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Southern Ireland and the Spanish Civil War

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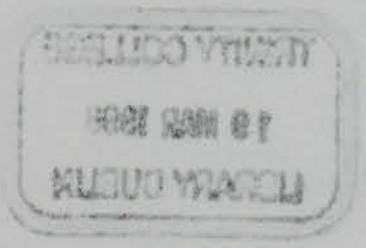
Southern Ireland and the Spanish Civil War

Fearghal McGarry



Submitted for the degree of doctorate in philosophy to the
Department of Modern History, Trinity College
1997

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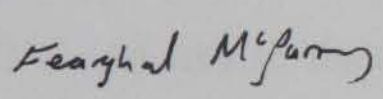

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Abstract

The subject of this thesis is the response of the Irish Free State[1] to the Spanish Civil War. The level of interest in this subject, both historical and of a more popular nature, particularly in recent years, has been considerable. The story of the military intervention of just under one thousand Irishmen to fight on opposing sides has been the source of much curiosity, controversy and also, in regards to the Irish Brigade, some humour and derision. The study of the political extremism in the Irish Free State (of the far-left, far-right and republicanism) which motivated this exodus is also an area of increasing historiographical interest but has more often been considered in an Irish context rather than as a part of the ideological struggle which gripped Europe in the 1930s. The partisan role of the Catholic Church and the more neutral response of the Irish government have received brief analyses in many texts of twentieth century Irish history. One important aspect of Ireland's response to the Spanish Civil War which has largely evaded historical scrutiny is the reaction of what might be termed the clerical right – an amorphous coalition of Catholic intellectuals, corporatist activists and fascist sympathisers. The purpose of this thesis is to examine all of these areas of interest not, as previously has been the case, in isolation but rather by focusing on the interaction of these forces. It is hoped this will enable a more comprehensive understanding not only of Irish responses to European events in this period but also of political culture in the Irish Free State.

The first section of this thesis which considers the participation of the military combatants – that group of individuals most committed to Spain – is the natural starting point for a study of Irish responses to the war. Chapter one examines the experiences of the Irish Brigade, the force of seven hundred volunteers led by General Eoin O'Duffy, which served in the Nationalist army for the first six months of 1937. The Irish Brigade has generally been depicted as a colourful epilogue to the history of the Blueshirt movement which, at its peak, challenged Fianna Fáil power in 1933-34. This thesis touches on the Blueshirt phenomenon only incidentally and considers General O'Duffy in the context of his later political career as head of the National Corporate Party. The traditional motives ascribed to O'Duffy's intervention in Spain, anti-communism and zealous Catholicism, are questioned. The motives of the rank and file of Brigade volunteers, who are invariably (and misleadingly) described as Blueshirts, are also examined without the presumption that they were simply following the example set by their charismatic commander-in-chief. The

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[1] For reasons of brevity, the term Irish Free State is used to denote Southern Ireland from 1936-39 throughout this thesis rather than also using the terms Eire or Ireland which were adopted in the 1937 Constitution.

experiences of the Irish Brigade in Nationalist Spain and the reasons for their disillusionment are also considered. Finally, the much derided military performance of the Irish Brigade is assessed in light of recently released Nationalist military documents.

Like the previous section, chapter two focuses less on the military history of Irish involvement in the International Brigades than the experiences of the Irishmen in Spain. The accepted motives offered for fighting in Spain (to protect democracy and oppose fascism) are questioned. The social and political backgrounds of the volunteers, and the ideologies within the Irish left, are examined to construct a more complex explanation for their participation. To date, the history of Irish involvement in the International Brigades has generally been written by veterans of the war and left-wing historians of the labour movement. The difference between uncovering a left-wing tradition and constructing one is slender. Most Irish accounts of the International Brigades depict a militarily and (broadly) politically unified body of men, 'the Connolly Column', which fought as part of an equally disciplined Republican army. For a war so consumed by controversy, these accounts are surprisingly devoid of the variety of perspectives associated with Spain. They contrast with recent histories of other nationalities involvement in the war which describe the political conflicts, ideological tensions and military failures, as well as successes, one might expect in the first international army of revolutionaries.[2] Using interviews and recently released sources from the Department of External Affairs, this chapter considers the controversial aspects of the Spanish Civil War which, although by now widely known, are rarely touched on in most Irish accounts. How did the bitter infighting between anarchists, Trotskyists and communists affect the Irishmen? Did the communists preside over a reign of terror in the International Brigades? How did the predominantly Catholic volunteers react to the anti-clericalism of Republican Spain?

The second part of this thesis considers domestic reactions to the Spanish Civil War. The Irish volunteers who fought in Spain represented a particularly extreme section of political opinion but to what extent was their commitment to one side shared by people in Ireland? Chapter three considers the responses of republicans and the Irish left. Traditional republican perceptions of Spanish republicanism are analysed. Did non left-wing republicans sympathise with Spanish republicanism? The frequently asserted relationship between Irish republicanism and anti-fascism (or the cause of oppressed nations) is examined. In particular, the attitudes of Republican Congress and the Communist Party in Ireland towards the Spanish Civil War and Popular Front ideology are considered. Why was Spain considered so important that both organisations sacrificed their best leaders there? This chapter focuses not just on policy or political theory, as has been the trend in recent works, but also on the practical activities of pro-Republican supporters, whether

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2 One recent example is Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Stanford, 1994) which focuses on the American units in the International Brigades among which many Irish volunteers fought.

disseminating propaganda or organising aid for the Spanish government, against the background of popular anti-communism. Recently released Special Branch files add a new dimension to the activities of the Irish left in this period.

Chapter four details one of the lesser known aspects of Irish responses to the war – the remarkably popular, albeit short-lived, manifestation of pro-Franco public opinion known as the Irish Christian Front. The Christian Front has been alternately described as a revival of the Blueshirts, a fascist organisation, a clerical party, and a non-political Catholic Action movement. This chapter assesses the variety of ideological strains present within the organisation. Was the Christian Front the product of a clerical and repressive Irish Free State or an expression of Irish sympathy for Spanish Catholicism? Particular emphasis is placed on the role of Patrick Belton, who dominated not just the Christian Front but Ireland's pro-Franco lobby for the first year of the civil war.

Chapter five analyses the response of the Catholic Church to the war in Spain. It may appear excessive to devote an entire chapter of a study of Irish responses to a foreign war to the role of the Catholic Church; yet the Spanish Civil War, for the majority of the Irish population, was more than any other recent foreign policy issue fundamentally a religious issue. The pro-Franco position adopted by the Church is well-known. This thesis does not challenge that interpretation but analyses the reasons for its trenchant stance and assesses Irish clerical reactions in the context of wider ecclesiastical responses in Spain and the Vatican. Clerical attitudes towards Spain are also considered in the context of the Catholic Church's response to the rise of communism, fascism and authoritarianism in Europe during the 1930s. The variety of views within the Catholic Church on Spain is analysed but not, as is often done, by focusing on scholarly periodicals such as *Studies*. Instead, lesser known, cheaper and generally non-intellectual clerical periodicals which were more widely read by Catholic families are considered. Most importantly, the issues raised by the Spanish Civil War are considered in the context of their domestic significance to the Irish Church. To what extent were the forces aligned against Nationalist Spain perceived as threats to the Irish Catholic Church? Controversial aspects of clerical support for Spain, such as financial and military aid and the application of pressure on the government, are also considered.

Chapter six briefly considers the response of County Limerick to the Spanish Civil War. The chapter has two principal functions. First, to examine how the issues raised in the first five chapters manifested themselves in a local environment. This permits the most viable method of observing the interaction between groups which responded to Spain. How did Limerick react to the news of clerical atrocities? What sort of people fought in Spain? How did local politicians respond to the war? What tensions between local groups surfaced over Spain? How did the local clergy influence opinion? In some respects, such a study presents

a more 'realistic' or 'accurate' picture of Ireland's response to Spain than the other chapters which analyse the national, and invariably leadership, responses of various organisations to Spain.

The third and final part of this thesis analyses party political and governmental responses to Spain. The first section of chapter seven details the opinions of nationalists, unionists and socialists in Northern Ireland. Although the subject of this thesis is the response of the Irish Free State to Spain, the thirty-two county compositions of the Irish Brigade, International Brigades, Christian Front and Catholic Church demand that political reactions in Northern Ireland are briefly surveyed.[3] The primary focus of this chapter is the response of Labour, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Like the Catholic Church, the position adopted by the Labour Party (which was widely criticised for not supporting the Spanish Republic) is well-known. The lesser known reactions of the labour movement have been examined so that the attitudes of the party and trade-union leadership can be considered alongside those of rank-and-file workers and labour activists. This thesis reconsiders the traditional explanations offered for Labour's lack of support for the Spanish government.

Fine Gael's pro-Franco policy is considered in the context of the party's response to European events, particularly the Abyssinian war and the rise of totalitarianism, during this period. Fine Gael's use of rhetoric and religious arguments are examined for explanations of its pro-Francoism. The central focus of the final section of chapter seven analyses the tensions between the neutral policy of the Fianna Fáil leadership and the pro-Franco and, to a much lesser extent, pro-Republican views of its membership. An analysis of opinion within local bodies is used to examine the strength of opposition to de Valera's foreign policy within Fianna Fáil and rank-and-file responses to criticism of their party's position on Spain. De Valera's handling of the sensitive issues raised by the war – the quiet discontent in his own party and the more rumbustious opposition in the Dáil – are also considered.

The final chapter analyses Irish foreign policy. The Irish government's contacts with both the Republican government and the Nationalist authorities are detailed. With the benefit of reports from Republican and Nationalist diplomats, recently available following the post-Civil War liberalisation of access to state records, the views of the Spanish antagonists on Irish policy are also considered. The role of Leopold Kerney, a diplomat who later aroused controversy during the Second World War, and the extent to which his political sympathies influenced Irish policy, is closely examined. The study of governmental responses to Spain also involves wider issues than bilateral relations. The influence of British foreign policy, membership of the Commonwealth, and the Vatican on Irish policy are central themes

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[3] Northern Ireland's response to Spain was not included in the subject matter of this thesis because Northern responses (in large part deriving from the North's different religious and political composition) demanded a more comprehensive and longer analysis than could be included in this study.

throughout. De Valera's Spanish policy is also considered in the context of the development of Irish neutrality and increasing European instability – from the failure of Abyssinian sanctions (1936) to the Second World War (1939) – which occurred during this period.

Finally, a note on the terms used throughout this thesis. The terms Republicanism and Republicans refer to Spanish politics unless otherwise stated. References to republicanism and republicans are used to describe Irish republicanism. Nationalists (higher case) denotes the Spanish rebels; nationalists denotes Irish nationalists (in this thesis, most often in Northern Ireland). Labour (higher case) refers to the political party; labour to the trade union movement. The use of Ireland and Irish government refers only to the twenty-six counties except where the entire country is clearly being discussed. For similar reasons of brevity, the term Church denotes the Catholic Church.

Part I: SPAIN

1. The Irish Brigade

General O'Duffy's[1] political career between his resignation from Fine Gael and decision to lead an Irish Brigade to Spain has received little attention.[2] This is hardly surprising given O'Duffy's involvement in the marginal and secretive fringes of far-right politics. The Irish Brigade's participation in the Spanish Civil War is usually considered as a well-meaning if risible epilogue to the general's brief career as leader of the opposition. However, the history of O'Duffy's National Corporate Party, illuminated by the recent release of files from the Department of Justice, provides an interesting insight into the development of Irish fascism and the origins of the Irish Brigade. This chapter also considers the motives and experiences of the hundreds of volunteers who served in the Irish Brigade – many of whom shared few of the political objectives of their leader.

In September 1934 the Blueshirt movement was thrown into disarray when O'Duffy insisted that his sudden resignation applied to his presidency of Fine Gael rather than his leadership of the League of Youth.[3] Ned Cronin,[4] appointed successor to O'Duffy as director general of the League by the executive committee of Fine Gael, responded by suspending prominent supporters of O'Duffy within the organisation. Most senior Blueshirts sided with Cronin against O'Duffy as did almost all of the more constitutional Cumann na nGaedheal/Centre Party sections of Fine Gael. By late 1934 the controversy receded as it became apparent that O'Duffy had failed to retain the loyalty of the vast majority of Blueshirt activists.[5] There

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[1] Eoin O'Duffy (1892-1944): b. Co. Monaghan; county surveyor/auctioneer; secretary, GAA Ulster Council; director of organisation, IRA; Monaghan TD, 1921-2; chief of staff, National army, 1922; Garda Commissioner, 1922-33; leader, Army Comrades Association, 1933; president, Fine Gael, 1933-4; NCP leader, 1935-6.

[2] Two recent exceptions are Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe 1919-1989* (Dublin, 1990) and R.A. Stradling, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War' in Paul Preston and Ann Mackenzie (ed.), *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain* (Edinburgh, 1997).

[3] In *Why I resigned from Fine Gael* (Dublin, 1934) O'Duffy claimed that "the calculated obstruction practised by Cumann na nGaedheal within the merger made it necessary for me to resign from the Presidency of Fine Gael in order to assert that autonomy [of the League of Youth]". O'Duffy's resignation was to a large extent forced by the increasing section of the Fine Gael leadership worried about the general's fascist tendencies, his unsuitability for politics and, probably most importantly, Fine Gael's lack of success under his leadership.

[4] Edmund Cronin: landowner and farmer, Charleville, Co. Cork; founder Army Comrades Association (ACA), 1932; stepped aside for O'Duffy to become leader, 1933; Fine Gael vice president, 1933; regained leadership of Blueshirts, 1934; expelled from Fine Gael in October 1936; attempted to organise a rival brigade to Spain, November 1936; retired from politics.

[5] *United Ireland* (27 October 1934) estimated that O'Duffy would attract, at most, ten per cent of the League of Youth. According to the Blueshirt membership figures (August 1934) this would still have totalled a respectable 4,800 activists (P24/67/1/B, Ernest Blythe papers, UCD Archives). Mike Cronin states that O'Duffy's new party drew just eighty members from the League but this figure is too low given the attendance of three hundred and fifty delegates at O'Duffy's National Corporate Party conference in 1935 (Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts in Ireland*, (Oxford D.Phil, 1993) p.138).

were now two organisations claiming to be the legitimate League of Youth. Many Blueshirts preferred to leave the movement rather than choose sides.[6]

Relieved of his responsibilities as leader of the opposition, O'Duffy became increasingly involved in international fascism. In December 1934 he attended the Nazi-sponsored International Action of Nationalisms conference in Zurich and the Italian-controlled *Comitati d'azione per l'Universalità di Roma* at Montreaux.[7] The latter organisation appointed O'Duffy to the secretariat of the Fascist International – a co-ordinating committee for fascist propaganda.[8] The following month he visited Rome where he met Mussolini and attended a meeting, organised by the right-wing Catholic *Italia e fede* which established the Centre for Corporative Studies.[9] During 1935 O'Duffy made several other similar trips to Europe strengthening his ties with international fascism.

Special Branch reports reveal that O'Duffy's section of the League of Youth adopted a radical change of tactics during 1935. In March 1935 O'Duffy continued to display the traditional Blueshirt hostility towards republicans. He belligerently told a group of his supporters in Bandon "we have as much guns as the I.R.A."[10] However, only two months later, there were indications that O'Duffy was courting republican support. In May, he announced that his League of Youth was considering a new constitution based on the 1916 Proclamation and instructed his supporters not to inform on republicans to the gardaí.[11] When O'Duffy visited Cashel the gardaí reported that two Blueshirts had visited a local republican to set up a meeting with the IRA:

"General O'Duffy is now most anxious to draw as many as possible of the extreme Republican element into the new Organisation, and the rank and file of his supporters are instructed to cultivate the utmost friendliness with the I.R.A."

The author of the report added, "it can safely be assumed that this new pose will not have a very long life" – a supposition based on the legacy of bitterness which divided Blueshirts and republicans.[12] The IRA in Cashel, at any rate, declined to meet O'Duffy.

During the same period O'Duffy initiated another unlikely initiative. In May 1935 his newspaper, *The Blueshirt*, announced the formation of the 32 Club in Northern Ireland.[13] The 32 Club had many of the features typical of O'Duffy's idiosyncratic political style – the avowal of non-political intentions, the attempt to link corporatism with Gaelic medieval

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6 Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin, 1987) p.183.
7 Michael A. Ledeen, *Universal Fascism*, (New York, 1972) pp.113-5. See also D/Jus B1/35, *Irish Independent*, 7 January 1935.
8 Michael A. Ledeen (1972) p.122.
9 *Ibid*, p.128.
10 D/Jus D32/36, Supt., Bandon, to Chief Supt., Cork, 17 March 1935.
11 D/Jus B9/35, Supt., Cahir, to Chief Supt., Thurles, 1 May 1935.
12 D/Jus B9/35, Supt., Cahir, to Chief Supt., Thurles, 1 May 1935. The report also noted that Easter lilies were worn at the League dance at Carrick-on-Suir.
13 *The Blueshirt*, Vol. 1, No. 22, 1 May 1935.

guilds and the planning of the most minor organisational details. By O'Duffy's anglophobe standards, however, the 32 Club was tempered by an uncharacteristically conciliatory policy on Northern Ireland.

According to the article the 32 Club aimed to cultivate cross-border relations with a view to the voluntary reunification of Ireland through "the reinstitution of an independent Irish Monarchy linked by dynastic ties to the British Commonwealth of Nations". By "giving a new emphasis to our millennial culture and historic traditions" the organisation would "satisfy the dual aspirations of humanity for an arbitral paternal authority and democratic social reforms". Each branch organiser would be known as a pioneer and entitled to wear a silver badge provided by the organisation. The discussion of "party politics" would be "rigidly discouraged". The most curious detail was the instruction that, at each meeting:

"a chair shall be left vacant in a prominent position reserved for the personage who is to give embodiment to the idea of National unity".[14]

It seems likely that O'Duffy's ambitions had grown from dictatorial to monarchic.

The 32 Club was an attempt by O'Duffy to forge an alliance with the Ulster Fascists, one of Northern Ireland's several tiny fascist organisations. The Ulster Fascists – who claimed "no connection with British Fascists Limited of Kilkeel fame"[15] – were led by Job Stott, director of the Ulster Centre of Fascist Studies. Stott's organisation claimed to have close ties with the British Union of Fascists.[16] Interestingly, Stott's majority section of the Ulster Fascists had split the year before in opposition to co-operation with the Blueshirts.[17] In April, a delegation of O'Duffy's Blueshirts led by Captain The O'Donovan met Stott and other Ulster Fascists at the Grand Central Hotel in Belfast. The negotiations foundered and Stott's motion to establish a branch of the 32 Club was defeated by two Blueshirts, Brendan Kielty[18] and Jack Hewitt. Another three delegates abstained. The reasons for the failure of what was probably Ireland's only cross-border fascist initiative are not clear but RUC Special Branch reports indicate a lack of planning and considerable incompetence:

"From what can be ascertained the meeting resolved itself into a huge farce, no one apparently taking the proceedings seriously. McKeaveney [an Ulster Fascist] is described as a "mental case" and The O'Donovan may be described as falling within the same category. No attempts have been made to hold further meetings".[19]

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14 *Ibid.*

15 Ulster Centre of Fascist Studies, *A Brief Introduction to Fascism in Ulster* (Pamphlet, n.d.).

16 *Ibid.*

17 James Loughlin, 'Northern Ireland and British Fascism in the inter-war years', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 116.

18 Brendan Kielty, a chemist's assistant from Plumbridge, Co. Tyrone and former engineer with the IRA, served in O'Duffy's Irish Brigade in Spain.

19 Inspector General's Office, RUC to secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, 12 June 1935, Home Affairs (HA) 32/1/615, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

Although O'Duffy's attempts to forge alliances with the IRA and Ulster Fascists appear ill-conceived there was some logic to the initiatives. The gulf between the Blueshirts and the IRA was not as wide as their mutual animosity suggested. Much of the Blueshirt leadership, in contrast to Fine Gael, was fervently nationalistic and irredentist. Their support for Cumann na nGaedheal and the merger with Fine Gael resulted from their allegiance to Michael Collins during the Treaty split and a virulent enmity towards Eamon de Valera rather than any conviction in Cumann na nGaedheal policies. Many Blueshirts disapproved of the moderate nationalism of Cumann na nGaedheal/Fine Gael. O'Duffy's militant nationalism was a significant factor leading to his resignation from Fine Gael.[20]

Colonel P.J. Coughlan's[21] autobiographical account of the Blueshirts in Cork –*The Truth, The Story of the Blueshirts* – illustrates this extreme nationalism. Coughlan, like O'Duffy, was deeply scornful of the moderate section of Fine Gael personified by James Dillon and Frank MacDermot - "who never lost even an hour's sleep for the freedom of this country".[22] Coughlan stated that he sided with Collins because of de Valera's "trickery" during the Treaty negotiations. But although he emphatically rejected the perfidy of Fianna Fáil, Coughlan opposed the 1930s IRA only because of their ineffectual idealism. In a revealing passage, written in 1934 during the height of the Blueshirt conflict with the IRA, Coughlan declared:

"I say here straight to you if I had only my choice of two stands to take up tomorrow in the Public Life of this country, well - I'd stand by [Tom] Barry and [Sean] Buckley, because I'd be a hypocrite to my own principle if I stood with de Valera, and yet I know Barry could not get me anywhere."[23]

Added to this nationalistic affinity, the departure of the left-wing membership of the IRA to form Republican Congress in 1934 diminished the ideological differences between the IRA and O'Duffy's Blueshirts – as was later demonstrated by the IRA's pro-Nazi sympathies during World War II. Another factor in favour of some form of coalition was de Valera's application of coercion against both organisations. By 1935 the Blueshirts were largely a vanquished force and de Valera was effectively targeting the state's public safety powers against the IRA.

The alliance between O'Duffy's irredentist Blueshirts and the Ulster Fascists ("the most British Organisation in the Empire"[24]) was also not as unlikely as might appear. The latter's assertion that the "The Red Hand of Ulster is the Grasping Hand of Communism and the

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20 Maurice Manning (1987) pp.158-160.

21 P.J. Coughlan: ex-National Army officer; leading ACA/Blueshirt activist in the Cork area; remained loyal to O'Duffy after Fine Gael split; appointed deputy director-general of O'Duffy's League of Youth/NCP; organised recruitment of Irish Brigade volunteers in Cork.

22 P.J. Coughlan, *The Truth, The Story of the Blueshirts* (Skibbereen, 1934) p.15.

23 *Ibid*, p.26. Tom Barry and Seán Buckley were IRA leaders in Cork.

24 Ulster Centre of Fascist Studies, *A Brief Introduction to Fascism in Ulster* (Pamphlet, n.d.)

Grabbing Fist of Party Government"[25] indicates that they shared O'Duffy's anti-unionist sentiments and proclivity to invent communist threats. More significantly, the Ulster Fascists declared:

"The BLUESHIRT Movement in the Free State is to a great extent FASCIST minded. From a FASCIST viewpoint IT'S ONLY HOPE for the SALVATION OF IRELAND is to remain WITHIN THE EMPIRE . . . A DOMINION OF IRELAND within the British Empire of FASCIST NATIONS would receive our full support".[26]

In this context O'Duffy's decision to manoeuvre the Blueshirts into a broader coalition of anti-Free State forces should not be dismissed as ridiculous. However, O'Duffy's resounding lack of success in implementing this strategy suggests that his ambitions outweighed his political competence. O'Duffy's impaired political skills partly explain his mixed fortunes in Ireland and Spain during this period.

O'Duffy followed these attempts to realign his declining section of the League of Youth with the establishment of a new political organisation. During late 1934 and early 1935 it had been rumoured that O'Duffy was planning a new corporate farmers political party with Patrick Belton.[27] However, O'Duffy's National Corporate Party (NCP), formed without the support of Belton, did not appear until June 1935.[28] At the inaugural convention O'Duffy outlined the objectives of his new party; the abolition of party politics, the establishment of a thirty-two county corporate state and the protection of liberties against communism, capitalism and dictatorship.[29] Three hundred and fifty delegates attended the meeting which lacked the dynamism previously characteristic of the Blueshirt movement. The meeting was devoted to recriminations over the Blueshirt split and lengthy procedural wrangling between O'Duffy and two members of his executive committee. Special Branch felt there was "little to fear from this Movement".[30]

Events during the rest of the year supported this conclusion. O'Duffy made little attempt to establish branches or attract publicity.[31] This may have been due to his involvement with European fascism or, more likely, a reflection of the lack of Irish support for fascism. The opposition of Cronin's Blueshirts was also important. O'Duffy's attempts to set up a branch in Roscarbery, Co. Cork, failed when the meeting was broken up by pro-Cronin Blueshirts.[32] At least two other meetings in the Cork area were disrupted in this period. By

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25 *Ibid*, p.1.
26 *Ibid*, p.13.
27 *Irish Times*, 14 September, 19 November 1934; *Irish Press*, 4 February 1935. See the newspaper cuttings in D/Jus B35/34, D/Jus B1/35.
28 Belton launched the National Agricultural Association, a development of the Cork Annuitants' Defence Association, in January 1935.
29 Maurice Manning (1987) p.199.
30 Special Branch report, 8 June 1935, D/Jus B23/35.
31 Maurice Manning (1987) p.200.
32 Report of Chief Supt.s Office, Cork, 29 October 1935, D/Jus B9/35.

late 1935 the gardaí noted that O'Duffy's support in the important Blueshirt region of west Cork – which had equalled Cronin's following the split – was now far weaker.[33]

By the summer of 1935 it was evident that O'Duffy's new party was in trouble. Financial difficulties compelled O'Duffy to cease publication of the party newspaper, *The Nation*, in August and Thomas Gunning[34] resigned as full-time general secretary.[35] But as the NCP slipped further into obscurity O'Duffy's plans grew more ambitious. He appeared unable to appreciate the marginal position of his party. In the next general election the NCP executive expected to "secure one seat in each of the 20 constituencies, two seats in one constituency, and no seat in 13 constituencies".[36] O'Duffy, moreover, believed "the estimate was not an optimistic one" and continued to consider ambitious policies to be enacted when his party gained an over-all majority:

"He is now apparently also going to dabble in finance reform and proposes to overhaul the Banking system and introduce the National Credit System as soon as the political parties as presently understood are replaced by Teachtaí elected on the vocational basis".[37]

Significantly, the only burst of activity within the NCP occurred following the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. O'Duffy was extremely critical of the government's support for League of Nations sanctions against Italy. In September he announced that "several Blueshirts have volunteered for service, not for Italy or against Abyssinia, but for the principles of the Corporate system".[38] An internal party bulletin stated that "hundreds" of Blueshirts had volunteered for Italy.[39] However, two months later the NCP executive committee rejected the proposal declaring that Italy needed moral rather than military support.[40]

The NCP continued to decline during 1936. In March the party adopted a new uniform of green shirts, green ties, and "1916 Volunteer" hats.[41] O'Duffy defensively declared:

"Blue is not our national colour no more than yellow or red. All over the world green is, and ever shall be recognised as the national colour of the Emerald Isle."[42]

However, the change of shirts symbolised a belated acceptance that the NCP had failed to gain control of the Blueshirt movement.

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33 *Ibid.*

34 Thomas Gunning: studied for priesthood in Freiburg; left the seminary and worked as a journalist; briefly edited Catholic *Standard*; O'Duffy's personal secretary, 1933-7; remained in Spain as journalist and adviser to Nationalists, 1936-9; worked for Ministry of Propaganda, Berlin (writing broadcasts for William Joyce), 1939-40; died of TB in Breslau, Germany, June 1940.

35 NCP Circular, 7 August 1935, *Ibid.*

36 NCP Bulletin No. 5, December 1935, *Ibid.*

37 Chief Supt., Dublin to Dept. of Justice, 17 December 1935, D/Jus. B9/35.

38 *Irish Press*, 9 September 1935, D/Jus B1/35.

39 NCP Bulletin No. 5, December 1935, D/Jus B9/35.

40 O'Duffy to John McCarthy, 29 October 1935, D/Jus B9/35.

41 *Irish Press*, 4 March 1936.

42 NCP Circular No. 14, November 1935, D/Jus. B9/35.

In June 1936 O'Duffy visited the small number of towns where NCP branches still existed to generate enthusiasm for the forthcoming party convention. A meeting in the formerly strong Roscarbery area attracted only six members. A garda report described it as "a tame affair, devoid of any interest".[43] The second and final NCP convention was held on July 18, the first day of the Spanish Civil War. Special Branch reports present a picture of a party close to collapse. The attendance had dropped to two hundred and fifty delegates and the mood was subdued:

"Nothing of a revolutionary nature was proposed or discussed at the Convention. . . The proceedings did not occasion much public interest . . . Even the presence of the delegates attired in green shirts did not excite attention on the part of the few onlookers".[44]

However, the air of apathy surrounding the National Corporate Party was soon to change.

Six weeks later, O'Duffy was contacted by Ramirez de Arellano, a Carlist aristocrat based in London, who urged him to raise a volunteer militia to fight with the Nationalists – "What a glorious example Ireland could give the whole of Christendom!"[45] O'Duffy had been recommended by Cardinal MacRory who described him to Arellano as "a chivalrous, courageous, upright man and a good Catholic, and above all a fine organiser".[46] O'Duffy raised the idea in a letter to the *Irish Independent* which graphically stressed the religious aspects of the war:

"In Madrid priests are battered to death on the altars, and their heads stuck on the railings outside the churches by howling mobs of women and youths armed by the Government".[47]

His proposal met with widespread enthusiasm.[48] On August 15, the Cashel branch of the NCP opened a recruiting office. The Catholic Young Men's Society in Listowel followed several days later.[49] Other organisations such as the Irish Town Tenants' Association called on young single men to join the Brigade.[50] Eamon Horan told Tralee Urban District Council that he would lead the Kerry contingent.[51] The following week, O'Duffy claimed to have received two thousand applications and opened a fund to support his new military

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43 Report of Supt.s Office, Clonakilty, 23 June 1936, *Ibid.*
44 Special Branch report, 20 July 1936, *Ibid.*
45 Eoin O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain* (Dublin 1938) p.12.
46 Capt. Liam Walsh, *General O'Duffy – His Life and Battle*, p.205 (MS, n.d.) National Library of Ireland (NLI).
47 *Irish Independent*, 10 August 1936.
48 Letters to the editor, *Irish Independent*, 11-13 August 1936.
49 *Irish Independent*, 15, 18 August 1936.
50 *Ibid*, 22 August 1936.
51 *Ibid*, 15 August 1936.

organisation – the Irish Crusade Against Communism.[52] By the end of the month the figure had risen to seven thousand applications.[53]

Why did O'Duffy agree to organise the Irish Brigade? In his autobiographical account, *Crusade in Spain*, he offers several motives – the historic links between Ireland and Spain, the need to oppose communism and, most importantly, to defend the Catholic Church.[54] The Irish Crusade Against Communism – the name itself embodied the latter two motives – repeatedly emphasised these reasons. On the eve of his departure to Spain O'Duffy declared:

"Our motive is simple, our object is definite. The motive is born of Christianity, and the object is defence of Christianity; both are deep-rooted in the traditions of our race and inseparable from any true conception of the Irish nature".

He emphasised the non-political nature of both the Brigade and the Spanish Nationalists:

"I have ceased all social and political manifestations, and have concentrated on one thing alone – on helping the cause of Christian Spain . . . the motive of the Patriot leaders in Spain is genuinely Christian, and their fundamental object the defence of Christian civilization".[55]

These motives have generally been accepted by historians. Maurice Manning, for example, stated:

"The Spanish situation was, from the outset, calculated to appeal to O'Duffy's enthusiasm and to his imagination. Here before his very eyes the conflict between the forces of Christianity and Communism was being fought out in bloody battle for possession of one of the oldest countries of Europe – a country moreover bound to Ireland by many strong ties of history and religion".[56]

Dr. R.A. Stradling, the most recent historian to consider the Irish Brigade, also concluded:

"For O'Duffy Irish Catholicism was inevitably implicated in the fate of Spain; he saw his mission as purely and simply, a Crusade against Communism"

and later:

". . . it seems clear that O'Duffy's immediate purpose was twofold; to help protect fellow-Catholics, both clerical and lay, from murderous persecution; and to play a part in stemming the 'Red Tide' threatening to inundate Christian civilization".[57]

Although anti-communism and militant Catholicism were clearly important motives it is doubtful that O'Duffy's participation was based solely on these terms. O'Duffy's other attempts to intervene on the side of fascist powers suggest that his participation in the Spanish Civil War should be viewed in the context of his commitment to international

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52 *Ibid*, 24 August 1936.
53 *Ibid*, 27 August 1936. The figures were probably exaggerated by O'Duffy. In 1933 O'Duffy claimed Blueshirt membership numbered one hundred thousand when the real figure was closer to forty thousand (Mike Cronin (1993), p.57).
54 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) p.1, 40.
55 *Irish Independent*, 21 November 1936.
56 Maurice Manning (1987) p.200.
57 R.A. Stradling, 'Franco's Irish Volunteers', *History Today*, March 1995, p.44.

fascism as well as his chosen image of a Christian crusader. The fact that there was no question of either a communist threat or a danger to the Catholic Church in Abyssinia did not deter O'Duffy from proposing to lead a Brigade there. Similarly, the plight of the Catholic Church was not a motive – although anti-communism obviously was – to offer the anti-clerical Nazis a 'Green Legion' to fight in Spain.[58] Political considerations were central to his decision to fight in Spain. Several trends were apparent in O'Duffy's post-Fine Gael political career; an increasing participation in international fascism, a shift right towards more extreme domestic political views and a corresponding decline in his political influence in Ireland. His decision to fight in Spain was a logical outcome of these trends.

O'Duffy's decision to organise an Irish Brigade can also be seen as a response to his marginal position in Irish politics. Both Spanish officials and his own officers testify that O'Duffy used the presence of the Brigade in Spain for propaganda purposes in Ireland. His involvement in the Spanish Civil War halted what appeared to be an irreversible decline into political obscurity. O'Duffy, if only temporarily, regained his status as the dynamic leader of the Blueshirt movement. He also succeeded in recruiting substantial numbers of Ned Cronin's Blueshirts. Cronin's concern that his old rival was again overshadowing him is evident both from his early remark that the Brigade "has as much prospect of reaching Saragossa as it has of reaching the moon" and his later unsuccessful attempts to organise his own brigade.[59]

O'Duffy's simplistic depiction of the Spanish Civil War as "the first massed attack of International Communism against Christianity"[60] appears incongruous given his knowledge of Spain's right-wing movements.[61] O'Duffy knew Franco was not the non-political crusader he described to the *Independent* – indeed his later summary of Franco's political plans bear a striking resemblance to his own:

"Franco is planning for a new State, based on Spanish tradition, adapted to his country's peculiar needs, designed and governed on the teachings of the Papal Encyclicals on social justice. He . . . may be influenced by the system in . . . Portugal, which is now accepted as the nearest approach to the ideal form of vocational, as against the political party system of representative government".[62]

O'Duffy belonged to the "reactionary, ultramontanist element of the [Fascist] International"[63] and perceived Franco – who also styled himself as a Catholic crusader against communism and advocate of corporatism – as an ideological ally.

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58 Robert Fisk, *In Time of War* (London, 1983); John P. Duggan, *Neutral Ireland and the Third Reich* (Dublin, 1989) p.199.
59 *Irish Independent*, 22 August, 26 November 1936.
60 *Irish Independent*, 21 November 1936.
61 See Eoin O'Duffy (1938) pp.217-8 for his account of Spanish right-wing political figures.
62 *Ibid*, p.227. O'Duffy's description of Franco's economic policy – "It brings the wheel round full cycle to the medieval ages of faith, the fraternal co-operation of the Guilds, the harmony between capital and labour, and Christian morality" – reflected his ideas more than Franco's.
63 Michael A. Ledeen (1972) p.128.

O'Duffy's attempts to render the Irish Brigade non-political were superficial. His assertion that he suspended the NCP to preserve the "non-political character of the Brigade" is contradicted by his original statement (and that of other NCP members) that the party – struggling to exist even before the war – was disbanded due to "the volume of work connected with the Crusade against Communism".[64] His concern about the political appearance of the Brigade did not prevent him from purchasing one thousand green shirts (the NCP uniform) for his volunteers.[65] Indeed, members of O'Duffy's own party believed he was motivated by fascism. One Dublin NCP member complained:

". . . it is, to say the least of it, unfortunate that a politician who has discredited his denials of the Fascist creed by attendance at International Fascist Conventions, and by public pronouncements, should have put himself forward as the champion of religion, and should have issued, in the name of religion, a call to arms".[66]

In September O'Duffy travelled to London to discuss his proposal with Nationalist officials. Despite his elaborate cloak and dagger precautions, English Special Branch observed him meeting Count de Arellano and Juan de la Cierva[67] who organised the transport of the volunteers.[68] O'Duffy travelled on to Spain to discuss the venture with rebel leaders. According to press reports General Cabanellas, the nominal head of the Burgos *junta*, rejected O'Duffy's offer.[69] General Mola, who met O'Duffy on September 22, was more enthusiastic. The following day as the Nationalist forces were celebrating the relief of the *Alcazar* General Franco telegraphed his approval to O'Duffy.[70]

Irish volunteers would form *banderas*[71] (battalions) of the *Tercio* (Foreign Legion) commanded by Colonel Yagüe.[72] Each *bandera* would be a self-contained Irish unit commanded by Irish officers. An English-speaking adjutant and a limited number of Spanish liaison officers and privates would be incorporated into each *bandera*. The *banderas* would have Irish medical staff, chaplains and cooks. O'Duffy even arranged for St. Mary's Anti-Communist pipe band to accompany the Irish Brigade. Enlistment was for six months or the duration of the war. The volunteers would receive the same rate of pay as the rest of the

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64 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) p.60; *Irish Independent*, 13 September 1936. P.J. Coughlan offered the latter reason in the *Independent* three days later.
65 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) p.60.
66 Hugh P. Allen to the *Irish Independent*, 25 August 1937 (one of a series of cuttings on Spain and the NCP in W.G. Fallon's papers (Ms. 22,712, NLI).
67 De la Cierva was an aeronautical inventor (designer of the autogiro) and one of the original conspirators involved in the rebellion. He acted as an unofficial agent for the Nationalists in London.
68 W 12847/9549/41, Foreign Office series, Public Record Office, London.
69 *Irish Press*, 30 September 1936, D/Jus B1/36A.
70 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) pp.16-23.
71 Self-contained battalions of 600 men including maintenance units and mobile artillery.
72 The Brigade was integrated into the elite Foreign Legion to circumvent non-intervention (Nationalist telegram, London to Salamanca, 24 February 1937, R.1105-10, *Archivo de Burgos* (AB), *Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores* (MAE), Madrid; Fr. Alex McCabe diary, 17 June 1937) and not, as has been suggested, because of the high expectations of the Brigade's military capabilities (Dermot Keogh (1990) p.80; R.A. Stradling (1995) p.46).

Tercio, over twice that of a regular Spanish soldier,[73] although O'Duffy agreed with Franco's stipulation that Irish volunteers were not eligible for compensation or pensions.[74] O'Duffy originally insisted that his men could not be deployed against the Catholic Basques but later decided they were "no more entitled to partition from Spain than the six counties of Ulster are to partition from Ireland".[75]

O'Duffy returned to Ireland to organise the recruitment and transport of the volunteers. The *Irish Times* claimed they were breaking the Non-Intervention Agreement but O'Duffy correctly predicted that the government could not prevent unarmed and plain-clothes volunteers leaving Ireland.[76] Nevertheless, arrangements for their departure were conducted in relative secrecy. Juan de la Cierva liaised between O'Duffy and the nationalists in Salamanca. On October 16, a ship intended to pick up the first group of volunteers at Passage East, near Waterford, was postponed by Franco. Reportedly Merry del Val, the Nationalist representative in London, warned Franco that the Irish Brigade would exacerbate relations with Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, who had adopted a strong position on non-intervention.[77] O'Duffy returned to Spain although the Nationalists in London would have preferred a more patient approach:

"General O'DUFFY whom we cannot delay any more leaves tonight for there. STOP Advisable to receive him well so as to keep him well disposed (need to be) later."[78]

O'Duffy waited while Franco considered the viability of the Brigade. There was some opposition to the idea in Salamanca.[79] The Brigade, however, had influential supporters particularly among the aristocratic descendants of the 'Wild Geese'.[80] Moreover, the support of the Irish volunteers, in contrast to German and Italian assistance, embellished Franco's image as a defender of Catholicism. Several days later Franco told O'Duffy to continue organising the Brigade.[81]

The transporting of the recruits remained beset with difficulties. During November, Franco's agents in London pressed the *Secretaría General*[82] in Salamanca to authorise the transport of

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73 Paul Preston, *Franco* (London, 1995) p.145.
74 D/FA Madrid Embassy (Series Con) 6/2, 6 October 1939.
75 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) pp.86-87, p.195.
76 *Irish Times*, 25 August 1936; *Irish Independent*, 29 August 1936, 14 September 1936.
77 Francis McCullagh, *In Franco's Spain* (London, 1937) p.245.
78 Telegram, London to *Secretaría General*, Salamanca, 27 October 1936, R.1105-10, *Archivo de Burgos* (AB), *Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores* (MAE).
79 Franco's diplomatic advisers, particularly J.A. Sangróniz, opposed the Brigade (Francis McCullagh (1937) p.150). Keogh also noted that O'Duffy made a poor impression at his first meeting with Franco (Dermot Keogh (1990) p.73).
80 This group included the Duke of Algeciras, the Duchess of Tetuan and General Kindelán, head of the Nationalist Air Force. Dermot Keogh (1990) p.81.
81 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) p.68.
82 The *Secretaría General del Estado*, based at Salamanca next to Franco's personal headquarters was the centre of political power in Nationalist Spain. It was run by Nicolás Franco, two under-secretaries (José Carrión and Manuel Saco) and the diplomat José Antonio Sangróniz (Paul Preston (1995) p.255).

groups of at least three hundred volunteers.[83] Fearing non-intervention difficulties, Franco instructed the volunteers to find a way of travelling in small groups.[84] O'Duffy made his chagrin known in London:

"We have O'Duffy here very angry of difficulties he has all his men who have lost their employment in a very awkward situation stop O'Duffy wishes to be categorically and finally told whether or not we wish to use them . . ."[85]

O'Duffy instructed several small groups of key personnel to travel to Spain but by the end of November he resolved to meet Franco again. This news appears to have spurred the Nationalists into decisiveness – "O'Duffy do not let him sail. FRANCO now ready accept large numbers."[86]

Another ship was cancelled in late November.[87] Nonetheless, a telegram from London suggests that plans for an impressive force were near completion:

"German[88] now says cannot send ship before Sunday. Have cancelled arrangements and want you to send Dominé as quickly as possible to take 750 men . . . Next Irish contingent of 1,000 leaving (?) 1st January (and after that?) 1,000 every week until total of 5.000. Italian Minister at Dublin offers Italian ship gratis for January telegraph if you want us to accept offer. O'Duffy will arrive at Salamanca on Wednesday. General McNeill very distinguished soldier and second Chief of the General Staff of the Irish Army will arrive Salamanca to join volunteers before 31st of this month. American-Irish offer cavalry squadron 500 men and horses completely equipped except for arms they will pay all expenses. Tell O'Duffy if he accepts".[89]

The telegram raises several interesting points. The Irish Brigade clearly enjoyed support from Lodi Fé, the Italian minister in Dublin. The soldier referred to, Major General Hugo MacNeill,[90] then assistant Adjutant General of the Irish Army, never arrived. Considering MacNeill's rank and O'Duffy's tendency to exaggerate it is possible he never agreed to enlist in the Brigade. However, given MacNeill's close relationship with O'Duffy, his pro-Nazi tendencies and mercurial reputation it is quite plausible that he intended to fight in Spain.[91] The loss of such an accomplished officer was a severe blow to the military efficiency of the Brigade. The squadron of American-Irish cavalry also failed to arrive. The telegram indicates possible reasons for friction between Franco and O'Duffy. As the Nationalist anticipation of five thousand volunteers was clearly over-ambitious it must be suspected that O'Duffy

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83 Telegram, London to *Secretaría General*, 14 November 1936, R.1105-10, AB, MAE. The London office believed it impractical to arrange ships for a smaller number.
84 Telegram, Salamanca to London, 17 November 1936, *Ibid.*
85 Telegram, London to Salamanca, 17 November 1936, *Ibid.*
86 Telegram, Salamanca to London, 22 November 1936, R.1105-9, AB, MAE.
87 Telegram, Salamanca to London, 1 December 1936, R.1105-10, AB, MAE.
88 Germán Baráibar was private secretary to J.A. Sangróniz.
89 London to Salamanca, 7 December 1936, R.1105-10, AB, MAE.
90 Hugo MacNeill: National Army colonel during Irish Civil War; appointed Adjutant General following army mutiny of 1924; first director of Irish Military College, 1927; Commandant of Military College 1930-32; commanded 2nd Division, 1942-46; Eastern Command, 1946-51.
91 See John P. Duggan (1989) pp.180-92 for MacNeill's war-time flirtation with the Nazis. On Christmas eve, the Nationalists in London informed Salamanca that MacNeill was unable to go to Spain.

exaggerated the resources at his disposal.[92] According to Fr. McCabe, the rector of the Irish College in Salamanca, the Nationalists expected ten thousand Irish volunteers.[93] Conversely, Franco's inability to organise transport for the smaller number of Irish volunteers prepared to fight – and there were at least twelve hundred – clearly frustrated O'Duffy.

Finally, on December 13, approximately six hundred volunteers boarded the German *Domingo* off the coast of Galway.[94] On January 2, the Nationalists arranged for a Spanish ship, the *Dominé*, to pick up a large number of volunteers on the night of the sixth to be followed by groups of five hundred every ten days.[95] By January 5, the Irish organisers were concerned about Salamanca's failure to confirm the sailing:

"Irish do not want to get men assembled from all over their country if we do not ascertain tomorrow that the ship has left Spain in time to be at Passage East . . ."[96]

To the evident disquiet of the Irishmen the Nationalists again cancelled at short notice:

"Steamer did not arrive last night Wateford[sic] where 500 Irish had been brought secret from different parts of all Ireland after resigning their respective employments. To avoid public scandal have had to transport the men back to their home but now they will claim indemnity for jobs they have lost. Telegraph if we try freight (?) ship and try to get the men assembled again which will be rather difficult because they are disappointed".[97]

An Italian steamboat was cancelled two weeks later.[98] On January 22, the London agents told Nicolas Franco that the alternative source of transport, "our German friends", could not provide any ships. The Italian embassy in London advised the Nationalists to ask Mussolini to help organise transport.[99] The *Secretaría General*, however, told its London office that the Italians would not help and instructed them to "Multiply sailings chartering all ships

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92 Another telegram suggests there may have been a shortage of recruits – "Pass this to O'Duffy STOP [Liam] Walsh thinks that it would help future recruiting if Gunning cable reports arrival Ferrol of Irish and by post fuller report for independent newspapers" (London to Secretaría General, Salamanca, 22 December 1936, R.1105-10, AB, MAE). The *Irish Independent* provided important support to the Irish Brigade and pro-Franco lobby. Leopold Kerney, the Irish representative to Spain, reported to Dublin "amongst letters destroyed by Fr. Mulrean whilst acting as censor in Cáceres, was one from O'Duffy strongly recommending that a recompense of some kind should be given to somebody of the "Independent" for good work in favour of Franco; as far he could remember the name was Thomas Grehan, who, he thought, was described as General Manager" (Kerney to Joseph Walshe, secretary of External Affairs, 29 December 1939, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4).

93 Fr. Alexander McCabe diary, 17 June 1937, Fr. Alex McCabe papers, NLI. Kerney was told by William Carney, a *New York Times* journalist, that "Franco was very disappointed because O'Duffy's promise for a total of 12,000 men had not materialised" (Kerney to Walshe, 21 April 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 51/1).

94 *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times*, 14 December 1936. Maurice Manning (1987) p.204 and Stradling (1995) p.44 incorrectly give the date as December 5.

95 Telegram, London to Salamanca, 2 January 1937, R.1105-10, AB, MAE.

96 *Ibid*, 5 January 1937.

97 *Ibid*, 8 January 1937.

98 Telegram, Salamanca to London, 10 January 1937, 23 January 1937, R.1105-9, AB, MAE.

99 Telegram, London to Salamanca, 22 January 1936, *Ibid*. According to the Italian embassy in London, Italy had surplus ships following the invasion of Abyssinia.

necessary so all men ready embark may sail before 5th February".[100] The London agents remained unable to organise ships. On February 22, two days before the enforcement of the Non Intervention Act, O'Duffy telegraphed London – "Has Ship been yet arranged for Irish Troops. Reply urgently".[101]

The new legislation ended the possibility of large numbers of volunteers arriving in Spain.[102] Franco's indecision, the complications arising from non-intervention, and co-ordination difficulties between Salamanca, London and Dublin resulted in only seven hundred volunteers arriving in Spain. This had two important repercussions; relations between O'Duffy and Franco were strained from the outset and the Irish *bandera* never reached full strength, effectively hindering its capacity to perform as an autonomous military unit.

By early 1937 most of the volunteers had arrived in Cáceres. They were predominantly drawn from rural Ireland. Per capita, Tipperary, Longford, Limerick, Kerry, Westmeath and Carlow were the most strongly represented counties (map 1.1).[103] Some broad comparisons can be made between the distribution of the volunteers and Blueshirts (map 1.2).[104] Again, the south-west and midlands, those areas greatest affected by the economic war, feature prominently in both organisations; Limerick, Cork, Tipperary, Waterford, Carlow, Kilkenny and Meath. A comparison of the composition of the Brigade with electoral support for Fine Gael in 1937 (map 1.3)[105] is more problematic offering points of similarity and difference. A large number of recruits originated from the pastoral midlands (counties such as Tipperary and Longford) which was an area of strong electoral support for Fine Gael. However, the equally strong Fine Gael region of north-west Ireland (south Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon and west Donegal) was not well represented among the Irish Brigade. Monaghan and Kerry, prominent areas for volunteer recruitment, were clearly not significant areas of Fine Gael support. One explanation for the latter anomaly may be the substantial number of Blueshirts in Kerry. The distribution of Blueshirts – generally young, committed and radical Fine Gael activists – offers a more useful indication of regional support for the Irish Brigade than Fine Gael electoral support. The fact that Monaghan produced a substantial number of volunteers, but was not an area of strong support for either Fine Gael or the Blueshirts, can be explained by the loyalty retained by General O'Duffy in his own county.

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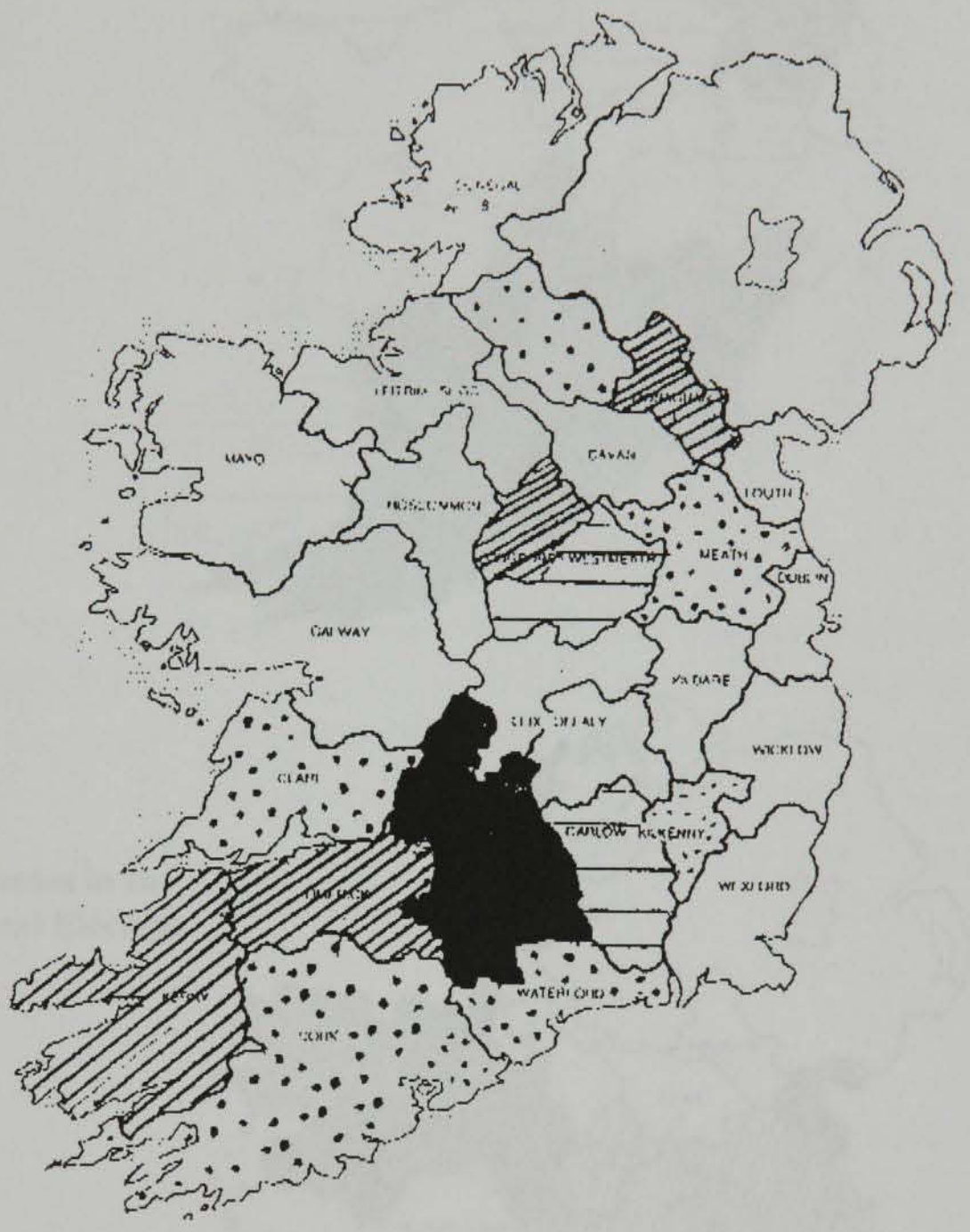
100 Telegram, Salamanca to London, 23, 26 January 1937, R.1105-9, AB, MAE.
101 *Ibid.*
102 Telegrams, London to Salamanca, 24 January, 1, 3 March 1937, *Ibid.* Small numbers of Irishmen continued to join the Irish Brigade up till late March (D/Jus B1/36A, Special Branch report, 19 March 1937).
103 Source: National and regional newspaper, memoirs, records of the departments of External Affairs and Justice. Sample size – 430.
104 Source: P24/67/1A, Blythe Papers, UCD.
105 Source: Michael Gallagher, *Irish Elections 1922-44* (Limerick 1993) p.208.

Map 1.1 — Geographical Distribution of the Irish Brigade

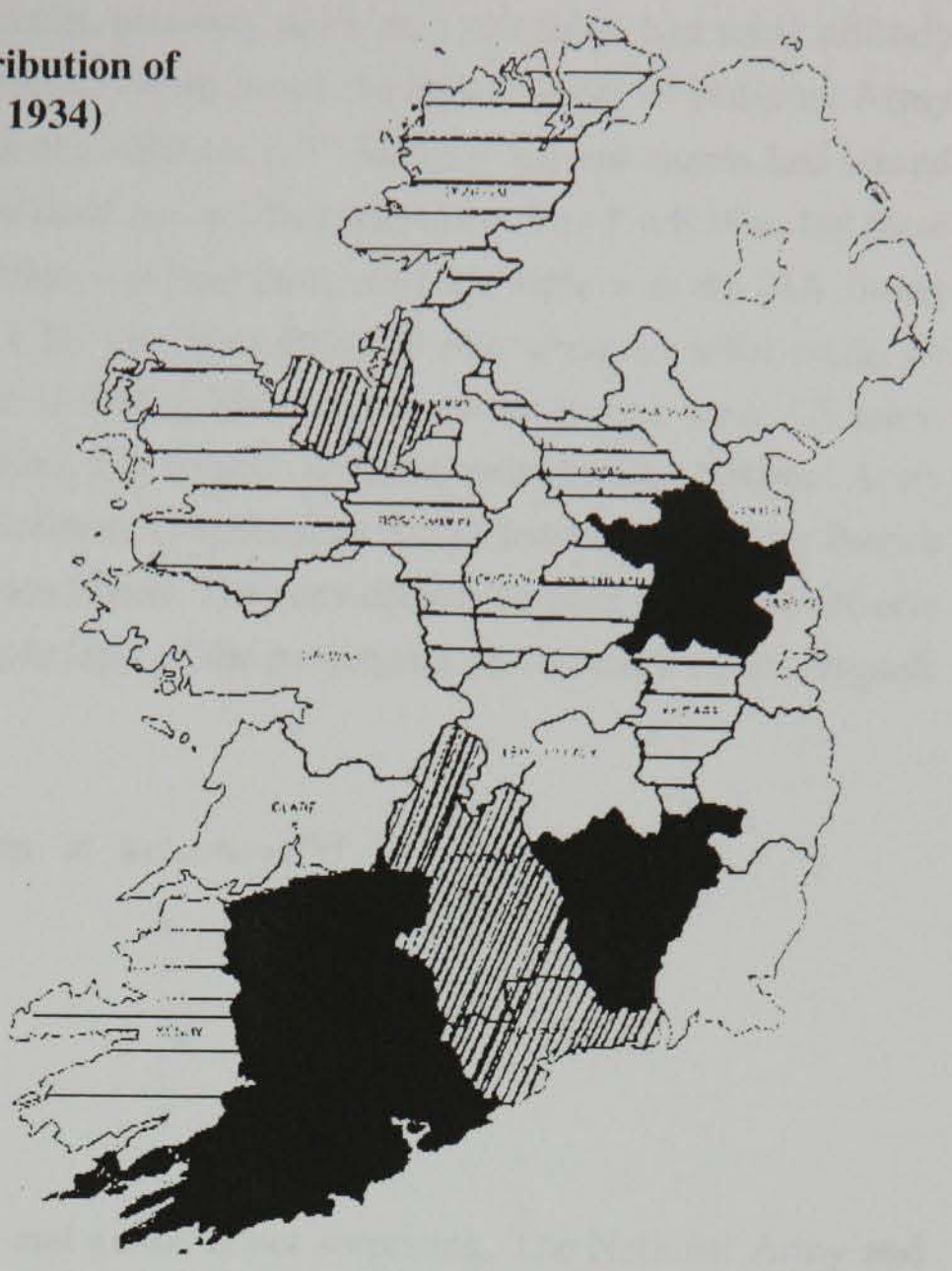
Tipperary	84
Dublin	52
Kerry	44
Cork	42
Limerick	38
Monaghan	18
Longford	17
Galway	13
Clare	13
Kilkenny	11
Westmeath	10
Mayo	9
Wexford	9
Meath	8
Waterford	8
Antrim	8
Roscommon	8
Fermanagh	7
Cavan	6
Kildare	4
Donegal	4
Carlow	4
Sligo	3
Louth	3
Offaly	3
Wicklow	2
Leitrim	1
Tyrone	1
Laois	0
Armagh	0
Derry	0
Down	0



Volunteers per 10,000 Males

Over	10	
Over	5	
Over	3	
Over	2	

Map 1.2 — Geographical Distribution of Blueshirts (August 1934)



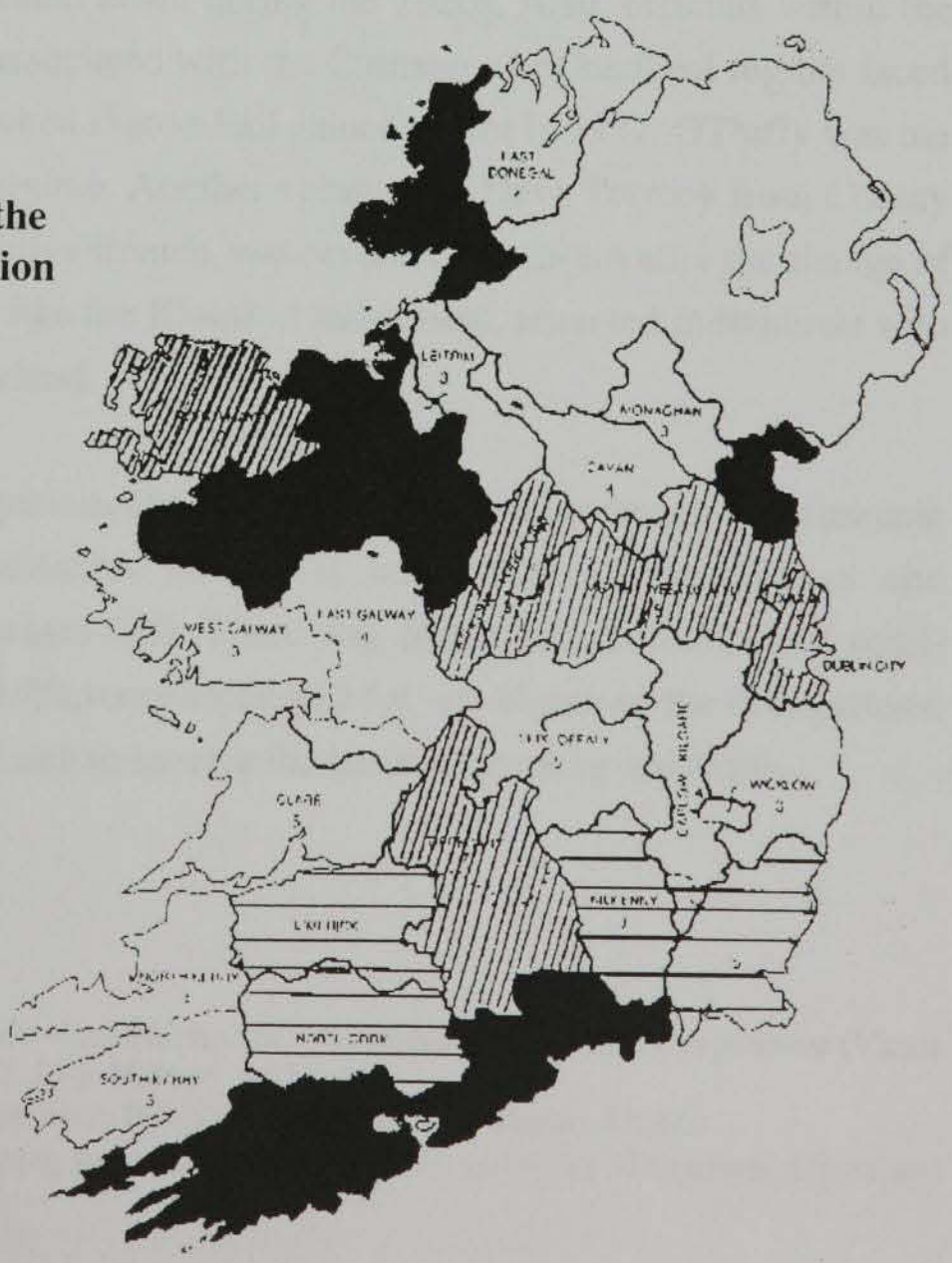
Blueshirts per 10,000 of Population

Over 250

Over 200

Over 100

Map 1.3 — Fine Gael votes in the 1937 General Election



Over 40%

Over 37%

Over 35%

A substantial proportion of the recruits, probably more than one third, had some military experience.[106] A Department of Justice report noted the high number of National Army veterans among one group of departing volunteers.[107] Many of the volunteers had served only three or four years with the National Army, often during the Irish Civil War, but there was no shortage of experienced soldiers – at least thirty-six had fought with the IRA during the War of Independence (table 1.1). The Irish Brigade also attracted what could be described as a mercenary contingent including Irish veterans of the British army, US navy, and French and Spanish foreign legions. The Brigade included several senior National Army officers – Commandant Dermot O'Sullivan, Commandant Sean Cunningham, Major Patrick Dalton, and Brigadier-General Eamon Horan. The considerable number of trained officers among the contingent is interesting in light of the subsequent performance of the Brigade command.

Table 1.1 Military Experience of Volunteers[108]

IRA volunteers only	8
IRA and Anti-Treaty	1
IRA and National Army	27
National Army only	28
Volunteer Force	1
Other armies	7

The high proportion of ex-soldiers and gardaí is not surprising. The National Army and Garda Síochána were ruthlessly scaled down during the 1920s. Also, officials within the security forces who were closely associated with the Cumann na nGaedheal regime faced career set-backs, even dismissals, when Fianna Fáil gained power in 1932. O'Duffy was the most famous casualty of the new regime. Another volunteer – Dave Tormey from County Westmeath – a sergeant in the Detective Branch, was reverted to uniform after the change of government.[109] The Irish Brigade, like the Blueshirt movement, attracted individuals who were discontent with De Valera's Ireland.

An analysis of the volunteers occupations (table 1.2) indicates a wide variety of economic backgrounds. There were, for instance, almost as many business proprietors and professionals (25) as unskilled workers (27). There was also a similar number of semi-skilled workers and tradesmen (27). Farmers accounted for one eighth of the occupations. Farmers, clerks, motor-drivers and mechanics were the most common occupations.

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106 One account estimated that approximately three hundred of the volunteers had military experience (Victor Ennis, *Some Spanish Moors* (MS, n.d.) p.2, Irish Military Archives).
107 D/Jus. 'Calendar of Events, 1930-39', pp.61-2, P67/534, Sean MacEntee Papers, UCD.
108 Source: National and regional newspapers, memoirs, records of the departments of External Affairs and Justice. Sample size – 72.
109 *Irish Independent*, 14 December 1936.

Table 1.2 Occupations of volunteers[110]

Farmers		9
Business Proprietors		9
Professionals:		16
Students	4	
Chemists	2	
Doctors	2	
Teachers	2	
Engineers	2	
Librarians	2	
Solicitor	1	
Journalist	1	
Semi-skilled/Trades:		27
Garda	8	
Building	7	
Mechanics	5	
Apprentices	3	
Baker	1	
Telegraphist	1	
Agricultural Inspector	1	
Fisherman	1	
Unskilled:		27
Labourers/Workers	10	
Clerks/Shop Assistants	8	
Motor Drivers	6	
Hospital Porters	3	

It must be noted, however, that many of the recruits do not fit into conventional occupational categories. A significant proportion (O'Duffy claimed over half) were the sons of farmers.[111] Due to the economic war most of these were either unemployed or under-employed. Few of these men described themselves or were described as farmers. This explains the discrepancy between the relatively low number of farmers in table 1.2 and the fact that most volunteers came from predominantly agricultural areas. Also, few farm-owners could afford to neglect their land for an indefinite period of time. The large number of recruits who were ex-soldiers – most for only a short period – have also been excluded from table 1.2.

O'Duffy's description of the Irish Brigade as non-political is inaccurate. The general had a tendency to describe every movement he led as non-political. There were republicans and government supporters in the Brigade but the Blueshirt movement was clearly the most dominant political faction.[112] For example, all five of the local body representatives who enlisted were Blueshirts.[113] It is difficult to estimate how many of the volunteers were, or

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[110] Source: National and regional newspapers, memoirs, Department of External Affairs files, Department of Justice files. Sample size – 84.

[111] *Irish Press*, 10 September 1937.

[112] Seósamh O'Cuinneagáin, for example, rejoined the IRA and was interned in the Curragh during the 'emergency' (William Tierney, 'Irish Writers and the Spanish Civil War', *Eire-Ireland*, Vol. 7, No. 7, p.37).

[113] Bernard Fitzsimons, Carlow UDC; Eamon Horan, Tralee UDC; Sean Keane, Cork County Council; John O'Brien, Clonmel Town Commissioners; Patrick J. Gallagher, Sligo Corporation.

had been, Blueshirts. One historian stated that most of those who went to Spain were never Blueshirts.[114] This may be correct but the geographical distribution of the Brigade (map 1.1) indicates that most volunteers were drawn from areas with a strong Blueshirt tradition. The sister of one volunteer, James Ryan from Cashel, Co. Tipperary, stated that her brother had definitely never been a Blueshirt. The family made its living renting con-acre and fixing farm machinery and could not afford to alienate their neighbours. However, when asked how Ryan had heard of the proposed Brigade, she replied that his friends "who went to the [Blueshirt] meetings" had told him.[115] The political bias of some volunteers was often almost unconscious. One veteran, Patrick Smith, vehemently rejected the view that the Brigade was dominated by Blueshirts or any other political group but then later commented:

"I would say that in my part of the country it was only decent fellas who followed Cumann na nGaedheal and, let's say, not so decent fellas who followed Fianna Fáil".[116]

The composition of the Brigade partly reflected the recruiting process which was directed by O'Duffy's Greenshirt and Blueshirt network of officials. As the recruitment was often secret it would have been far more difficult for a republican, particularly outside Dublin, to enlist than a volunteer with some Blueshirt connections.

Table 1.3 lists the known political affiliations of sixty four volunteers – fifty-six of whom belonged to a section of the Blueshirt movement. It is interesting that so many of those loyal to Cronin chose to fight with O'Duffy.[117] One of the most prominent to do so was Captain Padraig Quinn.[118] A letter from Quinn to another Kilkenny Blueshirt suggests that although the Irish Brigade attracted significant numbers from Cronin's organisation it should not be assumed they transferred their political allegiances:

". . . I would like to impress on you the fact that there is and will be no change in my political views; as far as National life at home is concerned I am and will remain a member of Fine Gael and the Blueshirt Organisations, but I am prepared to accept the General as my Commanding Officer in the event of the Brigade embarking for Spain.

A number of Blueshirts here and there throughout the counties of Carlow and Kilkenny have volunteered their services for the "Irish Brigade" to Spain, the motive of such service being for the GLORY OF GOD and the HONOUR OF IRELAND".[119]

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114 Mike Cronin (1993) p.65.

115 Telephone conversation, Mrs. Chris Boland, 31 March 1996.

116 Patrick Smith interview, Spanish Civil War collection (SCW) 14891/2, Sound Archives, Imperial War Museum (IWM) , London.

117 Twenty-six volunteers were definitely NCP members. It is not clear what proportion of the thirty volunteers described by contemporary sources as League of Youth were loyal to each faction.

118 Padraig Quinn: Kilkenny Blueshirt leader; appointed to Fine Gael national executive, 1933; jailed for non-payment of rates, 1934; supported Cronin after O'Duffy resigned, 1934; split from Fine Gael with Cronin, 1936.

119 Padraig Quinn to Joseph Doyle, 22 September 1936, D/ Taois S9179.

Table 1.3 Political Affiliations of volunteers[120]

National Corporate Party	27
League of Youth (unspecified)	21
League of Youth (Cronin)	8
IRA/republican	5
Fianna Fáil	3

Quinn's letter raises the question of the motives of the volunteers. For Quinn, religious sentiment appears to have been more important than politics. Only a small number of the Brigade, essentially key NCP members such as Thomas Gunning and John Muldoon,[121] can be readily identified as hardened fascists although undoubtedly many of the volunteers sympathised with European fascist leaders – as did many Irish people. Fascism, as the failure of the NCP demonstrates, did not have a mass following in Ireland. Moreover, with its inherent characteristics of irredentism and extreme nationalism, it is difficult to see how fascism could encompass a significant internationalist appeal. The fact that only ten British volunteers fought for Franco,[122] which had a far larger fascist organisation than Ireland, suggests that the Irish volunteers were motivated by other factors.

For many of the recruits anti-communism appears to have been more important than sympathy for fascism. The Spanish Civil War occurred during a decade of unprecedented anti-communist fervour in Ireland. The conflict was widely presented, not just by extremists such as O'Duffy, but by the clergy and mainstream politicians as a consequence of the expansion of Russian communism. Patrick Smith from Co. Cavan believed:

"Russia wanted world domination . . . if she got Spain, she was very strong in France . . . we'd have her in England and Ireland".[123]

Mirroring the response of International Brigade volunteers to fascism, many of O'Duffy's volunteers regarded Spain as the front-line in the war against communism.

However, anti-communism was but one aspect of the militant Catholicism central to the appeal of the Irish Brigade. Newspaper accounts convey the pious atmosphere as volunteers left the North Wall in November; recruits were presented with miraculous medals, Sacred Heart badges, prayer books and blessed by priests while supporters gathered to sing 'Faith of our Fathers'.[124] Similar scenes occurred throughout Ireland. In Cork, Col. P.J. Coughlan, accompanied by three priests, told his recruits that "the hour had come to take

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120 Source: National and regional newspapers, memoirs, Department of External Affairs files, Department of Justice files. Sample size – 64. The League of Youth category includes volunteers who were described (or described themselves) as League of Youth without specifying whether they were loyal to O'Duffy, Cronin or Fine Gael.

121 Muldoon volunteered to fight with the Italians against Abyssinia in 1935 and was associated with the Universality of Rome organisation (*Irish Independent*, 14 November 1936).

122 This figure does not include the Irishmen who joined the Brigade from Britain. Hugh Thomas (1990) p.980 lists twelve Britons (two of which, Fitzpatrick and Nangle, were actually Irish) who fought for Franco. Interestingly, Thomas commented that half of the twelve were "at least partially Irish".

123 Patrick Smith interview, SCW 14891/1, IWM.

124 *Irish Independent*, 28 November 1936.

their departure for the battlefields of Spain to strike a blow for Christ the King". Captain Liam Walshe described the volunteers as "part of a crusade prepared to fight under the banner of the Cross to help deliver Spain".[125] Most of the letters sent home by Irish soldiers which were published in newspapers stressed the religious aspect of the war.[126] Although, like the speeches of the Brigade organisers, they could have been intended as propaganda, private letters such as the following one from a seventeen year old Kerry volunteer attest to a considerable degree of religious motivation:

"I didn't want to tell you I was coming here that day because I was afraid you wouldn't like it. Please tell me how you feel, and that you forgive me, because I treated you rotten and I know it . . . Please Mam answer this, you don't know how happy a word from you will make me. I have been awfully fed up when I didn't get an answer. I have a feeling you hate me for it, but after all what I have done is for Our Lord, and if I die it will be only for the best".[127]

A Department of Foreign Affairs memo also emphasised the importance of religion in the recruitment process:

"The general character of the volunteers already gone to Spain does not appear to be very high, but we have information that some of them are very young men who have been enticed from their families through the impression that they are going to fight for Christianity".[128]

However, as the former part of the memo suggested, not all of the volunteers were so pious. There were numerous reasons for joining the Irish Brigade. George Timlin told Cathal O'Shannon he "went for the crack".[129] Another volunteer told an Irish journalist "he had fought as a boy in the Irish Civil War, and had liked it so much that he had come out to see what the Spanish Civil War was like".[130] Fr. McCabe who met many of the volunteers noted:

"As regards the men, a good many of them were idealists, who came out to fight for religion and Spain. Some were of the adventurous type, who, in the old days, would take the English "bob", and join the British Army to see the world. It was a change from standing at the corner and staring at the pump".[131]

McCabe observed that the appeal of the Brigade was partly due to the economic depression of the 1930s and the more limited opportunities for emigration, particularly for men from rural areas impoverished by the economic war:

"Now that so many Irishmen can't go to America, or into British politics, or the British Army, it's a problem to find an outlet for them, and, especially, for the restless element. For one thing, Ireland is too poor and there isn't a decent living for everybody in Ireland. Even the Irish Brigade is an example of it".[132]

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125 *Ibid.*
126 See D/Jus B1/36, B1/36A.
127 D/FA Madrid Embassy 10/2. Another volunteer Patrick Smith recalled "I wasn't afraid to die, thanks be to God, because I believed in a merciful God and with the idea that I went to Spain that should I die I was a Christian martyr" (Patrick Smith interview, SCW 14891/2, IWM).
128 D/FA 241/12, 18 December 1936.
129 Cathal O'Shannon, 'Even the Olives are Bleeding' (RTE, 1975).
130 Francis McCullagh (1937) p.246.
131 Fr. McCabe diary, 17 June 1937.
132 *Ibid*, 25 April 1937.

His opinion was shared by General Mulcahy:

". . . they have gone to fight for our religion in another country – But who sent them there? The forces . . . that sent a hundred times as many men from here into the British Army during the last few years, and there is not a single person in Ireland that is blind to the fact".[133]

Few volunteers went to Spain inspired by one single motive. Political and religious motives merged with incentives such as the prospect of employment or the opportunity to travel. This is illustrated by William Geraghty, a Dublin volunteer, who was interviewed by R.A. Stradling. Explaining his decision to enlist, Geraghty mentioned the historic and religious ties between both countries – "I felt indebted to Spain . . . Religiously, I always believed strongly in my Catholic faith".[134] He attributed his decision to anti-communism but stressed he was not a fascist:

"Franco, to my knowledge, was never a dictator. He loved his own country and protected his own country against atheistic communism and had they got established in France, and they were established in England, because I'd seen that in Hyde Park, that they were very well established in 1936. Europe was in danger of being overrun, including Portugal, by atheistic communists".[135]

Significantly, however, when Geraghty later discussed army life in Spain, he added:

"At that time I was adventurous, I wanted to go to the Amazon if I didn't go to Spain . . . I think I was nearly born a soldier. I always had the inclination".[136]

The volunteers received an enthusiastic reception in Cáceres where they were stationed for their basic training.[137] Their parade through Cáceres was the highlight of the town's new year celebrations.[138] Fr. McCabe, who visited the Irish base on January 6, was also initially enthusiastic. He found O'Duffy to have "the simple, friendly, hospitable way of all Irishmen with one another, and especially, of the Irish lay folk with their priests".[139] McCabe thought the volunteers "looked athletic, clean, and muscular and seemed to be a crowd that will give a tough account of themselves". The morale of the officers appeared excellent – "They're manly, cheery, and refined, and they're all good companions, like school-boys going home for a holiday".[140]

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133 Speech of General Mulcahy in Mayo, 5 December 1936, D/Jus B1/37.
134 William Geraghty interview, SCW 14893/1, IWM.
135 *Ibid*. Geraghty recalled reading about Mexico, Russia and "the atrocities on the Czar and his family in 1917". He believed Republican Spain was supported by "Soviet Russia and Bolsheviks from several other countries namely America, England, Canada and China and . . . Cuba".
136 *Ibid*.
137 See Dermot Keogh (1990) pp.81-2 for an account of the Irish in Cáceres.
138 L.33-66, *Cuartel General del Generalísimo* (CGG), *Archivo General Militar de Avila* (AGMA).
139 Fr. McCabe diary, 4 January 1937.
140 *Ibid*, 6 January 1937.

The following day, however, McCabe discovered some of the tensions in Cáceres. Much of the trouble centred around the Irish chaplain, Fr. Mulrean,[141] who was feuding with Captain Gunning – "O'Duffy's right-hand man and factotum in Spain".[142] Mulrean was resented by many of the Irishmen, particularly the officers:

"In the pulpit, he doesn't preach. He growls at them, worries them in canine fashion, and is always denouncing them. He does this when the Spanish officers are present in the Church, and it humiliates the Irish officers".[143]

Although the Spaniards were impressed by the piety of the volunteers, the volunteers were disappointed with the Spanish Church:

". . . the Irishmen, even the common soldiers, are not very impressed by Spanish Catholicism, even though that's what the whole row is supposed to be about. They have noticed that several women, girls and children, a few professional and middle-class men, and an occasional Spanish officer attend Mass, but the ordinary Spanish male . . . believes in a different way of life".[144]

Another problem was the drinking habits of the Irish which differed from local standards in Cáceres. McCabe noted that when the Spaniards "see these idealists, and frequent church-goers drinking and 'having one too many' they are profoundly shocked".[145] Other sources testify that alcohol was a problem from the outset. According to Captain Tom Smith when the *Domingo* arrived at Lisbon some of the volunteers "got drunk, fought the police, and caused an awful scandal along the whole water-front".[146] Lieutenant Pete Lawlor observed similar scenes at the *vin d'honneur* held for the Brigade at Salamanca.[147]

The calibre of the recruits was varied.[148] Even O'Duffy admitted "a few doubtful characters" had been accepted. At the barracks McCabe observed:

"One or two of the men have a crazy look, and a few of them look limp, spineless and worthless. The Irishmen compared with the Spaniards, look soft".

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141 McCabe wrote of Mulrean, "He had a "tough" job, but the officers and men regarded him as a "bully" addicted to gossip, a sneak and mischief maker. He was educated in the seminary in Madrid – and bore the marks of it."

142 Kerney to Walshe, 13 March 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 52/1.

143 Fr. McCabe diary, 7 January 1937. The officers also complained that Mulrean inquired into "intimate and even feminine affairs" at confessions – "They feel that he sits down in the box and listens eagerly just to satisfy his morbid curiosity".

144 *Ibid.*

145 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.82.

146 Francis McCullagh (1937) p.235.

147 Lawlor told a British soldier in the *Requetes*, "I knew it was going to be sheer bloody murder with the boys drinking all that wine on empty stomachs. I tried to see if we couldn't get them some food, but it was no use. Sure enough, when the time came to get back into the train the boys were so drunk it was all we could do to push them into it." Peter Kemp, *Mine Were of Trouble* (London, 1957) p.87.

148 As Fr. Mulrean harshly commented, "Strike me pink, if I know where the old man managed to pick up all the scum he has collected" (Francis McCullagh (1937) p.292).

One volunteer who believed the Spanish climate would improve his tuberculosis was hospitalised on arrival in Cáceres.[149] Two Irishmen from Liverpool who had been caught deserting were "in a wretched hole of a cell". In the next cell McCabe discovered two insane volunteers – "one stripped naked to the waist, was up in the window, and clinging to the bars . . . having a sun-bath on a frosty day in January". McCabe also observed, however, that when the Irishmen were on duty discipline was strict. The training of the men, conducted by two British army veterans, appeared to be progressing well. The Irish priest concluded that the "men are a fine lot, and 99% of them seem to be quite happy. They are anxious too, to get up to the trenches and to fight".[150]

McCabe's optimism faltered on a second visit to the base when he came across two volunteers who had been badly beaten by their officers:

"The men may have been rowdy, or the officers may have taken a drink, and felt that they had to bully someone. It's possible that the attack was due to Irish politics. The Brigade is mostly "Blue Shirt". That is, the men are political followers of General O'Duffy, but there are some old I.R.A. men, and this may have been a private row due to political rivalries. It was so serious that there was a military enquiry over it. If these incidents spread, they would ruin the Brigade".[151]

McCabe concluded the "sooner they are sent to the front, the better for themselves, and for the town of Cáceres".

Fr. Mulrean's correspondence to Fr. McCabe suggests that the Spanish authorities were already disappointed with the proficiency of the Irish officers:

"We would have gone [to the front] two weeks ago, but the Spanish Authorities would not take the responsibility of sending so many men with officers unfit to lead them".

The chaplain also believed the disciplinary standards of the Brigade were declining:

"On Sunday week last I preached against drunkenness and the Kips . . . The attendance at the Kips has increased to my knowledge from 5 the 1st fortnight to over 40 a week now. O, my work gets more difficult every day. Drunkenness is a curse, I told them they were trying to make a national virtue out of it, and the language vile".[152]

On February 16 the volunteers received their orders for the Madrid front. The Brigade suffered its first casualties the following day on route from Valdemora to Ciempozuelos. A Nationalist *bandera* from the Canary Islands, coming across the English-speaking volunteers in unusual uniforms, mistook them for International Brigaders and opened fire killing two

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149 Fr. McCabe diary, 25 April 1936. The volunteer, who died in Spain the following year, was Eunan McDermot, a Blueshirt from Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. He had previously spent four years in an American sanatorium.

150 *Ibid.*

151 *Ibid.*

152 Mulrean to McCabe, 9 February 1937, folder 57, Fr. McCabe papers.

Irishmen, Lieutenant Tom Hyde[153] and Dan Chute. Although the Spanish *bandera*'s reaction on coming across English-speaking troops in a foreign uniform was understandable, O'Duffy insisted that the incident was deemed the fault of the Spanish unit who failed to follow correct military procedure.[154] I found no mention of the incident among the military records of the Irish Brigade but the recollection of a soldier in the *Requetes* of the Canary Islands *bandera* as "a gay and feckless lot" who "seemed to regard the war as a joke and anything military as utterly ridiculous" supports O'Duffy's statement.[155]

The village of Ciempozuelos, fifteen miles from Madrid, close to the main road to Cordova, had been the scene of heavy fighting and the Brigade's first duty was to clear away the corpses scattered around the town.[156] The village was not particularly exposed but it was shelled daily and the Irishmen were frequently sniped at by opposing soldiers belonging to the International Brigade.[157] However, the Brigade's worst enemy was the combination of cold nights and unsuitable uniforms which led to rheumatism, pleurisy, and colds.[158]

On March 6, the Department of External Affairs notified Leopold Kerney, the Irish minister in Spain, that O'Duffy's men "are to a large extent discontent with their lot. They complain of the bad food, poor clothing and of their treatment generally. They are said to be poor in physique, and with exceptions, bad soldiers".[159] The following week, while visiting Salamanca for talks with the Nationalist authorities, Kerney detected signs of friction between the Irish Brigade and the Spaniards. The Irish minister felt that J.A. Sangróniz, one of Franco's diplomatic advisers, was unimpressed with the Brigade:

"He [Sangroniz] expressed appreciation for the friendly sympathy evidenced by the substantial collections made in all the parishes throughout the country for Red Cross purposes; he referred to Mr. Belton's

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153 Tom Hyde (1897-1937): b. Midleton, Co. Cork; member, Irish volunteers 1916-17; ASU, 4th Battalion, 1st Cork Brigade during Anglo-Irish war; retired from National Army with rank of captain; Cork staff officer of National Corporate Party, 1935-6; leader, No. 1 section, A Coy, Irish Brigade.

154 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) p.136.

155 Peter Kemp (1957) p.46. R.A. Stradling was told by one volunteer's brother that Major Dalton believed he was at fault for ordering the Brigade to march in open (offensive) formation behind their own lines (Patrick Smith interview, SCW 14891/2, IWM).

156 The area had previously been occupied by members of the British battalion. Francis McCullagh described the interior of a church in Ciempozuelos – "The blasphemous and indecent inscriptions which the Reds had painted on the walls were all effaced, but one inscription was left on the doorway because neither the Irish nor Spaniards understood it . . . "Los Saklatvala" [the original name of the British battalion]" (Francis McCullagh to Dr. Mageean, 3 April 1937, EP 5/2/37, Down and Connor Archives).

157 The Irish Brigade and British Battalion of the International Brigades were stationed in the same section of the Jarama front in February and March 1937. Several International Brigaders claim to have communicated with the Irish Brigade. John Dunlop, a Glaswegian member of the British battalion, stated "you could shout across and listen to what they were saying" (John Dunlop interview, SCW 11355/4, IWM). Tom Murphy, an International Brigader from Co. Monaghan recalled "Our trenches were maybe a few hundred yards [away]. Frank Ryan used to speak on the speaker, he says: "Irishmen go home! Your fathers would turn in their graves if they knew that you'd come to fight for imperialism. This is the real Republican Army. The real, real men of Ireland" (Tom Murphy interview, SCW 805/2, IWM).

158 Eoin O'Duffy (1938), pp.143-8.

159 Walshe to Kerney, 6 March 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 51/1.

organisation and efforts, "and then O'Duffy," he added – almost as an afterthought –; it occurred to me that he might feel (erroneously, I think) that there was need to be tactful where O'Duffy came into the picture".

In his report, Kerney also mentioned a letter written by General Aranda to Captain Camino, the senior Spanish officer in the Irish Brigade:

". . . the last words written were in the form of a question – "Y esos Irlandeses? The peculiar form of the question – "And those Irish?" rather than – "and the Irish?" – seems to imply lack of appreciation or criticism of some kind, but this cannot be certain".[160]

Fr. McCabe who was with Kerney at the time noted in his journal:

"The question has a contemptuous tone, and a full translation would be, "And these damn, good-for-nothing Irish?" Kerney did not miss the contemptuous tone of the question".[161]

There were other indications of tension within the Brigade. While Kerney was visiting Salamanca Major Patrick Dalton, apparently suffering from sciatica, returned to Ireland.[162] O'Duffy appointed Dermot O'Sullivan, a leading member of his National Corporate Party, as the new acting-major of the Irish Brigade. On March 12 Tom Smyth, Captain of B Company, also went home – reportedly due to illness. On the same day, the Irish *bandera* was strengthened by a company of mixed Spanish and Moroccan cavalry.[163] The first real military test of the Irish *bandera* occurred the following day when the Irishmen were ordered to advance on the nearby village of Titulcia. Amidst heavy shelling the Brigade neither reached the village nor managed to engage any Republican troops in combat.[164] Three volunteers from Tralee died during the assault.[165] Sergeant Gabriel Lee[166] died shortly afterwards from wounds received during the attack.

On March 14 the Brigade was again ordered to advance on Titulcia. O'Duffy, convinced that the attack had no chance of success, disobeyed the order.[167] He later claimed that Mola and Franco, whom he met soon after, agreed with his decision.[168] Another volunteer, James McCarthy, gave a broadly similar account of events:

"He [O'Duffy] asserted that there had been no reconnaissance of the valley, and, he said, it was possible that the enemy had fortified their positions overnight and surveyed our positions of yesterday as well . . . Relations between the Area Commander [General Saliquet] and General O'Duffy became somewhat strained

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160 Kerney to Walshe, D/FA Madrid Embassy 52/1, 13 March 1937. See Dermot Keogh (1990) p.92.
161 Fr. McCabe diary, 10 March 1937.
162 The *Irish Press* (10/3/37) reported that Dalton was injured during "an engagement on the Madrid front". Mulrean informed McCabe: "Dalton wounded himself, he fired at a hand grenade, at a distance of about 8ft, his hand was badly wounded" (Mulrean to McCabe, 12 February 1937, folder 57, McCabe papers).
163 Seósamh O'Cuinneagáin, *The War in Spain*, (Enniscorthy, n.d.) p.19.
164 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) pp. 156-9.
165 Tom Foley (30) John McSweeney (23) and Bernard Horan (23).
166 Gabriel Lee (1905-37): b. Dublin; IRA volunteer; served in National Army until 1924; North Dublin League of Youth director; remained loyal to Fine Gael following O'Duffy split.
167 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) pp. 161-2.
168 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) p.163.

but General O'Duffy's stand was vindicated by General Franco who agreed that we could suffer heavily without gaining any worthwhile success if we repeated our advance towards Titulcia bridge".[169]

There are several inconsistencies in O'Duffy's account of the failed assault on Titulcia. It is unacceptable for local commanders in any army to arbitrarily counteract divisional orders but in the elite *Tercio* where soldiers were shot for minor infractions of discipline it was almost inconceivable.[170] Secondly, O'Duffy's belief in the futility of another assault on Titulcia is not supported by the low casualty-rate of March 13.[171] Also, it is unlikely that Franco supported O'Duffy against General Saliquet, the commander of the armies around Madrid, particularly as the purpose of the assault was not necessarily to capture Titulcia but to form part of a diversionary series of attacks around to relieve pressure on Italian forces at Guadalajara.[172]

One volunteer's account of the events suggests that O'Duffy's reversal of the divisional order was actually forced by the refusal of his own officers to fight:

"After five hours rest, the companies assembled in the Plaza prior to again undertaking the attack. It was early apparent that all was not well with the higher commands. Dissension was rife and acrid speculation was indulged in as to the issue of the trouble. Lieutenant Tom Cahill, O.C. of "A" was animatedly objecting to leading men on what must certainly be a fruitless expedition".[173]

The failure at Titulcia was a pivotal point for the Irish Brigade. It confirmed the Nationalist command's doubts about the *bandera*'s military capabilities. Two years later Leopold Kerney reported a conversation with Mulrean about the consequences of Titulcia:

". . . at the time of the Guadalajara offensive (March 1937, when I was in Salamanca) the Brigade was holding trenches protecting some village near Ciempozuelos; O'Duffy ordered his men to withdraw, leaving behind about 12 machine guns, unmanned; Franco went to Ciempozuelos to have an explanation with O'Duffy [who] . . . turned up late that night and saw Franco next day (St. Patrick's Day, I think) at 11 a.m. at Navalcarnero; Franco took O'Duffy to task and also asked for an explanation of shooting incidents and indiscipline; O'Duffy threatened to take his men home and Franco at once took him at his word . . . "[174]

Soon after the Irish Brigade's assault on Titulcia – and almost certainly as a consequence – the Irish *bandera* was transferred north of Madrid to La Marañosa. They were stationed with the *Requetes*, the military wing of the Carlist movement, which had originally invited

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169 *Evening Echo*, 15 September 1967.

170 See Paul Preston (1995) pp.27-30 for an account of the "savage discipline" and "mentality of brutal ruthlessness" of the *Tercio* soldiers who called themselves "the bride-grooms of death".

171 Compared to, for example, the decimation of one-third of the 1st International Brigade during an assault on the Casa de Campo on 9 November 1936 or the loss of two hundred and twenty-five men of the six hundred strong British Battalion at Pingarrón on 12 February 1937 (Hugh Thomas (1990) p.482, 592.

172 R.A. Stradling (1997) p.128; Paul Preston (1995) p.229.

173 Seósamh O'Cuinneagáin (n.d.) p.21. The later insistence of the Nationalist command that O'Duffy take his own decisions without consulting his company captains supports this interpretation. Cahill was removed from the front-line and repatriated on March 16.

174 Kerney to Walshe, 19 December 1939, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

O'Duffy to Spain. As the Madrid front remained stagnant following the failure of the Nationalist assault on Guadalajara the Irish Brigade were again deployed in a defensive capacity. The disintegration of the Irish *bandera* soon followed.

The hostility between the Irish officers was central. The most serious rift occurred between O'Duffy and Gunning, "the brains of the Brigade", while the *bandera* was still stationed in Cáceres.[175] O'Duffy relied on Gunning who was influential with the other Irish officers and the Spanish command.[176] The inclusion of two Anglo-Irish officers from the Foreign Legion, Lieutenant Michael Fitzpatrick and Lieutenant Bill Nangle, in the Irish *bandera* resulted in further trouble. Both were Protestant, Sandhurst educated, ex-British army officers and resented their new commander.[177] Kerney reported that O'Duffy sneered at some of his officers as being "Protestant Englishmen".[178] Given their background (Fitzpatrick was a Freemason whose favourite author was Kipling) and O'Duffy's anglophobia, there was a certain inevitability about the friction which followed. O'Duffy's long absences from the front – he preferred to direct operations from the *Gran Hotel* in Salamanca – and his reliance on Dalton to run the Brigade led to other difficulties. When Dalton returned to Ireland several officers refused to fight under the new commander Dermot O'Sullivan.[179] On April 9, O'Duffy informed Franco that he had relieved the "English" officers and several Irish ones from command for undermining the loyalty of his soldiers.[180] Fitzpatrick was later dismissed from the Foreign Legion by Yagüe when, much to the disgust of the Spanish officers, he announced that he was a Freemason.[181]

Relations between the Irish officers and the Spanish military command were also contentious. After the incident with the Canary Islands *bandera* a large number of Spanish officers were drafted into the Brigade. Their presence and the implication that Spanish leadership was necessary was resented by the Irish officers. Francis McCullagh,[182] an Irish war correspondent, who visited La Marañosa noted:

"General O'Duffy and his Irish officers did not like this influx of Spaniards but could do nothing to prevent it . . . the presence of some twenty Spanish officers in an Irish Bandera of seven hundred and thirty men meant an impossible situation, which could not, I felt, last for many weeks longer".[183]

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175 Fr. McCabe diary, 6 January, 17 June 1937.
176 Kemp commented of Gunning, "A skilful intriguer, he contrived, so long as he remained O'Duffy's secretary, to keep the Irish Brigade divided against itself". Peter Kemp (1957) p.86.
177 Francis McCullagh (1937) p.132. and Peter Kemp (1957) pp.90-1.
178 Kerney to Walshe, 8 June 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 51/1.
179 *Irish Times*, 23 June 1937.
180 O'Duffy to Franco, 9 April 1937, L.156-25, CGG, AGMA. The officers concerned were Fitzpatrick, Nangle, Cahill and possibly Smith, a Belfast Protestant, who resigned his command allegedly due to illness on March 12.
181 Yagüe to Franco, 6 August 1937, L.156-25, CGG, AGMA.
182 Francis McCullagh, a well-known war correspondent and adventurer with strong anti-communist beliefs was author of *A Prisoner of the Reds*, *Red Mexico* and 'An Open Letter to De Valera' a pro-Franco tract published in the *Irish Independent*.
183 Francis McCullagh (1937) p.297.

O'Duffy, moreover, did not get on with General Yagüe, the commander of the Foreign Legion. Kerney reported to Dublin:

"There has been friction between O'Duffy and General Yague. The Duchess believes that a couple of the Spanish liaison officers (of whom I understand there are about 5 in all) are largely responsible for this state of affairs, because of their propensity for carrying tales to headquarters".

Captain Meade, a Spanish officer attached to the Irish *bandera* told Kerney that much of the tension between the two men occurred because Yagüe "who at the time was only a Colonel . . . looked down on O'Duffy, but had to treat him with the respect due to a General".[184]

The harshness of life at the front and the breakdown of command destroyed morale. McCullagh, the only journalist to visit the Irishmen during this period, described the situation:

"I found the Irish unhappy, owing to the isolation, the intense monotony of trench warfare, ignorance of the language, the difficulty of communicating with Ireland, letters taking an incredibly long time owing to the censorship and other delays. The food was unfamiliar and there was no tea, whiskey or humour. What depressed them most was the austere Spanish landscape, wrecked houses and burned villages".

According to McCullagh, the hatred between the Spanish people shocked even veterans of the Black and Tan war and the regular executions "shook the nerve of the toughest among the Irish".[185]

McCullagh formed a low opinion of the military leadership of the *bandera*:

"[O'Duffy] knows nothing of modern mechanized war, so that he left his command at the front to the Irish major, who knew equally little . . . The Irish expected guerrilla fighting, unaware that the aeroplane had killed it".

McCabe also learnt of similar complaints:

"The Spaniards thought, too, that all the officers would have been trained in a Military Academy, such as they themselves have in Toledo, Segovia or Avila . . . the Irish officers had no military training, or no experience of actual warfare, except what some them got in cross-road ambushes in Ireland, during the Black-and-Tan struggle".[186]

O'Duffy clearly bears much responsibility for the condition of the Brigade. The organisational and leadership abilities which enabled him to head the Garda Síochána for over a decade deserted him in Spain. Indeed, his ignominious departure from Fine Gael and unsuccessful leadership of the NCP suggest that his decision-making capacities were seriously diminished before he arrived in Spain. Despite O'Duffy's enthusiastic advocacy of teetotalism as head of the gardaí, it seems likely that his alcohol problem was to blame. As

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184 Kerney to Walshe, 9 June 1938, D/FA 119/17.
185 *Irish Press*, 26 May 1937. See also the account of James McCarthy in the *Evening Echo*, 15 September 1967.
186 Fr. McCabe diary, 17 June 1937.

far back as 1933 an Italian representative of the *Universalità di Roma* reported that the Blueshirt leader "often spoke under the influence of whiskey".[187] Mike Cronin, a historian of the Blueshirt movement also noted O'Duffy's heavy drinking.[188] Regardless of the cause, O'Duffy's behaviour in Spain was erratic. Kerney reported that O'Duffy was described by individuals who met him in Salamanca as 'flippant', 'fantasque' and 'a queer fellow'.[189] McCullagh said of him:

"O'Duffy's mentality was an especially interesting study – his vanity, the generosity with which he threw himself into his work, his incompetence, his irritability, and the unevenness of his temper".[190]

Similarly, Fr. McCabe remarked:

"O'Duffy seems to have two separate halves in his brain. One of them belongs to a genial capable man, and the other to a plunging obstinate mule".[191]

The same qualities which resulted in O'Duffy's unsuitability for the presidency of Fine Gael – his bluntness, impetuosity, exuberance and poor judgement – also damaged his credibility in Spain.[192]

On March 24 the Irish Brigade was inspected by Yagüe who reported drunkenness, insubordination and low morale. He blamed the lack of professional officers in the *bandera* and concluded that the unit was so inefficient any front they occupied would not be secure. Interestingly, in this and other military documents, it was the Irish officers and rarely the rest of the volunteers who were blamed for the Brigade's shortcomings. In 1940 Kerney reported a conversation with Pablo Merry del Val, director of propaganda at the Ministry of the Interior:

"He asked me about "that General", pretending not to be able to recollect the name of O'Duffy, who was so well known to him; he said that O'Duffy's officers were bad, but that his men were good . . ."[193]

Yagüe recommended the dissolution of the Brigade and redistribution of the volunteers among other *banderas* of the *Tercio*.[194] The following week a further report claimed that O'Duffy was using the Nationalists for his own political gain and that the Irish *bandera* was spreading a bad example among the other units of the *Tercio*. The report also referred to a shooting incident within the Irish Brigade.[195] The Spanish command, perhaps influenced by Gunning, refused to recognise O'Duffy's appointment of O'Sullivan as commander and insisted on the appointment of a Spanish officer. In April, a third report described the further decline of standards within the Irish *bandera*. An Irish officer had intervened in a fight

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187 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.46.
188 Mike Cronin (1993) p.238.
189 Kerney to Walshe, 8 March, 8 April, 12 May 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 51/1.
190 Francis McCullagh (1938) p.264.
191 Fr. McCabe diary, 2 May 1937; Dermot Keogh (1990) p.93.
192 Maurice Manning (1987) p.160-2.
193 D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4, 17 April 1940.
194 Yagüe to *General Jefe de la División Reforzada de Madrid*, 24 March 1937, L.156-24, CGG, AGMA.
195 *El Teniente Coronel Ayudante to General Segundo Jefe de Estado Mayor del Cuartel General de S.E. el Generalísimo*, Salamanca, 29 March 1937, *Ibid.*

seriously wounding another officer. The fact that he had sided with a private against another officer was deplored by the *Tercio* command. The following week Dermot O'Sullivan, told a Nationalist officer, Xavier de Silva, that the Brigade wished to return to Ireland. O'Sullivan, who was clearly distraught, told de Silva he would lead the Irish Brigade – representing "*la gran democracia Irlandesa*" – to fight on the side of the Republican government. When Yagüe learnt of O'Sullivan's outburst he placed him under arrest and disarmed the Brigade.[196] O'Sullivan's comments suggest that some of the volunteers were disillusioned not only with the Brigade but also by Nationalist Spain.

On April 9, O'Duffy wrote to Franco belatedly responding to Yagüe's demand for a change in the leadership of the Brigade. The first section of the letter accused Spanish and Irish officers of undermining his authority and sought to assure Franco of his loyalty.[197] The letter, alternately recriminatory, obsequious, self-pitying and obstinate confirms McCabe and McCullagh's descriptions of O'Duffy's personality. The uncompromising tone of the latter section suggests that O'Duffy had decided to wind up the Brigade:

"I am forced to believe, unfortunately that Your Excellency does not trust the battalion any longer and I feel we cannot stay here unless we enjoy Your Excellency's total confidence. I could not ask other Irishmen to come over to Spain either. This would mean that the Irish battalion would be fighting without reserves and as Your Excellency will appreciate due to your vast military experience that without reserves the battalion would soon cease to exist. This would not be of any help to Spain or Ireland. It would be a calamity for both countries. Consequently, I have no alternative but to ask Your Excellency to order the proper transportation in order to send the battalion to their own country. It will be a sad journey but it has to be done. We came here, full of sincere wishes to help Spain, and also to be able to have the honour of raising our flag beside yours when Your Excellency takes Madrid. We leave Spain unfortunately with pain and sadness".[198]

O'Duffy asked Franco to allow the Irish volunteers who wished to stay to form their own company within a *bandera* of the *Tercio*. More surprisingly, given their strained relations, O'Duffy told Franco that as long as one decent Irishman remained in Spain he wished to stay and fight for Spain – albeit as an *attaché* at the *Gran Hotel*. This, he believed, would prevent

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196 Report of El Coronel 2º Jefe de E.M., Navalcarnero, 22 April 1937, L156-24.; Yagüe to *General 2 Jefe de E.M.*, 26 April 1937, L.335-100, CGG, AGMA;

197 "I am sorry to have to communicate, Your Excellency, that on the part of the official attachés to the battalion, disastrous efforts are being made in order to cause discontent and to undermine the loyalty of the Irish troops . . . there are some Englishmen under the Irish battalion and a few depraved Irishmen who were suspended from their positions because of their behaviour, but with great pride I can assure you that 99% of the battalion remain loyal . . . The troops are dressed in rags, that is the reality of the bad state of their clothing. I have not seen beggars so badly dressed, but there is a loyal heart behind these rags and thanks be to God, their loyalty is as great today as on the day they embarked from Ireland to fight for the faith of their ancestors, although their lives have not been very happy lately. Your Excellency will appreciate my position. My attitude towards the cause of which, Your Excellency, is so noble and dignified, *Caudillo*, remains intact and will not change ever . . . those irresponsible officers who have caused so much sadness and inconvenience, both to me and to the rest of the Irish people in Spain, do not represent the cause of Your Excellency . . . there will not be any future alterations regarding my attitude or the individuals of the battalion referred to. Personally I could not do any other thing but help Your Excellency and that is what I have been doing so willingly. I left behind what I cared for most in order to help the cause that Your Excellency has been leading to proudly". Translation, O'Duffy to Franco, 9 April 1937, L.156-25, CGG, AGMA.

198 *Ibid.*

propaganda from their "mutual enemies in Russia and France.[199] Franco agreed to allow a small number of Irishmen remain but declined O'Duffy's offer.

The following week, Captain Camino reported O'Duffy's withdrawal terms to Salamanca. With the exception of a small number of men, described as mainly Protestant, the volunteers wished to leave Spain. O'Duffy requested the immediate withdrawal of his troops from the front, new uniforms, and repatriation of the volunteers on a first class Spanish vessel with an abundance of supplies. Again, O'Duffy felt this would negate "pernicious propaganda and twisted interpretations" from their mutual enemies. Both sides were to maintain the official story that the Brigade was returning because of the number of injuries and its successful completion of the six-month term of service. O'Duffy also requested to be allowed to make a propaganda speech to the Nationalist press and radio. Franco agreed to all but the last condition.[200]

Towards the end of April, various supporters of the *Bandera* attempted to mediate between O'Duffy and the Spanish command. Although McCabe felt O'Duffy was set on returning,[201] he agreed to help the Bishop of Gibraltar, Monsignor Fitzgerald, reach a compromise:

"The Bishop is enthusiastic about the Brigade, and he hasn't discovered yet that the Brigade is a "wash-out" and that the Spanish Command is sick of it. He [O'Duffy] should have given the Bishop a frank and exact idea of the situation".[202]

McCabe gave the Bishop a more realistic assessment of the Brigade than the one he received from his recent meeting with O'Duffy:

"I said that the Spanish authorities were not satisfied with the discipline of the Irish soldiers, or with the military capacity of the Irish officers. I thought it would be a friendly act to give the Bishop a hint, and put him on his guard. Besides, I sympathize with the Spanish point of view. This is a tragic and very expensive war for them. Their own army training, especially in the Legion, is good, the discipline is strict, and there has been too much laxity and "tom-foolery" in the Brigade to satisfy a serious soldier like Franco . . . The Bishop had an interview with Franco, but he is very discreet, and he didn't refer to it afterwards".[203]

On April 25, McCabe and the Bishop met General Kindelán, head of the Nationalist Air Force but the erstwhile supporter of the Irish bandera was now clearly reluctant to get involved:

"He was very courteous in his references to the Brigade, and simply said that "some" of the men had "exceeded their measure".[204]

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199 *Ibid.*
200 Series of documents dated 19 April 1937, drafted by Captain Camino and initialed by General Franco, L.156-24, CGG, AGMA.
201 "When the Bishop saw him in Cáceres, he talked as if he were anxious to stop on, but a notice appeared in the "Independent" a couple of days later, that the Brigade is leaving Spain. Therefore, some days before he talked to the Bishop, he must have taken this decision". Fr. McCabe diary, 25 April 1937.
202 Fr. McCabe diary, 21 April 1937.
203 *Ibid.*
204 *Ibid*, 25 April 1937. Dermot Keogh (1990) p.92.

On April 30, Fr. McCabe and Captain Meade drew up a series of documents for negotiations between O'Duffy and the Spanish Command which outlined the main areas of contention. The Irish demanded new uniforms, a change of liaison officers, and a transfer to a different front (away from Yagüe's control). They refused to agree to a change of leadership but conceded that Spanish officers could be appointed as A.D.C.s to O'Duffy and O'Sullivan. The Spanish insisted that the Irish improve discipline (particularly for offences against officers), communicate more effectively with Spanish headquarters and that O'Duffy take his own decisions instead of consulting with his company captains. Most importantly, O'Sullivan had to be replaced by a Spanish officer.[205]

McCabe pressed O'Duffy to accept the compromise. O'Duffy denied there was anything wrong with the Irish Brigade.[206] On May 2, McCabe and the Duchess of Tetuan made one final attempt to convince O'Duffy to change his mind:

"I wanted to find out definitely from O'Duffy if he had decided the question "to leave or not to leave". As we walked in the sun on the upper gallery, I came to the point, and asked O'Duffy if he would drop Capt. O'Sullivan, and for the sake of the Brigade, have a Spanish Major instead. O'Duffy got quite thick and obstinate, and began to splutter something about O'Sullivan's merits, and then he shouted out violently, "No, I'll take the Brigade home. I wouldn't stop here for the Duchess of Tetuan or all the O'Donnells in Ireland . . ."[207]

The Spanish authorities were equally unenthusiastic. In early May, the Duchess suggested a compromise to Nicolas Franco but was immediately rebuffed.[208] The following month Kerney reported to Dublin:

"Nicolas Franco and General Franco have now sized up O'Duffy's role who they consider has bluffed and promised much whilst performing little. They believe that his desire to return to Ireland is prompted by the approach of the general election and they realise now that O'Duffy's venture in Spain is a political one. They thought originally that O'Duffy had the military experience and science of a general; they now know, from conversations with him and otherwise, that his military knowledge is very limited. General Franco now refuses to see O'Duffy and is anxious to liquidate the whole affair as smoothly as possible".[209]

During May and early June Franco and O'Duffy argued over the details of the Brigade's repatriation. In his autobiography, O'Duffy recalled:

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205 Series of mediation documents dated 30 April 1937, folders 54-5, McCabe papers.
206 Fr. McCabe diary, May 1, 1937.
207 Fr. McCabe diary, May 1-2, 1937. Dermot Keogh (1990) p.93. See also Kerney to Walshe, 9 June 1938, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4 for O'Duffy's refusal to compromise.
208 Fr. McCabe to O'Duffy, 5 May 1937, folder 55, McCabe papers.
209 Kerney to Walshe, 8 June 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 51/1. Dermot Keogh (1990) p.92;

"General Franco gave orders that one of the best ships on the sea should be procured to bring home the Irish Brigade, that the catering should be first-class fare, and that a special first-grade train should be engaged to convey the Brigade to Lisbon at a total cost of £8,000".[210]

In fact, as Spanish documents reveal, these requests were made by O'Duffy who hoped to portray his Brigade as returning heroes.[211] In early June, Kerney reported, not surprisingly, that "Franco has difficulty in acceding to this request". On June 17, two months after the Brigade had been disarmed and ordered from the front, approximately six-hundred and fifty volunteers left Lisbon on board the *Mozambique*.[212] Between seven and fourteen men had died in Spain.[213] Around twenty Irishmen remained in Spain – six of them recovering in hospitals – the rest continued to fight with the Foreign Legion.[214]

Initially, O'Duffy's attempts to portray the Irish Brigade as a success were partly effective. An internal Nationalist document seen by Leopold Kerney shows that, ostensibly, they accepted O'Duffy's version of events:

"As a matter of fact, the news of the dissolution and repatriation of the "Irish Brigade", published in the foreign newspapers, is confirmed. The effectives of this organisation were always limited in number and never exceeded 600. With this decision, taken in agreement with our Supreme Command, and due to the two reasons given in the "Irish Independent" the question of . . . repatriation . . . is automatically settled".[215]

It was in the Nationalists interests to maintain the illusion of a successful Irish Brigade. Their agents in London were concerned about the:

"extreme[ly] bad impression it will create in this country and the comments in the Press by our enemies who will not fail to get in contact with the returning men and publish stories against us."[216]

The Brigade was met on its arrival in Dublin by a small crowd of supporters and a marching band – although O'Duffy recalled a cheering crowd of ten thousand.[217] A reception at the Mansion House was attended by the Lord Mayor, Alfie Byrne, Monsignor Waters, director

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210 Eoin O'Duffy (1938), p.242.

211 Camino/Franco documents, L.156-24, CGG, AGMA.

212 Not including the St. Mary's Anti-Communist Pipers band. According to Spanish records 632 men and 15 officers left on the *Mozambique*. The *Irish Times* (22 June 1937) reported 633 men and 24 officers.

213 The *Irish Press* (18 June 1937) stated fourteen men were "killed in action". The *Irish Times* (22 June 1937) stated that seven were killed in action and another five reported missing. Fr. McCabe recorded, probably more accurately, that seven Irishmen died before the Brigade's departure – two (accidents), two (shell-fire), two (shell wounds), one of pneumonia.

214 Lieutenants Bill Nangle, Michael Fitzpatrick, Pete Lawlor, sergeants T. Jones, M. Cadell, M. Weymes and legionaries J Madden, J. McCarthy remained in the Foreign Legion. Thomas Gunning was discharged but remained in Spain. P.J. Keogh, J. Duffy, Gabriel Delaney, J. Smith, J. Hayes, J. Doyle and S. O'Donnelly were hospitalised. John McGuire, D.V. O'Higgins, David O'Dea, Andrew O'Toole, Austin O'Reilly remained fighting in the legion. They were later joined by some of the injured volunteers.

215 Kerney's translation, Gérman Baraibar to Viscount de Mamblas, 13 May 1937, Kerney to Walshe, D/FA Madrid Embassy 51/1, 19 May 1937.

216 Telegram, London to Salamanca, 7 May 1937, L.1105-10, AB, MAE.

217 Eoin O'Duffy (1938) p.242.

of the CYMS and Paddy Belton, the Irish Christian Front president.[218] O'Duffy was later made a Freeman of Kilkenny.[219]

Despite such ceremonies, however, O'Duffy found it impossible to prevent more authentic accounts of the Irish Brigade becoming known. The hostility between O'Duffy and his officers, illustrated by Thomas Gunning's letter to Desmond FitzGerald, the Fine Gael politician, was too deep-seated to allow for much of a show of unity:

"O'Duffy and his entourage of bosthoons have given us a black eye here that will last for generations . . . We have insulted, swindled and hurt the grandest people on earth who thought of us as the finest soldiers and the most self-sacrificing Christians in the world. I should have known O'Duffy well enough to realise that he could and would make a mess even of this affair, which seemed so foolproof. I was very stupid, and I did a poor day's work for both Spain and Ireland when I helped the insane, uncultured lout to put his flat and smelly feet across the frontier last October".[220]

The splits within the Brigade became apparent as soon as the *Mozambique* reached Dublin. Two factions, a group of Kerrymen led by Horan and Carew, and another of northerners headed by Seán Cunningham marched off in separate directions from the main body. They told journalists that the Irish Brigade had been politically motivated, O'Duffy's officers had refused to fight, the only battle they were involved in was with one of Franco's units and that O'Duffy had been told to leave by Franco.[221] A dispute between O'Duffy and Belton over missing ICF funds during the summer of 1937 further tarnished the image of the pro-Franco movement in Ireland.

The failure of the Irish Brigade profoundly affected O'Duffy. He expected the virulent criticism and derision of the Irish left but not from Nationalist supporters. Many of those who lauded the Brigade on its departure ignored or pilloried O'Duffy on his return. Reviewing Francis McCullagh's *In Franco's Spain,* the pro-Franco periodical *Hibernia* commented:

"He [McCullagh] could have been excused for lashing out at the ignorant self-seekers who parodied the whole military history of Ireland by their clowning on the sacrificial altar of a great Christian people . . . For the first time in history . . . Irishmen have been talked of as cowards".[222]

O'Duffy was clearly sensitive to such criticism and responded to *Hibernia*:

"It would have been better perhaps if the shells of the Communists, which exploded in our trenches and dug-outs everyday and every hour of the day, for eleven weeks on the Jarama front, had effectively found their mark, rather than we should be subjected to such vilifying attacks . . . on our return to the country for the honour of which we risked everything that held life dear to us".[223]

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218 *Irish Press*, 22 May 1937.
219 *Irish Press*, 30 September 1937.
220 Thomas Gunning to Desmond FitzGerald, 15 July 1937, P80/7627, Desmond FitzGerald papers, UCD.
221 *Irish Times*, 23 June 1937.
222 *Hibernia*, January 1938.
223 *Ibid*, April 1938.

O'Duffy, now in declining health, made no attempt to revive the National Corporate Party. The general appeared a rather tragic figure in his final years. As his personal secretary noted: "In mind and body General O'Duffy was now a tired man . . . He was not a 'sick man' but his new timidity and indifference towards affairs was so unusual as to set one thinking".[224]

O'Duffy's fascism and the failure of the Brigade ensured that he remained in the political wilderness. His unsolicited offers to assist President Hyde and Eamon de Valera were declined. His only political activity following his return from Spain was with the secretive pro-Nazi People's National Party during World War II. The general briefly liaised between Nazi agents and the IRA with predictably little success. O'Duffy died in November 1944 and was buried, as he requested, close to the grave of Michael Collins.

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224 Captain Liam Walsh (MS, n.d.) p.213.

2. The International Brigades

The experiences of the other section of Irish men who fought in the Spanish Civil War – the volunteers of the International Brigade – contrasted in many ways with those of the Irish Brigade. The geographic, social and political backgrounds of the soldiers who supported Republican Spain varied considerably from the Irish Brigade. Most met with public condemnation rather than praise as they left Ireland. However, perhaps the most obvious contrast with O'Duffy's men lay in the International Brigaders military performance in Spain and their enduring historical legacy.

I. Backgrounds

In September 1936 the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) begun recruiting volunteers for the International Brigades.[1] The leaders of Republican Congress, struggling to maintain their own flagging organisation, were initially reluctant to support the proposal. In mid-September, Frank Ryan declared – "I wouldn't go to Spain, nor to USA, just now, because I feel I have to stand my ground here and rally our own. The front-line trenches of Spain are right here".[2] Peadar O'Donnell[3] held a similar opinion and did not take an active part in recruiting.[4] In December, a Republican Congress statement denied reports that George Gilmore, another prominent leader, had resigned to protest recruitment but distanced the organisation from the military unit – "Republican Congress sent no volunteers to fight for the Spanish Republic but members of the party naturally came together inspired by the same motive".[5]

Nevertheless, Republican Congress soon became committed to military intervention in Spain. From the outbreak of the war, Charlie Donnelly, a prominent advocate of an internationalist ideology within Congress, urged Ryan and Gilmore to support the Spanish Republic. At a meeting of the leadership shortly after the Nationalist rebellion Donnelly:

"accused Ryan of betraying the legacy of Connolly . . . Ryan's answer was that while Charlie had been writing accusing letters from London, he had been trying desperately to hold the rapidly weakening Congress

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1 *Communist Party of Ireland, Outline History* (Dublin, n.d.) p.63.
2 Frank Ryan to Gerard O'Reilly, 17 September 1936, cited from Seán Cronin, *Frank Ryan* (Dublin 1980) p.78.
3 Peadar O'Donnell (1893-1986): b. Co. Donegal; joined IRA, 1918; imprisoned by government during civil war, 1922-4; led campaign against land annuities, 1927; founder Saor Eire, 1931; editor, *An Phoblacht*, 1931-4; founder Republican Congress, 1934; activist and author until his death.
4 Grattan Freyer, *Peadar O'Donnell* (New Jersey, 1973) p.101.
5 *Irish Press*, 21 December 1936.

together, at home and in America. The argument was finally settled and the meeting agreed that a message of support should be sent to the Spanish Republican Government".[6]

Republican Congress became further drawn into support of the Spanish government following the vehement public reaction to its telegram to the Republican government. Cardinal MacRory, the Primate of All-Ireland, denounced Congress and hinted that the government should investigate the matter.[7] Ryan responded with a lengthy defence of the Spanish Republic.[8] Right-wing organisations such as the Irish Christian Front, many of the clergy and the more fervent anti-communist newspapers such as the *Irish Independent* orchestrated a campaign in support of Nationalist Spain. The combined opposition of what Republican Congress termed "the anti-Republican forces in Ireland" ensured that Spain became the most urgent political issue for the Irish left.[9]

General O'Duffy's decision to form the Irish Brigade was another important factor leading to Congress support for the International Brigades. Once Congress had committed itself to political support of the Spanish Republic it inevitably felt a need to respond in equal measure to O'Duffy. Frank Ryan's statement on the departure of the first large group of volunteers emphasised this:

"It is a demonstration of the sympathy of revolutionary Ireland with the Spanish people in their fight against international Fascism. It is also a reply to the intervention of Irish Fascism in the war against the Spanish Republic which, if unchallenged, would remain a disgrace on our own people. We want to show that there is a close bond between the democracies of Ireland and Spain. Our fight is the fight of the Spanish people, as it is of all peoples who are the victims of tyranny".[10]

Irish communists tend to play down the importance of O'Duffy's role in the origins of the left-wing contingent. Michael O'Riordan,[11] whose *Connolly Column* remains the most influential history of the Irishmen who fought in the International Brigades, stated:

". . . even if O'Duffy's Brigade had never enlisted for Franco, the Irish Unit of the International Brigades would still have come into being, because of the strength of the traditions that bound the Irish struggle for independence with the fight for humanity the world over".[12]

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6 Joseph Donnelly, *Charles Donnelly: The Life and Poems* (Dublin, 1987) p.43.
7 *Irish Independent*, 21 September 1936. Seán Cronin (1980) p.78 believes MacRory's attitude was responsible for Ryan going to Spain but does not outline the "very strong" evidence which he claims exists for his assertion.
8 *Irish Press*, 23 September 1936.
9 *Ibid*, 5 November 1936.
10 *Ibid*, 14 December 1936.
11 Michael O'Riordan: b. Cork 1917; CPI member; fought in Spanish Civil War; interned in Curragh, 1940-3; founder Liam Mellows (Cork) Labour Party branch; expelled Labour Party, 1944 (ostensibly for attending communist conference); founder Irish Workers' Party; general secretary (third) Communist Party of Ireland, 1970.
12 Michael O'Riordan, *Connolly Column* (Dublin, 1979) p.137.

It is necessary to distinguish between the motives of the Communist Party of Ireland and those of Republican Congress for supporting the International Brigades. Irish communists, representing a tiny section of an exceptionally well-disciplined and powerful international organisation, were inherently internationalist in their outlook. Furthermore, the Communist Party of Ireland followed the instructions of the Comintern – whether this demanded it foment class war (1933), strive for class unity against fascism (1934), denounce the Second World War as imperialist (1939), or support it as anti-fascist (1941). For this reason the first part of O'Riordan's statement is accurate – Irish communists would have gone to Spain in much the same numbers had O'Duffy not organised the Irish Brigade. However, the motivations cited by O'Riordan, the CPI, and many secondary sources for the Communist Party's support of the Spanish Republic – the Irish tradition of international solidarity with freedom fighters and their desire to defend Spanish democracy against fascism – belong more to myth than reality.

The objective of the Popular Front policy, as formulated by the Soviet Union and implemented by the Comintern through its control of the Communist Parties, was to secure the support of the 'western democracies' (essentially France and Britain) against the threat posed to the Soviet Union's security by the fascist states. Communists argued that the fascist powers represented a mutual enemy and depicted communism as the natural 'anti-fascist' ally of the democratic nations. In an attempt to render the Popular Front policy more plausible, the Comintern ceased advocating revolution, even suppressing it in Spain, and became a staunch defender of 'bourgeois democracy'.[13] At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, two years after the introduction of the Popular Front policy, the International Brigades were established by the Comintern which instructed each Communist Party to raise a certain number of volunteers.[14] The objective of Comintern support for the Republican Government, and *raison d'etre* of the Brigades, was the defence of Soviet foreign policy interests not those of 'bourgeois democracies' which were denounced as 'fascism in disguise' in 1933 and again in 1939 after the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany. Consequently, the support of the CPI and the other communist parties for the International Brigades must be seen primarily in the context of their adherence to Soviet-Comintern policy rather than ostensible motives such as the "spontaneous response of world democracy to the threat of fascism".[15]

The motivations of Republican Congress are more complex. It is significant that Charlie Donnelly, the Congress leader originally most committed to Spain, was to some extent politically distanced from the rest of the movement. Frank Ryan recalled:

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13 E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (London 1984) p.84.

14 Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, 1990) p.454. Joe Monks, then a member of the Communist Party in London recalled – "When Pollitt and the British CP began to organise groups from here, they asked for an Irish contingent . . . " (Joe Monks interview, Spanish Civil War collection (SCW) 11303/1, Sound Archives, Imperial War Museum (IWM), London.

15 R. Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army* (Kentucky, 1982) pp.7-15.

"Charley and I used to be in opposing wings when he first came into the movement in Ireland. He was all theory then and had little use for my "nationalism" as he called it".[16]

Similarly, Donnelly's brother commented:

"He was an internationalist believing that true nationalism must have an international dimension and would quote Connolly to prove it. He held that Connolly and Casement's nationalism was essentially internationalist because it was anti-imperialist. He had always had difficulty in convincing his fellow Republican Congress members of this as they were more concerned with Irish issues . . . "[17]

Donnelly's internationalism was rooted in his Marxism and held less appeal for most members of Republican Congress or the IRA.[18] The fact that these two organisations lacked a significant internationalist ideology suggests that their members were motivated to fight in Spain more in response to political circumstances in Ireland and other non-political factors than abstract or theoretical notions of international solidarity. A joint manifesto signed by IRA volunteers, Congress members, communists and other veterans of Spain points to such a conclusion:

"We saw the "Irish Independent" spreading atrocity propaganda as it did about "Catholic Belgium" in 1914. We saw that its allies in Britain were the "Daily Mail", the "Morning Post", and diehard Tories, well-known to us for their attitude to Ireland and any other people striving towards liberty. We saw General O'Duffy, Patrick Belton and others, who but three years ago were in the forefront of a blatant effort to uproot democratic government in this country, organising financial and even military support for the war to overthrow the Spanish Republican Government. It was now clear that the same sinister forces that had stampeded the Irish people into the Great War in 1914 were again at work, for as false a cause, with as cynical a propaganda."[19]

Republican Congress supported intervention in Spain as a response to the threat (or provocation) posed by the resurgent coalition of right-wing forces in Ireland which occurred in the autumn of 1936. O'Duffy's participation served to reinforce their belief that "Irish fascism", ambiguously defined as those forces which most strenuously opposed the 'Workers Republic' (General O'Duffy, Patrick Belton, William Lombard Murphy, the proprietor of the *Irish Independent*, and the more reactionary elements within the Catholic Church and Fine Gael) could be effectively opposed in Spain.

On 11 December 1936 approximately eighty volunteers left Ireland led by Frank Ryan.[20] The choice of Ryan as leader reflected his military experience, commanding presence and probably also his prominence as a republican rather than a communist.[21] The following

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16 *Workers Republic*, July 1938.
17 Joseph Donnelly (Dublin, 1987) p.32, 42.
18 Although the IRA leadership ordered its members not to intervene on either side a substantial number joined the International Brigades (see table 2.5).
19 *Irish Democrat*, 23 October 1937.
20 *Irish Press*, 14 December 1936.
21 Conor Foley, *Legion of the Rearguard* (London, 1992) p.163.

week another thirty men departed from Belfast.[22] Their quiet departure contrasted with that of the Irish Brigade. Volunteers for the International Brigades generally left in complete secrecy. Few told even their parents of their decision to fight in Spain. Eugene Downing recalled:

"I told my parents I was going to the Grand National . . . I sent a postcard from London, "Come up to have a look at London for a few days". Then I sent a postcard from Paris. So I gradually attuned them to the idea that I was moving further and further away. Eventually they got a postcard from Spain."[23]

The secrecy was partly due to their fears about non-intervention but many volunteers also knew their parents and friends would oppose their decision to fight for such a dangerous and unpopular cause. One young IRA volunteer wrote to his parents:

"I am very sorry for not telling you where I was going. I am going to Spain to fight with the International Column. Please forgive me for not letting you know. I got my wages in the Gas. Co. alright.
I left a message with a fellow to be delivered to you on Sunday. I shall be in Spain by Monday. So God bless you and protect you. Tell all at home I wish them the best of luck. Don't forget to say a few prayers for me. I am going to confession now. Tell all the children to pray for me. Don't forget to write to me. Tell all at home to write as well. We are going out to fight for the working class of Spain. It is not a religious war. That is all propaganda. I must close now as we are moving away from the station. Good bye, dear Mother. Don't forget to pray for me. Tell Dad also to say a few prayers for me."[24]

The emphasis the writer places on religious devotion suggests an eagerness to disassociate his cause from anti-clericalism. Similarly, Eilís Ryan recalled the departure of her brother, Frank Ryan:

"He put his rosary beads into my hand and said, "Tell mother and father that I'm not a 'red'. I am going to fight for democracy in Spain".[25]

The reports of the desecration of Catholic churches and murder of clergy had a sensational impact in the autumn of 1936. Interestingly, though, a letter from the young IRA volunteers' parents (also from a republican background) to the Department of External Affairs shows that they opposed their son fighting in Spain but apparently not for religious reasons:

"– [his uncle] was shot at the Custom House, May 1921, and – [another uncle] was hanged in Mountjoy, March of the same year, but "fighting for freedom in Spain" is quite a different thing from fighting for freedom in Ireland."[26]

Potential recruits were first vetted by the CPI which selected suitable volunteers for service. Volunteers were rejected for various reasons – age, physical or mental condition, political unsuitability, as well as importance to the party. Twenty-one year old Bob Doyle, rejected by the CPI because of his youth, persuaded the British Communist Party (CPGB) to accept

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22 *Irish Independent*, 19 December 1936.
23 Eugene Downing interview, January 1996.
24 D/FA Madrid Embassy 10/2.
25 'Eilís Ryan In Her Own Words', *Saothar 21*, 1996, p.135.
26 Letter to Eamon de Valera, D/FA Restricted.(R) 241/12. Many files relating to individuals in Spain are restricted by the National Archives. The persons named within the files can not be identified.

him.[27] Others such as seventeen-year old Tommy Woods lied about their ages.[28] Sean Murray,[29] the general secretary of the CPI told Bill Clare and Seán O'hEidirsceoil they were more useful to the party in Ireland.[30] For those approved by the CPI the process was perfunctory. Eugene Downing recalled his experience:

"It was all done through the Communist Party . . . Sean Murray was there. He says, "Can you read that?". I'd want to be blind not to. "Right", he says, "you're elected". That was my medical test."[31]

In London the Irish recruits were inspected by the British Communist Party and travelled on to Paris using a 'weekend ticket' often under an assumed name.[32] After further medical and political examinations, the dangers of service in the International Brigades were explained and those who wished to continue were smuggled over the Spanish border to the International Brigades training base. The Irish consul in Paris, Art O'Brien, complained that the use of the 'weekend ticket' coupled with the indifference of the French authorities allowed Irish volunteers to reach the Spanish border with relative ease even after the implementation of non-intervention legislation. In late February he reported:

". . . the French authorities are undoubtedly still committing breaches of the non-intervention agreement by allowing foreigners to use French territory for the purpose of intervening in the Spanish war. It is quite clear that Paris is being used as a regular centre for the reception and despatch of volunteers of all nationalities."[33]

By mid-1937 O'Brien had repatriated six destitute Irishmen who reached France using the weekend tickets. However, his suggestion that Irish nationals should be excluded from the weekend ticket system was rejected as impractical by de Valera.[34]

Volunteers who applied for a passport often found their applications approved even if it was known they intended to fight in Spain. Frank Edwards received a passport by asking Owen Sheehy-Skeffington, another well-known radical, to write a letter recommending him for a position in a French school.[35] In October 1936 the Passport Office referred two applicants to the Special Branch who reported that they were active communists and known to have recently volunteered for service in Spain.[36] One had a letter from his parish priest saying he wished to visit the grave of his brother. The other man claimed he was making a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Special Branch referred the applications to the Department of Justice who passed

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27 David Corkhill (ed.) *The Road to Spain* (Fife, 1981) p.146, p.151.

28 Frank Ryan discovered Woods' age after his death in Cordova (Frank Ryan to Sean Murray, 13 July 1937, D/FA 10/2).

29 Sean Murray (1898-1961): b. Cushendall, Co. Antrim; commandant IRA Antrim Battalion, Anglo-Irish War; anti-Treaty combatant, civil war; attended Lenin International School, 1928-31; organised Revolutionary Workers' Groups, 1931-33; CPI general secretary, 1933-40; national organiser CPNI, 1950-61.

30 Gustav Klaus (ed.), *Strong Words, Brave Deeds* (Dublin, 1994) p.19.

31 Interview with Eugene Downing, January 1996.

32 The 'weekend ticket', issued by Southern Railways in England, enabled Irish and British citizens to travel to France, Belgium and Holland without a passport.

33 Art O'Brien, Paris Consul, to Joe Walshe, secretary, Dept. of External Affairs, 26 February 1937 (D/FA 102/98).

34 Two deserted, four decided not to continue to Spain (D/FA 102/98).

35 Uinseann MacEoin, *Survivors* (Dublin 1980) p.11.

36 Restricted file.

them on to the Department of External Affairs. After several weeks consideration De Valera, the Minster for External Affairs, decided he had "no objection to passports being issued in these two cases". It has been suggested that De Valera's lax attitude may have been motivated by a desire to rid Ireland of troublesome radicals but there was little the Irish government could legally do to prevent volunteers travelling to Spain before the introduction of non-intervention legislation.[37]

It is difficult to estimate how many Irishmen enlisted in the Republican forces. In contrast to the Irish Brigade, Republican volunteers arrived intermittently between September 1936 and April 1938 and fought on several different fronts. Bill Scott, a member of the Communist Party, arrived in September 1936 before the formation of the International Brigades and joined the Thaelmann Centuria.[38] Tommy Patton and William Barry also preceded the first large contingent of volunteers which arrived in December 1936.

Any estimate must also contend with the problem of defining an Irish volunteer. Michael O'Riordan's much quoted figure of one hundred and forty-five is misleading.[39] He includes English volunteers who associated with the Irish in Spain (such as Samuel Lee from London) as well as some second-generation Irish living in England (Johnny Riordan from London and Pat Murphy from Liverpool) and the USA (Pat Long, Paul Burns, and the O'Flaherty brothers, Charlie, Eddie and Frank).[40] However, O'Riordan excludes far more second-generation Irishmen than he includes. He omits volunteers who travelled from Ireland (Robert Hepburn and Arthur Nicholl), Northern Ireland (H. McGrath, Archibald Baillie) England (J.J. O'Reilly and Gerard Doyle), the USA (Andrew Delaney, Chris Kelly) and Canada (Paddy McAllister, Pat McGuire). Also excluded from O'Riordan's list are several deserters (including Charles McGuinness, Patrick Keenan, Tim Kennan and Brendan Moroney), Irishmen who fought in units other than the International Brigades (John Sullivan)[41] and volunteers who opposed the communist line in Spain (Captain Jack White).

On 3 January 1937, Frank Ryan informed Gerard O'Reilly that the British Battalion was "five hundred and fifty strong, of which three hundred and fifty are from Ireland, fifty being

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37 See p266-8. The police in Britain and the USA were also unable to stop volunteers travelling to Spain (R. Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army* (Kentucky, 1982) p.40.

38 *Irish Democrat*, 27 March 1937.

39 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.138. Other estimates except for Bowyer-Bell generally agree: 400 (J. Bowyer-Bell, *The Secret Army* (Dublin 1979) p. 134); 146 (Peter O'Connor, *For the Record: Some Personal Recollections* (Unpublished MS, n.d.) p20); 132 – volunteers leaving Ireland only (Frank Edwards in Uinseann MacEoin, *Survivors* (Dublin, 1980) p.12); 127 – volunteers leaving Ireland only (Sean Cronin (1980) p.88).

40 The fact that some of those who were born in Ireland but lived in Britain such as George Leeson did not consider themselves Irish while other second-generation Irish such as Sam Wilde, commander of the British Battalion, described themselves as "more Irish than English" complicates the issue. David Corkhill (ed.), *The Road to Spain* (Fife, 1981) p.14, p.75.

41 John Sullivan fought with the Irrintzi Battalion (Basque forces) from February 1937 until the fall of Bilbao in June 1937. He was arrested by Nationalists trying to leave Spain in October and released in December 1937 (D/FA 143/71).

from Belfast, sixty Liverpool-Irish, and as you know New York, Philadelphia and Boston are well represented".[42] This estimate is too high, even were it to include second-generation Irishmen, and was clearly intended for propaganda purposes. The badly-kept and often inaccurate records of the Republican government and International Brigade headquarters provide little reliable information but these and other recently released files suggest that close to two hundred Irishmen fought with the Republican forces.[43]

The geographical origins of the Republican volunteers differed substantially from General O'Duffy's recruits (table 2.1). While the Irish Brigade drew much of its support from villages and small towns in rural Ireland, the International Brigade was predominantly drawn from cities and large towns; Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Waterford account for two-thirds of the recruits. Donegal, a county with a tradition of social radicalism and a source of strong support for Republican Congress, was also well represented. Many of those born in rural counties actually lived in Dublin or other cities as left-wing organisations in Ireland were mainly urban-based.[44] The Communist Party had no real existence outside Dublin and Belfast.[45] Republican Congress fared little better with branches only in the cities, large towns and several traditional radical bases such as Achill and Castlecomer.[46] Interestingly, forty three, at the very least, of the one hundred and forty four volunteers included in the sample lived outside Ireland. One obvious explanation is that the 1930s was a period of economic depression and high emigration. Even so, the figure, representing thirty per cent of the total sample, is significant.

Table 2.1 – Geographical Distribution of Volunteers[47]

Dublin	42	Cavan	4
Antrim	26	Limerick	4
Cork	12	Tipperary	4
Waterford	12	Clare	3
Donegal	7	Galway	3
Derry	6	Kilkenny	3

The other counties accounted for two or less volunteers.

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[42] Frank Ryan to Gerald O'Reilly, 3 January 1937, cited from Marcel Acier, *From Spanish Trenches* (New York, 1937) p.113.

[43] Irishmen are recorded as Irish, English, American and Dutch in the records of the International Brigades (*S. Militar* 1948, *Carp. 1688*, *Archivo Historico Nacional*, *Seccion Guerra Civil*, Salamanca). Records of British Foreign Office, Dominion Office and Department of External Affairs (particularly the restricted files) referred to throughout this chapter include a substantial number of names omitted from O'Riordan's list.

[44] See p.195.

[45] Communist Party of Ireland, *Outline History* (Dublin, n.d.) p.29.

[46] Patrick Byrne, *The Irish Republican Congress Revisited*, (London, 1994) pp. 21-2.

[47] Source: British and Irish government records, national and left-wing newspapers, memoirs, interviews etc. Sample size – 144.

Table 2.1a – Volunteers residing outside Ireland before fighting in Spain[48]

Britain	37
USA	4
Canada	1
Australia	1

Table 2.2 – Age of volunteers[49]

17 - 19	3
20 - 24	25
25 - 29	16
30 - 39	18
Over 40	3

Table 2.3 – Occupations of volunteers[50]

Professions:		**7**
Journalists	5	
Teacher	1	
Clergyman	1	
Skilled/semi-skilled workers:		**15**
Tradesmen	9	
Printers	2	
Salesman	1	
Baker	1	
Apprentice	1	
Butcher	1	
Others:		**33**
Labourers/Unskilled workers	20	
Sailors	4	
Soldiers[51]	4	
Waiters	2	
Docker	1	
Transport worker	1	
Milkman	1	

Table 2.3 lists the occupations of volunteers. The sample is small but it clearly demonstrates that the International Brigade volunteers were drawn from a lower socio-economic background than O'Duffy's volunteers. Less than 13% held professional occupations and over twice as many workers were unskilled (60%) than skilled or semi-skilled (27%). Some occupations common among the Irish Brigade volunteers – farmers, gardaí, business-owners – were noticeably absent. There were also few ex-National Army soldiers. The much disputed perception of the International Brigades containing a large proportion of intellectuals and artists is not borne out by Irish statistics.[52]

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48 Source: *Ibid.* Sample size – 23.

49 Source: *Ibid.* Sample size – 65.

50 Source: British and Irish government records, national and left-wing newspapers, memoirs, interviews etc. Sample size – 55.

51 This figure includes only those who were serving soldiers immediately prior to travelling to Spain and excludes the much larger numbers of individuals who had, at one point, served in an army.

52 The contingent included two poets (Charlie Donnelly and Tom O'Brien). Another volunteer, Alec Digges, was part of the New Theatre Group.

As in the case of the Irish Brigade a substantial proportion of the recruits had some military experience, although the sort of experience was usually quite different (table 2.4). The International Brigade volunteers who fought in the Irish Civil War opposed the Treaty while, with few exceptions, Irish Brigade volunteers served with the National Army. A significant proportion of those with military experience in both groups served with the British army before the Spanish Civil War. Approximately half the International Brigade recruits were, or had been, members of the post-Civil War IRA. Many had left after the split with Republican Congress in 1934. Another difference between the two contingents was the absence of senior National army officers on the Republican side.

Table 2.4 – Military experience of volunteers[53]

IRA (Anglo-Irish and/or Civil War)	12
IRA (Anglo-Irish and/or Civil War) and other armies	3
IRA (post Civil-War)	15
IRA (post Civil-War) and other armies	1
British Army/Navy	9
Canadian Army	1

Table 2.5 indicates the political affiliations of the volunteers. It is not possible to estimate how many volunteers were not aligned to a political party as sources generally record the political affiliation of an individual rather than the fact that he was not a member of any party. However, the communist vetting procedure ensured that few non-left wing recruits enrolled in the Brigades. The estimate of Communist Party members is probably too low. IRA and Republican Congress members were usually open about their political affiliations but communists were more circumspect often strategically infiltrating other left-wing organisations.[54] It should also be noted that Republican Congress was technically an umbrella group of left republicans rather than a political party. Hence, the political loyalties of the fifty-two volunteers were less rigid than the table appears to suggest.

Over half the volunteers were communists, a large number considering the size of the CPI compared to the far more populist IRA and Congress organisations. The proportion (59%) closely resembles one historian's estimate that sixty per cent of the International Brigades were composed of communists.[55] The fact that IRA activists were more numerous than those of Republican Congress is surprising as one would assume the type of volunteer who went to Spain would have been more attracted to Congress than the socially conservative IRA. A letter written by Frank Ryan confirmed that many of the volunteers were in the IRA

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[53] Source: British and Irish government records, national and left-wing newspapers, memoirs, interviews etc. Sample size – 41.

[54] For instance, there is disagreement over whether Charlie Donnelly, a prominent figure in Republican Congress was ever a member of the Communist Party. Manus O'Riordan, 'Communism in Dublin in the 1930s' in Gustav Klaus (1994); Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.76.

[55] Hugh Thomas (London, 1990) p.455.

right up to leaving for Spain.[56] One explanation may be that the Spanish Civil War appealed to IRA volunteers bored with hijacking Bass trucks or harassing money-lenders and keen for real action. The opportunity to shoot Blueshirts was an additional inducement.[57]

Table 2.5 – Political affiliations of volunteers[58]

Communists		34
CPI	25	
CPGB	9	
IRA		12
Republican Congress		9
NILP		2
Clan na nGael		1

Political affiliations, a potentially contentious issue in the International Brigades where communists fought alongside anarchists, socialists and liberals, were less of a problem among the Irish contingent who generally shared a similar left-wing republican background. Irish volunteers, like the rest of the International Brigade, declared their affiliation as anti-fascist on their military papers. Frank Ryan's response to being labelled a communist by a left-wing newspaper demonstrates his cautious outlook on the issue:

"As you know, far from being a leader of the British – or any other – Communist Party, I don't even happen to be a member. But on the other hand no one is going to get me join an anti-Communist ramp. Hence my persistent refusal to answer on my party affiliations".[59]

With the possible exception of Charlie Donnelly, who was known to disprove of Stalin's purges, the Irish Marxists all appear to have been members of the Communist Party.[60] According to one Northern Ireland Socialist Party leader, non-CPI Marxists were excluded by the communist organisers.[61]

An assessment of the factors leading the Communist Party and Republican Congress to support the International Brigades does not adequately explain why particular individuals belonging to those organisations, and other recruits with different political perspectives, volunteered for service. Irishmen went to Spain for a wide variety of reasons. One British volunteer described the International Brigades as a disparate collection of "pure idealists, political opportunists, doctrinaire Marxists, adventurers and plain rogues"[62] – although in

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56 Seán Cronin (Dublin, 1980) p.85.
57 J. Bowyer-Bell (1979) p.133; Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (London, 1987) p.151.
58 Source: British and Irish government records, national and left-wing newspapers, memoirs, interviews etc. The political affiliation of communists who belonged to additional organisations is recorded only as communist. Sample size – 58.
59 Seán Cronin (1980) p.103
60 Joseph Donnelly (1987) p.39.
61 Malachy Gray, 'A Shop Steward Remembers', *Saothar 11*, 1986. The NISP was sympathetic to the anti-Stalinist Spanish POUM.
62 Jason Gurney, *Crusade in Spain* (London, 1974) p.66.

Ireland one might expect adventurers and mercenaries more likely to join the better paid and more socially acceptable Irish Brigade.

The motivations most frequently cited, indeed adopted as the credo of the Irish contingent, were that they wished to protect democracy against international fascism and "restore the honour besmirched" by O'Duffy's involvement.[63] While many men undoubtedly went to Spain to defend democracy, a large proportion were revolutionaries with little sympathy for any bourgeois government. Some believed Spain marked the start of an inevitable war against fascism. Others were attracted to the revolutionary nature of the struggle. Paddy McElroy from Dublin stated:

"My reason for going to fight the Spanish Government forces was the same as that of all the comrades I met out there. Each and every one of us had developed a hatred of the ruling class of our own countries . . . ".[64]

Similarly, Joe Monks recalled – "We were going to change the world, it wasn't a question of anti-fascism with me. It was a question of revolution".[65] Such public statements were unusual. They rested awkwardly with the Popular Front ideology of the communist organisers who (at least publicly) interpreted the Spanish Civil War as a conflict between democracy and fascism rather than capitalism and socialism. The Communist Party was keen to stress its recently acquired democratic credentials both in Ireland and Spain:

"The C.P.I. does not have as its object the overthrow of the democratically elected Government. Everywhere in the world to-day Communists are defending democratic government."[66]

The venture also attracted its share of adventurers – both political and non-political. Captain Jack White[67] was an example of the former. Following a brief but distinguished military career White had been active in a variety of causes from anti-imperialism to labour struggles throughout Ireland and Britain. As one Northern Ireland civil servant noted with prescience in 1934 – "White is a stormy petrel & cannot resist the impulse to join in any fight that is going".[68] Captain Charles McGuinness[69] typified the less politically-minded adventurer. During the War of Independence McGuinness had been sent to Europe by Michael Collins to

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63 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.56.
64 *Irish Democrat*, 11 December 1937.
65 Joe Monks interview, SCW 11303/1, IWM.
66 *The Worker*, 14 November 1936.
67 Captain Jack White (1879-1940): b. Whitehall, Broughshane, Co. Antrim; son of Field Marshal Sir George White; enlisted British army, 1899; awarded DSO for service in South Africa, 1901; resigned commission, 1909; leading member of Irish Citizen Army, 1913; organised Ulster Protestants against unionism with Roger Casement before World War I; involved in labour dispute in Wales, 1916; financial supporter of Socialist Party of Ireland, 1919; imprisoned for sedition in Dublin (1920), Edinburgh (1921); arrested for anti-treaty activism (1922); joined Larkin's Irish Workers' League, 1923; joined Revolutionary Workers' Groups, 1931; organised Dublin branch of Republican Congress composed of British ex-servicemen; converted to anarchism in Spain; fell out with International Brigade leaders and left Spain to work with Emma Goldman in London.
68 Memo to Sir Dawson Bates, Minister for Home Affairs (HA) 32/1/608, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland.
69 Charles McGuinness: b. Derry 1893; nautical sea captain; sent to Italy and Germany by Michael Collins to purchase arms for the IRA, 1920; deserted from International Brigades, November 1936; wrote a series of sensational articles for the *Irish Independent* about his experiences in Spain; arrested with other IRA members for attempting to sail a Nazi spy to Germany, 1942.

purchase arms for the IRA. He also served in the British navy. After his return from Spain, McGuinness returned to the IRA and was arrested for attempting to sail a Nazi spy to Germany.[70] The introduction to his series of articles ('I Fought With the Reds') for the *Irish Independent* illustrates his unique outlook:

"There was a war on in Spain! Inactive, in the warlike sense, since the Chinese campaign of 1926, I decided to investigate Europe's most complex fracas. After studying the leading press reports, like most people, I came to the conclusion that the Government forces were losing. This, then, was the side I should support".[71]

However, in contrast with many of the Irish Brigade volunteers, the International Brigaders were predominantly highly politicised. Even many of the non-affiliated recruits were politically conscious. For example, Tom Murphy from Belfast, who was not then a member of any political organisation, recalled his motivation:

"I was on a railroad job for a while . . . in a camp I found *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, the *Communist Manifesto*, and I says this is my life, this is great, what wonderful people these are, the writers".[72]

However, even the actions of politically motivated recruits should be viewed within a social and economic context. Raymond Carr's belief that the "psychological and material effects of the depression" and the "sheer boredom with a depressed and depressing Britain" were factors is equally applicable to Ireland.[73] Indeed, a few volunteers were not ideologically motivated. For them, Spain simply offered adventure or an employment opportunity – a metal worker from Dublin enlisted because he heard the Republican government paid well for skilled workers.[74]

Given the multiplicity of potential motives a more useful approach is to establish a social-political pattern shared by the volunteers. By assessing the characteristics recruits tended to have in common it is possible to outline what sort of individual was likely to join the International Brigades. The average Irish volunteer was working class, aged in his twenties

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70 Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (London, 1995), p.217.

71 *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1937. McGuinness soon deserted. A British Consul official in Barcelona reported his reasons – "He described the latter [conditions] as appalling owing to lack of organization, want of training on the part of the troops and a fairly complete absence of any attempt at sanitary precautions" (W 16991/9549/41). The *Irish Independent*, however, received a more dramatic account of his departure – "I fancied now and then that the beautiful pale faces of the Spanish *senoras* wore looks something like that of our Irish womenfolk when the "Tans" went swaggering through semi-demolished towns in Ireland in 1921. . . I had witnessed executions in China, saw firing squads during the World War in East Africa, but never anything so wanton as this. "My God", I prayed, "Get me out of this accursed land. Nothing in the world, no cause can justify this" (*Irish Independent*, 6 January 1937).

72 Tom Murphy, SCW 805/1, IWM. Art O'Brien noted the political motivation of another non-party volunteer – "The person has during the past few years taken a deep interest, both in Ireland and England, of "left-wing" propaganda. He was particularly influenced by the propaganda of Mr. Frank Ryan and Mr. Pollit [sic] of the British Communist Party. He gradually became "class conscious" and finally intervened actively in the Spanish struggle (O'Brien to Walshe, 5 February 1938, D/FA [R] Paris Embassy P10/55).

73 David Corkhill, *The Road to Spain* (Fife, 1981) Introduction. Eugene Downing also suggested that peer pressure and a sense of duty motivated volunteers to fight.

74 After a dispute over wages he was arrested. He later deserted after learning he was to be transferred to the infantry (D/FA [R] 210/182). Another volunteer from Dublin, Tim Kennan, claimed to be lured to Spain by the promise of a high-paying job. (R. Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army* (Kentucky 1982) p.167).

or early thirties, and lived in an urban area in Ireland or abroad.[75] He was politically conscious and committed to left-wing activism of some form. He had probably been arrested and almost certainly harassed because of his political beliefs. In many cases he, or members of his family, had fought against the Treaty during the Irish Civil War.

Hywel Francis, in his study of Welsh miners in the International Brigades, suggests that the past experiences of communist miners was a crucial factor in their decision to fight in Spain:

"Their acceptance of imprisonment . . . their fanaticism, their optimism, and their readiness to challenge the existing social order . . . This acceptance of hardship was only one step away from an acceptance of death which volunteering for the International Brigades entailed".[76]

Similarly, Robert Rosenstone, historian of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, pointed out that most American volunteers were already involved in trade unionism or political movements and argued:

"For many of the men the commitment had really been made earlier. Spain merely reflected the depth of their dedication, there the forces of the decade – simplified into the idea of democracy versus fascism – seemed to have been joined in battle."[77]

In the context of Ireland, where socialism and communism were entirely without popular support, the argument of historians like Francis and Rosenstone is certainly strengthened. The life of a committed left-wing radical in Ireland often involved not just dismissal from a job, harassment or arrest but estrangement from one's own community and family.[78] Similar consequences were known for British socialists but, for a variety of reasons – the existence of a strong socialist tradition, the political support of the Labour Party for the Spanish Republic, the relative strength of the Communist Party, and the less important influence of the Catholic Church – the level of anti-communist hostility in Britain was far less intense. The political and social isolation of the volunteers offers one explanation why so many of those who went to Spain lived away from Ireland.[79] These men could be compared with the large number of Germans and Italians exiled in Europe before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War who comprised the first early surge of recruits into Republican Spain.[80]

A further aspect of the marginal status of socialism in Ireland worth considering is the likely effect on activists of the consistent failure of their movements to achieve any significant level

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75 Robert Rosenstone presents a similar profile of American recruits – "The "average volunteer" was an American in his twenties who had lived in an industrial or urban center where labor unions and radical political parties had been most active". (Robert A. Rosenstone, 'The Men of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion', Journal *of American History*, September 1967, p.326.

76 Hywel Francis, 'Welsh Miners and the Spanish Civil War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, 1970, p.182.

77 Robert Rosenstone (September 1967) p.337.

78 See, for example, Joseph Donnelly (1987) p.33.

79 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.58. When Joe Monks was asked if it was difficult to make the decision to go to Spain he replied – "No, it would have been a wrench had I been leaving Dublin I should think" (Joe Monks interview, SCW 11303/1, IWM).

80 R. Dan Richardson (1982) p.23.

of acceptance or support. In September 1936 George Gilmore admitted that the policies of Republican Congress were a "comparative failure".[81] Two years later, a CPI leader referred to "our own Party's terribly weak position".[82] Did the failure of the Irish left make the war in Spain a more attractive proposition? If the frustrations of left-wing activism in Ireland led many socialists to emigrate to Britain where the fulfillment of their objectives was more viable, the decision to go to Spain was arguably a logical development of the impetus which led them to Britain.

In the case of two International Brigade veterans whom I interviewed – Eugene Downing, a former member of the Dublin branch of the Communist Party, and Peter O'Connor from Waterford, a CPI member living in London in 1936 – many of the characteristics of the outlined social-political pattern are evident. Both men came from working-class urban environments. Downing's uncle fought in the Anglo-Irish War and he grew up listening to stories of IRA men on the run. As a young child, O'Connor remembers his two older brothers marching into the army barracks in Waterford after the departure of the British forces in 1922. His older brother fought in the East Waterford Brigade flying column during the Anglo-Irish War. His family were firmly anti-Treaty. By the 1930s both men were politically conscious and strongly disproved of the ideological direction (or lack of it) within the IRA. O'Connor left the IRA joining progressively, the Revolutionary Workers' Groups, Republican Congress and the Communist Party. Downing was never in the IRA but, rather unusually, became politicised through an intellectual process rather than as a result of direct republican or trade union experience.[83]

During 1933-34 O'Connor was an activist in Waterford, supporting strikes and protesting against slum conditions, before emigrating to London where he joined the London branch of Republican Congress and unionised the work-force at his factory. Downing, like most Irish communists, was also involved in various campaigns with Republican Congress. He spent one month in prison for picketing the 'Bacon Shops' in Dublin. Both men were conscious of the threat posed by fascism in Ireland and Europe. O'Connor remembers attending a demonstration against Mosley's Blackshirts in London; Downing recalls running into the grounds of the German Embassy in Dublin to paint 'Release Thaelmann' on the door.

When I asked both volunteers why they joined the International Brigades, O'Connor replied, rather adamantly, that he went to Spain to fight fascism. Downing offered the same reason

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81 Seán Cronin (1980) p.70.

82 Letter from Johnny Nolan to Tom O'Brien, 2 August 1938, one of a series of letters to Irish volunteers in Spain in Gustav Klaus (1994) p.166.

83 "I must pay tribute to bourgeois democracy. I used to go to the Kevin St. Library and it was there that I first came across *Dialectical Materialism* by Bakunin. That's how I first started to get interested in it." Downing's knowledge of Marxist theory initially earned him the suspicion of party members who assumed he was a police spy. Eugene Downing interview, January 1996.

but was open to discussing other underlying motivations for his decision. He felt that Spain offered a more meaningful cause than activism at home:

"I had become disillusioned with the Irish scene but Spain was a different matter. There was no disagreement [with the CPI but I was] . . . just dormant. There was a feeling of frustration. What was happening? We weren't getting anywhere . . . There was the frustration. The lack of any particular progress anywhere. Nothing was happening . . . Spain was kind of a life-line for frustrated left-wingers. This is something we can do. This is where the battle is being fought. That was the point."

II. Spain

From December 1936 Irish volunteers began arriving at the International Brigade headquarters at Albacete – remembered by one recruit as "the most demoralizing place in Spain . . . a haven for deserters, saboteurs, blackmarketeers, spies, fifth columnists, and rumour mongers".[84] The commander of the base was André Marty, a notorious figure "obsessed with fear of fascist or Trotskyist spies".[85] English-speaking volunteers were sent to the dreary nearby village of Madrigueras for military training which varied from rudimentary to sufficient depending on the immediate demands of the Republican Army.[86]

The tensions between different nationalities in the International Brigades are well-documented and the Irish experience proved no exception. As there were not enough recruits for an independent unit, Irish volunteers were incorporated in the British Battalion. This was initially opposed by Frank Ryan, the most senior political figure among the Irish volunteers, but as Frank Edwards recalled:

"We were not there as a separate unit, we were part of a British company. Frank [Ryan] was fighting hard for a separate identity, but he was too optimistic. He was outvoted. There was no way we would be made a separate Irish unit."[87]

Nonetheless, for propaganda purposes, the volunteers were usually described as an independent unit in left-wing newspapers in Ireland.

There was naturally some tension between the Irish soldiers, most of them strong republicans, and the British. Maurice Levine, a Mancunian, stated "nearly all of them [the Irish] felt they were all military experts".[88] Jim Brewer, a Welshman felt the republicans formed a distinctive group and commented that some Englishmen "didn't accept the

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84 Peter O'Connor (n.d.) p.9.

85 Hugh Thomas (1990) p.458. One volunteer described him as "both a sinister and a ludicrous figure . . . There is no doubt that he was quite literally mad at the this time. He always spoke in an hysterical roar, he suspected everyone of treason, or worse, listened to advice from nobody, ordered executions on little or no pretext – in short he was a real menace." (Jason Gurney (1974) p.54).

86 Frank Edwards in Uinseann MacEoin (1980) p.11; Eugene Downing interview, January 1996; Joe Monks (n.d.) pp.6-7.

87 Frank Edwards in Uinseann MacEoin (1980) p.12.

88 Maurice Levine interview, SCW 9722/3, IWM.

superiority of the [higher ranking] ex-IRA blokes".[89] This predictable friction between the two nationalities was exacerbated by several incidents. The British Communist Party paper, the *Daily Worker*, consistently failed to report that Irishmen were fighting with the "British" volunteers at Cordova.[90] The presence of an ex-British army officer, George Montague Nathan, proved another source of difficulty. Nathan had served in Ireland with the Black and Tans and has been implicated in the murder of the Lord Mayor and ex-Lord Mayor of Limerick (George Clancy and George O'Callaghan) during the Anglo-Irish War.[91] Accounts of reactions to Nathan's past vary. Joe Monks stated:

"Feeling that he was now a Socialist . . . Nathan referred to the fact that he had served in Ireland with the Crown forces. He specified that he had been with military intelligence in County Limerick. His exact words were: ". . . We are all Socialists together now". The meeting responded to the spirit of his speech and clapped him."[92]

Monks' benign account of the response to Nathan's role in the War of Independence contrasts with that of Maurice Levine:

"Nathan was recognised as one of the Crown Forces, the Black and Tans . . . At Madrigueras, Ryan and the other Irishmen put Nathan on trial for his life, charging him with being a spy for the Franco forces. It was a secret trial, but one of the witnesses, Jimmy Prendergast, told me about it afterwards. Nathan had denied the charge and said he had come to Spain because he was anti-Fascist. "I'm a Jew, though I've never been bothered with the Jewish community, and I'm against Hitler . . . If you want to shoot me for what happened in Ireland, all right. But I was under orders. I was a member of the British Crown forces and I had to do what I was told. What you said I did is true". They eventually accepted his explanation and deleted all references to the past."[93]

Due to the increasing tension at Madrigueras the most urgent question for the Irish volunteers was whether to remain in the British Battalion or transfer to the American base.[94] On New Year's Day, 1937, Ryan issued a circular appealing for patience:

"As most of you will have read in the newspapers before leaving home an Irish unit of the International Brigades is being formed. It may be necessary to make clear to some why all Irish comrades are not just now together. The fact is that the military situation does not allow the war to be held up so that all Irishmen can be collected and formed into a unit. At the earliest possible opportunity that will be done . . . It must also be

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89 Jim Brewer interview, SCW 9963/5, IWM.
90 Interview with Eugene Downing, January 1996; Frank Edwards in Uinseann MacEoin (1980) pp.19-20.
91 Richard Bennett, 'Portrait of a Killer', *New Statesman*, 24 March 1961 (and interesting follow-up correspondence, 31 March 1961, 7 April 1961).
92 Joe Monks, *With the Reds in Andalusia* (Pamphlet, n.d.) p.8
93 Maurice Levine, *Cheetham to Cordova* (Manchester, 1984) p.39. Monks denies that the subject of the Limerick killings ever arose. According to his account only Nathan's membership of military intelligence was discussed. Peter O'Connor was reluctant to discuss the subject. He doubts whether Nathan killed the Irish politicians but states that when Ryan absolved Nathan "it was good enough for everyone" (Peter O'Connor interview, June 1995).
94 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.67 states that the Irish unit was divided between the British and American battalions due to the "high rate of casualties".

made clear that in the International Brigades in which we serve – there are no national differences. We are all comrades."[95]

While Ryan was attached to the XII Brigade in Madrid a number of Irish volunteers met to debate the question. The tension between the conflicting demands of nationalism and socialism, which divided the Irish left during the 1930s and resulted in the disastrous split within Republican Congress at the Rathmines Congress in 1934, was central to the debate. Peter O'Connor noted in his diary:

"About forty-five comrades attended and decided, by a majority of five,[96] to join the Lincoln Battalion. The main reason given by those who voted to join the Americans was the wrongs done to Ireland by the English in the past. They claimed that though they were anti-fascist they still looked on the English as their enemy. Those of us who were not only class conscious but politically conscious as well . . . pleaded passionately for a distinction to be made between anti-fascist or working class comrades from England and British imperialism."[97]

Thus, in late January, a number of the Irish volunteers calling themselves the 'James Connolly Section' transferred to the nearby American base at Villanueva de la Jara. The British reaction was one of bemusement, irritation and condescension. James Jump commented that the Irish "weren't prepared to serve with their oppressors" but soon "realised how silly they'd been and came and joined the British".[98] Charles Bloom, a Londoner, recalled:

"all the Irish got into trouble with us . . . with our officers. They didn't like the British . . . comical when you come to think of it. They were on our side and yet they had a long standing antipathy towards the British".[99]

Jim Brewer's reaction was understandable but also illustrates the lack of comprehension of Irish nationalism among the British contingent which contributed to the split:

"[Bill Paynter] quashed any idea that we should be in national groups because at the maximum we were about one hundred and forty-nine . . . the Irishmen were a smaller group and it was an utterly ridiculous idea. We'd fight better as Britons than we would as four distinct nationalities".[100]

When Ryan returned he found two of his men under arrest and the others split between the American and British Battalions. He blamed several British officers whom he described as "the swelled-headed adventurer type":

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95 Frank Ryan circular, 1 January 1937, Spanish Civil War file, Irish Labour History Society Archives.
96 Bill Alexander, veteran and historian of the British Battalion, recorded the vote as 26 against 11. Bill Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty* (London 1982) pp.68-9.
97 Peter O'Connor (n.d.) p.9.
98 James Jump interview, SCW 9524/3, IWM.
99 Charles Bloom interview, SCW 992/2, IWM.
100 Jim Brewer interview, SCW 9963/5, IWM. Frank Ryan complained about the "political density" of the British officers, one of whom informed the Battalion – "Men from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, all of you are representatives of the British working-class" (Seán Cronin (1980) p.91).

"The representatives of the British CP wrecked the Irish Unit . . . I had a Dubliner named Terry Flanagan (fresh from Dublin Brigade, IRA) in charge of that Section. Flanagan was framed as a 'suspect', believe it or not, by Wilfrid McCartney[sic], Battalion commander, ex-British officer . . . and ex-Black and Tan (vide Gen. Crozier).[101] The Irish Section was shifted off to the Americans. When I came back (end of January) I was told a pack of lies by McCartney."[102]

The Irish soldiers attached to the American battalion remained there for the duration of the war; the others (and those that followed) fought with the British Battalion – although not as a distinctive company or "Connolly Column" as has often been stated.[103]

Ryan displayed his irritation with the International Brigade command at a meeting held before the departure of the British Battalion for the front. Fred Copeman, a CPGB official, described the incident:

". . . Ryan started complaining in regard to the political treatment of the Irish section. André Marty called him to order. Frank at all times was hard of hearing, and in spite of the shouting and bawling he went solidly on with his speech. Marty lost his temper and literally screamed for him to sit down. This produced no result at all. Frank continued in better spirit than before, with the lusty help of some of the Irish, American, Canadian and British delegations. Then four guards entered the hall and proceeded to arrest him. This caused an uproar, and that night "deputations", armed to the teeth, appeared demanding his release, not knowing that he had already been set free some two hours after the conference".[104]

A Dublin volunteer who deserted from the International Brigade in early 1937 reported a similar account to the Irish representative in Paris:

"The Irish Volunteers, as a body, desired to serve as a separate unit, but the proposal met with the determined opposition of the Valencia authorities on the plea, apparently, that the Irish could not be trusted. The authorities suspected that some of the volunteers were associated in some way with the "Blue Shirt" movement in Ireland and that their real motive underlying their presence in Spain was to sabotage, as far as possible, the Government plan of defence against Franco. Thus according to Mr – , a number of the Irish

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101 According to Bill Alexander (1982) p.69 Wilfred Macartney was also "accused of being a British army terrorist in Ireland".

102 Seán Cronin (1980) p.91.

103 The nomenclature of the "Irish units" is confusing. In *Connolly Column*, O'Riordan claims the first group of Irish soldiers (attached to the 12th Battalion of the XIV International Brigade) chose "the title of the "James Connolly Unit" to designate the Irish Section of the Brigades". However, both contemporary accounts and the Irishmen who fought in the 12th Battalion do not mention this title. Most volunteers and contemporary sources refer to the "James Connolly Unit" only in the context of the group of men who attached themselves to the Lincoln Battalion in January 1937 and formed part of what became popularly known as the Irish company because of its high proportion of Irish and Irish-Americans (see, for instance, the *Irish Democrat*, 3 April, 12 June 1937). Other non-contemporary accounts, most of them following O'Riordan, speak of the "Connolly Column" or the "Irish Battalion" giving the misleading impression that the Irish volunteers fought as an autonomous unit (Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.58). For most of their time in Spain, the Irishmen were distributed among different sections and companies in the British and Lincoln Battalions. After the initial tension in early 1937, the varied deployment of the Irish volunteers (a military necessity) does not appear to have caused any further difficulties.

104 Fred Copeman, *Reason in Revolt* (London, 1948) pp.83-84. Bill Alexander claims that Ryan demanded that the Irish be withdrawn from the British Battalion (Bill Alexander (1982)p.69). Peter Kerrigan recalled that Ryan demanded that the Irishmen be transferred to the American Lincoln Battalion on the eve of battle (Peter Kerrigan interview, SCW 810/6, IWM).

volunteers are at the present moment undergoing sentences of imprisonment "for sabotage". One of these volunteers is a Dublin man named Flanagan . . .

– believes that there are not more than 85 or 90 Irishmen serving in the International Brigade. They are scattered about among the various units and all are suspect. It appears that they made some form of demonstration against the treatment meted out to Flanagan as well as voicing their opinions on some occasions against the conditions of their service".[105]

The novel aspect of this account, until now closed by the Department of Foreign Affairs, is the allegation that the "Valencia authorities" (presumably the International Brigade command) suspected that the Irish group had been infiltrated by Blueshirts. This assertion – made by a disgruntled deserter – appears implausible, particularly as the "Valencia authorities" knew that many of the volunteers were members of the Communist Party of Ireland. However, it is known that Flanagan and another Irish volunteer were jailed without trial (the former for being 'an undesirable', the latter for disobeying an order) until Frank Ryan negotiated their release.[106] Two other facts lend further credence to the idea that some of the Irish may have been distrusted by the Brigade command; the enormous propensity of the communists, and in particular André Marty, for paranoia and the later execution of an Irish volunteer accused of sabotage.[107]

The tensions which existed at Madrigueras lessened when the volunteers reached the front.[108] The first group of Irishmen in action formed part of the 1st Company of the British (16th) Battalion sent to the Cordoba front to reinforce the Marseillaise (12th) Battalion of the XIV Brigade. After heavy fighting between late December and mid-January only sixty-seven men remained uninjured out of the one hundred and forty-five strong company.[109] Of the forty-three Irish soldiers in the company nine died at Lopera in December while another, Denis Coady, was killed at Las Rosas the following month. Such high casualties were characteristic of the International Brigades, which were initially used as crack units of the Republican army. Although, on this occasion, André Marty blamed Major Gaston Delasalle, the commander of the Marseillaise battalion, who was tried by a jury of his own soldiers and shot as a spy.[110] At the end of January the company returned to Madrigueras to rejoin the recently-formed XV Brigade. The Brigade consisted of four battalions, British, French,

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105 D/FA [R] Paris Embassy P10/55.

106 Seán Cronin (1980) p.91.

107 As Jason Gurney put it: "One of the inherent defects of the Communist Party is a passion for conspiratorial activity and its corollary of suspicion. Throughout the War the leadership was convinced that among the International Brigades there were a number of people who were Fascists who had joined for the purpose of spying and sabotage". Gurney offers several reasons why this was improbable (Jason Gurney (1974) pp.144-145).

108 Bill Alexander (1982) p.69. In contrast to the earlier difficulties, John Dunlop, a Glaswegian, recalled the favourable response among the machine-gun company to Jack Nalty's lecture on the IRA (John Dunlop interview, SCW 11355/10, IWM).

109 *Ibid* (1982) p.89.

110 Joe Monks (n.d) p.18; Hugh Thomas (1990) p.491.

American, and Slavic-Italian, and was led by General Gal (Janus Galicz), a Hungarian Red army officer, and Vladimir Copic (political commissar), a Croatian communist.[111]

In February 1937, General Franco launched an offensive aimed at capturing the Madrid-Valencia road near the valley of Jarama, just outside the capital. From February 12-14 the British Battalion was involved in heavy fighting. With no ammunition for their machine-guns, a section of the front broke into a disorganised retreat before being rallied by Frank Ryan and Jock Cunningham.[112] By the end of the first day of fighting only two hundred and twenty-five out of the six-hundred strong British Battalion remained uninjured.[113] On February 16 the Abraham Lincoln Battalion (including the 'James Connolly Section') arrived at Jarama. The following week the Lincoln Battalion was ordered to advance towards heavily defended Nationalist lines. One hundred and twenty-seven volunteers were killed and over two hundred wounded in the advance.[114]

Although heavy casualties were inevitable as the inexperienced International Brigades attempted to stem the determined assault of the more professional Nationalist forces, much of the blame has been placed on the International Brigade command, in particular, General Gal (Janus Galicz) – considered "the worst of the International Brigade generals".[115] The advance of the Lincoln Battalion, disastrous not just in terms of fatalities but also morale, provides one example.[116] Although the Battalion commander, Robert Merriman, insisted the strength of the Nationalist defences and the absence of air and artillery support rendered any advance suicidal, Gal repeatedly ordered him to attack "at all cost". Soldiers were killed as soon as they left their trenches. By the end of the day no territory had been gained and only one hundred and twenty-five men remained uninjured out of the four-hundred strong battalion.[117]

Although the Jarama front stabilised by late February the XV International Brigade remained there until mid-June (including one uninterrupted period of seventy-three days in the trenches).[118] Nineteen Irish soldiers, including 'Kit' Conway[119] and Charlie Donnelly, were killed at Jarama.[120] The battle of Jarama proved, if not a victory, an important stage in

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111 R. Dan Richardson (1982) pp.72-23.
112 Bill Alexander (1982) p.100.
113 Hugh Thomas (1990) p.592; Bill Alexander (1982) pp.94-97.
114 Bill Alexander (1982) p.103.
115 R. Dan Richardson (1982) p.72. 'Gal' was also described as "incompetent, bad-tempered, and hated" (Hugh Thomas (1990) p.591.
116 Vincent Brome (1965) pp.186-7.
117 Bill Alexander (1982) pp.103-4; Sandor Voros, *American Commissar* (Philadelphia, 1961) p.355-8; Vincent Brome, *The International Brigades* (London, 1965) pp.116-8.
118 Bill Alexander (1982) p.104.
119 Christopher Conway (1899-1937): b. Clogheen workhouse; left workhouse to work as agricultural labourer, 1913; enlisted British army but feigned insanity for discharge, 1915; member South Tipperary Brigade, Anglo-Irish war; deserted National army to oppose treaty, 1922; served in US army; returned to Ireland and rejoined IRA, 1932; left IRA for CPI; company commander in British Battalion.
120 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.73.

the defence of the Spanish Republic. After his failure to break through at Jarama and Guadalajara the following month, General Franco accepted Madrid's defences would not fall quickly and initiated what became a two year campaign against the rest of Republican Spain.[121]

Irish soldiers fought on other fronts during this period. In March the 86th Mixed Brigade (consisting of the XX International Battalion and two Spanish battalions) was sent to the Pozoblanco sector. Irish soldiers served in the 2nd (Anglo-American) company of the XX Battalion.[122] Peter Daly commanded the Spanish-American section of the Anglo-American company. The casualty rate resembled that of Jarama. By April 28, the 2nd Company was reduced from ninety-two soldiers to only forty-five. By July 4, only twenty men were left.[123]

In early May 1937, week long street-fighting between anarchists (aided by POUM supporters) and the local authorities (supported by the PSUC) broke out in Barcelona.[124] The May uprising confirmed the perilous state of disunity in the Spanish Republic; poorly-armed volunteers at the front were shocked to learn that so many weapons were kept behind the lines by opposing political factions. The communists placed the blame on their Marxist rivals, the POUM, implausibly accusing them of acting under Franco's instructions.[125] The POUM was declared illegal, the central committee arrested, and militias under their influence were disbanded. Prominent activists were secretly tortured and executed – mainly by foreign communists working with the Russian secret police in Spain.

The Irish volunteers appear to have accepted the communist interpretation of events in Barcelona. An article in the *Irish Democrat*, apparently written by Frank Ryan, described the POUM as "a Fascist force in the rear".[126] Patrick Smith, a Dublin volunteer, told the *Democrat* – "The P.O.U.M. rising in Barcelona failed in its object. It has finished this disruptive group and the workers organisations and the People's Front comes forth strengthened".[127] The volunteers were generally less hostile towards the anarchists than the POUM who were perceived as the real traitors to the Republic. Eugene Downing offered one reason:

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121 Although a central thesis of Preston's recent biography of Franco is that the *Caudillo*, against the wishes of Hitler and Mussolini, was eager to undertake a slow and thorough campaign of attrition throughout Republican territory. Paul Preston, *Franco* (London 1993).
122 Bill Alexander (1982) p.111.
123 Joe Monks (n.d.) p.38, p.48.
124 The POUM (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*) was an anti-Stalinist Marxist Party (labelled as Trotskyist by orthodox communists) founded by dissidents from the Spanish Communist Party. The P.S.U.C. (*Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña*) was essentially the Catalonian Communist Party.
125 Hugh Thomas (1990) p.701.
126 See p.96.
127 *Irish Democrat*, 3 July 1937.

"The anarchists were part of the tradition of Spain so they were quite a different thing. They were regarded with a certain amount of disdain because they weren't subject to discipline but they wouldn't be regarded as in the pay of the enemy whereas the way the George Orwell crowd would be depicted . . . as actually paid spies for Franco."[128]

Peter O'Connor believes the anarchists were "very good fighters" but describes the POUM as a "scandalous sectarian section" who prevented soldiers fighting for the Republic.[129] Paddy O'Daire thought the anarchists were responsible for the reverses in Andalusia and Catalonia due to their lack of military organisation.[130] Similarly, in *Connolly Column*, O'Riordan comments that the "anarchists behaved more as caretakers than combatants" but quotes approvingly a description of the POUM as "infiltrated by outright Fascist and other undesirable elements, who sought only a place to hide, or a base from which to effect the greatest harm to the Republican war effort".[131] Following the battle of Quinto, Frank Ryan told Seán Murray:

"Hitherto Peadar's [O'Donnell] friends (the anarchists) had been in charge of this front and No-Man's Land was as a result generally 6 miles wide!!!".[132]

That the Irish volunteers accepted the communist version of the uprising is not surprising considering both the party's dominance within the International Brigades and its control over information through the publication of the various front-line newspapers such as *Our Fight* and *Volunteer for Liberty* which were often the only source of information for foreign soldiers in Spain. The mixed opinions about the anarchists which contrast with the outright condemnation of the POUM reflects the almost obsessional campaign of the Comintern against unorthodox (anti-Stalinist) Marxism.

One volunteer who openly refuted the party line was Pat Reade, a "veteran of World War I, the IRA and the Wobblies". Reade was known as "a die-hard anarchist and an outspoken anti-Communist".[133] Reade, who joined the International Brigades from America, was initially assigned to a French unit but sent to the more liberal Abraham Lincoln battalion after voicing criticisms of the Communist Party. An historian of that battalion described his experiences there:

". . . Commissar Steve Nelson accepted his grumblings, matched his arguments, and valued his courage. Doran [Nelson's successor] lacked that tolerance. One day, he simply dismissed Reade from the brigade for

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128 Eugene Downing interview, January 1996.
129 Peter O'Connor interview, June 1995.
130 Joe Monks (n.d.) p.23.
131 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.90, 95.
132 Ryan to Murray, 2 September 1937, cited in Conor Foley (1992) p.169.
133 Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, (Stanford, 1994) p.165. One English volunteer described Reade as "a toothless gimpy looking American . . . one of the remaining Wobblies". He remembered the "anarchistic" Reade stealing stored weapons from another militia for their badly armed unit (Bernard McKenna interview, SCW 847/3, IWM).

"always attacking the party". Reade, broken-hearted and near tears, could only say good-bye to the men he had come to love".[134]

Brendan Moroney, who admitted travelling to Spain for adventure, claimed he was imprisoned on several occasions for protesting against communist methods in the Brigades.[135] The most prominent Irish volunteer known to have objected to the increasing dominance of the communists in Spain is Captain Jack White, the well-known political agitator, who enthusiastically supported the volunteer militias and collectivisation programmes of the Spanish anarchists. He reportedly left Spain after clashing with Frank Ryan who accused him of Trotskyism.[136]

However, the influence of the Barcelona uprising on the morale of the International Brigades appears to have been insignificant. An inquiry carried out by an English political commissar, Wally Tapsall, on behalf of the XV Brigade which implicated the Spanish communists in the disturbances was suppressed.[137] Only senior officers on the Brigade staff had a clear idea of the serious nature of the infighting between the political factions; Frank Ryan told Tom Barry, the IRA leader, of the "splits, indiscipline, agitators, treachery, groups out for power for themselves and so on among the Spanish Republicans".[138] According to Downing, soldiers at the front heard little of these rivalries:

"No, it [the POUM/CP conflict] hadn't been publicised to that extent. These were minor things, minor irritations. We didn't realise the importance it would assume afterwards . . ."[139]

On July 6, the Republicans launched the initially successful Brunete offensive capturing Brunete, Villaneuva de la Canada and Quijorna. On July 18 the Nationalists counter-attacked. By the end of the month the lines had stabilised at the cost of another high casualty rate – the British Battalion was reduced from six hundred and thirty men to one hundred and eighty.[140] In late August, the XV Brigade was sent to the Aragon front. Peter Daly from Wexford now commanded the British Battalion. When Daly was killed during the assault on Purburrell Hill near Quinto, he was replaced by another Irishman, Paddy O'Daire, much to Frank Ryan's amusement:

"Her [the British Battalion] new boss is Irish; and you remember how she hated the Irish. It's a great joke to be taking orders from what she used call 'the pig in the kitchen' type".[141]

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134 Peter N. Carroll (1994) pp. 165-6. Reade could not be accused of inconsistency. As a CPI member in 1923 he was one of the most outspoken critics of the "right wing" party leadership (Mike Milotte (1984) pp. 66-9).

135 Brendan Moroney, 'Twenty Months in the International Brigade', *Hibernia*, September, 1938, p.23.

136 See Jack White, *The Meaning of Anarchism* (Pamphlet, n.d.) and his profile in the anarchist *Workers Solidarity*, Spring 1997

137 Fred Copeman (1948) p.21

138 Seán Cronin (1980) p.114.

139 Eugene Downing interview, January 1996.

140 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.84.

141 Seán Cronin (1980) p.124.

By September, the Lincoln-Washington Battalion, stationed close to the British Battalion, had captured Belchite. Two Irishmen (Jim Woulfe and Charlie Regan) died during the assault.

By late 1937 morale within the International Brigades had decreased considerably; the long and often tedious period without leave at Jarama, heavy casualties of the Brunete campaign, harsh discipline within the Brigades and open differences between the leadership of the British Battalion had taken a toll.[142] Further difficulties followed in September when, as a consequence of the integration of the International Brigades with the regular Republican Army, recruits who had volunteered to fight in Spain were informed that service until the end of the war was mandatory.[143] It was during this period that around seventy of the British Battalion who refused to continue fighting were sent to the re-education centre known as Camp Lucas.[144] Desertions also became a problem during this period.[145] One such disillusioned volunteer from Waterford who called at the Irish legation in Paris recounted his experiences in Spain:

"Shortly after his arrival in Spain, however, he began to realise, first of all, from the nature of his military training, secondly from the general character of the officers of the International Brigade and many of the soldiers and thirdly by the orders which he was supposed to obey, that the struggle in Spain was in reality a war between Italian and German Fascism on one side and Russian Communism on the other. The Catholic Church is supposed to be in sympathy with fascism and is known to be strongly opposed to communism. Hence, the Church is indicated as the chief enemy which must be obliterated at all costs. A secret police, modelled in similar lines to the O.G.P.U. operates among the civilian population but more particularly among troops and something corresponding to a reign of terror, according to – appears to exist. He cited cases of brutal murders which, he stated, he had witnessed of soldiers, civilians and prisoners of war . . . He also stated that he had witnessed the deliberate desecration and destruction of churches. He mentioned the name of an Irish volunteer from Waterford who boasted of the number of "God boxes" (Churches) which he had helped to destroy and he expressed the opinion that a large number of the Irish volunteers have similar sentiments. According to his statements, – became "suspect" on account of his apparent attachment to the Church and he received repeated warnings from his comrades that he would certainly be "eliminated" by the secret police on the slightest pretext. He received such a warning before he decided to desert."[146]

The following year a volunteer from Clare reached Paris with a similar account. In December 1936 he left London to join the International Brigades but soon "got into bad order with the

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142 On 14 July 1937, Bill Paynter, political commissar of the British battalion, informed Harry Pollitt, the CPGB leader – "I am anticipating quite a deal of trouble when it [the Brunete campaign] is all over. First, from the political divisions that exist among the leading people since this action seems to have aggravated the position. Second from the men, who will raise with new energy the demand for repatriation or leave to England . . . They [seventeen deserters] constitute a hell of a problem for me" (Box 21/B/3g, International Brigade Archives (IBA), Marx Memorial Library (MML), London).

143 Bill Alexander (1982) pp.79-80; Hugh Thomas (1990) p.607, pp.715-6.

144 John Angus, *With the International Brigade in Spain* (Loughborough, 1983) p.7.

145 Approximately 300 out of 2,000 'British' (including Irish) soldiers deserted (Bill Alexander (1982) p.81; Vincent Brome (1965) pp.184-191).

146 D/FA Paris Embassy [R] P10/55.

authorities". He claimed to have been tried and sentenced to death by "a committee of the Russian Central European Secret Service Organisation" in July 1937 but his sentence was commuted and he managed to escape to France the following year:

"Regarding his experiences in Spain, – stated that shortly after his arrival there he began to realise that he had been deceived as to the purpose of the Civil War. The International Brigades was comprised of the "scum of the earth" and, to his amazement, he found that the Irish members were no better than the rest. In such matters as the reviling of the name of God and active participation in the campaign for defaming the Spanish priests (the Basque clergy were generally excluded from this campaign) he found that "the Dublin men were just as bad as those from Belfast". He found that civilians were being "massacred" wholesale on the smallest suspicion of "fascist" tendencies, and the International Brigade was frequently required to provide firing parties to carry out these executions. It was for refusing to do duty on one of these firing squads that he was arrested and sentenced to death . . .

– became unpopular in the Brigade on account of his openly expressed views on what he heard and saw going on around him; the reviling of God and the Clergy, the desecration of churches, the executions of civilians . . . the shooting of members of the Brigade by individual officers and the killing of militiamen and volunteers who were under arrest."[147]

How credible are these two accounts which, until now, remained closed to researchers? Some of the claims appear exaggerated. While thousands of Spanish civilians were executed in Republican territory there is little evidence that soldiers from the International Brigades were involved in massacres. The executions of Spanish civilians within Republican territory were generally not sanctioned by the Republican government, the regular army or the International Brigades but rather were the work of political factions, in particular the anarchists and the socialist-communist youth.[148] The International Brigades were, however, involved in the execution of Nationalist soldiers. Jim Brewer, a Welsh volunteer, refused to serve in a firing squad which, as the conventions of war permitted, shot Nationalist soldiers captured in civilian clothes.[149]

Similarly, the Waterford volunteers' allegation that Irish soldiers deliberately desecrated or destroyed churches is suspect. The vast majority of assaults on churches can be attributed to the outbreak of revolutionary fervour which swept Spain in July and August 1936 before the arrival of the International Brigades. Moreover, the bulk of the attacks were carried out by unorganised, mostly anarchist, gangs rather than the more disciplined communists who attempted to under-emphasise the revolutionary aspects of the Spanish Civil War. Most

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147 *Ibid.*

148 Hugh Thomas (1990) pp. 273-81. Although Peter N. Carroll (1994) p.203 author of a sympathetic account of the Lincoln battalion refers to the executions of "Spanish dissidents".

149 "We [the Brigade officers] want a volunteer firing squad. You, and you and you, and they pointed to me and I said no thank you. I said behind us is the legitimate government which has got legal institutions and that man is entitled to a trial. It was a point of honour to me. I was horrified and disgusted" (Jim Brewer interview, SCW 9963/7, IWM).

churches destroyed after this initial period were attacked because they were used as strategic bases during the street-fighting. In one letter, for example, Frank Ryan, states:

"There's a Cathedral and a few Churches over there in Belchite. The Fascists will use them as strongholds too. Villaneuva, Brunete, Quijorna, Quinto – every time it is the same story; the Church is the Fascist key-fortress . . ."[150]

However, their statements concerning the communist influence in the Brigades and the status of the Catholic Church are more credible. The authority exercised by communists was a contentious issue for the non-communist minority within the International Brigades. Communists comprised approximately sixty per cent of the Brigades at the outset; a proportion which rose as volunteers such as Paddy O'Daire, attracted by the commitment and discipline of the Communist Party, joined during the conflict.[151] The Brigades were controlled by the political commissariat at Albacete which was appointed by the Comintern and consisted almost entirely of leading Comintern functionaries. The commissariat ensured the appointment of trusted and disciplined communists to key political and military posts within the Brigades.[152] Further control was ensured by the role of political commissars who were appointed on a brigade, battalion and company level.[153] In theory, commissars exercised equal power to the military officers in the Brigades as both jointly signed orders and reports. Commissars were expected to enforce discipline, raise morale and guide the political education of the soldiers. They were also supposed to "maintain constant vigilance towards defeatist elements, Trotskyists and deserters" – terms broad enough, as one historian pointed out, to include anyone who proved undisciplined, critical, or merely unenthusiastic about the communist authorities.[154] Only particularly zealous communists were appointed. For example, all three Irish commissars (Liam McGregor, Jim Prendergast and Donal O'Reilly) were graduates of the Lenin International School in Moscow.[155]

Discipline was enforced by Brigade officers, the N.K.V.D. (the Soviet secret police, also known as the Cheka and the G.P.U.) who operated independently of Republican Government control and by the S.I.M. (*Servicio Investigación Militar*) who were appointed by the political commissariat and functioned as the military police of the Brigades. The methods of discipline prevalent in Russia, then at the height of Stalin's purges were imported into Spain resulting in widespread imprisonment and executions. The experience of the two Irish deserters was not particularly unusual – there may have been other Irish volunteers not

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150 *Book of the XV Brigade* (Madrid, 1938) p.257.
151 Bill Alexander (1982) p. 150; Ian MacDougall (ed.), *Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (Edinburgh, 1986) p.303.
152 Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution* (North Carolina, 1979) p.112.
153 E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1984) p.29.
154 Vincent Brome, *The International Brigades* (London, 1965) p17; R. Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army* (Kentucky, 1982) pp.51-54, pp.91-94; pp.119-124.
155 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.132; Frank Graham (ed.), *Book of the XVth Brigade* (Newcastle, 1975) p.63.

fortunate enough to escape.[156] The number of executions remains unknown but André Marty, the leader of the political commissariat, confirmed authorising the execution of five hundred soldiers from the International Brigades.[157] Many of the soldiers within the Brigades were unaware of the existence of such methods as the accused quietly "disappeared from circulation".[158]

The other issue raised by the deserters concerns the question of religious atrocities in Republican Spain; 12 bishops, 4184 priests, 2365 monks and 283 nuns (respectively 20%, 13%, and 12% of all the bishops, priests and monks in Spain) are believed to have been executed during the Civil War.[159] One volunteer who fought with the British Battalion described his impression of the anti-clerical atmosphere which existed in much of Republican Spain:

"In every village that I saw the churches had been destroyed or desecrated with an extreme of hatred and detestation that was unmistakable and everything that I was able to find out about events led me to the conviction that very few people in any village had not actively participated in the revulsion".[160]

In the village of Madrigueras where mass was forbidden and the wrecked church used as a canteen, the issue was impossible to evade.[161] How did the Irish volunteers, some of whom were practising Catholics, react to the assault on religion in the Spanish Republic? The widespread destruction of the churches which occurred at the outbreak of the Civil War was usually justified as a consequence of the clergy taking an active part on the side of the Nationalists. Hugh Thomas, however, found "nearly all the stories of firing by rebels from church towers" to be untrue and argues that the Catholic Church was attacked simply because it was perceived as an ally of the Nationalist cause.[162] Joe Monks, a Dublin volunteer, accepted the former explanation for the destruction of the church in Madrigueras but was aware of attacks motivated purely by anti-clericalism:

"The story told to us about the First Days – the July fighting in Madrigueras was that the local Fascists, having failed in their bid to take over the town, fell back to make a last stand by turning the church into a fortress; and then when they were overcome, the priests and nuns perished with them. We heard, too, that

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156 On 8 July 1937, Norman King, a British consulate official in Barcelona reported to the Foreign Office that James Campbell from Derry had been detained by a police round up of "many anarchists and Trotsky Communists, and other undesirable elements" (DO 35/553/3). See p.284 for Patrick Keenan's difficulties with the Republican authorities.

157 R. Dan Richardson (1982) p.175.

158 Jason Gurney (1974) p. 137, 141, 146. Moreover, most volunteers were disinclined to believe the rumours – "Of course, the propaganda was completely mad at that time. Stalin was God at the time . . . All these things that came out about Stalin were known and published in books but we ignored it" (Eugene Downing interview, January 1996).

159 Hugh Thomas (1990) pp.270-1.

160 Jason Gurney (1974) p.60.

161 Joe Monks (n.d.) p7; Hugh Thomas (1974) p.862.

162 Hugh Thomas (1974) pp.268-73.

there were pueblos where the local Republicans did not harm the priest or the church; but lorry loads of incendiaries from the bigger towns came and burned the churches."[163]

Monks recalled that Dave Springhall, a political commissar in the British Battalion:

"asked about the reactions to the wrecked churches and the replies suggested that none of the Irish, particularly the non-believers, liked to look upon a desecrated church. Indeed one youth had been seen to physically close his eyes to such scenes as the demonstration went through the streets of Barcelona".[164]

The experiences of most Irish left-republicans – the pro-Treaty position adopted by the hierarchy and its opposition to the IRA, Saor Eire and Republican Congress – left many with little sympathy for the plight of the Catholic Church. Frank Edwards, for example, was dismissed from his position as a national school-teacher due to the influence of Dr. Kinane, the Bishop of Waterford.[165] Irish communists were equally unlikely to sympathise with the Catholic Church. Left-wing volunteers who were devout Catholics, such as Frank Ryan, did not see a contradiction between practising their religion and rejecting the political values of the Catholic Church. Indeed, Ryan's experiences in Spain appear to have reinforced such a perspective:

"Around the barricades, are scattered sheaves of religious pictures . . . A composite photo of Franco, Christ and Mola – in that order. Ugh! What would Christ say to this prostitution of His teachings?"[166]

Eugene Downing believes most of the Irish volunteers were imbued with an anti-clerical ethos before fighting in Spain:

"I never remember it being a problem. I remember one Irishman . . . who made a bit of a laugh of himself because before we went across he said, "Will there be a priest at the front?". The priests were too busy looking after the Moors! This may seem contradictory but a left-wing Irishman might be anti-clerical but that's not to say he's anti-religious. They made the distinction. In my case I wasn't just anti-clerical, I was anti-religious and most of the other fellows would have been the same."[167]

The widespread coverage of Spanish atrocities in Irish newspapers probably represented a greater difficulty for the volunteers. The stories, many of them invented or exaggerated, reinforced the assumption that left-republicans represented a threat to Irish Catholicism. This was emphasised by some of the Irish clergy. A priest at the Pro-Cathedral in Galway announced:

"It is an awful thing that even Irishmen can be got to fight for the cause of the devil. I say that every man who fights for Caballero, Lenin, Trotsky, or Marx are fighting against Christ and for the devil".[168]

The popular association of the Republican government with anti-clericalism ensured a hostile reception for veterans returning to Ireland. The unlikely presence of Eamon McGrotty, a

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163 Joe Monks (n.d.) p.7.
164 *Ibid*, p.4.
165 *Ibid*, (n.d) p.1.
166 Seán Cronin (1980) p.127.
167 Eugene Downing interview, January 1997.
168 *Irish Press*, 1 March 1937.

former Christian Brother, and Robert Hilliard,[169] a Church of Ireland Minister, among the Irish contingent offered some opportunity to counter such accusations although there is little evidence that "the Protestant Minister and the Catholic Monk"[170] were particularly religious. Jason Gurney recalled that Hilliard:

"had developed the most startlingly irreverent manner by the time I knew him. When in wine he would put on his parsonical voice and make a benediction – 'In the name of Marx,' – and with two fingers raised he made the curve of the sickle. 'Engels' – he drew the handle. 'Lenin, Stalin, Stakinov, Dimitrov' – the points of the hammerhead; 'the Party line' its handle. All delivered with extreme unction."[171]

After the Brunete campaign there were three further large-scale Republican offensives – Aragon (August/September 1937), Teruel (December 1937/January 1938) and the Ebro (July 1938). Each followed a similar pattern, an initial breakthrough, followed by a Nationalist counter-attack and a Republican retreat. By this stage of the war, the International Brigades, numbering only fifteen thousand soldiers (including an ever-increasing proportion of Spanish recruits) out of a Republican army of five hundred thousand, no longer formed a militarily significant proportion of the Republican forces.[172] By late 1937 the number of Irishmen fighting in the Brigades was far lower than the beginning of the year due to the high rate of injuries and deaths. Also, Frank Ryan's influence among the Brigade command ensured that Irish veterans were repatriated, often against their wishes, after several military campaigns.[173] A small number of replacements, predominantly communist in composition, continued to leave Ireland for Spain. Frank Ryan's letter to Desmond Ryan suggests he was reluctant to recruit more activists:

"I wanted to bring out a few hundred men; I could get them; I could bring them. I didn't, for I wanted them at home all the more. I go alone, and I'll try to save the lives of the few that are left. That's my new role."

Ryan's reluctance was based on his realistic assessment of the chances of Republican victory:

"I worry more now for the outcome of the war. The new Four Power Pact will give Germany and Italy more scope. The liberty of Spain is apparently the price to be paid for staving off a great war".[174]

The military initiative resided with the Nationalist forces during the latter stages of the Spanish Civil War. On 9 March 1938 the Nationalists launched a massive assault on Aragon. The Republican army, greatly weakened after Teruel, was taken by surprise.[175] Their defences collapsed in mid-March as Nationalist air and artillery superiority over-powered

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169 Robert M. Hilliard: b. Moyeightragh, Killarney; fought against Treaty during Civil War; graduate Trinity College Dublin where he formed Thomas Davis Society, edited *TCD* newspaper, and won Read Sizarship; amateur boxer, selected to represent Ireland in Olympic Games; clergyman in Belfast; died 14 February 1937.

170 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.73, Conor Foley (1992) p.166.

171 Jason Gurney (1974) p.69.

172 R. Dan Richardson (1982) pp.89-90.

173 Frank Edwards in Uinseann MacEoin (1980) p.13.; Peter O'Connor (n.d.) pp.14-15.

174 Frank Ryan to Desmond Ryan, 11 June 1937, LA10 Q/19(2), Desmond Ryan papers, UCD Archives.

175 Hugh Thomas (1990) p.798.

Republican units hampered by confusion, poor communications and a severe shortage of supplies. As Hugh Thomas commented - "The fronts hardly existed".[176] The mutual distrust between the various political factions within the Republican army compounded these problems. Such conditions explain why the XV Brigade unsuspectingly marched into a column of Italian soldiers on March 31. One hundred and fifty out of the six hundred and fifty strong British Battalion were injured or killed.[177] A further one hundred soldiers (including between nine and fourteen Irish men) were captured).[178] At the San Pedro de Cardeña prison camp they endured Gestapo-directed interviews, tests, measurements and beatings.

Between March and July 1938, the Republican army, including the remnants of the XV Brigade reformed on the north bank of the Ebro. On July 25, the XV Brigade crossed back over the Ebro river as part of a surprise Republican offensive. By now only about a third of the reorganised six-hundred and fifty strong British Battalion were British or Irish.[179] Similarly, the Lincoln Battalion had a three-to-one majority of Spaniards.[180] The role of the International Brigades was coming to an end.

It was during the Ebro offensive that the accusation of espionage by Blueshirts was again raised, on this occasion, with fatal consequences. John Dunlop, a British volunteer, recalled that Maurice Ryan, a volunteer from Tipperary, had been under suspicion for some time:

"As for Ryan he was a bull of a man, a huge fellow . . . A highly amusing character, a big curly haired fellow, a tremendous drinker – his main aim in life seemed to be to make fun of everything that we were doing . . .He used to boast that he had a brother who was a colonel on the Fascist side . . . We always thought that his purpose was if not to gather information at least to disrupt things as much as he could."[181]

When Ryan proved unreliable in the midst of battle his past behaviour ensured he was not given the benefit of the doubt:

"Just inches above my [Dunlop's] head there was a long burst of machine gun fire but it was coming in the wrong direction. I looked back and I could see one of our own machine guns actually firing on us. That more or less ended our attack. I told Sam Wild and it turned out that we'd been fired on by a gun under the command of the Irishman, Maurice Ryan. He was flailing drunk. I don't know how many of our blokes had

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176 *Ibid*, pp.797-803.
177 Bill Alexander (1982) p.179.
178 A Nationalist memo dated 8 April 1938 listed Robert Doyle, John Lemon, Maurice Levitas, Patrick Byrne, Frank Ryan, Michael McGrath, Victor Barry, Joseph Byrne, and Archibald Baillie as prisoners at the *Campos de Concentracíon de Prisioneros* at San Pedro de Cardeña. A later memo (1 May 1938) included Peter Brady, John O'Beirne, David Kennedy, and Hugh O'Donnell. R1501-16, *Archivo de Burgos, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores*.
179 Bill Alexander (1982) p.204.
180 Hugh Thomas (1990) p.851.
181 Account of John Dunlop in Ian MacDougall (ed.), *Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, (Edinburgh, 1986) p.145. Jim Brewer described a similar personality – "[Ryan] always had a bottle of wine . . . always wandering around at night, and he had a brother who was with O'Duffy's crowd fighting for Franco and his main idea was he hoped he'd meet his brother on the field of battle and wipe him out. So a lot of personal animus there. And altogether a very mysterious fellow" (Jim Brewer interview, SCW 9963/5, IWM).

been hit and wounded by this gun but he was overpowered and arrested. Later he was sent down to Brigade headquarters and sent by them to Divisional headquarters and they sent him back to Brigade headquarters with orders to sent him back to his own Battalion . . . with orders for him to be executed by his own comrades. I was told some time later that Sam Wild, the Battalion commander and George Fletcher, second in command, took Ryan for a walk and told him to go ahead and then they shot him in the back of the head."[182]

Another Scottish volunteer, Tom Murray recalled a different version:

"Well, there was one bad character . . . I won't mention his name. He was Irish, he came from the Free State, he came from the south. And he was quite a capable bloke, too. It was an unsavoury business. But we decided on a certain move, and he resisted it. He was in charge of one of the machine gun crews, and . . . he wanted to place the machine gun and his crew in a situation which we thought was extremely vulnerable. I said to him, "Look here now, you are going to do what you're told." . . . He picked up a hand grenade and was about to throw it at me. I jumped out of the way and we took him to the rear. However, we were sure that there something radically wrong before he was taken back and quizzed. And of course he was boiling with hostility by this time because we had dragged him back from the front, from the front line and demoted him, as it were. He would be a *cabo* or a *sargento* or something like that, you see, in rank. And we dragged him back and of course he was very angry with us. There wasn't much of a court martial but there was established information, and his conduct of course was reprehensible at the front, his carry-on, you see. You couldn't stand for that sort of thing. It would have been chaos. It just would have been anarchy. You had to be very disciplined at the front. I won't tell you who did it. I didn't do it and I won't tell you who did it. But there was a decision taken to get rid of him because of what we discovered about him . . . we had discovered that he had a brother in the Fascist ranks. He had a very strong anti-Soviet background and anti-Socialist background. At any rate he was got rid of, just shot in the back of the neck".[183]

Jim Brewer recalled yet another version. Ryan, although on duty, had wandered off with a bottle of wine for his usual *siesta*. This had been the latest of a series of incidents. Ryan, considered "bloody mad" by his gun crew, had previously threatened to kill an English soldier. Brewer claimed that Ryan had not been dealt with before because he "had been protected by this Irish company commander". Ryan, however, had been "allowed too much rope and eventually over did it".[184]

The practice of executing International Brigade soldiers originated in the XIV Brigade in April 1937.[185] The policy was enthusiastically supported by the political commissariat at Albacete who urged "ruthless action" to combat indiscipline in the ranks. Both the commander and commissar of the British Battalion, Fred Copeman and George Aitken, refused to permit executions believing that they would have a disastrous effect on morale. After the Brunete campaign, Copeman came under renewed pressure from the Brigade

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182 John Dunlop interview, SCW 11355/13, IWM.
183 Ian MacDougall (1986) pp.323 - 324.
184 Jim Brewer interview, SCW 9963/5, IWM.
185 R Dan Richardson (1982) p.99.

command and several of his commissars to permit the shooting of deserters. Amidst severe tension among the Battalion leadership Copeman and several officers returned to England to discuss the issue with the GBCP; the Battalion command was reorganised but Copeman felt the issue remained unresolved.[186] Several months later, while Copeman was in hospital, his successor as Battalion Commander, Sam Wilde, agreed to the demands of the Brigade command for the execution of British volunteers. Two men were shot after the Teruel offensive in January 1938.[187] Maurice Ryan was shot in August 1938; two more were executed in the winter of 1938.[188] At least three volunteers in the Lincoln battalion were also executed.[189]

If Maurice Ryan was a fascist saboteur he was an unlikely one. Constant drunkenness, absences from the lines and boasting about a brother fighting with the Nationalist army are not characteristic of saboteurs. Moreover, it seems unlikely that Ryan had a brother with the Nationalists; the only Ryan known to have fought with the Irish Brigade, James Ryan (also from Tipperary) was not related to Maurice Ryan[190] and the Irish Brigade had left Spain long before the Ebro campaign. It seems more probable that Ryan was shot because of his indiscipline. He was previously arrested for drunkenness, was known to have composed a popular front-line song ridiculing the communists and was generally regarded as a trouble-maker.[191] Also, Ryan was well-spoken and claimed to have received a public-school education in England – traits which would not have endeared him to his comrades. He was also extremely reckless; Steve Fullarton recalled one occasion when Ryan nonchalantly strolled around the top of an exposed knoll while other soldiers under cover were being hit.[192] Such actions suggests some form of personality dysfunction rather than fascism as the cause of Ryan's behaviour. The 'official' histories of the British battalion state simply that Ryan died in action on the Ebro front.[193]

The battle of the Ebro followed a similar pattern to previous Republican offensives, albeit on a larger scale with much graver consequences for the military position of the Republic. The XV Brigade retraced a similar route to their retreat four months before reaching 'Hill 481' which they assaulted without success for five continuous days. Four Irishmen – Jimmy Straney, Paddy O'Sullivan, George Gorman and James Haughey – died there.[194] The twenty-five mile Republican advance was contained by early August. A Nationalist counter-attack followed with the most intense air and artillery bombardment of the entire war. On

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186 Fred Copeman (1948) pp.137-140.
187 *Ibid*, p147; Bill Alexander (1982) p.164.
188 Bill Alexander (1982) p.82. See Thomas O'Brien's untitled poem in Gustav Klaus (1994) p.89 which forty years later describes his memory of guarding deserters.
189 Peter N. Carroll (1994) pp.183-4.
190 Chris Boland interview, 31 March 1996.
191 Account of John Dunlop in Ian MacDougall (1986) p.146.
192 Account of Steve Fullarton, *Ibid* (1986) p.297.
193 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.163 and Bill Alexander (1982) p.274.
194 Michael O'Riordan (1979) pp.127-8.

September 23, the XV International Brigade took to the field for the last time. The Battalion suffered characteristically high casualties – two leading Irish communists, Jack Nalty and Bill McGregor, died on the final day of fighting.[195]

III. Return

A combination of international circumstances resulted in the disbanding of the International Brigades. Since Munich, Soviet foreign policy had been moving towards a *rapprochement* with the fascist states; the USSR had announced its willingness to withdraw from Spain by the summer of 1938.[196] Given the greatly diminished proportion of foreign volunteers in the Republican army, it became tactically astute for Negrín to propose their withdrawal from Spain in the hope that the League of Nations would force Franco to do likewise.[197]

On December 6, 1938 the remaining volunteers of the XV Brigade were repatriated. Over a third of the Irish soldiers died in Spain.[198] Many of the survivors preferred to stay in Britain rather than return to a country which labelled them 'reds'. It was difficult enough to secure employment in Ireland without having a reputation of a radical.[199] In 1949 Vincent Crompton, who returned to Cork, complained to Nan Green, an International Brigade Association official:

"The people here amaze me! They are so poor and yet so stupidly religious. I'm branded as a Communist . . . This is the most ignorant country I've been and I've been in many. A country of fools . . ."[200]

Another volunteer from Tipperary wrote to his father:

"I don't want to go home and remain there because I know very well the misery that the people go through and unfortunately the way people are blinded in regard to the People of Spain. They only know one side of it but I happen to know both because I was on the right side and fought against the Priests who machine gunned the poor women and children & I would be classified as a red."

A garda report suggests his fears were well-grounded:

"Prior to leaving Ireland – did not display any extreme political tendencies and certainly none of the tendencies now displayed in his letters. Should subject return to Thurles it is probable that he would require a measure of protection."[201]

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195 *Ibid,* p.132.
196 Hugh Thomas (1990) p.851.
197 E.H. Carr (1984) p.73.
198 *Communist Party of Ireland, Outline History* (Dublin, n.d.) p.64
199 Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.139. Seven years after the war Paddy Duff informed Nan Green (of the International Brigade Association in London) "it is not so easy for anyone with a left-wing record to get a help. The movement here is still very weak and the intense Catholic feeling of the people militates particularly against me with my Spanish record (25 April 1936, Box 24/IR/8, IBA)
200 Crompton to Green, (n.d.) Box 24/IR/25, IBA, MML.
201 Letter of Thurles volunteer to his father, 12 October 1938, D/FA [R] 210/164.

The Irish government regarded the returning International Brigade veterans as a potential threat. They were, in the words of one writer, "marked men in the public eye". Michael O'Riordan, Johnny Power and Paddy Smith were interned in the Curragh for much of World War II.[202] The Dublin publisher, Thomas O'Brien, who left the Communist Party on his return from Spain was monitored by Special Branch for several decades.[203] Many returned to left-wing politics within the Communist Party and the Labour Party.[204] Paddy Trench, who worked as a journalist with the POUM in Spain, was one of a group of Trotskyists who infiltrated the Labour Party in Dublin.[205] Frank Edwards set up the Ireland-USSR Friendship Society in 1946. Several became prominent officials with the labour movement in Ireland and Britain.[206] Others returned to the republican movement. James O'Reegan was imprisoned for his part in an IRA bombing campaign in Britain during the Second World War. Others continued the anti-fascist struggle (despite the Nazi-Soviet pact) by enlisting in the British army at the outbreak of the Second World War.[207]

The Spanish Civil War bequeathed a mixed legacy to the Irish left. The International Brigades have taken a central place in the history of the Irish left. However, the death of so many dedicated activists, including proven leaders such as Frank Ryan, Charlie Donnelly, and 'Kit' Conway, hastened the demise of the radical left in Ireland. Republican Congress, on the verge of collapse in 1936, existed throughout the war as little more than a support group for the International Brigade volunteers. The CPI, reduced to just twenty members by 1941, suspended independent activity.[208] The bleak political situation faced by volunteers on their return was described by Frank Edwards:

"I found however a complete change. The Christian Front was gone, so too were the last fragments of Republican Congress. All of my old friends were retired to the side lines. No political organisation existed in which they could play a part. My task now was to try to get a job, any sort of a job; it was not going to be easy".[209]

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202 Where Brendan Behan took great pleasure in winding up both pro and anti-fascist sections of the IRA (Brendan Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (1991) p.61; Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.139).
203 Gustav Klaus (1994) p.39.
204 Donal O'Reilly was a Labour Party candidate for Dublin Corporation in 1945. Peter O'Connor represented Labour on Waterford Corporation and Johnny Power chaired the Waterford Labour Party branch in 1945.
205 Mike Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1984) p.188.
206 Bill Alexander (1982) pp.245-247; Michael O'Riordan (1979) p.139.
207 Including Paddy O'Daire, Alec Digges, Paddy Roe McLaughlin, Maurice Levitas and Jim Prendergast. Michael Lehane who objected to serving with the British army was killed at sea with the Norwegian Merchant Navy (Michael O'Riordan (1979) pp.139-140).
208 Manus O'Riordan, 'Communism in Dublin in the 1930s' in Gustav Klaus (1994) p.235.
209 Frank Edwards in Uinseann MacEoin (1980) p.14.

Part II: DOMESTIC RESPONSES

3. Republican and Socialist Responses

Frank Edward's description of his disheartening return to an Ireland where the "last fragments" of organised left-wing activism had been effectively marginalised accurately reflects the moribund condition of the Irish left in 1939. The Spanish Civil War precipitated a period of frenetic activity within the Irish left which resulted in both the organisation of the International Brigade contingent and an initially enthusiastic pro-Republican campaign. But the final years of the 1930s also marked the collapse of the once vigorous republican socialist movement represented by Saor Eire and Republican Congress which had originally demonstrated considerable potential for growth in the early years of the decade. This chapter traces the decline of the Irish left during these years and the increasing difficulties faced by pro-Republican campaigners in the face of popular anti-communism.

During the Spanish Civil War, campaigns to support the Popular Front government were organised throughout Europe. Generally led by communists, pro-Republican committees attempted to unite the far left, moderate socialist and social democratic parties and middle class liberals in a united front against fascism. Irish political circumstances, however, differed substantially from countries such as Britain and France. The Communist Party was a negligible political force. The Labour Party and trade-union movement were broadly hostile to the Spanish Republic and Ireland did not have an influential liberal middle class. The most important section of radical opinion in Ireland, the IRA, was not particularly left-wing. Public opinion was strongly anti-Republican. Nonetheless, the pro-Republican campaign, organised by Republican Congress and the CPI, attempted to construct a united front of socialists and republicans in support of the Spanish Republic. An analysis of the pro-Republican campaign in Ireland must consider the origins and development of republican socialism in the mid 1930s.

Republican Congress was formed following the schism between left-wing members of the IRA and the less socially radical army council. Tension between advocates of military force and political action, an ever-present characteristic of Irish republicanism, had mounted during the late 1920s. Saor Eire, established in 1931 by prominent IRA socialists such as George Gilmore, Peadar O'Donnell and Frank Ryan, was only reluctantly tolerated by the IRA leadership. Left republicans defied the army council to participate in the campaign against Jim Gralton's deportation and protect the Revolutionary Workers' Groups against anti-communist attacks in 1933. The crisis came to a head at the IRA's annual convention in March 1934 when Michael Price called for the adoption of a 'Workers' Republic' as the objective of the organisation. Following the defeat of the resolution by the casting vote of the

executive committee, O'Donnell, Ryan, Gilmore, Price and a substantial minority of IRA volunteers left the convention.

The left republicans began organising a new movement, Republican Congress, to unite socialists, republican workers and small farmers into a radical united front. Approximately one hundred and eighty-six delegates attended the first general assembly at Rathmines Town Hall in September 1934. They were drawn predominantly from the IRA, the Communist Party, the recently revived Irish Citizen Army and several trades' councils and trade-unions.[1] The assembly, called for the purpose of uniting the myriad strands of Irish republicanism, failed to unite even the delegates who attended the meeting. The Department of Justice noted:

"It was revealed a short time before the assembly that there had been a serious disagreement between Price on the one hand and O'Donnell, Gilmore and Ryan on the other, as to what the next step should be. Price, it seems, wanted to declare for a Workers' Republic forthwith, though what was to happen next he did not make clear. O'Donnell and the others would have none of this suggestion which, they said, was unreal and even dangerous; for if they came out publicly for a Workers' Republic here and now, and for nothing less, they would get the support of their convinced followers – but of nobody else".[2]

The argument has retrospectively been dismissed as one of the obscure left arguing over abstract issues but the difference between the two groups was significant. The majority of the organising committee, including Michael Price, a former IRA leader, and Roddy Connolly, the son of James Connolly, advocated an openly socialist republican party. The minority section argued for a united front (a movement rather than a party) of Irish republicans and the subordination of socialist objectives to republicanism. Peadar O'Donnell's section won the vote, ninety-nine to eighty-four, but many of the losing faction immediately walked out leaving the new movement a divided splinter group.

Interestingly, the numerically influential CPI delegates supported the more moderate of the two proposals – the objective of a Republic rather than a Workers' Republic. The Communist Party, in common with O'Donnell's section, believed that Republican Congress should exist as a united front movement rather than a political party. The CPI, in fact, would have preferred if the Republic/Workers' Republic issue had not been raised as their policy urged building a popular front on immediate issues (such as opposition to the Blueshirts)

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[1] Department of Justice (D/Jus), *Notes on Republican Congress*, (n.d., November 1936?) p.12, P67/527, Sean MacEntee papers, UCD Archives. The report noted the attendance of several foreign communists, Shapurji Saklatvala, Reginald Bridgeman and Max Raylock, as well as CPI members, some of them representing 'front' organisations – Sean Murray, Jim Larkin Jnr., V. Morahan, Donal O'Reilly, Loftus Johnston, John Breen (Labour League against Fascism), Tommy Geehan (Belfast Unemployed Workers' Movement) and Christy Clarke (INUW). The most prominent labour delegates included William McMullen (vice-president, ITUC), Joe Ellis (secretary, Port and Dock Workers' Union), Roddy Connolly (president, Bray Trades' Council), and J. O'Byrne (president, Dundalk Trades' Council).

[2] D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.13.

rather than ultimate political goals.[3] The adoption of the united front did not surprise the Department of Justice:

"The "United Front" policy is so well understood that it needs no description. It is a well authenticated product of Moscow; and the establishment of a "United Front" of left wing political parties and organisations is prescribed by the Comintern, as the principal tactical objective of Communists in all parts of the world . . . "[4]

The Department of Justice correctly assumed that the Communist Party was motivated by international policy rather than domestic factors.[5] The Rathmines meeting took place during the transition of Comintern policy from 'class against class' to the 'Popular Front'.[6] In Ireland, this led to support for orthodox republicanism and a more moderate form of socialism. The adoption of a united front by Congress led Special Branch to suspect the new movement was controlled by the Communist Party:

"The Republican Congress is frankly Communist, but it preaches national rather than international Communism, and it does not openly acknowledge allegiance to Moscow. The adoption by the Congress of the United Front slogan and policy, which is prescribed by the Comintern, makes it very difficult to accept the new movement as something radically different from international Communism . . . "[7]

Was Congress merely another front for the party? Its principal leaders – O'Donnell, Gilmore and Ryan – although not hostile to communism, and advocates of a united front with Marxists, were never party members. Ryan outlined his concept of the role of Republican Congress:

"The future lies in working-class rule. In my opinion, not in the Communism advocated to-day, but certainly in that direction. That explains, at once, why I associate on a platform with the CP and at the same time why I would not join the CP. And eventually the gap between the CP policy on the one hand and the Fianna Fáil and IRA policies on the other hand will be filled by a new movement".[8]

However, given the organisational discipline and 'entryist' techniques of the CPI, it was probably the most influential section within Republican Congress. The CPI delegation included not just party members but delegates from the Labour Defence League, Labour League Against Fascism, Unemployed Workers' Movement and other ostensible trade-union and trades' council representatives. Sean Murray informed the Comintern Congress in

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[3] Mike Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1984) p.155.

[4] D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.13.

[5] The extent of Moscow's influence on the CPI should be revealed by the forthcoming publication of Comintern directives to the CPI during this period (Barry McLoughlin and Emmet O'Connor, 'Sources on Ireland and The Communist International, 1920-43', *Saothar 21*).

[6] Mike Milotte (1984) p.156-7.

[7] D/Jus, *Notes on Communism in Saorstat Eireann*, p.14, P67/528, Sean MacEntee papers.

[8] Ryan to Gerald O'Reilly, 18 April 1936, cited in Seán Cronin, *Frank Ryan* (Dublin, 1980) p.65. Ryan did not share the blind faith in Moscow characteristic of communists. Tom Jones, imprisoned with Ryan in Burgos, recalled "When the Hitler-Stalin pact was made in 1939, Frank became very upset and talked about it for days. He was strongly of the opinion that Russia was going Fascist and that this was the reason for the deal" (Tom Jones, *Recollections of Frank Ryan*, (MS, 1975) p.7, Box 28/G/13, International Brigade Archives, Marx Memorial Library, London).

Moscow that the CPI had "decided influence" in the vote concerning the future of Republican Congress.[9]

Despite the failure to reach a consensus at Rathmines, police reports note that "activities of all kinds were intensified" in the aftermath of the Rathmines meeting – "more attacks on Blueshirts and "scabs"; more rent agitation; more publicity for strikes; and more speechmaking . . . further efforts . . . to penetrate the orthodox Labour movement".[10] In contrast to the CPI, the new movement was not confined to Dublin and Belfast. Branches were established in Cork, Kilkenny, Dungloe, Leitrim, Castlecomer, Dundalk, Tuam, Tralee and Achill.[11] In Waterford, Republican Congress launched a campaign against tenement owners and supported a lengthy building strike which resulted in a partial victory for the workers. Peter O'Connor, a founding member of the Waterford branch, recalled that "over the next six months there was more political activity in Waterford than there had been previous or since".[12]

During this period of militant activity there were indications that a united front of socialists with more moderate labour and republican activists was attainable. In November 1934 Labour Party and IRA leaders co-operated with a protest organised by the CPI-controlled Irish Unemployed Workers' Movement. Special Branch described this as:

"significant for the reason that I.R.A. speakers (Sean MacBride) and Congress speakers (Frank Ryan) appeared on the same platform. The rank and file of both sides had always fraternised; but up till that time the leaders of the two groups had kept apart since the "split"".[13]

The following year Congress participated in several strikes in Dublin – including the 'Bacon Shops' and Dublin Tram and Bus workers. In March, the IRA co-operated with Republican Congress and communists in support of the striking transport workers.[14] In Waterford, Republican Congress mounted a high profile but unsuccessful campaign to reinstate Frank Edwards, a local school-teacher and Congress member, who had been dismissed due to the influence of Dr. Kinane, the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. Despite the Bishop's warning that attendance was gravely sinful a number of republicans and at least one well-known Fianna Fáil member shared a platform with Republican Congress at a large protest meeting for Edwards in January 1935.[15]

Tom Barry, however, provided a reminder of the ideological conservatism of the IRA leadership when he objected to being tried alongside two Communist Party members

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9 Mike Milotte (1984) p.155
10 D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.14.
11 Nora Harkin, 'Foreword' in Patrick Byrne, *Irish Republican Congress Revisited* (London, 1994); D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.14.
12 Peter O'Connor, *For the Record* (MS, n.d.) p.5.
13 D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.14.
14 *Ibid*, p.16.
15 Peter O'Connor (MS, n.d.) p.7; J. Bowyer-Bell, *The Secret Army* (London, 1972) p.120.

following the end of the Tram and Bus workers strike.[16] Two members of the Cumann na mBan executive, Eithne Coyle and Sheila Humphreys, were pressured into resigning from Congress by the republican leadership.[17] Another illustration of the gulf between Congress and the IRA occurred soon afterwards. For the second consecutive year, the Wolfe Tone commemorations at Bodenstown were marked by violent clashes between left republicans and the IRA.[18] Republicans, for the most part, were not tempted by the united front.

By 1936 it was evident that despite energetic efforts Republican Congress had failed to unite left-wing and republican groups. There were several reasons. The departure of most left republicans from the IRA ensured that the militaristic and 'non-political' faction retained control of the organisation. The close ties between the Communist Party and Republican Congress also alienated the latter from the IRA leadership, conservative republicans and mainstream labour. Indeed, some republicans felt the conservative IRA leadership was already too far oriented to the left. Brian O'Higgins, for example, complained to Mary McSwiney about the 'communistic taint' of IRA economic policy in 1935.[19]

Such concerns were less of a problem to the rank-and-file of the IRA – a majority of which had voted in favour of the Workers' Republic motion at Rathmines. The Department of Justice observed that "the rank and file of both sides had always fraternised". Another report stated that the antagonism between the IRA leadership and Republican Congress "is much less strong amongst the rank and file who continue to make common cause in many directions".[20] Despite the Bodenstown assaults Frank Edwards believed there was never a significant cleavage between Congress and the IRA.[21] Edwards asserted that Republican Congress was supported by most of the local IRA in Waterford.[22] This is supported by a letter from Brian O'Higgins to Mary McSwiney – both of whom were hostile to Congress:

"As for the Edwards case it is damned now by its association with the Congress crowd. I suspect that the reason the public meeting you spoke of was not held was that there is probably no one in Waterford to organise it. The few I.R.A. who were there are probably all gone over to Peadar [O'Donnell] . . . "[23]

Thus the response of the republican movement to Republican Congress was complex. Many IRA volunteers sympathised with the aims of their former comrades, particularly as the dramatic resurgence of IRA membership and activity following de Valera's election had not

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16 Mike Milotte (1984) p.160.
17 Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* (London, 1983) p.230. Cumann na mBan was an auxiliary organisation of the IRA with an anti-communist outlook.
18 D/Jus *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.16.
19 Brian O'Higgins to Mary McSwiney, 14 January 1935, P48A/252/10, Mary McSwiney papers, UCD Archives.
20 D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.22.
21 Uinseann MacEoin, *Survivors* (Dublin, 1980), p.10.
22 *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.14; Uinseann MacEoin (1980) p.7.
23 Mary McSwiney to Brian O'Higgins, 14 January 1935, P48A/252/10.

resulted in any tangible gains. The IRA leadership, as *Republican Congress* complained, appeared devoid of ideas:

"From 1932 on it was clear the I.R.A. should rouse the Republican population of Ireland into an Ard-Fheis of the nation to mass for the new national advance. Instead, volunteers were sent out in silly attacks on neighbour lads of the same home circumstances who, in the absence of any lead from the I.R.A. were joining the Fianna Fáil Reserve in the belief that it was to be used against the Fascists. Instead of raising the economic war into an assertion of the nation's sovereignty, I.R.A. leaders tried to develop it into a squabble over Bass bottles in public-houses".[24]

Interestingly, a Department of Justice report appeared to agree with the left republicans analysis of the IRA leadership's lack of constructive policy:

"It is probably not untrue to say that Twomey and McBride have come to feel that they have a certain prescriptive right to their present posts of eminence, and that they have, consciously or unconsciously, shaped their policy so as to secure and consolidate their position".[25]

The report believed the present IRA leadership's sole objective was to preserve the tradition of "separatism-cum-physical force . . . mainly by talking about it and letting a few of their supporters go to gaol from time to time".[26] The leadership's primary method of handing on this tradition to the next generation was to avoid confrontation with the government. The report concluded:

"There is a great deal of talk as to "what we will do when we get power" but meanwhile nothing must be done which is likely to provoke destructive retaliation. "Play-acting" is what George Gilmore calls it".[27]

Most other militant nationalists accepted the need for a republican united front. In August 1936, a letter in *Saoirse Eireann* outlined the need for republican unity. In January 1938, a writer in *Wolfe Tone Weekly* made a similar appeal. Brian O'Higgins, the editor, added that Sinn Féin was to blame for the current disunity.[28] Even Fianna Fáil hinted at the advantages of a republican united front to the pre-schism IRA in 1932. One government representative told the IRA:

"a fusion now of the national forces, that is of the labourers and the working farmers, will ensure that the national march to freedom and social justice and cultural and economic development will commence with rapid movement and overwhelming strength".[29]

But although most republicans admitted the necessity for a united front (to oppose the Blueshirts/Fine Gael and push Fianna Fáil towards more radical republicanism) each faction wanted one on its own terms. Both the militaristic (IRA) and political factions (Sinn Féin) of the ideologically right-wing republican leadership remained hostile to the concept of a united front organised by Republican Congress.

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24 *Republican Congress*, 29 June 1935.
25 D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress,* p.22.
26 *Ibid.*
27 *Ibid.*
28 *Wolfe Tone Weekly*, 22 January 1938.
29 Richard Dunphy, *The Making of Fianna Fáil Power in Ireland, 1923-48* (Oxford, 1995) p.183.

The Rathmines schism provided another reason for the failure of Republican Congress. The vote evenly split a movement which was too fragile and recently established to afford such division.[30] The split had a profound impact nationally. For example, the Workers' Republican Party in Tralee, a left republican affiliate of Republican Congress which numbered over one hundred members collapsed soon after the Rathmines Congress and its leaders drifted into the Labour Party.[31] The rift between left republicans did not mend. Many of those associated with the defeated motion actively worked against Republican Congress. Michael Price and Seamus O'Brien gained control of the Irish Citizen Army and forbade its members to join Republican Congress.[32] Many of the Workers' Republic supporters infiltrated the Labour Party and opposed a united front on Congress terms.[33]

Most importantly, however, Republican Congress never offered a serious challenge to the mainstream political parties. The belief of Pat Devine, a member of the CPI central committee, that the Labour Party's adoption of the Workers Republic constitution was "in line with the general rising feeling throughout the country for Republican Labour unity" was characteristic of the CPI's unfounded optimism.[34] The Labour Party and labour movement vehemently rejected united front resolutions throughout the period.

More significantly, there was no suggestion that radical Fianna Fáil supporters, whom Republican Congress identified as the key to success, were attracted to the organisation. In September 1935 the *Republican Congress* newspaper announced a "MOMENTOUS UNITY MEETING". An invitation, purportedly by numerous trade union leaders and heads of Fianna Fáil cumainn, was issued to various bodies. But as the Department of Justice noted:

"when the proposed demonstration actually took place . . . most of the foregoing failed to put in an appearance".[35]

The January 1936 issue of *Republican Congress* surveyed the state of the movement frankly:

"We have survived a year's battering by the forces that smashed Saor Eire. That the Congress forces are not more highly organized in the country is a misfortune, but that we are here at all is a miracle".[36]

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[30] Patrick Byrne, joint secretary of Republican Congress until its disintegration in the late 1930s, recollected – "When the vote was taken, the United Front resolution was carried by 99 votes to 84. Personally, I was deeply disappointed by the result . . . Looking back, I think it was a great mistake and I was as shocked as my friends Roddy Connolly, Archie Heron, Nora Connolly and the others . . . From then on the movement lost momentum. Trade Union support melted away . . . Nora Connolly . . . wrote 'The Communists did not want the Workers' Republic. They were all for a United Front, but this was something Russia wanted, not what we wanted'" (Patrick Byrne, p.32).

[31] Paul Dillon, 'Labour in Kerry in the 1930s' (paper given at 'Ireland in the 1930s' conference, UCD, 12 September 1997).

[32] D/Jus, *Notes on Communism in Saorstat Eireann, Supplement*, p.10, P67/528, Sean MacEntee papers.

[33] *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.13; Gilmore (1974), p.3; Patrick Byrne (1994) p.32.

[34] Pat Devine, 'Easter Week 1916', *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 18, 1936, p236.

[35] D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.18.

[36] *Ibid*, p.19.

The fragile position of Republican Congress deteriorated even further following a series of assaults in mid-April which were partly connected to the news of anti-clerical atrocities in Spain. Significantly, mainstream republicans appeared almost as hostile as the general public. On April 12, when Congress and CPI members attempted to join a republican march to Glasnevin, they were repeatedly attacked by both onlookers and the other contingents in the procession.[37] The *Irish Independent* reported:

"As they came to the gates of the cemetery the shout was raised: "This is a Catholic graveyard. Don't let the Communists in" . . . The trouble persisted in the graveyard itself . . . and the members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade were kept busy dressing the injuries . . . In the cemetery women were to be heard joining the men in arguing against Communism and many references were made to events in Spain".[38]

Left republicans found it impossible to hold public meetings in this volatile atmosphere. Due to previous trouble, Dublin Corporation refused to rent Rathmines Town Hall to Republican Congress.[39] A Special Branch report described extraordinary scenes when Congress optimistically attempted to hold a public meeting in College Green on April 13:

"Between 7-30 and 8 p.m. these persons [Roddy Connolly, William Gallacher, a Scottish communist MP and Jim Larkin Jr.] made no attempt to address a meeting. At this time the crowd numbered between 4,000 and 5,000, the majority of whom were of the respectable type. A fair percentage of females was present. Everything was quiet up to 8 o'clock when Peadar O'Donnell ascended an electric lamp standard and attempted to address the meeting. Immediately he was observed on the standard there was an outcry from the crowd and while he attempted for several minutes to make himself heard he could not do so. It was clear at this stage that about 98% of the people present were opposed to the meeting.

Owing to the presence of a strong force of uniformed gardai, assisted by members of Detective Branch, between O'Donnell and the crowd, he was not subjected to direct violence, but a number of missiles were thrown at him during the time he was standing on the standard. None of these missiles, which consisted of small bottles and at least one egg, took effect, but the last bottle narrowly escaped his head. After this he descended from the pole amidst wild cheering from the crowd. The crowd attempted to surge in, apparently with a view to attacking O'Donnell and his friends, but the gardai succeeded in pushing the crowd back and preventing an actual clash taking place. . .

It was very obvious the hostility shown towards the holding of meeting was a spontaneous protest from the Dublin people against Communism, and it can be safely stated that had it not been for the extensive police arrangements made to cope effectively with the situation the lives of the speakers at the meeting would have been in grave danger".[40]

Following the meeting, an anti-communist mob rampaged through the city centre pursued by large numbers of gardaí. A large crowd was prevented from attacking the CPI headquarters on Ormond Quay, Unity Hall, and the Workers' Union of Ireland offices on Marlborough

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37 The other organisations were Dublin Brigade IRA, Cumann Oglaigh na hEireann, Cumann na mBan, Cumann na gCailíní, Fianna Eireann, Mna na Poblachta and Cumann Poblachta na hEireann.
38 *Irish Independent*, 13 April 1936.
39 Special Branch report, 9 April 1936, D/Jus D2/6/36.
40 *Ibid*, 14 April 1936.

Street. The frustrated protesters instead targeted Trinity College and the Masonic Hall on Molesworth Street while another group smashed up the Republican Congress office on Middle Abbey Street.

Congress members believed the violence was orchestrated by a combination of Blueshirts and right-wing sodalities which encouraged easily manipulated mobs from the slums.[41] Certainly, the selection of Trinity College and the Masonic Hall as substitute targets indicates a spirit of militant Catholicism. Special Branch was more specific, noting before the public meeting that "certain persons associated with the C.Y.M.S. in Dublin City and County would not hesitate to use force in the prevention of [communist] activities".[42]

The lack of support for the far left in Dublin indicated by such incidents was confirmed by the Dublin municipal elections of June 1936. Republican Congress entered two candidates in Dublin. Frank Ryan polled 418 votes out of 32,517 (1.3%) while George Gilmore performed little better with 730 votes out of a poll of 32,617 (2.2%).[43] It is difficult to estimate the numbers involved in Congress and the CPI when the Spanish Civil War broke out the following month but the left was clearly in a weak position. [44]

A special branch report dated September 1936 concluded that the Communist Party consisted of:

"a handful of professional agitators and probably had never numbered more than two or three hundred, of whom not more than fifty or sixty, if so many, are active members. It has no real existence outside of Dublin and Belfast".[45]

Eugene Downing, a CPI member at the time, believes there were only twenty to thirty genuine activists in Dublin – "They could all fit into one room in Connolly Hall".[46] The fact that the Communist Party received only a negligible amount of local subscriptions while spending substantial amounts on rent, printing "and the maintenance of three or four officials in idleness" led the gardaí to suspect that the party was funded from abroad, either by Moscow or the Communist Party of Great Britain.[47]

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41 As Brian O'Neill, a prominent CPI member, put it – "The gangsters know what the priest means when he says: "The shame of it – the Communists are out there preaching against God, and it Lent". As they sit in the chapel listening their hands are on the iron bars up their sleeves" ('Dublin Strike Episode', *Left Review*, Vol. 1, No. 9, June 1935, p.340).

42 Special Branch report, 9 April 1936, D/Jus D2/6/36.

43 D/Jus, '*Calendar of Events*', 1930-39, p.56, P67/534, Sean MacEntee papers.

44 In April 1936, Ryan confided to Gerard O'Reilly – "The Congress from an organisational view-point is only a name. It exists only in Dublin". He acknowledged in July that the "CPI will not make much progress either" (Seán Cronin (1980) p.65, 69).

45 D/Jus, *Notes on Communism in Saorstat Ireland*, P67/523, p.16. Another report from this period stated "There are no reliable figures as to its membership, which appears to be practically confined to Dublin and Belfast. Perhaps an average of a couple of hundred, with the majority in Belfast, would be a reasonable estimate" (D/Jus, *Notes on Communism in Saorstat Eireann, Supplement*, p.6).

46 Eugene Downing interview, January 1996.

47 D/Jus, *Notes on Communism in Saorstat Ireland*, p.19.

Accessible Special Branch reports do not include an estimate of Republican Congress membership but it was clearly the more populist of the two organisations. Indeed, one garda report noted that the CPI was:

"largely dependent on supplies provided by the Republican Congress, which attracted more subscriptions because of its professed nationalism".[48]

Republican Congress established six branches in Dublin – five corresponded with the IRA battalions in the city and the sixth, led by Captain Jack White, was composed of British ex-servicemen.[49] Close to five hundred men were members of the Dublin IRA in 1934. Two years later, it numbered only ninety-three.[50] Although there were several reasons for the decline in IRA numbers (such as the establishment of de Valera's reserve force) Republican Congress must have recruited a considerable number. In 1936 Peadar O'Donnell claimed:

"the I.R.A. has withered, especially in Dublin, where working-class militancy is high and where it is only through Gilmore, Ryan, and I that it could develop in contact with this section of the working-class movement".[51]

According to Patrick Byrne, joint secretary of Republican Congress, the movement enjoyed significant support in Achill, Leitrim and Kilkenny.[52] Substantial branches also existed in Waterford and Belfast. Given that Republican Congress was a united front movement rather than a political party its leaders were probably unsure of the numbers involved. Patrick Byrne provides what could be considered an optimistic estimate of activists and supporters when he states that over two thousand supporters marched to Bodenstown in 1934.[53]

Despite its weakness the movement responded strongly to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Coincidentally, Peadar O'Donnell was on holiday near Barcelona when the Nationalist rebellion began. He returned to Ireland determined to organise support for the Spanish Republic. However, the sensational atrocity stories of the *Irish Independent* had further hardened attitudes to communism. O'Donnell described the aftermath of one Congress meeting on Spain:

". . . the other speakers were ambushed on their way back to the committee rooms, [and] got through only after a mild drizzle of bricks, bottles and the like . . . an efficient plan of campaign had been worked out by "Catholic Action" committees in the city".[54]

The gardaí were again forced to protect Congress members when they were surrounded by a mob on O'Connell Street in August.[55]

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48 *Ibid.*

49 Patrick Byrne (1994), p.15. The latter battalion (described by Special Branch as "a handful of ex-soldiers") marched in Dublin on armistice day to protest against British imperialism in 1934 and 1935.

50 Sean Cronin, *The McGarrity Papers* (Tralee, 1972) p.166.

51 Peadar O'Donnell, 'The Irish Struggle To-day', *Left Review*, Vol. 2, No. 7, April 1936, p.300.

52 Patrick Byrne (1994), p.21-2.

53 *Ibid*, p.23, 40. Byrne claims a similar number attended a national Congress rally in Dublin in March 1937. The *Irish Press* does not appear to have reported the rally but the figure seems implausible at this stage of the movement's decline.

54 Peadar O'Donnell, *Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (1937) p.134.

55 *Irish Independent*, 18 August 1936.

The efforts of Republican Congress to propagandise on behalf of the Spanish Republic were characterised by such scenes. Despite this opposition Republican Congress initially succeeded in mounting a well-publicised campaign. Indeed, the Spanish Civil War appeared to energise the flagging movement. As Patrick Byrne, joint secretary of Republican Congress commented:

"A depleted Congress organisation carried on and was to receive a new infusion of life with the outbreak of the Franco/Fascist rebellion . . ."[56]

One reason for the renewed activity of Congress was the mobilisation of the pro-Franco movement in Ireland. Left republicans interpreted the pro-Nationalist campaign as a resurgence of the Blueshirt movement. This view was expressed at a Republican Congress meeting in September:

"We declare that the so-called Christian Front is a disguised Fascist organisation, a puppet of the "Independent" newspaper trust and is in underhand league with General O'Duffy and his Fascist party. That this combination of the so-called Christian Front, General O'Duffy and the 'Independent' is shamelessly and recklessly trying to use the name of religion to further the rise of the discredited Fascist groups in Ireland."[57]

Just as the rise of the Blueshirts invigorated the IRA in 1933, the Irish Brigade/Christian Front movement temporarily gave the republican left a sense of purpose.

The Republican Congress campaign came into conflict with the hierarchy when Cardinal MacRory declared it "a scandal and an outrage that an Irish Catholic body should be guilty of pledging support to such a campaign".[58] Frank Ryan's lengthy reply to MacRory, reported in the *Irish Press*, was a propaganda high-point in the pro-Republican campaign. Pointing out that the hierarchy had been proved wrong when they warned that a victory for Irish republicanism would destroy religion, Ryan asked why the Church should be believed about Spanish Republicans. Ryan declared that Congress support for Spanish, Basque and Catalan Republicans did not imply approval of anti-clerical outrages – just as it did not follow that "you applaud the massacre of two thousand Catholics at Badajos, that you believe the Mohommedan Moors are fighting for Christianity, or that you approve the godless scum of the Foreign Legion". He tackled the issue of the atrocities pointing out that similar outrages occurred in monarchist Spain in 1909 when 'Reds' were unknown there and suggested that, like the accounts of 'Catholic Belgium' during World War I, they had been exaggerated by the *Irish Independent*. Other violent acts, Ryan believed, were an understandable reaction to the part the Spanish Church played in supporting Franco and representing "the Almighty as God become Fascist".

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56 Patrick Byrne (1994) p.32. See also Denis Carroll, *They have fooled you again* (Dublin, 1993) p.215; Milotte (1984) p.171.
57 *Irish Press*, 16 September 1936.
58 *Irish Independent*, 21 September 1936.

Ryan compared the claims of "the so-called Christian Front and Fascist General O'Duffy" to represent Christianity with those of "the Mohommedan Moors and Foreign Legion mercenaries". Both alliances shared the common aim of suppressing workers' rights. Ryan concluded:

"We Republicans deny that religion is at stake in Spain just as we denied – in the teeth of ecclesiastical condemnation – that religion was at stake when we were fighting in arms to defeat the Cosgrave Government in 1922-23. Our stand in 1922-23 is already vindicated: history will vindicate our stand on the Spanish question to-day".[59]

Essentially, these remained the central arguments of Republican Congress during the war. Ryan's letter invoked popular or racist stereotypes, such as the involvement of "Mohommedan Moors" and "godless scum of the foreign legion", in much the same way as pro-Franco propaganda. Ryan's attempt to present the Spanish Civil War in an Irish historical context, although tendentious, was characteristic of Congress policy. In his letter, Ryan compared aspects of Spain to 1867, 1914-18, 1916-23 and 1922-3 to illustrate various points. The dates did not need explanation, they symbolised various successes and betrayals. This technique simplified a complicated foreign issue and stressed the republican, rather than socialist, aspects of the war. Ryan similarly described the aim of O'Duffy's and Belton's organisations as "anti-[Irish] republican" rather than pro-Franco. Republican Congress was keenly aware of the importance of support from mainstream Irish republicanism.

The defence of the Spanish Republic became the central purpose of Republican Congress. Attempts to involve the wider republican movement initially met with some success. The involvement of O'Duffy and Belton, the hated leaders of the Blueshirt movement, in the pro-Franco campaign eased their task. Dr. James Brennan was dropped from the national directorate of Cumann na Poblachta, an IRA-backed political organisation, for his involvement with the Christian Front.[60] In November, a notice signed by George Gilmore and Owen Sheehy-Skeffington announced:

"In view of the success of the "Irish Independent's" drive to organise under cover of a ramp against the Spanish Government, the anti-Republican forces in Ireland, and danger of its propaganda actually attaching to its campaign bewildered sections of Republican opinion unless some exposure of its role is attempted, a number of Republican people are arranging to meet".[61]

Ernie O'Malley, a respected republican, presided over the well-attended meeting. There is no evidence that other leading republicans (as opposed to socialist republicans) attended. The other speakers were Ambrose Martin and Peadar O'Donnell. Martin read a message from the

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59 *Irish Press*, 23 September, 1936.
60 *The Worker*, 14 November 1936.
61 *Irish Press*, 5 November 1936.

Basque President, José Antonio Aguirre, which claimed that twenty-five Basque priests had been shot by Franco's forces and the Bishop of Vitoria had been forced to flee his diocese. O'Donnell spoke scathingly of the *Irish Independent* comparing its attitude to Spain with its well-known views in 1913, 1916, and 1922.[62] Republicans, both traditional and socialist, could be expected to identify with this theme.[63] The *Independent* retorted with an editorial titled 'The Insolence of a Clique' which labelled those who attended the meeting as "an unparalleled challenge to the Irish people" but was careful not to alienate traditional republicans:

"The dead who died for Irish freedom would turn in their graves at the suggestion that Irish republicanism is to be compared with Spanish anti-God Communism".[64]

Another largely attended left republican meeting was held in the Engineers' Hall on Dawson Street the following month. George Gilmore, recently returned from Spain, gave a speech emphasising political rather than religious aspects of the Spanish war. He criticised other newspapers and the Labour Party for not exposing the propaganda of the *Irish Independent*. Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington[65] delivered the by now obligatory denunciations of O'Duffy and Belton. Again, the meeting was chaired by a distinguished republican, Fr. Michael O'Flanagan,[66] a former vice-president of Sinn Féin. He outlined the class nature of the Spanish Civil War, the malign role of the *Irish Independent*, past and present, and the reactionary position of the Irish Catholic Church.[67] Fr. O'Flanagan, a trenchant critic of the role of the Catholic Church in Irish politics, spent the next two and a half years disseminating this message.[68] O'Flanagan visited the United States twice to lecture on Spain and declared at a rally in Madison Square Gardens:

". . . you are not bound to follow the leadership of your pastor in political affairs. Rather, it is your duty to make up your own mind and pay no more attention to the views of your pastor than you would to the views of any other man of equal political intelligence".[69]

However, O'Flanagan's participation should not be seen as evidence of support among orthodox Irish republicanism for the Spanish government as he had been expelled from Sinn

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62 *Irish Independent*, 6 November 1936. This referred to the opposition of the newspaper to workers during the 1913 lock-out, its editorial calling for the execution of James Connolly in 1916, and its anti-republican position during the Irish civil war.

63 Many republicans never forgave the *Irish Independent* for calling for the execution of Connolly. As Todd Andrews wrote – "The *Irish Times* simply did not appear in Nationalist households any more than did the *Independent* in Republican households after 1916". C.S. Andrews, *Dublin Made Me*, (Dublin, 1979) p.64.

64 *Irish Independent*, 6 November 1936.

65 Sheehy-Skeffington was accurately described by Fr. Denis Fahey, an anti-communist priest as "well-known and ubiquitous: she is mixed up in almost every subversive activity".

66 Michael O'Flanagan (1876-1942): b. Castlerea, Roscommon; Sinn Féin vice-president, 1917; suspended from ministry for republicanism, 1918; Sinn Féin propagandist in USA, 1921-6; expelled from Sinn Féin for breach of discipline, 1936; pro-Spanish government activist, 1936-9.

67 *Irish Press*, 4 December 1936.

68 Denis Carroll (1993) p.217.

69 *Workers' Republic*, August 1938.

Féin in January 1936 for a breach of discipline.[70] Republican Congress repeatedly emphasised the connection between Irish and Spanish republicanism. However, the claim that Irish republicans generally supported the Spanish Republic demands close analysis. The suppression of *An Phoblacht* during this period makes it difficult to assess broad republican opinion. It is thought that several prominent republican leaders including Brian O'Higgins, Mary McSwiney and J.J. O'Kelly ('Sceilig')[71] were pro-Franco.[72] Many republicans did not appear particularly interested in the conflict. Few prominent republicans supported the Spanish government.[73] The issue was briefly raised at the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in January 1937. J.J. O'Kelly pointed out that Ireland's membership of the Commonwealth meant de Valera's government was powerless to recognise Franco before Britain. Curiously, considering his republicanism, O'Kelly appeared to disapprove of the decision to recognise the Spanish Republic in 1932:

". . . before the flight of the King of Spain everyone who knew anything about foreign affairs saw where Spain was heading for. But the Free State Government, with almost indecent haste, rushed to give recognition to the new rulers of Spain".[74]

Special Branch surveillance of public meetings held by the Women Prisoners' Defence League over a six month period reveals an interesting variety of republican responses to Spain.[75] Generally, the Spanish Civil War was mentioned to illustrate the question of Irish sovereignty rather than to express approval for either side. In November, for example, Maud Gonne MacBride made a similar point to that of O'Kelly:

". . . until the British Government decided to recognise General Franco's Government, the Free State had no power to officially recognise it. She emphasised this fact as a greater necessity for the I.R.A. to continue to fight for the freedom of their country".[76]

Most of the speakers were hostile to the organisers of the Irish Brigade and the Christian Front. They were considered the most extreme element of the pro-treaty forces and the

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70 Denis Carroll (1993) p.211.

71 John J. O'Kelly/'Sceilig' (1872-1957): b. Valentia island, Co. Kerry; Gaelic League president, 1919-23; TD and Minister for Irish, 1919-21; anti-treaty, 1921; Sinn Féin president, 1926; editor and author.

72 Denis Carroll (1993) p.221. The *Irish Democrat* (3 April 1937) stated that O'Kelly "openly avows pro-Nazi and pro-Mussolini sympathies and shares Paddy Belton's antipathy towards the Spanish Republic". Brian P. Murphy, however, disputes that O'Kelly was pro-Franco (*Irish Historical Studies*, May 1995, p.420). I found no direct evidence but O'Kelly's statement at the 1937 Sinn Féin Ard-Fheis indicates hostility towards Republican Spain.

73 There were occasional reports of anti-Franco remarks at Sinn Féin public meetings. In November, two republican speakers, Tim Powell and Patrick Hogan, referred to Franco as a fascist (*The Worker*, 12 December 1936). There was, however, no indication of a pro-Republican campaign within Sinn Féin.

74 *Saoirse Eireann*, January 1937.

75 The Women Prisoners' Defence League (also known as the Republican Prisoners' Defence Association and the Political Prisoners' Defence Committee) was composed of republicans believed by Special Branch to be closely connected to the IRA. Occasionally, left republicans such as Cora Hughes and Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington spoke at the meetings. A comment in Detective Maher's report suggests that the Department of Justice was especially interested in the attitudes of republicans towards the Spanish Republic – "During the cause of her speech, Madam MacBride made no reference of any description to the Spanish War, or to Communism". (Special Branch report, 13 September 1936, D/Jus D1/36).

76 Special Branch report, 29 November 1936, D/Jus D1/36.

Blueshirt movement. Interestingly, both groups were criticised for not supporting Irish republicanism rather than their opposition to the Spanish Republic. When it became known that O'Duffy was organising the Irish Brigade, MacBride commented that "before going to help Spain, or any other country it would be better to endeavour to free our own country".[77] Similarly, Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington (who later organised collections for the Spanish Republic) remarked of the Christian Front:

"there were in this country a section of people collecting money for the assistance of the people in Spain and that it would be much better for them if they saw after their prisoners in Arbour Hill and the Six Counties".[78]

Some of the hostility was clearly based on personal animus towards O'Duffy and Belton. The pro-Franco leaders were often criticised for their personal defects. One republican, Frank Powell, claimed that Patrick Belton was spending Christian Front money "drinking creamy pints of Guinness's porter in Madrid" and accused Desmond Bell, the Christian Front secretary, of embezzlement.[79] Again, they were not criticised for their support of General Franco. The coalition of 'anti-treaty' forces in favour of General Franco does not seem to have pushed Irish republicans into a position of support for the Spanish Republic. Statements in favour of the Spanish government were vague and often focused on personalities. John Doyle, for example, commented that "Peadar O'Donnell was a much more honest man than either Paddy Belton or General O'Duffy".[80]

The Women Prisoners' Defence League responded to Spain with a variety of views – hostility towards the pro-Franco lobby, some sympathy for the Congress position but, generally, a reluctance to adopt a firm position on Spain. This spectrum of views can be observed at one meeting in January 1937. The opening speaker, Alec Lynn, expressed the view that:

"it did not matter to the Irish people about the Spaniards killing one another, what he wanted was to see the English people killing one another".

The final speaker, Maud Gonne MacBride, however, appealed to the crowd to attend Fr. Ramon Laborda's lecture in the Gaiety theatre where "they would be told the truth about Spain, and the lying propaganda they read in the papers".[81]

An analysis of republican newspapers during this period suggests that republicans were not interested in the Spanish Civil War unless it affected Irish sovereignty. Spain was seldom

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77 *Ibid*, 30 August 1936.
78 *Ibid*, 18 October 1936.
79 *Ibid*, 22, 29 November 1936.
80 *Ibid*, 15 November 1936.
81 *Ibid*, 17 January 1937.

mentioned in republican periodicals. *Saoirse Eireann*[82] expressed no opinion on the Spanish Civil War. *Wolfe Tone Weekly*[83] showed little interest in Spain until late 1938 when it became evident that the rivalry between the major powers might lead to a European conflict. Brian O'Higgins, the editor, viewed the Spanish Civil War as a conflict between the fascist powers (Italy and Germany) and democracies (France and Britain). His main concern was that Ireland, a country sympathetic to democracy, would support the British war effort against fascism. From O'Higgins' perspective of traditional republicanism – 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity' – this was worrying, particularly given his pro-Italian sympathies:

"Ireland is expected, in company of Great Britain, to make war on a country which has Christianised and, in great part, civilized the Mediterranean and the States of Europe, and has given Ireland her religion; the birth place of Dante, of Michel Angelo, of Raphael, of Leonardo de Vinci . . . "[84]

With the exception of this article *Wolfe Tone Weekly* generally mentioned Spain only to criticise Fr. O'Flanagan who was typically referred to as speaking "from a Communist platform" or having "a sorry exhibition made of himself" at public meetings.[85]

Prison Bars[86] was the only republican organ which consistently indicated some disdain towards the Spanish Nationalists but it did not publish any articles in support of the Spanish Republic. In October 1937 one article condemned the aerial bombing of villages in Spain – although it attributed the blame to England rather than Franco for not agreeing to international efforts to abolish the practice. In April 1938, there was a passing reference to "that Christian Bomber Franco". *Prison Bars* was one of the few republican papers to draw attention to Frank Ryan's incarceration although its plea was accompanied with the caveat "that we regret that any Irishman should fight anywhere except directly against the British Empire till we have won our own freedom."[87]

The political repercussions of the Spanish Civil War were also considered by *Republican Review*[88] which drew similar conclusions to *Wolfe Tone Weekly*:

"Owing to the change of alignment in the international situation which has occurred within the last couple of years Britain has found herself allied with democratic countries. Our sympathies are with democratic countries and therefore our sympathies have been to a greater or lesser degree on England's side. This happened in the Abyssinian War, the Spanish War and the Sino-Japanese War. Any thinking Republican cannot but have

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82 A republican monthly published from November 1926 until December 1937. *Saoirse Eireann* was pro-IRA but hostile to Sinn Féin because the national executive had sided with Fr. O'Flanagan against Brian O'Higgins and Mary McSwiney.

83 Broadly similar to *Saoirse Eireann* (in fact they merged in December 1937), *Wolfe Tone Weekly* was published by Brian O'Higgins from September 1937 until April 1939.

84 *Wolfe Tone Weekly*, 27 August 1938.

85 *Ibid*, 8 October 1938, 27 August 1938.

86 The organ of the Women's Prisoners' Defence League published from May 1937 to December 1938.

87 *Prison Bars*, May 1938.

88 A monthly journal associated with Sinn Féin published between September 1938 and June 1939.

been seriously perturbed during the last couple of years at the prospect that if a war broke out the sympathies of a vast number of people would have been with Britain's side in the war".[89]

Again, Spain is considered only in the context of Irish sovereignty. Interestingly the author, *Connachtach*, believed that Irish republicans sympathised with the Spanish government. *Connachtach*'s conclusion to this dilemma was characteristic of the republican tendency to subordinate every issue to Irish independence:

"Are we going to allow our natural dislike of dictatorships to make us forget that "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity" and are we to become England's ally because we don't like some of her enemies?"

Solidarity with democratic countries, anti-fascism, and other ideological issues did not figure in the *realpolitik* of Irish republicanism. The article, as with the content of the other republican periodicals surveyed, illustrated the wide gulf between traditional republicanism and Republican Congress and suggests that what support for the Spanish government did exist among much of the republican movement was both tenuous and conditional. Peadar O'Donnell and Frank Ryan's belief that Irish republicanism was inextricably linked to Spanish republicanism, anti-fascism and other oppressed nations, held true only for their tiny section of the republican movement.[90]

On December 12 approximately eighty Irishmen led by Frank Ryan left Dublin to join the International Brigades. Tom Barry, the IRA chief of staff, forbade IRA members to join but was ignored, particularly in Dublin, by many activists.[91] In the next two years at least another hundred volunteers, most of them CPI, IRA and Republican Congress members, travelled to Spain. The departure of so many committed activists had a devastating impact on the far left and the pro-Republican campaign. Eugene Downing, a CPI member who remained in Ireland until 1938, recalled:

"Then the Spanish thing turned up. People started disappearing off to Spain. There were practically no activists left".[92]

Those who left included not just important organisers and speakers like Ryan but the younger activists who defended Congress meetings from Catholic Action groups.[93] Throughout the Spanish Civil War, Nora Harkin recalled, "there were very few meetings. The climate was not conducive to holding meetings."[94] After the departure of Ryan's contingent to Spain public meetings were held even less frequently. Five pro-Spanish government meetings were reported during November and December 1936 but only two in

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89 *Republican Review*, September 1938.

90 Indeed, English argued that Ryan's relationship with the Nazis during World War II suggests there was no 'necessary' connection between republican socialists and anti-fascism. Richard English, *Radicals and Republic* (Oxford 1994) pp.248-51).

91 J. Bowyer-Bell (1979), p.133.

92 Eugene Downing interview, January 1996.

93 Two of the four section leaders of the CPI 'defence corps' fought in Spain (D/Jus, D2/36A).

94 Nora Harkin interview, June 1996. Patrick Byrne's claim that during the Spanish Civil War "The Left movement was no longer in retreat. We held meetings and rallies when and where we liked" is not supported by other sources (Patrick Byrne (1994) p.40).

January and February 1937.[95] Significantly, it is around this period that Special Branch reports refer to "the failure of this movement [Republican Congress]".[96]

However, the Spanish-aid campaign persevered despite the departure of the most committed section of the Irish left and the lack of support from the republican movement. In January 1937 Fr. Ramon Laborda, who had been invited to campaign in Ireland by George Gilmore when they met in Barcelona, arrived to promote the Spanish Republic. Laborda's visit was a tactically astute move by the pro-government campaigners. As a member of the Spanish delegation which attended the Irish Eucharistic Congress in 1932 his clerical credentials were impressive. His visit provoked consternation among Irish clerics. A Jesuit from Milltown Park warned Fr. Dunne, Archbishop Byrne's secretary:

"A Spanish secular Priest, Fr. Laborda, said mass here this morning and is known by one of our scholastics here with being Basque. Fr. Laborda appears to be strongly anti-Franco, he is certainly giving out against him, much to the indignation of Spaniards here. I understand Fr. Laborda intends to visit his Grace, the Archbishop, and hence I am writing to put you on your guard".[97]

Fr. Dunne informed a priest who was helping Laborda that Archbishop Byrne would not allow Laborda permission to celebrate Mass in Dublin:

"His Grace wishes it to be known that Fr. Laborda's suspicion here is irrelevant. Even if he has not engaged in any propaganda on behalf of the Spanish "Reds" and even if his associates here are free from suspicion of being in sympathy with Communists, Fr. Laborda is, admittedly, here to collect money . . . a violation of Statute 425 Can. Phn. Mayn (1927)".[98]

At a well-attended meeting at the Gaiety, Laborda argued that the Spanish Civil War was misrepresented abroad:

"If it was a religious war, how would they explain the expulsion from his diocese by Franco's troops, of the Bishop of Vitoria and other acts against priests and monks?"[99]

Laborda returned to Ireland at the end of February. His previous visit was effective enough to warrant the Irish government's disapproval of his return. J.A. Belton, the secretary of the Paris legation, was criticised by the Department of External Affairs for endorsing Laborda's passport:

"The Secretary of Legation should have been aware from reports in the Irish newspapers that Father Laborda was engaged in activities during his last visit here which caused embarrassment to the Government. As it may be necessary to request him to leave Saorstát Eireann, the action taken by the Legation may cause difficulties".[100]

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95 Source: national, left-wing newspapers and Department of Justice reports.
96 D/Jus, *Notes on Communism in Saorstat Ireland, Supplement*, p.5.
97 Fr. Kenny to Fr. Dunne, 1 December 1936, Spanish Civil War file, Edward Byrne papers, Dublin Archdiocesan Archives).
98 Fr. Dunne to Fr. Kieran, 21 December 1936, *Ibid.*
99 *Irish Press*, 18 January 1937.
100 D/FA Paris Embassy P2/65.

Laborda generally received a hostile reception at public meetings. His invitation to speak at Queen's University was overturned by the Students' Union.[101] He fared little better at the Ulster Hall. When Laborda announced:

"The Irish clergy know I am a priest and was an eye-witness of the war in Spain. Yet not a single Irish priest has asked me about the war, because they are partisans of Fascism"

there were shouts of "Up Franco" and "What about the nuns?" Violence was averted only by the arrival of thirty armed policemen.[102] The following month Fr. O'Flanagan and Fr. Laborda opened an exhibition on Basque life during the Civil War at Egan's Galleries on St. Stephen's Green.[103] Laborda left Ireland shortly afterwards, Frank Ryan claimed he:

"was virtually being deported by the Free State Government as part of its 'non-intervention' programme".[104]

Several pro-Republican committees were set up in this period, most of them dominated by Republican Congress members. In September 1936, Robin Tweedy, a Communist Party member, organised the first meeting of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee. The following week it merged with the Northern Irish Spanish Medical Relief Committee to form the All-Ireland Spanish Medical Relief Committee.[105] The *Irish Independent* was outraged; an editorial entitled 'An Audacious Proposal' declared that no-one would be fooled by Tweedy's claim to be organising humanitarian aid.[106]

In early February 1937, the Irish Friends of the Spanish Republic (also known as the Spanish Aid Committee) met at the Teachers' Hall. Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington was secretary but the meetings were usually chaired by John Swift, the radical secretary of the Bakers' Union.[107] The committee was supported by Republican Congress, the Communist Party of Ireland and various non-aligned socialists such as Sheehy-Skeffington, Swift and O'Flanagan. Despite the small numbers involved the organisation was active in forging international ties. With many male socialists fighting in Spain, left-wing women played a prominent role. Most of the work of the Irish Friends of the Spanish Republic was carried out by the Women's Aid Committee.[108] Katherine Gillet-Gatty represented the committee at a Paris conference on Spanish aid. The following month Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington attended the National Conference of the Friends of the Spanish Republic in London to affiliate the committee to the International Organisation for Aid for the Spanish Republic.[109]

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101 *Irish Press*, 9 March 1937.
102 *Ibid,* 25 March 1937.
103 *Ibid,* 6 April 1937. Frank O'Reilly, head of the Catholic Truth Society warned Fr. Dunne about the exhibition but did "not know what could be done that would be within the law" (Frank O'Reilly to Fr. Dunne, 12 April 1937, Spanish Civil War file, Edward Byrne Papers).
104 *Irish Democrat*, 27 April 1937.
105 *Irish Press*, 9 September 1936.
106 *Irish Independent*, 9 September 1936.
107 John P. Swift, *John Swift, An Irish Dissident* (Dublin, 1991) p.103.
108 This included Hannah Sheehy-Skeffington, Nora Harkin, Dr. Catherine Lynch, Patricia Lynch, and Bobby O'Brien (Nora Harkin interview, June 1996).
109 Newspaper reports of Women's Aid Committee meetings are contained in D/Jus D2/37A.

However, without much support from republican groups, the trade-union movement and the Labour Party, the Women's Aid Committee met with little success in Ireland. Nora Harkin, the treasurer of the committee recalled the Labour Party's attitude:

"They were very reluctant. They didn't want to be pressurised into taking sides. They liked to think when the thing was over and everybody praised the Spanish workers and all that that they were also supporters. But we didn't see any support from them. It was just a small band as always sticking out its neck to get something for them [the Spanish people]. I remember trying to organise meetings. The only people who gave us a room were the Bakers Union. Nowhere else would".[110]

Efforts by Irish socialists to draw middle-class intelligentsia into support for the Spanish Republic, which succeeded in Britain and France, were not successful in Ireland. The primary reason for this, as Mike Milotte noted, was that this class was virtually non-existent in Ireland. Many of the liberal intelligentsia were exiled from Ireland. They also appeared less pro-Republican than their European counterparts.[111] This can be observed in the case of Irish writers. In February 1937 Jack Carney, a member of Friends of the Spanish Republic asked Desmond Ryan, an Irish historian and left-wing activist based in London:

"I wonder if you could arrange for Irish writers to collaborate in a statement on Spain. O'Donnell would agree and there are others I feel sure who would rise to the occasion. Sean O'Casey is sympathetic and I suppose Yeats is. Francis Stuart I think is Nazi".[112]

Ryan, a trenchant supporter of the Spanish Republic, devised a moderate letter professing pacifism rather than Republican support:

"By all means send every aid to the various funds, medical, civilian and others, to the Irish Christian Front, to the Spanish Medical Aid, to the "Universe" Medical Fund, to the Spanish Relief Committee, to the Society of Friends or to the Irish Republican Congress or to the Irish Friends of the Spanish Republic, we care not which, turn a deaf ear to all counsels of venom and hatred, and let one word alone go forth to Spain, a word learned bitterly in Irish bloodshed, Irish disillusion and Irish fratricidal strife – Whoose hateth his brother, abideth in death".[113]

The inclusion of Republican Congress and the Irish Christian Front appears incongruous given the support of both organisations for Irish military factions in Spain.

Ryan's efforts, as he reported to Carney, met with little success :

"I wrote to Dublin to Sean O'Faolain re P.E.N. and a statement but he is no longer secretary and personally of the let-Spain-fight-her-own-battles mind. I gather from him Peadar does not regard P.E.N. as aught but bourgeois."[114]

In April Ryan surrendered to the apathy of the Irish literary community:

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110 Nora Harkin interview, June 1996.
111 Mike Milotte (1984) p.174.
112 Carney to Ryan, February 19, 1937, LA 10/Q22(1), Desmond Ryan papers, UCD Archives.
113 Form letter drafted by Ryan, February 1937, LA 10/Q22(3).
114 Desmond Ryan to Jack Carney, March 1937, LA 10/Q22(8).

". . . the fact is that there was no enthusiasm for it in Dublin, and Mrs. Skeffington's efforts to get signatures failed. The truth was that no-one there was keen. Some said it was too Christian, others that it was not Catholic enough and they all failed to respond when asked to draft an alternative or better one. My efforts through a third party to get O'Casey to sign it came to nothing".[115]

The lack of success of the pro-Republican campaign, the Irish left's ever-shrinking numbers and the Popular Front policy resulted in closer co-operation between Republican Congress and the Communist Party of Ireland. In late 1936 Special Branch observed:

"In July the Civil War broke out in Spain, and for the past couple of months, the Congress group have been concerting action with Sean Murray and the Communist Party of Ireland in an effort to turn this event to profit for propagandist purposes. A raid by the police on the 28th August on the Communist headquarters disclosed the fact that Frank Ryan was printing pamphlets, etc. for the Communists, and there is no doubt that the two groups are co-operating on a number of issues. Indeed, at the present time (November 1936) the Republican Congress as a separate organisation has practically ceased to exist, and the same may almost be said of the Communist Party of Ireland".[116]

The trend towards unity continued in 1937 with the setting up of the *Irish Democrat* jointly supported by Republican Congress, the Communist Party of Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Socialist Party. At a meeting to launch the *Irish Democrat* Owen Sheehy-Skeffington described it as "a non-party paper open for the expression of the views of all parties, organisations, and individuals who adhere to its ideals". The newspaper's stated objective was a united front of the working class.[117] The Spanish Civil War dominated the *Irish Democrat* which emphasised Irish aspects of the conflict, particularly the need to defend democracy:

"Republican Spain was fighting O'Duffy and his "Black and Tan" Brigade before they ever set foot on Spanish territory, because in defending democracy, they are fighting its enemies throughout the world. And, in attacking the liberties of the Spanish, O'Duffy is attacking those of the Irish people".[118]

The defence of democracy and anti-fascism were the twin pillars of the *Irish Democrat*'s support for the Spanish Republic. Republican Congress, unlike the IRA, expressed a modicum of faith in democracy and supported armed insurrection only if power was withheld from a majority of the people.[119] The Department of Justice was cynical about the difference between both groups:

"The I.R.A. make no pretence of democracy: they say quite frankly that they propose to seize power as an oligarchy (*a la* Franco) pleading necessity, as "the masses always let the revolution down". They add, of course, that having seized power, they will use it as good democrats. The Congress leaders on the other hand

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115 Desmond Ryan to John Brophy, 24 April 1937, LA 10/Q22(14).
116 D/Jus, Notes *on Republican Congress*, pp.20-1.
117 *Irish Democrat*, 27 March, 1937.
118 *Ibid.*
119 D/Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.22.

claim to be whole-hearted democrats. They will have none of the I.R.A.'s plan for a *coup d'etat*, which they describe as "Hitlerism" – referring, no doubt, to the Munich "putsch" and not to Hitler's democratic entry into power. They do not exclude the armed insurrection; but they regard it as being the last and not the first step, and as being feasible (as well as justifiable) only when power is being withheld from a majority of the people by "the forces of reaction".

The commitment of the Republican Congress leadership to democracy was certainly questionable. It was the left-wing section of the IRA which later formed Republican Congress that led the "No Free Speech to Traitors" campaign to prevent Cumann na nGaedheal from participating in the general election in 1932. The CPI's commitment to democracy was no less dubious. They had championed the cause of democracy, albeit with remarkable enthusiasm, only since the Comintern's recent adoption of the Popular Front.

The general election campaign of July 1937 demonstrated the close relations between Republican Congress and the Communist Party. The CPI withdrew their candidate, Bill Scott, so that "the whole force of the workers movement" could support Frank Ryan, on leave from Spain, as a 'United Front Against Fascism' candidate.[120] The Dublin electorate responded apathetically to the ambitious united front agenda:

". . . to drive from Irish public life the Fascist Party of Cosgrave; for the rejection of the New Constitution; the scrapping of every form of coercion and persecution; against international Fascism and war; solidarity with the Spanish, Catalan, and Basque peoples in their fight against Italian and German Fascism, and a programme of immediate economic demands to be realised by action in Parliament and in the country during the next five years".[121]

Seán O hEidirsceoil recalled the colourful atmosphere of one Frank Ryan election meeting in Christchurch Place:

"We were not as worried as we should have been because Father O'Flanagan was to be our principal speaker and we felt that, even in the super-charged atmosphere of the time, the crowd would stop short of actually attacking a priest – even a silenced one! As soon as our lorry drove up and stopped in the centre of the crowd we formed a tight ring around it. There was no sign of Father O'Flanagan. Our insurance had run out and we had no way of renewing it!

Then the shouts and catcalls started. Someone began to sing 'Faith of Our Fathers' and this was followed, not by Hail Marys, but by a hail of stones and bottles . . . I don't know how long this stand-off lasted but it was clear that the frustrated rage of the crowd could boil over at any minute . . .

The tension had become almost unbearable when we heard cheering coming from the direction of Parliament Street. When our lorry, with the group of speakers and others, had retreated after the first hail of missiles, it had driven down to O'Connell Street where an IRA meeting was being held. Our crowd told them the Blueshirts were breaking up a Frank Ryan meeting (which was not even unstrictly true) and the entire meeting came to our assistance. The cheers heralded the return of our lorry with some very tough

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120 *Irish Democrat*, 26 June 1937.
121 *Ibid*, 3 July 1937.

reinforcements. The sight of the approaching crowd was too much for our 'fundamentalists' and they withdrew – more blasphemously than prayerfully – with dark threats about what they would do next time".[122]

Not surprisingly, given the strength of anti-communist feeling in Dublin, which did not seem to have diminished from April 1936, Ryan received only eight hundred and seventy-five votes. The *Irish Democrat* consoled itself that at least 'the right' had performed badly. Ned Cronin, J.L. O'Sullivan, Patrick Belton and John Corr failed to get elected.[123]

The Irish left suffered a serious set-back in December 1937 when the *Irish Democrat* ceased publication. The main reason was lack of funds. A notice in the final issue announced that the *Democrat*'s re-appearance depended on the response to its appeal. A letter from Frank Ryan to Desmond Ryan pointed to additional reasons for the demise of the newspaper:

"Will you continue to help the "Democrat"? It will badly need help now. To tell the truth, I've been so busy on the organisational side of it – and the mechanical too ! – that for weeks past I've been able only to slap together several issues. I'd like to see you contributing more, under your own name, if possible – anonymously, if you prefer".[124]

The survival of the *Democrat* depended greatly on Frank Ryan's skill as a journalist, editor, printer and fund-raiser. Ryan's return to Spain was a set back for the paper – and the future of Republican Congress. Virulent anti-communism led to other problems – police harassment, circulation difficulties, and a reluctance by left wing activists like Ryan to publicly support the *Democrat*.

The fighting between the POUM and the communists in Barcelona, which had such a profound impact on socialism internationally, led to dissension among the supporters of the *Irish Democrat*. Despite its non-party aspirations, the *Democrat* adopted an uncompromising Communist Party line on the disturbances in Barcelona. An article in May 1937 described the POUM as "a Fascist force in the rear" and commented:

"The trouble originated with the numerically insignificant POUM, a Trotskyite body which has carried on a campaign of wrecking and disorganising against the war".[125]

Two weeks later a similar article described the fighting in Barcelona as a *putsch* and declared that the new Republican government would "prevent Fascist intrigues at the rear".[126] The Northern Ireland Socialist Party (which was politically far closer to the POUM than the Spanish Communist Party) withdrew its financial support from the *Democrat* in protest.[127] The collapse of the *Irish Democrat* confirmed the decline in the strength of Republican

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122 Seán OhEidirsceoil, 'A Personal Memoir of the Thirties' in Gustav Klaus (ed.), *Strong Words, Brave Deeds* (Dublin, 1994) pp. 199-201.
123 *Irish Democrat*, 10 July 1937.
124 Frank Ryan to Desmond Ryan, 11 June 1937, LA 10/Q19(2), Desmond Ryan papers.
125 *Irish Democrat*, 8 May 1937. Seán Nolan, a CPI executive member, attributed the article to Frank Ryan (Mike Milotte (1984) p.174).
126 *Irish Democrat*, 22 May 1937.
127 Mike Milotte (1984) p.174.

Congress. Significantly, it was the supposedly less populist and poorly-funded Communist Party which was able to launch a successor.[128]

As the pro-Republican campaign faltered there was a change in emphasis from Popular Front propaganda to humanitarian activities. The Irish Food Ship for Spain Committee was established in late 1938. The committee was predominantly composed of former members of the Irish Friends of the Spanish Republic. Fr. O'Flanagan was president, Patrick Byrne (Republican Congress) secretary and Robin Tweedy (CPI) trustee.[129] Appeals were made for food, clothing and medicine which were sent to Belfast and later transported to Spain with a convoy of British ships. Fr. O'Flanagan's circular emphasised the non-political nature of the appeal:

" . . . Irishmen and women who differ on the issues in the Spanish War feel bound to come together quickly in the fight against famine and disease".

However, given the political views of the committee members, the appeal was treated with much scepticism. Several letters in the *Irish Independent* complained about the initiative by the "Irish Friends of Red Spain". Fr. Ambrose Coleman, a well known anti-communist, alleged that munitions were being transported on the ships.[130] The reaction of the Labour Party and trade-union movement was also negative.[131] The committee managed to contribute goods valued at approximately £700.[132]

In January, at a Food Ship meeting in the Metropolitan Hall in Dublin, a number of partisan speeches were made. Fr. O'Flanagan, recently returned from Barcelona, delivered a strongly anti-clerical speech which blamed "muscular Christianity" for the outbreak of the war:

"He knew what happened in Ireland to any priest who remained true to the cause of Ireland . . . Having referred to Strongbow's coming to Ireland with the blessing of the Pope, Father O'Flanagan said that the Church was not a safe guide in their political ideas".[133]

Father O'Flanagan's activities attracted the attention of Sean MacEntee, Minister of Finance and one of the most anti-communist members of the government, who urged the Department of Education that the republican priest "be requested to restrain his utterances in view of the fact that he is directly employed by the State".[134] When the Department of Education declined to take action MacEntee approached de Valera who appeared equally reluctant:

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128 *Workers' Republic*, May-August 1938.

129 The vice-presidents were Professor Rudmose-Brown, Lennox Robinson, Maude Gonne-MacBride, George Ervine, Frank Edwards and Robert Doherty.

130 *Irish Independent*, 14 January 1939.

131 See p.225.

132 Denis Carroll (1993) p.221.

133 *Irish Press*, 19 January 1939.

134 Fr. O'Flanagan was employed to write histories of the Irish counties in Gaelic. De Valera's reluctance to interfere may have been due to his friendship with O'Flanagan – he was known to frequently visit the priest at the National Library where he worked (Denis Carroll (1993) p.234-6).

"The Taoiseach suggests that your Minister might consider the question of speaking personally to Father O'Flanagan with a view to impressing on him the impropriety, in the circumstances, of public utterances of the kind to which you refer".[135]

In 1938 the Frank Ryan Release Committee was set up in response to the news of his capture by Nationalist forces.[136] It was composed of well-known republicans and several socialists.[137] The committee drew up a public appeal which stressed Ryan's contributions to republicanism, the Gaelic language, the GAA, the UCD Student Union but not, however, the revolutionary movement. The committee gathered petitions and lobbied the Irish government for Ryan's release.[138] The response demonstrated Ryan's extraordinary popularity in Ireland. By 1939, fifty-three Dáil deputies (almost forty of them Fianna Fáil), several senators and Cardinal MacRory had signed a petition for Ryan's release.[139] General O'Duffy even appealed to General Franco for clemency.[140] An Irish-American petition was signed by Michael O'Connor, the Fianna Fáil national president, Charles Connolly, editor of the *Irish Echo*, and Joseph Stynes of the American GAA.[141] Michael Quill, president of the powerful Transport Workers' Union of America, wrote to William Norton about Ryan's case.[142]

Norton, the leader of the Labour Party, liaised between the committee and the Irish government. In April 1939, he refused the committee's request to ask a parliamentary question on the advice of Joseph Walshe, the secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs.[143] Walshe told Norton that Leopold Kerney had asked the Frank Ryan Release Committee to refrain from publicity to help Ryan's chances of freedom. Norton continued to act as a liaison but was careful not to associate himself publicly with the committee. In June 1939, for example, he refused a request to attend a public meeting for Ryan.[144]

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135 J.J. McElligott to Maurice Moynihan, 12 January 1939; Moynihan to McElligott, 17 January 1939, D/Taois S11083.

136 See pp.283-5 for the international aspects of Ryan's case.

137 President – Aodghan O'Rahilly; vice-presidents – senator D. Robinson, Cu Uladh, Margaret Pearse, Maude Gonne MacBride, P.T. Daly; secretaries – M. Hall, George Ervine; treasurer - Michael Cremin; committee - P. O'Keeffe, Mrs. Austin Stack, Donal O'Reilly, Maire Comerford, Simon Donnelly, Linda Kearns-McWhinney, Tom Barry, Michael Price, Eamonn de Barra, R.M. Fox, R.J. Connolly, Flann Campbell (Box 42, Post Office Workers' Union papers (PWU), Irish Labour History Society Archives).

138 *Ibid.*

139 The Catholic periodical, *Hibernia* (May 1938) also supported the petition but added "We feel sure that Mr. Ryan, as a Catholic, would not object to spending a few years rebuilding the churches wrecked and desecrated by his "comrades" in the Red Armies".

140 Ryan's sister recalled: "Maud Gonne was terrific and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington worked very hard. The Duchess of Tetuan in Spain was very interested in Frank's situation . . . The Limerick County Council, Dublin Corporation, all the branches of Conradh na Gaeilge . . . even General O'Duffy helped when Frank was under sentence of death. He met me in Wynne's Hotel, in Abbey Street, for a cup of coffee. He came with me to the GPO and he wrote a telegram to Franco from himself. He didn't pay for it but he did sign it, asking for Frank's release" (Eilís Ryan, 'Oral History, Eilís Ryan In Her Own Words', *Saothar 21*; see also Desmond Ryan, 'Poor Old Shaw: The Fight for Frank Ryan's Release', LA 10/D285, Desmond Ryan papers.

141 *Workers Republic*, June 1938.

142 Quill to Norton, 19 February 1940, Box 42, PWU papers.

143 M. Hall to Norton, 24 April 1939; Walshe to Norton, 25 April 1939. *Ibid.*

144 Hall to Norton, 20 June 1939; Norton to Hall, 30 June 1939. *Ibid.*

Ryan's case presented a delicate problem for Norton. Whichever position he adopted would result in some criticism. A Waterford branch resolution suggests their was some pressure within Labour for a more assertive stance:

"To request the De Valera Government to use their influence with the Franco authorities, and to refuse to receive Franco's Minister until Frank Ryan is released from the concentration camp in which he now lies ill at Burgos".[145]

Norton ignored the resolution. Labour continued to support the government's foreign policy. When Norton eventually raised the issue in the Dáil one year later his intervention drew an angry response from one correspondent:

"Like many other Irish Catholic workingmen I wonder why you, Mr. Norton (& I hold you in great respect) should interest yourself in a man purporting to be an Irish Catholic who went to Spain to assist a godless anti-christian lot that desecrated & burned hundreds of churches and murdered thousands of priests".[146]

The Frank Ryan Release Committee wound down in 1940 in response to the widespread rumours that Ryan had escaped from his Burgos prison. The source of the rumours appears to have been the Department of Foreign Affairs. In September 1940, a memo written by Norton noted that the Department:

"understood officially that he [Ryan] escaped from prison in Spain with, it is thought, the connivance of the Spanish Authorities, and it is thought he is now in Portugal".[147]

The following month Norton informed Michael Price, a member of the release committee, that:

"the Department has now some reason to believe that he has managed to get to America and is at present there".[148]

In fact, General Franco had, with the knowledge of the Irish government, handed Ryan over to the German authorities. The Irish government's campaign of misinformation was probably due to the political sensitivity attached to Ryan's peculiar status in Germany and embarrassment resulting from their approval of his escape.[149]

The Spanish Civil War had a profound impact on the Irish left. The outbreak of the conflict temporarily reinvigorated the left and, in particular, Republican Congress. The pro-Republican campaign marked the culmination of the trend towards a united front between the Communist Party, Republican Congress and non-aligned Irish socialists. In political terms, however, the Spanish Civil War was a period of failure for the left. By December 1937, the

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145 Peter O'Connor to Norton, 17 June 1939, *Ibid*. The Waterford branch was particularly radical. Its secretary Peter O'Connor, a CPI member, had recently returned from the International Brigades and joined Labour under Lenin's dictum 'We must work with the tools at our disposal' (Peter O'Connor (n.d.) p.17).

146 J.B. Stafford to Norton, Box 42, PWU papers.

147 Norton memo, 25 September 1940, *Ibid*.

148 Norton to Michael Price, 17 October 1940, *Ibid*.

149 See Seán Cronin (1980) pp.156-234 for the long and complicated series of events leading to Ryan's 'escape' to Germany.

Irish left no longer published a newspaper. By late 1938 Republican Congress no longer existed as a political force but rather as a sort of benevolent organisation involved in the Food Ship and Frank Ryan campaigns. By the end of the Spanish Civil War Republican Congress had completely disintegrated.[150]

According to Mike Milotte, the Communist Party fared little better:

". . . the anti-communist campaign in the Free State during the Spanish civil war; the unflinching hostility of the Labour Parties, North and South; and the deepening economic depression – all had undoubtedly taken their toll on the Communist Party. But pursuit of the ever-elusive Popular Front through the abandonment of militancy, coupled with the subordination of all theory and practice to the foreign policy requirements of the Soviet Union, had also contributed much to the near-collapse of the communist movement in Ireland".

Republican Congress also faced virulent anti-communism and hostility from the Labour Party but the movement's inability to secure the co-operation of the IRA was probably a more significant cause of its failure. Indeed, in April 1936, Peadar O'Donnell predicted:

"It is a fact that a platform which included the present I.R.A. leaders [and Republican Congress] . . . would rally deep enough masses to make the winning of Fianna Fail and labour representatives to the united front very easy. But if the I.R.A. goes to pieces . . . then from Communist Party to Fianna Fail a new deadening of spirit will be felt".[151]

But although the IRA constituted the obvious link between Republican Congress and Fianna Fáil, the real centre of power, historians have recently suggested that Republican Congress strategy was critically flawed.[152] Peadar O'Donnell believed a united front of republicans would "free the republican masses from the ball and chain formula of Fianna Fáil" but Congress did not offer alternative objectives to attract Fianna Fáil's radical supporters. The declared aim of Republican Congress was the "full realization of Fianna Fáil's original policy". O'Donnell stated that "our quarrel with de Valera was not that he was not a socialist, but that he was not a Republican". As Richard Dunphy stated:

"The dilemma for the Congress lay in its belief that the Fianna Fáil programme, and the ideals which inspired it, were in some way revolutionary, in the sense of subversive of the capitalist system . . . This patently was not the case; but, instead of encouraging the Congress leaders to subject the republican ideology which they shared with Fianna Fáil to critical examination, the obvious conservatism of the Fianna Fáil Government merely led them to sniff the scent of 'betrayal'".[153]

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150 Patrick Byrne (1994) p.46.

151 Peadar O'Donnell, 'The Irish Struggle To-day', *Left Review*, Vol. 2, No. 7, April 1936, p.300.

152 See Richard Dunphy, *The Making of Fianna Fáil Power in Ireland* (1995) pp. 183 -189 and Richard English (1994).

153 Richard Dunphy (1995), p.187. Dunphy stated – "This grandiose schema (based, it might seem, upon an attempt to emulate the Popular Front strategy of the *Comintern*) depended, not upon the exposure of the class limitations of Fianna Fáil's economic strategy, but upon the subordination of class to the revolutionary potential of the national struggle . . . Far from analysing Irish society in class terms, the Republican Congress merely reproduced the old Gael-versus-Planter stereotype, so deep-rooted in Irish Catholic Nationalism" (p.188).

Similarly Richard English, in his study of Republican Congress, criticises:

"the intellectual inadequacy and incoherence of the republican socialist's case. Their view of history, of the relation between class and nation, of the mechanisms of political power, of land, of religion, of political violence, and of Irish unionism have all reflected their incapacity to deal successfully with actual Irish experience".[154]

At times English, with his focus on "the mentality which typified republicans" underestimates the differences between republican socialists and traditional Irish republicans. He argues, for example, that Frank Ryan's presence in Germany with Sean Russell, the pro-Nazi militarist, disproves Republican Congress rhetoric that their form of republicanism was anti-fascist.[155] However, Republican Congress protests such as the 'Release Ernst Thaelman' campaign and demonstrations against the Italian navy's visit to Dublin suggest the movement was genuinely internationalist. Congress leaders genuinely perceived a connection between Irish 'fascism' and the cause of Franco.[156] Moreover, Ryan's presence in Germany resulted from a series of historical circumstances largely beyond his control. Evidence from Ryan's period of incarceration in Burgos indicates a wide gulf between his views and those of the IRA. Tom Jones, a Welsh International Brigader, imprisoned with Ryan recalled Ryan's dismay when he heard of the IRA bombing campaign in Britain in 1939:

"he was so angry that he requested me to pass on two or three names to the representative of the British Embassy who came to the prison to see me . . . Frank believed that the whole of Ireland would eventually re-unite, not so much by force of arms but through British and world public opinion and by agreement with the Protestant people of Northern Ireland".[157]

Nonetheless, as is pointed out by English and Dunphy, the movement's emphasis on republicanism, to a large extent explains its lack of success. The split between the 'Workers Republic' and 'Republic' factions at Rathmines was central. By opposing the Workers' Republic motion, O'Donnell and Ryan (supported by the CPI) subordinated class struggle to the broader appeal of republicanism. By rejecting socialist policies alone as a method of achieving power, Republican Congress relied on the strategy of uniting workers, rural labourers and small farmers under the banner of republicanism – a task which Fianna Fáil had already achieved. This left Republican Congress as the third (and least successful) challenger, after Fianna Fáil and the IRA, for the leadership of the republican movement in Ireland. It also alienated a considerable number of socialists (from the Price/Connolly leadership to radical trade union, regional and Protestant support) from the movement.

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154 Richard English (1994) p.275.
155 Richard English (1994) pp.248-51.
156 Although some (Charlie Donnelly and Frank Ryan) felt this more strongly than others (George Gilmore and Peadar O'Donnell). But even the latter two leaders (who did not support military intervention) visited Spain during the civil war and showed a huge interest in the conflict.
157 Tom Jones, *Recollections of Frank Ryan* (MS, 1975).

By the autumn of 1936 it was clear that Congress could not construct a broad united front. Given the strength of anti-communism and the socially conservative outlook of the IRA leadership, it cannot have surprised Congress leaders that the fight for the Spanish Republic failed to capture the enthusiasm of the republican movement. Their insistence that Irish republicanism was linked to international anti-fascism, in the face of obvious republican indifference, was characteristic of the organisation's optimistic self-delusion. Indeed, the decision by Congress leaders to aid Spain can partly be seen as a tacit acknowledgement of the movement's failure to create a united front. The failure of Ireland's popular front explains the appeal of the Spanish one. Ironically, the motivation of one of the most celebrated events of Irish socialist history, the participation of two hundred Irishmen in the fight for the Spanish Republic can, in large part, be explained by the complete lack of progress made by Irish socialism during this period.

4. Irish Christian Front

The pro-Franco lobby faced few of the difficulties of the public hostility which dogged Irish republicans and socialists during this period. Nationalist supporters exaggerated the threat posed by the declining number of Communist Party and Republican Congress activists and combined pro-Francoism with a popular appeal to anti-communism. Following the reports of anti-clerical atrocities, and the support offered to Franco by prominent clergy and politicians, a considerable number of people welcomed the organisation of a pro-Franco group. However, despite this conducive atmosphere, the most important body of pro-Nationalist support, the Irish Christian Front (ICF) had a relatively short and troubled history.

Introduction

On 22 August 1936 Alexander McCabe announced the formation of the Irish Christian Front "to help the stricken people of Spain in their struggle against the forces of international Communism".[1] The ICF urged uncompromising support for the Nationalist insurgents:

"Anyone who supports the Spanish government supports church burning and priest slaughter. We should wish for the success of the Patriot arms in Spain, not that we are the least concerned with the temporal issues at stake there, but that we want the advance guard of the anti-God forces stopped in Spain and thereby from reaching our shores".[2]

The Christian Front manifesto, released the following week, suggested it was not exclusively interested in Spain – "the organisation has been founded by working men and women to unmask communism and to give a lead to Irish workers".[3] The manifesto also emphasised the non-political nature of the Christian Front – a claim which met with considerable scepticism from republicans and socialists:

"The Irish Christian Front is a national movement not drawn from any political party, but we invite adherents of all political parties who subscribe to its objects to join. We disagree entirely with views expressed here and there by people who say that prominent public men should not be identified with the movement."[4]

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1 *Irish Independent*, 22 August 1936.
2 *Irish Christian Front*, (Dublin, 1936).
3 *Ibid.*
4 *Ibid.*

It is interesting that the organisers attracted criticism from such an early stage. The ICF standing committee was composed of Patrick Belton (president), Dr. James P. Brennan (vice-president), Aileen O'Brien (organising secretary), Alexander McCabe (honorary secretary) and Liam Breen.[5] The criticism of "prominent public men" was probably directed at Patrick Belton,[6] an independent Dáil deputy, and the best-known figure on the committee. Elected as a Fianna Fáil deputy in 1927, Belton left the abstentionist party to enter the Dáil. He was a founding member of the National Centre Party which merged with Cumann na nGaedheal and the National Guard to form the United Ireland Party (Fine Gael) in September 1933. Belton was closely associated with General O'Duffy's right-wing faction within the UIP; he was nominated to the national executive by the Blueshirt leader and expelled shortly after O'Duffy's resignation in September 1934.[7]

Alexander McCabe, a retired nationalist politician from Sligo, was the only other well-known committee member.[8] He had been a Dáil deputy for Sinn Féin and Cumann na nGaedheal from 1918 to 1924. After resigning from political life, he returned to teaching and established the Educational Building Society in 1933. He was later interned for his involvement with the secretive pro-Nazi PENAPA (People's National Party) during the Second World War.

Dr. James Brennan, the coroner for south County Dublin, was an executive member of Cumann Poblachta na hEireann, a republican party established with the support of the IRA in March 1936.[9] Aileen O'Brien,[10] recently arrived in Ireland, was the subject of Special Branch attention:

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5 The original executive committee was composed of the standing committee plus P.J. Cahill, J.D. Doyle, M. Doyle, B. Gibney, J.A. Corr, J. Keegan, T.P. French, Mrs. Fitzsimons, F.F O'Driscoll and Lord ffrench. The membership changed frequently in the following year.

6 Patrick Belton (1885-1945): b. Lanesborough, Co. Longford; educated King's College, London; joined British civil service; fought in 1916 rising; imprisoned for involvement with National Aid Association; left civil service and established successful tillage farm in north County Dublin; built several large housing estates including Belton Park and Mount Belton; successful publican, speculator and retailer; unsuccessful independent Dáil candidate (1926), elected Fianna Fáil TD (June 1927) but expelled a month later; failed to retain seat as independent (September 1927); founder member Centre Party; elected Cumann na nGaedheal TD (1933) but expelled the following year; unsuccessful independent Dáil candidate (1937); elected Fine Gael TD (1938); resigned from Fine Gael (1942); failed to retain seat as independent (1943).

7 Ned Cronin, circular to League of Youth officers, P24/510, Ernest Blythe papers, UCD.

8 Alexander McCabe/Alasdair MacCába (1886-1972): b. Co. Sligo; member Supreme Council IRB, 1914; imprisoned for organising volunteers, 1917; elected to Dáil, 1918, 1921 as Sinn Féin deputy; elected pro-Treaty TD, 1922, 1923; retired from politics, 1924; returned to teaching, 1927; founder, Educational Building Society, 1933; interned for involvement with pro-Nazi People's National Party in 1939; EBS managing director, 1941-1970.

9 Brennan was later active in Clann na Poblachta.

10 Aileen O'Brien: b. California, 1913; daughter of US ambassador to Bolivia; resided United States, South America, Switzerland, Ireland and Spain; educated Freiburg University; writer and linguist; *Pro Deo* international secretary; Spanish agent for ICF until dismissal in 1937; member 'Keep The Spanish Embargo Committee', a Catholic pressure group which lobbied the US senate and congress, 1938-9.

"She is believed to be born in California and to have travelled extensively having received her education in Switzerland. She is also believed to have been associated with some Russian "White Guards" and to be one of the members behind a "Pro Deo" Society which is concerned with armaments".[11]

O'Brien was the Irish representative of the International *Pro Deo* Society of Geneva, an anti-communist organisation funded by the arms manufacturers, Vickers & Armstrong, which described itself as "a united Christian front against the world-wide campaign of the militant atheists".[12] She was a close associate of another Christian Front supporter, D. Francis Noone, president of *Pro Deo* and the British League of Crusaders.[13] Both were from the far right of Catholic Action and preached an extreme form of anti-communism – warning, for instance, that communist subversion could be found in the "Labour Party, Trade Unions, League of Nations, and even in such places as Trinity College, Dublin".[14] O'Brien was later involved with pro-Franco pressure groups in Britain and the USA.[15]

The Origins of the Christian Front

After the establishment of the Christian Front standing committee in Dublin, branches appeared rapidly throughout Ireland (map 4.1). Typically, a small number of prominent townspeople met to form a branch and then organised a public rally in the area. The purpose of the rallies was to demonstrate support for the Spanish Nationalists and protest against communism in Spain and Ireland. Due to its sudden appearance, rapid growth and some disagreement within the organisation about its objectives, the ICF was very poorly structured. There was no agreed criteria for membership, no elected leadership and often little contact between rural branches and the Dublin standing committee. There was not a formally constituted membership comparable to a political party or Catholic Action organisations such as the Catholic Young Men's Society.

The Christian Front was an unusual movement which defies simple categorisation. The name of the organisation was chosen to mirror the communist Popular Front terminology.[16] Republicans and socialists regarded the ICF as a fascist revival of the Blueshirt movement. Less extreme observers, such as Donal O'Sullivan, feared the establishment of a Catholic political party.[17] Fianna Fáil leaders and the *Irish Press* perceived it as anti-government pressure group – an opportunistic attempt by Fine Gael and the far-right to mobilise public opinion against a sensitive foreign policy issue. The

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11 Special Branch report, 24 September 1936, D/Jus D34/36.
12 Aileen O'Brien, 'What is Pro Deo?', *Irish Monthly*, Vol. 64, 1936, p.446.
13 *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 November 1936.
14 *Irish Catholic*, 26 November 1937.
15 Ignacio de Mugiro, Nationalist consul, Liverpool, 17 September 1937 to Burgos, R.1057-4, *Archivo de Burgos*, *Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores*, Madrid.
16 Fr. Richard Devane SJ, 'foreword' in Cardinal Goma, *The Martyrdom of Spain* (Dublin, 1936)
17 Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its Senate* (London, 1940), p.475.

leadership of the Christian Front insisted the movement was non-political and consistently denied rumours that it would contest the general election.

The description of the ICF as another manifestation of the Blueshirts resulted from Belton's involvement. He was clearly the prime mover behind the ICF. Speaking in the Dáil on August 13 Belton hinted at the formation of the new organisation:

"It is a shame and disgrace to this country, which at least is Christian and, I hope, Catholic, that the Government is going into Recess now for three months, leaving behind it sanctions on the Catholic Christian nation of Italy, while maintaining trade relations – and not only trade relations but a most-favoured nation agreement – with Spain. The country is already manifesting its hostility to that line of conduct on the part of the Government, and I think, by the time we reassemble in three months, the country will have manifested in a more pronounced manner its hostility to that action on the part of the Government on the one hand, and that inaction on the other".[18]

Belton's political record suggests he was motivated by a combination of self-aggrandizement and his desire to reunite right-wing political opinion against Fianna Fáil. The Christian Front was not his first attempt to establish an anti-government pressure group. In August 1935, during the Anglo-Irish economic dispute, Belton suggested that "all those who are not satisfied with our external policy . . . come together in conference to formulate a scheme that might be acquiesced in by the Government". Belton urged General O'Duffy to join him and unite the opposition under Cosgrave's leadership.[19]

Similarly, during the Abyssinian War, Belton suggested organising political opinion against the government's support of sanctions against Italy. A crude appeal to Christianity was also central to this proposal:

"Our ancient freedom was used to spread Christianity in Europe, whereas our modern freedom, so eulogised by the President in Geneva, is now being used to wipe it out".[20]

On both occasions Belton appears to have been motivated by the objective of reuniting the Irish political right, as it had been in 1933-34, to create a viable challenge to Fianna Fáil's increasing political dominance.[21] Belton would have been assured of a prominent position within such a realignment. Belton's political objectives, if not his affiliations, remained consistent throughout the 1930s; the amelioration of farmers' conditions, support for right-wing regimes in Europe and the introduction of aspects of authoritarian rule such as corporatism and anti-semitic measures.

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18 Dáil Debates (DD) 63, 2912. Sanctions against Italy had, in fact, been withdrawn by the League of Nations in July 1936 and the issue did not feature in ICF policy.

19 *Irish Independent*, 30 July, 3 August 1935.

20 *Irish Independent*, 12 November 1935.

21 Peadar O'Donnell commented – "I thought him [Belton] an excellent choice for the big farmers, ranchers and allied interests eager for a new try to down de Valera. They called themselves the Christian Front" (*Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (London, 1937), p.239).

Belton's third attempt to establish a single issue-based pressure group succeeded because public opinion – which had been divided on the economic dispute and largely uninterested in Abyssinia – was widely united in outrage against the Spanish atrocities. However, the importance of Belton, who was undoubtedly motivated primarily by partisan political objectives, as founder and leader of the Christian Front has obscured the importance of Catholic Action as the central ideological strain within the ICF. Belton's partisan objectives were not shared by many Christian Front organisers throughout Ireland who wished to create a non-political populist Catholic Action movement.

Catholic Action originated in the eighteenth century as the Catholic Church attempted to develop "an apostleship of the laity" to counteract the anti-clerical influence of ideologies such as liberalism, socialism and rationalism. Its objectives were to disseminate Catholic principles in public life and help the poor through Catholic social teaching. The papacy aimed to expand the role of the laity without diminishing the authority of the clergy. The movement was slow to develop in Ireland, according to Fr. E.J. Cahill SJ, a leading proponent of Catholic Action, because the land struggle, the education issue, and the national question preoccupied both Church and laity until the 1920s.[22]

The 1920s and early 1930s constituted a period of rapid growth for Catholic Action in Ireland.[23] In 1921 the Central Catholic Library was established and Frank Duff founded the Legion of Mary. The following year the Knights of St. Columbanus were established in Dublin. Father Edward Cahill founded *An Rioghacht*, the League of the Kingship of Christ, in 1926 while Fr. John Hayes established *Muintir na Tíre* in 1931.[24] The Catholic Young Men's Society (CYMS) and the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland (CTSI) were successfully revived during this period.[25] In addition study circles were set up by lay and religious groups to examine Catholic social teaching. Catholic Action received official encouragement when the national council of Maynooth in 1927 urged that:

"Catholics be united in suitable societies as a disciplined army and make every effort to foster religion, to defend it in public and private and to repair any defects in our Christian way of life".[26]

The development of Catholic Action in Ireland reflected increasing Vatican support for the movement. The movement received further encouragement in 1931 from two papal encyclicals, *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Non abbiamo bisogno*. However, despite the proliferation of these societies, Catholic Action remained in a weak position in Ireland by

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22 Fr. E.J. Cahill SJ, 'The Catholic Social Movement', *Irish Ecclesiastic Record*, December 1930, p.585.
23 J.H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-1970* (Dublin, 1971) pp.62-73; Maurice Hartigan, *The Catholic Laity of Dublin 1920-1940* (Unpublished Ph.D., Maynooth 1992) pp.81-96.
24 *An Rioghacht* (the Kingdom) was a federation of Catholic action study circles. *Muintir na Tíre* (People of the Land) developed from a producers' co-operative to organising rural weekends and study congresses to discuss rural issues and vocationalism.
25 The CTSI, founded in 1899 to provide cheap Catholic reading material to the poor, was revived by Frank O'Reilly in the 1920s. The hierarchy used the CTSI annual conferences to give its views on Catholic Action.
26 Evelyn Bolster, *The Knights of St. Columbanus* (Dublin, 1979) p.58.

the mid-1930s; the rapid and uncoordinated appearance of the societies, an uncertainty as to the nature and aims of Catholic Action among the laity, the lack of radicalism of many of the societies and the unenthusiastic attitude of the Irish hierarchy were all contributory factors.[27]

The growth and decline of the CYMS in the 1930s provides a useful example of these problems. Founded in Limerick in 1849 by Dean Richard Baptist O'Brien to foster the spiritual, intellectual and social welfare of its members, the CYMS struggled to establish itself in Dublin until the 1930s. In 1927, under the leadership of a Dominican, Fr. A.M. Crofts, the CYMS developed into a militant anti-communist Catholic Action society. In contrast to other Catholic Action bodies its members were predominantly working-class. In 1933 it established a Central Study Circle and urged its members to actively suppress communist organisations.[28] CYMS members became prominent in violent attacks on left-wing groups in Dublin.[29] In 1934, Archbishop Byrne placed the CYMS under closer hierarchical control, appointing his vicar general, Monsignor John Waters,[30] as the first director-general of the society. As the society grew increasingly radical the Dublin membership rapidly increased – from two hundred in 1927 to twelve hundred by 1936. In 1937, the militant Claude Road branch produced a draft programme urging radical measures such as the formation of Catholic guilds, increased censorship, action against Jewish economic power and the vetting of candidates at election time – an agenda closely resembling that of the ICF. The national council of the CYMS, concerned by the radicalism of the programme, rejected the Claude Road proposal. By 1940 the CYMS had failed to develop into a mass organisation and had dropped much of its earlier radicalism such as militant anti-communism in favour of the devotional activities associated with the more conservative religious sodalities.[31] Maurice Hartigan offered several reasons for its decline; a lack of clerical support, non co-ordination with other Catholic Action bodies, their resentment of Monsignor Waters' ambitions to develop the CYMS into a co-ordinating body for Catholic Action, and a lack of understanding and support of Catholic social teaching among the laity. Interestingly, Hartigan believed the CYMS was also out-manoeuvred by the Anti-Communist League in 1933 and the Christian Front in 1936.[32]

The CYMS was only one of several organisations striving to expand Catholic Action in this period. In November 1935 Frank O'Reilly, the CTSI secretary and organiser of the

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27 As Hartigan concluded – "An examination of Catholic Action in Ireland shows that it grew up in spite of the bishops and not because of them. It came mainly from below, from the lesser clergy and the laity rather than from above" (Maurice Hartigan (1992) p.92).
28 Maurice Hartigan (1992) pp.95-110.
29 Special Branch report, 9 April 1936, D/Jus D2/6/36.
30 Monsignor Waters: theologian and president of Holy Cross College, Clonliffe; parish priest, Iona Road; strongly anti-communist (publicly supported the ICF and Irish Brigade); director general of the CYMS until his death in 1939.
31 Maurice Hartigan (1992) p.114-8.
32 *Ibid*, p.118-9.

Eucharistic Congress, held a meeting to establish a new organisation, the League of Justice and Charity, to unify Catholic Action.[33] The attendance included Alfred O'Rahilly, Frank Duff, Archdeacon Lyons and Fr. John Charles McQuaid. The following year O'Reilly cancelled the project because:

"The work of the Irish Christian Front might be impeded if he proceeded with his plans, especially as it intended to seek episcopal approval and to formulate a programme of Catholic Action".[34]

Similarly, in June 1935, the supreme council of the Knights of Columbanus discussed a motion "for the formation of a Federation of Catholic Societies in Ireland".[35] For advocates of Catholic Action such as Monsignor Waters, the Irish Christian Front offered the potential to develop into the long-awaited unifying body. In contrast to the CYMS, the Christian Front was a new organisation and, following the meetings in Dublin and Cork, appeared more likely to attract a mass membership. Significantly, many of those pressing for a unifying body, such as W.G. Fallon,[36] a leading member of the Knights of Columbanus, and Monsignor Waters, were involved in the ICF.[37] Many of the Christian Front's 'respectable' supporters - academics, clergy, Catholic action advocates, the *Irish Catholic* and *Standard* newspapers - who supported the organisation from its beginning had an entirely different agenda from the clique of minor politicians who comprised the Dublin leadership. For them, the Christian Front fortuitously appeared at an important point in the development of the Catholic Action movement. The conflicting objectives of Catholic Action advocates and the more political leadership became an increasing problem within the organisation.

The Growth of the Christian Front

According to the *Irish Independent* the first Christian Front demonstration held in Dublin on August 30 attracted close to fifteen thousand people.[38] Patrick Belton explained the objectives of the Christian Front; to combat communist propaganda, demonstrate Irish sympathy with Spanish Catholics and raise funds for Spain.[39] Although opposed to the government's foreign policy, Belton addressed the issue in moderate terms:

"Many people here differed strongly from our Government's policy of sanctions against Italy and the continuance of special trade agreements with the anti-God Government of Spain, but it is recognised that it is

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33 The governing council was intended to represent St. Vincent de Paul, CYMS, CTSI, Legion of Mary, Knights of Columbanus, Muintir na Tire, Guilds of *Regnum Christi*, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and trade-union and vocational groups.

34 Maurice Hartigan (1992) p.122.

35 Acc. 3328, Ms. 22, 599, W.G. Fallon papers, NLI.

36 W.G. Fallon: senior counsel; president, Young Ireland branch, United Irish League; involved in proportional representation movement; advocate of political unity/coalition rule in the Dáil; member, Knights of Columbanus and Ancient Order of Hibernians; executive committee member, Irish Christian Front.

37 After the demise of the ICF efforts continued to form a central committee of Catholic Action in 1939 with little success (Peter McKevitt memo, 24 April 1939, III/Meetings of the Hierarchy, MacRory papers, Armagh Archdiocesan Archives).

38 *Irish Independent*, 31 August 1936.

39 *Ibid,* 31 August 1936.

our Government's right to govern when it has its democratic majority . . . we appreciate the difficulties of its task in existing circumstances".[40]

The Christian Front, Belton added, did not favour military intervention (a reference to the Irish Brigade) or supplying arms to the Spanish Nationalists.[41] This moderate line was echoed by a later speaker who declared that any attempt to "make party capital" from the government's adherence to non-intervention would be "a disgrace".[42]

The second speaker, Dr. Brennan, denounced communism in rhetorical terms redolent of the militant Catholicism of cults like the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Communism, he declared, was organised:

". . . by fiends, stimulated by a love of lust, rapine, and murder, controlled by the hidden forces of avarice, greed and pride mustered together under the approving hordes of satanic barbarity."

It could be opposed only by:

". . . intense devotion to our Faith and impregnable loyalty to our Fatherland. The blood of the martyrs, the sacrifices on the gibbets, the tortures of the dungeon, the usurpation of lands and property failed to damp the ardour of these saints and soldiers of Ireland who regarded adherence to their religion . . . as sacred and beyond sacrifice".[43]

Despite Brennan's assertion that the ICF welcomed Protestant members the speech of Lord ffrench, a Catholic peer well-known in Catholic Action circles, illustrated the movement's inherently Catholic outlook:

"We know what the term 'loyalist' means here in Ireland. We know that if the Government in the North of Ireland were to hand out arms and munitions to the Orange mob in Belfast . . . what would happen then to the priests and nuns and churches . . ."[44]

Despite its implicit Catholicism, Brian McCaffrey, the president of *An Rioghacht*, and the *Irish Catholic* newspaper publicly disapproved of the "non-sectarian" nature of the ICF.[45] Their fears were groundless. In Belfast, for example, the Christian Front attracted only Catholic support; a police report noted that its activities were "confined to exclusively Roman Catholic areas".[46]

The Christian Front leaders perceived their opposition to communism as a holy war, a perspective which justified the use of violence against those classed as "social intellectuals". Their militancy concerned Colonel Ned Broy, the Garda Commissioner, who

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40 *Ibid,* 31 August 1936.

41 Relations between the Christian Front and the Irish Brigade were troubled. After the Fine Gael split Belton and O'Duffy failed to agree on establishing a new corporatist party. Belton's organisation helped provide transport for the Irish Brigade but they argued bitterly over the proceeds of the national collection (*Irish Press*, 4 February 1935, 12 August 1937).

42 D/Jus D34/36.

43 *Irish Independent*, 31 August 1936.

44 *Ibid,* 31 August 1936.

45 *Irish Catholic*, 5 September 1936, 15 October 1936.

46 Inspector general's office to secretary, Ministry for Home Affairs, 28 November 1936, HA/32/1/637, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland (PRONI).

advised the Minister for Justice "there is reason to anticipate that if the speakers incite the audience mass attacks on person and property of Communist and Republican Congress Organisations may be attempted".[47] Broy clearly feared a repetition of the mob violence of the previous April. The meeting confirmed Broy's suspicions. Alexander McCabe told the crowd "it was the duty of every citizen to find out who these people were" while John Corr singled out Sean Murray, the general secretary of the Irish Communist Party, for criticism.[48]

The third speaker, Liam Breen, advocated:

"the co-operation on agreed terms of all those engaged in industry, and to that end urge both employers and employed to organise themselves fully for collective bargaining as a means to social progress on peaceful lines".[49]

This was one of the ICF's earliest references to corporatism or vocationalism – the idea that workers, employers, and government should form statutory bodies to regulate wages and conditions in society – which soon became an important part of ICF policy. Corporatist ideas, a central ideological aspect of Catholic Action, had become increasingly popular in Ireland since Pope Pius XI announced his approval in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). A small but influential group of right-wing Catholic academics (including Prof. Alfred O'Rahilly,[50] Prof. James Hogan[51] and Prof. Michael Tierney[52]) and Jesuits (Fr. Edward Cahill, Fr. Richard Devane and Fr. Edward Coyne)[53] enthusiastically advocated corporatism in study groups, lectures and Catholic periodicals. Corporatism received most attention in 1933 when Fine Gael agreed to O'Duffy's demands to incorporate it into the party's economic policy. However, the right-wing of the Blueshirt leadership, led by General O'Duffy, generally failed to distinguish between the corporate society envisaged by Pius XI (and most of the Irish Catholic intellectuals) and the corporate state exemplified by Mussolini's Italy. O'Duffy's hostility to constitutional democracy resulted in the expulsion of his Blueshirt faction from Fine Gael and the party's gradual departure from corporatist polices.

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47 Broy to Department of Justice, 26 August 1936, D/Jus D34/36.
48 D/Jus. D34/36.
49 *Irish Independent*, 31 August 1936
50 Alfred O'Rahilly: trained as Jesuit but left order; professor of mathematical physics, UCC; Sinn Féin member; fought in War of Independence; Cumann na nGaedheal TD, 1922-24; contributor to *Standard* and responsible for its corporatist direction.
51 James Hogan: fought in War of Independence; Cumann na nGaedheal supporter; professor of history at UCC; anti-communist and corporatist; founder of Irish manuscripts commission, 1928; author of *Could Ireland become Communist?*; prominent in Army Comrades Association/Blueshirts; Fine Gael vice president, 1933; resigned to protest O'Duffy's leadership, August 1934; returned to Blueshirts, August 1935; unsuccessful by-election candidate, 1936.
52 Michael Tierney: son-in-law of Eoin O'Neill; Cumann na nGaedheal TD; lost seat, 1931; professor of Greek, UCD; prominent in Army Comrades Association/Blueshirts; Fine Gael vice-president, 1933; senator, 1937; member of government commission on vocational organisation.
53 See p.139 for Fr. Coyne.

Following the meeting, the question of diplomatic and trade ties with Spain was raised by the Christian Front members of Dublin County Council. John Corr,[54] the ICF treasurer, proposed censuring the Irish government for "allowing representatives of the Communistic Government of Spain to remain in this country while their Government persists in their appalling persecution of the Christians". Belton agreed with the spirit of Corr's motion but argued that the responsibility of the government for life and property in Spain should be considered. He successfully proposed that the government instead be requested to terminate trade relations.[55] The resolution marked the beginning of the Christian Front's transition from a non-political role to criticism of the government. It also indicated the considerable influence of the ICF on public bodies.[56] This can be explained by genuine pro-Franco sentiment, the acquiescence of Fine Gael deputies to motions which embarrassed Fianna Fáil and the difficulties faced by representatives who knew that opposition to such measures would be misinterpreted as tolerance of communists.

On September 10, the Christian Front announced its intention to organise branches throughout Dublin and ultimately in every parish in Ireland. It added:

"Whatever political opinions are held individually by our members, they are all at one in repudiating the suggestions that our Government has any taint of Communism"[57]

– a reassurance for which Fianna Fáil may not have been particularly grateful. Belton did not agree with this view. Privately, as he explained to Cardinal MacRory, Belton felt Fianna Fáil had facilitated the growth of communism:

"It is just eight years since Peadar O'Donnell told me in this room that his party would support de Valera for no other reason than that his Government would of necessity be weak as far as they were concerned. This has come true and organisations banned by the Church have since flourished".[58]

At a meeting in Dun Laoghaire Belton insisted that his organisation was welcomed by the hierarchy.[59] The Christian Front clearly felt assured of some degree of ecclesiastical approval:

"The standing committee feel they have a right to ask the clergy in every parish to get such committees formed and such collections made forthwith so that a supreme effort will be made at once to hurry out urgent medical supplies . . . "[60]

The ICF received substantial support from local clergy who played a leading role in establishing branches in Drogheda, Roscommon, Naas, Limerick, Ballinasloe,

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54 John Corr: Dun Laoghaire retailer; former chairman Dublin County Council; ICF treasurer; political career ended following imprisonment for bribery after the senate elections, 1944.
55 *Irish Press*, 1 September 1936.
56 Four members of Dublin County Council – Patrick Belton, John Corr, William Rollins, and John McCabe – were members of the executive committee of the Christian Front. Dr. Brennan, the county coroner, was a local government official. This local government clique dominated the leadership of the ICF.
57 *Irish Press*, 10 September 1936.
58 Belton to MacRory, 29 December 1936, Spanish Civil War file, VIII/Appeals, MacRory papers.
59 *Irish Press*, 11 September 1936.
60 *Ibid,* 13 September 1936.

Phibsborough, Tralee, Galway and Monasterevan. For example a meeting to organise a branch in Waterford was reportedly attended by seven priests and only two lay people.[61] Senior clergy such as Monsignor O'Leary, vicar general and dean of Kerry, Monsignor Waters, Archbishop Byrne's vicar general, Monsignor Considine, vicar general of Galway and Kilmacduagh, and Monsignor Sexton, dean of Cork were associated with the movement. However, in some places, such as Belfast, branches were formed without the authorisation of either the parish clergy or the ICF executive committee.[62] A few branches, such as Dun Laoghaire, were formed without clerical co-operation.[63]

During September and October, ICF branches appeared rapidly throughout Ireland (see map 4.1) – although a large number were concentrated around Leinster. Local branches were invariably established by committees composed of local politicians (most often Fine Gael and independents), clergy, lay members of Catholic bodies, and trade-union representatives. The inaugural meeting of the Drogheda branch, for example, was attended by two members of the ICF executive committee, three county councillors, two trade union officials, a representative from the Total Abstinence club, the chairman of the local Catholic club and a local priest.[64] A branch in Tralee was established by Monsignor O'Leary, dean of Kerry, Fr. Baldwin OP, T. Lynch, chairman of Tralee Urban Council, D. Allman, the regional secretary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, and two ICF standing committee members.[65]

In September, a Christian Front meeting in Cork attracted over forty thousand people.[66] The platform included Lord Mayor Seán French, James Hogan and Alfred O'Rahilly. The Catholic Church was represented by Monsignor Patrick Sexton, the dean of Cork, and by the "many priests and religious" in the crowd.[67] Like many of the clergy closely associated with the Christian Front Monsignor Sexton held staunch views on communism. He blamed the Spanish Civil War on "a gang of murderous Jews in Moscow".[68] The principal speaker, Alfred O'Rahilly, also focused on the dangers of communism. He criticised trade unions, in particular the British-based amalgamated unions, for their support of Republican Spain. His remarks may have been provoked by the absence of most of Cork's Labour and trade-union representatives from the meeting.[69] O'Rahilly also criticised the Irish government for

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61 The priests were Archdeacon Kelleher (PP Ballybricken), Fr. Norris (PP St. Patrick's), Fr. J. O'Connor (Adm. Cathedral), Fr. D. Power (Adm. St. John's), Fr. Raymond OFM, Fr. Antoine OFM, Fr. Crofts OP, Mayor J. Alward and Sean Lane (*Irish Times,* 1 October 1936).

62 Inspector general's office, RUC to Ministry for Home Affairs, 16 October 1936, HA/32/1/637, PRONI.

63 *Irish Times*, 1 October 1936.

64 *Irish Catholic*, 30 November 1936.

65 *Irish Independent*, 11 January 1937, D/Jus D2/37A.

66 The *Irish Times* (21 September 1936) placed the figure at "over 40,000" and stated that it was "biggest public meeting to be held in the town". The *Belfast Newsletter* also estimated forty thousand.

67 *Cork Examiner*, 21 September 1936.

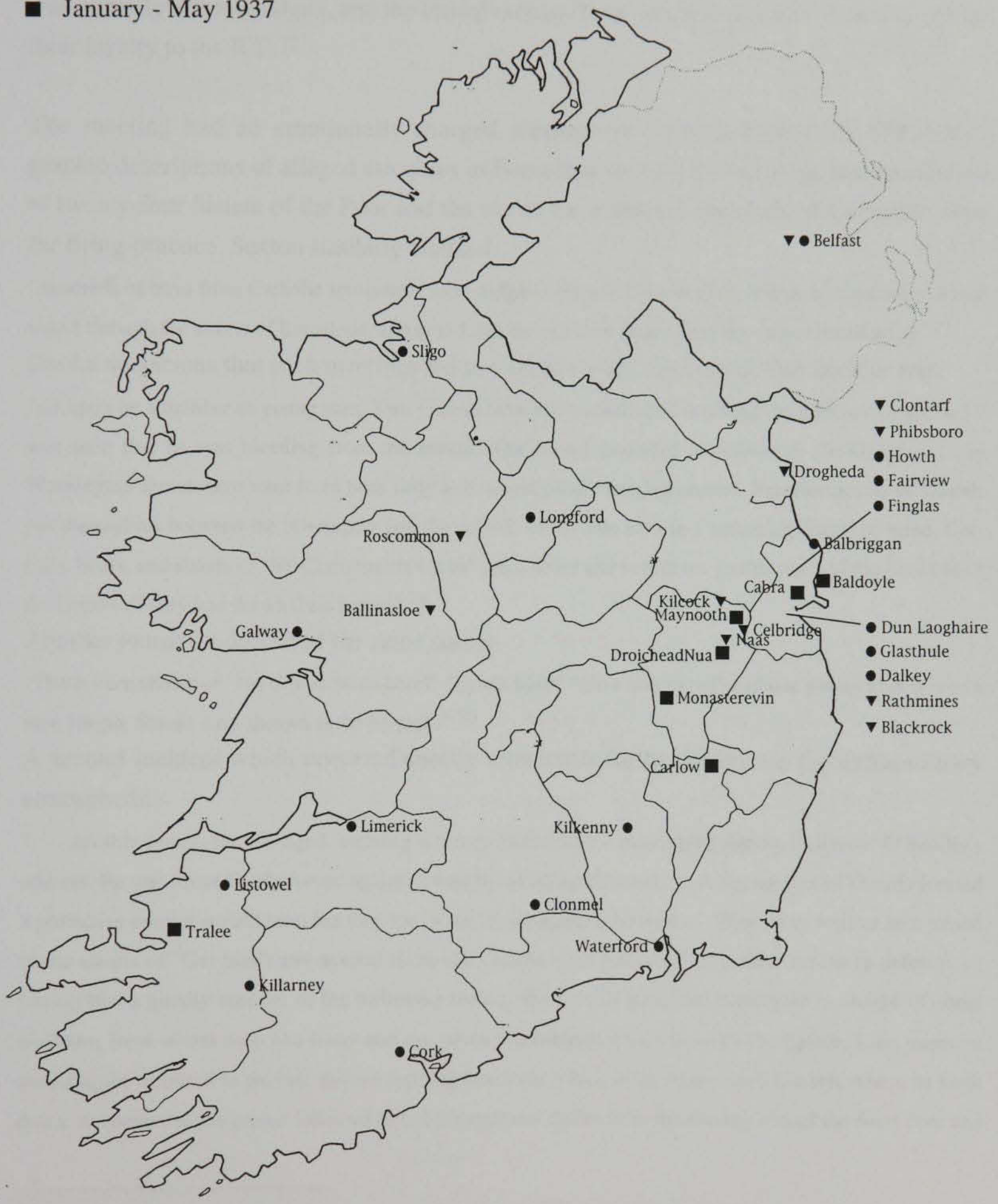
68 *Ibid*, 21 September 1936. The *Irish News* quoted Sexton as saying "a gang of renegade atheistic Jews ruling in Russia" (21 September 1936).

69 See O'Rahilly's letter to the *Cork Examiner*, 25 September 1936.

Map 4.1 — Christian Front Branches

Date of Establishment

- ● September - October 1936
- ▼ November - December 1936
- ■ January - May 1937



its adherence to the Non-Intervention Agreement.[70] Concluding his speech, O'Rahilly advocated corporatism, or functional democracy as he termed it, as the solution to class tensions:

"The Pope had held out a tremendous ideal for professional and industrial self-government in which the labourer would secure an increasing control in industry".[71]

The receipt of cheques from Douglas Hyde, the Marquis MacSweeney and Eoin O'Mahony was publicly acknowledged, and the crowd crossed their hands above their heads to pledge their loyalty to the ICF.[72]

The meeting had an emotionally-charged atmosphere perhaps fuelled by O'Rahilly's graphic descriptions of alleged atrocities in Barcelona such as the stripping and crucifixion of twenty-four Sisters of the Poor and the use of the exhumed skeletons of Carmelite nuns for firing-practice. Sexton similarly claimed:

"hundreds of boys from Catholic seminaries were dragged out and burned alive; scores of nuns were driven naked through the streets of Barcelona, and petrol was thrown over them. They too were burned alive".[73]

Gardaí suspicions that such meetings led to violence were confirmed. One heckler was:

"set upon by a number of young men. Two Guards eventually succeeded in taking the man in charge, and it was seen that he was bleeding from the mouth. The crowd persisted in following the Guards . . . at Washington Street there must have been fully a thousand people surging around. Reinforcements of Guards put themselves between the interrupter and the crowd, which was now in a menacing frame of mind. Cat-calls, hoots, and shouts of "No Communists for us" were heard and before the guards reached the environs of the Bridewell they had drawn their batons".[74]

Another journalist described the same scene:

"There were shouts of "No Communists here!" "Lynch him!" "Give him to us!" and one young man waved a rope length. Stones were thrown at the barracks".[75]

A second incident which occurred shortly afterwards further illustrates the extraordinary atmosphere:

". . . another man – middle-aged, wearing a brown tweed suit – interrupted during Professor O'Rahilly's address. He was immediately forced against a wall by an enraged crowd . . . A big number of Guards formed a protective cordon around him, but they too, were forced against the wall . . . Women as well as men joined in the shouts of "Get him", and several times the Guards were forced to raise their batons in defence. . . having lost a goodly number of the following throng, the Guards gave the interrupter in charge of some civilians, from whom he broke away and ran down Washington Street towards the Parade. Like magic, a crowd again collected in pursuit, and the running man took refuge in St. Augustine's Church, where he knelt down. A number of the crowd followed him, but priest and clerks from the sacristy closed the front door and

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70 J. Anthony Gaughan, *Alfred O'Rahilly, II Public Figure* (Dublin, 1989), p.301, 305.
71 *Ibid*, p.300.
72 *Cork Examiner*, 21 September 1936.
73 *Irish News*, 21 September 1936.
74 *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 September 1936.
75 *Irish News*, 21 September 1936.

held the crowd back, while other priests approached the man whom they took from a crowd which had gathered around the seat where he was kneeling. Previous to this a young man had attempted to force the interrupter from his seat, and both had fallen to the ground. The interrupter was taken to the sacristy by the priests who appealed to the crowd to leave quietly. . . ".[76]

Such incidents offer an important insight into the widespread public support accorded to the Christian Front movement. The demonstrations provided an outlet for Irish people to exhibit not only concern about the atrocities in Spain but also their own fear and hatred of communism in Ireland. The hysterical scenes at Cork suggest that for many supporters, the appeal of the Christian Front was far more emotional than intellectual.

Although the agenda of the Cork meeting, with its focus on anti-communism and corporatism, closely resembled that of the standing committee some tensions existed between both groups. When the Cork ICF organiser, Liam de Roiste, invited Alfred O'Rahilly to join his organising committee, the latter suggested "having only local speakers" as "a lot of obloquy has fallen on the Irish Christian Front in Dublin owing to the people at its head". O'Rahilly warned de Roiste that "Belton, Brennan, and Co." were attempting to found a Catholic political party.[77] Underlying the tensions between Cork and Dublin was the fundamental issue of the objective of the Christian Front. De Roiste, Hogan, and O'Rahilly were prominent supporters of the Catholic Action movement. De Roiste wanted to enlist the support of the hierarchy to mould the ICF into a co-ordinating body for Catholic Action rather than an association which he believed would be used for political purposes. De Roiste informed Dr. Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe:

"Apart from the present purpose of voicing sympathy with our brother Catholics in Spain who are suffering, it is proposed that a permanent organisation be established to combat communism and communistic ideas in Ireland. The original promoters in Dublin, to who all praise is due for the initiation seem to visualise a new and separate organisation, with the ordinary constitution and rules of a national organisation. The Cork view is that what should eventuate is a drawing together of existing Catholic bodies, for the general purpose of combating communism and promoting the ideas of a Catholic social policy and Catholic standards in social, industrial, economic affairs and in public life generally. . .

We are strongly of the opinion there should be no new party, or organisation; that whatever form the "Front" take, as an organisation, it should be representative, as it were, of all existing Catholic activities and, while appearing as a lay movement, be in close touch with the Hierarchy as a whole and with each Bishop in his diocese."[78]

In a letter to the *Irish Catholic* de Roiste simplified his argument:

"Here's the "Cork view" – definitely, firmly, decisively, "Every loyal Catholic in Ireland is a member of the Christian Front . . . The "Front" organisation will not supersede any organisation, but supplement them all. It is not a "league", it is a crusade for Christianity in public affairs . . . No social status test. No political test.

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76 *Ibid*, 22 September 1936.
77 J. Anthony Gaughan (1989), p.300.
78 Liam de Roiste to Fogarty, 22 September 1936, Killaloe Diocesan Archives. I am grateful to Martin Browne who examined the Diocesan Archives for references to the Spanish Civil War.

Only test – loyalty to Christ our King before loyalty to politics, class, party, trade union. That is our line here, and must be the line throughout the country".[79]

In fact, the ICF leadership never defined the criteria for membership of the organisation. Different branches advocated various methods of enrolment. The Limerick committee suggested a register in the city centre to be signed by members. The Cork branch, under de Roiste's influence, opposed any measure of exclusivity and felt the crossing of its supporters' arms in the air at meetings was sufficient. Belton's attitude differed considerably; from as early as October 1936, he called for elections "to establish democratic control as soon as practicable".[80] Belton's vision of the ICF – a formal organisation under his centralised leadership – was more narrow than de Roiste's and held less appeal for those who feared political motives behind the standing committee. The disparity of objectives among its members should be considered when assessing the strength of the Christian Front. During the autumn of 1936 the ICF appeared to be a phenomenally successful organisation but the lack of a formal membership, agreed constitution and divergent views of its members suggest its strength could be easily over-estimated.

By late September there were indications of hierarchical support for the new movement. At Drogheda the Primate of All-Ireland, Cardinal MacRory, hinted his approval. Like the ICF, MacRory depicted Spain as a religious war – "It is a question of whether Spain will remain as she has been so long, a Christian and Catholic land, or a Bolshevist and anti-God one". MacRory favoured providing medical supplies but appeared less certain about the military aid which he was covertly helping to organise:

"We should all pray for Spain and, if able to, we should all help from our purses, help her to obtain war supplies – what I should say is medical supplies for her sick and wounded. I do not want to say anything about any other kind of help. As Christians, if we are able, we should be prepared to render that help to her".[81]

The reference to medical supplies indicates support for the Christian Front - no other organisation was involved in such work. MacRory did not explicitly name the movement as the hierarchy was traditionally cautious about endorsing Catholic Action groups, particularly those not under ecclesiastical control.[82] The Society of Jesus was less cautious and several well-known Jesuits including Fr. Richard Devane, Fr. Edward Coyne and Fr.

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79 *Irish Catholic*, 1 October 1936; See also Liam de Roiste, 'Irish Christian Front, Purposes and Organisation', *Irish Catholic* 15 October 1936.

80 *Irish Catholic*, 29 October 1936.

81 *Irish Independent*, 21 September 1936.

82 The Knights of Columbanus, for example, were established in 1922 but despite receiving support from Cardinal MacRory and Archbishop Byrne did not receive official hierarchical support until 1934. It was not until 1951 that the society was recognised as a Catholic Action group of the Lay Apostolate (Evelyn Bolster (1979) pp.22-7).

P.J. Gannon, prominently supported the Christian Front. These priests perceived the Christian Front's potential as a politically influential Catholic Action group rather than a Catholic political party. Eight months before the establishment of the Christian Front, Fr. Devane stated:

"I do not advocate a confessional or Catholic Party, as such, much less a political party, but a party of Catholic activists who accept a programme based on the Catholic social teaching of recent Popes. A small select party that will draw its members from each and every political party and who will strive might and main to get each of the present three parties of state to accept formally, publicly, and specifically, the Catholic position as set forth in a series of theses drawn directly from the great social encyclicals".[83]

During the same period another cleric who became a prominent support of the Christian Front, Archdeacon Kelleher, advocated the formation of:

"some sort of central body which might promote the study . . . and later on, very much later on . . .the application of Catholic social philosophy, teaching, practice etc.".[84]

One obvious question about the prevalence of such views is why Catholic activists felt the need for such a body given the commitment of all three major political parties to maintaining, by legislation if necessary, Catholic standards in public life? One answer is provided by the pessimistic tone of the Bishops' pastoral letters during this period. Their preoccupation with secularism, sexual morality, and immoral literature and films indicated their belief that Irish society was afflicted by declining public standards. This domestic crisis had international parallels. To many observers, the rise of communism and fascism, the instability of liberal democratic systems, and the Spanish Civil War suggested modern capitalistic society was on the verge of collapse. Corporatism, by promoting Catholic values, offered a solution to the political polarisation of Europe and the perceived decline of morality in society.

The Christian Front issued a new appeal following MacRory's endorsement:

"The Irish Christian Front has been sending out medical supplies to Spain, but to give the help in this direction we feel the Cardinal would wish our efforts to be increased tenfold. We, therefore, appeal to the Irish people in the words of the Cardinal for "help from our purses" for the medical supplies for the sick and wounded of the Christian Front in Spain".[85]

The ICF planned to hold church gate collections around Ireland throughout October although there were conflicting reports about the final destination of the money. On

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83 Fr. R.S. Devane SJ, 'A Catholic Social Programme', *Irish Monthly*, Vol. 64, 1936 p.22.

84 Seán Faughnan, 'The Jesuits and the drafting of the Irish constitution of 1937', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 26 (1988-9) p.84. The formation of the annual Social Order Summer School at Clongowes Wood Jesuit college was one manifestation of this idea.

85 *Irish Press*, 22 September 1936. Belton was never slow to capitalise on and exaggerate religious approval of the ICF. For instance, he added an epilogue to Cardinal Gomá's *Martyrdom of Spain* (published in Dublin with the imprimatur of Archbishop Byrne) which stated, quite misleadingly considering Gomá's pamphlet never mentioned his organisation, "I appeal strongly to those who are not yet members to take heed of the grave warning of His Eminence and to join the Movement [ICF] at once".

September 26, Brennan asserted – "They were accused of sponsoring the Spanish rebels. That was a lie".[86] Five days later though, the ICF stated:

"Now that the order has been given for an advance on Madrid, it is necessary to ensure that the heroic soldiers fighting to save Christianity are adequately equipped with field-dressings".[87]

The latter statement indicates the funds were being collected for the Nationalist authorities rather than Spanish Catholics. Although the Nationalists do not appear to have attempted to influence Christian Front policy, they sent detailed requests for medical supplies through their agents in London.[88] The lack of Nationalist participation in the pro-Franco campaign is partly explained by de Valera's refusal to allow a representative into Ireland.[89] The Nationalist representative in Liverpool, Ignacius de Mugiro, liaised with English fascists, Catholic clergy and activists (including Aileen O'Brien) to arrange rallies and collections in Britain.[90] In addition, there was little need for the Nationalists to direct the fund-raising campaign in Ireland – described by de Mugiro as "an enormous success".[91] Diplomatic reports from Leopold Kerney, the Irish representative to Spain, also show that the Nationalists were eager to distance themselves from Belton and O'Duffy to improve relations with the Irish government.[92]

On October 25, the Irish hierarchy announced a national church collection "for the relief of suffering Catholics". They were careful to emphasise they were not snubbing the Christian Front collection:

"In authorising these collections, we in no way wish to discourage similar collections that are being made for the same purpose with laudable zeal by other organisations, such as the Christian Front, on the contrary, our desire is to eulogise and support them".[93]

Dr. O'Doherty, the Bishop of Galway, also endorsed the ICF:

"There are Communists in Ireland, and they want to pose as good Nationalists . . . There is an organisation being founded to combat that".[94]

The Christian Front gained momentum during October and November. The *Irish Press* reported that a demonstration in Waterford attracted twelve thousand people.[95] However, the frequently voiced suspicions that the ICF harboured political ambitions continued to discourage political support. The expressions of support for the government's non-intervention policy from several ICF branches were insufficient to reassure sceptics.[96] Dáil

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86 *Irish Press*, 26 September 1936.
87 *Ibid*, 1 October 1936.
88 Telegram, *Secretaría General*, Salamanca to London, 16 January 1937, R.1105-10, *Archivo de Burgos*.
89 See p.270.
90 De Mugiro, Liverpool, 17 September 1937 to Salamanca, R.1057-4, *Archivo de Burgos*.
91 *Ibid*, 26 November 1936.
92 p.283.
93 *Irish Press*, 14 October 1936.
94 *Irish Catholic*, 22 October 1936.
95 *Irish Press*, 12 October 1936.
96 *Irish Times*, 5 October 1936; *Irish Catholic*, 8 October 1936.

deputies from the major parties attended Christian Front rallies in Limerick and Galway but such occurrences were unusual and significantly the Limerick committee had little formal contact with the Dublin leadership.[97] Such branches quickly collapsed when the ICF leadership became more political. A garda report on the Galway Christian Front noted:

"At that meeting [November 1936] there were people on the platform connected with every political party in this country, namely, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, Labour Party etc. A short time after that, however, a lot of people began to doubt the bona fides of the Irish Christian Front, left the movement, and took neither hand nor part in the work from that time to this".[98]

Significantly, these suspicions were shared by supporters of the Christian Front. The *Irish Catholic* advised:

"If your organisation wishes to double its membership, to secure the unqualified approval of Irish Catholics, and thus materially advance the cause you have so nobly undertaken, see to it that your leaders are not in any way connected with politics".[99]

At a meeting in Howth, one county councillor spoke of the necessity for the movement "to purge itself of any suspicion of political bias of the Fascist type".[100]

On October 25,[101] the Christian Front held a second public meeting in Dublin which attracted over forty thousand people.[102] The speakers were now more openly critical of the government. Belton declared:

"It was to be hoped that our Government would make it plain to the British Government and others that in no circumstances would Ireland allow herself to be placed in the false position of having any association with the Reds. Unfortunately we still continue to maintain special trade relations with the Spanish Government".[103]

The organisation's social and economic policy had developed from vague references to corporatism to more specific proposals. Belton argued for increased currency circulation and national management of credit to combat unemployment and poverty.[104] He asserted that outdoor relief and the dole led directly to communism. James Brennan demanded better housing and education - "good citizenship as opposed to book knowledge".[105] Other speakers focused on unemployment and poverty.[106]

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97 See p.198.

98 Seán O'Maícin, Galway, to Commissioner 'C.S.' Branch, 23 March 1937, D/Jus D34/36.

99 *Irish Catholic*, 24 September 1936. Speakers at ICF meetings in Limerick and Rathmines expressed similar concerns (*Irish Catholic*, 19 November 1936).

100 *Irish Press*, 16 October 1936.

101 The Feast of Christ the King, celebrated on October 25, was established by the Vatican to promote Catholic Action.

102 The *Irish Independent* (26 October 1937) claimed one hundred and twenty thousand attended. The *Irish Times* (26 October 1937) estimated a more plausible forty thousand.

103 *Irish Press*, 26 October 1936.

104 The reform of the banking system and the introduction of a national credit scheme were also aspects of the economic policy of General O'Duffy's National Corporate Party (Special Branch report, 17 December 1935, D/Jus B9/35).

105 *Irish Independent*, 26 October 1936.

106 *Irish Catholic*, 29 October 1936.

An anti-fascist motion was passed but Alexander McCabe revealed an ambivalence characteristic of some ICF leaders when he declared amid cheers:

"Thanks to Hitler, the Communists were driven back from Germany, thanks to Mussolini they were kept from Italy, and thanks to Franco, they will never come to Ireland".[107]

The ICF had been accused of fascist tendencies by left wing activists since its inception. They pointed to Belton's links with General O'Duffy's National Corporate Party and the rhetoric of leaders like Desmond Bell who praised Hitler's concentration camps as evidence. The ideology certainly appealed to some of the ICF leaders. Belton's anti-semitic and pro-Italian speeches in the Dáil indicated a sympathetic outlook to fascism, as did his earlier involvement with O'Duffy's National Corporate Party. The evidence is stronger against Alexander McCabe, the ICF secretary, who was interned for his involvement with the pro-Nazi People's National Party in 1939.[108] However, much of the fascistic rhetoric of ICF leaders can be attributed to their perception of fascists as the most effective opponents of communism in Europe. As with the Blueshirt movement, fascism was a less important feature of ICF ideology than Catholic corporatism.

The October demonstration illustrated the huge public support for the Christian Front. As Patrick Keatinge stated:

"There have been few movements of mass public opinion in Ireland with as broad a base as the Christian Front. Mass demonstrations criticising the government's foreign policy have occurred since, but while these have been a predominantly urban phenomenon, the Christian Front made its Church door collections throughout the country".[109]

Keatinge attributes the success of the ICF to the fact that Irish people perceived the war in Spain as a clear moral choice between Christianity and Communism. Support for the Christian Front superseded the more narrow sectional, regional, or occupational interests typical of most pressure groups.[110] However, Keatinge's conclusion also suggests an inherent weakness within the Christian Front. The huge crowd mobilised in Dublin to demonstrate sympathy with Catholics in Spain and, to a lesser extent, to protest against Irish communism. Even republicans like Peadar O'Donnell recognised the genuine nature of much ICF support:

"the main strength of any great popular movement rests on all that is honest and sincere within it. Those who saw in the I.C.F. movement just another form of expression for the anti-Republican element within the country and especially for the upper tier of landed interests suffering most from the economic war had need to remind themselves that the sodalities of the various churches really saw the events in Spain as a religious war . . . These men believed the stories they were told and it was their drive which achieved that basis of excited sincerity which made the I.C.F. formidable".[111]

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107 *Irish Press*, 26 October 1936.
108 Robert Fisk, *In Time of War* (London, 1985) pp.432-6.
109 Patrick Keatinge, *The Formulation of Irish Foreign Policy* (Dublin, 1973) p.173.
110 *Ibid*, pp.171-2.
111 Peadar O'Donnell (1937) p.245.

The large crowd in Dublin did not gather to demonstrate against the Irish government or to support corporatism and currency reform. The difficulty facing the Christian Front was how to shift its agenda from a consensus based on the Spanish Civil War and anti-communism to wider issues without losing its popular but ephemeral support.

The demonstration indicated other weaknesses. Most importantly, senior politicians and the hierarchy did not openly support the organisation. The Christian Front representatives on the platform (Patrick Belton, James Brennan, John Corr, William Rollins, Liam Breen, Desmond Bell, T.J. Campbell[112] and Dr. Conor O'Malley) were politically insignificant. Fianna Fáil were naturally suspicious of an organisation led by one of the most truculent of the ex-Blueshirt leaders and the criticism of government policy by Christian Front leaders ensured its continued opposition to the organisation. Although Fine Gael's Spanish policy closely resembled that of the ICF, the opposition distanced itself from the organisation.[113] Many Fine Gael politicians resented Belton who had helped to split the party only two years before.[114] With occasional exceptions, such as Michael Keyes, the Limerick TD, Labour Party leaders were hostile to the Christian Front which opposed its Workers' Republic constitution.

The Catholic Church was represented only by two Jesuits, Fr. Edward Coyne and Fr. R.S. Devane. Neither Archbishop Byrne, nor his vicar generals, including Monsignor Waters who approved of the Christian Front, appeared on the platform. Although this did not necessarily indicate hierarchical disapproval, the absence of senior clerical figures and leading politicians allowed Christian Front opponents to claim that it lacked significant support. Peadar O'Donnell concluded:

"I am convinced that it was the big meeting in Dublin that was their undoing, all of Catholic Ireland was summoned to the city. . . He [Belton] let a couple of priests on the platform, and that only made people notice the people that weren't there. . . The papers did their best next day to hide the thinness of the speeches of the speeches in new stories of frightfulness, but the movement was on the wane".[115]

The Decline of the ICF

The October rally, with its huge attendance, marked the peak of public support for the ICF which soon became involved in several controversies. Belton's authoritarian leadership was largely to blame. On November 4, James Brennan threatened to resign when Belton

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112 See p.207.

113 General Sean MacEoin attended ICF meetings in Longford and Killarney, while Fine Gael TDs supported the Limerick ICF.

114 For example, James Dillon wrote to Frank MacDermot – "We are still afloat, but little more. O'Duffy is on the rampage with a vengeance. The Blueshirts are split from stern to stern, the morale of Fine Gael is shattered. Belton has embarked in every form of treacherous activity . . . a motion for Belton's expulsion appears on the agenda of both sides for their next meeting" (17 October 1934, MacDermot papers, National Archives). Nonetheless, leading Fine Gael politicians met Belton in May 1936 seeking his return to the party.

115 Peadar O'Donnell (1937) p.254.

became involved in a public dispute with Monsignor Arthur Ryan, a professor of philosophy at Queen's University.[116] Brennan informed Desmond Bell (who replaced Aileen O'Brien as ICF secretary):

"unless he [Belton] resign his office as President, or alternatively that he be given no power to act alone for the I.C.F . . . [and] steps be taken to summon . . . all existing branches for the purpose of electing a more representative Standing Committee (pro tem), I resign from any office I hold in the Standing Committee.[117]

Brennan was uneasy about the political nature of Belton's leadership. In a letter to Cardinal MacRory, which referred to the "establishment of a quasi political . . . Xian Front", Brennan stated:

"the original objectives have been gradually subverted toward aims to which I could not give support . . . it may be knowledge to Your Eminence that many if not the vast majority of our supporters are inclined to adopt this outlook".[118]

The most damaging controversy concerned the allocation of the national collection.[119] On October 21, Cardinal MacRory wrote to Archbishop Byrne:

"Mr. Belton was impressed by what we did in Maynooth. He called on me on Tuesday evening in the college. He and a Spanish Co[unt] are now wondering if they can get slices of the collection . . . I told them it is a matter for the Cardinal Primate of Spain".[120]

A month later, MacRory was still reluctant to part with the money:

I have not given any of the money to the I.C. Front; I never got authority from the Spanish Primate to do so. In any case, I think it much better that we should hand over the sum collected and let the Primate and his colleagues use it as they judge best . . . some of Mr. Belton's critics would grumble at our handing over their money to him".[121]

Belton instructed Aileen O'Brien, the Christian Front's Spanish agent, to persuade Goma to hand over the money. On November 3, Cardinal Goma cabled his agreement to Belton who travelled to Spain to confirm the arrangements.[122] He stayed with Fr. Alexander McCabe, the rector of the Irish College at Salamanca, who expressed irritation that MacRory had not informed him of Belton's intentions – "Cardinal MacRory knew everything of what was going on. He did not tell me very much".[123] McCabe, a cynical individual, had formed a poor opinion of Belton while on holidays in Ireland:

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116 See p.208. Brennan informed Desmond Bell - "when the prestige of the organization is concerned, none of the officers has the right to prejudice its objects in public controversy without the assent of the responsible authority" (Brennan to Bell, 4 November 1936, Spanish Civil War file, VIII/Appeals, MacRory papers).
117 *Ibid.*
118 Brennan to MacRory, 10 November 1936, Spanish Civil War file, VIII/Appeals, MacRory papers).
119 See Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe 1919-48* (Dublin, 1988) pp. 72-7.
120 MacRory to Byrne, 21 October 1936, Spanish Civil War file, Byrne papers, Dublin Archdiocesan Archives.
121 Ibid, 30 November 1936.
122 Telegram, Goma to Belton, 2 November 1936; Belton to MacRory, 3 November, 5 November 1936 (Spanish Civil War file, VIII/Appeals, MacRory papers).
123 Fr. McCabe diary, 12 October 1936, Acc. 4872, Fr. McCabe papers, NLI.

"I got the impression that Mr. Belton was one of the modern Irish Saints, a man like Matt Talbot, who was prepared to die for the sacred Spanish cause, and who would be probably canonised later with Matt Talbot".[124]

Elsewhere in his diary, McCabe refers to Belton as "a greedy shark", "a cold fish", and "a boor of the first order".[125] The relationship between both men was strained. McCabe knew that Belton had changed his route to Spain when Joseph Walshe, the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, informed Belton that they held tickets for the same boat to Spain.[126] After their first meeting in Salamanca, McCabe observed:

"He [Belton] keeps looking at me in a heavy-headed bovine way, and we both seem to be playing a game of hide and seek with each other. We are both concealing what we know, and trying by stealth, to find out what the other knows".[127]

The following day, November 17, Belton and McCabe were granted an interview with José Sangróniz, Franco's senior diplomat and Fr. Despujol, Cardinal Goma's secretary. They discussed whether the Nationalists should receive Goma's funds directly or if they should be channelled through the Christian Front who would purchase medical supplies in Ireland. Fr. McCabe noted:

"They all gathered round Belton as if he were a big bull that they were trying to shove a step forward. It's difficult to know what he wants, what he wants to do, or have done. Sangroniz asked him two or three times, "Now, is Mr. Belton satisfied?" Belton who doesn't speak Spanish or French, or even English on these occasions, just glares at them from under his eyebrows, as if deliberating like a bull in the ring, which of them he will charge first".[128]

On November 23, Belton finally met Cardinal Goma. McCabe noted:

"Mr. Belton had drawn up a declaration, which he wished the Cardinal to sign, and which he intended to use as political propaganda in Ireland. I gave the Cardinal a respectful hint to be careful, and when he read the Spanish translation, he frowned and said that he couldn't sign this. He dictated a short simple statement of thanks for the money received, and we typed it in the adjoining room.[129]

Belton's mission was successful. Goma transferred the bulk of the national collection to an Irish bank account in Belton's name. The Nationalists may have been grateful for the favourable publicity and funds generated by the Christian Front but Belton's initiative was regarded as a nuisance. They would have preferred to acquire the cash without any restrictions and were still trying to get control of the money in December:

"Ex Dublin Mayor Belton says Cardinal Primate of Spain has asked him to buy medical supplies for the value of 32,000 pounds, results of subscription Irish Catholics. Strongly advise persuading Cardinal to send

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124 *Ibid*, 12 October 1936.
125 *Ibid*, 16 November 1936.
126 "There's some hocus-pocus in all this, and I feel, somehow, that Belton does not want to travel out with me. And I'm perfectly delighted". *Ibid*, 12 October 1936.
127 *Ibid*, November 16.
128 *Ibid*, 17 November 1936. Cited in Dermot Keogh (1988) p.76.
129 *Ibid*, 23 November 1936.

us . . . authority to withdraw total amount paid to his name, so that we can use it any purpose which may be more urgent for the Army. Cardinal might write . . . Belton telling him he had changed his mind and has made independent arrangements."[130]

MacRory did not authorise Goma to give the money to Belton. This was confirmed, as Leopold Kerney reported, by the publication of Goma's correspondence in 1939:

"The Cardinal says that this alteration of the original intention was due to the initiative of Mr. Belton, who was supported by Mr. O'Duffy and Miss Eileen[sic] O'Brien, the latter acting as intermediary between Mr. Belton and the Cardinal; as the foreword states – "an indication of diplomatic character made by Miss O'Brien and the Irish General O'Duffy was sufficient" for the "substantial gift which the Irish Catholics destined for the churches in Spain" to be placed in Franco's hands for the military hospitals. The Cardinal "counting on the acquiescence of the Primate of Ireland to whom I have telegraphed" handed the money over to Franco; he had not yet been notified of that acquiescence when he did so . . . "[131]

Goma regretted the affair and sent MacRory an apologetic, if convoluted, letter in November 1936. He told MacRory the idea to purchase supplies came from General O'Duffy and Aileen O'Brien:

"the appliance to the collected sum to the ends of military sanity[sic] was absolutely inicated[sic] by extrage[sic] persons to the administration of the church . . . this one[Goma] was agreeded[sic] with pleasure to the change of finality of the expressed collected money . . . I have noticed something strange, anormal[sic] with me upon this affair . . . The fact that they insist upon asking Your Eminence for more money, is also absolutely an initiative from them".[132]

Belton's mission to Spain created difficulties within the ICF. Five days after he left for Spain, James Brennan, the vice-president, declared that Belton should not have gone and resigned.[133] At a Christian Front meeting the following month Belton insisted that the standing committee unanimously supported his mission to Spain. The following day Alexander McCabe, the ICF secretary, disclaimed any responsibility for Belton's remarks.[134] He resigned without explanation two weeks later.

Three months later the purpose of Belton's mission to Spain became publicly known. At the ICF conference in February 1937 Belton refused to confirm the source of the money. He claimed to have retrieved £28,786 of funds from Spain which "had been driven out of this country [Ireland] by politicians". He insisted, quite misleadingly, that "not one penny of it [the hierarchy's collection] was given, or was ever destined for, the Irish Christian

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130 Telegram from Nationalist office, London to Secretaría *General*, Salamanca, 7 December 1936, R.1105-9, *Archivo de Burgos*. Belton was aware of the Nationalists preference. The *Irish Independent* reported - "He [Belton] also heard on pretty good authority that politicians demanded that the cash, not goods, should be sent, and boasted that their [ICF] influence prevailed" (4 February 1937).

131 Kerney to Walshe, 17 April 1940, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

132 Goma to MacRory, 15 November 1936, Spanish Civil War file, VIII/Appeals, MacRory papers. See Dermot Keogh (1988) p.74 for an interpretation of the curious wording of the letter.

133 *Irish Independent*, 11 November 1936.

134 *Irish Press*, 24 December 1936.

Front".[135] Belton's curious speech provoked an *Irish Press* editorial questioning the source of the funds.[136] The issue remained controversial throughout the summer of 1937. A further *Irish Press* editorial was devoted to the subject in July,[137] and General O'Duffy, ever eager to embarrass his old rival, recounted his knowledge of the affair in a series of bitter letters to the press throughout August.[138]

Belton's actions in Spain damaged the relationship between his organisation and Cardinal MacRory, particularly as Belton quoted MacRory's public statement that he (MacRory) had given the money to Cardinal Goma and not the ICF to strengthen his own denial that the repatriated funds formed part of the national collection. Belton warned MacRory in February:

"that inquiries are to be made of Your Eminence regarding the disposal of the Bishops' collection for Spain. I presume these will be made by the people who were so saturated with petty party politics that they resented the inauguration of the I.C.F. & who remain passive in the face of Jewish immigration & the export of food to the Reds in Spain".[139]

As MacRory predicted, the news that Belton received most of the national collection led to 'grumbling'. M.J. Kennedy, a Fianna Fáil deputy wrote:

"In response to an appeal by the Irish Bishops, the Irish public subscribed generously . . . In view of general and oft-repeated rumours that it has been sent back to the organisation known as "the Irish Christian Front" . . . it would be well if the secretary of that organisation, or some other responsible officer, cleared the air on the matter".[140]

By late 1936 increasing criticism of de Valera's recognition of the Spanish government by Fine Gael and the Christian Front led the *Irish Press* to suspect a conspiracy:

"It will without doubt, be both interesting and instructive for the public to watch the different moves in the game which has now been set on foot with the object of enabling the Fine Gael party to . . . assume control of the Irish Christian Front movement".[141]

The editorial was prompted by the opposition's claim that Fianna Fáil was 'soft' on communism and a statement by Liam Burke, Fine Gael's general secretary, that:

"a great non-political movement had arisen in the country which would . . . force the Government's hand and . . . check the moral and national menace which had been growing in our midst".[142]

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135 *Irish Times*, 4 February 1937.
136 *Irish Press*, 4 February 1937.
137 *Ibid*, 21 July 1937.
138 *Ibid*, 8 April, 7, 12 August 1937.
139 Belton to MacRory, 17 February 1937, Spanish Civil War file, VIII/Appeals, MacRory papers. Belton assured MacRory his letters and suggestions would remain confidential ("I have confidences of Cardinal Goma & General Franco too") and offered to show the Cardinal records of his financial transactions.
140 *Irish Press*, 6 March 1937; see also the report of Dublin Board of Health meeting, *Irish Press*, 21 July 1937.
141 *Ibid*, 26 November 1936.
142 *Irish Press, Irish Independent*, 26 November 1936.

Although Fine Gael undoubtedly enjoyed the embarrassment inflicted on the government by the ICF there is little evidence to support the *Irish Press* claims. Few opposition deputies were associated with the Christian Front. Recognising this, the *Irish Press* switched its focus to links between the Blueshirts and ICF:

"It would be interesting and instructive to the public to know how many of the officials of the Christian Front were at one time identified with the Blueshirt movement". [143]

Similarly, Seán MacEntee claimed that "the self-appointed champions of Christianity were the men who tried to sabotage the whole local services in 1934 or 1935 because they thought to paralyse the arm of Fianna Fáil".[144]

There were more grounds for these assertions. Belton was a prominent ex-Blueshirt, as were Desmond Bell and Laurence Hayden (who replaced Alexander McCabe as secretary).[145] There were significant similarities between the two movements – both were corporatist, exclusively Christian and claimed to be non-political. They shared similar characteristics such as militant Catholicism, anti-communism and a distrust of conventional politics. Moreover, as the Christian Front became increasingly critical of Fianna Fáil and Labour, its support shifted from a wide base to a more partisan membership resembling that of the old Blueshirt movement. ICF meetings often discussed traditional Blueshirt issues such as the economic war and the threat posed by republicans.[146]

Belton's speech at a Mansion House ceremony on December 22 signalled this change in the direction of the movement:

"When they had finished this [Spanish aid] their attention would be devoted to this country . . . Then we will see who is Red and who is anti-Red". [147]

Significantly, aid for Spain, the original purpose of the Christian Front, was omitted from the new manifesto issued in January. The document focused on anti-communism, social policy and alternatives to the established political system.[148] The new direction coincided with a more aggressive political style. On January 22, Belton accused Seán Lemass, the Minister for Industry and Commerce, of supporting the Republican government by permitting exports to Spain. The *Irish Press* urged the moderate element within the ICF to move against Belton:

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143 *Irish Press*, 22 December 1936.
144 *Ibid*, 17 February 1937.
145 *The Worker*, 21 November 1936; *Irish Press*, 22 December 1936.
146 For example, at a meeting in Roscommon, Monsignor Cummins declared "I believe that the farmer in Ireland is the worst treated and most inarticulate being in the country . . . By this economic war, the people have been robbed and the country impoverished" (*Irish Press*, 22 December 1936).
147 *Irish Independent*, 23 December 1936.
148 *Irish Press*, 23 January 1937.

"In what capacity did Mr. Belton approach Mr. Lemass . . . Obviously it was as head of the Christian Front . . . It now knows beyond question what is to be expected if Mr. Belton can allege that he has the Christian Front behind him. That means yea or nay that it will become an aggressive political organisation . . . is that what its members desire?". [149]

The *Press* was aware that Belton's leadership had aroused resentment within his organisation. His polemical style greatly weakened the ICF. The Limerick branch of the ICF, for example, collapsed after Belton's attack on Lemass.[150] By January, only Belton and Liam Breen remained from the original five member standing committee. James Brennan and Alexander McCabe had resigned and Aileen O'Brien was dismissed in December.[151]

Public criticism of Belton's presidency increased in January. The *Dundalk Examiner* and the *Standard*, a Catholic periodical, published critical editorials.[152] The *Irish Catholic* commented:

"Behind the distrust of the organisation which is becoming more evident every day there lurks the suspicion that designing men intend, at some future date, to use the Front as a weapon for political ends . . . When, therefore, the National Convention meets on February 3, it is to be hoped that it will select as leaders men who are in no way connected with party politics". [153]

Branches in Naas and Droichead Nua resolved that only non-political candidates should be eligible for the presidency.[154] The Maynooth branch suggested the presidency should not be held by the same individual for consecutive years. Belton was placed under further pressure when revelations of his mission to Spain became known particularly as the misappropriation of funds was rumoured. Belton confided to Fr. McCabe:

"You know how dangerous it is to handle public money here. We are having our first convention of ICF here on Wed. next and the "Irish Press" is running a campaign to shift me from the Presidency". [155]

Belton's anti-semitism also became more apparent in this period. At a meeting of the Dublin Board of Health he revoked a bye-law exempting Jews from the humane killing laws arguing – "If Jews came here to live as Christians, they should be made conform with Christian practices and methods". [156] He later justified his actions by declaring:

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149 *Ibid.*

150 See p.198.

151 Belton dismissed O'Brien after his visit to Spain. He suspected, probably correctly, that O'Brien's loyalties rested with the Nationalists rather than his organisation. Fr. McCabe noted in his journal: "He's [Belton] not quite sure of O'Brien, "For all I know", he says, "she may be Sangroniz' mistress". Belton has a good many angular corners but he's a highly serious self-respecting family man and not a bit Bohemian". Belton confided to McCabe that Archbishop MacRory disapproved of O'Brien "and took a severe attitude towards her playing such a prominent part in the Irish Christian Front" (Fr. McCabe diary, 17 November 1936).

152 *Irish Press*, 30 January 1937, *The Worker*, 27 February 1937.

153 *Irish Catholic*, 28 January 1937.

154 *Irish Press*, 23, 26 January 1937.

155 Belton to McCabe, 29 January 1937, folder 57, McCabe papers.

156 *Irish Press*, 16 December 1936.

"I don't want to see special facilities given to these people who created the present position in Spain, and are doing their damnedest to do the same again in Ireland".[157]

As he confided to Cardinal MacRory, Belton believed Jews were responsible for the growth of communism:

"The problem here is bigger and more urgent than many people imagine. The Jews have a stranglehold here & present arrivals mainly consist of those expelled from European countries for their communist activities. They have an international organisation and they control money. They did their job well in Spain & can do it here if not checkmated."[158]

In March Belton accused the government of allowing "undesirable aliens" into Ireland.[159] He told the Dáil:

"Industrial development in this country had meant that we were handing over the country to a gang of internal Jews . . . these alien Jews went into commerce with the result that not a single Irishman owned a house in some of Dublin's principal streets . . . "[160]

Belton's anti-semitism, voiced "in the congenial climate of the 1930s",[161] concerned Chief Rabbi Herzog who urged Archbishop Byrne to warn Catholics against the ICF:

"The trouble really is that Belton is parading his Jew-hatred and his insulting attitude toward the Jewish religion under the colours of Christianity. Therein, lies the danger, lest God forbid, popular passions become influenced and serious disturbances result as a consequence".[162]

Byrne did not criticise the Christian Front. In fact, only ten days later his vicar general Dr. Wall, Bishop of Thasos, appeared at a public ceremony to bless a Christian Front ambulance and announced that "had it not been for his indisposition the Archbishop would have been present at the ceremony".[163]

The ICF convention, held in the Ormond Hotel in Dublin on February 3, and attended by eighty-five delegates, revealed a deeply divided movement. De Roiste was the first to protest:

"Just after Belton began his address, he was interrupted by Liam de Roiste, Cork City, who objected to the president's opening remarks on party politics.

Mr. de Roiste [rising to his feet] – I do not think you should refer to these matters just now.

Mr. Belton – Unfortunately I am in the chair.

Mr. de Roiste – It is not right that you should discuss here questions of what politicians are doing.

Mr. Belton – I have only read about six or seven lines, and it is not helping a Christian or Catholic organisation to start interruptions half a minute after the business has started.

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157 *Irish Press*, 30 December 1936.
158 Belton to MacRory, Spanish Civil War file, VIII Appeals, MacRory papers.
159 *Irish Press*, 1 March 1937.
160 *Ibid*, 5 March 1937.
161 Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985* (Cambridge, 1989) p.78.
162 Herzog to Byrne, 3 January 1937. Cited in Maurice Hartigan (1992) p.341.
163 *Irish Independent*, 14 January 1937. Since the late 1920s Archbishop Byrne, suffering from progressive paralysis, rarely appeared in public and delegated most of his work to his vicars general.

Mr. de Roiste was about to speak again when Mr. Belton shouted: "Resume your seat". Mr. de Roiste, accompanied by Mr. J.P. Weldon, another Cork city delegate, then left the meeting."[164]

Another delegate, Archdeacon Kelleher, argued that the national executive should not be elected until the branches were better established. Since October, Belton had argued for an election to confirm his mandate to lead the movement. Many members were clearly reluctant to grant Belton this mandate:

"Mr. J. Sweeney – It is generally understood in the country, and there is a feeling that this organisation was formed with a political object. Politics will kill it.

Mr. Belton – I cannot allow you to proceed. Has there been any politics in the organisation?

. . . At this point there were opposing cries of "No" and "Yes" from various delegates.

Mr. Belton – There is no politics in it.

Mr. C. Buckley – I can bear out what the Maynooth delegate has said as to the dissatisfaction and suspicion that has been created in regard to the Executive, and yourself in particular." [165]

However, Belton, twice deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin and a member of a vast array of local bodies, was an experienced manipulator of committee procedures.[166] When one delegate argued against Kelleher, Belton rapidly pressed ahead:

". . . he [Belton] was ruling in favour of Mr. McCann. If he was going to carry on at the head of the Organisation, he was going to do so by the votes of the delegates present. Unfortunately there was only one nomination for the Presidency and that was himself".[167]

Belton secured the nomination by eighty votes to five.[168]

Belton's victory proved illusory as the ICF began to disintegrate – a process hastened by its leader's extremist rhetoric. Belton's ineptitude as president, exemplified by his controversial outbursts, was central to the movement's rapid demise. During the Dáil debate on non-intervention, two weeks after the ICF convention, Belton labelled the Irish government "red" and dropped any pretence of the Christian Front's non-political status by announcing that he was "President of one of the largest political organisations that ever existed in this country".[169]

Most Christian Front branches collapsed soon after the February conference. The Waterford branch, led by Archdeacon Kelleher, split from the Dublin leadership and renamed itself the Catholic Union.[170] Special Branch reports confirm the national decline

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164 *Irish Independent*, 4 February 1937.
165 *Ibid.*
166 *Thom's Directory* (1937) lists Belton as a member of the Dáil, Dublin Corporation, Dublin County Council (chairman), General Council of County Councils, Dublin Board of Public Health, Dublin Port and Docks Board, Governing Body of the National University, and a Commissioner of Irish Lights.
167 *Irish Independent*, 4 February 1937.
168 *Irish Times*, 4 February 1937.
169 Dáil Debates 65, 631, 671.
170 *Irish Democrat*, 24 April, 15 May 1937.

of the organisation in this period. A report of a meeting in Drogheda noted that many of the "three hundred young people" present were intent on disrupting the proceedings with:

"remarks such as - "'Up de Valera' 'Up Hitler' 'Up Ballyseedy' 'Down with O'Duffy' 'You are all Blueshirts'. . . It was noticeable that none of the local clergy attended the meeting, and with the exception of Alderman Kierans, Councillor Dennis, and Mr. Allen, N.T. no other prominent men were present. There was very little local enthusiasm."[171]

The controversy over the national collection precluded further support from the hierarchy. In March, Belton asked MacRory to bless a shipment of ambulances to Spain:

"I am sure Cardinal Goma would appreciate your blessing them very much and so would the people of this country. . . I think it advisable to have a prominent ceremony".[172]

There was little likelihood of MacRory continuing to lend his prestige to the Christian Front. MacRory rejected the request despite Belton's persistent appeals:

"I hope you don't mind me in my ignorance putting the matter of Your blessing these ambulances to you again . . . If it can be done I would suggest College Green Dublin . . . I am sure we would have 50,000 to 100,000 people present. What do [you] think of this suggestion?"[173]

The exclamation marks in MacRory's diary indicate some scepticism:

"Letters from Belton wanting me to bless ambulances for Spain in College Green Dublin on Sunday afternoon - 100,000 to be present! Declined with thanks!"[174]

On March 24 the Christian Front sent questionnaires to the three major political parties which, if answered positively, would ensure their support in the imminent general election. The parties were asked if they would ban communism, implement a social policy based on the Papal encyclicals and recognise General Franco.[175] The publication of a questionnaire which none of the parties would agree to indicated the increasing isolation of the Christian Front from political reality.

On April 4, the ICF called for a public demonstration against the government's foreign policy. The *Irish Independent* estimated the attendance at twenty thousand – a significant figure but only one-sixth of its estimate of the October turnout.[176] The speakers demanded a ban on communism and Franco's recognition. An unimpressed Special Branch officer reported that John Corr

"dealt with Communism in Europe and the activities of the Christian Front, unemployment, industry, strikes, etc. and was generally loud spoken about affairs he seemed to be poorly conversant with".[177]

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171 Special Branch report, 28 February 1937, D/Jus D34/36.
172 Belton to MacRory, 1 March 1937, Spanish Civil War file, VIII Appeals, MacRory papers.
173 *Ibid*, 3 March 1937.
174 5 March 1937, Diaries 1929-45, VI Joseph Cardinal MacRory, MacRory papers.
175 *Irish Press*, 25 March 1937.
176 *Irish Independent*, 5 April 1937. The *Irish Press* (5 April 1937) estimated ten thousand.
177 Special Branch report, 5 April 1937, D/Jus D34/36.

The meeting displayed the organisation's increasingly xenophobic direction. W.G. Fallon denounced H.G. Wells, Josef Stalin and "Cockney-minded Karl Marx". Belton linked Jewish control of industry with communist subversion in Ireland.[178] His increasingly aggressive (and desperate) rhetoric recalled the Blueshirt era:

"if political action, or even military action, was necessitated to banish Communism we are free, and must remain free, to adopt ourselves to whatever situation may arise".

Curiously, Special Branch reported only that "in a mild manner he [Belton] criticised the Saorstat Government".[179] Belton's bombastic language probably caused less concern to the government than his moderate appeals the previous autumn. The Christian Front had degenerated from a powerful pressure group to a body of political cranks within six months.

The Irish left was cheered by the Christian Front's loss of political and clerical support. The *Irish Democrat* declared:

"The discredited Christian fakers, it was noticeable, had not a single clergyman on the platform, nor a man of any serious standing in public life. The same old weather-beaten collection of nonentities . . ."[180]

In contrast to late 1936, left-wing activists now felt secure enough to openly disrupt their demonstrations. The *Irish Press* reported "an almost constant barrage of interruptions, cheers, and booings, accompanied by frequent scuffles between police" and a small section of the crowd.[181]

The *Irish Press* responded to Belton's rash speech by enquiring if ICF members had "consented to become the pliant tool of a would-be Dictator".[182] Frank MacDermot, a former Fine Gael politician, summed up the growing public unease:

"These utterances are the culmination of propaganda that has been proceding for some months, and I think that the time has come when the country should realise whither we are drifting. The Christian Front is an organisation which has received widespread support, and it is not a small thing that it should be committed to opinions so illiberal and so contrary to the whole tradition, not only of Irish Nationalism, but of Irish Catholicism.[183]

The *Irish Catholic* withdrew its support following the public meeting. An editorial advocating the need for a Catholic Action federation concluded that the ICF had failed because of its focus on negative action rather than a social programme.[184] In May the liberal periodical, *Ireland To-day*, assessed the decline of the "discreditable and pseudo-religious movement":

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178 *Irish Independent*, 5 April 1937.
179 Special Branch report, 5 April 1937, D/Jus D34/36.
180 *Irish Democrat*, 10 April 1937.
181 *Irish Press*, 5 April 1937. A garda report refuted the *Irish Press* account – "The report is entirely misleading . . . Gardaí were able to deal with the interrupters without the use of any great force and at no times were batons drawn".
182 *Irish Press*, 6 April 1937.
183 *Ibid.*
184 *Irish Catholic*, 8 April 1937.

"its desertion, without a word explaining or recanting, by all the more respectable elements, has ruled it out as being any longer a factor in the coming elections . . . Spain will not prove an issue, yet the incident of the rise and virtual collapse of the movement is not without its warnings. The head of Fascism, backed by certain powerful elements of the Press . . .has shown itself here much more positively than its alleged anti-body communism."[185]

In mid-May the Christian Front postponed its activities, ostensibly so as not to influence the general election results – an unconvincing reason for a pressure group and one which conflicts with Belton's public statements during this period. For example, at a Mansion House ceremony to welcome the return of the Irish Brigade, Belton declared:

"He did not want to make a political statement but . . . today there were only two parties – those who stood for the worship of God and those who did not".[186]

Belton was more concerned with his re-election than the flagging Christian Front. He campaigned unsuccessfully on three issues; more financial assistance for farmers, the prevention of Jewish immigration, and a ban on communism.[187] The electorate was more interested in the economic war and the new constitution. Belton lost his seat to a Labour Party candidate.

In May, an attempt to form a branch of the Christian Front in Carrickmacross failed when only six of the large number of people invited attended the inaugural meeting.[188] During this lengthy period of decline, the focus of Christian Front activity moved from corporatism to more negative and often unconventional subjects. P.J. Clarke, an executive committee member, announced the establishment of a "special branch" of the Christian Front to "clean Irish and imported journalism", combat "filthy and blasphemous material" from foreign countries and close down the "thriving nudist clubs" in Dublin.[189]

As the ICF petered out during the summer of 1937 other, lower profile, Catholic societies took over the organisation of the pro-Franco campaign. The Ancient Order of Hibernians sponsored the tour of Fr. Gabana, a Spanish Nationalist supporter, who had originally been invited to lecture by the ICF.[190] *An Rioghacht* organised the visit of Arnold Lunn, a well-known pro-Franco lecturer.[191] The Christian Front's popularity from late 1936 to early 1937 gives the misleading impression that other Catholic Action organisations ignored the Spanish Civil War. In September 1936 the CYMS launched a "Crusade of Prayer for Spain" and a Daily Mass Crusade. It declared "if the sad lesson of Spain had been learnt in

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185 *Ireland Today*, May 1937. The editorial continued – "In fact, here the anomaly, which requires some explanation surely, is that virulent anti-Communism has preceded the advent of the virus itself".
186 *Irish Press*, 22 May 1937.
187 *Ibid*, 16 May 1937.
188 *Ibid*, 11 May 1937.
189 *Irish Independent*, 11 May 1937.
190 *Irish Democrat*, 22 May 1937.
191 *Irish Independent*, 26 April 1937.

Ireland then our Catholic laymen will be found enrolled for Catholic Action".[192] John Dillon, a vice-president of Fine Gael, told a meeting of the Ancient Order of Hibernians "I think I speak for every Hibernian in world when I say we would regard a victory for the Reds of Valencia as a world disaster".[193] The Catholic Truth Society issued pamphlets on Spain such as *Workers of Ireland: Unite Against Communism* by Fr. J. Cleary.[194] The Irish Messenger published *For God and Spain* by Aodh de Blacam. Most of the Catholic sodalities also responded devotionally to the Spanish Civil War.[195] A *Te Deum* for Franco at the end of war was organised by Marquis MacSweeney and the Order of Malta. During the first year of the war their efforts were overshadowed by the popularity and radical approach of the Christian Front.

Despite the hopes of Catholic Action advocates that the ICF might form a unifying group the Christian Front developed few links with other Catholic Action bodies. One exception was the CYMS; its director general, Monsignor John Waters, enthusiastically supported the ICF. The more radical members of the CYMS appear to have been attracted to the ICF. Thomas French, the organising secretary of the CYMS was a member of the executive committee of the ICF.[196] Fr. A.M. Crofts OP, who directed the revival of the CYMS in the early 1930s was a founder member of the Waterford Christian Front. There was also some overlap with the Catholic Boy Scouts. Dr. Conor Martin, the National Scout Commissioner, organised the ICF in Galway and Professor J.B. Whelehan, Chief Scout of the Catholic Boy Scouts of Ireland was vice-chairman of the Blackrock ICF branch.[197]

Although the small but influential clique of corporatist and anti-communist Jesuits involved with Catholic Action groups such as *An Rioghacht* and the Jesuit Social Order study group supported the ICF few of their secular leaders followed them. The Knights of Columbanus, for example, treated the ICF in much the same way as they did *Maria Duce*, another "peripheral expression of the Catholic social movement" a decade later. They refrained from criticism but remained aloof. The Knights channelled their funds into the national collection rather than the Christian Front.[198]

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192 *Irish Catholic*, 17, 24 September 1936. Following the demise of the ICF, the CYMS resumed its position as leader of Catholic Action. The *CYMS Quarterly Review* announced "the C.Y.M.S. of Ireland regarded itself as the official Society of Catholic Action. It was well that people outside the Catholic Church should know . . . that Catholic Action had nothing to do with politics" (Spring 1939, Vol. 1, No. 2).

193 Ms. 22,596, W.G. Fallon papers, NLI.

194 Fr. J. Cleary C.SS.R, *Workers of Ireland: Unite Against Communism*, published October 16, 1936, with the imprimatur of Archbishop Byrne.

195 For example, in reparation for the outrages in Spain, the Sodality of Our Lady offered 843 Masses, 509 Communions, 1,024 Rosaries, 353 visits to the Blessed Sacrament, 142 half-hours of adoration, 19 hours of adoration, 142 Acts of Mortification, 425 Statues of the Cross . . ." (*Irish Catholic*, 11 March 1937).

196 See Maurice Hartigan (1992) p.102 for French's radical anti-communism.

197 *Irish Catholic*, 17 December 1936.

198 Evelyn Bolster (1979) p.79, 93.

In August, Belton announced his intention to resign his presidency due to ill-health and expressed concern about finding a successor:

"where will be found a man of ability who will take up the difficult and thankless job to lead the country against Communism?"[199]

There were few volunteers. A final meeting in October 1937 resolved to reorganise the movement with the same policies but in co-operation with other Christian societies. The recent lack of activity was explained by various illnesses; Belton had a "severe breakdown in health" attributed to overwork and his visit to Spain, Lord ffrench and Fr. Fallon, the brother of W.G. Fallon, were also ill. Despite their avowed intention to reorganise, Belton's summary of the Christian Front's achievements resembled more of a valediction than a call to arms:

"Many of the principles contained in the social policy of the Irish Christian Front had since been incorporated in the Constitution of the country – some of them almost in the same words – and it could hardly be doubted that the efforts of the ICF had a direct bearing on securing this result".[200]

The reasons for the demise of the ICF are numerous. Perhaps most important was the difference of objectives between Catholic Action activists such as de Roiste, the Jesuit intellectuals and Archdeacon Kelleher and the more political leadership of the Christian Front. The absence of mainstream political support, and the loss of public support which followed the ICF's transition from fund-raising to a new role as guardians of Irish morality were also important. The leadership of Patrick Belton was another significant factor. He was unsuitable for the presidency of a non-political organisation dependent on public consensus for its survival. His political background and temperament precluded widespread support from Fianna Fáil, the Labour Party, and, to a lesser extent, Fine Gael. His tenacity in gaining control of the national collection strained relations between the ICF and the hierarchy, and contributed to the departure of most of the standing committee. His belligerent speeches alienated moderate support from the Christian Front. Without Belton's leadership, the movement would have achieved more success uniting the various strands of Catholic Action.

The decline of the Christian Front diminished the pressure on de Valera's continued recognition of the Spanish government. Pro-Franco sympathies continued to be expressed during 1938 and early 1939 but within the Dáil and the press rather than by public demonstrations. The duration of the war also deflated public opinion on Spain. The wave of mass demonstrations in late 1936 was a reaction to the sensational news of anti-clerical

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199 *Irish Press*, 14 August 1937.
200 *Irish Independent*, 5 October 1937.

atrocities. Such incidents occurred infrequently afterwards. The lengthy military campaign involving Italy, Germany and Russia made the original depiction of Christians against Communist more difficult to sustain.[201] Other events, such as Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia and the impending war in Europe, vied for public attention. Although there is little reason to suppose Irish people significantly changed their views on the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939, the actions of the politically inept Christian Front had seriously discredited the organised pro-Franco lobby in Ireland by the summer of 1937.

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201 In November 1937 an article in *Ireland To-day* stated – "Madrid did not fall and has not fallen and with the receding prospects of a speedy victory and the disappointment that there was no winning side to claim their "bravos," all interest was encouraged to fade away, the atrocities were no more, the headlines vanished and only painstaking search could now gleam the attenuated items of news . . ." (John Fitzgerald, 'Spain – Prospect and Retrospect', p.9).

5. The Catholic Church

The previous chapter indicates the importance of clerical support for the pro-Franco campaign in Ireland. As we have seen, the Catholic Church, despite offering tentative support for the Irish Christian Front, maintained a generally cautious attitude towards Belton's controversial organisation. However, the public suspicion surrounding the Christian Front does not appear to have limited the Church's enthusiastic support of General Franco during this period. This response was influenced by numerous sources including the Vatican, the Spanish Catholic Church, press coverage and, most importantly, clerical interpretations of the issues involved which, to a great extent, reflected the Irish Church's domestic concerns. Despite its hierarchical structure the Catholic Church is not a monolithic body which acts in unison on particular issues; a range of views on any issue is evident. The opinions of the hierarchy and several religious orders are surveyed here – the attitudes of secular Catholic bodies and the Catholic laity, which also form part of the Catholic Church, are generally omitted except where they appear in clerical publications.[1]

This chapter is divided into four sections. First, the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the events of ideological significance, in particular the rise of the European right, which preceded the Spanish Civil War is considered. Second, the positions adopted by the Church (in Spain, the Vatican and Ireland) on the Spanish Civil War and the extent of clerical public support for the Nationalists are broadly outlined. The third section analyses clerical interpretations of Spanish issues of domestic significance – the perceived threats posed by communism, Judaism, Freemasonry, Protestantism and the secular press – and analyses why the war was considered so important by the Irish Church. The final section assesses facets of clerical aid for the Nationalists (apart from public support) such as financial contributions and attempts to manipulate government policy and the press.

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[1] The opinions of religious orders are constructed from clerical owned and edited periodicals. The views of the hierarchy are surmised from press reports, Lenten pastorals and the small number of accessible diocesan archives containing material on the Spanish Civil War. Of seventeen diocesan archives contacted, ten, according to their archivists, contain no material on Spain, one was inaccessible, three held minimal sources, while three (Dublin, Armagh and Down and Connor) contain a substantial amount of pertinent material.

I – The Catholic Church and Political Ideology

The Catholic Church, as Pope Leo XIII affirmed in *Sapientiae Christianae*, ostensibly does not favour any political system as long as its prerogatives are respected.[2] This was reiterated by Pius XI in *Dilectissima Nobis* (1933) which specifically refused to condemn the Spanish Republic. In practice, however, the Catholic Church often intervened in political questions, whether to improve its status or merely support the *status quo*. In the period between the two world wars, European liberal democracy – which was generally tolerant, if not supportive, of the Catholic Church – was increasingly undermined by dictatorships of the left and right which implemented far less favourable ecclesiastical policies. The persecution of the Catholic Church by foreign governments was a dominant theme of the Irish hierarchy's pastorals during the latter 1930s.

Pope Pius XI addressed the issue of political systems in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). Capitalism was criticised for the unjust conditions it forced upon the working class but, unlike communism, it was not the system but merely the social order which unfettered capitalism created which was condemned. Traditional liberalism was dismissed as utterly impotent and the totalitarian aspects of fascism were also criticised. The only political ideology approved by the Holy See was corporatism. In the corporate society – described by *Quadragesimo Anno* as a middle way between the extremes of capitalism and totalitarianism – workers, employers, and government formed organising bodies to represent their industry or profession. With legislative power to regulate wages and conditions, these bodies were intended to protect workers and avoid the excesses of capitalism and state absolutism.

Despite papal criticism of fascism many Irish Catholics regarded Mussolini in a favourable light. This is reflected in numerous religious journals. In the Jesuit periodical *Studies*,[3] James Meenan praised the economic wonders of the Mussolini regime.[4] A writer in the *Catholic Bulletin*,[5] stated that Italian fascism represented "the spiritual resurgence of an intensely Catholic people".[6] Fr. T. O'Herlihy, writing in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*,[7]

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2 "The Church holds that it is not her province to decide which is the best among the many and diverse forms of Government . . . and amidst the various forms of state rule she does not disapprove of any, provided the respect due to religion and good morals be observed". Cited from Dr. Arthur Ryan, 'Spain, the Church and Europe', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, December 1936, p.580.

3 *Studies:* established in 1912; edited in this period by P.J. Connolly SJ; influential despite its small circulation; associated with clergy and Catholic intellectuals from University College Dublin in the 1930s.

4 James Meenan, 'Fascist Italy and its Public Works', *Studies*, 1934, p.664.

5 *Catholic Bulletin* (1911-1939): secular-owned anglophobic, anti-semitic, pro-Fianna Fáil monthly; founded in 1911 by Patrick Keohane who was appointed to the senate by de Valera in 1938; influenced by Fr. Timothy Corcoran SJ, professor of education at UCD; edited in early years by J.J. O'Kelly, president of the Gaelic League (1919-23); later edited by Keohane until his death in 1939.

6 Romanus, 'The Truth about Irish Fascism', *Catholic Bulletin*, November 1933, p.891.

7 *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 1864-1968): edited at the National Seminary, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth; specialised in Church history, theology and canon law.

probably the most prestigious Irish religious journal, was equally enthusiastic about Mussolini.[8]

Why was such a favourable opinion of Mussolini held in Ireland – an opinion which, as can be seen from *Quadragesimo Anno* and other encyclicals, was not entirely shared by the Vatican? The most important factor, perhaps, was that in Italy, following the failure of liberal democracy, the *Duce* was perceived as the only alternative to communism. Also, many Irish clerics did not distinguish between Mussolini's corporate state and the corporate society advocated by Pius XI. Pius, who did not view them as interchangeable, believed systems where the state held immense power represented a "grave evil".[9]

Despite papal opposition to state absolutism Irish clerical sympathy towards fascism partly reflected Vatican ambivalence. The wording of *Quadragesimo Anno*, for example, was sufficiently ambiguous so as to be interpreted as sympathetic or critical of fascism. In an influential article, Fr. Edward Coyne,[10] quoted a section of the encylical critical of the Italian state to illustrate the incompatibility of fascism with Catholicism:

"It is feared that the new syndical and corporative institution possesses an excessively bureaucratic and political character and that . . . it risks serving particular political aims rather than contributing to the initiation of a better social order".[11]

Coyne did not, however, include the preceding sentence:

"Little reflection is required to perceive the advantage of the institution [the Italian State] thus summarily described: peaceful collaboration of the classes, repression of socialist organizations and efforts, the moderating influence of a special ministry".[12]

Pius XI opposed state absolutism but his ambiguity resulted from a preference for the right-wing variety over the left-wing and more anti-clerical strain. During his reign Pius sympathised with Italian fascism and, for a shorter period, Nazism primarily because they shared many common enemies – communism being the most important.[13] It was not until the anti-clerical excesses of Nazi Germany became evident that Pius explicitly censured fascism in the encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* (1937) and his policy was replaced by the more conciliatory approach of his successor, Pius XII, in 1939.[14]

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8 "To drag the country out of the morass in which it stagnated, to give it stability in the pursuance of patriotic virtues, to preach the gospel of work for the uplifting of the nation, were the preoccupation of the new leader – Mussolini" (Fr. T. O'Herlihy CM, 'Fascist Italy', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, May 1928, p.507).

9 "It is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organisations can do". Cited it J.H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1971) p.67.

10 Fr. Edward Coyne SJ: Jesuit intellectual; advocate of corporatism; member of committee which advised de Valera on the 1937 constitution; appointed to government commission on vocational organisation, 1938-43.

11 Quoted from Edward J. Coyne SJ, *The Corporative Organisation of Society*, *Studies*, February 1934.

12 Cited in Charles Delzell (ed.), *The Papacy and Totalitarianism Between the Two World Wars* (New York, 1974), p.142.

13 John P. McKnight, 'The Papacy and Fascism', in Delzell (1974) pp.17-23; E.E.Y. Hales, 'Mussolini, Hitler, and Pius XI', *Ibid*, pp.45-49.

14 Peter C. Kent, 'The Vatican and the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 16 (1986), p.459.

The fascist sympathies of Pius XI were shared by many of the Irish clergy even to the extent of supporting the concept of dictatorial government. A columnist in the Jesuit *Irish Monthly*[15] scorned the idea:

"That democracy (meaning the English system of government, not even democracy in the true, direct sense) is of more consequence than tradition, spiritual freedom, or culture".[16]

Other clerics, such as Father T. O'Herlihy associated democracy with corruption.[17] Dr. Cornelius Lucey, a future bishop of Cork, described "absolute monarchy or dictatorship" – given the availability of a suitable dictator – as "the ideal system".[18] The degree of anti-democratic sentiment is surprisingly strong when one considers that the ideological struggle between fascism and communism, which engendered such views in Europe, remained largely theoretical in Ireland.

The crisis-ridden state of European liberal democratic systems in the 1930s offers some explanation for the prevalence of such rhetoric. Also, a pro-fascist consensus did not exist among Catholic intellectuals. In *Studies* Daniel Binchy, a former diplomat, argued against the idea that the Vatican had "blessed" fascism by its Concordat with Italy.[19] Monsignor Arthur Ryan, a lecturer at Queen's University and prominent critic of fascism, lamented the "tragic misunderstanding" of *Quadragesimo Anno* with the "Fascist notion of a Corporative State".[20] Clerical sympathy towards Italian fascism rarely extended to the German variety – primarily due to Hitler's poor relationship with the Catholic Church. As early as 1934 the Nazi Party was criticised in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* for its anti-clerical campaign against both Catholic and Protestant Churches.[21] It is evident, however, that Irish clerics devoted far less criticism to fascistic anti-clericalism than that of Republican or left-wing governments.[22]

The Catholic press did not view fascism as an homogeneous entity. While most Irish Catholics preferred democracy to dictatorship they believed that strong leadership, clearly lacking in many European liberal democracies, was necessary to counter communism. The Catholic Church was not prepared to countenance anti-clerical states like Nazi Germany. The nature of radical fascism contrasted with the Church's innate conservatism and the demands of the totalitarian state competed with ecclesiastical prerogatives in areas such as education

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15 *Irish Monthly* (1873-1954); established by the Jesuits; strongly anti-communist; edited in this period by Fr. T. Mulcahy, SJ.

16 Hispanista, 'III Spain Arises But We?', *Irish Monthly*, February 1938, p.110.

17 Fr. T. O'Herlihy CM, 'Fascist Italy', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, May 1928, pp.506-16.

18 Dr. Cornelius Lucey, 'Recent Study in Social Science', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, April 1933, p.376.

19 Daniel Binchy, 'The Papacy in a changing world', *Studies*, December 1937, p.647.

20 Dr. Arthur Ryan, 'Spain, the Church and Europe', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, December 1936, p.579.

21 W.F.P. Stockley, 'A Nazi on Nazi Germany', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, March 1934, pp.296-310. The German state insisted on control over Church property and persecuted clerics opposed to Nazi policy. Papal encyclicals condemning divorce and the supremacy of the state were suppressed by the German Government (Anon, 'Whither Germany', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, May 1937, pp.449-456).

22 Garrett O'Driscoll, 'Is Fascism Our Fate?', *Ireland To-Day*, December 1937, pp.43-48.

where the Church considered itself supreme. Authoritarian or corporatist right-wing ideologies were far more acceptable. Fr. Edward Coyne, a critic of Mussolini, had little difficulty supporting the Austrian leader Engelbert Dollfuss. Oliveira Salazar, the Portuguese dictator who established a corporate state, was most frequently held up by the Catholic press as the ideal politician.[23] Dr. Morrisroe, Bishop of Achonry, advised "those who would like to know what the Catholicity of the nation implied" to study Portugal.[24] Ten years later, Dr. Lucey, now Bishop of Cork had found his "suitable dictator".[25]

It is against this background that the attitude of the Irish Catholic Church to Franco must be considered. It is clear that Franco's dictatorial aspirations would not damage his credibility if he was perceived as a leader in the mould of Salazar rather than Hitler. Franco, demonstrating uncharacteristically skilful public relations and considerably aided by the Spanish hierarchy, successfully styled himself as a Catholic authoritarian leader. The Irish Catholic press regularly emphasised Franco's authoritarian credentials.

Another factor which militated in favour of ecclesiastical support for the Nationalists, even before the beginning of the civil war, was the tradition of clerical hostility towards the Spanish Republic. The anti-clerical constitution and legislative programme of the Second Republic established in 1931 ensured international Catholic opposition to the new regime. The anti-clerical attacks which occurred between 1931 and 1936, particularly during the Asturian miners revolt in 1934 were well-publicised by the clerical press and the *Irish Independent*.[26] As early as March 1936, an *Irish Catholic*[27] headline proclaimed "The Red Terror in Spain".[28] The outbreak of the war did not surprise educated Catholics who had been antipathetic towards the Spanish Republic for some time.

The Church was also aware of events in Spain through the many Irish religious (in particular nuns and clerical students of the Irish College at Salamanca) who visited or lived in Spain. The letters of Mother Teresa Joseph Healy, a member of the Blessed Virgin Mary order in Seville, describe the plight of religious in the new Republic. In April 1931, a week after the Republican electoral victory, she wrote:

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23 Salazar's Government was considered ideal for its corporate constitution, excellent relationship with the Catholic Church, and authoritarian but not totalitarian ideology. Portugal also avoided the problems (civil war, conspicuous oppression of minorities, and irredentism) of other states with authoritarian governments. The Austrian leaders, Engelbert Dollfuss and Kurt von Schuschnigg, and the head of the Spanish CEDA, Gil Robles, were also highly regarded by the Irish Catholic press.

24 *Irish Independent*, 28 February 1938.

25 "He is the perfect dictator if there ever was such . . .[Salazar shows] a way of translating our Catholic social principles into practice along authoritarian lines". Dr. Cornelius Lucey, 'Salazar', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, March 1944, p.213.

26 Donat O'Donnell, 'The Fourth Estate - 3: The Irish Independent', *The Bell*, February 1945, p.390; Vivian Mercier, 'The Fourth Estate - 4: The Irish Press', *The Bell*, March 1945, p.479.

27 *Irish Catholic*: established in 1888 by T.D. Sullivan, Home Rule MP and Land Leaguer as a weekly organ of Catholic opinion; edited in 1936 by John J.M. Ryan and priced 2d; 1936-1940 circulation approx. 20,000.

28 John J. Dunne, *Headlines and Haloes* (Dublin, 1988) p.99.

"On Monday 14th, the Republic was declared throughout Spain. Next day they celebrated it, and it seemed as if all hell was let loose in the City. I could not possibly describe the atrocities of the mob. We remained here with barred doors . . . Next day we heard it had been all planned to make a raid on . . . our convent".[29]

The following month her order was attacked by a mob of "Communists" who chanted "Death to the Jesuits", "Death to the nuns" and attempted to burn down the convent. Fortunately, as Healy observed, the convent was located next to an army barracks:

"If the Army keep faithful we are in the best possible place, for there are always guards on duty next door, and they all love the nuns and feel it their duty to defend them".[30]

The next day she dispassionately related how the head of police ("a fine man") waited until a large crowd of "communists" had gathered in an open square for a public meeting before ordering his forces to open fire. In the class-riven atmosphere of Republican Spain the nuns – "marked" as monarchists because aristocratic children were educated at the convent – increasingly identified their interests with the Spanish right.[31] Living under such circumstances the loyalties of Irish religious to the civil guard, army and forces of conservatism were as much instinctive as political.

Fr. Alex McCabe, the rector of the Irish College at Salamanca, regularly sent letters to Archbishop Byrne outlining the political situation. Describing the new Popular Front's legislation as "more socialist than Republican" in April 1936 he predicted:

"It would seem that the country is going to have a pretty rough passage in some time, and as they have been at this sort of thing for a century at least, they're likely to keep it up for a little longer".[32]

McCabe, unlike many of the Irish religious in Spain, did not automatically absorb the values of the Spanish Church. He was deeply cynical about Spanish conservatism, particularly the reactionary Catholic Church, and felt that greed and inequitable land distribution were responsible for the civil war. However, these candid observations which he recorded in his diary seldom appeared in his correspondence to clerics in Ireland.[33]

When the Spanish Civil War began it was actually welcomed by many religious in Spain. An Irish nun from a convent in Zalla recorded her reaction when she heard the news of disturbances on July 18:

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29 Letter from Mother Teresa Joseph Healy BVM, 20 April 1931, Archives of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Madrid.

30 *Ibid*, 12 May 1931. Healy believed the violence was orchestrated by communists – "The Sevillanas lose all control on these occasions; the great number don't know what they are saying or hardly what a Republic means. They are paid and led by the Communists, and Seville is a real hot-bed for the latter".

31 Healy noted – "Little by little the new Ministry are making laws when it will be impossible for us religious to remain . . . all the people at the head of affairs, even in Seville, are bad men, masons for the most part, uneducated and rough . . . Some think the only thing to save Spain at present is a Dictatorship, but no one really knows what the future will bring. It is a second Russia".

32 McCabe to Fr. Dick Glennon, Archbishop Byrne's secretary, 6 April 1936, Foreign Colleges, Edward Byrne papers, Dublin Archdiocesan Archives.

33 For example, when McCabe heard an account of local *Falangists* extorting money from business-men he noted – "If this sort of thing happened in Ireland, the Bishops would issue a Collective Pastoral that would shake every county, town and village to its foundations. In Spain, at present, the only people that dare to issue Pastorals seem to be the generals" (Fr. McCabe diary, 25 November 1936, McCabe papers, NLI).

"For a long time the newspapers of the right party have been hinting at "un coup d'état" and we, tired of the way the Government was acting longed for the moment when all these joined to the right cause would give the word to rise up and put an end to the state of affairs".[34]

On 20 July when news of the first Nationalist successes reached her convent (in Republican territory) she noted:

"The red and gold of the Spanish banner may be seen over the principal buildings of Burgos. Who would wonder at tearful eyes and palpitating hearts!"[35]

On 27 July, the Irish nuns in Zalla – with the exception of the Mother Superior, Regla O'Mahoney, who refused to leave her convent – were evacuated by the English consul.[36] Similar incidents occurred throughout Spain. Fifteen Irish nuns were evacuated from Chateau Habas in Londes.[37] On July 22, Mother Teresa Healy's convent in Seville, which had been in the midst of fighting due to its proximity to the army barracks, came under the protection of the Nationalist rebels.[38]

It is clear, both from the religious press and first-hand accounts of Irish religious in Spain, that the Irish Catholic Church was very conscious of the political situation in Spain. It demonstrated a marked hostility towards the Spanish Republic from its inception. Conversely, the rise of authoritarianism, if not necessarily fascism, throughout Europe was viewed sympathetically. Prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War a tradition of clerical support for the Spanish Right was firmly established in Ireland. These preconceptions help to explain the partisan attitude quickly adopted by Irish clergy during the conflict.

II – The Catholic Church and the Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Catholic Church

As Catholics became an integral element of support for the Nationalists – both domestically, with the military support of the Carlists and the moral backing of the Spanish hierarchy, and externally in terms of potential diplomatic support – Franco increasingly emphasised his Catholic image. The military coup which initiated the Spanish Civil War was depicted as a crusade to defend Catholicism from left-wing persecution. The Spanish Church, for its part, needed little incentive to support General Franco. Cardinal Gomá, the Primate of Spain, and the rest of the Spanish hierarchy with the exception of Dr. Vidal y Barraquer, the Archbishop of Tarragona, and Dr. Mateo Múgica, the Bishop of Vitoria, declared their unqualified

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34 Quoted from *A short account of our house in Zalla, whilst under the Red Government*, (Unpublished MS, n.d.) Archives of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Madrid. It is not known which nun wrote the account.
35 *Ibid.*
36 *Ibid.*
37 D/FA 243/66.
38 *Ibid.*

support for Franco[39] By September 1936, with the publication of the *Two Cities* pastoral by Plá y Deniel, Bishop of Salamanca, which contrasted Nationalist Spain (St. Augustine's celestial city) with the Republican zone (the sinful earthly city), Franco was explicitly acknowledged as the leader of a "crusade".

Deniel's pastoral significantly influenced Franco:

"He not only approved it but adjusted his own rhetoric subsequently to derive from it the maximum political advantage. By latching on to the idea of a religious crusade, Franco could project himself not just as the defender of his Spain but also as the defender of the universal faith. Leaving aside the gratifying boost to his own ego, such a propaganda ploy could bring only massive benefit in terms of international support for the rebel cause."[40]

Franco intensified his public religiosity following his investiture as Chief of State on 1 October. He became a daily communicant, appointed a personal chaplain, and publicised his devotion to St. Teresa of Avila.[41] Even the anti-clerical *Falangists* incorporated religious aspects into their propaganda and policies.[42]

In return the Spanish Church provided vital support to Franco. In December 1936, Cardinal Gomá persuaded the Vatican to appoint him *Chargé d'Affaires* to Nationalist Spain – an important preliminary to *de jure* recognition. After the destruction of Guernica, which prompted many Catholics to reconsider the sanctity of the Nationalist crusade, the Spanish hierarchy responded to Franco's request "to dispel false information abroad" with the collective pastoral *To the Bishops of the Whole World* which concluded that the only hope for peace and justice in Spain lay in "the triumph of the National Movement". The Spanish hierarchy helpfully overlooked Franco's anti-clerical tendencies demonstrated by his totalitarian rhetoric and suppression of the anti-Nazi encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*.

The Vatican

The Vatican's attitude towards the Nationalist cause was more cautious. Although Pius XI indicated his sympathies in a well-publicised speech to exiled Spaniards at Castelgandolfo on 14 September, which contrasted the heroism of the Nationalists with the brutality of Republicans, the Vatican refused to offer Franco unqualified support. Since the foundation of the Spanish Republic in 1931 the Vatican and the Spanish Church had differed widely in their approach to the new regime. The Holy See exhibited a willingness to work with the Republican government absent among many Spanish clerics who actively fomented discontent against the new regime.[43] The Vatican's ambivalence towards the Nationalists

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39 Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, 1990) pp.286-7.
40 Paul Preston, *Franco* (London, 1993) p.185.
41 *Ibid.* p.188, p.220.
42 "Nationalist Spain seemed indeed to become one immense church, full of fantastic images and passions, battered flags, relics and middle-class communicants" (Hugh Thomas (1990) p.287).
43 Peter C. Kent (1986) p.441.

resulted from its broader concerns about the ideological polarisation of the 1930s. Despite his distaste for left-wing governments, Pius XI – unlike elements within the Spanish Church – was distressed by the outbreak of war. The Holy See perceived the rising, like communist disorders, as part of a wave of radicalism which was challenging the social order of Europe.[44] Moreover, by 1936, it was apparent that German fascism was equally as anti-clerical as Russia or Mexico.

The Vatican's refusal to recognise Franco until Monsignor Ildebrando Antoniutti's appointment as papal *Chargé d'Affaires* in October 1937 caused much bitterness within Nationalist Spain.[45] The Vatican's concern for the Basques, noticeably absent among most of the Spanish hierarchy, was an additional source of irritation. The Holy See's reluctance to fully support the Nationalists even led to friction between Cardinal Gomá and the Vatican. It was not until the fall of the Basque region in October 1937 – which effectively marked the end of popular Catholic allegiance to the Republic – that the Vatican ceased its policy of maintaining influence in both Republican and Nationalist zones. Even so, Pius did not appoint a papal nuncio, Monsignor Cicognani, until May 1938. The delay was due to Vatican suspicions about Franco's ties with Germany, concern about Catholics in Republican territory and, significantly, Franco's poor relations with the Holy See.[46] The semi-official *Osservatore Romano* did not offer the unqualified support of the Nationalist cause typical of the Spanish Church until Franco was on the verge of victory in January 1939.[47]

The Irish Catholic Church

The position adopted by the Catholic Church in Ireland was closer to the outright partisanship of the Spanish Church than the diplomacy of the Vatican. This is demonstrated by a brief survey of the clerical press including the periodicals of the Passionist, Franciscan, Capuchin, Oblate and Dominican orders and the devotional publications of the Apostleship of Prayer, Little Flower Guild and Crusade of the Miraculous Medal.[48]

The *Cross*,[49] published by the Passionist Fathers, was one of the more overtly political religious organs in Ireland during this period. The July 1936 edition, for example, contained

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44 *Ibid*, pp.444-5.
45 *Ibid*, p450; Paul Preston (1993) p.273.
46 Peter C. Kent (1986), pp.456-7.
47 *Ibid*, p.458.
48 A broad section of the Catholic press was surveyed but a systematic analysis of clerical press between 1936-9 was restricted to eight periodicals (*Assisi*, *Cross*, *Fr. Mathew Record*, *Lourdes Messenger*, *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, *Virgo Potens*, *Imeldist*, and *Little Flower Monthly*). Other publications, such as the *Irish Monthly* and *Irish Rosary*, which were surveyed less extensively, did not reveal a significantly different outlook from the comprehensively analysed periodicals.
49 The *Cross*: a monthly periodical established in 1910 by the Passionist Fathers; priced 2d in 1936; anti-communist and anti-semitic – Chief Rabbi Herzog complained to Archbishop Byrne about its anti-semitic content in 1937.

a forthright editorial which condemned Britain's "shrill and stupid denunciation" of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia and dismissed the League of Nations as "an arena for speeches, as a clearing-house for international ideas, and as a harmless hobby for otherwise idle busy-bodies".[50]

The August editorial, written during the first days of the military coup, observed that "it is difficult to appraise the present situation" but stated:

"a strong movement to the Right is now in progress, a natural and understandable reaction from the excesses which have accompanied the success of the Left Parties at the recent elections".[51]

By September, the *Cross* had formulated an uncompromisingly pro-Nationalist policy from which it did not waver throughout the war. An emotive editorial attributed the conflict to widespread terrorism, vote-rigging, the seizure of power by an non-elected government, and the wave of anti-clerical atrocities:

"Priests were burnt alive and barbarously mutilated by diabolically inspired fiends in human shape. Nuns were violated, stripped naked and turned into the street".

The *Cross* concluded with a contrast between the two warring zones with resembled Plá y Deniel's *Two Cities*:

"That where the patriot-armies are victorious, there the churches are freely opened, the clergy are respected and welcomed by the people, Holy Mass is celebrated and is attended by large congregations, and nuns are free to minister to the needs of the sick and wounded, the poor and the afflicted . . . behind the Red lines, where a line of blazing churches mark the "victories of the proletariat", whilst the dead bodies of men, women and children are heaped in horrid promiscuity".[52]

The regular reports of the execution of Spanish Passionists personalised and authenticated the descriptions of widespread anti-clerical atrocities.[53]

The *Cross* covered the Spanish Civil War extensively until its conclusion in 1939 (histogram 5.4). On only one occasion, in October 1936, did the periodical adopt a more sophisticated analysis which suggested the conflict was based on more than a simple division between communists and Christians. It agreed with the view of Alvaro de Aguilar, the Spanish representative in Ireland, that the refusal of large land-owners to redistribute land was a fundamental cause of the conflict. The editorial reflected that "probably not more than twenty-five per cent" of the government forces were communist but were led to war through frustration with the present social order.

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50 The editorial also referred to the recent election of France's socialist government. Recalling "the strange alliance between Judaism and Communism" the *Cross* noted that "M. Blum is also a Jew!" (*Cross*, July 1936, p.94).

51 *Ibid*, August 1936, p.141.

52 *Ibid*, September 1936, p.187.

53 The murder of thirty Passionists at San Christo de La Luz in Ciudad Real was reported in October (*Cross*, October 1936, p.231). See also September 1937, p.226; December 1937, p.324.

Apart from this solitary aberration, the *Cross* consistently presented strongly partisan pro-Franco and anti-Republican propaganda throughout the war. An editorial in March 1938 declared:

"We ourselves have received authentic testimony that women of the revolution sank their teeth in the throat of more than one priest and literally drank their blood".[54]

Elsewhere reports of the bravery of the Nationalist forces, such as the siege of the *Alcázar* at Toledo or the rescue of religious by "flying columns" were contrasted with accounts of Republican cowardice. Propaganda was also incorporated into the short stories which were a regular feature of the periodical. One story concerned a Soviet agent who joined the Nationalists after learning of the atrocities committed by "reds" against a loved one in a Spanish convent.[55] Another story fictionalised the machine-gunning of townspeople by Republicans posing as a unit of Nationalist soldiers.[56]

Assisi,[57] published by the Franciscan Fathers, followed a similar approach to the *Cross* although it generally adopted more moderate rhetoric and less clearly defined positions on political issues. An August editorial on the failure of the League of Nations, for example, pointed out that the League "has proved to be a failure" and evenly placed the blame on left-wing governments in Russian, Spain and Mexico and other nations "obsessed with the theory of state-absolutism".[58] Nonetheless, its September editorial was as uncompromisingly partisan and simplistic as the *Cross:*

"There is no question of the revolt of a section of the army against lawfully established authority. The war in Spain represents the army and people of a fundamentally Catholic country, wide awake at length to the evil in their midst, and fighting to defend Christianity".[59]

Assisi maintained a substantial level of coverage of Spain through the war although it did not match the *Cross* (histogram 5.4). As with that periodical, atrocities against its own order were frequently reported. *Assisi* reported, for example, that José Calvo Sotelo, the Monarchist politician assassinated by Republican assault guards, was "a fervent tertiary of St. Francis . . . buried in the Franciscan habit, crucifix in hand".[60] Other Franciscans recounted the destruction of friaries and the execution of members of the order by "reds".[61]

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54 *Cross*, March 1938, p.462. Many of the periodicals were preoccupied with the role of women in the Republic. One editorial declared – "And, worst feature of all perhaps, reminiscent of the worst excesses of the French revolution, bands of unsexed women, brandishing their rifles, march to battle like modern Amazons . . . harpies and harridans that batten on blood-shed and delight in cruelty. We are not without the spawn of such a brand here in Ireland!" (*Cross*, October 1936, p.187). The *Little Flower Monthly* (June 1937 p.183) noted with satisfaction that the only role women were allowed by the Nationalists was to nurse the wounded.

55 W.J. Randall, 'Red Relic', *Cross*, December 1936, p.333.

56 Alfred Grosch, 'It happened in Castellon', *Cross*, November 1938, p.305.

57 *Assisi*: a monthly periodical established in 1928 by the Franciscan Fathers; priced 2d in 1936.

58 *Assisi*, August 1936, p.307.

59 *Ibid*, September 1936, p.401.

60 *Ibid*, July 1937, p.328.

61 The killers were invariably described as "reds" although most anti-clerical violence has now been attributed to anarchist and other non-communist groups. See also *Assisi*, May 1938, p.235, August 1938, p.365, May 1939, p.241.

The content was entirely pro-Franco. The tone of an article by the Christian Front activist, Aileen O'Brien, 'General Franco – As I Know Him', is characteristic:

"When the little shy man from Galicia, unarmed and unguarded, walks smilingly through the streets, aristocrats, workers, peasants and shopkeepers, raise their voices with the enthusiastic cry: Long Live Franco!"[62]

Assisi did not question why so many Spaniards supported the Republican government. The civil war was consistently presented as a conflict between Spaniards (equated with Catholics or Nationalists) and Russian communists – "The mask is off in Spain, and emphatically the issue is Christ versus Lenin".[63] One editorial critical of newspaper coverage of Franco indignantly inquired – "does Spain belong to Spaniards or to Russian Reds?"[64]

Assisi presented the Spanish Civil War as a struggle between good and evil. The actions of the Nationalists, supported by the Catholic Church, were necessarily above reproach. It was an unsophisticated and untenable analysis which led to distortions of widely established facts. Anything which imputed less than noble motives to Franco was part of an elaborate anti-clerical conspiracy. An editorial written at the end of the war complained:

"Why is it that no opportunity was missed to blacken the motives and methods of Franco's campaign? In spite of all that the *Osservatore Romano* (the semi-official Vatican) has said, and all that individual members of the Hierarchy have said, and all the incontrovertible reports in Catholic periodicals and press have said, a stream of lying and half-lying propaganda flows continually from the presses belonging to those who cannot do enough for the Jews".[65]

The *Lourdes Messenger*,[66] published by the Oblate Fathers, followed a similar line, and devoted substantial coverage to Spain throughout the war (histogram 5.4). Many of its reports referred to the plight of the seventy-three members of the Oblate order in Spain. In November 1936 it reported that one Oblate, Fr. Perez, had been killed and wondered of the others – "Are they dead or prisoners or in the battle-line?"[67] It announced later that seven Oblate scholastics were missing, believed dead, and five scholastics and five brothers were imprisoned in Republican territory.[68]

Like the *Cross* and *Assisi*, the *Lourdes Messenger* was strongly pro-Franco. As with *Assisi* it was not questioned why Spaniards sided with the Republic. An editorial entitled 'Franco's

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62 *Assisi*, September 1937, p.419.
63 *Ibid*, December 1936, p.567.
64 *Ibid*, February 1939, p.108.
65 *Ibid*, April 1939, p.161.
66 *Lourdes Messenger*: a monthly periodical established by the Oblate Fathers in 1931; priced 1d in 1936.
67 *Lourdes Messenger*, November 1936, p.365.
68 *Ibid*, May 1937, p.146.

Spain' referred to the "efficiency and fairness of Franco's regime".[69] Another article considered the piety of the Nationalists:

"Nationalist troops, as they leave for the front, invoke the help of the "Virgin de las Batallas". The miraculous statue of Our Lady del Pilar . . . has been clothed with the "manto" of a General of the Spanish forces . . . General Franco has a great devotion to Our Lady . . . Religion and patriotism go hand in hand with the fighting men of Christian and Catholic Spain".[70]

The content of the *Father Mathew Record and Franciscan Mission Advocate*,[71] published by the Capuchin order resembled the previous publications in some respects although its coverage of the war declined dramatically in 1937. Again many of the articles concerned persecuted members of the Capuchin order in Spain. In September it reported that twenty-five convents were destroyed, "not a few friars" imprisoned and "some even have shed their blood for Christ". An account of the execution of Fr. Angel de Canete, the Superior of Antequera Convent by a "committee of Reds" was graphically detailed.[72]

The *Father Mathew Record* demonstrated a more measured approach to political issues than most of the clerical press. An article on the increasing polarisation in Europe complained that "some kind of fatalist madness" appeared to force people to narrow their political ideas into a choice between fascism and communism.[73] In comparison with the previous publications considered, the *Father Mathew Record* adopted a more sophisticated analysis of the civil war. On several occasions it grappled with the issue of popular support for the Republic. An article in October 1936 noted – almost as an aside:

"It is dreadful now to remember journeys in Spain in which one took the beggars for granted and bothered little if rackrenting was a pastime on lines worse than Ireland".[74]

The Christmas issue referred to "exhibitions of Satanic cruelty" by Republicans but added:

"What kind of a state of life was it that made men and women fight like people possessed, turned them against the religion which they had for so long held, seduced them from the principles of right and wrong which even good pagans believe? . . The peasants there were oppressed and suffered from hunger, while the rich aristocrats neglected their duty".[75]

Irish political parties (and implicitly Fine Gael which adopted the most militant position) were criticised for the immoderate tone of the debate on the Non-Intervention Bill:

"On such a burning question . . . one would have particularly expected, patience, reasoning, lack of passion, especially anger from the representatives of the people".[76]

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69 *Ibid*, September 1938, p.262.
70 *Ibid*, December 1938, p.381.
71 *Father Mathew Record and Franciscan Mission Advocate*: a monthly periodical established by the Franciscan Capuchin Fathers in 1908; priced 2d in 1936.
72 *Father Mathew Record*, October 1936, p.543.
73 *Ibid*, March 1937, p.133.
74 *Ibid*, October 1936, p.549.
75 *Ibid*, November/December 1936.
76 *Ibid*, April 1937, p.211.

Although there was an absence of the sycophantic pro-Franco propaganda characteristic of the other clerical periodicals, the *Father Mathew Record* was not an apologist for the Republican government. Like *Blackfriars*, the English Dominican journal, the *Father Mathew Record* balanced issues of social justice in Spain against the freedom of the Church. Although the Catholic Church was persecuted by Republicans it did not automatically follow that the Nationalists represented all that was good in Spain. However, unlike *Blackfriars*, the *Father Mathew Record* did not advocate a neutralist point of view.[77] It was firmly pro-Nationalist as is indicated by the following editorial:

"we have many unimpeachable witnesses that the revolt is in the hands of men to whom the slow poisoning of the Spanish people by Communist and Anarchist agitators has become intolerable, and who are attempting to cleanse their country of the scourge of Bolshevism".[78]

Nonetheless, the *Father Mathew Record* presented an alternative, more cerebral, analysis of the civil war.

The Jesuit *Irish Monthly*, a low-brow counterpart to the more intellectual *Studies* (which seldom mentioned the war), vociferously supported the Nationalist cause. Its crude analysis of the civil war – illustrated by the titles of articles such as 'Should Irish Labour Favour Franco' and 'The People Back Franco' – was aimed at the labour movement which it clearly considered vulnerable to Republican propaganda. Other articles praised Franco's piety which, as noted earlier, was carefully emphasised by Nationalist propagandists throughout the war:

"Carmen, General Franco's daughter, was admitted into the Sodality of Our Lady. His family had looked forward eagerly to this event. The whole city [Salamanca] shared their joy . . . It is interesting to note that the members of Franco's family meet together to recite the Rosary daily".[79]

Spanish support for the Republic was rarely considered. The civil war was portrayed as either an external (Russian) or inexplicable assault on Spanish Christianity:

"GENERAL FRANCO and his glorious Crusaders march on to victory. Barcelona, the festering centre of Spain's woes – the source from which poison has flowed through the nation's blood for half a century – has fallen.[80]

The *Irish Monthly*, belying the intellectual reputation of the Jesuits, conveyed a particularly simplistic analysis of the Spanish Civil War. This may have been a response to the particularly harsh treatment meted out to the Jesuits by the Republican government in Spain or simply a reflection of the reactionary conservatism prevalent among the Society of Jesus during this period.[81]

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77 James Flint OSB, '"Must God go Fascist?": English Catholic Opinion and the Spanish Civil War', *Church History*, Vol. 56, No. 3, September, 1987, p.370.
78 *Father Mathew Record*, September 1936, p.482.
79 'Truth about Spain', *Irish Monthly*, February 1937, p.150.
80 *Ibid*, March 1939, p.49.
81 J.C.H. Aveling, *The Jesuits* (London, 1981) p.267, 352.

The publications of Catholic sodalities, although also under clerical control, traditionally contained less political content than the periodical of the religious orders. These devotional publications were intended for a wider, and usually younger, readership.[82] For example, the *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*,[83] an organ of the Apostleship of Prayer, was marketed as "the ideal home magazine providing reading matter to suit all ages and tastes".[84] Hence, the *Irish Messenger* included regular features on fashion – "Why should the forming of fashions be in the hands of Freemasons and Jews only?" – cooking and entertainment. The *Irish Messenger* did not refer to the war until December when it announced the publication of a pamphlet, *For God and Spain*, by Aodh de Blacam.[85] This popular pamphlet widely publicised a strongly pro-Nationalist position.[86] The conflict was only substantially referred to on one other occasion when the *Messenger* urged:

"And soon, please God, the world will see a new Spain, or rather the old Catholic Spain, emerge victoriously, purged no doubt, but freed from the satanic pest of atheistic Communism".[87]

Virgo Potens,[88] the organ of the Crusade of the Miraculous Medal, contained few contemporary editorials on political affairs. However, news of Spain was incorporated into the magazine by means of its regular short stories. These lurid adventure stories must have had a considerable impact particularly on its younger readership. *Death at Midnight*, for example, concerned a group of "men, women and even children" besieged with a number of Nationalist soldiers "while the Red leaders prepared for the ghastly ceremony of tearing out the eyes of their victims and skinning them alive". In a variation on the famous siege of the *Alcázar*, a Republican leader, General Aranda, told Don Juan, the rebel commander, that his wife, Dona Rosa, would be released if the rebels surrendered. Like Colonel Moscardó at the *Alcázar*, Don Juan refused the offer. Dona Rosa's final telephone conversation to her husband closely resembled that between Moscardó and his son:

"I am glad you have not wavered," she told him courageously. "I die for Spain! Hail Christ the King!"[89]

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82 The Jesuit-owned Irish Messenger was the most successful devotional publishing house. Between 1937-38, 417,939 pamphlets were sold and an extraordinary 2,746,000 copies of the monthly *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart* (Source: Fergus O'Donoghue, 'Two Corkmen, The Editors of the Messenger', *The Sacred Heart Messenger*, March 1988).

83 *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart:* a monthly periodical established by the Jesuits in 1888; edited in 1936 by Fr. Charles Scantlebury who was also national director of the Apostleship of Prayer; priced 2d in 1936.

84 *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, December 1936, p.565.

85 Aodh de Blacam (1891-1951): b. London; member Gaelic League; convert to Catholicism, 1914; Sinn Féin activist, 1915; journalist and author; member Fianna Fáil, 1926-47; *Irish Press* columnist ('Roddy the Rover'), 1931-48; resigned from Fianna Fáil national executive over rural depopulation policy, 1947; member Clann na Poblachta, 1947-51.

86 The Irish Messenger Office printed five thousand copies of *For God and Spain*. Fr. Scantlebury suggested ten thousand but was overruled by his treasurer (See Fergus O'Donoghue, 'Two Corkmen, The Editors of the Messenger', *The Sacred Heart Messenger*, March 1988).

87 *Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, February 1938, p.95.

88 *Virgo Potens*; a monthly periodical established in 1922 by the Daughters of Charity; priced 2d in 1936.

89 Dona Rosa was saved, however, as General Aranda experienced a revelation (a recurrent theme in these stories) and switched sides – "he was so struck by the Patriot's fine example, that he ended by becoming himself a Catholic and a patriot" (B.J. Oakley, 'Death at Midnight', *Virgo Potens*, November 1938, pp.10-14).

The Imeldist,[90] *the Children's Eucharistic Monthly*, published by the Dominican order, was specifically aimed at young children. Although the format consisted of a number of cautionary short stories and a few regular features, Spain was mentioned on several occasions. The details of the atrocities were toned down, the political analysis considerably simplified but the tone was still militant:

"Priests are being shot to death: Nuns are being tortured and ill-treated . . . And why all this? Because wicked pagans do not want God. As good Catholics and loyal Imeldists, Almighty God will expect us to do our part in fighting for this Church by our prayers. Take your place in the battle for victory".[91]

One regular feature, the *Imeldist* Burse, which raised money for seminarians, observed that with so many priests "being put to death" there was "all the more need to replace them with new priests".[92] Aunt Hyacinth, a regular columnist, kept her correspondents informed about Spain. Reflecting on the international situation in December 1936, Aunt Hyacinth urged:

"My little readers, do pray that God may direct those in authority to move along the right lines in their efforts to secure a lasting peace, not merely a patch-up affairs which is so easily rent again . . . the great Powers are at least beginning to recognise the corrupt influences of paganism".[93]

Like the other devotional periodicals the *Little Flower Monthly*,[94] the organ of the Little Flower Guild, rarely discussed political events. Nonetheless it focused considerable attention on Spain, particularly during the first two years of the war (histogram 5.4). It did not present a political analysis but rather stressed the importance of prayer:

"We read – apparently unmoved – the stories that pour in from Spain. Are we – honestly – doing anything for our fellow Catholics there? Do we even offer the family Rosary at night for them?"[95]

This emphasis on prayer, often related to the sodality's particular devotion, rather than political criticism was characteristic of the devotional publications. As in the *Imeldist*, even the youngest readers were informed about Spain. Aunt Monica, columnist of *Our Flowerlets' Circle*, referred to the persecution of Catholics in several issues.[96] Again, the importance of devotion was emphasised:

"Say the Rosary, in the name of God! Say it for the Spanish Catholics . . . Pray, make acts of self-denial, go to Mass and Communion for poor Spanish Catholics!"[97]

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90 The *Imeldist*: a monthly periodical established in 1912 by the Dominican order; priced 1d in 1936.
91 *Imeldist*, October 1936, p.310.
92 *Ibid*, p.323.
93 *Ibid*, December 1936, p.400.
94 The *Little Flower Monthly*: established in 1916 by the Irish Sisters of Charity; priced 2d in 1936.
95 *Little Flower Monthly*, October 1936, p.303.
96 *Ibid*, October 1936, p.332; November 1936, p343; December 1936, p.397.
97 *Ibid*, October 1936, p.332.

The war was also incorporated, rather unconvincingly, into the regular stories which constituted much of the periodical. In one episode of a serialised story, 'the Lake of Kilroan', the central characters discussed the vote-rigging and other methods of electoral fraud which resulted in the election of the Republican government. The following month they discussed the virtues of General Franco.[98] 'Connie the Communist' fictionalised the capture of an Irish woman by a group of communists – "Nuns, I fancy: they'll do as targets!". The heroine was saved by the eponymous Connie, "a tall and strongly-built girl", who was revealed to be a priest in disguise.[99]

This analysis of the Catholic press permits some general observations. The extent of unqualified support for the Nationalists is overwhelming, even among the publications specifically intended for children. The influence of this propaganda deriving from such authoritative sources, particularly considering the huge circulation of periodicals like the *Irish Messenger*, must have been profound. The Catholic press, with one notable exception (the *Father Mathew Record*), offered uncritical support to General Franco. In Ireland the fundamental issue of the liberty of the Catholic Church outweighed considerations such as social justice and the means by which the Church was entitled to adopt to protect itself. This contrasts with the attitude of a minority of the clerical press in Britain, France and America where, in particular, the Dominican order consistently suggested that issues such as social justice must be balanced against the self-interest of the Church.[100] Significantly, the Irish Dominican publication, the *Irish Rosary*,[101] adopted an extreme pro-Franco perspective. Another point which arises from the survey is the strength of the international ties between the religious orders. The anti-clerical atrocities were not viewed as an abstract issue but one which affected the members of Irish priests' orders in Spain. This partly explains the immense impact of the war in Ireland. The revelations of atrocities were a central theme of the clerical press and militated against a reasoned discussion of the events in Spain.

The Irish Hierarchy

During July and August, while the nature of the Nationalist coalition was unknown, the Irish hierarchy generally confined themselves to condemnations of anti-clerical atrocities. On August 23, Dr. Byrne, Archbishop of Dublin, protested against the "Communist savagery" and appealed for prayers. Dr. Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam, was more partisan.

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98 *Ibid*, April 1939, p.113; May 1939.
99 *Ibid*, December 1937, p.375.
100 The best known advocates of this view were the English Dominican *Blackfriars* and the French Dominican journals *La Vie Intellectuelle* and *Sept* (both influenced by Jacques Maritain), and the American *Commonweal*. See Donald MacKinnon, 'The Spanish Civil War 1936-9: Catholicism's minority voice', *New Blackfriars*, November 1986 and James Flint (1987).
101 *Irish Rosary* (1897-1962): edited in this period by M.H. MacInerney, OP, a leading member of the Vigilance Association.

Describing the conflict as "the red war foretold by the founders of Russian Communism" he declared:

"In those circumstances there can be no doubt about the duty of Catholics . . . [to pray for] the speedy overthrow of the enemies of God".[102]

The atrocities were discussed by three bishops the following week. Dr. Wall, (auxiliary) Bishop of Thasos, attributed them to "Bolshevist proclivities" and the Republic's atheistic education system. Dr. McKenna, Bishop of Clogher, recalled the former persecution of Catholics in Ireland. Dr. Mageean, Bishop of Down and Connor, declared that "the war in Spain is between Christianity and Communism".[103] This uncompromising position, which necessitated unqualified support for the Nationalists, soon became the central theme of the hierarchy's pronouncements on the war. The condemnations, expressed with increasingly dramatic rhetoric, continued throughout September. Dr. McNamee, Bishop of Dromore, felt that:

"The orgies of the Roman amphitheatre in the pagan days of Nero, the bloodiest massacre of the French revolution, had nothing more atrocious to show".[104]

By late September, as the links between the Spanish Church and Franco strengthened, the Irish hierarchy's support of the Nationalists began to reflect that of the Spanish Church. Their pronouncements developed from general denunciations of anti-clerical persecution to a more specifically pro-Nationalist position. Cardinal MacRory's speech at Drogheda marked the beginning of an intensive propaganda campaign which identified the Nationalists with Christianity:

"There is no room any longer for any doubt as to the issue at stake in the Spanish conflict. It is not a question of the Army against the people, nor of the aristocracy plus the Army and the Church against Labour. Not at all. It is a question of whether Spain will remain as she has been so long, a Christian and Catholic land, or a Bolshevist and anti-God one".[105]

Dr. Mulhern, the Bishop of Dromore expressed the same idea;

"As events have shown, the mask is off, and the contest in Spain is not a struggle between political parties as to who shall rule, but between God and his enemies".[106]

Dr. Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam compared Spain to the battle of Lepanto.[107] From this period the hierarchy presented the war as a struggle between good and evil. Its complexities were largely ignored. The hierarchy's joint declaration following their annual meeting in

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102 August 23, 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events For The Year 1936', *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1937*.
103 *Ibid*, August 30.
104 *Ibid*, September 30.
105 *Irish Independent*, 21 September 1936.
106 *Ibid*, 21 September 1936.
107 *Ibid*, 6 October 1936.

October 1936 equated the Nationalists with Spain and Republicans with international communism:

"Spain at this moment is fighting the battle of Christendom against the subversive powers of Communism".[108]

The hierarchy's support for the Nationalists manifested itself through frequent public speeches, annual Lenten pastorals, collective statements following the hierarchy's annual meetings in October 1936 and October 1937, a reply to the collective letter of the Spanish hierarchy and the holding of a *Te Deum* in 1939.[109] An analysis of the Lenten pastorals between 1937 and 1939 provides some indication of the importance the hierarchy attached to the Spanish Civil War.

Following the closely related issue of communism, Spain was the topic most frequently referred to in the 1937 pastorals (histogram 5.1).[110] Anti-clericalism, a theme which encompassed the persecution of the Church, was the fifth most prominent subject. In 1938 the war was again one of the more prominent issues (joint fifth) while anti-clericalism and communism were, respectively, the two most dominant issues (histogram 5.2).[111] In 1939 the Spanish Civil War, drawing to an end, was overshadowed by the looming European war (represented by the theme of international unrest), but remains joint tenth (histogram 5.3)[112]. Communism and anti-clericalism are respectively the third and fifth most frequently mentioned subjects in 1939. If references to foreign states are considered – all of which were negative – Spain's prominence is striking. In 1937 Spain was mentioned in thirteen pastorals greatly outnumbering Russia, the usual perennial favourite. In 1938 Russia figured in seven, Spain six and Mexico in three. In 1939 Spain was discussed in four pastorals while Germany, in the wake of *Mit Brennender Sorge* and increasing Nazi anti-clericalism, featured in three pastorals. The Lenten pastorals – the most important statement of the hierarchy's views in the ecclesiastical year – clearly demonstrate that the Spanish Civil War was considered of central importance by the Catholic Church.

The discussion of Spain in the pastorals followed a general pattern. The same themes – the communist and non-democratic nature of the Republic, the involvement of Russia, the association of Catholicism with the Nationalists, and the unambiguous nature of the war – were repeatedly emphasised. With few exceptions the bishops identified themselves with the

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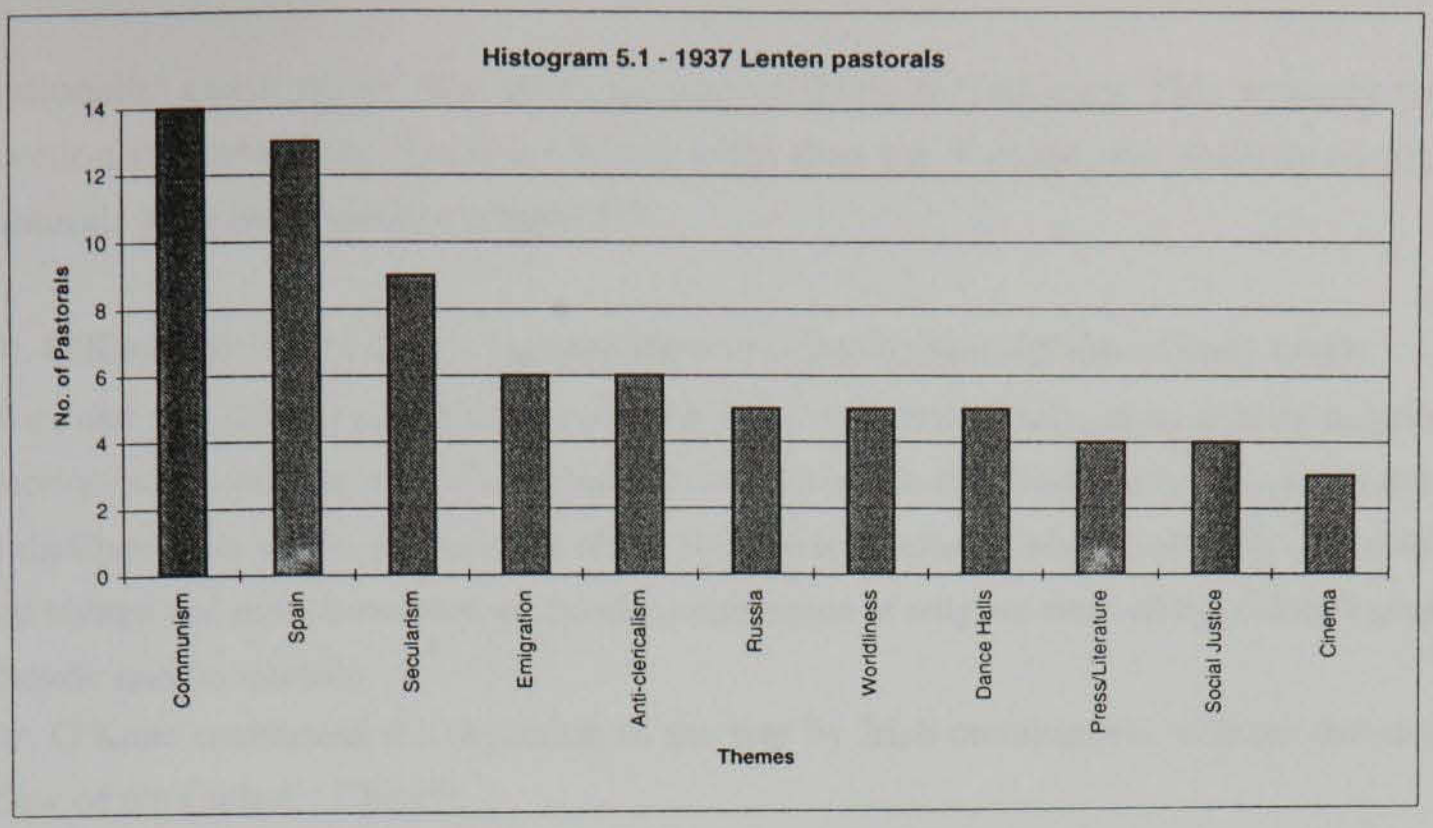
108 October 13, 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events For The Year 1936', *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1937.*

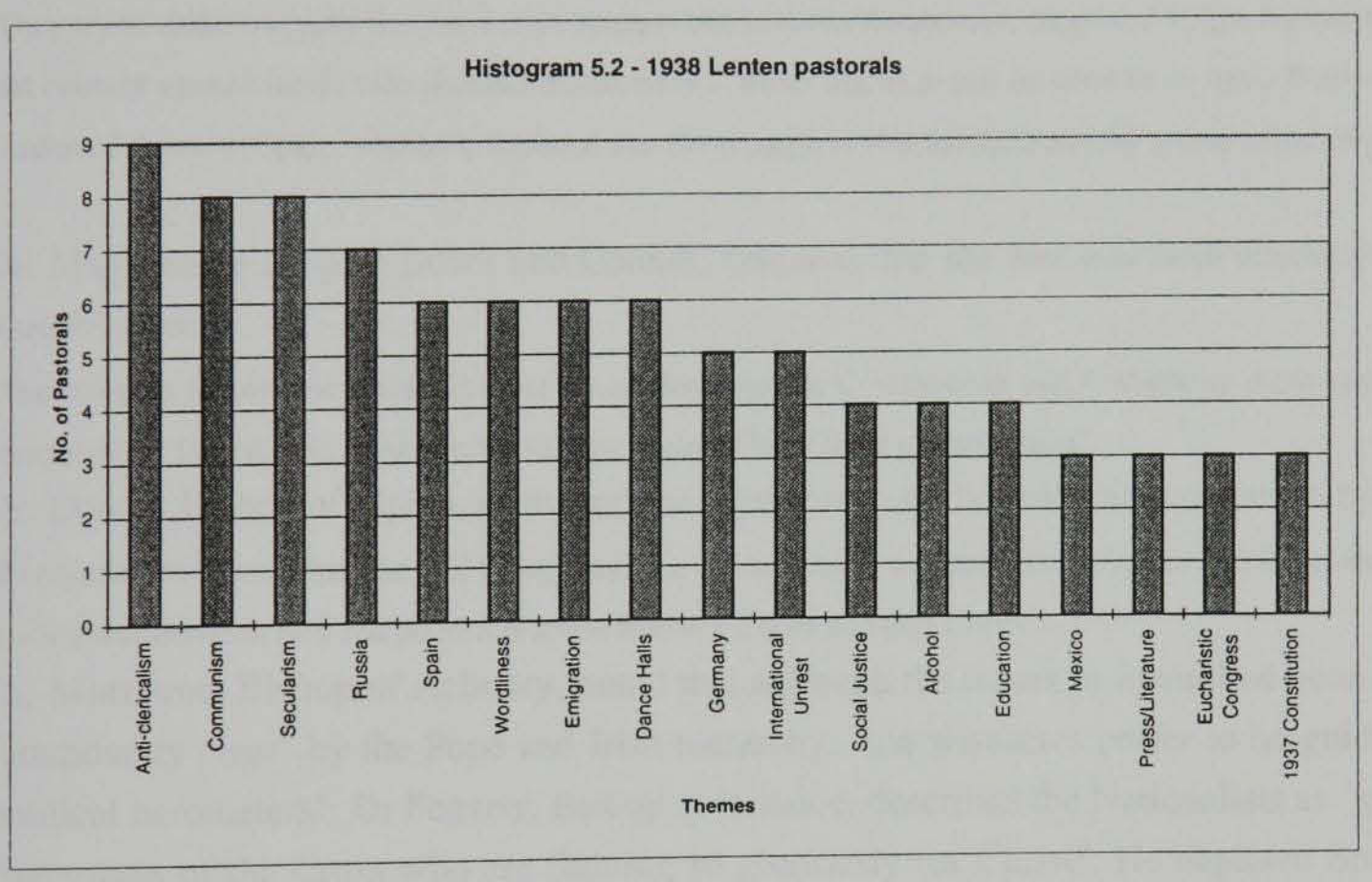
109 April 24, 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events For The Year 1939', *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1940.*

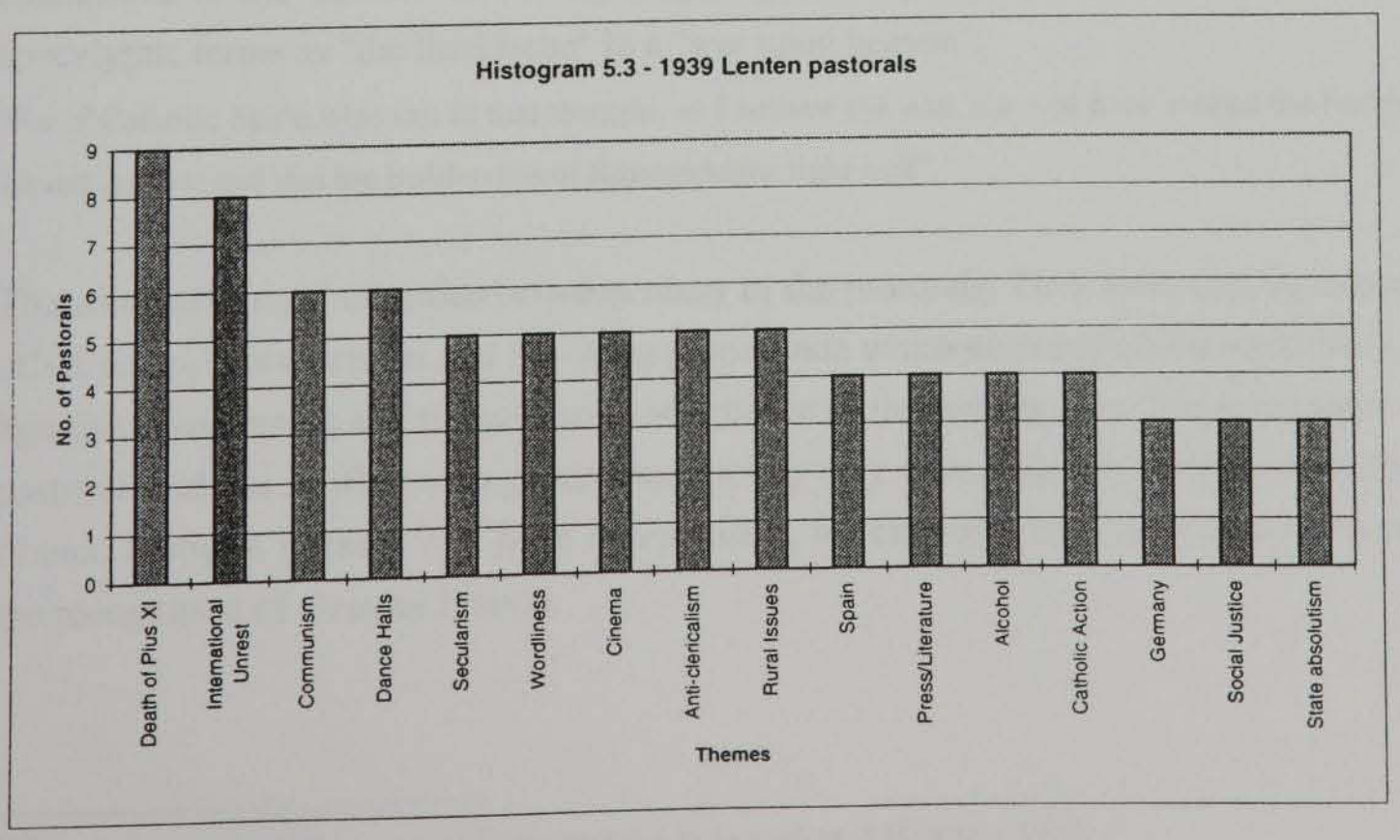
110 Histogram 5.1: Based on an analysis of twenty-one Lenten pastorals in the *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1937. Subjects mentioned in less than three pastorals are excluded. Some topics are grouped into general themes for clarity. Secularism, materialism, and atheism are categorised together, as are anti-clericalism and persecution of Catholics, and worldliness and pleasure-seeking.

111 Histogram 5.2: Based on an analysis of nineteen Lenten pastorals, *Irish Independent*, 28 February 1938.

112 Histogram 5.3: Based on an analysis of twenty-two Lenten pastorals, *Irish Independent*, 20 February 1939.


Histogram 5.1 - 1937 Lenten pastorals
No. of Pastorals
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
Communism
Spain
Secularism
Emigration
Anti-clericalism
Russia
Worldliness
Dance Halls
Press/Literature
Social Justice
Cinema
Themes


Histogram 5.2 - 1938 Lenten pastorals
No. of Pastorals
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
Anti-clericalism
Communism
Secularism
Russia
Spain
Wordliness
Emigration
Dance Halls
Germany
International Unrest
Social Justice
Alcohol
Education
Mexico
Press/Literature
Eucharistic Congress
1937 Constitution
Themes


Histogram 5.3 - 1939 Lenten pastorals
No. of Pastorals
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
Death of Pius XI
International Unrest
Communism
Dance Halls
Secularism
Wordliness
Cinema
Anti-clericalism
Rural Issues
Spain
Press/Literature
Alcohol
Catholic Action
Germany
Social Justice
State absolutism
Themes

Nationalist cause rather than mere support of Spanish Catholics. This strongly partisan position resembled the Spanish Church more than the Vatican. An analysis of the 1937 pastorals provides a useful example.[113]

Dr. O'Kane, Bishop of Derry, stressed the moral justification for the military coup:

"For a time they [Russia] achieved their purpose in Spain. A capable Catholic leader, with the majority of the electorate to support him, tried all constitutional means to restore freedom to the Spanish people and liberty to the Church, but in vain. Assassination of one of the most prominent Catholic statesmen, murder of priests and bishops and nuns, destruction of churches, suppression of religious rites, all has at length goaded the Catholic spirit to rebellion".

Dr. O'Kane contrasted the depiction of the war by Irish communists with the authoritative view of the Catholic Church:

"They try to make it appear that the war in Spain is one between democracy, supported by the Government in that country against rebels who demand dictatorship . . . they ask us to pay no heed to the Holy Father or the Cardinal Primate of Spain, who have declared that the struggle is between God and the power of darkness".

Dr. Mageean, Bishop of Down and Connor, declared that the war was both necessary and unambiguous:

"The struggle is now inevitable, it must go on; for between Communism and Catholicity there can be no compromise. The issue is clear-cut: for God or against God, Christ or anti-Christ".

Dr. Doorly, Bishop of Elphin, dismissed the significance of the political divisions in Spain:

"Everyone now knows that the war being fought in Spain is not a war between Royalists and Republicans; it is not a war between rich and poor; it is a war between Christ and anti-Christ".

Dr. Morrisroe, Bishop of Achonry, noted that although the issues in Spain had been made "abundantly clear" by the Pope and Irish hierarchy, "the wiseacres prefer to be guided by political barometers". Dr Fogarty, Bishop of Killaloe, described the Nationalists as "gallant champions of the Cross who are fighting so gloriously for Christ". He depicted Spain in apocalyptic terms as "the final issue" in a "war upon heaven":

"For if Catholic Spain wins out in that struggle, as I believe she will, she will have broken the backbone of the red dragon; and that the Bolshevists of Russian know right well".

There are striking similarities between many of the pastorals. They were clearly intended to offset neutral press reports and left-wing propaganda which emphasised the legitimacy of the Spanish government and the undemocratic nature of the Nationalists. Although most of the pastorals did not conflict with government policy they were naturally welcomed by the pro-Franco lobby in Ireland. The *Irish Independent*, for example, used the occasion to call for the recognition of General Franco.

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113 All Lenten pastoral quotes are from the *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1937.

III – Interpretations of the Spanish Civil War

It has been outlined how intently the Irish Catholic Church responded to the Spanish Civil War. Their enthusiasm for Franco is evident. The Nationalists, of course, received support from the Catholic Church throughout the world but seldom to the degree seen in Ireland. The Holy See was "profoundly ambivalent about the justice of the Nationalist cause throughout much of the Spanish Civil War".[114] In Britain, although "the pro-Nationalist views of almost all the bishops were never in doubt", the hierarchy of England and Wales "made some effort to avoid partisanship".[115] Dr Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster, denied that the English Catholic Church identified itself with the Nationalists.[116] Why did the Irish Catholic Church offer such unqualified support?

There are some obvious answers. Given the lack of popular support for socialism in Ireland, the Catholic Church was not concerned that its partisan stance would arouse much controversy.[117] For historical reasons, strong ties existed between Irish and Spanish Catholicism. Many Irish religious were based there and Ireland, like Spain, was steeped in a Catholic tradition. The perceived similarity between both countries lay at the heart of clerical concerns about the war. It was widely felt that the problems afflicting Spain also threatened Ireland. To appreciate this it is useful to analyse how the clergy related issues arising from the war to Irish circumstances.

Fear of communism was central to the response to Spain. This is evident from much of the Catholic press. *Assisi* contrasted complacent Irish Catholics with the:

"earnest, zealous, determined, patient" communists who are "prepared for the popular upheaval which in blood and terror will teach us all the grim lessons".[118]

The *Father Mathew Record* warned that "it is folly to presume that what happened to the land of Loyola and Teresa and John of the Cross could not occur in ours".[119] These fears ware shared by the hierarchy. Dr. Mageean, for example, stated:

"But while I agree that Communists are few and their influence at present small, I do not agree that the danger from Communism in this country is negligible. As in Spain, a few years ago, there is a wave of liberalism passing over Ireland to-day . . . Who with the example of other countries before his mind will be so rash as to prophesy what the situation may be here in Ireland in ten years time if we pursue the policy of drift".[120]

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114 Peter C. Kent (1986) p. 441.
115 James Flint (1987) p.370.
116 *Ibid*, pp.369-70.
117 Compared to Britain and America, Irish Catholic opinion was overwhelmingly pro-Franco. An American poll conducted in December 1938 found that only 39% of Catholics favoured Franco while 30% actually supported the Spanish Republic (J. David Valaik, 'Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Embargo, 1937-39', *The Journal of American History*, June 1967, p.85).
118 *Assisi*, September 1936, p.402.
119 *Father Mathew Record*, September 1936, p.484.
120 23 November, 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events For The Year 1936', *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1937*.

This attitude of impending doom, not just about communism but often concerning a general malaise in Irish society, was widely shared among the hierarchy to judge by the pessimistic tone of the Lenten pastorals. Cardinal MacRory observed that even "this glorious old Church of ours, faithful for fifteen hundred years, has no infallible guarantee of unfailing fidelity".[121] Dr. Casey, Bishop of Ross, felt the danger of Ireland becoming communist "is real and imminent". Dr. Codd, Bishop of Ferns, believed communism was already established in Ireland:

"The impact of this revolutionary movement has been felt in this country only in its initial stages. There is as yet no organised murder or destruction of Churches. And, please God, this disaster will be averted if the mischief is checked before it begins to spread apace".[122]

Bishop Fogarty felt Ireland was at risk from communism and secularism. Dr. Doorly, Bishop of Elphin, regarded the civil war as "a warning to us to guard against a similar catastrophe in our own country".[123] Dr. O'Kane, Bishop of Derry, regarded Basque support for the Republic as a lesson:

"that if we give ear to traitors in our midst our constancy to our religion may be undermined, and the emissaries of Russia may succeed where open persecution failed".[124]

Given the absence of any popular manifestation of socialism or communism in Ireland why did so many Irish clerics believe Ireland was under communist influence? The papers of the Holy Ghost priest, Fr. Denis Fahey, provide a fascinating, albeit extreme, insight into clerical anti-communism in this period. Fr. Fahey, a prolific author, founder of *Maria Duce*,[125] and lecturer on philosophy and church history at the Holy Ghost college, believed the French and Russian revolutions had been fomented by Freemason and communist societies under the secret control of Jews who were, in turn, agents of Satan.[126]

A *Report on Communist Activities in Ireland* (*circa* 1942) reveals how the illusion that a large number of Irish people were under communist influence could be sustained. It described how a wide array of political bodies – from the IRA to the Labour Party – were involved in a communist conspiracy.[127] The IRA was identified as the main threat:

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121 *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1937.
122 *Ibid.*
123 *Ibid.*
124 Not all bishops were so alarmist. Dr. MacNeely, Bishop of Raphoe felt there was no need for panic but warned that in "these days of so-called Popular Fronts" it is necessary to "scrutinise credentials very carefully". Dr. Kinane, Bishop of Waterford merely pointed out that "with such vital issues at stake" and the example of Spain "it would be criminal to take risks".
125 A right-wing anti-semitic organisation established in the mid 1940s which embodied many of Fahey's extreme views on communists, Freemasons and Jews. According to Whyte, *Maria Duce*'s associate membership was as large as six thousand, and its periodical, *Fiat*, had a circulation well into five figures. J.H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1971) p.165.
126 *Ibid*, p.72.
127 Namely, the Communist Party of Ireland, the League of the Militant Godless, the Anti-Imperialist League, the United Front Against Fascism, Irish Republican Congress, the IRA, the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, the Labour Youth Movement, Freemasonry and Jewish secret societies.

"The present body bearing this name exists only to exploit the separatist tradition in the interests of a social programme that is indistinguishable from Communism".

Even members of the Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress, although they had joined in "pursuit of a legitimate desire for self-betterment", found themselves committed to a programme which was "Communistic in essence and ultimate effect".[128]

One sinister aspect of Fahey's activities concerns the wide number of people and organisations kept under surveillance. Records, containing personal (and often scurrilous) information were kept on numerous organisations including the Communist Party of Ireland, the Trinity College branch of the Labour Party, the Fabian Society, the New Theatre Group, the Secular Society of Ireland, the National Union of Journalists, and Radio Eireann.[129] To take the latter institution, for example, Michael Farrell, the Radio Eireann film critic was "under suspicion" for keeping "subversive company". Cecil Salkeld, described as a "wastrel", was "obviously intoxicated during broadcasts" although it was believed he was "not a menace, except to Communism". The presence of Austin Clarke, Lennox Robinson and Sean O'Faolain were further indications of subversion in Radio Eireann – "It is not alleged that these people are Communists, but they are distinctly undesirable".[130]

Among the papers is a list of approximately three hundred people believed to have communist sympathies.[131] Another list, entitled *"Who's Who" in Left Movement* contains more detailed information, much of it idiosyncratic, on eighty individuals involved in left-wing politics, the labour movement and the arts.[132] The inclusions, many of them focusing on salacious details and a suspected lack of Catholic orthodoxy as much as left-wing links, reveal more about extreme clerical anti-communism than the Irish left. One civil servant's entry noted:

"Dresses most extravagantly, long hair, big hat, open shirt; belongs to New Theatre Group. There is a mixed Marriage in the family somewhere; possibly Val's grandmother was a Protestant (non-practising)".

The entry for a prominent left-wing activist commented:

"Was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for selling pornographic posters, fine of £2 substituted on appeal; son of Methodist Church clerk; Fabian Society, T.C.D.; Secretary, Left Book Club, a contemptible effeminate type".

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128 *Report on Communist Activities in Ireland*, pp.1-5, Box 5, Fr. Fahey papers, Archives of the Holy Ghost Fathers.

129 *Report on Communist Activities in Ireland*, No. 3, Appendix B, pp.3-4, Box 5, Fahey papers.

130 *Ibid.*

131 The full title is *List of persons known to be communists – either members of the Communist Party's of Ireland or Great Britain, or adherents of the Fourth International: And also of persons known to have communistic or subversive sympathies* (*Report on Communist Activities in Ireland*, Appendix A, pp.1-11, Fahey papers).

132 Austin Clarke, Harry Kernoff, Dorothy McArdle, Sean O'Casey, Frank O'Connor, Liam O'Flaherty, Sean O'Faolain are included in the list.

A *Report on Communism in Ireland* dated October 1937 summarises the views of Fahey and his extremist circle during the Spanish Civil War. Freemasons "control the bulk of the country's business".[133] Jews, "though less than one per cent of the population," own "sixty per cent of the rateable property in Dublin".[134] Jews were prominent in the Communist Party and had infiltrated all the Freemason lodges in Dublin. Two out of Dublin's five dailies were "Red on the Spain question and the government party's organ is pink". The report concluded:

"Almost every Jew is a Freemason, and by racial tradition they are violently opposed to Christianity. Communism is the natural social expression of the Jewish mentality, and should Red revolution be ever launched in this country . . . Jewish leaders and finance will take control here as elsewhere, for the whole plan is theirs".[135]

It is generally assumed that extremists like Fr. Denis Fahey and his mentor Fr. Edward Cahill,[136] professor of Church history at Milltown Park, were not influential figures.[137] Cahill was founder of *An Rioghacht*, a small but influential group within the burgeoning Catholic Action movement, and is often credited as the pioneer of Catholic Action in Ireland.[138] Cahill, a Fianna Fáil supporter, frequently advised de Valera – although probably with little success – on constitutional issues during this period.[139] Their positions as lecturers also indicates some influence over a large number of their orders. Moreover, both were prolific authors and speakers.[140] Fahey exerted considerable influence over the Knights of St. Columbanus.[141] He was also the key note speaker at the CYMS social week in 1939 where he warned that Catholic countries like Spain and Ireland were susceptible to:

"the various agencies of Naturalism: the Press, the cinema, and the radio, social organisation on the basis of unchecked competition, and a monetary system dominated by Judaeo-Masonic combinations".[142]

The assumption that Fahey and Cahill did not exert much influence is based more on the outlandish nature of their ideas than an analysis of contemporaneous Catholic press. The

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133 *Report on Communism in Ireland*, October 1937, p.6, Box 5, Fahey papers.
134 *Ibid.*
135 *Ibid.*
136 Father Edward Cahill, SJ: founded *An Rioghacht*, 1926; asserted the existence of a Judaeo-Masonic conspiracy against the Catholic Church in *Freemasonry and the Anti-Christian Movement* (Dublin, 1929); advised de Valera on the 1937 constitution; appointed to government commission on vocational organisation, 1938-43.
137 J.H. Whyte (1971) p.73.
138 Maurice Hartigan, *The Catholic Laity of Dublin 1920-1940*, (Maynooth Ph.D., 1992) p.92. Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, the Bishops and Irish Politics* (Cambridge, 1986) p.208. J.H. Whyte (1971) p.65.
139 Cahill was not an uncritical supporter of the government. For example, he believed de Valera's Criminal Law Amendment Bill should have allowed for imprisonment for the possession of contraceptives. He also felt the new constitution should have established an executive, independent of the legislature, and responsible only to the president (Seán Faughnan, The Jesuits and the drafting of the Irish constitution of 1937, *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 26 (1988-9).
140 The *Irish Catholic* (18 February 1937), for example, reported Fr. Fahey's speech on Jewish penetration in Ireland and also made it the subject of their editorial. A large number of articles by Fahey and Cahill were published in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* between the 1920s and 1940s.
141 Evelyn Bolster, *The Knights of St. Columbanus* (Dublin, 1979) p.67.
142 *Catholic Young Men's Society Quarterly Review*, Spring 1939, Vol. 1, No. 2, p.7, 49.

secular-owned *Catholic Bulletin*, *Catholic Mind* and the Dominican *Irish Rosary* orchestrated a campaign against Freemasonry in Ireland throughout the 1920s and '30s.[143] The idea that a Judaeo-Masonic conspiracy lay behind the Spanish Civil War was frequently raised in the clerical press. The *Lourdes Messenger* noted that "Masons of the whole world" were carrying out "the programme of Moscow and Valencia".[144] The *Irish Rosary* wrote of Spain being "defeated by the anti-Christs and her land overrun by Red Lodges".[145] More significantly, these views appeared in the more cerebral and respectable periodicals intended for Catholic intellectuals and the clergy. As early as 1933 an article in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* described the Spanish Republic as "a perfect Masonic masterpiece" with a constitution "framed by Jews, atheists, Freemasons, and Socialists". The author argued that "it is in the [Freemason] sects that the revolution has its immediate origin".[146] In *Studies* Fr. P.J. Gannon[147] asserted that masons were the architects of the Spanish Republics and the civil war.[148] Another article claimed "the real makers of the Spanish Republic in 1931 were the Freemasons – not the Socialists, Anarchists or Communists".[149]

There are interesting parallels between the descriptions of communism and Freemasonry. Both groups were sinister secretive bodies, honeycombed with Jews and Protestants, whose existence explained why people in Catholic nations acted in an anti-clerical manner. The massacre of Spanish religious in 1835 could be attributed to Freemasons rather than political radicals resentful of the clerical power in Spanish society.[150] One hundred years later, church burnings in Barcelona were explained not by popular perceptions of the Church's reactionary nature but the actions of communist conspirators. The adherence of General Franco and General O'Duffy to such theories rendered them more credible.[151] In one article Fr. Fahey approvingly quoted Franco's victory speech at Madrid on 19 May 1939:

"The Jewish spirit [is] . . . responsible for the alliance of large-scale capital with Marxism and . . . the driving force behind so many anti-Spanish revolutionary agreements".[152]

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143 Desmond Bowen, *History and Shaping of Irish Protestantism* (New York, 1995) p.398.
144 *Lourdes Messenger*, February 1938, p.34; April 1939, p.119.
145 *Irish Rosary*, February 1937, p.81.
146 Fr. H. Muñoz OP, 'New Light Upon The Spanish Revolution', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, December 1933, pp. 574-587.
147 Fr. P.J. Gannon SJ; professor of Theology, Milltown Park; critic of the Irish Academy of Letters; prominent in the pro-Nationalist campaign in Ireland.
148 Fr. P.J. Gannon SJ, 'An Inquest on Spain', *Studies*, 1937, pp.129-134; 'The Latest Phase in the Spanish Civil War', *Studies*, 1938, pp.314-318.
149 F. Joy, 'Communist Front', *Studies*, 1936, p.667.
150 Rev. H. Muñoz OP, 'New Light Upon the Spanish Revolution', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, December 1933, p.578.
151 O'Duffy referred to his militia as "the Irish Brigade against Communism, Jewry and Freemasonry" (*Hibernia*, April 1938, p.29). Franco believed Republican Spain was controlled by "a conspiracy of freemasons, Bolsheviks and Jews". After the war Franco compiled an index of suspected masons numbering eighty thousand although there had been no more than ten thousand Freemasons in the Republic. He became an obsessive collector of Masonic artefacts even creating his own Masonic grotto (Paul Preston, *Franco* (London, 1995) pp.323-4).
152 Fr. Denis Fahey, 'Jewish Hatred of Catholic Spain' (Unpublished MS), Box 6, Fahey Papers.

Similar attitudes were evident, although less openly, among the hierarchy. Their joint pastoral of October 1931 spoke of:

"growing evidence of a campaign of Revolution and Communism, which, if allowed to run its course unchecked must end in the ruin of Ireland"

and referred to the "fanatical hatred of God, as now dominates Russia and threatens to dominate Spain".[153] Further evidence of the hierarchy's belief in the existence of a far-reaching communist conspiracy is contained in a remarkable report, *The Spread of Communism in Ireland*, drawn up for consideration at the hierarchy's annual meeting some time after the joint pastoral was issued.[154] The report, which reiterated many of Fahey's beliefs, focused on Saor Eire's radicalisation of the IRA and blended fact and fiction to produce a distorted picture of the Irish left. It claimed that Peadar O'Donnell, under Moscow's instructions, had converted the IRA to communism:

"In 1930, over 100 I.R.A. men, as well as O'Donnell, were members of the W.R.P. [Workers' Revolutionary Party] at Bachelor's Walk. The acceptance of Communism was made compulsory on the I.R.A. throughout the country, and the effect was a veritable purge of nearly all those who had taken part in the Anglo-Irish or even Civil War, for very few of them accepted Communism".[155]

It would not be unjust, the report stated, to interpret the initials of the IRA as "Irish Red Army". The IRA, it asserted, was:

"actually carrying out the world programme of Free Masonry - the overthrow of the Christian Social Order in favour of a Universal Workers' Republic, in which Free Masonry will be Master, or rather the Jews, who in turn control Free Masonry".[156]

The lack of public support for the IRA was dismissed. The report pointed out that all revolutions were directed by minorities – "the affairs of Mexico and Spain are recent illustrations of this obvious truth" – and that the present IRA were as numerous and better-armed than during "the Terror".[157] It concluded that if by "indifference on our part" the IRA were to obtain a mandate "anything might happen in Ireland".

The clerical press, Lenten pastorals and the confidential report on communism all indicate that the extreme views associated with Fahey and Cahill were accepted more widely than has been previously acknowledged. Indeed considering the alarmist nature of the pastorals in this period it would be surprising if the hierarchy had not privately held such views. The Church's response to Spain was partly motivated by the fear that Ireland was susceptible to the same communist influences as Spain. This idea was shared by organisations such as the Catholic Young Men's Society, the Irish Christian Front and even Fine Gael who repeatedly called for the suppression of communism in this period.

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153 Dermot Keogh (1986) p.180.
154 *Report re The Spread of Communism in Ireland*, (n.d.), Folder No. 2, Meetings of the Hierarchy, 1928-1945, MacRory papers, Armagh Archdiocesan Archives.
155 *Ibid*, p.3.
156 *Ibid*, p.4.
157 *Ibid*, p.5.

The reaction of the Church to the Spanish War was also opportunistic as it provided an opportunity to criticise left-wing tendencies in the labour movement. The war was linked, often unfairly, to the activities of left-wing politicians and trade unionists in Ireland. Although the Irish Labour Party did not emulate its British counterpart by supporting the Spanish Republic it was, as *The Round Table* noted, watched closely for signs of Republican sympathy:

"The Catholic Church in Ireland is naturally and properly alarmed at the possibility that Labour may become tainted by communist propaganda, and there are signs that this is possible".[158]

The *Irish Rosary* believed the attitude of Labour Party leaders gave grounds "for some alarm".[159] *Assisi* applauded the protest of two delegates at the 1937 Labour Party conference who declared they were "not proud of a party which supported the Reds in Spain".[160] A priest at the Pro-Cathedral, referring to the same incident, declared of the delegates:

"Are they really only dumb dogs? Do they possess the gift of speech only when there is a question of condemning Fascism or proposing a resolution in support of the Red demons of Moscow and Barcelona?"[161]

Assisi noted another "cleverly-worded resolution of sympathy with Red Spain" at the 1938 conference.[162] The *Lourdes Messenger* concurred.[163] There was, in reality, little evidence of support for the Spanish Republic among Labour Party members and none from the leadership. Labour's policy on Spain did not differ from that of the government. The hierarchy appear to have accepted this and, unlike sections of the clerical press, did not criticise the party.

In the absence of pro-Republican sympathies within the Labour Party, attention was focused on the trade union movement. Referring to trade unionist attitudes to Spain, the *Father Mathew Record* dramatically warned:

"There are men in trade unions in Ireland who have not only been to Russia but have also attended special courses in Marxist doctrines in Russian training colleges".[164]

The *Irish Rosary*, again at the forefront, criticised the Irish Trade Union Congress for affiliating with the International Federation of Trade Unions because the latter backed "Godless Government" in Spain.[165] British trade unions with Irish branches which donated funds to Spain were also targeted.[166]

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158 *The Round Table*, February 1937, p.162.
159 *Irish Rosary*, February, 1937, p.84.
160 *Assisi*, March 1937, p.103. This referred to an argument between William Maslin and two Tipperary delegates following a speech by a Northern Ireland Labour Party delegate in favour of the Spanish Republic.
161 *Irish Catholic*, 18 February 1937.
162 *Assisi*, May 1938, p206. A reference to Conor Cruise O'Brien's criticism of the Spanish Nationalists.
163 *Lourdes Messenger*, May 1938, p.130.
164 *Father Mathew Record*, October 1936, p.555.
165 *Irish Rosary*, April 1937, p.250.
166 *Ibid*, November 1936, p.812.

Some of the hierarchy were clearly unsympathetic towards organised labour. The Bishop of Derry's Lenten pastoral, devoted to "those who prate about a Workers' Republic and the rights of democracy", is characteristic. Dr. O'Kane observed that "Labour leaders and strike organisers" enjoyed "fair salaries" and were of the class "who rarely work". Although they were not yet "in downright bad faith" they unwittingly formed part of the "campaign against the Church" in Ireland.[167] Bishop Fogarty censured trade unionists when the Irish section of the ATGWU endorsed a donation for medical aid to the Spanish Republic:

"It was humiliating in the extreme to see a gathering of Irish trade unionists led by the noses by an Englishman and voting a subsidy of £1000 from their common funds to help the Reds now warring against God and Jesus Christ, like wild beasts in Spain".[168]

This criticism which emanated from a vocal minority within the Church was based more on hostility towards trade unionism and fear of communist subversion than a critical assessment of the facts. Most of the hierarchy, it should be noted, refrained from criticising the labour movement on Spain.

Far more attention was focused on the issue of the press. The coverage of the war reaffirmed clerical beliefs about the malign influence of the press – particularly British owned newspapers – and offered the Church an opportunity to speak out strongly. The perceived anti-Catholic bias of the international and domestic press was criticised. There was a tendency to attribute unfavourable coverage of Spain to a conspiracy. The *Lourdes Messenger* spoke of a "conspiracy of silence" by the non-Catholic press.[169] The *Cross* felt the press silence on Spain contrasted with its reaction to the invasion of Abyssinia and Jewish persecution in Germany.[170] *Assisi* noted "a disdainful air of neutrality" within the press.[171] The *Irish Messenger* published *For God and Spain* to counter the suppression of anti-clerical atrocities by most newspapers in the "English speaking world".[172] There was a widespread feeling that the British press, in particular, was orchestrating a campaign against nationalist Spain. The *Irish Monthly* spoke of "news-services which really are hostile agencies of propaganda".[173] Dr. McNamee, Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, denounced the silence of the British press.[174]

The hierarchy's reply to the collective letter of the Spanish hierarchy emphasised the importance they attached to the issue. Almost the entire letter was devoted to the "cruel injustice" done to Spanish Catholics by the international press:

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167 *Irish Independent*, 28 February 1937.
168 *Ibid*, 24 September 1936.
169 *Lourdes Messenger*, May 1937, p.132.
170 *Cross*, April 1937, p.508.
171 *Assisi*, December, 1936 p.567.
172 *Irish Messenger*, December 1936 p.565.
173 Hispanista, 'III Spain Arises – But We?', *Irish Monthly*, January 1938, p.109.
174 *Irish Independent*, 14 September 1936.

"We know, and our people, know, that by cunning and malevolent distortion of the facts, and by giving full publicity to the mendacious propaganda of your enemies, while maintaining an ignoble conspiracy of silence on everything that might counter it, the world press has grievously misled the nations . . . on the issues at stake in that monumentous conflict".[175]

The clergy tended to disbelieve reports which reflected poorly on the Nationalists and uncritically reproduce anti-Republican sources. Following the destruction of Guernica, for example, the *Cross* argued:

"Some alleged eye-witnesses have asserted that the sky was "black with aeroplanes", yet no airmen can be found to state categorically that his plane took part in the air-raid, and General Franco positively asserts that there was no such raid".[176]

However, another revealing *Cross* editorial suggests that reports of Nationalist atrocities were sometimes accepted with a disturbing pragmatism:

"The charges of atrocity and counter-atrocity are hurled by each side against its opponents. No civil war was ever waged in kid-gloves, and when collective insanity seizes upon a people, there is no cure for it save destruction".[177]

Irish newspapers came under close scrutiny. The *Cross* observed:

"The *Irish Times* and the *Evening Mail* have scarcely concealed their delight at the fact that the Catholic Church is suffering a veritable martyrdom in Spain . . . The *Irish Press* . . . can spare no room for editorial comment upon events in Spain . . . The *Irish Independent* whatever may be its shortcomings in other respects, has at least given the Spanish crisis the important place which it merits".[178]

This attitude was generally shared by the Catholic press. The *Irish Independent* was frequently singled out for praise. Bishop Fogarty commended the newspaper twice in September 1936.[179] Fogarty later complained that only the *Irish Independent* and *Cork Examiner* had given Franco "unflinching and unequivocal support".[180] The *Irish Press* was rarely publicly criticised by clerical sources – this would have been regarded as criticism of the government – but it was never commended for its coverage and often privately regarded as "pink" on Spain.

The *Irish Times* attracted most criticism. As early as August Fr. Stephen Brown, a prominent Jesuit intellectual, compared the *Irish Times* editorial policy with the views of Sean Murray and Peadar O'Donnell and observed that it "finds itself in strange company".[181] The reports of its Spanish correspondent, Lionel Fleming, exacerbated clerical

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175 *Irish Press*, 13 October 1937.
176 *Cross*, June 1937, p.48. The *Lourdes Messenger* (June 1937, p.166) agreed – "we should not be at all surprised to learn that the alleged bombing either never happened, or was greatly exaggerated".
177 *Cross*, October 1936, p.187.
178 *Ibid.*
179 *Irish Independent*, 9 September, 24 September 1936.
180 *Ibid*, 20 February 1937.
181 *Ibid*, 22 August 1936.

irritation.[182] The *Catholic Bulletin* believed the newspaper was guided by Britain's strategic interests in the Mediterranean.[183] Other critics alleged sectarianism. The *Irish Rosary*, for example, accused the *Irish Times* of espousing political liberalism "with the cards of anti-Catholic innuendo up their sleeves".[184]

The *Rosary's* accusations raise the issue of clerical attitudes to non-Catholic opinion. A *Lourdes Messenger* editorial observed:

"Since the inception of the Spanish trouble in 1936, we have witnessed the spectacle of the baiting – there is no other word for it – of the Catholic Church by certain members of the minority Church".[185]

Cardinal MacRory accused Protestantism and the press of collusion in:

"an apparently deliberate campaign in most of the newspapers in Great Britain and, I regret to say, in some of our own in Ireland – a campaign backed up by high dignitaries of the Church of England"[186]

The Church of Ireland, in contrast to the Catholic Church, did not adopt a firm position on the Spanish Civil War. Some of the comments made by Church of Ireland bishops, although well meaning, affronted the idealised image of the Nationalists depicted by the Catholic clergy. For example Dr. MacManaway, Bishop of Clogher, sympathised with the Spanish Catholic Church which he felt was "passing through the most awful barbarity ever experienced by any Christian Church" but added that:

"[although] they were not in a position to judge which of the opposing parties was the more cruel or the more savage, they could not help feeling sympathy for the Church".[187]

Similarly, at a Church of Ireland Synod in Dublin, Dr. Gregg, the Archbishop of Dublin, advised against passing a resolution sympathising with the Catholic Church in Spain:

"Although information of a kind exists that certain terrible things have happened, it is not information which I myself am prepared to accept as totally reliable. They would cause less embarrassment if they did not pass such a motion".[188]

The cautious attitude of Church of Ireland clergy, particularly their reluctance to unreservedly accept the reports of anti-clericalism, was greatly resented by some Catholics. However, some of the statements by Church of Ireland clergy were, if not deliberately provocative, certainly ill-advised given the impact of the atrocities in Ireland. At the joint Synods of Dublin, Glendalough and Kildare, the Rev. Precentor E.H. Lewis-Crosby attributed the atrocities to the fact that:

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182 *Cross*, October 1936, p.233. Fleming's reports were mildly pro-Republican but, in terms of bias, fell short of the pro-Nationalist adulation of Gertrude Gaffney, the *Irish Independent*'s Spanish correspondent.
183 *Catholic Bulletin*, 1937, Vol. 27, p.578.
184 *Irish Rosary*, February 1937, p.81.
185 *Lourdes Messenger*, July 1938, p.161.
186 June 22, 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events For The Year 1937', *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1938.*
187 *Irish Press*, 26 September 1936.
188 *Irish Press*, 4 November 1936.

"so many of the Church leaders in Spain have gone hand in glove with those who have oppressed the peasant classes and others by denying them really the means of living by the way the were treating them".[189] Lewis-Crosby's comments provoked an editorial in the *Irish News*, a newspaper particularly sensitive to perceived sectarian slights, which referred to his speech as "a disgusting charge".[190]

The criticism of the *Irish Times*, the Church of Ireland and even, to a lesser extent, the *Irish Press* was interrelated. All tended to view Spain as a political rather than religious issue. The Catholic Church's belief that the war was an unambiguous struggle between Catholicism and communism demanded, as Bishop Fogarty put it, "unflinching and unequivocal support" of General Franco. An objective or neutral outlook, any measure which fell short of full support for the Nationalists, was viewed with hostility. Of course, the intolerance and hostility of the Catholic Church towards Protestantism were underlying motives for the criticism. The periodicals which dwelled most on the issue, such as the *Cross* and the *Irish Rosary*, were not noted for their ecumenism.

The Catholic Church had long felt that Ireland was dependent on English (Protestant) newspapers and news services.[191] A joint pastoral expressed concern about "the indecent paper" in 1927. The Censorship of Publications Act (1929) was partly motivated by the belief that "all evil in literary and journalistic matters derived from abroad".[192] The analysis of Lenten pastorals indicates the extent of ecclesiastical concern about immoral press and literature (histograms 5.1-5.3). Spain provided further evidence of the pernicious influence of the English newspaper. As with other issues – such as communism – the Spanish Civil War reinforced Church fears, present before the war, and offered an opportunity to speak out strongly.

IV Support for the Nationalists

This final section examines how the Catholic Church supported the Nationalists beyond lending its moral authority to their cause. Apart from influencing public opinion through public speeches, sermons and the clerical press, in what tangible ways did the Catholic Church aid the Nationalists? What was the extent of clerical support for military intervention? Financial support and attempts to influence press coverage are also considered. Most importantly, clerical efforts to influence government policy are examined.

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189 *Irish News*, 6 November 1936.
190 *Ibid.*
191 Terence Brown, *Ireland, A Social and Cultural History* (London 1987), pp.69-71.
192 *Ibid*, p.69. The introduction of a tax on imported daily papers in 1933 was another manifestation of this idea.

Cardinal MacRory broached the subject of aid for Spain when he endorsed the Christian Front's fund-raising campaign in September 1936. He may also have had other forms of support on his mind:

"We should all pray for Spain and, if able to, we should all help from our purses, help her to obtain war supplies – what I should say is medical supplies for her sick and wounded. I do not want to say anything about any other kind of help."[193]

In fact MacRory was already covertly helping to organise military support for the Nationalists. In early August he was contacted by Ramirez De Arellano, a Carlist aristocrat, who proposed sending a unit of Irishmen to Spain. MacRory enthusiastically recommended O'Duffy:

"He seems to me the man who would be most likely to help. He organised and was head of the Free State Police. Later on he became a politician and remains so still. He is a chivalrous, courageous, upright man and a good Catholic, and above all a fine organiser."[194]

The Cardinal's decision to support military intervention was taken at a remarkably early stage of the war. On August 6 – just three weeks after the military coup – MacRory noted in his diary:

"Wrote to Comte de Ramirez De Arellano . . . recommending General O'Duffy as likely to help to get volunteers force to assist Spanish insurgents".[195]

MacRory played an important role in the establishment of the Irish Brigade. Captain Liam Walshe, O'Duffy's secretary, stated that when O'Duffy learnt that MacRory had written Arellano "a glorious letter, wholeheartedly and enthusiastically agreeing with my [Arellano's] views and intentions" O'Duffy felt that "finally settled the matter".[196] MacRory and O'Duffy met in Rosslare where they "spent a long time planning and discussing the possibility of help for Spain".[197] The Cardinal insisted on secrecy regarding his role. Later, along with the rest of the hierarchy, he refused O'Duffy's request to designate a priest to act as Brigade chaplain.[198]

MacRory's enthusiasm for military intervention does not appear to have been widely shared within the Church. Only a minority of clergy openly encouraged the venture and these were

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193 *Irish Press*, 21 September 1936.
194 Liam Walshe, *General O'Duffy – His Life and Battle* (MS, n.d.) p.205, NLI.
195 6 August 1936, Diaries 1929-45, VI Joseph Cardinal MacRory, MacRory papers.
196 Liam Walshe (MS, n.d.) p.205. Arellano's original letter proposing the brigade to O'Duffy did not mention the Cardinal's involvement. In his biography O'Duffy recalled – "On meeting him [Arellano], incidentally, I enquired why he wrote to me in particular, and was informed that my name was given to him by a distinguished Irish ecclesiastic to whom he wrote in the first instance (Eoin O'Duffy, *Crusade in Spain* (Dublin, 1938) p.15).
197 Liam Walshe (n.d.) p.205.
198 Mulrean to McCabe, 8 February 1937, folder 57, McCabe papers. MacRory told Walshe he had no priests to spare and his position as Primate of All-Ireland prevented him from asking other bishops for help. He suggested O'Duffy try the orders or find other priests and ask their bishop's permission (Liam Walshe (n.d.) p.207).

often eccentric individuals such as Fr. Kearney – an avowed opponent of "Hydra-Judaism, Paganism and False Christianity" – who wrote to Fr. McCabe:

"I was the first priest, as Gen. O'Duffy admits, to support him in his noble effort to relieve Noble Spain. . . It happens that I was a member of the National Vigilance Club (exclusively clerical) formed in 1920. The Club have secrets that may never be revealed, the keynote of which is that Ireland was in the hands of spies. De Valera is a spy!"[199]

Although the meetings held for departing volunteers were invariably attended by local priests, the Irish Brigade received little support from the clerical press.[200] Even the militant *Cross* commented:

"We must confess that we have little trust in the proposal to send an Irish Brigade to Spain. The days for that kind of thing are gone past . . . any thinking man must pause before endorsing such a project".[201]

Apart from brief references in the *Cross* and *Irish Monthly*, the Irish Brigade was not mentioned in the clerical press surveyed – a paucity which contrasts with the extensive coverage of other subjects related to the war. There are several possible reasons. The idea of military intervention, as the *Cross* indicated, was considered unwise. The Catholic Church, like MacRory, may not have wished to associate itself too closely with as controversial a figure as O'Duffy – particularly as support for the Brigade implied criticism of the government's foreign policy. The performance of the Irish Brigade did little to boost their credibility. Although it was greeted on its return by Monsignor Waters, one of Archbishop Byrne's vicars-general, who wished "to honour them as soldiers of the Cross" – the venture was widely accepted as a military disaster.[202] Even the *Irish Monthly*'s sympathetic *Hispanista* commented:

"Though the efforts made were not fortunate in the outcome, they were sincere and generous, and their failure really came from the lack of well-organised support."[203]

Despite its militant rhetoric, which helped to create the myth of Spanish crusade in many young men's minds, the Church generally felt it wiser to ignore or, at least, only privately support military intervention.

Ecclesiastical efforts to organise financial support for the Nationalists were initially less controversial. In October 1936 a national collection for the relief of Spanish Catholics was announced at the annual meeting of the hierarchy. The bishops also declared their desire "to

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199 Fr. Kearney to McCabe, 27 May 1939, 25 March 1939, McCabe papers. The club was probably a more radical version of organisations such as the Irish Vigilance Association, Irish Vigilance Society, and Catholic Vigilance Association which were popular in the 1920s and 1930s.

200 Other priests opposed the Irish Brigade. Patrick Lindsay, a future high court judge offered a lieutenantship by O'Duffy, was dissuaded by a determined cleric, Fr. Tom Fahy (Patrick Lindsay, *Memories* (Dublin, 1993) p.55).

201 *Cross*, September 1936, p.187.

202 21 June 1937, 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events For The Year 1937', *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1938*.

203 *Irish Monthly*, February 1938, p.112.

eulogise and support" the "laudable zeal" of the Christian Front campaign.[204] The holding of a national collection emphasises the importance of the war to the hierarchy.[205] Dr. O'Doherty, Bishop of Galway, outlined its purpose:

"What we have got to do is help in a more practical way, first of all by prayers, and secondly by bringing them material aid. The Russians are pouring gold in to Spain to help the communists".[206]

The collection was, according to MacRory, highly successful and raised the "magnificent total of £43,331".[207] The enthusiastic response of parishioners was referred to in six Lenten pastorals. The amounts raised by various dioceses varied considerably (histogram 5.5 & map 5.1). At either extreme, the diocese of Tuam collected just over £5 per thousand Catholics while Clonfert raised almost £35 per thousand Catholics. Proportionately, most money was raised by Killaloe, Clonfert, Cashel and Emly, Ossory and Ferns, a group of dioceses clustered together in the south/midlands in an area which roughly corresponds to Co. Clare, Tipperary, Kilkenny and Wexford (map 5.1). Interestingly, this the region which responded most enthusiastically to the Irish Brigade. Ross in south Cork raised a similar sum. Adjoining this belt, the dioceses of Limerick, and Cloyne (corresponding to Co. Limerick, and north Cork) in the south-west and Kildare and Leighlin (Co. Kildare, Carlow and Offaly) in the south-east were the next highest contributors, along with Armagh and Dromore in the north of Ireland. The dioceses of Galway, Tuam, Achonry, Cork and Kerry contributed substantially less than the national average (histogram 5.5).

Although the funds were designated for "suffering Catholics" the identification of Catholicism with Franco ensured it was perceived as a collection for the Nationalists. The large sum indicates that the collection met with popular support in Ireland despite Peadar O'Donnell's claim that there was opposition to the collection.[208] Dr. Kinane, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, confirmed that there was some resentment:

"a few protesting Catholics, somewhat after the manner of Judas of old, had said that their contributions could have been more usefully expended in relieving distress at home".[209]

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204 *Irish Press*, 14 October 1936.

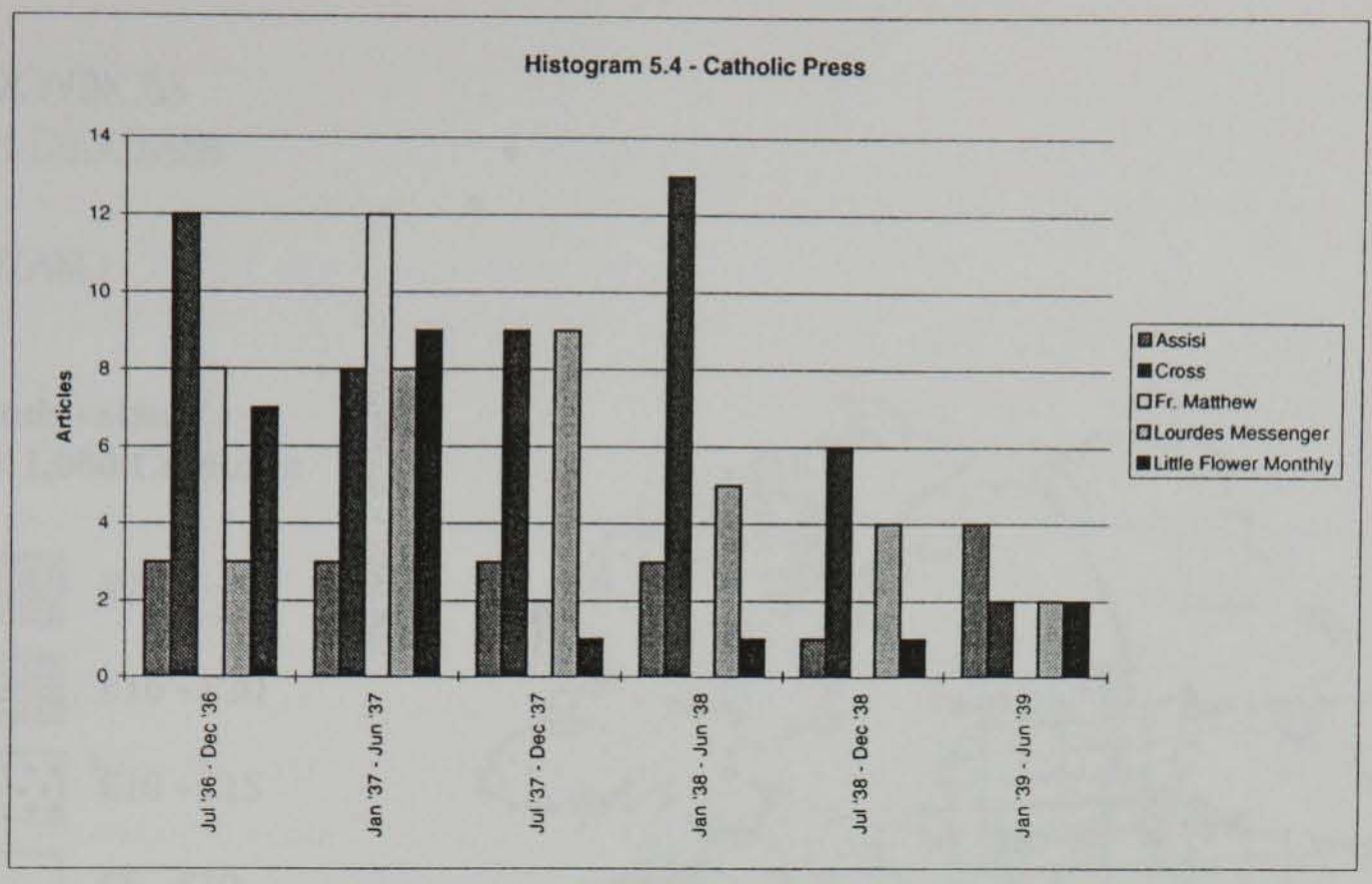
205 Proposals for a collection for Austrian and German refugees were rejected in April 1939 (18 April 1939, Diaries 1929-45, VI Joseph Cardinal MacRory, MacRory papers). A proposed collection to rebuild Spanish churches was rejected in 1940 (Kerney to Walshe, 29 March 1940, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4).

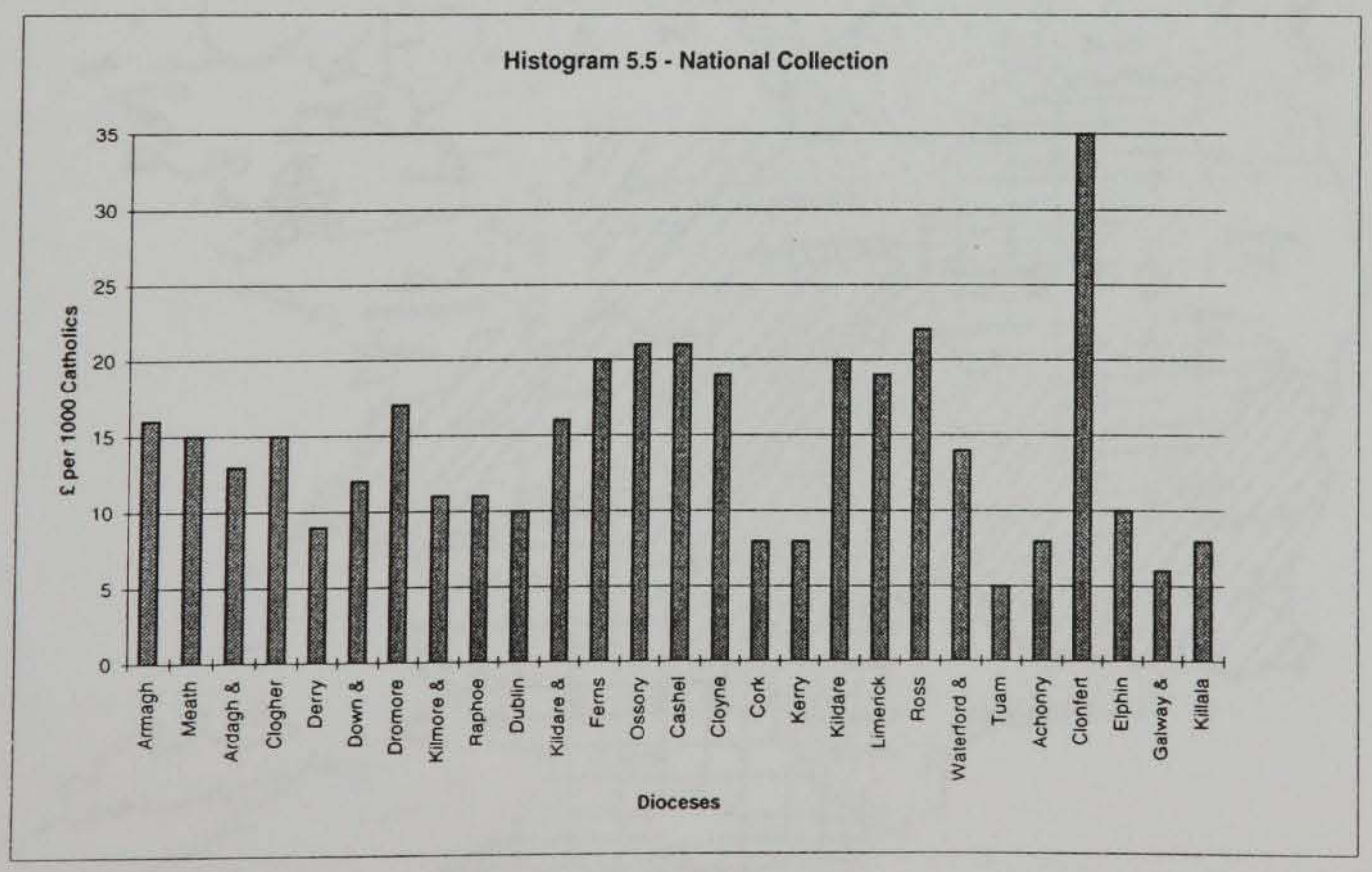
206 *Irish Press*, 19 October 1936. O'Doherty later contradicted himself –"Next Sunday's collections are meant not merely for those fighting against the Government, but for all Catholics. There are some Catholics fighting for the Government". It is unlikely that the hierarchy intended to grant some of the collection to organisations within Republican territory.

207 5 December 1936, 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events For The Year 1937', *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1938*. MacRory lodged £43,772 18s 7d into Cardinal Goma's account in the National Provincial Bank via the Munster and Leinster Bank between November 1936 and January 1937 (Spanish Civil War, VIII Appeals, MacRory Papers).

208 It was not, as often described, a 'Church gate' collection. Peadar O'Donnell commented – "But the Irish bishops with their singular genius for misreading public opinion, made a mistake in sending the plates travelling along the seats during Mass, for many people refused to be squeezed into this tacit vote in favour of General Franco and not only refused to put a penny in the plate but ignored the plate itself and brought it to a halt. Tiny commotions broke out here and there . . . " (*Salud! An Irishman in Spain* (London, 1937) p.246).

209 *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1937.


Histogram 5.4 - Catholic Press
Articles
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
Jul '36 - Dec '36
Jan '37 - Jun '37
Jul '37 - Dec '37
Jan '38 - Jun '38
Jul '38 - Dec '38
Jan '39 - Jun '39
Assisi
Cross
Fr. Matthew
Lourdes Messenger
Little Flower Monthly


Histogram 5.5 - National Collection
£ per 1000 Catholics
0
5
10
15
20
25
30
35
Armagh
Meath
Ardagh &
Clogher
Derry
Down &
Dromore
Kilmore &
Raphoe
Dublin
Kildare &
Ferns
Ossory
Cashel
Cloyne
Cork
Kerry
Kildare
Limerick
Ross
Waterford &
Tuam
Achonry
Clonfert
Elphin
Galway &
Killala
Dioceses

Map 5.1 — National Collection for Spanish Catholics

PROVINCES
and DIOCESES
of
IRELAND

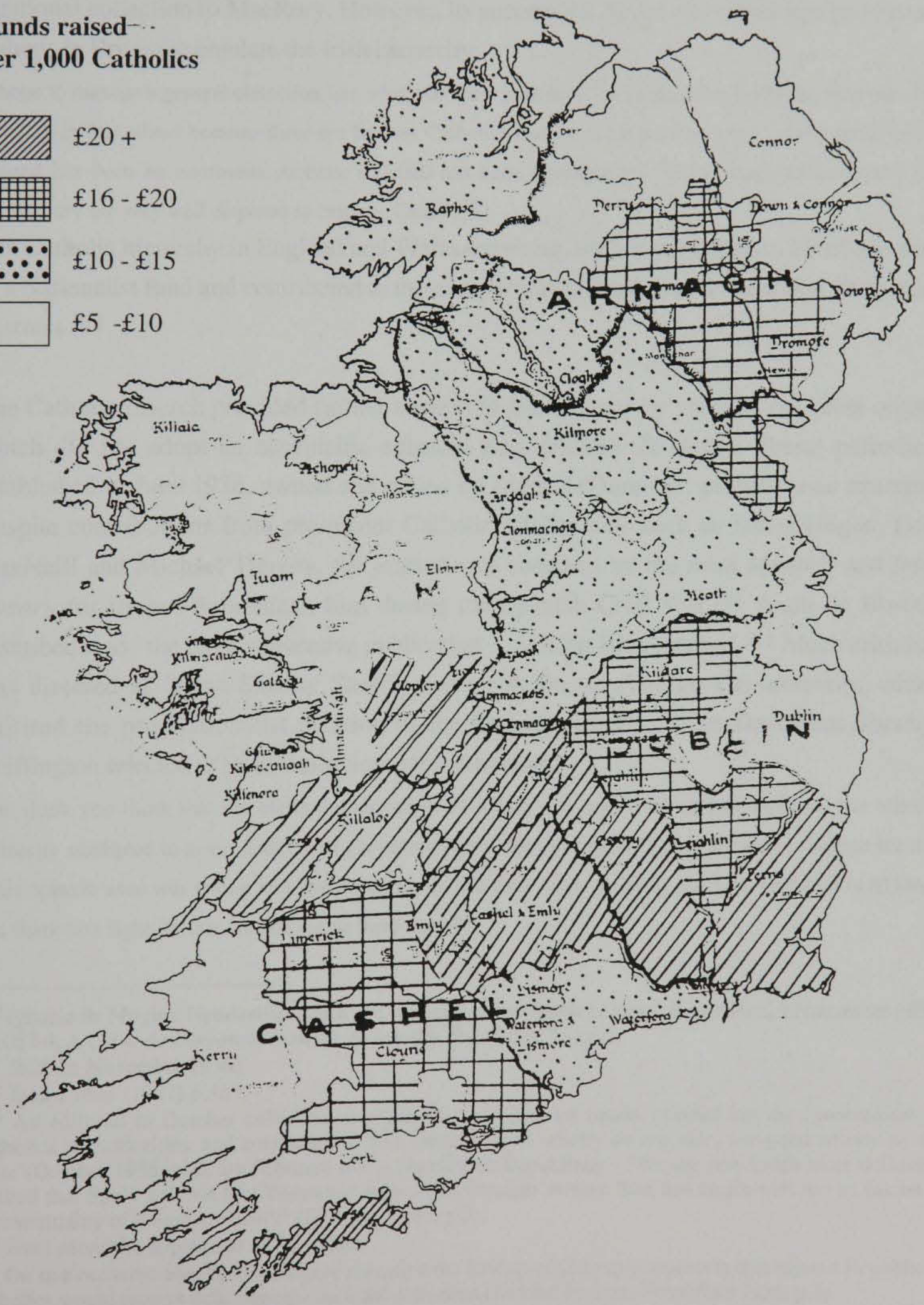
Funds raised—·
per 1,000 Catholics

£20 +

£16 - £20

£10 - £15

£5 -£10



The Nationalists were pleased with the collection which reinforced the identification of their forces with Catholicism. In early November, Ignacio de Mugiro, the Nationalist consul in Liverpool, informed the *Secretaría General del Estado*:

"The collection in Ireland has met with enormous results. I had the great honour of visiting the Cardinal of Armagh, Primate of said Island, and he told me they had already made £32,000 and he hopes to reach £40,000."[210]

There is no indication in Mugiro's reports that he was responsible for suggesting the idea of a national collection to MacRory. However, its success led Mugiro to encourage pro-Franco bishops in Britain to emulate the Irish hierarchy:

"I hope to manage a general collection like what was done in Ireland. Of course here it will not reap the same result as in that island because there are far less Catholics and far more poor people . . . The collection in Ireland has been an enormous success. £32,000 has been collected. . . The Bishops of Liverpool and Shrewsbury are very well disposed to help the Cause".[211]

The Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales, however, were more cautious about donating to a Nationalist fund and contributed to the non-partisan Committee for the Relief of Spanish Distress.[212]

The Catholic Church provided further support to Nationalists by pressurising press organs which did not adopt an acceptable editorial line. *Ireland To-day*, a liberal periodical established in June 1936, owned and edited by James O'Donovan, provides one example. Despite contributions from prominent Catholic intellectuals such as James Hogan, Eoin MacNeill and Michael Tierney, the journal was censured by the *Irish Monthly* and *Irish Rosary* for its pro-Republican bias during the Spanish Civil War.[213] Aodh de Blacam described it as "the most subversive publication . . . on the Irish market".[214] Much criticism was directed at Owen Sheehy Skeffington's column, *A Foreign Commentary*, which satirised the pro-Nationalist position of the Catholic Church.[215] In December Sheehy-Skeffington rejected O'Donovan's pleas for moderation:

"But don't you think that the clerical domination of which you expressed an apprehension has already indirectly attempted to assert itself? It might amuse you to hear that Father Paddy Brown . . . said to me that in his opinion what was wrong with this country was that there were too many Aodh de Blacam's in it! Don't you think he's right, & that it's our job to fight them?"[216]

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210 Ignacio de Mugiro, Nationalist consul in Liverpool to *Secretaría General*, Salamanca, 9 November 1936, R.1057-4, *Archivo de Burgos*, *Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores*, Madrid.

211 *Ibid*, 26 November 1936.

212 James Flint (1987) p.369.

213 An editorial in October called for restraint in the debate on Spain, pointed out the involvement of Catholics on both sides, and concluded – "Evil cannot reside wholly on one side, nor good wholly on the other"(October 1936, p.2). By February it was openly pro-Republican – "We are now much more definitely assured that Spain will not be Communist with a Government victory than that Spain will *not* be fascist in the eventuality of a Franco victory" (February 1937, p.3).

214 *Irish Monthly*, September 1936, p.647.

215 On one occasion Sheehy-Skeffington ridiculed the Bishop of Galway's statement that injured Republican Catholics would receive help from the national collection (*Ireland To-Day*, November 1936, p.7).

216 Sheehy-Skeffington to O'Donovan, 29 December 1936, Ms. 21,987, (xiv), O'Donovan papers, NLI.

The complaints against *Ireland To-Day* continued. The academic, Donal O'Sullivan believed the column was "devoted to sneers at . . . Irish Catholics". Michael Tierney, the lecturer and Fine Gael politician, told O'Donovan that "Mr. S.S. is just as bad on the Popular Front side as Paddy Belton on the [other]". Fr. P.J. Gannon criticised the coverage of his dispute with Fr. Gabana, a pro-Republican Basque.[217] By February 1937, O'Donovan felt he could no longer retain his controversial columnist despite the advice of his colleague, Liam O'Dunleavy, who told him:[218]

"I have been thinking this thing over very deeply and I do not believe that either circulation or adverts will be improved by suppressing Skeff. Circulation will drop, I think. I do not believe the priests have any influence on the sale of the magazine. They don't read themselves. They cannot prevent people from going to see a dirty picture, dancing on Sundays, drinking or buying vile English Sunday papers at the Church doors".[219]

O'Donovan dropped Sheehy-Skeffington from the March 1937 edition. Although the periodical became increasingly less progressive the clerical campaign did not abate – as O'Donovan complained to Fr. C.C. Martindale:[220]

". . . we are not necessarily under a ban from Jesuit quarters. Quite frankly I must admit that in other quarters, namely Secular and Dominican (Irish) there have been veiled and in one or two cases open attacks upon us. . . This merely to show you that although priests have visited newsagents and ordered the withdrawal of our magazine from their shops, yet our conscience can be quite clear . . ."[221]

The collapse of *Ireland To-Day*, a year later in March 1938, has incorrectly been solely attributed to clerical efforts.[222] Financial difficulties and a struggling circulation against the background of what Frank MacDermot, the former Fine Gael deputy, described to O'Donovan as "the intellectual stagnancy of Ireland" were also critical factors.[223] However, the clerical pressure greatly exacerbated these problems – income from advertising declined as few companies wished to be associated with a periodical accused of anti-clericalism. The difficulties faced by O'Donovan against a low-key but effective campaign of clerical criticism, and the less subtle activities of zealous secular Catholics like Aodh de Blacam indicate the pressures which could be applied on the press to conform to a clerical perspective.

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217 O'Sullivan to O'Donovan, 8 December 1936, Ms. 21,987, (xii); Tierney to O'Donovan, 6 February 1937, Ms. 21,987, (xv); Gannon to O'Donovan, Ms. 21,987, (v).

218 O'Donovan informed a potential contributor, Fr. C.C. Martindale, of his difficulties – ". . . lay ventures which tend to cover serious ground are frowned upon. If, in the nature of things, a slightly questioning or unorthodox note, by chance should gain entry even once, a hue is raised, the charge of subversiveness is made and direct action taken to suppress in toto what the main is . . ."(14 January 1937, Ms. 21,987, xv).

219 O'Dunleavy to O'Donovan, 23 February 1937, Ms. 21,987, (ii).

220 Fr. C.C. Martindale, an English intellectual, was one of the more liberal members of the Society of Jesus (J.C.H. Aveling, *The Jesuits* (London, 1981) p.253.

221 O'Donovan to Martindale, 23 March 1937, O'Donovan Papers, Ms. 21, 987.

222 Paul Blanshard, *The Irish and Catholic Power* (Connecticut, 1972) p.183.

223 As O'Donovan informed Martindale – "culturally things are at a very low ebb, the reading public is pathetically small in numbers". Only 3,500 editions were printed of the January 1937 edition.

The threat of loss of advertising lay behind clerical attempts to suppress the reports of Lionel Fleming (the *Irish Times*' Spanish correspondent) which received an adverse reaction within clerical circles. Fleming recounted the controversy in his autobiography:

"The publication of my first articles was followed by the arrival in our office, of a very polite priest. He told [R.M.] Smyllie [the editor] that, by pure chance, he had been talking to several of our more prominent advertisers, who had hinted that, unless the *Irish Times* discontinued this series of articles, they would feel compelled to withdraw their custom. He spoke, said the priest, as a well-wisher of the paper; he would not like to see the *Irish Times* lose money".[224]

The *Irish Times* was in a better position than *Ireland To-Day* to withstand such pressure and Fleming's articles continued. In response, according to Paul Blanshard, "virtually all Catholic education advertising" was withdrawn inflicting a substantial financial loss on the newspaper.[225] Smyllie's biographer noted that Fleming's articles "lost a few Catholic readers and a great deal of Catholic advertising".[226] Curiously, Breandán OhEithir, an *Irish Times* columnist for over twenty-one years, stated:

"The *Irish Times* was obliged to withdraw its correspondent who was reporting on the Civil War in Spain when the Catholic Colleges, which for reasons of well-heeled snobbery advertised in the paper, threatened to withdraw their advertising".[227]

The evidence supports the former version. In August 1936 twenty-eight advertisements for Catholic colleges were placed by eleven different orders and congregations.[228] Fleming's articles first appeared on 29 August and continued intermittently for three weeks. Between the 1st and 9th of September there were only eight more advertisements by Catholic colleges. After this point no further advertisements were placed for the entire month. More conclusively, the following year, during a similar period,[229] not one advertisement was placed by a Catholic college. In terms of both the speed of reaction and its unity the boycott is quite remarkable. Within eleven days of Fleming's first article approximately fourteen separate Catholic colleges appear to have agreed to blacklist the *Irish Times*. The efficiency of clerical co-operation in this case demonstrates that the Catholic Church was willing to act quickly and coherently against bodies which it considered did not serve its interests. Such tactics probably achieved considerable success against weaker and less independent newspapers, periodicals and newsagents than the *Irish Times*.

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224 *Head or Harp* (London, 1965) p.169. Fleming described Smyllie's characteristic reaction:
"He was shown the door. Hardly before he was out of earshot, Smyllie expressed himself in song:
'Oh the Pope of Rome I do defy
And every Papish Union.
And as I live I hope I'll die
A loyal Presbyterian'.

225 Paul Blanshard, *The Irish and Catholic Power*, (1972) p.183.

226 Tony Gray, *Mr Smyllie, Sir* (Dublin, 1991) p.115.

227 Breandán OhEithir, *The Begrudger's Guide to Irish Politics* (Dublin, 1986) p.98.

228 The most regular advertisers were the Dominican, Loreto, Holy Ghost, Carmelite, Presentation, and Holy Faith colleges.

229 *Irish Times*, 19 August 1937-10 September 1937. This was the peak period of advertising for colleges as the new term began in early September.

The *Irish Press*, which adopted a neutral position corresponding to its owner's non-intervention policy, was also subjected to clerical pressure. However, attempts to influence the *Irish Press* – a mass-circulation newspaper owned by the head of the government – demanded more subtle tactics than the withdrawal of advertising and its blacklisting from newsagents. In February 1937, Aodh de Blacam, an *Irish Press* columnist, wrote to Cardinal MacRory about "the difficulty of getting the Spanish case made clear" in the Irish Press. De Blacam was aggrieved that his editor had "mutilated" one of his pro-Franco articles and told MacRory:

"Your Eminence knows how much hurt to Irish public opinion has been done by the Irish Press attitude. The bogey of Fascism has been propagated, Fascism has been identified with the Spanish Church, and thus the suggestion has been spread among the people that Bishops are always on the side of militarists . . "[230]

De Blacam told MacRory that de Valera, who had "neither the time nor health to watch the Press" was not to blame but that if brought to his attention he could be shown how his newspaper was "poisoning the well". He contrasted the difficult attitude of the *Irish Press* with the acquiescent *Irish Independent* and warned MacRory of the consequences of inaction:

"namely, the bias of 100,000 families by news and articles and leaders which tend all towards the Left".

Another letter sent by de Blacam to MacRory reveals that the Cardinal carried out his request:

"I am deeply grateful for your Eminence's letter, and feel assured that Mr. de Valera's attention will improve the Press attitude; though a fully satisfactory change can come only after time has improved the personnel".[231]

The comment about personnel refers to another past grievance of de Blacam's. In 1936 he unsuccessfully pressed for the appointment of his right wing friend, Hugh Allen,[232] as editor of the *Irish Press*.[233] It is difficult to judge if MacRory's intervention had much effect on the *Irish Press* as the assertion that the newspaper followed a 'red' policy on Spain is wholly misleading. The *Irish Press* favoured neither side throughout the war. De Blacam clearly felt there was no improvement. Seven months later, MacRory recorded the minutes of his meeting with de Blacam:

"Mr. De Blacam came around 3.15 . . .

5. Irish Press still has Red complexion

6. University College a good deal anti-clerical".[234]

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230 De Blacam to MacRory, 24 February 1937, folder 13, XV Miscellaneous, MacRory papers.
231 *Ibid*, 17 April 1937.
232 Hugh Allen: former editor of the anti-semitic and right-wing *Catholic Pictorial* and Catholic *Mind;* Frank O'Reilly's deputy in the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland; National Corporate Party member.
233 *Ibid*, 2 February 1938.
234 14 November 1937, Diaries 1929-45, VI Joseph Cardinal MacRory, MacRory papers. The reliability of the information given to MacRory by de Blacam is questionable. However, de Blacam's heightened fear of communism does correspond with the views of the hierarchy in this period. The reference to UCD's anti-clericalism was elucidated by a letter to MacRory in 1943. While attending a Literary Society debate on the Spanish Civil War de Blacam discovered the "anti-Irish . . . spirit which animates and corrupts the university". He told MacRory that all the speakers "declared their sympathy with the Reds":

The Catholic Church supported the Nationalists militarily, financially, and by exerting influence on perceived sympathisers of the Spanish Republic – forcefully in the case of *Ireland To-Day* and more diplomatically with the *Irish Press*. However, it was not military or financial aid – amply supplied by Germany and Italy – that Franco sought by emphasising his Catholic credentials. As the leader of a rebellion against a legitimately elected government Franco needed international diplomatic support. In Latin America, where his propagandists effectively convinced the Catholic Church and conservative elite that the Nationalists were fighting a crusade against communism, Franco received *de jure* recognition from Guatemala, Salvador and Nicaragua by November 1936.[235] The Vatican's *de facto* recognition of Franco in 1937 provided a further veneer of diplomatic respectability. Ireland, with its predominant Catholic population and tradition of clerical obedience, might have been expected to follow suit.

Dr. Fogarty was the first bishop to criticise the Irish government's neutrality. On August 17, before Ireland adopted the Non-Intervention Agreement, he announced that the government should sever diplomatic relations with "the Communists of Madrid". He criticised the government for not condemning the "Spanish Reds". [236] Dr. Keane, Bishop of Limerick, appeared to agree when he stated – "For all who cherish their Christian heritage there can be no neutrality on this issue".[237]

These sentiments were not voiced by most of the hierarchy. Dr. Wall, auxiliary Bishop of Thasos, appeared to approve of the state's neutrality:

"The only help that the nations can give Spain is to stand aloof, because if one nation entered another would follow it, and there would be a war in Europe".[238]

Cardinal MacRory avoided the issue of diplomatic relations but urged the government to take action against organisations like Republican Congress which supported the Spanish government. The hierarchy strengthened their demands for the suppression of communism which appears to have been considered a more important objective than the recognition of Franco. On November 22, both Cardinal MacRory and Dr. Mageean called for the suppression of communism to avoid another Spain. MacRory wondered how long governments would allow communists to plot the overthrow of "Christian states".

"As I sat there, listening to what to my ears [was] national and religious blasphemy, I thought of the Spanish universities, in which the same kind of talk led on to the Red revolution. In my closing remarks, I implored the lads of U.C.D. not to repeat the example of the young Spaniards, who . . . led the assault upon their country. There were many nuns present. They, of course, could not speak, but I am sure they were not of the Red mind. I thought that all the rest were against me . . ."

235 Alistair Hennessy, 'Fascism and Populism in Latin America' in Walter Laquer (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (1979) p.249.

236 *Irish Independent*, 18 August 1936.

237 *Ibid*, 15 September 1936.

238 *Ibid*, 31 August 1936.

"It is my opinion that before long the Christian States will have to take serious action and ban Communism".[239]

Similarly, the Catholic periodicals contain little criticism of the government's foreign policy. The clerical press generally avoided discussing domestic politics.[240] Although the erroneous suggestion that non-intervention worked to the Republic's advantage was occasionally raised, the government's participation was not criticised.[241] Aodh de Blacam's articles in the *Irish Monthly* combined fervent pro-Francoism without compromising government policy. He dismissed the idea of intervention:

"Material action in support of the Catholic causes is, of course, out of the question; for, if one nation intervened, others would be drawn in on the other side and a universal war might follow".

The *Irish Rosary*, one of the most pro-Franco periodicals, also refrained from criticism of de Valera's foreign policy. Academic religious journals such as *Studies* and the *Irish Ecclesiastical Report* were even more careful to avoid adopting positions on divisive domestic political questions.

Although the hierarchy generally refrained from public criticism of government policy de Valera was privately informed of their views. In September, Francis McCullagh, the anti-communist war correspondent sent Dr. Mageean, Bishop of Down and Connor, the following dramatic telegram:

"Right here in Salamanca is the world's greatest story of racial and religious resurrection, ignored, misrepresented, by English Correspondents because England doesn't want another great Catholic power in the Mediterranean. But most amazing of all, judging by Irish newspapers, ERIN is towed like a dead fish in the wake of puissant, seductive, experienced Sassanach propaganda and same thing happening America where Jewish Freemason influence in Press exercising extraordinary Power. Please use your influence to make IRELAND see the truth in this matter".[242]

Mageean, clearly impressed by McCullagh's observations, forwarded the telegram to de Valera the very evening he received it.[243] He told de Valera:

"He [McCullagh] compresses much into a few lines. Apart from his reference to Ireland you will agree, I think, that he sums up the position neatly. I appreciate the difficulty and danger of a positive attitude on the

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239 22 November 1936, 'Record of Irish Ecclesiastical Events For The Year 1936', *Irish Catholic Directory and Almanac for 1937*.

240 Hartigan stated – "In general, Catholic publications avoided direct mention of politics . . . where it did so it was usually only when the status quo was threatened" (Maurice Hartigan, *The Catholic Laity of Dublin 1920-1940*, (Ph.D., Maynooth 1992) p.92). An exception to this rule was made for the Labour Party.

241 Criticism of non-intervention was based on distrust of Britain and France. The *Lourdes Messenger*, for example, claimed that England breached the agreement ("the child of the British Government") to support the Spanish Republic (June 1937, p.166).

242 McCullagh, Salamanca to Dr. Mageean, 21 September 1936, EP 5/2/37, Mageean papers, Down and Connor Archives.

243 The De Valera papers so far released (formerly held at Killiney) do not contain any letters from the hierarchy concerning the Spanish Civil War.

part of the Free State, but Captain McCullagh's judgement on the situation is valuable, and that is my reason for sending you the card".[244]

Mageean, who reportedly had a good relationship with de Valera, disassociated himself from McCullagh's aquatic simile. He neither criticised de Valera nor demanded a change in foreign policy but the implication is clear – "a positive attitude" would be welcomed. As was noted earlier Cardinal MacRory, who did not have a good relationship with de Valera, also privately discussed the war with de Valera. Pressure on this sensitive issue was applied by the hierarchy but more often, and probably more effectively, through private channels than the public ones employed by Fogarty.

The Lenten pastorals of 1937, issued a week before the Dáil met to vote on the Non-Intervention Bill, were particularly significant to the government. Again, Fogarty was most explicit:

"I know full well . . . how much you would like to see those who represent our country indicating more clearly than they have done their sympathy with a cause they need not be ashamed of."

Dr. Morrisroe, Bishop of Achonry, adopted a similar forthright position;

"A thoroughly Catholic State would not lend its co-operation, by trade pacts or other beneficial agreements, to Governments – such as Moscow and Madrid – that are to tear out the very name of Christ from the hearts of his followers".[245]

Dr. Keane, Bishop of Limerick, hinted at a desire to see a firmer attitude adopted against Republican Spain:

"You may ask yourselves how it is that the Christian nations of Europe are not united as one man against the spirit that emanates from Moscow and Madrid".

Morrisroe and Fogarty were the only bishops to openly criticise the government. Although there can be little doubt that the rest of the hierarchy disagreed with the continued recognition of the Spanish Republic they refrained from criticism. This was not an acknowledgement that foreign policy was the domain of the government but rather that direct confrontation was not always the best way to influence policy. The fact that the Vatican had not yet recognised the Nationalist regime considerably weakened any argument which could be made in favour of recognition.[246] Morrisroe and Fogarty's pastorals can be explained by their personal hostility to de Valera.[247] During the Blueshirt crisis both bishops made statements regarded

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244 Mageean to de Valera, 21 September 1936, EP 5/2/37, Mageean papers.

245 *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1937.

246 De Valera had previously told the Dáil that his government "did not see why they should do more in the matter then the Vatican had done".

247 This is not to suggest that Fogarty opportunistically used the war to embarrass de Valera but rather that his hostility towards de Valera outweighed any compunction to restrain his comments. It is evident from his pastoral letters – with their references to dragons, titans and "gallant champions" – that he viewed the war as a crusade. When Fr. McCabe, the rector of the Irish College, met Fogarty at the annual meeting of the hierarchy in October 1936 he noted – "He is a most striking man, with the white hair of an old chieftain, and the young heart and enthusiasm of a boy. At seventy, he would be prepared to take a rifle and go out and fight in Spain" (12 October 1936, Fr. McCabe diary, folder 61, McCabe papers).

by the government as "incitements to violence against the state".[248] Morrisroe and Fogarty frequently criticised government policy in their Lenten pastorals.[249]

The pastorals demonstrate how important the war was to the hierarchy but, with two notable exceptions, the bishops stopped short of dictating foreign policy to the government. Their position was noted by *The Round Table*'s Irish correspondent:

"It is worth noting that the Catholic Hierarchy have been wise enough not to identify themselves publicly with Mr. Cosgrave's motion or General O'Duffy's mischievous antics".[250]

While the hierarchy displayed strong pro-Franco sympathies they did not consider their differences of opinion serious enough to merit public conflict between Church and State. There were other issues of greater importance such as the drafting of the new constitution. Given the volatility of public opinion on Spain, the hierarchy, backed by Fine Gael and the Irish Christian Front, could have applied intense pressure on the government. Instead their concerns were privately raised with de Valera. The lack of ecclesiastical censure demonstrates de Valera's strong relationship with the hierarchy.

Conclusion

From mid-1937 Spain was emphasised less frequently by the hierarchy (histogram 5.2-5.3) and the clerical press (histogram 5.4). As the war slowly progressed, and the extent of Italian and German intervention became clear, there were fewer signs of enthusiastic support for Franco. After the publication of *Mit Brennender Sorge* the political credibility of the fascist powers (particularly Germany) whom Franco so clearly relied on declined considerably (histogram 5.3). Atrocities, such as the aerial bombing of Guernica by the Condor Legion, although widely denied within the Catholic press, underlined the complexities of the war. The ignominious return of the Irish Brigade contributed further to the waning of enthusiasm for the 'crusade'. Fr. Mulrean, the Irish Brigade's chaplain, informed Fr. McCabe:

" . . . you asked how things have changed here in Ireland. Complete indifference amongst our own. The brigade did all amount of harm".[251]

The collapse of the Irish Christian Front in 1937 lowered the profile of the war.[252] Belton's acquisition of the national collection also proved embarrassing for Church leaders. The

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248 1280/29, De Valera papers, (formerly in) Franciscan Archives, Killiney.

249 In 1938, example, Morrisroe blamed emigration on the government's policy of hampering farmers with restrictions. Fogarty, to illustrate the sin of dishonesty, offered the example of "confiscating . . . land without fair compensation in the name of the government, as is not infrequently done"(*Irish Independent*, 28 February 1938).

250 *Round Table*, March 1937, p.365.

251 Mulrean to McCabe, 8 January 1938, McCabe papers, folder 59.

252 *Hibernia* (April 1937, p.16), a pro-Franco monthly of "enlightened Catholic opinion", editorialised – "Controversy around the platform of the Christian Front has, in some degree, tended to befog the attitude of

clergy remained overwhelmingly pro-Franco but occasional doubts surfaced. In 1938, Dr. J.F. O'Doherty, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Maynooth, urged a less partisan perspective. He believed the censorship of Spanish news and scepticism of Catholic intellectuals like Jacques Maritain indicated that the issues were far from "clear as crystal". He disclaimed Maritain's "complete approval" of pacifism but concluded with a quotation from the Catholic *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*:

"Il est sans doute trop tôt pour parler dans une revue d'histoire des événements tragiques qui affligent actuellement l'Espagne: trop de passions y sont encore mêlées".[253]

Another indication of declining support for Nationalist Spain was noted by the Irish minister in Spain, Leopold Kerney. Following the end of the civil war Fr. O'Hara, the vice-rector of the Irish College, told Kerney that Cardinal Gomá had asked Cardinal MacRory to contribute to a fund to rebuild the Spanish churches. MacRory, according to O'Hara, "was not much in favour of the idea" as "there was no longer the same enthusiasm" for Spain.[254]

De Valera recognised General Franco's government on February 10, 1939. The Lenten pastorals which followed were concerned more with the impending Second World War. Bishop Fogarty's pastoral again proved the exception:

"Even our Government, whatever their private opinions may be, have been keeping bad company during the crisis. Ireland, perhaps the most Catholic country in the world, has seen herself throughout this vital campaign officially represented not with the National Government of Spain, but with a junta that were out for the destruction of religion and civilization under the name of democracy".

A *Te Deum* in honour of Franco's victory was celebrated by Archbishop Byrne, accompanied by eight priests, in the Pro-Cathedral on 24 April 1939. The *Te Deum*, organised by a committee of Catholic societies, was essentially a reunion of Ireland's pro-Franco lobby, and marked the end of ecclesiastical involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Numerous senior Fine Gael politicians were prominent among the congregation. Senor Berardis, the Italian consul, Herr Hempel, the German consul, and diplomats from Portugal, Chile and Spain represented the international right, while Paddy Belton and General O'Duffy, accompanied by several Irish Brigade members, represented the fragmented Irish right.[255] The *Te Deum* did not conflict with Irish foreign policy but the conspicuous absence of Fianna Fail members suggests the ceremony rankled government officials.

The response of the Catholic Church to the Spanish Civil War facilitates some insights into the characteristics of the Church during this period. Section I demonstrates the pronounced right-wing authoritarian political beliefs of the Irish clergy. There is a substantial strain of

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Ireland and its leaders to Spain, and the mist still hangs about us in spite of clear statements of sympathy and moral support in the highest places" .

253 Dr. J.F. O'Doherty, 'The Catholic Church in 1937', *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, January 1938, pp.12-3.

254 D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4, Kerney to Walshe, 29 March 1940.

255 *Irish Independent*, 25 April 1939.

antipathy to parliamentary democracy. Section II, the survey of Catholic press and pronouncements of the hierarchy, outlines the strongly partisan position adopted by the Church. The comprehensive nature of the pro-Franco propaganda in a wide range of religious periodicals is evident. This can be attributed to several factors. Irish sympathy for the Nationalists was a natural reaction to the wave of anti-clerical atrocities in Spain, particularly given the relationship between both countries and the strongly international character of Irish Catholicism.[256] The extent of pro-Francoism and the narrow range of views exhibited by the Irish clergy contrasted with the more diverse perspectives evident among the French and British clergy.

Section III, which focuses on domestic aspects of clerical rhetoric about Spain, reveals the extremely pessimistic world-view of the Irish Church. The Lenten pastorals, with their emphasis on the dangers of communism, secularism, and worldliness suggest a faith under siege rather than the reality of a dominant Catholicism which would remain securely entrenched for several decades. The prevalent suspicion of a far-reaching communist conspiracy, evidenced in private correspondence as well as public pronouncements, similarly contrasts with the negligible strength of communism in the Irish Free State. However, it could also be argued that the Church's concerns in this period, both international (the growth of communism, worldliness and anti-clericalism) and domestic (the popularity of dance halls, the cinema and non-Catholic literature) reflected a prescient and self-interested response to the increasing threat posed by the development of a modern secular culture.

The final section, which assesses the extent of pro-Franco support offered by the Catholic Church, does not permit a simplistic conclusion. The Catholic Church played an important and often secretive role in the organisation of military, financial and political support for the Nationalists. Its attempts to manipulate newspaper coverage of the war are particularly interesting. Most importantly, however, the Church did not pressure the government into adopting a pro-Franco foreign policy. The difference in the perspectives between Church and State were substantial. The government adopted a neutral position, the Catholic Church one of its most partisan stances of the twentieth century. It could be argued that de Valera's refusal to implement a 'Catholic' foreign policy demonstrates that although the Catholic Church exercised a strong hold over many aspects of state policy – such as health and education – this did not extend to all areas of government. It should also be noted though that the most important section of the hierarchy showed considerable restraint and moderation – characteristics which the Catholic Church is not often associated with in this period – in its pronouncements on Spain to ensure that their differences did not result in public conflict.

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256 The international ties between the religious orders are evident from the survey of Catholic press. For the internationalism of Irish Catholicism see Terence Brown, *Ireland, A Social and Cultural History* (London, 1981) pp.34-9.

6. Limerick: A Regional Study

The response to the Spanish Civil War of some of the more interested observers, whether among the left, right or the Catholic Church, has been analysed in some detail. Before considering how these pressure groups influenced the principal political parties and the formulation of government policy, it is useful to examine how the interaction of these groups affected public opinion on Spain in a local community. A regional study of County Limerick not only offers some indication of public sentiment concerning the war and its impact on local politics but also provides an insight into how bodies such as the Christian Front and the Catholic Church responded to Spain on a local level.

In late July 1936 news of the rebellion in Spain began appearing in Limerick newspapers. By mid-August the *Limerick Chronicle*[1] had declared its support for the Nationalists. Pointing to the wave of anti-clerical atrocities, the *Chronicle* described the war as a battle between Christianity and communism.[2] The following week the *Limerick Leader*[3] published the first of many strongly pro-Nationalist editorials. Limerick also received news of Spain from local sailors who worked for the Limerick Steamship Company which sailed to Valencia, Tangiers, Ceuta and Gibraltar each fortnight.[4] A sailor named Doyle described his visit to Valencia:

"The streets were barricaded with sand-bags, in preparation for attack by the Patriot forces, and almost every adult of either sex was armed with either revolvers or rifles. It was nothing unusual to see young girls sauntering about the streets swinging revolvers in their hands. The majority of them looked even more fanatical than the men".[5]

He reported seeing government forces assist mobs to burn down churches and desecrate religious statues.

On August 11, Limerick Corporation became one of the first public bodies in Ireland to protest against the Spanish government's treatment of Catholics when it passed a unanimous resolution urging the severance of diplomatic and trade relations.[6] This action was widely supported in Limerick. The *Chronicle* described it "as a practical way of showing what the Saorstat Government thinks of the Red savagery" adding:

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1 The *Limerick Chronicle* (1766-): reportedly the oldest extant paper in the Irish Free State; adopted a pro-Fine Gael editorial line in the 1930s.
2 *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 August 1936.
3 The *Limerick Leader* (1893-): had the largest circulation of the three newspaper groups included in this local study; strongly anti-communist and pro-Fianna Fáil during this period.
4 *Limerick Echo*, 11 August 1936.
5 *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 October 1936.
6 *Ibid*, 13 August 1936.

"already there are signs of practical support, as in Cashel and Tralee steps are being taken to open recruiting bureaux to enrol volunteers for an Irish Brigade to fight side by side with the patriot army of Spain."[7]

The following week Limerick Trades' and Labour Council passed a unanimous resolution against Spanish anti-clericalism.[8] On September 5, the Limerick Workers' Union also condemned the "Communist atrocities".[9] Later that week, the Limerick branch of the Typographical Society endorsed the Trades' and Labour Council resolution[10] The response of local workers was not limited to such resolutions. The Limerick and Ardnacrusha District Clerical Branch of the Electricity Supply Board resigned from its union, the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union, to protest against the donation of union funds to the Spanish government.[11] Labour sentiment in Limerick, at least publicly, was firmly united against the Spanish government.

A flamboyant editorial in the *Limerick Echo*[12] suggests that the Spanish Civil War had a dramatic impact in the city. The *Echo* urged "unity of purpose, firmness in resolution, and fervid persistency" from all sections of the community:

"There is, therefore, a delightful opening for the activity of the Boy Scouts, so that before the eyes of the world he can be looked upon as more for use than ornament. There is a grand opening for the League of Youth to demonstrate its earnestness for Faith and Motherland. There is a glorious field for speedy action whereupon the Irish Republican Army can cross swords with the hidalgo redshirt, and force the Manzanares to run red with the blood of the despoilers of pure womanhood. The Irish Brigade with the Limerick Crusade can try conclusions with the bull-baiter and the paid auxiliaries of the Russian white slaver, whose united efforts with man power and money are put to upset the noble calculations of the Patriots . . . Let the rivers run red with the blood of the assassins and let your war cry be Ireland Aboo . . . you wear the badge of clean Christianity against the blood-red jacket of the Soviet and knife-thrower".[13]

On September 5 a Fine Gael politician, D.J. Madden,[14] proposed Limerick County Council[15] adopt what was known as 'the Clonmel resolution' – a resolution of support for Franco. Madden's speech was couched in religious and anti-communist rhetoric:

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[7] *Ibid*, 15 August 1936.
[8] *Ibid*, 22 August 1936.
[9] *Limerick Leader*, 5 September 1936.
[10] *Limerick Leader*, 9 September 1936.
[11] *Ibid*, 16 September 1936.
[12] The *Limerick Echo* and *Limerick Weekly Echo* (1921-1985): the former was owned by Mrs. K. O'Sullivan, the latter by Mr. K. O'Sullivan; the political bias of these papers was less predictable than the *Chronicle* and *Leader* but they showed strong support for General O'Duffy and the Blueshirt factions during this period.
[13] *Limerick Echo*, 25 August 1936.
[14] D.J. Madden, a former United Irish League politician, was Limerick's representative on the central council of the League of Youth (Fine Gael section) in 1935.
[15] A Fianna Fáil (16 members) and Labour (4) coalition wrested control of the council from Fine Gael (16) following the 1934 local elections (*Limerick Leader*, 30 June 1934).

"Spain today was a country of despotism and terror, let loose by the agents of hell. It was overrun by pagans, who recognised no God, and indulged in atrocities and murders of the most inhuman kind . . . They would show that there was no welcome for the doctrines of Lenin and Stalin in Ireland."[16]

Although none of the councillors appear to have disagreed with Madden's crude analysis of the war, the Fianna Fáil representatives opposed the latter section of the resolution which pledged support to "any movement which may be established to safeguard the interests of the Catholics of Spain". Councillor Hartney argued that it might conflict with the government's non-intervention policy. After some disagreement – Edward Walsh argued that they had never protested against sectarian persecution in Northern Ireland – the council agreed to support any measures approved by the hierarchy and the government.[17]

In Limerick, as in the rest of Ireland, financial and moral support for Spanish Catholics was organised by the Irish Christian Front which was established in Dublin in late August. In mid September, several members of the ICF national executive visited Limerick to organise a local branch. On October 2, Edward Treacy, a local solicitor representing the national executive, convened a meeting at Limerick Town-hall to discuss the formation of a Christian Front branch. To the irritation of at least one local citizen the private meeting involved only invited prominent citizens.[18]

The attendance demonstrated that local politicians had adopted a non-partisan approach to the new organisation. Three Dáil deputies – Mayor Dan Bourke (Fianna Fáil), James Reidy (Fine Gael) and Michael Keyes (Labour) – were present. Bourke's announcement to the press concerned communism in Ireland rather than Spain and indicated that the Limerick Christian Front was interested in domestic issues:

"Limerick would for ever stand for the cause of Christianity . . . There was no great danger that Communism could make inroads in Limerick but Limerick citizens would be prepared to play a big part in the nation-wide activity".

It was decided to establish a branch but further action, including the appointment of officials, was postponed until discussions with the national executive.[19] The Dublin leadership evidently exercised substantial influence over the branch.

On October 19 the Limerick Christian Front held its inaugural meeting – the setting of council chambers adding a measure of prestige to the occasion. A provisional committee was formed with Mayor Bourke as chairman, James O'Brien (Carpenters' Guild) and Tom Duggan, secretaries, Michael Tynan (solicitor) and Denis O'Dwyer (chamber of commerce

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16 *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 September 1936; *Limerick Leader*, 12 September 1936.
17 *Limerick Echo*, 8 September 1936.
18 *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 October 1936. A correspondent to the *Chronicle*, "Simple Catholic Worker", claimed that contrary to the report in the *Irish Independent* (3 October 1936) the meeting was not advertised in the local press and that the "ordinary citizen" had been overlooked. I did not discover any advance notice of the meeting in the local press.
19 *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 October 1936; *Limerick Leader*, 5 October 1936.

president) as treasurers. The attendance suggests that the Christian Front drew support from a broad section of society – labour leaders, prominent business-men and the clergy (see table 6.1). The presence of six priests indicated substantial clerical approval for the organisation.

The question of political bias dominated the meeting. Thomas Dennehy, the executive committee's representative, rejected allegations of politics and argued that the organisation existed only to oppose communism. Keyes gave a guarded response to Dennehy's speech. He felt the ICF programme calling for the removal of social evils could be perceived as fascist. More enthusiastically, Mayor Bourke concluded:

"The Patriot Forces in Spain had their heartfelt sympathy and all the citizens fervently prayed for the success of their arms."[20]

Table 6.1: Attendance at ICF Inaugural[21]

Trade union/trades' council representatives	15
Business proprietors/professionals	10
Priests	6
Politicians	4
Unidentified	1
ICF national executive	1

Despite the Christian Front's aspiration of a branch in every parish apparently only one other branch (in Pallaskenry) was established in County Limerick. Again, there was significant clerical support. During Sunday Mass in Pallaskenry, Fr. Quinlan:

"urged the people to pray for peace, and to join and support the Irish Christian Front in its noble efforts to combat Communism".[22]

Limerick County Council was less successful in formulating a non-partisan response to Spain. When a Leitrim council resolution demanding the suppression of communism came before it, the Fianna Fáil representatives proposed that it be marked read. Fine Gael insisted on its adoption. The argument soon extended to Spain when Tim O'Connell, a Fine Gael councillor, criticised the government for permitting trade with Spain:

"The fact that they continued to do so went to show that they had sympathy with the Reds, who were guilty of atrocious crimes . . ."[23]

Fine Gael was defeated fifteen votes to eight.[24] With the exception of a Christian Front supporter Michael Hickey, who abstained, Labour supported Fianna Fáil. P.J. Rea, the *Limerick Weekly Echo* columnist, was critical of what he described as "commonplace interference":

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20 *Limerick Leader*, 21 October 1936.
21 Source: *Limerick Chronicle*, 20 October 1936; *Limerick Leader*, 21 October 1936. Sample size – 37.
22 *Ibid*, 3 October 1936.
23 *Ibid*, 24 October 1936.
24 *Limerick Leader*, 24 October 1936. The *Limerick Echo* (20 October 1936) reported the vote as fourteen to six.

"If President De Valera saw the use of meddling in such a delicate web of diplomacy, he would not shirk the issue, neither would Dan Bourke, and so John McCormack [Fianna Fáil councillor] you used sound sense and judgement".[25]

Rea's comments suggest that the Fine Gael resolution was seen by some as motivated more by partisanship than pro-Nationalist sympathies. The fact that a ban on trade with the Spanish Republic would have affected the Limerick Steamship Company and impacted on Limerick more than most cities may have contributed to opposition to O'Connell's suggestion. The issue of trade with Spain, condemned by Limerick Corporation in August, was raised on several other occasions although rarely so persuasively as in Michael O'Hartigan's[26] letter to the *Limerick Echo*:

"And what of those who support, buy and eat the oranges from Valencia – a region redolent quite recently of massacre and butchery – oranges blood be-spattered, sometimes reddened with the vital fluid of the grower who chivalrously rushed into the line of fire to receive into his own breast the bullet intended for the heart of his dear old Parish Priest".[27]

Despite disharmony in the county council, Limerick's enthusiastic response to the hierarchy's national collection on October 25 demonstrated the widespread sympathy for Spanish Catholics. According to the *Limerick Leader*, the amount raised (£2,174 15s 7d) represented:

"a phenomenal success . . . in the cases of some churches, at least, the sum realised was never exceeded on any previous occasion".[28]

The Christian Front met on the same day to organise a public demonstration. Once again the subject of politics dominated the meeting.[29] Since the last meeting Michael Keyes had received criticism from sections of the labour movement for his involvement with the organisation. He expressed doubts about supporting the Nationalists as "it had been stated that Franco would appoint a Fascist regime". Keyes announced that his continued support for the ICF was subject to approval by the Trades' Council. Canon Hannan replied:

" . . . the question as to what General Franco would do after he had won the civil war in Spain did not arise. To his mind the subject they had to deal with was Christianity against Communism".[30]

Fr. Fitzpatrick outlined the objectives of the organisation; to combat communism, social evils and send medical supplies to Spain. Pat Moloney, a Locomotive Workers' representative, felt there was an urgent need for the Christian Front as he had proof that communism was prevalent in Limerick. However, when challenged, Moloney refused to

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25 *Limerick Weekly Echo*, 31 October 1936.
26 O'Hartigan was a prominent Christian Front supporter.
27 *Limerick Echo*, 1 December 1936.
28 See map 5.1 and histogram 5.5, chapter 5: The Catholic Church.
29 *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 October 1936, *Limerick Leader*, 28 October 1936.
30 *Ibid.*

reveal his evidence. James McQuane, president of the Trades' Council, was applauded when he declared there were not five communists amongst the Limerick workers.

Despite Keyes' reservations, resolutions from several local bodies suggest that the Spanish Nationalists, and the Christian Front, enjoyed broad support. On November 1, the 'Old IRA' protested against the Spanish "Reds". The church-burnings which accompanied the outbreak of the rebellion precluded any solidarity between Irish and Spanish republicanism:

"On many occasions it had been sought to represent Republicanism as being tainted with Communism, but such dishonest practices cut no ice, and it was well-known that the twin war-cry of the Old IRA had been and ever would be "Faith and Fatherland".[31]

The following week Limerick Corporation unanimously agreed to attend the ICF public meeting.[32] Significantly, the Trades' Council finally declared their support and resolved to "be associated in heart and spirit with the practical work of the Christian Front".[33]

Despite the wide approval for the Nationalists, the Spanish Civil War remained a divisive issue among county councillors. D.J. Madden was again at the source of controversy when he moved that the councillors:

". . . extend our sincere sympathy to the Patriot Forces in Spain, and . . . place on record our congratulations to their forces, who are nobly, unselfishly, and heroically fighting on behalf of Christianity and humanity".

Councillor Harnett (Fianna Fáil) argued that the motion contradicted the spirit of non-intervention and was unnecessary because of the recent adoption of the 'Clonmel resolution'. The discussion deteriorated into a bitter argument, motivated more by antipathy between the councillors than any difference of views on Spain:

"Mr Power [Fine Gael] said there was nothing contentious in the motion. The Council were either for Christ or anti-Christ.

Mr Walsh [Fianna Fáil] said it was stated in the Press that General O'Duffy was sending a number of men to Spain, and if it later transpired that there were no Limerick men in the contingent it would be apparent that the Council were only a lot of blatherers.

Mr. O'Connell [Fine Gael] – If de Valera went it would be all right."[34]

Madden's motion was defeated seventeen to ten. Again, Fianna Fáil and Labour united against Fine Gael and Michael Hickey, the Labour representative, abstained. The division reflected the position in the Dáil where Labour supported the government's policy of non-intervention and recognition of the Spanish Republic. The timing of the motion (two days before a contentious Dáil vote calling for Franco's recognition) suggests Madden intended to embarrass Fianna Fáil.

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31 *Ibid*, 3 November 1936
32 *Limerick Leader*, 14 November 1936.
33 *Limerick Chronicle*, 12 November 1936.
34 *Ibid*, 14 November 1936.

If Madden's motives were mischievous he would have been pleased with the public opprobrium which followed. The parish priest of St. Munchin's, Canon O'Dwyer, publicly criticised the Fianna Fáil councillors – in particular Michael Ryan and Edward Walsh. Even the *Limerick Leader*, a staunch government supporter, remarked that the vote "must have been very welcome and encouraging to those interested in the progress of Communist propaganda":

". . . We do not stand for the crass stupidity that would vote against an unexceptionable motion simply because of the political views of its proposer, and we feel quite sure that no-one would reject and repudiate such a spirit more vehemently than would the President himself".[35]

Such disputes were not confined to Limerick city. A Newcastle West town commissioners meeting ended in confusion after several members walked out when Tim O'Connell (Fine Gael) again called on the government to ban trade with Spain. Bitter exchanges continued at the next meeting when O'Connell disputed the minutes which recorded his motion as unsuccessful. M. McCarthy, a Fianna Fáil representative, defended his and his colleagues – M.J. Clifford (Independent) and J. Brady (Labour) – sudden departure:

"Mr. McCoy [Fine Gael]: You walked out because you had not the guts to propose a direct negative.

Mr. McCarthy: I had the guts if I wanted to, and you know it. We all know the reason that the resolution was proposed – for a political purpose".[36]

In Newcastle West, like Limerick, Labour and Fianna Fáil combined against Fine Gael. However, none of the politicians represented on Limerick's local bodies appear to have held sympathies other than those of the prevailing pro-Nationalism. The Spanish Civil War was the cause of disputes in political bodies throughout Europe but perhaps only in Ireland did such bitter scenes occur where the vast majority of members held broadly similar ideological views of the conflict. Clearly, the absence of a tradition of bipartisan co-operation in the Free State (in large part a consequence of the divisive legacy of the Irish Civil War) motivated such disputes more than the controversial issues raised by the war.

The Christian Front public meeting on November 15 presented an impressive display of unity against the perceived threat of Irish communism as much as the reality of the Spanish variety. As table 6.2 indicates the demonstration was supported by a wide array of local bodies. Only several thousand people braved the heavy rains but the low attendance was compensated for by the impressive turnout of local dignitaries, city officials and clergy on the large raised platform.[37] Businessmen, clergy and political party representatives were particularly prominent. Resolutions were passed in favour of corporatism, sending medical supplies to Spain and suppressing communism. Canon O'Dwyer's speech was probably a

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35 *Limerick Leader*, 21 November 1936.

36 *Ibid*, 9 December 1936.

37 An attendance of twenty to thirty thousand had been predicted (*Limerick Chronicle*, 14 November 1936).

little too belligerent for Mayor Bourke whose party was committed to non-intervention. Recalling Limerick's historic triumphs, the Canon predicted "the day when an Irish Legion will lead Spanish soldiers into the city of Barcelona".[38]

Table 6.2 – Attendance at the ICF Public Meeting[39]

Business proprietors/professionals	23
Clergy	18
Politicians	15
Trade union/council representatives	13
Sporting/cultural groups	4
City Officials	4
Catholic Action Groups	4
Unidentified	1

The only notable absentee from the demonstration was Bishop Keane.[40] The Christian Front branch had not yet gained the credibility of other organisations patronised by the Bishop such as the Legion of Mary and the St. Michael's Temperance Society.[41] Despite Cardinal MacRory and Archbishop Byrne's favourable references to the Christian Front, the hierarchy never attended any of their public meetings. Nonetheless, the presence of eighteen clergymen on the platform (including six parish priests and two administrators) indicates substantial ecclesiastical enthusiasm for the Christian Front. This is confirmed by the attendance of all of Limerick's nine (mostly clerical-directed) confraternities and sodalities. The participation of the clergy naturally increased the credibility of the organisation. It seems likely that Father Quinlan in Pallaskenry was not the only priest to urge his congregation to join the Christian Front.

The clergy's interest in the Spanish Civil War was not confined to the Christian Front. Throughout the war they ensured that Spain maintained a high profile. News of Spain was incorporated into Church devotions and traditions. For example, in October 1936, Bishop Keane ordered an Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament throughout the diocese to atone for the anti-clerical "outrages".[42] In February 1937, Keane's Lenten pastoral urged firmer action against Republican Spain.[43] The war was also the subject of numerous church sermons which were usually comprehensively reported in the local newspapers. These sermons occasionally called for conciliation but more frequently reflected the assertive pro-Franco position adopted by the Irish hierarchy. In September 1936, for instance, Fr. Michael Fox, spiritual director of the Holy Family asked the congregation of the Redemptorist church in

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38 *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 November 1936.
39 Source: *Limerick Chronicle*, 16, 18 November 1936; *Limerick Leader*, 18 November 1936. Sample size – 82.
40 According to the Limerick Diocesan archivist there is no mention of the Christian Front or the Spanish Civil War in Dr. Keane's papers.
41 *Limerick Chronicle*, 27 October 1936, 15 March 1938.
42 *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 October 1936.
43 *Irish Independent*, 8 February 1937.

Limerick to "pray for the success of the Patriot forces, the defenders of their glorious Faith and country".[44]

Limerick priests also used their prestige beyond official church activities to influence opinion. The stature of the clergy allowed them to pass resolutions on local bodies which normally fell foul of party politics. This is illustrated by Canon O'Dwyer's resolution passed by the Mental Health Committee in April 1937.[45] The clergy also organised public lectures on the war. In December 1936, Fr. P.J. Byrne OSA informed a crowded Savoy Cinema that "never was an insurrection more justified than that initiated by Franco". Fr. Byrne's speech suggests he intended not merely to disseminate propaganda but influence government policy:

"One was very unwilling to speak critically, especially of those who had done so much towards the making of a sane Catholic State here in Ireland. It was to be regretted, however, that they were not amongst the first to give recognition to Nationalist Spain".[46]

A lecture by Fr. J. Cleary C.SS.R at the Grand Central Cinema warned of the threat to democracy posed by the Spanish government. Fr. F. Stenson STD explained how Freemasons had fomented the war. The lectures generally depicted the war in simplistic terms but, judging by the descriptions of high attendances, were very successful. They were also widely reported in the local media – often the entire speech was reprinted *verbatim*. Clerical lectures prompted the *Limerick Leader* to write editorials on Spain on three occasions.[47] For example, when the Spanish priest Fr. Gabana spoke at the Grand Central Cinema the *Leader* reflected:

"Franco has the overwhelming majority of the Spanish people behind him, and none are more anxious for his victory than the workers and the real champions of democracy. . . Freemasons, Jews, atheists and unbelievers of every kind are behind the Red campaign of ruin and murder in Spain . . . It is heartening to learn from Father Gabana that Franco is certain to win, and that his victory will smash Communism not only in his own country but in all Europe and in all the world."[48]

Local support for Nationalist Spain took a more direct form in late November when small numbers of men began leaving to serve with the Irish Brigade. Four men from Limerick city were among the third group of General O'Duffy's volunteers to travel to Spain on 27 November. Despite O'Duffy's fears that de Valera might prevent the departure of his brigade, the volunteers made no attempt to leave secretly. Their names, and the names of other recruits awaiting passports, were printed in the local press before their departure.[49]

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44 *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 September 1936.
45 See page 196.
46 *Limerick Leader*, 14 December 1936; *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 December 1936. The lecture was entitled '*Spain – Yesterday and to-day and . . . ?*'
47 The *Limerick Echo* (1 December 1936) also published an editorial on Fr. Byrne's lecture.
48 *Limerick Leader*, 2 June 1937.
49 *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 November 1936.

Two weeks later, approximately twenty-six volunteers from County Limerick left Galway on board the *Dun Aengus*. On January 6, another group of approximately thirty-two Limerick men were forced to return from Passage West when the expected transport ship failed to arrive.[50] Due to transport and non-intervention difficulties most of these men never reached Spain. Security was noticeably tighter on this occasion; the local contingent travelled by car in groups of two and gardaí conspicuously watched the railway station and other public places.[51] By February 1937, at least forty Limerick men were fighting with the Irish Brigade in Spain.[52]

Most of the volunteers were working-class, generally unskilled or semi-skilled. As table 6.3 shows, clerks and shop assistants were the most common occupations. The majority of volunteers appear to have held jobs before they enlisted. A letter from William Gleeson[53] to the *Limerick Leader* appealing for work following the volunteers return to Ireland indicates that at least two-thirds of the Limerick city recruits were employed before they enlisted:

"Of the 33 who returned 22 have found employment with their former employees – there's a fine spirit of Christian comradeship! But what about the remaining 11? Would it be too much to ask one or other of our influential citizens to the needful and procure some kind of work . . . "[54]

Table 6.3: Occupations of volunteers[55]

Clerks/Shops:	7
Unskilled:	7
Tradesmen:	4
Farmers:	2

The volunteers were mostly aged in their twenties – although records from the Department of External Affairs show there were at least two minors (under twenty-one) among the Limerick contingent. At least eleven of the forty had served in the National Army. Some, such as William Delaney, an officers training camp instructor and captain in the National Army, had considerable experience. At least two of the eleven National Army soldiers had been pre-truce IRA volunteers, while another had also served in a foreign army. None are known to have fought on the anti-treaty side during the Irish Civil War.

It may be assumed from these statistics that the volunteers' political sympathies generally rested with Fine Gael rather than Fianna Fáil. An estimate of how many could be described

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50 *Limerick Echo*, 12 January 1937.
51 *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 January 1937.
52 Numerous sources: national and regional newspapers, government records, personal memoirs etc. The total number was probably a little higher.
53 Gleeson, a Christian Front supporter, was president of the Limerick Branch of the Typographical Society.
54 *Limerick Leader*, 28 June 1938. It is not known how many, if any, of the unemployed eleven held jobs before their departure.
55 Numerous sources, particularly national and local newspapers. The unskilled category includes two unemployed ex-soldiers whose occupations (wireless-operator and gunner) rendered them unskilled outside the army. Sample size: 20.

as Blueshirts is complicated by several factors.[56] First, by the autumn of 1936, the term Blueshirt, although frequently used, applied to any one of three groups – General O'Duffy's tiny National Corporate Party, the official Fine Gael League of Youth (discreetly being wound down by the party leadership), and Ned Cronin's breakaway faction (which also called itself the League of Youth). Records for both League of Youths and the National Corporate Party for 1936 do not appear to have survived. League of Youth (Fine Gael) records for 1935 (i.e. after O'Duffy's split but before Cronin's) indicate that only two of the thirty-nine Limerick volunteers, Daniel Ahern and John Mangan were members of that organisation.[57] However, the 1935 League of Youth register (which lists only 4,050 members nation-wide compared to a membership of 47,923 in 1934) is not a reliable register of active, or once active, Blueshirts.[58]

The Limerick League of Youth (Cronin section) did not co-operate with O'Duffy's venture – although individual Blueshirts loyal to Cronin probably enlisted with the Irish Brigade. In December 1936, while Cronin was in Spain attempting to form a rival Irish Brigade, the League of Youth national council (Cronin faction) met in Geary's Hotel in Limerick to officially split from Fine Gael. They also warned the British government that if it continued to favour "the Reds in Spain" the League of Youth would adopt a policy of complete separation from England. The organisation's county directors were instructed to forward the names of Blueshirts who were prepared to "fight for Christianity" in Spain. Intriguingly, this suggests that had Cronin's mission to Spain met with success a rival, and possibly more numerous, Irish Brigade would have fought in Spain.[59]

The Irish Brigade volunteers were inspired by right-wing, anti-communist and, most importantly, religious convictions. The speech of the Limerick area recruiter, James Ryan, to the departing volunteers conveys the pious aspirations of the Irish Crusade against Communism:

"You will have a rocky road to travel. You will pass through the bye-roads of the thorns and the thistles. You will, perhaps, be wounded on the way, but your wounds received for Christ the King, will one day be the trophies of your victory, and shine more resplendent on the day of your resurrection. You may be called to make the ultimate sacrifice, but the blood of the martyr is always the seed of the Church".[60]

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56 Also, following the disorders of 1933/34, the acrimonious splits and the accusations of fascism, the term 'Blueshirt' was considered insulting by many members of Fine Gael. For example, when independent representative M.J. Clifford called a Fine Gael member, Amos Reidy, a Blueshirt at a meeting of the Newcastle West Town Commissioners the latter invited Clifford "out on the road to have it out" (*Limerick Chronicle*, 21 July 1936).

57 Information kindly provided by Mike Cronin (Source: League of Youth 1935 Membership Ledger).

58 Mike Cronin, 'The socio-economic background and membership of the Blueshirt movement, 1932-35', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 114, (November 1994) p.234.

59 *Limerick Leader*, 14 December 1936.

60 *Limerick Chronicle*, 19 December 1936.

Interestingly, despite the attention focused on Spain by the local newspapers, only one newspaper (*the Limerick Weekly Echo*) actually encouraged the volunteers to enrol. The *Chronicle* and *Leader* reported the departure of the men without editorial comment. P.J. Rea, the *Weekly Echo* columnist enthused:

"To the Front, brave men and women of Limerick . . . the bugle call on Sunday was as shrill and as sweet as the last rally of Sarsfield on the plains of Landen. Bravo, Limerick . . . The Cross is the aim all and the end all of the belligerents. After all it is well worth fighting for, and we are no better than our forefathers who fought for it at home and in foreign lands. Up then, men of Limerick, and form a Crusade, and with God at your elbow and a good rifle, then make way for Limerick".[61]

Curiously, an editorial published a month earlier in the *Weekly Echo*'s sister paper, the *Limerick Echo*, supported non-intervention and pointed out that O'Duffy had never helped the Catholics in Northern Ireland.[62]

In contrast to the Irish Brigade, the departure of four Limerick-born men – Frank Ryan, Jim Tierney, Gerard Doyle and Jim Woulfe – to fight for the Republican government was not mentioned in the local newspapers. This is partly explained by the fact that at least three of the men did not reside in Limerick in 1936.[63] Also, neither the CPI or Republican Congress appear to have held public meetings in Limerick during this period. Given the local enthusiasm for the Christian Front and the Irish Brigade, this was probably prudent. Indeed, the fact that three out of the four men had left Limerick suggests the city was not conducive to left-wing activity.

In early 1937, with a general election impending, it appeared Spain might become an electoral issue. At a Fine Gael meeting, attended by James Reidy, George Bennett, Liam Burke and Dr. T.F. O'Higgins,[64] the principal issues discussed were the Treaty, the economic war, local administration and the government's Spanish policy. Dr. O'Higgins accused Fianna Fáil of pandering to its left-wing supporters – "a mixture of sincere Republicans and half-baked Communists" – by continuing to recognise the Spanish government.[65] Two months later, O'Higgins repeated his criticisms at an election meeting in Limerick. Describing de Valera as a dupe of Anthony Eden's co-operation with "Red Russia and Pink France", O'Higgins asserted that Ireland was accredited to "the Communist Government" only because diplomatic relations were considered useful by Britain.[66]

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61 *Limerick Weekly Echo*, 31 October 1936.
62 *Limerick Echo*, 22 September 1936.
63 Ryan, joint secretary of Republican Congress, worked at the Co-Op Printing Press in Dublin. The *Irish Democrat* (7/7/37) referred to Tierney as a resident of Dublin. Gerard Doyle resided in London (D/FA 10/11A).
64 The first two were local TDs. Liam Burke was Fine Gael secretary and Dr. T.F. O'Higgins, brother of the late Kevin O'Higgins, was a prominent Fine Gael politician.
65 *Limerick Chronicle*, 19 January 1936.
66 *Limerick Leader*, 13 March 1937.

At least one of Limerick's government deputies took such accusations seriously. Dan O'Brien told the Ballyagran cumann:

". . . he wished to sound a note of warning. The result was taken for granted, and the only danger was over-optimism. Every weapon was used by the opposition to deceive the people and to keep them from voting. In this connection he referred to the debate in the Dáil on the Non-Intervention pact, and said they had the nauseating spectacle of the Opposition trying to make political party capital out of the Catholic traditions of this nation".[67]

However, the political capital gained by Fine Gael's stance on Spain was to some extent countered by the unambivalent pronouncements of local Fianna Fáil cumainn. Herbertstown Cumann, for example, passed a resolution expressing sympathy with the "Insurgents of Spain" who were defending not only Spain but "Christianity itself against the world forces of atheism".[68] Mungret Cumann, perhaps wary of losing ground in light of controversial Dáil debates and Dr. O'Higgins criticism, condemned the Republican atrocities:

". . . it is undoubtedly a war for the extermination of the Catholic religion, and it behoves every Catholic to raise his voice in condemnation of it".[69]

It does not appear that Fianna Fáil's political fortunes in Limerick were adversely affected by the war. This may be due to the discrepancy between the government's foreign policy and the rhetoric of local party members. With the exception of the acrimonious debates in Limerick County Council – Fianna Fáil representatives joined in with the prevailing pro-Franco enthusiasm even if it contradicted government policy. A notable example occurred when the Fianna Fáil dominated Limerick Mental Hospital Committee unanimously passed a militaristic resolution proposed by Canon O'Dwyer, one of the local clergy's more prominent pro-Franco supporters.[70] O'Dwyer outlined how the 'Patriots' were in conflict with the "disruptionist forces of Communism and Jewry" and requested the board to sympathise with the Irish Brigade in their "noble and gallant fight":

"Their kith and kin in America were looking for a lead from Catholic Ireland, and he had no doubt that if that lead were given, Catholic Irishmen in America would send 20,000 volunteers to aid Franco . . . "[71]

The compliant accommodation of such resolutions offers one reason why government representatives in Limerick, unlike their colleagues in Dublin, were rarely accused of harbouring communist sympathies.

Despite its initial popularity, the Limerick branch of the ICF encountered difficulties in early 1937. The only objective to meet with much success was fund-raising. A flag day collection and sale of pamphlets organised by Limerick's nine confraternities and sodalities at the public meeting raised one hundred and fifty-five pounds. Subscriptions to the Christian

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67 *Ibid*, 20 March 1937.
68 *Ibid*, 12 December 1936.
69 *Ibid*, 18 May 1937.
70 Seven Fianna Fáil, five Labour, two Fine Gael, and two independent representatives attended the committee meeting.
71 *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 April 1937.

Front contributed another seventy pounds. As table 6.4 shows, the subscribers were mostly professionals and prominent townspeople. Interestingly, labour organisations, with the exception of the Nursing Association and the Limerick Railway Workers (represented by the fervently anti-communist Pat Moloney) were not represented among the subscribers.

Table 6.4 – Subscribers to the Irish Christian Front[72]

Occupations	No. Subscribers	Amount
Professionals/Proprietors:		
Bank Officials	10	£5 - 10s
Solicitors	7	£5 - 10 - 6
Business Proprietors	4	£11 - 10
Auditors	2	£1 - 10
Doctors	1	£1
Workers' groups:		
Limk. Railway Workers	n/a	£14 - 17 - 3
Nurses Association	n/a	£1
Clergy	2	£3
Politicians	3	£4
Unidentified	13	£19
Total	42	£66 - 17 - 9

Following the November demonstration there was some uncertainty as to how the Christian Front should develop. One unresolved problem was what exactly constituted membership. The most common method was to ask the crowd at demonstrations to cross their arms in the air and pledge their loyalty to the Christian Front. The Limerick committee suggested establishing a public register to enrol members.[73] However, there was no further mention of this at the following meetings.

When the committee met in January little interest was expressed in promoting anti-communism or corporatism. It was decided to send two delegates, Mayor Bourke and Dr. Roche-Kelly, to the national convention in February.[74] The lack of enthusiastic anti-communism probably reflects the absence of any signs of left-wing subversion in the city. The committee's inaction on corporatism is also not surprising considering the policies of the main political parties. Although Michael Keyes, a Labour deputy, proposed the corporatist resolution at the public demonstration his party consistently adopted an anti-corporatist position throughout the 1930s. De Valera, although unwilling to criticise corporatism due to its popularity with the clergy and Catholic intellectuals, disguised his lack of enthusiasm beneath the vocationalist veneer of his new senate.[75] Fine Gael was the only major political

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72 Source: *Limerick Leader*, 8 May 1937.
73 *Limerick Leader*, 23 November 1936.
74 *Ibid*, 23 January 1937.
75 Joseph Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985* (Cambridge, 1989) p.272.

party to include corporatism in its policy documents but their commitment to it had waned since the Blueshirt split in 1934.[76]

On January 25, one week before the ICF national convention, the *Limerick Leader* dramatically withdrew its editorial support from the organisation. The *Leader* did not offer any reason but the suspicion of political bias had clearly arisen again:

"It is quite frequently found, of course that the man who proclaims himself non-political is rabidly political! In this connection nothing is more disgusting than to see politics introduced into organisations that are professedly non-political . . .

An organisation is either political or non-political and if it be the latter it is mean and deplorable to damage that status simply for the purpose of temporarily serving the interests or exigencies of some particular party or scoring over another one".[77]

Reports of the most recent committee meeting did not mention any political differences. In fact, it was a government deputy, Mayor Bourke, who was appointed to represent the branch at the Christian Front convention. It seems the *Leader*'s editorial was due not to local controversy but the activities of the ICF president Paddy Belton. As early as November 1936, the *Irish Press* had accused the ICF of attempting to embarrass the government.[78] Three days before the *Limerick Leader* withdrew its support, Belton publicly accused Seán Lemass, the Minister for Industry and Commerce, of supporting the Republican government by permitting trade with Spain. The following day the *Irish Press* announced that Belton's activities exposed the ICF as a partisan organisation.[79] It would appear the *Leader* was following the example set by the *Irish Press*.

There is no record of Mayor Bourke attending the convention but given the condemnatory tone of the *Leader*'s editorial – a pro-government paper – it must be considered unlikely. The withdrawal of Fianna Fáil support proved fatal for the Limerick branch. It was wound up with little public explanation – there is no record of further meetings after 18 January 1937. The situation in Limerick presents an interesting contrast to the national position. The Christian Front never attracted significant support from Fianna Fáil in Dublin. Belton's strident attacks on government policy in early 1937 – although tarnishing the non-political claims of the Christian Front – proved less immediately disastrous for the organisation which had already assumed an anti-government character. Support for the ICF in Limerick, however, was based on the premise that the organisation was non-political. The withdrawal of Fianna Fáil's support resulted not in control of the branch resting with Fine Gael or anti-government elements but its complete collapse.

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76 *United Ireland*, 4 July 1936.
77 *Limerick Leader*, 25 January 1937.
78 *Irish Press*, 26 November 1936.
79 *Ibid*, 23 January 1937.

The Christian Front was not the only pro-Franco organisation encountering difficulties. In May 1937, Patrick Aherne of Blackboy Pike, near Boherlass, received a letter from his son, Fred, explaining why the Irish Brigade were returning home. The lack of reserve volunteers to replace the wounded and sick had led to "the strain of over-duty". The intense heat, poor drinking water and the volunteer's susceptibility to "tropical" diseases added to the Brigade's problems. Fred Aherne did not refer to the bitter infighting which had occurred within the Brigade – and was, in fact, the main reason for its return – but the letter concludes on a revealing defensive note:

"Nevertheless we do not go home ashamed, but proud of the part we have taken against Communism, and I may add if every five or six hundred men, who are at present in uniform in this country, did as much as the Irish Brigade, this war would have long since passed into history".[80].

The Irish Brigade returned in June. A number of Limerick volunteers described their experiences positively. Sergeant Paul Sheehy, assistant scoutmaster in the Limerick Catholic Boyscouts, told a reporter they had fought alongside the Carlist *Requetes*, "the finest soldiers anyone could meet", and received mass in the trenches every morning. Another local volunteer revealed that the Brigade was dreaded by the "Reds" and confirmed "there was no doubt whatever but that that the war was a purely religious one".[81] However, in contrast with these reports and the contingent's well-publicised departure, their low-key return suggests they were not widely regarded as a success. After the Brigade's return, the details of its only battle – with another Nationalist unit – became publicly known. The *Limerick Leader* and *Chronicle* refrained from editorial comment on their return. In contrast, a *Limerick Chronicle* editorial had referred to the Brigade in very favourable terms only two months before:

"When that end [the defeat of the Republicans] has been achieved we will only then know the part played by the Irish volunteers in such a glorious campaign".[82]

There was no formal ceremony to honour the returning crusaders – a tacit recognition of the Brigade's poor performance. The coverage of the *Limerick Echo*, which described a triumphant return, differs completely from the other newspapers:

"A large crowd waited so as to give the homecoming heroes a hearty welcome, and remained on until after 2 a.m. when the 'busses bearing them arrived in Sarsfield street. Cheer and cheer rang out in the still morning air as the coaches drew up at the depot, and many affectionate and moving scenes were witnessed as the young Christian soldiers alighted. Songs, both religious and patriotic, were rendered, and the scenes for the spontaneity of its enthusiasm would be difficult to surpass".[83]

However, the defensive tone of P.J. Rea's column in the same newspaper implies their performance was viewed negatively in Limerick:

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80 *Limerick Leader*, 22 May 1937.
81 *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 June 1936.
82 *Ibid*, 17 April 1937.
83 *Ibid*, 22 June 1937.

"They did their bit. They cannot be sneered at. They had no axe to grind. Brave boys, every mother's son of them, who reckoned not of the one life they had, nor prize, nor emolument, but to give that life for the faith they had possessed since their respective cradles, since the sponsors stood near them at the holy water fount . . . The apologia is fully sufficient; they were no longer wanted. Generals Malo [sic], Lona [sic] and Franco are well able to finish the job".[84]

All of the Limerick contingent returned to Ireland alive although the harsh conditions of trench-fighting exacted a toll. John Cross, an old IRA veteran died from 'Maltese Fever' shortly after his return.[85] Another volunteer, James Doyle, a twenty-two year old from Thomond Gate died in April 1939. Most of the Limerick veterans reunited for the funeral. His death, they stated, added "one more name to the fast increasing roll of honour of those men who have made the supreme sacrifice for the cause of Christianity".[86]

During the general election campaign in mid 1937 foreign policy was rarely mentioned by the opposition. The *Limerick Chronicle* advised Fine Gael to campaign on the economic war, industry, unemployment, emigration and the Commonwealth.[87] The party's election advertisements did not mention Spain. The section on foreign policy focused on the benefits of Commonwealth membership.[88] Again the sole, and presumably non-representative, exception was provided by the idiosyncratic P.J. Rea:

". . . General O'Duffy will be just in time for the General Election. The Constitutional scheme is now before the public, Eire is the watchword, and the spink [sic] of the illustrious dead must be considered when Labour, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil put forth their appeals to all Ireland. The Irish Brigade must count at the polls, and some form of compensation looms in the offing".[89]

Why did the Spanish Civil War, the source of so much debate in Limerick's local bodies during late 1936 and early 1937 cease to become a contentious issue by the summer of 1937? The setbacks suffered by the pro-Franco bodies offer some explanation. The Christian Front, which raised the profile of the Spanish Civil War in Limerick, had collapsed by February 1937. The premature return of the Irish Brigade (followed by bitter infighting between its leaders) discouraged more bombastic speeches on local bodies about the Irish crusaders in Spain.

Another reason why Spain did not figure largely was the public acceptance of the Non-Intervention Agreement. De Valera skilfully associated his government's participation in non-intervention with the continued recognition of the Spanish Republic. Significantly, even

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84 *Limerick Echo*, 4 May 1937.
85 D/FA 10/11A.
86 *Limerick Leader*. 22 April 1939. A Solemn Requiem Mass for twenty-two deceased Irish Brigade members (including Cross and Doyle) was held at the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin (*Limerick Echo*, 9 May 1939).
87 *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 April 1937.
88 *Ibid*, 19 June 1937.
89 *Limerick Echo*, 4 May 1937.

the pro-Fine Gael *Limerick Chronicle* and the pro-Irish Brigade *Limerick Echo* did not criticise the government's foreign policy. A *Chronicle* editorial in September 1936 urged tolerance for the different opinions on non-intervention and a Christmas editorial approvingly noted that the war had not spread through Europe. The wilder voices emanating from the *Irish Independent* and sections of Fine Gael which called for the immediate recognition of Franco and an end to non-intervention were not prevalent in Limerick.

By mid 1937 Spain was a much less politically divisive issue. One example of this was the unanimous passing of Councillor McCarthy's resolution on Frank Ryan. According to McCarthy, Ryan (recently captured by the Nationalists) was a "brilliant County Limerick man" who deserved their help. The council appealed to General Franco for leniency but emphasised that they were not condoning Ryan's participation in the International Brigades.[90] The East Limerick Old IRA Brigade Committee passed a similar resolution.[91] The Irish Brigade Association viewed the issue differently to General O'Duffy and criticised the actions of Limerick County Council.[92]

While the war was less newsworthy than in late 1936 and early 1937, the combined efforts of the clergy and the *Limerick Leader* ensured it was not forgotten. The *Leader* published strident denunciations of the Republican government throughout the war. When the Spanish hierarchy released their collective letter in September 1937 the *Leader* offered another unsophisticated analysis:

"No one reading their statement and pondering for a moment as what it all showed could resist the conclusion that the real director and dictator of operations on the side of the Reds in Spain from the beginning could be none other than the devil himself".[93]

An analysis of the news and editorial coverage which the two main papers, the *Chronicle* and *Leader*, gave to the Spanish Civil War reveals some interesting results (table 6.5). One aspect common to both was the extent to which the Spanish Civil War was reported in connection with local events. A significant proportion of the articles concerning Spain, particularly in the earlier stages of the conflict, are reports of meetings of local bodies, lectures or sermons. Other articles concern news of Irish people fighting or otherwise involved in Spain. Table 6.5 demonstrates that not only the high level of news about Spain but also the substantial local interest in the war.

The contrasting editorial policies of the *Leader* and *Chronicle* (table 6.6) are also interesting. The *Limerick Leader*, which had a pro-government bias, regularly reported news of the war throughout its duration. Its editorial coverage was also consistently high. The *Limerick*

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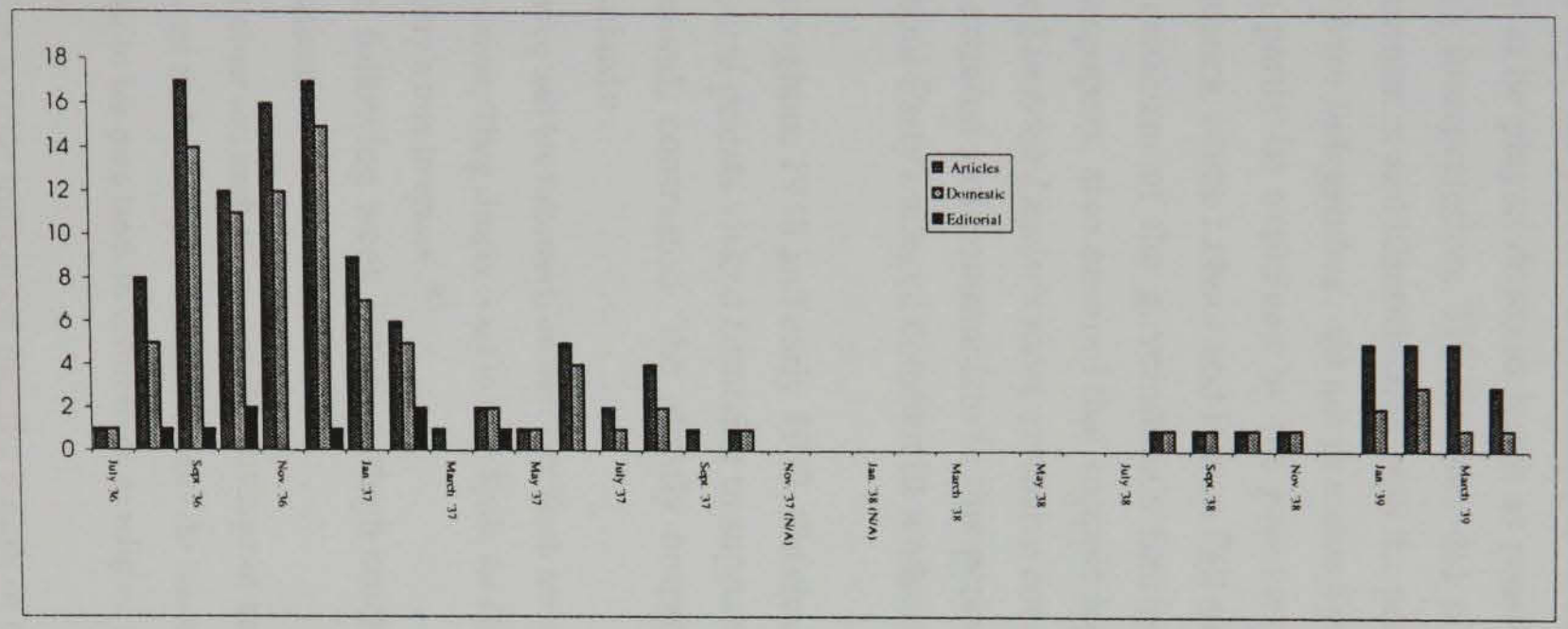
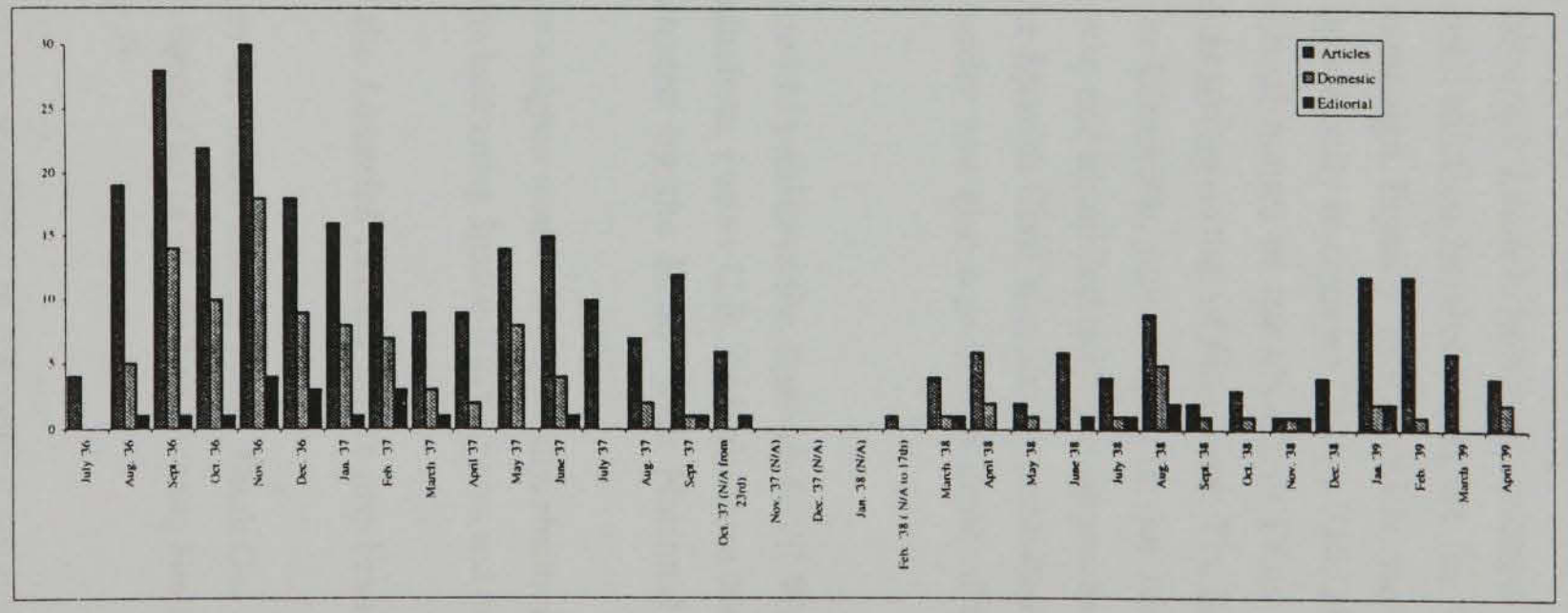
90 *Limerick Leader*, 14 May 1938.
91 *Limerick Echo*, 31 May 1938.
92 *Irish Press*, 4 July 1936.
93 *Limerick Leader*, 6 September 1936.

Histogram 6.5 - References to the Spanish Civil War in Limerick Chronicle 1936-39



Histogram 6.6 - References to the Spanish Civil War in Limerick Leader 1936-39



Articiles: Number of articles relating to Spanish Civil War
Domestic: Number of above articles relating to Irish aspects of the Spanish Civil war e.g. speeches, meetings.

Chronicle, which was pro-Fine Gael, maintained regular news coverage of Spain only until the summer of 1937. Moreover, the *Chronicle* contained no editorials about the conflict after April 1937. This is the exact opposite of the position taken by the two national 'party papers'. The *Irish Independent* devoted extensive coverage to the war. The *Irish Press* mentioned it as little as possible. For example, when the *Press* published its first editorial on Spain the *Independent* had already printed twelve leaders on the subject.[94] This suggests that the Spanish Civil War was viewed in a different political context in Limerick than in Dublin. The war was perceived as a sensitive issue for the government by the *Irish Press* – and thus one to be played down as much as possible. The *Limerick Leader*, however, evinced no such interpretation. The *Leader* did not see a contradiction between support for the government and identification with the pro-Franco campaign. Equally the *Chronicle*, unlike the *Irish Independent*, did not perceive Spain as an opportunity to criticise Fianna Fáil. This can partly be explained by the genuinely non-political nature of the Christian Front in Limerick where Labour and Fianna Fáil support was as strong as that of Fine Gael. The lack of criticism of the government's foreign policy in Limerick, particularly in the local newspapers, also ensured that support for Franco was not identified with the opposition. The *Limerick Leader*'s more extensive coverage of the Spanish Civil War can be attributed to its extreme anti-communism in this period – the *Leader* was also a persistent critic of the Labour Party's alleged communist tendencies.

Throughout 1938 and early 1939, the clergy continued to publicise the Spanish Civil War. Several priests visited Limerick to support the Nationalists. Father C.E. Ardagh, from New Zealand, contrasted "the ghastly outrages perpetrated by the Reds" with Nationalist standards:

"Franco and his followers, on the other hand, are activated by the highest motives of Christianity, charity and patriotism, They simply want to save Spain for God and to win back erring Spaniards to their own and their country's true interests".[95]

The following week Father Ardagh congratulated the *Limerick Leader* on its pro-Franco position:

"An observer, such as we had the privilege of being, must cry out "Thank God for Spain! Thank God for Franco! So I thank you. Please continue the cause. Franco is fighting for us all – anyone doubting him is a traitor to his own land, to civilization, to religion and to God".[96]

There is little indication that the length of the conflict, the revelation of Nationalist atrocities such as Guernica or the diminished profile of the war as a domestic political issue led to a substantial change in public opinion. Opposition to the Spanish Republic remained strong. In September 1938, for example, the pro-Republican film, *Blockade* – which a jury of

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94 *Irish Independent*, 29 August 1936.
95 *Limerick Leader*, 15 August 1938.
96 *Ibid*, 24 August 1938.

prominent Cork citizens deemed suitable for viewing –was banned by a similar jury in Limerick.[97]

The withdrawal of the International Brigades in October 1938 marked the end of the participation of Limerick men in the war. The higher proportion of casualties in the International Brigades compared to the Irish Brigade was reflected in Limerick. Jim Tierney, although badly wounded, returned alive.[98] Jim Woulfe died in hand to hand fighting in the town of Belchite on the Aragon front during August 1937.[99] Frank Ryan and Gerald Doyle were captured on 31 March 1938 by Italian soldiers following Nationalist advances in Aragon.[100] Doyle was released in October 1938.[101] Ryan remained in San Pedro prison after the other International Brigaders had been released. Ironically, Limerick's best-known anti-fascist spent his last years in war-time Germany eventually dying in Loschwitz sanatorium near Dresden on June 10 1944.[102]

Limerick sailors continued to be involved in the conflict. The activities of the Limerick Steamship Company, the only Irish freight company to trade with the Republic during the Spanish Civil War, aroused considerable controversy. Patrick Belton accused Seán Lemass, the Minister for Industry and Commerce, of communist sympathies for permitting the company to trade with Spain. On 5 October 1938 one of its ships, the *Luimneach*, was bombed during a raid on Barcelona.[103] Two years later, the *Luimneach* was sunk off the coast of Spain. The intelligence facilitating these attacks often came from Nationalist officials in London who monitored shipments of coal and other supplies by both the *Clonlara* and *Luimneach* and cabled their times of departure and destinations to the *Secretaría General* in Salamanca.[104] The activities of the Limerick Steamship Company also attracted the interest of British naval intelligence. The Dominions Office informed the Irish High Commissioner of the company's profitable but illicit export business:

"As you know, the difficulties in dealing with the Spanish situation do not lessen with the lapse of time, and we have now received information that the s.s. *Clonlara*, which is registered in the Free State, left Antwerp on the 25th March for Valencia and passed Gibraltar on the 2nd April, carrying in her cargo 310 cases of revolvers declared as dried fruits and window glass".[105]

The Dominions Office requested the Irish government to deal with the problem as quickly and discretely as possible.

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97 *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 September 1938.
98 Michael McInerney, 'The Enigma of Frank Ryan', *Old Limerick Historical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p.27.
99 Frank Graham (ed.), *The Book of the XV Brigade* (Newcastle, 1975) p.272.
100 Bill Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty* (London, 1982) pp.170-180.
101 D/FA 10/11A; *Limerick Echo*, 1 November 1938.
102 See Sean Cronin, *Frank Ryan* (Dublin, 1980).
103 *Limerick Leader*, 5 October 1938; *Limerick Echo*, 11 October 1938.
104 See series of telegrams in R.1105-12, *Archivo de Burgos*, *Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores*, Madrid.
105 C.W. Dixon to J.W. Dulanty, 28 April 1937, DO 35/553/7, Public Record Office, London.

In early 1939, as Franco's victory appeared increasingly inevitable, the war was again discussed in Limerick Corporation when J. Dalton, a Fine Gael representative, proposed that congratulations be sent to Franco for his victory at Barcelona. This was seconded by M. Hartney, a Fianna Fáil representative. The resolution was unremarkable given the pro-Nationalist consensus among local politicians. However, when Alderman Reidy added that the corporation should call on de Valera to recognise Franco there was a predictable reaction from the government members. Reidy reminded Mayor Bourke of his involvement with the Christian Front:

Ald. Reidy – "We are only giving expression to the will of all the citizens. You presided at a public meeting at which the support of the citizens was pledged to the insurgents.

Mayor – "I have always supported General Franco and am in full sympathy his cause, but I think the question of recognition should be left in the hands of the Government."

Reidy argued that without his amendment Bourke's sympathy with Franco was "mere hypocrisy" – "The first part of the resolution is a pious expression of sympathy. The addendum is practical."[106]

Mayor Bourke declared both resolutions adopted – presumably not because of the strength of Reidy's arguments but the fact that Fianna Fáil did not control the corporation. As Hartney complained – "This savours of dictation and will be regarded as a bit cheeky". To lose a vote on such a sensitive issue would prove embarrassing. Hence, the Fianna Fáil councillors acquiesced to a resolution which increased pressure on their own Government's foreign policy.[107] This was the last time the issue came before a public body in Limerick. The following month the Irish government recognised General Franco's regime. The Spanish Civil War ended soon after on 1 April 1939.

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106 *Limerick Leader*, 28 January 1939.

107 Several weeks later the Spanish Foreign Minister sent Limerick Corporation a message of thanks (*Limerick Leader*, 20 February 1939).

Part III: Political Reaction

7. Party Political Responses

The regional study of Limerick provides some insight into the pressures applied on local politicians to respond to the Spanish Civil War. Aside from several acrimonious exchanges between county councillors, the war does not appear to have been a particularly divisive issue in local politics. The three main parties adopted a non-partisan attitude towards the Christian Front. Labour and Fianna Fáil were rarely singled out by local newspapers and pro-Franco supporters for not demonstrating sufficient enthusiasm for the Spanish Nationalists. Interestingly, this position was not reflected among the higher echelons of the political parties. Some of the most bitter Dáil debates of the decade occurred following the government's refusal to recognise General Franco. First, however, the response of political parties in Northern Ireland is briefly considered.

I. Northern Ireland[1]

Northern nationalist politicians, noted for their clerical tendencies during this period, were intensely pro-Franco and, unlike Fianna Fáil, were not constrained by the responsibilities of implementing foreign policy.[2] Working-class Catholic opposition to the pro-Republican attitude of the amalgamated unions was particularly strong in Northern Ireland. The two most important Nationalist newspapers, the *Irish News* and *Derry Journal*, respectively edited by T.J. Campbell MP[3] and J.J. McCarroll MP adopted a similar editorial line to the *Irish Independent.* The *Irish News* published ten editorials on Spain in October, eight in November and nine in December 1936. The news content was strongly biased against the Republican government. An 'Official Report on Red Atrocities in Spain' released by the Burgos authorities was reproduced without critical analysis. Other articles reported atrocities without identifying details of the location, names of victims or dates of the incidents. One report, for example, declared

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[1] The focus of this thesis is the response of the Irish Free State to the Spanish Civil War. A brief analysis of Northern Ireland's response is included because some of the bodies considered, such as the Catholic Church, the Christian Front, the Irish Brigade and the left-wing parties were organised throughout the thirty-two counties and influenced by events in the north. The more extensive treatment of left-wing parties, disproportionate to their political importance, reflects the greater significance of the war to the left and its more complex response.

[2] Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London, 1976) p.146. For an example of what Farrell terms "reactionary clericalism" see T.J. Campbell, *Fifty Years of Ulster, 1890-1940* (Belfast, 1941).

[3] T.J. Campbell (1871-1946): barrister; *Irish News* editor, 1895; Home Rule candidate, 1918; political associate of Joseph Devlin; Stormont senator, 1929-34; Belfast Central Nationalist MP at Stormont, 1934-46; county court judge, 1945.

"Nuns have been made drink benzine, then soaked in it, and set on fire. A priest who refused to blaspheme was cut open and burned alive".[4]

The *Irish News* justified its partisan coverage as its "duty as a Catholic journal".[5] The management of the newspaper even corresponded with Franco's Spanish Press Services in London about methods of discrediting the pro-Republican campaign.[6]

As in the south, pro-Franco support was mobilised by the Irish Christian Front. Approximately six hundred Christian Front supporters travelled to Dublin for the public demonstration in October where T.J. Campbell was one of the speakers.[7] In October 1936 William McCann formed a branch in Belfast. The RUC noted that "About seventy persons attended, almost all of whom are members of the National League for the North".[8] They resolved to supply medical aid to the "patriot soldiers", assist refugee victims of the "Red" government, and prevent the sale of communist newspapers. The war was also discussed at League of the North meetings. Hugh Martin told a branch in Belfast "the next time they would have a celebration would be when it was proclaimed to the world that the Spanish Nationalist forces had won their fight".[9] More militant support of Franco was demonstrated by a contingent of predominantly Catholic volunteers from Northern Ireland led by Captain Seán Cunningham, a former Belfast IRA leader, which enlisted with the Irish Brigade.

Inevitably there was some tension between Catholic enthusiasm for Franco and the more staid response of Protestants. One *Irish News* editorial, 'A Protestant Attack on Spain', labelled criticism of the Spanish Catholic Church by Rev. Lewis-Crosby "a disgusting charge".[10] The neutral attitude of the Church of England was also criticised.[11] Another editorial referred to "a conspiracy of silence" among Protestants:

"There is much smug hypocrisy, with many pious smirks, whenever Spain is spoken of in non-Catholic quarters".[12]

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[4] The report, despatched by Aileen O'Brien from Spain, was immediately challenged by a telegram from Harry Midgley – "Belton . . . challenge you to produce proof of story printed in to-day's *Irish News*". Further controversy ensued when Fr. Arthur Ryan agreed with Midgley that such unsubstantiated stories were not reliable. Belton accused the prominent Queen's lecturer of siding with "the communists" (*Irish Press*, 4 November 1936).

[5] "From the time the first reports were published of the civil war in Spain the "Irish News" gave editorial support to the Christian forces who are fighting to save their country from the terrors of Communism. In doing so we owe no apology to anyone, nor do we seek praise for our work. We have performed our duty as a Catholic journal" (*Irish News*, 10 November 1936).

[6] H.C. O'Neill to H.J. Kennedy, 22 April 1938, EP 5/2/37, Bishop Daniel Mageean papers, Down and Connor Diocesan Archives.

[7] *Ibid*, 26 October 1936.

[8] Special Branch report, 16 October 1936, Home Affairs (HA) 32/1/637, Public Record Office, Northern Ireland (PRONI). The National League of the North, then declining rapidly, was the most important nationalist party in Northern Ireland between the late 1920s and mid 1930s.

[9] *Irish News*, 23 October 1936.

[10] *Ibid*, 6 November 1936.

[11] *Ibid*, 23 October 1936.

[12] *Ibid*, 10 November 1936.

Such sentiments were largely a consequence of the sectarian bitterness between both communities although there was some deliberate baiting of Catholics by unionists. Captain Herbert Dixon MP told the Windsor Unionist Association that he felt the pro-Franco position of the *Irish News* was contradicted by its record of support for communism. He also referred to an "unholy alliance" between "Romanism" and communism.[13]

Surprisingly, the Irish Christian Front did not achieve a level of initial success in Northern Ireland comparable to the rest of the country. Despite RUC concerns about its possible expansion only one other branch appears to have been established.[14] A public demonstration "confined to exclusively Roman Catholic areas" passed off relatively peacefully in December.[15] Although the RUC expected fifteen thousand supporters the *Irish News* reported an attendance of only four thousand.[16] Compared with the reported attendance of twelve thousand in Waterford, the Belfast turnout was remarkably low. This appears to have been due to a lack of clerical and political support. T.J. Campbell, the influential Nationalist politician who spoke at the ICF rally in Dublin, did not attend the meeting. Campbell's *Irish News*, which extensively covered the activities of the Christian Front nationally, devoted little coverage (and no editorial support) to the Belfast branches throughout 1936. No clergy were present on the platform, and the Belfast Christian Front did not appear to have any formal links with Dr. Mageean, the Bishop of Down and Connor.[17] Interestingly, the RUC reported that St. Malachy's branch was established without the support of either the executive committee or local clergy.[18]

Notwithstanding the establishment of a study circle in November, the activities of the St. Malachy's branch became increasingly negative and soon degenerated into harassing the communist meetings on Library Street. In April 1937 Special Branch observed that questions from Christian Front members occupied over one hour of a communist meeting. In early May they maintained a silent vigil at the meetings.[19] By mid-summer they had adopted more aggressive tactics:

"[Donal O'Reilly, an ex-International Brigader] was subjected to a considerable amount of heckling from members of the local branch of the Irish Christian Front organisation, and an argument arose between members of the audience which caused the meeting to end rather abruptly".[20]

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13 *Ibid.*
14 This was formed in St. Peter's District, Belfast (*Irish News*, 24 December 1936).
15 Special Branch report, 28 November 1936, HA 32/1/637.
16 *Ibid*; *Irish News*, 7 December 1936. However, a counter rally organised by communists under the title of the Belfast Anti-Fascist Committee was much less successful, attracting only thirty people. (Special Branch report, 6 December 1936, HA/32/1/554).
17 Bishop Daniel Mageean papers, Down and Connor Archives.
18 Special Branch report, 16 October 1936, HA 32/1/637.
19 Special Branch report, 2 May 1937, HA/32/1/555
20 *Ibid*, 18 July 1937.

The branch faded into insignificance by mid-1937. Nonetheless, as a crude indication of public opinion, it should be noted that the ICF's public rally outnumbered equivalent demonstrations in support of the Spanish Republic.[21]

By mid-1937 Spain was no longer a prominent issue but the general election of 1938 demonstrated that Northern Catholics remained solidly pro-Franco throughout the war. Although Catholics boycotted the elections in most constituencies, nationalist politicians campaigned vigorously in the Dock ward – primarily to unseat Harry Midgley[22] the incumbent Northern Ireland Labour Party[23] MP. A Unionist victory was preferred to Midgley's continued representation due to the NILP's retreat from anti-partitionism, Midgley's silence during the 1935 riots and his pro-Spanish government activities. On 2 February, Midgley was forced to abandon two meetings. An account in the *Irish News* commented that "only the presence of police prevented untoward happenings":

"Immediately the van stopped, the street, which had been practically deserted a moment before, was filled with people, and the moment one of the candidates' supporters started to speak uproar broke out. Men and women started to chant in unison: "We want Franco," while children danced in front of the van, shouting and jeering . . . A section of the ground began singing "A Soldier's Song," while others struck up "Franco's here," to the tune of the "Blues are here".[24]

Two days later, Midgley made another attempt to speak in a Catholic district. A "hostile crowd" which rushed the platform was restrained by a police cordon. Midgley, perhaps unwisely, responded to the singing of "God Save Ireland" and yells of "Get to – outa here" by calling Franco "a monstrosity" and "killer of babies".[25] Most Catholics switched their votes from Midgley to the nationalist candidate, James Collins, ensuring the success of the unionist candidate.[26]

In comparison with nationalists the response of unionists to the Spanish Civil War was relatively subdued. The subject was never mentioned at the unionist dominated Parliament or Senate at Stormont between 1936 and 1939.[27] At Westminster, Unionist MPs were also content to leave foreign policy to the British government. As one communist agitator complained:

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21 See histograms 7.1-7.3.

22 Harry Midgley (1893-1957): Protestant joiner; joined ILP, 1910; served World War I; Belfast Dock NILP MP, 1933-8; Belfast Willowfield MP 1941-57; founder Unionist Commonwealth Labour Party, 1942; Minister of Public Security, 1943-5; joined Unionist Party, 1947; member Orange Order; Minister of Labour, 1949-52; Minister of Education, 1952-7.

23 The NILP was established in 1924 following the collapse of the Belfast Labour Party during the War of Independence. Under Midgley's leadership, the party espoused moderate social democratic policies and an ambivalent anti-partitionist policy.

24 *Irish News*, 2 February 1938.

25 *Ibid*, 4 February 1938.

26 See Mary N. Harris, 'Catholicism, Nationalism and the Labour Question in Belfast, 1928-38', *Bullán An Irish Studies Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 1997) for an account of this.

27 Northern Ireland Parliament, Official Reports of Debates, Vol. 19 (20 November 1935) - Vol. 22 (6 December 1939); Northern Ireland Senate Debates, 1936-9.

"Ulster returns I believe thirteen M.P.'s. Up to the present not one of these thirteen has taken part in or uttered an opinion on any of the debates that have taken place on Spain".[28]

Like the *Irish News*, the unionist *Belfast Newsletter* devoted extensive coverage to the war (nine editorials in August, five in September, and six in October 1936). In July, it described the conflict as one between "the Conservative forces of Spain and . . . Moscow". However, by August, the *Newsletter* believed "whichever side is victorious the unfortunate people of Spain will have little liberty" and urged all parties to refuse "to range themselves on the side of one or other of the combatants". The pro-government attitude of the British and Northern Ireland Labour parties and the pro-Franco response of the Irish Free State were both condemned – "when the Church sides with Fascism in Spain, enthusiasm for the cause of democracy soon tends to evaporate".[29]

The meetings of the Preceptories of the Imperial Grand Black Chapter of the British Commonwealth,[30] which occur during their annual marches on the last weekend of August, provide an interesting sample of unionist reactions to Spain. The principal speaker at Coleraine, Sir Ronald Ross MP, told his audience "if they desired to see an example of Republican misfortune they had but to look at Spain". John Gordon MP, contrasted Spanish and Irish republicanism with the stability of paternalistic British democracy:

"[In Ulster] there had always been men of power and influence who exerted and sacrificed themselves in the popular cause . . . Republican sentiment had produced chaos in Southern Ireland".[31]

At Giford over twenty thousand members of the Belfast Grand Black Chapter were addressed by Sir William Allen MP, the Sovereign Grand Master of the Black Preceptories:

"The Roman Catholic Church was wringing her hands in despair, and no wonder. If what Spain was going through to-day was merely the result of nearly 2,000 years of preaching, then, might God help the world. It might be – and they prayed it would – that out of the fire now burning in that unhappy country, Spain, something might come that would be cleaner and better".[32]

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[28] Special Branch report, 14 June 1938, HA/32/1/559.

[29] *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 July 1936, 1 August 1936; 19 August 1936.

[30] The Imperial Black Chapter of the British Commonwealth originated from the Imperial Grand Lodge of Knights of Malta and Parent Black Lodge of the Universe which later evolved into the Imperial Grand Encampment of the Universe and Grand Black Lodge of Scotland of the Most Ancient, Illustrious and Knightly Order of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem. The Preceptories are composed only of Orange Order members of the rank of Purple Marksman or higher but are institutionally autonomous from the Orange Order. Their views provide a reasonably representative indication of Orange opinion (Tony Gray, *The Orange Order* (London, 1972) pp. 209-218).

[31] *Belfast Newsletter*, 31 August 1936.

[32] *Belfast Newsletter*, 31 August 1936. Allen added "he believed that the "boundary" had been placed there by the hand of Almighty God, and he believed that the time would come when the South would appeal to the North for its protecting hand and power to deliver the South from the hands of Communism – itself a horror that was raising its head in Spain to-day".

Captain Dixon, referring to Cardinal MacRory's recent criticism of Lord Craigavon,[33] asked:

"Has the intervention of the Hierarchy against the democratic leader of the country, either in Mexico in the past or Spain at the moment, been for the benefit of any party or cause".[34]

Rev. James Toland, Belfast No. 4 District chaplain, felt the Catholic Church had deliberately fomented the Spanish Civil War. Rome, he asserted, had won its last two battles against the Roman Empire and Christianity and was now attacking socialism. Like Allen, Toland believed Catholicism was to blame for the savagery of the Spaniards. The revolutionaries were the product of "ages of superstition and despotism":

"the natural issue . . . of the violence done to reason and faith – for superstition was the twin to atheism".

At a demonstration in Co. Down, Reverend O'Connor compared "the sorry plight of the Roman Catholic countries of the world" with Ulster and pronounced himself "thankful that they were a Protestant people governed by a Protestant King".[35] Sir Robert Lynn MP criticised "the [Catholic] teaching which produced orgies such as had occurred recently". He condemned both "Mr. O'Duffy" for forming a brigade and Northern socialists for supporting "Reds who had murdered priests and burned down churches".[36] At a demonstration in Moyroe, Co. Tyrone, William Grant MP also related Spain, if not very cogently, to Irish circumstances:

"What was taking place in Spain did not speak much for the Christianising influence of Roman Catholicism. It was dreadful to read of the slaughter and execution in that country, but who knew what might have occurred in Ireland if an attempt had been made to force Ulster into an all-Ireland Parliament".[37]

The rhetoric of the speakers, mostly prominent unionist leaders, followed a general pattern. The most common theme was that Catholicism, through its inherent flaws, had caused or contributed to the Spanish Civil War. Protestantism, by contrast, provided some protection against such disturbances occurring in Ulster. A similar concept, mentioned by Sir Ronald Ross and John Gordon, was that republicanism, whether Spanish or Irish, inevitably led to internal disorder. Unionists, like most political and religious organisations in Ireland, interpreted Spain according to their own preconceptions. Essentially, the Spanish Civil War reinforced unionists' sense of political and religious superiority over Catholics.

Although there was an element of unionist *schadenfreude* about the misfortunes of Spanish Catholicism – Fr. Ryan, Professor of Philosophy at Queen's University, referred to "Protestant glee" – there was no suggestion of approval for the Republican government.

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33 Sir James Craig/Viscount Craigavon (1871-1940): business-man and landowner; Orange Order member; Unionist MP at Westminster, East Down, 1906-21; Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and Stormont MP, 1921-40.
34 *Ibid.*
35 *Ibid.*
36 *Ibid.*
37 *Ibid.*

Unionists shared nationalists antipathy towards socialism and were strongly critical of left-wing support for the Spanish Republic. Moreover, the republicanism of the Popular Front government was as equally as abhorrent to unionists as its socialism. The response of Fermanagh's *Impartial Reporter* to Harry Midgley's appeal for medical relief was characteristic of unionist sentiment:

"We refuse to publish anything of the sort to aid the Communists and the murderers now in Spain".[38]

However, unionist anti-communism, virulent as it was, seldom led to support for the Spanish Nationalists who were held in low, although not less, regard than Spanish Republicans. Although Spanish Nationalists were associated with conservatism, a positive point for unionists, the relationship between Franco and the Catholic Church, both in Spain and Ireland, prevented unionists from adopting anything other than a lukewarm preference for Franco. In contrast to southern Catholics who described Franco as authoritarian or evaded his fascism, unionists generally described Franco as a fascist. Unionists opposed fascism not only as a political philosophy but because the fascist states were aligned against British interests. Franco's close relationship with Mussolini, in particular, was viewed by unionists as a threat to British strategic interests in the Mediterranean.

This disdain towards both antagonists was demonstrated by Sir Edward Archdale, Grand Master of the Orange Order, who commented:

"In Spain it was Communism on one side and Fascism on the other, and he did not think there was much to choose between them. It would, he thought, be like the Kilkenny cats in the end, nothing except the tips of tails left, and he did not think it would be much harm".[39]

Similarly, at the annual meeting of the Pottinger Women's Unionist Association, Herbert Dixon justified unionist ambivalence:

"If one side won, there would be a Communist Party, already red with blood . . . What is the other party we would have to fight for? We would have to fight for a party that would be a military-clerical party – the very thing that we in Ulster have been fighting against all our lives".[40]

There was, however, no ambivalence about unionist commitment to non-intervention. They supported Baldwin's adherence to non-intervention not only because of their disapproval of both sides but because it was regarded in the best interests of Britain.

As foreign policy legislation was enacted at Westminster, unionist governmental responses to the Spanish Civil War consisted of little more than monitoring left-wing parties and the Christian Front. However, the voluminous Special Branch files, of great personal interest to Sir Dawson Bates,[41] the Minister for Home Affairs, were maintained not because of any

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38 *Irish Independent*, 11 September 1936.
39 *Ibid*, 5 October 1936.
40 *Ibid*, 23 October 1936.
41 Richard Dawson Bates (1877-1949): b. Belfast; solicitor; Orange Order member; Ulster Unionist Council secretary, 1905-21; Stormont MP, 1921-45; Minister for Home Affairs, 1921-43.

threat posed by the pro-Spanish Republic campaign but due to the anti-partitionist nature of the organisations. Bates also guarded against the encroachment of Free State republicans into the Northern state. An exclusion order was issued against Fr. Michael O'Flanagan to prevent him addressing a Food Ship for Spain Committee with the "communistic Republican" Peadar O'Donnell.[42]

Unofficial unionist reactions to the war were generally confined to attacks on left-wing groups by belligerent loyalist organisations such as the Jubilee Defence Protestant Association and the Ulster Protestant League – an anti-communist right-wing group formed in the early 1930s to "safeguard the employment of Protestants".[43] In July 1937 an NISP meeting against non-intervention was interrupted by "some of the more militant Protestant organisations".[44] The following week's meeting was brought to an end by the Jubilee Defence Protestant Association's rendition of the National Anthem.[45] In a rare example of ecumenism, the attendance at a meeting the following month was almost entirely composed of Ulster Protestant League and Irish Christian Front hecklers.[46]

Support for the Spanish Republic was organised by the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI), Socialist Party of Northern Ireland (NISP) and Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP). As in the south, the CPI were the most enthusiastic supporters of the Spanish Republic. The transition of the Northern section of the CPI from "class against class" to the Popular Front policy initially met with more success than in Southern Ireland. However, the Belfast riots of July 1935, the worst disturbances since 1922, were a setback for the left in Northern Ireland. The membership of the Belfast section of the Communist Party, the only branch in Northern Ireland, was estimated by one member to be as low as fifty during the Spanish Civil War.[47] Partly as a result, and also in response to Popular Front policy, the CPI intensified its campaign for a united front with Labour. The Spanish Civil War saw elements within the NILP and the communists draw closer together but only on the Spanish campaign.

The war dominated the weekly meetings of the CPI at Library Street. Spain was discussed at over two-thirds of the meetings between August 1936 and May 1937 (histogram 7.1).[48] The speakers' moderate interpretations of the war were influenced by Popular Front ideology. Many of the speeches were a mirror version of Catholic pro-Nationalist

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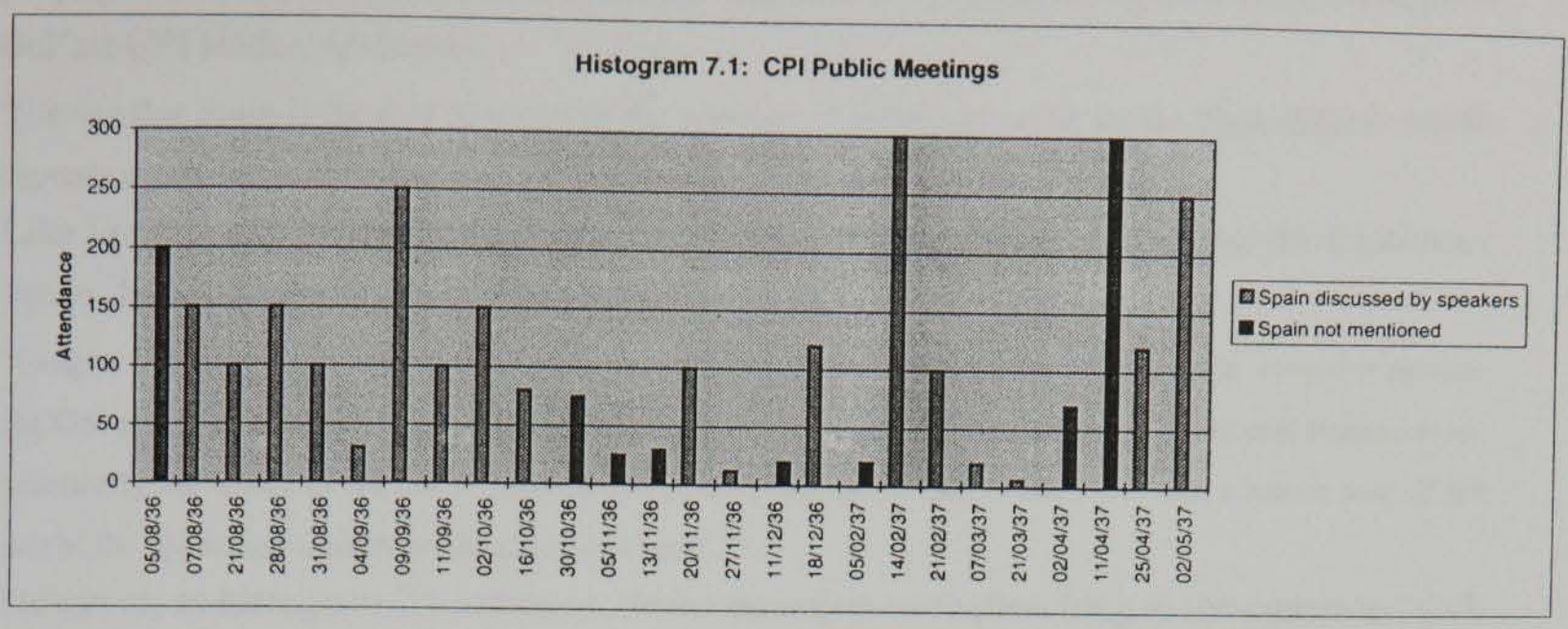
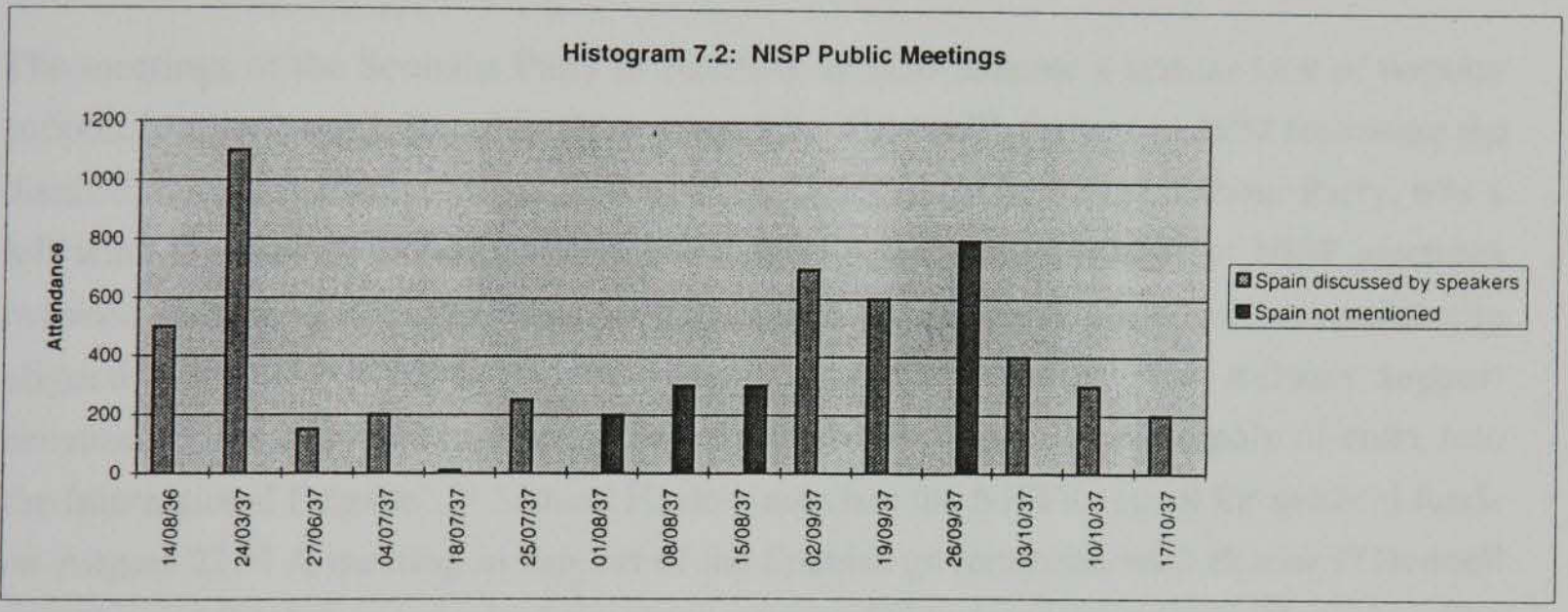
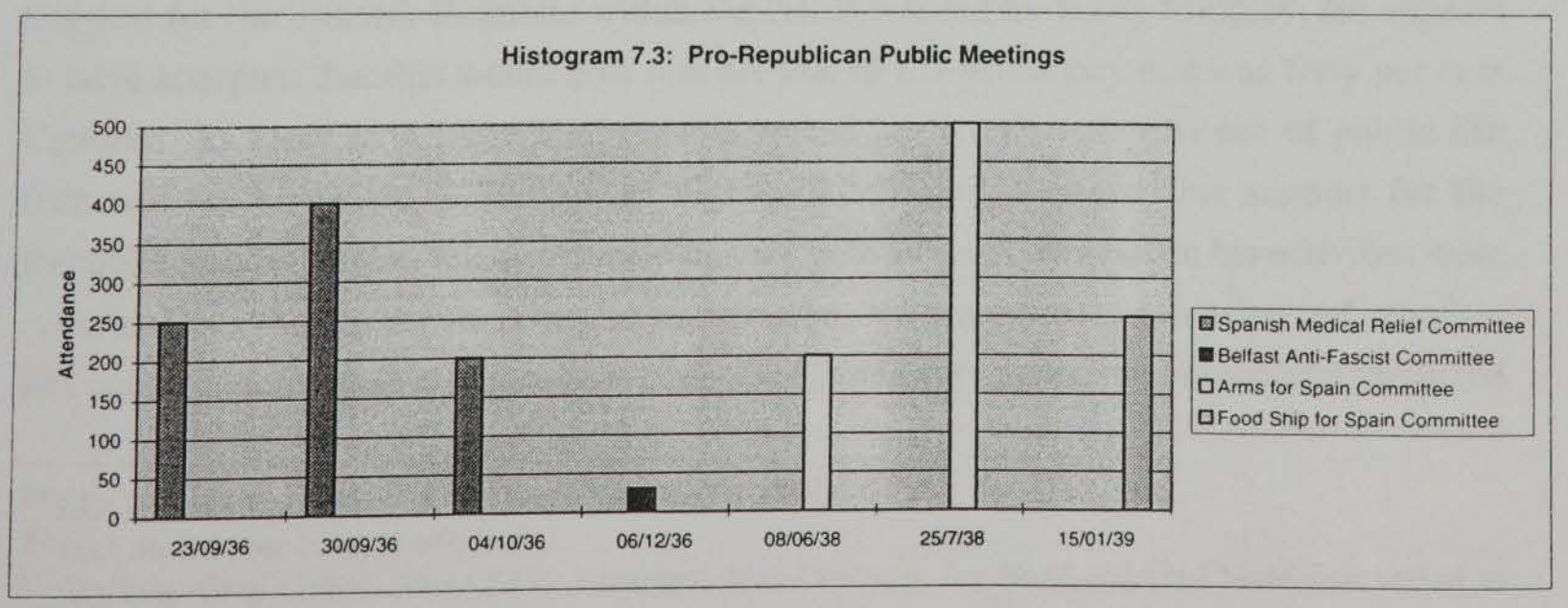
42 Asst. secretary, Minister for Home Affairs to E. Gilfillan, county inspector, Belfast RUC, 27 January 1939.
43 Mike Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1984) p.127
44 Special Branch report, 25 July 1937, HA 32/1/560.
45 *Ibid*, 1 August 1937.
46 *Ibid*, 19 September 1937.
47 Malachy Gray, 'A Shop Steward Remembers', *Saothar 11* (1986). Mike Milotte (1984) p.180 does not give an estimate but commented "The Communist Party's twists and turns in the 1937-39 period had a devastating effect on party organisation – which virtually disintegrated".
48 Histogram 7.1 (Source: Special Branch reports, HA 32/1/554 and HA/32/555).


Histogram 7.1: CPI Public Meetings
Attendance
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
05/08/36
07/08/36
21/08/36
28/08/36
31/08/36
04/09/36
09/09/36
11/09/36
02/10/36
16/10/36
30/10/36
05/11/36
13/11/36
20/11/36
27/11/36
11/12/36
18/12/36
05/02/37
14/02/37
21/02/37
07/03/37
21/03/37
02/04/37
11/04/37
25/04/37
02/05/37
Spain discussed by speakers
Spain not mentioned


Histogram 7.2: NISP Public Meetings
Attendance
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0
14/08/36
24/03/37
27/06/37
04/07/37
18/07/37
25/07/37
01/08/37
08/08/37
15/08/37
02/09/37
19/09/37
26/09/37
03/10/37
10/10/37
17/10/37
Spain discussed by speakers
Spain not mentioned


Histogram 7.3: Pro-Republican Public Meetings
Attendance
500
450
400
350
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
23/09/36
30/09/36
04/10/36
06/12/36
08/06/38
25/7/38
15/01/39
Spanish Medical Relief Committee
Belfast Anti-Fascist Committee
Arms for Spain Committee
Food Ship for Spain Committee

propaganda. Even the rhetoric resembled Catholic propaganda. William McCullough, a Belfast CPI leader, declared:

"We say that Spain is the acid test, that on the question of victory or defeat for the Spanish Government depends the whole future civilization".[49]

Like Franco's supporters, the CPI postured as defenders of law and order and the legitimate Spain. James Hughes indignantly declared:

"Imagine the army officers who were entrusted with the task of defending the Irish people, revolting against the Government and bringing in Negroes to defeat the Republican Government . . . General Franco spent practically the whole of his life in Spanish Morocco living as a Moorish chieftain with a harem and all the rest of the appendages that Moorish chieftains have".[50]

However, as histogram 7.1 indicates, the communists were preaching to the converted and, occasionally, the trenchantly opposed. Attendances were consistently small as were the meetings of its front groups. The larger attendances are due to the presence of Christian Front and Ulster Protestant League members.

The meetings of the Socialist Party of Northern Ireland indicate a similar lack of popular support for the Spanish Republic (histogram 7.2). The NISP, formed in 1932 following the disaffiliation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) from the British Labour Party, was a left-wing pressure group affiliated to the NILP. Speakers at two thirds of NISP meetings between August 1936 and October 1937 discussed Spain. The NISP, which was politically aligned with the POUM, organised financial and medical rather than military support because, as one activist explained, "the Communist Party had the monopoly of entry into the International Brigade".[51] Samuel Haslett launched the NISP's appeal for medical funds on August 22.[52] A meeting in support of the Spanish government, with Peadar O'Donnell and Harry Midgley as principal speakers, attracted five hundred people. However, like most of the CPI meetings it was disrupted by constant heckling. An RUC report described it as "a failure".[53]

Support for the Spanish Republic within the NILP was led by Harry Midgley. He appears to have accepted that this would cost him his seat in a constituency that was forty per cent Catholic. As early as August Midgley announced he "would rather be out of public life than sell his birthright of liberty".[54] Although Midgley presented his support for the Republic as a principled left-wing stand against uninformed Catholicism his activities were criticised by other socialists. Many of his speeches were needlessly offensive to Catholics. His public letter which castigated the Catholic Church for supporting Franco and predicted

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49 RUC Special Branch report, 3 April 1938, HA/32/1/556.
50 *Ibid*, 16 October 1936, HA/32/1/554.
51 Malachy Gray (1986). Three NISP members, Alex Donegan, Joe Boyd and Fred McMahon served as ambulance drivers in Spain.
52 *Irish Press*, 22 August 1936.
53 Special Branch report, 19 August 1936, HA/32/1/554.
54 *Irish Independent*, 15 August 1936. See also Midgley's letter to the *Irish News* (14 August 1936).

the demise of clerical power was denounced as "typical Orange, anti-Catholic propaganda" by the *Irish News*.[55] Midgley's vituperative style suggests that he intended to irritate Catholic opinion. Midgley told J.J. McCarroll, the editor of the *Derry Journal*:

"You and your co-religionists have been responsible for one of the worst developments in the history of the working-class movement . . . you have made many magnificent Protestants . . . wonder whether Catholics are only interested in liberty as long as liberty is defined by their own Church, or its interests affected".[56]

Many of Midgley's left-wing contemporaries believed his provocative rhetoric was an indication of his emerging sectarianism which resulted in his conversion to unionism. Malachy Gray recalled Midgley's intervention at one meeting:

"I had a lot to learn, particularly from Harry Midgley, on how not to behave in the political life of Northern Ireland. . . He took over the meeting and launched into a stinging attack on the Catholic Church: the other speakers followed in the same vain. The real betrayal of democracy by the Chamberlain Government was set aside, and not explained. This was the first public manifestation of the direction in which Midgley was going that finally landed him in the Unionist Party and the Orange Order".[57]

The left wing parties co-operated on the pro-Republican campaign. Their first joint effort, the Spanish Medical Relief Committee, originally established by the NISP in September, held only three public meetings. The committee included Victor Halley (NISP), Samuel Haslett (NISP), Jack Dorricott (NISP), Harry Midgley (NILP), William McCullough (CPI) and Loftus Johnston (CPI). Special Branch noted that "no enthusiasm was displayed" at the second meeting and "very little" at the final one.[58] The Arms for Spain Committee was established in 1938 to pressure the British government into allowing the Spanish Republic to purchase armaments. The committee was composed of Midgley, Halley, McCullough, Betty Sinclair (CPI) and Samuel McVicker (North Belfast Socialist Party). A later body, the Irish Friends of the Spanish Republic, included Halley, Haslett, Midgley and several southern republicans.[59] The final joint effort, the Food Ship for Spain Committee, was organised in early 1939 by the NISP, CPI and Republican Congress. The short-lived nature of the committees, the low attendances (histogram 7.3) and ubiquity of the activists indicate an unsuccessful campaign.

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55 *Irish News*, 7-8 September 1936. The editorial continued – "This may be the voice of a Labour leader, but the words are the words which the Catholics of Belfast have heard coming from Orange platforms and read in Orange gutter-sheets for several generations".

56 *Derry Journal*, 31 August 1936. Cited in Graham Walker, *The Politics of Frustration* (Manchester, 1985) p.95. When McCarroll professed amazement that Midgley had managed to conceal his bigotry for so long, Midgley recalled "the painful experience of being compelled to listen to his puny little sectarian whimpering and childish economic ideas at Stormont, during his rare, but not refreshing, orations" (*Irish News*, 11 September 1936).

57 Malachy Gray (1986). Jack Macgougan recalled "It gradually became clear that Midgley was more inspired by anti-Catholicism than the pros of the Spanish Civil War". Jack Macgougan, 'Letting Labour Lead: Jack Macgougan and the Pursuit of Unity, 1913-1958', *Saothar 14* (1989).

58 Special Branch report, 30 September, 8 October 1936, HA/32/1/558.

59 R.N. Tweedy, Nora Connolly O'Brien, Sheila Bowen Dowling, Dorothy Macardle and Dr. Nora McCormick.

The reasons for this are clear. Mainstream unionist and nationalist opinion was hostile to the Spanish Republic. The NILP and NISP, at a low ebb following the 1935 riots and a wave of anti-communism, was particularly isolated by the loss of Catholic support during the war. Peadar O'Donnell's depiction of Northern Ireland as a bastion of pro-Republicanism – "while we were still whistling at one another in the south, Belfast rose up and spoke" – is misleading.[60] Although Milotte states that the NILP "unimpeded by Catholicism, took a firm stand for the Spanish Government" the left's attitude was more ambivalent.[61]

Even the radical NISP lost Catholic support during the campaign. As early as September 1936 the *Irish Press* reported:

"The attitude of the Socialist Party towards the Spanish war has already led to dissension among a large body of its members. Catholics and Nationalists in the party have expressed strong disapproval of the official attitude of supporting the Spanish Government. Six County representatives of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, which has a large Catholic membership, have been noticeably absent from recent conferences and meetings of the party when resolutions dealing with Spain were discussed".[62]

At an NISP meeting the following year, Jack Dorricott referred to the lack of support for their campaign among trade unionists and the NILP:

"I think it is absolutely tragic that these seats behind the platform are empty. Why is it that the Trades Union officials and the Labour Party officials are not on this platform tonight . . . The last time the Socialist Party held a public meeting in the Ulster hall the report in the *Irish Press* attempted to drive a wedge between the Labour and Socialist Party by trying to point out that the Chairman at that meeting said that the election in Dock Ward would solely be fought on the question of Spain".[63]

Interestingly, an analysis of Special Branch reports of left-wing meetings suggests that much of the left's rhetoric was specifically aimed at Protestants. Many of the speeches echoed unionist allegations that the Free State was dominated by the Catholic Church. Samuel Haslett, for example, declared:

"We are somewhat disappointed to find that in other parts of Ireland sectarian passions have been raised against our efforts . . . one has to admit that that feeling that we thought was to-day dead in Irish politics is still very much alive in certain parts of the country. We, in Belfast should pride ourselves that at least we have sufficient tolerance to allow free speech . . . "[64]

At another meeting Haslett stated:

"Don't you know that it was the Apprentice Boys of Derry who showed that they were determined to lay down their lives if necessary in defence of civil and religious liberty. Ulstermen in every part of the world were associated with the long drawn out fight for civil and religious liberty".[65]

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60 Peadar O'Donnell, *Salud ! An Irishman in Spain* (London, 1937) p.244.
61 Mike Milotte (1984) p.170.
62 *Irish Press*, 5 September 1936.
63 Special Branch report, 2 September 1937, HA 32/1/560.
64 *Ibid*, 4 October 1936, HA/32/1/558.
65 *Ibid*, 20 September 1936.

Samuel McVicker, leader of the North Belfast Socialist Party, appealed to similar sentiments at a meeting of the Arms for Spain Committee:

"As members of the Belfast community I put it to you if there if any flag you love more than any other it is the Union Jack. Belfast had been especially loyal from time immemorial and what do the Fascist Powers think of the Union Jack to-day? What do they think of the British seamen carrying out their legitimate trade on the high seas?"[66]

The left appeared resigned to its lack of influence among Catholics – at least on the Spanish Civil War. The Union Jack and Apprentice Boy rhetoric was characteristic of the Popular Front tactic of appealing to what would previously have been viewed as reactionary patriotic sentiments. The difficulty in Northern Ireland was that such appeals alienated sympathetic Catholic opinion. There were also clear indications of a shift away from anti-partitionism and (thus Catholic support) among the Northern left during this period. An NILP conference rejected a pro-united Ireland motion in 1937.[67] The Belfast CPI also retreated from its position of uncompromising republicanism.[68] If Catholics were unenthusiastic about the left in Northern Ireland, the left-wing parties, despite their anti-partitionist constitutions, were similarly ambivalent about Irish republicanism.[69]

The Spanish Civil War sharpened religious and political differences both within the left and between Catholics and Labour. These tensions were exposed by Craigavon's snap election in January 1938.[70] Midgley's disastrous campaign has been outlined. His enthusiasm for Spain was not shared by other NILP leaders. Jack Beattie,[71] dependent on Catholic votes in Short Strand, conspicuously failed to support the Spanish Republic.[72] In Oldpark, Jack Macgougan fought an anti-partitionist campaign and disassociated himself from Midgley.[73] Nonetheless, Labour candidates were criticised throughout the North for their pro-Spanish government sympathies.[74] The Spanish Civil War exposed the lack of

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66 *Ibid*, 30 July 1938, HA 32/1/559.

67 The Armagh branch's resolution that the NILP should co-operate with Free State workers to secure unity was heavily defeated (*Irish Democrat*, 6 November 1937).

68 William McCullough "introduced the most significant revision yet in communist thinking on the Northern state" when he suggested support for a progressive government at Stormont. Mike Milotte (1984) p.179.

69 Mike Milotte (1984) p.123 noted that support for Labour did not imply rejection of the Union – "Most Northern labour leaders, themselves drawn from the Protestant section of the working class . . . were unsympathetic to the struggle for national independence, although in public, and for the sake of organisational unity, they endeavoured to appear neutral on the issue".

70 The NILP Catholic vote declined dramatically. A successful unionist election campaign against de Valera's constitution resulted in a surge in the unionist vote. Representation at Stormont changed from 36 Unionists, 3 Unof Unionists, 2 NILP, 11 Nationalists in 1933 to 39 Unionists, 3 Unof. Unionists, 1 NILP, 1 Ind Lab., 8 Nationalists in 1938. The proportion of support for each party changed significantly – Unionists 43.1% to 56.5%; Unof. 21.4% to 29.1%; NILP 8.6% to 5.7%; Nat 26.9 to 4.9% (Appendix 1, David Harkness, *Northern Ireland since 1920* (Dublin, 1983).

71 Jack Beattie (1886-1961): b. Belfast; Presbyterian; blacksmith, Harland and Wolff shipyard; ILP member, 1919-25; NILP Stormont MP, 1925-49; expelled from NILP for anti-partitionism, 1934; readmitted but again expelled, 1944; Westminster MP for West Belfast, 1943-50, 1951-55; founder of Irish Labour Party in Belfast, 1949.

72 Graham Walker (1985) p.99.

73 *Ibid*, p.107.

74 *Irish News*, 2 February 1938.

genuine (as opposed to tactical anti-unionist) support among Catholics for the NILP and revealed the precarious tactic of "avoiding the issue".[75] The NILP's open policy on partition resulted in division and weakness which was easily exposed by sectarian issues such as the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Civil War was an equally unsuccessful period for the far left in Northern Ireland. The NISP lost Catholic support through its support of Spain. Labour, with the exception of Midgley (who was personally hostile to communism) remained largely hostile to efforts to draw it into a united front on Spain. The bleak outlook of socialism in Northern Ireland was symbolised by the unique united front of ICF and UPL members at pro-Republican meetings throughout the war.

II. The Labour Party

The history of the labour movement from the establishment of the Irish Free State to the mid-1930s was one of steady decline. Trade union membership fell from 175,000 in 1924 to 92,000 within five years. Jim Larkin's[76] split from William O'Brien's[77] Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) to form the Workers' Union of Ireland further weakened trade unionism. The labour movement's political wing, the Labour Party,[78] tied to a contracting trade union movement, and failing to firmly address the critical issue of Anglo-Irish relations, fared poorly throughout the 1920s, particularly following Fianna Fáil's entry to the Dáil.[79] In 1930 the Labour Party separated from the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC) to develop its political organisation and broaden its electoral appeal beyond trade unionism. Despite the party's adoption of constitutional republicanism under William Norton[80] in the 1930s, Labour failed to successfully compete with Fianna Fáil's populist social policies.

Notwithstanding the ITUC's separation from the Labour Party, trade unions continued to dominate the Labour Party. Thirteen large unions, including the ITGWU, remained affiliated and union representatives formed the majority of delegates at the annual conferences. Its leadership was predominantly comprised of trade union leaders – T.J.

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75 Emmet O'Connor, *A History of Labour, 1824-1960* (Dublin, 1992).

76 James Larkin (1876-1947): b. Liverpool; organised Dublin branch, National Union of Dock Labourers, 1907; founder ITGWU, 1908; led workers in lock-out, 1913; labour organiser, USA, 1914-23; founder Workers' Union of Ireland, 1923; Independent Labour TD, 1926-32, 1937-8; Labour TD, 1943-4.

77 William O'Brien (1881-1968): b. Ballygurteen, Clonakilty, Co. Cork; member Irish Republican Socialist Party, 1898; co-founder ITGWU, 1909; interned 1916; general secretary, Labour Party, 1919; Labour TD, 1922-3, 1927, 1932-3, general secretary, ITGWU, 1923-46.

78 The Irish Labour Party: established at 1912 Irish Trade Union Congress; abstained from 1918 general election; focused on socio-economic policy rather than Anglo-Irish issues during the 1920s; changed name from the Irish Labour Party to the Labour Party in 1936.

79 Enda McKay, 'Changing with the Tide, the Irish Labour Party, 1927-33', *Saothar 11*, 1986.

80 William Norton (1900-63): general secretary, Post Office Workers' Union, 1924-57; TD, 1926-63; member ILP&TUC executive, 1926-30; chairman, Irish Labour Party, 1930; Labour Party leader, 1932-60; Tánaiste, 1948-51, 1954-7.

O'Connell[81] and William Norton, for example, were respectively head of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) and Post Office Workers' Union. Given these ties and the existence of little more than nominal Labour Party branches in many constituencies,[82] an analysis of trade union responses to the Spanish Civil War must be utilised – as well as those of Labour Party representatives – to provide an indication of grass-roots Labour Party opinion.

The labour movement in the 1930s encompassed a broad array of political opinion. Larkin's Workers' Union of Ireland, Louie Bennett's Irish Women Workers' Union and the Bakery and Food Workers' Amalgamated Union were militant while unions like the INTO were conservative and hostile to socialism. Most fell somewhere in between and advocated, like the Labour Party, moderate social democratic policies. Prior to the Spanish Civil War, both Labour and the trade union movement adopted a firm stance against international and domestic fascism which it described as "capitalism in its most decadent form".[83] A joint manifesto was issued by Labour and the ITUC which organised a series of anti-fascist meetings. William Norton was deeply critical of the Blueshirts at the 1933 Labour Party conference. The following year William O'Brien's opening address condemned:

"the Machiavellian tyranny of a Mussolini, the apparent sadism of a Hitler, the specious patriotism of a Pilsudski, and the vengeful opportunity of a Dollfuss".[84]

Accompanying this anti-fascism, there were some indications of a shift to the left during the 1930s. Following the Republican Congress split a small but vocal number of militant activists such as Roddy Connolly, the son of James Connolly, and Michael Price, a former IRA leader, joined the party. Labour's political rhetoric became increasingly anti-capitalistic culminating in 1936 with the adoption of the Workers' Republic constitution – a phrase redolent of James Connolly's Marxism. But such trends should not be overstated, the anti-fascist campaign drew Labour closer to Fianna Fáil than the far left. Roddy Connolly's appeal for co-operation with republican socialists met with hostility at the party conference in 1934 but a resolution opposing "anti-Christian communistic doctrines" was successfully proposed.[85]

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81 T.J. O'Connell (1882-1968): teacher, 1902-16; general secretary INTO, 1916; TD 1922-32; Labour Party leader, 1927-32; co-founded Education Building Society with Alexander McCabe, 1933; senator, 1941-4, 1945-51, 1954-7.

82 Even after 1930 the party's national organisation was "weak and in the majority of constituencies virtually non-existent" (Donal Nevin, 'Labour and the Political Revolution' in F. MacManus (ed.), *The Years of the Great Test* (Cork, 1967) p.58. The *Workers' Republic* (May 1938) claimed that of three hundred Labour branches only thirty sent delegates to the annual conference and half of these were from the Dublin area.

83 Tony Brown, 'Internationalism and International Politics', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2.

84 Labour Party, *Fourth Annual Report* (1934) p.9.

85 *Ibid*, pp.113-9.

Labour's response to the Spanish Civil War was muted. Labour deputies voted against Cosgrave's motion to recognise General Franco but offered no reason for their position. In fact, the only Labour TD to mention Spain in the opening months of the war, William Davin, urged the government to protest against the anti-clerical atrocities.[86] Apart from one sceptical article about the pro-Franco atmosphere and criticism of Patrick Belton *Labour News*, the party newspaper, did not discuss Spain.[87] The communist *Workers' Republic* bitterly condemned Labour's reticence:

"It is time to ask what is the attitude of the Irish Labour Party and Trade Unions to the attempt to rouse the Irish people on the side of this programme of Spanish Fascism. The Labour leaders are silent while every principle dear to Labour is at stake".[88]

Another editorial referred to the "cowardly silence" of the Labour Party and the "treachery which passes for leadership in the ranks of the Labour movement".[89] The Communist Party's anger at Labour's silence often outweighed its conciliatory united front policy. One editorial attacked "the suicidal policy of leaders who have no faith in the class and movement the represent" and during the general election several Labour candidates were described as "filth".[90]

Most Labour deputies, with the notable exception of Michael Keyes in Limerick, remained aloof from the Christian Front but less senior representatives were initially associated with the movement. A Labour Party county councillor helped form a branch of the ICF in Drogheda.[91] Dan Foley, president of the trades' council and a Labour Party politician, enthusiastically supported the Christian Front in Waterford.[92] At a local level other indications of support for the Nationalists were discernible. A Labour Party branch in Durrow, Co. Laois, declared its support for the "Patriot cause".[93]

The more vocal response of trade union branches to the Spanish Civil War provides a more useful indication of opinion within the labour movement. The most outspoken section of trade unionists were Irish members of the British amalgamated unions which protested against their union's contributions to the British Labour Party's fund for Republican Spain.

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86 *Irish Independent*, 13 September 1936.

87 James Martyn's article queried why it was "the duty of Irish people to save Spain from the Communists and make that country safe for the Fascists". The fact that this was the only anti-Franco article published between 1936-9 suggests that *Labour News* was instructed by party leaders to adopt a more cautious editorial policy. The following year Desmond Ryan wrote – "The Irish Labour Party is so scared that its official organ won't even mention Spain. I sent them a most objective, indeed milk and water article and they sent it back with deep regrets" (Ryan to John Brophy, 24 April 1937, LA 10 Q22/14, Desmond Ryan papers, UCD).

88 *The Workers' Republic*, 29 August 1936. Another editorial (12 September 1936) stated "Is it any wonder that Irish workers are being misled by the lying propaganda and that one or two branches of unions have actually passed resolutions in favour of the assassins who are murdering their fellow Spanish trade unionists? . . . This cowardly silence must be broken. The Labour Executive and T.U.C. must speak".

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Ibid*, 13 February, 3 July 1937.

91 *Ibid*, 12 December 1936.

92 Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Waterford* (Waterford, 1989) p.241.

93 *Irish Independent*, 8 September 1936.

The campaign was partly orchestrated by right-wing clerical bodies such as the Irish Crusade Against Communism and the Christian Front. The latter declared that Irish members of the ATGWU were helping the "Spanish Red Army in their fight to exterminate Christianity".[94] Fr. J.P. Burke told the congregation of Newry Cathedral:

"Catholics in Omagh have left the Transport Union in protest. Catholic workers in Armagh have publicly asked for prayers and Masses for the Catholic cause in Spain. What of Newry? I make no suggestion, it's up to yourselves".[95]

On September 4, the Omagh Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU) protested against their headquarters' donation of one thousand pounds to the Republican government.[96] Branches in Strabane and Derry quickly followed.[97] The union's difficulties increased as workers began resigning in protest. The following week a number of workers in Strabane and an entire branch in Athenry left the ATGWU.[98] The Athenry branch was persuaded to rejoin when Gilbert Lynch,[99] the general organiser, explained that the money was intended for non-partisan medical relief but he failed to persuade a branch in Galway from disaffiliating two days later.[100] Branches in Limerick and Tyrone also dissolved themselves.[101] Over six hundred Galway workers defected to their unions' bitter rivals, the ITGWU, in October.[102] Ernest Bevin, the general secretary of the ATGWU, responded by sending a telegram to Dublin stating "with deliberate inaccuracy" that his union was neutral and the grant was intended for both sides.[103] When Bevin delivered the same message at the ATGWU annual conference in Dublin, in a powerful speech which recalled the 1913 lock-out and accused the *Irish Independent* of being "anti-worker" he was unanimously endorsed by the delegates.[104]

Other amalgamated unions faced similar problems. Branches of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) in Derry, Dublin and Limerick protested against donations to Spain.[105] A branch in Mallow, declaring that "Irish railwaymen would never be found on the side of Atheism", disaffiliated from the NUR.[106] A notable exception was provided by the Cork NUR which, to Alfred O'Rahilly's consternation, endorsed the grant.[107] The Birr branch of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives and the National Union of

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94 *Ibid*, 16 September 1936.
95 *Irish News*, 10 September 1936.
96 *Irish Independent*, 4 September 1936.
97 *Belfast Newsletter*, 9 September 1936.
98 *Irish Press*, 10 September 1936; *Irish Independent*, 10 September 1936.
99 Gilbert Lynch: fought in 1916; member ITGWU; national organiser ATGWU; ITUC president, 1945-6.
100 *Irish Press*, 14 September 1936, *Irish Independent*, 16 September 1936.
101 *Irish Press*, 12 September 1936; Mike Milotte (1984) p.170.
102 *Irish Press*, 5 October 1936.
103 Tom Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge, 1991) p.193.
104 *Irish Press*, 19 September 1936.
105 *Irish Independent*, 21-22 September 1936, 1 October 1936.
106 *Irish Press, Irish Independent*, 18 September 1936.
107 *Irish Independent*, 26 September 1936.

General and Municipal Workers in Derry issued similar protests.[108] A branch of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers in Kilkenny disaffiliated and applied to the ITUC to join the Irish National Union of Workers.[109] In Northern Ireland, an exasperated National Union of Distribution and Allied Workers official reported:

"We actually have members inside the movement resigning on account of our supporting the workers in Spain. These are the very people who cry out to workers of the world about the fascist form of the northern government . . . I suppose this could only be found in Ireland".[110]

The Spanish Civil War disrupted the amalgamated unions at a particularly unwelcome time. In April the ITUC had established a commission of inquiry into trade unionism which was essentially an attempt by William O'Brien to dominate the British unions.[111] Irish resentment of the amalgamated unions was based on rivalry, nationalist sentiment and the concern that socialist unions should not represent Catholic workers.[112] The actions of the Irish branches which disaffiliated lent some credence to the latter criticism. In November 1936 the *Irish Catholic* declared:

"It is only when the Labour movement in this country is Catholic to the core, when the Catholic rank-and-file are led by Irish Catholic leaders, that we can safely count upon the Irish workers remaining impervious to Communistic guile".[113]

Another editorial warned that Irish workers belonging to English unions might be duped into "Communist activities". It referred to the ATGWU contribution and again insisted that Irish labour must be "Catholic to the core".[114]

Apart from this wave of protests there were other indications of trade unionist hostility to the Republic. An NUR branch in Dublin condemned the "reds".[115] The Irish Union of Distributive Workers and Clerks in Listowel urged the government to sever diplomatic relations. Significantly, the more radical unions did not support Republican Spain. Larkin's militant Workers' Union of Ireland banned its officials from speaking on pro-Republican platforms, provoking the resignation of Jack Carney – one of its most important figures.[116] The Irish Women Workers' Union remained silent. The Dublin Trades Union Council – which persuaded the ITUC and Labour Party to campaign against fascism in 1934 – refused to allow the pro-Republican New Theatre Group to use its Torch theatre and

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108 *Irish Press*, 18 September 1936.
109 ITUC, *43rd Annual Report* (1937), p.173. The INUW was the Irish breakaway of the ASW.
110 T.J. McCoubrie to political general secretary, USDAW, cited in Graham Walker, *The Politics of Frustration* (Manchester, 1985) p.110.
111 Charles McCarthy, 'From Division to Dissension: Irish Trade Unions in the Nineteen Thirties - Part II', *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 5, No. 4, p.476.
112 Ken Hannigan, 'British based unions in Ireland', *Saothar 7*, 1981, p.40.
113 *Irish Catholic*, 12 November 1936.
114 *Ibid*, 21 January 1937.
115 *Irish Independent*, 1 September 1936.
116 Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin* (London, 1965) p.298.

rejected the appeals of the Food Ship for Spain Committee.[117] One of the few (and possibly the only) unions to adopt an openly pro-Republican position was the Irish Bakers' Confectioners' and Allied Workers' Amalgamated Union under John Swift's[118] radical leadership.[119]

Most trade union leaders appeared indifferent to the fate of the Republic. Like Labour, the ITUC resisted attempts to draw it into united front activities. The executive refused to admit two radical unions, the Irish Seaman's and Port Workers' Union and the Workers' Union of Ireland, associated with Republican Congress to the Trade Union Congress.[120] William O'Brien refused a request to lend his name to the Food Ship for Spain Committee.[121] The ITUC, which had appealed to the Spanish government for clemency for Asturian rebels in 1935, appeared to lose interest in Spain in the new climate.[122] An invitation from the International Federation of Trade Unions to a conference on the Spanish Civil War was ignored.[123] When Cork Workers' Council forwarded Robin Tweedy's[124] appeal for Republican Spain to the ITUC for "the benefit of their observations" Congress replied that the national executive "have no views to express on the matter".[125] When Kathleen McColgan, the Irish representative of the English based National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, appealed for funds to support Spanish refugees, the ITUC issued a "non-committal" appeal to their affiliated trade unions. According to the ITUC general secretary no Irish unions contributed:

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117 Seamus Cody, John O'Dowd, Peter Rigney, *The Parliament of Labour – 100 Years of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions* (Dublin, 1986) p.169.

118 Swift's entry in Fr. Fahey's *"Who's Who"* states – "Lapsed Catholic; subscriber to The FreeThinker, each issue of which he receives by post; recently wrote a blasphemy in a poem published in Torch; General Secretary of Bakers' Union and one of the Assessors to the Commission, on the price of bread, just set up; is certainly a Communist" (Box 5, Fr. Denis Fahey Papers, Archives of the Holy Ghost Fathers).

119 John Swift, *John Swift* (Dublin, 1991) p.103. The union's monthly journal was strongly anti-Franco. One editorial declared "We cannot conceive there are many now who take seriously Franco's role of saviour of God and country in this iniquitous business of bartering his own land and risking the peace of the world for the patronage of the dictators of Rome and Berlin" (*Bakery Trade's Journal*, July 1937, cited from the *Irish Democrat*, 17 July 1937). Another radical trade unionist Joseph Ellis, general secretary of the Irish Seaman's and Port Workers' Union, denounced the Christian Front but is not known to have publicly referred to the Spanish Civil War (*Irish Press*, 5 March 1937).

120 Department of Justice, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.18, Seán MacEntee papers, P67/527.

121 Patrick Byrne to William O'Brien, 3 January 1939; O'Brien to Byrne, 17 January 1939, William O'Brien papers, Ms. 15, 695, NLI.

122 ITUC general secretary to Lerroux, Spanish Premier, 28 February 1935, ICTU/2, 1163, Box 45, ITUC Records, National Archives.

123 IFTU general secretary to ITUC, 20 February 1937; ITUC general secretary to P.J. Cairns, 13 October 1941, ICTU/2, 1163, Box 45.

124 Tweedy's entry in Fr. Fahey's *"Who's Who"* states – "Born in Cornwall; aged 65; reared a Presbyterian; Institute of Electrical Engineers; Profession - Consulting Engineer . . . visited U.S.S.R, in 1930 and 1933; one of the founders of Left Book Club, 1936; lends grounds of his residence at Carrickmines for social outings of C.P.I.; was member of Committee of Friends of the Spanish Republic . . . member of the Editorial Board of Workers' Republic".

125 R.N. Tweedy to P. Shanahan, Cork and District Workers' Council secretary, 29 October 1938; Shanahan to ITUC general secretary, 4 November 1938; Lynch to Shanahan, 10 November 1938, ICTU/2, 1163, Box 45.

"Head Offices of two Unions in England replied that they were already subscribing to funds raised there. No other replies were received from any Union and no contribution was made by or on behalf of the Irish Trade Union Congress".[126]

The appeals of another English trade union leader – who appeared unaware of Irish trade unionist hostility to the Republic – for funds for the International Brigade were equally unsuccessful:

"So far as I can remember at the moment, we have had nothing at all from our Irish Branches though appeals have been made through the medium of our Monthly Report. I do hope our Irish members will rise to the occasion and help defeat the Fascist crowd".[127]

Meanwhile, the Labour Party continued to avoid the subject. Party leaders attempted to steer two controversial motions moved by left-wing delegates through the annual conference in 1937. Michael Price and John Breen[128] (both Dublin North-West) proposed censuring Michael Keyes TD for his involvement with the Christian Front. Joseph Cahill and Dan Kennedy, both from Co. Tipperary, promptly moved an amendment approving of his association with the ICF. Keyes argued that Limerick Trades' Council had received clerical assurances that the movement was non-political. When Price pointed out that the Christian Front publicly opposed the workers' republic – "the declared objective of the Labour Party" – Keyes agreed to reconsider his participation.[129] Price offered to withdraw his resolution if the administrative council instead censured the ICF. Norton rejected Price's compromise on the unconvincing premise that next year's administrative council was not yet elected but attempted to placate him by attacking Belton:

"The President of that organisation was a well-known and very belligerent politician (hear, hear), who in the course of his career had been a member of all the political parties in the country (applause), except, to its eternal credit, the Labour Party (hear, hear)".[130]

When Price reluctantly withdrew his demand, a relieved William O'Brien thanked Price and Cahill "for the restraint they had shown in this very critical matter" adding "if the discussion went on the wrong lines it could do a lot of harm". The debate reveals Labour's reluctance to confront the Christian Front. It was in the leadership's interest to avoid a vote on an issue which would reveal division within the party, particularly as opposition to the Christian Front would have been perceived as an expression of anti-Franco sentiment. Significantly the Spanish Civil War, the *raison d'être* of the Christian Front, was not

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126 ITUC general secretary to P.J. Cairns, 13 October 1941, ICTU/2, 1163, Box 45.

127 National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades' Association secretary to ITUC general secretary, 23 March 1938, ICTU/2, 1163, Box 45.

128 A Department of Justice report described Breen as a former IRA volunteer from Belfast who joined the CPI in 1933. Breen was one of a number of communists who infiltrated Labour in this period. The report noted – "He is a member of the Workers' Union of Ireland and on the instructions of the C.P.I. he joined the Irish Labour Party in October 1936. Since joining Labour Party has not openly taken part in the activities of the CPI, but is a member of the existing Dublin District Committee" (D/Jus, *Notes on Communism in Saorstat Eireann*, p.3, P67/528, Sean MacEntee papers, UCD).

129 Labour Party, *Sixth Annual Conference* (1937) p.113-4.

130 *Ibid*, p.114.

mentioned during the debate.[131] Labour's attitude to the ICF contrasted with its outright hostility towards the Blueshirts in 1934. Norton provided one explanation when he stated that "a considerable number of people" sincerely believed the ICF was solely motivated by anti-communism.[132] The Irish Christian Front presented a more subtle threat to Labour than the Blueshirt movement. Belton's rhetoric, couched in Christian and anti-communist terms, was more difficult to criticise than O'Duffy's fascistic polemics. Norton was also aware that confrontation with the Christian Front would provoke allegations of communist tendencies within Labour.

The second resolution proved more contentious. Seamus O'Brien,[133] a Rathmines delegate, proposed a resolution against "Fascism in Europe" and urged a renewal of the anti-fascist campaign.[134] In recent months, O'Brien argued, fascist propagandists were "more active than ever" attacking labour and promoting corporatism. Frank Robbins, an ITGWU delegate, seconded the motion and delivered a lengthy critique of Hitler, Mussolini and the ICF but conspicuously not Franco.

Joseph Cahill, who earlier supported Keyes, argued that it was unfair to criticise fascism without including a more harmful political system and amended O'Brien's motion to include "Godless Communism":

"We opposed Fascism because it enslaved the body and Communism because it enslaved body and soul . . . Our Christian religion is the greatest heritage we have and the hard-won charter of our liberties and our rights".[135]

Cahill also disassociated "the workers of Tipperary" from a previous speaker – "I am not proud to support the "Reds" and I do not think that organised Labour should stand for that".[136] Cahill's argument was again supported by Dan Kennedy who noted that:

"the other "isms" attacked materially, but to his mind, Communism attacked spiritually, from a different angle altogether".[137]

Thomas Hayden from Tullow, also condemned communism – "all its pros and cons" – but drew applause when he said that living conditions were more important than "all those

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131 The ITUC was equally reluctant to challenge Catholic Action bodies. A resolution deploring "sectarian outside interferences" (a reference to criticism from another Catholic action body, the Waterford Aquinas Study Circle) was defeated at the 1937 ITUC Conference. See Matt Merrigan, *Eagle or Cuckoo* (Dublin, 1989) pp.88-9.

132 Labour Party, *Sixth Annual Conference* (1937) p.115.

133 Seamus O'Brien, a member of the Irish Citizen Army (led by Michael Price after the Congress split), was a delegate at the Republican Congress general assembly in Rathmines (D/ Jus, *Notes on Republican Congress*, p.12, P67/527, Sean MacEntee papers, UCD).

134 *Ibid*, p.129.

135 *Ibid*, p.132.

136 The previous day A. H. McElroy, the NILP fraternal delegate, complained of attacks by the *Irish Independent* ("that infamous rag") on his party and declared that the NILP made no apologies for supporting Spanish democracy against international fascism. The speech generated much unwelcome publicity for Labour from the *Independent* and other newspapers.

137 Labour Party, *Sixth Annual Conference* (1937) p.132.

isms". Con Connolly (Cork City constituency council), quoted from the *Irish Rosary* and advocated "constructing an Ireland on Christian Social lines".

William Norton reiterated the party attitude in a lengthy speech – later published as *Cemeteries of Liberty, Communistic and Fascist Dictatorships*. Norton questioned the need for the debate as Labour's hostility to both ideologies was well-known. He criticised the dictatorships of Russia and Germany and declared that Sweden and New Zealand, rather than Russia, offered Labour inspiration from abroad. Norton believed the constant warnings to Irish workers betrayed a "deplorable want of faith in the deep-seated religious convictions of the Irish working class".[138] As for the allegations of communist infiltration, Norton pointed out that the CPI had always reserved its "bitterest criticism and vilest abuse" for the Labour Party.[139]

Norton's speech raises two interesting points. Remarkably, he delivered a lengthy address on international fascism and Communism, during the peak of Irish interest in the Spanish Civil War, without once mentioning the conflict. Also, the speech differed substantially from Norton's lengthy critique of fascism in 1934. Norton now equated fascism exclusively with Nazism rather than the broad domestic and international threat of 1934. In large part this must be attributed to the pro-Franco atmosphere of the period.[140] In 1934 criticism of Mussolini, Hitler and the Blueshirts met with support within Labour and offended only a minority of the Irish public. Criticism of Franco, which implicitly suggested support for the Republican government, divided the left and right of the party, and presented newspapers and politicians hostile to Labour with valuable propaganda.

William Maslin, a left-wing Trinity College delegate, described Cahill's amendment as a "red herring". Labour's real enemy was fascism not the red scare conjured up by Belton and "that filthy rag" the *Irish Independent*. More controversially, Maslin criticised Labour for not supporting "the constitutionally elected Government of Spain" and not speaking against Cosgrave's motion for "Fascist Franco's alleged Government". Maslin's remark that "anyone in the room not prepared to support that [Republican] Government" was there under false pretences met with cries of "No". Dan Kennedy dramatically suggested that Maslin immediately move his expulsion.[141]

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138 *Ibid*, p.133.

139 *Ibid*, p.134.

140 Norton's change of emphasis has been attributed to the decline of the Blueshirt movement, fear of adverse publicity, and his desire to avoid recalling the Blueshirt period because it represented a period of success for the far left within Labour (Vincent Geoghegan, 'Cemeteries of Liberty: William Norton on Communism and Fascism', *Saothar 18*, 1991). The latter motive is questionable. The defeat of Roddy Connolly's resolutions calling for a united front and anti-fascist action in October 1934 would suggest the far left was no less a marginal force within Labour than in 1937.

141 Labour Party, *Sixth Annual Conference* (1937) p.138.

The concluding speakers, like Norton, expressed considerable irritation about the need for a debate. John Gill (ITGWU) did not understand why Labour, among all the other parties, should repeatedly condemn ideologies "which everybody knew it hated". Another delegate remarked that the best argument offered for fascism was provided by those "who wasted the time of everyone listening to long speeches" when important business was on the agenda. Eamon Wall (Cork North constituency) interestingly commented that:

"the motives of those moving the resolution and amendment could be well understood, but the Labour Party had a definite road to travel and could not be hauled either to the right or to the left".[142]

The debate was resolved when it was again agreed to withdraw both motion and amendment. The withdrawal of this and the previous motion meant (presumably intentionally) that it was difficult to estimate the strength of the left and right wings within Labour. But the acrimonious argument provided some indication of the divergence of opinions within Labour. The hostility within the party towards communism is evident; even delegates like William Maslin, who were sympathetic to Marxism, were forced to disclaim all connection with communism.[143] Many delegates clearly perceived communism as a greater evil than fascism – an unusual sentiment within European social democratic/socialist parties which generally co-operated with the far left against fascism during this period. The rejection of ideology was a recurrent theme among the speakers. Dan Kennedy, Thomas Hayden, John Gill and Eamon Wall advised delegates to ignore "isms" in favour of traditional trade union issues. As Hayden put it:

"they were paying far too much attention to all those "isms," when there were people in the country living in houses which were not fit for pigs, on mere pittances of 5s. and 12s. 6d. a week".[144]

These delegates represented an important viewpoint within the Labour Party which, in this period, rejected Marxism yet also espoused anti-capitalistic sentiments. This group of speakers represented the most numerically dominant perspective in the debate.

Labour continued to maintain a low-profile on Spain in the Dáil. Its deputies were inconspicuous during the three day non-intervention debate. Norton spoke only to refute the allegations of Richard Anthony,[145] an Independent Labour deputy. Referring to "the pinks . . . reds and the pale pinks", Anthony noted that Labour refused to condemn communism at their annual conference.[146] When a clearly outraged Wiliam Norton

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142 *Ibid*, p.140.

143 "Mr. William N. Maslin (Trinity College) said that in rising to criticise the amendment, he wished to point out that he was neither an Atheist nor a Communist" (*Ibid*, p.139). His colleagues were not so sure. Two years later, L.J. Duffy, the secretary of the Labour Party, announced "He did not know how Mr. [J.T.] O'Farrell [Railway Clerks' Association] could seriously talk about a "popular front" having regard to the fact that he himself was up to his neck in one with Mr. Maslin, Mr. Cruise O'Brien and others" (Labour Party, *Eighth Annual Conference* (1939) p.110). Conor Cruise O'Brien recalls Maslin as an important, if secretive, "apparatchik" within Labour's small group of far left members (Telephone conversation, 19 October 1995).

144 Labour Party, *Sixth Annual Conference* (1937) p.133.

145 Richard Anthony, an extremely anti-communist politician, had been expelled from Labour following his support of Cumann na nGaedheal's Public Safety Bill in 1931.

146 Dáil Debates (DD) 65, 697-8.

exclaimed "Stop your dirty political tricks . . . You told a deliberate lie", he was ordered from the Dáil for using non-parliamentary language.[147]

Labour's second contribution to the debate occurred when William Davin supported Fine Gael's amendment to sever diplomatic relations with "the so-called Government of . . . Caballero" – a position which must have caused consternation among Labour's left-wing.[148] Davin, it should be noted, was not arguing from a pro-Franco perspective, but rather felt non-recognition was a logical concomitant to non-intervention. Indeed, Davin challenged Belton's statement that "99 per cent of the Irish people were in favour of the recognition of the so-called Franco Government" and criticised Fine Gael's support for Franco's recognition:

"I wonder what Deputy McGilligan, as Minister for External Affairs at a particular period, would think if the Spanish Government in 1922 and 1923 sent a diplomatic representative here to recognise the de Valera republican Government at that time?"[149]

Davin split Labour's vote by supporting Fine Gael's amendment. All the Labour deputies, except Norton who was suspended, then voted for non-intervention. Labour's discomfort on Spain was illustrated by Norton's emotional response to Richard Anthony's goading. Davin's remarkable participation in the debate indicates the strength of anti-Republican sentiment in the Labour Party.[150]. He rejected the party line to urge the government to pursue a more hostile foreign policy towards the Spanish government.

Despite Labour's cautious policy on Spain, even occasional pro-Republican remarks by left-wing members resulted in criticism of the party. This criticism focused not so much on the party's Spanish policy, which was identical to that of the government, but on the recently adopted Workers' Republic constitution. Following the contentious Dáil debate, *Labour News* noted that the "campaign of slander is widespread and it is both public and private".[151] The *Limerick Leader* insisted Labour was "Communistic in aim, origin and tendency".[152] The *Standard* advised its members to "look for other guidance" if Labour

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147 DD 65, 698-9.

148 DD 65, 935.

149 DD 65, 935-6. McGilligan replied, "We would have hurled him out". Davin was later sceptical of Fine Gael's championing of Franco:

"**General Mulcahy:** . . . If we are a democratic Government, taking decisions that are going to be helpful in Europe, and are going to be helpful on the side that we want to see win in Spain–

Mr. Davin: What side is that?

General Mulcahy: The side that is fighting against the Communist Government in Spain.

Mr. Davin: It should be the side of the Spanish people.

Mr. Belton: That is the side of the Spanish people (DD 65, 942).

150 However, it should be noted that Davin did not appear to have considered the issue prior to the debate. At one point it became evident that Davin was unaware of the content of the amendment he was discussing (DD 65, 936-7). As McGilligan remarked – "It is rather a tribute to the virtues of parliamentary government that Deputy Davin should have found himself so swayed by one argument that he is now a definite adherent to a proposal of which he knew very little before he came into the House" (DD 65, 955).

151 *Labour News*, 27 February 1937.

152 *Ibid.*

continued to pursue a Workers' Republic.[153] The *Irish Catholic* claimed the ultimate aim of Labour's policy was the seizure of the state "by a revolution of class-conscious workers".[154] Even the *Irish Press*, which usually ridiculed such 'red scares' uncharacteristically declared that "the public in this country have a right to know what is the Irish Labour Party's policy on Communism".[155] The campaign against Labour's constitution was orchestrated by the hierarchy with the assistance of compliant conservative trade unionists such as T.J. O'Connell. Cardinal MacRory's memo of a meeting of the hierarchy's theological committee noted:

"INTO & Labour Party. Our secs to see Mr. O'Connell who is to be asked to make suggestions to Labour to remove from its Constits & programme things found objectionable by the Bishops' Theol. Committee".[156]

Having achieved no success seven months later MacRory instructed the bishops to increase the pressure:

"Replied to Kinane [Bishop of Waterford and Lismore] advising, with Bish. of Lim. to hold his hand till after the meeting of the Adm. Co. of Labour P. on 25th inst. If they are ugly about changing their Constit. then he might at once send on to I.N.T.O. & Labour P. the resol. of the Bishops".[157]

The party revoked the offending clause in 1939.[158]

Following this period of intense pressure in early 1937, Labour generally managed to avoid controversy on Spain although some embarrassment was provoked by Conor Cruise O'Brien's speech at the 1938 annual conference. Although the delegates were debating Abyssinia, he referred to the "[Spanish] revolt against a democratically elected Government . . . supported by international Fascism with Nazis and Italian troops". A recently elected deputy, Gerard McGowan, immediately declared:

"he felt that he would be lacking in his duty if he did not enter a protest. With respect to everybody's religious beliefs, he said they were Catholics first and politicians afterwards".[159]

Other deputies rose to argue but the chairman ruled Spain out of order and Norton pleaded to the delegates to remember the press was present.

Can Labour's lack of support for the Spanish government, which contrasted with social democratic and socialist parties throughout Europe, be explained simply by clerical pressure? The controversy aroused by the Workers' Republic constitution illustrates that regardless of its position on Spain, Labour was under considerable pressure – from the hierarchy, political opponents and press – to eschew any trace of socialism. Given this

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153 *Ibid.*
154 *Ibid.*
155 *Irish Press*, 2 November 1937.
156 18 January 1938, Cardinal MacRory diaries, VI Joseph Cardinal MacRory, Cardinal MacRory papers, Armagh Archdiocesan Archives.
157 *Ibid*, 20 October 1938.
158 Labour Party, *Eighth Annual Conference* (1939), pp.161-74.
159 Labour Party, *Seventh Annual Conference* (1938) p.193.

atmosphere support for Republican Spain would clearly have been a risky electoral strategy.

Another explanation can be found in the party's conservative ideology. Unlike much of the European left, for example the Northern Ireland and British Labour parties, the Labour Party did not view itself as a socialist party. There was a widespread distrust of "isms". In particular, there was a pronounced hostility towards communism. Many Labour members believed communists were responsible for anti-clericalism in Spain. The following resolution illustrates the sentiments of one rural branch:

"We, the members of Kilmichael Labour Party, hereby condemn the stand the government have taken in allowing Communism to be preached in this country. We call for the immediate suppression of the Communist Movement, as we regard that its main outlook is to bring to Ireland, a repetition of the same barbarous and gruesome occurrences which have recently taken place in Spain".[160]

Even among more sophisticated politicians, such as Thomas Johnson, who were resolutely opposed to authoritarian movements, there was a suspicion of anti-fascism. Many party members would have agreed with his rebuttal of Roddy Connolly's anti-fascist resolution:

"The whole propaganda for a united front was merely an attempt here as in England, France and other countries, to nobble the Labour Party under the name of and by the officials of the Communist Party".[161]

The most common interpretation of Labour's position on Spain is that, under the influence of clerical power and a weak leadership, the party reneged on its obligations to Republican Spain. As the international secretary of the Labour Party concluded in 1980:

"The climate of the time was one of extremely conservative Catholicism and this exercised much influence on all political thinking . . . The Labour Party was undoubtedly blown somewhat off course at this time . . . All in all this was not a very honourable era for Labour on the international front".[162]

This interpretation largely originated from the far left's bitter criticism of Labour during and following the war. The CPI consistently emphasised the idea that vacillating Labour leaders had caved in to clerical and political pressure:

"Who is responsible for this scandalous attitude of Labour? Are the old fossils who have kept the movement in its present plight still holding back all advance? Whatever group of leaders are responsible they must be exposed before the workers and if necessary removed".[163]

However, this argument overlooks the opinions of the rank and file labour movement, or rather it presupposes that they adopted a more pro-Republican position than their leaders. But the disruption within the ATGWU offers a striking example of grassroots labour sentiment. Branches in Tyrone, Strabane, Athenry, Limerick and Galway preferred to disaffiliate rather than condone a financial contribution to the Spanish Republic. There was an absence of pro-Republican resolutions from trade union and Labour Party branches.

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160 D/Jus D2/7/36.
161 Labour Party, *Fourth Annual Conference* (1934) p.119.
162 Tony Brown, 'Internationalism and the Labour Party', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2.
163 *The Worker*, 12 December 1936.

Although British labour adopted a more supportive attitude towards the Republican government its leadership has been similarly depicted as weak and even cowardly. In a recent study of the British labour movement's response to Spain, Tom Buchanan – citing the existence of strong Catholic working-class support for the Nationalists – stressed the "primacy of the defensive, institutional imperative" of labour leaders in reflecting the concerns of a divided trade union movement.[164] Instead of asking, like previous historians, "Why didn't the labour movement do more for Spain?", Buchanan questions "What might the labour movement have been expected to do?".[165] The same question must be asked of labour leaders in Ireland. Spain provided yet another threat to the fissile Labour Party. Regardless of electoral consequences, support for the Spanish Republic would have been disastrous for the Labour Party. Indeed, had Labour been forced to adopt a partisan position on Spain – judging from Keyes' involvement in the ICF, Davin's support of Fine Gael's amendment and the anti-socialist opinions of many Labour members – it may well have backed Fine Gael's call for a cessation of diplomatic relations with the Spanish government.[166] The attempts to attribute Labour's response to clerical intimidation and a reactionary leadership[167] are based on the historical tendency to treat working-class support of Franco as wrong or shameful and under-emphasise it rather than an assessment of such support as a legitimate assertion of the views of Irish workers.

III. Fine Gael

Fine Gael's response to Spain was in many respects a continuation of its policy on Abyssinia. Many of the issues of the Abyssinian crisis were again raised – fascist aggression, the concept of a Catholic foreign policy, Ireland's participation in the international response, and clerical opposition to the government's policy. During the summer of 1935 Fine Gael criticised the government support for League of Nations sanctions aimed at forcing Italy to withdraw from Abyssinia. Several prominent deputies suggested de Valera should extract political concessions, such as a resolution of the annuities dispute, for supporting the British initiative. Ned Cronin, O'Duffy's successor as League of Youth director, argued:

"Surely it was not that Mr. de Valera felt that their obligations to Britain were of such a nature that it would be dishonourable for them to take advantage of the situation to force Britain to come to terms?"[168]

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164 Tom Buchanan (Cambridge, 1991) p.3.
165 *Ibid,* p.227.
166 Another Labour deputy, Gerard McGowan, was a member of the national executive of the pro-Franco Catholic Young Men's Society.
167 Michael O'Riordan, *Connolly Column* (Dublin, 1979) pp.35-6; Denis Carroll, *They Have Fooled You Again* (Blackrock, 1993) p.214; John Swift, *John Swift* (Dublin, 1991) p.101.
168 *Irish Independent*, 26 September 1935.

Frank MacDermot,[169] who heard of the proposal while abroad believed it supported only by a couple of members but on returning:

"found the case was even worse than he realised – that Dr. O'Higgins and Mr. Cronin were speaking, not merely for themselves but representing the policy of the Standing Committee of the Party – that Mr. Cosgrave[170] had been shown Dr. O'Higgin's speech in manuscript and had approved of it . . ."[171]

In fact Cosgrave soon declared that the tariff dispute should be resolved before Ireland agreed to support the sanctions.[172] MacDermot resigned from Fine Gael following his failure to persuade the party leadership to change its position.[173] He later became a strong critic of Fine Gael's Spanish policy after detecting what he considered an equally unprincipled stance.

By the time the Dáil met to debate the application of sanctions Fine Gael had declared itself in favour of the government position. James Dillon[174] stated that his party "emphatically endorse the attitude adopted by President de Valera at the League of Nations".[175] However, Patrick McGilligan's[176] remark that "So far as it goes this is a good measure" – was more indicative of his party's lack of enthusiasm.[177] James Fitzgerald-Kenney was one of several deputies who opposed involvement in Italian affairs.[178] General MacEoin argued that sanctions would lead to an international conflict.[179] Within Fine Gael there was considerable sympathy for Italy. William Kent sympathised on religious grounds:

"As an Irishman and as a Catholic . . . I will not agree to the application of sanctions against Italy, who is going out to civilise and to Christianise a pagan race".[180]

Grattan Esmonde described the Italian invasion as "a just war" and argued that Mussolini ("the Abraham Lincoln of Africa") was motivated by a desire to end the slave trade.[181]

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169 Frank MacDermot (1886-1975): b. Dublin; Oxford educated lawyer; British Army, 1914-8; New York banker, 1919-27; Roscommon TD, 1932-7; co-founded National Centre Party, 1932; Fine Gael vice-president, 1933; resigned Fine Gael, 1935 and from Dáil, 1937; senator, 1938-42; *Sunday Times* New York, Paris correspondent until 1950.

170 William Thomas Cosgrave (1880-1965): b. Dublin; member Irish Volunteers, 1913; fought in 1916; Sinn Féin MP, Kilkenny, 1917-8; Minister for Local Government in first Dáil; Chairman, Provisional Government after death of Collins; President, Executive Council, 1922-32; leader Cumann na nGaedheal, 1923-32; Fine Gael vice president, 1933-5; leader Fine Gael, 1935-44.

171 *Irish Press*, 14 October 1935.

172 *Irish Independent*, 12 October 1935.

173 Fine Gael standing committee meeting, 1 October 1935, P39/Min/2, Fine Gael Party records, UCD.

174 James Dillon (1902-86): son of John Dillon; elected as independent TD, 1932; co-founded National Centre Party, 1932; Fine Gael vice-president, 1933; resigned to oppose neutrality, 1941; Minister of Agriculture, 1948-51, 1954-7; rejoined Fine Gael, 1951; party leader, 1959-65.

175 DD 59, 487.

176 Patrick McGilligan (1889-1979): b. Co. Derry; educated UCD; Sinn Féin member, 1910; pro-Treaty TD, 1923-65; Minister of Industry and Commerce, 1924-32; Minister for External Affairs, 1927-32; Minister of Finance, 1948-51; Attorney General, 1954-7; professor of international and constitutional law, UCD.

177 DD 59, 503. McGilligan, despite voting for the Bill, complained that "an attempt is being made to reduce an aggressive nation by starvation" (DD 59, 1691).

178 DD 59, 503, 7 November 1935.

179 DD 59, 525

180 DD 59, 530.

181 DD 59, 531.

Many Fine Gael deputies sympathised with Patrick Belton's motion to block the legislation. McGilligan's assertion that "The Whips are off, so far as this Party is concerned" is not supported by the minutes of parliamentary party meeting:[182]

"It was decided that no-one should vote for the Motion. There was a considerable volume of opinion to the effect that a large number of deputies did not wish on the other hand, to vote with the Government. The discussion implied that the Party generally would abstain from voting".[183]

Although only Kent and Hales voted against the League of Nations Bill much of the opposition clearly disapproved of it.[184]

It is difficult to discern to what extent sympathy for Italy was due to anti-communism, Catholicism, pro-fascism or political opportunism. It was most likely a combination of motives. Although the most right-wing section of the party left with General O'Duffy (Patrick Belton and Thomas Gunning for instance) significant support remained for authoritarian political movements within Fine Gael.[185] For example, Grattan Esmonde, prominent during the debate on Abyssinia, declared:

"All great countries in Europe are bringing about their corporative revolutions to-day. We must not lag behind; the time has come for us to take our part in this movement which has the blessing of the highest authority on earth and the approval of His Holiness the Pope".[186]

Patrick McGilligan, a former Minister for External Affairs, asserted:

"if the Fascist State is stopped, and stopped severely in its present course, the Fascist State may suffer and the sufferings of that State may not be confined to the borders of that country".[187]

Another deputy, Cecil Lavery, believed "Fascism has done much good in countries that have adopted it and may prove a satisfactory government for other countries in time to come".[188] There was nothing remarkable in these views which reflected the widespread sympathy for authoritarian government in Ireland during this period. It is, however, noticeable that the source of such views was invariably Fine Gael politicians rather than Labour or Fianna Fáil. One of the reasons Frank MacDermot offered for resigning was the strength of support for corporatism within the party even after O'Duffy's departure.[189]

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182 DD 59, 1688.

183 13 November 1935, Parliamentary Party Meeting, P39/Min/4.

184 Deputy McGovern was granted permission to vote for Belton's motion (20 November 1935, Parliamentary Party meeting, P39/Min/4). Grattan Esmonde, William Kent and Patrick Belton (independent) voted against a second reading for the League of Nations Bill. Kent and Belton voted against the Bill which was supported by Fine Gael. Belton's motion to block the bill was supported by Kent, Hales, and R.S. Anthony (Independent Labour). The remainder of Fine Gael abstained.

185 Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe 1919-89* (1990) p.58. Most of the Cumann na nGaedheal politicians who initially encouraged O'Duffy's right-wing policies (Ernest Blythe, Desmond FitzGerald, J.M. Sullivan) remained in Fine Gael.

186 *Irish Press*, 1 January 1935.

187 Cited from Conor Cruise O'Brien in Owen Dudley Edwards (ed.), *Conor Cruise O'Brien Introduces Ireland* (London, 1969) p.114.

188 *Irish Press*, 22 October 1936.

189 *Irish Press*, 14 October 1935. The corporatist philosophy was embodied within party policy. The General Purposes Committee draft of Policy headings in 1933 included "The planning of our national economic life with a view to increased industrial efficiency and harmony by the organisation of agricultural and industrial corporations with statutory powers . . . under the guidance of a national economic council".

MacDermot's fears, however, do not seem justified by the party's lack of interest in corporatism during this period. Intellectuals like Michael Tierney who formed the corporatist wing of Fine Gael were less influential after the Blueshirt split.[190] Indeed, by 1936 even *United Ireland*, the party organ, conceded the policy was not popular.[191]

Another feature of the opposition's foreign policy was a marked hostility towards the League of Nations – "the greatest farce of all time" as Kent referred to it – which stemmed largely from the belief that it was dominated by France and Britain.[192] Fine Gael's foreign policy, which shifted from opposition to support of sanctions in less than a month also demonstrated a surprising inconsistency.[193] This inconsistency provoked assertions that Fine Gael was pursuing a foreign policy based on partisanship rather than principle. Ireland had after all signed the League of Nations covenant upon which the sanctions were based. Norton described Fine Gael's accusation that the government was following British policy as "mean, dirty, party political propaganda".[194]

Abyssinia, in one sense, marked an aberration in the opposition's foreign policy. In Ireland, like most recently independent states, the central ideological difference between the two main parties lay in their attitude to the previous ruling power. Fine Gael (and Cumann na nGaedheal before 1933) advocated a closer relationship with Britain than Fianna Fáil. During the debate on sanctions, however, Fine Gael showed a marked hostility towards British policy. The tensions between pro-British and pro-Fascist sympathies resulted in a degree of inconsistency during the debates on Abyssinia and Spain.[195]

Following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, several Fine Gael branches declared their support for the Nationalists. In August the Tipperary branch of Fine Gael agreed to raise funds for the "Patriots".[196] The following month the South Dublin constituency executive of Fine Gael condemned the "Reds", congratulated the "Patriot army" and urged de Valera to ban communism.[197] An indication of the strong, near unanimous, pro-Franco sentiment within the rank and file of Fine Gael is provided by table 7.1 which details resolutions on the Spanish Civil War passed by local bodies throughout Ireland.[198] While such resolutions were blocked by Fianna Fáil or Labour representatives on several occasions, there is no known example of Fine Gael members opposing a pro-Franco motion. Indeed, determined

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190 Even the League of Youth (Fine Gael section) was not enthusiastic about corporatism following O'Duffy's departure (Maurice Manning, *The Blueshirts* (Dublin, 1971) p.186).
191 *United Ireland*, 4 July 1936.
192 DD 59, 728.
193 It is likely that MacDermot's resignation was not greatly regretted by Fine Gael leaders. MacDermot, who held firm and independent principles, consistently opposed much of Fine Gael's domestic and foreign policy (Maurice Manning (1972) p.187).
194 DD 59, 507.
195 Conor Cruise O'Brien (1969) p.114.
196 *Irish Press*, 22 August 1936.
197 *Irish Independent*, 24 September 1936.
198 See pp.247-51 for the response of local bodies.

Fine Gael pressure on local bodies where it formed a minority occasionally forced Fianna Fáil and Labour to acquiesce to pro-Franco resolutions.[199]

Fine Gael ensured that the Spanish Civil War maintained a high profile within the Dáil. William Cosgrave urged the recognition of Franco in November:

"It is not the fate of the whole gallant Spanish people and their centuries-old glorious civilization which are at stake. It is something more important even than these. It is the fate of European civilization and of everything in it which endears it to us that is in the balance".[200]

Fine Gael's trenchant support for Franco was, at this point, apparently based on the communist nature of the Republican government:

". . . it must surely now be clear to everyone that the cause of the Caballero Government and the cause of the Communist International are identical. Moscow, Barcelona and Madrid form a common front".[201]

Cosgrave argued that recognition would not contradict non-intervention which his party supported. Anticipating the argument that only the fascist powers recognised Franco, Cosgrave commented:

"It would indeed be a pity . . . that it should seem to be left to those States that boast their non-democratic character to take the step of recognising as a Government that Party in Spain which is fighting our most deadly foe".[202]

Cosgrave did not dwell on the atrocities in Republican Spain "that have shaken our people to the very core" because he wanted to emphasis that communism was the "main issue at stake". Fine Gael's decision to not introduce religious arguments ensured that the tone of the debate was not unduly bitter. Professor O'Sullivan repeated Cosgrave's arguments and warned of the dangers of the growth of communism. He dismissed Franco's fascist tendencies:

"It is not a question as to whether the form of government that that Party will set up is the precise form of government which we would set up if we had the settling of matters there. That is not the question".[203]

Fine Gael's position was undoubtedly popular, particularly in rural areas, as is demonstrated by table 7.1. Interestingly though, the Catholic Church and many pro-Franco regional newspapers did not publicly support Fine Gael's campaign. There was considerable support for the government's policy of neutrality. Fine Gael's position attracted criticism from the usually sympathetic conservative and pro-Commonwealth press. The *Round Table*,[204] a periodical hostile to Fianna Fáil's republicanism, argued strongly against recognition:

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199 *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 January 1939.
200 DD 64, 1195.
201 DD 64, 1197.
202 DD 64, 1198.
203 DD 64, 1202.
204 The Irish correspondent of *Round Table*, a British periodical which espoused progressive Commonwealth ideas, was John J. Horgan, a well known Cork solicitor and publicist. Horgan, a Cumann na nGaedheal

"To recognise a new Government when the old one had unmistakably disappeared would also be common diplomatic practice involving no partisan responsibility. But to recognise a new Government which had begun as a military cabal, which had not even obtained command of the capital, and which might possibly (if unaided from abroad) be defeated and dispersed, while the great body of Powers still recognised the old régime, was to link the prestige of the recognising Government irretractably with that of the recognised".[205]

Referring to his pro-Franco motion, the *Round Table* commented that Cosgrave "seems to be obsessed with the fatuous notion that the only duty of an Opposition is to oppose". Similarly the unionist *Belfast Newsletter*, which disliked both parties but generally preferred Fine Gael for the same reason as *Round Table*, declared:

"Opponents of the Government have found difficulty in raising a damaging cry and in presenting a clear-cut policy which would lead to a turnover of votes, and it may be that they hope to achieve something by accusing Ministers of inactivity in face of "Red savagery in Spain".[206]

As with Abyssinia, the conflict between pro-British policy (which demanded a neutral diplomatic position and support of non-intervention) and pro-Catholic/fascist policy (recognition of Franco) resulted in criticism of Fine Gael from traditionally sympathetic sources.

The debate on the Spanish Civil War (Non-Intervention) Bill in February 1937 focused on diplomatic representation rather then non-intervention. The opposition refused to support the Bill unless the government agreed to withdraw Leopold Kerney from Spain. Despite Fine Gael's approval of non-intervention a number of deputies were critical of the policy. There was some disagreement among the opposition. Several deputies, including Professor O'Sullivan and Desmond FitzGerald, agreed with James Dillon's conditional support of non-intervention:

"I want non-intervention because I believe it will bring victory to the Burgos Government. If I believed that non-intervention meant that the Burgos Government would be defeated, I should be against non-intervention".[207]

Indeed, FitzGerald's commitment to non-intervention was so slight that he suggested if Franco looked likely to lose

"an argument could be put up that, even if it meant the war extending beyond the realm of Spain, we might take certain action to bring about victory on the right side there".[208]

This contrasted with de Valera's support of non-intervention which was based on avoiding a European war and ending the conflict quickly.[209]

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member in the 1920s was an unsuccessful candidate for the senate in 1925 and chairman of the Intoxicating Liquor Commission the following year.

205 *Round Table*, Vol. 27, 1936-37, p.281.

206 *Belfast Newsletter*, 19 August 1936.

207 DD 65, 920, 65, 621, 65, 946.

208 DD 65, 770.

209 DD 65, 598-9.

Curiously, another section of Fine Gael disproved of non-intervention for precisely the same reason as their colleagues supported it. James Fitzgerald-Kenney described the legislation as "a Bill which may do an injury to General Franco . . . [and] cannot do the slightest harm to the opposing junta".[210] Patrick McGilligan believed non-intervention was advocated by Britain and France because they desired a Republican victory.[211] He suggested the policy would be more beneficial if "we prohibit volunteers from going to the aid of the other [Republican] Party".[212] James Morrissey believed the Bill was intended to ensure that General Franco did not receive further assistance from Ireland.[213] Similarly, General Mulcahy[214] argued that the legislation was "a criticism and condemnation" of the Irish Brigade.[215]

As Mulcahy's comment suggests many Fine Gael members approved of and, in some cases, identified with the Irish Brigade. Fitzgerald-Kenney complained that the Bill would prevent more Irishmen fighting for "General Franco and the Catholics".[216] O'Sullivan and George Bennett paid tribute "those brave men of our race who lost their lives in the sacred cause of fighting militant Communism".[217] John Costello declared that many of the Brigade "were strong supporters of this Party".[218] John Dillon believed there was "a difference of method and not of sentiment" between his party and the Irish Brigade.[219] Many of the Irish Brigade recruits were drawn from the League of Youth which, at the time of O'Duffy's departure, was loyal to Fine Gael. Some of the Brigade leaders such as Padraig Quinn were prominent Fine Gael supporters and many of those who split from Fine Gael with O'Duffy were civil war comrades of leading Fine Gael politicians.

Fine Gael changed its tactics from the November debate by emphasising the religious nature of the war.[220] With simple but effective logic, Fine Gael argued that if the war was, as the Catholic Church declared, fundamentally a religious conflict the Irish government should not maintain its pro-Republican policy by continuing to recognise the Spanish government. As Dillon put it "the fundamental issue, is God or no God".[221] Daniel

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210 DD 65, 747.
211 DD 65, 721.
212 DD 65, 715.
213 DD 65, 1016.
214 Richard Mulcahy (1886-1971): b. Waterford; joined Irish Volunteers, 1913; fought in 1916; IRA chief of staff; Clontarf MP, 1918; TD 1922-41; pro-Treaty; general officer commanding Provisional Government military forces, 1922-3; Minister of Defence, 1923-4; senator, 1943-4; Fine Gael leader, 1944-59; Minister of Education, 1948-51, 1954-7.
215 DD 65, 856. Fitzgerald-Kenney similarly complained that non-intervention was designed "to prevent persons from this country going out to fight on behalf of Christendom and on behalf of the continuation of a society based upon Christian principles in Spain" (DD 65, 748).
216 DD 65, 747.
217 DD 65, 896, 1003.
218 DD 65, 955.
219 DD 65, 920.
220 DD 65, 614.
221 DD 65, 695.

McMenamin asserted that "there is only one issue involved in Spain and that is Christianity or Atheism".[222] This theme was reiterated by FitzGerald and Coburn.[223] Several deputies referred to the recently released Lenten pastorals. General MacEoin rebutted criticism of Franco by commenting that he would "accept the statement of the Cardinal as against anybody else".[224] McGilligan quoted Pope Pius XI and Cardinal MacRory in his speech.[225]

These arguments inevitably led to the accusation that the government was implementing an anti-Catholic policy – a criticism which provoked some of the most bitter exchanges since Fianna Fáil entered the Dáil. Mulcahy reminded de Valera of his description of Ireland as a state with Catholic ideals.[226] When de Valera stressed the complexities of the war, one deputy suggested he inform the Pope, the Cardinal Primate of Spain and the Irish hierarchy that they were mistaken.[227] Similarly, McGilligan argued:

"It may be that the clergy, the poor man, the rich man, the educated man, the Hierarchy, are wrong . . . Is there nobody on the Government side to tell us what is the real issue in Spain?".[228]

Patrick McGovern accused the government of disobeying the Church:

"All the Catholic Bishops of Ireland and the Archbishops and Bishops of Spain have spoken. What is the use of their speaking if we, the Catholic section of this country, are not prepared to accept their teaching".[229]

Patrick Belton characteristically put the argument most forcefully when he interrupted de Valera's cautious and repetitive outline of the complexities of the war to demand –"Christ or anti-Christ – that is the issue – which are you for?"[230]

The other major criticism of the opposition was that Fianna Fáil was following a socialist agenda. FitzGerald felt government policy was "dragged at the tail" of "pink liberalism".[231] Dillon asked if Ireland should always "trot along in the wake of every pink Liberal Government in Europe".[232] Less charitably, several deputies accused the government of communist tendencies. Fitzgerald-Kenney believed "the sympathies of the Fianna Fáil Party are entirely with the Red Government in Spain".[233] When de Valera challenged the opposition to provide evidence, Coburn interjected:

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222 DD 65, 814.
223 DD 65, 769, 710.
224 DD 65, 802.
225 DD 65, 727-8.
226 DD 65, 857.
227 DD 65, 785-6.
228 DD 65, 723. Similarly Martin Roddy challenged Thomas Derrig, the Minister for Education, when he suggested that volunteers in Spain were inspired by ideological rather than Christian motives –"Is he prepared to dispute the evidence submitted by the Holy Father, by the representative of the Holy See, the Cardinal Primate of Spain" (DD 65, 779).
229 DD 54, 829.
230 DD 65, 853.
231 DD 65, 764.
232 DD 65, 923.
233 DD 65, 745.

"Deep down in your heart your sympathies are with the Red Government and the same is true of everyone of your Party".[234]

The atmosphere of the debate recalled the bitterness of the Blueshirt period. Dillon, for example, belligerently warned:

"if we have got to choose between splitting this country and joining the Popular Front . . . we will make our choice of splitting this country from top to bottom before we will unite with anyone under the banner of the Popular Front".[235]

As with the debate on Abyssinia it is difficult to discern the specific motives for Fine Gael's position. The plight of Catholicism was central and the opposition's claim that there was only one important issue echoed the statements of the Irish hierarchy. The opposition did not place as much emphasis as the government on the complexities of the struggle, particularly the involvement of fascist powers. Franco's fascism was ignored or dismissed as irrelevant. Dillon believed "Communism, Fascism, democracy or anything else" should be ignored until the "supreme issue is determined".[236] Daniel McMenamin viewed Franco, like Napoleon, as a force of nature against disorder:

"human nature revolted and, on that melting mass of anarchy, arose General Franco. In that sense he is a political entity. Call him Fascist if you like, but he is there representing the forces of law and civilisation".[237]

McGilligan adopted a different approach and asked de Valera, rather unconvincingly considering Germany and Italy's position, did he not know that Franco had "again and again, expressed himself as vehemently against Fascism as against Communism".[238] Again, as with Abyssinia, there was some evidence of a general sympathy towards fascism. Given a choice between Mussolini and Labour – "that representative of sloppy sentimentalism in the form of cheap sloppy democracy" – James Coburn declared he would vote "a thousand times for Mussolini".[239] FitzGerald, who felt de Valera was too keen to impress "the Communistic, liberal, pinkish papers in Europe" appeared sympathetic to Nazi Germany:

"If I remember rightly, he [de Valera] actually implied criticism of the Nazi Government in Germany and their treatment of Jews . . . ".[240]

Anti-communism was another key factor leading to Fine Gael's strong support of Franco. Since its establishment Fine Gael had consistently adopted a more aggressively anti-communist position, at least rhetorically, than Fianna Fáil. This is illustrated by the melodramatic wording of the party's founding policy document:

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234 DD 65, 840.
235 DD 65, 926. The debate was interrupted following a disturbance after Seán MacEntee added – "That is a fitting speech from the son of a man who split this country in the interests of the British Liberal Party" (DD 65, 926).
236 DD 65, 695.
237 DD 65, 823.
238 DD 65, 726.
239 DD 65, 710.
240 DD 65, 766.

"Unconditional opposition to Communism, under whatever name it exists or may later appear; the adoption of every means to drag it and its agents into the open, to expose its inhuman and un-Christian character and to destroy it".[241]

Throughout this period, Fine Gael – like the Catholic Church and other clerical bodies – linked the events in Spain with the threat of communism in Ireland and repeatedly called for the proscription of communism. At a meeting in Co. Mayo, for example, General Mulcahy claimed that the government's social policy "is the type of thing . . . that made Spain what it is today".[242] The opposition's repressive approach to communism differed substantially from the government outlook, expressed by Dr. Ryan in May 1936:

"If people said that in their opinion the best form of government for this country was the form of government in Russia, they were bound to protect them and allow them to put their views before the people".[243]

It is difficult to know if Fine Gael's impassioned stance improved its electoral appeal. Fine Gael raised the issue during the Wexford by-election in August 1936. At one meeting a speaker announced that if Spain "was a war for democracy and if democracy meant such bloodshed and atrocities, then he was all for Fascism".[244] Fianna Fáil's "resounding victory", during the peak of public outrage at the anti-clerical atrocities, suggests that the opposition's pro-Francoism was not a significant electoral factor.[245] Nonetheless, the opposition's fundamental argument – that non-intervention coupled with diplomatic representation to the Spanish Republic misrepresented public support for the Nationalists – was compelling. The policy was certainly more successful than its previous stance on Abyssinia.[246] Moreover, the popularity of the Christian Front and the number of resolutions passed by local bodies suggests that a considerable section of Irish opinion supported the proposal. Fine Gael's use of the unambiguously pro-Franco pronouncements of the Catholic Church must also have concerned Fianna Fáil.

However, the debate also exposed weaknesses in Fine Gael's foreign policy. There was disagreement between deputies on fundamental issues such as whether non-intervention favoured Franco or the Republic.[247] The confusion indicated not only varying opinions on

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241 General purposes committee, 9 November 1933. P39/MIN/2, Fine Gael Party records.

242 D/Jus B1/37.

243 DD 64, 1211. Fianna Fáil argued that repression would exaggerate the importance of what was essentially an unpopular cause. Ryan's speech was described as "morally wrong" by Fr. Fahey (untitled Ms. (n.d.), Box 5, Fahey papers, Holy Ghost Archives.

244 *Limerick Chronicle*, 15 August 1936.

245 Maurice Manning (1987) p.191.

246 Conor Cruise O'Brien (1969) p.115.

247 This difference of opinion reappeared on later occasions. In April 1937 Dillon asserted that if non-intervention was effective "the Government of Burgos will control Spain in three weeks" but Mulcahy argued that "the Valencia Government has been carrying on, and carrying on successfully, with increasing Spanish support and less foreign support, and the Franco Government has been carrying on with decreasing Spanish support and increasing foreign support" (DD 69, 666, 680).

the issue but the absence of a coherent foreign policy.[248] Conor Cruise O'Brien's criticism of Fine Gael's policy on Abyssinia could equally apply to Spain:

"It was clear, however, that the coherence and sense of purpose which had marked the pro-Treaty party's conduct of external affairs while in office had collapsed in opposition and in the changed circumstances of the mid-thirties".[249]

The political misfortunes of the previous five years appeared to have diminished the opposition's ability and morale. The latter is illustrated by J.W. Dulanty's confidential remark to Malcolm MacDonald in August 1936 that there was "no chance of Mr. Cosgrave's party returning to power and he found this view shared by Mr. McGilligan, Mr. Cosgrave's ablest lieutenant".[250] Significantly, neither Fine Gael's standing committee or parliamentary party formally discussed Spain.[251] This contrasts with the party's approach to Abyssinia where the minutes of the standing committee record that a "long discussion" occurred.[252] The private papers of several leaders do not indicate much interest in the Spanish Civil War.[253] Cosgrave lacked de Valera's appreciation and understanding of foreign policy.[254] The resignation of Frank MacDermot, who forced the party debate on Abyssinia and opposed Fine Gael's position on Spain, weakened the opposition's ability to formulate a consistent foreign policy.

Although Fine Gael effectively conveyed their staunch opposition to diplomatic relations with Republican Spain, some of the wilder speeches which accused Fianna Fáil of communist and anti-Catholic motives alienated moderate opinion and left the opposition open to charges of political opportunism.[255] As one British official observed "the opposition were clearly using the debate as an opportunity of castigating the Government with a clerical 'whip'".[256] The more conservative pro-British organs of opinion also disapproved. The *Irish Times* declared:

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248 There were other indications. James Dillon believed the Spanish representative (who resigned following the outbreak of the war) was still in Ireland – "We want the Spanish ambassador in this city given his papers and told to go home" (DD 65, 695). Mulcahy consistently criticised non-intervention despite his party's support for it. On one occasion he declared "when you have such countries in the world as Italy and Germany, who are looking so much for fight, many of us would prefer to see them exercising their predilections in that respect in preventing the development of a Communist Government in Spain"(DD 66, 683).

249 Conor Cruise O'Brien (London, 1969) p.115.

250 MacDonald memo, 26 August 1936, Dominions Office series (DO) 35 399/5, Public Record Office, London.

251 Fine Gael standing committee meetings (1936-9), P39/MIN/2; Fine Gael Parliamentary Party meetings (1936-9), P39/MIN/4.

252 Fine Gael Standing committee meeting, 1 October 1935, P39/MIN/2.

253 The private papers of Patrick McGilligan, Ernest Blythe and Richard Mulcahy contain no reference to the Spanish Civil War. Desmond FitzGerald's papers contain two letters and a several cuttings.

254 Patrick Keatinge, *The Formulation of Irish Foreign Policy* (Dublin, 1973) p.54.

255 The *Round Table* felt the opposition's demand of non-recognition of the Republic was more reasonable than its previous motion for Franco's recognition but concluded – "Mr. de Valera has acted very wisely and correctly over this difficult question" (Vol. 27, 1937, p.596). *The Leader* believed non-intervention should not become a political issue (*Irish Press*, 12 March 1937).

256 Dominions Office memo, 2 March 1937, DO 35/553/3.

"It is a thousand pities that the question of the Spanish war should have been introduced into the domestic politics of the Irish Free State. In our opinion, the Free State Government has acted with admirable wisdom . . . if any other Government had been in power, it would have acted in precisely the same way".[257]

Moreover, the rhetoric employed by the opposition – such as Dillon's remark about splitting the country – ensured that Fianna Fáil appeared more reasonable and credible to many observers.[258] Only the most partisan of supporters would have accepted Fine Gael's claim to be more Catholic than the government. As with the debates on local bodies Irish Civil War animosities rather than any major difference of opinion on Franco contributed to much of the bitterness.[259]

Critics of Fine Gael repeatedly alleged that, if in power, they would have pursued the same policy as Fianna Fáil. Given Cumann na nGaedheal's cautious approach to foreign policy, it is unlikely they would have defied conventional diplomacy recognising Franco alongside Germany and Italy. Moreover, considering that Fine Gael, unlike Fianna Fáil, were content to remain in the British Commonwealth, it would have been less likely than de Valera to risk a constitutional crisis by breaching Commonwealth foreign policy.[260] However, Fine Gael policy might have differed in some respects. De Valera's ostensibly even-handed approach, for example his refusal to specifically criticise Republican atrocities in the government's announcement of non-intervention, may not have been duplicated by Fine Gael.[261] Although Fine Gael were unlikely to recognise Franco it would have been possible, as they argued in February 1937, to suspend or terminate diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republic.[262] At the very least the party might have, as it urged de Valera, symbolically retained Kerney in Dublin during the war. It was de Valera's characteristically punctilious interpretation of neutrality, a policy which resulted in his controversial message of condolence to the German embassy in 1945, which particularly irritated Fine Gael.

Outside the Dáil Fine Gael associated itself with the Nationalist cause. The links between the party and the Irish Brigade were emphasised by the news of casualties in Spain. Many

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257 *The Irish Times*, 1 March 1937.

258 See p.243.

259 The degree of acrimony between the parties, ostensibly over Spain but clearly rooted in their mutual antagonism, also recalled the more recent Blueshirt disorders of 1933-4. More extreme Fine Gael deputies regarded the period with some nostalgia. Fitzgerald-Kenney, for example, declared "If disorder started in this country again, the Blueshirts were ready to put on their shirts again and to keep peace and order as they did before" (*Irish Press*, 26 May 1937).

260 See p.290.

261 *Irish Press*, 26 August 1936.

262 Cosgrave might have placed more emphasis than de Valera on the moral rather than legal aspects of foreign policy. Following a Fine Gael meeting in 1934 Michael Tierney complained to Frank MacDermot about Cosgrave's fondness for morality. Tierney objected to a motion by several zealous Blueshirts to derail trains and proposed – "a new formula [be] put up: expression of sympathy with the farmer and an intimation that our members should help in seizure cases in every way they could "consistent with the moral law". I tried to improve the phase by deleting the word "moral". Would you believe it, I was foiled by Cosgrave, who liked it because he is keen on morality!" (Tierney to MacDermot, September 1934, MacDermot Papers, National Archives).

of the volunteers were drawn from areas with a strong Blueshirt and Fine Gael presence. Fine Gael branches such as Thomastown in Kilkenny and party representatives on numerous local bodies passed resolutions of sympathy for Thomas Hyde and Daniel Chute, the first Irish Brigade casualties.[263] A memorial mass at the Pro-Cathedral was attended by three Fine Gael deputies, Peadar Doyle, Gearóid O'Sullivan and Eamonn O'Neill.[264] The funeral of Gabriel Lee, who died following the advance on Titulcia, was attended by William Cosgrave, General Mulcahy, John Costello, Vincent Rice, Peadar Doyle and a large contingent of League of Youth members nostalgically attired in Blueshirts.[265] Fine Gael's politicisation of the funeral prompted O'Duffy's secretary, Captain Walshe, to complain rather unconvincingly that the Irish Brigade should not be used for political gain.[266] A Fine Gael deputy, Peadar Doyle, attended the ceremony to welcome the Irish Brigade on their return in June 1937.

Spain was not a factor of importance in the general election of July 1937 which was dominated by de Valera's Constitution. This was acknowledged by Fine Gael who did not mention Spain in their campaign speeches or literature. Fine Gael performed poorly and, although voters are influenced by numerous issues, the performance of several individuals indicates that a strong pro-Franco position was not sufficient to improve electoral performances. Patrick Belton, one of Franco's most enthusiastic supporters lost his seat.[267] General Mulcahy and Desmond FitzGerald, also prominent in the pro-Nationalist lobby, failed to retain their seats.[268]

Fine Gael continued to raise the issue of diplomatic relations with Spain throughout the war. Spain was not a prominent issue after early 1937, but the opposition's pro-Franco convictions remained strong. As late as July 1938 the subject continued to provoke extreme declarations from deputies:

"They are recognising the godless beings who have destroyed the churches, murdered priests and nuns . . . We stand for Christianity. We stand for it against the Jews, the Gentiles, the Reds and the Freemasons of the world. Let our Government show that it stands for it."[269]

The arguments put forward by the opposition differed little from the non-intervention debate. De Valera's announcement of Franco's recognition in February 1939 met with derision from the opposition. Fitzgerald-Kenney accused him of "tamely following the

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263 See table 7.1 and *Irish Press*, 1 March 1937. Hyde was a well-known former member of the League of Youth.

264 *Irish Press*, 1 March 1937.

265 *Irish Press*, 1 April 1937. The greater number of deputies can be attributed to Lee's position as director of the North Dublin League of Youth and his loyalty to Fine Gael after O'Duffy's resignation.

266 *Irish Independent*, 7 April 1937.

267 Patrick Keatinge (1973) p.259; Conor Cruise O'Brien (1969) p.116; J. Bowyer-Bell, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39', *Studia Hibernica*, Vol. 9 (1969) p.159.

268 *Irish Press*, 3 July 1937.

269 DD 72, 673-4.

British lead".[270] O'Sullivan similarly claimed the government was "following them [Britain and France] beforehand". The *Te Deum* for Franco's victory celebrated by Archbishop Byrne in the Pro-Cathedral provided a final demonstration of the opposition's close relationship with the pro-Franco lobby. Numerous clergy, ministers of authoritarian states, Irish Brigade veterans, Christian Front members and Catholic Action activists were joined by Cosgrave, Doyle, FitzGerald and other Fine Gael politicians.

IV. Fianna Fáil

For Fianna Fáil the Spanish Civil War presented a sensitive problem rather than a political opportunity. By mid-August, following several weeks of sensational reports of anti-clerical atrocities, support for the Nationalist rebellion began to extend beyond the *Irish Independent* and O'Duffy's National Corporate Party to more moderate political bodies. On August 11, Castleblayney Urban District Council (UDC) passed a resolution against the outrages and requested the government to ban trade with Spain.[271] On the same day Limerick Corporation urged the cessation of trade and diplomatic relations.[272] Three days later Tralee UDC, which had a Fianna Fáil majority, resolved that Ireland should recognise the Nationalist "provisional government".[273]

By August 21, similar protests by Leitrim and Longford county councils, the urban district councils of Kilkenny, Clonmel, Naas, and town commissioners in Kilkee and Tuam prompted a government response. De Valera realised that the announcement of Ireland's adherence to the Anglo-French non-intervention proposals, which he had agreed to the previous week, could be used to counter growing public unease with Irish diplomatic relations with Spain.[274] De Valera's secretary, Maurice Moynihan, told the Department of External Affairs:

> "The President contemplates making the resolution of the Tralee Urban District Council an occasion for a statement on the subject [the Non-Intervention Agreement], and he would be glad if you would be so good as to furnish material for such a statement *which he proposes should be to the general effect that the Government has no authentic information that would warrant it in either expressing sympathy with or condemnation of one side or the other in the Spanish Civil War*".[275]

There was, in fact, no correlation between non-intervention and diplomatic relations with Spain but placing the issues together in one statement astutely suggested they were linked and that the government had responded to the public outcry. Interestingly, the italicised

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270 DD 74, 495.
271 *Irish Independent*, 12 August 1936.
272 *Limerick Chronicle*, 13 August 1936.
273 *Irish Independent*, 15 August 1936; *Belfast Newsletter*, 17 August 1936.
274 De Valera informed the French government of his acceptance in principle of the terms of the NIA on August 14 (D/FA 227/87).
275 Maurice Moynihan, secretary, Dept. of President to Dept. of External Affairs, 21 August 1936, D/FA 227/4.

section contained in de Valera's original memorandum was omitted from the final version sent to the Department of External Affairs. The significance of the original draft was that it questioned the reports of atrocities featured in the *Irish Independent* since the outbreak of the war.

The statement released by the Government Information Bureau announcing Ireland's participation in the Non-Intervention Agreement (NIA) declared:

"To those public bodies, however, and to others who have requested the government to sever diplomatic relations with the Spanish government the government of the Saorstát Éireann would point out that diplomatic relations are primarily between States rather than Governments, and that the severance of diplomatic relations between two countries would serve no useful purpose at the present time".[276]

The government, it added, was shocked by the "tragic events" in Spain, particularly the "excesses" which reportedly accompanied them. It sympathised with the "great Spanish people" and would gladly participate in efforts to restore peace. The statement avoided expressing sympathy for either side but the "excesses" would have been widely perceived as a reference to the anti-clerical atrocities. The declaration represented a more prudent concession to anti-Republican public opinion than the originally envisaged draft announcement.

De Valera's advice to public bodies was widely rejected. In September, at least four county councils (Dublin, Limerick, Donegal, and Mayo), nine UDCs (Wicklow, Athlone, Enniscorthy, Naas, Tipperary, Carrick-on-Suir, Athy, Clonakilty, and Cashel) and Bandon Town Commission passed resolutions on Spain (see table 7.4). Admittedly, many of the UDCs represented staunch Blueshirt regions (County Cork, Westmeath, Wexford, Tipperary and Kildare feature prominently) but the series of resolutions also indicated considerable sympathy for the Nationalists within Fianna Fáil. Four of the six county councils which passed resolutions on Spain in August and September contained Fianna Fáil/Labour majorities.[277]

Fianna Fáil support for the Spanish Republic was minimal. Only one Fianna Fáil cumann, Killolano and Movidy in Co. Cork, is known to have passed a pro-Republican resolution – which the CPI enthusiastically publicised:

"This cumann deplores the tragic events in Spain. We are moved by the efforts of the Spanish Government and people in their defence of representative Government and democratic institutions. We pray that by perseverance and heroic sacrifice ordered conditions will be restored to beloved Spain".[278]

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276 *Irish Press*, 26 August 1936.

277 This includes pro-Fianna Fáil and pro-Fine Gael independents represented in brackets. The political compositions were; Leitrim - FF 13(2) FG 11(3); Longford - FF 13(2) FG 10(1); Dublin - FF 10 FG 12(2); Limerick - FF 16 LP 4 FG 16; Donegal - FF 16(1) FG 14(5); Mayo - FF 19(1) FG 18. (Source – including political affiliation of independents – *Irish Times*, 4 July 1933).

278 *The Worker*, 26 September 1936.

Only one Dáil deputy publicly supported the Spanish government in the opening stages of the war. Speaking at Gort, Hugo Flinn, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Finance, announced:

"They had dictatorships in Russia, Italy and Germany, and at the present time in Spain the struggle was concerned with an attempt to change the system of Government. There was a struggle going on between Fascism and democracy. Fianna Fáil had no time for Fascism".[279]

Fianna Fáil members on local bodies generally responded to the Spanish Civil War in three ways. First, and most frequently, they either acquiesced to or occasionally proposed pro-Nationalist or anti-Republican resolutions. Often this was because Fine Gael controlled the local body. In such cases opposition was not merely futile but presented Fine Gael with an opportunity for propaganda. Given the hostility towards the Spanish Republic, opposition to pro-Franco resolutions was often met with suspicion. The following exchange occurred in Athy UDC:

"Chairman - We will take this resolution as adopted unanimously.

Mr. T. Carbery - I am dissenting.

Mrs. Doyle - Are you a Communist?"[280]

However, in most cases, Fianna Fail's co-operation with pro-Nationalist resolutions was both voluntary and enthusiastic; like most other sections of public opinion, Fianna Fáil were outraged by the reports of anti-clerical hostilities.

A second response of Fianna Fáil local representatives was to modify resolutions to render them less militantly pro-Franco or critical of government policy. An example of the former occurred when Councillor Dunne, a Fine Gael member of the Fianna Fáil dominated Longford County Council, proposed a motion of sympathy for the dead Irish Brigaders, Tom Hyde and Daniel Chute. The motion was agreed but only on condition that Irishmen fighting with the International Brigade were included.[281] This could be seen as an indication of sympathy with the Irish volunteers of the International Brigades – which was predominantly composed of republicans – but the council may just have been reluctant to associate itself too closely with O'Duffy's Brigade. Resolutions which pressured or implicitly criticised government policy were also altered. The Fianna Fáil members of Dublin Corporation agreed to protest against anti-clerical atrocities and the execution of civilians but rejected the final section of the resolution which urged a trade embargo.[282]

Thirdly, local government representatives occasionally vetoed pro-Nationalist motions. Fianna Fáil controlled Clare County Council, asserting that such matters were best left to

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279 DD 65, 612. Although Flinn's quotation was repeatedly quoted by Fine Gael throughout the debate on non-intervention the deputy did not comment or contribute to the debate.
280 *Irish Independent*, 11 September 1936. Cited in J. Bowyer Bell (1969) pp.144-5.
281 *Irish Press*, 10 March 1937. A Dun Laoghaire UDC resolution was similarly amended (*Irish Times*, 2 March 1937).
282 *Irish Press*, 6 October 1936.

Table 7.4 — Local Body Resolutions

Urban District Council (UDC) County Council (CC) Town Commission (TC) DATE	LOCAL BODY	Condemn atrocities/govt.	Ban Trade	Cease Relations	Recognise Franco	Pro-Franco	Financial Aid	Clonmel Resolution	Hyde/Chute	Hyde/Chute/Int. Brigade	Congratulate Franco	Congratulate O'Duffy	Frank Ryan	Party Majority
1936														
12-Aug	Castleblayney UDC	•	•											
14-Aug	Limerick Corporation	•		•										
15-Aug	Tralee UDC	•	•	•	•									FF
18-Aug	Leitrim CC			•										FF
20-Aug	Longford CC			•			•							FF
20-Aug	Kilkenny UDC			•										
20-Aug	Kilkee TC			•										
21-Aug	Clonmel UDC							•						
21-Aug	Naas UDC	•		•										
22-Aug	Tuam TC	•												
24-Aug	Galway UDC	•	•	•										
27-Aug	Offaly UDC							•						
27-Aug	Dundalk UDC					X								
28-Aug	New Ross UDC			•				•						
31-Aug	Carlow UDC			•				•						
01-Sep	Dublin CC		•	X										FG
03-Sep	Bandon TC							•						
03-Sep	Wicklow UDC							•						
05-Sep	Athlone UDC							•						
05-Sep	Enniscorthy UDC							•						
05-Sep	Naas UDC							•						
07-Sep	Limerick CC							•						FF
09-Sep	Tipperary UDC							•						
10-Sep	Carrick on Suir UDC							•						
11-Sep	Athy UDC							•						
12-Sep	Clonakilty UDC							•						
15-Sep	Kilrush UDC							•						
17-Sep	Cashel UDC							•						
20-Sep	Donegal CC	•												FG
21-Sep	Mayo CC							•						FF
06-Oct	Dublin Corporation	•	X											
13-Oct	Arklow UDC	X				X								
16-Oct	Limerick CC		X			X								FF
14-Nov	Limerick CC					X								FF
09-Dec	Clare CC					X								FF
1937														
02-Mar	Dun Laoghaire UDC								X	•				
08-Mar	Mayo CC								•					FF
08-Mar	Bandon TC								•					
08-Mar	Fermoy UDC								•					
10-Mar	Longford CC								X	•				FF
10-Mar	Cashel UDC								•					
10-Mar	Cork CC								•					FG
22-Mar	Dublin CC								•					
14-Aug	Kilkenny UDC											•		
1938														
14-May	Limerick CC												•	
1939														
28-Jan	Limerick UDC			•							•			
25 Apr	Cork Corporation										X			FF

the government, opposed Fine Gael's motion of support for the "Patriot forces".[283] In Limerick, Fianna Fáil and Labour councillors combined to defeat Fine Gael motions in support of the "Patriot army" and a trade ban.[284] However, opposition to such motions did not necessarily demonstrate a pro-Republican bias. In many cases the disagreements were based on the suspicion that Fine Gael was trying to embarrass the government. The following examples show that the motives behind such actions were complex.

A lengthy and acrimonious discussion ensued in Arklow UDC following a motion of support for "the Anti-Reds". The chairman, who had "all the sympathy in the world for these people", felt the subject was irrelevant to council business. Another councillor, T.P. Kavanagh, offered a medley of objections:

"The *Irish Independent* roars that there are so many priests and nuns being killed. Another paper is telling of the atrocities that General Franco is committing. I don't think we should interfere with these places that are so far away from us at all, particularly in view of the fact that these people did not offer any sympathy to us, and we wanted it as much as any other country in the world during the Black and Tan time. We have it in Belfast now . . . "[285]

The proposer, R. O'Toole, persevered and suggested that as "a Catholic body" the council must support the Nationalists:

"One side is fighting for religion and the other side is fighting against it, and it is purely a matter of religion, and not territory or anything else".[286]

The chairman insisted "there is no member of this Council but would fight the same as any other man" for Christianity but pointed out that the council was not aware of "the inside affairs of these people". The principal objections – that the war was irrelevant to the local body, the councillors did not possess reliable information, and even the curious Northern Ireland analogy – were frequently raised in local bodies.[287] One revealing aspect of such arguments which rarely featured in Dáil debates or regional newspaper editorials is the cautious and, at times, sceptical attitude of local representatives towards Nationalist propaganda. However, while scepticism about the claims of the pro-Franco lobby clearly existed, pro-Republican speeches were seldom heard on local bodies.

Another lengthy disagreement occurred in Cork Corporation following the conclusion of the war when Richard Anthony, a well known anti-communist politician, proposed congratulating Franco. One Labour representative, Con Connolly objected because he "doubted the sincerity of the motion":

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283 *Ibid*, 9 December 1936.
284 *Limerick Leader*, 24 October 1936; *Limerick Chronicle*, 14 November 1936.
285 *Irish Independent*, 13 October 1936.
286 *Ibid.*
287 Following criticism of General Franco and General O'Duffy, Fianna Fáil councillors on Dundalk UDC opposed the adoption of the 'Clonmel resolution'. P.F. Adams, describing the motion as "perfect tripe" asked "What special knowledge of Spain had Clonmel Corporation or any other Urban Council?" (*Irish Independent*, 27 August 1936).

"There was no need for Catholics of Cork to praise their religion in order to give colour to the victory of a certain type of Government".[288]

Another representative recalled the belligerent behaviour of the Christian Front "heresy hunters" during the public meeting in Cork. The Lord Mayor noted that reports from Spain conflicted and added that he would not vote for any issue on Spain until he knew the "exact position". Fianna Fáil and Labour united to defeat the resolution. The debate revealed a rather complex response to Anthony's motion. Connolly opposed it partly on personal grounds –his suspicion of Anthony's motives – and also because he felt Catholicism was being used to praise fascism. MacSwiney was motivated by his hostility to the right wing Christian Front lobby. The Lord Mayor, surprisingly given the extensive pro-Franco publicity during the war, remained unconvinced of the benefits of a Nationalist victory.

In November 1936 the wave of resolutions from local bodies abated. From this point, criticism of Fianna Fáil was generally confined to the Christian Front, Fine Gael and hostile newspapers. When Cosgrave proposed the recognition of General Franco the government position was supported by Frank MacDermot, the former Fine Gael deputy, who methodically outlined the inadvisability of recognition. MacDermot, who sympathised with the Nationalists, pointed out that rebel governments should be recognised following the achievement of *de facto* control. He argued that it was against the interests of the Free State to identify itself with the fascist powers and criticised the opposition's ebullient anti-communism:

"The fear I have is that a sort of hysteria is being created in Ireland owing to all this excitement about Communism that may result in doing just the kind of thing that may increase Communism rather than dispel it".[289]

Fianna Fáil's tactics in the debate suggest that like Labour it perceived Spain as a sensitive area ideally discussed as little as possible. De Valera, the only government speaker, ensured that Fine Gael did not receive a right of reply.[290] He praised MacDermot's speech and outlined the diplomatic requirements for recognition – stability and *de facto* authority. The Vatican's continued recognition of the Republic allowed de Valera to dismiss criticism of his policy on religious grounds:.

"We are told that the cause of Christianity demands it. It is extraordinary if that is so, when the head of Christianity in the Vatican State has not himself deemed it prudent or right so to accord . . . "[291]

De Valera deflected criticism by accusing Fine Gael of political opportunism and fascist tendencies:

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288 *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 April, 1937; J. Anthony Gaugahan, *Alfred O'Rahilly II* (Dublin, 1989) p.306.
289 DD 64, 1212.
290 Although this was a strategy which de Valera often used in the Dáil (Patrick Keatinge (1973) p.58.
291 DD 64, 1221.

"There has been, from the opposite benches, a continued effort since 1931 to try to mend the fortunes of their Party, and to build up a case for Fascist organisations on the grounds that this Government was sympathetic to Communism".[292]

He referred to the opposition's attempt to convince the Catholic Church that Ireland was menaced by communism and alluded to the Blueshirt period:

"There is, I am glad to see from the opposite benches, agreement now, though there was a time in which one might very well begin to doubt it, that our people believe in a democratic form of government. "[293]

Unlike many of its local politicians, Fianna Fáil's Dáil deputies appeared united behind De Valera's foreign policy. The subject only arose at one parliamentary party meeting when Eamon Donnelly[294] raised Donnchadh O'Briain's motion:

"That in the opinion of the Party the line of action to be taken by members towards the organisation called the 'Christian Front' should be defined".

The uninformative minutes recorded that "after a lengthy discussion, it was decided that no action need be taken in this matter by the Fianna Fáil Party".[295] Dermot Keogh stated that the motion indicated a "growing disquiet" about government policy on Spain. He noted that Tommy Mullin, an activist on the left of Fianna Fáil, favoured the party not adopting a position on the motion because it was likely to favour the Christian Front.[296] However, a subsequent Dáil speech by Eamonn Donnelly, who raised the motion, suggests that he wished to see involvement with the Christian Front condemned. Donnelly was one of only a handful of government deputies to speak against Fine Gael's amendment to the Non-Intervention Bill and was clearly the least sympathetic to both the Nationalists and Belton's Christian Front.[297]

Regardless of the motive, the lengthy discussion of the Christian Front motion was characteristic of what Seán Lemass described as de Valera's technique of agreement though exhaustion.[298] Given Belton's record as a radical Blueshirt and his controversial departure from Fianna Fáil in 1927 it seems unlikely many deputies sympathised with the Christian Front. However at least three government TDs, Daniel Bourke, James Victory and John Flynn, were associated with the ICF in this period and the fact that a lengthy discussion was preferred to the adoption of an anti-Christian Front position indicates some support

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292 DD 64, 1217.

293 DD 64, 1222.

294 Eamonn Donnelly (1885-1945): born Middletown, Co. Armagh; joined Irish Volunteers, 1913; Sinn Féin director of elections, 1918, 1921, 1923; anti-treaty; Republican MP for Armagh, 1925-9; Fianna Fáil TD, 1933-7, Republican MP for Belfast Falls, 1942-5.

295 Parliamentary Party Meeting, 19 November 1939, FF/439, Fianna Fáil Party Archives.

296 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.68.

297 Donnelly appears to have borne considerable animosity towards Belton. Describing Belton's speech as a "bitter harangue" he reminded the deputies of Belton's fine for sabotage during the Blueshirt crisis and disparaged his military record – "I gave the Deputy credit on one occasion, and he accepted it under false pretences, for fighting for this country in the GPO. He was never in it in his life except to post a letter" (DD, 65, 733-41).

298 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.68.

for the ICF and, more significantly, for its pro-Franco objectives. De Valera, like William Norton, preferred inaction to adopting a position on the issue.

The Dáil debate on the Non-Intervention Bill marked the peak of opposition to the government's foreign policy. Several of the recently released Lenten pastorals criticised the government's policy. The Christian Front, although showings signs of disunity, was still a threatening force. Fine Gael had adopted a more uncompromising position, accusing the government not only of communist subversion but implementing an anti-Catholic foreign policy. Although the debate lasted for three days rather than several hours, Fianna Fáil's tactics varied little from November. Once again, government deputies were reluctant to participate. Only de Valera, Donnelly, Thomas Derrig, and very briefly, P.J. Ruttledge and Seán Lemass[299] spoke. The opposition repeatedly drew attention to Fianna Fáil's reticence.[300] Indeed few government deputies appear to have attended the debate.[301] It was an indication of the public unpopularity of recognition of the Spanish Republic that even uninformed Fine Gael backbenchers were eager to make lengthy speeches but few government deputies wished to be reported speaking against the amendment.

De Valera, constrained by his position, was reluctant to offer a candid opinion of the issues involved. He could not describe the war in the same stark terms as Fine Gael. Moreover, if de Valera agreed with the opposition's argument that the war was between communism and atheism, the government's continued recognition of the Republic would appear morally indefensible. He stressed the political complexity of the civil war. For example, he pointed out the motives of other states for intervening in "a fight which for most of them, at any rate, is not the sort of fight that we think it is, but is a fight for one "ism" against another".[302] The opposition interpreted this to mean that de Valera felt the central issue in Spain was fascism against communism. Professor O'Sullivan retorted that if it was, as de Valera claimed, a struggle between "isms", it was "between Communism and Religionism".[303] When de Valera pointed out that he was describing other states' perceptions rather than his own, Belton reiterated what other deputies had demanded throughout the debate:

"Do not tell us what some people believe the Spaniards think is an issue in this fight. What do you think is the issue in this fight? That is what we want to know".[304]

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299 Seán Lemass (1899-1971): b. Co. Dublin; joined Irish Volunteers, 1915; fought in the GPO, 1916; interned, 1920-1; anti-treaty; Dublin TD, 1924-69; Minister for Industry and Commerce, 1932-48, 1951-4, 1954-7; Taoiseach, 1959-65.

300 DD 65, 712, 742, 802.

301 At one point Mulcahy announced - "May I draw attention to the fact that the whole Fianna Fáil Party have cleared out of the House, with the exception of one Minister on the Front bench . . ."(DD 65, 713).

302 DD 65, 605.

303 DD 65, 609.

304 DD 65, 633.

In fact, throughout the debate, de Valera clearly indicated (or as clearly as his cautious rhetorical style permitted) that his sympathies were with the Nationalists. Introducing the bill, he declared "there can be no doubt on which side is the sympathy of the vast majority of the people of this country".[305] Later, he stated:

"Having confidence, as I have, in the national spirit of the Spanish people, in the ideals – and the religious ideals at that – inspiring the Spanish people, I have no doubt, for one, how this contest is going to be ultimately finished by the Spanish people".[306]

An exchange with James Coburn drew a more forthright declaration of his sympathies:

"**Mr. Coburn:** Is the President supporting Caballero?

The President: No. I have no use for him. Will that satisfy the deputy?"[307]

De Valera suggested Irish policy was more favourable to the Nationalists. When Dillon inquired to which side Kerney was accredited de Valera disingenuously replied:

"If the deputy will look at the map he will see that St. Jean-de-Luz is nearer to Burgos than it is to Valencia".[308]

De Valera avoided discussing the merits of the Nationalists and focused on non-intervention and criticism of Fine Gael. He pointed out that non-intervention could prevent the war from extending beyond Spain and that the Spaniards had a right to decide their own form of government. In this respect de Valera's attitude differed fundamentally from the opposition:

"If somebody says to me: "It is not the end of the conflict we want to see, but to have it settled in the right way," I say it will be settled as the Spanish people want it settled or it will not be settled at all, because if you put in a Government by foreign aid, although it may be established for a time in Spain, do you think that if it does not correspond with the feelings of the Spanish people it is going to last?"[309]

De Valera switched from defence of his policy to criticism of the opposition. He disputed their claim to be a more religious party, accusing them of fascist sympathies, political opportunism and attempting to smear his government with communist allegations. De Valera appeared more willing than Fine Gael to distinguish between his personal sympathies and the role of the government. Although he acknowledged the extent of Irish sympathy for Franco, he believed it should be subordinated to the objectives of foreign policy.

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305 DD 65, 398.
306 DD 65, 854-5.
307 DD 65, 850.
308 D/Taois S9626. O'Sullivan was not impressed –"When he was asked in a second question about accrediting a Minister he . . . tried in some extraordinary , back-stairs way to suggest that this man had been in touch with Franco. Why did he not answer straight out that he was not accredited to Franco? Why? Because he was ashamed to say that straight out" (65, 618).
309 DD 65, 854.

In the Dáil, Fianna Fáil presented the most disciplined response to Spain of the three parties. This can partly be attributed to the party's sense of purpose under de Valera. Fine Gael, in contrast, did not appear unified. De Valera's technique of managing foreign affairs also greatly assisted the government to maintain unity.[310] As President and Minister for External Affairs, de Valera was firmly in control of foreign policy. For example, all decisions on non-intervention were left to de Valera by the Cabinet.[311]

Fianna Fáil encompassed both supporters and opponents of the Spanish government. There was some affinity between Irish and Spanish republicanism. The Popular Front, like Fianna Fáil, was supported by urban workers, agricultural labourers and small farmers. Fianna Fáil deputies, moreover, must have been conscious of the Catholic Church's anti-republicanism during the Irish Civil War. Seán Lemass, one of Fianna Fáil's less clerical leaders, told one historian "there was far more sympathy for the Spanish Republic both within and without Fianna Fail than might be apparent from the newspapers".[312]

However, Fianna Fáil also reflected the Catholic ethos of the Irish Free State. Sean T. O'Kelly, Thomas Derrig and de Valera were known for their religious orthodoxy. Sean MacEntee informed Dermot Keogh that he was personally pro-Franco – "We were told about all the convents being burned, nuns being molested and so on". But, more significantly, MacEntee commented "nobody ever formulated foreign policy except de Valera".[313] The less disciplined response of government councillors who supported pro-Franco motions clearly troubled de Valera. However, they also acted as a pressure valve by allowing Fianna Fáil members to demonstrate their support for the Nationalists, ensuring that foreign policy did not become a contentious issue within Fianna Fáil and that the party was not publicly perceived as anti-Franco.

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310 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.61, 69.
311 Cabinet Minutes, 22 December 1936, Cab 7/381. Contrary to procedure, the Non-Intervention Bill was not submitted to the Executive Council (D/Taois S9628).
312 J. Bowyer Bell (1969) p.143.
313 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.68-9.

De Valera's justification of non-intervention was well received outside the Dáil.[314] Clerical and political sympathy for Italy did not prevent de Valera from supporting the League of Nations in 1935; greater pressure did not deflect his policy from its central tenet of neutrality during the Spanish Civil War.[315] The introduction of the Non-Intervention Act, the decline in recruitment for volunteers, and the ruthless nature of the war in Spain diffused much of the controversy about recognition.[316] The government was considerably assisted by the Irish Brigade's return, the dramatic decline of the Christian Front, and the incessant bickering between the two groups in the summer of 1937. The hierarchy and the Catholic press devoted less attention to Spain as the war progressed. Following the Munich agreement and the annexation of the Sudetenland, Irish public interest in international affairs focused more on the impending European war than the Spanish Civil War.

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314 A British Dominions Office official described it as "a moderate and careful defence of the Govt.'s policy" (DO 35/553/3).

315 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.69.

316 Keogh noted the importance of the Nationalist bombing of Guernica which was prominently reported by the *Irish Press*. *Ibid*, p.91.

8. The Free State Government

Introduction

The previous chapter has outlined the pressures placed on Fianna Fáil both by its own membership and, far more aggressively, by Fine Gael to adopt a more sympathetic foreign policy towards the Spanish Nationalists. But, as has been demonstrated, pro-Franco opinion in Ireland had little influence on de Valera's formulation of policy on Spain. Government policy was influenced predominantly by international rather than domestic factors. The Spanish Civil War occurred during an important period of transition for Irish foreign policy. A series of developments, most notably, the External Relations Act, the Anglo-Irish agreement, the demise of the League of Nations and impending Second World War significantly influenced Irish foreign policy. Although the Spanish Civil War was not a central focus or determinant of Ireland's international relations, an assessment of government policy on Spain, particularly the importance of Commonwealth membership, and the influence of London and the Vatican, provides a useful insight into the development of foreign policy in this period.

Since his election in 1932, de Valera had taken a close interest in foreign policy, as is demonstrated by his decision to combine leadership of the government with responsibility for the Department of External Affairs.[1] This was most evident in de Valera's prominent participation in the League of Nations which offered a more politically conducive mechanism than the Commonwealth for developing international relations. His maiden speech at Geneva demonstrated the importance he attached to the League. He emphasised his support for a strong League, and, in an unusually frank address, raised the central weakness of the organisation:

"There is a suspicion that the action of the League in the economic sphere can be paralysed by the pressure of powerful national interests, and that if the hand that is raised against the Covenant is sufficiently strong, it can smite with immunity".[2]

De Valera hoped its members would "show unmistakably that the Covenant of the League is a solemn pact, the obligations of which no State, great or small, will find it possible to ignore". However, the idealistic concept of collective security upon which the League was founded did not withstand the political turmoil of the decade. Japan defied the League

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1 Patrick Keatinge, *The Formulation of Irish Foreign Policy* (Dublin, 1973) p.55.
2 Eamon de Valera, *Peace and War --speeches and statements by Mr. de Valera on international affairs* (Dublin, 1944) p.5.

following its invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and Italy's occupation of Abyssinia on October 3, 1935, provided further evidence of the League's inability to preserve international peace. De Valera strongly supported firm action against Italy:

"The final test of the League and all that it stands for has come . . . Make no mistake, if on any pretext whatever we were to permit the sovereignty of even the weakest State amongst us to be unjustly taken away, the whole foundation of the League would crumble into dust".[3]

Although the League responded quickly to the invasion, declaring Italy the aggressor on October 7, inadequate sanctions and the lack of political will among its members to enforce a resolution, enabled Italy to defy the League. On July 4, 1936 the League admitted defeat and withdrew its sanctions. De Valera bluntly observed:

"As far as we are concerned, we are satisfied that the League as it was, cannot any longer command our confidence. Therefore the League of Nations, unless it is reformed, is not of advantage to us, and I do not think it would be, in its present form, of advantage to humanity in general".[4]

The reluctance of the international community to sanction military action against Italy was central to the League's failure. France was unwilling to act without Britain which had embarked on a policy of appeasement. This failure altered De Valera's perception of the League. He concluded that its only useful remaining role was as an instrument for arbitration and conciliation.[5]

The Abyssinian crisis precipitated a transition in Irish foreign policy from advocacy of collective action to a more isolationist stance.[6] Neutrality became an increasingly important aspect of foreign policy. Shortly before the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, de Valera declared:

"All the small States can do, if the statesmen of the greater States fail in their duty, is resolutely to determine that they will not become the tools of any great Power, and that they will resist with whatever strength they may possess every attempt to force them into a war against their will".[7]

The Spanish Civil War occurred just two weeks after the League rescinded its sanctions against Italy. Irish foreign policy during the war must be considered in the context of the "weakened and discredited state of the League", the likelihood of European war, and de Valera's deepening commitment to neutrality.[8]

Despite de Valera's prominent role in Geneva, Anglo-Irish affairs, and the pursuit of measures to diminish Ireland's ties to Britain, remained the central focus of Irish policy.

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3 *Ibid*, p.45.
4 Maurice Moynihan (ed.), *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera 1917-73* (Dublin, 1980) p.275.
5 *Ibid.*
6 Nicholas Mansergh, 'Ireland: External Relations 1926-1939', F. McManus (ed.), *The Years of the Great Test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967) p.136. Patrick Keatinge (1973) pp.23-25.
7 Eamon de Valera (1944) p.59.
8 Richard Veatch, 'The League of Nations and the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 20 (1990) p.182.

These measures included membership of the League of Nations, establishing diplomatic representation abroad, and creating breaches in Commonwealth policy. However, as de Valera admitted in June 1936, foreign policy was complicated by the geopolitical realities of the Anglo-Irish relationship:

"If we held the whole of our territory, there is no doubt whatever what our attitude would be . . . that we have no aggressive designs against any other people. We could strengthen ourselves so as to maintain our neutrality . . . But we are in this position, that some of our ports are occupied, and, although we cannot be actively committed in any way, the occupation of those ports will give to any foreign country that may desire a pretext, an opportunity of ignoring our neutrality . . . The first thing that any Government here must try to secure is that no part of our territory will be occupied by any forces except the forces that are immediately responsible to the Government here".[9]

The objective of demonstrating Ireland's diplomatic independence was constrained by several factors, not just Commonwealth membership, but the necessity of maintaining good relations with Britain in order to gain control of the Treaty ports. The resulting tensions were demonstrated in the question of the recognition of General Franco's regime.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War

When the military coup began on July 18, Leopold Kerney,[10] the Irish minister plenipotentiary to Spain, was staying at La Taja, near Vigo in north-west Spain. Kerney was cut off from the Irish legation in Republican Madrid when Nationalist forces gained control of the area. On August 4, the Nationalists escorted Kerney to the French border. In February 1937 Kerney returned to St. Jean de Luz, a small French border town, where many of the diplomats accredited to Spain were established, until the Irish government recognised General Franco in February 1939. The Madrid legation was run in Kerney's absence by Mary Donnelly whose most urgent task was to assist Irish citizens, mostly nuns, caught in Republican territory to leave Spain. After the sudden removal of Spanish police from the Irish legation, Kerney instructed his staff to fly the Irish tricolour to protect the building from the looting which followed news of the rebellion. The legation remained undamaged throughout the war. Donnelly, who was evacuated on August 13 (but later returned to Madrid) commended Spanish government officials who "treated her with courtesy and were helpful" although she noted an ominous absence of priests in Madrid following the military coup.[11]

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9 Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its Senate* (London, 1940) pp.476-7.

10 Kerney was one of several republicans who resigned from the unofficial foreign ministry of the Second Dáil during the Irish Civil War and the first to be reinstated by the Committee of Inquiry into the Cases of Civil Servants who Resigned or Were Dismissed for Political Reasons despite Fine Gael's objections that he had previously "acted as a go-between in order to get assistance from the Russian Government through Russian agents in Italy". Appointed commercial secretary for France, Belgium and Holland in April 1932, Kerney was accredited to the Spanish Republic after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1935. He retired in 1946. (Dermot Keogh, *Ireland and Europe 1919-1989* (Dublin, 1990) p.38; Dáil Debates 65, 775).

11 Kerney to Joseph Walshe, 5 August 1936, D/FA 243/66.

The initial success of the rebellion placed the Irish government in a sensitive position. There were now two rival heads of state in Spain; President Azana, commonly depicted in Ireland as the atheistic leader of a 'red' regime, and General Franco, seen by many as a Christian patriot fighting to preserve Spain from communism. Kerney's accreditation to the former resulted in considerable domestic criticism.[12] During the first year of the war intense public, political, and clerical pressure was applied on the Irish government to alter its diplomatic relationship with Spain. The departure of close to a thousand volunteers to fight in Spain presented additional complications for the government.

A series of reports by Alvaro de Aguilar, the Spanish Minister to Ireland, to Madrid provide an interesting perspective on relations between the two countries during the opening phase of the war. On August 3, Aguilar reported:

"Imperialist press[13] which receives its inspiration from England commenting on Spanish rebellion states that the only logical intelligent attitude for foreign governments would be to provide the Spanish government with all the help they many need with the idea of maintaining the present equilibrium in the Mediterranean, if a new attitude was to be taken, the mentioned balance could be seriously threatened".[14]

Two days later, he reported:

"Official elements show absolute neutrality about the problem in Spain, probably due to complete ignorance. Public opinion favours Government considering it as defending democratic institutions, as also imperialist press, only dissidents are clerical elements who still have great influence in the country".[15]

Aguilar seemed intent on providing his superiors with favourable information. In both telegrams he reported the favourable attitude of the *Irish Times* towards the Spanish government but omitted the respectively neutral and hostile positions of the more influential *Irish Press* and *Irish Independent*.[16] The second report is remarkably misleading. By early August, Irish public opinion, outraged by reports of anti-clerical atrocities, was firmly set against the Spanish government. Despite his reference to their "great influence", Aguilar's description of "clerical elements" as the "only dissidents" inaccurately implied that the Catholic Church was the only significant source of anti-Republican Government opinion in Ireland.

The following week Aguilar reported:

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12 Domestic criticism of foreign policy, including views expressed within Fianna Fáil, are discussed in the previous chapter but instances where such pressure may have influenced the formulation of foreign policy are included in this chapter.

13 Presumably a reference to the *Irish Times* which was critical of the Nationalists throughout the war.

14 Translation, Alvaro de Aguilar to Ministry of State, 3 August 1936, R163-9, *Archivo de Barcelona, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores*, Madrid.

15 *Ibid*, 5 August 1936.

16 The editorial policies of the *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* respectively reflected the views of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. The reported circulation of the *Irish Times* was only 20,000 compared to 134,000 for the *Irish Independent*, and 100,000 for the *Irish Press* (Donat O'Donnell, 'The Fourth Estate-3: The Irish Independent', *The Bell*, Vol. 9, No. 5, February 1945, p.393).

"This Government continues to show sympathy towards the democratic cause. The clerical element is showing itself ever more aggressive. Labour Party and intellectual elements organised functions for Spanish Government".[17]

Again, there was little evidence for such optimism. Contemporary newspaper accounts did not indicate a pro-Republican bias within the Irish government or Labour Party. Possibly Aguilar was relying on private information, the following week he stated:

"I have just visited the President of the Government. It has been shown me that within neutrality his sympathy for Spanish population, it would be against the social peace for military element to triumph. I hope that it will be possible to harbour the mediation offer . . . Offers to influence clerical press to lessen extremist campaign".[18]

It is difficult to interpret this telegram. De Valera's personal sympathies towards either side are not known although he clearly hinted support for the Nationalists in the Dáil debate on non-intervention.[19] His expression of support may simply have been tactful diplomacy. Alternatively, given the misleading nature of his previous reports to Madrid, Aguilar may have extrapolated more than was justified from de Valera's sympathy for the Spanish people.

The penultimate sentence concerns an offer by de Valera to mediate between the Republican government and the rebels. The offer was refused by José Giral,[20] the Republican prime minister:

"[Giral] . . . apart from being grateful the sympathy shown for Spanish people expressed by President of that Government and the offer to influence certain clerical press in order to avoid extreme campaign may inform that mediation offer may not find their circumstances suitable".[21]

De Valera's offer to influence the "clerical press" – which could refer to the *Irish Independent*, the secular-owned *Irish Catholic* and *Standard* or periodicals published by the religious orders – is curious. It is difficult to envisage de Valera asking press editors to moderate the pro-Nationalist bias of their coverage and less likely they would respond to such a request.[22]

The series of telegrams ends after Aguilar's abrupt resignation on September 8 - a month after he professed his "absolute loyalty" to "the present Government and the Republican

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17 Translation, Aguilar to Ministry of State, 14 August 1936, R153-15, *Archivo de Barcelona*.

18 *Ibid*, 20 August 1936.

19 See p.254.

20 José Giral y Pereira (1880-1962): chemistry professor; Minister for Marine in Popular Front government, February 1936; Prime Minister of Republican government, July-September 1936; minister in Caballero's government, 1936-7; Foreign Minister in Negrín's government, May 1937-March 1938; President of Republican government-in-exile, 1945-7.

21 Translation, Ministry of State to Aguilar, 23 August 1936, R153-15, *Archivo de Barcelona*. This was confirmed the following day – "In respect the offer made he [Giral] would not consider present atmosphere appropriate" (*Ibid*, 24 August 1936).

22 The papers of Eamon de Valera, as yet released, do not contain any references to press coverage of the Spanish civil war. However, the original government press release announcing Ireland's participation in non-intervention declared that the government had not received any information to verify the anti-clerical atrocities appearing in the press. See p.246.

cause".[23] Aguilar's resignation was probably due to his government's refusal to allow his brother-in-law, Leopoldos Matos, to leave Spain.[24] His final telegram to Madrid attributes his decision to "grave family reasons",[25] although he informed de Valera it was due to "not being in agreement with the policy of the Spanish Government".[26] Aguilar's procrastination before resigning ensured that he remained out of favour in Nationalist Spain.[27]

Aguilar's resignation proved convenient for the Irish government as there had been growing criticism of the Republican government's continued diplomatic presence in Ireland. De Valera, however, would have been more concerned about the developing crisis in Europe. The ideological struggle between communism and fascism distinguished the conflict from Spain's past civil wars. Few European Governments were inclined towards neutrality. Italy, Germany and Portugal provided Franco with soldiers, weapons and supplies. The Soviet Union and Mexico supplied the Republican Government. The Civil War cut across traditional alliances; Stanley Baldwin's National government favoured the Nationalists while Leon Blum's Popular Front sympathised with the Republican Government. Britain and France responded quickly to contain the war in Spain.

The Non-Intervention Agreement (NIA) originated from the crisis in France precipitated by José Giral's request for munitions and aeroplanes from the French government. The Spanish Popular Front, a legally constituted government, was entitled to purchase arms to defend itself from rebellion, particularly as France had agreed to supply Spain with weapons the previous year. France, however, was little less divided than Spain. The outrage expressed by the French right-wing press, the revolutionary potential of extremist left and right factions, and a bitterly divided cabinet prompted Blum to refuse Giral's request. On July 25, Blum announced that his government would abstain from intervention in Spain. The measure placated the French right but was unacceptable to Blum's left-wing supporters when it became apparent that Italy was providing assistance to the Nationalists. Blum's solution was to appeal to Britain and Italy to join France in adopting non-intervention. Britain cautiously agreed but urged that as many countries as possible should sign the Non-Intervention Agreement (NIA), particularly partisan states like Portugal and Germany. As well as diminishing the risk of a European war, Britain hoped non-intervention would prevent Italy's drift towards closer alliance with Germany.[28]

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23 Aguilar to Ministry of State, 12 August, 8 September 1936, R153-15.

24 "I implore V.E. as a special personal favour that you would authorise my brother-in-law . . . and family to leave Spain . . . I can guarantee V.E. that he has not taken part in the present sedition" (Aguilar to Ministry of State, 6 August 1936, R153-15). Aguilar did not receive a reply.

25 *Ibid*, 8 September 1936.

26 Alvaro de Aguilar to de Valera, 16 September 1936, D/FA 118/42.

27 Kerney to Walshe, 6 March 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

28 Jill Edwards, *The British Government and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1979) pp.1-40; Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Basingstoke, 1994) pp.12-44.

On August 15, Britain and France formally agreed to adhere to the NIA. By the end of the month, Italy, Portugal, Germany and the Soviet Union had agreed by participate. On August 25, the Irish Government announced their commitment to the NIA:

"The policy of non-intervention had been adopted in the conviction that it is in the interests of Spain itself, and that it is in the present circumstances the policy which will best serve the cause of European peace".[29]

Spain's welfare was certainly a factor leading to de Valera's decision. The mutual ties of religion and history ensured Irish sympathy for Spain and de Valera's concern was demonstrated by his prompt offer of mediation. However, self-interest rather than sentiment guides foreign policy. With the 'Treaty ports' under British occupation, de Valera was gravely concerned by the possibility of war in Europe. The NIA also offered de Valera, like Blum, an opportunity to deflect domestic pressure on foreign policy.[30]

The Non-Intervention Agreement, formulated by France, consisted of a preamble and three point declaration outlining the concept of non-intervention and the proscription of the export of war supplies to Spain. Various governments agreed to adhere to sections of the declaration but often not to the entire document. Italy and Germany, for instance, made no reference to the preamble which dealt with direct and indirect abstention from intervention. By late August it was apparent that the NIA was merely a set of slightly differing declarations with no force in international law.[31] Cynical observers pointed out that although it was flawed, the NIA enabled governments to be seen to respond to the Spanish crisis.[32] The subsequent implementation of the agreement supported such a view.

Twenty-six countries sent delegates to the Non-Intervention Committee (NIC) which was formed to supervise the NIA. John W. Dulanty,[33] the Irish High Commissioner in London, represented Ireland at the inaugural meeting on September 9. A sub-committee comprising the two countries bordering Spain and seven arms producing countries formulated NIA policy in place of the unwieldy twenty-six member body which generally approved the sub-committee's resolutions. Ireland's minimal influence on the NIC, as well as its perceived Anglo-French domination, resulted in some domestic criticism.[34]

The inherent flaws within the Non-Intervention Agreement soon became evident. Ireland was one of several countries which inadvertently weakened the agreement – others did so

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29 *Irish Press*, 26 August 1936.

30 See p.246.

31 Jill Edwards (1979) p.41.

32 The NIA's principal flaws were its lack of legal force, the fact that the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy supported it only because they believed it would favour their own allies, and that the latter two countries joined only when assured the NIA had no real power to prevent intervention (Michael Alpert, (Basingstoke, 1994) pp.59-60).

33 John W. Dulanty (1881-1955): b. Newton Heath, Lancaster, England; British civil servant, 1912-20; Irish Free State Trade Commissioner, London, 1926-30; High Commissioner, London, 1930-50; consultant, Irish Embassy, London, 1950-55.

34 "The President has said here tonight that he has got his orders from the Non-Intervention committee - that he has got his orders from John Bull – he is here tonight to carry them out" (DD 65, 627).

more deliberately. The NIA prohibited the export of "all arms, munitions and military equipment, as well as aircraft, assembled or otherwise, and all warships" to Spain. As this formula proved too vague it was left to individual countries to devise their own list of proscribed exports. The Irish government decided new legislation was unnecessary because Ireland did not manufacture arms or war material.[35] The NIC was dissatisfied as Dulanty reported to Joseph Walshe,[36] the secretary of the Department for External Affairs:

"It will be seen that the Saorstát figures prominently in the list and I have been asked by the Committee to recommend that the Saorstát Government should expand the present scope of its prohibition of exports"[37]

Similarly, although the Irish government agreed to the scheme for the supervision of aircraft, it felt there was no need for an observer in Ireland. Francis Hemming, the NIC secretary, explained the importance of full compliance with NIC measures to Dulanty:

"If one country backed out of the scheme the front would be broken and no doubt others would attempt to follow suit on the plea of their unimportance in the proposed scheme. Aircraft could leave, say, United Kingdom airports for the Saorstát, where there would be no effective control to prevent their subsequent departure for Spain. Moreover, a non-co-operating country might well become a centre for jumping off for Spain".[38]

The Irish government was not the only offender but its lackadaisical attitude diluted the power of the NIA. Ireland was singled out by one non-intervention historian:

"Tanks and armoured vehicles were not banned by the Irish Free State, nor were gas, aircraft and certain chemicals such as nitrates. Indeed the Irish Free State was prominent among some other countries for the number of things it did not prohibit . . . The blatant abuse of such loopholes was to offer an excuse to other States who later wished to exploit the situation and revoke part of their own agreement."[39]

In the meantime, Nationalist military advances resulted in a re-assessment of Ireland's diplomatic relations with Spain. Kerney summarised government policy in November 1936:

"Our attitude has been that it is a matter for Spaniards themselves to decide as to who shall be head of the Spanish State and that, when their choice is beyond doubt, it is to the head of the State accepted by all Spain that an Irish Minister should be accredited, but that, pending the conclusion of the struggle between the two rival candidates, no positive step should be taken which might imply intervention by the Irish Government in a war in which the combatants of each side are Spaniards".[40]

This policy, followed by most states without strong allegiances to either side, was bitterly resented by the Spanish government which objected to rebels receiving equal treatment to a legitimate government. In line with this neutral outlook, the Irish government reduced

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35 Cabinet 7/382, 31 December 1936, D/Taois S9177.

36 Joseph Walshe (1886-1956): b. Tipperary; joined republican diplomatic service, 1919; Department of External Affairs secretary, 1922-46; appointed Irish ambassador to Holy See, 1946; sympathetic to authoritarian/clerical regimes.

37 Dulanty to Walshe, 22 December 1936, Non-Intervention Committee Papers (NICP) /A, D/FA London Embassy.

38 Dulanty to Walshe, 19 December 1936, NICP/A, D/FA London Embassy.

39 Jill Edwards (1979) p.42.

40 Kerney to Walshe, 30 January 1939, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

contacts with the Republic by transferring the Irish legation from Madrid to St. Jean de Luz. Kerney remained in contact with the Spanish government by correspondence and established a similar relationship with Franco's administration.

Franco's dramatic success in early November ensured that diplomatic recognition remained a pressing issue. A memo, dated November 11, states that the Department of External Affairs, like most observers, were "fairly certain" Franco would capture Madrid and claim *de jure* authority. External Affairs considered three options - ignoring Franco's claim and maintaining *de jure* recognition of the Republic, recognising his claim, or:

"compromising (and, perhaps, temporising) between the two first mentioned alternatives, by continuing to recognise the old Government as the de jure Government of all Spain, while acknowledging that the de facto authority over a large part of Spain, including the metropolis, rests with the Franco administration".[41]

It was believed the Soviet Union would take the first option, Germany and Italy the second, while Britain would "play for safety" by acknowledging Franco's *de facto* authority and treat both belligerents equally.

The memo quoted Oppenheim's *International Law* that the criteria for recognition were the stability of a new government and the means it employed to achieve power. It concluded:

"Although one may not accept Oppenheim's view that the "means" adopted by revolutionaries should influence the action of foreign Governments in their regard, his general statement that de facto recognition is often found "easier" to grant than de jure recognition cannot be denied. There can be but little doubt that, in the case of Spain, the safest course will be . . . [de facto recognition] and only States which are suffering under extraordinarily powerful home pressure will be inclined to grant General Franco's Madrid Government full de jure recognition from the beginning of its reign".[42]

The Irish government was poised to offer Franco *de facto* recognition after the fall of Madrid, a position which corresponded with British policy. This would have provoked domestic criticism from those who advocated *de jure* recognition for Franco but such pressure was unlikely to have outweighed that already facing the government.

However, by late November, circumstances again changed as Republican forces demonstrated their ability to defend Madrid. A memo written prior to a Dáil motion for Franco's recognition outlined the difference between formal *de facto* recognition and the lesser recognition accorded for practical purposes such as the protection of foreign nationals. The latter, which allowed for unofficial contact, was readily given to Franco "as a matter of practical necessity" but *de jure* recognition recently granted by Italy and Germany, and urged by Fine Gael, was strongly criticised:

"Such action by Germany and Italy recently was clearly not a breach of the Non-Intervention Pact, but it might be held that, in so far as it throws the weight of the influence and prestige of those States on one side

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41 External Affairs Memo, 11 November 1936, D/FA 227/87.
42 *Ibid*, p.5.

in the dispute and against the other, it amounted to unjustifiable interference in the internal affairs of another country".[43]

By late 1936, the presence of large numbers of foreign volunteers in Spain represented a more serious example of "unjustifiable interference". There were approximately seventy thousand Italians, five thousand Germans, several thousand Portuguese and seven hundred Irish among the Nationalist forces by early 1937. The Republican army included thirty-five thousand International Brigaders and two thousand Soviet 'technicians'.[44] Although their presence did not violate the terms of the NIA, the volunteers were an embarrassing testament to its ineffectiveness. The British government, in particular the foreign secretary Anthony Eden,[45] was keen to address the problem, as was de Valera who informed London he would support measures to stem the flow of volunteers. Joseph Walshe urgently contacted H.F. Batterbee at the Foreign Office:

"He [Walshe] told me that whole situation was troubling the Irish Free State Government, and that they were most anxious to keep in close touch on this matter . . . Unless something was done a situation would soon arise in which Englishmen were fighting against Englishmen, Englishmen against Irishmen and Irishmen against Irishmen and were also beginning to consider whether the Paris and Lisbon loopholes ought not to be stopped".[46]

The implications of O'Duffy's Irish Brigade were equally worrying to the British government, particularly as a member of the British Union of Fascists had recently enquired if English volunteers could legally enlist in O'Duffy's unit.[47] A Foreign Office memo urging a ban on recruitment stated:

"We do not want British subjects to be fighting in Spain, non-intervention or no non-intervention. They are certain ultimately to be a responsibility to us and them may involve us in complications. It would be particularly unfortunate if United Kingdom Communists found themselves fighting opposite Irish Catholics".[48]

The weekly departures of the Irish Brigade volunteers during the autumn of 1936 concerned the Irish government. International Brigaders left the country discreetly but General O'Duffy's men departed in a blaze of publicity. At the North Wall in Dublin, crowds gathered to sing 'Faith of our Fathers' while priests blessed the volunteers. Such incidents undermined non-intervention and proved an embarrassing indication of public support for the Nationalists. A government report reveals other paternal objections:

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43 External Affairs Memo, 26 November 1936, D/FA 227/87.
44 Gabriel Jackson, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (London, 1980) p.149.
45 Sir Robert Anthony Eden, (1897-1977): b. Windlestone hall, Durham, England; Foreign Secretary, 1935-38, 1940-5, 1951-5; Prime Minister, 1955-7.
46 H.F. Batterbee Memo, 30 November 1936, Foreign Office series (FO) W 17160/9549/41, Public Record Office, Kew, England.
47 Gérard de Langué to Under Secretary, War Office, 5 September 1936, Dominions Office series (DO) 35/161/3, Public Record Office.
48 Proposed Issue of Public Statement on Recruiting for Spain, 14 December 1936, FO W 18567/9549/41.

"Another consideration which the Government has to have in mind is the consequence to the general well-being of the country of the return from a foreign war of this terrible character of groups of men whose moral outlook cannot but be seriously altered for the worse".[49]

The conclusion illustrates the importance of Vatican opinion to the government:

"In a recent issue of the "Osservatore" the policy of the Holy See was laid down in this somewhat ambiguous fashion:

> "The Holy See would be ready to support non-intervention provided that it was absolutely complete and all comprehensive. However, it should be remembered that the Civil War in Spain had a different character from other civil wars, in as much as on one side there was wholesale destruction of churches and things belonging to the worship of God as well as wholesale killing of the ministers and servants of the Church".

This is not very helpful guidance in the present case, and I fear we are not likely to get anything more direct from the Holy See at present".[50]

The pro-Nationalist position of the Vatican was an influential determinant on Irish foreign policy in relation to Spain; not only were good relations desirable from a diplomatic point of view, but government policy, for domestic political reasons, could not be seen to conflict with the Holy See.

It proved difficult for the government to prevent volunteers travelling to Spain. In November 1936 gardaí were instructed to automatically notify External Affairs of suspected volunteers for Spain.[51] The gardaí were often forewarned that individuals intended fighting in Spain as political extremists were routinely kept under surveillance. P.J. Gallagher's application for a passport, for example, was the subject of one such report:

"Patrick Joseph Gallagher . . . Sligo, County Director of the O'Duffy Section, League of Youth, has applied for a passport to enable him to travel to France, Switzerland and Portugal. He has stated in his application that the purpose of his journey is a holiday . . . Gallagher has attended meetings in Dublin in connection with the formation of an Irish Brigade to assist the Patriot Forces in Spain, and it is believed that he has applied for the passport with the intention of travelling to that Country".[52]

The fact that P.J. Gallagher departed for Spain six days later illustrates the government's difficulty.[53]

Although the government withheld passport endorsements for Spain, it was unable to prevent volunteers travelling to countries contiguous to Spain.[54] Potential International

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49 External Affairs Memo, 18 December 1936, D/FA Restricted [R] 241/12.
50 *Ibid.*
51 Commissioners' office to D/Jus B1/36, 19 March 1937.
52 Supt. Fahy to Chief Supt. Direen, Sligo Superintendents' Office, 7 November 1936, D/Jus B9/35.
53 *Irish Independent*, 14 November 1936. Gallagher does not appear to have been granted a passport in November 1936 yet he travelled to Liverpool, and from there on to Portugal, suggesting either laxity on the part of British officials or the use of false passports (Passports and Endorsements, November 1936, D/FA 102/21).
54 A memo to de Valera stated – "Apart from the steps already taken to discourage Irish nationals from entering Spain by with-holding endorsements on passports for Spain, it does not appear that any further

Brigade recruits could travel to France if they provided a plausible reason. Indeed, some were not particularly plausible – one prominent communist received a passport "for the ostensible purpose of visiting Lourdes".[55] Similarly, large numbers of Blueshirts applied for passports to holiday in Portugal.[56] The government's second problem was that even without passports volunteers could reach Spain. Due to the free travel agreement between Ireland and Britain, International Brigade volunteers could purchase a 'week-end ticket' which permitted travel to Paris without a passport. The French Communist Party organised passage onwards to Spain. Jack Nalty, an Irish communist who was refused a passport without "certain references" reached Spain with a weekend ticket.[57] As late as February 1938, the Irish legation in Paris reported Irish volunteers entering Spain in this way.[58] The government found it equally difficult to legally prevent Irish Brigade volunteers without passports from leaving Ireland. In January 1937, a German ship picked up five hundred recruits several miles off Galway bay. When de Valera inquired if it was possible to prevent such departures the Department of Industry and Commerce concluded that "the Minister's power in this matter is limited".

In early 1937 Britain announced its intention to enforce the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870. A prominent legal expert, Professor Barriedale-Keith, pointed out that the Irish Free State, unless it abrogated the act, was also bound by its terms. The Irish Attorney-General was unimpressed for political as much as legal reasons:

"K.'s letter is characteristic. As long as embarrassment is likely to be caused to someone he is satisfied. Of course, nothing could prevail on us taking the view that the 1870 Act applies here. We also have the anomaly that the British Gov^{t}. would regard any nationals as Br. subjects but it is indeed questionable whether they would act on the logical outcome of this and interfere with our 'brigades'".[59]

International pressure also mounted as the Soviet Union began pressing the NIC to prohibit volunteers travelling to Spain. After extensive British representations, Germany and Italy agreed to a total ban on recruitment to begin on 20 February 1937. The measure was treated with characteristic insincerity by the fascist powers; Italy shipped seventy thousand soldiers to Spain between December and February in anticipation of the ban.[60]

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action can be taken by the Saorstát Government, as it would not be practicable to prevent Irish nationals from travelling to Great Britain or to countries contiguous to Spain" (22 December 1936, D/FA 227/87).

55 D/FA [R] 2/1043.

56 Passports and Endorsements, October/November 1936, D/FA 102/21.

57 D/FA 102/2.

58 Art O'Brien, Paris, to Sean Murphy, Dept. of External Affairs, 26 February 1938, D/FA 102/98.

59 Attorney Generals' Office to Dept. of the President, 13 January 1937, D/Taois S9561. Despite several requests by (British) Labour Party MPs, the British government refused to interfere with O'Duffy's volunteers who sailed from Liverpool on several occasions (W 2889/7/41, W 2893/7/41).

60 Jill Edwards (1979) p.143.

The Irish government had agreed in principle to the measure as early as December 18.[61] The Non-Intervention Act, passed by the Dáil on February 24, prohibited the recruitment and transport (but not the actual participation) of non-Spanish nationals to fight in the civil war.[62] Chaplains were excluded from the bill.[63] Gardaí were granted considerable powers to enforce the legislation:

"The power of the police to arrest without warrant on suspicion may seem to be drastic, but if the Act is to be made effective it is obviously necessary. We would have like to have taken power to search premises but it was found difficult . . . without appearing unduly to interfere with individual rights".[64]

Every application for a passport had to include a gardaí report on whether the applicant might try to evade the provisions of the act.[65]

The enforcement of the legislation was a politically delicate issue. Gardaí were instructed to direct their efforts against the organised transport of volunteers rather than suspected individuals. This suggests that the government was more concerned by the departures of large groups of Irish Brigade recruits than the small number of volunteers enlisting with the International Brigades. Indeed, several of the latter, including Frank Ryan, returned to Ireland for high profile visits, before travelling back to Spain. The commissioner's office assured the Department of Justice the legislation would be enforced:

"as unostentatiously as possible . . . If at all possible we shall endeavour to avoid Court proceedings - especially against dupes".[66]

The Irish Crusade Against Communism, O'Duffy's recruitment organisation, was aware of the potential to embarrass the government. Captain Liam Walsh, O'Duffy's secretary, advised arrested volunteers to insist on trial by jury and choose imprisonment rather than pay fines.[67] A telegram sent to Franco's headquarters by Nationalist agents suggests that Walsh intended to circumvent the legislation:

"Send us the following official despatches STOP One saying that Liam Walsh is nominated Captain of the Spanish Foreign Legion . . . Dispatch saying 12 Pearce[sic] Street Dublin is a base Headquarters of the Spanish Foreign Legion STOP These letters might be dated 23rd December 1936 STOP A dispatch dated 17th January saying all individuals nominated in the attached list are soldiers of the Spanish Foreign Legion STOP This is very urgent owing to Irish Act of Parliament enforced to-day".[68]

However, due to difficulties in Spain, the demand for Irish Brigade recruits ceased after February 1937 and the legislation was never enforced. A small number of volunteers

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61 Dulanty to Francis Hemming, 29 December 1936; NICP (A), D/FA London Embassy. The Irish cabinet agreed to participate in the observation scheme necessary to supervise the agreement on 2 February 1937 (Cabinet 7/389, D/Taois S9177).

62 Participation in the war was not declared illegal as the government did not wish to penalise those already fighting in Spain (Spanish Civil War Non-Intervention Bill, 1937, Committee Stage, D/Jus B1/37).

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 Secretary, D/Jus to Garda Commissioner, 27 February 1937, D/Jus B1/37.

66 Commissioners' office to secretary, D/Jus 2 March 1937, *Ibid.*

67 Liam Walshe Memo, 24 February 1937, *Ibid.*

68 Telegram, London to *Secretaría General*, 24 February 1937, R.1105-10, *Archivo de Burgos*.

continued to travel to Nationalist Spain after February 1937. Gardaí observed the departure of a group of five men for Lisbon in March 1937, at least one of whom fought with the Nationalist forces.[69]

With the volunteer issue superficially resolved, the NIC turned to the problem of war supplies. Assured that the Nationalists were sufficiently supplied, Italy and Germany supported the Anglo-French proposals to establish a supervision scheme. In March 1937, the NIC set up a Non-Intervention Board (NIB) staffed by six hundred and thirty observers. Twelve Irish officers, appointed by the Department of External Affairs, participated in the scheme. The men, mostly old IRA officers, performed their tasks with mixed results.[70] By the end of June, the NIC secretary, Francis Hemming reported that "one or two" had been fired for not learning French. Two others were respectively dismissed for "gross conduct" and a lack of "standard manners and tact".[71] The duties of the officers were hazardous. Both Nationalist and Republican planes frequently attacked freighters off the coast of Spain. Italian 'pirate' submarines also sunk neutral and Republican shipping throughout the summer of 1937. Such pressures affected one Irish NIB officer in Pau who became insane and died shortly afterwards.[72]

As it became apparent the war might continue for two or three years, the Nationalists attempted to forge better relations with other states. Viscount de Mamblas, an Oxford educated aristocrat, formerly head of the Cultural Relations section of the Ministry of State, was appointed to liaise with the British and Irish representatives in February 1937.[73] When De Mamblas met Kerney in March he requested information on "the true position in Ireland" of General O'Duffy, Patrick Belton and Francis McCullagh. De Mamblas asked Kerney how de Valera would view the presence of an unofficial or semi-official Nationalist representative in Dublin. Kerney referred the question to Dublin but told Mamblas that "the opposition would make every effort to utilise this gentleman's presence for their own advantage". Kerney replied frankly to his enquiry about diplomatic recognition:

"I told him that the Government's first duty was of course to safeguard Irish interests; that they did not feel that they could just at this stage set a headline by giving to the Franco regime an official recognition, which

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69 John Madden from Roscrea, Co. Tipperary who remained in the Foreign Legion after the return of the Irish Brigade (*Generalísimo* to *General 2 Jefe Milicias*, 29 June 1937, R156-25, *Archivo General Militar de Avila*).

70 Sean Murphy to Dulanty, 12 March 1937, NICP/B, D/FA London Embassy.

71 Hemming to Dulanty, 2, 28 June 1937, NICP/B; Col. Christian Lunn to Hemming, NICP/C, D/FA London Embassy.

72 Sean Murphy to Dulanty, 25 October 1938, NICP/C, D/FA London Embassy.

73 Kerney to Walshe, 18 February 1937, D/FA [R] 241/12; Kerney to Walshe, 27 February 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

would in any case be of no material and of but slight moral advantage to Spain; that our attitude was uninfluenced by and independent of that of England".[74]

Kerney added:

"the President himself stated that there was no doubt as to the direction of the sympathies of the majority of the Irish people; that I had no doubt myself as to where the sympathies of my Government were, although I had not discussed this question officially at home; that recognition by the Vatican would be a very desirable preliminary step; that my personal opinion was that recognition by some important Catholic country such as the Argentine or Brazil might have a repercussion in Ireland".[75]

That Kerney told de Mamblas his government favoured the Nationalists is not surprising but it is interesting that he reported this back to Dublin. Kerney clearly felt assured of the Irish government's pro-Franco sympathies.

Kerney's conversation with de Mamblas raised most of the essential aspects of Irish policy on Spain. The independence of Ireland's foreign policy from Britain was repeatedly emphasised throughout the war. Although this was a fundamental objective of Irish diplomacy in the 1930s, it may have been exaggerated by Kerney who exhibited a marked anglophobia on several occasions.[76] The importance of the Vatican and other Catholic states was another characteristic of foreign policy in this period. Finally, although Kerney acknowledged the pro-Franco sympathies of his government, Irish policy towards Nationalist Spain remained cautious and conventional as is illustrated by the refusal to grant *de facto* recognition or accept an unofficial representative.

The reports of William Macaulay,[77] the Irish minister to the Vatican, support Kerney's assertion that Vatican recognition was an important preliminary to Irish recognition. Macaulay was instructed that de Valera "wishes to be kept informed as fully as possible on every aspect of the Holy See's relations with the two parties in Spain".[78] Macaulay complained that "the Holy See is most reticent, and reluctant to discuss about Spain and its relations with the Vatican".[79] Significantly, he was urgently requested to send reports from Rome prior to Dáil debates on Franco's recognition and non-intervention.[80]

The common perception that the Vatican was virulently pro-Franco, based perhaps on the position of the Spanish and Irish hierarchy, is misleading. The Vatican maintained only

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74 Kerney to Walshe, 6 March 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.
75 *Ibid*, 6 March 1937.
76 See below, p.276, 285. One British diplomat in Spain referred to "the difficult attitude of the [Irish] Minister here" (13 July 1939, D/FA 210/55).
77 William J.B. Macaulay: consul-general, USA, 1932; envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, Holy See, 1936-44.
78 Walshe to Macaulay, 15 November 1938, D/FA 227/4.
79 Macaulay to Walshe, 18 November 1936, D/FA 227/4.
80 Telegram, Walshe to Macaulay, 10 November 1936, 16 February 1937,

cautious support for the Nationalist regime throughout the War.[81] In September 1936, for example, Cardinal Pacelli, the Papal Secretary of State, told Macaulay:

"The recognition of General Franco's Government awaits more tangible evidence of its success and permanency than even the capture of Madrid".

Macaulay reported that "the Holy See will do nothing to lend colour to the suggestion that it is following the lead of the Fascist States".[82] The Vatican's pro-Nationalist proclivities were tempered by Germany's anti-clericalism:

"The Vatican has reached a point as regards Germany where all hope of reconciliation is practically abandoned . . . that Franco has to accept assistance from Hitler is deplored".[83]

It was not until after the fall of the Basque province in August 1937 that the Vatican accepted a Nationalist representative and even this was played down:

"The Holy See still insists that this does not mean recognition of Franco - apparently because Letters of Credence have not been accepted . . . the Holy See is waiting for more definite evidence of Franco's ultimate success".[84]

The Vatican's cautious attitude towards the Nationalists may have influenced Irish policy. It certainly reduced domestic pressure to recognise Franco. During one Dáil debate, de Valera pointed to the Vatican's position in response to opposition criticism:

"We are told that the cause of Christianity demands it. It is extraordinary if that is so, when the head of Christianity in the Vatican State has not himself deemed it prudent or right so to accord [recognition]."[85]

After his meeting with de Mamblas, Kerney was instructed to visit Salamanca "to enable the Government to come to a decision about the recognition of the authorities there".[86] Although Kerney's mission could have been regarded as *de facto* recognition of Franco by the Republican government, he made little effort to keep his visit secret.[87] On March 11, he met the Nationalist diplomatic secretary, José Antonio Sangroniz, to request an audience with Franco. Sangroniz agreed but the meeting never occurred, perhaps, as Fr. McCabe thought, because Kerney was still accredited to the Spanish Republic.[88] Sir Henry Chilton, the British ambassador, suggested Kerney's visit was not treated as an important occasion:

"He said he had seen neither General Franco nor even his brother, Nicholas Franco; in fact as far as I was able to gather he had interviews with no-one "bigger" than Sr. Sangroniz and the Fascist leader Sr. Hedilla".[89]

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81 Peter Kent, 'The Vatican and the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 16 (1986) pp.441-64.
82 Macaulay to Walshe, 29 September 1936, D/FA 227/4.
83 *Ibid.*
84 *Ibid*, 12 August 1937.
85 DD 64, 1221.
86 Telegram, Walshe to Kerney, 8 March 1937, D/FA [R] 241/12. See Dermot Keogh (1990) pp.85-8.
87 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.86. Kerney drove around Salamanca with diplomatic corps plates and an Irish tricolour attached to his car (Fr. Alex McCabe diary, 11 March 1937, McCabe papers, NLI)
88 Fr. Alex McCabe diary, 14 March 1937.
89 Chilton to Foreign Office, 31 March 1937, FO W 6518/1/41.

Three days later, with still no appointment with Franco, Kerney returned to St. Jean de Luz and filed a lengthy assessment. Kerney's republicanism did not extend to the Spanish model:

"I believe that the Republic founded in 1931 has been destroyed by its responsible leaders as a result of toleration on their part of the excesses of supporters, uncontrolled and perhaps uncontrollable, whose guiding principle was one of anarchy, and that a re-establishment of ordered conditions under a Republican form of government, depending on a majority vote at a general election, is at the present time an utter impossibility".[90]

He suggested Dublin consider severing relations with the Republic:

"I believe that the question of continued recognition of any regime in Spain where anarchical conditions might prevail would of necessity arise at an early date, if not now".[91]

Although he accurately predicted the conflict would continue for some time, Kerney favoured recognition of Franco:

"I believe that any regime whatsoever that might result from a military victory achieved by Franco would be definitely more worthy of our moral support than the regime that would follow on his defeat. I believe that few Irish interests are likely to suffer . . . if we were to recognise Franco. I believe that such recognition would firmly establish Irish prestige in Spain and in many parts of the world, and that the importance of such a step would be infinitely greater if it were to be taken before other countries took similar action".[92]

Kerney's endorsement of the Nationalists is surprising. On the basis of religious sentiment, the Irish government understandably wished to recognise the side supported so adamantly by the Irish hierarchy but not necessarily before the Vatican. Kerney's reference to Irish prestige is questionable. Had Ireland recognised Franco in March 1937 it would have joined Germany and Italy as the only European countries with full diplomatic ties to the Nationalists; such recognition had recently been described by an External Affairs memo as "unjustifiable interference". Diplomatically, Irish foreign policy would have gravitated from a consensus of 'democratic' nations (led by France and Britain) towards the Fascist states. Also, despite Italy and Germany's initiative, the conventional criteria for recognition was not which side was "more worthy of our moral support" but rather which government exercised control of the state. In his report Kerney admits that a Nationalist victory was not assured. Domestic pressure may have figured in De Valera's refusal of Kerney's proposal. Recognition of Franco before a shift in the military balance, such as the fall of Madrid, would appear as a capitulation to the opposition - particularly following so closely on the non- intervention debate in February.[93]

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90 Kerney to Walshe, 15 March 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 52/1.
91 *Ibid.*
92 *Ibid.*
93 Dermot Keogh (1990) p.91.

Following Kerney's mission to Salamanca, Germán Baráibar, the private secretary of J.A. Sangroniz, informed de Mamblas:

"that Mr. Kerney might believe that we had not here a clear knowledge regarding the political situation in his country . . . It would be well if you were to explain to the Minister Mr. Kerney, that we have a very close conception of the actual position of . . . [Patrick Belton, General O'Duffy and] the significance of the Cosgrave party as well as that of the powerful Government Party of de Valera which undoubtedly forms the most important and considerable nucleus of opinion in the Free State".[94]

The Nationalists evidently were willing to distance themselves from their more zealous Irish supporters to gain the friendship of the Irish government. The post-script is particularly interesting:

"The operations in Vizcaya are not proceeding badly! It might be that after the capture of Bilbao the Holy See would recognise us and this would be the best chance for the de Valera Government to recognise us ahead of the London Government and so taking a step of complete sovereignty, independent of the Metropolis and other Dominions of the British Empire".[95]

The Nationalist diplomats clearly had a reasonable understanding of the intricacies of Irish politics. They knew Irish recognition was unlikely to precede the Vatican. The final section suggests Sangroniz was aware that Kerney's previous assertion that Irish policy was "uninfluenced by and independent of that of England" was misleading, and that the Irish government considered it desirable to recognise Franco before Britain. Sir Henry Chilton naturally suspected the reason for Kerney's visit and bluntly asked him if Ireland was considering recognition:

"Mr. Kerney replied that as far as he knew they were not and that his visit to Salamanca was not intended to imply any such act on the part of his Government. It is quite possible, however, that he may have been sent to 'tâter le terrain'. . . "[96]

The constitutional relationship between Ireland and Britain, constantly in flux throughout the 1930s, was a central determinant of Irish policy towards Franco. After King Edward VII's abdication in December 1936, de Valera introduced the Executive Authority (External Relations) Act which ensured that, while Ireland was 'associated' with the Commonwealth, the British monarch would continue to act on Ireland's behalf for diplomatic purposes when authorised by the Irish government. Essentially, the legislation asserted the right of the government to pursue an independent foreign policy while retaining Commonwealth membership and the symbolic use of the Crown.[97] External

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94 Germán Baráibar, Nationalist Diplomatic Cabinet, to de Mamblas, 27 April 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 52/1. See Dermot Keogh (1990) pp. 89-90.

95 *Ibid*.

96 Chilton to Foreign Office, 31 March 1937, FO W 6518/1/41. A Foreign Office official minuted that Irish recognition before Britain would be "unfortunate" but admitted he was not sure that there were any "technical objections".

97 As Nicholas Mansergh put it – "Relations with Britain and the Commonwealth had thus been taken out of the Constitution, where Mr. de Valera felt that they had no place, and had become matters of external policy for the government of the day. This was the most significant development in the whole period". (Nicholas Mansergh, 'Ireland: External Relations 1926-1939', F. McManus (ed.), *The Years of the Great Test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967) p.134).

association was first tested in early 1937 when de Valera, under pressure from Joseph Walshe, agreed to appoint a representative to Italy.[98] As it was necessary to accredit the envoy to the Italian empire, the action implied recognition of Italy's occupation of Abyssinia – a sensitive issue for the British Government. Not only would this breach Commonwealth unity, it meant that George VI, as head of the Free State, would recognise Italian control of Abyssinia but refuse such recognition as King of Great Britain. After Malcolm MacDonald, the Dominions Secretary,[99] expressed serious objections de Valera postponed the appointment until the Anglo-Italian agreement recognised the status of Abyssinia.[100]

Spain provided the next test of the prerogatives of Irish foreign policy. Baráibar's letter shows that the Nationalists knew the Irish government was eager to precede British recognition. However, the postponement of diplomatic relations with Italy also demonstrated that de Valera was reluctant to break with Britain on issues of sensitivity to the Foreign Office. Anglo-Irish relations had improved since MacDonald's appointment as Dominions Secretary in 1935. Britain was also keenly aware of the potential difficulties. The "long and uninteresting" non-intervention Dáil debate was studied by the Dominions Office which noted de Valera's refusal to confirm that Ireland would recognise Franco with the rest of the Commonwealth:

"the Irish Free State may prefer to recognise with the non-intervention countries rather than with the members of the British C'w. It will clearly be necessary to deal with the question of recognition, if this ever becomes necessary, very carefully".[101]

However, despite these concerns, the Dominions Office was satisfied with De Valera's policy on Spain. An assessment of his performance in the Dáil judged his "concluding speech . . . a moderate and careful defence of the Govt's policy".[102] De Valera, for his part, appears to have decided to wait for a conclusive shift in the military balance before recognising Franco. This was probably not appreciated by Sangroniz and might explain the later deterioration of relations between Kerney and de Mamblas.[103]

Although Kerney remained accredited to the Republic until February 1939, Irish relations with the Spanish government worsened during the war. The legation in Madrid remained closed and the Spanish government, since Aguilar's resignation, was not represented in Ireland. The Republican government, unlike the Nationalists, did not appoint an official to liaise with diplomats in St. Jean de Luz.[104] Moreover, it refused to communicate directly

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98 Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists* (Yale, 1984) p.223.
99 See p.289.
100 Deirdre McMahon (1984) p.223.
101 Dominions Office Memo, 11 March 1937, DO 35/553/3.
102 *Ibid.*
103 Interestingly, though, Francisco Ayala, a Republican government official, appeared to be aware that British policy constrained de Valera's freedom to recognise Franco. See p.276.
104 Kerney to Walshe, 16 February 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

with diplomats not resident in Republican territory.[105] Kerney also appeared reluctant to maintain links with the Republic. In March 1937, he reported a conversation with the British consul in Bilbao, Ralph Stevenson, who invited him to visit Bilbao and the Basque president José Antonio Aguirre:

"I told him that the suggestion tempted me but that my personal feelings were averse to travelling on a British destroyer and that, in any case, this might not be the most opportune moment for such a visit".[106]

The visit would have balanced his recent mission to Salamanca, and had it become known in Ireland, Kerney could have justified it by pointing out that Basques were the most devout Catholics in Spain.

In June 1937 Kerney reported an unofficial visit from Francisco Ayala, a Spanish government official. Ayala was a friend of Francisco de Arano, the Spanish agent of the Irish Iberian Trading Company, whose family Kerney had helped get permits to leave the Nationalist zone. Ayala asked Kerney to assist his younger brothers who were caught in Burgos at the beginning of the war. Kerney told Ayala he would make inquiries but took the opportunity to question him about the Republic's attitude to Ireland:

"I asked him why my few letters to Valencia had remained unanswered; he thought they might have gone astray in the post, but admitted that there was a certain feeling against the Diplomatic Corps non-resident in Spain. . . I reminded him that the Irish Government's attitude had been very correct throughout and that the Government had not yielded to the clamour for a breach of diplomatic relations with Spain, but that public opinion was somewhat inflamed, Ireland being a predominantly Catholic country, and prejudiced, even prior to the Civil War by the destruction of churches in Spain".[107]

Ayala pointed to the support given the Republic by Catholic Basques. Elsewhere, he pointed out, the Catholic Church was perceived as an enemy of the Republic. Kerney raised "the prevalence of disorder and anarchy" in Republican territory, and remarked that between order and disorder "there could be no doubt as to where the sympathies of the outside world would go". Ayala insisted that a disciplined army and police force had transformed the Republic – "He was very emphatic on this point and begged me to go to Valencia for a few days to judge myself" – an offer which Kerney declined.[108]

Ayala's report to the Spanish Ministry of State differs substantially from Kerney's.[109] He understandably omitted his request for visas for his family. More significantly, his report indicates that the Republican government was less happy with Ireland's diplomatic policy than Kerney reported. Ayala did not accept Kerney's comments about the Irish

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105 *Ibid*, 24 May 1937.
106 *Ibid*, 23 March 1937.
107 *Ibid*, 7 June 1937.
108 *Ibid*, 7 June 1937.
109 Report of Francisco Ayala, Valencia, 7 June 1937 to the Spanish Ministry of State, R.1069-10, *Archivo de Barcelona*.

government's "correct attitude". He told Kerney that by visiting Salamanca and not residing in Republican Spain he had contradicted his accreditation:

"This comment seemed to be effective. It exposed the "correct conduct" - and that was Kerney's exact phrase - that he was maintaining by recognising us instead of Franco. Kerney tried to convince me that this behaviour signified they were supporting our cause. I did not feel it prudent for me to make any allusion that this attitude could be connected with British politics".[110]

When Kerney told Ayala he visited Salamanca to find out the "real situation" and seek information about Irish volunteers in Spain, Ayala replied that Kerney should also have gone to Madrid or Valencia to inform his superiors of the "real situation" in the Republic. Also, Ayala did not accept Kerney's justification that he was following the rest of the diplomatic community by residing in St. Jean de Luz:

"I had to remind him that the other diplomatic representatives had substitutes to carry on work in Madrid and Valencia if they were abroad - unlike Ireland".[111]

Ayala's account of their discussion about the Republic's increased prospect of military success and the question of religious tolerance is the only section of the report which matches Kerney's. Ayala explained that official repression against Catholics occurred because of the position they adopted in the civil war rather than their religion. He was irritated by Kerney's questions about religious freedom in the Republic:

"This insistent behaviour let me know that Kerney had read an article in a Basque newspaper from Santander which attacked as hypocritical Sr. Irujo's suggestion to re-establish religious practice".[112]

He observed that although Kerney's view of anti-clericalism in the Republic was mistaken the misconception existed and should be dealt with.

When Kerney requested Ayala or other Republican officials to visit him if they were in St. Jean de Luz, Ayala noted:

"The impression I got from this conversation which lasted one hour is that he finds himself in an embarrassing situation. He cannot communicate anything to his government, on top of that, he is bereft of people to substitute for him in the Loyal zone. The position adopted is difficult for him."[113]

Ayala, optimistically "thinking of the near triumph of our arms" told Kerney that the Republican government would be delighted if he returned to Madrid. Kerney replied that only his government could take that decision. Ayala's conclusion is particularly interesting:

"I picked up the sensation from Sr. Harding [Kerney's middle name] that he is an arch-enemy of our cause but, at the same time, he is considering the possibility of our triumph and is prepared to move according to the circumstances . . . Contrary to what he told me, I think he is the person who has put his Government in an attitude of distancing themselves in which it finds itself to-day".[114]

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110 *Ibid.*
111 *Ibid.*
112 *Ibid.*
113 *Ibid.*
114 *Ibid.*

Although Ayala almost certainly overstates Kerney's influence on foreign policy, it is significant that he detected his anti-Republican hostility. The differences between the two reports suggest that Kerney, in contrast with his sensitivity towards the Nationalists, was not particularly concerned about Republican irritation at his diplomatic status. Kerney deliberately under-emphasised the Republican government's displeasure with Irish policy in his report to Dublin.

Several days later José Giral, the Republican foreign minister, notified de Valera of the appointment of Ricardo Baeza, "former ambassador . . . distinguished writer and an old friend of Ireland" as Aguilar's replacement.[115] De Valera firmly rejected the initiative:

". . . the Government of the Irish Free State desire to maintain the close and friendly relations which exist between the Irish and Spanish people. In furtherance of that purpose they wish to avoid any act which might appear to any substantial section of the Spanish people to constitute an interference in the civil strife in Spain."[116]

The appointment of Aguilar's replacement after a six month interval would undoubtedly have attracted criticism from the Nationalists and their Irish supporters but de Valera's refusal, nonetheless, conflicted with Irish recognition of the Republic. It implied *de facto* recognition of the Nationalists and demonstrated a hardening of attitudes against the Republican government as External Affairs acknowledged to J.W. Dulanty:

"they have turned down the request though they have been very polite about it. Joe Walshe thought you would like to know of this as it represents a new state in the course of our relations with the Spanish Government".[117]

Ireland's unfavourable attitude towards the Spanish government was influenced by the Republic's declining prospects of victory and the perception of its anti-clericalism.[118] In November 1937 José Camina, a Basque refugee, attempted to convince Kerney that the latter view was simplistic. Camina told Kerney of the refusal of Dr. Mateo Múgica, Bishop of Vitoria, to sign the pro-Nationalist *Letter of the Spanish Bishops* and his subsequent exile from Spain. He also described the executions of Basque priests and the methodical destruction of Basque towns by Nationalist forces. Kerney reported the conversation without comment to Dublin.[119]

In March 1938, the Republican government again attempted to establish a diplomatic representative in Ireland. The approach showed a more subtle appreciation of the popular

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115 Telegram, Giral to De Valera, 11 June 1937, D/FA 118/23.
116 Telegram, De Valera to Giral, 14 June 1937, D/FA 118/23.
117 C.J. O'Donovan Memo, 15 June 1937, NICP/B, D/FA London Embassy.
118 Kerney, like most observers, expected a Nationalist victory. In February 1937 he commented that his presence at St. Jean de Luz "is the best possible intermediary stage in view of probably developments in the future when official relations with Franco come to be established" (Kerney to Walshe, 16 February 1937, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4).
119 *Ibid*, 15 November 1937.

mood in Ireland. José Antonio Aguirre, President of *Euzkadi* (the Basque republic), instructed Canon Alberto Onaindía, a Basque priest, to negotiate on behalf of the Republic. Onaindía presented Kerney with a letter from Manuel de Irujo[120] urging his government to accept Francisco Velar Juareguibeitia, another Basque Catholic, as consul general - rather than minister plenipotentiary "due to the desire to proceed as discreetly as is desirable under present circumstances".[121] Onaindía assured Kerney that Velar would maintain contact between the two governments "without resorting to any public propaganda whatsoever".[122] Kerney explained "the state of public opinion in Ireland and the difficulties which might lie in the way of a favourable decision in a delicate matter of this kind". De Valera refused the request.[123] Again, the treatment of Catholics in Republican Spain appears to have been decisive. The following month, Kerney told Canon Onaindía:

"the ban on the free exercise of that religion in that particular portion of Spain had a necessarily fatal effect on the sympathies of Catholic Ireland".[124]

By 1937 Irish policy towards the Republic closely resembled the Vatican's. There was no official break but meaningful diplomatic relations ceased.[125] This reflected External Affairs policy but was also partly due to Kerney's pro-Nationalist sympathies.

Ireland's position was resented by the Spanish left. The anarchist *Solidaridad Obrera*, for example, published an unflattering profile of de Valera:

"He then [de Valera after the Anglo-Irish War] had the admiration of the whole of Europe and the youth before the war considered him a symbol of progressive ideals. In power he has slowly become a real dictator. Forgetting the past and the desires of his people he did not hide his sympathy for the Fascists. His conversion went so far that this ex-hero of Irish independence was first among all other European Governments to officially recognise the trampling by Mussolini of other people who knew how to defend no less courageously than he the cause of freedom".[126]

During the same period the pro-Nationalist sympathies of the Irish government became more evident. During the non-intervention debate, for example, De Valera declared:

"there can be no doubt on which side is the sympathy of the vast majority of the people of this country . . ."[127]

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120 Minister of State without portfolio in the Spanish government.
121 Irujo to Onaindía, 14 January 1938, D/FA 118/23.
122 Kerney to Walshe, 12 March 1938, *Ibid.*
123 Sean Murphy to Kerney, 28 March 1938, *Ibid.*
124 Kerney to Walshe, 23 March 1938, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4. Onaindía forwarded Kerney a copy of the 'Religious Programme of the Government of the Spanish Republic'.
125 Michael Alpert (1994) p.74.
126 Translation, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 29 April 1938, *Comentarios de prensa sobre la política Irlandesa*, R2571-21, *Archivo de Burgos*. The article concluded – "If the information transmitted to us is correct de Valera will soon disappear from the political scene. But the real de Valera, the hero and revolutionary died some time ago".
127 DD 65, 598.

Kerney's activities indicated a similar bias. He refused to visit the Spanish Republic to which he was accredited but entered the Nationalist zone at least four times in 1937. The following year he even attended the funeral of a Nationalist general.[128]

This bias was also reflected in minor aspects of Irish policy. In September 1937, William Macaulay inquired:

"what attitude I am to adopt towards "the Chargé d'Affaires of Spain: who has announced to me his reception by the Cardinal Secretary of Spain . . . I do not see how I can acknowledge this communication at all in view of our relations with Valencia Government".[129]

Macaulay was instructed to treat the chargé d'affaires as "the representative of a fully recognised State".[130] Another example occurred in April 1938 when the Department of External Affairs agreed to accept Nationalist passports.[131]

The government's actions at Geneva also indicate pro-Nationalist sympathies. The failure of the NIC to prevent flagrant abuses of non-intervention by Italy and Germany stimulated a rare bout of activity within the moribund League of Nations in September 1937.[132] The Spanish government, aware of Britain and France's concerns, requested the League to either seek strict enforcement of non-intervention or withdraw support from the NIC and allow the Spanish government to purchase armaments. It was proposed that unless "the veritable army corps on Spanish soil" withdrew "in the near future, the Members of the League . . . will consider ending the policy of non-intervention". Supported by Britain and France, the resolution - "a hard-hitting and specific demand for action" - passed by a large majority; thirty-two in favour, two against and fourteen abstentions (including Ireland).[133] Although the resolution was not adopted due to the League's unanimity rule, the vote was considered "a clear-cut victory for the Spanish Republic".[134]

Ireland was one of only seven European States not to vote in favour of the resolution. Switzerland, as always, abstained due to its neutrality, the Bulgarian representative never received instructions, and Albania, Austria, Hungary, and Portugal were under some

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128 Kerney to Walshe, 30 June 1937, 10 November 1937, 16 April 1938, D/FA Madrid Embassy, 19/4; Dermot Keogh (1990) p.95.
129 Macaulay to Walshe, 16 September 1937, D/FA 227/4.
130 Walshe to Macaulay, 27 September 1937, D/FA 227/4.
131 Sean Murphy to Art O'Brien, Paris Legation, 29 April 1938, D/FA P2/92.
132 The decision to establish the NIC had acknowledged the League's inability to effectively act as an international body of arbitration. The USA's non-membership, Germany and Japan's departure in 1933, and Italy's exclusion following its invasion of Abyssinia rendered the League impotent.
133 Richard Veatch, 'The League of Nations and the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 20 (1990) pp.195-198.
134 *Ibid*, pp.195-9. Particularly as eighteen of the thirty-two states which supported the resolution were represented on the NIC.

degree of fascist influence.[135] Why did De Valera refuse to support a measure which had secured such wide support? He objected to the section which noted:

"the members of the League who are parties to the Non-Intervention Agreement will consider ending the policy of non-intervention if the efforts and the appeal now being made to end outside participation in the Spanish conflict should not in the near future prove successful".[136]

At Geneva, De Valera professed his commitment to non-intervention and declared that his government "rejoiced" when the NIC was established.[137] Having decided that the NIA was "best for Spain and best for Europe" de Valera refused to support a resolution which threatened to terminate the agreement.[138] De Valera's argument is not convincing. The purpose of the motion, in particular the section accurately described by de Valera as a threat to dissolve the NIA, was to acknowledge the present failure of non-intervention and its transgression by Germany and Italy. The League's failure to prevent the occupation of Manchuria and Abyssinia proved that well-meaning rhetoric was insufficient to enforce international policy. The only realistic way to force the fascist states to adhere to non-intervention was to threaten to end the agreement. If the NIA was rescinded France could open its border and allow the Republic to import weapons. De Valera refused to join the thirty-two other states acting against Italian and German intervention. Ireland's abstention implied that de Valera preferred an ineffective non-intervention which favoured the Nationalists to a measure which might place the Spanish Republic on an equal standing. Significantly, when it became clear, in late 1938, that the termination of non-intervention would benefit the Nationalists the Irish government appeared less committed to the policy.[139]

There were other considerations for de Valera. For domestic reasons de Valera would not wish to be seen supporting a motion sponsored by the Spanish government. Significantly, the *Irish Press* which placed as much or little emphasis on foreign policy as Fianna Fáil desired, led with the front page headline – "MR DE VALERA'S RESOLUTE STAND".[140] Also, French and British equivocation on non-intervention was due to temporary expediency rather than foreign policy morality or sympathy for the Republic. De Valera did not identify Irish interests with those of the Anglo/French block. The vote allowed Ireland to demonstrate its independence from the Anglo-French block in Geneva. Indeed, de Valera concluded:

"I also want to make it clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding that our Government is not being committed to any policy of action which might result from the termination of the Non-Intervention

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135 Portugal and Albania voted against. Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Bulgaria and Ireland abstained. Richard Veatch (1990) p.198.
136 Eamon de Valera (1944) p.60.
137 *Ibid*, p.61.
138 *Ibid*, p.63.
139 See p.289.
140 *Irish Press*, 1 October 1937.

Agreement. There is a danger in the present condition of Europe that the League of Nations as it now is may degenerate into a mere alliance of one group of States against another group. That would be the end of our hopes for a real League, and I consider that the smaller States of the League in particular should resist from the beginning every tendency in that direction".[141]

But, as de Valera must have suspected, the League had already degenerated into two polarised alliances and all but the most optimistic advocates of a "real League" admitted defeat after the occupation of Abyssinia.[142] The purpose of De Valera's speech was to emphasise that, although Ireland was adopting what might be considered a pro-Nationalist position at Geneva, Ireland was allied to neither the fascist or Anglo-French alliances.

Despite the government's sympathetic attitude towards the Nationalists, diplomatic relations deteriorated as the Nationalists increasingly felt their military progress justified some form of official recognition. In April 1938, Kerney reported that de Mamblas told him:

"how greatly surprised General Jordana[143] was by our note of protest in the BOLAND case,[144] which had caused the worst possible impression . . . De Mamblas told him [Jordana] of my visit to Salamanca a year ago and said that at that time there seemed to be a fair prospect of official recognition; that he had explained the position, referring to complications caused by O'Duffy etc., in correspondence; that his relations with myself were always friendly - and I gathered that he described me as being personally in favour of Franco's cause".[145]

De Mamblas' belief that O'Duffy's presence was an obstacle to recognition may partly explain why the Irish Brigade was despatched from Spain so rapidly. The description of Kerney as pro-Franco is interesting. Kerney defensively added:

"Needless to say, I am no blind adherent of any Spanish or non-Irish cause, but I naturally endeavour to avoid saying or doing anything which might give rise to unfriendly criticism of myself, my Government or my Country; de Mamblas apparently gives me credit for a less neutral attitude than this".[146]

Since March 1937 Kerney had urged his government to recognise Franco. He almost certainly told de Mamblas of his recommendation. De Mamblas warned Kerney that "the tendency in Burgos is becoming more and more pronounced in favour of an attitude of strict reciprocity in official matters" but did not say if Kerney's status would be affected.

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141 Eamon de Valera (1944) p.63.

142 De Valera told the Dáil in June 1936 – "As far as we are concerned, we are satisfied that the League as it was, cannot any longer command the confidence of the ordinary people in the world. It does not command our confidence" (Maurice Moynihan (1980) p.274).

143 General Francisco Jordana y Souza (1876-1944) was Franco's Foreign Minister from January 1938 to August 1939.

144 Bridget Boland, an Irish woman working in Spain as a house-keeper, was murdered by the anarchist Malatesta Battalion led by Comdt. 'Euscariaza' who was believed to have been a Nationalist agent (D/FA 118/23).

145 Kerney to Walshe, 16 April 1938, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

146 Kerney to Walshe, 16 April 1938, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

Relations between Ireland and the Nationalists were further complicated by the capture of Major Frank Ryan, the most senior Irish officer in the International Brigades, at Calaceite on 31 March 1938. Thomas Gunning, an Irish Brigade officer who remained in Burgos after O'Duffy's departure, told Kerney that Ryan was fortunate to survive:

"It was still usual to shoot at the front all officers who were captured . . . The Moors and the *Tercio* took no prisoners: this applied more especially to members of the International Brigade".[147]

According to Gunning, Ryan reached Zaragoza alive only because he was captured by Italian soldiers. It was intended to "bump him off" there but:

"a well-known semi-official journalist (*El Tebib Arrumi*) made an indiscreet reference to the existence of this prisoner and his case could not then be hushed up; the journalist was rapped over the knuckles and Ryan's life was safe for the time being".[148]

With some satisfaction, Gunning described Ryan's conditions in Zaragoza where the prisoners were forced to salute the Nationalist flag, and shout *'Viva'* to their captors' *'Arriba Espana, Viva Espana'*. Ryan refused and was badly beaten.[149] He was accused of executing Nationalist prisoners and various revolutionary activities in Ireland.[150] The *New York Times* reported that much of the evidence was "supplied by an Irishman who did publicity work for General O'Duffy and remained in Spain after the Brigade returned home".[151] Several days later, Gunning was overheard complaining about Ryan by Kerney's assistant, Mary Donnelly:

"for two months I have been trying to get him [Ryan] shot; I've gone to them with tears in my eyes to get them to shoot him, and they won't shoot him".[152]

After an appeal from Ryan's mother,[153] de Valera requested Dr. Paschal Robinson, the Irish Papal Nuncio, to appeal for leniency. Robinson sent Shane Leslie[154] to meet the Duke of Alba, Franco's representative in London.[155] Alba cabled Franco:

"The Apostolic Nuncio of Dublin sent by President de Valera to specifically speak to me about Frank Ryan . . . According to the President's judgement because of Ryan's conduct he is liable to any punishment but please do not shoot him because considering the propaganda that has gone on in Ireland and Irish circles in America he would be presented as a martyr for his convictions and would bring about an enormous reaction

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147 *Ibid*, 10 June 1938.
148 Kerney to Walshe, 7 June 1938, D/FA 244/22.
149 *Ibid.*
150 There was some confusion whether Ryan was being tried on civil or military charges. Kerney initially told Dublin and Sir Maurice Peterson, a British diplomat, that it was the latter. Peterson correctly insisted that Ryan was held on murder charges rather than as a prisoner of war (FO W 10335/6/41).
151 *New York Times*, 29 May 1938. In January 1939, de Mamblas confided to Kerney that "an Irishman named Gunning had prejudiced this cause tremendously by going from one person to another in Burgos denouncing Ryan" (Kerney to Walshe, 23 November 1939, D/FA 19/4).
152 Cited in Dermot Keogh (1990) p.94; Kerney to Walshe, 2 June 1938, D/FA 244/22. Gunning, an unstable character, blamed the Catholic Church for the war and felt "it was a pity the reds did not go far enough to kill the whole eighteen bishops".
153 "I would not come but that I have heard that my son's life is in grave danger and that in order to save him a cable from you to General Franco's headquarters is the only hope I have" – Annie Ryan to de Valera, 3 April 1938, De Valera Papers, formerly in Franciscan Archives, Killiney.
154 Shane Leslie (1885-1971): b. Glaslough, Monaghan; poet, author; convert to Catholicism.
155 *Irish Times*, 22 April 1963.

against us. This would militate against the favourable attitude towards our Government which intends adopting a free State".[156]

The British government also became involved in Ryan's case. Numerous (British) Labour MPs, trade union branches, and radical groups inundated the Foreign Office with appeals to intervene.[157] Approximately one thousand people attended a public meeting in Hyde Park. The Foreign Office observed that Ryan's case "was becoming very troublesome and meetings were being held in London and Dublin".[158] Britain's agent in Nationalist Spain, Sir Robert Hodgson, was in a better position than Kerney to monitor Ryan's situation. Hodgson's personal appeal to the Nationalist authorities was followed up by official representations.[159]

As the Duke of Alba's telegram hints, Ryan's fate became entangled with the issue of diplomatic relations. Kerney, clearly dissatisfied with his continued accreditation to the Republic, observed:

"I do not know whether any question is likely to arise in the immediate future as to official recognition by Ireland of the Franco regime in Spain. I do not suggest for one moment that any relationship could possibly exist between any such question and the impending fate of Frank Ryan. If, however, there were likely to be any fresh consideration at this stage of our relations with Spain, the opportunity of saving Ryan's life might present itself by reason of considerations of greater weight than any appeal for the exercise of mercy as a favour".[160]

De Valera was unlikely to be persuaded to reconsider his foreign policy by such reasoning. Kerney's urgent appeal to the Nationalists for clemency was not answered for two months and he was forced to rely on journalists like William Carney of the *New York Times* for information.[161] He suspected that Thomas Gunning, who was on better terms than him with Jordana, Sangroniz and Hodgson was slandering him in Burgos.[162] When Kerney learnt from Carney that the Nationalists planned to hand Ryan over to Hodgson, he reported:

"I surmised that they might have some motive of unfriendliness towards myself, or that they might wish, for some reason, to slight the Irish Government, although their supposed attitude would most probably have a

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156 Telegram, Duke of Alba to *Secretaría General*, 8 June 1938, R1105-12, *Archivo de Burgos*.

157 Six Labour Party branches, four MPs, the Six Point Group, the Left Book Club, Woolwich Communist Party, the Belfast Socialist Party, and the Northern Ireland Peace Council urged the Foreign Office to help Ryan. Four parliamentary questions were asked on Ryan's behalf in 1939. The Foreign Office registered more appeals for Ryan than any British Prisoner of War.

158 Foreign Office Memo, 3 July 1939, FO W 10133/6/41.

159 R.A. Butler MP to George Griffith MP, 3 April 1939, FO W 5916/6/41. Foreign Office records reveal that British officials assisted other Irishmen in Spain. W.J. Sullivan, an official at the British Consulate in Valencia, ignored guidelines to smuggle Patrick Keenan, an Irish deserter from the International Brigades, from Spain to prevent his execution by the Republican government (DO 35/553/3).

160 Kerney to Walshe, 16 April 1938, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.

161 Kerney to Walshe, 24 May 1938, D/FA 244/22.

162 *Ibid*. Two Foreign Office documents on Thomas Gunning, listed in the main index, have been misplaced or removed from the Foreign Office series of files.

boomerang-like effect. . . He [Carney] thought, however, that there was dissatisfaction because we had not recognised Franco long ago, and that they connected my visit to Salamanca in March 1937 with the negative result of that visit in so far as recognition was concerned".[163]

Ryan's treatment indicates that despite Kerney's friendly relations with de Mamblas, the minister's standing in Nationalist Spain was not high.

Kerney, under pressure to improve his standing at Burgos, told de Mamblas "off the record" that his government had notified him that it "was anxious to effect recognition of General Franco's Government as soon as possible":

"It may be that my deliberate indiscretion may have the effect of making the Spanish nationalist authorities think twice before doing anything which might be construed as a slight, and which - as I pointed out to Carney for the benefit of his friends in Burgos should he be seeing them soon again - would disservice Franco's cause and merely give fresh ammunition for a useless newspaper campaign in Ireland to rouse opinion against the Irish Government".[164]

By the summer of 1938, Ryan was out of immediate danger due to the protests of Kerney, Hodgson and De Valera.[165] However, Ryan's incarceration, which continued long after the release of other International Brigade volunteers, remained a source of contention between both governments and damaged relations between Kerney and Sir Maurice Peterson, Hodgson's successor. In July 1939, Dulanty requested the Dominions Office to instruct Peterson to support Kerney's efforts to free Ryan. Peterson informed Kerney:

"You will remember our discussing the case of Mr. Ryan some weeks ago . . . the High Commissioner for Eire in London had expressed the hope to my Government that I will support your representations".[166]

Peterson was shocked by Kerney's reply:

"We certainly did not discuss it . . . I could scarcely have discussed it with you in view of the fact that I have too clear a conception of my duty as Irish Minister to do anything which might leave it to be inferred that an Irish citizen could be an object of paternal concern for any Government other than that of his country . . . If I were to take advantage of your kind offer . . . I would be guilty of creating fresh doubts as to whether Mr. Ryan is an Irish citizen or a British subject; such doubts in this regard as existed when your predecessor, Sir Robert Hodgson, appeared to be taking a friendly interest in this case have since been dispelled by me".[167]

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163 *Ibid.*

164 *Ibid.*

165 The British Foreign Office believed it was responsible for Ryan's survival. A memo noted "Ryan was reported to have been in charge of the execution squads of the International Brigade. The Spanish Government therefore almost certainly consider him a common murderer, and this may be the charge on which he was condemned to death, which sentence, thanks to intervention by Sir. R. Hodgson, having been subsequently committed to one of 30 years imprisonment" (5 July 1939, FO W 10335/6/41).

166 Peterson to Kerney, 4 July 1939, FO W 10600/6/41.

167 Kerney to Peterson, 8 July 1939, *Ibid.* Kerney clearly continued to resent the suggestion that the Nationalists were going to hand Ryan over to Hodgson the previous year.

A Foreign Office official minuted "A nice little example of 'team-work' with the Empire!". R.A. Butler MP telephoned Dulanty to inform him of the exchange of correspondence and Kerney's attitude.[168]

An attempt by de Valera to mediate an end to the Spanish Civil War in the summer of 1938 may also have adversely affected relations with the Nationalists. In July, Dulanty met Dr. Malcolm de Lilliehook, head of the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees in Spain, who was attempting to gain support for an initiative proposed by Juan Negrín, the Republican prime minister. Negrín believed he could negotiate a surrender if Franco agreed to remove his foreign soldiers from Spain and prevent "wholesale massacres" in Republican territory.[169] Dulanty, although sceptical, arranged a meeting between Joseph Walshe and de Lilliehook. They suggested offering Franco the immediate abdication of the Republican government, demobilisation of its forces, and impartial economic reconstruction on a generous scale if he repatriated all German and Italian soldiers and agreed to ban reprisals.[170]

External Affairs officials conceded that the initiative's acceptance would be a "splendid thing" but strongly urged de Valera not to proceed. They argued that Franco would regard a truce as an opportunity for the Republic to re-arm and that if there had been any likelihood succeeding, the British government – "only to glad to get the kudos for themselves" – would have supported it:

"It is unlikely that Franco would accept anything less than the complete surrender of his opponents. No doubt, in order to obtain that he would be ready to give a guarantee of no reprisals. Dr. de Lilliehook's belief that Franco will adopt any other attitude at our insistence can only be described as childish . . . Any attempt on our part - and it would be bound to fail - to put an end to the Spanish war by following the suggestion of Dr. de Lilliehook could only lead to a loss of goodwill and prestige".[171]

Kerney was instructed to cancel his holidays and prepare for a "special mission".[172] De Valera, however, pursued the initiative through the Vatican officials who would certainly receive a better hearing than Kerney. On August 16, Dr. Paschal Robinson, the Irish Papal Nuncio, cabled Cardinal Pacelli, the Vatican secretary of state:

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168 Foreign Office Minutes, 15-17 July 1939, *Ibid.* Prior to this, relations between Kerney and the British officials in Spain were good. In 1936 Sir Henry Chilton reported – "He [Kerney] seems an agreeable man and has a pleasant French wife who seems to have acquired an Irish accent. He apparently desires to be friendly" (FO W 340/340/41). In June 1939, Peterson commented – "Though he [Kerney] has previously stated that his instructions from Mr. de Valera were not to treat the English in a more friendly way than other foreigners he seems most anxious to co-operate with me and most appreciative of small attentions. He is an ardent golfer" (FO W 10390/3612/41).

169 Negrín-de Lilliehook Memo, Barcelona, 7 July 1938, D/FA S92 (1995 release).

170 External Affairs Memo entitled *Peace Terms for Spain*, 5 August 1938, D/FA S92.

171 External Affairs Memo, 10 August 1938, *Ibid.*

172 Walshe to Kerney, 15 August 1938, *Ibid.*

"Mr. de Valera believes that if General Franco were ready to give an assurance that there would be no executions or acts of vengeance, a cessation of hostilities could be negotiated - particularly if General Franco were to be generous in his terms".[173]

Robinson asked Pacelli to instruct the Spanish Papal Nuncio, Geatano Cicognani, to discuss the proposal with General Jordana, Franco's foreign minister. The Vatican was not enthusiastic. On September 22, Pacelli sent Jordana's reply to Robinson which, Pacelli added, "reflects completely the reality which the Holy Father, with his great vision had anticipated":

"Of course absolutely no acts of retaliation have taken place, not even those which could be motivated by a natural desire for justice . . . There is only one option for Red Spain; total surrender to the benevolence of General Franco".[174]

Macaulay reported that Franco's inflexible stance met with some understanding from Vatican officials:

"The Holy See appears to believe that there is no possibility of bringing about mediation between the two factions in Spain. For one thing it is not at all in the interests of Bolshevism to have the civil war ended except by the victory of the Barcelona Government and any tendency to compromise would be most strongly resisted by the Communist Parties backed by Moscow".[175]

The communist faction of the Republican army would not have surrendered easily but there were more compelling reasons for the failure of mediation. Franco was vehemently opposed to any compromise:

"Those who desire mediation serve the reds and the hidden enemies of Spain . . . National Spain has won and will not allow anything or anyone to rob her of her victory or to whittle it down".[176]

When F.T. Cremins,[177] the Irish representative at the League of Nations, met Franco's unofficial agent in Geneva, Domingo de las Bárcenas, he suggested, under instruction from de Valera, that "it might help to bring about a cessation of hostilities" if Franco reassured the Republic about reprisals. Bárcenas replied:

". . . of course there would have to be justice. He, for example, knew the man who had murdered his sister, and he added that 100,000 persons had been murdered by the Reds in Madrid alone".[178]

De Valera, like most observers, probably underestimated Franco's capacity for brutality. Franco's attitude to mediation reflected his belief that the civil war was "an all-or-nothing, life or death struggle which had to end with the total annihilation of the Republic and its supporters".[179] But although the scale of executions in Nationalist territory was not widely

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173 Robinson to Pacelli, 16 August 1938, *Ibid.*

174 Translation, Pacelli to Robinson, 22 September 1938, *Ibid.*

175 Macaulay to Walshe, 21 September 1938, *Ibid*.

176 *Heralde de Aragón*, 28 August 1938. Franco told *Le Temps* (12 October 1938) "the only possible end to the war was the unconditional surrender of the vanquished" (D/FA 227/87).

177 Francis Thomas Cremins (1885-1975): b. Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary; civil servant, Dept. of Posts and Telegraphs, 1903-22; joined Dept. of External Affairs, 1922; League of Nations delegate, 1934-40; chargé d'affaires, Irish legation, Berne, 1940-9.

178 Cremins to Walshe, 5 October 1938, D/FA 227/87.

179 Paul Preston, *Franco* (London, 1993) p.224.

known it was naïve for de Valera to expect Franco to forego reprisals in return for a victory which was, by that stage, inevitable. It could be argued that the government was merely attempting, as External Affairs put it, "to get the kudos for themselves" but the initiative suggests that de Valera was willing to ignore the cautious option in favour of an active but neutral role in Europe. The involvement of the Vatican is also interesting. While Irish politicians always sought a close relationship with the Vatican, it is likely that by late 1938 with most European states belonging to opposing alliances and war approaching, de Valera saw the Vatican as an increasingly important neutral ally.

The government also demonstrated concern on the question of Basque refugees. Dulanty was instructed to inform the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief that requests "to admit Basque or other Spanish refugee children" would receive "sympathetic consideration".[180] These humanitarian initiatives were influenced by political prejudices. When Paul Perrin, secretary of the *Bureau International Pour Le Respect Du Droit D'Asile Et L'Aide Aux Réfugies Politiques* requested the Irish government to accept some of the three hundred and fifty thousand Spanish refugees in France, Joseph Walshe indignantly noted:

"Apart from the title of the organisation, in itself highly suspect . . . [Perrin] would like our Government to give employment to a certain number of Spanish Reds who apparently do not wish to return to their own country. Would you be good enough to inform M. Perrin that Ireland, having an unemployment problem of her own, is not in a position to give employment to outsiders".[181]

Another example of this bias occurred when the Committee for Spanish Relief requested financial aid. Joseph Walshe instructed Dulanty to inform them that the "Irish people have already sent considerable money to Spain" – a reference to the collections of the Hierarchy and Christian Front which were handed over to the Nationalist army![182]

Throughout 1938 the Nationalist authorities grew increasingly impatient towards states which refused diplomatic recognition. In September, Kerney reported that de Mamblas had complained about a "very disappointing" Dáil speech by de Valera:

"he [de Mamblas] said that he had discussed this matter in Burgos and that the decision had been left in his hands as to whether a protest should made by him; he had decided not to do so but to remind me that Burgos was far from considering existing relations between myself and Burgos as being "satisfactory"".[183]

Relations deteriorated further the following month when de Mamblas informed Kerney he was no longer welcome in Nationalist Spain:

"I am sorry to know that Ireland is not included among those countries which are entertaining normal diplomatic relations with SPAIN and that you as the Representative of EIRE should therefore be excluded from the list of Chiefs of Mission whose presence in Spain would be both useful and welcome. During this

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180 Walshe to Dulanty, 26 May 1937, D/FA 243/7.
181 Walshe to Sean Murphy, Paris Embassy, D/FA P2/108.
182 Walshe to Dulanty, 26 May 1937, D/FA 243/7.
183 Kerney to Walshe, 3 October 1938, D/FA Madrid Embassy, 19/4.

last week, Norway, Venezuela and now Denmark have been added to the list as they have taken the decision which was to be expected. When will we see Ireland in their company?"[184]

By late 1938, de Valera was eager to recognise Franco but was constrained by Commonwealth foreign policy. Dulanty strongly argued in favour of immediate *de facto* recognition at a meeting of the High Commissioners. He agreed with Francis Hemming's view that "the time had now come when it might be well to grant General Franco belligerent rights or to close down the Non-Intervention Committee":[185]

"The position of the Eire Government in this connexion was difficult. Eire, like Spain, was a Catholic country, and the President[sic] himself was half a Spaniard. In such circumstances . . . it was difficult to resist the argument that general Franco should be allowed to exercise those belligerent rights to which he was entitled under International Law and which, in fact, he was in practice already exercising".[186]

The pressure to recognise Franco intensified after the fall of Barcelona on January 26. Kerney predictably suggested that "the moment is perhaps opportune for examining afresh the question of our relations with Spain":

"Can it be admitted that the fate of Madrid will be justification for the taking of a decisive step on our part? . . . It may be taken as certain that most of these States that already have agents in Burgos will hasten to accord de jure recognition of the new regime immediately after the fall of Madrid. If we wait, we may find that the Irish Legation may be one of the last to be re-opened in Madrid".[187]

He reminded Walshe that the Holy See, Italy, Germany, Portugal, Hungary, Albania, and Czechoslovakia had already recognised Franco. Of the states with agents in Burgos, Britain was probably uppermost in Kerney's mind. Eager not to appear impatient, Kerney concluded rather unconvincingly - "this is, of course, not intended as an argument in favour of recognition but merely to recall to your mind the precise position as it is to-day".

Walshe replied that de Valera needed time to consider his suggestion – "Having followed a non-interventionist attitude so far, the Minister does not want to give any impression of haste". He instructed Kerney not to promise recognition after the fall of Madrid:

"We might be putting ourselves in the position of being last in the race. The other countries concerned may decide to give recognition long before Madrid has actually fallen".[188]

In fact, the main obstacle was not the desire to avoid appearing hasty but concern about Britain's reaction. Following Kerney's report, Dulanty tested the ground by informing the

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184 *Ibid*, 17 October 1938.
185 The timing of Dulanty's statement is important. By December 1938 the International Brigades had disbanded, Russian aid to Spain had been dramatically scaled down but the massive Italian support was still vital for Franco's success. The end of non-intervention would thus have greatly hastened Franco's victory.
186 Note of a Dominions Office Meeting, 1 December 1938, DO 114/88. Cited in A.J. Canavan, *Irish Political and Press Reactions to European Events*, 1935-39 (Ph.D., University of Ulster, 1992), p.103.
187 Kerney to Walshe, 30 January 1939, D/FA Madrid Embassy 19/4.
188 Walshe to Kerney, D/FA Madrid Embassy, 50/12.

Dominions Secretary, Sir Thomas Inskip, that Ireland would recognise Franco after the fall of Madrid.[189] W.C. Hankinson, a Dominions Office official, prepared a memorandum on the implications of Ireland's proposed action. He noted that similar "awkward constitutional and political questions" had arisen when Ireland decided to accredit a minister to Italy but were resolved when de Valera agreed to delay the appointment. However, Irish recognition of Franco was "much more difficult":

"It is perhaps only slightly anomalous that two of His Majesty's Diplomatic Representatives at the same capital should be accredited to the same Head of State under different titles, but the situation would be much more awkward if, in respect of the same foreign country, His Majesty had two Diplomatic Representatives accredited to different heads of the State".[190]

Hankinson noted that in the cases of Albania (1928), China (1928) and the Spanish Republic (1931) Commonwealth states had taken "identical and simultaneous action" on *de jure* recognition. De Valera had breached this convention in 1932 by not recognising the new government in Chile. In 1937 de Valera again broke with Commonwealth unity on Italy.[191] Considering these precedents, Hankinson concluded that their objection was:

"not so much constitutional as political, i.e. the undesirability of an appearance of divergence of policy in international affairs between the British Commonwealth Governments. In this matter (as is generally recognized) the Eire Government must be regarded as a law unto themselves!"[192]

A memo prepared for Malcolm MacDonald outlining the ambiguous relationship between Foreign Office policy and the Dominion governments noted that "one or two of the Dominions were very touchy about references . . . to the relationship of the Dominions to international affairs":

"The fact is that we communicate very fully with the Dominions on every aspect of international affairs. We send them regularly telegrams containing information as to events and as to our policy or proposed policy. It is open to those Dominions to treat these telegrams either as coming merely for their information or else coming with a view to seeking their own comments or opinions in return. Canada almost invariably treats them simply as coming for their information, and a telegram from Mr. Mackenzie King expressing any view on international affairs is a very rare event . . . Eire adopts generally the same attitude".[193]

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189 Note of a Telephone Call, 1 February 1939, DO 114/97, p.94. Inskip told Viscount Halifax, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that Dulanty "made no statement as to the grounds upon which they based the decision" but Dulanty had called to let the Foreign Secretary have an opportunity to consider "whether he would like to make any observations". See A.J. Canavan (1992) for discussion of this correspondence.

190 Memo A, 7 February 1939, DO 114/97, p.95. Another reason for the Foreign Office's less flexible attitude towards Irish recognition of Italy was that recognition of Abyssinia, and the promotion of that recognition to other states, was the main concession offered by Britain to reach a settlement of Anglo-Italian affairs in April 1938 (William C. Mills, 'Chamberlain, Eden and the Nyon Conference', *The International History Review*, Vol. XV, No. 1, February 1993, p.6).

191 However, because Britain recognised Italy the Irish initiative was less serious than the proposed recognition of Franco's government.

192 Memo A, DO 114/97, pp.95-96.

193 Foreign Office Memo, 23 March 1938, DO 35/576/5.

Ireland emphasised its independence from British policy to the Dominions Office whenever possible. Dulanty even objected to the foreign secretary's references to "consultations" and "public opinion in the Dominions" when he discussed foreign policy at Westminster.[194]

The Foreign Office adopted a more flexible view than the Dominions Office on Ireland's most recent assault on Commonwealth unity. Oliver Harvey informed Hankinson that the Foreign Office did not consider the implications "should be given quite so much weight".

"We feel that it is difficult to maintain any longer the constitutional principle that Foreign Governments should be recognised by all the Dominions simultaneously. Therefore, if General Franco were to be recognised at different times by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, and by Ireland, we could make no objection on constitutional grounds".[195]

The Dominions Office accepted this conclusion but only, it emphasised, because:

"it was clear that recognition of General Franco's Government by the United Kingdom Government would be only a question of time, and that the view would not necessarily hold good on any future occasion".[196]

Irish recognition of Franco in February 1939, although anomalous, presented Britain with no strategic difficulties. De Valera knew that if British recognition was clearly imminent, Ireland's action would be tolerated. This was why recognition could not be offered earlier in the war. De Valera established the precedent of independent recognition of a new government but with the minimum disruption of Anglo-Irish relations. One Fine Gael deputy cynically remarked:

"our Government was hurriedly acting, so that nobody could possibly accuse them that they were following the example of bigger Governments. They were following them, beforehand, judging by the information coming through the Press for the last week".[197]

At midnight, 10 February, Ireland granted General Franco *de jure* recognition.[198] Kerney presented his credentials to Franco on 10 April. The circumstances surrounding the presentation of credentials by J.G. Ontiveros, Aguilar's successor as Spanish representative, to President Hyde suggests that recognition remained a controversial issue in July 1939.[199] To avoid republican protests about Frank Ryan, the government did not notify the press. Ontiveros, to his surprise, only received confirmation of the timing of the

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194 20 May 1938, *Ibid*. Dulanty told the Dominions office that his function at meetings was to receive and provide information only – any views expressed were his own and his government was not involved in consultations on foreign policy.

195 Harvey to Hankinson, 21 February 1939, DO 114/97, p.98. The Foreign Office also felt that because Britain was delaying recognition to keep in step with the French government it was unfair to suggest that Dominion governments should defer action until it suited Britain. (Hankinson, Notes of discussion with Lord Mounsey, 24 February 1939, DO 35/553/5).

196 Hankinson to Harvey, 27 February 1939, DO 114/97, p.98. The Foreign Office was more pragmatic. Harvey replied to Hankinson (17 March 1939) that "no action we take would prevent any one Dominion taking their own line . . . [and] would, most probably, only exasperate the Dominion govt. and incline them to take divergent actions even if they were not otherwise disposed to do so".

197 DD 74, 487.

198 D/FA Madrid Embassy 50/12.

199 J.G. Ontiveros to Burgos, 28 July 1939, R.791-5, *Archivo de Burgos*.

ceremony on the morning it was scheduled. He noted "an extraordinary level of security", which he described as "an uninterrupted line of police from the Spanish legation to Dublin Castle".[200] However, the cortege passed without trouble and the Spanish minister described the public reaction as he as polite and friendly.[201] The presentation of credentials by Ontiveros, almost three years to the day after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War marked the end of a troublesome diplomatic issue for de Valera's government.

Nonetheless, the fact that Irish recognition preceded British recognition (albeit only by seventeen days), with the acceptance if not approval of London, established a significant precedent in Irish foreign policy. Similar to the establishment of legations in other countries, the independent recognition of states represented another stage in de Valera's dismantling of the Free State's ties to the Commonwealth, a process which originated with the Statute of Westminster. Britain's passive response mirrored its "wise and statesmanlike" reaction to de Valera's External Relations Act which substituted dominion relations with external association and established the basis for an independent diplomatic policy.[202]

Ireland's enthusiastic support of non-intervention and the participation of Irish volunteers on the Non-Intervention Board, admittedly with mixed results, marked the origins of what would become a significant Irish contribution to international peace-keeping operations, a tradition which reflected the government's commitment to an active neutrality in world affairs. De Valera's secret attempt to mediate an end to the Spanish Civil War provided further evidence of his belief that small nations could avoid the polarisation of Europe and play an independent and conciliatory role in international affairs.

The Spanish Civil War was a serious test of the government foreign policy. Deirdre McMahon noted that one of the most remarkable aspects of de Valera's Anglo-Irish policy in this period was "its apparent imperviousness to domestic pressures" - a description which could equally apply to de Valera's Spanish policy.[203] His refusal to recognise Franco until the end of the conflict, despite significant domestic opposition between November 1936 and February 1937, prevented Ireland from being internationally perceived as a state with far-right sympathies.

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200 "*. . . un extraordinario servicio de vigilancia y una uninterrumpida sucesión de agentes de Policia durante toda la extensa carrera desde la Legación al Castillo*", *Ibid.*

201 Ontiveros was not impressed by the Irish government's neutrality during the war. One interesting report which he sent to the Spanish Foreign Ministry concerned the news bias of Irish newspapers. Ontiveros summarised one article and commented that "the *Irish Independent* was the only one [newspaper] that picked up the healthy opinion of the true right-wing Catholic sector, and maintained with perseverance the cause symbolised by the Caudillo, and struggled many times with the other newspapers representing the governmental sectors and the people averse to Catholicism, which supported the republican side, the jews and Marxists" (Translation, J.G. Ontiveros to Burgos, 3 June 1939, R.791-5).

202 Nicholas Mansergh, 'Ireland: External Relations 1926-1939', F. McManus (ed.), *The Years of the Great Test, 1926-39* (Cork, 1967) pp.134-5.

203 Deirdre McMahon (1984) p.288.

De Valera's response to the central foreign policy dilemma presented by the Spanish Civil War, the question of diplomatic ties with Spain, demonstrated considerable skill. At the outbreak of the war, the Irish government had to choose between continuing to recognise the deeply unpopular Republican government or General Franco. The latter course demanded breaking with conventional diplomacy, precipitating a diplomatic rift with Britain, and associating Ireland with European fascism. De Valera's policy of continuing technical recognition of the Spanish Republic clearly demonstrated Ireland's neutrality to the international community. It was also a position which de Valera consistently adhered to during this period. He resisted strong British pressure to sever diplomatic relations with Germany in 1939.[204] The government's more subtle policy of breaking off meaningful contact with Republican Spain and developing a closer relationship with Nationalist Spain discreetly reflected its pro-Nationalist sympathies in a manner which resembled Ireland's later 'benevolent neutrality' towards Britain during World War II.

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204 On 1 September 1939, Inskip suggested to Dulanty that if Ireland remained neutral it could at least sever relations with Germany. The Foreign Office's comment that "no such action was taken, and Eire continued to maintain an attitude of neutrality" clearly indicates that the severance of diplomatic relations was inconsistent with neutrality, a point which helps explain de Valera's refusal to officially sever relations with the Spanish Republic during the war. (Dominions Correspondence, March-September 1939, DO 114/98, p.16)

Epilogue

One of the most striking aspects of Irish responses to the Spanish Civil War was the variety of ideologies which commanded support in the Irish Free State. This is illustrated by the participation of the two military contingents. The volunteers of the International Brigades were inspired not just by the desire to protect democracy and oppose the Irish Brigade but by a range of ideologies — communism, republicanism, socialism, anarchism and even syndicalism. Similarly, the convenient description of the Irish Brigade as Blueshirts or fascists inadequately explains their motives. The importance of anti-communism and militant Catholicism should be acknowledged — the International Brigades did not have a monopoly on international solidarity or honourable motives. The volunteers in Spain are often described as republicans and Blueshirts engaged in another round of the Irish civil war. However, the tendency to view Irish history as occurring within a vacuum, isolated from Europe, has become increasingly untenable. Ireland, like other nations, responded to the ideological civil war between left and right which gripped Europe throughout the 1930s. European ideas merged with Irish circumstances; the street-fighting between fascists and communists in Germany was mirrored — albeit in a marginal and distinctively Irish way — by the clashes between Catholic Action activists and left republicans.

In some respects, the two military contingents present stark contrasts. The International Brigade volunteers were mainly urban, working-class, republican and committed left-wing activists. The Irish Brigade volunteers were predominantly rural, representative of a broader socio-economic background, pro-Treaty and pro-Fine Gael although often less politically conscious. These differences partly explain their contrasting experiences in Spain. The motives of the Irish Brigade varied widely. A small minority were fascists, but many wished simply to defend the Catholic Church and fight the "reds". The reality of Franco's Spain — with its conservative Church, reactionary ethos and ruthless repression — was not what the crusaders expected and disillusionment soon followed. In contrast, most of the International Brigade volunteers had clear motives and aims. With few exceptions, they were committed and experienced left-wing agitators. Participation in the war was an extension of their previous activism in Ireland and Britain. Republican Spain, with its political infighting and bitter anti-clericalism, also may not have met their expectations but their political convictions resulted in higher levels of discipline and motivation than within the Irish Brigade. The contrast between the efficiency of the communist-led International Brigades and O'Duffy's inept leadership was also central to the two units performance in Spain.

Yet, there were also similarities between both sets of volunteers. Some went to Spain for the same reasons — boredom, unemployment and a desire for adventure. The political groups which organised both contingents responded to the same political circumstances in Ireland. In 1933-34, General O'Duffy was at the height of his political power with an organisation of over forty thousand activists behind him. Following de Valera's electoral victory the IRA were also, politically and numerically, at their strongest point since the Irish Civil War. But within the next three years, both organisations were broken by a combination of de Valera's ruthless application of public safety powers, Fianna Fáil's political successes and a series of damaging splits. By 1936 both the far-right and far-left groups were the remaining hard-core activists of movements which had been deserted by most of their supporters. The impotent Greenshirt rump and the collapsing Republican Congress/CPI coalition were partly motivated to fight in Spain as a result of their political failure in Ireland.

Domestic reaction to the Spanish Civil War was dominated by the clerical right. The Christian Front embodied many negative aspects of the Free State. The propensity to invent communist conspiracies, the demands for increased censorship, the sectarian and anti-semitic undercurrents of militant Catholicism and the preoccupation with sexual morality were characteristic of the repressive atmosphere of the Irish Free State. Yet the leadership of the irrepressible Patrick Belton has obscured the complex nature of the organisation. There was a more constructive aspect to the Irish Christian Front. Much of the initial popularity of the ICF can be attributed to the support of Catholic Action activists. Corporatism, following the release of *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and before its civilised culling by government committee (1938-43) — proposed an alternative, and not necessarily negative, system of government. Most of the serious support enjoyed by the Christian Front — from prominent Jesuits, the *Irish Catholic*, the *Standard*, and Catholic intellectuals like Liam de Roiste and Alfred O'Rahilly — was intended for Catholic Action as formulated by Pius XI rather than Patrick Belton. However, the Christian Front illustrated the failure of corporatist ideas to make a genuine impact beyond a small number of well-educated Catholics. The ideas discussed by Catholic intellectuals in *Studies* were barely recognisable by the time they filtered down to a local branch of the Christian Front. Despite the enthusiastic resolutions calling for corporatism in Limerick, there was little discussion of the idea, no attempt to implement such polices, and more significantly, no indication that local leaders desired to introduce corporatism. In Limerick, Catholic Action meant anti-communism. Limerick's Christian Front demonstrates another aspect of the organisation. Belton's anti-government agenda was often not shared outside Dublin. The immense popularity of the Christian Front demonstrated Irish interest in Spain and the strength of anti-communism but not necessarily widespread disapproval of the government's foreign policy.

The response of the Catholic Church to the Spanish Civil War demonstrates the importance the clergy attached to European events. This was partly due to the extensive coverage of anti-clerical atrocities in the Catholic press and the presence of many Irish religious in Spain. But the Irish clergy had also closely observed the rise of authoritarian regimes throughout Europe and support for Franco must be seen in the context of clerical approval for right-wing leaders during this period. There was not a deep commitment to parliamentary democracy within the Irish Church, particularly among the more intellectual clergy. This partly reflected political sympathies within the Vatican but the Irish clergy appeared more enthusiastic about authoritarianism than the Catholic Church in countries such as Britain and France.

The Church did not believe the war was particular to Spanish circumstances but viewed it as part of a tide of communism sweeping Europe. There was a widespread belief that the forces aligned against Nationalist Spain — primarily communism but also Freemasonry, Judaism and the secular press — represented a grave threat to the Catholic Church in Ireland. The views of figures at the right-wing fringes of the clergy such as Fr. Edward Cahill and Fr. Denis Fahey were clearly more influential than has previously been acknowledged. It is difficult to correlate this profound fear of communism, which is central to the Church's reaction to the Spanish Civil War, with the marginal position of communism in Ireland. But, although its fear of imminent revolution organised by a conspiracy of communists, mason and Jews was clearly unfounded, the Church astutely identified some of the issues it associated with Spain as a threat to its status. The clergy linked the Spanish Civil War to secularism, state intervention in education and the increasing influence of the non-Catholic press. These issues were hardly to blame for the Spanish Civil War but they reveal the Church's growing unease with the development of modern secular culture.

The boycott of the *Irish Times* and collapse of *Ireland To-day* indicated the importance of the media to the Church. It is not surprising that non-Catholic (or British) sources of news were targeted as a threat to clerical authority. This thesis has suggested that the most significant aspect of clerical support for Franco was not financial, military or even the direct application of pressure on the government but rather its ability to influence popular opinion. The survey of clerical press demonstrates the extraordinary level of pro-Franco propaganda in Catholic periodicals. The regional study of Limerick illustrates the central role of the clergy in disseminating information whether through sermons from the pulpit, organising public lectures, supporting the Christian Front or encouraging local bodies to respond to the war. This influence on popular opinion was the most important pillar of clerical authority in Ireland.

The response of the Labour Party and trade-union movement to the Spanish Civil War has been reassessed by focusing on the opinions of the rank-and-file as well as the leadership. Despite its Workers' Republic constitution and the infiltration of numerous far-left activists, Labour proved impervious to the Popular Front and other forms of Marxist influence. Labour delegates at party conferences were uninterested in ideology. The party leadership was hostile to socialism and, at least publicly, uncritical of the Spanish Nationalists. The traditional interpretation of Labour's response to the war which castigates the leadership for betraying the workers and bowing to clerical pressure is untenable if the opinions of grass-roots trade unionism are considered. The enormous pressure on Labour — from the extreme activities of clerical anti-communists to the more measured threats of the Irish hierarchy — naturally influenced Labour's leadership. But, more significantly, the reaction of workers belonging to the amalgamated unions demonstrated the popular hostility of Irish labour to the Spanish Republic. Regardless of their personal views, the Labour leadership had little choice but to remain neutral to avoid a divisive split on Spain.

Fine Gael's response to Spain was motivated by a range of factors. It was clearly the party most sympathetic to authoritarian movements in the Dáil. Its ambivalent response to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia contrasted with the firm opposition of Labour and Fianna Fáil. Despite the Blueshirt split, the attitude of many Fine Gael deputies indicated that an anti-democratic strain remained within the party — possibly a reaction to their recent political misfortunes. Fine Gael's advocacy of the suppression of communism also contrasted with the views of the other two parties. Its fervent support of General Franco is partly explained by this pronounced anti-communism. There was also an overlap between Fine Gael and the Irish Brigade in the form of senior party supporters such as Padraig Quinn, and a greater number of less senior officials such as Gabriel Lee. As with its attitude to communism, the philosophical basis of Fine Gael's foreign policy differed substantially from that of the government. Fine Gael, at least in opposition, argued for a 'moral' or 'Catholic' foreign policy. Considering that the actions of 'Catholic' countries such as Italy were generally not motivated by religion, it was a concept with some limitations. It was, however, an idea with influential supporters including Joseph Walshe, the secretary of the Department of External Affairs. The party's pro-Franco stance was also motivated by the absence of a bipartisan political tradition in the Dáil. Fine Gael's range of motives and lack of clear policy objectives resulted in an incoherent foreign policy during this period.

De Valera's handling of domestic aspects of the Spanish Civil War must be considered a success. Despite widespread support for Franco throughout Ireland, de Valera managed to convey the importance of non-intervention, neutrality and, to a lesser extent, the continuation of the diplomatic status quo. His position as head of the government and External Affairs added to his control of foreign policy. The spate of pro-Franco resolutions from local bodies, many of them dominated by Fianna Fáil representatives, quickly died

out. The regional study of Limerick shows that aside from the opposition of a small number of Fine Gael politicians, the government's foreign policy attracted little criticism from pro-Franco supporters such as the clergy and even the pro-Fine Gael local newspapers. De Valera's exercise of control over his own party was equally skilful. As the discussion of the Christian Front resolution at the parliamentary party meeting demonstrates, de Valera refused to allow his party to adopt a partisan position. Although Fianna Fáil contained pro-Franco and pro-Republican supporters there was no significant dissension. Local opposition to aspects of government policy was often a response to local issues and was intended to dispel criticism rather than challenge the party leadership. It is difficult to envisage Fine Gael in government during this period responding to Spain with a similar level of equanimity. Fianna Fáil's response to the Spanish Civil War emphasises the discipline, sense of purpose and pragmatic flexibility of the party under de Valera's leadership.

De Valera's handling of the international aspects of the Spanish Civil War was equally successful. Both hostile public opinion and some uneasiness among rank-and file were comfortably subordinated to foreign policy objectives. In fact, as this study demonstrates, membership of the Commonwealth was a far greater restriction than public opinion on de Valera's freedom to pursue an independent policy on Spain. The influence of London and the Vatican on foreign policy was considerable. The Anglocentric nature of foreign policy in this period is illustrated by the Department of External Affairs overriding objective of recognising Franco before Britain. It is a testament to de Valera's political acumen that a potentially embarrassing issue, diplomatic recognition of Franco, was turned to his advantage and used to weaken Ireland's ties to Commonwealth foreign policy.

The extent of Leopold Kerney's influence on policy offers an interesting case study of the role of Irish diplomats. Kerney attracted criticism during the Second World War for his contacts with German intelligence agents and was suspected of not disclosing full reports of his diplomatic activities. Kerney's role during the Spanish Civil War also proved controversial. He adopted a strongly partisan attitude towards the Nationalists which he maintained throughout the war. He consistently argued for the earliest possible recognition of Franco's regime and under-emphasised Republican disapproval of Ireland's position in his reports to Dublin. He was partly responsible for the closeness of Ireland's relationship with the Nationalists and the lack of contact with the Republic. However, there is little evidence to suggest that he significantly influenced De Valera. Irish neutrality was demonstrated by de Valera's refusal to allow either Nationalist or Republican representatives into Ireland during the war although subtle concessions granted to the Nationalists indicated the government's sympathies. Nonetheless, de Valera's neutrality is illustrated by the fact that both Nationalist and Republican diplomats resented the Irish government's foreign policy. Irish policy on Spain demonstrates the increasing importance

attached to neutrality in this period but, as de Valera's mediation offers of 1936 and 1938 indicate, it was a constructive neutrality rather than a negative isolationism.

Commemoration

The Spanish Civil War has earned a place in popular Irish culture, not because of the response of the government, political parties or the Catholic Church but because of the role of the small number of men who volunteered to fight in Spain. The popular memory of both groups of volunteers offers a fascinating insight into how changing political and cultural circumstances transforms the recollection of historical events. O'Duffy's final appraisal of the Irish Brigade has not as yet proved prophetic:

"We have been criticised, sneered at, slandered, but truth, charity, and justice shall prevail, and time will justify our motives. We seek no praise. We did our duty. We went to Spain". [1]

History has judged their intervention in Spain harshly.[2] Although three times as many Irishmen fought for Nationalist Spain as for the Republic there are no Irish memorials to the Brigade. There is no association to commemorate their participation in the Spanish Civil War. A memorial to the Irishmen who fought in Spain, unveiled in 1991 by the Lord Mayor outside Liberty Hall as part of Dublin's year as Cultural Capital of Europe commemorates only the International Brigaders. The role of the Brigade has been similarly overlooked in Spain. In 1996 the government of King Juan Carlos offered Spanish citizenship to the volunteers of the International Brigades who fought to protect the Spanish Republic. The men of the Irish Brigade have largely been forgotten.

Those involved in the 'Connolly Column' are remembered in popular Irish culture as heroes; the Irish Brigade are remembered, if at all, with derision.[3] The ineffective military performance of the Irish Brigade, the contrast between their low casualty rate and that of the International Brigades and their early return are partly to blame. The volunteers also fell victim to the shift in public perceptions of right-wing movements which followed World War II. When the Irish Brigade left for Spain they were feted by many clerics, politicians and the *Irish Independent* as defenders of the Catholic Church. Decades later, they are remembered now only as defenders of Franco's fascistic regime. In contrast to the Connolly Column there is no political tradition or section of opinion which wishes to keep the memory of the Brigade alive. During the last sixty years, as the once condemned "reds" of the International Brigades gained the proper respect due for their premature anti-fascism, the reputation of the men who offered their services to Spain and the Catholic Church was gradually destroyed.

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[1] Eoin O'Duffy (1938) p.248.

[2] R.A. Stradling (1997) pp.130-2.

[3] Christy Moore's *Vive el Quinte Brigada* contrasts the heroic International Brigaders with O'Duffy's 'fascist' contingent. The Irish Brigade are further ridiculed in Brendán O'hEithir, *The Begrudger's Guide to Irish Politics* (Dublin, 1986) p.82 and Brendan Behan, *Confessions of an Irish Rebel* (London, 1965) p.133. *The Sick Bed of Cuchulainn* by The Pogues favourably recounts imagined adventures with Frank Ryan in Madrid.

In contrast, the reputation of the Irish volunteers of the International Brigades has grown throughout the last six decades. The vicissitudes of Comintern policy — particularly the Non-Aggression Pact and the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Hungary — resulted in the estrangement of many International Brigade veterans from the party.[4] As Sean Murray, the former secretary general of the CPI confided to a friend who inquired about the veterans in 1966:

"I should say there are far more who have gone by the wayside or into other paths than have passed on, few, however, have passed to the other side and joined the enemy . . . though there are some who have become soured, bitter, cynical and to a degree hostile".[5]

Despite the disappearance of the far left as a political force the popular memory of the Connolly Column has not diminished. In 1984, Tommy Patton's death on the Jarama front was commemorated with a monument on Achill Island unveiled by the chairman of Sligo County Council and the chairman of the Labour Party.[6] The Irish volunteers were honoured, with the rest of the British Battalion, by a memorial erected in the Jubilee Gardens opposite the Houses of Parliament in 1985.[7] In Dungarvan, a plaque to Michael Lehane, who survived Spain to die serving in the Norwegian merchant navy, was erected by the Killarney Republican Graves Association in 1989.[8] In 1991, a plaque was erected to honour the Connolly Column at Liberty Hall by the Dublin Trades' Union Council and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions — two bodies which refused to support the International Brigades in the 1930s. On May Day 1994, the Waterford branch of the ATGWU and the Trades' Council erected two plaques to the local volunteers who served in Spain. The head of the Trades' Council, whose predecessor helped to found the Waterford ICF branch sixty years before, declared that the commemoration "would also serve to expose the reactionary role played by the Christian Front".[9] *An Phoblacht*, the newspaper of the republican movement which warned IRA volunteers not to fight in Spain has also embraced the Connolly Column as part of its republican tradition.[10] Perhaps the greatest honour came in 1996, when the promise of Dolores Ibarruri, the Spanish communist leader, was fulfilled and Irish volunteers were granted the right to Spanish citizenship.

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4 Eugene Downing interview, January 1996. Not all lost the faith. As late as 1976 Tom Murphy declared "Stalin had to be hard, had to be cruel to be kind, and he built the Red Army up and all the machinery, so I take my hat off to Stalin and what he came through. Although it doesn't say it in the *Daily Worker* I still say he was a great man. He'll come back and be put in front alongside Lenin later on for his greatness" (Tom Murphy interview, SCW 805/2, IWM).

5 Sean Murray to Seán Gannon, 1966, D2162/A/89, Sean Murray papers, PRONI.

6 *Irish Times*, 8 September 1986.

7 Due to the insistence of Joe Monks, an expatriate Irish veteran, trade-union activist and member of the memorial committee, the wording of the memorial was altered. Instead of commemorating only British involvement, the memorial honours the "men and women volunteers who left these shores to fight side by side with the Spanish people" partly in recognition of the large number of Irishmen who left, and returned to, Britain (Joe Monks interview, Spanish Civil War collection, IWM).

8 The Norwegian government awarded Lehane the Norwegian War Medal in January 1997.

9 For locations and details of these memorials see Colin Williams, Bill Alexander, and John Gorman (ed.s), *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War* (Gloucestershire, 1996).

10 *'Vive la Quince Brigada'*, *An Phoblacht*, 11 September 1986.

In recent years, particularly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the role of the International Brigades, and its commemoration through such monuments, numerous meetings, and written accounts has become an increasingly important part of the historiography of the Irish far left.[11] The historical importance of the Spanish Civil War to the far left is symbolised by the struggle over Frank Ryan's legacy. The curious fate of Ireland's best known anti-fascist, who died in Spain as a reluctant adviser to German military intelligence, has attracted much controversy. Richard English referred to the "distinguished guest" in Germany "drawing double rations" to question the relationship between republicanism and anti-fascism.[12] Yet, as far as the left was concerned, Ryan was another victim of Nazism. By the 1960s, his legacy had been co-opted by the communist tradition. An International Brigade veteran at Ryan's grave in Dresden, East Germany declared:

"He died in enemy hands, but the soil in which he rests is now friendly soil. He rests in a land dedicated to the cause of freedom and peace for which he lived and died . . . But the day will come when both Ireland and Germany will be unified once more in a world without war".[13]

Ryan had become myth. Throughout the 1960s republican and communist groups denounced each other as "fascists" to the East German government in a long struggle to gain control of Ryan's remains.[14] Eventually, a compromise was agreed and Ryan was returned to Ireland where he was re-interred as "a staunch anti-Fascist" in 1979.[15]

But it is not only the radical left who have shared in the legacy of the International Brigades. A picture commemorating the Irishmen of the International Brigades now hangs in the Dublin offices of the Labour Party which refused to support the Spanish Republic or the International Brigade volunteers and described the Communist Party, the organisers of the Brigade, as "the bitterest enemies of the official Labour movement".[16] The trade union movement which opposed the Spanish Republic in the 1930s financed most of the memorials to the volunteers recently erected in Ireland.

Why have the radical outcasts of the 1930s assumed such a central role in the Irish left's reconstruction of the past? In part the political rehabilitation of the once reviled volunteers reflects a transformed popular view of the nature of the Spanish Civil War; in the 1930s it

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11 Internationally as well as domestically — sixty thousand copies of a Russian translation of Michael O'Riordan's *Connolly Column* were distributed in the Soviet Union (*Saothar 13*, 1988, p57).

12 Richard English, *Radicals and the Republic* (Oxford, 1995) p.250.

13 Speech at laying of wreath, 21 July 1961, Box 28/G/8, International Brigade Archives, Marx Memorial Library.

14 For example, Sean Nolan and Michael O'Riordan described the attempts of the "pro-fascist" Irish-German society to return Ryan's remains as an attempt to "play down his anti-fascist record and to deliver a blow against all progressive forces in our country". Irish Workers' League to Zentralkomitee Sozialistiche Einheitspartei, Berlin, DDR, Box 28/G.

15 Colin Williams *et al* (1996) p.53; Eilís Ryan, 'Oral History, Eilís Ryan In Her Own Words', *Saothar 21*.

16 Dáil Debates, 64, 934; *Labour News*, 20 February 1937.

was widely perceived as a war against Catholicism, it is now remembered as a war against fascism. The enthusiasm of the moderate left to celebrate the war may also be connected to a sense of embarrassment or atonement for their failure to support Republican Spain. The commemoration also marks a recognition of the commitment and bravery of the Irishmen who fought and died for the Spanish Republic and an acknowledgement of the importance of those who understood the enormous threat posed by fascism. However, the legacy of the Connolly Column has also had an important political function for the Irish left. Their participation in Spain stands out as inspiring achievement amidst a period which in reality marked the submergence of the radical left in a conservative Ireland which rejected its political philosophy.[17] The very presence of an Irish contingent in the International Brigades suggests a vibrancy and a status for the Irish left which was essentially illusory. Ironically, the failure of the radical Irish left to sustain itself in Ireland during the 1930s has, in historical terms, been largely obscured by the commemoration of its participation in the greatest failure of the international left during that decade.

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17 As Eugene Downing stoically reflected: "It saved the Irish left from political oblivion. They wouldn't be heard of at all only for their involvement in the Spanish Civil War. . . This saved them from oblivion. So they all rushed over there, which to say didn't come to anything either, but nevertheless they were more part of history by becoming involved in that" (Eugene Downing interview, January 1996).

Appendix 1 – The Irish Brigade[1]

General O'Duffy
(Inspector General)

Patrick Dalton[2]
(Major of the Irish Brigade)

Company Captains:

A Coy. (Infantry)	Dermot O'Sullivan (Kerry)
B Coy. (Infantry)	Tom F. Smith (Antrim)
C Coy. (Infantry)	Padraig Quinn (Kilkenny)
D Coy. (Machine-Gun)	Sean Cunningham (Antrim)

Captains based at Irish Brigade Headquarters:

James Finnerty (Dublin)	Tom Carew (Tipperary)
Thomas Gunning (Sligo)	A. O'Farrell (Canadian/Irish)

Lieutenants:

Tom Hyde (Cork)	George Timlin (Dublin)
Tom Cahill (Tipperary)	Peter Lawlor (Kildare)
Dave Tormey (Westmeath)	Tom O'Riordan (Cork)
Eamon Horan (Kerry)	Gilbert Nangle (Kerry)
Lieut. Hagen (Cork)	Lieut. Sheehy (Roscommon)
Michael Fitzpatrick	James Clancy (Tipperary)
Michael Cagney (Cork)	Patrick Gallagher (Sligo)
Edward Murphy (Wicklow)	Joseph Hughes (Longford)

Approximately 650 Irish Legionaries.

26 Spanish liaison officers (including at least nine aristocrats).

3 Doctors, 2 Chaplains, 2 Nurses.

16-man St. Mary's Anti-Communist Pipe Band.

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[1] Source: folder 55, Fr. Alex McCabe papers.

[2] Patrick Dalton and Tom Smith returned to Ireland in March 1937. O'Sullivan took over as acting-major, Tom Cahill captain, A Coy. and Dave Tormey, captain B Coy.

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VIII Appeals

VI Joseph Cardinal MacRory

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James Jump (9524/6)

Peter Kerrigan (810/6)

Maurice Levine (9722)

Maurice Levitas (16358)

Bernard McKenna (845/5)

Joe Monks (11303/4)
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