millman, *La Question Juive entre les Deux Guerres*, p. 116.

<sup>43</sup> Another 1,400 members were in Paris's *lycées* or *collèges*. - Report of Jan. 1929, F7/13232, Archives Nationales.

<sup>44</sup> Weber, *Action Française*, p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Millman, *La Question Juive entre les Deux Guerres*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>46</sup> Emmanuel Naquet, "Un Mouvement Typique de la France de l'Entre-Deux-Guerres: La LAURS (Ligue d'Action Universitaire Républicaine et Socialiste)", *Mémoire de Maîtrise*, Université de Paris X, Nanterre, 1987, p. 226.

<sup>47</sup> The formation of LAURS drew on the atmosphere of strong general sympathy for Scelle within the ENS, as 113 out of the 150 current *normaliens* signed a petition against the riots of the extreme right - *Ibid.*, p. 69.

group, independent of party considerations. The early unity of student organisations of the left reflected the physical dominance of the nationalist leagues and corporate groups of university space.<sup>48</sup> As the French student left developed its own strength in the early 1930s, these coalitions and alignments became increasingly concerned to establish their own separate identities. Communist students in Paris formed their own organisation in 1926, the Union Fédérale des Étudiants (UFE). The UFE like the corporate groups controlled by the right, claimed a political neutrality through a corporate and syndical identity.<sup>49</sup> Despite this neutrality, the UFE's syndical character allowed it a definite political agenda. The year after the formation of UFE, the Étudiants Socialistes (FNES) created their own Federation within the SFIO's youth organisation.<sup>50</sup> LAURS and the FNES shared memberships until the early 1930s when the growing membership of the latter allowed it to break ties with its predecessor.<sup>51</sup>

The Dreyfus Affair created political repertoires for academics and students, for the left and the right, for those in Paris and for those at universities across the country. The politics of confrontation persisted in French universities long after the heated conflicts of 1890s, as there remained a fundamental polarisation over the legitimacy of the Republic itself.

## Defining Political Space at the University of London

The long history of public confrontation in national affairs which gave French academics and students their political identities, was largely absent from Britain. Certainly there were moments when British universities were drawn into wider political events such as during the General Strike of 1926 when a large number of Oxbridge students volunteered for essential service work to help break the strike, while a small core of left-wing academics and students supported the TUC. Despite these events, there was no British parallel to the Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard collective commitment to national politics. In the early 1930s, when British students self-consciously sought to create new political movements there were no predecessors they could directly claim. The extent to which the

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<sup>48</sup> As one English student commented when he joined a left-wing student group in Nancy: "Most of our meetings were broken up by fascists and royalists, and there were many fights across the café floors with flying glasses and tables. It was an intensely happy and flowering period for me" - Philip Toynbee, *Friends Apart: A Memoir of Esmond Romilly & Jasper Ridley in the Thirties*, Macgibbon & Kee, London, 1954, p. 35.

<sup>49</sup> Naquet, "Un Mouvement Typique de la France de l'Entre-Deux-Guerres", p. 87.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69 & 130.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 390-391.

organisations and activities they developed were unprecedented in Britain was reflected in the conflicts they generated with university authorities. In another sense, this was also true for British academics, who during the 1930s created a variety of new professional and political organisations. For many of the most prominent academics, their political commitments extended back well before the 1930s, yet this did not prevent debates on the legitimacy of that activity. Throughout the first half of the 1930s both British academics and students found their university identities could be invoked as much to restrict as to legitimise political participation.

### London's Student Vanguard

The academics and students of the London School of Economics and Political Science lived close to the political currents of the metropolis, not simply due to their geographic location on the Strand. For its inhabitants, the LSE possessed a distinctive ethos arising from its origins, location, student composition and teaching staff. Harold Laski described the LSE as located near the heart of events in the capital, unlike the universities of Oxbridge which were cloistered off from the "real world".<sup>52</sup> The School's founding father in the 1890s was leading Fabian Sidney Webb, and as its student magazine proclaimed, "we do not want to forget that the school was founded by a socialist in a slum".<sup>53</sup> Amongst British universities in the early 1930s, the LSE "enjoyed an undisputed reputation as the centre of the student movement on the left, in London certainly, and in the country at large".<sup>54</sup> Yet despite its proximity to the politics of the capital and its radical heritage, after 1934 political life within the school had been largely stifled by the overwhelming paternalism of the School's authorities.

There was no constitution for the LSE, resulting in administrative power being largely concentrated in the position of Director.<sup>55</sup> Since 1918, LSE's Director had been William Beveridge, whose vision of the school was centred on protecting and entrenching the academic prestige vital for its continued financial existence. This fundamental focus was expressed in two objectives; the notion of a pure and scientific social science, and an "almost total political abstemiousness".<sup>56</sup> Beveridge's

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<sup>52</sup> Kramnick & Sheerman, *Harold Laski*, p. 246;

This opinion was shared by a later Director, Ralf Dahrendorf - Dahrendorf, *LSE*, p. 300.

<sup>53</sup> *The Clare Market Review*, Michaelmas Term 1933, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. 189.

<sup>55</sup> Dahrendorf, *LSE*, p. 179.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

dual aims, which helped the School to establish itself and expand in the 1920s, led to increasing problems during the 1930s as he clashed with students and senior staff.<sup>57</sup> The LSE had been popularly labelled Red Houghton Street due to the prominence in the Labour movement of its founders and several members of the academic staff. It was a label Beveridge sought to absolutely reject as a threat to the School's funding and legitimacy. Ironically, at the same time that Beveridge was heading the AAC's campaign for academic freedom abroad, he found himself under attack in Britain over his attempts to regulate the political activity of the students and academics of the LSE.

In his diary of 1933 Beveridge expressed his desire, "to be a personal influence on generations of students".<sup>58</sup> It was an aspiration that the structure of the LSE permitted and perhaps encouraged, but one which his students were to resist. Such paternalism was ill-suited to LSE's distinctive student body which contained high numbers of part-time, graduate and overseas students.<sup>59</sup> Compared to other British universities, the student body of the LSE was older as there had been a massive growth in the number of graduate students during the interwar years.<sup>60</sup> This community, representing a tenth of LSE's students, often played a key role in the student political groups which would clash with the administration in 1934.

Despite expansion and building efforts at the school during the interwar period, it still remained a cramped enclave in inner London. Questions of political space were therefore physical as well as ideological. Students required permission to use the school's facilities which had to be negotiated directly with the administration. As political activism increased in the mid 1930s, this relationship became gradually strained and antagonistic. The expansion of left-wing student activities within the school, created growing pressure on the existing regulation of political groups. In early 1934, the LSE Marxist Society sought to hold a series of lectures on Marxism in rebuttal to those by the school's academics, which it felt to be too bourgeois and reformist. It was denied facilities.<sup>61</sup>

The LSE Union was the focus for social, athletic, political and cultural activities of students within the School. At its political debates the Union usually averaged a weekly attendance of 100 to 150, though for special debates it could

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>58</sup> Diary entry of 6/8/1933, Ic50, LSE Archives.

<sup>59</sup> Dahrendorf, *LSE*, p. 173;

Kramnick & Sheerman, *Harold Laski*, p. 245.

<sup>60</sup> Graduate students increased from 47 in 1920 to 293 by 1937 - Dahrendorf, *LSE*, p. 173.

<sup>61</sup> *The Clare Market Review*, Lent Term 1934, p. 35.

draw up to 500 students such as when Kerensky visited the school in late April 1937.<sup>62</sup> The largest meetings of the Socialist Society could sometimes outdraw the Union, thanks to the prominence of such celebrity speakers as Hugh Gaitskell, Sir Stafford Cripps, Leonard Woolf, R.H. Tawney, and G.D.H. Cole. Tensions were increased between students and the Director when an American Communist, Frank Meyer, was elected Union President. Meyer had come to the LSE from Oxford where he had held a Rhodes Scholarship and led the formation in 1932 of a pro-Communist student group, the October Club.<sup>63</sup> Faced with increasing student activism within the school,

The Director proceeded to devise a Code for the Union and a Memorandum for student societies establishing clearly that he was the only authority when it came to notices, meetings, and the allocation of rooms. All the time he dealt with Mr Meyer in a notably hostile manner, until in the end the Union rallied to the defence of its President.<sup>64</sup>

Beveridge's draft regulations held that the name of the School could not be used or published by students without his permission; equally his permission was required to sell literature on campus which would only be granted when its distribution was incidental and confined to a specific meeting (only in exceptional cases would general distribution be allowed); collections for charity within the LSE were also to be authorised by the Director.

Beveridge was committed to the position that any publication sold in the School require his sanction as Director. In early March 1933, he banned an issue of the left-wing journal Student Vanguard which accused an LSE academic of spying on colonial students for the Foreign Office. The allegation was libellous, and was ultimately retracted with an apology by the paper. However, the incident produced the explosion of the accumulated tensions between the School's Director and the Union President. Meyer reacted to Beveridge's censorship by leading five other left-wing students to sell the paper at the School, which resulted in all six students being suspended by the Director.<sup>65</sup> Those suspended were aged between 27 and 21, and four were postgraduates. Meyer and the Chair of the Marxist Society were expelled from the school on 5 March 1934, although the latter was allowed to

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<sup>62</sup> For Union Debates see Minutes in C oll Misc, 649 2/5, LSE Archives.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Harrison, "Oxford and the Labour Movement", Twentieth Century British History, 2, 3, 1991, pp. 252-253;

Two Cambridge Communist students who also attended the LSE in the early 1930s were John Cornford and Michael Straight.

<sup>64</sup> Dahrendorf, LSE, p. 274.

<sup>65</sup> Report to Emergency Committee, 22/3/1934, p. 2 in 67/11/A, LSE Archives.

ultimately return to the school to finish his degree. Amidst public criticism of his actions, Beveridge encouraged the Home Office to force Meyer out of the country.<sup>66</sup>

Michael Straight, a newcomer to the school and its Socialist Club remembers the Union at the time as "a battlefield, and on every bulletin board, notices were posted, summoning all students to an emergency meeting".<sup>67</sup> Meyer's deliberate act of defiance had been committed without consulting the Union executive.<sup>68</sup> When the Union was faced with a motion of censure against Meyer and another of confidence in him, it chose the latter perhaps because it was vaguely worded.<sup>69</sup> Within a week 400 LSE students had signed a petition against Meyer's expulsion.<sup>70</sup> Protesting the expulsions, Straight marched in the ragged ranks of students outside the School. However, he noted that "the week of examinations was approaching; the time for agitation had passed".<sup>71</sup>

### **New Rules, New Restrictions**

In the wake of Meyer's expulsion and the public criticism it generated, Beveridge introduced a gamut of rules.<sup>72</sup> These regulations were described in detail in the Students Union Handbook 1934-35.<sup>73</sup> Student societies were to be registered at the discretion of the Director subject to the general conditions that their membership was confined to the school, that they nominated two responsible student representatives, and that their purpose was "consistent with the welfare of the school, and appropriate to the school as a University institution".<sup>74</sup> General conditions were also imposed on student meetings, so that their attendance was limited to school members only. Meetings were only to be advertised in the general press with specific permission and the school's notice boards could not be used for posters or propaganda.<sup>75</sup> It was stated that "all students are bound to obey all rules made and instructions given by the Director of the school or under his authority, and to refrain from any conduct derogatory to the character or welfare of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Michael Straight, After Long Silence, Collins, London, 1983, p. 49.

<sup>68</sup> The Clare Market Review, Lent Term 1934, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Dahrendorf, LSE, p. 275.

<sup>71</sup> Straight, After Long Silence, p. 55.

<sup>72</sup> Dahrendorf, LSE, p. 278.

<sup>73</sup> Students Union Handbook 1934-35, pp. 32-33 in 67-F Central Filing, LSE Archives.

<sup>74</sup> Other British universities followed the practice that each student society required the patronage of an academic to take responsibility for their activities.

<sup>75</sup> Letter of 23/3/1934, LSE 67/11/A, LSE Archives.



school".<sup>76</sup> As one student complained, "We are told that it is our job to study in an atmosphere of academic detachment, that time spent in political activity is wasted and that older people know better than we do what is best for us".<sup>77</sup>

Over the following two years there was a general solidification of the restrictions which had been fully enunciated due to the Meyer case. Against this background, student groups mobilised into a coalition over civil liberties, and implicitly over student rights. The LSE Council for Peace and Civil Liberties was chaired by W.A. Lewis of the Student Christian Movement (SCM), and included representatives from the League of Nations Union, Socialist, Conservative, Marxist and Liberal Clubs. This coalition sought to stage W.H. Auden's politically controversial play The Dog Beneath the Skin, but was refused permission by the school's authorities. Equally an address by two Hunger marchers to a joint meeting of the SCM, Liberal and Socialist societies was prevented as it involved organisations outside the School.<sup>78</sup> The joint meeting reveals how university regulations designed to isolate the students' groups from external political organisations facilitated coalitions and cooperation within campus.

A significant concern of the new regulations was whether LSE students could identify themselves as members of the school in political activity outside its walls. This was a confrontation over whether the students could legitimise their political position in public by their membership of the LSE, a connection which Beveridge fundamentally opposed. In February 1935, Beveridge refused to allow an "LSE Socialist Society" banner in the London demonstrations against the Unemployment Assistance Act, a restriction strongly criticised by the student's Union.<sup>79</sup>

In this contest for identity, Beveridge sought advice from his London neighbour the Provost of University College, who replied that,

The issue has never been the subject of any College regulation or edict, but the matter has come up in this way. All political societies, before receiving recognition by the College, have to give, at the beginning of each session, a pledge that they will not engage in propaganda work inside or outside the College. We have always interpreted that pledge in as generous a way as possible, but when a year or two ago there was some doubt as to its exact

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<sup>76</sup> Letter of 25/5/1936, LSE 67-H, LSE Archives.

<sup>77</sup> The Clare Market Review, Dec. 1936, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> The Clare Market Review, Oct. 1934, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> Letter of 10/4/1935, LSE 67-G, LSE Archives.

significance, I held a general meeting of the students and made it quite clear to them that, so far as propaganda outside the college was concerned, the one form which could not be allowed was taking part as College students under some College banner in this or that political demonstration. On investigation it seemed to me that their doing so was due to a genuine misunderstanding, into the details of which I need not enter. I explained to them that though I did not intend to take any action in regard to the past, when they were asked to renew their pledge at the beginning of the next session they must understand that it did cover this situation. When the time came they were unwilling to give the pledge, so no application was made, and the Society automatically came to an end. That is the only occasion on which this matter has been raised. Fortunately it settled itself without any need for any formal edict on the part of the College, and I sincerely trust that the matter will continue here in the same clear, if informal, understanding.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps, it was this informality which allowed Provost Mawer more flexibility in adapting to the various calls within UCL for political and humanitarian action over international events that would intensify during the mid 1930s. Unlike Mawer, Beveridge tried to draw a strict division between his school and outside political events, which generated considerable animosity within the LSE.

Mawer's account downplayed the extent to which students at UCL sought to extend the boundaries of political action within and outside their Gower Street campus in 1934. The incident to which his letter referred occurred at the beginning of that year's summer term, when UCL authorities required a pledge from the Socialist Society that its activities would be restricted to discussion. However, the students of the Socialist Society argued that since they were affiliated to a national body, the radical Federation of Student Societies (FSS), they were obligated to follow its requirements of "participation in and support of all working class activities".<sup>81</sup> The same argument was used to justify off-campus political action in other universities by socialist students groups affiliated to the FSS, such as the October Club in Oxford. After joining demonstrations against the Unemployment Assistance Act, the UCL Socialist Society was deregistered by the College.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Letter of 21/2/1935, LSE 67-G, LSE Archives.

<sup>81</sup> University College Magazine, June 1934, p.245;

The FSS had been formed as a Communist inspired breakaway from the University Labour Federation which was affiliated to the Labour Party.

<sup>82</sup> University College Magazine, June 1934, p. 246.

Deregistration channelled the Socialist Society's membership and their collective concerns into new organisations, a Social Problems Group, and a War and Peace Society. Both had to adopt forms that could be approved by the College authorities.<sup>83</sup> The Provost in a letter to the founders of the Social Problems Group set out the UCL authorities' conception of what aims and activities were acceptable for student societies. He wrote,

In order to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding, I would stress the importance of observing the distinction between a discussion club and a political society, and point out that whatever the ultimate complexion of the opinion of the majority of the members of your club may be, it must not become a political society for the advocacy of these views. In particular there are two forms of activity upon which the Club must not embark. The first is, it must not appear at any meeting or demonstration outside the college in the name of the College; and the second is, that the Club must not engage in the distribution of literature supporting this or that point of view within the precincts of the College.<sup>84</sup>

Both new clubs formally complied with the authorities' view that they should provide for discussion amongst students on a broad basis, rather than act as a focus for campaigning or agitation.<sup>85</sup> Though these limits would segregate British students into distinct campus-orientated groups, their broad and non-aligned character provided the basis for alliances amongst UCL's student societies over more political issues later in the decade.

At a meeting in mid May 1936 the Social Problems Club decided by 49 votes to 1 to seek approval from the College authorities to change itself into a new Socialist Society. Its justification was the need for a UCL student society to lead and be the focus of progressive opinion.<sup>86</sup> The reformation of the Socialist Society and its acceptance by UCL authorities reflected the growing tolerance of student political activity by the latter during the second half of the 1930s. Perhaps more significantly, it also reflects the extent to which students had accepted the boundaries against involvement with non-university groups. UCL's new Socialist Society was formed within the framework which its predecessor had refused to accept. Official restrictions kept the increasing political activities of student groups

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<sup>83</sup> University College Magazine, March 1935, p.164.

<sup>84</sup> Minutes of 6/11/1934, p. 8 in "Minutes of College Committee, 1934-1935", UCL Archives, London.

<sup>85</sup> Both of the new groups carried clauses in their constitutions that "the Club should not affiliate to any particular political or religious body" - Minutes of 4/12/1934, p. 6, in "Minutes of College Committee, 1934-1935", UCL Archives.

<sup>86</sup> University College Magazine, June 1936, p. 263.

within British campuses, fundamentally maintaining their distant relationship with external political bodies.

The efforts by the authorities of UCL and LSE to circumscribe collective political activity by students were largely successful. Politics was a matter to be discussed by distinct students' groups, which consciously limited their activities and membership outside university. Alliances on campus were far easier than with non-university bodies because religious, academic, political and other student societies shared memberships, facilities, as well as concerns. The close and continued interaction between various student groups, partially explains why coalition, and not polarisation, was the dominant characteristic of British universities, unlike their French counterparts. Student independence from external organisations, and interdependence on each other, promoted and then preserved the coalitions which after 1936 would take as their main focus the civil war in Spain.

### The Laski Controversy

When the British Union of Fascists labelled the LSE as "that alien-infested college of subversion" in 1936, they were referring not so much to its student activists as to the public prominence of several of its academics, particularly Harold Laski.<sup>87</sup> At the same time as the regulation of student political activities was stirring debate at LSE, there developed within the School a debate over political action by academics. The controversy centred on which forms of political activity, and public visibility, were permissible for British academics. For Beveridge, overridingly concerned with the school's public image and its external sources of funding, any political commitment by staff should be subordinated to the interests of the school. Others, such as Laski, saw these interests as complementary rather than conflicting. In 1926, the year before he was appointed Professor of Political Science, Laski had stated his belief that "active participation in public affairs was an essential prerequisite for effective political analysis".<sup>88</sup> However, his prominence in national politics put him under increasing pressure from those who were opposed to his connection of political activity and teaching. At the time, the LSE had around eighty teachers but Laski was a defining presence, both for the way the outside world saw the LSE, and for how the school perceived itself.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> clipping of *Blackshirt*, 14/2/1936 in LSE 26/1/10, LSE Archives.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Newman, *Harold Laski: A Political Biography*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1993, p. 167.

<sup>89</sup> Dahrendorf, *LSE*, p. 175.

In late May 1934, Laski had travelled to Moscow to deliver three lectures in which he criticised both British capitalism and the communist alternatives.<sup>90</sup> This provided a pretext for an attack by the London press, led by The Daily Telegraph and taken up by The Morning Post and The Evening Standard.<sup>91</sup> More significant than the press vitriol was the public statement by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of University of London that Laski would be held answerable for his comments before the appropriate inquiry. The strongest attacks on Laski and the LSE, ironically came from the MP for University of London, Sir Ernest Graham Little, who called for disciplinary action and reduced funding to the LSE. Little's actions were motivated by his personal animosity against Laski, which was probably only surpassed by his hatred of Beveridge.<sup>92</sup> These public attacks provoked strong defences of Laski by his colleagues. The Times carried a joint letter by Professors Chorley, Gregory, Power, Tawney and Webster of the LSE, and Cambridge economist John Maynard Keynes wrote to the New Statesman protesting the controversy.<sup>93</sup> Despite these efforts, Laski felt that he had largely been let down by the British academic community on the issue of academic freedom.<sup>94</sup>

For Beveridge, it was the public nature of such a debate, rather than the debate itself, which threatened the LSE's reputation and funding. Through the school's governing committee, Beveridge was able to have Laski's frequent writings for the national press declared a breach of its rules on professorial employment and the public controversy over his Moscow lectures declared "against the best interests of the school".<sup>95</sup> Laski agreed to end his regular articles for the Labour Party's Daily Herald and to limit his extra-curricular political activities but, embittered, he pulled back to focus on teaching.<sup>96</sup>

The confrontation over Laski's political activities occurred at the same time as the crisis over students politics within the school, which left Beveridge beleaguered, depressed and seeking career alternatives outside the LSE.<sup>97</sup> It took two more academic years before Beveridge finally decided on returning to Oxford. On the other hand, Laski maintained his impressive public energy in 1934, for he was elected alderman on Fulham Council and was one of the founders of the

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<sup>90</sup> Kramnick & Sheerman, Harold Laski, p. 326.

<sup>91</sup> Dahrendorf, LSE, p. 280.

<sup>92</sup> Kramnick & Sheerman, Harold Laski, p. 329.

<sup>93</sup> press cuttings, LSE 26/1/10, LSE Archives.

<sup>94</sup> Newman, Harold Laski, p. 173.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>96</sup> Kramnick & Sheerman, Harold Laski, p. 331.

<sup>97</sup> Dahrendorf, LSE, p. 283.

National Council of Civil Liberties.<sup>98</sup> In the same year he was also forced to resign from the Relief Committee for the Victims of German and Austrian Fascism after the Labour Conference in Southport had declared the committee to be a Communist front organisation.<sup>99</sup> Laski, despite his deeply felt opposition to Nazism, bowed to the constraints of the Labour Party just as he had accepted those of the School.

### **British Academics and the Labour Party**

Laski's willingness to work within the Labour Party, even where he disagreed with party policy, was strikingly characteristic of British academics during the 1930s. Rather than the independent stance of their French peers, British academics on the left enthusiastically submerged themselves within a party organisation. Academics were encouraged to channel their political energies through Labour by their desire to claim a distinctive role within the party based on their scholarly expertise, and the possibility after Labour's electoral disaster in 1931 of remaking the party along more radical lines.<sup>100</sup> These two factors meant that their commitment to the Labour Party was increasing at the very time when 'intellectuals' were being increasingly marginalised within the party, especially its decision-making.<sup>101</sup> Though Laski and other party members were to disagree strongly with elements of the party's international policy, especially over the Spanish civil war, they were not prepared to break with the party through which they had defined their political identity.

Nineteen thirty-one was a year of crisis and change for the British Labour Party. From holding office as a minority government, the party had been shaken by the defection of its most prominent leaders to a Conservative-dominated National Government which had been followed by a massive electoral defeat in which it had lost 230 seats.<sup>102</sup> This collapse and the loss of the party's first generation of leaders

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>100</sup> Equally significant was the collapse of the Cambridge Labour Club in the wake of 1931 disaster which was later reformed as the Cambridge University Socialist Society. Labour's weak position in the early 1930s made it easier for students to commit themselves to a more radical socialist alternative, rather than the party itself - Patrick Seale & Maureen McConville, *Philby: The Long Road to Moscow*, Hamist Hamilton, London, 1973, p. 29.

<sup>101</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour People: Leaders & Lieutenants, Hardie to Kinnock*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 9-10; Robert Dare, "Instinct & Organization: Intellectuals & British Labour after 1931", *Historical Journal*, 26, 3, 1983, p. 695.

<sup>102</sup> David Howell, *British Social Democracy: A Study in Development and Decay*, 2nd ed., Croom Helm, London, 1980, pp. 10-11.

provoked a re-evaluation of party policy by many of its members. Whether the party had collapsed or been betrayed, the fall of the Labour government encouraged a more radical vision of politics for academics such as G.D.H. Cole and Laski. The defeats of 1931 also reinforced their commitment to the Labour Party as both Laski and Cole felt there was as an opportunity to remake the party and to increase its radical commitment. With the parliamentary wing of the party severely weakened, Laski was a much-needed public figure for the party,

When Labour was out of office, his importance in the labour movement was at its greatest. His ideological passion found strong support in sections of the party and his constant willingness to work, write and speak for the party gave him visibility and importance second to some of the party's parliamentary leaders.<sup>103</sup>

Alongside his increasing activities for the party, Laski's political analysis became more sympathetic to Marxism as he questioned the gradualism of democratic socialism.

For G.D.H. Cole, the crisis of 1931 reinforced his conception of the role of intellectuals inside the Labour Party which stemmed from his earlier experiences of Fabianism. Cole believed that academics had a distinct purpose within the Labour Party of thinking out party policy and principles, based on their intellectual expertise.<sup>104</sup> This drew on the Fabian emphasis on the role of the expert in preparing and advising the Labour Party on how best to manage the neutral British state.<sup>105</sup> Despite Cole's commitment to working within the Party, he was largely viewed by its leadership as not quite "sound"; a "permanent undergraduate".<sup>106</sup> Despite this distance, the leadership of the Labour Party was willing to use and cooperate with the various academic 'think-tanks' which Cole established in the early 1930s. Perhaps the most significant of these was the New Fabian Research Bureau, founded in early 1931 with support from Party leaders Attlee, Dalton and Henderson.<sup>107</sup> Cole also founded the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda, however this organisation quickly changed its character into the Socialist League, which was intended as an activist lobby group for radical policies. Cole broke with the new League to focus on more moderate research and propaganda work for the party.

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<sup>103</sup> Dahrendorf, LSE, p. 304.

<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth Durbin, New Jerusalem: The Labour Party and the Economics of Democratic Socialism, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1985, pp. 91-98.

<sup>105</sup> Howell, British Social Democracy, p. 27.

<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth Durbin, New Jerusalem, p. 81.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

Through regular social discussions held at home or in his college rooms in Oxford, Cole encouraged a group of young students and dons who shared his commitment to left-wing politics. Economists Evan Durbin and Hugh Gaitskell were part of this 'Cole Group' when they studied together in Oxford during the late 1920s, and they had been profoundly influenced by Cole's conception of intellectual engagement.<sup>108</sup> Taking up lectureships at the LSE and UCL respectively, Durbin and Gaitskell acted as Cole's assistants on the New Fabian Research Bureau, which perhaps best encapsulated their desire to work inside the Labour Party. Together they exemplify the web of political sociability upon which such commitments to the Labour Party were built. Across London there were a variety of other forums for political activity, such as the multitude of social and political clubs or the Bloomsbury homes of other academics.<sup>109</sup> Professional and personal networks often overlapped to provide the opportunities for academics to discuss and debate contemporary politics and economics.<sup>110</sup>

This political milieu provided the basis for the reviving of the dormant University of London Labour Party. Distinct electorates existed for the graduates of London, Cambridge and Oxford, the Scottish universities and the new English universities, which encouraged the establishment of university Labour parties.<sup>111</sup> Voting in university constituencies was overwhelmingly conservative during the 1930s, and such university Labour parties were more significant for providing a focus for Labour support than for mounting an effective electoral challenge.<sup>112</sup> By the end of 1934, in the space of two years, the University of London Labour Party had risen from nothing to a constituency party numbering 73 members.<sup>113</sup> The group was open to graduates and teaching staff of the University of London, though it drew its most prominent members from the LSE and UCL. Despite its membership, the University of London Labour Party always acted as a local constituency party rather than a distinct grouping of intellectuals. Its acceptance of

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>109</sup> Residence in Bloomsbury gave left-wing academics a proximity not only to their universities but to the resident literary intelligentsia, encouraging social contact and common political activity between the two groups.

<sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Durbin, *New Jerusalems*, p. 115.

<sup>111</sup> An effort to co-ordinate members of various 'redbrick' English universities into a single constituency organisation failed - Executive Committee Minutes, 23/2/1937, London University Labour Party Collection, University of London Archives, London.

<sup>112</sup> For example, after the 1935 election the Cambridge University Labour Party had increased its official membership to 139, yet its poll of only 3,500 votes had been doubled by both of its two Conservative opponents - Minutes of 1/6/1936, Add. 881/1, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>113</sup> Minutes of General Meetings, London University Labour Party Collection University of London Archives.



a Labour ethos was a powerful contrast with the independence from the party line of London's socialist students.

### Academic Freedom

In early August 1934, H.D. Dickinson, a lecturer in Economics at University of Leeds made a controversial anti-war speech on a visit to Auckland, New Zealand. Dickinson was quoted as saying that he would rather be shot by his own government than in a war, and that the only good thing to come out of the First World War had been the Bolshevik Revolution.<sup>114</sup> Following an outcry in the British press over the lecture, Dickinson was censured by the Vice-Chancellor of Leeds. The attacks sparked a joint-letter by Cambridge and London academics, who on 11 October 1934 wrote,

This case raises in the clearest way the issue of free speech, and, taken in conjunction with recent events in England such as the campaign against Professor Laski as well as political developments abroad, shows that there is an urgent necessity to affirm the rights and duties of University teachers and research workers in this matter.<sup>115</sup>

The letter was signed by a group of leading left-wing scientists - Lascelles Abercrombie, J.D. Bernal, P.S.M. Blackett, J.B.S. Haldane, G.H. Hardy, L. Hogben, F.G. Hopkins, R. Marrack, J. Needham - who arranged for a meeting at the University of London Club, on 21 October 1934. The Academic Freedom Committee which was established at the meeting was largely drawn from prominent academics in the Cambridge-London-Oxford triangle.

Given the support the AUT had given to the AAC in its efforts to care for German academic refugees, its reaction to the new Academic Freedom Committee showed that the domestic campaign had a far more politicised character. The AUT did send a delegate to the London meeting, who was not impressed by the proceedings and felt that the new committee was badly organised. The delegate reported that

I do not imagine however that this movement is going to do very much... It struck me that there was an undercurrent of political feeling - it showed itself in some of the speakers - and that there might be quite a real danger of

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<sup>114</sup> Letter of 11/10/1934, K318, Needham Papers, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

this new body being used for the interests of one particular party, namely, the Socialist and Labour Party.<sup>1</sup>

The Academic Freedom Committee attempted to link the cases of Laski and Dickinson with the attacks on academics in Germany, yet such an international phenomenon was explicitly denied by the AUT.<sup>2</sup> The tension between the Academic Freedom Committee and the AUT reveals the different political mentalities of their separate constituencies. The Academic Freedom Committee comprised prominent academics from London and Oxbridge (the latter where the AUT was particularly weak).<sup>3</sup> On the other hand the AUT circulated its local branches in Britain's 'redbrick' universities, thirteen of which replied that they felt there had been no infringement of academic freedom at their institution and neither was one likely to occur in the immediate future.<sup>4</sup> Against the abstract principle of academic political engagement, the AUT was far more concerned with pragmatic professional measures.

In August 1935 the Academic Freedom Committee organised a Conference at Oxford.<sup>5</sup> One of its speakers was a representative of the French organisation, the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels et Antifascistes (CVIA), who called for the establishment of a similarly broad organisation of British intellectuals independent of party politics. Though the Academic Freedom Committee saw itself as appealing to intellectuals both inside and outside the university, it was never able to achieve the large national membership of CVIA as British academics largely remained organised in their own distinct political and professional groups.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of 30/4/1935, "File: Academic Freedom Committee", Mss 27, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>2</sup> The Universities Review, Oct. 1935, pp. 1-3;  
The Universities Review, April 1936, pp. 101 & 140.

<sup>3</sup> It was not until June 1935 that a Cambridge branch of the AUT was formed; significantly it was only launched with the support of politically prominent senior academics such as Pascal, Dobb, Elwin and Cornford - Letter of 5/6/1935, Mss 27/3/186, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>4</sup> "File: Academic Freedom, Position of Junior Staff", Mss 27, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>5</sup> "Report of the Conference on Academic Freedom", pp. 18-21, K319, Needham Papers, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of 16/12/1935, "File: Academic Freedom Committee", Mss 27, Modern Records Centre.

## Comparative Conclusions

Just as events in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century marked a national tradition of political participation by French intellectuals, so those in London during the early 1930s symbolised the limits in the development of a similar tradition in Britain. Politics for the students and academics at the University of London was not about a public commitment to parallel their French peers. The strength of restrictions by university authorities and the *mentalités* of the activists themselves made political activity a matter centred within the university. Unlike Paris, there was no long history of polarised struggles for public space by both left and right. Rather, British students and academics built alignments and coalitions within campuses or professional groups. This difference between the political activity in the universities of the two capitals, symbolises the gap between intellectual politics in the two countries.

These two national political traditions were significantly different in four key (and inter-connected) areas:

- (i) Histories of political participation
- (ii) Political arenas
- (iii) Forms of organisation and activity
- (iv) Alignments and coalitions

Traditional national differences in political participation were preserved in the distinct political arenas and forms of organisation which focused political activity outside the university in France and concentrated them within the university in Britain. Within the national contrasts students and academics followed separate conceptions of political organisation, most clearly over whether they independently aligned themselves with larger political parties or national organisations, worked within party organisations or followed a separate course. These national differences in political forms, spaces and traditions shaped not only political activity but also the creation of coalitions, alignments and movements in the two countries.

### (i) Histories of political participation

The Dreyfus Affair of the late 1890s established French academics and students as political actors on the national stage, fitting both with particular political repertoires. The familiar forms of organisation and activity established in the Affair were overwhelmingly focused on intervention in public debates and public spaces. The Dreyfusard experience became a powerful reference point which was consciously and continually invoked by academics and students of all political hues throughout the interwar period.

In Britain, there was no parallel singular reference point to justify participation in public politics. As a result, the birth of new political groups for both academics and students during the early 1930s was far more idiosyncratic - marked both by their confrontations with their own university authorities and diverging local concerns. The focus of these groups on politics within the university, was partly a product of these conflicts, but was also largely derived from their own strong traditions of campus-based organisation and activity.

### (ii) Political arenas

Political participation by French students and academics had developed out of a long history of confrontation in public debates and public spaces. This focus on politics outside the university in France was reinforced by the legal depoliticisation of the university itself. Compared to their British peers, French academics and students enjoyed a greater degree of freedom outside university walls. One significant consequence of this public-orientation was the importance of confrontation for university members in the symbolic and physical claiming of space in the public arena.

For most members of British universities, the central focus of their political (and other) activities was the university itself. During the mid 1930s there were campaigns by students for greater political participation in public debates, yet their politics remained overwhelmingly campus-centred. This campus-focus was strongly felt even at non-residential British universities where there was a strong commitment by the institutions themselves and their members to campus-life.

(iii) Forms of organisation and activity

The Dreyfus Affair had been fought by French academics as political independents. This formal independence from parties and parliament not only legitimised political engagement, but was part of their political capital. In petitions and public meetings senior academics preserved an identity as independent individuals (although this image was less true of junior academics who were more likely to be involved in party politics). Significantly, the inter-linked structure of the state education system reinforced the broader, non-professional conception of *intellectuel* in France, placing academics beside other public figures in heavily mixed milieus.

In contrast to their seniors, French students developed their own distinct organisations as part of existing nationalist leagues or parties of the left. Significantly, this form of organisation made students not only subject to external discipline and policies, but also drew them into national political confrontations and developments. Paralleling these groups which existed and acted outside the university, were student corporate organisations which were formally defined as 'non-political'.

Unlike their French peers, British academics were far more likely to justify their engagement in political activity by their professional skills rather than abstract values. Union and party organisations reached across campuses, as did the connections of academic disciplines or shared educational backgrounds (both of which were also strong in France). During the 1930s they sought a role on the inside of the Labour Party due to the dual considerations of legitimising political participation through their professional expertise and seeking to remain distant from public controversy. The failure of the campaign for "Academic Freedom" to mobilise broad support outside the university reflected the extent to which British academics maintained their own distinctive identities.

The campus-focus of British students was most powerfully expressed in their forms of organisation. Almost all student political activity was channelled through university clubs and societies. Though these were frequently aligned to national parties or wider movements, they remained firmly autonomous and locally idiosyncratic. They were also subject to university regulations, which were primarily concerned with keeping students away from the controversy

Nevertheless, the polarisation of the 1930s, the willingness of such groups to engage in public space (reinforced by their lack of broad roots within the university itself) and their overlapping memberships with leagues and parties, gave corporate student groups a far more ambivalent political identity.

of the public arena. These restrictions were reinforced by the perspectives of the participants themselves, and their opportunities and resources within their institutions.

#### (iv) Alignments and coalitions

The extreme polarisation of the Dreyfus Affair became a lasting characteristic of politics in French universities. Conflict and confrontation defined not only the organisations of the 1920s and 1930s but also their activities which were focused on clashes over public spaces or in public debates. These traditions and tendencies shaped the later coalitions amongst academic and student groups.

The university-orientated mentalities of British academics and students facilitated broad coalitions amongst university groups which shared campus space. These alignments were encouraged during the early 1930s when university restrictions united disparate groups in coalitions to claim common 'rights' to participate in public politics. Such coalitions were sometimes intermeshed with the broad-reaching movements that developed around the twin themes of "against war" and "against fascism".

## Chapter 3

### Campaigns & Coalitions, 1934-1936

Political histories of the thirties have stressed the extent to which the slogan "against war and fascism" rallied support from a variety of groups and coalitions in both Britain and France.<sup>1</sup> "Against war and fascism" is seen as covering a multitude of campaigns, from those against militarism to support for League of Nations, as well as opposition to the extreme right in domestic or international politics. Underlying the shared political rhetoric, there were significant differences between the two countries in the slogan's meaning, resonance and tone. This gap was best expressed by two symbolic dates - 6 February in France and 11 November in Britain. The former marked the riots of the extreme right in 1934 which had increased the polarisation of French politics, focusing the left on the domestic threat of fascism and the right on the growing unity of the left. It was Armistice Day which created controversy within British universities as activists became increasingly concerned about international politics and clashed with university regulations. Embodied in these two key dates was a profound contrast between the national political cultures of the two countries which were focused on the domestic instability in France and overseas events in Britain.

This political mobilisation of the mid 1930s drew heavily on the traditions and perceptions discussed in the previous chapter. In French universities between 1934 and 1936 there was a reshaping and transformation of an already polarised and highly politically active population. In British universities, the same years were dominated by political movements over international events which overlapped with confrontations over university restrictions, producing far more campus-specific campaigns and coalitions. While Paris would remain the focus of French national (and university) politics, by the mid-1930s London had been replaced as the leading political campus by Oxford and Cambridge due to their resources and elite ethos.

At the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, students and academics faced limitations on their political activities which were similar to their London counterparts. In Oxford, Armistice Day 1933 became the focus for confrontation

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935-1941*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Shorth Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, Abacus, London, 1994, pp. 143-150.

between students and university authorities. By 1936, the tone of this debate had changed and there was widespread national criticism of the unreasonable proctorial regulation of student political activity. During the mid 1930s, there were therefore significant developments in political campaigns by students within the university. In Cambridge Armistice Day 1933 was marked not by proctorial regulation, but by the clashes between students of the left and right. This confrontation came to symbolise the growing coalition between political, religious and other students groups against war. This coalition was encouraged by leading academics, particularly those close to the Communist Party. The CPGB's activist approach to politics had a strong appeal for those at Oxbridge who saw 'real politics' as occurring outside the university. Class was a powerful influence in shaping this conception of politics, which transcended the changing policy of the Communists during the first half of the 1930s.

### Armistice Day: Oxford

I propose to adhere to the rule not to give any undergraduate political club leave for a public meeting.

Vice-Chancellor of Oxford to University Proctors, 1933.<sup>2</sup>

In February 1933, the Oxford Union became the focus of the national press when it passed the motion that "this House will not fight for King and Country" by a substantial majority.<sup>3</sup> The Oxford Union (and its sister institution at Cambridge) embodied the ambiguous position of the ancient universities in British political life. The Union mixed prominent statesmen, politicians and public figures with students in debates on the leading issues of the day. However amidst this playing at parliament, the Union and its members saw themselves as operating outside of narrow party or political considerations. Voting at the debates was on the speakers' ability as much as the motion itself.<sup>4</sup> Union debates, as T.E.B. Howarth has argued, constitute a very erratic barometer of political and social opinion amongst

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of 3/5/1933, PR 3/2/339, Proctors' Records, Bodleian Library.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Ceadel, "The 'King and Country' Debate, 1933: Student Politics, Pacifism and the Dictators", *Historical Journal*, 22,2, 1979, pp. 397-422.

<sup>4</sup> Brian Harrison, "Politics" in Harrison, ed., *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol III The Twentieth Century*, p. 406.

In November 1936 the Cambridge Union voted against the election of the National Government by 163 to 149, while the following week a mock election by students gave 650 votes to the National Conservatives, 225 to the Socialists, and 171 to the Liberals - *The Cambridge Review*, 15/11/1936, p. 116 & *The Cambridge Review*, 22/11/1935, p. 122.



undergraduates. But attendances in the inter-war years relative to the student body, were often surprisingly high and the choice of motions and of distinguished visitors invited is frequently indicative of preoccupations and social trends.<sup>5</sup>

Given the heated public controversy which had been stirred by the "King and Country" motion it was not surprising that university authorities were unwilling for such a spotlight to return to their institution later in the same year. The university's Proctors who were responsible for regulating student activities outside of their residential colleges sought to prevent a potentially controversial meeting of the growing student anti-war movement. As the left-leaning journal The New Oxford Outlook wrote,

an Anti-War Committee, on which the October Club was represented together with the Labour Club and the Oxford Peace Groups, applied for permission to hold a meeting criticising the work of the University Officer Training Corps. This permission was refused, and the same organisations then combined with representatives of the Liberal Club and the League of Nations Union to form a Free Speech Committee, to hold a meeting protesting against restrictions of this kind. Permission for this meeting also was refused.<sup>6</sup>

Like in London, restrictions against student political activity could encourage further political action and broaden campaigns across different campus groups. Of all the aforementioned students groups, it was the radical October Club which in defiance of university authorities arranged a meeting over Free Speech at Ruskin College for 1 November 1933.<sup>7</sup> Over 400 students attended the meeting, which the university was unable to prevent as it was convened at a college on the periphery of the university both administratively and geographically.<sup>8</sup> Still, Proctors waited outside the meeting to collect names of students attending, and after its close they were roughly interfered with by the students of Ruskin College. This challenge to university authority, and the fear of public disturbance on Armistice Day during the following week, resulted in the October Club being suspended on 7 November 1933.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> T.E.B. Howarth, Cambridge between Two Wars, Collins, London, 1978, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> The New Oxford Outlook, 1, 2, Nov. 1933, p. 133.

<sup>7</sup> The meeting was formally convened by the Federation of Student Societies of which the October Club was a member.

<sup>8</sup> Ruskin College was unique within Oxford as it had been created as an independent institution for students from the organised labour movement - Harold Pollins, The History of Ruskin College, Ruskin College Library, Oxford, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Letter of 2/11/1933, PR 3/2/339, Proctor's Records, Bodleian Library.

Within its brief two year existence, the October Club claimed 300 student members.<sup>10</sup> Few of these formally belonged to the Communist Party, and despite its radical marxism there was considerable overlap between its membership and the Labour Club. As one commentator wrote of the October Club,

inside the club there is a fairly small but very active group, but the larger part of its membership, like that of every other political club in the University, only attend the weekly meetings when a speaker comes down to address them. Its numerical success has been due in no small degree to the calibre of these weekly speakers, who have included Bernard Shaw and HG Wells besides a number of other well-known people.<sup>11</sup>

The most significant consequence of the suspension of the October Club, was not the end of its radical politics, but that it merged its membership with that of the Labour Club. This coalition of the left would probably have occurred anyway given the appeal of Popular Front coalitions amongst left students in the mid-1930s. Yet the early end of the October Club, partly explains why students of the left did not have to face the party divisions of their seniors but co-existed within the Labour Club.

Though the Oxford University Labour Club was affiliated to the Oxford City Labour Party, the Club had always followed its own independent line, as members of the Club were not required to be members of the Party.<sup>12</sup> Despite the support of senior university figures such as G.D.H. Cole and A.D. Lindsay, the Club suffered through a difficult early existence before the 1930s as its meetings were frequently interrupted by conservative students.<sup>13</sup> Rather than paralleling the French pattern of regular political violence, these clashes were often merely the boisterous rejection of left-wing politics.

Oxford students of the political left were at the forefront of criticism of university regulations on student life. In February 1934 they called for the end of proctorial discretion, with the formulation of enumerated rules for student societies and proctorial registration of a club being reduced to a formality.<sup>14</sup> They also demanded freedom of publication, and abolition of restrictions on social activities between male and female students. Given the large number of women students in

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<sup>10</sup> The New Oxford Outlook, 1, 2, Nov. 1933, p. 169.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> M.P. Ashley & C.T. Saunders, Red Oxford: A History of the Growth of Socialism in the University of Oxford, 2nd. ed., Oxford University Labour Club, Oxford, 1933, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Part of those rules specified that all student clubs had to register a list of members and senior members with the Proctors, and that they were limited to only one public meeting a term - The New Oxford Outlook, 1, 3, Feb. 1934, pp. 259-260.

the Oxford Labour Club, calls for sexual equality were not merely matters of principle, but pragmatically related to the running of the club.<sup>15</sup> In June 1934 the Labour Club applied to the university authorities for a mixed club room. Despite the fears of Oxford's Proctors the proposal was supported by the Principals of the women's colleges.<sup>16</sup> The establishment of facilities such as regular club rooms, and the attraction of social intercourse with the opposite sex, did much to increase the appeal of political activity to the students of Oxford.<sup>17</sup>

The development of political opinion and organisation amongst Oxford undergraduates during the early 1930s was revealed by the controversy that erupted over Armistice Day 1936. Fearing a public outcry if students staged an anti-war demonstration during the town's memorial service, Oxford Proctors banned a planned wreath-laying march by anti-war students.<sup>18</sup> Once again, restriction fuelled a broad coalition amongst student groups of all political colours. Eleven Oxford student societies signed a joint letter of protest, including the Conservative Association, Liberal Club, Labour Club, League of Nations Union and Pacifist Society.<sup>19</sup> A protest meeting supported by the same organisations and the SCM was also organised, chaired by the President of the Oxford Union. The Proctors' actions were publicly criticised by Oxford academics in the Labour Party (G.D.H. Cole, Richard Crossman and Patrick Gordon Walker), as well as writer H.G. Wells, the National Council for Civil Liberties and a group of Liberal and Labour MPs.<sup>20</sup> The reaction to the Proctors' restrictions on students demonstrations over Armistice Day reveals the degree to which the concept of acceptable student political activity had shifted, both inside and outside of Oxford. Politics had become a deep-rooted activity within Oxford by 1936, even if it remained largely focused on campus activities and organisations.

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<sup>15</sup> Ashley & Saunders, *Red Oxford*, p. 31-32.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of 30/10/1934, PR 3/2/339, Proctor's Records, Bodleian Library.

<sup>17</sup> "A fair number joined the Labour Club as a way of meeting women. The Club had the reputation, not unfounded, of having the best women in Oxford as members. It also held good 'socials'" - Leo Pliatzky in Brian Harrison, ed., *Corpuscles: A History of Corpus Christi College*, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 1994, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Proctors had prevented a delegation of students from welcoming Hunger Marchers. The Labour Club protested, Philip Toynbee decrying the infringement on rights of students to express their opinion in public. He wrote that "the former right of clubs to demonstrate and of students to carry banners have already been withdrawn" - Letter 3/11/36, PR 3/2/339, Proctor's Records, Bodleian Library.

<sup>19</sup> *The Granata*, 20/11/1936, p. 126.

<sup>20</sup> *The Oxford Magazine*, 19/11/1936, pp. 175 & 184; *The Cherwell*, 21/11/1936, p. 123.

## British Fascism and British Anti-Fascism

Political coalitions amongst Oxford students developed out of their anti-war campaigns focused on Armistice Day, rather than in opposing the British Union of Fascists (BUF). David Renton has argued that the confrontations with the newly formed fascist group represented the first stage of politicisation and coalition-building within the University of Oxford in the early 1930s.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this was true for a vanguard of students on the far left, but the most successful coalitions in Oxbridge before 1936 were mobilised against international war (and the subsequent confrontations with university authorities), not British fascism.

From their birth in October 1932, the British Union of Fascists were a marginal force in British politics.<sup>22</sup> Their paramilitary style, corporatist ideology and anti-semitism seemed to many alien in a British context.<sup>23</sup> In July 1934, the BUF claimed 50,000 members but by October 1935 this had collapsed to 5,000.<sup>24</sup> Though membership slowly increased during the second half of the 1930s, it remained overwhelmingly concentrated in the East End of London.<sup>25</sup> The BUF were never a national presence, especially within British universities, despite the Communist Party's efforts to rally support by leading the physical and political challenge to the fascists.<sup>26</sup> The weakness of British fascism was reflected in the extent to which political alignments both nationally and locally were unaffected by the rapid rise and collapse of the BUF. Compared to France where domestic fascism was seen as the central issue of national politics in the mid-1930s, the BUF had only a transitory and peripheral impact on British politics. Those student activists who enjoyed the physical confrontations of the BUF remained a minority; for most in British universities the threat of domestic fascism in the mid 1930s was not serious enough to force them into political action.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dave Renton, Red Shirts & Black: Fascists & Anti-Fascists in Oxford in the 1930s, Ruskin College Library, Oxford, 1996.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Thurlow, Fascism in Britain: A History, 1918-1985, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1987, pp. 23, 107 & 117.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Thurlow, "The Failure of British Fascism 1932-40" in Andrew Thorpe, ed., The Failure of Political Extremism in Inter-war Britain, University of Exeter, Exeter, 1989, p. 74.

<sup>24</sup> John Stevenson & Chris Cook, Britain in the Depression: Society & Politics 1929-1939, 2nd ed., Longman, Harlow, 1994, p. 234.

<sup>25</sup> Thurlow, Fascism in Britain, p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Morgan, Against Fascism & War, p. 27.

<sup>27</sup> Toynebee, Friends Apart, pp. 21-23.

## Oxbridge, Politics and the 'Real World'

The confrontations between Oxford students and university authorities over public engagement in politics outside the university arose in an environment very different to than of their peers in London. The complaint of one Oxford student that, "wherever he may turn he will find University rules defending his position as an undergraduate and a gentleman rather than a student and a citizen" reveals the significant class differences which distinguished the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>28</sup> Their elite *mentalité*, residential nature and regulation of daily life, gave rise at both universities to a powerful motivation to become active in politics outside university.<sup>29</sup> The quads of the ancient universities were not merely part of its distinctive architecture but felt by some of its members to represent a sense of enclosure and isolation.<sup>30</sup> During the 1930s, left-wing politics was therefore seen as a way of getting involved in the 'real world'. The same enclosure that focused the aspirations of activists outside college walls, generated an intense communal life within the colleges, which encouraged and provided more opportunities for political groups than at non-residential universities.

The desire for a politics outside of campus was most clearly articulated by those who aligned themselves in the early 1930s with the Communist Party. In 1931 the first Communist cells were formed within the Universities of London, Cambridge, and Oxford.<sup>31</sup> In London, student communists were encouraged by their proximity to other radical organisations, including such left-wing landmarks as the bookshop at Red Lion Square.<sup>32</sup> However, in Cambridge and Oxford, it was university life itself rather than its surrounding milieu which encouraged activism in 'town'. The first communist efforts by the Oxford and Cambridge cells were directed outside the university to involvement in 'real' issues in the surrounding community like rent disputes and strikes.<sup>33</sup> Activity off-campus was what mattered and what appealed about party politics. Margot Heinemann described becoming a

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<sup>28</sup> The New Oxford Outlook, 1,3, Feb. 1934, p. 269.

<sup>29</sup> Restrictions included college curfews at midnight and the compulsory wearing of academic gowns when outside college at night.

<sup>30</sup> Poet Stephen Spender wrote of being a student in the early 1930s, "Oxford was in some ways for me a period of my life having little connection with what went before or after it. There was a sense of unreality, of living in a vacuum" - Stephen Spender, World within World, Readers Union, London, 1953, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Wood, Communism & British Intellectuals, p. 51; Seale & McConville, Philby, p. 31.

<sup>32</sup> Toynebee, Friends Apart, pp. 17-18.

<sup>33</sup> Maurice Cornforth, "Recollections of Cambridge Contemporaries" in Carmel Haden Guest, ed., David Guest: A Scientist Fights for Freedom (1911-1938), Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1939, p. 98.

communist as a student in October 1934 out of her interest in the party's practical work, despite being put off by its theory.<sup>34</sup> As a Party member she was expected to do work in town, and after three weeks she helped to organise a rent strike. Equally for historian Roy Pascal,

It was a principle whenever a Communist group was formed that it should undertake work in the working class, distributing party literature, carrying on party propaganda of various kinds, helping in industrial struggles and so on. [Therefore] the first thing that the group in Cambridge thought of was what could be done... We proceeded to create tasks... and to carry them out, working among railway workers, the bus workers and taking every opportunity to help... I think it must be said that people tended to join the Communist Party and leave the Labour Party because of this sort of requirement. You felt that something was being done, that you weren't just sitting up in a study and thinking about the political situation.<sup>35</sup>

Public politics gave purpose to communist students and academics, making their clashes with university authorities in the early 1930s almost inevitable.

Underlying the tension for university activists between campus restriction and politics in the 'real world' were perceptions of class and class identity. Nineteen-thirties Britain was an intensely class-stratified society, and these divisions were powerfully expressed in both politics and education. Both the Communist Party and the Labour Party identified their politics in specifically class terms; they were of and for the working class. Student activists such as Heinemann did not share this background, nor would they have had much contact with those the labour movement represented, until they joined its ranks. Class provided not only the symbols and rhetoric of politics on the left, but also the motive for engagement. During the early 1930s, the Communist Party had emphasised its working class identity, as part of a 'class against class' strategy of absolute sectarian distance from other socialist groups. The line of "class against class" had a strong personal appeal for students such as John Cornford, especially in its call for a purist campaign amongst the working class towards revolution.

Cornford's attitude to the English middle class was described by a Cambridge contemporary as based on a "sense of absolute separation from the 'enemy', of irreconcilable antagonism and difference".<sup>36</sup> It was an ideology which

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<sup>34</sup> Recorded Interview with Margot Heinemann, Reel 1, Side 2, 9239/5, Imperial War Museum.

<sup>35</sup> Pascal quoted in Gary Werskey, *The Visible College*, pp. 216-217.

<sup>36</sup> Victor Kiernan, "John Cornford: A Memoir", pp 5 & 9 in John Cornford Collection, Trinity College Archives.

coloured Cornford's appearance so that he became famed around the university for wearing stained trousers, black shirt, ragged raincoat, 'dirty sweaters' and a tattered academic gown.<sup>37</sup> On meeting Cornford in 1934, Margot Heinemann was struck by the way he looked and acted like a worker.<sup>38</sup> To her, Cornford was striking for cutting his bourgeois connections and his stance of accepting nothing short of revolution.

Cornford's connection of politics and class exemplified the appeal of the left to student activists at Cambridge and Oxford, of a 'real world' removed from upper class privilege. Significantly, these motives for political action remained unchanged even with the reversal of Comintern strategy in mid 1935 to the call for a cross-party and cross-class coalition against fascism.<sup>39</sup> This *tournant* had been anticipated in some respects for Cambridge students when they were told in 1934 by Communist MP William Gallacher that "the party needed good scientists, historians and teachers, and that they should study and become good students, not run away to factories".<sup>40</sup> Though Communist campaigns for a Popular Front produced greater efforts at proselytising and organising within the university, the 'real' political struggle was still seen as occurring off campus.<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, this physical and mental crossing of class boundaries was not faced by Conservative students within Oxbridge. Tory students in the early 1930s constructed their political identities through the sociability of dining or social clubs, rather than through activism amongst the working class. There was a profound difference in political *mentalité* between the left and right amongst British students, explaining why there are fewer records for right-wing politics despite its numerical strength. Their politics was not centred on notions of public engagement or expressions of class allegiance, but rather consisted of merely living the status quo. These contrasting conceptions of politics within Britain's elite universities also

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<sup>37</sup> Stansky, & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>38</sup> Recorded Interview with Margot Heinemann, Reel 1, Side 2, 9239/5.

<sup>39</sup> Even during the late 1930s, some Oxford students affected a 'proletarian' accent in speaking of politics - Denis Healey, *The Time of my Life*, Michael Joseph, London, 1989, p. 35;

For a balanced account of the international and internal pressures which shaped the new strategy see E.H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern 1930-1935*, Macmillan Press, London, 1982.

<sup>40</sup> Margot Heinemann, "The People's Front & the Intellectuals" in Jim Fryth, ed., *Britain, Fascism & the Popular Front*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1985, p. 161.

<sup>41</sup> "Left-wing students saw themselves as joining in a struggle already being carried on by the working class, or finding a useful role in the wider peace movement, rather than as a separate estate with wholly distinct problems and attitudes, or even a new revolutionary leadership" - Noreen Branson & Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1971, pp. 258-259.

partly explains why there were so few clashes between left and right as compared to France during the 1930s.

### Left-wing Politics at 'Elite' and 'Civic' Universities

In late 1935, Cambridge's Socialist Society and Labour Club merged to form the Cambridge University Socialist Club. On a national level, the Federation of Student Societies dissolved itself and merged with the University Labour Federation in January 1936.<sup>42</sup> This amalgamation of left-wing students, was largely based on the increasing activism and broadening student coalitions against war and university regulations within London, Oxford and Cambridge. Interestingly, members of the Socialist Society at the University of Leeds took a very different view of calls for coalition, and of student politics itself. This dissent crystallised the different attitudes and opportunities for political activity between British elite and civic universities.

In its report on the ULF Conference in Cardiff during January 1936, the Leeds' Socialist Society described itself as "probably unique among University Labour and Socialist groups in that it has persistently held fast to a strictly Fabian attitude".<sup>43</sup> The resolution from Leeds "protesting against the united front with Communism" was outvoted, and the efforts of its delegates seem confined to the role of marginal dissent. Unable to accept the majority's orientation in the ULF, Leeds' delegates consoled themselves with the argument that their moderate approach was more likely to deliver practical results than Marxist and communist extremism.<sup>44</sup> Though unsuccessful in resisting the merger with the FSS, Leeds Socialist students saw their efforts as loyally in line with the policies of the official Labour movement.

At the ULF Conference in Manchester the following year, the Leeds delegates attacked not only the policy direction of the ULF, but also its conception of its purpose.<sup>45</sup> Reporting after the Conference, they noted that,

Our opposition to the ULF policy was concentrated by our delegates on two

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<sup>42</sup> Stanksy & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, pp. 228 & 247.

<sup>43</sup> *The Gryphon*, Feb. 1936, p. 206.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Six of the leading members of Leeds' Socialist Society rejected the ULF's policy of a 'united front' which they felt would increase Communist influence in university groups and the Labour movement. Interestingly, they were "willing to support wholeheartedly a *Popular Front*, that is, a union of Radical, Liberal, and Democratic forces against Fascism and War" over which they did not share the same fears - *The Gryphon*, Feb. 1937, p. 176.



points, namely the proposal for a 'United Front' between Socialists and communists in all its forms, and the conception of the ULF as a separate political organisation with an independent policy of its own.

Positively, the delegates urged that the function of University Socialist Societies was to provide a forum for discussion and organisational experience for Socialists of all shades of opinion. The appropriate political parties were the correct media for political activities and student unions for student grievances. Finally, we urged that direct Socialist propaganda and education should be the main purpose of the ULF and its affiliated clubs to which objective all other activities should be subordinated.<sup>46</sup>

This emphasis on education and discussion within the university provided a conception of student activism that rejected the role of the student groups in anti-war and anti-fascist agitation. Leeds' officials stated their belief "that for effective politics on a national or international scale students will have to go outside the University and become active members of the appropriate political party, which in their view is the Labour Party".<sup>47</sup> It was loyalty to the party rather than campus coalitions and activism which mattered most to Leeds left-wing students, partly because they shared neither the same intense focus on university life or the self-conscious leadership *mentalité* as their peers at Oxbridge.

### Armistice Day: Cambridge

The official commemorations of Armistice Day 1933 in Cambridge were overshadowed by street fighting amongst undergraduates in what seemed like a full-scale political war. Brawling erupted outside Peterhouse when socialist and pacifist students sought to march to the town's war memorial.<sup>48</sup> The marchers intended to lay a wreath at the memorial which read "To the Victims of a War They Did Not Make, from Those Who are Determined to Prevent All Similar Crimes of Imperialism". The march had been organised by the Cambridge University Socialist Society in co-operation with the Student Christian Movement. The wording of the wreath, which echoed the CPGB's stand against imperialist war, had been too provocative to win support from the students of the League of Nations Union. In response, Cambridge's Tory students and others, described by Heinemann as boat toughs, met the demonstration with flour, feathers, eggs and tomatoes.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *The Gryphon*, Feb. 1937, p. 201.

<sup>47</sup> *The Gryphon*, March 1937, p. 238.

<sup>48</sup> Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. 212.

<sup>49</sup> Recorded Interview with Margot Heinemann, Reel 1, Side 1, 9239/5, Imperial War Museum.

In his study of the politics of scientists in Cambridge, Gary Werskey argues that the Armistice Day clash "marked the beginning of Cambridge's left-wing renaissance", in that it politicised religious pacifists and others who previously saw their anti-war commitments as 'non-political'.<sup>50</sup> Certainly Armistice Day 1933 has been preserved in the popular memory of the university as the birth of a coalition between socialists and pacifists against war and fascism. However, the alliance that Werskey sees as sealed in 1933 was constantly changing through the decade as international events gave rise to a variety of campaigns. The real significance of Armistice Day 1933, rather than marking the birth of a single political movement within Cambridge, was the absence of further clashes between students of the left and right over political space. The lack of physical confrontations is especially striking when compared to the frequent conflicts within and around French universities at the same time.

Part of the reason for resistance to anti-war activism in Cambridge during the early 1930s lay in the prominent role of the Communist Party in organising such movements.<sup>51</sup> Physicist J.D. Bernal was one of the key figures behind organising a Cambridge Anti-War Council which in the week of the 1933 clash had organised a public meeting addressed by German novelist Ernst Toller as well as an Anti-war Exhibition.<sup>52</sup> In the same year Bernal had stopped being an official member of the Communist Party. His independent position left untouched his strong commitment to communism and close contact with the Party.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group (CSAWG)**

Another organisation which drew strongly on Bernal's initiative was the Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group (CSAWG). Like the town's Anti-War

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<sup>50</sup> Werskey, *The Visible College*, p. 218;

Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. 212.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Ceadel, "The First Communist 'Peace Society': The British Anti-War Movement 1932-1935", *Twentieth Century British History*, 1, 1, 1990, pp. 58-86.

<sup>52</sup> The meeting was organised by the Relief Committee for Victims of German Fascism to raise funds for working class German refugees - flyer, K 70, Needham Papers, University Library, Cambridge;

The 1933 Anti-War Exhibition attracted an estimated 2,000 people - Pamphlete, "What is the Cambridge Anti-War Council", p. 3, 416/0.16, Cambridge Trades Council & Division Labour Party, Cambridgeshire County Record Office.

<sup>53</sup> Werskey, *The Visible College*, p. 166;

This was one of the few examples of a deliberate 'independent' stance adopted by a British Communist academic fitting the image of fellow-traveller describe by David Cauter - David Cauter, *The Fellow-Travellers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, p. 7.

Council, the Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group was formed in 1932. The group was "originally formed by a left-wing coterie", or in the words of C.H. Waddington, "a really coherent group of friends".<sup>54</sup> Marriage made academic and political partnerships common amongst the leaders of the CSAWG, such as the Needhams, the Piries and the Woosters.<sup>55</sup> Given their very low numbers within the university itself (less than 10% of total population), women were strikingly over-represented in the CSAWG ranks. The CSAWG drew its strongest support from amongst post-doctoral researchers and postgraduates especially within the two largest laboratories of Cambridge, the Dunn Biochemical Institute and Cavendish Laboratory for experimental physics.<sup>56</sup> One of the keys to the Group securing such diverse political and religious support was the compatibility, for some, of academic and political commitments.

In his study of left-wing British scientists, Gary Werskey correctly recognised the extent to which CSAWG was formed within the framework established by their academic work in science. Some quickly accepted that "Marxism in its widest implications is the essence of the modern scientific outlook".<sup>57</sup> Socialism was the political correlative to advances in physics and biology and science was the cornerstone of socialism. Strengthening this appeal of Marxist theory was the special recognition which the USSR seemed to accord to science in practice through extensive funding and cooperative, state-directed research.<sup>58</sup> As Joseph Needham wrote for the Cambridge Review in 1935, the Soviets were building a new society based on scientific principles and advances which gave the scientist an essential social function.<sup>59</sup> The conjunction of scientific theory and marxist philosophy is not so surprising, given the emphasis on pure science within these elite institutions.

Scientific socialism, like other intellectual traditions, justified a distinctive political voice for those with particular forms of knowledge. Unlike the French Dreyfusards, the scientists of CSWAG did not claim to speak for universal values, but rather to apply their professional expertise to certain related political areas. Given the personal experiences of scientists in military research during the First World War, military technology provided a central motive for the Cambridge

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<sup>54</sup> Werskey, The Visible College, pp. 221 & 223.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 220-221.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Cornforth, "Recollections of Cambridge Contemporaries", pp. 92-93.

<sup>58</sup> Werskey, The Visible College, pp. 142-146;

Seale & McConville, Philby, p. 50.

<sup>59</sup> The Cambridge Review, 15/11/1935, pp. 136-137.

Scientists' Anti-War Group.<sup>60</sup> In petitioning against the extension of military regulation over scientific research in June 1934, the members of CSAWG were explicitly combining political and professional concerns.<sup>61</sup> This membership was concentrated in certain pockets of the university, for out of the 423 staff and graduate students engaged in scientific research, there were only 79 signatories to the petition, and by the beginning of the following academic year the group could only claim 88 members.<sup>62</sup>

Colleges, like the laboratory, offered a physical focus for political organisation and activity. The residential colleges that formed the foundation of Oxford and Cambridge gave the elite universities a structure and ethos unique in Britain. The Oxbridge colleges expressed an overwhelmingly public-school culture, because of the shared educational and social background of their middle class members.<sup>63</sup> This common ethos did not prevent its members from seeing each college as architecturally, socially and intellectually individual.<sup>64</sup> The intimacy of the college environment was an influential frame in which undergraduates and academics lived, studied and engaged in politics.

After his experiences of the political conflicts at the LSE, Michael Straight moved in late 1935 into the largest college in Cambridge, the prestigious Trinity College. As an 19 year old, Michael Straight remembered,

Living in college, I found myself at the centre of the political life of the university. I was well enough ahead in my studies to be able to coast and so, for the first time, I took on a political role. I worked with Dobb on his Anti-Fascist Exhibition. I helped to plan demonstrations and parades. I canvassed for the Labour Party. I made speeches demanding sanctions against Italy in response to Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia".<sup>65</sup>

Maurice Dobb was not only Straight's economics tutor, but one of the few British academics who was openly a member of the Communist Party.<sup>66</sup> His role as adviser, tutor, father-confessor, and friend to the young radicals, while important

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<sup>60</sup> In October 1935, Bernal, Needham, Pirie and Wooster signed a protest against the University of Cambridge receiving a grant for aeronautical military research - K 28, Needham Papers., University Library, Cambridge

<sup>61</sup> Werskey, *The Visible College*, p. 220.

<sup>62</sup> "Origin and Development of the Cambridge Scientists' Anti-War Group", K 22, Needham Papers, University Library, Cambridge; Werskey, *The Visible College*, pp. 339-342.

<sup>63</sup> Harrison, "College Life, 1918-1939", p. 94

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>65</sup> Straight, *After Long Silence*, p. 65.

<sup>66</sup> Pamphlete, "What is the Cambridge Anti-War Council", p. 4

for some students has been overstated.<sup>67</sup> While Dobb was a frequent presence at the early morning discussion meetings held by some of Trinity College's left-wing students, most of his political activities, such as his role as the secretary of the town's Anti-War Council, were largely outside the ken of undergraduates.<sup>68</sup>

The Cambridge Anti-war Exhibition, which Dobb and Bernal prominently supported, provides a profound register of how the relationship between anti-war and anti-fascist currents changed in Britain during the mid-1930s. By 1935 the exhibition had developed a harder edge over anti-fascism with sections devoted to Austria and the proto-fascist movements of France and Spain.<sup>69</sup> Ironically this concern with international fascism occurred at just the same time that the British variant was becoming increasingly marginal to political life.

### *6 Février. Paris*

L'Heure de la Jeunesse,

Étudiants,

En face de la situation extérieure: crise économique et déséquilibre budgétaire qui nous regnent, en face de la guerre qui nous menace, que font les gouvernements? Ils se succèdent.

La Patrie est en Danger!...

La Révolution Nationale est urgente.

Les Étudiants en tête!"

Poster of Jeunesses Patriotes<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Neal Wood, Communism and British Intellectuals, p. 86;

Trinity's Communist cell attracted a large following because of the recruiting efforts of leading students John Cornford and James Klugmann, rather than the presence of Dobb. In focusing on the influence of academics as political mentors, what has been missed is the influence of students on each other, and how often political allegiance and friendship overlapped. Perhaps most importantly many students who were Communists at university had become political radicals whilst still at public school.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Alison Duke, Cambridge, March 1996.

<sup>69</sup> flyer, K 40, Needham Papers University Library, Cambridge;

The Cambridge Review, 1/11/1935, p. 63;

The Cambridge Review, 8/11/1935, p. 96.

<sup>70</sup> "The Hour of Youth, Students, In front of the international situation: economic crisis and budgetary disequilibrium which reigns over us, in front of the war which menaces us, what do the governments do? They replace each other. The Country is in Danger!... The National Revolution is urgent. The Students at the head!"- Report of 13/1/34, M6 8289, AD Bouches-du-Rhône.

The long-rehearsed rhetoric of the French extreme right culminated in the first weeks of 1934. A financial scandal became a political crisis, as police and parliamentarians were implicated in protecting a known embezzler.<sup>71</sup> The resignation of the government did nothing to still the vociferous and vehement attacks of the right-wing press. These were matched by a series of violent demonstrations and confrontations between the extreme right and police in the streets of Paris and large towns across the country. The most polemical and public leader of the demonstrations was Action Française, who rallied support with the call "*contre les voleurs*".<sup>72</sup> Throughout France, students of nationalist leagues formed the vanguard of the campaigns over the scandal, hawking the newspapers of the leagues and protesting on the streets.<sup>73</sup> Resignations from cabinet were not enough to stop the controversy, as the attacks escalated from the corruption of politicians to an attack on the legitimacy of the Republic itself.

The crisis culminated when the Prefect of Police in Paris was dismissed by the new Prime Minister Daladier, partly for his passivity and sympathy for the extreme right's demonstrations. Various veterans' groups and nationalist leagues organised demonstrations for 6 February 1934 in the streets of Paris against the new government. It was a reflection of the divisions amongst these various groups that they intended to converge on the Chamber in separate columns, as each sought to keep their own forces separate from their rivals on the right.<sup>74</sup> Nationalist students were in some ways an exception to this sectarianism, as they grouped together in a body titled the Front Universitaire. They arranged to meet before most of their seniors at 6:30 pm on the Boulevard St Michel, though they seem to have mixed with elements of Action Française in approaching the Chamber. By that evening a pitched battle had broke out in Place de la Concorde as police and the marchers faced off until midnight. The scale of violence as the rioters fought to cross the Seine had been unknown in Paris since the Commune of 1871 and left 15 dead and 1,435 wounded.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Serge Bernstein, *Le 6 Février 1934*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975.

<sup>72</sup> Eugen Weber, *Action Française*, pp. 321-323

<sup>73</sup> During January 1934 there were intensifying demonstrations in Paris by the leagues over the scandal. On the first two days of February, several hundred students of Action Française and Jeunesses Patriotes in Bordeaux marched to Place Gambetta in the town's center. - Report of 2/2/34, 1M 561, AD Gironde.

<sup>74</sup> To some on the left, the separate columns reflected not the factionalism of the right but a coordinated conspiracy - Max Beloff, "The Sixth of February" in James Joll, ed., *The Decline of the Third Republic: St. Antony's Papers, No. 5*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1959, pp 23 & 25.

<sup>75</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French*, Havard University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 324.

In the shock of the following day, Daladier resigned, becoming the fifth government to fall in under two years. The new cabinet was a coalition of the right and centre; however, far more significant than events within the parliament was the transformation of French political life sparked by the clashes. The 6 *Février* became the symbolic date which defined the political identity for both the left and the right. The French left saw the riots in Paris as an attempted coup, while for the anti-parliamentary leagues the bloodshed of the night confirmed the illegitimacy of the Republic. Both extremes of the political spectrum sought to build coalitions in reaction to the threat of the other. Political mobilisation and political polarisation fed off each other.

### **6 *Février*: Reactions in the Provinces**

As during the Dreyfus Affair, academics and students were prominent actors on both sides of the crisis in 1934, partly because they had maintained the same approach to politics as 1898. They were in the forefront of the left's championing of coalitions and the right's reaction to it. The events in Paris had a far deeper impact outside Paris than the Affair of 1898-99, sparking immediate counter demonstrations on 8 February 1934 in 30 different towns, the largest of which were held in Lyon, Nantes, Brest and Toulouse.<sup>76</sup> Two days after the riots, 5,000 people gathered in Toulouse to hear speeches in defence of the Republic by the local representatives of the SFIO and CGT.<sup>77</sup> Amongst the speakers was the secretary of the local group of *Étudiants Socialistes*, Descours.<sup>78</sup> The rally took place in the central square of Toulouse, the Place du Capitole, which was bordered by cafés, including that which housed the local Association Générale des *Étudiants* (AG). Following the meeting some members of the *Jeunesses Socialistes* tried to storm the nearby site of AG revealing the close connection between corporate students groups and the extreme right, at least in the eyes of their opponents. Police tried to protect the students of the AG, though they reported that in the confusion some members of the *Étudiants Socialistes* were assaulted by the *Jeunesses Socialistes* "*par erreur sans doute*".<sup>79</sup> This case of mistaken identity suggests the class differences between the student and youth sections of the SFIO which also underpinned the sporadic

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<sup>76</sup> There were also protests in Lille, Bordeaux, Valence, Cherbourg, and Rennes amongst others - Antoine Prost, "Les Manifestations du 12 Février 1934 en Province", *Mouvement Social*, 54, 1966, p 14.

<sup>77</sup> Report of 9/2/1934, 130 W 13, AD Haute Garonne.

<sup>78</sup> A socialist student, A. Auban, also spoke at the demonstration during the general strike of 12 February 1934 - *La Dépêche*, 13/2/1934, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Report of 9/2/1934, 130 W 13, AD Haute Garonne.

clashes between students of the leagues and working class activists. Following the attack, the AG published a letter in Le Midi Socialiste which stressed its strictly neutral and non-political character.<sup>80</sup> Despite its claimed limited role in defending student corporate and material interests, the political identity of the AG was far more ambivalent, which surfaced in later confrontations between the left and right.

These reactions in Toulouse to national politics had their own local character, which was further developed in the general strike of 12 February 1934 called by the CGT.<sup>81</sup> The show of strength by the organised labour movement in Toulouse was a reaction far more to Paris events than to the relatively marginal right-wing forces locally. Equally, the strength of the SFIO and CGT within Lille and Toulouse distanced them from the PCF. In Bordeaux, Montpellier and Marseille, reactions to the *6 Février* were as much about local balance of power as national events.<sup>82</sup> Within this interaction between national and local politics, academics and students emerged as key actors at both these levels.

In reaction to the Front National Universitaire which grouped together students from the Action Française and the Jeunesses Patriotes, the left-wing students of Toulouse formed a Front Universitaire Antifasciste (led by socialist students), which held a meeting on 1 March 1934 to assert the university's rejection of the riots of *6 Février*.<sup>83</sup> The meeting was chaired by Professor Soula of the Faculty of Medicine and also a member of the SFIO. Soula opened proceedings in front of the 400 strong audience by criticising the "*mentalité ancien combattant*" dominant in French politics as a pretext for war. Soula was followed by Professor Fourgeaud from the Faculty of Law who called for a union of workers and intellectuals to defend the fundamental principles of the Republic and democracy. Given the political atmosphere, Fourgeaud's words were enough to provoke the right. The following morning, a group of students marched from the Faculty of Law to the AG in the Place du Capitole, chanting insults against Fourgeaud and singing the Marseillaise.<sup>84</sup> The drive to confrontation was so strong that the march triggered an immediate counter-demonstration by the *Étudiants Socialistes* and workers in the square.

The *chahut* began on 2 March 1934 when Fourgeaud's course on political economy was suspended when it was filled by 400 students which was double the

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<sup>80</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 12/2/34, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Antoine Prost, "Les Manifestations du 12 Février 1934 en Province", pp. 26-27.

<sup>82</sup> Ligue des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen, Jan-Apr 1934, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Report of 2/3/1934, 130 W 13, AD Haute Garonne.

<sup>84</sup> Report of 15/3/1934, Ibid.



normal attendance. Fourgeaud wrote to the local right-wing newspaper, *L'Express du Midi*, criticising those students who led the strike, citing in his own defence his service record from 1914-1918 and the accepted right of academics to adopt political positions.<sup>85</sup> The Front National Universitaire replied in the same journal that while it accepted the political engagement of their teachers, the meeting by the Front Universitaire Antifasciste had described itself as "*une réunion de combat pour lutter contre les 'methodes fascistes de l'Université' (?)*".<sup>86</sup> Citing the attacks by the Jeunesses Socialistes, they accused Fourgeaud of being an accomplice to the assaults on students. Against those on the left who labelled the leagues as 'fascist', the FNU sought to reverse the label;

Les étudiants se trouvent à l'heure actuelle devant des gens, qui sous prétexte de combattre un fascisme inexistant, instaurent à Toulouse un fascisme véritable, et qu'ils prétendent nous imposer, sous prétexte qu'il est rouge.<sup>87</sup>

The letter by the Front National Universitaire closed noting that the decision by Dean Abelous of the Faculty of Medicine to suspend Professor Soula's course for fear of trouble, was "*accueillie avec joie par l'unanimité des étudiants en médecine*".<sup>88</sup>

In response to the suspension of Soula's course, the youth groups of the SFIO and PCF marched from the Faculty of Medicine to the Place du Capitole on 6 March 1934.<sup>89</sup> Police identified few students amongst the initiators of the march whose chants accused Dean Abelous of being motivated by his Action Française sympathies.<sup>90</sup> The march ended outside the AG which was seen as favouring the Front National Universitaire, an impression confirmed by an open letter from the AG's President, Pierre Nielsen, to the Prime Minister Doumergue defending the *chahut* as inspired by the attacks on students.<sup>91</sup>

A week after the anti-fascist meeting which had triggered the trouble, the university and civic authorities made a concerted commitment to restore order in the Faculties. A detachment of a dozen police prevented any groups from forming at the entrance to the Faculty of Law and admission to Fourgeaud's course was

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<sup>85</sup> Clipping of 7/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Clipping of 8/7/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> "The students one finds at this moment in front of the people, who under the pretext of combatting a fascism which doesn't exist, institute in Toulouse a real fascism, that they pretend we impose, under which pretext lies red" - *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Report of 9/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

Report of 7/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Nielsen had been personally attacked during the confrontations, for which four students and three workers would later be charged for assault. Two of the students received suspended prison sentences including Communist activist Jean Marcenac - Report n.d., *Ibid.*

strictly controlled.<sup>92</sup> Inside, 150 students of the course listened to the Rector of the University call for calm. He was accompanied by the Dean of the Faculty of Law. When Fourgeaud started to speak, 80 students walked out of the room leaving stink bombs in their wake. The course was cancelled again, though Fourgeaud was cheered by a counter-demonstration of 200 members of the Étudiants Socialistes and Jeunesses Socialistes as he left the building.<sup>93</sup> A strong police presence and expulsions by the Dean finally produced quiet in the Faculty of Law, though demonstrations and counter-demonstrations continued in the streets.<sup>94</sup> Still the FNU continued to lead sporadic opposition to Fourgeaud, calling for a boycott of his course, and attempting to resume the *chahut* the following term.<sup>95</sup>

Occurring during the middle of the unrest against Fourgeaud, the Front National Universitaire mobilised around another rallying point. It sponsored a mass for the victims of 6 *Février* at the Cathedral of St Etienne, on the 11 March 1934.<sup>96</sup> The service was lead by the Archbishop of Toulouse and attended by Dean Abelous and Professor Thomas (later Dean of the Faculty of Law).<sup>97</sup> Also attending the mass were Nielsen and six other members of the AG committee. Amongst the student ranks were delegates from the Association des Étudiants Catholiques, the Phalange Universitaire, Étudiants d'Action Française and the Comite du Front National Universitaire. The latter acted as a *service d'ordre* at mass, and police reported that they were hoping for trouble.<sup>98</sup> Outside the cathedral, sixty PCF members staged a counter-protest, during which two Communists were arrested for carrying fire-arms. Significantly, due to the threat of violence, the students of the Front Universitaire Antifasciste, which numbered 100 members, had declined to participate in the protest.<sup>99</sup>

In reaction to the role of the local AG in the *chahut* of Fourgeaud and the demonstrations of the nationalist leagues during March 1934, left-wing students in Toulouse formed their own corporate group, the Union Syndiale des Étudiants (USE).<sup>100</sup> Their efforts were supported by sympathetic academics in the Faculties of Medicine (Professors Ducing, Soula, Brustier, Vallois), Law (Fourgeaud) and Letters

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<sup>92</sup> Report of 9/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Report of 9/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Report 15/3/34, *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Report 17/3/34, *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> A similar mass on 6 February 1935 attracted 700 people in Bordeaux - Report of 6/2/1935, 1M 443, AD Gironde.

<sup>97</sup> Report of 2/3/1934, 130 W 13, AD Haute Garonne.

<sup>98</sup> Report of 10/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Report of 12/3/1934, *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> LMC 14902, *L'Union Syndncale des Etudiants (1934-1940)*, Toulouse, n.d, p. 3. in Library Municipale, Toulouse.

(Faucher) and perhaps more importantly by three grants of 2,000 francs each in 1934 and early 1935 from the SFIO-dominated municipal government.<sup>101</sup> While existing student corporate groups were largely defenders of the professions, the new USE claimed a more radical face by committing itself to the CGT's Fédération des Fonctionnaires. Initially the group used the union offices as its base before moving to a café in the Place du Capitole. Drawing on the strength of the local Socialist student's group, within a month of its foundation the USE claimed 300 members.<sup>102</sup>

Its membership strength, and its close contact with local trade unions and the SFIO made the USE reluctant to participate in Communist calls for united action. In mid-January 1936, at that same time that British Communist and Socialist students were merging in the University Labour Federation, a meeting was held in Toulouse to discuss a similar measure. An estimated 70 students attended the meeting which was addressed by a delegate from the Union Fédérale des Étudiants in Bordeaux, who called for common action between the UFE and USE.<sup>103</sup> In Bordeaux, local Communists and Socialists had come together in the UFE during the previous month, and their group now numbered 120 students.<sup>104</sup> In Toulouse, where the USE was triple the size, the motion for fusion of Communist and Socialist students was overwhelmingly rejected. While the *6 Février* created coalitions amongst French students on both the left and right, because they were organised through national parties and leagues, these coalitions rarely became the mergers which occurred in Britain.

In the wake of the *6 Février* confrontations of varying levels of violence occurred at universities across France. The *chahut* of Fourgeaud was paralleled by others of left-wing academics in Grenoble and Paris. In the former, Professor Esmonin of Grenoble's Faculty of Letters faced a *chahut* of his course on art history. The students argued that Esmonin had marched with the left during the general strike of 12 February 1934, "*à la tête d'un cortège révolutionnaire qui, en passant devant la Faculté a osé crier: 'à bas les étudiants!'*".<sup>105</sup> At the Sorbonne, biologist Marcel Prenant faced a vigorous *chahut* by Étudiants d'Action Française for his communist politics.<sup>106</sup> Prenant described the experience in which his lecture was interrupted,

par un jeune garçon qui me reprocha violemment ma complicité avec la grève.

A ce signal, ses comparses dispersés dans la Salle, effectuèrent une charge

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> Report of 15/1/1936, 1303 W 13, AD Haute-Garonne.

<sup>104</sup> Report of 17/12/1935, 1 M 605, AD Gironde.

<sup>105</sup> *L'Étudiant Français*, 25/3/1934, p. 6.

<sup>106</sup> *L'Étudiant Français*, 10/5/1934, p. 1.

contre mes auditeurs qu'ils frappèrent à coups de poings et de matraques redoublant de brutalité s'ils tentaient de se relever. L'appariteur et le garde de la Sorbonne, retraité d'âge certain, ne pouvant s'opposer aux agresseurs, me firent signe de sortir et fermèrent la porte à clef derrière moi laissant les fascistes maîtres du terrain.<sup>107</sup>

Even with restricted entry to Prenant's course and with around hundred students of the left to oppose trouble, several hundred nationalist students gathered in the courtyard of the Sorbonne until they were dispersed by police. Echoing the Dreyfus Affair, the leagues sought to meet every challenge of the left following the 6 *Février* and it was academics who were often prominent targets.

### **Patrons of Unity: the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes**

Le rassemblement anti-fasciste de 1934 n'en représente pas moins pour le monde intellectuel français un changement non seulement d'échelle mais de nature.<sup>108</sup>

Despite the spontaneous reaction to the sixth of February of unity in the streets by the various organisations of the French left, the leaderships of both the PCF and SFIO maintained their distance from each other.<sup>109</sup> Only in mid-1934 did the PCF reverse its historic sectarianism following policy debates within the Comintern.<sup>110</sup> From attacking the SFIO as "social-fascists", the PCF became the champions of unity of action against domestic and international fascism at all costs. Ultimately, the PCF and the SFIO agreed to a *pacte d'unité d'action* on 27 July 1934, however the months in which it took both parties to overcome their mutual antipathy, opened opportunities for other groups to seek to organise an energetic opposition to the leagues.

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<sup>107</sup> "By a young man who violently reproached me for my support of the strike. At this signal, his dispersed stooges in the room, launched an attack against my students who they hit with fists and bludgeons, increasing their brutality if they tried to resist. The porter and guard of the Sorbonne, of retirement age, not being able to oppose the attackers, signalled for me to leave and locked the door behind me leaving the fascists masters of the terrain" - Prenant, *Toute Une Vie à Gauche*, Encre, Paris, 1980, pp. 94-95.

<sup>108</sup> Ory & Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France*, p. 94.

<sup>109</sup> Nathanael Greene, *Crisis & Decline: The French Socialist Party in the Popular Front Era*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1969, p. 9.

Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 42.

<sup>110</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern 1930-1935*, Macmillan Press, London, 1982.

Predating the major changes in party policy and alignments which developed after mid-1934, was the creation of a new political organisation that drew heavily from the universities. Following the success of the general strike of 12 February 1934, François Walter and other activists of the Syndicat National des Instituteurs sought to maintain the spontaneous coalition against the leagues.<sup>111</sup> Over the course of meetings on 17 February 1934 at Maison de Mutualité and then on 5 March 1934 at Musée Social they were able to rally support for a broad-ranging anti-fascist coalition of intellectuals, a Comité de Vigilance.<sup>112</sup>

The new organisation was publicly launched by a manifesto in the press titled "Aux Travailleurs" dated 15 March 1934. Its opening and closing lines defined the concern of the new group:

Unis, par-dessus toute divergence, devant le spectacle des émeutes fascistes de Paris et de la résistance populaire qui, seule, leur a fait face, nous venons déclarer à tous les travailleurs, nos camarades, notre résolution de lutter avec eux pour sauver contre une dictature fasciste ce que le peuple a conquis de droits et de libertés publiques...

...Notre premier acte a été de former un Comité de Vigilance qui se tient à la disposition d'Organisations ouvrières.<sup>113</sup>

The declaration was signed by a trio of prominent intellectuals, representing the three parties of the French left - physicist Paul Langevin (PCF), ethnographer Paul Rivet (SFIO) and philosopher Alain (Radicals).<sup>114</sup> Together they called for those inside and outside the existing parties of the left to form a united defence of the parliamentary Republic. In its early life the organisation adopted the name Comité d'Action Antifasciste et de Vigilance; however as the push for coalition between the parties spawned other local Comités d'Action across France, it eventually claimed its own distinct identity as the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels et Antifascistes (CVIA).

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<sup>111</sup> Ory & Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>112</sup> Prenant, *Toute Une Vie à Gauche*, pp. 96-96.

<sup>113</sup> "United, above all divisions, in front of the spectacle of the fascist riots in Paris and of the popular resistance which, alone, faced events, we have come to declare to all the workers, our comrades, our resolution to fight with them to save from a fascist dictatorship those rights and public liberties which the people have conquered... Our first act is to form a Comité de Vigilance which places itself at the disposal of the Labour movement - Dossier: "France - CVIA", Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine.

<sup>114</sup> Nicole Racine-Furland, "Antifascistes et Pacifistes: Le Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Antifascistes" in Anne Roche & Christain Tarding, eds., *Des Années Trente: Groupes et Ruptures*, CNRS, Paris, 1985, p. 57.

In its name, its birth in a petition, and directly through its Parisian leadership, the Comité de Vigilance drew strongly on a Dreyfusard heritage.<sup>115</sup> The elections of CVIA's first national committee on 8 May 1934 reveal the extent to which its national leadership was concentrated in particular sections of the university. The seven academics elected represented the largest occupational group on the committee, compared to five writers and five teachers.<sup>116</sup> Those from higher education were Paris academics, Langevin, Basch, Bayet, F Dominois, G Fournier, Prenant and Wallon. These names represent a Parisian elite drawn from Collège de France, Ecole des Hautes Etudes and the Sorbonne, who would reappear in political movements throughout the 1930s. Mobilised together, almost all of them had long histories of political activism, while Langevin, Basch and Wallon were veterans of the Dreyfus campaigns.<sup>117</sup>

The deep roots of CVIA's leadership within the University of Paris were revealed by a number of the organisation's *interventions* in public life during the mid-1930s. Soon after its formation the organisation held a large meeting on 30 May 1934 in the Latin Quarter titled "La Jeunesse Devant le Fascisme".<sup>118</sup> Two thousand attended the meeting, and it was estimated that the great majority of these were students.<sup>119</sup> The speakers included academics Perrin, Rivet, Langevin, Lévy-Bruhl, Prenant, and Bayet; along with writers Benda, Cassou, Fernandez, and Guehenno. There were also anti-fascist speeches by a *normalien* and a female student. The prominence of women on the platform during the campaigns of the Rassemblement Populaire is significant, given their formal exclusion from politics in the Third Republic. The pluralist style of Popular Front politics stressed the inclusion and representation of different groups including not only intellectuals and students, but also different classes, religions, sexes and even nationalities. At a time when politics was defined in gender terms, the prominence of women on the platform symbolised the expansion of political life beyond its ordinary concern.

Equally it was the concerns of CVIA's leading academics that saw it later champion both the call from female students of the ENS Sèvres for equality of treatment and the petition by male *normaliens* against war.<sup>120</sup> The connection

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<sup>115</sup> Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower*, p. 212;

Pascal Ory, *La Belle Illusion: Culture et Politique sous le signe du Front Populaire 1935-1938*, Plon, Paris, 1994, p. 93.

<sup>116</sup> *Vigilance*, 18/5/1934, p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> Racine, "Références Dreyfusiennes dans la Gauche Française de l'Entre-Deux-Guerres", pp. 117-119.

<sup>118</sup> Dossier: "France - CVIA", Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine.

<sup>119</sup> *Vigilance*, 10/6/1934, p. 6.

<sup>120</sup> *Vigilance*, 10/5/1935, p. 4.

between CVIA's strength within the University of Paris and national politics was perhaps most clearly symbolised in early May 1935, during the municipal election for Paris's fifth arrondissement. These elections saw the tentative beginnings of co-operation by parties of the left, but it was the campaign by CVIA's President, Paul Rivet, on the Left Bank which received national attention as a microcosm for the polarisation of French political life.<sup>121</sup> In the first round of voting the sitting candidate Georges Lebecq, who was also leader of an ex-servicemen's group which had marched in the riots of 6 February 1934, had narrowly missed an outright majority against the four candidates of the PCF, Radicals and SFIO.<sup>122</sup> Faced with the prospect of Lebecq's re-election, Paul Rivet, a prominent ethnographer and member of the SFIO, announced his candidature as a non-party representative behind whom all parties of the left could rally. His opponent was labelled a "*symbole du 6 février*" by CVIA.<sup>123</sup>

With under a fortnight to campaign before the second round of voting on 3 May 1935, Rivet was supported by a published appeal by ten *savants*, including Paris academics Irène and Frédéric Joliot-Curie, Louis Lapiacque, Paul Langevin, Jacques Hadamard, Jean Perrin, and Georges Urbain.<sup>124</sup> Socialist students and Communist students were also involved in the intense campaigning, though some were roughed-up by students of the leagues as they put up posters supporting Rivet.<sup>125</sup> With the withdrawal of the other candidates of the left, Rivet achieved a spectacular victory on the second round of voting by 2445 votes to 2292.<sup>126</sup> His election was seen by CVIA's activists and later historians as one of the first to be marked by the shift from sectarianism to co-operation that ultimately produced the national election of the Front Populaire.

As in the Affair of 1898, the Ecole Normale Supérieure provided a network of support which was central to the mobilisation in defence of the Republic. *Normalien* support was fundamental to CVIA's founding declaration *cum* petition, "Aux Travailleurs". The manifesto was signed by over 110 past and 90 present students of the school, making them a key group in the organisation's

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<sup>121</sup> Ory & Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France*, p. 101-103.

<sup>122</sup> Procès-verbal, D2 M2/106, AD Seine.

<sup>123</sup> *Vigilance*, 25/5/1935, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1 & 6.

For Joliot and Perrin support for Rivet's campaign was also financial as both contributed 100 francs to his election fund - *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>125</sup> Henri Noguères, *La Vie Quotidienne en France au Temps du Front Populaire, 1935-1938*, Hachette, Paris, 1987, p. 82.

<sup>126</sup> Procès-verbal, D2 M2/108, AD Seine.

development.<sup>127</sup> Most visibly, past and present students in Paris formed the frontline leadership for the Comité de Vigilance in national politics. On a second level, the position of the Ecole Normale Supérieure as the national entrance into the teaching ranks of academia, gave common experiences and friendships to a small distinct group of academics. Regardless of the wide range of positions and locations they later occupied as teachers, the strong personal connections between *normaliens* shaped and facilitated professional and political contacts. The Paris-focus of the historiography of French universities has to a large extent missed the importance of these personal networks between universities, which extended into national and local politics.<sup>128</sup> Classmates from 1899, Wallon in Paris and Daudin in Bordeaux played similar roles in CVIA's campaign. As national or local patrons, the academics in the Comité de Vigilance provided a non-partisan rallying point for the movements to anti-fascist coalition inspired by 6 Février.

The Comité de Vigilance may have been a Paris creation, but it extended across France. By the end of April 1934, the organisation claimed nearly 2,000 members nationally, which had increased to a membership of approximately five thousand by mid November 1934.<sup>129</sup> At the height of the movement in late 1935, it claimed two hundred local committees.<sup>130</sup> CVIA's local committees were largely comprised of *fonctionnaires* or teachers, revealing the extent to which professional boundaries were blurred in the broad conception of *intellectuel* in France.<sup>131</sup> Within these mixed local committees it was frequently academics who played the most prominent role, serving as the presidents of the local committees of Algiers,

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<sup>127</sup> Alain Baudant, "L'Ecole Normale Supérieure: Données sur la Participation de l'Université de Paris à la Vie Politique Française", Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Paris I, 1972, p. 63.

<sup>128</sup> Terry Nichols Clark argues that French academics were divided into professional clusters which cut across universities and were centred on the patronage of a senior Professor in Paris. Christophe Charle has criticised this concept as too static and extreme, but it does show the professional interaction between different universities within the state system - Terry Nichols Clark, Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1973, pp. 10 & 67-69; Charle, La République des Universitaires 1870-1940, p. 201.

<sup>129</sup> At the end of 1934, CVIA stated that of its 5,241 members, 3,700 were outside Paris - Vigilance, 5/12/1934, p. 3.

CVIA's membership in the capital was estimated at 2,037 at the end of October 1935 and as 3,300 in May 1936 - Vigilance, 28/4/1936, Supplement, p. 2.

In mid 1937, the organisation admitted that its membership records were confused and incomplete. While it was impossible to know the exact number of members, the peak of 8,532 claimed in November 1936 was unlikely - Vigilance, 20/4/37, p. 7.

<sup>130</sup> Ory & Sirinelli, Les Intellectuels en France, p. 98.

<sup>131</sup> Jackson, The Popular Front in France, p. 44;

Claude Willard estimated that there were 450,000 intellectuals in France in 1936 (which represented 2.2% of population) including 186,000 teachers in state education and not counting 73,850 university students - Claude Willard, "Les Intellectuels Français et le Front Populaire", 3-4, 1966-67, Cahiers de l'Institut Maurice Thorez, p. 116.



Bordeaux, Dijon, Lille and Montpellier.<sup>132</sup> Their political authority within the towns where they taught reveals the extent to which their social status within the community could encourage certain forms of politics.

Significantly the strongest public support for CVIA's petitions from France's provincial universities seems to have been in the same locations dominated by the nationalist leagues. A survey of several of the Comité's petitions and public appeals reveals that its support within French universities was shaped by both personal connections and local politics. While academics in Paris consciously saw themselves on the national political stage, the public stances of their peers in Bordeaux and Montpellier suggest that these were in part in a reaction to the particular militancy and strength of nationalist students within their own institutions.<sup>133</sup> As in the Dreyfus affair, the interaction within the university between students and academics shaped the stances they adopted in national politics.

TABLE 3.1: UNIVERSITY SUPPORTERS FOR THE COMITÉ DE VIGILANCE DES INTELLECTUELS ET ANTI-FASCISTES<sup>134</sup>

Paris	No.	Provincial Universities	No.
Collège de France	7	Aix-Marseille	1
Ecole des Hautes Etudes	9	Algiers	8
University of Paris	48	Bordeaux	11
		Caen	3
		Dijon	5
		Grenoble	3
		Lille	1
		Lyon	6
		Montpellier	11
		Nancy	2
		Poitiers	7
		Rennes	1
		Strasbourg	10
		Toulouse	3
Total	64	Total	72

<sup>132</sup> *Vigilance*, Jan. 1935, p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> For nationalist student activity in Bordeaux and Montpellier, see the earlier discussions of the 1935 strike in the Faculties of Medicine against "*l'invasion des étrangers*" and the 1936 *chahuts* over the Jèze Affair.

<sup>134</sup> *Vigilance*, Jan. 1935, pp. 2-3;

*Vigilance*, 15/9/1935, p. 4.

Petitions in "Dossier: CVIA", Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine.

The Comité de Vigilance's success in acting as a non-partisan sponsor of a broader anti-fascist coalition at both a national and local level was partly due to its origins as a deliberately non-communist initiative. As Claude Willard recognises, CVIA differed in both its successful recruitment from universities and its focus on domestic politics from the two Communist-initiated campaigns to form a common front against fascism, the Mouvement Amsterdam-Pleyel and the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires.<sup>135</sup> The Comité de Vigilance represented a transformation of politics in that Dreyfusard independence was used to legitimise the call for unity amongst the parties of the left against the threat of domestic fascism. The non-partisan identity of French intellectuals was crucial to their role as a rallying focus for the parties that eventually formed the Front Populaire, symbolised by their prominence in the mass demonstrations of 14 July 1935 which marked the coalition between the SFIO, PCF and Radical Party.<sup>136</sup> Significantly the very success of the Popular Front, weakened the impetus that fuelled CVIA and the organisation was increasingly fragmented in its reactions to international events.

### The Jèze Affair

Sur le front de défense de la liberté, les éducateurs occupent un secteur particulièrement exposé.

The journal of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme<sup>137</sup>

Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935, and the League of Nations attempts to restrict the conflict, created far more controversy in France than in Britain. Across British politics, conservatives, liberals and socialists were largely united in calling for sanctions against Italy.<sup>138</sup> In France, the left's advocacy of sanctions was seen by the extreme right as unjustifiably risking war. This isolationist nationalism drew on earlier reactions to the non-aggression pact concluded between France and Russia in May 1935. Though the pact itself had been the initiative of a government of the right, the leagues feared that the international

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<sup>135</sup> Willard, "Les Intellectuels Français et le Front Populaire", p. 120.

Both Amsterdam-Pleyel and the AEAR developed before the PCF's *tournant* to seek coalitions against the threat of domestic fascism, and so were not the pregenators of a Popular Front, but camouflaged bids to win supporters away from other parties, especially the Socialists - Tony Judt, "Une historiographie pas comme les autres: The French Communists & their History", *European Studies Review*, 12, 4, Oct. 1982, p. 454.

<sup>136</sup> Racine-Furland, "Antifascistes et Pacifistes", p. 88.

<sup>137</sup> *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, 10/2/1936, p. 87

<sup>138</sup> Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 384-385.

politics of the left would betray France into war and cause the country's destruction.<sup>139</sup>

Such an isolationist anti-war stance was encapsulated by a petition which appeared in October 1935 during the intensifying debate over Italy, Ethiopia and the League. The petition "Pour la Défense de l'Occident et pour la Paix en Europe", stressed that the imposition of League sanctions on Italy risked dragging France into war over Ethiopia.<sup>140</sup> As its dual title implied, conflict against Italy was beyond the pale, at least in terms of skin colour, for those who felt that latin solidarity and Mediterranean identity gave the two countries a shared Western superiority. The petition was signed by a number of leading members of the Académie Française and prominent writers of the right including Robert Brasillach, Charles Maurras, and Pierre Drieu la Rochelle. Over twenty academics also signed the petition, though apart from Bernard Fäy of the Collège de France and two Professors of the Faculty of Law in Paris, most names were from provincial universities. Equally significant, was the reaction of CVIA to the petition which revealed the polarised nature of French politics by labelling the petition, "Le Manifeste des Intellectuels Fascistes".<sup>141</sup>

The hostility of the nationalist right against the League of Nations over sanctions against Italy was soon focused on Gaston Jèze, Professor of International Law at the Faculty of Law in Paris. Jèze had served as a delegate for the Ethiopian Negus to the League of Nations and with his left-wing sympathies was a tailor-made symbol for those who opposed sanctions and France's role in the League.<sup>142</sup> With the intensification of political polarisation following 6 February 1934, the *chahut* of Jèze's courses at the Faculty of Law in Paris was of a striking intensity. The *chahut* began in November 1935, which resulted in the suspension of Jèze's course as the leagues alternatively occupied or stormed the lecture hall. The demonstrations brought together the various factions of the extreme right, including students of the Croix de Feu which had largely stood apart from the activities of the Phalangeards and Étudiants d'Action Français.<sup>143</sup> Between January and March 1936, the riots intensified within the Faculty of Law as they became linked to other political events in the capital. The Jèze *chahut* reveals the vigour of which the students of the nationalist leagues were capable. Acting together they were able to maintain

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<sup>139</sup> Report of 23/10/1935, M154 246, AD Nord.

<sup>140</sup> Ory & Sirinelli, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>141</sup> *Vigilance*, 15/10/1935, p. 6.

<sup>142</sup> Andre Courtin, *Huit Siècles de Violence au Quartier Latin*, Stock, Paris, 1969, p. 349

<sup>143</sup> Report of 11/3/1936, 1953, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

sustained resistance to both university and police authorities, despite the counter-demonstrations of the left.

With the renewal of the *chahut* in early January 1936, both academics and students of the left appealed to the government for stronger action. On 14 January 1936, CVIA protested to the Minister of Education over the invasion of academic freedom, while a day later the Minister received a petition from fifty students of the Ecole Normale Supérieure against the campaign by their "*camarades du Droit*" against Jèze.<sup>144</sup> The petition described the demonstrations as against the interests and reputation of both the University of Paris and the French state itself. It continued that, "*Aujourd'hui, le problème posé pas celui de la liberté d'opinion mais celui de la liberté d'action*".<sup>145</sup> The Ligue des Droits de l'Homme also publicly protested the *chahut* to the government,

qui assurent à tous les maîtres des Universités, sans distinction d'opinion, la pleine liberté de pensée, qui garantissent le droit des vrais étudiants à travailler paisiblement, et qui arrêtent toute tentative de guerre civile.<sup>146</sup>

Part of the left's attack on the Jèze demonstrators was to portray them as unrepresentative of the university itself. The pro-communist students of the UFE described the Jèze *chahut* as the work of minority students.<sup>147</sup> CVIA published the arrest figures from the 11 February 1936, stressing that of the 105 protesters detained by police at Faculty of Law, only 25 were identified as law students.<sup>148</sup> Still, another 20 of those detained were students from École Libre des Sciences Politiques (a *grande école* known as Sciences Po), 14 were students at the Faculty of Medicine, 11 from the Faculty of Letters, and 3 were studying pharmacy and science. Even if the majority of protesters for leagues came from outside the Faculty of Law, it seems that at least two thirds were students. The police figures undercut efforts at a strictly institutional reading of the political geography of the University of Paris. Though students of the Faculties of Law and Medicine, and those of Sciences Po, seem to have been the leading contingents for the leagues, a considerable amount of support came from outside of these 'bastions' of the right.

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<sup>144</sup> *Vigilance*, 15/1/1936, p. 5;

Petition, AJ61 194, Archives Nationales, Paris.

<sup>145</sup> "which assure to all teachers of the universities, without distinction of opinion, the full liberty of thought, which guarantees the right of the true students to work peacefully and which stops all attempts at civil war" - *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, 10/2/1936, p. 77

<sup>147</sup> Letter of 26/2/1936, F7 13314, Archives Nationales, Paris.

<sup>148</sup> *Vigilance*, 15/2/1936, p. 4.

It was not only activists and organisations of the left which were touched by the confrontation over Jèze, other groups within the university felt it necessary to publicly take a position outside the polarisation. One of these was the Fédération Française des Étudiants Catholiques, whose president, Roger Millot, publicly stated that,

La Fédération française des Étudiants catholiques, fidèle à poursuivre une action strictement corporative en dehors de toute politique, ne veut pas s'associer à des manifestations d'un caractère plus politique que corporatif.<sup>149</sup>

He went on to criticise those leading the Jèze *chahut* as prejudicing the image of the university and as a danger to free opinion. Given the French right's emphasis on its close relationship with the Catholic Church, this non-political position adopted by the leading Catholic student group was a political victory for the left.

### Regional Reactions to the Jèze *Chahut*

Paris events, often quite self-consciously, set the national agenda. Their campaigns and counter-protests were echoed throughout provincial universities. This nationalisation of events was encouraged by the local press (particularly that of the extreme right) which looked to Paris in an effort to stir domestic action.<sup>150</sup> In Toulouse the USE passed on 15 January 1936 a unanimous motion against the Jèze riots, specifically criticising the Paris AG for its role in supporting the leagues' protests. Four days later, the USE with the UFE formed a Comité d'Entente to support those in Paris who were standing for freedom of opinion over the Jèze affair.<sup>151</sup> This mobilisation of the Toulouse left preceded that of their local opponents, who marked the *rentrée* in the Faculty of Law with what police described as a spontaneous *chahut* in the first year course taught by the Dean of the Faculty, Professor Thomas.<sup>152</sup> When Thomas arrived for his course, some of the students chanted "*A bas Jèze! Jèze démission*", and sang the Marseillaise. They also shouted "*Vive le Doyen*" to show that their protest was one of solidarity with the Paris demonstrators, rather than aimed at the Dean himself. On 24 January 1936 another first year law course was interrupted by calls against Jèze, though these were quickly quietened by the appeal of the professor. It is significant that the

<sup>149</sup> *L'Étudiant Catholique*, 1 Trimestre 1936, p. 47

<sup>150</sup> *L'Express du Midi*, 16/1/1936, p. 1.

*L'Express du Midi*, 17/1/1936, p. 3.

*L'Express du Midi*, 18/1/1936, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> Clipping of 19/1/1936, 130 W 13, AD Haute Garonne.

<sup>152</sup> Report of 22/1/1936, *Ibid.*

agitation was only amongst first years, and that second and third years remained aloof from any attempt at *chahut*. The *chahut* in Toulouse was therefore a symbolic effort to nationalise the Paris protest, but as events of 1934 had shown, any serious campaigns in the town were likely to be limited by the hostility of local authorities and a strong student left.

The polarised atmosphere of the Jèze debates fundamentally shaped other activities within French universities during the first months of 1936. The proposed increase in students fees by the Laval government created a national issue which affected students of all political creeds. Yet the continuing protests over Jèze and the deeply-felt symbolism of the 6 *Février* politicised, polarised and undercut any efforts towards a wide-ranging coalition over the problem.

At the same time as the leagues were seeking to extend the Jèze *chahut*, the corporate Association Générale within each university, and their national federation, the Union Nationale des Étudiants, were calling for a national corporate strike against fee increases in early February 1936. However, given the close relationship between the corporate associations and the leagues, left-wing students reacted ambivalently to such proposals of 'non-political' action. The feared nationalist motives underlying the proposed strike were reinforced by its proximity to the symbolic date of 6 *Février*. On 5 February 1936, both the Union Syndiale des Étudiants and Union Federale des Étudiants in Toulouse agreed to join a corporate strike if it remained strictly 'non-political' though they publicly reserved the right to help with courses in the Faculty of Law if the strike turned political by joining the continuing demonstrations against Jèze.<sup>153</sup> These concerns were paralleled in Paris, where Socialist and Communist students were able to secure the support of the national federation of Catholic students, to form their own Groupement Corporatif Interfédéral des Étudiants.<sup>154</sup> Just before the national strike was to take place on 11 and 12 February 1936, it was called off by the UNE which had managed to secure the government's agreement to maintaining fees at their previous level.<sup>155</sup> A tract by the Toulouse AG praised the UNE's role in maintaining the old registration fees and attacked the Groupement Corpartif Interfédéral des Étudiants formed by the left for confusing a corporate issue with politics.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Report of 5/2/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Report of 13/2/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Le Midi Socialiste*, 12/2/1936, p. 5.

<sup>156</sup> Report of 12/2/1936, 130 W 13, AD Haute Garonne.

The situation within the University of Montpellier contrasts strongly with that in Toulouse. Leagues like Action Française and the Croix de Feu drew strong support amongst students, and these had increasingly drawn into coalition and co-operation with each as part of the Front National.<sup>157</sup> This strength of the extreme right gave the local Association Générale the support to carry out the strike against fees in Montpellier even though it had been nationally suspended by the UNE.<sup>158</sup> The AG was far from united in such actions; the existing committee received a vote of confidence of only 80 votes to 57, despite the AG having over several hundred members.<sup>159</sup> The strength of the extreme right within the AG of Montpellier was revealed by the telegram supporting the Jèze *chahut* sent by the association to the law students of Paris, at the same time as the corporate strike was being debated.<sup>160</sup> Montpellier was in the forefront of a group of Associations Générales, including those of Bordeaux and Marseille, which dissented from the UNE's moderate line which had sought to avoid confrontation.<sup>161</sup>

### Blum's March

The atmosphere of polarisation and confrontation fuelled by the on-going agitation over Jèze, the debate over a national corporate strike on fees, and the agitation surrounding the symbolic date of 6 *Février*, culminated in a national *cause célèbre*. On 13 February 1936, the funeral cortege of nationalist historian Jacques Bainville provided an opportunity for Action Française to stage a large demonstration of strength on the Boulevard St-Germain. By chance, SFIO leader Léon Blum crossed the cortege's path as he was returning home by car, and was seriously assaulted by members of the league. The shock of such street violence being directed against a national figure spurred the Chamber of Deputies to decree the immediate dissolution of the league Action Française, and its component sections the Camelots du Roi and the Fédération des Étudiants d'Action Française.

The reaction amongst the parties of the Popular Front to the assault was as swift as that within the parliament. A counter-demonstration was immediately called for 16 February 1936 by the SFIO, PCF and other groups composing the

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<sup>157</sup> Despite the efforts of the Croix de Feu's national leadership to maintain its distance from its competitors on the right, local groups such as that in Montpellier readily cooperated with other leagues - *L'Eclair*, 7/2/1936, p. 5.

<sup>158</sup> *L'Eclair*, 11/2/1936, p. 6;

*L'Eclair*, 12/2/1936, p. 4.

<sup>159</sup> *L'Isle Sonate*, 21/12/1934, p. 17.

<sup>160</sup> *L'Eclair*, 15/2/1936, p. 6.

<sup>161</sup> *L'Eclair*, 16/4/1936, p. 5.

Rassemblement Populaire. The march was planned through the heart of the Latin Quarter, and represented a defining moment for politics in French universities during the 1930s. The demonstration of the Rassemblement Populaire marked the end of the previous absolute dominance of the extreme right in the streets around the University of Paris, and their ability to meet with violence any newspaper hawker, public meeting or even lecture of their opponents. Without a campus to parallel those that existed in Britain, the physical and symbolic claiming of political space had been the leagues' *raison d'être*. The assault on Blum ended one of few public preserves left to the leagues in front of the growing momentum of the Rassemblement Populaire, their dominance of the streets of the Latin Quarter. Not only had Action Française been dissolved by the force of law, but the right had lost control of the streets to the marchers of the Rassemblement Populaire.

The march of the 16 February 1936 began in the early afternoon as approximately a thousand demonstrators formed columns around the Pantheon. Facing the Pantheon, the Faculty of Law was a prominent target for the marchers. As they passed down the rue St Jacques next to the Faculty, police reported that the demonstrators had repeatedly chanted "*fascistes assassins*".<sup>162</sup> There were some verbal exchanges between law students in the windows of the Faculty and the passing protesters in the street, which culminated after fifteen minutes when one student gave a fascist salute.<sup>163</sup> From rue St. Jacques, the marchers passed along the Boulevard St Germain to Place de la Nation which they reached at 5:00 pm. In Place de la Nation the demonstration was estimated as numbering two thousand by police.<sup>164</sup>

The marchers carried tricolours and sang the Marseillaise, both of which had been nationalist symbols until reclaimed by the left republicanism of the Rassemblement Populaire. But it was the chant of "*la Police avec nous*", which most strongly captured just how far the balance of power on the streets had been transformed from early 1934, when the Prefect of Police had been dismissed for his sympathetic treatment of the leagues.<sup>165</sup> Much of the police efforts were directed at keeping small groups from the leagues away from the mass of marchers. Pro-active policing led to the arrest of six students of Action Française and the Croix de Feu.<sup>166</sup> An attempted counter-demonstration by the extreme right numbering around 250 was dispersed on the Boulevard St Germain with more arrests.

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<sup>162</sup> Report of 17/2/1936, p. 6, BA 1862, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5

<sup>165</sup> Report of 16/2/1936, BA 1862.

<sup>166</sup> Report of 17/2/1936, p. 6 in BA 1862.



Significantly, one of the few physical clashes between left and right that did take during the march was between students. Around 4:30 pm, on the corner of the Boulevard St Michel and the rue des Ecoles, police reported a brawl between two groups of students in which there were numerous injuries, including to three police officers who tried to intervene.<sup>167</sup>

## The Dissolution of the Leagues

The leading historian of the Action Française, Eugen Weber, has largely down-played the effects of legal dissolution on the league and its student section arguing that,

[Dissolution] came when all these bodies were losing ground. It may even have permitted them to end with a flourish careers that otherwise would have dragged on in a slow, gradual decline.<sup>168</sup>

From its peak in the mid 1920s, the league was faced with a declining readership for its press, splits within its membership, and the increasing competition from 1934 of the Croix de Feu. Dissolution seemed only a partial measure anyway, as it did not affect the league's vitriolic newspaper, allowing it to maintain its prominent presence in French public life. The legal measures were minimised by the league's leaders, so that "the Action Française always spoke of 'dissolved' Camelots and 'dissolved' Leaguers, ironically implying that the decree had not actually done anything to prevent their existence".<sup>169</sup> Equally Action Française's opponents feared that dissolution had merely driven the organisation underground.<sup>170</sup>

For the students who supported Action Française, legal dissolution meant that their striking victory in the *chahut* against Jèze had been unexpectedly reversed into an almost total defeat. The league was far from a declining force within French universities during the mid-1930s. Police estimates of its membership and the increased rhythm of confrontation after 6 February 1934 show that the league was gaining strength in the atmosphere of polarised conflict.<sup>171</sup> The *chahuts* of academics sympathetic to the left, the national strike by medical students "*contre l'invasion des mètèques*" in early 1935, and their victory against Jèze (paralleled by

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<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>168</sup> Weber, *Action Française*, p. 365

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>170</sup> Noguères, *La Vie Quotidienne en France au Temps du Front Populaire 1935-1938*, p. 52.

<sup>171</sup> Étudiants d'Action Française in Lille were estimated at 200 members - Report of 1/10/1934, M154/237, AD Nord.

In Bordeaux, the section of Étudiants d'Action Française doubled in size to 300 students - Report of 7/2/1934, 1 M 442, AD Gironde.

almost another national strike) made the league a dominant presence throughout France's universities. However, dissolution denied the league its repertoire of political action which it had derived from the Dreyfus Affair, of physical clashes and the claiming of public space. The confrontations with which the league had defined its presence on the streets, in lecture-halls and in police reports were strikingly absent as the Front Populaire came to power in mid 1936.

Like its senior counterpart, L'Étudiant Français was allowed to continue despite dissolution, though it dropped the title "Organe des Étudiants d'Action Française". Denying its death L'Étudiant Français claimed,

On a voulu frapper des organisations. On n'atteindra pas notre propagande.<sup>172</sup>

Though students still gathered to sell nationalist newspapers, they were restrained in reacting to challenges from the left.<sup>173</sup> There was also a noticeable change in content of the journal from February 1936 which had previously devoted so much of its print to organising, mobilising and glorifying the league's public clashes. Equally, the attempt by the dissolved league to give students an organisational focus through the Institut d'Action Française was quickly limited by the authorities. The Institute had previously periodically arranged courses and lectures for the league, and after the dissolution of the Fédération National des Étudiants d'Action Français, their headquarters at 33 rue St André was taken over by the Institute.<sup>174</sup> Still when the Institute attempted to rally broader support from students with a mass meeting to be addressed by nationalist leaders Maurras, Daudet, Brasillach, Moulmier, Pujo and Fäy on 18 May 1936, it was prohibited by the police.<sup>175</sup> Though in Paris, 33 rue St-André was still used as a base from which to sell L'Action Française, student support declined after dissolution.<sup>176</sup>

For some students the dissolution of Action Française led them to channel their energies into the other student groups of the remaining leagues. The leading beneficiary of this constituency was the Croix de Feu. Police reported that its student section, the Volontaires Nationaux, were drawing increasing support amongst students in Paris, while the Phalange faced a decline in its own

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<sup>172</sup> L'Étudiant Français, 10-15/2/1936, p. 1.

<sup>173</sup> In the wake of dissolution, police noted that Communist vendors sold l'Avant Garde & l'Humanité outside the headquarters of Étudiants d'Action Français at 33 rue St André in an effort to deliberately provoke the league's members - Report of 30/3/1936, BA 1896, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>174</sup> Report of 13/5/1936, BA 1895, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>175</sup> Clipping of 15/5/1936, Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Report of 29/4/1936, BA 1896, Archives de la Préfecture de Police. Report of 8/6/1936, Ibid.

membership.<sup>177</sup> The dissolution of Action Française marked the turning of the tide for all groups of the nationalist right, and with the election of the Front Populaire in June 1936, the Croix de Feu, Jeunesses Patriotes, Solidarité Française were all dissolved. Immediately following the dissolution of the Croix de Feu, its militants in Paris engaged in a series of cat-and-mouse incidents with police at the train station of Gare Saint Lazare. Groups would arrive at the station, to cry "*Vive de la Rocque*" or to wear the league insignia on their clothes.<sup>178</sup> Within a week, 54 people had been detained by police, of whom seventeen were students. The latter included a 17 year old female student, who was wearing a *cocarde*.<sup>179</sup> These confrontations were short-lived as the Croix de Feu changed itself into a political party, the Parti Social Français, which established its own student section as a corporate association.

Dissolution meant war by other means for the extreme right, although they had lost the organisational forms which had made them the pre-eminent forces *dans la rue*. Action Française and the Croix de Feu were affected by dissolution in different ways. The organisation of the former was largely driven underground, its supporters surfacing in private meetings or dinners, or much more rarely in violence on the streets. Still, Action Française maintained its newspaper, and this kept its politics in public view, if not its membership. The Croix de Feu was able to avoid these consequences of legal dissolution by changing its form into a political party. As will be examined later this change in form affected the political repertoire which could be used by its student supporters. Nineteen-thirty-six saw a fundamental transformation of the French political landscape, as the extreme right not only lost control of the streets to Rassemblement Populaire, but were also denied the political repertoire of confrontation which had made them such a presence within French universities.

### The Dissolution of CVIA

The legal dissolution of the leagues was paralleled by the political dissolution of CVIA. With the electoral victory of the Front Populaire and the subsequent marginalisation of the extreme right, the Comité de Vigilance had lost part of the impetus behind its birth. More significantly, as CVIA moved its focus away from domestic politics to take a position in relation to international events the

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<sup>177</sup> Report of 3/3/1936, BA 1953, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>178</sup> Report of 23/6/1936, BA 1862, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>179</sup> Report of 30/6/1936, *Ibid.*

divisions within the organisation became increasingly apparent.<sup>180</sup> The divisions which had been expressed at the November 1935 Congress over the Franco-Soviet Pact of May 1935 became irreconcilable at the Congress of June 1936, following Hitler's remilitarisation of the Rhineland. Finding that motions supporting anti-militarism conflicted with his call for hard-line resistance to the Fascist powers, Paul Langevin headed a group who resigned from the national committee of the Comité de Vigilance following the June 1936 Congress.<sup>181</sup> Joining Langevin were fellow academics Frédéric Joliot, Albert Bayet, Lucien Febvre, Francis Perrin, Henri Wallon, Marcel Prenant, Jeanne and Georges Fournier. Wallon, Prenant and the Fourniers were strongly pro-Communist.

Most studies of this split within CVIA stress the extent to which the division was over the conflicting imperatives of pacifism and anti-fascism - whether the organisation was 'against war' or 'against fascism'.<sup>182</sup> This interpretation is mirrored in many other areas of the historiography of the 1930s, polarising the forces of pacifism/appeasement on one hand and the forces of committed anti-fascism on the other.<sup>183</sup> The supposed inherent contradiction or 'schizophrenia' between the demands of anti-war and anti-fascist politics, has partly been the creation of historians who seek to fix the historical experience of diverse groups on the simplicity of a four-word slogan. "Against war and fascism" was a phrase that provided a clear symbol of political aspirations for a variety of parties and groups, yet it certainly did not encapsulate a single fixed meaning throughout decade. As a rallying point, it was approached from different directions, even within the same organisation such as CVIA, at different times, in reaction to different events and contexts.

The Comité de Vigilance's success in rallying support against what it perceived to be an indigenous fascist threat was striking. As Nicole Racine-Furland argues, "*L'antifascisme du Comité de vigilance, réponse au 6 février, est donc, avant tout une réaction à une menace intérieure*".<sup>184</sup> However, as this anti-fascism was redefined in relation to international affairs, the Langevin *tendance* found their own activism conflicting with the majority position within CVIA. The resulting split was not merely between pacifists and communists, but also over the policy and purpose of

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<sup>180</sup> Michel Bilis, Socialistes et Pacifistes: L'Intenable Dilemme des Socialistes Français 1933-1939, Editions Syrons, Paris, 1979, p. 134;

Winock, Le Siècle des Intellectuels, p. 251-253.

Ory & Sirinelli, Les Intellectuels en France, p. 99.

<sup>181</sup> Vigilance, 31/7/1936, pp. 6-7.

<sup>182</sup> Racine-Furland, "Antifascistes et Pacifistes", p. 61.

<sup>183</sup> For the SFIO see Green, Crisis and Decline, p. 134.

<sup>184</sup> Racine-Furland, "Antifascistes et Pacifistes", p. 90.

the organisation. A subsidiary conflict was certainly the role of PCF in CVIA, as Communist members and sympathisers had aroused hostility by regularly holding separate meetings to discuss party strategy.<sup>185</sup> The split is a reminder that the communist definition of the anti-war and anti-fascist alliance was not the only one at the time, in fact the creation of CVIA had pre-dated the official Comintern formulation of the new line. Given the leading role of Langevin in the anti-fascist movement, it was also true that as some of the organisation's rank-and-file stated, "*Vigilance sans Langevin n'est plus vigilance*"<sup>186</sup>

### The Oxford Congress, July 1936

The fifth International Congress of Socialist students opened in Oxford on 17 July 1936. The congress was dominated by debate over whether the national coalitions between socialist and communist students should be extended to a merging of their separate groups worldwide. The morning before the Congress opened, a delegation of Communist students met with Socialist representatives to discuss whether 'unity of action' could become 'unity of organisation'. On 18 July 1936, Communist John Cornford in his capacity as a delegate for the University Labour Federation moved a motion that the Communist delegation be invited to attend the Congress.<sup>187</sup> He was supported by the delegates from Spain, where Socialist and Communist students had already united in one organisation. Expressing strong reservations over any shift from coalition to merger were members of the French delegation. They felt that their national membership had not been allowed to consider such a question of organisation. As one French delegate argued, the Socialists had already achieved "*une unité avec les communistes, et sur d'autre point avant trouvé que la mauvaise foi des communistes empêchaient la vraie unité.*"<sup>188</sup> This distance between the French Socialist students and their peers in Britain, Spain and Belgium was revealed in the debate over USSR.<sup>189</sup> The British delegates unanimously supported allying with a USSR pact for peace, whereas almost all the French delegation voted against this proposal.<sup>190</sup> Cornford's praise for the USSR was questioned by Dourieux and Rabaud of the French delegation who argued that the USSR had changed dramatically since 1917.

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<sup>185</sup> Racine-Furland, "Antifascistes et Pacifistes", p. 62.

<sup>186</sup> "Vigilance without Langevin is no longer vigilance" - tract of Paris section 8/16th arrondissements- Box 187, Fonds Paul Langevin, Paris.

<sup>187</sup> Rapport du 5ieme Congres de FIES, p. 1 - SAI 2947, International Institute of Social History.

<sup>188</sup> Rapport du 5ieme Congres de FIES, p. 5.

<sup>189</sup> L'Étudiant Socialiste, Oct. 1936, p. 16.

<sup>190</sup> Rapport du 5ième Congrès de FIES, p. 7.

The pivotal motion for unity of organisation between Socialist and Communist student movements was moved by Boutbien of the French delegation and seconded by Cornford.<sup>191</sup> While the motion received the unanimous support of the British delegation, their French counterparts were strongly divided.<sup>192</sup> Rabaud claimed that the French delegation possessed no mandate to support such a merger, and threatened the secession of the French Federation from the international organisation.<sup>193</sup> Though the motion was comfortably passed by the Congress, and Boutbien elected president of the new International, later debates would reveal that it was Rabaud's dissent which most clearly reflected the position of the French Socialists.<sup>194</sup>

Despite the deep divisions between the British and French Federations over the call for merger between the socialist and communists, the Congress still ended with a powerful image of unity. After three days of debates, the Congress was brought to an emotional close when it addressed by a representative of the Spanish delegation. On the opening day of the congress in Oxford, a military revolt had erupted in Spanish Morocco. By 20 July 1936 this had spread to become a civil war throughout Spain. After the Spanish student's speech, the congress unanimously voted a motion of fraternal salute to the Frente Popular, and closed as the delegates sang the International.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9b.

<sup>192</sup> *L'Étudiant Socialiste*, Oct. 1936, p. 19.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

## Chapter 4 Volunteers & Witnesses

In July 1936, twenty year old Cambridge chemistry student, Hugh Gordon, headed to Barcelona for his summer holiday.<sup>1</sup> He had visited Spain the previous summer with Trinity College friends and fellow Communists, James Klugmann and Phillip Cell. Rather than walking across the Pyrenees as he had in 1935, Gordon returned to Barcelona by train with another Cambridge friend. They awoke on their first morning in Spain to find that the streets of the city had been transformed by a military rebellion. On 19 July 1936, troops had attempted to march to the Plaza de Cataluña in support of the *pronunciamiento* which had occurred two days earlier in Morocco.<sup>2</sup> They were opposed in bloody clashes by the ad hoc militias of left-wing political groups as well as the Republican government's assault guards and police. By the following day, the revolt by the army and rightist groups had been defeated in Barcelona and Madrid, but had succeeded in claiming power in towns across Northern and Western Spain.<sup>3</sup>

Touring the freshly-improvised barricades that dotted the streets, the Cambridge students found that their Communist Party cards were more useful than their British passports in gaining a friendly reception from the various checkpoints. Gordon was struck by the sporadic columns of smoke from burning churches across the city. Remembering the events almost sixty years afterwards, he stated that,

One got the impression that this was the people having a go at last after being suppressed for ever so long, and it was impossible for a couple of English students really to do anything except observe it.<sup>4</sup>

Some foreigners though chose not merely to observe, but to participate in the fighting. Amongst those Gordon encountered on the streets was Felicia Brown, an English painter and Communist who would be killed a month later fighting in Aragon with the militia.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Recollections of a Younger World", pp. 374-376, in CP/Ind/Kett/1, National Museum of Labour History.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, 3rd ed., Penguin Books, London, 1986, pp. 232-236. Casualties over the two days of fighting in Barcelona were estimated at 500 killed and 3,000 wounded - Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> These included Burgos, Saragossa, Huesca, Teruel, Pamplona, Seville and Valladolid.

<sup>4</sup> "Recollections of a Younger World", p. 374.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p. 367.

A member of Somerville College, Audrey Beecham, who was also in Barcelona for her summer holidays, participated in the street fighting - Pauline Adams, Somerville for Women 1879-1993, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 233.

Despite the action and atmosphere on the streets, the students had to face more practical concerns, for "our time in Barcelona had to come to an end, because the banks were all closed and we had run out of money".<sup>6</sup> With train services shut down, the students contacted the British Consulate which arranged for them to be evacuated on a Royal Navy destroyer to Marseille. Once back in England, Gordon was quickly speaking at street meetings for the Communist Party on what he had seen in Spain.

The handful of students and academics from British and French universities who actually experienced the fighting in Spain at first-hand have a two-fold significance for this study. They were the people most directly touched by the war, revealing the mixed backgrounds from which outsiders viewed Spain. Secondly, the ways in which their experiences were interpreted by others in their own countries became important markers in framing understandings of the civil war. In reaction to the prominence accorded to intellectuals at the time and afterwards, historians have sought to show that these were only a statistically small fraction of combatants in Spain.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the few university students and academics who went to Spain exercised a disproportionate influence on their peers' perceptions of the war and its later history.

### The First Volunteers

Perhaps the most prominent university figure to fight in the war was Cambridge student John Cornford. In the days immediately preceding the rebellion's outbreak, Cornford was lobbying at the Oxford Congress of Socialist students for the international merger of Socialist and Communist student organisations. Cornford had just graduated from Cambridge with a first class honours degree in history with distinction. Only 20 years old, he was unsure of his immediate future.<sup>8</sup> Though he wanted to work in politics, he ultimately decided to stay at Cambridge as a research student in history. Before returning to university, Cornford and his girlfriend, Margot Heinemann, planned a trip to the continent combining politics and holidaying. They intended to relax in the south of France

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<sup>6</sup> "Recollections of a Younger World", p. 377.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 126.

Judith Cook, *Apprentices of Freedom*, Quartet Books, London, pp. ix & 2.

Rémi Skoutelsky, "Les Volontaires Français en Espagne Républicaine 1936-1939", Thèse, Université de Paris I, 1996, p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. 244.



before attending the World Peace Conference in Brussels.<sup>9</sup> Such travels to Europe were common for Oxford and Cambridge students during their summer holidays, shaping their understanding of international politics.

It was in the same spirit that Cornford decided to include Spain on his travels after hearing of the military rebellion. He began his trip early, and intended to join Heinemann in the south of France after he had seen for himself what was being described as a workers' revolution against a military revolt.<sup>10</sup> Cornford arranged press credentials with the Daily Herald, and also carried a letter of introduction from the pro-Communist student organisation, the Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants pour la Paix, la Liberté et la Culture.<sup>11</sup> With fellow Trinity Communist Richard Bennett, he arrived in Spain a fortnight after the fighting had broken out.<sup>12</sup> While Bennett joined the PSUC radio station in Barcelona, Cornford's time as journalist did not last long, as on a tour of the Huesca front with Franz Borkenau, he volunteered for the POUM militia.<sup>13</sup>

As Heinemann remembered, "I was at Nîmes, waiting to hear from him, when I got a letter saying that he'd joined up and was going to stay there, which he certainly hadn't intended to do when he went out".<sup>14</sup> In late July 1936, anarchist, POUM and PSUC militia columns had rapidly advanced out from Barcelona through Aragon to within reach of Saragossa and Huesca. Like many others, Cornford felt that the fighting would be over very quickly and so he wanted to participate before it ended.<sup>15</sup> The impulsiveness of Cornford's action was reflected in his choice of the closest militia units, for otherwise he probably would have joined a Communist unit. Significantly, despite the later conflict during the war between POUM and the PSUC, and the more recent historical debates over the clash, there seems to have been little ideological antagonism between the young committed Communist and his more revolutionary comrades, who included several German ex-Communists.<sup>16</sup> It was not ideology, but the long periods of inactivity on

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 323-4.

<sup>10</sup> Recorded interview with Margot Heinemann, Side 3, 9239/5, Imperial War Museum.

<sup>11</sup> The letter stated that Cornford "*est mandaté par nous pour enquêter sur la situation en Espagne et porter aux courageux étudiants Espagnols et à tous les défenseurs de la République l'expression de la solidarité agissante des étudiants du monde entier, pour la cause de l'Espagne libre*" - Letter of 7/8/1936, John Cornford Papers, Trinity College Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Bill Alexander, British Volunteers for Liberty: Spain 1936-1939, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1982, pp. 41 & 222.

<sup>13</sup> Stansky & Abrahams, Journey to the Frontier, p. 314

<sup>14</sup> "The Spanish Civil War", p. 1, CP/Ind/Kett/1, National Museum of Labour History.

<sup>15</sup> As Cornford later wrote to his father "I expected at that time that the fighting would be over very soon" - Letter of 15/9/1936, John Cornford Papers, Trinity College Archives.

<sup>16</sup> Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, pp. 123-124;

a quiet front and the militia's disorganisation which increasingly frustrated Cornford.<sup>17</sup> Joining up to directly participate in the struggle against international fascism, he found himself feeling useless, lonely and bored far away from home.<sup>18</sup>

Cornford's experience typified the ad hoc arrival of volunteers during the initial stages of the war. The first large groups of volunteers who crossed the Pyrenees to join the fighting seem to have been Spaniards returning home from France.<sup>19</sup> These were quickly joined by other groups - political refugees from Central Europe, French anarchists, and other committed activists such as 21 year old Trotskyist Maurice Loeuillet, a law student at Aix who left for Spain in August 1936.<sup>20</sup> As the fighting continued these early volunteers, who had arrived in small groups or individually to join the nearest militia units, were obscured by the arrival of a far larger, more organised, Communist-inspired effort, the International Brigades.<sup>21</sup>

In mid-September 1936, Cornford returned to England, partly on sick-leave, but also with the purpose of organising a small disciplined group of comrades to fight in Spain. As he told a close friend, he wanted a special band to act as an example to the militias, people who would shave every morning and act as a disciplined formation.<sup>22</sup> In the words of Heinemann, he was, "looking for people really with a bit of expertise, something to contribute".<sup>23</sup> Two of the staples of English public school education - classical languages and the military experience of the Officer Training Corps - provided some of these skills.<sup>24</sup> Cornford turned to his contemporaries from the anti-war and anti-fascist campaigns within universities

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Valentine Cunningham has implied that the CPGB distrusted Cornford after his experiences with the POUM, obscuring Harry Pollitt's direct assistance in recruiting and transporting Cornford's group - Valentine Cunningham, "Saville's Row with The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse", *Socialist Register*, 1982, p. 279

For a rebutal of Cunningham's charges see John Saville, "Valentine Cunningham and the Poetry of the Spanish Civil War", *Socialist Register*, 1981, p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> George Orwell was to share such experiences on the same front half a year later - George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Penguin Books, London, 1986, pp. 22-32

<sup>18</sup> Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. 331.

<sup>19</sup> David Wingeate Pike, "France" in James W. Cortada, ed., *Historical Dictionary of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 1982, p. 217.

<sup>20</sup> Skoutelsky, "Les Volontaires Français en Espagne Républicaine 1936-1939", p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> David Berry, "French Anarchists in Spain, 1936-1939", *French History*, 3, 1989, p. 427.

<sup>22</sup> Straight, *After Long Silence*, p. 87.

<sup>23</sup> Recorded interview with Margot Heinemann, Reel 2, Side 3, 9239/5, Imperial War Museum.

<sup>24</sup> While many of the working class volunteers from Britain, France and other countries had done military service or experienced battle in 1914-1918, the anti-militarism of the student left meant that former public school students such as Cornford and Esmond Romilly had refused to join their school's OTC - Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. 155; Esmond Romilly, *Boadilla*, Macdonald, London, 1971, pp. 26 & 29.

between 1933 and 1936. Perhaps more important than their skills were the resources which students had to make their political commitment meaningful: passports, money and travel experience.<sup>25</sup> Some of them had finished their studies in the month before the war and were without steady jobs. Like the large numbers of unemployed and refugees who later joined the International Brigades, those who most readily volunteered to fight in Spain often had weak personal commitments and a strong political consciousness.

Cornford's group of seven students included John Sommerville and Bernard Knox from Cambridge, and Mannassa (Sam) Lesser, who had just finished a diploma in Egyptology at UCL.<sup>26</sup> Growing up in a family of Jewish Poles in London's East End had given Lesser direct contact with the anti-semitism that Mosley's British Union of Fascists was attempting to organise in the mid-1930s. It was a background that provided powerful reasons to join the actively anti-fascist Communist Party, which he did in his first year of university in 1934. Unusually, given the strong anti-militarism of the left, Lesser also joined the university's OTC, citing Lenin to justify learning the weapons of revolution. It was this military training which Jack Cohen, a CPGB organiser, appealed to, arguing that the Republic needed those with military training and expertise.<sup>27</sup> Lesser disagreed with Cohen, for he felt that what was necessary for the defence of Republican Spain was arms not more men. However, he became absolutely convinced that volunteers with military experience were vitally needed in Spain after talking with both the head of the CPGB, Harry Pollitt, and Cornford. Carrying his University of London OTC uniform and a gas mask which had been a farewell present from his college friends, Lesser left for Spain just as the new academic year was opening.

Cornford's group of volunteers has been portrayed as solely a personal initiative, conceived and executed in ignorance of the Comintern's official formation

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, p. 36.

The experience of 24 year old Oxford student Jim Brewer contrasted to that of Cornford's group. Brewer had been born into a family of South Wales miners, and had worked for two years in the mines before winning a WEA scholarship to Ruskin College. In the summer holidays of 1936, he decided to go to Spain, though it took him several months before he was able to join a group of volunteers being organised by the CPGB in January 1937.

Brewer's difficulties in getting to Spain reveal the importance of the Communist Party in organising passports, day tickets, accommodation and transport necessary for working-class volunteers to travel to Spain. The familiarity of middle class students with international travel meant that they were over-represented amongst the first volunteers - Recorded Interview with Jim Brewer, Reels 1-3, 9963/10, Imperial War Museum.

<sup>26</sup> Lesser changed his name to Sam Russell during the civil war, when he worked on Spanish Radio in Barcelona - Recorded interview with Sam Russell, Side 1, 9484/6, Imperial War Museum.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

of the International Brigades in late September 1936.<sup>28</sup> Margot Heinemann describes him recruiting a small group of friends in a "free-lance" fashion, which the Communist Party then aided in transporting to Spain.<sup>29</sup> Lesser's experience suggests that the CPGB's role extended to informally recruiting the first volunteers, before it became officially committed to the International Brigades. Another member of Cornford's group, the New Zealander George McLaurin, who was a former Cambridge student, had also been asked to volunteer by Pollitt.<sup>30</sup> Despite the accounts of participants and historians, few works have positioned Cornford's efforts within the Party organisation or recognised that these were largely dependent on Pollitt's pro-active support. Personal initiative and party mobilisation ran together, as each drew on the other.

Cornford's role in organising a group of volunteers for Spain raises one of the recent methodological debates over the historiography on the Communist Party. In America, Theodore Draper has polemically attacked the growth of social histories focused on the Communist Party as producing a profound mis-reading of the party's organisation, membership and history.<sup>31</sup> To Draper, any attempt to write a history of the Communist Party 'from the bottom up' ignores its monolithic and totalitarian nature. He criticises those who put forward the interpretation that national Communist Parties enjoyed a measure of autonomy from Moscow leadership, as based on a distorting emphasis on isolated incidents and individual biography. These histories, he concludes, "depoliticise the most political of all political movements".<sup>32</sup> For Draper, any attempt at social history must be incorporated within a consideration of the Communist Party's political organisation and institutional structures.

Yet Draper's model of the Communist Party as a monolithic organisation gives it a coherence and unity that it lacked in reality. Cornford's recruiting efforts in England between 15 September and 5 October 1936 were too early to be part of the co-ordinated international effort that was still developing.<sup>33</sup> According to Paris

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<sup>28</sup> Stansky, & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, pp. 360-361.

<sup>29</sup> Recorded interview with Margot Heinemann, Side 3, 9239/5..

<sup>30</sup> Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Theodore Draper, "American Communism revisited", *New York Review of Books*, 9 May 1985, p. 37.

For arguments supporting a social history of the Communist Party see Kevin Morgan, "Introduction" in Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman & Kevin Morgan, eds., *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social & Cultural History of British Communism*, Pluto Press, London, 1995, pp. 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Theodore Draper, "The Popular Front revisited", *New York Review of Books*, 30 May 1985, p. 46.

<sup>33</sup> Saville, "Valentine Cunningham and the Poetry of the Spanish Civil War", p. 273.

police, the PCF had begun recruiting French and Spanish volunteers to fight for the Republic as early as August 1936.<sup>34</sup> The fall of Irún in early September 1936, which sent large numbers of Republican refugees into France, produced an intensification of such activity by the French left as the Republic's position seemed more perilous.<sup>35</sup> The French Communists were at the forefront of organising military aid to Republican Spain, and it seems that Thorez's suggestion in September 1936 for a Comintern army coincided with Moscow's own decision to commit itself to supply armaments to the Republic.<sup>36</sup> Given the official birth of the International Brigades in the following month, the speed of their creation indicated that the Comintern was co-ordinating national efforts which had already been developing. Since British efforts were slightly behind those of the French Communists, it is not surprising that Cornford's group only realised the extent to which they were part of a much larger effort when they arrived in France.<sup>37</sup> Though the group was eager to join the fighting, their transportation through Paris and then Marseille was delayed as they were joined by much bigger contingents of volunteers headed for Spain.<sup>38</sup>

France was the focus for the organisation of the International Brigades.<sup>39</sup> This was partly due to its geographical proximity, which made it an important route to Spain. It was also partly due to the domestic strength of the PCF, which created networks for the recruitment and transportation of volunteers in certain regions of communist dominance, such as the Nord, the Bouches-du-Rhône and the Seine.<sup>40</sup> The PCF started mass recruiting for the Brigades in September 1936.<sup>41</sup> Not only were the French the largest national contingent within the Brigades, but many volunteers were refugees from Central and Eastern Europe resident in France. Jacques Delperrie de Bayac has estimated that the Brigades were drawn from 53 countries, and ultimately totalled 35,000 volunteers, of whom almost half went to Spain between October and December 1936.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Carlos Serrano, *L'Enjeu Espagnol: PCF et Guerre d'Espagne*, Messidor, Paris, 1987, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 440 & 452;

E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, Macmillan Press, London, 1984, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> John Sommerfield, *Volunteer in Spain*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1937, pp. 11 & 20;

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Farré, *Pasión y Farsa*, p. 39;

Jacques Delperrie de Bayac, *Les Brigades Internationales*, Fayard, Paris, 1968, p. 85;

Pike, *Les Français et la Guerre d'Espagne*, p. 163.

<sup>40</sup> Skoutelsky, "Les Volontaires Français en Espagne Républicaine 1936-1939", p. 247.

<sup>41</sup> Delperrie de Bayac, *Les Brigades Internationales*, p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9 & 90.

TABLE 4.1: NATIONAL ESTIMATES OF BRIGADES<sup>43</sup>

Country	No. of Volunteers	Volunteers (%)
France	9,000	25.7
Germany & Austria	5,000	14.3
Poland	4,000	11.4
Balkans	4,000	11.4
Italy	3,000	8.6
Britain	2,000	5.7
Other	8,000	22.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,000</b>	

Despite their numerical prominence in the Brigades, the French volunteers have been relatively neglected by historical accounts compared to their English or American peers. This is partly due to the shortage of memoirs and biographical accounts in French relative to those in English, Italian, and German.<sup>44</sup> Rémi Skoutelsky has provided the most comprehensive investigation into the demographic composition of the French contingent. Of 3910 French volunteers, he identified 19 students.<sup>45</sup> Of these 8 were students from the Ile-de-France (Paris), and 3 were from Aquitaine and the Midi-Pyrénées.<sup>46</sup> The average age of these student volunteers was twenty-three.<sup>47</sup> Some had been very active in student politics, such as Henri Chrétien who had led the UFE in 1933 before becoming a médecin-chef in the Brigades. Thirteen of the students were members of either the PCF or JC.<sup>48</sup>

The French student volunteers described by Skoutelsky are demographically similar to the Cornford group in at least three regards. Firstly, the greatest number of volunteers amongst students in both countries were drawn from the largest, and most prestigious universities - Paris, Cambridge and Oxford. They were more likely to be older and finishing their degrees than starting their studies. They were frequently members of the Communist Party, or at least politically active before the

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 386.

The figures are based on the 1938 Commission of the League of Nations are generally accepted, though estimates of 10,000 French volunteers are supported by Skoutelsky and Thomas - Skoutelsky, "Les Volontaires Français en Espagne Républicaine 1936-1939". p. 471; Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp.982-983.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1994, p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Skoutelsky, "Les Volontaires Français en Espagne Républicaine 1936-1939", p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220 & 222.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

war. In fact, they were more likely to be Communists than their fellow volunteers.<sup>49</sup> However, a significant difference between the two countries is the attention which British students have received compared to the relative silence surrounding their French peers. This contrast is partly numerical, as British students were part of a much smaller national contingent which meant they were relatively more prominent. Their prominence has also been exaggerated by the way intellectual engagement in Spain has been memorialised in British historiography.<sup>50</sup> It is this contrast between students which underlies the generalisation that British intellectuals outnumbered their French counterparts in the Brigades.<sup>51</sup>

After arriving in Alicante, Cornford's group were moved to Albacete for training where their contingent joined 500 earlier volunteers, who were mostly French.<sup>52</sup> Combining with another British group, they made up a twenty-strong half-section in the French Commune de Paris Battalion, which Lesser described as a "collection of odds and sods".<sup>53</sup> Their training was quickly cut short and the newly-formed units were rushed to the collapsing front around Madrid.<sup>54</sup> In contrast to Cornford's first visit to Spain when the revolt seemed as if it would be over in a matter of weeks, the Republic was now directly threatened by Franco's drive north. In two months, the Army of Africa had spearheaded the Nationalist push through the provinces of Andalusia, Extremadura and New Castile, reaching the outskirts of Madrid by the first week of November 1936.

The Nationalist attack on Madrid was launched on 8 November 1936, through the large park on the city's west, the Casa de Campo. The attack was met

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<sup>49</sup> Skoutelsky estimates that 56.4% of his total sample were members of the PCF (with another 7.9% belonging to Communist front organisations), compared to 70% for French students - *Ibid.*, pp. 277 & 283;

It seems likely that all seven students in Cornford's group were Communist, while Cook and Thomas estimates that over 60% of the British contingent were Party members - Cook, *Apprentices of Freedom*, p. 2;

Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 455.

<sup>50</sup> Stansky & Abraham's biography of Cambridge students Cornford and Julian Bell drew the following review:

"Why is there such a compulsive desire, not just to recall the 1930s, but to recall it in this particular way: to locate all the debates about commitment, actions, intellectuals in that particular moment?... But no one has yet managed to explain satisfactorily why we need what we need out of the 30s, why we read it in the way we do" - Alexander Cockburn, "To and From the Frontier", *The Review*, Oct 1986, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Delperrie de Bayac, *Les Brigades Internationales*, p. 98.

David Winegate Pike, "Review: Juan Avilés Farré, *Pasión y Farsa: Franceses y Británicos*", *American Historical Review*, 100, 4, 1995, p. 1242.

<sup>52</sup> Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. 366.

<sup>53</sup> Recorded interview with Sam Russell, Reel 1, Side 2, 9484/6, Imperial War Museum; Sommerfield, *Volunteer in Spain*, p. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Sommerfield, *Volunteer in Spain*, pp. 49 & 90.

by desperate Republican resistance and made little progress. That evening, the 1,900 strong 11th International Brigade was rushed into the front.<sup>55</sup> Over the following two days, a third of the Brigade were killed in action but their line held. In the intense fighting that took place around the Casa de Campo and then University City throughout November 1936 the casualties were extremely high. George Maclaurin was killed on their third day at the front, while Cornford received a head wound from an artillery shell.<sup>56</sup> After a month in the front-line the original British group had been reduced to almost half with only 12 members remaining in the field. The enormous casualties that the Brigades received in their first few days of action would continue throughout the war, as their role increasingly became that of reliable shock troops, used at the heaviest point of attack.<sup>57</sup>

Amongst the terrible human cost, there was an optimism that the arrival of the volunteers had marked a change in the course of the war. One of the British students, Bernard Knox, wrote of

the unique atmosphere of Madrid in November: the pervasive, blind fear of what Franco's troops would do if they won, a fierce pride in the fact that for the first time the apparently irresistible advance of European Fascism had been stopped, and stopped by a miracle of military improvisation, the exhilarating feeling that if we could do this we could do anything.<sup>58</sup>

The failure of the Nationalist attack on Madrid fundamentally redefined the nature of the civil war, extending it indefinitely.

## **The International Brigades and Domestic Politics**

Though the role of the International Brigades in battle has been comprehensively covered, far less research has examined their effects on the distant social milieus from which the volunteers were drawn.<sup>59</sup> As Tom Buchanan has argued, the Brigades 'internationalised' the Spanish conflict by making the civil war a direct and personal experience for the family, friends and communities which they left behind.<sup>60</sup> As Oxford Communist Philip Toynbee remembered, it was

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 480.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111 & 121.

<sup>57</sup> Cook, *Apprentices of Freedom*, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Knox, "Remembering Madrid", *New York Review of Books*, 27, 17, 6/1/1988, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> The personal and family trauma which volunteering caused is considered in Hywel Francis, "Say Nothing & Leave in the Middle of the Night: The Spanish Civil War Revisited", *History Workshop*, 32, Autumn 1991, p. 71.

<sup>60</sup> Tom Buchanan, "The International Brigades", unpublished paper at Conference on the Spanish Civil War, University of Oxford, Oxford, 1 Feb 1997.



upon hearing the news that his friend Esmond Romilly had volunteered in late August 1936, "That the war became, for the first time, personally and immediately disturbing".<sup>61</sup> At the University of Edinburgh, medical student David Pritt recalled that,

Some of the chaps with whom I was friendly joined the International Brigade and therefore I was involved personally in that direction. One actually died.<sup>62</sup>

Those volunteers who returned from Spain, and perhaps more powerfully those who did not return, made the distant fighting of intense local concern throughout Britain and France.

For UCL Professor of Genetics, J.B.S. Haldane, his personal sympathies with the Republic were reinforced by the political commitments of his family. When his stepson volunteered for the International Brigades, his wife became Honorary Secretary of the Brigade's Dependants Aid Committee.<sup>63</sup> From March to May 1937 Charlotte Haldane worked in Paris as a translator assisting in the covert transportation of volunteers. Her son, Ronald Burghes, was eventually invalided back to Britain in autumn 1937.<sup>64</sup> Haldane himself went to Spain soon after his stepson. Haldane's research on gas warfare during the First World War made him a leading expert in the field, and he was invited to Madrid in December 1936 to devise possible means of civilian defence from such attacks for the Republican Government.<sup>65</sup> The war of 1914-1918 made gas warfare seem the greatest danger to soldiers and civilians alike, yet Haldane's work in Madrid, during which he gave lectures to the British volunteers on gas and grenade warfare, convinced him that the nature of modern warfare had changed from gas to aerial bombardment.<sup>66</sup> The political and professional effects of this change were most strongly felt in 1938, as Haldane's experiences in Spain made him one of the leading scientific experts and

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For example, Cambridge students knitted sweaters for the Brigade volunteers - Recorded interview with Sarah Henriques Harris, Reel 1, Side 1, 12533/4, Imperial War Museum.

<sup>61</sup> Philip Toynbee, *Friends Apart*, p. 86.

<sup>62</sup> "The Spanish War", p. 12 in CP/Ind/Kett/1, National Museum of Labour History.

<sup>63</sup> Charlotte Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, George Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1949, pp. 92 & 98.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> Knox, "Remembering Madrid", p. 36.

<sup>66</sup> Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, p. 75;

A number of volunteers left for Spain carrying gas masks including Lesser and Haldane's stepson. On 4 December 1936, there was a gas scare in Madrid as ten men were reported affected by gas from shells. A delegation of British MPs who were visiting the city around the same time called for British Foreign Office to make gas masks available to Republican Government as gas shells had already been used and civilians were so close to the front-lines that they were bound to be affected - Report of the Visit by an All Party Group of Members of Parliament to Spain, Spanish Embassy, London, pp. 15-16; Madrid: The 'Military' Atrocities of the Rebels, Labour Party, London, 1937, p. 14.

political activists on aerial warfare in Britain. At the same time, Haldane was writing letters to the News Chronicle in which he emphasised the strong morale and maintenance of order in Madrid despite the constant bombardment and high civilian casualties.<sup>67</sup> He also found time to share a bottle of scotch behind the lines in Madrid with student Bernard Knox when the latter was wounded.<sup>68</sup>

In early March 1937, news reached University College London that Sam Lesser had been badly wounded in leg and back during "the engagement in which Ralph Fox and John Cornford lost their lives".<sup>69</sup> A committee led by his friend and fellow Communist Brian Pearce was organised to send letters and magazines to his hospital in Ciudad Real. After a week, it was announced that Lesser was returning to London for treatment and would hopefully visit University College.<sup>70</sup>

When members of the International Brigades returned to their own countries, they often emerged at the forefront of domestic political conflicts. Some such as Edinburgh student and volunteer, David Mackenzie, took to the platform in mass meetings to aid Republican Spain and oppose non-intervention.<sup>71</sup> As a witness who had experienced the fighting at first hand, his testimony had the weight to rebut anti-Republican reports in the British press and newsreels.

Equally, Paris science student, Maurice Laban, twice wounded during the war, returned from Spain to campaign for the Republican cause. He vividly remembered the emotional farewell from his unit's political commissar in Spain, who had said,

Vous qui partez en France parce que vous ne pouvez plus lutter ici, il vous reste une autre arme, peut-être plus puissante que celles que vous avez eues entre les mains: la propagande. Ambassadeurs du peuple d'Espagne auprès des autres peuples, dites-leur bien ce que vous avez vu. Dites-leur la vérité, rien que la vérité, sans exagérer.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Madrid: The 'Military' Atrocities of the Rebels, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Knox, "Remembering Madrid", p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> Phineas, 2/3/1937, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Phineas, 9/3/1937, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> See Chapter Seven.

<sup>72</sup> "You who depart for France because you can no longer fight here, you remain with another weapon, maybe more powerful than that which you have had in your hands: propaganda. Ambassadors of the people of Spain to other peoples, tell them what you have seen. Tell the truth, nothing but the truth, without exaggeration" - Les Cahiers de la Jeunesse, 15/1/1939, p. 27.

It was often students who emerged as the most articulate ambassadors for the Republican cause, sharing the platform with politicians, intellectuals and other public figures.

### The Death of John Cornford

In late December 1936, Cornford and the remaining four members of the British sub-section were transferred south to participate in a Republican counter-offensive. On the 27 December 1936, John Cornford celebrated his twenty-first birthday on the Córdoba front, as head of a machine gun unit in a battalion of French volunteers. That night, or the following day, he was killed in action near the small village of Lopera, although the exact circumstances of his death remain uncertain.<sup>73</sup>

For those who were closest to his life, his family, close friends and Cambridge peers, Cornford's death was a deeply-felt tragedy. It was partly the strength of these personal feeling which meant that reactions to his death transcended party political boundaries within Cambridge culminating in a memorial appeal in his honour. Cornford's image also became a significant reference point for many at universities across Britain, and even internationally. At the same time, the way Cornford's life was memorialised and the efforts of others to give meaning to Cornford's death registered a particular view of the Spanish conflict and of intellectuals.

The confusion of battle meant that details were slow in arriving back to England.<sup>74</sup> As one of Cornford's closest friends and a comrade in the Communist Party, Michael Straight was one of the first in Cambridge to learn of events in mid-January 1937.<sup>75</sup> Straight was so shaken by the news of Cornford's death that in early 1937 he agreed to leave the university to work as a spy for the USSR.<sup>76</sup> After informing Cornford's family and Heinemann, Straight wrote an obituary which was

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<sup>73</sup> Stansky, & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, pp. 388-390.

<sup>74</sup> Saville, "Valentine Cunningham and the Poetry of the Spanish Civil War", p. 276.

<sup>75</sup> Straight, *After Long Silence*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-105;

The spy scandal surrounding the Cambridge quartet of Blunt, Burgess, Philby and Maclean created a stereotype of Cambridge Communists in the 1930s which had little to do with the university experiences of the vast majority of left-wing students - Stephen R. Parsons, "Communism in the Professions: The Organisation of the British Communist Party among Professional Workers, 1933-1956", PhD, University of Warwick, 1990, p. 13.

printed by The Cambridge Review in early February 1937.<sup>77</sup> The obituary described Cornford as Cambridge-born and educated. He had come from a prominent family in the university; he was a great grandson of Charles Darwin, both his grandfathers had attended Trinity College, as had his father who was Professor of Philosophy at the university. Even amongst those who did not meet him directly, his name was known across the campus, explaining the unique obituaries of The Cambridge Review and The Granta.<sup>78</sup> The profound resonance of Cornford's image around Cambridge was reflected in the widespread distribution of a photograph of him and the launching of a memorial appeal in his name (with that of George Maclaurin).<sup>79</sup>

The news of his death moved even those who were far from close to Cornford. A year behind Cornford at Stowe school, Jon Vickers had then followed him to Cambridge to read Modern History. Yet Vickers was initially apathetic to politics, and had a fairly disparaging view of his senior. As he remembered,

I was very affected by John Cornford being killed, but not in the way that you might think perhaps - rather in the way that Yeats' poem Easter 1916 describes, in that I thought he was a bit of an ass, a bit of an eccentric, and here he was going out and doing something that was really rather fine. That made me think rather hard about myself. It wasn't so much someone I'd admired, it was rather the other way round.

I knew him personally. We were at school together, although he was two years older.

His death made me ask some questions. What made him do it? I then came to the conclusion that this had been quite a sensible thing - in fact a very sensible thing - to do. That made me think that other things which I hadn't thought of as sensible were perhaps more sensible than they had seemed.

I'm sure that was the thing that got me thinking.<sup>80</sup>

Cornford's death at the beginning of 1937 encouraged Vickers into political activism, and he joined the CUSC, eventually becoming its secretary.

Cornford's image was a powerful symbol of political engagement for others in universities outside Cambridge. James Klugmann, who had shared the

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<sup>77</sup> The Cambridge Review, 5/2/1937, p. 228;

Stansky & Abrahams, Journey to the Frontier, p. 390.

<sup>78</sup> Two former Cambridge students, George Maclaurin and Lorrimer Birch, had been killed in the International Brigades before Cornford, however there was almost no organised publicity over their deaths within the university.

<sup>79</sup> Recorded interview with Sarah Henriques Harris, Reel 1, Side 1, 12533/4, Imperial War Museum.

<sup>80</sup> "Recollections of a Younger World", pp. 390-391.

leadership of Cambridge Communist students with Cornford, was probably responsible for the obituary which was printed in Paris, by La Voix des Étudiants.<sup>81</sup> Though Cornford's photo was confused with that of Belgian student Pierre Bruchet, it reveals the far greater prominence of British student volunteers, even in France.<sup>82</sup> Interestingly in Oxford, there was less coverage of Cornford's death than in Paris, The Cherwell seemed more concerned to claim volunteer Giles Romilly as Oxford's own.<sup>83</sup> The LSE Union unanimously voted its condolences over the death of John Cornford at a meeting on 10 February 1937, where 120 students were present.<sup>84</sup>

At University College London in March 1937, a short story in the student magazine described the death of a 21 year-old English student in the fighting around Madrid.<sup>85</sup> The age of the hero, its setting and the timing of the story's publication suggest it was modelled on Cornford whose death had been announced the previous month. The short story also reveals the origins of some of the images used in the following pacifist article in the same issue:

For many months now in Spain there has been raging a war terrible to think of. Civil war is always ghastly. This war touches students in particular, because it is a war between two forces of political opinion. Students have felt their cause to be right, and have gone out to fight for it. This is commendable only in that these young men - and women too - have believed in their cause utterly, willing to die for it. From all other viewpoints it is a pitiful thing that these young people, in the prime of life, destined for great things, some of them, should go out to Spain and throw their lives away in a fight for justice. I need mention no names, all will know of someone who has gone and will never return, leaving the world a poorer place by his loss. Was it worth it? Have they thrown away their lives in vain? No, they died supporting the best possible cause - freedom and justice. But how much more they could have done if they had lived.<sup>86</sup>

The rhetorical scope of the article seems out of key, given that only four UCL students volunteered to fight in Spain and the first death from this group was recorded in the following issue. Even that death conflicts with the image of the article for it was that of a 40 year old mature-aged student, who had studied

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<sup>81</sup> La Voix des Etudiants, Feb 1937, pp. 12-13.

<sup>82</sup> For Belgian reactions to the death of Bruchet, who was killed on 11 November 1936 in Madrid see Georgette Smolski, "L'ULB devant la Guerre d'Espagne", Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine, 18, 1-2, 1987, p. 421.

<sup>83</sup> The Cherwell, 6/2/1937, p. 50

<sup>84</sup> Minutes of 10/2/1937, Coll Misc 649 2/4, LSE Archives.

<sup>85</sup> University College Magazine, March 1937, pp. 162-3.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 109-110.

engineering at UCL from 1932 to 1934 and had previously worked on London's docks and fought in the First World War. As his obituary noted ,

He went out to Spain, not as a young idealist, but as a man who knew what war is like and who knew why he wanted to fight.<sup>87</sup>

Clearly Cornford's image had a powerful national appeal almost immediately. To the extent that there was a direct student presence in Spain, it was mythologised around him.

In death, John Cornford also became a political symbol for the defenders of the Spanish Republic. An open letter from the leaders of Cambridge University Socialist Club used his death to attack the conservatism and anti-communism of the Labour party leadership. They wrote that,

The whole of John Cornford's great work was directed towards the creation of unity. He fought while he lived for the unity of the working-class in this country, he died fighting in the united working-class of Spain.<sup>88</sup>

This description of Cornford as the embodiment of the Communist Party's Popular Front strategy was in many ways a misrepresentation of his politics. Despite Cornford's work from 1935 in campaigning for the merger of Socialist and Communist students groups within Cambridge, Britain and then internationally, this amounted to a re-writing of the sectarianism which had first attracted him to politics and had characterised most of his political life. Cornford was one of those who in the words of another Cambridge communist, Eric Hobsbawm, "joined the party in the stalinist period and largely because of its stalinism, i.e. because they welcomed the construction of a totally devoted, disciplined, realistic, anti-romantic army of revolution".<sup>89</sup> Rather than the image of the young student, poet or intellectual which quickly became enshrined in popular memory, Cornford's foremost identity was his exceptional political commitment. In the words of another volunteer who met him in Spain, he was a "Real Communist".<sup>90</sup>

Cornford's death reveals how the volunteers of the International Brigades made Spain a direct and tangible concern for those they left behind. Politics and personal emotion mixed, facilitating new campaigns such as that for humanitarian aid which was launched in Cornford's name in February 1937.

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<sup>87</sup> *Phineas*, 27/4/1937, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Letter signed by G.P. Croasdell, J.P. Astbury, M.J.C. Hodgart & Michael Straight, p. 2, "File: Notes for an Obituary" in John Cornford Collection, Trinity College Archives.

<sup>89</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays*, Phoenix, London, 1973, p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> Romilly, *Boadilla*, p. 183.

## Chapter 5

### Humanitarian Aid: July 1936-April 1937

Developing at the same time as the International Brigades and arms shipments to Spain were a multiplicity of humanitarian aid efforts for those affected by the war which were undertaken by a variety of groups outside Spain. The collection of medicine, money, food, clothing and other material for the combatants and non-combatants in Republican Spain, and far less frequently for Nationalist Spain, was perhaps one of the most prevalent forms of international activity over the civil war. While the historiography of the civil war has largely focused on military and political events, the importance of the international relief efforts it generated has been rightly recognised by several recent histories on British reactions to the conflict.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, such campaigns are almost totally absent from French historiography. This contrast between how the histories of the two countries have been written, suggests a deeper contrast between British and French aid efforts during the war, the ways in which such campaigns developed, and the different contours which this one form of political activity had in the two countries.

This chapter has two concerns: firstly to trace chronologically the development of various aid organisations and appeals during the civil war's first nine months (from July 1936 until April 1937), examining how in responding to particular events in Spain, such campaigns were also shaped by their own individual environments, concerns, and domestic political alignments. Secondly, the dominant characteristics of aid campaigns are contrasted between the two countries both in national politics and within the universities. Spanish relief developed in France through established political parties and trade unions, which gave it a far more 'politicised' character than in Britain where these organisations mixed with an array of 'non-political' groups in ad hoc coalitions for aid. For academics and students, the differences between national campaigns and coalitions in the two countries were fundamental in shaping their own aid efforts and whether these were organised outside or within the university.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, passim.

Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991.

## The Politics of Humanitarian Aid

In British historiography, humanitarian aid for Spain was first recognised as representing a broader definition of politics, which reflected popular concern with the civil war. Michael Alpert has rightly argued that part of the reason that campaigns for Spanish relief touched so many participants was that they encapsulated both political and non-political motives. The success of such campaigns was that they "allowed the participation of people who would perhaps have striven to avoid association with any politically identified group".<sup>2</sup> Alpert seems to imply that political motives and concerns were simply diametrically opposed to non-political ones, instead of seeing them as overlapping and interacting.<sup>3</sup> The term 'humanitarian' can be used to escape such a definitional dichotomy by combining political and non-political motives, for they co-existed, intertwined and were often blurred together in the various campaigns.

An exact definition of the political character of specific aid campaigns in either country is particularly difficult. Common to the propaganda and publicity of almost all relief work were appeals for 'non-partisan' or 'non-political' support, above mere party politics. Yet, when such claims were made by the established parties themselves or their committed activists they obviously had a political resonance. The key is to balance the broad language of the appeals with the political contexts in which they were formulated. The intentions of the organisations which sponsored them, the perceptions of their supporters and how they developed over time, are all crucial factors which gave meaning to the appeals.

The majority of relief efforts during the civil war was either explicitly or implicitly pro-Republican, as the Republican Government was seen on the left as representing 'the Spanish people', 'the Spanish workers' or more simply the 'true Spain'. Within pro-Republican relief, there were varying levels and motives of support, which are not reducible to merely party terms, though in both countries the tensions between Communists and Socialists were a major factor in shaping how aid developed. Differences and divisions between campaigns were broader

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Alpert, "Humanitarianism and Politics in the British Response to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-9", *European History Quarterly*, 14, 4, Oct 1984, p. 433.

<sup>3</sup> Buchanan strongly argues that the leadership of the British Labour movement mobilised humanitarian campaigns for the Spanish Republic to depoliticise its ranks - Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, p. 118-119.

Conversely, the CPGB campaigned on humanitarian issues in an attempt to gain a broader political base. The tactics cut both ways, suggesting that humanitarian efforts have no implicit political or 'non-political' character but depended on individual circumstances.



than strict definitions of 'politics', but were often centred on the very purpose and methods of aid in the war.

Despite appreciating how the broad appeal of humanitarian aid quantitatively expanded political participation, Alpert did not examine how the same campaigns qualitatively changed the political arena. The 'soft' politics of relief also had a significant impact on the 'hard' politics of other aspects of the war, such as reactions to non-intervention and perceptions of the Republic. Equally, these other issues, as well as the changing positions of the established parties and unions, formed the political background against which relief, promoted as 'non-political', developed. What is needed is a broader conception of the 'political' which recognises the different motives, aims and levels of commitment that distinguished the various aid campaigns and coalitions from each other.

The political meaning of humanitarian relief was the central point of contention between the first two studies of British aid efforts during the Spanish civil war. Jim Fyrth's The Signal Was Spain: The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain 1936-39 argued that humanitarian efforts during the war fuelled a popular movement which drew together a range of political, religious and other groups in a dozen major relief campaigns and over a thousand local committees.<sup>4</sup> The scale of the campaigns which Fyrth describes, their number of participants and the funds they collected, suggest that the war in Spain was far more than merely "a question for the few".<sup>5</sup> Central to The Signal Was Spain is the argument that the wide-ranging ad hoc coalition of support for relief campaigns represented a Popular Front extending across political parties, religion and class.<sup>6</sup> For Fyrth, this coalition was always a political one, committed to anti-fascism and to supporting the Spanish Republic, through the political act of providing aid.<sup>7</sup>

Fyrth's conception of a British Popular Front united to aid Spain has been challenged by the work of Tom Buchanan who has rightly stressed how such a reading marginalises not only the substantial relief efforts of the organised labour

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<sup>4</sup> Jim Fyrth, The Signal Was Spain, p. 21.

Fyrth also stresses the common political culture which developed around these campaigns of meetings, leaflets, films, concerts and collections - Jim Fyrth, "The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1939-39", History Workshop, 35, Spring 1993, pp. 155-156.

<sup>5</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945, p. 398;

Fyrth estimates around a dozen major national campaigns in Britain which raised two million pounds and material for 29 foodships during the course of the war - Fyrth, "The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1939-39", p. 155;

Fyrth, The Signal Was Spain, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Fyrth, The Signal Was Spain, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Fyrth, "The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1939-39", p. 162.

movement but also the reactions of those who were not politically committed to the Republic.<sup>8</sup> While Buchanan recognises that local coalitions between diverse groups were formed across the country to send humanitarian aid to Spain, he argues that these never became a coherent mass movement.<sup>9</sup> Buchanan's primary objection to Fyrth's work is the unitary political character which is implied in his conception of an Aid Spain movement. Buchanan argues,

... it must be borne in mind that the idea of an 'Aid Spain Movement' is one imposed with hindsight. No such body existed at the time. Moreover, the term clearly has a political connotation. It was first coined by the Communist Daily Worker (which listed 'Aid Spain' donations) and cannot be isolated from the broader Communist project of seeking to establish a position of leadership in solidarity with the Spanish Republic. The myth has persisted that 'Aid Spain', however defined, was the only legitimate avenue for supporting the Spanish Republicans: in practice there were myriad avenues, all equally legitimate. All of the various institutions involved in helping the Spanish republic - political, religious, and humanitarian - had their own interests and objectives.<sup>10</sup>

Buchanan is right to stress the differences between, and within, the various aid campaigns. Relief efforts were separated not merely by politics, but by their conceptions of aid itself - whether it was for combatants as well as non-combatants, whether it was for Republicans, Nationalists, or both.

There are no French parallels to the work of Fyrth and Buchanan on humanitarian aid during the Spanish civil war. Given the detailed histories of popular pressures in the formation of *Rassemblement Populaire* and the *grèves sur le tas* of June 1936, the absence of any major study on French relief efforts for Spain is a surprising silence.<sup>11</sup> Despite the CGT's major role in organising humanitarian aid during the war, authors have preferred to focus on its role in the industrial conflicts of June 1936 and November 1938.

Given this gap in the historiography, before we examine how campaigns for humanitarian aid developed in French universities, we must first outline the hitherto ignored national relief efforts which developed during the 1930s. Fortunately, national and university campaigns in France were much more closely

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Buchanan, "Britain's Popular Front?: Aid Spain and the British Labour Movement", History Workshop, 31, Spring 1991, p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71.

<sup>10</sup> Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, pp. 96-97.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, The Popular Front in France, passim.; Georges Lefranc, Histoire du Front Populaire 1934-1938, 2nd ed., Payot, Paris, 1974, passim.

inter-connected than their British counterparts, as academics played a large role as patrons in the former. In Britain, though the works of Fyrth and Buchanan have provided a comprehensive picture of the national aid campaigns, the variety of aid which developed within British universities and their inter-action with national campaigns have received far less attention. The contrast between the ways Spanish relief touched universities in the two countries is not merely in terms of what has been written by historians, but was also shaped by the distinct political space available in Britain and France at the time, by the organisation of aid in the two countries and by their existing university structures and traditions.

## Humanitarian Aid in France

### The October Revolution, the Frente Popular and France

French reactions to the civil war which broke out in Spain in 1936 were fundamentally shaped by a strong concern over the preceding two years with Iberian politics. Two events were particularly significant for both the French left and the right in increasing this awareness: the October Revolution of 1934 and the triumph of the Frente Popular coalition in the national elections of February 1936. Both events created perceptions and encouraged campaigns which gave the civil war a powerful resonance across the border. The vigour and immediacy of French reactions to the *pronunciamiento* in July 1936 are only explicable by these earlier engagements and concern with Spanish politics.

In October 1934, a cabinet crisis resulted in the entry of the Catholic party of the right, the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA), into a coalition government.<sup>12</sup> This sparked a revolt by the Spanish left who saw the CEDA as the precursor of fascism which had so recently triumphed in Germany, Austria, and almost France. Led by the Socialist trade union, the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), and including anarchists, Communists and Catalan nationalists, the rising was quickly quelled in Madrid and Barcelona. In the Asturias the revolution held on for several weeks until the area was reconquered by the Foreign Legion. The fighting left between 1,500 and 2,000 dead, and this was followed by the imprisonment of thousands (including the leadership of the Spanish left), as well as further killings and torture.<sup>13</sup> The severity of the repression

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 133.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143-144.

by the Spanish military and the judiciary roused a strong reaction from the left in France, partly because of the close personal connections between activists in the two countries.<sup>14</sup> In late November 1934, CVIA's national committee sent a telegram to the Spanish government objecting to the brutal treatment of the defeated rebels.<sup>15</sup> Events in 1934 generated a strong sense of solidarity between the left of the two countries, particularly as both saw themselves trying to combat a domestic 'fascism' which had tried to take power that year, from the streets in France in February, and through the state in Spain in October.

For CVIA, as well as for many party *militants*, political protests also found material expression in the activities of the Comité d'Aide aux Victimes du Fascisme Espagnol.<sup>16</sup> The president of the Comité d'Aide was Henri Wallon, lecturer at the Sorbonne on child psychology, and also a member of the CVIA bureau.<sup>17</sup> Wallon, though not a member of the PCF, had strong communist sympathies after visiting the USSR in the early 1930s, which was reflected in his support for the Cercle de la Russie Neuve.<sup>18</sup> For Wallon and other academics of the left, their interest in the Spanish political battleground predated the war by almost two years.

Outside of Paris, reactions to the repression of the Spanish left reinforced the currents of co-operation and united action amongst local parties of the Rassemblement Populaire. In Toulouse, the SFIO and PCF held a joint meeting for Spanish political prisoners in early November 1934.<sup>19</sup> This co-operation became formalised in a Comité de Défense des Victimes de la Répression formed to protest events in Spain as well as the arrest of left activists in Toulouse. The Comité de Défense included all the parties of the local section of Rassemblement Populaire and the town's Socialist Mayor.<sup>20</sup> At the same time as local political parties were

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<sup>14</sup> Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", pp. 40-41;

Vigilance, 5/11/1934, pp. 9-11;

For the PCF's role as mentor to the PCE - Serrano, L'Enjeu Espagnol, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Vigilance, 20/11/1934, p. 8;

Paul Langevin and Jean Perrin had signed telegrams to protest the repression in Spain in the previous issue - Vigilance, 5/11/1934, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Vigilance, 5/1/1935, p. 12.

The following issue contained a protest at the execution of 25 Spanish miners - Vigilance, 20/1/1935, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Vigilance, 25/2/1935, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Dictionnaire Biographique du Mouvement Ouvrier Français, Vol 43, p. 336.

<sup>19</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 2/11/1934, p. 3.

This was paralleled in Bordeaux by the formation of a Comité d'Entr'aide aux Réfugiés Espagnols - Report of 28/11/1934, 1 M 444, AD Gironde.

<sup>20</sup> Reports of 6/12/1934 & 23/12/1934, 1945 W 140, AD Haute-Garonne.

One difficulty with local aid organisations at this time and during the Spanish civil war is that due to the variations in their titles as reported in the local press, their relationship with other national and local bodies is sometimes unclear.

engaging in closer co-operation, a Comité Populaire d'Aide aux Victimes du Fascisme en Espagne et Orphelins des Révolutionnaires held a gala of Spanish drama and music at the Foyer du Peuple.<sup>21</sup> This was followed by another performance for aid in mid-December 1934.<sup>22</sup> On 10 February 1935, Wallon chaired a mass meeting against the repression of the Spanish left which was held in Toulouse with 800 national delegates drawn from the SFIO, PCF, LDH, CGT, CGTU and anti-fascist committees.<sup>23</sup> The continuing protests and the national fundraising efforts of the Comité d'Aide aux Victimes du Fascisme Espagnol represented in many ways the direct predecessor to the humanitarian aid campaigns that would later develop in France during the civil war.

In February 1936, Wallon was one of the signatories to a joint telegram by CVIA and the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, enthusiastically welcoming the new Frente Popular government in Spain and its amnesty for prisoners from the 1934 revolts.<sup>24</sup> The Spanish elections of that month were the second key event which shaped French pre-war conceptions of Spain. With their own national elections to be held in late April and early May 1936, both the French left and right were extremely sensitive to potential parallels with the politics developing across the Pyrenees border.<sup>25</sup> The success of the Spanish left was to a large degree a surprise. Despite the very different coalitions they represented, the Frente Popular and Front Populaire were seen by supporters and opponents as closely connected movements. For the French left the success of the Frente Popular represented the possibilities of left unity, whereas for the French right the increasing street violence that followed the Spanish elections would recur in France if the Front Populaire were elected. Across the political spectrum, the confrontations and coalitions which were developing in Spain were seen as a potential mirror for France's own domestic divisions.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Report of 7/11/1935, 1945 W 140, AD Haute-Garonne.

<sup>22</sup> Clipping of 20/11/1934, 1945 W 140, AD Haute-Garonne.

<sup>23</sup> *Vigilance*, 25/2/1935, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Vigilance*, 15/2/1936, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> David W. Pike, "Reaction in France to the Frente Popular and its Victory (January-July 1936)", unpublished paper at Conference: Spain in an International Context 1936-1959, University of the West of England, Bristol, 18-20 July 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Joel Colton, "The Formation of the French Popular Front 1934-1936", in Martin S. Alexander, & Helen Graham, eds., *The French and Spanish Popular Fronts: Comparative Perspectives*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 21.

## *Aidez l'Espagne: The Rassemblement Populaire*

The previous concern and heightened awareness of Spanish events which had developed over the preceding two years, meant that when the civil war erupted in mid-1936, French reactions were immediate. Two days after the first military rising, the Front Populaire government had agreed to the Frente Popular's request for military supplies. Equally, for the parties and trade unions of the French left the commitment to provide material support for the besieged Spanish Republic developed within the first weeks of the war. Just as during 1934, these efforts were shaped by the existing coalition of the Rassemblement Populaire. On 30 July 1936 in the Salle Wagram, the Rassemblement Populaire organised a mass rally in support of the Spanish Republic which *L'Humanité* described as, "*C'est le Paris du Front Populaire qui est venu ce soir*".<sup>27</sup> The following day, a meeting was held to unite the left's aid efforts for Republican Spain which was organised by the PCF's Secours Rouge.<sup>28</sup> Arising out of this meeting a Commission de Solidarité du Rassemblement Populaire pour l'Aide au Peuple Espagnol was founded, including representatives of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, CGT, PCF, Radicals, SFIO, Amsterdam-Pleyel, and Secours Rouge.<sup>29</sup> Victor Basch, as President of the Rassemblement Populaire, was named as President of the Commission de Solidarité, while its co-Treasurers were elected from the CGT and Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. As with many of the coalitions for humanitarian aid later established in Britain, Communist activism in their foundation gave the Party a key administrative role. As principal initiators of the meeting, the pro-Communist organisation Secours Rouge provided the bulk of the secretariat and staff for the Commission.<sup>30</sup> The Commission's tasks included maintaining a unified list of subscriptions and donations of aid for the Republic, arranging the provision of cards and stamps of solidarity, and organising national fundraising days of solidarity, *fêtes*, and meetings for Spanish relief.<sup>31</sup>

The first public appeal of the Commission de Solidarité was launched the following week in the national press of the SFIO and PCF. A target of one million francs worth of aid to be raised before 15 August 1936 was announced, which would go to providing medicine and aid for the wounded as well as food for Republican soldiers and their families.<sup>32</sup> The appeal reflects the blurring of

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<sup>27</sup> *L'Humanité*, 31/7/1936, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Le Populaire*, 5/8/1936, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 195.

<sup>30</sup> Serrano, *L'Enjeu Espagnol*, pp 220-221.

<sup>31</sup> *Le Populaire*, 5/8/1936, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *L'Humanité*, 5/8/1936, p. 3.

*Le Populaire*, 5/8/1936, p. 1.

humanitarian relief for combatants and non-combatants in the civil war's initial stages when there were few clear distinctions between the military and home front. On 8 August 1936, the Commission de Solidarité held its first Parisian meeting for Republican Spain at the Vélodrome d'Hiver, which was followed a day later by the departure from Paris of two trucks carrying condensed milk, sugar, food and coffee.<sup>33</sup> By 16 August 1936, the Commission de Solidarité was able to publish that 1,065,376 francs had been donated for Republican Spain.<sup>34</sup>

While the Rassemblement Populaire symbolised the broad appeal of solidarity with Republican Spain across the French left, it remained merely a co-ordinating body. From its formal birth in July 1935, the Rassemblement Populaire had always represented a coalition of co-ordinated, rather than co-operative, action. Each of its affiliated organisations maintained their own distinct memberships, activities and policies.<sup>35</sup> Revealingly, the day after the Commission de Solidarité published in the pages of *Le Populaire* that over one million francs of aid had been raised, the journal printed an appeal by the SFIO's Federation of the Seine which reminded its members of its own collections of money and goods, including conserves, chocolate and underwear.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, while humanitarian aid for Republican Spain became the central focus for many French parties of the left and trade unions, separate campaigns were directed within each organisation, rather than mounted across the Rassemblement Populaire.

Within a week of the military risings in Spain, both Victor Basch as President of Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, and Paul Rivet for CVIA had sent telegrams of solidarity to the Republic's President and Prime Minister.<sup>37</sup> CVIA's telegram read, "*Dix mille intellectuels antifascistes expriment au gouvernement espagnol ardente sympathie et foi en victoire définitive contre fascisme armé*".<sup>38</sup> This sympathy had found concrete expression on 26 July 1936, as Paris members of CVIA had spontaneously organised the shipment of 12,500 francs worth of condensed milk and medical supplies to Barcelona by truck.<sup>39</sup> Within three days the Paris section of CVIA had raised 9,000 francs towards covering the initial cost of this initial aid, and during August 1936

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<sup>33</sup> *Le Populaire*, 9/8/1936, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Le Populaire*, 16/8/1936, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> The failure of CIVA's mixed membership in June 1936 is quite significant in this regard, for there was no other major organisation apart from the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme which shared its membership with other parties.

<sup>36</sup> *Le Populaire*, 17/8/1936, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Les Cahiers des Droits de l'Homme*, 10/8/1936, p. 596;

*Vigilance*, 31/7/1936, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Vigilance*, 31/7/1936, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

over 61,000 francs were contributed nationally by CVIA for further relief work. Amongst the donors for CVIA's Spanish aid were Sorbonne Professors Louis Lopicque and Victor Auger, as well as the Joliot-Curies who donated 500 francs.<sup>40</sup>

Alongside CVIA's efforts, the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme engaged in its own fundraising, which while not as quickly improvised was able to draw on a far more extensive national membership.<sup>41</sup> By the end of August 1936, the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme had raised 380,000 francs for Spanish relief.<sup>42</sup> These separate appeals amongst intellectual groups were paralleled by independent appeals by the SFIO and PCF. The newspapers of both parties sought to use the publication of subscription lists and publicity for their own aid efforts to mobilise their memberships within the party and to recruit new members.

The fragmented character of French aid appeals marked even the efforts of the CGT, the newly re-unified national trade union which was responsible for the largest aid efforts during the civil war. Five days after the outbreak of the revolt, the CGT's General Secretary Léon Jouhaux had sent a message to UGT leader Largo Caballero expressing fraternal admiration for their fight against fascism and assuring the Spanish proletariat of the CGT's complete solidarity.<sup>43</sup> On 29 July 1936 the CGT launched its first appeal, published in L'Humanité and Le Populaire under the title "Au Secours du Peuple Espagnol".<sup>44</sup> Aimed at local, departmental and national sections of French union movement, the appeal read:

La solidarité doit être agissante et efficace. Des fonds sont indispensables pour assurer le ravitaillement de la population, secourir les blessés, panser les plaies de la guerre civile.<sup>45</sup>

After a fortnight, the CGT reported regular and enthusiastic contributions.<sup>46</sup> By that time, it had already sent 250,000 francs worth of anti-gangrene and tetanus medicine to Spain, and another 50,000 francs to the International Solidarity Fund of the Labour and Socialist International for the "same object".<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Vigilance, 15/9/1936, pp. 28, 30 & 31.

<sup>41</sup> In mid-1937 the Ligue numbered approximately 140,000 members - Madeleine Reberieux, "Victor Basch et les Droits de l'Homme", in Michel Denis, Michel Lagrée & Jean-Yves Veillard, eds., L'Affaire Dreyfus et l'Opinion Publique: en France et à l'Étranger, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 1995, pp. 102 & 110.

<sup>42</sup> Serrano, L'Enjeu Espagnol, p. 224.

<sup>43</sup> La Voix du Peuple, July-Aug. 1936, p. 483.

<sup>44</sup> L'Humanité, 29/7/1936, p. 2.

Le Populaire, 29/7/1936, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> "The solidarity has to be active and effective. The supplies are indispensable to assure the resupplying of the population, to help the wounded, to dress the wounds of the civil war" - La Voix du Peuple, July-Aug. 1936, p. 484.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



The speed of the CGT's response to events in Spain, meant that its aid appeal remained distinct from the newly-created Commission de Solidarité of the Rassemblement Populaire. Though the latter would sometimes publicly include the CGT's appeal funds within its own total, the CGT raised twice as much money as the other organisations within the Commission de Solidarité.<sup>48</sup> The distinctiveness of the two appeals was confirmed by a report in mid-January 1937 that the CGT had made a contribution of 600,000 francs to the funds of Rassemblement Populaire, revealing the tight control the CGT exercised over the direction of its own fundraising.<sup>49</sup> This financial control was true at both a national and local level, such as in Toulouse where union officials held the office of Treasurer in the local fundraising appeals.

### *Aidez l'Espagne: French Academics and Students*

The extent to which existing political organisations in France swiftly reacted to the civil war is striking. The speed of relief appeals reflected the continuity with which the Rassemblement Populaire mobilised in defence of the Frente Popular. The academics who had become figureheads for left unity during 1934 and 1935 at either a national or local level, continued in these roles through meetings and appeals for the Spanish Republic. Yet, as will be considered later, despite the national prominence of academics such as Basch, Langevin, Wallon and others, the few aid campaigns which would develop within French universities, like the national aid movement itself, did so within the framework established by the major parties.

Moving away from the national organisations which were largely interacting on the Paris stage, it is striking that regional aid efforts developed out of the local Rassemblement Populaire committees. In towns like Bordeaux and Toulouse from late July 1936 onwards, the fundraising and collections for the Spanish Republic reinforced the existing local coalitions between the SFIO, PCF, CGT, Secours Rouge and the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. In Bordeaux 3,500 people attended a meeting of the Rassemblement Populaire for Spain at which the keynote speaker was Communist Paul Vaillant-Courtourier.<sup>50</sup> In Toulouse at the same time, a Comité d'Aide du Peuple Espagnol was formed out of the efforts of the local Secours Rouge

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<sup>48</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Aidez l'Espagnol*, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> Report of 31/7/1936, 1 M 57, AD Haute-Garonne.

and the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme with representatives from the SFIO, PCF and CGT.<sup>51</sup> The new committee was based in the Bourse du Travail, and the local union secretary acted as Treasurer for relief funds. On 6 August 1936, the local SFIO and unions organised a *soirée artistique* to benefit Spanish anti-fascists through their own public subscription.<sup>52</sup> The following week, Le Midi Socialiste printed an appeal for relief funds to be directed to Treasurer of the SFIO Federation, revealing how each party sought to mobilise its own members within its distinct campaigns.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of existing parties in organising humanitarian relief perhaps explains why there were so few campaigns organised around French universities. During the war's early stages, there were several pro-Republican meetings by students in Paris and Toulouse organised by LAURS, Socialist and Communist activists, but few details have survived.<sup>54</sup> Students do represent a striking absence from the columns of donors listed by the major party newspapers, and given the parties' willingness to highlight their other activities it seems probable that there were few distinct university campaigns or collections. Equally, it was unlikely that nationalist students were much involved in one of the few pro-Franco aid efforts in France, which was organised by the followers of Action Française in Toulouse.<sup>55</sup> This appeal for clothes and shoes for the nationalist army, sponsored by the French colony in San Sebastian, seems largely a one-off attack against the efforts of the French left rather than a sustained campaign for the Nationalist cause.

At the same time the Toulouse group of Secours Rouge was appealing to the Spanish residents of the town for moral and material aid.<sup>56</sup> The activism of French communists in organising humanitarian aid, and a few months later volunteers for the International Brigades, often ran together. In Lille, the PCF and Secours Rouge were accused of recruiting volunteers by making the Bourse du Travail a base for collections of material and men.<sup>57</sup> Equally in Marseille, PCF sections and the leader of Secours Rouge were recruiting volunteers at the same time as collecting food and

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<sup>51</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 5/8/1936, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> La Dépêche, 4/8/1936, p. 6;

Le Midi Socialiste, 4/8/1936 p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 14/8/1936, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> La Voix des Étudiants, Dec 1936, p. 8;

It was reported at the LSE that "the association of the Friends of Republican Spain, originating with the students of Toulouse University spread rapidly throughout France" - The Clare Market Review, March 1937, p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> L'Express du Midi, 22/11/1936, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> La Dépêche, 4/8/1936, p. 6.

Le Midi Socialiste, 3/8/1936, p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Reports of 19/11/1936 & 8/12/1936 in M149-35, AD Nord.

clothes for Spain.<sup>58</sup> This mixing of military and humanitarian aid largely occurred in PCF strongholds, revealing the extent to which local aid campaigns for Spain, and the coalitions that supported them depended on the contours of the local community.

### Humanitarian Aid in Britain

As in France, the first humanitarian aid campaigns which developed in Britain over the Spanish civil war were initiated by the organised labour movement. However, unlike France where the PCF were strong enough to directly challenge the SFIO, the strong opposition of the leadership of the Labour Party and TUC to collective action with the Communist Party quickly encouraged aid campaigns outside party frameworks. It was the proliferation of these largely ad-hoc campaigns and coalitions reaching across and outside established political divisions which formed the focus of Jim Fyrth's work, and for which there was no French parallel.<sup>59</sup> French relief campaigns were formed out of established political groups and coalitions, which meant that they were highly politicised, whereas in Britain, the organisation of aid was far less tied to the boundaries of party politics.

### The Spanish Medical Aid Committee

With neither the mass support of the PCF, nor the existing alliance of the Rassemblement Populaire, British Communists channelled their activism into creating new coalitions for Spanish relief. The Spanish Medical Aid Committee was formed in early August 1936 out of such initiatives, in cooperation with the Socialist Medical Association which was affiliated to the Labour Party.<sup>60</sup> On 23 August 1936 the SMAC's first British Medical Unit left London to establish a hospital for Republican forces on the Aragon front. The Unit numbered 21 volunteers including 4 surgeons, 4 medical students and 6 nurses.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Report of 31/10/1936, M6 10899, AD Bouches du Rhone;  
Report of 8/2/1937 M6 10900, AD Bouches du Rhone;  
Report of 5/2/1937 M6 10898, AD Bouches du Rhone.

<sup>59</sup> Jim Fyrth, *The Signal was Spain*, passim.

<sup>60</sup> Letter of 8/8/1936, DSM(2)-6, University of Hull Archives.

Draft of 26/11/1936, no 280 in Ms Addison dep c 202, Bodleian Library.

<sup>61</sup> Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, p. 48.

The unit was lead by Sinclair Loutitt, who at age 23 was a veteran of both the Cambridge University Socialist Society and the Communist Party - Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. 399.

While the SMAC became one of the leading British humanitarian efforts in the civil war, at a national level it was subject to the strong tensions between its committee of activists and the leadership of the Labour Party and TUC. The latter ultimately choose to cease funding the SMAC in November 1936 due to the prominence of Communists in its relief work. While these party political divisions have been well documented, less attention has been given to the different levels of politicisation within the SMAC's campaigns. Ultimately the political character of local relief efforts must be determined by their particular context, with reference to their supporters, the nature of their aims and appeals, the specific community they developed within, and background events in Spain. This is particularly the case within British universities, where relief campaigns during the civil war created new coalitions and fuelled a quantitative and qualitative expansion of political concern.

Support for the SMAC extended far outside the labour movement, involving academics and students in campaigns within the university itself and in their surrounding communities. In Cambridge, the worlds of town and gown overlapped as revealed by a mid-October 1936 meeting for the SMAC. The meeting at the Guildhall for the British Medical Unit in Spain had an impressive list of sponsors from within the University, led by the Vice Chancellor, the President of Queens' College, the Mistress of Girton College, the Principal of Newnham College and Professors F.M. Cornford, D. Keilin, G.E. Moore, D.S. Robertson, J.A. Ryle, and J.B. Trend, as well as F.L. Lucas and Dr J. Needham.<sup>62</sup> The meeting was also supported by the Bishop of Ely and seven other clergy, including Professor Canon Charles Raven who agreed to chair the meeting.<sup>63</sup>

Canon Raven's public support for the SMAC symbolises the extent to which the war in Spain had built coalitions between politically divergent groups in Britain. Following the outbreak of the military revolt in Spain and at the end of the university summer holidays, Raven had written to J.D. Bernal pointing out the differences between their approaches to pacifism because of their respective political positions.<sup>64</sup> While Raven supported the socialist argument that social

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<sup>62</sup> Cambridge Review, 16/10/1936, p. 28.

<sup>63</sup> A similar appeal for the SMAC drawing support from academics and clergy had appeared in Leeds, signed by Professors Harvey and Smith with four local clergymen. Their letter appealed for funds and volunteers for the medical unit in Spain, noting that "All friends of suffering humanity and of all democratic causes must feel how terrible and urgent is the need for this relief which the Spanish Government is itself so inadequately equipped to give" - Yorkshire Press, 21/9/1936 in Box 6, Frank Smith Collection, University of Leeds Archives.

<sup>64</sup> Letter of 14/8/1936, Box 97, Bernal Collection, University Library, Cambridge.

change was needed to avoid war, he disagreed with Marxist theory as neither profound nor consistent. He contrasted the positive, constructive, and revolutionary steps made by the newly formed Peace Pledge Union to the utopianism of English communism. Raven wrote to Bernal,

You ask me whether we can co-operate. That is not easy to answer. We are agreed in our opposition to war and agreed that this involves a far-reaching constructive programme. But we disagree as to the basis of that programme; and this would, I fear, mean that as soon as we began to plead for peace we should find it necessary to disown one another's promises.<sup>65</sup>

Raven suggested that pacifists and communists might find common ground if they looked at wider issues; however, it was the specific events of the civil war in Spain which after July 1936 made such a coalition possible. Raven's letter sets out some of the political and theoretical differences amongst British supporters of the Spanish Republic which were bridged by humanitarian aid.

Raven opened the SMAC's Guildhall meeting of 18 October 1936 with a message of endorsement from the Archbishop of York. He then spoke of the tragic fighting in Spain, concluding that medical aid offered one outlet for sympathy, whatever the different political views of the audience.<sup>66</sup> Cambridge biochemist Professor J.R. Marrack spoke as co-Treasurer of the SMAC on the difficulties which were being faced by the Spanish government in improvising a medical service. He was followed by Communist activist Mrs Isobel Brown who, "described the heroism of the Spanish people as [she] had seen them marching badly armed or not armed at all to meet an enemy equipped with all the resources of modern warfare".<sup>67</sup> Her appeal for donations was followed by journalist J. Langdon-Davis who attacked non-intervention for allowing fascism in the Mediterranean to threaten European peace. The meeting collected 121 pounds for the SMAC, bringing the total amount raised in Cambridge during the civil war's first three months to 336 pounds. Despite the success of the meeting in appealing for broad support, there were limits to the 'soft' politics of aid as revealed by the University's Spanish Society and correspondence in The Cambridge Review.

Amongst the Guildhall meeting's sponsors had been Cambridge's Professor of Spanish, J.B. Trend, who because of his pro-Republican politics had also served on the Communist-organised Committee of Enquiry into Breaches of International

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Cambridge Review, 16/10/1936, p. 28.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Law Relating to the Intervention in Spain in the same month.<sup>68</sup> Trend was also President of the Cambridge University Spanish Society, a student group devoted to Spanish art, drama and literature which found itself increasingly drawn into politics by the war. The minutes of the 19 October 1936 meeting of the Spanish Society in Professor Trend's rooms at Christ's College recorded that,

The Secretary explained to those present that the resolution concerning support of the British Medical Aid Unit in Spain was involving the Society in association with other active political bodies in the University; an association which was giving cause for alarm to many of the members of the Society who took strong exception to the appearance of political partisanship which was being given to the Society.<sup>69</sup>

A resolution to discontinue subscription to Medical Aid was passed by nine votes to two; however, another motion to publicly dissociate the society from the Guildhall meeting was opposed by Professor Trend and two students. The motion was therefore changed to deny support for "political views which have any bearing on the present situation in Spain", in which form it was passed and published in The Cambridge Review.<sup>70</sup> The society's disengagement from the politics of the civil war was a political statement in itself. This disengagement was a common form of reaction to the civil war, undercutting the polarised image that reactions to Spain were either pro-Republican or pro-Franco.<sup>71</sup> Within universities many groups chose to avoid public politics in spite of the broad appeal of humanitarian aid campaigns such as the Spanish Medical Aid Committee.

A more antagonistic response to the SMAC meeting was contained in the letter from A.F. Wills to the Cambridge Review which opened by attacking the partisanship shown by leading members of the Spanish Society in the war.<sup>72</sup> Though not mentioned in the letter, Professor Trend was most certainly Wills' target. The letter argued that democratic government in Spain had ceased to exist, and that the Republic was now controlled by Marxist and Anarchist trade unions. Turning to the Guildhall meeting Wills wrote,

There are various ways of helping, without allowing ourselves to become mere - and, I regret to say, in most cases, ignorant - partisans. The maintenance of the 'British Medical Unit in Spain' or any other organisation,

<sup>68</sup> Cambridge Review, 9/10/1936, p. 3;

Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, p. 27.

<sup>69</sup> Minutes of 19/10/1936, Add 7978 Cambridge University Spanish Society, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> contra K.W. Watkins, Britain Divided: The Effect of the Spanish Civil War on British Opinion, Thomas Nelson & Sons, London, 1963, passim.

<sup>72</sup> Cambridge Review, 23/10/1936, p. 49.

on whichever side, which exists to alleviate the human suffering caused by civil war, constitute objects fully worthy of our practical support. But that support should derive from motives of human brotherhood; motives sufficient to transcend all personal or party feeling we may have in the struggle. In other words, the townsfolk of Cambridge and members of Cambridge University must not be asked to put their hands in their pockets under manifestly false pretences.<sup>73</sup>

In concluding his letter, Wills expressed his own Nationalist sympathies, with the hope that for the welfare of Spain, the war would be won by "the side which is the more truly patriotic of the two".<sup>74</sup> For Wills, Franco's forces represented not international fascism but the true Spain. His opponents shared this image of a true Spain, but of one which was defined by the Republic rather than Franco.<sup>75</sup> Wills' attack on the British left that "what is at stake now is of vital importance: Spain - Spain herself!", was echoed by supporters of the Republic against what they felt to be the hostile political agendas of British conservative or Catholic groups.<sup>76</sup> In both Britain and France, Republican and Nationalist supporters saw their side as representing the 'true' Spain. Therefore, when they spoke of aid for Spain, it was frequently a politically rather than geographically defined nation to which they referred. This image of a 'true Spain' which underlay political and humanitarian campaigns for both sides, was revealed by the replies to Wills' letter by two Cambridge communists.

Historian Roy Pascal rebutted Wills' charges that the Frente Popular was illegitimate on the grounds that, despite the changing composition of government in the war, it was still a democratic reflection of the Spanish people.<sup>77</sup> Wills' imputation of bad faith to the SMAC's humanitarian efforts were unwarranted, argued Pascal, for rather than attacking the political agenda of the British Medical unit, "he should not cover his partizanship [sic] over with a sugary and transparent coat of impartiality".<sup>78</sup> Student Michael Straight, who like Pascal was a Communist, also wrote stressing that the Republic was a democratic government which was both legitimate and representative. Straight employed a common Marxist interpretation of European fascism, when he wrote of Franco's forces,

If we take fascism to mean the continuance, by force of the capitalist system in the face of an attempt by the working class to replace it by a system of

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 33-36.

<sup>76</sup> *Cambridge Review*, 23/10/1936, p. 49.

<sup>77</sup> *Cambridge Review*, 30/10/1936, p. 68.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

socialism, then the rebellion is most certainly a fascist rebellion.<sup>79</sup> Faced with the dictatorship and martial law of General Franco, Straight concluded that democracy would be impossible, hence the heroic unarmed resistance to international fascism and Franco's Moorish troops.

Wills' reply to Pascal and Straight focused on the initial SMAC meeting rather than on their general arguments in favour of the Republic. He wrote, I do not think any member of the Cambridge Committee, present on the platform in the Guildhall on Sunday, October 11th will deny that that meeting, advertised as a non-political one, was (apart from the Chairman's and Dr Marrack's speeches), in effect - and more particularly *after* the bulk of the donations had been handed in - other than an anti-Fascist ramp. *That* is what I mean by 'false pretences'.<sup>80</sup>

While the academics and clergy who were patrons of the SMAC's humanitarian appeal in Cambridge had often explicitly disavowed political labels, for Wills the appeal was still politicised by its pro-Republican character. The debate in The Cambridge Review and the withdrawal from politics by the Spanish Society revealed that opponents of the Spanish Republic questioned or at least distanced themselves from humanitarian relief, especially where it was strongly pro-Republican or linked to other political debates such as those over non-intervention.

### **The Chancellor's Initiative: The Scottish Ambulance Unit**

The contrast between the Spanish Medical Aid Committee and the less studied Scottish Ambulance Unit highlights how different levels of politicisation fuelled different conceptions of humanitarian aid. Scottish efforts were initially intended as a northern parallel to the SMAC, but due to their differing conceptions of relief, the two organisations quickly assumed different forms. As the SMAC recorded,

A few days after the formation of this Committee, Sir Daniel Stevenson, of Glasgow, wired to the Secretary for particulars and a representative of Sir Daniel interviewed members of the Committee in London in order to ascertain the activities that were being undertaken. It was suggested by the Committee that Sir Daniel and his supporters in Glasgow should work in close co-operation with this committee, and that for purposes of liaison Dr

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Cambridge Review, 6/11/1936, p. 90.



Christopher Addison [the President of SMAC] should be accepted as the President of the body responsible for organising the Scottish Unit.<sup>81</sup>

Though the Scots refused SMAC leadership, they did organise their first relief efforts along lines similar to the SMAC unit. At the end of August 1936, Sir Daniel Stevenson, Chancellor of the University of Glasgow, wrote to the Glasgow Herald that a Scottish relief effort had received permission from the Spanish authorities. He stated that,

What is needed now is the immediate organisation of the Scottish unit more or less on the lines of the London one - first-class surgeons, physicians, experienced assistants, preferably medical students and mechanics. A substantial sum - at least £2,500 to begin with - will be required for transport, maintenance and necessary equipment - most of all for the purchase of a large supply of much-needed anti-tetanus, anti-typhoid, and anti-gangrene sera, and finally for the maintenance of the unit while in Spain... Of course, aid will be given equally to the sick and wounded irrespective of party.<sup>82</sup>

This language of non-political and non-partisan humanitarian aid was repeated throughout the Scottish Ambulance Unit's initial appeals.<sup>83</sup> To some extent this emphasis on strictly 'non-political' aid was shared by the public appeals of both Scottish and English relief efforts, yet the underlying differences between the organisations sponsoring the appeals meant that the Scottish Ambulance Unit was far less politicised than the SMAC. This divergence affected not only relations between the two organisations, but also their conception of aid itself.

Sir Daniel Stevenson was described by the Glasgow Herald as "one of the best-known men in the public life of Glasgow".<sup>84</sup> He had become Chancellor of the University of Glasgow in 1934, aged 83. Before the First World War Stevenson had served for twenty years on municipal government and had been Glasgow's Lord Provost for four years, becoming well-known locally for his philanthropy and Liberal politics. As a "great traveller, with a gift for languages", Stevenson had a strong interest in international affairs, a concern which led him to endow several professorial chairs and student exchange scholarships.<sup>85</sup> During the mid-1930s he often used his Foreword as Chancellor in Glasgow's Student Handbook to encourage his students to study and discuss world events. In the Student Handbook

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<sup>81</sup> Report of SMAC, n.d., no. 299 in Ms Addison dep c207, Bodleian Library.

<sup>82</sup> Glasgow Herald, 31/8/1936, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> The following week Stevenson wrote "May I again emphasise that aid will be given to the sick and wounded irrespective of politics or party" - Glasgow Herald, 7/9/1936, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Clipping Glasgow Herald, 12/7/1944 in DC 227/2/1/7/1, University Archives, Glasgow.

<sup>85</sup> L.G. Wickham Legg & R.E.T. Williams, eds., The Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-1950, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, p. 836.

of 1936, Stevenson described the civil war in Spain as "the latest disgrace to civilisation".<sup>86</sup> He attacked the atrocity stories which had been prevalent in press coverage of the war and criticised the British government's policy of non-intervention as denying the Republic its sovereign rights. Though Stevenson sought to encourage in his students a greater interest in international affairs, he appears to have made little effort to directly mobilise them in the fundraising for the Scottish Ambulance Unit. Rather, as patron of the Scottish Ambulance Unit, he relied on his prominence in local politics and Glasgow society to appeal to the town for humanitarian relief in Spain.

Besides Stevenson, who served as chairman of the Scottish Ambulance Unit, the committee of the Unit was of a very different political colour from the left-wing activists of the SMAC. The Scottish Unit's patrons included eight titled nobility, two professors and the Bailie of the university. They publicly stated that,

no shade of political thought has influenced the Executive Committee of the unit. The one thought which has actuated the committee has been to serve humanity and to alleviate acute suffering by sending a medical unit to Spain.<sup>87</sup>

As one Glasgow unionist reported to the TUC, Stevenson had chosen close personal friends for the committee rather than political allies.<sup>88</sup> Yet despite its high brow character the Scottish Ambulance received strong support from local labour groups. The Spanish Medical Aid Committee wrote to the National Council of Labour in early November 1936 arguing that the Scots Unit was distrusted by the local Glasgow labour movement.<sup>89</sup> In fact, the Liberal patrons of the Scots unit were far more acceptable to the Labour movement's leadership than the Communist influence on the SMAC.

The financial importance of union support for the Scottish Ambulance Unit was revealed at a public meeting at the end of 1936, which Stevenson called a "stocktaking meeting of the executive".<sup>90</sup> Of the 4,000 pounds raised for the Scottish Ambulance Unit, 1,000 pounds had come from the TUC and another 1,000 pounds

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<sup>86</sup> *Students' Handbook 1936-37*, SRC, Glasgow, p. xv.

<sup>87</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 18/9/1936, p. 7.

<sup>88</sup> Report of 12/11/1936, Mss 292 946/41, Modern Records Centre.

The Scottish Ambulance Unit did make an effort in January 1937 to recruit Citrine onto its committee in an effort to solidfy TUC funding - *Glasgow Herald*, 1/1/1937, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> Letter of 4/11/1936, Mss 292 946/41, Modern Records Centre;

The Spanish Medical Aid Committee were probably also worried about a potential rival for Labour/TUC funding. Ultimately, their fears were justified for Labour's anti-communism would cause it to switch funding from the English Committee to the Scots Unit.

<sup>90</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1/1/1937, p. 7.

from a single anonymous donor, who was probably Stevenson. The rest of the contributions had been made up by three donations of 100 pounds a few more of between 25 pounds and 20 pounds, and nearly 1,000 small sums. Local labour support for the unit was not merely motivated by parochialism, but may also have resulted from the tensions within Glasgow's working class Catholic community over the war which strengthened the attractiveness of a 'non-political' appeal outside the labour movement.<sup>91</sup>

The Scottish Ambulance Unit contrasted with its English counterpart not only in its leadership but in its formulation of aid. While the first British medical unit established itself close to the Aragon front (and later became formally attached to the International Brigades), the Scottish unit was located in Madrid. In early November 1936 the capital was also the most contested front of the war, yet its location also encouraged the unit to increasing focus on providing civilian relief.<sup>92</sup> Such a role had been foreshadowed by the Unit's public appeals of September 1936 which highlighted the casualties from the aerial bombardments of Madrid and the potential need for evacuations as surrounding towns became part of the front.<sup>93</sup> This mixing of relief to both the war front and civilians created increasing tensions within the Unit during 1937, fuelled by political differences and fundamentally different conceptions of aid.

In January 1937, the Unit was re-fitted in Glasgow and returned to Madrid. Stevenson announced that despite the large amount of money already spent, it was agreed to risk going on again in faith, notwithstanding the large outlay (estimated at about £1,200) for replacement of an ambulance captured by the rebels, another destroyed by a rebel bomb, the reconditioning of others much the worse for wear, and the addition of two lorries to help in the evacuation of British and Spanish civilians to the coast and transport of food supplies from the coast to Madrid.<sup>94</sup>

Trade unionist Roderick MacFarquhar had joined the Unit's second mission to Spain as a driver, and was soon engaged in bringing in wounded from the fronts surrounding Madrid. Yet MacFarquhar was also irritated that,

we also had the rather - I thought so anyway - unnecessary task of issuing

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<sup>91</sup> Ian S. Wood, "Scotland and the Spanish Civil War", *Cencrastus*, 18, 1984, pp. 14-15; Tom Gallagher, "Scottish Catholics and the British Left 1918-1939", *The Innes Review*, 34, 1, Spring 1983, pp. 35-36.

<sup>92</sup> The SMAC was jealous of the publicity which the Scots unit was receiving in the besieged capital of Madrid- Mss 292 946/41, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>93</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 18/9/1936, p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

food from our trucks to the people of various suburbs of Madrid, which I personally did not like because I thought it was not properly organised and should have been left to the Spanish authorities to do and not us.<sup>95</sup>

While MacFarquhar was concerned that the main role of the Unit should remain close to the front itself, the civilian relief work of the Unit was praised by Oxford tutor Helen Grant. Grant was visiting Madrid as part of a delegation for the Friends Service Council and felt that,

The Scottish Ambulance it appears is also doing excellent work apart from dealing with the wounded.... they take the ambulance round in the early morning and distribute cups of hot chocolate to the waiting women.<sup>96</sup>

MacFarquhar's uneasiness over the Unit's operations were further fuelled when the Unit's head, Fernanda Jacobsen, decided to use the Unit's ambulances and trucks to help evacuate some of the right-wing *madrileños* who had been forced to seek political asylum in Madrid's embassies at the outbreak of the revolt.<sup>97</sup> Stevenson's printed appeals in Glasgow had stressed that aid would go to both sides *within* the besieged capital, however MacFarquhar felt that evacuating Nationalist sympathisers went against the whole *raison d'être* of the Unit and the strongly pro-Republican politics of Stevenson himself.<sup>98</sup> MacFarquhar had met Stevenson shortly before the Unit left for Madrid and felt that,

The primary purpose of the Scottish Ambulance Unit, as far as Sir D.M. Stevenson was concerned, was to supply an ambulance service on the front to the wounded of the Republican Army. It also had, through the generosity of the Scottish people several truckloads of food which it was taking out to supply to the people of Spain.<sup>99</sup>

Jacobsen's concern with civilian relief and the evacuation of Nationalist sympathisers had moved much of the unit's work away from the front which had been the spur for the initial aid efforts of the war's early stages.

The tensions within the Scots unit finally erupted when the Nationalist attack at Guadalajara in early March 1937 seemed to threaten that Madrid would

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<sup>95</sup> Ian MacDougall. ed., Voices from the Spanish Civil War: Personal Recollections of Scottish Volunteers in Republican Spain 1936-39, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1986, p. 79.

<sup>96</sup> Diary, p. 63, Add 8251/II, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>97</sup> MacDougall. ed., Voices from the Spanish Civil War, p. 81.

<sup>98</sup> Stevenson launched the appeal of January 1937 with the words, "we venture to hope that even those who were unwilling to contribute in the past for fear of the beneficiaries being entirely on the government side, will surely have no hesitation in coming forward now to help in the relief of distress - distress which is as acute on one side as the other in Madrid" - Glasgow Herald, 1/1/1937, p. 7.

MacDougall. ed., Voices from the Spanish Civil War, p. 84.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

finally fall. MacFarquhar advocated that the unit should retreat with the Republican army, a position he felt was supported by Stevenson's pro-Republican beliefs. Jacobsen wanted to remain in Madrid, which MacFarquhar argued against,

She said that we were there to help both sides, which of course I immediately claimed was not a proper account of the view of the Scottish people who were contributing towards the support of a Republican Government and a Republican victory.<sup>100</sup>

After the clash MacFarquhar and two others left the unit to join the medical services of the International Brigades. The three dissidents produced a Memorandum in March 1937 which criticised Jacobsen for distributing food independently of Republican authorities, for making provisional plans to remain in Madrid if it was captured, and they also accused un-named members of the Unit of being Franco sympathisers.<sup>101</sup>

MacFarquhar's accusations were not only used by the SMAC to discredit the Scottish Ambulance Unit, but have been carried on in pro-Communist histories of the war which portray the unit as inefficient, ineffective and of dubious political sympathies.<sup>102</sup> It was not until recently that this negative image of the Scots unit has been questioned, for as Tom Buchanan has written,

the allegation that Jacobsen was in any sense pro-fascist is misleading. However, her attempt at even-handedness in such a politically charged situation was certainly dangerous.<sup>103</sup>

In a Madrid fearful of fifth columnists, non-political efforts could easily be misconstrued. Despite the pro-Republican position of Stevenson and some of its other supporters, the Scottish Ambulance Unit's conception of non-partisan civilian humanitarian aid created tension with those who felt such impartiality to be impossible.<sup>104</sup> The attacks on the unit reveal not its own political bias, but the different conceptions of relief, reinforced by different political commitments, which existed between aid campaigns in Britain. Despite the controversy of March 1937

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>101</sup> Memorandum dated 30/3/1937 - Mss 292 946/41, Modern Records Centre; The first British Medical Aid Unit of the SMAC had its own problems, as in late November 1936 its volunteer workers produced a memorandum attacking "Loutitt at the head of the administration has given vent to an obsession for political manoeuvring and intrigue which is totally out of place in a unity such as ours". The unit also complained of the "secret" meetings organised by the Communists within the Unit - Memorandum from Unit, 30/11/1936, Mss 292 946/41, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>102</sup> Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, p. 187; Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>103</sup> Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 109.

<sup>104</sup> "The Scottish Ambulance Unit not only tends to sick and wounded of both sides in this brothers conflict, but it ministers to the necessitous non-combatants" - *Glasgow University Magazine*, 15/5/1937, p. 335.

and the increasing strain of continual funding, the Scottish Ambulance Unit remained in Spain until September 1938.<sup>105</sup> During this time it largely focused on civilian relief in Madrid - distributing food and evacuations.<sup>106</sup> Over the course of the war, the Committee spent over £20,000 on the Unit, including £3,000 from Stevenson personally.<sup>107</sup> However, despite Stevenson's prominent role, the Scottish Ambulance Unit remained very much a local rather than university campaign.<sup>108</sup>

## Other Relief Efforts

A similar appeal to the Scottish Ambulance Unit, both in its focus on a central patron and its low level of politicisation, was the University of London Ambulance Unit, sponsored by Sir George Young.<sup>109</sup> Young was a former diplomat who had taught at the University of London and had been drawn into the war by his residency in Spain. In February 1937, Young's University Unit launched a public appeal signed by H.A.L. Fisher, William Beveridge and Sir Arthur Salter, all prominent academics and recognised public figures of Liberal politics. The Unit was based at Young's home in Torremolinos which had been converted into a hospital. Like the Scots unit, Young's appeal claimed to be non-partisan,

The unit will serve both sides. It will be based to begin with on Malaga (government), where the need now is greater than at Cordova or Granada (Insurgent).<sup>110</sup>

The rationale of greatest need could be used to justify aid to the Republic, as the appeal noted that in the revolt most medical staff and supplies had fallen to the Insurgents. Another important factor which prevented relief work on both sides of the battlefield was the hostility of Nationalist authorities to foreign interference, though not foreign supplies of arms.<sup>111</sup> On the other hand, it was in the Republic's interests to publicise the civilian suffering the war had caused, to strengthen its image as a victim of great power aggression. Though there was a real difference between the need for humanitarian relief in the Republican Zone compared to that of the Nationalists, this gap was accentuated by the politics of both sides.

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<sup>105</sup> *contra* Alexander, British Volunteers for Liberty, p. 226.

<sup>106</sup> MacDougall, ed., Voices from the Spanish Civil War, p. 342.

<sup>107</sup> Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, p. 107.

<sup>108</sup> Students were invited to participate in a Flag Day on 15 May 1937 around Glasgow to raise funds for the Unit - Glasgow University Magazine, 5/5/1937, p. 335.

<sup>109</sup> Fyrth, The Signal Was Spain, p. 86.

<sup>110</sup> Letter of 23/3/1937, Mss.27 A14.3 Box 2, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>111</sup> Farah Mendelsohn, "Practising Peace: American and British Quaker Relief in the Spanish Civil War, D.Phil, University of York, 1997, p. 159.

The difference in politicisation of Young's Unit as compared to other efforts such as the SMAC was shown by the support the former received from the AUT, a body which explicitly sought to avoid party politics. Though the AUT did not engage in active fund-raising for the Spanish Republic as it had done for German refugee academics a few years earlier, it did make efforts to publicise to its members the relief appeal for Young's University Ambulance Unit.<sup>112</sup> According to a report written by Young in the AUT journal, *The Universities Review*, the February 1937 appeal had raised 300 pounds.<sup>113</sup> By mid-1937, the Unit had collected donations totalling 1,200 pounds and had moved to Almería, where it had opened two hospitals, totalling 60 beds. It had also established a field hospital near the front. The Unit's personnel comprised three British doctors and six nurses, all unpaid volunteers. Though the AUT agreed to circulate a further appeal for the University Ambulance Unit on staff notice boards, the Unit never achieved the same prominence as the SMAC in public or within English universities.<sup>114</sup>

Young's Appeal does not seem to have touched the students of the University of London, perhaps because, in contrast to Cambridge where university figures led the town's aid campaigns, Spanish relief in London developed with a far more distinct character within the university and its authorities' regulations. Within the London School of Economics, the Union was one of the few available focuses for Republican supporters to articulate and mobilise concern amongst students over the Spanish civil war. Through motions at its general meetings and efforts at fund-raising under its auspices, the Union became the channel for pro-Republican activity and energy within the School. At the Union's General Meeting of 14 October 1936, the following motion was tabled, "That this Union would welcome the opportunity of subscribing to the Spanish Medical Aid Fund by means of a general collection in LSE".<sup>115</sup> Members of the Socialist Club recommended a large Union grant to the SMAC which was passed with only one dissent by the 100 present. Five days later the Executive Committee sought to implement the motion, but found that it was not covered by the constitution. Significantly, the Union's President G.R. Collins argued that support for the SMAC paralleled its earlier fund-raising efforts for a German Scholarship Fund.<sup>116</sup> However, the School's authorities did not draw such an analogy. It was reported at the following week's general meeting that the

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<sup>112</sup> Earlier the AUT had circulated an "Appeal for Victimised Teachers" by a Spanish teachers union which called for real and material support. - Minutes of 12/11/1936, Mss.27 A14.3 Box 2, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>113</sup> George Young, "The British Universities Hospital and Ambulances in Southern Spain", *The Universities Review*, 9, 2, May 1936, pp. 132-134.

<sup>114</sup> Letter 23/3/1937, Mss.27 A14.3 Box 2, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>115</sup> Minutes of 14/10/1936, Coll Misc 649 2/4, LSE Archives.

<sup>116</sup> Minutes of 18/10/1936, Coll Misc 649, 3/4, LSE Archives.

Union had been unable to hold a collection for Spain because it had not yet met with the Director to receive his authorisation. A motion was then passed asking the School's authorities for permission to collect for Spain within the Union.<sup>117</sup> Their reply is not recorded, but it appears that only limited informal collections took place.

Though this immediate student response to the war within the LSE was stifled due to the lack of official sanction, the following term at LSE a far more successful meeting on Spain was held. On 20 January 1937 an estimated 400 students attended the Union General meeting, which was addressed by Lord Faringdon. The film "Defence of Madrid" was also shown and 30 pounds was collected for Spanish relief.<sup>118</sup> Despite Young's efforts amongst academics, fundraising by students in London seems to have initially focused on the Spanish Medical Aid Committee, probably because it was the most publicly prominent of Spanish relief campaigns in the first eight months of the war. Like the Scottish Ambulance Unit, Young's Unit found its funds increasingly strained as the war in Spain continued, which resulted in it eventually being absorbed into the relief efforts of American Quakers.<sup>119</sup>

The aid efforts of the British Quakers in Spain also drew heavily from British Universities. Over a month after the war had started, Gilbert Murray had encouraged Spanish academic, Professor Castillejo, to contact the Society of Friends about the provision of humanitarian relief, though he doubted they had an established organisation in Spain.<sup>120</sup> Following this meeting, the Friends Service Council established a small committee which sought to provide aid to both sides, and asked Murray to contact the Foreign Office on their behalf.<sup>121</sup> A delegation including Leeds Professor of Philosophy John Harvey was sent to Catalonia to establish relief, though they assumed that the war would shortly be over.<sup>122</sup> The Quakers were perhaps the only international group to successfully establish relief operations in both Nationalist and Republican zones. Yet despite the strength of this non-partisan commitment, the actual amount of aid was heavily weighted to the

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<sup>117</sup> Minutes of 21/10/1936, Coll Misc 649 2/4, LSE Archives.

<sup>118</sup> Minutes of 20/1/1937, Coll Misc 649 2/4, LSE Archives.

<sup>119</sup> Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 118.

<sup>120</sup> Letter of 28/8/1936, 78, Mss Gilbert Murray, Bodleian Library.

<sup>121</sup> Letter of 5/9/1936, 79, Mss Gilbert Murray, Bodleian Library.

<sup>122</sup> The volunteer worker who accompanied Harvey, Alfred Jacob, had been preparing to go to Spain to establish a Quaker hostel before the outbreak of the war - Mendlesohn, "Practising Peace", p. 59.



latter, due to the restrictions of Nationalist authorities.<sup>123</sup> Humanitarian relief in the Nationalist zone was controlled by Auxilio Social, which was part of the women's section of the Falange. Quaker relief workers noted that "the greatest courtesy prevailed but the strong nationalist trend now predominant precluded the possibility of foreign relief workers playing anything but a very subsidiary role".<sup>124</sup> Not only were relief efforts stifled by official intervention, but it also seemed that the Nationalist zone could claim more productive agriculture and fewer refugees.<sup>125</sup> Though striving to avoid politics, the efforts of the Friends Service Council powerfully illustrate the extent to which humanitarian aid was directed to the Republic.

It was not only the hostility of the Nationalists which undermined the non-partisan relief efforts of the Friends Service Council, but also the committed pro-Republicanism of the other groups with which they co-operated. While sharing public platforms with the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR) which was founded in November 1936, the Friends Service Council eventually insisted that "public meetings would be prefaced with the reading of a statement emphasising the strictly neutral, non-political basis of the NJC".<sup>126</sup> Despite their reservations over the more political campaigns that they were associating with, Quaker relief efforts provided a powerful legitimising argument for supporters of the NJCSR. Repeatedly at universities, the aid provided by the Friends Service Council was cited by Republican supporters who were seeking to prove the good faith of their own efforts. With their relief work focused on the refugees and children in Catalonia, Quaker relief operations intensified over the course of the war as the focus of international relief gradually shifted away from Madrid during 1937.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> In 1938 it was estimated that the Friends Service Council were spending 45,000 francs per month in the Nationalist zone compared to 125,000 francs per month in Barcelona and 130,000 francs per month in Murcia - Henry Van Etten, Le Secours Quaker International, Société des Amis (Quakers), Paris, 1938, pp. 8 & 10.

<sup>124</sup> Noah Curtis & Cyril Gilbey, Malnutrition: Quaker Relief in Austria (1919-1924) - Spain (1936-1939), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1944, p. 71.

<sup>125</sup> Mendlesohn, "Practising Peace", p. 149.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 39;

Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, pp. 97-98.

<sup>127</sup> Curtis & Gilbey, Malnutrition, pp. 44 & 57.

## Humanitarian Appeals in Oxford

Significantly, a similar debate to that which had take place in Cambridge over the politicised nature of pro-Republican humanitarian aid, also occurred in Oxford. During February 1937 there were several non-partisan appeals in Oxford, including a concert in the Hall of Balliol College in support of the Mayor's Spanish Relief Fund.<sup>128</sup> The Relief Fund was described as being,

for the benefit of non-combatants suffering as a result of the Civil War in Spain. It appeals to human rather than party loyalty, and the need for support becomes increasingly acute as the war develops.<sup>129</sup>

A similar 'non-political' concern for non-combatants was expressed in a meeting at Somerville College on 24 February 1937. The Cherwell recorded of the meeting,

It was organised by the Labour Club, but Miss Blomfield, who took the chair, opened the meeting by declaring that she would dissolve it at the first mention of politics. Within these limits very interesting speeches were made by Miss Grant and Señor Moreno, leaving the College understanding and feeling a great deal more about Spain. People can be seen at every turn knitting endless scarves for the non-combatants.<sup>130</sup>

Even at this "most politically orientated of the women's colleges" at Oxford, the pro-Republican positions of Grant and Moreno were palatable as they were stated in humanitarian rather than party terms.<sup>131</sup>

Interestingly it was another Somerville don, Enid Starkie, who attacked the publicity of the Oxford University Spanish Democratic Defence Committee for their political extremism which overshadowed the humanitarian concern they purported to represent.<sup>132</sup> In replying to Starkie, Ashley Boramall, the Honorary Secretary of the Defence Committee, argued that,

Her first point is that the appeal launched by us is political, and therefore appeals to self-interest, and not humanitarianism. This may or may not be deplorable, but the fact remains that last term a campaign was conducted on purely humanitarian grounds for the Medical Aid, and only realised £50 in the whole term, and that a similar campaign yielded £75 in the first six weeks of this term [for the Youth Foodship] whereas this campaign has in a week yielded £150, and we are sure there is plenty more to come.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Oxford Magazine, 18/2/1937, pp. 398-399.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, pp. 398.

<sup>130</sup> Oxford Magazine, 4/3/1937, p. 479.

<sup>131</sup> Adams, Somerville for Women, p. 358.

<sup>132</sup> Oxford Magazine, 4/3/1937, p. 474.

<sup>133</sup> Oxford Magazine, 11/3/1937, p. 504.

Boramall's argument that fundraising was more effective when it was explicitly pro-Republican has been repeated by historians such as Alpert and Buchanan, though this trend was probably more a reflection of the greater activity of political activists than of the donor's sentiments. However, despite this defence of politics, Boramall still argued that the Spanish Medical Aid Committee represented "an appeal for money for a purpose which cannot be considered anything but humanitarian".<sup>134</sup>

Starkie's criticism was supported by several pro-Republican academics and students who, while committed to humanitarian aid for Spain, disapproved of the Spanish Democratic Defence Committee's methods. As the student newspaper The Cherwell stated, "we heartily commend the object of the appeal, though we dissociate ourselves from the propaganda which has recently been issued for it".<sup>135</sup> The university Proctors, who had received several complaints about the language in leaflets of Oxford University Spanish Democrats Defence Committee, wrote to University College Fellow E.F. Carritt who was named as a member of its Committee. The Proctors objected that,

no such body has been registered with us (as a political organisation with undergraduate members ought to be) and of course the activities permitted to such undergraduate organisations do not extend to circularising the public in that way.<sup>136</sup>

Carritt replied that while he had been a member of the OUSDDC committee in the previous term, he had resigned in protest at the offending leaflet. He wrote to the Proctors,

Would you allow me to add, in slight extenuation of a childish folly which I regard as very damaging to a cause I have much at heart, that the Committee has done some very laborious and sincere work in collecting food supplies, medical stores and warm clothing for Spain.<sup>137</sup>

Alongside the enthusiastic pro-Republicanism of the Spanish Democratic Defence Committee, one of the few pro-Nationalist aid campaigns in Britain was based in Oxford. An appeal for medical aid for the Nationalist forces was issued by the Catholic Weekly Universe in the first week of September 1936. Donations were to be sent to Oxford's Professor of International Law, Francis de Zulueta.<sup>138</sup> Of

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Cherwell, 6/3/1937, p. 148.

<sup>136</sup> Letter of 24/2/1937, PR 26/1/2, University Archives, Oxford.

<sup>137</sup> Letter of 26/2/1937, PR 26/1/2, University Archives, Oxford.

<sup>138</sup> Fyrth, The Signal was Spain, p. 193.

Basque descent, Zulueta was an ardent Catholic and devoted Franco supporter.<sup>139</sup> His role in the Universe campaign contrasts with the role played by another Spanish Catholic academic at Oxford, Enrique Moreno, who in late September 1936 wrote to the British press supporting the Republic against accusations of religious atrocities.<sup>140</sup> Within three weeks the Universe Medical Fund had raised 3,574 pounds.<sup>141</sup> Despite its pro-Nationalist commitments, the appeal later co-operated with various left-wing groups over Catholic Basque refugee children. Even where Catholics or Nationalist supporters did take positive steps over the war, these could still end in coalition with the left despite their divergent politics.

### **The Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal**

These different conceptions of humanitarian aid came together in a distinctive relief campaign which developed within Cambridge. In the second week of February 1937, a week after obituaries were published announcing the death of John Cornford, subscriptions were publicly solicited for a memorial appeal in his name and that of George Maclaurin who had been killed in the fighting around Madrid. The Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal was unique, not only for the breadth of support it received but in offering several different avenues for contributions. Firstly, we shall examine the coalition of groups who sponsored the appeal, and secondly, consider the political implications of the choices made by contributors to the appeal.

The Memorial Appeal drew support from a broad range of groups within the university and within the town itself. The initial Memorial Appeal Committee included representatives from the Cambridge Trades Council and Labour Party, Cambridge Communist Party, University Labour Party, Socialist League, Left Book Club and League of Young Liberals.<sup>142</sup> One key to this wide support amongst the left was the leadership position of academics in Cambridge Labour, especially that of the appeal's Treasurer, Dr Joseph Needham. At the time, Needham was a 36 year old Reader in Biochemistry, and with his wife Dorothy, formed an academic and political partnership committed to the left of the Labour Party. He was a strong supporter of the left-wing dissent of the Socialist League within the Labour Party, while she had been a Labour candidate in the Cambridge City Council elections.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> A.L. Rowse, All Souls in my Time, Duckworth, London, 1993, pp. 96-97.

<sup>140</sup> Catholics and the Civil War in Spain, National Council of Labour, London, 1936, p. 3.

<sup>141</sup> Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, p. 118.

<sup>142</sup> Cambridge Review, 12/2/1937, p. 254.

<sup>143</sup> Werskey, The Visible College, pp. 167 & 220.

Together, they were vital to the willingness of the local Labour organisation to work with local Communists despite the considerable activity by the Labour Party leadership at a national level to prevent any political mobilisation across party lines.<sup>144</sup> In fact, despite its inclusion in the Cornford appeal, the Socialist League had been disaffiliated by the Labour Executive a week before the appeal after it had openly joined the campaign for unity on the left with the Communist Party and ILP.

The success of aid appeals in facilitating local cross-party coalitions on the left was symbolised by the Memorial appeal's public meeting in Cambridge's Guildhall on 22 February 1937. The meeting was chaired by Professor Ernest Barker and 51 pounds were collected in donations. The audience were addressed by radical Labour MP Aneurin Bevan from South Wales, along with representatives of the Communist Party and the British League of Nations Union. Bevan evoked loud applause when he said that the sacrifices of the International Brigade in Spain would weld the British Labour and Communist parties into one.<sup>145</sup> Though nationally, antagonism from Labour's hierarchy stifled any official alliance between the parties throughout the 1930s, Bevan's speech expressed the opportunities for co-operation at a local level between the two camps over the civil war.

Amongst student groups, the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal drew an even broader backing, mobilising support from every section of the political spectrum. The existence of a single socialist student club meant that student Communists and Labour supporters did not have to face the party divisions of their seniors. Far more significantly, the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal was able to draw the backing of conservative students, as well as the left. This cross-party support was fuelled by the deeply personal resonance of Cornford's death across the university.<sup>146</sup> Amongst student groups, a joint-letter in support of the appeal was signed by representatives of the Conservative Association, Liberal Club, Democratic Front, British League of Nations Union and the Socialist Club.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Buchanan, The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement, p. 118.

<sup>145</sup> Cambridge Review, 26/2/1937, p. 286.

<sup>146</sup> As one student stated at the Cambridge Union in the wake of Cornford's death, "Whether or not we believe, as I must believe, that the cause for which he died was the cause of democracy, of most of the things which are most worth living for, whether or not we agree, as I must disagree, with many of the political aims for which he lived, we must all realise - and I think that in the last few days we have all realised - what a loss to life John Cornford's death will be, what a loss to those values and standards of life which we prize most highly" - notes, "Notes for an Obituary", John Cornford Papers, Trinity College.

<sup>147</sup> Cambridge Review, 19/2/1937, p. 272.

As the text of the student's joint-letter reveals, unity for humanitarian relief was constructed through stressing the non-political character of the memorial's broad appeals. Donors to the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial appeal could choose whether their money went to assist the International Brigade, the second British Youth Peace Assembly Foodship to Bilbao, or the British Medical Aid Committee units. The joint-letter stressed the differences between the three appeals:

We feel that some members of the University have been dissuaded from contributing to this and other funds for work in Spain by a certain confusion as to the nature of the appeals, and in particular by the apparent association of pure civilian relief work with support for the International Brigade. It should be clearly understood that the Youth Foodship and the British Medical Aid are entirely non-interventionist in character and are being supported by all parties: in order to co-ordinate such non-political relief work, the CU Joint Spanish Relief Committee has been formed, representing every shade of political opinion in the University... We have in Spain to-day the spectacle of hundreds of thousands of Spanish Civilians suffering appalling privation through no fault of their own in a particularly pitiless and horrible war which they did not start and over which they have no control. Whatever our political or religious views may be, we cannot deny the urgency of work to bring some of the essentials of life to these people.<sup>148</sup>

The letter's wording reveals the extent to which the broad sweep of the memorial appeal and its widening base of support were equally due to a 'softening' of political issues. Engagement was partly fuelled and facilitated by the mixing of political issues with moral and humanitarian concerns which were legitimised as 'non-political'. Consensus over humanitarian aid for Spain did not prevent divergent politics, as shown in university debates over non-intervention which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Joseph Needham's accounts for the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal provide a potentially revealing source for trying to map the variegated nature of the political and "non-political" support for the Spanish Republic.<sup>149</sup> Between February 1937 and April 1937 the Memorial Appeal raised over 1,210 pounds. There are two main difficulties with the accounts, in that complete collection records for all 21 Cambridge colleges have not survived. Also significant amounts appear to have been donated in bloc, without specific choices being nominated or at least recorded. Students from the large and prestigious colleges, such as Trinity, St John's, and

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> K93 also K75-K85, Needham Papers, University Library, Cambridge.

Queens' raised approximately 10 pounds per College, though without collection sheets we lack information on who gave and for what cause.

The individual collection sheets for the colleges that do exist provide a basic insight into the significant political choices being made by those who supported the humanitarian campaigns. The contributions to either the International Brigades, Spanish Medical Aid or the Youth Foodship were an expression of political preference, as much as any vote or survey of public opinion. The significance of these differences is hard to gauge, but they do provide a powerful reminder that there was never any single political position or ideology underlying pro-Republican humanitarian aid. Behind common slogans lay disparate motivations, perceptions and objectives, and part of the success of the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal was to seek to include as many of these as possible. The distinctions between contribution choices becomes much more meaningful when one contrasts the male Cambridge colleges with the two colleges for women. At Newnham especially, there was the strongest support for the Youth Foodship for civilian relief in Bilbao, a choice that contrasts with their male peers.

TABLE 5.1: THE CORNFORD-MACLAURIN MEMORIAL APPEAL(in shillings)<sup>150</sup>

College	Students	Int. Brigade	SMAC	Foodship	Total
Caius	308	21.0 (35%)	13.0 (22%)	13.5 (23%)	60.0
Jesus	265	16.5 (60%)	8.5 (31%)	2.3 (8%)	27.3
Peterhouse	154	16.5 (46%)	13.5 (33%)	11.0 (27%)	41.0
Selwyn	156	9.0 (22%)	21 (52%)	10.5 (26%)	40.5
Sidney Sussex	171	8.0 (15%)	33.5 (63%)	11.5 (22%)	53.0
Queens	256	-	19 (11%)	11.0 (6%)	180.0
Girton	214	35.5 (20%)	41.3 (23%)	37.5 (21%)	177.0
Newnham	286	12.5 (10%)	38.5 (30%)	63.0 (49%)	129.5

Total of Appeal at 27 April 1937: 1210 pounds.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

Perhaps the key to this gender difference is the identification and justification of some forms of relief work as 'non-political'. The label of 'non-political' aid was frequently invoked to legitimise and claim broader support by British campaigns, including the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal and the later efforts for Basque child refugees. Both Jim Fyrth's and Tom Buchanan's detailed studies of British aid recognise the large number of women who participated in humanitarian fundraising over Spain, but neither differentiates their experience from that of men.<sup>151</sup> Still in Britain, it was women who played a leading role in humanitarian politics (though there were few appeals in which they were specifically targeted).<sup>152</sup> It was female MPs, Atholl, Rathbone and Wilkinson who formed the coalition at the head of British relief efforts. This contrasts with France, where women were far less prominent in national and local Spanish relief campaigns, because such aid was more politicised and remained the preserve of the parties from which they were largely excluded.<sup>153</sup> This suggests that it was not the form of political activity which was gendered, the appeal for humanitarian aid, but rather how it was organised. Within French universities, there was an almost total sex segregation which prevents any real comparison between female academics in the two countries.

## Conclusion

The national contrasts between humanitarian aid efforts in Britain and France were reflected in the International Solidarity Fund which had been created by the Labour and Socialist International.<sup>154</sup> The Fund had previously provided aid for German and Austrian political refugees and to the Spanish left after the October 1934 rising. It was during the Spanish civil war that the Fund received its largest donations, becoming one of the main international focuses for humanitarian aid to the Republic. Like the initial CGT aid, the LSI directed the proceeds of the International Solidarity Fund to the UGT, which it justified as meeting the

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<sup>151</sup> Fyrth, *The Signal was Spain*, p. 22.

uchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 65.

<sup>152</sup> One of the few campaigns specifically focused on women was a "Milk for Spain" appeal sponsored by 18 British women during the Basque offensive, pamphlet, Mss. 27 A14.3 Box 2, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>153</sup> The exception to this was itself a party organisation, the pro-Communist Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme - Reynolds, *France Between the Wars*, p. 197.

<sup>154</sup> The Labour Party and SFIO were affiliates to the Labour and Socialist International, while the TUC and CGT were members of its industrial wing, the International Federation of Trade Unions.



immediate needs of the working class.<sup>155</sup> In early September 1936 it was reported that the Fund had received contributions totalling 30,544 pounds of which 12,018 pounds were from Britain and only 657 pounds from France.<sup>156</sup> The report however noted that close to 20,000 pounds had been raised in France by the Rassemblement Populaire (not appreciating the extent to which the CGT maintained control of its own aid funds). By mid-January 1937, the Rassemblement Populaire claimed 500 local Commissions de Solidarité throughout France which had raised a total of three million francs.<sup>157</sup> At the same time the CGT had sent another five million francs of humanitarian aid to the Republic. Rather than the totals raised, it was the ways in which fundraising was organised which shaped the opportunities for academics and students.

While British universities were the sites of a proliferation of heterogeneous humanitarian campaigns over the civil war in Spain, the reactions of French academics and students were expressed in different forms, locations and views. This contrast is partly due to general differences between their national political arenas, which meant that the war in Spain was felt as a far more direct and polarised issue in France as humanitarian relief was organised through established parties and unions. There were also the contrasting structures of the universities in the two countries which encouraged different forms of political participation. In France there could be no university-centred campaigns as the university itself was formally depoliticised, while Spain in 1936 was a highly controversial issue. French academics and students were therefore active in public aid campaigns, either as independents (in the case of those academics who became national and local figures) or through party organisations. Despite the success of the parties to which they belonged, it is extremely doubtful that French students were as successful at humanitarian fundraising as the British students of the University Labour Federation who raised 700 pounds in one academic term.<sup>158</sup> In Britain, the campus-focus of students' groups encouraged coalitions over Spanish relief as both academics and students emerged as prominent actors in a range of ad hoc aid groups.

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<sup>155</sup> Report 4/9/1936, p. 4-5 in SAI 932/3400, International Institute of Social History.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>157</sup> Aidez l'Espagne!: Conférence International de Paris 16-17 Janvier 1937, CICAER, Paris, 1937, pp. 23-24.

The Rassemblement Populaire had sent 5,000 tons of food and clothing and medicine to Spain: 4,000 tons from Marseille via Alicante to Madrid and 900 tons from Bordeaux to Bilbao and Santander.

<sup>158</sup> Clare Market Review, March 1937, p. 19.

This chapter has emphasised how different aims, forms of organisation, support and methods of humanitarian relief existed in both countries, even though most aid was initially overwhelmingly directed towards the Spanish Republic. In France, these divisions largely followed those of party politics, and while these were also present in Britain, there were also more general differences caused by the contrasting levels of politicisation amongst British aid campaigns. Each aid campaign needs to be understood in its own context through recognising its organisers' identity, aims and their efforts in Spain, especially since most sought to broaden their support through 'non-political' appeals. Perhaps the key to these diverse relief efforts was that from October 1936 until the spring of 1937, they were overwhelmingly focused on Madrid, the Spanish capital which combined the war's primary military front with the country's most acute civilian emergencies of aerial bombardment, refugees and food shortage.

## Chapter 6 Non-Intervention

Non-intervention, the international agreement to deny armaments and military material to both the Spanish Republicans and Nationalists, stands as one of the central issues in histories of the Spanish civil war. Non-intervention was seen by many contemporaries and historians as the most decisive factor in the Republic's ultimate defeat, given the covert military material and troops which Franco's forces received from Germany, Italy and Portugal.<sup>1</sup> The effect of these criticisms of the Nationalists' evasion of the Non-intervention Agreement has been to solidify the policy's intentions, its implementation, and its ineffectiveness into one, at the cost of its historical context. In the wake of the Republic's defeat, non-intervention has been so stereotyped as misguided and deliberately hypocritical that the politics of its supporters, and the complexity of the choices they faced has largely been lost.<sup>2</sup> There is a strong need to re-historicise non-intervention so as to understand the extent to which its legitimacy and support changed over the course of the war, and to explain the extent to which it was supported by different groups. Outside Spain, Republican supporters were divided amongst themselves over the effects and desirability of the policy, and though many would ultimately reject non-intervention, they arrived at that rejection from very different motives and backgrounds.

The complex motivations and perceptions underlying support for or opposition to non-intervention are perhaps most powerfully revealed by the national context in which the policy was first formulated. The English Channel separated two governments with fundamentally different characters, concerns and commitments which gave each country its own distinctive reasons for supporting and opposing non-intervention. Within their national borders, the debate over non-intervention cut across party lines, and divided pro-Republican supporters. The debates between academics and students over non-intervention were fundamentally shaped by the distinctive forums in which they were articulated. The commitment of French students and British academics to party politics meant that they saw non-intervention differently from the campus-focused politics of British students or the public independence of French academics. Political forms and

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<sup>1</sup> Glyn Stone, "Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War", *European Studies Review*, 9, 1979, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> E.H. Carr describes non-intervention as "tainted with hypocrisy from the outset" - Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 17.

organisations were powerful influences on the contours of the changing debate over non-intervention within and around the university.

## Domestic Politics & Foreign Policy

Two sets of factors have been seen as causing the newly-formed Front Populaire government led by Léon Blum to reverse its initial decision of 19 July 1936 to agree to the Spanish Republican government's request for armaments against the military coup which had broken out two days earlier.<sup>3</sup> One set were diplomatic pressures, especially those applied by the British National government, which British and American historians have tended to emphasise as decisive in the formulation of a new French policy.<sup>4</sup> However, as Julian Jackson writes "the decisive, proximate, factor in the adoption of non-intervention was the domestic French situation".<sup>5</sup> Far more significant in forcing the Blum government to change its position over supplying military material to the Republic were internal divisions within the Front Populaire cabinet, the fears on both the left and right of either civil war in France or that the Spanish conflict would escalate into an international conflagration.<sup>6</sup> The military rising in Spain had been seen by the French left as the potential predecessor of a coup against the Front Populaire, while the nationalist right's virulent campaigns against entanglement in an international conflict echoed their response to the League of Nations sanctions against Italy in 1935. The latter's slogan "*A bas la Guerre Civile!*" was intended as an indictment of the Front Populaire for inciting a domestic civil war through its involvement in the Spanish conflict.<sup>7</sup> The debates over non-intervention in France and Britain were fundamentally shaped by their respective domestic political landscapes.

The governments of Britain and France had significantly different motives for initiating and supporting an international non-intervention agreement over the civil war in Spain. France's first socialist government felt a strong ideological solidarity with Republican Spain.<sup>8</sup> However, this sympathy was complicated by the

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<sup>3</sup> Lefranc, *Histoire du Front Populaire (1934-1938)*, pp. 494-500.

<sup>4</sup> Stone, "Britain, Non-Intervention and the Spanish Civil War" passim; Pike, *Les Français et la Guerre d'Espagne*, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 208.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 83.

<sup>7</sup> Flyer, M154/299B, AD Nord;

Unlike the student protests against League sanctions in late 1935 and early 1936, there was very little opposition *dans la rue* over Spain following the dissolution of the leagues.

<sup>8</sup> Joel Colton, *Léon Blum: Humanist in Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1966, p. 236.

Front Populaire's commitment to the nationalisation of the French armament industry which meant that military aid could only come from the government itself.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the policy of non-intervention offered a justification to avoid the direct supply of arms to Spain by the French government which would have aroused strong controversy throughout France. In contrast, non-intervention in Britain reflected a predominantly Conservative government's detachment from Spanish events, and their desire to isolate a conflict which might threaten their diplomatic efforts towards the stabilisation and *rapprochement* of Western and Central Europe.<sup>10</sup>

The contrasting government motives underpinning non-intervention meant that attacks on the policy itself had different meaning in the two countries. In France, the slogans "*Ouvrez les frontières*", "*Blum à l'action*", "*Des canons pour l'Espagne*" symbolised the extent to which opposition to non-intervention was centred on calls for the government itself to directly supply arms to the Spanish Republic.<sup>11</sup> The slogan "*Blum à l'action*" had actually originated in the sit down strikes before the Front Populaire took power, but like other slogans, its meaning changed over the course of the war.<sup>12</sup> In Britain, the policy was seen by its opponents as denying the Spanish Republic its legal right to purchase arms on the free market.<sup>13</sup> It was the denial of arms rather than their supply which was the critical issue. Equally, the different political character of the respective governments helped to reinforce the distinctive national contours of the debates over non-intervention. The Front Populaire was attacked by the French left for betraying its sister government, the Frente Popular, while British critics of the policy saw it as reflecting their government's implicit sympathy for the Nationalists. The attacks in both countries ranged from absolute rejection of the policy on principle to the various calls for its reform in practice which would ensure a greater (and more legitimate) effectiveness.

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<sup>9</sup> The law for nationalisation was being debated at the same time as non-intervention, and was passed on 8 August 1936 by the Senate and on 11 August 1936 by the Chamber. However it was only partially implemented - Jeffrey J. Clarke, "The Nationalization of War Industries in France, 1936-1937: A Case Study", *Journal of Modern History*, 1977, pp. 411-430.

<sup>10</sup> Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>11</sup> Report of 30/3/1938, BA 1778, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris; Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> *The Student*, 13/11/1936, pp. 81-82.

## **Absolute Opponents of Non-Intervention: The PCF and the CPGB**

In both Britain and France, the Communist Party stood out in its early, vigorous, unified and absolute rejection of any Non-intervention Agreement which would compromise the defence of the Spanish Republic. Though many outside the party shared these views, the CPGB and PCF were at the forefront of organised opposition to non-intervention almost from the first formulation of the policy. Their rejection of non-intervention as a direct attack on Republican Spain anticipated that of the USSR, which was willing to formally accept the policy for almost two months.<sup>14</sup> This common opposition to the arms embargo meant that internationally Communists exercised a profound influence on other groups and individuals in shaping the contours of opposition to non-intervention, either through slogans and political language or through 'front' organisations and coalitions which drew heavily on communist activism. Communist criticism of non-intervention also developed nationally distinctive tones due to the differing positions of the Communist Party in French and British politics.

Central to the differences between the PCF and CPGB were their respective sizes, both in terms of their membership and voting strengths.<sup>15</sup> After the suppression of the German Communist Party, the PCF had emerged as the leading national party outside the USSR. The push towards coalition which had led to the election of the Popular Front government in 1936 had not only marked a parliamentary breakthrough for the PCF but had given it a far more extensive political and industrial membership. In contrast, the CPGB had yet to establish either a popular appeal or anything greater than a marginal electoral presence. Though its membership was increasing throughout the 1930s, because of its overall numerical weakness the CPGB's greatest political success was achieved in mixed coalitions and campaigns with other groups.

The differing positions of the Communist Parties in Britain and France fundamentally affected their relationship to the national organised labour movement. The interwar character of the PCF had been marked at its birth in the bitter schism of the SFIO in 1920. This long history of sectarian antagonism between the two parties, which was paralleled in industrial relations by that between the CGT and CGTU, was only overcome in the wake of the riots on 6 February 1934. In Britain, the divisions between the CPGB and the Labour Party/TUC, though

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel R. Brower, The New Jacobins: The French Communist Party and the Popular Front, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1968, p. 162.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 2.

antagonistic, were never as deeply embittered as in France. The CPGB never represented more than a marginal threat to the leadership of the British labour movement, whereas in France the PCF was a direct challenger to the SFIO and within the newly-unified CGT.<sup>16</sup> These positions were reinforced in the debates over non-intervention, as the CPGB divided its attacks between accusations of Nationalist sympathies of the British government and the ineffectiveness of the Labour Party. In France, the old tensions which had been submerged in the Rassemblement Populaire threatened to be re-opened by the PCF's attacks on non-intervention as a 'double treason' by the SFIO. The PCF accused the SFIO leadership of betraying Republican Spain and the anti-fascist program of the Rassemblement Populaire.<sup>17</sup> In essence this was also a double attack on the SFIO - both as the party of government and as a party of the left.

In both Britain and France, Communists in their energetic championing of opposition to the Non-intervention Agreement were seeking to increase their own support, often appealing directly to the membership of the organised labour movement. Those within the university who shared the party's absolute rejection of non-intervention either formally joined its membership or, more commonly, independently participated in its campaigns.<sup>18</sup> Equally as significant, the Communist Party's absolute rejection of non-intervention strongly influenced the political language and slogans which were adopted by other groups in opposing the policy within both countries.

Throughout France during mid-August 1936, the PCF held a series of meetings at which relief for the Spanish Republic and the absolute rejection of non-intervention were the dominant themes. PCF deputies such as Duclos and Marty toured southern towns, including Toulouse, Bordeaux and Montpellier, calling for solidarity, aid and opposition to non-intervention.<sup>19</sup> In September 1936 the PCF's campaign against Blum's foreign policy intensified, in newspaper attacks, mass meetings, and even a short strike in Paris.<sup>20</sup> The Nationalists' capture of Irún was one motive for the new wave of criticism, as was perhaps the growing membership

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<sup>16</sup> Sowerwine, *Sisters or Citizens?*, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup> Draft, "Abandon de l'Espagne, Suicide de la France", n.d., 360 AP 28, Archives Nationales.

<sup>18</sup> Physicist Frédéric Joliot joined the SFIO following 6 February 1934, but he started to move away from the party in 1936 when he strongly disagreed with the party's position of non-intervention - *Dictionnaire Biographique du Mouvement Ouvrier Français*, Vol. 32, p. 226.

<sup>19</sup> *L'Humanité*, 15/8/1936, p. 4;

*Le Midi Socialiste*, 17/8/1936, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> The strike by Parisian metallurgical workers "was for 'bread and Spain' because the party was unsure if it could mobilize a strike around a purely political issue" - Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 109.

of the PCF itself.<sup>21</sup> Communist calls for a reconsideration of non-intervention were echoed even in Socialist dominated Toulouse where 10,000 people attended a Rassemblement Populaire meeting which called for a new policy by the government and advocated action through the League of Nations instead.<sup>22</sup> The increasing tension between the leaderships of the SFIO and PCF culminated in early December 1936 when the latter abstained from a parliamentary vote on the Blum government's foreign policy.<sup>23</sup>

### **Ambivalent Defenders of Non-Intervention: CVIA**

In contrast to the unity shown by communists in opposition to non-intervention, the Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels Anti-fascistes reflected a far more divided membership over the issue than the absolute commitment of the PCF. The Comité de Vigilance's increasingly ambivalent position over non-intervention reinforces the importance of relating reactions to the policy to the evolution of the civil war over time and linking reactions to non-intervention to other issues. CVIA's national committee enthusiastically supported non-intervention in a public statement in December 1936 which announced,

Le CVIA se félicite que le Gouvernement du Front Populaire, se dégageant des lenteurs de procédure du Comité de Londres, ait pris l'initiative, aujourd'hui publique, de demander l'institution d'un contrôle effectif de la non-intervention...

... Le gouvernement français, en acceptant un contrôle international à sa propre frontière, donne une preuve exemplaire de son attachement à la paix, et de sa volonté d'action pour l'organisation de la paix.<sup>24</sup>

The Comité de Vigilance was one of the first to welcome non-intervention, just as it had been one of the first French organisations to send aid to the Republican Spain.

To support its position CVIA's Bureau conducted in November 1936 a survey of membership opinion through Vigilance, its journal. After two months of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 225;

Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 7/9/36, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 133.

<sup>24</sup> "The CVIA congratulates the Government of the Front Populaire, on freeing up the slow procedure of the Committee of London, having retaken the initiative, publicly today, by demanding the institution of an effective control of non-intervention... The French Government, in accepting an international control at its proper frontier, has given exemplary proof of its attachment to the peace, and of its willingness to act for the organisation of the peace" - Vigilance, 16/12/1936, p. 2.



non-intervention, opinion was almost evenly divided over the policy, though only a minority favoured its immediate rejection.

TABLE 6.1: CVIA's SURVEY OF ITS MEMBERSHIP OVER NON-INTERVENTION<sup>25</sup>

Question	yes	no	abstain
(1a) Whether there should be a campaign to change the position of the French government over non-intervention?	290	380	44
(1b) Whether there should be direct action of relief by French workers, without an official change in the government positions?	330	103	81
(2) Whether they were opposed without condition to non-intervention?	254	421	39
(3) Whether the lifting of non-intervention would lead to an international escalation of the war to the Spanish Republic's detriment?	296	261	157
4) Whether France should act unilaterally in lifting the embargo?	144	492	78

As questions (1a) and (1b) reveal, support for non-intervention and humanitarian aid to the Republic was not mutually inconsistent. While committed opponents of non-intervention like Paul Langevin viewed CVIA's referendum on Spain as unacceptable, it did reveal that for others, domestic anti-fascism and support for the Spanish Republic did not necessarily imply opposition to non-intervention.<sup>26</sup>

Yet if the position adopted by the Comité de Vigilance reflected the way in which non-intervention divided parties and other organisations, it also shows how the following months of warfare altered the legitimacy and the balance of support for non-intervention. Increasingly CVIA's bureau adopted motions critical of a policy which could not prevent German and Italian involvement in the war. Still, it was the policy's application not its objectives which caused criticism from CVIA. The continual breaches of non-intervention by the Nationalists did not necessitate its abandonment, and during the first half of 1937 CVIA appealed to the League of Nations and the countries involved to make the pact workable. As the table below

<sup>25</sup> *Vigilance*, 27/10/1936 p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Vigilance*, 16/12/1936, p. 21.

reveals, appeals for aid and support for non-intervention could run together and influence each other.

Though the Republic's victory at Guadalajara in mid March 1937 produced incontrovertible evidence of the scale of Italian commitment, it was probably the Basque campaign the following month, with its large loss of Republican territory, its exodus of refugees and the prominence of foreign aircraft, which spurred CVIA to unequivocally call for the lifting of the arms embargo. Significantly, it sought by its motion of early July 1937 to suspend non-intervention merely so it could be re-implemented more effectively.

TABLE 6.2: RESOLUTIONS BY CVIA'S FEDERAL BUREAU ON SPAIN<sup>27</sup>

Date	Federal Bureau Resolution
23/7/1936	Appeal for humanitarian aid
7/9/1936	Announce support for Blum's policy of non-intervention
20/11/1936	Appeal to English democrats for action for Spanish Republic
10/12/1936	Call for effective non-intervention
15/1/1937	Criticise the presence of German and Italian troops in Spain
30/3/1937	Criticise Non-Intervention Agreement and call for action through League of Nations
25/4/1937	Recognition of the failure of non-intervention
11/5/1937	Call for aid in the evacuation of the Basques Appeal to the League of Nations over the failure of non-intervention
6/7/1937	Call for the negotiated removal of all foreign troops, and while this was being implemented the lifting of the embargo on arms

After a year of fighting in Spain, the CVIA Congress held in mid-July 1937, passed a resolution rejecting the policy of non-intervention by 2,026 votes to 1,250. The motion read,

Le Congrès du CVIA, constatant que la politique dite de non-intervention est, depuis un an, une duperie, demande que le gouvernement français reprenne sa liberté, revienne à la loi et rétablisse le commerce des armes avec l'Espagne antifasciste...

...le Congrès du CVIA se prononce contre la reconnaissance de Franco

<sup>27</sup> *Vigilance*, 7/7/1937, pp. 15-17;  
*Vigilance*, 11/5/1937, p. 9;  
*Vigilance*, 12/8/1937, p. 7.

comme belligérant.<sup>28</sup>

Though there was still considerable support for the aims of non-intervention, ultimately it was the PCF's view of the policy as a '*duperie*' which was invoked by CVIA in rejecting the policy with which it had been so initially sympathetic. The Congress also voted (with only 2 dissenters) to seek the return of Langevin, Joliot-Curie and Basch.<sup>29</sup> Langevin declined for reasons of health, though given his activism in opposing non-intervention it seems more likely that the debates over the civil war had furthered his distance from the organisation.<sup>30</sup>

### Ambivalent Proponents of Non-Intervention: The SFIO

Like many other organisations, both the SFIO and Labour Party, though committed to supporting the Spanish Republic, were strongly divided by non-intervention. Within both parties, the debates over the leadership's initial support for non-intervention were linked to wider disputes over policy and ideology.

Unsurprisingly for a party which in 1920 had defined itself in opposition to the principles of Leninist centralisation, the SFIO was a party whose organisation and ideology encouraged diversity. If opposition to non-intervention provided a rallying focus for the PCF to attract support, adherents of the SFIO reacted to events in Spain from a variety of perspectives.<sup>31</sup> Nathanael Greene's study of the SFIO's increasing divisions over foreign affairs between 1936 and 1938, personalised these ideological differences by focusing on its national leadership.<sup>32</sup> The party's centre was represented by the alliance between its parliamentary leader Léon Blum and General Secretary Paul Faure. To their left were two *tendances*, the *Bataille Socialiste* led by Jean Zyromski and the *Gauche Révolutionnaire* of Marcel Pivert. The *tendances* were parties within the party, committed to their own visions of its ideology and aim. Zyromski advocated closer relations with the communists, while the *Gauche Révolutionnaire* called for socialist revolution to be the SFIO's

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<sup>28</sup> "The Congress of the CVIA, noting that the policy called non-intervention is, since one year ago, a deception, asks that the French Government retake its liberty, and reverse the law and reestablish the commerce in armaments with antifascist Spain... the Congress of the CVIA pronounces itself against the recognition of Franco as a belligerent" - *Vigilance*, 12/8/1937, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Vigilance*, 2/11/1937, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 173;  
Irvin M. Wall, "French Socialism and the Popular Front", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5, 3, 1970, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Nathanael Greene, *Crisis and Decline: The French Socialist Party in the Popular Front Era*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1969, p. viii.

paramount commitment.<sup>33</sup> With the outbreak of the civil war in Spain, both *tendances* saw in Iberian events justification for their own political visions, and both were soon opposed to the Blum-Faure formulation of non-intervention, though for very different reasons.

In reaction to the government's adoption of non-intervention, Zyromski founded a pressure group within the SFIO to lobby against the policy.<sup>34</sup> The Comité d'Action Socialiste Pour l'Espagne (CASPE) included members of both *tendances*, though Pivert initially supported non-intervention.<sup>35</sup> Despite this early dissent over non-intervention within the SFIO, it was not until mid 1937 that the policy became a central issue of confrontation, as it became linked to the strong disillusionment within the party over the government's stalled domestic reform. During the first months of 1937 there were increasing tensions between the Gauche Révolutionnaire and the SFIO leadership over the former's attacks on the Front Populaire government. These culminated in reaction to 16 March 1937 when police repression of an anti-fascist demonstration in Clichy left five dead.<sup>36</sup> The Gauche Révolutionnaire's subsequent criticism of the government led to the expulsion of 22 members of the Jeunesses Socialistes by the party leadership.<sup>37</sup> As a result of these clashes over domestic policy Pivert became increasingly critical of the operation of non-intervention, though his opposition to the policy was from a fundamentally different position from Zyromski.

The importance of the battle between the *tendances* in Paris has concentrated historians' attention on the SFIO's ideological divisions at the expense of its regional differences. Geography was a major influence on the Fédération National des Étudiants Socialistes (FNES) as it sought to position itself in relation to the debates within the SFIO over the policies of Blum's government. Both Zyromski and Pivert were Vice-Presidents of the FNES, and actively concerned to encourage the political development of students. Though electorally dominated by the PCF, Paris was the heartland for both the Bataille Socialiste and Gauche Révolutionnaire as well as the FNES.<sup>38</sup> It was Paris students who provided the leadership of the national

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49 & 57.

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 228-227.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel Guérin, *Front Populaire, Révolution Manquée*, François Maspero, Paris, 1970, pp. 151-152.

<sup>36</sup> The clash outside a PSF rally between anti-fascist protestors and police left 6 dead and hundreds wounded. In the wake of the clash, the SFIO leadership seemed to believe the events were a product of a conspiracy, which implied that the PCF had manipulated the demonstration to embarrass the government - Brower, *The New Jacobins*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>37</sup> Guérin, *Front Populaire, Révolution Manquée*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>38</sup> Greene, *Crisis and Decline*, p. 181.

federation and controlled its journal, Essais et Combats. Their concerns dominated its direction and meant that the reaction of the FNES to the war in Spain was framed against the battle of the *tendances* within the party.

For French socialist students, non-intervention was not merely a matter of government policy, but also of party loyalty. When in January 1937, at the first meeting of the Federal Bureau of the FNES, Boutbien, the Federation's representative to the socialist students' International, proposed a motion absolutely rejecting non-intervention, he received only one other supporting vote. The seven other members of the Federal Bureau were unanimous in declaring their agreement with the policy followed in Spain by the Blum government.<sup>39</sup> After the vote, Boutbien, who had been active in seeking unity with Communist student groups during the July 1936 Oxford Conference, resigned from the party. Though the FNES was unwilling to directly challenge the party leadership over non-intervention, as the war continued a variety of dissenting perspectives over the policy developed within the student Federation.

During the first three days of April 1937, the FNES held its annual Congress, which included student delegations from universities across France, as well as the leading senior figures of Pivert and Zyromski.<sup>40</sup> The Congress debate on non-intervention reveals the extent to which FNES was geographically as well as ideologically divided. With 175 members the student socialists of Toulouse were by far the largest university group outside Paris, and as such were in a strong position to question Parisian hegemony of the Federation.<sup>41</sup> Before the debate over non-intervention, the Toulouse delegation had walked out during an earlier session of the Congress over the inclusion on the platform of two Paris delegates who had been expelled from the Jeunesses Socialistes, reflecting their lack of sympathy with the radical dissent of Gauche Révolutionnaire.<sup>42</sup>

The debates over Blum's foreign policy revealed that the Congress was divided between those who rejected non-intervention absolutely and those who condemned the flawed implementation of the policy, but accepted it in principle by

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<sup>39</sup> Essais et Combats, Feb. 1937, p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> The speeches of Pivert and Zyromski to the Congress symbolise their contrasting concerns - Pivert protested against the recent expulsion of several activists from the Youth section of the SFIO, while Zyromski, who made his appearance during the debate on Spain, encouraged the students to focus on studying international politics - Essais et Combats, April 1937, pp. 22-23.

<sup>41</sup> Essais et Combats, Feb. 1937, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Essais et Combats, April 1937, pp. 19 & 23.

calling for its reform. This divide was regional as well as ideological as revealed by the following exchange.

Raust (Toulouse) estime aussi que la non-intervention a été jusqu'ici une duperie. Il s'agit d'en faire une réalité. Il déclare d'accord avec la proposition de Largo Caballero qu'une délégation des Internationales exerce effectivement le contrôle aux frontières et sur des bateaux. Il indique que l'URSS n'a pas fourni à l'Espagne un soutien désintéressé. Il dépose une motion dans ce sens.

Rabaud [Paris] estime que le gouvernement a eu tort dans son action initiale quand il réalise le blocus, et qu'en tout cas il faut se déclarer pour la levée de l'embargo.<sup>43</sup>

The motion proposed by the Toulouse delegation, while condemning the existing operation of non-intervention, accepted it in principle by calling for a scheme which would make it effective on all parties. The Toulouse motion received 28 votes. Ultimately, the Congress followed Rabaud's absolute rejection of non-intervention, carrying by 41 votes the resolution which called for "*la levée immédiate de l'embargo sur les armes et le matériel à destination des antifascistes espagnols*".<sup>44</sup> Given that there were also 15 abstentions from the vote over non-intervention, it is significant that this resolution did not even achieve an absolute majority from the delegates.<sup>45</sup> Compared to the unanimous Congress resolution against compulsory military service, the divided vote over non-intervention reveals not only the different perceptions of the policy within the university sections of Fédération Nationale des Étudiants Socialistes but how these were linked to internal party debates.

The decision by the Fédération Nationale des Étudiants Socialistes to start publishing their own journal in early 1937 reveals some of the disparate perspectives from which non-intervention was criticised. Until January 1937, the FNES had shared its journal with the far more pro-communist Belgian Federation of Socialist Students.<sup>46</sup> The political differences between the two countries make it

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<sup>43</sup> "Raust (Toulouse) also considered that non-intervention had been up until now a deception. He called for it to be made a reality. He declared his agreement with the proposition of Largo Caballero that an International delegation effectively exercise control at the frontier and aboard shipping. He indicated that the USSR did not furnish disinterested aid to Spain. He set down a motion to this effect.

Rabaud [Paris] considered that the government were wrong in their initial action when they had created the blockade, and that in any case he called for the lifting of the embargo" - *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

<sup>44</sup> *Essais et Combats*, May 1937 p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> 48% votes for the Congress resolution, whereas the Toulouse motion had 33% support.

<sup>46</sup> The joint publication featured an editorial by the head of Belgian socialist students attacking non-intervention as abandoning Spain under the pretext of pacifism - *L'Étudiant Socialiste*, Dec. 1936-Jan. 1936, p. 1.

difficult to determine early reactions in France to non-intervention, given the editorial dominance of the Belgians. Equally the new journal, *Essais et Combats*, was far from representative of national currents within the French Federation. Paris based and authored, the prominent influence of the Gauche Révolutionnaire emerges in several of its articles. Jean Lauriet, in a piece titled "A bas l'embargo!", rejected the view that criticism of non-intervention within the SFIO was treasonable to the party.<sup>47</sup> Rather than silencing dissent, there was a need for free criticism within the party, which was an implicit defence of the *tendances'* independence. Lauriet argued that Spain's importance for France was that it marked the first serious defeat of fascism by socialism, and therefore,

Dès le début de la guerre civile espagnole, il était visible *qu'elle était décisive pour notre sort à tous*. Dès le moment où fascisme triomphait en Espagne, une victoire fasciste devenait fort vraisemblable en France et *tous les espoirs de socialisme étaient perdus pour des décades*.<sup>48</sup>

Without German and Italian aid, he believed that the rebellion would have been defeated in a month. Lauriet argued that the Blum's government's primary justification for non-intervention had been world peace, and that internal opposition in France to supplying arms to the Republic was only a secondary consideration.<sup>49</sup> After five months of fighting in Spain, he felt that there remained the risk of war, though it would now be imperialist rather than revolutionary. Citing the POUM's call for democracy and revolution, Lauriet called for action.

Lauriet's argument against non-intervention was given a greater immediacy by a postscript added to the article by its author, calling for an international campaign of protest to save the comrades of the POUM.<sup>50</sup> The postscript concluded that the French abandonment of Republican Spain through non-intervention had given the USSR room to extend its purges against the workers' party of Spain. This anti-Stalinist critique of non-intervention was elaborated in a later article by J. Rabaud, "La Révolution espagnol en danger".<sup>51</sup> He argued that while Soviet aid had been vital for the defence of Madrid in the winter of 1936, it was now deliberately being used to separate the war from revolution. Stalin would not have had a free hand in Spain if Blum's government had actively supported the Spanish Republic.

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<sup>47</sup> *Essais et Combats*, Feb. 1937, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> "From the beginning of the Spanish civil war, it was obvious *that she was decisive for all our fates*. From the moment when fascism triumphs in Spain, a fascist victory becomes more likely in France and *all the hopes of socialism would be lost for decades*" - *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> A reply to Lauriet the following month, argued that intervention would have lead to SFIO losing government as the Radicals and bourgeois held the real power in Front Populaire - *Essais et Combats*, Mar. 1937, pp. 9-10.

<sup>50</sup> *Essais et Combats*, Feb. 1937, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Essais et Combats*, Mar. 1937, pp. 11.

Lauriet's and Rabaud's articles were striking, as one of the few critiques of non-intervention which were anti-communist rather than drawing on the same language as the PCF, as well as for their unusual sensitivity to the dynamics of domestic politics in Republican Spain before the dramatic confrontation of May 1937. At the same time as these articles, the FNES Bureau was becoming more explicit in its anti-communism generally, especially in relation to the second round of trials in Moscow.<sup>52</sup> This anti-communist, revolutionary critique of non-intervention within the Fédération Nationale des Étudiants Socialistes would have found ready support amongst the Gauche Révolutionnaire *tendance*, revealing the extent to which Paris students, even when they dissented from SFIO leadership, did so by allying themselves to other currents within the party.<sup>53</sup>

The strong divisions within the SFIO were most fully expressed in July 1937 at the Party Congress in Marseilles which followed the shock resignation of the Blum government from office.<sup>54</sup> The Congress debate centred on party members' disenchantment with the government's 'pause' in domestic economic reforms and its foreign policy over Spain.<sup>55</sup> As Greene writes, "on Spain an acrimonious debate was followed by a unanimously voted motion which avoided the issues by, in effect, criticising non-intervention without calling for its end".<sup>56</sup> At the close of the Congress, Blum's motion on policy was passed with 2946 mandates, though those of *tendances* received significant support, with 1545 mandates for that of Zyromski and 894 for Pivert.<sup>57</sup> Hostility to non-intervention had not only strengthened the PCF's challenge to the SFIO, but had also increased the following of the dissenting *tendances* within the party. However, despite representing almost half the mandates at the Congress in mid-1937, the ideological differences between Zyromski and Pivert meant that this dissent always remained fragmented.<sup>58</sup>

### **Ambivalent Supporters of Non-Intervention: The Labour Party**

During the Labour Party Conference held in Edinburgh in October 1936 the provision of humanitarian relief and non-intervention's denial of military aid were

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> Guérin, *Front Populaire, Révolution Manquée*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>54</sup> Greene, *Crisis and Decline*, pp. 141-149.

<sup>55</sup> Irvin M. Wall, "French Socialism and the Popular Front", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5, 3, 1970, p. 18.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 230.

<sup>57</sup> Bilis, *Socialistes et Pacifistes*, p. 229.

<sup>58</sup> Donald Noel Baker, "The Politics of Socialist Protest in France: The Left Wing of the Socialist Party 1921-1939", *Journal of Modern History*, 43, 1, March 1971, p. 24.



linked by both defenders and opponents of the policy. The Labour Party leadership sought to justify its acceptance of non-intervention by reference to France, arguing that the policy had originated with a French Socialist government which needed British support.<sup>59</sup> Yet the leadership were also under substantial pressure to reverse this position, especially after a Spanish Socialist delegation arrived to make an emotional appeal to the conference. Jiménez de Asúa opened his address with the words that,

In the papers this morning you will have read that there has been a terrible air bombardment by heavy bombers of the villages around Madrid. We could not stop that bombardment. Why? Because we had not the fighting aircraft to do it, because the Pact of Non-intervention has prevented us from getting them.<sup>60</sup>

Jiménez de Asúa then attacked non-intervention as in principle a "monstrosity" against international law, and in practice a complete failure as it had been broken so extensively by the Fascist powers. He linked humanitarian aid and opposition to non-intervention together when he asked,

What are we here for? We are here to thank you for your help; to thank you with profound emotion for the medical supplies, for the food, for the clothes that you have sent, and for the other help that you have given we thank you; but we say that that is not enough. We ask you to help us to remove the obstacles that are now stopping us from getting arms.<sup>61</sup>

Both he and Isabel de Palencia closed by appealing for the material and arms that would give the Republic a quick victory, rather than the devastation of a long drawn-out war.<sup>62</sup>

The Spanish delegates had a profound impact on the tone of the conference, providing a rallying point for opposition within the Labour Party to non-intervention. As Margot Kettle, a student at the University of Edinburgh who watched the conference remembered fifty years later, "when the Party Conference had received a delegation from the Spanish Republicans, headed by Madame Palencia, it reversed its decision, and that was a historic moment".<sup>63</sup> Yet, despite the impact of the event in Kettle's memory, the actual results of the Conference were far

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<sup>59</sup> Buchanan, *The Popular Front in France*, p. 71; Howell, *British Social Democracy*, p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> *The Agony of Spain: Socialist Appeal to British Democracy*, Labour Party, London, 1936, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4 & 7.

<sup>63</sup> "Recollections of a Younger World", pp. 125-126 in CP/Ind/Kett/1, National Museum of Labour History.

more ambivalent. A delegation was sent to the Prime Minister, but the Labour Party and the TUC did not officially reject non-intervention until June 1937.<sup>64</sup>

Oxford academic G.D.H. Cole, committed to radicalising the Labour Party from within, argued that,

Many of the delegates who attended the Edinburgh Conference of the party in October came away disgusted - there is no other word. They felt that they had been steam-rolled by the platform, and that the platform and policy was one of sheer evasion of the essential issues. Over Spain, on which feeling in the movement runs high, the Conference first accepted, by means of the Trade Union block vote, a resolution endorsing the policy of non-intervention. Then after the speeches of the Spanish delegates had made those present realise that non-intervention meant in fact leaving the Spanish people defenceless against General Franco's plentiful supplies of German and Italian arms, the feeling in the Conference so mounted that the earlier resolution had to be set aside, and Messrs Attlee and Greenwood sent to London to see Mr Chamberlain in order to tell him - no one quite knew what, for even at this later stage there was no plain declaration in favour of helping the Spanish people. The Spanish business at the Conference was an appalling muddle, out of which the British Government was able to make abundant capital in favour of its 'non-intervention' policy. Nor has the situation improved since. Local Labour Parties have done much, but the Labour Party has done next to nothing, to help the Spanish cause.<sup>65</sup>

As expressed in Cole's attack on the Labour Party's leadership, the debates over non-intervention must be linked to other currents in the organised labour movement. Ben Pimlott has described the Edinburgh Conference as a turning point in constitutional reform of the Labour Party, in part because the leadership's hijacking of the agenda had left even moderate proponents of constitutional reform so unsatisfied.<sup>66</sup> In that context, non-intervention became a symbol for those, especially members of constituency parties, who resented trade union domination of the Labour Party and saw the party's leadership as out of touch. The Home Countries Labour Association which was at the forefront of this push for constitutional reform within the party, also established in late February 1937 a

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<sup>64</sup> Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 71 & 99.

<sup>65</sup> Notes, "The British Labour Movement Today", n.d. in A1/55/10, Cole Papers, Nuffield College Archives.

<sup>66</sup> Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, p. 127.

Labour Spain Committee to encourage opposition to non-intervention within the party.<sup>67</sup>

Yet the tensions over non-intervention between the national policy of the Labour Party and the views of its local activists had relatively little impact within British universities compared to party politics in France. The Cambridge University Labour Party and Cambridge University Socialist Society sent a joint-delegation of academics and students to meet with Attlee and Dalton in the hopes of changing the party's policy over non-intervention.<sup>68</sup> That the party leadership agreed to receive the delegation, shows the willingness of some within the Labour Party to encourage activists within the universities. Unlike France where the PCF and the *tendances* inside the SFIO provided vigorous challenges to the party's leadership, those who favoured a stronger policy over Spain within the Labour Party faced fewer alternatives. Labour activists like Joseph Needham and G.D.H. Cole chose to remain in the party despite their divergences over policy while putting their efforts into independent appeals and coalitions for Spain.

In contrast to their French peers, British socialist students were largely distant from the internal debates over non-intervention within the Labour Party. Though the University Labour Federation was affiliated to the Labour Party, the debates and policies of its constituent student societies tended to be largely campus-based. The mixed memberships of socialist societies, combining communists and socialists, seem to have generated far fewer tensions over non-intervention than within the Labour Party itself. Rather, as revealed by the Union debates in Oxford, Cambridge and London, there was a broad consensus on the left against non-intervention.

### **British Student Debates Over Non-Intervention**

When the British academic year began in 1936-37, the civil war had been raging for several months and non-intervention had already been implemented. In the last days of November 1936, the Oxford Union debated the motion that "This House deplors the continued adherence of the British Government to the non-intervention agreement".<sup>69</sup> The motion was narrowly lost by 71 votes to 63 votes.

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<sup>67</sup> However the leadership of the Home Counties Labour Association/Labour Spain Committee were unwilling to associate themselves with the Unity campaign of the CPGB, ILP and Socialist League - *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes of 15/2/1937 & 7/5/1937, Add 881/1, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>69</sup> *Oxford Guardian*, 30/11/1936, p. 8;

Given the assumed strength of Conservative opinion amongst Oxford students, it is surprising that the debate was not lost by a wider margin, but perhaps this was because of the low attendance.<sup>70</sup> One of the students responsible for the debate was Union President James Brown, a member of the Liberal Club and Balliol College. In the preceding month, Brown had attacked support for non-intervention in a letter to the Liberal Club's newspaper. He wrote, "it seems to be almost universally assumed that this policy is intrinsically right. This is alarming".<sup>71</sup> Even more of a concern was that, "as I write, the situation in Spain seems to be going from bad to worse. In all probability Madrid will soon fall".<sup>72</sup> Brown argued that Britain needed to establish its legal right to supply arms to the Spanish Republic, in case there was a later rebellion in France (ironically, the same fear had helped to motivate Blum's decision not to supply arms). The opposition of Oxford Liberal students to non-intervention led them to seek an article from G.D.H. Cole, patron of the Labour Club, which attacked the government for destroying the League of Nations through its non-intervention policy and called for a People's Front of the left united around foreign policy.<sup>73</sup>

The Union debate in Cambridge took place on a much greater scale than in Oxford, partly due to the unique local political atmosphere in the town in the first week of February 1937 after the obituaries for volunteer John Cornford were printed. On 9 February 1937, the Cambridge Union debated the motion "That this House deplores His Majesty's Government's policy of Non-intervention in Spain".<sup>74</sup> One of the key-note speakers in the debate was Harry Pollitt, Secretary of the British Communist Party, who was well received and delivered a speech in which he accused the National Government of favouring Franco. Perhaps it was Pollitt's charisma or the shock at the recent news of Cornford's death that contributed to the motion being carried. The House adjourned a few minutes before midnight, and the motion against non-intervention received 208 votes to 166 votes. More significant than the vote itself, was the way the debate reveals the independence of students from party politics and the complex intertwining of non-intervention with other issues, such as the experience of volunteers or humanitarian aid.

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The Oxford Magazine, 3/12/1936, p. 244;

The Cherwell, 5/12/1936, p. 188.

<sup>70</sup> The following term the Union passed by 106 votes to 91 the motion "that the British Government is disastrously mishandling the international situation" - The Oxford Magazine, 28/1/1937, p. 307.

<sup>71</sup> Oxford Guardian, 19/10/1936, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Oxford Guardian, 9/11/1936, p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> The Cambridge Review, 12/2/1937, pp. 261-262.

One of the leading speakers defending non-intervention in the Cambridge debate was John Churchill, like Cornford a member of Trinity College.<sup>75</sup> A few days after the debate Churchill signed the joint-letter endorsing the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal for humanitarian relief in Spain, as representative for the Cambridge University Conservative Association. Though most historiography has ignored the point, there was no inconsistency in Churchill's position.<sup>76</sup> Not only was it possible to support the government's policy of non-intervention and local humanitarian campaigns for those suffering in Spain, but there was frequently a nexus between the two in which the former position was partly justified by the latter.<sup>77</sup>

For other conservative students, pro-Republican sympathy could lead to increasing distance from the Conservative Party's foreign policy, especially the party's commitment to non-intervention. Another supporter of the Conservative Party who spoke in the Union debate was John Simonds, who defended non-intervention though he also desired the defeat of Franco. Simonds was one of the leading personalities in the Union, and his contribution at the non-intervention debate was described as "the best speech off the paper this term".<sup>78</sup> Several months after the Union debate, at a large fundraising meeting for a foodship to Bilbao in the first week of May 1937, Simonds adopted a new position. Speaking as a Conservative, he felt he could no longer support non-intervention, especially given its effects on the Spanish civilian population.<sup>79</sup> For Simonds, the Basque front's need for humanitarian relief ultimately led not only to sharing appeal platforms with the left, but also to sharing their rejection of non-intervention as deliberately worsening the civilian and military conditions in the Republic.

Simonds's dissent over non-intervention was perhaps most dramatically symbolised with the opening of the new academic year of 1937-38 at the traditional Union debate of no confidence in the current government. Speaking as the Union Vice-President, Simonds crossed the floor to argue that,

Non-intervention had only helped one side in Spain. He attacked the Cambridge Conservative Association where constipation is a representative

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>76</sup> *contra* Fryth who explicitly links aid and opposition to non-intervention - Fryth, *The Signal was Spain*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>77</sup> Buchanan contrasts the SMAC where political campaigning and humanitarian fundraising ran together with the Labour Party's Milk for Spain scheme which "was candidly presented as a means of depoliticising the campaign" - Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>78</sup> *The Cambridge Review*, 12/2/1937, p. 262.

<sup>79</sup> *The Granta*, 5/5/1937, p. 380.

condition, and, speaking as a Conservative, he stated that the Conservative Party was no place for any supporter of the Valencia Government or of collective security... John's speech was made in a tense silence, and the loud and prolonged applause which greeted it showed that the House too recognized that this was one of John's greatest speeches.<sup>80</sup>

The debates within Cambridge and most other British universities over non-intervention broadly took place between left-wing and right-wing students' groups. Though Conservative students like Churchill and Simonds both supported humanitarian aid for the victims of the civil war in Spain, Simonds' dissent in mid-1937 was still exceptional amongst Conservative students in Britain.

### **The International Brigades and Non-Intervention**

While the battles for Madrid and the Basque country fuelled increasing international criticism of non-intervention, those who volunteered to fight in Spain frequently returned to Britain and France to emerge at the forefront of the domestic debates over the arms embargo. Veterans of the International Brigades represented powerful critics of the workings of non-intervention, not merely for their first-hand experiences but also for their heroic stature which transcended the party divisions of the left. Under-represented amongst the veterans, student volunteers were over-represented on the platform and in print as articulate spokesmen for the Republican cause.

As one London student who served in the International Brigades would later write for his university magazine,

I was bombed and strafed by Hitler's and Mussolini's avion, shelled by their artillery, machine-gunned by their bullets and finally captured by Italian tanks and a mechanised Italian column. I got the idea intervention was going on.<sup>81</sup>

The author had spent almost 10 months in Spain, seven of them as a Nationalist prisoner. Held in a concentration camp, he claimed that his contact with other Spaniards and his own observations had given him an accurate idea of Nationalist reliance on Italian war material. While the Spanish Republican Government had stated that the Nationalists had received 100,000 Italian troops, he felt this estimate should be closer to between 200,000 and 250,000 Italian soldiers. The article closed

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<sup>80</sup> The Granta, 20/10/1937, p. 40.

<sup>81</sup> The Clare Market Review, 34, Dec 1938, p. 11.

by calling for the confidence trick of non-intervention to be stopped.<sup>82</sup> The LSE Research Students Associations was addressed by Mr Whittaker, who had been taken prisoner by the Nationalists, while the UCL Socialist Society also sought to hold a meeting with a UCL student who had been captured with the Brigades.<sup>83</sup> Whittaker, who was probably the author of the above article, provided in his talk to the research students the "most startling fact" that 250,000 Italians and 50,000 Germans were fighting for Franco.<sup>84</sup> These were significant over-estimates of the size of Italian and German forces in Nationalist Spain. At a maximum there were probably no more than 80,000 Italian military personnel and 10,000 Germans (including the 5,000 strong Condor Legion).<sup>85</sup>

The role of Fascist intervention in Spain was similarly overstated by Edinburgh medical student David Mackenzie, who had served as part of the first British contingent in the Brigades. After he had returned from the front, Mackenzie became prominent in the domestic conflict over non-intervention, speaking at public meetings across Scotland. In Glasgow, he addressed the University's Left Book Club, as well as speaking at the City Hall.<sup>86</sup> Mackenzie received an enthusiastic reception at the latter meeting, which raised £20 for the families of Glasgow volunteers. Mackenzie's experiences in Spain gave his testimony a greater authority as he spoke of the fascist military aid which the Nationalist army relied upon;

Madrid would never be surrounded by Franco's troops, and the real threat to the city he said, came from the German and Italian airmen, who in their first raid bombed 20 schools.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>83</sup> "LSE Research Students Association Magazine", 2nd issue, n.d., p. 6 in 24/2, LSE Archives;

*Phineas*, 1/11/1938, p. 5.

<sup>84</sup> LSE Research Students Association Magazine", 2nd issue, n.d., p. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Whealey estimates that between 16,800-19,000 Germans served in Spain during the war - Robert H. Whealey, *Hitler & Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 1989, pp. 101-102;

John Coverdale estimates that 75,000 Italian troops were sent to Spain and another 5,700 served with the Nationalist air force - John F. Coverdale, *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975, pp. 396 & 417;

Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 977-979.

<sup>86</sup> *Glasgow University Magazine*, 20/1/1937, p. 154;

*Glasgow Herald*, 11/9/1937, p. 12;

Andrew Ferns, "The Development of the Solidarity Movement with Republican Spain in Glasgow 1936-1939", BA (Hons) thesis, University of Strathclyde, 1975, p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 11/9/1937, p. 12.

Mackenzie used similar arguments when he wrote an article for Edinburgh University's journal The Student on the International Brigades.<sup>88</sup> He firstly defended the Brigades, arguing that less than half the volunteers were Communists. He described the Brigades' purpose as providing a co-ordinated and disciplined unit, to improve the exceedingly brave but untrained militias. Their initial success had been in stopping the Nationalist drive on Madrid. Mackenzie argued that Franco's army relied on Moors and Nazis, and that on the front-line he had only once fought against Spanish soldiers.<sup>89</sup> Around Madrid he claimed the Brigades were opposed by 5,000 well-equipped German regular troops, but these had been driven back by the bravery of the outnumbered volunteers of the Thaelmann Battalion.<sup>90</sup> Mackenzie also overestimated the role of Italy in the war, when he asserted that "International Fascism co-operated in Franco's plans before the revolt began".<sup>91</sup> Finally Mackenzie closed his article by calling for the end of non-intervention as the policy was directed against the Spanish militia and civilians.

The testimony of student volunteers in the Brigades was a powerful weapon for those who sought to argue that the non-intervention pact masked the realities of battle in Spain. In a November 1937 meeting at the Maison de Mutualité in Paris, Albert Bayet read from a letter he had received from a French student *milicien* who had been wounded three times in the fighting and was calling for the French border to be opened for humanitarian and military relief to Republican Spain.<sup>92</sup> The emotional impact of the letter was increased by Bayet's own preface in speaking of his personal experience of the war of 1914-1918 and the high casualties of combat.<sup>93</sup> Bayet's testimony also reveals how French academics continued on public platforms participating in national debates over non-intervention, just as they had in reacting to the 6 February 1934 and in campaigns for humanitarian relief to Spain.

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<sup>88</sup> The Student, 9/2/1937, pp. 188-189.

<sup>89</sup> This argument was reversed in the same issue by a letter to editor criticising Republican Spain as relying on the imported International Brigades - Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>90</sup> In fact there were no German ground forces in the initial attack on Madrid, which had been led by the Spanish Army of Africa.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

Mussolini had promised military aid in 1934 to Spanish monarchists, but not to the 1936 plotters. He only decided to commit himself in the Spanish conflict after hearing of France's initial military aid to the Republic - Coverdale, Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, pp. 50-54;

Paul Preston, Franco: A Biography, Harper Collins, London, 1993, p. 157.

<sup>92</sup> Aider l'Espagne Républicaine, Comité International d'Aide au Peuple Espagnol, Paris, c1937, p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 26.



## Patrons of Opposition: French Intellectuals and Non-Intervention

Either on the platform or through petitions, a prominent group of left-wing Parisian academics lobbied against the Blum government's policy of non-intervention. What is perhaps most significant about these political forms is that both were traditionally independent of party politics. The PCF's attacks on non-intervention had increasingly strained its alliance with the SFIO, which made the non-aligned identities of academics an important factor in keeping the debate over non-intervention from becoming merely an inter-party conflict, just as they had been in the formation of the Rassemblement Populaire coalition. This tension was reflected in the meeting of the national committee of Rassemblement Populaire in mid-September 1936, after the fall of Irún to the Nationalists. The committee passed a motion of confidence in the Blum government but also called for a reconsideration of non-intervention and alternative action through the League of Nations.<sup>94</sup> Because the policy of non-intervention had been born out of the strongly diverging views of a coalition government of Socialists, Radicals, and Communists, it gave greater political opportunities to Paris academics such as Victor Basch, Paul Langevin, Henri Wallon and Albert Bayet to act independently on the national stage.

These four academics had been at the forefront of the developing Rassemblement Populaire coalition between 1934 and 1936, and they retained a similarly prominent position at meetings calling for the reconsideration of non-intervention. Combining the roles of patrons and activists they were conspicuous either chairing or delivering the main speeches at an array of meetings calling for arms for Spain. On the platform, these engaged intellectuals were the equals of the leading politicians of the Third Republic, forming common opposition to non-intervention with Zyromski, Jouhaux, Pivert, Thorez and Duclos. Yet, as the earlier examination of the differences between Zyromski and Pivert has shown, common opposition to non-intervention did not mean common politics.

From the first formulation of the arms embargo on Spain, Langevin and Wallon were committed to the PCF's absolute rejection of any 'betrayal' of Republican Spain. On 20 August 1936, their names appeared in L'Humanité alongside those of André Malraux and Jean-Richard Bloch as sponsors of an appeal for "*Des avions pour l'Espagne*".<sup>95</sup> The appeal stated,

Offrir des vivres et des médicaments pour les combattants et les blessés c'est bien; mais il faut, et tout de suite; des armes, et des munitions pour que les

<sup>94</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 21/9/1936, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> L'Humanité, 20/8/1936, p. 2.

républicains espagnols en finissent avec les rebelles, les hitlériens, les legionnaires et les Marocains troupes par les généraux felons... a souscrire immédiatement pour offrir *des avions et des munition* aux milices d'Espagne.<sup>96</sup> Donations were to be sent to Wallon, who later visited Spain where he denounced non-intervention as a double act of treason by the Blum government.<sup>97</sup>

While Victor Basch was also absolutely committed to the Republican cause, his position on non-intervention was more ambivalent. A recent biography has emphasised how Basch's friendship with Blum meant that he did not immediately push the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme to oppose non-intervention in mid-August 1936.<sup>98</sup> Still, Basch's later place on the platform of several mass meetings against the policy suggests that even if his opposition was initially more qualified than Langevin's, it quickly hardened to put him at the forefront of the campaign. These ambiguities in such a prominent intellectual indicate the difficulties of pursuing the nuances behind the public position over non-intervention of academics from universities outside Paris.<sup>99</sup>

The independent opposition of Paris academics to non-intervention found collective form in the Comité International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Républicaine (CICIAER). The organisation was a non-party pressure group, led by Basch and Langevin, focused on reversing non-intervention through pro-Republican propaganda and information. In its meetings and pamphlets, academics were often the key speakers and writers. German Communist Willi Münzenberg has been credited as being the organising force behind the Comité de Coordination which was formed in mid-August 1936.<sup>100</sup> Though Münzenberg's role behind the scenes at the Amsterdam Anti-War Congress of 1932 and Pleyel Anti-Fascist Congress of 1933 has been widely recognised, there is far less information on his role in political campaigns for the Spanish Republic.

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<sup>96</sup> "Offering supplies and medicine for the combatants and the wounded is good; but they have to have, immediately, the arms and ammunition with which the Spanish Republicans will finish the rebels, Nazis, legionnaires and Moroccan troops led by the traitorous generals... subscribe immediately to offer *planes and ammunition* to the militias of Spain" - Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> "Abandon de l'Espagne, Suicide de la France", draft, n.d., 360 AP 29, Archives Nationales; "Culture et Révolution", Conference: Université de Madrid, 24/10/1936, 360 AP 18, Archives Nationales.

<sup>98</sup> Basch, Victor Basch, pp. 268-273.

<sup>99</sup> One exception to this is Henri Daudin in Bordeaux who was a strong public supporter of the PCF's rejection of non-intervention. In April 1937 he attacked the local committees of the SFIO and CVIA for supporting mediation in the civil war - La Gironde Populaire, 16/4/1937, p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Stephane Courtois & Marc Lazar, Histoire du Parti Communiste Français, Presses Universitaires de France, 1995, p. 152.

While it is true that the CICIAER shared the PCF's absolute rejection of non-intervention and drew strongly on the efforts of Communist activists in its ranks, it would be wrong to see it as merely a Communist front organisation. Far from being manipulated, non-Communist academics like Basch and Bayet consciously chose to commit themselves to the CICIAER due to their own political perspectives and the difficulty of organising dissent against a Socialist-led government which they otherwise supported.

Many of the key figures in the Comité International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Républicaine were signatories to the petition which appeared in the December 1936 issue of the pro-Communist journal Commune, which was titled "Déclarations des Intellectuels Républicains au sujet des Événements d'Espagne".<sup>101</sup> The petition opened by paying tribute to the magnificent resistance of the people of Madrid against the attacks of international fascism. It then called for the return of commercial relations with Republican Spain citing several delegations which had established Nationalist violations of the non-intervention pact. The petition claimed 1,400 signatories, who included the writers Rolland, Gide, Aragon, Benda and Nizan. It was also signed by 41 university academics and 200 *agrégés* (the majority of whom were *lycée* teachers).<sup>102</sup>

Given that their respective governments were the first proponents and most enthusiastic supporters of the Non-intervention Agreement, the policy provided a powerful stimulus for intellectuals in Britain and France to make common cause. In Paris, Münzenberg pushed for an international campaign against non-intervention,

L'action pour sauver Madrid n'est pas assez développée. En France de belles campagnes ont été faites. Mais c'est en Angleterre que doit porter surtout notre action. (Affiches, brochures). Il pense qu'une Commission du Comité Mondial et du Comité de Coordination pourrait aller en Angleterre et se mettre en rapport avec Philip Noel Baker, Norman Angell, etc., pour les convaincre qu'il faut faire en Angleterre une campagne dans le genre de celle qui a été menée en France.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Commune, Dec. 1936, pp. 389-191.

<sup>102</sup> Sirinelli, Intellectuels et Passions Françaises, pp. 103-105.

<sup>103</sup> "The action to save Madrid is not developed enough. In France good campaigns have been made. But it is in England that we particularly have to turn our action (Posters, pamphlets). He thought that a Commission of the Comité Mondial and of the Comité de Coordination should be able to go to England and to make a report to Philip Noel Baker, Norman Angell, etc., to convince them that what will have to be done in England, is a campaign of the same kind to that which has been conducted in France" - Minutes of 3/11/1936 in "Information: Bulletin", 10/11/1936, p. 1, No. 30, Fonds Paul Langevin, École Supérieure de Physique et de Chimie Industrielles de la Ville de Paris.

It was significant that no British academics were amongst the prominent intellectuals listed by Münzenberg, yet professional connections did facilitate the exchange of politics across the Channel.

In late November 1936, Langevin led a French delegation to London to campaign against what was feared to be the imminent recognition of Franco by the British government if he captured Madrid.<sup>104</sup> The delegation included fellow academics Bayet and Basch, along with leading representatives of the SFIO and CGT.<sup>105</sup> The delegation met Liberal leader Sir Archibald Sinclair, Tory dissident Winston Churchill and several Labour MPs.<sup>106</sup> French pressure was important due to the Labour Party and National Government's initial justification of non-intervention as an initiative of the Front Populaire. Langevin's delegation also presented a petition to the House of Commons. Their petition stressed three points: the massacres of women and children in bombing of Madrid, that the governments of France and Britain should defend principles of maritime law to end Franco's naval blockade of Basque ports, and that the policy of non-intervention had become a "*duperie*".<sup>107</sup>

Activists in Britain and France sought to pressure their own governments to reverse their commitment to non-intervention, partly by seeking connections across the Channel. This interaction became the *raison d'être* for the British group For Intellectual Liberty, which had originally tried to establish itself as a parallel to CVIA.<sup>108</sup> Langevin's delegation was soon followed by a reciprocal visit by a British delegation including fellow scientist J.D. Bernal, and the following year the French provided hospitality for the all-party delegation of British women MPs who visited Spain. Equally, Basch returned to Britain in March 1937 to see Wilkinson and Rathbone, though he was subject to police pressure during his visit.<sup>109</sup> While the focus for both French and British intellectuals always remained on their own domestic politics, academics in both countries were willing to use their international connections, both political and professional, to try and force the reconsideration of non-intervention at home.

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<sup>104</sup> Pike, *Les Français et la Guerre d'Espagne*, p. 178.

<sup>105</sup> Notes, No. 32, Fonds Paul Langevin, École Supérieure de Physique et de Chimie Industrielles de la Ville de Paris.

<sup>106</sup> "Information: Bulletin", 10/11/1936, p. 5, No. 30, Fonds Paul Langevin, École Supérieure de Physique et de Chimie Industrielles de la Ville de Paris.

<sup>107</sup> Notes, No. 32, Fonds Paul Langevin, École Supérieure de Physique et de Chimie Industrielles de la Ville de Paris.

<sup>108</sup> Minutes of 5/7/1937, A1, Add 9369, Manuscripts, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>109</sup> Basch, *Victor Basch*, p. 279.

Alongside the French academics who engaged in the debates over non-intervention as committed intellectuals, were others who did so as experts on international law. The juridical status of non-intervention was central to the arguments of Spanish Republicans such as Jiménez de Asúa who argued before Labour's Edinburgh Conference that the policy had no basis in international law, and therefore should be condemned in principle, regardless of its flawed practice. In early September 1936 the journal of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme published the legal opinions on non-intervention of two left-leaning members of the Paris Faculty of Law, Professors René Cassin and Gaston Jèze.<sup>110</sup> Both academics claimed that non-intervention was valid under international law, for while the Spanish Republican governments had a right to seek armaments from overseas, other governments also had the right not to supply arms. The position that non-intervention was valid under international law was supported by Louis Le Fur, Professor of International Law at the Paris Faculty of Law, who was also a strong supporter of Franco. In 1938 Le Fur argued that non-intervention was justified under the Covenant of the League of Nations, and that if France had intervened in Spain this would have caused a European war with Germany which is what the USSR desired.<sup>111</sup> Le Fur mixed politics and jurisprudence, arguing that the first large foreign intervention into the civil war had not been Italian pilots but the International Brigades organised by Moscow.<sup>112</sup> Such arguments were rejected by the Republican advocates such as Georges Scelle, who felt that non-intervention was inconsistent with both international law and the League of Nations.<sup>113</sup> Apart from the position of Le Fur, this debate over the legal validity of non-intervention never gained the same public prominence as the patrons of the Comité International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Républicaine.

## Conclusion

Given the extent to which reactions to non-intervention changed over time and the degree to which they divided groups and parties (with the exception of the PCF and CPGB), it is often difficult to establish exact perspectives on the policy. Debates over non-intervention followed the contours of the political forms established in British and French universities between 1934 and 1936. The views of

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<sup>110</sup> Les Cahiers des Droits de l'Homme, 20/9/1936, pp. 636-640

<sup>111</sup> Louis Le Fur, La Guerre d'Espagne et le Droit, Les Editions Internationales, Paris, 1938, pp. 34-36.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>113</sup> Georges Scelle, "La Guerre Civile Espagnole et le Droit des Gens", Revue Générale de Droit International Public, 46, 1939, pp. 197-228.

French students and British academics on non-intervention were strongly influenced by their commitment to party politics, not only by the constraints of party discipline but also by the internal debates on other matters of party policy. French academics and British students were far more independent from such concerns, though the former sought to act as public patrons for political coalitions outside university, whereas the latter were largely campus-focused. This difference between the universities of the two countries and the dynamics of their national politics meant that campaigns against non-intervention became a rallying point for broad coalitions in Britain, whereas in France they helped to widen political divisions amongst the left.

Within British universities, the independence of student socialist societies from the Labour Party was partly derived from their campus-focus, and was reinforced by the way the debate over non-intervention within the party became linked to other issues. In France, dissent over non-intervention became part of the general ideological conflict between the various *tendances* of the SFIO, the most radical of which attracted a strong student following in Paris. The debate over non-intervention within the Labour Party was linked to wider campaigns to reform the constitutional structure of the party, issues with far less appeal to students.

Not only did non-intervention change over time, and evoke reactions from a variety of view-points, it was also fundamentally connected to other forms of reaction to the war. Initial demands for humanitarian aid, refugee relief, the creation of the International Brigades and the growing concern with aerial bombardment all influenced the debate over the legitimacy of the arms embargo given the suffering of the Republic's civilian population. For communist activists at the time and some later historians, the campaign against non-intervention was only part of the wider campaign for aid for Republican Spain. Yet this link between politics and aid was far from straightforward. Within the Labour Party, SFIO and other groups such as CVIA, support for non-intervention was not inconsistent with pro-Republican humanitarian aid. As Tom Buchanan has argued, humanitarian aid could serve to mute the debate over non-intervention by channelling activists' energy into practical measures rather than general policy.<sup>114</sup> Still, it is also true that the Republic's most powerful argument against non-intervention was the image of a suffering civilian population and therefore drew on the same motives of humanitarian relief.

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<sup>114</sup> Buchanan, The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement, p. 118-9.

Most significantly, non-intervention focused pro-Republican propaganda on the dependence of Nationalist forces on foreign military aid, reinforcing the perception that the war was between a 'true Spain' and international Fascism. Thus, paradoxically, the very policy intended to contain the civil war in Spain, encouraged activists in Britain and France to see the war as part of a far greater international polarisation.

## Chapter 7 Refugees

Just as recruitment for the International Brigades 'internationalised' the civil war, so did the flight of refugees from the divided country personally touch many outside Spain. Members of British and French universities were involved not only in specific efforts to help their Spanish peers, but also in more general campaigns for refugee relief. Care for academic refugees drew on the organisations which had been established for German refugees in 1933. In France these faced the same institutional restrictions that had constrained their earlier development, while in Britain the system of academic relief which had been created in 1933 was unsuited to the war in Spain. In the first year of the war, the specific problems of academic refugees were overshadowed in both countries by more general refugee campaigns, especially for children in the Republican zone. There were two dominant contrasts between British and French reactions to Spanish refugees: firstly the large sporadic waves of refugees from the war into France gave it a fundamentally different character and magnitude from the controlled evacuations to Britain; secondly, the organisation of refugee relief differed markedly between the two countries. In Britain, refugee relief literally developed out of the established broad-reaching coalition for humanitarian aid to Spain. In France, aid for Spain had been marked by the independent efforts of political parties and the union movement, and it was the latter which first organised care for Spanish refugees. Though this was joined by state, Catholic and other efforts, there remained a strong contrast between politicised refugee relief in France and the proclaimed non-political coalitions for refugee care in Britain, which provided differing opportunities for those within the universities of the two countries.

### **Spanish Academic Refugees: British Efforts**

The exodus from German universities in 1933 created a variety of organisations, coalitions and campaigns in Britain and France for refugee academics and students. By the outbreak of the civil war in Spain, this international network of aid for academic refugees was firmly established, especially in Britain where the Academic Assistance Council's change of title in late 1935 to the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) symbolised its shift to a more permanent



footing.<sup>1</sup> The SPSL described itself as a "non-political, non-sectarian organisation" for the assistance of university teachers, meeting both the continuing needs of refugees from Germany and also new appeals from Austria, Russia, Italy and Portugal.<sup>2</sup>

The established strength of the SPSL meant that when the war in Spain erupted, British academics were ready to provide humanitarian assistance to their Spanish colleagues just as they had those from Germany. The SPSL's annual report of 1937 stated that,

The civil war in Spain has led not only to the closing of universities and the cessation of most of the scientific research work that was proceeding but also to the flight abroad of many university teachers, research workers and students who were in danger from one or other or both of the main parties in the war. The Society has endeavoured to make contact with all these refugees, and has in several instances been able to give urgently needed help for the continuation of their research or for plans that may lead to their re-establishment. The existence of the Society and its accumulated experience has led to constructive work both for the Portuguese and for the Spanish refugees. It is clear that the services of the Society will be needed for further assistance to Spanish scholars, and that the probability of new demands on its resources is greater now than at the time the decision was taken to keep the organisation in being.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this concern with Iberian events, the SPSL found that it was difficult to provide the same assistance to Spanish academics which it had so successfully organised for German refugees during the previous three years. Symbolically, one of the first cases taken up by the SPSL was that of providing assistance to four German refugee academics who had taken up positions in Madrid before the war.<sup>4</sup> There were very few Spanish academics who were refugees in the same permanent sense as the Germans, for in 1936 the war was seen as a short term affair which had temporarily displaced those in Spanish universities. After an extensive investigation for Spanish academic refugees, the SPSL concluded that, "at the moment there are very few and almost none in actual need".<sup>5</sup> That scarcely any refugee academics from Nationalist or Republican Spain arrived in Britain was confirmed during November 1936 by the SPSL's correspondence with University of Liverpool

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<sup>1</sup> Cooper, *Refugee Scholars*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *SPSL Third Annual Report*, 22/7/1937, p. 3 in Ms SPSL 1, Bodleian Library.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Letter of 28/8/1936, Ms SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of 21/10/1936, *Ibid.*

hispanist, Allison Peers.<sup>6</sup> The Society was eventually able to report that the civil war had led to the flight of thirty Spanish academics, however the SPSL was unwilling to fully commit its resources until it was certain that these were unable to return to Spain.<sup>7</sup>

Until 1938, the SPSL saw the war in Spain as too unsettled to make a public appeal for refugee academics, though in the interim it was able offer temporary assistance.<sup>8</sup> The Society reported that,

it has assisted certain Spanish scholars to transfer from the territory of one side to the territory of the other according to their desire; it has given temporary support to some who have found refuge in this country or France; and has assisted by negotiations or by financial grants or loans some of the refugee university teachers to secure positions overseas.<sup>9</sup>

This assistance included grants to two refugees and helping a third to visit Britain from France in search of a new academic post.<sup>10</sup> Though the SPSL was a well-developed organisation for academic relief its conception of aid had been defined by its birth, and therefore it largely waited for events in Spain to emerge as a parallel to the German crisis of 1933.

### Spanish Academic Refugees: French Efforts

For both the refugees from Germany in 1933 and Spain after 1936, France was the initial destination for the displaced. One Spanish academic visiting Britain, estimated that after six months of the civil war 15 Professors from the University of Madrid and 5 Professors from the University of Barcelona had found refuge in France.<sup>11</sup> French efforts for academic refugees had been re-invigorated by the election of the Front Populaire which had substantially increased state funding for scientific research.<sup>12</sup> Still, as was the case for German refugees, the nationality restrictions on academic positions in French state universities were a heavy constraint on providing alternative employment for refugees from any country.

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<sup>6</sup> Letters of 22/10/1936, 9/11/1936, 10/11/1936, 16/11/1936, 24/11/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Reflecting the atrocities committed by both Nationalists and Republicans at the outbreak of the war it was noted that most of the academics refugees were liberals who feared both sides - *The Universities Review*, 9, 2, May 1937, p 145.

<sup>8</sup> *SPSL Third Annual Report*, 22/7/1937, p. 7 in Ms SPSL 1, Bodleian Library.

<sup>9</sup> *SPSL Fourth Annual Report*, Nov. 1938, p. 6 in Ms SPSL 1, Bodleian Library.

<sup>10</sup> Letter of 2/6/1937, Ms SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>11</sup> Letter of 14/12/1936, *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Pascal Ory, *La Belle Illusion*, pp. 484-488.

Despite the greater contact with Spanish refugees, the political controversy aroused in France by the civil war and the formal depoliticisation of French universities, imposed substantial limits on what action could be undertaken for academic refugees. In April 1937, the Council of the Faculty of Letters in Paris debated whether to allow Bosch Gimperà, the Rector of the University of Barcelona, to present 12 lectures on Catalan culture and art at the Sorbonne.<sup>13</sup> Though Gimperà had identified his lectures as 'non-political', and had spoken at the University of Oxford the previous year, considerations of politics underpinned the Council's debate.<sup>14</sup> The Council identified three factors of concern, which were that only 5 lectures were specifically on art, that the school year was well advanced which create difficulties in finding students to attend, and that "*l'intention politique - manifestation en faveur de l'autonomie catalane - n'est pas douteuse*".<sup>15</sup> The Faculty was therefore willing to hold up to 4 lectures focusing exclusively on art, but proposed that any others should be postponed to the following academic year. Perhaps underlying this restraint was fear that Gimperà's lectures might provoke a *chahut* by nationalist students or public attacks by the nationalist press. Given the prevalence of lectures on the civil war in British universities by Spaniards and visitors to Spain, the internal and formal depoliticisation of French universities seems striking.

In the same month as this debate the French Ambassador in Spain wrote to the Rector of the University of Paris to express his concern for the fate of Spanish intellectual refugees who may have reached Paris without resources.<sup>16</sup> The Rector replied in late April 1937,

Nous voudrions bien pouvoir (je parle de l'Université de Paris) améliorer le sort de collègues pour lesquelles nous ne pouvons et ne devons avoir en distinctement que de la sympathie. Mais vous comprenez combien nous sommes gênés dans notre action, et pour des raisons qui ne dépendent pas uniquement de la recherche de moyens matériels. L'aide aux intellectuels réfugiés, et particulièrement aux Espagnols, est une question qui nous dépasse. Comme vous le suggérez vous-même, l'affaire est du ressort du Département; je m'en suis d'ailleurs déjà entretenu avec le Quai d'Orsay et votre intervention personnelle serait sans aucun doute très utile.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Minutes of 24/4/1937, AJ16/4757, Archives Nationales.

<sup>14</sup> *The Oxford Magazine*, 19/11/36, p. 173.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of 24/4/1937, AJ16/4757, Archives Nationales.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of 5/4/1937, AJ16/6969, Archives Nationales.

<sup>17</sup> "We wish we had the capacity (I speak of the University of Paris) to properly ameliorate the fate of our colleagues for whom we clearly have sympathy. But you understand how many obstacles hamper our efforts, and for reasons which do not only depend on the search for material means. The aid to refugee intellectuals, and particularly to the Spanish, is a

Perhaps more significant than organisational efforts for refugees were the informal aid provided by British and French academics to their Spanish colleagues. In Britain these most often involved hispanists, such as J.B. Trend at Cambridge, whose professional connections to Spain had extended into close friendships. During the war, two refugee Spanish academics and three families found accommodation in Cambridge, including Alberto Jiménez who stayed with Trend.<sup>18</sup>

### French Refugee Relief 1936 - 1937

The civil war, far more than its rather stationary 1914-18 predecessor, was a conflict where the military front and civilian front frequently overlapped. The experience of bombardment, siege or street-fighting, as well as fears of the reprisals of the victors, consequently produced massive flows of refugees firstly within Spain, and increasingly into France. After Franco's quick march to Madrid in mid-1936, the capital had become the magnet for a huge displaced population. Initial international humanitarian aid efforts had been directed towards providing medical services at the front, but increasingly they focused on the provisioning, housing and sanitation problems of these refugees within Republican Spain. During October 1936, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (NJCSR) and the Comité Français de Secours aux Enfants were both involved in seeking to move children from Madrid, as the city itself became part of the front, to safer areas in Valencia and Catalonia.<sup>19</sup>

One of the first international efforts to provide refugee relief in the war was the Comité d'Accueil des Enfants d'Espagne (CAEE) founded by the CGT with assistance by Ligue des Droits de l'Homme.<sup>20</sup> Its two patrons were Léon Jouhaux and Victor Basch. The new Comité d'Accueil after negotiations with the Spanish Republican government produced a plan to evacuate from Spain refugee children between the ages of 6 to 13 years old and to provide them with temporary accommodation in France.<sup>21</sup> After one month in a *camp de triage* near the Catalan

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questions which is beyond me. As you suggest yourself, the matter is the responsibility of the Department; I am moreover already in contact with the Quai d'Orsay and your personal intervention has been without doubt very useful" - Letter of 27/4/1937, AJ16/6969, Archives Nationales.

<sup>18</sup> Letters of 21/10/1936 & 9/12/1936, Ms SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Marques, Les Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France (1936-1939), AutoEdition, Paris, 1993, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> La Voix du Peuple, July 1937, p. 456.

<sup>21</sup> La Voix du Peuple, Dec 1936, p. 792.

frontier for the children to readjust to a new climate and language, they were then to be placed amongst families from the labour movement. Relying on the support of local union *militants*, the CAEE established fund-raising committees and hostels throughout France, These included hostels in the university towns of Aix, Bordeaux, Lille, Grenoble, Marseille and Montpellier.<sup>22</sup>

TABLE 7.1: NUMBER OF COLONIES FOR SPANISH REFUGEE CHILDREN FORMED ANNUALLY IN FRANCE<sup>23</sup>

	1936	1937	1938	1938
Colonies	15	83	13	38

TABLE 7.2: LOCATION AND SPONSORS OF COLONIES FOR SPANISH REFUGEE CHILDREN IN FRANCE<sup>24</sup>

Location	No.	Sponsors	No.
Paris region	35	Spanish Republican Gov.	13
Midi / Pyrénées	20	Basque Gov.	10
Vendée / Limousin	16	British Gov.	1
Centre	9	French Gov.	22
Brittany / Normandy	8	Municipal Authorities	9
Nord	6	CAEE	54
Rhone / Alpes	6	Trade Union	11
East	4	Secours Populaire	2
Provence	3	Rassemblement Populaire	1
South-East	1	SFIO	1
		CNC	6

The above tables reveals how refugee relief in France was concentrated at particular times, regions and groups. The formation of colonies for refugee children shows that 1937 and 1939 were the peak years for refugees, though as will be discussed in the final chapter, the character of these two waves was fundamentally distinct. Regionally, colonies were concentrated in Paris and close to the frontier, partly because of the accessibility of both by rail. The efforts of the CAEE were later paralleled by other groups with different motives, like the Comité National Catholique de Secours aux Réfugiés d'Espagne (CNC) which was formed in mid-1937 with the new influx of refugees from the Basque region. Despite these political

<sup>22</sup> Marques, *Les Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France*, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-123.

differences, conditions within the colonies were remarkably similar.<sup>25</sup> Like humanitarian relief to Spain, the care of refugees in France remained divided between different political organisations.<sup>26</sup>

The sheer numbers of refugees fleeing to France during the Spanish civil war encouraged a highly distinctive, pro-active role by the French State. Though Blum's government was accused by many of betraying the Spanish Republic with its policy of non-intervention, it provided sympathetic treatment for Spanish refugees.<sup>27</sup> Departmental Prefects and municipal authorities were often leading local figures in the organisation of relief.<sup>28</sup> This high level of involvement in refugee relief by the French State had the effect of depoliticising the refugees themselves, though often tolerating highly political campaigns for their support. Participation in French politics was explicitly banned for Spanish refugees by State authorities, and their absence from political meetings, platforms and newspapers is striking, especially in contrast to their prominence in Britain.

### Basque Refugees to Britain

In contrast to France, the National Government in Britain only briefly involved itself directly with the refugee crisis in Spain when at the end of April 1937 it agreed to lend naval assistance for the evacuation of civilians from the coast of Northern Spain.<sup>29</sup> The evacuation itself, and more importantly the support of refugees after they had arrived in Britain, was organised by the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief. With fears of the civilian casualties if the bombing of Guernica or the massacres of Badajoz were repeated in Bilbao, the NJCSR successfully lobbied a reluctant government to accept the evacuation of almost 4,000 child refugees.<sup>30</sup> These arrived in Southampton on 20 May 1937, and almost from

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>26</sup> Symbolic of this politicisation of French refugee relief efforts is the disappearance of CGT records during the Occupation which has left few sources for the activities of the Comité d'Accueil des Enfants d'Espagne - *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>28</sup> In Toulouse aid efforts were led by the SFIO mayor, *normalien* Ellen Prévot, who strongly supported the Spanish Republic - *Bulletin Municipal: Ville de Toulouse*, April 1938, p. 247.

<sup>29</sup> Marques, *Les Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France (1936-1939)*, p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 109-110;

An estimated 15,000 refugee Basque children were sent to France - Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War*, University of Nevada Press, Reno, 1984, pp. 52 & 106.

the outset British academics and students were heavily involved in relief efforts for the Basque children.<sup>31</sup>

The first public appeal for the Basque refugees in Cambridge was made on 18 May 1937 by Canon Raven and Dr Plumb for the local branch of the NJCSR.<sup>32</sup> They were seeking funds and a large empty house to establish a hostel for 50 to 100 Basque children. They wrote,

Cambridge has already responded very generously to the appeal made for Medical Aid, but we hope that this appeal on behalf of the Basque children, whose suffering have been so great, will meet with an even more generous response.<sup>33</sup>

Even though this appeal directly followed three months of intensive campaigning by the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal, an initial meeting at the Guildhall, chaired by the Mayor of Cambridge, successfully raised 70 pounds for the refugees. On 17 June 1937, 29 refugee children and 3 Spanish women arrived in Cambridge, greeted by a crowd of several hundred Republican supporters.<sup>34</sup>

In Cambridge, there was a strong continuity between the new efforts to establish a Basque Hostel and other humanitarian campaigns for Spain. Inez MacDonald, a Research Fellow at Newnham College on sixteenth century Spain, served as secretary for the new refugee committee after having filled a similar post for the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal since February 1937. In the same year MacDonald had also visited the hospital established in Murcia by George Young's University Ambulance unit.<sup>35</sup> Another figure linking the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal and the local efforts for the Basque refugees was Professor Francis Cornford, who became treasurer of the new committee partly in tribute to his son's memory.<sup>36</sup>

Cambridge academics were not just the patrons of fundraising for the refugee children, but also personally involved in their care. Francis Cornford

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<sup>31</sup> At a meeting of the AUT executive, Dr W.J. Lucas of Southampton led a collection of £7 for the Basque refugees - Minutes of 28/5/1937, Mss 27/1/1/6, Modern Records Centre; Several LSE students worked as volunteers in the camp at Southampton when the refugees first arrived - Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 694.

<sup>32</sup> Jessie Stewart, ed., *'Recuerdos': The Basque Hostel at Cambridge*, Cambridge Daily News, Cambridge, c1939, p. 2;

*The Granta*, 26/5/1937, p. 437;

*The Cambridge Review*, 21/5/1937, p. 414.

<sup>33</sup> *The Granta*, 26/5/1937, p. 437.

<sup>34</sup> Stewart, *'Recuerdos'*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Newnham College Register 1871-1971*, Vol 1, Newnham College, Cambridge, 1979, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Allison Duke, Cambridge, March 1996.

invited the children to his windmill on the Norfolk Coast for a month over the following summer.<sup>37</sup> Trend took the children to performances by the Cambridge University Spanish Society and to the ballet.<sup>38</sup> Dr Stewart, the Dean of Trinity College also offered hospitality to the Basque refugees.<sup>39</sup> In mid-January 1938, when the refugees faced losing their temporary accommodation at the Pampisford Vicarage, they moved into a small villa offered by Jesus College.<sup>40</sup>

The evacuation from Bilbao not only gave British communities direct contact with the civil war in human terms, but for some it was also an encounter with the complex politics of the divided Republic. The refugee children who were sent to Cambridge were all from the same hostel in Bilbao which had been run by the Spanish Socialist Party for the orphans of its militiamen.<sup>41</sup> They were therefore a homogenous and highly politicised group, with a very different view of Basque Nationalism from the adults who were their hosts. Though the children were from Bilbao, they were not ethnic Basques and did not recognise the Basque anthem which greeted them on their arrival to Cambridge.<sup>42</sup> As one Cambridge aid worker would later write,

The deep cleavage between the Basque Nationalists and the Socialists was scarcely realised here, and it was a dangerous pitfall to well-meaning friends with a little knowledge of politics.<sup>43</sup>

The little touches which had been intended to make these 'Basque' refugees feel more at ease, such as a welcome cake with the words "Gora Euzkadi" and a large picture of Basque President José Aguirre at the hostel, only aroused the children's political hostility.<sup>44</sup> As Republicans, rather than Basque nationalists, they asked for the portrait of Aguirre to be removed. This differences in perspectives, between the

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<sup>37</sup> Stewart, *'Recuerdos'*, p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Academics were also patrons for the national Basque Children's Committee, including its mass meeting on "Spain and Culture" held at the Royal Albert Hall on 24 June 1937. Speakers included the painters Picasso and Constable, writer Heinrich Mann, and French academic Langevin, while the meeting was sponsored by Abercrombie, Blackett, Le Gros Clark, Haldane, MacMurray, Singer, and Trend - flyer, LP/SCW/14/6, National Museum of Labour History.

<sup>39</sup> NJCSR press release - WG/SPA/594, National Museum of Labour History.

<sup>40</sup> Stewart, *'Recuerdos'*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Transcript of recorded interview with Tony McLean, pp. 69-70 in 838/5, Imperial War Museum.

Legarreta notes the political tension amongst the children at the camp in Southampton, and she writes that half of them supported the main Basque Nationalist Party (Partido Nacionalista Vasco). Her own sympathies for Basque nationalism mean that she does not examine to what extent the situation in Cambridge was exceptional. - Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, pp. 111 & 253-254.

<sup>43</sup> Stewart, *'Recuerdos'*, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*



children and their British hosts, reveals the tension that was possible between the 'hard' politics of the front in Spain and the 'soft' politics of British relief work.

Another issue faced by the Cambridge Committee was the extent to which the children should become involved in fundraising for their own maintenance. The London-based national Basque Children's Committee had from an early stage of its existence used performances by the refugee children of traditional Basque dances as a profitable source of fundraising.<sup>45</sup> The Cambridge committee were initially opposed to such concerts as they did not want to exploit children, yet eventually the local committee yielded to the children's own desire to make a contribution to the Republican cause. Muting their socialist objections to Basque nationalism, both the boys and girls learned traditional Basque dances, though they adopted blue costumes rather than the traditional red.<sup>46</sup> Their tours to surrounding towns and by other refugee groups became a prevalent focus for relief efforts. These "endless Basque concerts" reinforced the distance between humanitarian efforts for Republican Spain and party politics in Britain.<sup>47</sup> The performances combined the powerful images of the Republic as defending the 'true' Spain of traditional Basque culture and that of the suffering of innocent non-combatants, which meant that refugees were far more prominent in public meetings in Britain than in France.<sup>48</sup> As in Cambridge, these de-politicised images of the children could be quite different from their experiences in Spain.

As part of their performance tour, the Cambridge Basque children visited Oxford where they drew an estimated audience of 800 people.<sup>49</sup> There was no hostel for refugees within Oxford, but academics and students were involved with several located nearby.<sup>50</sup> One attempt to channel this concern was a concerted campaign amongst Oxford College students to sponsor the support of an individual Basque child. During January 1938, the JCR's of the Colleges were circularised about 'adopting' a Basque child, and by the time the JCR of Corpus Christi College debated the issue two other JCRs had already accepted.<sup>51</sup> At Corpus it was

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18 & 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Transcript of recorded interview with Tony McLean, p. 71.

<sup>48</sup> The prominence of the Basque children was important at a time where British immigration authorities were keen to restrict the propaganda activities of Spanish or French political activists in Britain.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur Excell, "Spanish Civil War & Oxford", p. 14 in Mss 12 Arthur Excell Papers, Ruskin College Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Mrs Carritt, wife of don E.F. Carritt, took supplies of vegetables to the Basque camp at Labourne - *The Oxford Magazine*, 17/6/1937, p. 757.

<sup>51</sup> Minutes of 23/1/1938, JCR Minutes Book 1933-1944, Corpus Christi College Archives, Oxford.

proposed that to maintain a Basque refugee for six months would cost each JCR member 2 shillings. The JCR minutes record that,

It was at this point that Mr Urmsen began a running accompaniment of remarks to the effect that he didn't want to support a communist; that some had been known to clench fists and sing the internationale; and in any case they looked revolting.<sup>52</sup>

However, this resistance was effectively side-stepped as the President of the JCR offered that Corpus would adopt a comely and reactionary child, after which the motion was carried by 35 votes to 9 against. The 'undergraduate' tone of the debate was reinforced by the discussion which immediately followed the motion over which sex the refugee was to be, with only one of the all-male JCR not wanting to adopt a female. Though such a debate would have appalled those students who were committed to 'serious politics', by accepting the 'undergraduate' tone of the forum, the debate had been successful in mobilising the JCR for a cause that was also highly political.<sup>53</sup>

Amongst other Oxford colleges, students from Lincoln College pledged 13 pounds for two Basques refugees over three months, while those at Oriel College agreed to sponsor one child for three months.<sup>54</sup> Aside from this fundraising, the members of the Labour Club from Oriel and St. Hilda's arranged an afternoon play group for the Basques.<sup>55</sup> A similar visit by Basque refugees was organised at Somerville College for afternoon tea and games, though it was noted that the language barrier had presented a problem for the guest and the hosts.<sup>56</sup> As Michael Alpert argues, "the children personalised the issues for wide sections of the population especially when they were distributed all over the country in small groups".<sup>57</sup> Like humanitarian aid, these efforts for refugee Basque children mixed and clouded over any simple polarisation of political concern or humanitarian motives. What is clear is the real commitment to the children which many British

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Though JCR discussion was largely marked by a lack of seriousness, political agendas could be pushed if they adapted to such a forum. At Corpus Christi, the JCR agreed to subscribe to the CPGB's *Daily Worker* on the grounds that it provided the most comprehensive coverage of Scottish lower division football results, rather than as the tribune of world revolution - Minutes of 28/11/1937, JCR Minutes Book 1933-1944, Corpus Christi College Archives; *contra* Brian Harrison, "College Life 1918-1939" in Brian Harrison, ed., *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol 8: The Twentieth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 95-96.

<sup>54</sup> *The Oxford Magazine*, 17/2/1938, p. 418 & 419.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 430.

<sup>56</sup> *The Oxford Magazine*, 10/3/1938, p. 517.

<sup>57</sup> Alpert, "Humanitarianism and Politics in the British Response to the Spanish Civil War", 1936-9", p. 232.

students and academics felt. The female students of St Hilda's College JCR were still supporting their 'adopted' Basque child during the 1939-40 academic year.<sup>58</sup>

### **Catholic Refugee Relief and the Debate over Repatriation**

Though the relief efforts for the refugees from Northern Spain in mid-1937 drew strongly from those who were already engaged in humanitarian aid campaigns for Spain, they also marked the involvement of new groups in the war. The difficulties of the Catholic relief efforts which were created to care for Basque Catholic refugees represented a new stage in debates over the position of religion in the civil war. From the opening of the war British and French Catholics had often been involved in debates over the legitimacy of the Spanish Republic, sometimes unwillingly. The outbreak of the war had been accompanied by a wave of spontaneous anti-clericalism which became key for defenders and opponents of the revolt. The image of an anticlerical fury in which nearly 7,000 Spanish clerics were killed, provided a powerful symbol for those who attacked the Republic's moral, civil and political disorder.<sup>59</sup> For the Republic's supporters, the atrocities had been a short-lived reaction by the repressed provoked by the military revolt which demonstrated how unpopular, anachronistic, unrepresentative and illegitimate the Catholic Church was in Spain. Despite the testimonies of liberal Spanish Catholic intellectuals and international delegations to the Republic's respect for freedom of religion, and of Nationalist propagandists to portray their war as a crusade of faith, attempts to claim religious sanction by either side were riddled with ambivalence and ambiguity as reflected in the relief efforts for the Basque refugees.

The massive sea-borne evacuation of Northern Spain was initially directed towards the Atlantic ports of South-Western France. During the months of May, June and July 1937, an estimated 90,000 refugees left Bilbao, Santander and finally the Asturias.<sup>60</sup> In mid-1937 the Comité d'Accueil des Enfants d'Espagne recorded that it was caring for 8,000 children from Bilbao and Santander, as well as another 1,500 children from Toledo, Madrid, and Málaga who had been placed in hostels in France.<sup>61</sup> Arising out of the relief efforts of local clergy in the Gironde a Comité National Catholique de Secours aux Réfugiés d'Espagne (CNC) was formed during

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<sup>58</sup> *St Hilda's Chronicle*, 39, 1939-1940, p. 10

<sup>59</sup> Jose M. Sanchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1987, p. 9

<sup>60</sup> Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, pp. 50 & 341.

<sup>61</sup> *La Voix du Peuple*, July 1937, p. 466.

August 1937.<sup>62</sup> The Comité National Catholique was endorsed by the Archbishops of Paris and Bordeaux, Cardinal Verdier and Monsignor Feltin, who served as its Honorary Presidents.

The formation of the Basque Children's Committee in Britain had allowed the NJCSR to secure the support of the TUC and Catholic hierarchy during the May crisis of 1937.<sup>63</sup> However, after several months, the British Catholic press and hierarchy began publicly supporting calls for the repatriation of the children. Three factors motivated this reversal by the British Catholic Church, partly because it had always seen the evacuation as only a temporary measure, partly because of the financial strain of supporting the refugees, and partly because of the combined pressure of the total endorsement of Nationalist cause by the Spanish Church.<sup>64</sup>

Underlying the debate over repatriation was whether military events or political conditions should be responsible for determining when the refugees were returned to their families. Nationalist supporters in Britain lobbied for the return of the children to Spain, while Republican supporters saw such an action as absolutely unacceptable. Both sides accused the other of putting politics above the real interests of the children. The Committee of the Cambridge Home for Basque Children publicly defended its opposition to repatriation stating that,

Certain persons in the press and elsewhere... have seen fit to turn a work of common kindness into a political bear-garden and make these unhappy infants the pawns of party-feeling. Bringing the children to England has at least spared them the horrors of the last battles and air raids in Bilbao; it has saved some, undoubtedly, from mutilation or death.<sup>65</sup>

The letter stressed that children would be returned to Spain if their parents made a *bona fide* request for them. The deep commitment of the Cambridge committee, and political nature of refugees in its care, meant that during the civil war's final months, when even the national leadership of the Basque Children's Committee was calling for repatriation if possible, all 29 children in Cambridge were fostered by local families.<sup>66</sup> Even as late as November 1938, the Oxford University Spanish

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<sup>62</sup> Marques, *Les Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France*, p. 114.

<sup>63</sup> Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 111.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>65</sup> *The Cambridge Review*, 12/11/1937, p. 90

Gilbert Murray declined to write a similar letter to *The Times* for the Basque Children's Committee, though he was indignant at the attacks calling for repatriation - Letter of 17/9/1937, No. 82, Mss Gilbert Murray, Modern Manuscripts, Oxford.

<sup>66</sup> Stewart, *'Recuerdos'*, p. 25.

Democrats Defence Committee were able to secure 3,000 signatures for a petition that the Basque children be allowed to stay in Britain.<sup>67</sup>

Dorothy Legaretta's comprehensive survey of the relief efforts for Basque refugees argues that the Catholic Church was one of the central promoters of Nationalist attempts to force the repatriation of the refugees.<sup>68</sup> However, Catholic opinion was far more divided than Legaretta allows, as the Church hierarchy contained many conceptions of politics and its relationship to faith. While there was a striking demographic difference between the Catholic populations of Britain and France, it is interesting to note that the heated debate over Basque repatriation between British religious and political groups, was largely absent in France. This was partly because French trade unions and Catholic groups maintained their own very separate refugee efforts. There was no central body such as the Basque Children's Committee in Britain in which the different conceptions of relief could clash. By the end of 1937, the Comité d'Accueil des Enfants d'Espagne estimated that there were 35,000 Spanish refugees in France, 10,000 of whom were children placed with families.<sup>69</sup> Legarreta estimates that there was relatively little immediate repatriation of Basque children in France, though her estimates seem unusually low given the high numbers of refugees from Northern Spain. Probably, the effect of placing children with individual families and the reluctance of State authorities to create a potential issue by moving refugees in groups, meant that Basque refugees in France trickled back to Spain without the public debates that occurred in Britain.

Another key reason explaining the different reactions in Britain and France to Basque repatriation was the ambivalent relationship between Catholic faith and politics. Those who have focused on the religion's impact on the Spanish civil war have stressed how religion divided and polarised support for the Republic and the Nationalists.<sup>70</sup> Far less studied is the degree to which religion fuelled a disengagement from political debate, despite the efforts of both left and right to claim its support. In France, the large corporate students groups for Catholics, the Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne and the Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne Feminine, both deliberately distanced themselves from the political clashes of their peers.<sup>71</sup> Significantly, French Catholic students only officially became involved in Catholic

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<sup>67</sup> Excell, "Spanish Civil War & Oxford", p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation*, p. 202.

<sup>69</sup> Marques, *Les Enfants Espagnols Réfugiés en France*, p. 151.

<sup>70</sup> Sanchez, *The Spanish Civil War as a Religious Tragedy*, p. xiii.

<sup>71</sup> P. Drujon, *JEC: 15 ans d'Histoire (1929-1944)*, JEC, Paris, 1944, p. 32;

*Temoignages Pour une Histoire de la Jeunesse Étudiante Chrétienne Feminine 1930-1965*, Les Amis de la JCEF, Paris, 1981, p. 122.

relief efforts at the end of the war, when refugee relief was a much less controversial issue. While the Basque exodus involved Catholics in both Britain and France in the established humanitarian campaigns of the left of both countries, there was no single Catholic position on the war and often their conception of aid and politics was considerably different from those of Nationalist and Republican supporters.

## Chapter 8

### Humanitarian Aid (April 1937 - April 1938)

From the outset of the civil war, there had been a contrast between the broad coalitions which organised Spanish relief in Britain and the party-focused aid efforts in France. These differences between the campaigns were intensified over the course of the war due to the changing events in Spain, international currents and the domestic politics of Britain and France. The Nationalist offensive in Northern Spain, which opened on 31 March 1937, marked a new phase in the war, and generated new international concerns for the besieged civilian population of that area. For academics and students in Britain, relief for the encircled Basque country reinforced existing coalitions amongst political and non-political groups, while French campaigns for the same cause were marked by increasing inter-party tension. These contrasts were further accentuated by the other issues and debates which humanitarian aid to Spain was linked to in each country. Within British universities, aid campaigns for Spain ran together with those for academic refugees in China and Austria. In France, it was domestic politics rather than international events which most profoundly shaped the new relief efforts that developed after Blum's return to power in March 1938. Academics and students faced different opportunities for action over Spain, depending on how humanitarian aid was organised, the relationships between domestic political parties and the other events to which the civil war was linked in their respective countries.

#### **The Changing Face of the War: The Northern Front**

After the failure of attacks around Madrid, which culminated with the Republic's successful defence of Guadalajara in mid-March 1937, the Nationalist army opened their offensive in the Basque country confident of a quick campaign.<sup>1</sup> With their overwhelming air superiority, the new Nationalist offensive was marked by concentrated and well coordinated air and artillery bombardment. The aerial attacks on civilians and the Nationalist naval blockade of Northern ports generated increasing international concern for the civilian population of the Basque country. Like the battle for Madrid, this new phase of the war mixed humanitarian assistance for the besieged civilians, efforts at relief for refugees and political attacks

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, pp. 612-616.

on non-intervention.<sup>2</sup> Central to these concerns was the dramatic role played in Nationalist military operations by the aircraft and personnel supplied by Germany and Italy.<sup>3</sup> The destruction of Durango on the opening day of the offensive, was to be repeated on other Basque towns behind the front throughout the following months as the Condor Legion consciously experimented with different approaches to aerial attacks on military and civilian targets. These attacks culminated on 26 April 1937 with the bombing of Guernica. As Raymond Carr writes, "Guernica made such an impression on the European imagination because it was the first example of the horrors of modern war".<sup>4</sup> Though reactions to Guernica were very different in the French press compared to their British peers, in both countries the bombing campaign was a powerful spur to humanitarian aid and refugee relief efforts in the Basque country.<sup>5</sup>

### Foodships for Bilbao

Coalitions within British campuses had developed amongst left-wing and religious student societies during anti-war campaigns between 1933 and 1936. From the beginning of the civil war, these coalitions had sometimes been extended to include Conservative students through fundraising for humanitarian aid for non-combatants in Spain. These coalitions had developed differently within the separate campuses, and there were few efforts which matched the broad alliance in Cambridge which sponsored the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Appeal. One of the subjects of the Appeal had been a Foodship to Spain organised by the British Youth Peace Assembly (BYPA) which was intended to represent these local student coalitions at a national level. By early 1937, the student committee of the British Youth Peace Assembly included representatives of University Conservatives, University Liberals, University Labour Federation, British University League of

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<sup>2</sup> Headline "Le massacre de Guernica est le résultat de la 'non-intervention!'" - L'Humanité, 30/4/1937, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, p. 614.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Carr, The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective, 2nd ed, Weidenfeld, London, 1988, p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> The different press coverage that Guernica received in Britain and France is detailed in the works of Southworth and Pike. This contrast was partly due to the location of journalists in the Basque campaign, for while Philip Steer of The Times was with Republican forces near Guernica, the first French reporters to arrive at the town were travelling with the Nationalists and followed their version that the Basques had destroyed the town themselves. This difference was reinforced by France's more politicised press which gave two polarised visions of the war throughout the conflict - Herbert Rutledge Southworth, Guernica! Guernica!: A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda and History, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1977, pp. 137-138; Pike, La Français et la Guerre d'Espagne, pp. 217-225.



Nations Society, and the Student Christian Movement. The corporate National Union of Students (NUS) supported the BYPA as an associate member.<sup>6</sup> This broad-reaching national coalition was formed around the provision of humanitarian aid to Spain, and the BYPA was affiliated to the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief. The NUS described the BYPA's operations in 1937 as,

concerned almost entirely with the issues arising from the war in Spain.

Food, clothing and money were collected in the universities and colleges in a great campaign which reached its climax in the autumn.<sup>7</sup>

In early 1937, the BYPA launched two appeals for Foodships to Spain, the second of which was directed to the besieged Basques as the Nationalists' Northern offensive intensified.

The development of the Foodship appeals within University College London, reveal the extent to which coalitions for humanitarian relief in Spain were increasingly successful. The Union sponsored a Spanish Foodship Sub-Committee, which included representatives from the SCM, ISS, Peace, Socialist and Jewish students' societies.<sup>8</sup> During the first fortnight of March there were collections of "food (coffee, sugar, condensed milk), clothes, and money".<sup>9</sup> Collection tables were set up in the Union Lounges, and most of the fund raising was done during lunchtime. The organisers of the appeal "hoped to show the new Ivor Montague [sic] film, if it is realised in time, and to get the Cambridge Spanish exhibition".<sup>10</sup> At the end of the fortnight, three packing cases of tinned food, six parcels of warm clothing, and 5 pounds in cash had been collected for the first Youth Foodship.<sup>11</sup>

A special appeal for the Bilbao Youth Foodship was launched within UCL at the end of April 1937. The campaign was again organised through a Youth Foodship Committee, but was also supported by the International Society and individual members of the Catholic Society.<sup>12</sup> The sponsors of the appeal asked their fellow students to,

See report of the British delegation on the terrible shortage of food in the

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<sup>6</sup> NUS 1922-1943, p. 9, in Mss 280/144/8/4,, Modern Records Centre.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Preceding the first aid campaign in UCL was a talk on 22 February 1937 by the Liberal MP, Wilfrid Roberts, on "The International Significance of Spain" in which he gave an account of existing relief work. Roberts had visited Spain in November 1936 as part of an all-party delegation of British MPs, and on his return had become one of the leaders of pro-Republican aid efforts - Phineas, 2/2/1937, p. 3;

<sup>9</sup> Phineas, 2/3/1937, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.;

Montagu released two films on Spain during 1937.

<sup>11</sup> Phineas, 18/3/1937, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> University College Magazine, June 1937, p. 339.

Basque country. This is no political question but one of common humanitarian principles.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of lunch-time collections, the second appeal was organised differently from its predecessor,

It was decided that collecting cards should be distributed to individual members of the societies, in the hope that this method of collection would be more successful than the more general method adopted last term.

The campaign began with a meeting on May 3rd, at which Monica Whately, a member of the Church Delegation to Spain, gave a most moving account of some of her recent experiences in the Basque country. On May 13th a sound film, 'News from Spain,' was shown. Hugh Gosschalk, a member of the Student Delegation to Spain, made a brief appeal for help; the need of which was most adequately illustrated by the film.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of the testimony of Whately and Gosschalk on conditions inside Spain reveals the large role that the first-hand experiences of visiting delegations, like those of the International Brigades, had in pro-Republican fundraising.

Before the campaign's second week, the Foodship Committee had been seeking to raise 20 pounds, a total it in fact doubled.<sup>15</sup> This success was partly a reflection of the improved organisation of fundraising and perhaps more importantly reflected the increased humanitarian concern for suffering in Bilbao. This coalition within UCL would be reinforced after the Nationalist conquest of the Basque country by the efforts of the same student societies to financially 'adopt' one of the young Basque refugees in June 1937.<sup>16</sup> Humanitarian aid and refugee relief overlapped, but both appealed to student groups other than those on the political left. Given the success of the Youth Foodship appeal, it is surprising in a way, that student efforts had remained almost completely confined to campus. Fund-raising for aid and refugees was conducted through the Union and the student societies, but not by students groups on the streets of London. This campus focus in Britain made possible broad-ranging coalitions for humanitarian aid which in France were increasingly militated against by the tensions of party politics.

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<sup>13</sup> Phineas, 27/4/1937, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> University College Magazine, June 1937, p. 339;

The film "News from Spain" was also shown at LSE as part of fundraising for Spanish relief - Union Annual Report, 1937, p.5, LSE 67-J, LSE Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Phineas, 11/5/1937, p. 1;

Early donations had been almost equally divided between staff and students, so that given the large student meeting of 13 May 1937 it seems more probable that their proportion of contributions would have increased. - Phineas, 25/5/1937, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Phineas, 8/6/1937, p. 1.

## French Reactions to the Basque Offensive

Relations between the SFIO and PCF had been strained by the debate over the Front Populaire's non-intervention policy, and were further aggravated in March 1937 by the government's 'pause' in economic reform and the dramatic shooting of anti-fascist protesters in Clichy. The tensions between the two parties made both keen to maintain their own separate relief efforts for Republican Spain within the loose framework of the Rassemblement Populaire.<sup>17</sup> On 3 May 1937, a few days after the Nationalists had begun their offensive in the Basque country, the PCF secretariat launched a new appeal to organise Foodships to the besieged North.<sup>18</sup> Carlos Serrano described the motives behind the Comité Bilbao as, "*cette activité a une dimension humanitaire; elle est politique avant tout*".<sup>19</sup> The committee was led by prominent Communists politicians (Cachin, Duclos and Péri), Party intellectuals (Valliant-Couturier and Aragon) and independents (Malraux, Rolland, and Bayet). While earlier aid efforts by all parties had been coordinated under the Rassemblement Populaire, the Comité Bilbao represented a distinct campaign organised and patronised by the PCF. In response, members of the SFIO launched their own aid campaign so that throughout May 1937 Le Populaire and L'Humanité carried competing national appeals for food and medical supplies for the besieged Basques.<sup>20</sup>

The SFIO Foodship appeal for Bilbao originated around the same time as the PCF, from the opponents of non-intervention within the party (the Comité d'Action Socialiste pour l'Espagne supported by the Seine Federation of the SFIO).<sup>21</sup> On 7 May 1937, the party leadership took over the appeal, creating a Comité Socialiste de Secours pour Bilbao which appealed directly to the secretaries of the Party's Federations.<sup>22</sup> The committee's aims were to raise funds within the party that would feed the civilian population, provide medical aid to the wounded and help to evacuate women, children and the elderly.

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<sup>17</sup> The Jeunesses Socialistes refused to participate in the national days to collect for Spain organised by the Jeunesses Communistes on 5-6/2/1937 and 17-18/9/1937 - Serrano, L'Enjeu Espagnol, p. 137.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-114.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> L'Humanité, 6/5/1937, p. 1;

Le Populaire, 6/5/1937, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Le Populaire, 4/5/1937, p. 6;

Le Populaire, 6/5/1937, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Le Populaire, 8/5/1937, p. 3;

Le Populaire, 11/5/1937, p. 4.

Collecting for the same purpose far more successfully was the PCF's Comité Bilbao, which within ten days of its formation had sent two Foodships to Spain carrying a claimed 100,000 francs worth of supplies.<sup>23</sup> The speed of this aid may partly be attributable to the Comité Bilbao's decision to organise its national collections through the train station at Bordeaux and the PCF stronghold of Montreuil in Paris' 'red belt' of Communist suburbs.<sup>24</sup> Amongst the published donors to the Comité Bilbao were academics Langevin, Bayet and Wallon who each gave symbolic sums.<sup>25</sup> By 25 May 1937, the Comité Bilbao claimed 565,613 francs had been raised across France.<sup>26</sup> Twenty five trucks were to leave Paris with 60,000 kilos of food and material, which would be sent on three more Foodships to Bilbao.<sup>27</sup> In comparison, the appeal of the Comité Socialiste de Secours had only reached 89,107 francs by the end of May 1937.<sup>28</sup> In the first week of June 1937, as the defences around Bilbao collapsed, the Comité Socialiste de Secours appeal for aid also became an appeal for families to billet the refugee children from the town.<sup>29</sup>

Part of the PCF's success in organising Foodships for Bilbao was through the formation of local fundraising committees by party *militants* and other supporters across France. In Bordeaux, a Comité Girondin pour Bilbao was created, which claimed support from local numerous groups.<sup>30</sup> The Bordeaux committee was chaired by Professor Daudin who also presided at a mass fundraising meeting for Republican Spain in the town on 28 May 1937. At the same time as these efforts, the Union Fédérale des Étudiants in Bordeaux were finishing an appeal for an ambulance for Republican Spain which had been launched before the Easter holidays.<sup>31</sup> Nationally, the appeal had raised 13,092 francs, which was collected by nearly 100 students.<sup>32</sup> In mid-May 1937 the UFE students of Bordeaux were

<sup>23</sup> *L'Humanité*, 13/5/1937, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *L'Humanité*, 15/5/1937, p. 1;

Later collection depots were established in Tours, Orleans, Limoges, Bourges, Poitiers and Lyon - *L'Humanité*, 19/5/1937, p. 3;

*L'Humanité*, 23/5/1937, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *L'Humanité*, 9/5/1937, p.1;

*L'Humanité*, 13/5/1937, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *L'Humanité*, 25/5/1937, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> *L'Humanité*, 24/5/1937, p. 3;

*L'Humanité*, 27/5/1937, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Le Populaire*, 31/5/1937, p. 7;

In the second week of July 1937, the Comité Bilbao d'Aide au Peuple Basque claimed a total of 1,655,000 francs raised, while the Comité Socialiste de Secours à l'Espagne Républicaine reported 229,208 francs raised - report of 9/7/1937, BA 1665, APPP.

<sup>29</sup> *Le Populaire*, 6/6/1937, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Le Gironde Populaire*, 21/5/1937, p. 1;

The Comité Girondin pour Bilbao had first been announced the week before - *Le Gironde Populaire*, 16/5/1937, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Report of 8/5/1937, 1 M 605, AD Gironde.

<sup>32</sup> Report of 10/5/1937, 1 M 605, AD Gironde.

extending their appeal to local unions in the Gironde and the local deputies of the Front Populaire. It is likely, given the massive influx of Basque refugees by sea and by rail into Bordeaux that the local UFE students also became involved in Daudin's aid and relief efforts.

By January 1938 the Comité pour Bilbao claimed to have raised 3,500,000 francs.<sup>33</sup> However, despite this national success, these efforts were still shaped by local debates over Basque relief which reveal the politicised nature of French humanitarian aid and the significant tensions between the parties of Rassemblement Populaire.

### The Comité pour Bilbao in Toulouse

In Toulouse, from early August 1936 humanitarian aid for Republican Spain had been organised by a Comité d'Aide au Peuple Espagnol, which had included representatives from the SFIO, CGT, PCF, Secours Rouge, Ligue des Droits de l'Homme and other groups.<sup>34</sup> In early March 1937 the committee was re-organised into a Commission de Solidarité d'Aide au Peuple Espagnol with the same parties represented, although the new organisation was headed by a Secretary-General.<sup>35</sup> This post was occupied by the local secretary of the SFIO who also emerged as the directing hand of the Commission. The Commission relaunched the appeal for aid (of which a third was to go to the families of local volunteers in the International Brigades), and in March 1937 collected 22,521 francs, including a contribution of 1,000 francs from a Comité d'Aide des Étudiants.<sup>36</sup> Though the Commission formally represented a broad coalition of local parties, it was far more centralised than its predecessor, and was closer to the SFIO, which were key elements in a confrontation which occurred two months later.

On 9 May 1937, the newspaper Le Midi Socialiste announced the formation of a new aid campaign with the establishment of a provisional Comité pour Bilbao in Toulouse.<sup>37</sup> The new committee claimed the patronage of eminent local personalities, including academics from the University of Toulouse. Donations were to be sent to the pro-Communist Secours Populaire and the Amis de l'URSS or to the left-wing Catholic group the Jeune République.

<sup>33</sup> CICAER letter of 15/1/1938, p. 8, in F7/14741, Archives Nationales.

<sup>34</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 3/8/1937, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 4/3/1937, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 6/5/1937, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 9/5/1937, p. 5.

The response from the Commission de Solidarité was immediate and absolute. The following day, the Commission published a resolution in Le Midi Socialiste that it was the only nationally recognised body in Toulouse mandated to collect for humanitarian relief in Spain.<sup>38</sup> Only the Commission was qualified to organise relief for Bilbao and it therefore launched its own appeal. The Commission's response was signed by its office holders, the local leaders of the Socialist party, trade unions and the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. The Communists though represented on the Commission did not hold office, nor would they have been willing to censure the Comité pour Bilbao of which they were the anonymous initiators. The confrontation reveals the very real strength of the SFIO in Toulouse local politics, as well as the strong tensions between the parties of the French left on a national level.

The Comité pour Bilbao was killed at birth in Toulouse. Its unnamed supporters from the university remained unnamed, although it is reasonable to suspect that they were the same academics who had supported a petition creating a Comité Universitaire des Amis de l'Espagne Républicaine in mid-November 1936. The petition praising the Spanish Republic's fight against fascism had been signed by Professors Solua, Ducuing, Faucher, Bugnard, Guilhem, Valois as well as 38 school teachers, including 24 women.<sup>39</sup> In late January 1937 the Comité Universitaire had organised a week-long exhibition of pro-Republican posters and photographs, and after their unsuccessful support for the Comité pour Bilbao, the leading figures of the Comité Universitaire would reappear the following year in a more university-centred medical aid committee.<sup>40</sup> Significantly, the success of this later campaign, like the demise of the local Comité pour Bilbao, was largely influenced by the support it received from the local SFIO. The SFIO's political hegemony in Toulouse was a crucial factor in shaping the opportunities available for students and academics in their humanitarian relief efforts for Spain. Interestingly it was not the political events in Barcelona during May 1937 which separated the SFIO and PCF, but rather their campaigns for relief for Bilbao. Both parties sought to maintain their own memberships by organising party-based aid campaigns, and the tensions between them were felt both nationally and locally.

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<sup>38</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 10/5/1937, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> La Dépêche, 18/11/1936, p. 6;  
Le Midi Socialiste, 18/11/1936, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> La Dépêche, 22/1/1937, p. 6.  
La Dépêche, 25/1/1937, p. 6.

## May 1937: Bilbao and Barcelona

The divisions between the PCF and SFIO over fundraising for humanitarian relief to Bilbao occurred at exactly the same time as the antagonism between Spanish Communists, anarchists and the POUM resulted in five days of street fighting amongst Republican forces in Barcelona. The clashes of the first week of May 1937 were followed a month later by the outlawing of the POUM and in August 1937 by the forcible dissolution of the anarchist Council of Aragon. Like the impact of non-intervention, this civil war within the civil war has been blamed by many historians as the decisive factor in the Republic's military collapse.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the vigorous public debates which surrounded non-intervention in Britain and France, the split within the Republican camp symbolised by the May Days clashes in Barcelona, drew little comment during the war.

Though some groups on the far left in both Britain and France made the causes of the POUM and the anarchists their own, these were rarely echoed within the political mainstream in both countries.<sup>42</sup> For the vast majority of academics and students in both countries, the mid-1937 change in the Spanish Republic's internal politics had little effect on their perceptions of the civil war. The unique sensitivity of the *Étudiants Socialistes* in Paris to the political divisions within the Spanish republic, as reflected in their arguments against non-intervention, were largely because they linked such conflicts to the "*lutte des tendances*" within their own party.<sup>43</sup> The absence of any major international debate over the May Days in Britain and France was due to two key factors; the image of the Republic as a symbol of political unity, and the politics of humanitarian aid.

From the election of the Frente Popular in February 1936 and the unification of the Spanish Socialist and Communist Youth organisations, Spain had been seen internationally as a symbol for unity on the left. With the outbreak of civil war, the Republic was heralded as the embodiment of a progressive, liberal, socialist, communist and anarchist union against fascism. This image of the united Republic underpinned the first humanitarian and political campaigns over the civil war in both Britain and France. The French Rassemblement Populaire saw itself as paralleling the left's political coalition in Spain, while British activists sought to create such a Popular Front through campaigns to aid Republican Spain. The

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<sup>41</sup> Tim Rees, "Visions of the Vanquished: Recent Work on the Spanish Civil War", *European History Quarterly*, 23, 1993, pp. 571-582.

<sup>42</sup> Serrano, *L'Enjeu Espagnol*, p. 123.

<sup>43</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

foremost champions in both Britain and France of the Republic were the Communists who saw Spain as embodying united resistance to fascism. It was this international image which made the May Days eruption seem to be such an aberration. The image of the Spanish Republic as embodying a broad antifascist coalition, rather than the Communist attacks on the POUM as Trotskyist and fascist, represented what Raymond Carr has described as the power of the communist voice in preventing any debate.<sup>44</sup> Amidst the growing antagonism within the Republican camp, *L'Humanité* hailed Negrin's new government in mid-May 1937 as the true embodiment of the antifascist Popular Front.<sup>45</sup>

Few historians have connected the political debate over the May Days with the 'soft' politics of humanitarian relief for the Basque front. For those outside Spain, the focus in May 1937 was not Barcelona but Bilbao, where civilian relief and medical aid were most acutely needed as the Basque defences became more desperate. Even with the fall of Bilbao on 19 June 1937, the care of refugees and the Nationalists' continued offensive in the North made the military situation there the primary front of the war. Just as humanitarian aid for the besieged civilian populations of Madrid and Bilbao had provided a rallying point for opponents of non-intervention, so humanitarian campaigns for the Basque country made the May Days clashes in Catalonia seem of secondary concern. It was not merely perceptions of the Republic, or the politics of its overseas supporters which muted the debate over the Republic's divisions during the civil war, it was also the commitment and energy of relief efforts for the Basque country at the time when the Republic's own civil war was most visible.

### **October 1937: British Relief for Chinese Universities**

The opening of the new British academic year in October 1937 was also marked by interest in a new war, following the summer invasion of China by Japan. Japanese conquest had dramatic consequences for Chinese society, particularly its universities which were physically targeted during the fighting and then vigorously repressed.<sup>46</sup> Like the 1933 attacks in Germany on academic freedom, broad 'non-political' campaigns were established in British universities to send humanitarian aid to their Chinese peers. These not only intertwined professional and political concern, but reinforced existing campaigns for academic refugees and for Spain. At

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<sup>44</sup> Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy*, p. 176.

<sup>45</sup> *L'Humanité*, 18/5/1937, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *The Gryphon*, May 1938, p. 320.



the forefront of these appeals was the International Student Service (ISS) which had earlier organised 'non-political' aid for German student refugees in parallel to the work of the Academic Assistance Council. In October 1937 the ISS launched a national appeal at universities across Britain, though the form these campaigns took was influenced by existing campus coalitions between local students. Perhaps more significantly, the humanitarian campaigns which developed for Chinese universities reinforced and were often explicitly linked with relief efforts for Republican Spain.

In mid-October 1937, the group For Intellectual Liberty organised a telegram to the Chinese Minister of Education which was signed by 115 academics from 22 British universities and university colleges.<sup>47</sup> The telegram read,

Horrified by bombing of Chinese cities and destruction of schools and colleges we wish to convey to you our deepest sympathy and to assure you that we shall do everything in our power to urge our government to take effective measures to check Japanese aggression.<sup>48</sup>

The petition deliberately sought to draw support from as many universities as possible, with Edinburgh providing the leading number of signatories (19), followed by London (12). The petition was headed by Professors Ernest Barker (Cambridge), Gilbert Murray (Oxford) and R.H. Tawney (LSE, London). Included amongst the signatories were university figures who had been prominent in Spanish relief campaigns including Bernal, Needham, Sir Daniel Stevenson, Haldane, Blackett, Laski and the Principal of Somerville College, Helen Darbishire. The petition was paralleled by student debates over China. A motion of condemnation of Japan was passed by the LSE Union in October 1937, while the Cambridge Union later voted support for sanctions against Japan by 172 to 93.<sup>49</sup>

The academic year of 1937-1938 opened at University College London with the ISS appeal for Chinese Universities, which was supported by the Student Christian Movement and the British University League of Nations branch.<sup>50</sup> The campaign within UCL opened with a meeting on the "Plight of the Chinese Universities" which was addressed by a Chinese academic and Professor Tawney.<sup>51</sup> Significantly, Provost Mawer, who had tried to constrain student political activity outside and within University College during the early 1930s, chaired the meeting.

<sup>47</sup> *The Cambridge Review*, 29/10/1937, p. 43;

<sup>48</sup> Telegram, A3/22, Add 9369, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes of 27/10/1937, Coll Misc 649 2/5, LSE Archives;

*The Granta*, 1/12/1937, p. 178.

<sup>50</sup> *Phineas*, 4/10/1937, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Phineas*, 19/10/1937, p. 4.

Mawer's support was probably because he accepted its proclaimed "non-political" nature due to the mixing of his own professional and humanitarian concern. The appeal for China was organised by the Union for the first fortnight of November 1937.<sup>52</sup> The coalitions for Spain and then China probably facilitated the formation of the University College Peace Council, which comprised representatives from the SCM, Jewish Students Society, Peace Society, Socialist Society and the Association of Scientific Workers.<sup>53</sup>

At Oxford and Cambridge it was the existing student Peace Councils which collected for the ISS appeal through the broad coalition of student societies they represented.<sup>54</sup> The Cambridge University Peace Council sent a collective letter denouncing Japanese aggression to All-China Students Union and the Japanese Ambassador to Britain. It was signed by office-holders of the Conservative Association, Socialist Club, League of Nations Union, Liberal Club, Democratic Front, Anglo-American Society, and CSAWG.<sup>55</sup> On 19 October 1937, the ISS appeal in Cambridge was opened by Professor Chang Peng-Chun of Nankai University who addressed a meeting of academics in Trinity College, and then a mass meeting of students at St Andrew's Hall organised by the Peace Council and the ISS.<sup>56</sup>

Between October and December 1937 the ISS China Appeal was the focus of fundraising at universities across Britain. Amongst these were the University of Leeds where it was supported by the Vice-Chancellor, academic staff and students' Union.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Phineas, 2/11/1937, p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> University College Magazine, Autumn 1937, p. 88.

<sup>54</sup> In Oxford "methods of collecting included a self-denial lunch and a collection realising £15; collections at public meetings brought in £20; punts on the river collecting small sums fared successfully too" - The Cherwell, 28/5/1938, p. 89;

At Cambridge a Badminton Tournament was held with proceeds to aid China - The Granta, 2/3/1938, p. 303.

<sup>55</sup> The Cambridge Review, 29/10/1937, p. 49.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 44;

The Cambridge Review, 15/10/1937, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> The Gryphon, Dec. 1937, p. 161.

TABLE 8.1: ISS CHINESE UNIVERSITIES RELIEF APPEAL<sup>58</sup>

	Total	Staff	Students
University of Liverpool	470		
University of Oxford	460		
University of Cambridge	350	222	128
University of Leeds	160		60

More pro-actively, in both Cambridge and Oxford, students called for a boycott in their towns of Japanese goods in response to the attacks on China.<sup>59</sup> The Oxford University Peace Council wrote to Gilbert Murray and other academics asking for their support, as "we feel that an appeal signed by prominent senior members and published in the press would help a great deal in calling attention to our effort".<sup>60</sup> Following this letter, an appeal to the citizens of Oxford to back the boycott was published in The Cherwell, signed by Murray, W.E. Le Gros Clark, J.L. Brierly, E.R. Dodds, A. Zimmern, L. Abercrombie, G.F. Carritt, J.E. Meade, M. Holroyd and A. Headlam-Morley.<sup>61</sup> In Cambridge the following term a similar letter was signed by Professors Ernest Barker, F.L. Bartlett, F.M. Cornford, R.H. Fowler, G.H. Hardy, F. Gowland Hopkins, J.D. Bernal, F.L. Lucas, and M.M. Postan.<sup>62</sup>

Significantly, the new concern for China was not separated from the existing campaigns for Spain. At the University of Leeds, the ISS described itself as providing relief to students "regardless of consideration of race, creed, or political viewpoint, for there have been many cries in the student world since the war. Spain, of course offers the latest example".<sup>63</sup> At UCL, the ISS also expressed its willingness to provide aid to students in Spain, though like the AAC's search for Spanish academic refugees there were relatively few opportunities for specifically university-focused relief during the civil war.<sup>64</sup> Campaigns for China and Spain frequently overlapped, so that during the Peace Week in Cambridge in mid-November 1937, speakers included relief-worker Leah Manning on Spain and a

<sup>58</sup> The Granta, 19/10/1938, p. 193;

The Granta, 23/2/1938, p. 292;

The Cambridge Review, 21/2/1938, p. 189;

The Gryphon, Feb. 1938, pp. 170 & 183.

<sup>59</sup> The Cambridge Review, 21/1/1938, p. 186.

<sup>60</sup> Letter of 7/11/1937, Mss Gilbert Murray 83, Bodleian Library.

<sup>61</sup> The Cherwell, 20/11/37, p. 139.

<sup>62</sup> The Cambridge Review, 18/2/1938, p. 268;

This had been preceded by a letter supporting the boycott signed by a dozen prominent political students - The Cambridge Review, 21/1/1938, p. 194.

<sup>63</sup> The Gryphon, Oct. 1937, p. 47.

<sup>64</sup> Phineas, 4/10/1937, p. 5.

Chinese Professor.<sup>65</sup> In Oxford, fundraising for Spain and China blurred together as it was reported that, "the collection for the victims of aggression in Spain and China, organised by the OU Peace Council, amounted to £170".<sup>66</sup> Humanitarian relief for Chinese universities reinforced the fundraising campaigns and coalitions over Spain which had developed within British campuses. In France, there was a striking absence of any parallel campaigns over China, rather the coalitions of French students and academics were largely shaped by domestic politics and the changing face of the war in Spain.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Comité Sanitaire d'Aide au Peuple Espagnol in Toulouse**

In late April 1938, a Comité Sanitaire d'Aide au Peuple Espagnol (Section Toulouse) was formed, which was striking for its depth of support within the University of Toulouse's Faculty of Medicine.<sup>68</sup> The committee's two presidents were Professors Ducuing and Soula, who since the beginning of the civil war had participated together in the Comité Universitaire des Amis de l'Espagne Républicaine and in pro-Republican meetings.<sup>69</sup> The Comité Sanitaire included seven other academics from the Faculty of Medicine, as well as ten local doctors, two dentists and two pharmacists.<sup>70</sup> Most studies of French universities have stressed that their politics followed the division between the professional Faculties of Law and Medicine which were seen as favouring the right, and those of Science and Letters which were more prominently on the left. While this was frequently true, the Comité Sanitaire is one of many exceptions to that polarisation.

The Comité Sanitaire listed its four aims as:

- (i) visiting and tending to wounded International Brigade and militia members hospitalised in the region;
- (ii) providing medical assistance to the colony of refugee children in Toulouse;
- (iii) organising medical collections to be sent to Republican Spain;
- (iv) arranging propaganda such as meetings, posters and flyers.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *The Cambridge Review*, 5/11/1937, p. 63.

<sup>66</sup> *The Cherwell*, 28/5/1938, p. 89.

<sup>67</sup> The ISS in Britain collected 3,000 pounds for Chinese relief while that in France collected 28,810 francs, which was a fifteenth of the British total - EUI Annual Report 1937/1938, AJ61/101, Archives Nationales.

<sup>68</sup> *Le Midi Socialiste*, 22/4/1938, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Le Midi Socialiste*, 28/3/1938, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Le Midi Socialiste*, 22/4/1938, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

The first two aims reveal the extent to which Toulouse's proximity to the Spanish frontier meant that it was directly touched by the war, especially by civilian and military refugees.<sup>72</sup>

The Comité Sanitaire publicly disclaimed any partisan position, rather it proclaimed its motivation to be humanitarian concern.<sup>73</sup> It would be wrong to translate non-partisan, as the equivalent to the non-political label so frequently invoked in Britain. Support for the Comité Sanitaire did cut across party lines, as it included Professor Brustier from the Faculty of Medicine, who although a supporter of the Radicals, was also sympathetic to the local group of Socialist students.<sup>74</sup> Party politics remained important in shaping the medical collections organised by Comité Sanitaire, which revealed the extent to which it drew a large amount of support for the local SFIO. When Professor Soula, who was both a member of the SFIO and co-president of the Comité Sanitaire, accompanied a shipment of medicine to Barcelona, he seemed to be wearing both these hats at once.<sup>75</sup> The close relationship between the committee and the SFIO extended to the local group of Socialist students who collected 2,000 francs for medical aid during the Easter vacation.<sup>76</sup>

The predominance of SFIO *militants* within the Comité Sanitaire d'Aide au Peuple Espagnol (Section Toulouse), contrasts with the political character of the Centrale Sanitarie Internationale to which it was affiliated. The Centrale Sanitarie Internationale (CSI) was created in January 1937 by the Comité International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Républicaine led by Victor Basch and Paul Langevin.<sup>77</sup> The Centrale Sanitaire Internationale was largely a French initiative, which claimed a special role to co-ordinate and liaise with other international medical aid efforts due to France's geographic proximity to the war.<sup>78</sup> Though the SMAC was identified as the English section of the CSI, and Professor

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<sup>72</sup> In June 1938, Toulouse was uniquely affected by the isolated resistance in the Pyrenees of the Spanish Republic's 43rd Division, which triggered a local appeal to provide aid to the encircled soldiers and then for the wounded when they retreated across the border - Le Midi Socialiste, 7/6/1936, p. 5;

Le Midi Socialiste, 12/6/1938, p. 1;

Le Midi Socialiste, 15/6/1938, p. 5;

Le Midi Socialiste, 17/6/1938, p. 1;

Le Midi Socialiste, 18/6/1938, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 22/4/1938, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Brustier supported efforts to establish a group for Radical students in 1939 and was also patron of the Union Syndical des Etudiants in 1934 led by socialist students- Clipping of 15/3/1939, 1303 W 13, AD Haute-Garonne.

<sup>75</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 7/11/1938, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Le Midi Socialiste, 15/6/1938, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Conférence International d'Aide Sanitaire a l'Espagne Républicaine: Compte-Rendu et Résolutions, Centrale Sanitaire Internationale, Paris, 1937, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Marrack attended the CSI's international conference as a recognised delegate, the British refused to fund the new body.<sup>79</sup> Between March and July 1937 an appeal by the CSI for medical aid, sponsored by Professors Wallon and Roussy, raised more than one million francs.<sup>80</sup> Wallon's patronage of the Centrale Sanitaire International reveals the extent to which as a national organisation it was closely related to the PCF's efforts, even if it was not directly linked.<sup>81</sup> Like many other pro-Republican aid campaigns, the political character of French medical aid differed regionally, from its pro-Communist patrons in Paris, to its success in the Socialist stronghold of Toulouse.

### Paris Student Efforts for Spanish Aid and Refugee Relief

Originating at the same time as the Comité Sanitaire d'Aide au Peuple Espagnol (Section Toulouse), April 1938, were the first sustained humanitarian campaigns over the civil war to be established within the University of Paris. On the first day of April 1938, Mademoiselle Schneider, a student, wrote to the Rector of the university, announcing the formation of a Rassemblement des Étudiants pour l'Aide à l'Enfance Espagnole by a group of Paris students with the encouragement of some of their teachers.<sup>82</sup> The new group sought recognition from the Rector. However, while he was personally sympathetic to the initiative, and had given money to similar causes, he felt unable to officially commit himself.<sup>83</sup>

The Rassemblement des Étudiants pour l'Aide à l'Enfance Espagnole quickly claimed several hundred members.<sup>84</sup> The political affiliation of the group is harder to determine than its numbers. One of its leaders was a Communist, but whether it also included Socialist students is unknown.<sup>85</sup> The participation of Socialist and Communist students together was unlikely given that at the same time the committee was being formed, Paris Socialist students had split in half over the

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 12, 88 & 89;

Though Marrack attended the second of the CSI's Conferences in early July 1937, the SMAC's distance from the French body was reflected by its original attitude to the invitation to attend, when "it was decided that no useful purpose would be served by sending delegates to either of these conferences" - Minutes, Ms Addison 323, Bodleian Library.

<sup>80</sup> *Conférence Internationale d'Aide Sanitaire a l'Espagne Républicaine*, p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> The Centrale Sanitaire International section in Marsailles which was formed in mid December 1938 was largely led by Communist students and activists - Report of 30/8/1939, 1 M 1726, AD Bouches-du-Rhône.

<sup>82</sup> Letter of 1/4/1938, AJ16/6968, Archives Nationales.

<sup>83</sup> Letter of 5/4/1938, AJ16/6968, Archives Nationales.

<sup>84</sup> Report of 23/10/1938, No 14, Rassemblement Mondial des Etudiants, International Institute of Social History.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

SFIO's deregistration of them for their extreme left and anti-communist orientation. Given that the re-organised student section that remained within the SFIO claimed 300 members after the split, and the dissidents claimed a similar number, it seems unlikely that either group threw its full weight behind the humanitarian campaign as support from either would have doubled the Union's size. The deeply-felt clashes of French party politics which will be considered in the following two chapters, made it unlikely that the students could form a broad coalition similar to their British peers.

What brought the Communist students of the *Rassemblement des Étudiants pour l'Aide à l'Enfance Espagnole* and the Socialist academics and students of the *Comité Sanitaire d'Aide au Peuple Espagnol* (Section Toulouse) together was their common birth in April 1938. Mid March 1938 inaugurated a new Front Populaire government led by Blum which seemed to promise more opportunities for the French left, just as the German Anschluss with Austria made the international scene more threatening. This conjunction of French and European events reinforced the concern of the Republic's supporters as a new Nationalist offensive in Aragon and the Levante seemed to threaten both Barcelona and Valencia. By 14 April 1938 Franco's forces had reached the Mediterranean coast above Valencia, dividing the Republican territory in two. This military collapse not only generated international fears that the Republic itself would soon fall, but inspired frenetic relief efforts in France. Blum's second government unofficially relaxed its restrictions on the border, marking the high point of covert military aid from France. Equally, the PCF and SFIO sought to channel their *militants'* energies into humanitarian relief for Republican Spain. This convergence of domestic politics and the events of the war meant that in April 1938 academics and students for the first time established large-scale aid efforts based around the universities of Toulouse and Paris. While the Republican army was able to stabilise the front and delay defeat, Blum was quickly replaced by Daladier who was far less sympathetic to the Republic's demands for arms and to Spanish refugees in France.

### **Fragmenting Coalitions, Consolidating Coalitions**

The Republic's military defeats also intensified humanitarian campaigning in Britain during May 1938; however unlike in France, it was not party politics

which were the determining force in university relief efforts.<sup>86</sup> The aid campaigns of British students for Spain were increasingly organised through broad-reaching coalitions which extended across political and non-political divisions. These political and humanitarian alliances were reinforced by reactions to the attacks on Chinese universities and the Austrian crisis of early 1938.<sup>87</sup> While these later events caused increasing political divisions which will be considered in the following chapter, they also reinforced the humanitarian campaigning within British universities. After the Anschluss, relief campaigns for Austrian refugees were quickly incorporated into those already running for German refugees, Chinese universities and the Spanish Republic. That the same coalitions and campaigns remained active through each of these events, though with increasing support, reveals the extent to which fascism was seen in British universities as an international and interlinked phenomenon. Humanitarian campaigns drew on and reinforced this broadly defined anti-fascism. Significantly, Spanish aid was always placed alongside the new efforts, and the civil war remained the central concern which transcended other developments in international politics.

In France, the tensions between the parties of the Front Populaire were reflected in their commitment to distinctive humanitarian relief campaigns for Republican Spain, even where these were in response to the same crisis such as the siege of Bilbao. Party politics powerfully shaped the few aid campaigns which did develop in French universities during 1938. The antagonism between the SFIO and the PCF and the divisions within the SFIO itself affected the political space in which French academics and students could organise humanitarian relief. It was therefore domestic political events, rather than events in Asia or Central Europe, which were primary in shaping French political perceptions and activity over the war in Spain. Aid campaigns for Republican Spain reflected the increasing fragmentation of the Front Populaire, at the same time that British activists were seeking to use it to create an all-party coalition in Britain.

In both countries, political propaganda and humanitarian relief for the Spanish Republic focused on the image of the Republic as representing the united forces of the left - stretching from progressives and liberals to socialists, communists

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<sup>86</sup> During the second week of May 1938 a "Spain Week" of concerted fundraising was organised in Cambridge, with a Spanish Shop and frequent performances by the refugee Basque children - *The Cambridge Review*, 6/5/1938, p. 367.

<sup>87</sup> In Cambridge, the student Peace Council held a meeting on Austria at Trinity College which was supported by the League of Nations Union, Socialist Club, Liberal Club, Conservative Association, Democratic Front, Jewish Society, Anglo-American Society, CSWAG and the Majlis - *The Granta*, 23/2/1938, p. 287.



and anarchists. For Republican Spain's international supporters this image of unity overshadowed the increasing conflicts within the Republic itself, which was best encapsulated by the humanitarian focus on Bilbao during the Barcelona May Days in 1937. While the image of left unity underpinned humanitarian campaigns for the Republic in both countries, they had contrasting national characters due to the way in which aid was organised and whether Spain was seen as part of international or domestic political struggles. The increasing success of coalition-politics in British universities, and its increasing failure in France were further reinforced during 1938 and 1939 by the currents of party politics in both countries.

## Chapter 9

### Debates and Divisions within the Left

Nineteen thirty-eight was a critical year of change in the political climates of both Britain and France. Germany's military expansion in first Austria and then Czechoslovakia redefined political perceptions, coalitions and campaigns throughout Western Europe. Just as the bombing of Guernica and the Barcelona May Days embodied the failure of non-intervention and the political conflict within Republican Spain, so the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938 was seen as marking a definitive division between those who were committed to opposing fascism and those committed to avoiding a European war. While most historians have focused on reactions to the Czech crisis itself, far less studied is how these reactions were shaped by earlier changes in the domestic political landscape.

This chapter seeks to relate the coalitions and divisions which had been developing over the civil war in Spain during 1937 and early 1938, to the changes in party politics in Britain and France. Mirroring their parliamentary parties, the French student left was increasingly divided by domestic politics and the fear of European war, debates in which Spain became a significant symbol. Unlike their French peers, British students on the left were able to maintain campus-based coalitions despite the divisions of party politics. However, the increasing proliferation of pacifist groups encouraged by the diplomatic tensions of 1938 did represent one potential fissure within the British left. Drawing on the same fear of imminent war as the pacifists, an attack on the Government's Air Raid Protection policy was championed by the anti-fascist left, which focused on experiences in Spain.

Perceptions of the Spanish conflict remained central to the political concerns of many academics and students, and strongly shaped how later developments in Central Europe were seen. Even in September 1938 when a European war seemed possible, Spain remained a powerful symbol, if not of political allegiance, then of the actual human devastation which would occur. Reactions to the civil war influenced what coalitions and campaigns were created in response to the Munich Pact, be they anti-appeasement coalitions in Britain or renewed political polarisation in France.

## Dissent on the Left: Divisions over Spain

The tensions between French Socialist and Communist students had been felt even during the formation of the successful antifascist coalition of 1934. At the Oxford Congress of Socialist students in July 1936, the French delegation had been leading opponents to the international merger of Socialist and Communist student organisations.<sup>1</sup> This position was reinforced at the April 1937 National Congress of the Fédération Nationale des Étudiants Socialistes. The Congress was addressed by a Communist representative urging the merger of students groups on the left, but this appeal was rejected.<sup>2</sup> Instead the FNES adopted, by 51 votes to 5 (with 17 abstentions), a motion which deferred any merger until it had been effected by the PCF and SFIO themselves. Although the resolution called for unity of the working class, it also carried a strong attack on Communist policy. Unity on the left in France, argued the Socialist students, could not resemble that which had already been achieved in Belgium, Britain, Spain (and explicitly Barcelona), where the absorption of Socialist groups by the Communists had deprived them of their fundamental collective and revolutionary character.<sup>3</sup> The increasing anti-communism of the FNES was reflected in its direct criticism of the show trials in Moscow, and most strikingly, by the importance it gave to the May Days in Barcelona the following month.<sup>4</sup>

During the first half of 1937, elements of the FNES in their opposition to non-intervention had already been increasingly critical of Spanish Communist attacks on the POUM.<sup>5</sup> They therefore reacted to the clashes in Barcelona during the first week of May 1937 with a heightened sensitivity. The June 1937 issue of Essais et Combats was largely devoted to the Spanish Republic's internal conflict, and it carried a 31 page account of the confrontation by Marcel Olliver titled "Les Journées Sanglantes de Barcelone (3 au 8 Mai 1937)".<sup>6</sup> The unfolding repression of the POUM, its outlawing and eventually the trials of some of its leaders, became the central focus of the frequent articles on Spain in Essais et Combats.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Essais et Combats, Nov. 1937, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Essais et Combats, April 1937, p. 19-21.

<sup>3</sup> Essais et Combats, May 1937, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Though affirming solidarity with the October Revolution, the FNES reserved the right to criticise the current Russian regime as a personal dictatorship.

<sup>5</sup> Essais et Combats, Feb. 1937, pp. 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Essais et Combats, June 1937.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Lauriet in "Le Procès du POUM" accused the Republican authorities of assassinating Nin in a private prison before his trial and of falsifying evidence against the POUM, - Essais et Combats, Nov 1937, p. 9;

Just as the International Brigades had brought the impact of the war back to their home communities in Britain and France, so did foreign volunteers for the POUM dramatise for the FNES the issues at stake. Essais et Combats noted that,

Un ES de France, L'admiral, un ancien membre de la Section frontiste universitaire, Gaston Parrot, qui étaient partis se battre pour la révolution espagnole, des centaines d'autres militants sont victimes des sbires et des bourreaux de l'Internationale Communiste, devenue une entreprise d'agitation xénophobe, une police contre-révolutionnaire, un gangstérisme conscient et organisé... une campagne active, que nous avons contribué à animer, a permis de sauver L'admiral. Mais il reste tous les autres....<sup>8</sup>

The sensitivity of the FNES to the repression of the POUM was in part because Spain had become a symbol for their own opposition to Communist politics. This was exemplified at the mid July 1937 Congress of Unification in Paris held by the Socialist and Communist students' Internationals. Forbidden to participate by their own party, the students of the FNES criticised proceedings from sidelines, focusing particularly on Spain. During the Congress, the son of the Spanish Republic's first President Alcalá Zamora spoke for the united Spanish Socialist and Communist student group. He was criticised by the correspondent of Essais et Combats for speaking of saving Spanish democracy rather than of the realities of Communist suppression.<sup>9</sup> The accusation that the Communists were absorbing and repressing other parties on the left under the cover of a *union sacrée*, had a strong resonance in French domestic politics, particularly in early 1938. The correspondent concluded by accusing the Communists of falsifying the Congresses final resolution which "*justifiant les assassinats des révolutionnaires en Espagne*".<sup>10</sup>

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An editorial celebrating the Republican capture of Teruel also called for the release of POUM activists, noting that the military victory might also strengthen the revolution in Barcelona - Essais et Combats, Jan 1938, p. 2;

Essais et Combats carried articles on the repression of the POUM by journalist Yves Levy, who also gave a talk on the same subject to Paris students - Essais et Combats, Feb. 1938, p. 7;

Essais et Combats, April 1938, p. 9 & 16.

<sup>8</sup> "An ES from France, L'admiral, a former member of the Section frontiste universitaire, Gaston Parrot, who left to fight for the Spanish revolution, is one of the hundreds of activists who are the victims of the henchmen and torturers of the Communist International, which has become an operation of xenophobic agitation, a counter-revolutionary police, a deliberate and organised gangsterism... an active campaign, that we have helped to stimulate, has saved L'admiral. But all the others remain..." - Essais et Combats, Nov 1937, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 11

This active championing of the POUM not only distanced the FNES from the Communists but from other groups on the French left, including its own party. A review of the LAURS's new journal, *L'Equipe*, noted that neither it nor its parent body, the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme had taken a strong position on the POUM or Moscow purges.<sup>11</sup> The constant support for the POUM also exacerbated the differences between the socialist students and the SFIO leadership. Jean Lauriet questioned the latter's inaction in the face of unjust trials, falsified evidence, arbitrary assassination and private prisons in Republican Spain. He wrote in November 1937 that,

La direction de notre parti et la rédaction du 'Populaire' vont-elles enfin se décider à faire connaître à la classe ouvrière française tout ce qu'elles savent sur ce qui passe en Espagne, et cesser d'aider par leur silence à la colonisation de l'Espagne et du mouvement ouvrier international par le stalinisme.<sup>12</sup>

### Party Politics and the Étudiants Socialistes

Spanish events served as a symbol for the growing tensions between the students of the FNES and the leadership of the SFIO, but they were not the cause of the conflict. Following the Clichy tragedy in March 1937, the Gauche Révolutionnaire had been officially dissolved by the SFIO after its youth section in Paris had strongly attacked SFIO Minister of the Interior, Marx Dormoy.<sup>13</sup> However, this action neither prevented the members of the Gauche Révolutionnaire from acting as a party within the party, or from taking control of the Seine Federation of the SFIO which had previously been controlled by Zyromski's Bataille Socialiste.<sup>14</sup> With its Paris leadership strongly supporting the dissolved tendency, there was increasing strain between the FNES and the SFIO leadership.<sup>15</sup> Finally on 16 February 1938, the SFIO's Comité Administratif Permanent voted by 18 votes to 6 to dissolve the student Federation. Only Zyromski and the representatives of the Gauche Révolutionnaire defended the existing FNES. As *Essais et Combats*

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<sup>11</sup> The FNES refused to co-operate with LAURS's *L'Equipe* as the latter had criticised the Gauche Révolutionnaire - *Essais et Combats*, Jan 1938, pp 18.

<sup>12</sup> "Are the leadership of our party and the editors of 'Populaire' ever going to decide to make known to the French working class all that they know about what has happened in Spain, and stopped aiding by their silence the colonisation of Spain and the international worker's movement by Stalinism" - *Essais et Combats*, Nov 1937, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> B.D. Graham, *Choice & Democratic Order: The French Socialist Party 1937-1950*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 102 & 104.

<sup>15</sup> *Essais et Combats*, April 1938, p. 2.

complained, the dissolution was due to the FNES's energetic support of the Gauche Révolutionnaire; "C'était un procès de tendance: on ne tolérait pas que les ES passent défendre des idées, qui sont pourtant celles d'une fraction du Parti".<sup>16</sup> The leaders of the *tendance* itself soon found themselves facing expulsion from the party as their own commitment to dissent fuelled increasing clashes with the SFIO leadership.

With dissolution, the FNES divided into two student groups. Those who supported Pivert's dissent formed the Fédération des Étudiants Révolutionnaires, which also maintained control of Essais et Combats. The new Federation declared itself as anti-reformist, anti-stalinist and anti-militarist.<sup>17</sup> It claimed support from existing groups at the Paris Cité Universitaire and of female students at the École Normale Supérieure in Sèvres. For those students who remained within the SFIO, a Congress was held in late March 1938 to reconstitute the FNES.<sup>18</sup> It was attended by 12 delegates from Paris, 8 from Toulouse and 5 from other universities. The new General Secretary of the FNES was Jean Morin, who had previously been the Secretary of Paris ES section. The quick reorganisation of the FNES suggests that the radical line of Essais et Combats was in some ways unrepresentative of the Federation as a whole. Certainly the *lutte de tendances* in Paris seems to have had little effect on the strong section of socialist students in Toulouse, as was reflected in their successful fundraising efforts for the newly established Comité Sanitaire.<sup>19</sup> As B.D. Graham argues the Departmental Federations of the party were largely self-sufficient, with their own individual characters, which meant that the Gauche Révolutionnaire was largely unsuccessful in seeking national support for its clash with the party's leadership.<sup>20</sup> It seems that in Paris both the dissident students and those who remained in the party ended up with similar numbers of supporters. While the Fédération des Étudiants Révolutionnaires claimed that 400 copies of Essais et Combats were sold throughout Paris, the FNES claimed its membership in the capital numbered 300 students.<sup>21</sup>

Pivert's group had opposed SFIO support for the second Front Populaire government of Camille Chautemps which had lasted from 18 January 1938 to 10

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<sup>16</sup> "This was the trial of a *tendance*: they could not tolerate that the ES goes on defending the ideas, which are those of a section of the Party" - Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Pivert made a brief appearance at the Congress where he called for the maximum of independence for the Socialist students - Ibid., p. 7

<sup>19</sup> Police reported in mid June 1938 that at a meeting of 50 USE members in Toulouse there was a threat of a split over participation in Daladier's government following the Royan Congress of SFIO - report of 20/6/1938, 1303 W 13, AD Haute-Garonne.

<sup>20</sup> Graham, Choice & Democratic Order, p. 130.

<sup>21</sup> Essais et Combats, May 1938, p. 20;  
L'Étudiant Socialiste, Jan-Feb 1939, p. 16.

March 1938. As Blum returned to power, Germany's Anschluss with Austria encouraged him to seek to broaden the left's Front Populaire into a Front National, including representatives of the right, to resist Nazi expansionism. Such a coalition was vigorously attacked by Pivert as a *union sacrée* which was a fundamental betrayal of the Socialists' commitment to pacifism.<sup>22</sup> When Blum's second government again faced having its legislation blocked by a hostile Senate, Pivert's supporters demonstrated in the Luxembourg Gardens demanding more radical measures.<sup>23</sup> The demonstration had taken place despite being prohibited by Marx Dormoy, and four days later, after Blum's government had resigned, Pivert and the other leaders of the Gauche Révolutionnaire were suspended from the party.<sup>24</sup> After supporting the dissidents, the Seine Federation itself was dissolved in mid April 1938, prompting *militant* Daniel Guérin to write an article "Aux étudiants" in Essais et Combats which stated that the dissolutions had ended revolutionary activity within the SFIO, and now he and the other leaders of Gauche Révolutionnaire would join the side of students in the avant-garde.<sup>25</sup>

At the SFIO's National Congress in Royan during the first week of June 1938, the suspensions of Pivert and his followers were confirmed by vote. Significantly, in the Congress debate Pivert tried to make the conflict between the *tendance* and the SFIO leadership one of policy rather than party discipline.<sup>26</sup> Looking back, Guérin also argued that it was the *tendance's* opposition to a *union sacrée*, its loyalty to a traditional socialist pacifism, which was responsible for the split.<sup>27</sup> However, this focus on the *union sacrée* ignores the extent to which the gap between the Gauche Révolutionnaire and the party had developed over the 'pause' in the Front Populaire economic reforms, the tragic Clichy protests, and the disappointments of Blum's repeated resignations from office. It was the *tendance's* commitment to dissent - to the revolutionary hopes of June 1936 when French politics and labour relations had seemed transformed - which caused the split, not the specific issue at stake. The radicalism which defined its identity impelled it into a confrontation with the party leadership.<sup>28</sup> Just as the repression of the POUM had been the focus

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<sup>22</sup> Graham, Choice & Democratic Order, pp. 124 & 134.

<sup>23</sup> Guérin, Front Populaire Révolution Manquée, pp. 187-188;

Police identified students of the Federation des Étudiants Révolutionnaire as amongst the first of the demonstrators who gathered outside the Senate - report of 7/4/1938, BA 1867, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>24</sup> Guérin, Front Populaire Révolution Manquée, p. 193.

Graham, Choice & Democratic Order, pp. 143-145.

<sup>25</sup> Essais et Combats, May 1938, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Graham, Choice & Democratic Order, p. 165.

<sup>27</sup> Guérin, Front Populaire Révolution Manquée, pp. 190 & 201.

<sup>28</sup> Graham, Choice & Democratic Order, p. 143;

for the radicals of the FNES, so the *union sacrée* served as symbol for Pivert's break with the SFIO, though in both cases the split had far deeper ideological and organisational roots.<sup>29</sup>

### Campus Coalitions and Party Politics in Britain

The tensions between the *tendances* of the SFIO were paralleled by the internal divisions of the British Labour Party. While several studies have examined the radical left within the Labour party during the 1930s as a single dissenting body, it was in fact divided amongst several organisations.<sup>30</sup> Two of these bodies were the Home Counties Labour Association which advocated a larger role in party decision-making for constituency groups and the Socialist League which had initially been a propaganda group but increasingly advocated a more radical line for the party. Both these groups had opposed the party's concerted resistance to united action with other parties on the left. Equally, both were highly critical of Labour's initial support for non-intervention and of its leadership's failure to organise more pro-active propaganda or relief campaigns for the Spanish Republic. As Tom Buchanan has argued, the Labour party responded slowly to such criticisms, with its primary concern being to keep pro-Republican propaganda and aid efforts within the party's established institutions.<sup>31</sup> The absolute opposition to joint activity with other parties was such that Labour's leadership deliberately distanced itself from first the Spanish Medical Aid Committee and then the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief because of the prominence of Communist activists in both organisations.<sup>32</sup>

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Significantly Zyromski kept his dissent within the party, though his support for united action with the PCF contrasted to the party's growing anti-communism.

<sup>29</sup> The significance of the *union sacrée* for Pivert's new Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan was reinforced by later events, particular the fear of European war during the Czech crisis of September 1938. During the crisis the Fédération des Étudiants Révolutionnaires drafted a telegram to Daladier, in the name of students who could be called up for military service, opposing mobilisation as increasing the prospect of war. The Munich Agreement encouraged the Étudiants Révolutionnaires to join the pacifism of the CVIA and the Centre Syndical d'Action contre la Guerre - *Essais et Combats*, Oct. 1938, pp. 5 & 20.

<sup>30</sup> James Jupp treats the left as a whole, whereas Ben Pimlott contrasts the pragmatic reformism of the Home Counties Labour Association with what he sees as the ineffectual radicalism of the Socialist League - James Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain 1931-1941*, Frank Cass, London, 1982;

Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, passim.

<sup>31</sup> Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, passim.

<sup>32</sup> Buchanan, "The Role of the British Labour Movement in the Origins and Work of the Basque Children's Committee, 1937-9", *European history Quarterly*, 18, 2, April 1988, pp. 158-159.



In January 1937, the Socialist League directly challenged this policy by agreeing to cooperate with the Communist Party and ILP's campaign for unity amongst parties on the left. The campaign publicly opened with a mass meeting in Manchester on 24 January 1937, and within three days the Socialist League had been disaffiliated by the Labour Party.<sup>33</sup> Two months later, Labour's National Executive Committee held that party members could not also belong to the League, by which point the League had already lost half of its membership.<sup>34</sup> For those such as Joseph Needham who had hoped that the Socialist League would help to radicalise the party, the commitment to Labour remained despite the failure of the Socialist League.<sup>35</sup> In the Cambridge City Labour Party, Needham and H.L. Elvin were unsuccessful in seeking a motion disapproving the disaffiliation of the League.<sup>36</sup> As David Howell writes of the 1930s,

The enthusiasm of British intellectuals for progressive politics, was stronger than ever before. Yet the moderates' domination of the Labour Party remained unbroken. In the end all the enthusiasm shattered against the unwillingness of Labour leaders to support any radical agitation outside the institutions of the party.<sup>37</sup>

Significantly, this commitment to Labour's institutions was shared by many academics within the Party, who called for a more radical foreign policy but also saw themselves as loyal party members working within its organisation.

Labour academics such as Cole, Laski and Tawney did join their Communist and Liberal peers such as Bernal, Cornford, Haldane, Levy and Murray, in supporting the call for an all-party National Conference on Spain in early April 1938, as the Nationalist offensive in Aragon and the Levante seemed to spell the end for the Spanish Republic.<sup>38</sup> On 23 April 1938, a National Emergency Conference on Spain was held at Queen's Hall, London. It was attended by 1806 delegates drawn from trade unions (25.5% of delegates), the Labour Party (19.1%), the Co-operative movement (6.2%), the Communist Party (10.8%), the Liberal Party (1.9%), Youth

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<sup>33</sup> Pimlott, *Labour & the Left in the 1930s*, p. 98;

Howell, *British Social Democracy*, p. 90.

<sup>34</sup> Pimlott, *Labour & the Left in the 1930s*, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> Werskey, *The Visible College*, p. 167.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes of 3/2/1937, p. 13 & Minutes of 3/3/1937, p. 16, 634/08 "Executive Minutes, Nov. 1936-May 1941", Cambridgeshire Trades Council and Divisional Labour Party, Cambridge County Record Office.

<sup>37</sup> Howell, *British Social Democracy*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>38</sup> Appeal of 6/4/1938, LP/SCW/4, National Museum of Labour History; An Emergency Conference was organised by Home Counties Labour Association, the Provisional Committee of London Constituency Labour Parties and the Labour Spain Committee on 9 April 1938 was attended by 300 delegates representing of 78 divisional and local Labour Parties and 15 trade unions - Report, LP/SCW/4, National Museum of Labour History.

Groups (4.3%) and various other bodies including local Aid Spain Committees. The gathering had been supported by a petition signed by MPs of all parties and supported by academics Cole, Cornford, Haldane, Laski, Murray, Tawney.<sup>39</sup> The Conference was addressed by a volunteer from the International Brigades, Communist leader Harry Pollitt who had just returned from Spain, and the leader of the Labour left Stafford Cripps. The Conference's twin themes were the necessity to reverse non-intervention and for energetic humanitarian relief for Republican Spain. Significantly, though all of the Labour academics who supported the Conference were opposed to the Labour leadership's avoidance of collaborative campaigns, all of them also chose to remain in the Labour Party while channelling their energies into aid and propaganda efforts outside it.

At the same time as the Labour Party leadership had asserted its authority against the Socialist League, it also sought to quieten other dissenting groups within the party which advocated united action on the left. The Labour League of Youth was reorganised while the University Labour Federation was threatened with disaffiliation in April 1937. ULF President, Bill Shebbeare, claimed to be surprised by the measures as there was no ban on Communist membership of the Federation since it was formed in 1921, ignoring that from 1925 there had been such a ban on CP membership in the Labour Party.<sup>40</sup> Shebbeare argued that to be successful a socialist group in Britain's universities need to be a broadly-based forum. The ULF executive rejected the proposition that its members should individually join the Labour Party (thus formally excluding Communists), arguing instead that its mixed membership should "contract in" to the Party, like the trade unions.<sup>41</sup>

The students had probably drawn the ire of the party for the proceedings of their Annual Conference in Manchester during the previous month.<sup>42</sup> At the Conference the ULF celebrated doubling its membership to 3,000 students in 28 groups. The Conference's motions vigorously condemning non-intervention and opposing rearmament in Britain, may have been tolerable to the Labour leadership, but the ULF's slogan of "Unity works" was a direct negation of the Labour Party's official policy. The threat of disaffiliation had surprising little effect on the ULF's politics, or that of its Socialist Societies as was revealed by the May Day

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<sup>39</sup> Report of National Emergency Conference on Spain, LP/SCW/4, National Museum of Labour History.

<sup>40</sup> Student Forum, May 1937, p. 5 - Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants, International Institute of Social History.

Pimlott, Labour & the Left in the 1930s, p. 80.

<sup>41</sup> Student Forum, May 1937, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> The Clare Market Review, March 1937, p. 19.

demonstrations of 1937. The Labour Party held its official march on 2 May 1937, in which ULF members participated in Oxford, Cambridge and London.<sup>43</sup> However, the day before, 750 ULF students from these universities had marched in London, calling for "Unity against Fascism and War".<sup>44</sup> The student marchers had carried a banner of Cornford and another which outlined the growth of the ULF after the merger of Socialist and Communist students. It called for the workers to press for the same.

The distance of the ULF from Labour Party policy was reflected not only in the maintenance of politically mixed membership but also their commitment to the political alliances which Labour's leaders viewed with abhorrence. These campus-based coalitions were formed largely in reaction to international events. In Oxford,

The Liberal Club and the Labour Club have agreed on a programme for joint anti-government action. The programme includes arms for Spain and a guarantee of Czech independence.<sup>45</sup>

Both Clubs also agreed on the nationalisation of coal, the repeal of the Trades Disputes Act, state control of the Bank of England, and the establishment of a Constituent Assembly for India. Together they addressed a letter to the Press calling for similar joint action by the parties themselves.

### **Pacifism and Anti-Fascism**

From the mid 1930s, the first broad coalitions of students political groups had formed around the Peace Councils established within various British universities. Given the success of these alliances in campus-based campaigning over issues such as humanitarian relief for Spain and China, it is interesting that in 1938 there was increasing debate within the left over pacifism. Drawing on the fears aroused by the Abyssinia crisis and then Spain, pacifism in Britain had been successfully organised in the Peace Pledge Union, which grew rapidly in 1936 and early 1937.<sup>46</sup> The Peace Pledge Union was supported by those whose pacifism was motivated by practical political considerations or religious faith.<sup>47</sup> Amongst its leading sponsors were Cambridge academics Alex Wood and Charles Raven; the

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<sup>43</sup> Student Forum, May 1937, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> 120 CUSC students went to London for the march - The Granta, 5/5/1937, p. 380.

<sup>45</sup> The Cherwell, 4/6/1938, p. 126.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, p. 212.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

former was the Chairman of the University Labour Party and the latter was heavily committed to humanitarian relief for Republican Spain.<sup>48</sup>

The strength of support for the Peace Pledge Union within British universities was shown when pacifist students at the University of Glasgow nominated their own candidate for their Rectorial Election in October 1937. Winston Churchill had been put forward as the Rectorial candidate for Conservative students, while UCL's J.B.S. Haldane had been nominated as representing a "United Front against War and Fascism". Haldane's supporters stressed "the need for unity among all progressive groups", both political and non-political, against the threats of war and fascism.<sup>49</sup> The committee which publicly sponsored Haldane's Rectorial campaign included office-holders of the Student Christian Movement, the Students Representative Council, the Glasgow University Magazine, League of Nations Union, and the ISS (though significantly the strongest supporter of the campaign, the Socialist Club, was not named in the first appeal).<sup>50</sup> The appeal drew a pointed rejoinder published in the Glasgow University Magazine pointing out that the eleven signatories of the "United Front against War and Fascism" were more representative of a social clique of student politicians than the societies they claimed to represent but which in fact did not endorse Haldane.<sup>51</sup> Haldane's Rectorial Campaign was launched by a supper and dance organised by the Socialist Club which was addressed by Cambridge's Bernard Knox who had served in the International Brigades.<sup>52</sup> Significantly, Spain was also a central reference point for the pacifist students who supported the Rectorial campaign of Reverend Dr H.R.L. Sheppard, leader of the Peace Pledge Union. Their election flyers carried graphic picture of the bombing in Spain, asking "What are you doing to prevent this?".<sup>53</sup> Sheppard provided a very different answer to that question than did Haldane or Churchill, and he was ultimately elected Glasgow's Lord Rector.<sup>54</sup> Sheppard's electoral victory in Glasgow in late 1937 reflected the vitality of pacifist politics, and their successful appeal to students over a year after war had broken out in Spain

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 135, 204 & 321.

<sup>49</sup> Glasgow University Magazine, 21/4/1937, p. 320.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.;

Haldane was also supported by fellow academics Bernal, Needham, Gowland Hopkins, Hogben and Laski - The Student Front, 14/10/1937, p. 3 in File: "Glasgow University Rectorial Election 1937", Mitchell Library.

<sup>51</sup> Glasgow University Magazine, 5/5/1937, pp. 332-333.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> The Student Pacifist, 18/10/1937, p. 3 in File: "Glasgow University Rectorial Election 1937", Mitchell Library;

The Student Pacifist, 22/10/1937, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> Ceadel, Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945, p. 266.

Nationally, the Peace Pledge Union enjoyed growing support in the summer of 1938 with the increasing tensions over Central European diplomacy.<sup>55</sup> Immediately preceding these events there were attacks on pacifism by the left in London and Oxford, which though isolated are also revealing. On 25 February 1938 the Students' Union of University College London, debated "That collective security rather than pacifism is the best way of obtaining peace", with guest speakers John Strachey and Lord Ponsonby.<sup>56</sup> The motion for collective security received 88 votes against 56 votes for pacifism. The debate had arisen with the formation of a pacifist student society within UCL in the previous month. The Pacifist Society had been established as a separate body from the existing Peace Society, though the latter supported its registration by UCL's Provost.<sup>57</sup> The Pacifist Society aimed "to promote and encourage active peace policy based on the pacifist decision of individual abstention from war and the threat of war as an instrument of policy".<sup>58</sup> Rebutting charges of sectarianism against the pacifists, the treasurer of the Peace Council publicly defended their separatism since they continued to work on the council.<sup>59</sup>

Though small, the flurry of activity which gave birth to the society quickly aroused the hostility of some of the committed left.<sup>60</sup> Contributions by pacifists to Phineas drew the complaint from a Communist student Brian Pearce, that, "it is clearly apparent by several items in this term's first number that the College Pacifists have acquired an influence on Phineas quite out of proportion to their relative strength".<sup>61</sup> Pearce was particularly aggrieved that a student manifesto calling for collective security with the USSR and arms sales to Spain, had been relegated to the student weekly's back page, while its editorial had been strongly pacifist.<sup>62</sup> He called on the pacifists to "cease disrupting the struggle against Fascism", stating that,

Four students of UC went to Spain to help defend Democracy against International Fascism. Two have already given their lives. One wonders what the other two, working every day in danger of death for our sakes, will think of us if they read articles like your editorial, which are nothing but

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>56</sup> Phineas, 1/3/1938, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Phineas, 9/12/1937, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Students' Handbook 1938-1939, University College London, p. 186,

<sup>59</sup> Phineas, 15/2/1938, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> The Society attracted 30 students to hear Kingsley Martin speak - Phineas, 6/12/1938, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Phineas, 10/5/1938, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Phineas, 3/5/1938, p. 1 & 4.

sabotage of their struggle.<sup>63</sup>

Pearce continued this attack two issues later, criticising the continued publicity given to the Pacifist Society. Clearly worried that the new society might change the direction of progressive efforts, he condemned it as "making a pro-Fascist policy with 'Left' phrases [which] has, by the way, an ugly name among Socialists - Trotskyism".<sup>64</sup>

These attacks on absolute pacifism were paralleled in Oxford at the time UCL's Pacifist Society was being formed. The Liberal students newspaper Oxford Comment celebrated a recent pamphlet, Would I Fight? which it argued proved that few current Oxford students would have supported the Union's resolution not to fight for 'King and Country' in 1933.<sup>65</sup> The Oxford Comment conducted its own survey of 269 students asking them what they were willing to defend by arms. Only 23% of the survey were willing to fight for the League of Nations, 37% for Democracy, 53% for the British Empire and 64% for King and Country.<sup>66</sup> When Union President Raymond Walton stated that the pacifist vote of 1933 would be the same in 1938, the Oxford Comment threatened that there were plans afoot to debag him.<sup>67</sup> The Oxford University Pacifist Association had been established for several years, yet around the same time it also came under attack. The Association's decision to send a Christmas pudding to General Franco the previous term as a token of "their sincere wishes that Spain's troubles may speedily be ended in a spirit fitting to the season", was attacked by the left-leaning student newspaper The Cherwell as a pathetic betrayal.<sup>68</sup> The President of the Pacifist Association, Richard Symonds replied that a pudding had been sent to Negrín as well as Franco.<sup>69</sup> It was not intended as serious political action but to make the point that "war leaves no

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<sup>63</sup> Phineas, 10/5/1938, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Phineas, 24/5/1938, p. 1;

Perhaps the most directly effected by the new society, was the Peace Society which seems to have lost some of its direction, leading to it contemplating changing, "in favour of forming an International Affairs Society rather than a League of Nations Society" - Phineas, 6/12/1938, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Oxford Comment, 23/2/1938, p. 1;

Oxford Comment, 2/3/1938, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Though the survey was intended to show that the majority of Oxford students opposed pacifism, it also revealed that a large minority were opposed to war - Oxford Comment, 9/3/1938, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Oxford Comment, 9/3/1938, p. 6;

'Debagging' usually consisted of an assault on the victim's clothing and dignity, rather than on their person.

<sup>68</sup> The Cherwell, 22/1/1938, p. 3;

The Cherwell also described pacifist spokesman C.E.M. Joad as "pathetic" - The Cherwell, 5/2/1938, p. 97.

<sup>69</sup> The Cherwell, 24/1/1938, p. 79.

chance for the small joys of life".<sup>70</sup> These isolated exchanges in Oxford and London during the first half of 1938, reveal the extent to which the left's "United Front against War and Fascism" could cause conflict with those groups which were not prepared to give priority to the politics of anti-fascism.

The civil war in Spain has been described as curing the British left of its pacifism, of marking the shift from anti-war campaigns of the early 1930s to the committed anti-fascism of the end of the decade. It is equally important to recognise that for some in British universities, Spain positively encouraged pacifist belief rather than undermined it. As Martin Ceadel has argued, pacifists were divided by their religious and political perspectives and this affected their reactions to the civil war. Those whose pacifism was rooted in a religious apoliticism were "more inclined therefore, to see the suffering of the Spanish people in their civil war as confirming pacifist predictions about the nature of war, rather than to see the political issues involved as upsetting all previous assumptions".<sup>71</sup> Humanitarian aid for Republican Spain or the war's tragic victims could combine these multiple motives. During 1937, UCL Arts student J. Goodfellow was a leading organiser of the appeal for a Basque child refugee and responsible for collection for the BYPA 'Milk for Spain' Appeal in 1937.<sup>72</sup> The following year he was also one of the founders of the UCL Pacifist Society. Equally in Oxford, Richard Symonds who was active in the Labour Club as well as the Pacifist Association joined an all-party BYPA student delegation which travelled through Republican Spain in August 1938. Pacifism was not merely a form of defeatism, as it was sometimes portrayed by the political left. It could also be a source of activism in relief efforts for Spain which were so centred on the war's tragic impact on the civilian population.

### The Debate over Air Raid Precautions

Emerging from the same climate of impending war which fuelled the development of distinctive pacifist student groups within British universities was a national debate over Air Raid Precautions (ARP) led by left-wing academics. While invoking many of the same images which the pacifists used in their appeals to action, the protagonists of the ARP debate were supporting a very different political position. A central reference point for both pacifists and ARP campaigners was the

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Ceadel, , *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945*, p. 204.

<sup>72</sup> *Phineas*, 8/6/1937, p. 2;

*Phineas*, 12/10/1937, p. 2;

*Phineas*, 9/12/37, p. 4.

conflict in Spain, particularly the aerial bombing of civilians in major towns. Air raids emerged as a dominant image of the war because they symbolised both the Republic's need for humanitarian aid and the one sidedness of non-intervention, which allowed the Nationalists aeroplanes and pilots from Germany and Italy, while denying the Republic the anti-aircraft armaments needed for its defence. Following the almost daily bombing of Madrid during the Nationalists' siege during the last months of 1936, the air war had reached a new peak in April and May 1937 with the Basque offensive.<sup>73</sup> While the destruction of Guernica was seen by many as embodying the new face of war, the air raids on Republican towns greatly intensified during the first half of 1938.<sup>74</sup> Many of these raids were focused on Barcelona, which coincided with the increasing fears of a European war in Britain and France stirred by the crisis in first Austria and then Czechoslovakia.

Before the outbreak of the war in Spain, the memory of the First World War was so strong in Britain that the primary threat to civilian populations was feared to be poisonous gas.<sup>75</sup> The first British debates over Air Raid Precautions were therefore over the defence measures for civilians from gas between left-wing critics of the government and the Home Office which sought to treat the matter as one of individual responsibility. Left-wing groups such as the Socialist Medical Association and the Cambridge Scientists Anti-war Group rejected this premise, arguing that the only effective protection from gas could come from active government efforts. After experiments in late 1936, the CSWAG published The Protection of the Public from Aerial Attack in February 1937 which argued that the government's ARP scheme for gas masks, and the gas-proofing of domestic housing were largely technically ineffective, and also politically discriminatory against the working class.<sup>76</sup> The Cambridge academics who comprised the CSWAG, led by Bernal, Needham, Pirie, Waddington, and Wooster, cited their technical expertise and "scientific fact" to justify their attack on the government.<sup>77</sup>

After debate in Parliament and the press, the government produced its own scientific study which argued that the CSWAG had overestimated the effects of gas bombardment on residential housing.<sup>78</sup> Significantly, the reply to these counter-

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<sup>73</sup> Bombardements et Agressions en Espagne (Juillet 1936-Juillet 1938), Comité Mondial Contre la Guerre et le Fascisme, Paris, 1938, pp. 9-11 & 16-19.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Werskey, The Visible College, p. 226-227.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228-230.

<sup>77</sup> Nature, 1/5/1937, p. 760 in Box 36, Add 8287, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>78</sup> Werskey, The Visible College, p. 230.



criticisms in The Times by the scientists of the CSWAG revealed that the debate over ARP had entered a second stage by mid February 1938. They wrote,

If the Government experiments on the relative ineffectiveness of gas are to be accepted it is more than ever difficult to see why, if the safety of the public is the prime interest, they are to be left for the most part without any protection whatever against high explosives. The experience of Spain has shown that it is perfectly possible, even in a poor country in the midst of war, to build effective shelters for the civil population. With the resources and time at our disposal we should be able to do far better.<sup>79</sup>

After a year and a half, the conflict in Spain had become the touchstone for modern war. For the left, the civil war bore testimony not only to the Conservatives' failure in foreign policy, but also in their domestic provision of ARP.

On the same page of The Times which carried the CSAWG reply was another letter to the editor from Cambridge signed by 13 academics. The letter was no doubt motivated by the intensifying air attacks on Barcelona in January and February 1938 for it stated that,

In view of the growing horror of air raid in the Spanish conflict, and in view of the recent proposal of the Spanish Government to General Franco that both sides in Spain should refrain from bombing the non-combatant population, we urge the British Government to bring all possible diplomatic pressure to bear on General Franco to take back his refusal of the proposal.<sup>80</sup>

Amongst the signatories were F.M. Cornford, H.L. Elvin, F.L. Lucas, C.E. Raven and J.B. Trend who had each supported humanitarian relief efforts for the Republic. The two letters from Cambridge encapsulate the two positions which academics adopted in the political debates over ARP, either as scientific experts or as independent intellectuals. While the latter position was common in the moral criticism of the Nationalist air raids in both Britain and France, the linking of scientific argument and national politics over ARP in Britain was unique.

### **J.B.S. Haldane & the ARP Debate in UCL**

The academic who probably most epitomised this mixing of scientific expertise and political commitment was University College London scientist J.B.S. Haldane. Haldane described his own political development in these terms,

Till 1933 I tried to keep out of politics, but the support given by the British

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<sup>79</sup> The Times, 11/2/1938, p. 10 in Box 36, Add 8287, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Government to Hitler and Mussolini forced me to enter the political field. In 1936-1938 I spent three months in Republican Spain, first as an adviser on gas protection, and then as an observer of air raid precautions. I was in the front line during fighting, and in several air raids behind the line. Since then I have tried with complete lack of success, to induce the British Government to adopt air raid protection measures which had proved their efficacy in Spain.

Mr Chamberlain's policy, and recent developments in physics and biology, combined to convince me of the truth of the Marxist philosophy. Though I am a member of no political party, I have of late years supported the communist party on a number of issues.<sup>81</sup>

Haldane's strong support for the CPGB during the late 1930s mirrored in many ways that of Paul Langevin for the PCF; both were well-known scientists who as prominent independents in public life acted as consistent advocates for the Communist cause.

In September 1938, during the height of the Czech crisis, Haldane was the central figure in a national propaganda campaign over ARP launched by the Left Book Club.<sup>82</sup> Importantly, this campaign against aerial bombardment by high explosive and incendiary bombs rather than gas had been begun developing within British universities over a year earlier. It was especially within University College London and Cambridge, that scientists of the left gradually elaborated on the lessons of Spain. Within UCL, on 20 May 1937 the Peace Society organised a talk on ARP by Dr Hughes of the Cambridge Scientists Anti-War Group, and chaired by Haldane.<sup>83</sup> The advertising notices for the talk asked, "You remember Guernica?", while in the same issue Phineas carried appeals for the BYPA Foodship to Bilbao.<sup>84</sup>

Almost a year later, an anonymous article "ARP Criticised", was published in the University College Magazine which censured the UCL authorities for their "makeshift and half-hearted" attempts at ARP.<sup>85</sup> It argued that the civil war in Spain had proved that the primary need for civilian protection was not ineffective gas masks or gas-proof rooms, but shelters from high explosive bombs. As its author stated,

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<sup>81</sup> "Autobiographical Notes', p. 2, Box 7, JBS Haldane Collection, University College Archives;

cf Werskey, The Visible College, p. 159.

<sup>82</sup> Werskey, The Visible College, p. 232.

<sup>83</sup> Phineas, 27/4/1937, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Phineas, 11/5/1937, pp. 1 & 2.

<sup>85</sup> University College Magazine, Summer 1938, p. 224.

In Spain the chief aerial weapon has been the high explosive bomb, and a raid on Barcelona lasting 30 seconds produced nearly a thousand casualties. No other form of attack is likely to produce more devastating results than this. Well-constructed bomb-proof shelters are the only protection against such carnage... This protection we are not getting, and will not get unless the Government is forced by agitation to provide us with it.<sup>86</sup>

The imminence of war over Czechoslovakia fuelled the Air Raid Precautions debate to fever-pitch during September 1938, as Haldane gave talks across the country for the Left Book Club.<sup>87</sup> The publication by the latter of Haldane's study ARP, established him as one of the government's foremost and most authoritative critics. Haldane relied on his experiences in Spain extensively to justify his own arguments over the deficiencies of the British National Government's policy on ARP.<sup>88</sup> For him, Spain proved that effective air raid protection was possible for civilians, it merely required scientific organisation. The government's anti-gas measures would only increase the casualties from bombardment by high explosives, and Haldane argued that the Conservatives were deliberately ignoring the practical lessons which could be learnt from Spain.<sup>89</sup> Reflecting the aims of CPGB strategy at the time, Haldane called for a broad non-party movement to lobby the government into providing effective civilian defences.<sup>90</sup> He argued that real civilian protection would prevent war and offer a solution to unemployment and rearmament.<sup>91</sup>

Haldane's ARP directly cited University College as an example of the inadequacy of civilian protection in London. He described the basements of the college which were to be used as shelters as potential "death traps".<sup>92</sup> High explosive bombs with delayed fuses would render the majority of these basements as unsafe as the rest of the building. Haldane noted that while some basements were adequate, these should be supplemented by a system of trenches and the use of the first floor of steel frame buildings as shelters.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>87</sup> Werskey, The Visible College, p. 232.

<sup>88</sup> J.B.S. Haldane, ARP, Victor Gollancz, London, 1938, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 10;

Werskey, The Visible College, p. 232.

<sup>91</sup> Draft, "Can we get one hundred percent safety in air raids!", Box 7, JBS Haldane Collection, University College Archives.

<sup>92</sup> Haldane, ARP, p. 149.

Following the Munich Agreement, Haldane reproduced these arguments for student consumption in an article for Phineas which stressed that the blame for the existing inadequacies lay with the Government's policies, and not the UCL authorities.<sup>93</sup> A week later Phineas published the reply by the College administration. College Secretary P.O.G. Douie cited his own personal experience of bombing in France during World War I to explain that he was taking the threat seriously.<sup>94</sup> The College had drawn up a detailed ARP scheme, even going so far as to purchase 113 respirators and 16 decontamination suits after it had been refused government supplies.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

While the debate over Air Raid Precautions at UCL broke after the crisis of September 1938, it had been developing within the College for some time. In May 1938 it was possible for a UCL student to write that "Our President said that we live in times of war and rumours of war: that was last term; now we live in times of war and ARP".<sup>96</sup> The repeated air raids on Madrid, the Basque country and then Barcelona became the central reference points both for those attacking the politics of Chamberlain's government such as Haldane, and for newly organised pacifists at UCL envisaging the next war.

Following the Second World War, the pacifism which marked movements of both the left and right (especially in France) has largely been described as a form of defeatism. Pacifism was actually a source of activism which could fuel both the left's humanitarian concern for the victim's of the war and the French extreme right's absolute opposition to being drawn into a war between Fascism and

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<sup>93</sup> Phineas, 18/10/1938, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> Phineas, 25/10/1938, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Minutes of 1/11/1938, p. 5, "Minutes of College Committee, 1938", University College Archives;

Minutes of 29/11/1938, p. 3, "Minutes of College Committee, 1938", University College Archives;

Minutes of 7/2/1939, p. 4, "Minutes of College Committee, 1938", University College Archives.

<sup>96</sup> Phineas, 3/5/1938, p. 2;

Another perspective, articulated after the Munich Agreement was very different: "Now that the crisis is over, and life has resumed its usual routine; re-armament in the Times, and scandals in the Mirror. Now that we no longer look up every time an aeroplane passes by; surely we can leave the managing of the college's affairs to competent authorities. Must we and you drag up ARP from its damp trenches once again, must the Conservatives and the Socialists keep on giving Chamberlain advice. Sit back and relax, dear Phineas" - Phineas, 25/10/1938, p. 1.

Communism. It could therefore work both ways, to encourage campaigns for the Spanish Republic or discourage the right from mounting similar campaigns for the Nationalists.

## Chapter 10

### The Right and the 'Spanish Obsession'

In France the year of 1938 was marked by the Radical Party's shift to the right which effectively ended the Front Populaire coalition. This was paralleled by the revival of the French extreme right after the disaster of legal dissolution in 1936. A pro-Franco journal, Occident, was established as a direct rebuttal to the intellectuals of the left. Some nationalist students had been successfully reorganised by the Parti Social Français and its Centre Universitaire, while others were still willing to rely on the old repertoire of Action Française. In Britain, Conservative students faced the divisions of their seniors over foreign policy, with opposition to the Government's foreign policy being encouraged by the existing campus coalitions for Spain and humanitarian relief.

#### Occident

The week after the Nationalist army completed its occupation of Northern Spain in late October 1937, a new pro-Nationalist journal, Occident, was published in France. The title of the new journal was significant, as it echoed the October 1935 petition by right-wing intellectuals opposing League of Nations sanctions against Italy, "Manifeste pour la Défense de l'Occident". As in 1935, the French right saw the Spanish Nationalists as defending a common Western civilisation, a shared Latin solidarity, against communism. The first issue of Occident carried addresses from Franco and Bernard Fäy of the Collège de France on its opening page.<sup>1</sup> The journal was established as a reaction against the Spanish Republic's claimed support from French and Spanish 'intellectuals'. Directly contesting this claim Occident concluded its first issue with a text from renowned Spanish intellectual Miguel de Unamuno attacking the Republic.<sup>2</sup> As well as Unamuno, the journal cited guitarist Andrés Segovia, and composers Maurice Ravel and Igor Stravinsky as intellectual supporters of the Nationalist cause.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Occident, 25/10/1937, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 8;

See also article "Unamuno et le mouvement national", Occident, 10/2/1938, p. 8; For the attempts by both the French right and left to claim Unamuno see Françoise Peyrègne, "Les Derniers Mois de la Vie d'Unamuno d'après la Presse Française", Autour de la Guerre d'Espagne 1936-39: Actes du Colloque, Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, 1993, pp. 137-148.

<sup>3</sup> Occident, 10/1/1938, p. 8.

Occident's following issues contained a "Manifeste aux Intellectuels Espagnols" with 40 signatories and another petition supporting the Nationalists signed by 32 others.<sup>4</sup> The latter petition included the signatures of thirteen academics, including 8 from Paris and 3 from Bordeaux. Significantly, not only did the petition lack the numerical support of pro-Republican French efforts, but as 5 of the signatories were honorary professors, pro-Nationalist supporters were also older than their opponents.<sup>5</sup> Amongst the signatories of the petitions were two Paris academics, Louis Le Fur and Bernard Fäy, who emerged as the Nationalist counterparts to pro-Republican quartet of Albert Bayet, Victor Basch, Paul Langevin and Henri Wallon. Occident carried an article on Le Fur's legal justification for the Franco regime in La Guerre d'Espagne et le Droit.<sup>6</sup> Bernard Fäy published his own pro-Nationalist book which recorded his travels from San Sebastián, Burgos, Salamanca and symbolically concluding in the Catholic stronghold of Navarre.<sup>7</sup>

As well as contesting the allegiance of intellectuals, Occident sought to establish humanitarian campaigns similar to those which had rallied support for the Republic. Fay was named President of a French committee to restore Catholic churches destroyed by the 'reds' in Spain, which secured the patronage of General Joffre and Cardinal Verdier.<sup>8</sup> Other aid efforts were organised through Solidarité d'Occident and Amis de l'Espagne Nationale, though like the pro-Nationalist petitions these were never strong enough to rival those organised for the Republic.<sup>9</sup> The assumption of much of the historiography from the left is that the lack of pro-Nationalist aid campaigns and petitions relative to those supporting the Republic indicates the strength of the latter's cause. Rather, the contrast between the two sides was that different political ideologies sought different forums for expression.

Occident also championed the recognition of Nationalist Spain by the French government.<sup>10</sup> Diplomatic recognition of the Nationalists had first become an issue in late 1936, when it seemed likely that they would capture the Spanish capital.

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<sup>4</sup> Occident, 10/12/1937, p.4;

Occident, 10/1/1938, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> At least half of the academic signatories were drawn from the Faculties of Letters and Sciences, questioning once again the accepted political geography of the Quartier Latin.

<sup>6</sup> Occident, 25/2/1938, p. 4.;

The Paris publishers of La Guerre d'Espagne et le Droit, shared the same street and nationalist sympathies as the students of Action Française, rue St André des Arts.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Fäy, Les Forces de l'Espagne: Voyage à Salamanque, Les Amis de l'Espagne Nouvelle, Paris, 1937.

<sup>8</sup> Occident, 10/6/1938, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Occident, 25/6/1938, p. 7;

Occident 10/1/1939, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Occident, 10/5/1938, p. 1.

With the failure of the Nationalist offensive on Madrid, there was an increasing propaganda campaign by the right-wing press, led by Le Figaro in February 1937 to recognise the Nationalists as a belligerent power, and later the following year to exchange ambassadors with Nationalist Spain.<sup>11</sup> In the fifth issue of Occident, Le Fur called for the French government to recognise Franco's government as he already held two thirds of Spanish territory.<sup>12</sup> This press campaign for the recognition of Nationalist Spain increased dramatically during the final year of the civil war as the military situation of the Republic became more precarious.<sup>13</sup> The growth in pro-Nationalist propaganda was also encouraged by the resurgence of the extreme right in France in 1938 with the weakening of the coalition of the Front Populaire.

### **The Parti Social Français and its Centre Universitaire**

Before 1936, French politics had been marked by physical confrontation, with clashes on the streets, in public meetings, around newspaper sellers, at marches. The violence of 6 February 1934 had intensified this "atmosphere of battle" in political activity across the country.<sup>14</sup> After the dissolution of the leagues, the connection between nationalist politics and student corporate groups became increasingly nebulous. For the former league members, corporate groups offered one forum to re-organise their efforts in the wake of dissolution.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most successful league to adapt to the new situation was the Croix de Feu, which had been the fastest growing body on the right after the riots of 6 February 1934.<sup>16</sup> Just as the league re-organised itself into a political party, the Parti Social Français (PSF),

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 387;  
Pike, Les Français et la Guerre d'Espagne, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> Occident, 25/12/1937, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 387.

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Passmore, "Boyscouting for grown-ups?: Paramilitarism in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français", French Historical Studies, 19, Fall 1995, pp. 529-530.

<sup>15</sup> In March 1937, police reported that a newly-formed Syndicat Corporatif des Étudiants de Paris, was not the 'non-political' corporate group it was registered as, but was exclusively composed of nationalist students. Its committee was led by members of the Parti Franciste - Report of Aug. 1937, 304, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris;

In Bordeaux, police recorded the formation of an Association des Amis du Salon des Étudiants which claimed to be inspired by Italian culture (though it was probably more inspired by Italian politics). It claimed 150 members and was led by students who had formerly been members of the Action Française - Reports of 24/4/1937 & 30/4/1937, 1 M605, AD Gironde.

<sup>16</sup> For the debate over whether Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français were Fascist see Soucy, French Fascism, pp. 17 & 136;

Kevin Passmore, From Liberalism to Fascism: The Fight in a French Province 1928-1939, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 250.



to continue its legal existence, so its student section re-organised itself into a corporate group. From mid-1936, the paramilitary sorties which had characterised the league's old activities were phased out by the PSF as it sought other forms to maintain its public presence.<sup>17</sup> Equally the students of the PSF's Centre Universitaire rarely engaged in their former repertoire of violent street politics.

The first group of the Centre Universitaire was founded in Paris in mid January 1937.<sup>18</sup> It occupied the third floor of 120 Boulevard St Germain, behind a door discreetly labelled "PSF".<sup>19</sup> The Centre Universitaire had its own library of newspapers, political propaganda and a restaurant which were regularly used by approximately 100 students.<sup>20</sup> The Centre was intended as a corporate group for PSF members, assisting their activities as students and as militants within the party which directed the group's administration and leadership.<sup>21</sup> The students were largely drawn from the Faculties of Law, Medicine, Science and the École Libre des Sciences Politiques.<sup>22</sup> The following academic year, a Foyer Universitaire de Paris, was also established for female students. It opened with at least 80 members, drawn from the Faculties of Law, Medicine, Letters and the École des Chartes.<sup>23</sup>

The leagues had justified their organisation by action on the streets, whereas the new student organisations of the PSF justified their separate organisation through social work. As the Centre Universitaire's founder, medical intern Pierre Suire stated, "*le Social doit rester notre raison d'être*".<sup>24</sup> From the outset, medical students were encouraged to visit elderly and sick PSF members in Paris.<sup>25</sup> Other students were encouraged to lead workers study circles or contribute to the PSF's youth groups.<sup>26</sup> This social work had a political character, for it drew on the image

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<sup>17</sup> Passmore writes that in September and October 1936 the PSF's paramilitary mobilisation was briefly revived, but that it was far less important to the organisation than before dissolution - Passmore, *From Liberalism to Fascism*, pp. 236, 251 & 263.

<sup>18</sup> John Rymell, "Militants & Militancy in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français: Patterns of Political Experience on the French Far Right (1933-39)", PhD, University of East Anglia, 1990, p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> *L'Étudiant Social*, May 1938, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> Reception - *Ibid.*, p. 24;

Dinner - *L'Étudiant Social*, June 1938, p. 43;

Courses - *L'Étudiant Social*, Oct. 1938, p. 94.

<sup>21</sup> *L'Étudiant Social*, 1, Apr 1938, p. 4;

Rymell, "Militants & Militancy in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français", p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> based on regular courses - *L'Étudiant Social*, May 1938, p. 27;

*L'Étudiant Social*, Dec. 1938, p. 124.

<sup>23</sup> *Le Flambeau du Sud-Ouest*, Nov. 1938, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> *L'Étudiant Social*, Aug/Sept 1938, p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> *L'Étudiant Social*, April 1938, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *L'Étudiant Social*, May 1938, p. 22;

*L'Étudiant Social*, Aug/Sept 1938, p. 84;

*L'Étudiant Social*, Nov 38, p. 113.

of serving the nation which had been central to the politics of the *ancien combattants* of the Croix de Feu.<sup>27</sup> As was recognised by its members, the political repertoire for students had changed dramatically between the Croix de Feu's Volontaires Nationaux and their new student organisation,

Sous la direction de Pierre Suire, le Centre universitaire a fait pénétrer les idées Croix de Feu au Quartier Latin. Au 'Politique d'abord', nous avons substitué le 'social d'abord'.<sup>28</sup>

Significantly, for the bourgeois students of the Centre Universitaire social work offered the opportunity for cross-class contact which was central to PSF's rejection of marxist class conflict. Just as academics and students on the left had sought contact with the working class as the embodiment of socialist revolution, so students of the right sought the same contact to embody their 'national' rather than class-based politics.<sup>29</sup>

Despite this emphasis on social work for the party, the possibility of humanitarian aid for Spanish Nationalists does not seem to have been considered by PSF students.<sup>30</sup> The Centre Universitaire journal, L'Étudiant Social, gave a far greater public prominence to the group's corporate, rather than political, face. There is an almost complete absence of material on international events in L'Étudiant Social and it must be assumed that for political reading the students turned to the party's main newspaper.<sup>31</sup> Rather than formulating their own distinctive political positions like the Socialist students of the SFIO, the PSF students seem to have taken their own position firmly within the party line.

The leader of the PSF's parliamentary wing was Jean Ybarnégaray who was the second most popular speaker to the students of the Centre Universitaire after

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<sup>27</sup> "Étudiants, pour cela aidez-vous. Donnez au Centre Universitaire vos heures de liberté, vos aptitudes. Vous ne serez pas inutilisés. Vous servirez" - L'Étudiant Social, Aug/Sept 1938, p. 83; Rymell, "Militants & Militancy in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français", pp. 13-16.

<sup>28</sup> "Under the leadership of Pierre Suire, the Centre universitaire has caused the ideas of the Croix de Feu to penetrate into the Latin Quarter. For 'Politics first', we have substituted 'social [work] first'" - L'Étudiant Social, Oct 1938, p. 94.

<sup>29</sup> This aspect of the PSF's nationalism was particularly pronounced at a mass meeting in Paris on 11 May 1938 where La Rocque's speech stressed the importance that the audience mixed students and workers of the PSF. As L'Étudiant Social wrote of the meeting "*cette fraternisation cordiale de deux classes qu'on a voulu jusu'alors opposer arbitrairement prenait une valeur éminemment symbolique et constituait le fait important de cette mémorable soirée*" - L'Étudiant Social, June 1938, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> In February 1938, the PSF's newspaper in the Gironde carried an appeal by an ex-naval officer in Bordeaux for impartial aid to Spain in which he stressed the solidarity of latin people - Le Flambeau du Sud-Ouest, 5/2/1938, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> L'Étudiant Français, the journal of the Étudiants d'Action Française, emerged with a similar focus on the university rather than national politics after dissolution in February 1936.

the party's leader Colonel de La Rocque. Ybarnégaray was also the PSF's spokesman on foreign affairs and his view of the war in Spain seems to have been highly influential on the students. As deputy for the Basses-Pyrénées on the Spanish border and of Basque descent, Ybarnégaray had strong personal as well as political reasons for committing himself to supporting the Nationalists. At the PSF's first National Congress in Paris in late 1936, Ybarnégaray hailed Franco as a friend of France who tomorrow would be the victor and master of Spain.<sup>32</sup> He then attacked Blum for supporting the communists and anarchists of the Frente Popular. Ybarnégaray recognised that both Germany and Russia had supplied large amounts of military material to the two sides in Spain, yet unlike the left critics of non-intervention, he saw this aid as the very reason France should remain neutral in conflict, lest it be drawn into the "*duel à mort*" of Nazism and Communism.<sup>33</sup> This position changed little during the war, as the PSF attacked the Front Populaire for alienating Nationalist Spain whose anti-communism and Catholicism made it the true embodiment of the country.

At the Second National Congress of PSF students in mid February 1939, Ybarnégaray argued that the recent fall of Catalonia to the Nationalists was a triumph of the realism of his own policy.<sup>34</sup> He saw the victory of Franco as not the victory of a particular party but the triumph of order and authority in Spain over tyranny and bolshevism. The day before Ybarnégaray's speech, Bordeaux student Louis Audet addressed the Congress on "L'Étudiant et la France de 1939". Though Audet explicitly deferred to Ybarnégaray on foreign affairs, he did join the party's leaders in supporting the Munich Pact and welcoming the imminent victory of Franco.<sup>35</sup>

The PSF's consistent support for the Spanish Nationalists does not seem to have extended beyond denouncing the Front Populaire's support for Republican Spain and calling for the diplomatic recognition of Franco's government.<sup>36</sup> On 3 October 1936, the PSF staged a massive counter-demonstration to disrupt a PCF mass meeting in support of the Spanish Republic. The clash was a return to the pre-July 1936 confrontations over political space, as the meeting at the Parc des Princes

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<sup>32</sup> Le Partis Social Français Devant les Problèmes de l'Heure: Rapports Présentés au Premier Congrès National du PSE, Paris, 1936, p. 366 in 68 J 216, AD Nord.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 368.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Ybarnégaray, "La Paix ou la Guerre" 19/2/1939, p. 6 in 68 J 216, AD Nord.

<sup>35</sup> Louis Audet, "L'Étudiant et la France de 1939", pp. 8-13 in 68 J 216, AD Nord.

<sup>36</sup> In early 1938, a Paris police report noted that the PSF were supporting a propaganda campaign in France by one element of the Francoist coalition, the Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista, however such a campaign seems to have gained little publicity - Report of 8/3/1938, BA 1663, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

in the 16th arrondissement, represented a challenge to the PSF's claimed hegemony of Western Paris. Despite the Front Populaire's decision to ban the counter-demonstration, 15,000 to 20,000 PSF supporters gathered to challenge the 40,000 to 50,000 who attended the meeting.<sup>37</sup> In the ensuing scuffles 1,200 were arrested by police.<sup>38</sup> The violence of the counter-demonstration was exceptional as in France the heated press polemics by the extreme right and left over the Spanish civil war rarely found physical form.

## The Revival of the Extreme-Right

The establishment of Occident and the successful reorganisation of the PSF were paralleled by the increasing public activities of other former leagues in 1938 and 1939. Just as the election of the Front Populaire had forced the leagues out of public life, so the hostility of Daladier's government's to their former Popular Front allies in mid 1938 encouraged the right's belief that there was more political space to manoeuvre. The absolute opposition of the PCF to the Munich Agreement marked not only the definitive end of the Front Populaire coalition, but also the increasing marginalisation of the party in October 1938. As the Radicals increasingly adopted the anti-communism of the right, so the followers of Action Française even began to hope that the potential dissolution of the PCF would allow for the leagues' re-formation through royalist clubs.<sup>39</sup>

Despite this increasing confidence on the right in the late 1930s, the followers of Action Française were far less successful than the PSF in organising a new repertoire of action after dissolution.<sup>40</sup> The March 1939 banquet for 600 members of the medical profession organised by the Médecins et Pharmaciens Amis de l'Action Française, was addressed by 25 year old student and activist Roger Ballade. According to police, Ballade stated to his audience that,

Voici quatre années, dit-il que les étudiants en médecine ne se sont pas

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<sup>37</sup> A PSF poster for the counter-demonstration had deliberately mimicked the left's rallying calls, "*A bas le fascisme! Unité d'Action! Discipline! Vive la Liberté! Vive la France!*" - Report of 3/10/36, BA 1863, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris;

Rymell decried this parodying as contrived, unconvincing and overstated, however there were several occasions where the French right attacked the 'fascism' fo the left - Rymell, "Militants & Militancy in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français", pp. 171-172.

<sup>38</sup> Report of 9/10/1936, BA 1863, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>39</sup> Report of 19/12/1938, BA 1896, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>40</sup> This failure is significant given that Catherine Breen argues that the Nationalist cause excited far more support in the pages of Action Française than from the ranks of the PSF - Catherine Breen, "La Droite Français et la Guerre d'Espagne 1936-1937", Thèse, Université de Genève, 1973, p. 68

trouvés réunis auprès de leurs aînés. Durant cette longue période, nous avons assisté à pas mal d'événements entre autres la dissolution des ligues par le juif Blum (huées) mais croyait-il qu'il suffisait de nous dissoudre pour tuer notre mouvement; il a dissous les groupements d'Action Française mais la doctrine, elle n'est pas dissoute (applaudissements).<sup>41</sup>

Ballade, who was 25, had already been detained five times by the police during league demonstrations before the election of the Front Populaire.<sup>42</sup> However, after dissolution, there were fewer avenues for this commitment and it was certainly clear that the public activities of Action Française had been largely muted since 1936. Still there remained sporadic scuffles for the leagues' supporters to express their frustration, either in ambushes on left *militants* or, perhaps as frequently, with other groups on the right.<sup>43</sup>

On 15 December 1938, the Rassemblement des Étudiants pour l'Aide à l'Enfance Espagnole held a film screening in the Latin Quarter as part of its intensified fundraising campaign that term.<sup>44</sup> Approximately 150 people attended the movie which was shown at the Foyer International des Étudiantes. After half an hour of a pro-Republican film, the screening was interrupted by a barrage of tear gas from nationalist students. Police identified the two leaders of the demonstration as Jean Dufour and Pierre Boutang, both aged 22 and studying medicine and philosophy respectively.<sup>45</sup> Both men were linked to Action Française, and Boutang, who had given the signal for the *chahut* with the cry "*Montrez-nous les Carmélites!*", was a *normalien* who had already been cautioned by the Rector of the University of Paris for his political activities.<sup>46</sup> Dufour was identified by the police as deputy chief of Étudiants d'Action Française who had already been detained twice in 1938 for a demonstration against the Minister of National Education, Jean Zay, at the official opening of the academic year and for an attack on another student.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> "It was four years, he said, since the students in medicine had met together with their elders. During this long period, we have witnessed quite a few events including the dissolution of the leagues by the Jew Blum (boos) but does he believe that it is sufficient to 'dissolve' us to kill our movement; he had dissolved the groups of Action Française but the doctrine is not dissolved (applause)" - Report of 20/3/1939, BA 1895, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>42</sup> Report of 26/3/1936, BA 1896, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>43</sup> One of the leaders of the Gauche Révolutionnaire *tendance*, Daniel Guérin, was roughed up by nationalist students as he passed through the Latin Quarter following the SFIO's march protesting against the Senate's opposition to Blum's second government on 7 April 1938 - Guérin, *Front Populaire Révolution Manquée*, p. 188;

Rymell, "Militants & Militancy in the Croix de Feu and the Parti Social Français", p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> Report of 16/12/1938, BA 1665, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Letter of 23/2/1938, AJ16-2895, Archives Nationales.

<sup>47</sup> Report of 23/11/1938, BA 1896, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris; Report of 16/12/1938, BA 1665, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

Even though the public face of the leagues had gone, their members and their influence remained. Far more importantly than the sporadic violence of their most committed followers, the threat of confrontation remained. This threat was a powerful factor in excluding political activity from within university space, which partly explains why there was so little political and humanitarian activity within French universities, compared to their British counterparts. Open campaigning over Spain within the university, such as that by the Rassemblement des Étudiants pour l'Aide à l'Enfance Espagnole, could provoke reprisals. Even humanitarian aid was stifled by the polarisation of French politics and the absolute division between the extreme right and the left. It was not until the end of the decade as France's domestic political climate changed, that the students of Action Française were able to challenge the campaigns of the left. In February 1939, L'Action Française intensified its campaign for the appointment of a French ambassador to Nationalist Spain, and its followers planned demonstrations over the residence of the President Azaña of the Spanish Republic in Paris following the fall of Barcelona.<sup>48</sup>

### The Right's Corporate Presence

While the extreme right had lost their physical dominance of public space during the second half of the 1930s, they maintained strong links with the established corporate students groups. The united efforts of the student left were spectacularly unsuccessful in elections for student delegates to the university's Council of Discipline. In the elections of December 1937 in Paris, the left could only manage a quarter of the votes compared to what it labelled "*les listes 'nationales corporatives'*".<sup>49</sup> Such results were replicated across the country. Even in Toulouse the strength of the Union Syndicale des Étudiants was not enough to prevent the list of the Association Générale gaining three quarters of the vote.

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<sup>48</sup> Reports of 7/2/1939 & 15/2/1939, BA 1664, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>49</sup> Essais et Combats, 8, / 1/1938, p. 19.

TABLE 10.1: COUNCIL OF DISCIPLINE ELECTIONS IN PARIS, DECEMBER 1937<sup>50</sup>

Faculty	Association Générale	Left
Faculty of Letters	560 votes	240 votes
Faculty of Sciences	521 votes	203 votes
Faculty of Medicine	724 votes	244 votes
Faculty of Pharmacy	389 votes	75 votes
Faculty of Law	727 votes	125 votes

TABLE 10.1: COUNCIL OF DISCIPLINE ELECTIONS IN TOULOUSE, JANUARY 1938<sup>51</sup>

Faculty	Association Générale	USE
Faculty of Letters	165 votes	68 votes
Faculty of Sciences	138 votes	-
Faculty of Medicine & Pharmacy	338 votes	125 votes
Faculty of Law	209 votes	48 votes

The strength of the right amongst corporate groups, and its reviving confidence during the year was marked by the student protests at the end of 1938. The fact that the Munich Agreement did not represent a permanent settlement of claims in Europe, was strongly felt by the French government which was increasingly attacked in the Italian press after October 1938. These attacks culminated on 30 November 1938, when the deputies of the Italian Chamber interrupted its sessions with the chant "Nice, Corsica, Tunis" to herald a new phase of Italian expansionism.<sup>52</sup> Such territorial claims on its sovereign territory were absolutely opposed by the French. In Italy, the propaganda campaign for expansion was reinforced on 6 December 1938 by large demonstrations of university students in Rome for Corsica and Tunisia.<sup>53</sup> This immediately triggered massive marches at universities across France, some of which numbered several thousand students.<sup>54</sup> While no group was publicly identified as sponsoring the marches, it seems they were largely organised by the main corporate groups such as the Association Générale in Lille.<sup>55</sup> With widespread public sympathy (including that of the police),

<sup>50</sup> *Essais et Combats*, 8/1/1938, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> *L'Express du Midi*/28/1/1938, p. 4;

*Le Midi Socialiste*, 3/2/1938, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, *France and the Coming of the Second World War 1936-1939*, Frank Cass, London, 1977, pp. 256-257.

<sup>53</sup> *L'Express du Midi*, 7/12/1938, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Student protests on 7-8 December 1938 were estimated as numbering 5,000 in Paris and 1,500 in Toulouse - *L'Express du Midi*, 9/12/1938, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Lille Université*, Jan 1939, p. 13.

students marched singing the nationalist standard of the Marseillaise and parodying the Italian claims with their own, "*Naples à la France*".<sup>56</sup>

Both Socialists and Communists sought to channel the nationalist protests against Italy into support for Republican Spain however their efforts merely symbolised the strength of political divisions within France. Students of the left marched through Paris in late January 1939, chanting "*Les Italiens en Italie! L'Espagne aux Espagnols! des armes pour l'Espagne!*".<sup>57</sup> It was unlikely that their chants found much response amongst the students of the extreme right. While members of the PSF and the readers of Action Française or Occident might agree with the slogan "*L'Espagne aux Espagnols*", to them the true Spain was that of the Nationalists rather than the Republicans.

### Conservative Students and International Politics

Despite the overwhelming prominence of left-wing politics in Oxford and Cambridge after the mid-1930s, the majority of students and academics at both universities were actually much closer to the right.<sup>58</sup> Despite their numerical superiority, Conservative politics for most of its followers had little need of the public activism which defined the left. During the late 1930s, in reaction to the left's repeated campaigning, some Conservative students sought to adopt the same forms of activist politics while others deliberately distanced themselves from such engagement. These two different approaches to politics shaped the differing perspectives with which Conservatives viewed the civil war in Spain. As embodied by the leaders of the student Conservative Associations of Oxford and Cambridge, both approaches to politics affected not only their participation in collective action with the student left but also their relationship to the Chamberlain Government's foreign policy.

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Nationalist groups or parties were not mentioned in police reports of the demonstration which is significant given police success in identifying such groups in other proclaimed 'non-political' campaigns and organisations.

<sup>56</sup> Report of 28/1/1939, 1 M 605, AD Gironde;

Report of 15/12/1938 M6 10980, AD Bouches-du-Rhône.

<sup>57</sup> L'Humanité, 26/1/1939, p. 5;

L'Étudiant Socialiste, Jan.-Feb. 1939, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Toynbee, "Journal of a Naive Revolutionary" in Philip Toynbee, ed., The Distant Drum: Reflections on the Spanish Civil War, Sidwick & Jackson, London, 1976, p. 146.



The gap between the Cambridge University Socialist Club and their Conservative peers was not merely ideology, but as the left itself recognised, one of activity;

The merits of the Cambridge University Conservative Association are definitely negative merits. Indeed the chief virtues of the Conservatives are the things they do *not* do. Conservative propaganda tracts are never pressed into unwilling hands outside Mill Lane. Conservatives do not embarrass Petty Cury pedestrians by wandering unconcernedly by in sandwich boards and single file. The Conservatives do not hire buses, and singing the sixty miles to Westminster, they do not lobby MP's. The Conservatives do not send eighty-word telegrams to Franco. The Conservatives do not have 'bottle parties for Spain and they do not sell six penny soup-and-cheese lunches, lie down in the roadway, or cook sausages on the footwalk. Thank God for small mercies.<sup>59</sup>

Michael MacRobert served as Secretary for the Cambridge University Conservative Associations during 1938-1939, and for him the left's political activism was fundamentally misguided.<sup>60</sup> MacRobert wrote that,

The idea of an Organised Student Community playing an active and decisive *rôle* in National Politics is primarily humorous, but, widely and seriously held as it is, it repays investigation. The general case against it is that Democracy cannot work if the elements within it challenge the supremacy of the elected representatives of the people... The particular case against it is that, with the exception of mental defectives, and middle-aged women from Bloomsbury, Students as a whole are probably less fitted to influence the conduct of affairs than any other element in the country. What threads of respect remain for Undergraduate Politics are being swiftly dissipated by the bi-weekly demonstration, which appear to abrogate any claim of the demonstrators to serious political attention.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, the concept of Parliamentary sovereignty was particularly appealing for Conservatives at a time when the National Government claimed 432 seats in the House of Commons to 154 seats for the Labour Party. However, in the same term in which MacRobert penned his attack on the left, his own college had established the Queens' College Conservative Club which was arranging dances and other activities for its 60 members. These seem to be partly an imitation of the CUSC's success in building up a social as well as political organisation.

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<sup>59</sup> The Granta, 15/2/1939, p. 249.

<sup>60</sup> The Granta, 12/10/1938, p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> The Granta, 26/4/1939, p. 343.

What is perhaps most striking about MacRobert's antipathy to student activism was that his statements were made in 1939, at a time when he was personally opposed to Chamberlain's government. MacRobert was a prolific and respected speaker in the Cambridge Union, and its debates help to map out his changing politics during the late 1930s. In February 1937, MacRobert spoke in the Union supporting non-intervention in the civil war.<sup>62</sup> By November 1938, he no longer defended the government's foreign policy, and was instead a committed opponent of Franco, Germany and Italy.<sup>63</sup> The following term, he proposed the motion which opened the Union debate of no confidence in the government's foreign policy of appeasement, which was won by 216 votes to 99 votes.<sup>64</sup> MacRobert focused his attack on the prime minister, and ended his address by criticising the Labour Party for refusing to participate in an anti-appeasement coalition. His frequent speeches at the Union, college life at Queens' and support for the Japanese boycott in early 1938 mark out MacRobert as a highly active Conservative, yet his perception of political activity was different from those on the left whom he might work with in the Union or humanitarian relief.<sup>65</sup> Significantly, his increasing opposition to the Government's foreign policy did not affect his loyalty to the party itself or alter his views on the political activism of the CUSC.

In contrast to MacRobert's antipathy for student activism, for Edward Heath who was a leading figure amongst Conservative students at Oxford dissent within the Tory Party and activism were closely linked.<sup>66</sup> Heath was elected president of the Oxford University Conservative Association in June 1937 and had later become president of Federation of University Conservative Associations.<sup>67</sup> He was also extremely active in the Oxford Union being elected Secretary in late 1937 and President in late 1938.<sup>68</sup> Like many students on the left whose political activism had also encouraged European travel, Heath's visited Germany on his 1937 summer holiday, which confirmed his anti-fascist politics.<sup>69</sup> Over foreign policy, Heath supported Eden's opposition to Chamberlain's pursuit of *rapprochement* with Germany and Italy. Whilst Eden's resignation in February 1938 was a shock to

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<sup>62</sup> *The Cambridge Review*, 12/2/1937, p. 261.

<sup>63</sup> *The Granta*, 23/11/1938, p. 122.

<sup>64</sup> *The Granta*, 25/1/1939, p. 192.

<sup>65</sup> *The Granta*, 19/1/1938, p. 195-196.

<sup>66</sup> John Campbell, *Edward Heath: A Biography*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1993, p. 37.

<sup>67</sup> Heath won the presidency as an anti-fascist, defeating a Conservative who supported Franco - *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> At the time members of two colleges dominated the Oxford Union's elections, Balliol and Christ Church. Heath belonged to the former.

<sup>69</sup> Campbell, *Edward Heath*, pp. 30-31;

Heath, he remained committed to the party rather than a Popular Front alliance with the left.<sup>70</sup>

It was Heath's activist approach to politics which led him to join a BYPA student delegation to Republican Spain in early July 1938. The delegation of four Oxford students and one other from Liverpool, represented the Labour Club, Liberal Club, Pacifist Association, League of Nations Union, and NUS. Heath was described as joining the delegation in a "private capacity".<sup>71</sup> The students were forced to travel by plane from Barcelona, to Valencia and Madrid as republican territory had been cut in two by the Nationalists a few months earlier.<sup>72</sup> The students were treated very well by their hosts and enjoyed interviews with Prime Minister Juan Negrín, Alvarez del Vayo and Spanish academics.<sup>73</sup> They also visited the British Battalion of the International Brigades on the Ebro Front a fortnight before the Republic launched what would become its last offensive. Though Heath eventually broke with Conservative foreign policy over Central Europe, his energetic anti-fascism brought him close to the coalition of the left defending the Spanish Republic.

### **The Oxford By-Election: 'Balliol v Fascism'**

The national - or international question of an age is being fought out at Oxford at the present moment.<sup>74</sup>

In British national politics, Munich provided a rallying point for dissidents within both the Conservative and Labour Parties to seek a common coalition with Liberals and Communists, though such an alliance was never formalised. Like the debates over non-intervention, the Munich crisis ambivalently affected pro-Republican and Nationalist supporters, for opponents and supporters of the agreement could be found in both camps. Either fragmenting or creating new political alliances, the crisis in Central Europe intensified the international campaigns around Spain.

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32;

*The Cherwell*, 11/6/1938, p. 148.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Richard Symonds, Oxford, October 1997.

<sup>72</sup> During one of these flights their plane was shot at by Republican anti-aircraft - Richard Symonds in Brian Harrison, ed., *Corpuscles*, p. 119.

<sup>73</sup> Symonds felt that the students were "taken more seriously in Spain than [they] would be in Britain" - Interview with Richard Symonds.

<sup>74</sup> *The Cherwell*, 22/10/1938, p. 23.

The threat of war before Munich not only delayed the opening of a new academic year but left scattered physical scars within several British universities.<sup>75</sup> Amongst students throughout the country it seemed, "that the events at the end of the vacation had awakened more than the usual interest in politics".<sup>76</sup> This was particularly the case in Oxford, where the local by-election pushed academics and students into the national debate over Munich. The Master of Balliol, A.D. Lindsay, agreed to stand as an independent candidate on the single issue of Chamberlain's foreign policy. Significantly this Popular Front over the single issue of Chamberlain's foreign policy directly drew on a coalition two years earlier which had supported Sir Arthur Salter's independent campaign for one of the university's constituency seats.<sup>77</sup> It was therefore not merely the shock of Munich which gave birth to the all-party alliance supporting Lindsay against the Conservative Party's official candidate, but the existing close contacts within the university between its most politically active academics.

It was Oxford academics Roy Harrod, Richard Crossman and G.D.H. Cole who played a significant role in converting the town's Liberal Party and Labour Party to supporting a coalition candidate.<sup>78</sup> However, for Lindsay, Cole and many other academics who were members of the Labour Party, an independent cross-party coalition over the election only became possible when it became clear that it would neither split the local party nor result in its disaffiliation by Transport House.<sup>79</sup> Even in forming an unofficial coalition with Liberals, Communists and dissident Tories, which was viewed with suspicion by Labour's national leadership, Oxford academics retained their fundamental commitment to the party. Lindsay focused his own election speeches on the particular crisis which had arisen out of Munich, rather than issuing a general call for a Popular Front.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> In Oxford and Cambridge ARP trenches were dug at several colleges and Newnham College received a contingent of London children who had been evacuated in case the capital was bombed.

<sup>76</sup> Said in reference to a Freshers Tea at UCL addressed by Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson - Phineas, 18/10/1938, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> Salter's campaign was sponsored by Cole, Murray and Crutwell representing the Labour, Liberal and Conservative Parties - Letter of 11/8/1936, 78, Mss Gilbert Murray, Bodleian Library;

Preceding Lindsay's independent candidature, Rowse wrote to Murray seeking to avert the disaster of a Liberal candidate standing against Labour's candidate, who was then Gordon Walker. He sought some reciprocity after Labour's efforts in Salter's election in 1935 - Letter of 8/9/1938, 85, Mss Gilbert Murray, Bodleian Library.

<sup>78</sup> Roger Eatwell, "Munich, Public Opinion and Popular Front", Journal of Contemporary History, 6,4, 1971, pp. 125-127.

<sup>79</sup> Letter of 7/11/38 to New Statesmen, p. 1, A1/57, Cole Papers, Nuffield College Archives.

<sup>80</sup> Drusilla Scott, A.D. Lindsay: A Biography, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1971.

The by-election created a political frenzy in Oxford during the first weeks of the 1938-39 academic year. From its inception, Lindsay's electoral campaign relied heavily on the enthusiasm of its student supporters. As one first year member of Corpus Christi College remembered, "For many of us it was our initiation into politics on the ground as we cheerfully delivered leaflets on behalf of Lindsay".<sup>81</sup> Denis Healey, who whilst a student in the Labour Club also joined the CPGB, remembered that,

... undergraduate Communists flooded the meeting of the Oxford City Labour Party and helped to produce the majority which compelled Gordon Walker to stand down so that Lindsay could fight without a rival from the Left, much against his own will and that of the Labour Party's National Agent...

We fought the campaign with enormous enthusiasm. Almost all the undergraduates who took part supported Lindsay.<sup>82</sup>

Healey studied philosophy under Lindsay, and was also a member of Balliol, the college Lindsay headed. His enthusiasm for Lindsay's electoral campaign was therefore partly encouraged by personal contact which could develop between academics and students in Oxford's system of one-on-one tutorials and residential colleges.

Sharing these personal contacts with Lindsay, but of a very different political position, was Edward Heath. Heath also was a resident of Balliol and had been a frequent social guest of the Lindsays. Along with his position in the Conservative Association and the Union, he was president of the Balliol JCR at the time of the election. Heath's support for Lindsay against the Conservative candidate was seen by many as representing a students' Popular Front against appeasement. The Conservative Association was split by the election between support for Lindsay and the party's official candidate,

The two sides maintained friendly relations throughout, lunching each day at the Carlton Club opposite Balliol, Lindsay's supporters on one side of the room, Hogg's on the other, exchanging good-humoured abuse across the gap.<sup>83</sup>

Still, as one of Heath's biographers notes, "despite his rebellion over Munich, he clearly still saw himself as a leader of university Conservatism and was determined to use his position to advance his personal vision of a modern, progressive, self-

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<sup>81</sup> Alastair Hetherington in Brian Harrison, ed., *Corpuscles*, p. 131;

Throughout the campaign, Lindsay "always looked like the Master of Balliol" - Interview with Richard Symonds.

<sup>82</sup> Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life*, p. 37.

<sup>83</sup> Campbell, *Edward Heath*, p. 34.

consciously young Toryism".<sup>84</sup> Heath's commitment to the Conservative Party was as strong as his anti-fascism, though he remained an outspoken critic of Chamberlain's foreign policy.<sup>85</sup>

The by-election campaign was marked by "ten days of crowded meetings, hasty organisation, touring the city with loud-speaker vans and canvassing; and then it was polling day".<sup>86</sup> However university enthusiasm was not enough to reverse a safe Tory seat and while Lindsay halved the Conservative majority, he lost by 17,797 votes to 12,363 votes. Following the elections, Lindsay's campaign was publicly criticised by Gordon Walker, the Labour candidate who had been forced to stand down, as a betrayal of the party and especially for not dealing with Spain in the election.<sup>87</sup> G.D.H. Cole replied to these accusations by stating that Lindsay's election address, which focused on foreign policy, had stressed there should be no Anglo-Italian agreement without the withdrawal of Italian troops from Spain. Cole also argued that, "I both made, and heard made by others, plenty of strong references to the Spanish question in the course of the election campaign".<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, despite the ambivalence of Labour leaders such as Walter Citrine over Spain, the exchange between Gordon Walker and Cole treated commitment to Republican Spain as a symbol for commitment to the party's interests.

### **Conclusion: Party Politics, Foreign Policy and the Universities**

In reaction to the public activism of the left during the mid-1930s, students of the right in both Britain and France became increasingly prominent in political activity during 1938. For the former members of the leagues in France this reflected the increased opportunities brought about by a change in the national political climate as the Front Populaire fragmented and Daladier's government increasingly looked to the right. In British universities, the increasing prominence of the right

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<sup>84</sup> Campbell, *Edward Heath*, p. 37.

<sup>85</sup> Heath at the Union's Presidential debate moved the motion of no confidence in the National government's foreign policy. Interestingly he was supported by Mayhew who was also in a sense a dissident of the left as he was opposed to the Communist influence within the Oxford Labour Club - *The Cherwell*, 26/11/1938, p. 36.

<sup>86</sup> Scott, *A.D. Lindsay*, p. 254.

<sup>87</sup> Letter of 7/11/38 to *New Statesmen*, p. 3, A1/57, Cole Papers, Nuffield College Archives; This criticism was picked up by Eatwell and perhaps overstated in his analysis of Lindsay's campaign: "his deeply held religious and democratic beliefs led him to a more equivocal position on the Spanish civil war" which ignores Lindsay's other activities in support of Republican Spain - Eatwell, "Munich, Public Opinion and Popular Front", p. 129.

<sup>88</sup> Letter of 7/11/38 to *New Statesmen*, p. 3, A1/57, Cole Papers, Nuffield College Archives.

had less to do with national party politics than with the increased willingness of student Conservatives to adopt the militant forms and organisation of their socialist counterparts.<sup>89</sup> Though some British Conservatives such as Michael MacRobert at Cambridge saw student activism as a form of leftist self-aggrandisement, others such as Edward Heath at Oxford became heavily involved in the left's campaigns, delegations and appeals.

Participation in the left's campaigns for China, Spain and Central Europe encouraged Conservative students such as Heath to increasingly find themselves opposed to the Chamberlain Government's foreign policy of *rapprochement* with Italy and Germany. That this dissent only became widespread after the Munich Agreement was most clearly symbolised by the Annual Congress of the Federation of University Conservative and Unionist Associations in early January 1939. Significantly, the first motion before the Congress was on foreign policy, which, gave rise to a great deal of discussion. The motion urging support of the policy, especially with regard to renewed friendship with Italy, was defeated by 14 votes to 10... Mr Ilsley of UC said that our foreign policy could best be judged by its results, to wit - an increase in the German Navy and Italy's demands to France.<sup>90</sup>

UCL Conservative students joined their Cambridge and Oxford counterparts, who whether adopting or opposing the political forms of the left found themselves unable to accept the government's foreign policy as war began to look increasingly likely.

Though these debates amongst British conservatives were shaped by events in Central Europe, the civil war in Spain remained a significant symbol for their changing approach to politics. The 1937 Annual Congress of the Federation of University Conservative and Unionist Associations, held in Glasgow, had passed a resolution holding that the conflict in Spain was not a concern of England.<sup>91</sup> This position was the one which united Conservative MPs in Parliament (rather than the

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<sup>89</sup> With the opening of March 1938, a Conservative Club was formed at UCL. Its letter to Phineas noted that, "the Socialist have held long enough the monopoly of political activities here. It is high time that they were reminded that, in this country at least, they are in the minority" - Phineas, 1/3/1938, p. 3;

The UCL Conservative Society's intention to hold fortnightly meetings and debates expressed a new level of activism and organisation, which was derived from the left it was counter-attacking - University College Magazine, 15, 3, Summer 1938, p. 268.

<sup>90</sup> Phineas, 10/1/1939, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> The Congress did agree to co-operate with left wing organisation in campus Peace Councils - The Clare Market Review, March 1937, p. 19.

pro-Franco sentiments of which they were accused by the left).<sup>92</sup> Yet the all-party coalitions which developed around humanitarian aid for Spain meant that it became of both humanitarian and political concern to many Conservative students such as Heath. Significantly despite their growing opposition to Chamberlain's official policy the students remained committed to the Conservative Party, neither breaking away to join the left, nor supporting any of the extremely marginal attempts to establish groups on the extreme right.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast to the multitude of aid and relief activities of the left, the French right were "far more concerned with using what was happening in Spain as a rod for the crumbling back of the Popular Front".<sup>94</sup> Strikingly, despite the efforts of Occident in France to rebut the hegemony of left intellectuals in supporting the Republic, it was not events in Spain which provoked the strongest reactions from the students of the extreme right. Rather, the revival of the extreme right in French universities was marked by its counter-protests to Italian territorial claims against France at the end of 1938. The demonstrations were well-suited to the French right's nationalist approach to politics and encouraged by the gradual right-ward shift in the national political climate.

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<sup>92</sup> Thompson stresses that the dissent of Tory MPs over foreign policy was aroused by events in Central Europe and not the civil war in Spain - Neville Thompson, The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, pp. 116 & 165.

<sup>93</sup> At UCL, the attempt to found a Nationalist Society at University College was opposed by the College authorities, the Socialist Society and the Conservative Society. The Conservative Society saw the proposition as damaging to the government and representing another alien 'ism', and even sought the authority of central office to endorse its position- Phineas, 7/2/1939, p. 4;  
Phineas, 28/2/1939, p 2.

<sup>94</sup> Hilary Footitt, "Intellectuals of the French Right and the Spanish Civil War", M.Phil, University of Reading, 1972, p. 70.



## Chapter 11

### The Final Campaigns for the Spanish Republic

The end of summer 1938 was marked by the bloody attrition of the Spanish Republic's offensive across the Ebro river, and the increasing pressures of refugees and food shortages within its divided territory. As its military position became increasingly critical, elements within the Republican government appealed for humanitarian assistance from overseas as a means of increasing political pressure for either a mediated settlement of the war or the reversal of non-intervention. In contrast to the first relief efforts which had mixed appeals for combatants and non-combatants, the concerted campaigns of the civil war's final months were overwhelming focused on the food shortages faced by the Republic's civilian population, especially in Barcelona. Between October 1938 and March 1939, 29 Foodships were sent to Republican Spain from Britain.<sup>1</sup> The British Youth Peace Assembly organised fundraising for its own Foodship in British universities, while students and academics also contributed to the campaigns organised in Yorkshire, Manchester, Cambridgeshire, and Glasgow.<sup>2</sup> In France, the worsening position of the Republic intensified both aid and opposition to non-intervention, culminating in the campaign call of "*ouvrez la frontière*" in January 1939. By the end of the month, the military collapse of the Republic in Catalonia had reversed the meaning of "*ouvrez la frontière*" as refugees flooded across the French border from Spain.

In both Britain and France, appeals for humanitarian aid and then refugee relief during late 1938 and early 1939 were a culmination of the campaigns which had developed during the previous two years of fighting. However, there was a strong contrast between the perspective from which the civil war was seen in the two countries, as reflected in the other issues to which these final efforts were closely linked. Ever since the outbreak of the civil war, there was a strong concern within British universities to connect the civil war in Spain to other international events, and this was particularly the case in late 1938, as the new concern for refugees from freshly-partitioned Czechoslovakia both fuelled and limited existing relief efforts for Spain at the end of the civil war. The academic year of 1938-39

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<sup>1</sup> NJCSR Report, p. 3 in Mss SPSL 118/8, Bodleian Library.

In contrast to these general appeals, J.B.S. Haldane was contacted by the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy to secure Spanish PM Negrin's approval for a scheme to focus on medical treatment of malnutrition rather than foodships - Letter of 30/12/38, Box 15, Haldane Collection, UCL Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Dec. 1938, WG/SPA/552, National Museum of Labour History; Spanish Relief, Dec. 1938, p. 5, Box: Aid for Spain, National Working Class Library.

opened with appeals for Czech refugees, and by March 1939 it was again Central European events which were the focus of public concern in Britain. In France, the Czech crisis had intensified the shift in national politics from left to right, which had led to the birth of a new intellectual group, the Union des Intellectuels Français, to support the embattled PCF. Domestic politics, rather than other international events, remained the central concern of French aid for Spain until the refugee crisis of late January 1939. When the Spanish Republic collapsed, France became the country most directly touched by the war, and this forced the French state into a central role in organising refugee relief on a national and local level. State involvement was fundamental in encouraging university-based campaigns which paralleled those which had developed in Britain during the war.

### UCL and the Crisis in Europe

The delayed opening of the academic year at University College London in October 1938 was not only marked by debates over Air Raid Precautions, but also by fresh relief campaigns for those most affected by the crisis. On 31 October 1938, a meeting at University College London was chaired by economics lecturer Hugh Gaitskell to launch a Czech Refugee Fund. Gaitskell had previously helped to organise funds for the evacuation of Austrian dissidents after the repression of the left in 1934, when he had been in Austria on a research fellowship.<sup>3</sup> The meeting for Czech refugees was addressed by Professor Robert Seton-Watson who argued that the National Government had betrayed its moral responsibility to the Czechs by forcing the Munich Agreement on them.<sup>4</sup> The meeting was also addressed by the Deputy Mayor of Brno (Czechoslovakia) who claimed that the summer crisis had been caused by German imperialism and not the ethnic divisions of Czechoslovakia. For those committed to anti-appeasement politics, refugee relief was a moral response to the 'betrayal' of the Czechs by the British government. During the first week of November 1938, a collection on the UCL campus was undertaken for both the Lord Mayor's Fund for Czech refugees and the ISS appeal for Czech, Austrian and Chinese students.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time as these relief efforts for refugees from Central Europe, there was also a renewed focus on anti-semitic persecution within Germany. The

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<sup>3</sup> Durbin, *New Jerusalem*, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> *Phineas*, 8/11/1938, p. 3;

Seton-Watson was a specialist in Central European History at Kings College, London.

<sup>5</sup> *Phineas*, 1/11/1938, p. 1.

destruction of the *Kristallnacht* stirred at UCL a Union meeting on anti-semitism. Professor Haldane was one of the meeting's speakers, and a resolution was passed by 400 votes to 3 to protest "the barbaric persecution of sections of the German people by the group in control".<sup>6</sup> It was also moved that the Prime Minister should be encouraged to facilitate refugee immigration. As a result of this meeting, a Jewish Refugees Committee was established through the Union drawing the widest support of any political alliance amongst UCL students during the 1930s. Its sponsors included political groups (the Socialist Society, Pacifist Society, Conservative Society and the Peace Council), religious groups (the SCM), academic groups (the German Society, English Society and Medicine Society), as well as the Soccer club.<sup>7</sup> While some of these clubs were newly-formed themselves, the increasing number of student societies willing to support refugee relief reflected an expansion of concern over events in Central Europe. This coalition was inter-linked with the renewed humanitarian efforts for Republican Spain in late 1938.

The final aid campaign for Spain within UCL occurred during the same term as the appeals for Czech and Jewish refugees, commencing in the first week of December 1938. With the sanction of the UCL Provost, the appeal for humanitarian aid for Spain was organised by a sub-committee of UCL Peace Council, and supported by the Socialist Society, SCM, Jewish Students Society, Conservative Society, Historical Society, Pacifist Society, and Association of Scientific Workers.<sup>8</sup> While the first three groups had played a large role in organising Spanish humanitarian aid campaigns in 1937, the inclusion of four newly formed students societies signalled the broadening of interest in the civil war in Spain and in humanitarian relief generally.

In response to attacks on the pro-Republican aid for Spain campaign within the university as political fronts,<sup>9</sup> the widening alliance of student groups stressed the non-political nature of their appeal. Though the precarious position of the Republic's divided territory had considerably intensified its food shortages and refugee problems, with Franco's military success the Republic's claim to represent Spain had at least been geographically weakened. The appeal therefore stressed that,

We feel it important that your readers should realise that the campaign is

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<sup>6</sup> *Phineas*, 22/11/1938, p. 1

<sup>7</sup> *Phineas*, 29/11/1938, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Phineas*, 29/11/1938, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Third year UCL medical student, Charles Dent y Colsa, argued that the Nationalists also lacked medical supplies, but were denied these by the unilateral philanthropy of the left - *Phineas*, 22/11/1938, p. 2.

based solely on humanitarian principles... Should any student still feel that the appeal is raising political issues, he is welcome to earmark his contribution for the 'Friends Food Council' which sends food to the civilian population of the whole of Spain.<sup>10</sup>

Just as in earlier appeals, the non-partisan nature of Quaker relief was cited to rebut accusations of political bias against the relief appeal as a whole, although it is significant that one had to opt into 'non-partisan' aid.

Within a week, just over 28 pounds was raised in UCL, which was not only probably higher than the student contributions to the Bilbao Foodship campaign, but also achieved in half the time.<sup>11</sup> The subscriptions were divided between almost 13 pounds for the Government, 5 shillings for the Nationalists and 15 pounds earmarked for the side with the greatest need. Like the Cornford-Maclaurin Memorial Fund in Cambridge in early 1937, the choices made by UCL students in their donations embodied the ambivalence between the 'political' and 'non-political' distinction which was continually invoked in humanitarian campaigns. *Prima facie*, over half the contributions were given without regard to political situation in Spain.

The Nationalist offensive through Catalonia in early 1939 did not dull Republican support at University College. The Socialist Society held several self-denial lunches for Spain of bread and cheese in late January and February 1939.<sup>12</sup> At the same time as these, there was also an appeal from member of UCL's Department of Chemistry for volunteers to help a "group blowing ampoules to use as containers for procaine which is being sent to Spain by the Voluntary Industrial Aid Committee".<sup>13</sup> Part of the explanation for this strengthening of support for the Spanish Republic at a time when it was collapsing, was because both UCL students and academics saw the civil war as linked to other international events.

In late January 1939, paralleling the continuing aid efforts for Spain and refugees from Central Europe, over fifty UCL academics jointly published a "Statement from the Staff" which embodied the connection of the Spanish civil war to a wider crisis.<sup>14</sup> The statement began by observing "with misgivings the recent indications of a general abandonment in public affairs of the elementary principles

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<sup>10</sup> *Phineas*, 29/11/1938, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Phineas*, 24/1/1939, p 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p 6;

*Phineas*, 21/2/1939, p 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Phineas*, 7/2/1939, p 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Phineas*, 4/1/ 1939, p. 4.

on which our civilisation and culture depend".<sup>15</sup> It saw the "same spirit" extending from Nazi anti-semitic persecution, Japanese atrocities in China and the war in Spain. It attacked the National Government's foreign policy for failing to support the League of Nations or collective security "with the democratic and non-aggressive powers", and called upon it to support refugees from persecution. The perception of international events as a continuum, was expressed as it noted Fascist aggression in different countries;

in Spain where the democratically elected Government is facing a foreign invasion, whilst deprived by international agreement of the means of self-defence, and where in consequence the people are enduring ruthless aerial bombardment and the threat of slow starvation.

We regard the abandonment of Czechoslovakia to Germany by the Munich agreement as a betrayal of democracy, a grave injustice entirely inconsistent with the principles of the League of Nations and a step which has seriously jeopardised the safety of this country...

In face of the threat to intellectual freedom and to cultural and human values arising from the growth of Fascism, we believe that intellectual workers can no longer be indifferent to political affairs; for it was in the political field that freedom was won and it is in this field that it must once again be defended.<sup>16</sup>

The statement was signed by 6 professors, including Haldane, 45 university teachers and 37 research workers (the latter left unnamed in the printed copy in Phineas). These signatories represented 16% of UCL's professoriate, and 33% of its other teaching staff.<sup>17</sup> Such a campus-focused petition amongst academics was unusual; much more frequently petitions were for national appeals by prominent teachers. Perhaps this is why it drew such a strong response from within the college itself.

The "Statement from the Staff" provoked a strong student debate in the pages of Phineas, initiated by a letter from J. Edward Murphy which attacked the support for the Spanish Republic given the record of atrocities against Catholics which had been committed within its territory. Murphy asked,

All the world knows of the persecution of the Jews, which is an indefensible barbarity, but how many know the truth of the even greater and more ruthless persecution of the Catholics in Spain, under the democratically

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Based on records of College staffing for June 1938 - Minutes of 6 June 1939, Appendix XII - Academic Staff Appointments, Minutes of College Committee, 1938, UCL Archives.

elected government?... if these members of the Staff know, they are also being dishonest, and if honest can only be misguided.<sup>18</sup>

The following week Murphy's letter drew support from another student, Charles Dent y Colsa, who attacked,

The fairy stories of general religious tolerance in Red Spain... The cold fact of the murders, without trial, of 15,000 priests in government Spain. The only public Mass my own friends in Madrid have ever witnessed was the one they faked up for the Dean of Canterbury.<sup>19</sup>

Dent y Colsa closed with an open challenge to the students of the left to a public debate on Spain.

Printed alongside these criticisms of the "Statement from the Staff", which significantly all focused on Spain, there was also a collective letter supporting the staff signed by five students. They wrote to

voice the gratitude of the ordinary student to those who have signed the manifesto for their lucid description of the present trend of western 'civilisation'. We may well be grateful for the fact that while our politicians continue to muddle the issues to suit their own purposes our professors can still give a clear account of world events in terms of their ideals and standards for which the common people have fought and suffered for 2,000 years.<sup>20</sup>

Focused on more specific issues, H. Rosen of the Socialist Society wrote to Phineas in response to Murphy's attacks on the Spanish Republic. Rosen argued that,

...since he is concerned for the Spanish people let him ask himself if one defends culture by bombing schools and universities, if the best way to announce oneself as a Christian saviour is to machine-gun refugees, and if the word 'civilisation' can be discerned among the shambles of Guernica...

The Statement of the Staff was in keeping with the best traditions of the College.<sup>21</sup>

As encapsulated in the focus of the students' debate over the 'Statement of the Staff', part of the Spanish civil war's importance was due to the events it was placed next to, particularly whether it was seen in the context of the spread of international fascism.

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<sup>18</sup> Phineas, 24/1/1939, p 2.

<sup>19</sup> Phineas, 7/2/1939, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## The Last Campaigns for Spain in Oxford and Cambridge

Like UCL, the first term of the 1938-1939 academic year in Oxford and Cambridge was marked by intensified fundraising for the Foodships to Spain and relief efforts for refugees from Central Europe. In early November 1938 the student Peace Councils of both Oxford and Cambridge launched humanitarian appeals for civilian population of Government Spain.<sup>22</sup> The Oxford campaign was sponsored by the Principals of Somerville College and Lady Margaret Hall, as well as the Provost of Oriel College, the Rector of Lincoln College, the Master of Balliol and Professors Brierly, Harrod and Cole. The appeal estimated that there were four million refugees in Government Spain, and aimed to raise 1,000 pounds for humanitarian relief. As part of the campaign 68 studies for Picasso's *Guernica* were exhibited at Oriel College during the last week of November 1938.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to their restrictions of the mid-1930s, Oxford Proctors raised no objection to afternoon house to house collections of food by students for the Oxford Spanish Aid Committee.<sup>24</sup>

In Cambridge the University Peace Council, which comprised 46 student societies, established a Spanish Relief Committee.<sup>25</sup> The new committee also aimed to raise 1,000 pounds by the end of winter, and through its affiliated societies to contact every academic and student in the university. Three thousand jam jars were to be distributed across the campus to collect coins. The Peace Council also sponsored a Spain Week during mid-November 1938 for the collection of food, money and clothes.<sup>26</sup> A mass meeting was held at the Corn Exchange with Attlee as a keynote speaker which attracted an estimated audience of 1,500 people.<sup>27</sup> This meeting was disrupted by fireworks set off by some members of Conservative Association, who were criticised by the left for depriving the collection for Spain of an estimated 50 pounds of clothes and goods. Unlike the continual confrontations of student politics in France, this was an isolated incident as Conservative students generally either supported or ignored (rather than opposed) the left's humanitarian appeals.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Oxford Magazine*, 17/11/1938, p. 169.

<sup>23</sup> *The Oxford Magazine*, 24/11/1938, p. 205.

<sup>24</sup> Letter of 31/1/39, PR 3/2/339, Proctors' Records, Bodleian Library.

<sup>25</sup> *Spanish Relief*, Dec. 1938, p. 5, Box: Aid for Spain, National Working Class Library. *The Cambridge Review*, 4/11/1938. p. 62.

<sup>26</sup> *The Granta*, 9/11/1938, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> *The Granta*, 2/11/1938, pp. 59 & 67.

After almost three weeks of fundraising, the Cambridge University Peace Council announced that over 400 pounds had been raised for Spain, not counting collections made in the Colleges.<sup>28</sup> However, at the same time, the Peace Council's concern had now shifted to the pressing refugee exodus from Germany following *Kristallnacht*. For these refugees the Peace Council launched another fundraising appeal which was supported by all of the University's religious societies.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, there had been no separate appeal for aid or coalition established for Czech refugees in Cambridge during October 1938; however the term was full of fundraising appeals, such as dances for China and Central Europe<sup>30</sup>

Despite these new overlapping efforts in November 1938, Spain remained an important issue around campus, as four Newnham College students were able to attract a crowd of contributors for Spanish aid by cooking sausages over an open fire outside the Marshall Library.<sup>31</sup> After four months, the target of 1,000 pounds was claimed to have been achieved at Cambridge through voluntary collections and fundraising auctions.<sup>32</sup> One supporter of the Peace Council stated that "the most ingenious methods of extortion have been employed, from Art Exhibitions to sausages, and from bottle-parties to poetry".<sup>33</sup> The fundraising campaigns of late 1938 in Cambridge and Oxford were probably the most successful of those organised by students during the 1930s, as they drew on coalitions of support and fundraising methods which had been gradually developed over the decade in reaction to events in Germany, China, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Spain.

Student efforts were paralleled by their seniors, as The Cambridge Review carried a humanitarian appeal which revealed the deteriorating living conditions in Republican Spain,

The Cambridge Joint Committee for Spanish Relief draws attention to the much worsened plight of the Spanish People. The food situation in Eastern Spain is critical; the children in particular are feeling the effects of an acutely deficient diet.<sup>34</sup>

The appeal then noted the prevalence of skin diseases and tuberculosis amongst the children in Republican territory. To meet this need, a concerted effort to send

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<sup>28</sup> The Granta, 23/11/1938, p. 127.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> The Cambridge Review, 21/10/1938, pp. 22 & 30.

<sup>31</sup> The Granta, 30/11/1938, p. 148.

Apart from sausages the Peace Council had also used art exhibitions, bottle-parties and punts for fund-raising - The Granta, 30/11/1938, p. 160.

<sup>32</sup> The Granta, 1/3/1939, p. 283.

<sup>33</sup> The Granta, 30/11/1938, p. 160.

<sup>34</sup> The Cambridge Review, 21/10/1938, p. 24.



Foodships from Britain to Spain was launched during the war's final months, including an Eastern Counties Foodship sponsored by the Bishop of Ely, the Bishop of Chelmsford, two local members of Parliament and Professor Ryle from the University of Cambridge.<sup>35</sup> The Eastern Counties Foodship appeal estimated that 100,000 children were starving in Eastern Spain due to the acute food shortage. The appeal called for money or goods which were to be distributed by the NJCSR in co-operation with the Society of Friends.<sup>36</sup>

For some British academics the intensifying humanitarian appeals for Spain and a commitment to anti-appeasement politics reinforced each other. Oxford classicist E.R. Dodds wrote to the left-wing intellectual group For Intellectual Liberty at the end of October 1938 that,

It seems to me that at the moment the most urgent thing for FIL to concentrate on is Spain. I think we ought to ask our members now to get busy in their own districts on 2 jobs:

(a) organising local public meetings (where possible, through existing Spain Committees) to protest before it is too late against bringing [the] Anglo-Italian pact into force before the condition of proportionate withdrawal is fulfilled.

(b) raising money locally for sending food - on American ships, since ours get bombed - before the blockade is complete.<sup>37</sup>

Chamberlain's negotiations with Italy in February 1938 had triggered Eden's resignation as Foreign Secretary as well as a petition signed by 170 academics from FIL.<sup>38</sup> Implicit in Dodds' blurring of aid and politics was his recognition that the events of summer 1938 (the failure of the Ebro offensive and the Munich Agreement) had given both elements a renewed urgency. Concurrent with the strengthening of humanitarian efforts for Spain was a renewed political campaign for the beleaguered Republic.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The Granta, 25/1/1939, p. 193.

<sup>36</sup> In Cambridge, the two hundred members of the university constituency Labour Party raised 343 pounds for a Spanish Foodship during Michaelmas Term 1939. However, the appeal was disappointing as 236 pound had been donated by one member - Minutes of 9/6/1939, Add 8881/1, University Library, Cambridge;

Accounts of 28/10/1938, Add 8881/2, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>37</sup> Letter of 30/10/1938, B1, Add 9369, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>38</sup> The petition had read "Profoundly deplore rapprochement Mussolini before his troops leave Spain". It was signed by 65 academics from Cambridge, who represented 40% of the total signatories, though nine other British universities were also represented - Petition of 23/2/1938, A4, Add 9369, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>39</sup> FIL had also publicised a letter by French academic Albert Bayet against the closing of the French border to Spain to rebut statements by Chamberlain - Minutes of 20/7/1938 & 13/10/1938, A1, Add 9369.

## Leeds and London: Humanitarian Aid and Refugee Relief

At the University of Leeds, it was not until the final stages of the civil war that Spanish relief was able to successfully mobilise substantial support from the student body. The Students' Union had previously held aloof from political and humanitarian campaigns organised outside the university. In early May 1937 the Union committee had declined to affiliate to the local Leeds committee of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, "the object being outside the scope of its activities".<sup>40</sup> Neither did the Union support the University Committee for Spanish Relief which was established in early October 1937, as "a branch of the Leeds Joint Committee and is a non-political organisation engaged in the relief of Spanish war victims".<sup>41</sup> The University Committee was sponsored by Professor Smith and Professor Harvey, who had visited Spain during the summers of 1936 and 1937 as part of Quaker relief efforts. From its foundation, the University Committee sought student support for its efforts though these met with ambivalent results.<sup>42</sup>

The University Committee for Spanish Relief in Leeds organised appeals for humanitarian aid in late November 1937 and early February 1938.<sup>43</sup> While these found support amongst academics and the local population, few students seem to have played an active role in them. As the Secretary of the University Committee noted,

Our second collection week started on February 9th and although the money has not yet been checked, it appears that there has been little response from

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<sup>40</sup> Minutes of 6/5/1937, Union Committee Minute Books: April 1936 to June 1939, p. 69, University of Leeds Archives;

The Gryphon did publish an appeal by the local NJCSR committee which described itself as part of a non-partisan national effort headed by representatives from all major parties- The Gryphon, May 1937, p. 288

<sup>41</sup> The Gryphon, Nov. 1937, p. 80.

<sup>42</sup> The Leeds NJCSR committee appealed to students that, "They can help as either through Societies, or as individuals: -  
(a) By forming groups in order to 'adopt' a Spanish child  
(b) By accepting collecting boxes and cards  
(c) By supporting our meetings and general appeals" - Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> The Gryphon, Dec. 1937, p. 110;

On 8 February 1938, the University Committee for Spanish Relief held a concert in the University of Leeds' Great Hall, featuring a Spanish pianist, singer and dancer. It was reported that, "in the interval Prof. Smith, our Chairman, introduced Mrs EW Black, who made an appeal and stressed the urgent need for food, medical supplies and warm clothing for the women and children. A silver collection was then taken and most people contributed liberally... [the collection raised 25 pounds]... The hall was crowded, although it is notable that a very small percentage of the audience were students" - The Gryphon, March 1938, p. 278;

the students. There were very few collections, in spite of appeals for them.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps, this lack of enthusiasm for fundraising was due to the different conception of student politics (as well as opportunities) in Leeds compared to Oxbridge. Even the socialist students of Leeds had rejected the activism which characterised their southern peers during their lone dissent in the debates over Communist involvement in the University Labour Federation. Spain was not the only cause which failed to mobilise student support in Leeds during the mid-1930s, as the organisers of the ISS appeal for China and the students' "rag" for local charities also complained of student apathy.<sup>45</sup>

The decision of the Students' Union to support a "milk for Spain" appeal during the final months of 1938 was therefore vital in rallying support from the student body in Leeds. The Union's minutes recorded that,

The Spanish Relief Appeal which was organised towards the end of last term received very good support from the students. One thousand tins of milk were sold.<sup>46</sup>

For its efforts, the Union was publicly thanked by the local Spanish Foodship Committee.<sup>47</sup> In the same issue of The Gryphon it was noted that one of the Hostels for women students at the University was proposing "that Dinner should be missed one evening in order to send the consequent saving to the help of the Spanish people".<sup>48</sup> While there had been aid activity within the University of Leeds throughout the Spanish civil war, particularly championed by Professor Harvey, it was only in the war's final months that with the sponsorship of the Union it achieved mass student support.

Paralleling the growing success of appeals for humanitarian aid in Leeds, a campaign for refugee relief developed, in which the war in Spain was firmly linked to other international events. At the close of 1938, a Refugee Relief Committee was established within the University of Leeds as a sub-committee of the students' Peace Council.<sup>49</sup> The new sub-committee was primarily intended to raise funds for refugee students from Central Europe in the wake of events in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Germany. The Refugee Relief Committee initially succeeded in raising over £60, which included a 10 pound grant from the Chancellor, over 24 pounds from Department collections, almost 17 pounds from a concert in the Great

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<sup>44</sup> The Gryphon, March 1938, p. 278.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>46</sup> The Gryphon, Feb. 1939, p. 167.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>49</sup> The Gryphon, May 1939, p. 305.

Hall and general contributions totalling nineteen pounds.<sup>50</sup> Shortly before the end of the 1938-39 academic year the Refugee Relief Committee was able to grant 30 pounds towards sponsoring four refugee students from Central Europe.

Despite the success of its campaign refugee relief, the Peace Council's pro-Republican position in humanitarian efforts was far more controversial. A letter to The Gryphon pointed out the political hostility which could be stirred by mixing aid appeals for Central Europe with those for Spain, when it stated,

The posters in the JCR and other parts of the University certainly show up the Peace Council in its true colours. Bearing, in bold red letters, the caption: 'We Can Save Spain', these surely give the lie to the supposedly non-partisan nature of the organisation.

It is notable that, although the Council was formed as a result of the protest meeting against the persecution of Jews in Germany, and had, as first task, the organisation of some effort to assist Jewish refugees, no sign of any work in this direction has yet appeared.<sup>51</sup>

The posters, which were probably for the "milk for Spain" appeal, encapsulated the extent to which relief efforts for 'Spain' were implicitly for Republican Spain. As at UCL a few months earlier, the non-partisan image of relief was questioned in Leeds during the civil war's closing stages when it was no longer for civilian victims of continued fighting, but for refugees on a losing side. The editor of The Gryphon replied caustically that the Refugee Relief Committee had raised 25 pounds for Jewish Refugees and "that Spanish women and children have a right to live, whatever the colour of their politics".<sup>52</sup> The exchange in The Gryphon seems to suggest that humanitarian aid for Spain was for some a far more politicised issue than that for Central Europe.

Like in Leeds and other British universities, refugee relief campaigns for Spain and Central Europe ran together at the LSE. The character of the LSE Students Union, which had been in the forefront of clashes with the university's authorities over student political action, contrasted to the determined apoliticism of the Union in Leeds. At the LSE it had been university regulations rather than student apathy which had limited university-based aid efforts in the civil war's early stages. In mid November 1938, the LSE Union had voted to adopt two Spanish refugee babies.<sup>53</sup> The following term, the Union's Executive Committee noted that,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> The Gryphon, March 1939, p. 217.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Given that 120 students were estimated as present, and the motion had been carried by 70 votes to one dissent, the vote reveals what a large role apathy had in the unanimous

It was reported that plans for weekly and monthly collections for Spanish babies were proceeding well and that collections from a certain number of societies and faculties had guaranteed to raise some money.<sup>54</sup>

The following day after this report, on 18 January 1939, it was announced at a general meeting of the Student Union that over five pounds had been raised for Spanish babies.

At the same meeting, a motion calling for the Union to establish a sub-committee at the LSE to campaign for refugees was also carried which read, That in view of the urgencies of the situation in Government Spain where many thousands of children are faced with death by starvation unless food supplies arrive immediately and in view of the fact that the Liberal, Jewish, Student Christian Movement, Socialist and Indian societies would wish to raise money and food for Spain and that other societies wish to raise money for other humanitarian purposes, the Union Exec be requested to set up a sub-committee to co-ordinate the efforts of these societies.<sup>55</sup>

Underlying the motion was the blurring of Spain with other international events such as the new wave of refugees from Czechoslovakia and Germany which gave common cause to diverse students groups. While it occurred at the same time as the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning's appeal for academic refugees from Central Europe, the first collection made by the LSE Refugee Committee took Spain as its immediate focus. Within a fortnight of its establishment, the committee had doubled the total collected for the Spanish refugee babies to over 12 pounds, as well as collecting and knitting warm clothes to be sent to Spain.<sup>56</sup>

The connection drawn between humanitarian relief for Spain and refugees from other countries, both broadened the level of sympathy for Republican Spain while at the same time diffusing its appeal alongside a number of other competing causes. This was encapsulated in the Relief Committee's report on the first terms of its existence;

During the Michaelmas term the Union and the International Student Service Committee at the School collected about £60 for refugees from China, Spain, Austria and Czecho-Slovakia. The Union adopted two Spanish Babies

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motions passed in British universities over Spain - Minutes of 19/10/1938 & 16/11/1938, Coll Misc 649 2/5, LSE Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes of 17/1/1939, Coll Misc 649 3/5, LSE Archives;

On 11 January 1939 it was reported at a general meeting of the Union that the collection for Spanish babies was not wholly sufficient - Minutes of 11/1/1938, Coll Misc 649 2/5, LSE Archives.

<sup>55</sup> 18/1/1939, Coll Misc 649 2/5, LSE Archives.

<sup>56</sup> 31/1/1939, Coll Misc 649 3/5, LSE Archives.

and operated a scheme for the regular collection of money to support them. In face of the constant appeals for assistance for refugees the Union set up a Relief Committee to plan collections in the School. The committee has worked well so far and has received considerable help from the Staff. The total amount collected for Spanish relief through the Union is about £25 and a large amount of clothing has been collected and sent to Spain.<sup>57</sup>

Though Spain was always a central concern, the Union's Refugee Committee achieved its greatest success with its later efforts in mid-1939 when it raised 100 pounds and organised personal assistance for 40 German and Czech refugees.<sup>58</sup>

This connection between events in Spain and Central Europe which had partly fuelled and been reinforced by refugee relief, was also expressed in LSE debates over the National Government's foreign policy. On 25 January 1939, a week after the Refugee Relief Committee had been formed, the LSE Union debated and passed the following motion,

That in the opinion of this meeting of the Student's Union the defeat of the Spanish Republic by the combined forces of Franco, Mussolini and Hitler would be one of the severest blows yet received by democracy and progress throughout the world.<sup>59</sup>

The motion called for end to the policy of non-intervention and the restoration of the Spanish Republic's legal right to purchase arms. Of the 70 students present, there was only one recorded dissent. Three weeks later another motion was passed by the LSE Union condemning belligerent rights for Franco as the recognition of Fascism.<sup>60</sup> The rejection of Nationalist Spain and non-intervention were assimilated into a general condemnation of the British government's foreign policy of appeasement in Central Europe.

### **National Contrasts in Student Relief Campaigns**

The contrast between the campaigns of British and French students for humanitarian aid for Spain during late 1938, was reflected at the Executive meeting of the *Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants* on 23 October 1938.<sup>61</sup> The *Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants* drew heavily on the international contacts

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<sup>57</sup> *Annual Report 1938/9*, p. 6., 67-K, LSE Archives.

<sup>58</sup> Letter of 12/7/1939, 67-K, LSE Archives.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes of 25/1/1939, Coll Misc 649 2/5, LSE Archives.

<sup>60</sup> Minutes of 15/2/1939 Coll Misc 649 2/5 LSE Archives.

<sup>61</sup> Minutes of 23/10/1938, 14, *Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants*, International Institute of Social History.

of Communist students and it was probably these connections which encouraged the announcement of a fundraising competition for Spanish relief during November and December 1938 between the universities of North America and Western Europe.<sup>62</sup> Former Cambridge student James Klugmann spoke on the British university appeals which were aiming to raise 5,000 pounds before Christmas 1938. He reported that students at Cambridge had already raised 750 pounds before the end of October 1938.

In comparison to the successful fundraising coalitions of British campuses, the efforts of French students seemed more limited, both geographically and politically. Bicard addressed the Executive meeting for the Rassemblement des Étudiants pour l'Aide à l'Enfance d'Espagne (REAEE). The REAEE was currently supporting dispensaries for Spanish refugee children in Valencia, and was hoping to increase its fundraising the following month through the exhibition of films, lectures, meetings and receptions. The films included "SOS Spain" and "The ABC of Liberty", and it was the screening of one of these which was broken up by followers of Action Française in mid December 1938. The campaign was to culminate on 15 January 1939 with a ball.<sup>63</sup> Though the Rassemblement des Étudiants pour l'Aide à l'Enfance d'Espagne claimed several hundred members in Paris, it seemed to have little contact with students outside the capital, as was reflected in its proposal to send an appeal to provincial universities. The REAEE was not only geographically limited, but few Socialist students seem to have supported its Communist leadership.<sup>64</sup>

The Executive meeting of the Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants also heard from a third pro-Communist student organisation, which embodied the differences between British and French student aid efforts. Following Bicard's report on the REAEE was Bordeaux *lycée* teacher, Jean Daudin, who discussed the Mouvement Liberté which had been formed at the end of 1937.<sup>65</sup> Daudin was a Communist activist, whose father in Bordeaux, Henri Daudin, had been one of the leading public patrons of the PCF's aid efforts for Republican Spain.<sup>66</sup> The Mouvement Liberté had campaigned for the right to free discussion, including politics, within French universities which it held as necessary for academic work.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Les Cahiers de la Jeunesse, 15/11/1938, p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> Les Cahiers de la Jeunesse, 15/12/1938, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 8.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes of 23/10/1938, 14, Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants, International Institute of Social History.

<sup>66</sup> Dictionnaire Biographique du Mouvement Ouvrier Français, Vol 24, pp. 91-92.

<sup>67</sup> Les Cahiers de la Jeunesse, 15/12/1938, p. 11.

It was sponsored in October 1938 by a petition signed by 80 Paris Professors which read,

Etranger à toute doctrine et à tout intérêt de parti, il défend ce qui nous est commun à tous, non pas une opinion politique ou philosophique, mais le droit de nous en faire une.<sup>68</sup>

The Paris committee of *Mouvement Liberté*, which mixed professors and students, sought to organise debates in the Faculties and *Cité Universitaire*. Despite the obvious left-wing bias of the *Mouvement Liberté*'s sponsors, it was calling for conditions which already existed in British universities, in which students Unions had formalised debates amongst students and different students' groups cooperated to put forward common platforms. *Mouvement Liberté* represented the realisation that the decades of intense politicisation and polarisation surrounding French universities, had in fact constrained the development of campus-based organisations and repertoires of activity due to regulations based on the authorities' fears of confrontation.

Significantly, Jean Daudin in addressing the Executive meeting called for a focus on aid campaigns for Republican Spain as a means to establish an inclusive coalition of the left inside French universities,

He stressed the necessity for any broad student movement in France to hold aloof from political strife, which had divided students very much in the past. The movement should boldly pursue the path it traced out for itself and develop humanitarian aid for the victims of the war in Spain.<sup>69</sup>

Such a campaign was possible in Britain, but not France. The historical development of politics within French universities had been based on the confrontations of party politics in public spaces. The campus-based interconnections which had fuelled coalitions amongst political and 'non-political' students groups in Britain did not exist on the other side of the Channel. The divisions of left and right, and within the left itself, powerfully shaped how humanitarian aid had developed, whereas in Britain aid had been seen as a non-partisan issue which could appeal above and beyond the divisions of party politics.

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<sup>68</sup> "Foreign to all doctrines and all party interests, it defends that which is common to all, not one political opinion or philosophy, but the right of us to make one" - *Ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>69</sup> Minutes of 23/10/1938, 14, *Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants*, International Institute of Social History.



## *Ouvrez la Frontière: French Humanitarian Aid for Spain*

Throughout the war, the call to "*ouvrez la frontière*" had been put forward by French opponents of non-intervention, especially following the tightening of border controls by Daladier's government after 13 June 1938.<sup>70</sup> At a time when the Republic's survival seemed increasingly precarious, its French supporters were facing a much less sympathetic government after Blum's second resignation from office. As the front in Catalonia collapsed and the Republic's military position became increasingly precarious, the slogan acquired a new intensity. "*Ouvrez la frontière*" could refer not merely to military supplies for the Spanish Republic, but also humanitarian aid, and increasingly through January 1939, to refugee asylum in France. Another factor which fuelled the magnification of the campaign against non-intervention in France during late 1938, was the definitive rupture of the Front Populaire after the Munich Agreement and the rightward drift of Daladier's government. Perhaps most importantly, the slogan "*ouvrez la frontière*" symbolised the extent to which the Spanish civil war was seen as part of French domestic politics, rather than linked to other international events as it had been in Britain.

A survey of the complex changes in the French political landscape caused by the Czech crisis of September 1938 is beyond the scope of this study, but as discussed in the preceding chapters the crisis did aggravate existing divisions within the French left while increasing the confidence of the right. Most significantly, the Munich Agreement marked the definitive rupture of the Front Populaire coalition. The coalition had been under increasing strain following the fall of Blum's second government, and revealingly its fourth anniversary was commemorated on 14 July 1938 by marches, but no speeches, by mutual agreement of the parties.<sup>71</sup> In the post-Munich climate of relief at a European war so barely avoided, the PCF stood out by its absolute opposition to Daladier's policy.<sup>72</sup> The growing anti-communism within the Radical Party finally was able to express itself to the full, so that the Party's Annual Congress in late October 1938 was described as an "orgy of anti-communism" at which academic Albert Bayet stood out in

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<sup>70</sup> Timothy P. Maga, "Closing the Door: The French Government and Refugee Policy 1933-1939", *French Historical Studies*, 12, 3, Spring 1982, p. 435;

Louis Stein, *Beyond Death and Exile: The Spanish Republicans in France 1939-1955*, Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 11

<sup>71</sup> Colton, *Léon Blum*, p. 313.

<sup>72</sup> On 4 October 1938, the Chamber of Deputies voted confidence in Daladier's government (and its foreign policy) by an overwhelming 537 to 75 votes. Of the dissenters, 73 were PCF deputies - Jean-Pierre Azema, *From Munich to the Liberation 1938-1944*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, p 7.

continuing his support of the PCF.<sup>73</sup> On 10 November 1938 the Radicals formally broke with the Rassemblement Populaire.

Just as during Blum's first government when the PCF had sought to mobilise an independent critique of non-intervention through the CICIAER, so in the wake of Munich did the Party seek to focus intellectuals' opposition to Daladier's foreign policy. On the final day of September 1938, the day that Daladier was mobbed by enthusiastic Paris crowds on returning from Munich, L'Humanité published a "Manifeste pour la Paix" which argued that in preserving Czechoslovakia, France would preserve Peace and therefore called for the end of capitulation to Fascist expansionism.<sup>74</sup> Over the first three days of October 1938, L'Humanité printed the names of several intellectuals close to the PCF (such as the familiar figures of Langevin, Wallon, and Bayet), academics who were party members (including Marcel Prenant and Jacques Solomon) and a number of students in support of the appeal.<sup>75</sup> This petition for "Paix et Démocratie" became more impressive over the following two days as it garnered the signatures of over a dozen Professors of the Collège de France and Sorbonne.<sup>76</sup> These included physicist Frédéric Joliot, psychologist Henri Pieron, sociologist Marcel Mauss, and economic historian Henri Hauser; the last three of whom had been dreyfusards in their youth. While most of these signatories were already politically prominent, the Czech crisis had stirred a considerable amount of concern amongst Paris academics during September and October 1938, particularly those in Slavonic studies.<sup>77</sup>

Sixteen out of the twenty senior academics who first signed the petition opposing appeasement in L'Humanité had been public supporters of CVIA in 1934. They included two female academics, Irène Joliot-Curie and Geneviève Bianquis. Significantly five of these former CVIA members had publicly split from that organisation in June 1936.<sup>78</sup> Together they provided a core for new organisation, the Union des Intellectuels Français (UIF), which sought to rally support an active anti-fascist foreign policy, particularly over Spain. The leading role of academics in the Union des Intellectuels Français was particularly important because it was formed

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<sup>73</sup> Lamour, The French Radical Party, p. 245.

<sup>74</sup> L'Humanité, 30/9/1938, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> L'Humanité, 2/10/1938, p. 2;

L'Humanité, 3/10/1938, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> L'Humanité, 4/10/1938, p. 2;

L'Humanité, 5/10/1938, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Yvon Lacaze, L'Opinion Publique Française et la Crise de Munich, Peter Lang, Berne, 1991, pp. 80-87.

<sup>78</sup> Two more of CVIA's founders, Rivet and Gêrôme left the organisation in October 1938 over its endorsement of absolute pacifism and the Munich Agreement - Ibid., p. 449.

at a time when anti-communism was unifying the Radicals and the right into common cause, much as anti-fascism had done for the left after 6 February 1934. Jean-Jacques Becker has argued that at the same time as the PCF were increasing their opposition to Daladier's government over Munich, by the general strike of 30 November 1938 and then in supporting Republican Spain in the new year, they remained committed to the idea of the Front Populaire.<sup>79</sup> They maintained the same broad appeals in their mass meetings and propaganda, yet these forms of politics were largely a shell of earlier years. Given the party's increasing marginalisation in party politics, it needed more than ever the public support of intellectuals.<sup>80</sup>

These changes in the PCF's position were reflected in the humanitarian aid campaign for Republican Spain, which the party launched with the opening of January 1939 and the rapid progress of the Nationalists offensive in Catalonia. Under the title "Lait - Pain - Santé", the appeal was launched in *L'Humanité* on 5 January 1939 by donations from the PCF's deputies.<sup>81</sup> In contrast to its broad appeal for Bilbao in mid 1937, this campaign was heavily party-focused, paralleling the SFIO's own efforts to mobilise support from early 1938. Victor Basch was one of the first supporters of the appeal and gave 500 francs.<sup>82</sup> At the end of January 1939, a group of Communist students were listed as donating 150 francs, while the appeal itself now totalled 142,381 francs.<sup>83</sup> While this amount was more than doubled the following month it was still significantly less than the almost 600,000 francs which had been raised during the first month of the Comité pour Bilbao's campaign.<sup>84</sup>

The comparison of the Comité pour Bilbao and the PCF's appeal for "Lait - Pain - Santé" would seem to support Richard Gordon's general contention that material aid to Spain became increasingly sporadic in France after 1937.<sup>85</sup> However, as had been highlighted in Chapter 8, there had actually been an intensification of French humanitarian aid for Republican Spain during April 1938, as revealed by the

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<sup>79</sup> Jean-Jacques Becker, "Le Parti Communiste" in Réne Rémond & Janine Bourdin, eds., *La France et la Française 1938 en 1939*, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, 1978, pp. 230-231.

<sup>80</sup> At the PCF's National Congress in late December 1938, Langevin publicly declared to its members his support for "votre parti" - Langevin, *Paul Langevin, Mon Père*, p. 103; Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, *Langevin: Science et Vigilance*, Belin, Paris, 1987, p. 148.

<sup>81</sup> *L'Humanité*, 5/1/1939, p. 3;

During mid October 1938, a "Semaine des Intellectuels' en faveur de l'Espagne Républicaine" was held sponsored by Langevin, Wallon, Rolland, Bloch - Report of 12/10/1938, BA 1664, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>82</sup> *L'Humanité*, 10/1/1939, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> *L'Humanité*, 29/1/1939, p. 3.

*L'Humanité*, 30/1/1939, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> *L'Humanité*, 25/5/1937, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 379.

first large university-based appeals in Toulouse and Paris. In Toulouse, the local group of *Étudiants Socialistes* collected 8,000 francs for medical aid to the Republic, and held fundraising meetings in mid November 1938 and early January 1939.<sup>86</sup> Equally, despite the dramatic shifts of national politics during 1938 there does not seem to have been a significant change in general collections for Spanish aid in Toulouse.<sup>87</sup> Therefore the contrast between the PCF's appeals of May 1937 and January 1939, reflected the changing base of general support for the PCF itself, rather than any broad decline in support for Republican Spain within France.

On the same pages of *L'Humanité* that announced the daily total of donations for the "Lait - Pain - Santé", a manifesto appeared in mid-January 1939 by the *Union des Intellectuels Français*, which reflected both the increased activism of Paris academics after the Czech crisis and their present concern with Spain.<sup>88</sup> The petition demanded that with the repatriation of the International Brigades, the Spanish Republic should be allowed to participate in international commerce free of restriction, especially given the famine menacing its civilian population. It declared itself against the granting of belligerent rights to Franco, or to any new abdication to international fascism. It was headed by the signatures of Langevin and Wallon, who were joined by ten other members of the *Collège de France*, five *professeurs honoraires* of the Sorbonne, eleven professors from the Sorbonne, as well as a wide variety of other intellectuals and teachers.

Paralleling this petition by the academics of the *Union des Intellectuels Français*, was another signed by 80 students of the *École Normale Supérieure*. The students informed the Director of the School, Célestin Bouglé, that they intended to join a delegation of academics and laboratory workers, led by Jean Perrin and Joliot-Curie which would present the petition to Daladier. Bouglé wrote to the Rector of the University of Paris that,

Je n'ai cru devoir m'opposer à cette démarche: les signataires ayant respecté l'article de notre règlement qui veut que les déclarations et pétitions soient connues d'abord de l'administration de l'École.<sup>89</sup>

Interestingly, Bouglé described the signatories as "*d'opinions d'ailleurs assez diverses*", which seems a correct evaluation given the number of students involved. The

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<sup>86</sup> *Le Midi Socialiste*, 3/11/1938, p. 4;

*Le Midi Socialiste*, 6/1/1939, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> See *Le Midi Socialiste*, 1936-1939.

<sup>88</sup> *L'Humanité*, 12/1/1939, p. 3;

Report of 17/1/1939, BA 1664, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

<sup>89</sup> "I did not have to oppose this declaration: the signatories have respected the article of our regulations which requires that declarations and petitions are first made known to the administration of the School" - Letter of 18/1/1939, AJ16/2895, Archives Nationales

closeness of *normaliens* to the activities of academics is in stark contrast to other French university students. Their petition read as follows,

Les élèves de l'École Normale Supérieure de la rue d'Ulm soussignés émus par les violations incessantes et unilatérales du principe de non-intervention, demandent l'ouverture immédiate de la frontière espagnole et le maintien de cette ouverture jusqu'à cessation de toute intervention étrangère en Espagne.<sup>90</sup>

The primacy given to foreign involvement in the wording of the petition revealed that its focus was for military relief for the beleaguered Spanish Republic. However, when it was published the following month, events in Spain had perhaps given its demands a different meaning. By February 1939, the Republic was obviously collapsing militarily, but the border remained a central political issue, no longer as a supply route but as a passage for the massive exodus of Spanish refugees.

### *Ouvrez la Frontière: Spanish Refugees in France*

The petition from the École Normale Supérieure became part of a much wider campaign to open the French-Spanish border which had both political and humanitarian objectives. In the same issue of Cahiers de Jeunesse which published the ENS petition with 90 signatories, there was a copy of a telegram from the Jeunes Laïques et Républicains to the Chamber asking for the opening of the border to prevent the deaths of children and the innocent.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, a delegation from the Étudiants du Front Populaire also met at the Palais-Bourbon as part of several university demonstrations about the border. It was also during mid January 1939 that Blum, Thorez and Jouhaux renewed their collaboration of the mid-1930s, in issuing a joint call for the opening of the French border.<sup>92</sup> In the following weeks, the PCF organised a massive campaign of repeated demonstrations around Paris and throughout France focused on the slogan "*ouvrez la frontière*".<sup>93</sup> The intensity of these demonstrations was partly motivated by the dramatic advance of the Nationalist army towards Barcelona, but also by the PCF's own isolated position following the shift to the right by Daladier's government.

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<sup>90</sup> "The undersigned students of the Ecole Normale Supérieure moved by the incessant and unilateral violations of the principle of non-intervention, demand the immediate opening of the Spanish border and the maintaining of it as open up until the cessation of all foreign intervention in Spain" - Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Les Cahiers de la Jeunesse, 15/2/1939, p. 32.

<sup>92</sup> Greene, Crisis and Decline, p. 251.

<sup>93</sup> Reports of 25/1/1939, 26/1/1939, 27/1/1939, 29/1/1939 & 1/2/1939, BA 1867, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

In the midst of these campaigns "*ouvrez la frontière*" gained a new meaning as a flood of refugees from Republican Spain sought to enter France during the final week of January 1939. Emmanuelle Salgas identifies three phases of this exodus during which an estimated 450,000 Spanish refugees crossed into the French Department of Pyrénées-Orientales in the space of a fortnight.<sup>94</sup> The first large wave of the exodus occurred during the last four days of January 1939, when 114,000 refugees crossed the border. During the next four days, these were followed by another 126,000 refugees. Despite French government attempts to limit the flow of refugees to civilians and wounded, a new phase of the influx began on 5 February 1939 as some 250,000 soldiers of the Republican army crossed into France. For the extreme right, this new wave of refugees was the least desirable; "*La France envahie!*" is how L'Express du Midi described the retreating soldiers.<sup>95</sup> The PSF argued that at least 40,000 of the refugees should be sent back to Spain at once, as there were "*parmi les Espagnols réfugiés, un très grand nombre d'indésirables, de bandits, de criminels, de bourreaux*".<sup>96</sup> Unlike the extravagant estimates of left and right over the number of foreign troops in Spain, the PSF's figures for the total number of refugees were remarkably precise, reflecting the extent of State involvement in organising relief for the refugees.

### The University of Paris Appeal for Spanish Refugees

Coinciding with the heightened political activity over refugees, the University of Paris became the focus for a large humanitarian campaign. The Rector of the University, in his capacity as head of state education in the capital, appealed to others throughout France;

L'Université de Paris, comme vous le savez, a accepté de recueillir des fonds pour les enfants espagnols récemment réfugiés en France. Après entente avec M. Le Ministre de l'Education Nationale et avec M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur, il a été décidé que les sommes versées seraient réparties par priorité entre les colonies d'enfants espagnols qui ont été constituées dans

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<sup>94</sup> Emmanuelle Salgas, "L'Opinion Publique et les Représentations des Réfugiés Espagnols dans les Pyrénées-Orientales" in Jean Sagnes & Sylvie Caucanas, eds., Les Français et la Guerre d'Espagne: Actes du Colloque de Perpignan, Université de Perpignan, Perpignan, 1990, p.186-188.

<sup>95</sup> L'Express du Midi, 7/2/1939, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Le Flambeau du Sud-Ouest, 25/3/1939, p. 1.

The author argued that the true danger of the Spanish refugees was that they would spread Marxism in France.

certain départements.<sup>97</sup>

Certainly, such an official campaign would have been inconceivable without the deep involvement of the French state in organising refugee relief. It was not until the French government itself became committed in support of refugees that a humanitarian aid campaign could develop within the university. This campaign was undoubtedly aided by the strong sympathy for the Spanish Republic of Jean Zay, the Minister of Education.<sup>98</sup>

The wording of the appeal to Paris students was significant for it located the operation of the appeal firmly within France; "*l'Université de Paris agissant officiellement, décide d'organiser une souscription au profit des femmes et des enfants réfugiés sur notre territoire*".<sup>99</sup> It is striking that a university-based humanitarian aid effort similar to the ones which had developed in Britain could only occur in France when the war in Spain was ending and the problems of refugees were on "*notre territoire*". Posters around the university appealed to "*des étudiants de toutes nuances politiques et religieuses*".<sup>100</sup> The appeal was supported by Catholic students' groups in Paris, as well as the left. The national Catholic relief efforts for refugees in early 1939 led by the CNC, probably facilitated support of Catholic students for the Rector's appeal.

Still this alliance between religious and political groups was merely a temporary expedient rather than a deeply-grounded coalition. In Les Cahiers de la Jeunesse, the two sections made separate appeals. British and French socialist and communist students appealed,

Aux Étudiants Français et Anglais:

Aujourd'hui la paix du monde est menacée plus que jamais.

Mussolini réclame des colonies

Sauvez l'Espagne, sauvez la France, la Paix et la Démocratie

Les Universités doivent être sur le front de combat pour l'unité des démocraties franco-britannique pour demander:

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<sup>97</sup> "The University of Paris, as you know, has accepted the collection of funds for the Spanish children recently seeking refuge in France. After consulting with the Minister of National Education and with the Minister of the Interior, it has been decided that the amounts paid be distributed by priority between the camps of Spanish children that have been set up in certain Departments" - Letter of 3/3/1939, AJ16/6969, Archives Nationales.

<sup>98</sup> Zay had been one of the few in the Radical Party to oppose non-intervention. He had also been involved during the war in a confrontation with Jacques Chevalier, Dean of the Faculty of Letters in Grenoble who had been invited by Franco to tour Nationalist Spain to provide advice on education - Jean Zay, Souvenirs et Solitude, Talus d'Approche, Le Roelx, 1987, pp. 46-47.

<sup>99</sup> Poster, AJ16/6969, Archives Nationales.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Des armes, des canons et des munitions;  
Des vivres, du lait pour le peuple d'Espagne.<sup>101</sup>

For the Catholic students, the tone was quite different,  
Résolument à l'écart de toute opinion et organisation politiques, uniquement  
poussés par un sentiment d'élémentaire humanité et par les impérieuses  
exigences de notre charité chrétienne,  
Nous, étudiants catholiques, nous avons résolu d'aider à recueillir [pour] des  
femmes et des enfants qui viennent chercher refuge sur notre sol.  
Aucun d'entre vous ne peut rester indifférent à notre geste. C'est pourquoi  
nous sollicitons votre collaboration et nous vous disons: Aidez-nous!  
Nos différentes organisations se sont unies afin de secourir cette navrante  
misère.  
Au nom du Christ, nous vous le demandons.<sup>102</sup>

Within two months the University of Paris appeal had raised 360,000 francs for Spanish refugees in France.<sup>103</sup> However, this total was inflated by the inter-connected structure of French education. 290,000 francs came from Seine primary and secondary schools. As these figures suggest, the appeal seems to have remained Paris-focused. On 26 March 1939, the Rassemblement des Étudiants pour l'Aide à l'Enfance Espagnole intended to send the first lorry of books from the Sorbonne to various refugee camps in the Eure and the Eure-et-Loire.<sup>104</sup>

The following month the Rector of the University of Paris was invited by a group of Spanish students in the refugee camp at Agde to support their Comité Provisoire d'Accueil aux Réfugiés d'Espagne. The Rector replied,

Je dois vous dire tout de suite que, quelle que soit ma sympathie pour votre initiative, il est difficile au Recteur de vous donner un patronage officiel... Je suis par ailleurs heureux de pouvoir vous envoyer ma contribution

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<sup>101</sup> "To French and British students: Today the peace of the world is menaced more than ever, Mussolini demands colonies. Save Spain, save France, Peace and democracy. The universities have to be on the battle-front for the unity of French and British democracies to demand: The arms, cannons and ammunition; Food supplies and milk for the people of Spain" - *Les Cahiers de la Jeunesse*, 15/2/1939, p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> "Resolutely clear of all political opinions and organisations, uniquely driven by a sentiment of elementary humanity and by the pressing demands on our Christian charity, We, Catholic Students, have resolved to help in taking in the women and children who come to search for refuge on our soil. Some among us remain indifferent to our gesture. This is why we solicit your collaboration and we say to you: Aid us! Our different organisations are united to help to relieve this upsetting misery. In the name of Christ, we ask of you" - *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Letter of 24/2/3199, AJ16/6969, Archives Nationales.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*



personnelle à votre oeuvre.<sup>105</sup>

## Refugee Relief for Spanish Academics

While the Rector of Paris' official appeal for refugees was unprecedented in French universities, in Britain refugee relief largely developed within existing organisations. The prominence of Spanish intellectuals amongst the Republic's supporters fuelled concerns outside Spain about the extent to which they would suffer under Nationalist occupation. Given the international publicity surrounding the executions of the poet Garcia Lorca in August 1936 and of the Rector of the University of Oviedo in April 1937, these fears seemed to have some grounding. For academics, these fears reflected not merely political concern but also their personal and professional connections with Spanish colleagues.

In April 1938 Isobel Henderson, a Spanish tutor at Somerville College, Oxford, and daughter of the Rector of Lincoln College, wrote to the secretary of the Society for Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) over conditions in Spain.<sup>106</sup> She was particularly concerned about the fate of academics in Republican Spain at a time when the Nationalist army was driving towards the Mediterranean. She wrote that,

Prof J.B. Trend and I have been thinking that we might a) make a list of a few of the best Spanish University men who might find jobs here; b) canvass Oxford & Cambridge people willing to give them temporary hospitality; c) ask Azcárate [the Spanish Republic's Ambassador in London] to get in touch with them, so that they can give an English address to the Immigration Officers if they come over; and d) appeal to the colleges in their later support.

My idea was to be prepared in case of a sudden military debacle. Many of the best Spanish intellectuals are, of course, very much in politics and could not stay if Franco won.<sup>107</sup>

Henderson faced the difficulty that British immigration authorities required guarantees of housing and maintenance for refugees before they would grant

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<sup>105</sup> "I have to tell you straight away that, whatever my sympathy for your initiative, it is difficult as Rector to give you an official patronage... I am otherwise happy to be able to send to you my personal contribution to your work" - Letter of 19/4/1939, AJ16/6969, Archives Nationales.

<sup>106</sup> Letter of 12/4/1938, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

admission. She felt that, "Colleges will not directly invite people from Spain, but I think several would give Spaniards hospitality for a period, once they were in England".<sup>108</sup> Thus she was seeking SPSL backing to sponsor their entry into Britain. Henderson sent to the SPSL a "Purely Provisional List of Potential Refugee Scholars" including the names of Bosch Gimperà, Manuel Azaña, Juan Negrín and seven others. The list was of largely prominent public figures such as Gimperà who was Rector at Barcelona and Catalan Minister of Justice. Henderson admitted to Adams that though she would like to invite Negrín and Azaña they would probably be considered too political as well as unlikely to need aid.<sup>109</sup> She doubted that the SPSL appeal for academics refugees from Austria could be synchronised with an appeal for those from Spain.

The SPSL was sympathetic to Henderson's plan, and was willing to approach the Home Office to seek entry permission for ten eminent scholars.<sup>110</sup> However, the Society was more reticent about any general canvassing in Oxford and Cambridge for hospitality. Henderson was willing to agree with these reservations for she wrote in mid-May 1938 that, "I formed the plan when the end of the war seemed almost imminent: but at present it is clear that invitations to Republican intellectuals are neither necessary nor wise"<sup>111</sup> As the Nationalist advance stalled, the impetus in Britain for academic aid soon dissipated. Henderson would write to Adams that, "I am glad Franco has got stuck, but it does make things harder to arrange".<sup>112</sup>

In late June 1938, Henderson was still seeking to invite four Spanish academics to Britain.<sup>113</sup> She wrote that there were "several Oxford heads of house sympathetic about temporary hospitality for Spanish scholars".<sup>114</sup> These pre-emptive efforts reveal the deep concern amongst some British academics over the fate of their Spanish peers, but it was not until after the military position of the Republic totally collapsed in 1939 that Spanish refugees became a central concern within British universities.

Despite Henderson's efforts to create a scheme to support academic refugees in Oxford in early 1938, she was overseas when the refugee crisis occurred in early

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<sup>108</sup> Letter of 11/5/1938, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>109</sup> List, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>110</sup> Letter of 10/5/1938, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>111</sup> Letter of 17/5/1938, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Letter of 30/6/1938, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

1939. In her place, her mother Margaret Munro, as the wife of the Rector of Lincoln College, took the lead in organising a scheme to support refugee Spanish academics in Oxford.<sup>115</sup> With assistance from Oxford's Professor of Spanish, Entwistle, Munro sought to offer places in the university to Gimperà, Thomas and Alonso partly funded by the SPSL.<sup>116</sup> In Cambridge, Trend continued his efforts to support Spanish academics, offering his college rooms to Aguilar while he was overseas and looking for a position for Xirau amongst others.<sup>117</sup>

Perhaps the contrast between the way the British and Paris academics reacted to the plight of their Spanish colleagues provides the most appropriate close to this thesis. Groups in Britain and France had initially come together in reaction to the 1933 exodus of academics from Germany. Six years later, they maintained their own distinct approaches to refugee relief, reflecting the constraints and concerns of their own universities, as well as the political climates of their countries.

For the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, the end of the civil war finally included Spanish academics amongst its central concerns, yet at the same time it found its resources already strained by the influx of other academic refugees from Central Europe. The SPSL co-operated with the NJCSR in trying to establish the number of university teachers amongst the refugees in Perpignan.<sup>118</sup> By mid-April 1939, the SPSL had a list of 77 refugee scholars from Spain.<sup>119</sup> Yet despite these efforts, and the willingness of British academics to contribute to specifically Spanish relief, the SPSL remained far more successful in dealing with refugees from Central Europe.<sup>120</sup> One of the key factors in shaping British efforts for academic refugees was the timing of the appeals. In February 1939, For Intellectual Liberty had launched its own appeal for Spanish intellectual refugees, however by the mid-March this had been subsumed by refugees from Czechoslovakia who were described as the "most urgent problem".<sup>121</sup>

The SPSL was in close contact with a group of French academics who sought to create a Paris-based sister organisation to organise relief for university refugees

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<sup>115</sup> Letter of 26/1/1939, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>116</sup> Letter of 2/2/1939, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>117</sup> Letter of 7/3/1939, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

Letter of 7/3/1939, Add 8251/VI, University Library, Cambridge.

<sup>118</sup> Letter of 25/4/1939, Mss SPSL 118/8 Bodleian Library;

It was also contacted by Spanish committees for intellectual refugees based in Toulouse and later from Paris - Letters of 7/3/1939, 4/9/1939, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>119</sup> Letter 25/4/39, Mss SPSL 118, Bodleian Library.

<sup>120</sup> Letter of 23/2/1939, Mss SPSL 153, Bodleian Library.

<sup>121</sup> FIL Bulletins of 9/2/1939 & 18/3/1939, Add 9369, University Library, Cambridge.

in France. The groups' secretary was Canadian Louis Rapkine, who in a letter to the SPSL's Walter Adams revealed the limits upon what aid could be organised within the French universities. Despite the end of the war, refugees remained a politicised issue in France which imposed constraints on the relief that could be undertaken within the state education system. As Rapkin wrote to Adams in mid 1939,

Am writing this two days after one of our committee meetings that we held for the special purpose of helping some Spanish scholars. The Ministry of National Education appointed our committee to examine all the applications and to choose the candidates which are to be helped. All this is of course by the way; it is just to tell you that our Council met, and besides examining the Spanish scholars' applications, we also examined a few new ones coming from Austria, Tchechoslovakia [sic] and Germany. Now, it seems that the Government is ready to contribute, through the French National Research Council, some funds, to help certain foreign scientists who have shown, in the past, some good feeling towards French institutions of learning and science. But, the French National Research Council is rather afraid of taking this responsibility, because it is afraid of criticism by some of the reactionary elements.<sup>122</sup>

The fear that the extreme right, especially its press, would use academic refugees as a pretext for a scandal, reveals the extent to which Spain remained a politicised and potentially controversial issue.

Despite the formal constraints within the French university system, academics and students in southern France were heavily involved in aiding the large number of Spanish refugees arriving in their communities. In June 1938, a committee to aid Spanish intellectuals was established in Montpellier, which was headed by Jean Amade, a Professor in the Faculty of Letters.<sup>123</sup> With the exodus of early February 1939, Montpellier academics successfully raised 1,000 francs for refugee relief and co-operated with the Prefect and Mayor in establishing a residence for refugee intellectuals.<sup>124</sup> In Toulouse, state officials, political activists and academics collaborated in seeking to provide relief to the new refugees. The Comité Universitaire launched a new appeal in late January 1939, calling on Western governments to establish a neutral zone in Catalonia for refugees to prevent new massacres like that of Badajoz.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, the committee

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<sup>122</sup> Letter of 12/5/1939, Mss SPSL 145, Bodleian Library.

<sup>123</sup> Pierre Grau, "L'Aide des Félibres aux Intellectuels Catalans", in Sagnes & Caucanas, eds., *Les Français et la Guerre d'Espagne*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 202 & 206.

<sup>125</sup> *Le Midi Socialiste*, 27/1/1939, p. 4.

also appealed for material and money to help Spanish teachers and students.<sup>126</sup> Vice-President of the Comité Universitaire was Professor Daniel Faucher of the Faculty of Letters who also helped the local authorities to co-ordinate aid efforts.<sup>127</sup> Faucher was patron of a meeting held on 2 February 1939 to bring together all local groups in Toulouse involved with the refugees, and he was prominent in the Comité Universitaire's attempts to establish a canteen for refugee intellectuals. These local efforts reflected the dramatic impact of the refugees on towns across southern France, and how the sheer magnitude of the problem forced state authorities and pre-existing relief efforts to work together.

The influx of refugees into France meant that she was touched by the civil war even after Franco claimed victory on the opening of April 1939. As late as August 1939, a confidential paper titled "Le Problème des Universitaires Espagnols en Exil", was circulating amongst Paris academics.<sup>128</sup> The paper proposed that institutes, scholarships, courses and reviews should be established within French universities to aid the academic refugees from Republican Spain. Circumstances were very much against such an initiative, for as the Rector noted, discretion had to be shown so as not to publicly act against Franco.<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, he was willing to support the creation on an Institut des Hautes Etudes Hispaniques for the refugees from Republican Spain. Despite the constraints they faced within the state system, some French academics continued to search for ways to assist their Spanish colleagues.

## Conclusion

The crisis in Central Europe in September 1938 not only profoundly impacted upon political alignments within the universities of Britain and France, but affected the Spanish relief campaigns which had developed in both countries during the civil war. The Munich Agreement had been signed just as Nationalist forces were reversing the Republic's final offensive at the Ebro. The hectic months from October 1938 to March 1939, merged aid efforts and refugees, and blurred events in Spain with those in Central Europe. This connection between Spain and

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<sup>126</sup> Other appeals for aid were launched by the SFIO and by the local Comité Sanitaire - *Le Midi Socialiste*, 20/2/1939, p. 1;

*Le Midi Socialiste*, 24/3/1939, p. 4.

<sup>127</sup> Florence Mila, "Les Toulousains Face a l'Exode des Republicains Espagnols (1939)", *Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Toulouse (Miral)*, 1995, pp. 92 & 95.

<sup>128</sup> Notes of Aug. 1939, AJ16/6969, Archives Nationales.

<sup>129</sup> Letter of 28/12/1939, AJ16/6969, Archives Nationales.

the expansionism of Germany and Italy, particularly for those in Britain encouraged a view of international events which stressed continuity across Europe.

By January 1939, the Nationalist advance into Catalonia meant that the nature of British and French refugee relief was fundamentally changed. The scale of the human exodus towards France was unparalleled in the war. British and French academics and students were heavily engaged in relief campaigns to aid refugees, as well as separate efforts for their peers from Spanish universities. It was only when the war was effectively over and the French state had committed itself to caring for those refugees on its own territory, that university-based aid campaigns could emerge in France. Before that point, the civil war had been seen as too politicised, and the tensions between different political parties too pronounced for the campus coalitions which had proliferated in Britain to develop.

## Conclusion

Theodore Zeldin has written of the dual importance of intellectuals in French history as actors and recorders of political movements, For not only have intellectuals played a leading part in these conflicts, but they have also interpreted them and labelled them in such a way as to influence all thought about them. It was they who formulated the issues which they claimed divided the country and defined the principles which were at stake. Their generalisations became accepted truths, to the extent that they shaped events, for new controversies were fitted into the categories they had devised. They bequeathed to historians a framework into which the events of the past can be conveniently slotted, but this inherited framework is not necessarily the only one that can be used. The reasons why it was evolved need to be examined more closely, and there seems to be room, at any rate, for another perspective.<sup>1</sup>

This need for a critical examination of the experiences of Western intellectuals is particularly appropriate for the ways in which the Spanish civil war has been shaped in popular memory and academic history by their writings. The study of academics and students, rather than writers, poets and artists, has provided another perspective on the civil war which is more nuanced for its recognition of their shared social background and common forms of participation in national political currents. A comparison between Britain and France highlights the importance of these two elements in the identities of each country's intellectuals. The experiences of university intellectuals during the Spanish civil war contradict many of the existing works on the literary intellectuals of the 1930s which have argued that the politicisation of the decade was a limited phenomenon. University reactions to the war also point towards some of the nuances of national politics in the two countries.

### **Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War: Engagement and Disillusionment**

One of the dominant themes of histories of the 1930s is that while the Spanish civil war represented the highwater mark of political commitment for a British and French literary intelligentsia, the defeat of the Spanish Republic spawned a widespread disillusionment with that same engagement in politics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zeldin, *France 1848-1945, Vol. 1 Ambition, Love & Politics*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Stansky & Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, p. xviii; Gordon, "France and the Spanish Civil War", p. 403.

Tom Buchanan argues that because many British intellectuals supported the Spanish Republic based on their assumptions of its liberal politics, its democratic government, and the threat of foreign 'fascism', the very perspective which motivated their political engagement fuelled their turning away from politics as the complex internal politics of the Spanish Republic became more evident over time.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, the Communist Party, which had done so much to actively shape and politicise intellectuals' involvement in campaigns over Spain, was seen as corrupting or betraying the cause which it had promoted with so much energy.<sup>4</sup> With the onset of the Cold War during the following decade, this rejection of Communist involvement in the civil war took on a heightened resonance. For writers such as Orwell, Borkenau and Koestler, "the Spanish Civil War represented a personal encounter with what they saw as 'totalitarian' practices and a watershed in their relationship to communism".<sup>5</sup> For these three, and for others such as W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and Simone Weil, experiencing the war at close hand made them increasingly critical of the costs involved.<sup>6</sup> This disillusionment with the civil war and turning away from political activity are seen as originating during the war itself.

The experience within British and French universities was very different from that of the individual authors and poets who have emerged so prominently in the histories of the civil war.<sup>7</sup> Rather than withdrawing from politics, academics and students in both countries played a large role in the intensifying campaigns for humanitarian aid, Spanish refugees, and against non-intervention over the course of the war. These campaigns were shaped by the course of battle within Spain, by other international events such as impending war in Central Europe during 1938, and by the changes in domestic politics of Britain and France. Despite the gradual

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Stuart Samuels, "English Intellectuals and Politics in the 1930s", in Philip Rieff, ed., On Intellectuals: Theoretical Studies, Case Studies, Doubleday, New York, 1969, pp. 217 & 243.

<sup>3</sup> Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, p. 146

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 147;

Julian Symons' chapter on the Spanish civil war are subtitled "The Deceived" and "The Deceivers" - Julian Symons, The Thirties: A Dream Revolved, Cressent Press, London, 1960, pp. 119 & 129.

<sup>5</sup> Buchanan, Britain and the Spanish Civil War, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> "Disillusionment took many forms in Spain but hinged on the realisation that what had appeared from the safety of Britain as a just war - or even a crusade - was more complex, more squalid, and infinitely less heroic when seen at close quarters" - Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>7</sup> The paths of these two groups of intellectuals occasionally crossed, so that in early 1937 Oxford tutor Helen Grant saw celebrity writers Hemingway and Dos Passos when she visited besieged Madrid - Diary "Spain: March 25-April 18 1937", p. 68 in Add 8251, University Library, Cambridge.



accumulation of territory by Nationalist forces over the three years of fighting, the outcome of the war was always uncertain.<sup>8</sup>

Most strikingly, the major international campaigns for Republican Spain occurred when its military position was the most threatened, during the major Nationalist offensives against Madrid in late 1936, the Basque country in April 1937, the Levant in April 1938 and finally on Catalonia in January 1939. Each of these offensives gave humanitarian aid appeals and refugee relief efforts a distinctive character, either for the besieged civilian populations of Madrid and Bilbao, for the worsening food shortage in the divided Republican territory during 1938, or finally for the massive exodus of refugees from Catalonia in 1939. Oxford student Denis Healey remembered that as the European crisis intensified in 1938 and 1939 with events in Czechoslovakia and Spain, these produced a greater commitment to work harder to turn the tide, rather than resignation or despair.<sup>9</sup> Within the universities of both Britain and France, the period between October 1938 to February 1939 marked the high point of the overlapping campaigns for the Republic.

As the Spanish Republic's military forces disintegrated, the commitment for aid and relief for its civilian population intensified. While the first appeals for international assistance had been for combatants and their families, during the war's first year humanitarian aid shifted to focus overwhelmingly on the civilian relief. Within British universities these humanitarian campaigns were able to mobilise a broad range of support, which extended to explicitly 'non-political' groups and individuals. In France, party politics militated against such open coalitions, but within the parties themselves were a wide variety of perceptions of the war. It was the range of motives which these campaigns drew on, from a general opposition to war to absolute pacifism, from religious charity to professional solidarity, that meant they were able to broaden their support throughout the decade, despite the changes of party politics.

For besieged Republican Spain, the front-lines of the war ran through its major cities, and the Nationalist forces recognised no division between the military and civilian population. The civil war changed the image of modern warfare for the rest of Europe, as images of the trenches and gas attacks of the Western Front between 1914-1918 were replaced by that of air raids on civilian conurbations. Aerial bombardment, which symbolised for many pro-Republicans the hypocrisy of

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<sup>8</sup> Stanley Payne, "Review: Paul Preston, Franco", *European History Quarterly*, 25, Jan 1995, p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> Healey, *The Time of My Life*, p. 34.

non-intervention, was therefore linked to humanitarian campaigns for the suffering civilian population.

This continuing commitment to the Republican cause was recognised by Eric Hobsbawm, who was a Communist student at Cambridge in the late 1930s.

Hobsbawm wrote in his recent history of the twentieth century that,

What Spain meant to liberals and those on the Left who lived through the 1930s, is now difficult to remember, though for many of us the survivors, now all past the Biblical life-span, it remains the only political cause which, even in retrospect, appears as pure and compelling as it did in 1936. Yet at the time it seemed to those who fought fascism to be the central front of their battle, because the only one in which action never ceased for over two-and-a-half years, the only one where they could participate as individuals, if not in uniform, then by collecting money, by helping refugees, and by the never-ending campaigns to put pressure on our own chicken-hearted governments. And the gradual, but apparently irreversible advance of the nationalist side, the foreseeable defeat and death of the Republic, merely made the need to forge a union against world fascism more desperately urgent.<sup>10</sup>

Hobsbawm's own continuing commitment to the Communist Party after the Spanish civil war provides an important counterpoint to those who have described student politics as merely an adolescent adventure. In later decades both commentators and some participants themselves have sought to argue that the growth of a student organisations on the left (particularly those of the Communists) were a momentary flirtation, an act of defiance and desperation.<sup>11</sup>

The sheer strength of the left's commitment to Republican Spain was a matter of neither intellectual deception nor delusion, for it often survived the recognition of the complex and tragic realities of the war. British academics Francis Cornford and Gilbert Murray both lost their sons in the war, and both remained prominent supporters of the Republic.<sup>12</sup> Cambridge Communist student Bernard Knox returned from Spain shaken by his experiences and the high casualties in the

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<sup>10</sup> Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 160.

<sup>11</sup> Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, p. 73;

Despite their political differences at the time, the autobiographies of Philip Toynbee and Christopher Mayhew also share this downplaying of student political commitment - Toynbee, *Friends Apart*, p. 63.

Christopher Mayhew, *Party Games*, Hutchinson, London, 1969, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Basil Murray died in late April 1937 whilst visiting Republican Spain - Duncan Wilson, *Gilbert Murray OM 1866-1957*, Carendon Press, Oxford, 1987, pp. 343-344,

Republicans' front-line in late 1936.<sup>13</sup> Still, he was soon participating in fundraising campaigns for the Republican cause, which he continued to defend in the late 1980s, despite recognising its shortcomings.<sup>14</sup> Even in an editorial that denounced the Communist repression of the POUM, Rabaud of the Etudiants Socialistes in Paris called for the members of the SFIO to redouble their efforts of solidarity for their Spanish comrades.<sup>15</sup>

The various campaigns for humanitarian aid, refugee relief and against non-intervention, were most tightly intertwined for Communists, while elements also appealed to the different motives of others. Taken together, these campaigns, which were often contradictory, infused with political tensions, and fuelled by very different perceptions of politics and the war in Spain, do embody a positive movement that points towards the need for a reconsideration, not only of the history of intellectuals during the 1930s, but of British and French society at the end of the decade. This confident culture of activism, which harnessed the energies of a mixed minority, has been overshadowed by the long shadow of the world war which followed the conflict in Spain. Histories of French society in the 1930s have stressed the bitter climate of psychological pessimism, political polarisation and social division, which are seen as underlying the Republic's military defeat of 1940.<sup>16</sup> Though these factors were significant, the late 1930s were also marked by the strong commitment of the French left to the collapsing Spanish Republic. Tony Judt's argument that the Third Republic died unloved amongst French intellectuals of the left and right ignores the experiences of academics and students of both groups.<sup>17</sup> Neither did the French extreme right merely collapse into pacifist defeatism following its dissolution in 1936, as the protests against Italian expansionism at the end of 1938 and the propaganda campaign for diplomatic recognition of Nationalist Spain reveal. The vitality of the PCF, SFIO, PSF and other groups maintained the divisions between their student members, whereas amongst British students increasing activism led to coalition across and outside political boundaries.

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<sup>13</sup> Straight, *After Long Silence*, p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Knox, *New York Review of Books*, 26/7/1987, pp. 25 & 28.

<sup>15</sup> *Essais et Combats*, Dec. 1937, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> James F. McMillan, *Twentieth-Century France: Politics and Society 1898-1991*, 2nd ed., Edward Arnold, London, 1992, p. 103;

Weber, *The Hollow Years*, passim.

<sup>17</sup> Judt, *Past Imperfect*, pp. 15 & 23-25.

Judt's attack is focused on the commitments of French Communist intellectuals during the Cold War.

## Party Politics and Party Commitment

This continuing commitment was not only to the Republican cause, but also to the existing parties in both countries through which many of these intellectuals defined their identities. Whether as members inside the party or independent activists and patrons outside its organisation, party politics played a large role in determining the reactions of academics and students to the Spanish civil war.

Given that so much of the historiography has stressed the timidity of the SFIO and Labour Party in their support for the Spanish Republic, it is significant that the civil war itself seemed to have little direct effect on their levels of membership and support. Despite the divisions caused amongst the Socialists of both countries by their parties' initial adoption of non-intervention, and by the Labour Party's rejection of united action in Britain, party activists and *militants* were unwilling to push their dissent over policy into a radical challenge to the institutions of the party.<sup>18</sup> This was partly because alongside these debates Socialists in both countries were fully committed to a variety of aid and relief efforts for Spain.<sup>19</sup> While the Labour Party and the TUC sought to create humanitarian appeals which kept their members away from Communist front organisations, the activities of British academics were largely expressed in local or campus-based coalitions outside the Labour Party. In late February 1937, the Cambridge branch of the Labour Party replied to an appeal for the TUC Fund for Spain, "that our energies at present were being given to the Cornford-Maclaurin Fund".<sup>20</sup> In France, Socialist academics and students directed their activities through the local structures of the SFIO. The success of the Comité Sanitaire d'Aide in Toulouse was precisely because it followed the boundaries of party politics which increasingly separated French aid efforts for Spain. This political difference between the two countries was reinforced by the lack of campus-focus in French university politics which meant that academics and students were shaped by the local politics of their surrounding community, especially outside of Paris.

In both countries, the Communists made the Republican cause their own, through their consistent championing of aid, their absolute opposition to non-

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<sup>18</sup> Howell, *British Social Democracy*, p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Buchanan argues that the British labour movement was divided over Spain by the hostility of working class Catholics to the Spanish Republic. This opposition seems highly regionalised, and was less of an issue in the French labour movement - Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 167-195.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes of 22/2/1937, p. 14 in 634/08 Executive Minutes Nov 1936-May 1941, Cambridge City Labour Party, Cambridgeshire County Record Office.

intervention, their organisation of the International Brigades, and through the substantial material support which the USSR supplied to the Republic. While pro-Communist historians have stressed how campaigns over the Spanish civil war represented the culmination of the party's consistent activism against war and fascism from the early 1930s, this underestimates the extent to which a radical refashioning of party strategy had taken place across the decade.<sup>21</sup> British Communist students were able to take the lead in campus coalitions with other groups over Spain, either within existing Socialist Societies or through university Peace Councils and the national BYPA. In France, and to some extent in Britain, academics such as Langevin and Wallon were important public supporters of Communist initiatives as their independent identities broadened such campaigns "against war and fascism" outside the party ranks.

This patron's role was not confined to Communist sympathisers, but was adopted by a wide variety of university figures. Public patrons of pro-Republican campaigns during the civil war ranged from veterans of the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme (Victor Basch in Paris and Daniel Faucher in Toulouse), supporters of the Liberal Party (Gilbert Murray in Oxford, Francis Cornford in Cambridge and Sir Daniel Stevenson in Glasgow), to Quakers and Christian Pacifists (John Harvey in Leeds and Charles Raven in Cambridge). Importantly, these senior figures divided their patronage amongst a multitude of other professional, humanitarian, educational, and civic causes before the outbreak of the war in Spain. George Weisz has argued that the image of the Third Republic as a 'Republic of Professors, "a period of unparalleled academic influence in social and political life" has been largely derived from the activities of an isolated, unrepresentative Parisian oligarchy.<sup>22</sup> While the small circle of politically engaged academics, such as Langevin, Wallon, Joliot-Curie in Paris or the scientists of CSWAG in Cambridge were unique in their commitment, academics enjoyed a widely recognised position as patrons in national and local politics in both countries.<sup>23</sup>

During the mid-1930s French academics had played an important role as the independent supporters of cross-party coalitions during the development of the Rassemblement Populaire. From the *pronunciamiento* in 1936, new campaigns developed out of these existing coalitions, symbolised by Basch's role as president

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<sup>21</sup> Tony Judt has rightly warned of the "oddities of communist vocabulary" given that so many these histories have largely ignored the changing meaning and contexts of Communist slogans - Judt, *Past Imperfect*, p. 454.

<sup>22</sup> George Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France 1863-1914*, p. 338.

<sup>23</sup> Nathanael Greene, "National and Local: Rural Politics 1932-1936", *French Historical Studies*, 1976, 9, pp. 523 & 519.

of the Rassemblement Populaire's efforts to co-ordinate party-based aid appeals for Republican Spain. Alongside Basch, academics in both countries stood as sponsors for humanitarian aid appeals for Republican Spain, their independent support legitimising the claims that such appeals went beyond matters of party politics. Equally in the debates over non-intervention, the academics who were absolutely opposed to the policy emerged as important advocates in organisations such as the Comité International de Coordination et d'Information pour l'Aide à l'Espagne Républicaine or Haldane's campaign of 1938 over Air Raid Precautions. As patrons in the changing campaigns over the civil war, academics were both heavily involved in party politics and constantly invoking their own distinctive political identity.

### **Perceptions of Republican Spain: The Embodiment of Anti-Fascist Unity**

In both Britain and France, the independent political identity of intellectuals helped to legitimise calls for anti-fascist unity between the parties of the left, symbolised by the electoral campaigns of Paul Rivet in May 1935 and A.D. Lindsay in October 1938. At first sight the two elections were strikingly similar. In both, academics and students emerged at the forefront of heterogeneous coalitions which cut across pre-existing political formations and alignments. Despite their common character, the electoral campaigns led by Rivet and Lindsay developed at different times and in response to very different national dynamics. Both campaigns were largely focused on the same single-issue of anti-fascism, yet from two very different perspectives, one focused on domestic politics and the other concerned with international events. In France, the epithet 'fascist' had been commonly used since the 1920s by both left and right to label their opponents, whereas in Britain it was only after the rise of Nazism in 1933 that it was seen as a threatening international phenomenon.

This contrast explains not only the coalitions which did develop in both countries, but also what other alternatives were ruled out or left unconsidered. The political coalitions that were formed in France during the mid 1930s as a reaction to domestic politics precluded any parallel to the mobilisation over international events which occurred in Britain at the end of the decade. At the Oxford Congress of Socialist students in 1936, it was the French students who had participated in the triumphant Front Populaire coalition who opposed any shift from "unity of action" to "unity of organisation" with the Communists. Importantly, Spanish students

enjoyed a prominent role at the Congress as the international embodiment of anti-fascist unity.

In both Britain and France, the election of the Frente Popular in February 1936 was commonly invoked as a symbol of successful unity on the left, before the military rebellion in Spain five months later dramatically intensified this identification. Throughout the civil war, Republican Spain was seen by its supporters as representing a broad ranging alliance against fascism of liberals and anarchists, Catholics and Communists, progressive Conservatives and Socialists. This image was most strongly promoted by the Communists, especially in Britain where their campaigns for united humanitarian aid for Spain also carried calls for domestic unity of the left. The promotion of broad-reaching coalitions focused on anti-fascist unity and Spain by both the PCF and the CPGB were partly successful attempts to strengthen their own following. This call for an alliance on the left was supported out of different motives by British academics such as Cole and Laski from within the Labour Party and by French socialists such as Basch and Rivet. Cole's desire for a "People's Front", was grounded as much in his desire to radically reform the institutions of the Labour Party as in his perceptions of a general European crisis. Anti-fascist unity had distinctive meanings in Britain and France, which powerfully shaped perceptions of the civil war in Spain on the left in both countries. After 1934, French politics had been transformed by a coalition of the left against the threat of domestic fascism, which looked to Spanish events as a fraternal parallel.<sup>24</sup> For the second half of the 1930s, the campaign for anti-fascist unity in Britain was overwhelmingly focused on international events and opposition to the Chamberlain government's foreign policy.<sup>25</sup>

### **Different Political Repertoires, Different Political Battles**

The different perspectives of anti-fascist unity and of the civil war in Spain, were worked out through nationally-distinct forms of political activity and organisation. This contrast between British and French reactions to Iberian events was best encapsulated in the differing campaigns for humanitarian aid in the two countries. Drawing on his personal experiences, aid campaigns in the two countries were compared by British hispanist, Raymond Carr, who remembered that,

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<sup>24</sup> French activists spoke of the "lessons of Spain" and in the first days of the war called for the purging of reactionary elements in the civil service and army to prevent a similar revolt in France.

<sup>25</sup> Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain 1931-1941*, p. 120.

I had a long debate with A.J.P. Taylor over the degree of support for an active policy to aid Spain, which he maintained was widespread and deep. I came to left-wing politics from France in 1936 and found that support tepid - perhaps if I had lived in Glasgow or South Wales I would have thought differently.<sup>26</sup>

As Carr realises, though there was a fundamental contrast between British and French aid campaigns, there were strong connections between British and French working class communities, embodied in the support for the International Brigades or the fundraising efforts of the trade unions and established parties.

The civil war in Spain was felt as a far more direct and polarised issue in France, due to the intense political climate generated by the domestic crisis of 6 February 1934. British humanitarian aid for Spain was organised not only through the established labour movement, but also through a broad ad hoc coalition of political and non-political groups which coalesced in the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief. The French left's campaigns against the internal fascist menace between 1934 and 1936 militated against any parallel coalition in France, as the rivalry for increasing party membership was carried into the organisation of aid for Spain. Party-based humanitarian appeals in France had a far more politicised content than did the explicitly 'non-political' and 'non-partisan' campaigns in Britain.<sup>27</sup> This national contrast was heightened within the universities of Britain and France, where the campus-based independence and coalitions of British students and academics allowed them to participate in a proliferation of heterogeneous humanitarian appeals. In France, party politics shaped the activities of students and even those of 'independent' academics. It was not until the close of the war that a university-based humanitarian appeal was established in Paris to parallel those of Britain, and even this was distinctive in its recognition by the state. The forms of political organisation and activity accepted within the universities of each country reinforced the differing political content of their humanitarian aid campaigns.

The success of humanitarian aid appeals for Spain within British universities was partly because these were so strongly linked with other relief appeals for refugees from Germany, Austria, China and Czechoslovakia. Concern in Britain for German academic refugees in 1933 was in many ways the forerunner of this mixing

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<sup>26</sup> Raymond Carr, "Labour Pains", *Times Literary Supplement*, 4591, 29/3/1991, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> French campaigns were more politicised in the sense that they were more often explicitly pro-Republican (or in support of particular Spanish groups) and more consciously separate from other efforts of other parties.



of political activity with professional, humanitarian and personal concerns which explained the breadth of support for the Spanish Republic. The acceptance of humanitarian fundraising within British universities encouraged a feeling of continuity between overseas crises which were the subjects of the various appeals. While the content and organisation of humanitarian aid in Britain was less politicised, it did have a significant impact on the debates over non-intervention and the divisions within the Spanish Republic. In France, while these two issues evoked heated debate, the tensions between the aid efforts of the PCF and the SFIO revealed that the increasing hostility between the parties had been aggravated by a more fundamental antagonism as they competed for members and influence. A comparative approach to the campaigns of the two countries, and their various proclaimed political or non-political identities, firmly establishes not only a fundamental difference in the political climate of the two countries, but helps to map the differing political characters of such diversely organised and motivated campaigns.

While humanitarian aid for Spain campaigns were not the same between Britain and France, it is equally misleading to assume that the Spanish civil war evoked the same reaction from the right or from Catholics as it did from the left. It has frequently been argued that the Spanish civil war powerfully reinforced existing political divisions within both Britain and France, with the right and Catholics supporting Franco and the left rallying to the Republic.<sup>28</sup> However, far from there being a fundamental polarisation over the civil war in Britain or France, large elements of the right rejected rather than shared the Spanish obsession of the left. The emphasis on polarisation fails to account for groups such as the Cambridge University Spanish Society who consciously chose to distance themselves from the debate over Spain. The majority of those in universities in both countries remained, if not unconcerned by daily politics, then inactive.<sup>29</sup>

With a different conception of politics from their opponents on the left, Spain was not the same cause for the right. Few British Conservative students shared the activist vision of politics which so marked the Socialist Societies of their universities. In France, the legal dissolution of 1936 had officially denied the students of the extreme right their repertoire of public activism, and there were few direct confrontations with the forces of the Rassemblement Populaire. Differences in

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<sup>28</sup> Watkins, *Britain Divided*, passim.

Robert Graves & Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-end: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939*, 2nd ed., Faber & Faber, 1949, p. 337.

<sup>29</sup> Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, p. 257

political actions was reinforced by diverging political concerns. The war in Spain was on the periphery of Tory foreign policy which was focused on achieving a rapprochement in Central Europe. Equally, the leagues and later the PSF had a largely negative foreign policy, focused on the threat to France of foreign entanglements, particularly those initiated by the left. These initial reactions to the war changed over time, as some British conservative students became more involved in 'non-political' aid campaigns for Spain and more outspoken over the failures of non-intervention. By adopting the activist forms of the left, they often found themselves sharing its political positions, though their dissent on government foreign policy never ruptured their loyalty to the party.

What mattered in determining reactions to the civil war was not so much existing political alignments, but approaches to politics. Eugen Weber has questioned the assumption of a rigid polarisation of left and right in French politics, arguing that these categories were often blurred and subjectively imposed. Instead of ideological polarisation, Weber suggests that,

psychological categories, rough as they are, serve better than our present ones: optimist or pessimist, static or dynamic, tell us more, much more, about the character of a man or group, than right or left.<sup>30</sup>

Weber's approach partly explains why the strongest pro-Nationalist campaigns in France occurred during 1938 when Franco's military success had Occident and others arguing that support for the Nationalists was merely a recognition of the status quo in Spain. Republican and Nationalist supporters were separated by differing conceptions of politics as much as ideology, which explains why there were so few pro-Nationalist campaigns.<sup>31</sup> If the Spanish civil war was a powerful symbol for anti-fascist unity in Britain and France, the war also reveals that anti-fascism exaggerated the international unity of the extreme right as there was no automatic identification by either the British or French right with the Nationalist cause.

## Conclusion

Differences in political repertoires and party politics shaped the political climates of Britain and France which powerfully shaped the reactions of academics and students to the Spanish civil war. Contrasting the two countries highlights the

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<sup>30</sup> Eugen Weber, My France: Politics, Culture, Myth, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> Toynebee, "Journal of a Naive Revolutionary", pp. 148-149.

national contexts in which parties acted, aid and relief campaigns were organised and the war was debated. Though the slogans of these debates were remarkably similar on either side of the Channel, they were translated in particular circumstances. Theodore Zeldin has rightly warned the historian not to merely follow the political labels and slogans which French parties used to mass their troops,

the purpose of these labels is partly to conceal differences, to make common action possible, to rally support... the labels perpetuate distinctions, feuds, enmities whose origin is almost forgotten and whose significance is largely historical.<sup>32</sup>

Political programs and slogans were often compromises seeking to create unity by what they left silent as much as what they said.<sup>33</sup> Slogans such as "Against War and Fascism", "*Aidez l'Espagne*" or "*Ouvrez la frontière*" were intended to appeal to a diverse spread of supporters and their meanings changed over time.

These nuances of political language were perhaps best encapsulated in the debate over non-intervention which assumed different meanings in Britain and France. In the latter, the debate amongst the left focused on whether the policy was a betrayal of the Front Populaire and the possibility of direct military support for the Spanish Republic, while British arguments focused on the Republic's rights at international law to commercial liberty in purchasing arms. In both countries, the absolute opposition to the policy of Communist activists gradually overshadowed the political definitions of Socialists, pacifists and others. It is these other views which have been lost in a historiography which treats the civil war as a international ideological struggle *par excellence*. A recognition of the variety of religious, professional, humanitarian and personal motives provides an understanding of the depth of political commitments and the particular contexts in which they were formulated. As Marc Bloch has argued, history is the science of diversity and movement, and a conscious comparison of academics and students in Britain and France during the 1930s reminds us that reactions to the Spanish civil war were never as unitary, unchanging, or as certain, as the political slogans imply.<sup>34</sup>

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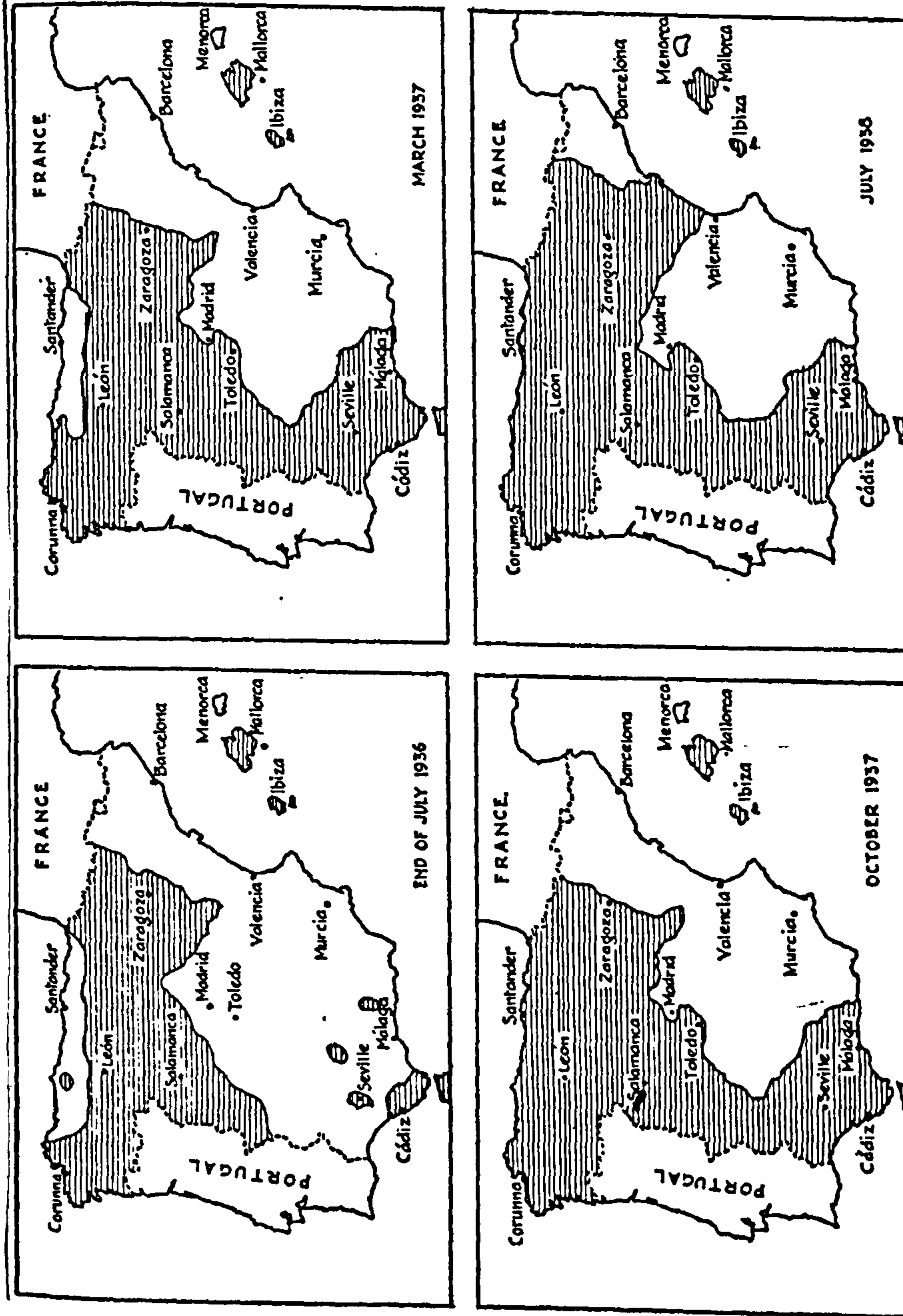
<sup>32</sup> Zeldin, *France 1848-1945, Vol. 1 Ambition, Love & Politics*, p. 385.

<sup>33</sup> Eugen Weber, *My France: Politics, Culture, Myth*, p. 49.

<sup>34</sup> Weber, *Ibid.*, p. 7.

# Appendix 1 Map 1

Divisions of Spain during the War



## Appendix 2

### Academic Appointments

From "The French University System, Report of the AUT Commission of Investigation, 1930", The Universities Review, 3, 1, Oct. 1930, pp. 32-57.

Vice-Chancellor	<i>Recteur</i>
Dean	<i>Doyen</i>
Professor	<i>Professeur</i>
Lecturer	<i>Maître de Conférences</i>
Lecturer	<i>Agrégé</i>
Temporary Lecturer	<i>Chargé de Conférences</i>
Temporary Tutor	<i>Chargé de Cours</i>

### Appendix 3 Aid for Spain (in francs)

LABOUR SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL <sup>1</sup>		International Solidarity Fund		France		France		France	
		Britain							
12/1/37	8,700,000	2,300,000		50,000 (CGT also 5,350,000)					
March 37	16,000,000	2,800,000		6,500,000					
<b>NATIONAL TOTALS<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>Britain</b>		<b>France</b>					
15/1/38		36,250,000		35,500,000 (145 frcs to a pound)					
<b>FRANCE<sup>3</sup></b>		<b>Rassemblement Populaire</b>	<b>CGT</b>	<b>Secours Rouge</b>	<b>PCF</b>	<b>SFIO</b>	<b>LDH</b>	<b>CVIA</b>	<b>CAEE</b>
12/8/1936	816,156	474,227		341,928					
14/8/1936	1,065,376	539,640		485,490					19,795
Aug. 1936	2,315,000	1,600,000			25,000	380,000			65,000
8/9/1936	3,153,990	1,874,165			1,065,376				
18/9/1936	3,988,891	2,4750,365							
24/9/1936	+1,522,319	2,705,862							
1/10/1936	4,717,041	3,087,395			80,150				
6/10/1936	5,020,226	3,349,822							
31/10/1936	6,137,699	4,039,704			741,142				
Jan. 1937	+3,000,000	6,000,000							
9/7/1937	10,577,572	6,673,624			1,655,000	229,208			
15/1/1938	+4,915,147	8,000,000			3,500,000				
									3,422,536

<sup>1</sup> La Voix du Peuple, Jan. 1937, p. 4.;

La Voix du Peuple, March 1937, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Report of 15/1/1938, CICAER, F7 14741, Archives Nationales

<sup>3</sup> Totals from L'Humanité, Le Midi Socialiste, Le Populaire and BA 1665, Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris.

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 CP/ORG/MISC/4/3 , File "Anti-War Congress"  
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PR 3/2/339, Proctors Records (Labour Club)  
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