

The Third Reich and Spain

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In this essay, I am going to analyze the relations between the Third Reich, the Second Spanish Republic and the Franco Regime, from 1931 until 1945. Due to the vast and complex nature of my topic, I will have to make a selection of specific events that are of relevance to my argument and leave aside a number of less relevant, yet important developments which I will attempt to mention in my footnotes.

I. NAZI ACTIVITIES IN SPAIN BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The Nazi infiltration of the Iberian Peninsula started off in Portugal in 1930 when a National Socialist organisation was founded by Friedhelm Burbach, a German working as an “export merchant” in Lisbon. Burbach maintained close relations with the Portuguese authorities and wrote pamphlets and articles against the “Jewish” Weimar Republic. In 1931/1932 he extended his connections into Spain with the help of Walter Zuchristian, an employee of the Siemens agency in Madrid. Burbach was eventually promoted to be the Nazi Foreign Commissioner for Spain and Portugal in 1933, shortly after the National Socialist “seizure of power”.¹

In their early days, the National Socialist activists in Spain were very careful not to raise suspicion, fearing reprisals from the Republicans and the Spanish Left. The weak dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) had just collapsed and had brought the monarchy down. Spain’s Second Republic, inaugurated in April 1931, was governed by an alliance of middle-class Republicans and reformist Socialists. It was one of the only regimes in Europe to go against the tide of authoritarian and fascist politics at the time.² In a letter to Burbach, dated June 12, 1933, Zuchristian described the attitude of the Nazi activists as follows:

“We are biding our time. For the time being we are keeping quiet and making all preparations to be in a position to become active when the swing comes. (...) Don’t worry; our [local sections] are ready for that moment.”³

¹ Emile Burns, *The Nazi Conspiracy in Spain* (London, 1937), 58-60. The author draws his knowledge on the National Socialist activities in Spain from a substantial amount of documents seized by the militia in a series of house-to-house searches of the Spanish Nazi headquarters, their subsidiary organisations and a number of individuals in the Republican zone, just a few days after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

² Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-45* (London, 1995), 254.

³ Burns, *Nazi Conspiracy in Spain*, 61.

The National Socialists did not have to wait for long. The Cortes⁴ elections in Spain in November 1933 brought victory to the centre and right. By mid-1933 the NSDAP had also become the only legal party in Germany and was now in full control of the State Treasury. The new political situation in Spain and the sudden increase in available funds created better conditions for more widespread German activity.

The Spanish section of the AO⁵ worked closely together with the German Embassy in Spain, the Reich Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Reich Ministry of National Enlightenment and Propaganda. The German Embassy being somewhat restricted in its actions due to its official representative function, the AO and its subsidiaries came to play a very important role in establishing closer connections to the Spanish Right, monitoring organisations and individuals that were opposed to National Socialism and promoting the development of a pro-German press. The infiltration of the Spanish press followed a very cautious procedure. Advertising funds were used to bribe newspapers to support the policy of National Socialism or to finance Spanish pro-German publications that were lacking financial resources.⁶ Articles – the topics ranging from “the development of a social science of dentistry”⁷ to openly aggressive criticism of France or the United Kingdom – were written in Germany⁸, translated into Spanish (and usually given a Spanish signature) and finally passed on to Spanish agencies which undertook to place them in the press.⁹ The AO was also charged with recruiting Spaniards willing to distribute

⁴ The Spanish Parliament is called ‘los Cortes’.

⁵ In 1930 the *Auslandsorganisation* of the NSDAP (in English: Foreign Organisation of the NSDAP; hereafter abbreviated AO), originally named *Bund der Freunde der Hitlerbewegung* (in English: League of Friends of the Hitler Movement), was founded on the initiative of Bruno Fricke, an ethnic German living in Paraguay, and Gregor Strasser. Its aims were the promotion of Nazi ideals abroad, the creation of Nazi cells in foreign countries and the enrolment of ethnic Germans from all over the world in the NSDAP, as well as the collection of information on local attitudes towards Germany and National Socialism. The AO started its activities in South America; the first branch of the NSDAP abroad (in Buenos Aires, Argentina) was officially recognized on August 7, 1931. By the end of August 1933, over 230 local and nationwide branches of the NSDAP had been set up in foreign countries all across the globe.

(<http://motlc.wiesenthal.com/text/x02/xm0208.html>) (12.12.2003))

After 1933 the AO entered close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Enlightenment and Propaganda, and was eventually incorporated as a separate branch into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1937.

(<http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/infoservice/download/pdf/geschaa.pdf>) (12.12.2003), page 4)

⁶ For an example, see Annex – Document 1.

⁷ Burns, *Nazi Conspiracy in Spain*, 38.

⁸ e.g. by the Hamburg-Bremen Information Committee. (Burns, *Nazi Conspiracy in Spain*, 37-39)

⁹ *Ibid.*, 29-30: In 1934, over one hundred and sixty such articles appeared in thirty different Spanish journals. The number of articles increased substantially over the years and, as the newspapers were paid for each issue in which they published one of those articles, the budget for articles grew. The author claims that even small provincial papers received up to 250 pesetas per issue and that, for example, the budget for articles for the month of September 1935 alone amounted to 22,450 pesetas!

pamphlets, literature on National Socialism and other propaganda material that were smuggled into Spain via a range of different channels.¹⁰

Another important organisation was the Harbour Service, a sub-section of the GESTAPO.¹¹ The Harbour Service was watching, amongst others, the conduct of German individuals¹² and companies in Spain.¹³

All major German organisations, such as e.g. the German Labour Front, were represented in Spain under one form or another, usually operating under the cover of an innocent-sounding company name.¹⁴

At first, everything seemed to go well for the National Socialist activists operating in Spain and Spanish Morocco¹⁵. A revolutionary insurrection of the Left was drained in blood by the right-wing government in October 1934.¹⁶ The Spanish Right seemed open to National Socialist propaganda, cooperation with the right-wing press was working well and the government was trying to revert some of the reforms achieved by the former Republican government. In mid-1935 however, signs of a crisis started to appear in the Spanish section of the AO. A new left-ward swing in Spanish politics had a demoralising effect on the Nazi groups; at the same time, splits developed in the local sections, caused by the isolation of the head of the AO in Spain, Zuchristian, from the members. Zuchristian was summoned to Berlin at the end of 1935 and replaced by Erich Schnaus.¹⁷

While Schnaus tried to reorganise the Spanish branch of the AO, the political climate seemed to turn even less favourable for National Socialism. Confidential information from Spanish Nazi sympathizers suggested that attacks were to be expected from the Spanish

¹⁰ Ibid., 49-50. See Annex – Document 2, and Annex – Document 3. These contacts were, in part, gathered with the help of the German radio. At the end of each Spanish broadcast, the listeners were invited to send the radio company their comments; people who wrote to the German radio were notified to the AO and their addresses listed in a directory. (Burns, 93-94)

¹¹ Note: The Harbour Service was not only operating in Spain; it was active in all foreign countries in which the AO had local sections.

¹² For an example, see Annex – Document 4.

¹³ Ibid., 136-176.

¹⁴ I will not go in further detail concerning the general procedures of the above-mentioned organisations as they were basically the same in every country in which the Nazis were active. For more information on specific actions of the National Socialist organisations in Spain, see Burns, *Nazi Conspiracy in Spain*. Of course, the author does draw his knowledge exclusively from the selection of documents at his disposal in 1937, and as a result is obviously mistaken as far as some minor details are concerned, also his style of writing is sometimes closer to that of a pamphleteer than to that of a scholar of history, but I believe that the book still manages to give an interesting description of the general nature of Nazi activity in Spain before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

¹⁵ The propaganda work in Spanish Morocco was mainly aimed at turning the Arabs against the Jews; the sections in Spanish Morocco also smuggled pamphlets into French Morocco to create anti-French sentiment among the population there. (Burns, 177-195)

¹⁶ Payne, *History of Fascism*, 254.

¹⁷ Burns, *Nazi Conspiracy in Spain*, 66-68.

authorities. By the end of 1935, it became more and more apparent that the Spanish Right was not in a position to win the coming elections. The headquarters of the AO in Spain made its preparations. Model institutions in Spanish were issued to the local sections so that they could register themselves as harmless associations or companies. Officially, there was no Nazi headquarters for Spain nor was there a Foreign Organisation.¹⁸

The elections on February 16, 1936 brought a clear victory to the Frente Popular.¹⁹ The National Socialists' fears of an intervention by the Spanish authorities grew stronger; on February 18, postal communication with Party offices inside and outside Spain was suspended and all documents were ordered to be brought to the official Reich Consulates or stored in a safe place. In March, large section meetings were prohibited and a new style of communication was introduced, supposed to sound like mere "business correspondence".²⁰ In April 1936, Schnaus passed his post as head of the Spanish branch on to Hans Hellermann and the AO headquarters was moved from Madrid to Barcelona.²¹

It is hard to measure exactly how efficient the National Socialists were in their propaganda efforts before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Right generally seems to have maintained its predominantly Catholic nationalist, partly monarchist, character throughout the period of the Second Republic. The extreme Right by and large showed an inclination towards Italian Fascism rather than German National Socialism; however most leader of the radical Right tried to avoid being referred to simply as 'fascists'.²²

Nonetheless the National Socialists had managed to establish contacts with leading figures of the Spanish Right and members of the UME²³, such as e.g. General Goded. José María Gil Robles, one of the leading figures of the Catholic party Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas²⁴, had attended the annual Nazi Party rally at Nuremberg in September 1933.²⁵ In the years to come before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, selected leaders of

¹⁸ Ibid., 68-69.

¹⁹ in English: The Popular Front. The Popular Front was a coalition of the more left-wing Republicans and most of the worker parties.

²⁰ Ibid., 71-75. See also Annex – Document 5.

²¹ Ibid., 77. Schnaus believed that he was too well-known in Madrid; it was feared that the Republican press was close to uncovering the German activities.

²² Payne, *History of Fascism*, 252-267.

²³ Unión Militar Española; in English: Spanish Military Union, founded in 1933.

²⁴ in English: Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rightist Groups; hereafter abbreviated CEDA. The CEDA was an umbrella party regrouping Gil Robles' Acción Popular and a range of other Catholic political organisations. It convened its first national congress in Madrid on February 28, 1933. (Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain 1923-1977* (Madison, WI, 1999), 44)

²⁵ Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain 1923-1977* (Madison, WI, 1999), 45.

the CEDA and other right-wing organisations were offered training courses in Germany.²⁶ From the Nazi correspondence secured by the Republican militia in Barcelona in July 1936 it also becomes apparent that in spring 1936, there was an increase in gun-running, covered up as “potato trade”. German arms were delivered to, amongst others, the Phalanx group in Madrid and members of the Traditionalist party.²⁷ A number of historians have also argued that General José Sanjurjo, designated leader of the military coup, had been promised German support during his visit to Germany in early 1936; this however appears to be most improbable as the future rebels anticipated the availability of the Spanish navy, in which case the use of German aircraft would have been unnecessary.²⁸

II. THE START OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

On July 17, 1936, the garrisons in Spanish Morocco rose. It was, as Sheelagh Ellwood has put it, the confirmation of “what everyone except the government had deemed imminent for months”.²⁹ The Spanish Civil War had begun.³⁰

General Franco left his ‘exile’, the Canary Isles³¹, and arrived in Tetuán, Spanish Morocco, on July 19, 1936. Within a matter of weeks, he had completely changed his reluctant attitude towards the idea of a military rising and was now about to assume the role of the major protagonist of the rebellion. Both the Spanish government and the rebels were turning towards foreign nations to get help. The rebels perceived Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany as their main natural allies. On July 22, Franco and Lieutenant-Colonel Beigbeder approached the German Consul in Tetuán, informing him of the “new Spanish Nationalist Government” and requesting him to “send ten troop-transport planes with maximum seating capacity through

²⁶ Burns, *Nazi Conspiracy in Spain*, 62.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 196-230.

²⁸ Christian Leitz, ‘Nazi Germany’s Intervention in the Spanish Civil War and the Foundation of HISMA/ROWAK’, in Paul Preston & Ann L. Mackenzie, eds., *The Republic Besieged: Civil War in Spain 1936-1939* (Edinburgh, 1996), 58.

²⁹ Sheelagh Ellwood, *Franco* (London, 1994), 72.

³⁰ As the title of my essay suggests, I will focus on the German involvement in the Civil War and mention other foreign participants, including Italy, only when necessary.

³¹ The Azaña cabinet had decided on February 16, 1936, to send the generals who were known to be opposed to the Republic away, giving them postings well away from each other in the hope that this would make it harder for them to plot against the Republic. Franco was sent to the Canary Isles. (Ellwood, 63)

private German firms”.³² Two days later, the German Foreign Ministry judged that compliance with Franco’s requests was “out of question”.³³ The same day, the Foreign Ministry was informed by the German Consulate in Tetuán that the Spanish Nationalist Government had seized a German Lufthansa plane at Las Palmas; the plane had been sent to Tetuán and was now on its way to Berlin.³⁴ Aboard the plane were Johannes Bernhardt and Adolf Langenheim³⁵, both members of the Tetuán section of the AO, and a Spanish representative. They had received a letter from Franco to Hitler, in which the General repeated his requests from July 22.³⁶

Lufthansa plane “Max von Müller”³⁷ arrived in Berlin the following morning. After short meetings with Bohle³⁸ and Rudolf Hess, Langenheim and Bernhardt met Hitler in Bayreuth that very night. Hitler agreed to put twenty transport planes at Franco’s disposition. His decision was at first received with discontent by Göring and von Ribbentrop – after all support of the Spanish Nationalist cause could result in serious international complications for Germany – but Hitler convincingly argued that Germany could not tolerate “a communist Spain”. Eventually the National Socialists’ fear of being surrounded by communist nation-states prevailed. It was feared that, in the event of a “communist victory” in Spain, France would soon fall into communist hands as well.³⁹ The geographic position of Spain, lying in the back of France and at the gates of the Mediterranean Sea, was of considerable strategic importance.⁴⁰ A special staff, *Sonderstab W*, was set up to control the organisation of the supply operation, run under the code name *Unternehmen Feuerzauber*⁴¹. Towards the end of July, both Italy and Portugal also promised to lend their support to the rebels.

³² *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 2, p. 3-4. Telegram from the German Consul at Tetuán to the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin, July 22, 1936.

³³ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 5, p. 7. German Foreign Ministry to the War Ministry, Foreign Department, July 24, 1936.

³⁴ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 6, p. 7-8. Telegram from the German Consulate at Tetuán to the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin, July 24, 1936.

³⁵ Adolf Langenheim was head of the AO section in Tetuán; however it appears that Johannes Bernhardt, who had established contacts to some of the leading rebel officers (including General Mola, Lieutenant-Colonel Beigbeder and Lieutenant-Colonel Yagüe) in his function as sales director for H. & O. Wilmer (acting as a trade representative of several German companies in Spanish Morocco), had taken the initiative of mediating between the rebels and Germany. (Leitz, 53-54)

³⁶ H.-H. Abendroth, ‘Die Deutsche Intervention im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg – Ein Diskussionsbeitrag’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 30 (1982), 118.

³⁷ Francisco Olaya Morales, *La Intervención Extranjera en la Guerra Civil* (Móstoles, 1990), 76.

³⁸ Supreme Head of the Auslandsorganisation.

³⁹ Abendroth, 118-122.

⁴⁰ I will elaborate further on this particular point later on in my essay.

⁴¹ in English: Operation Fire Magic.

Bernhardt was flown back to Tetuán on July 28. German transport of rebel troops to Seville started immediately as soon as the symbols of nationality had been removed from the first plane.⁴²

III. THE DETERIORATION OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE THIRD REICH AND THE POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENT (JULY – NOVEMBER 1936)

Some historians have argued that the Reich Government had conspired with the Nationalist rebels against the Spanish Popular Front Government long before the outbreak of the Civil War, but there is no evidence that this was actually the case. For instance, the German Government had even permitted the conclusion of two armament deals by the Friedrich Krupp A.G. with the War Ministry of the Spanish Government back in April 1936.⁴³ On August 1, 1936 however, when the Republican Government approached Sturm, the representative of the German Airplane Industry Association, requesting to purchase pursuit planes, bombers and aerial bombs,⁴⁴ the German Embassy in Madrid advised the Foreign Ministry in Berlin to react in a dilatory manner – without giving “a flat refusal” – as there was “no interest in the victory of the Government”.⁴⁵ Hitler’s decision at Bayreuth had laid down the new path for German policy regarding the Popular Government, but Germany was not yet in a position to openly show her opposition to the Republicans.

On August 4, the Spanish Government urged Sturm to give a clear reply to its requests of August 1, threatening to confiscate Lufthansa commercial planes⁴⁶ or to take other

⁴² Leitz, 62.

⁴³ Leitz, 60.

⁴⁴ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 21, p. 20. Telegram from the German Embassy in Spain to the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin, August 1, 1936.

⁴⁵ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 21, p. 21-22. Telegram from the German Embassy to the German Foreign Ministry, August 2, 1936.

⁴⁶ See: *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 15, p. 15-16, Telegram from the German Embassy in Madrid to the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin, July 29, 1936. On July 29, the Republican Government had learned about the arrival of the first German plane in Tetuán and phoned the German Embassy in Madrid to get an official communication from the Reich Government. In the telegram the Embassy asks for instructions how to answer the questions of the State Secretary of the Republican Foreign Ministry, Ureña, regarding the German shipments to the rebels. Unfortunately, I did not manage to find a document giving me information on the German Foreign Ministry’s reply to the telegram. The Spanish Government was now threatening to use this as a pretext for reprisal actions against Germany.

reprisals.⁴⁷ On August 9, the Spanish authorities seized a German Lufthansa plane and its crew at the airport of Badajoz. The German Government immediately demanded that the crew and the plane be released, claiming that the plane was used only to evacuate German citizens from Spain, and threatened to break off their relations with the Spanish Government.⁴⁸ It was not until August 15 that the Spanish authorities, pressed by the French Government, agreed to release the crew and promised not to make use of the seized airplane which would, however, remain in their hands. The Germans kept insisting on the release of the plane⁴⁹ – the measures taken by the Spanish Government offered the Germans a good excuse for delaying the signing of an International Non-Intervention Agreement prepared by the French and the British. Italy and Germany believed that a delay of the arms embargo on Spain would allow them to strengthen the Nationalist forces and weaken the Madrid Government. Further complications arose when Spanish warships started to interfere with German ships, opened fire at the German steamer *Kamerun* and had it searched by armed soldiers.⁵⁰

First indications of a shift in the German attitude regarding the arms embargo and the Non-Intervention Agreement appear in a telegram, dated August 21, from the German Ambassador in France, Welczeck, to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin:

“Within the [French] Cabinet the moderate members (...) believe they will be able to prevail against the interventionist members (...) only if they can find support very soon in an international obligation regarding an arms embargo.”

“(...) I have become convinced that postponement of final assent to the arms embargo must work to the disadvantage of the rebels, since, from considerations of geography alone, deliveries from countries which sympathize with them could not compete with French support.”⁵¹

Welczeck's views were shared by a number of other leading German figures (such as Admiral Raeder of the Reich Navy⁵² and Foreign Minister von Neurath) who managed to persuade Hitler

⁴⁷ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 28, p. 28. Telegram from the Chargé d'Affaires in Spain to the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin, August 4, 1936.

⁴⁸ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), p. 37, Editor's Note.

⁴⁹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 42, p. 41. Telegram from the Chargé d'Affaires in Spain to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, August 15, 1936.

⁵⁰ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 48, p. 47. Draft Telegram from the Acting State Secretary in Berlin to various German Missions abroad, Aug. 20, 1936.

⁵¹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 49, p. 49. Telegram from the German Ambassador in France to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, August 21, 1936.

⁵² *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 50, p. 50. Memo by the Acting State Secretary, Berlin, August 22, 1936.

of the urgency of the matter⁵³; Germany eventually joined the neutrality declaration on August 24.⁵⁴ This did of course not put an end to the active German support of the rebels.

The relations between Germany and the Spanish Government remained tense. In late August and early September, the participation of German airplanes in attacks flown against Madrid increased the fear of popular violence against German citizens and the German Embassy.⁵⁵

In October 1936 the Italian Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano, met von Neurath in Berlin and Hitler in Berchtesgaden. It was agreed that Germany and Italy would *de facto* recognise the Nationalist Government of Burgos immediately after the fall of Madrid.⁵⁶ Despite Italian requests to recognise Franco before the fall of Madrid, the Germans intended to wait for the fall of Madrid; Franco's advance was considered too slow. The German attitude was changed in mid-November by new blockades imposed by the Spanish Government on German ships travelling to Nationalist ports.⁵⁷ On November 18, Germany and Italy officially recognised the Spanish Nationalist Government, claiming that the Government of General Franco had now "taken possession of the greater part of the Spanish national territory" and that "no responsible government authority" could be "said to exist any longer in the rest of Spain"; the German Chargé d'Affaires was recalled from Alicante. The Chargé d'Affaires of the Republican Government had already left Berlin in early November.⁵⁸ In the language of the National Socialists, the Spanish Civil War was now a conflict opposing the Spanish Nationalist Government and the "Spanish Bolsheviks".⁵⁹

⁵³ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 55, p. 56. The Foreign Minister to the Acting State Secretary (Excerpt), August 24, 1936.

⁵⁴ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 54, p. 56. Note to the French Embassy in Germany from the Acting State Secretary Dieckhoff, August 24, 1936.

⁵⁵ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 62, p. 61-62. Telegram from the Chargé d'Affaires in Spain to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, August 29, 1936. Ironically enough, according to Chargé d'Affaires Voelckers, the guard for the German Embassy was "in the hands of the Anarchist-Communist Militia".

⁵⁶ Malcolm Muggeridge, ed., *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers 1936-1942* (London, 1948), page 53.

⁵⁷ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 119, p. 128-129. The Foreign Ministry in Berlin to the German Embassy in Italy, November 16, 1936.

⁵⁸ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 122, p. 132. Telegram from the Foreign Minister to the German Legation in Portugal, November 17, 1936.

⁵⁹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 127, p. 136-137. Memo by the Director of the Press Department of the German Foreign Ministry, November 23, 1936.

IV. HISMA/ROWAK AND NS SUPPORT FOR THE SPANISH NATIONALIST CAMP

As Germany's official position towards the events in Spain was that of "non-intervention in internal Spanish events"⁶⁰, the camouflaging of the German transport and supply organisations was of crucial importance. On July 31, 1936, a company named 'Carranza & Bernhardt, Transportes en General', was created to handle all the operational details; it became known under the name of HISMA⁶¹. Registered in Tetuán, it was officially a Spanish private company, co-owned by Johannes Bernhardt and Fernando de Carranza y Fernández-Reguera.⁶²

As it became clear that the expected Nationalist victory would not come about as quickly as imagined, HISMA's role in Spain became more and more important. At the beginning of August 1936, Franco's headquarters moved to Seville on the Spanish mainland. On August 7, HISMA opened its second branch in Seville. As the Civil War went on, HISMA established branches everywhere in the Nationalist territory, achieving constant proximity to the Nationalist leader.⁶³ HISMA also got in contact with the Portuguese Government, thus opening another channel to smuggle goods onto Nationalist territory (bordering Portugal) in Spain.⁶⁴

The remarkable growth of HISMA and its counterpart based in Germany, the ROWAK⁶⁵, exposes the economic motives behind the German intervention in Spain. The Spanish Civil War, for the Germans, was not merely an important fight against the spread of Communism and a welcome opportunity to test new tactics and the latest military equipment (for instance, the German Condor Legion, sent to Spain on November 6, 1936, was operating under a German commander with sole responsibility to Franco himself and thus enjoyed considerable autonomy).⁶⁶ Behind the front lines, it was also a battle for economic influence in post-war Spain. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, Spain had been the largest single source of British

⁶⁰ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 20, p. 19. Memo by the Head of the European Section of the Political Department in Berlin, July 31, 1936.

⁶¹ HISMA was the abbreviation of the company's commercial name Compañía Hispano-Marroquí de Transportes, Sociedad Limitada.

⁶² Leitz, 62.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 65. Note : Franco was recognised as Head of Stated and Generalissimo by the Nationalist Junta de Defensa Nacional on September 29, 1936.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁶⁵ Rohstoff-Waren-Kompensation Handelsgesellschaft, founded on Göring's orders on October 2, 1936. (Leitz, 70)

⁶⁶ Gerhard Hass, ed., *Deutschland im Zweiten Weltkrieg Band 1* (Cologne/Berlin, 1974), 101.

iron ore imports.⁶⁷ In the general turmoil caused by the war, the Germans saw their chance to “mould the Spanish economy into a useful dependent of Nazi Germany”⁶⁸ and inflict a deadly blow to the French and British interests in Spain. HISMA/ROWAK was in charge of the organisation of the entire trade relationship between Nationalist Spain and the Third Reich, including the procuring of Spanish raw materials in return for Germany’s support to the Nationalists and, from early 1937 onwards, the acquisition of mining concessions in Spain, which, by the end of 1938, amounted to one hundred and thirty-five.⁶⁹

The monopolistic position held by HISMA/ROWAK⁷⁰ was criticised by many in both the German and the Spanish Nationalist camp throughout the war, but remained unchallenged. In May 1937 Franco had to abandon his demand for the conclusion of an intergovernmental clearing and commodity agreement between Germany and the Burgos Government.⁷¹ In return, the Germans signed a series of protocols with the Nationalists in mid-July 1937, in which it was agreed to postpone a full economic agreement until after the war⁷², to advance commerce between the two countries in view of the greatest possible expansion and to allow for the export interests of each of the two countries insofar as possible⁷³. The last of the protocols dealt with the Spanish debts towards the Third Reich. It was agreed that the final decision on the repayment was to be postponed and that Germany would help in the reconstruction of the country and was allowed to form Spanish companies to mine raw materials with the help of German specialists and German capital, as long as these companies acted in accordance with Nationalist jurisdiction. Furthermore the Franco Government was to deliver raw materials to Germany as security and part payment on the debt.⁷⁴ As Leitz points out, economically speaking, these protocols seemed to bind Franco Spain very closely to Germany, but on the

⁶⁷ John R. Hubbard, ‘How Franco Financed his War’, *Journal of Modern History*, 25:4 (1953), 390: In 1935, 57 per cent of Spain’s total production of iron ore had been exported to the United Kingdom.

⁶⁸ Göring, as quoted in Wayne Bowen’s review of ‘Hermann Göring and Nazi Germany’s Economic Exploitation of Nationalist Spain’ by Christian Leitz, *German History*, 14:1 (1996): 21-37. (<http://www.h-net.org/~german/articles/bowen1.html>) (12.12.2003))

⁶⁹ Leitz, ‘Nazi Germany’s Intervention in the Civil War’, page 72; Walther L. Bernecker, ‘Die Internationale Dimension des Spanischen Bürgerkrieges: Intervention und Nichtintervention’, <http://webdoc.gwdg.de/edoc/p/fundus/3/bernecker.pdf> (12.12.2003), page 9.

⁷⁰ Private industrial interests were usually ignored in favour of the HISMA/ROWAK (Leitz, 71) and no trade was possible between the Third Reich and the Nationalist Government of Burgos without mediation by HISMA/ROWAK which charged high commissions for business transactions (Leitz, 77).

⁷¹ Leitz, 77 and 80-81.

⁷² *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 392, p. 413-414. Protocol Signed at Burgos on July 12, 1937.

⁷³ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 394, p. 417. Protocol Signed at Burgos on July 15, 1937.

⁷⁴ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume III* (London, 1951), doc. no. 397, p. 421-422. Protocol Signed at Burgos on July 16, 1937.

other hand, they offered enough flexibility to the Burgos Government to reduce Germany's influence in Spain. For example, as the new mining companies were dependent on Nationalist law, laws could be changed in order to limit Germany's economic expansion.⁷⁵ Germany did not manage to get the firm grip on Spanish economy that she had projected to gain. At the end of the war, Great Britain, France and the United States were still in a good position to maintain and extend favourable trade terms with Franco Spain.⁷⁶

Nonetheless, for the time being, the Germans seemed to have gained a dependent and useful ally when the Spanish Civil War ended officially on April 1, 1936. On March 27, 1939, Franco announced Spain's adhesion to the Anti-Comintern Pact⁷⁷; in May 1939, Spain withdrew from the League of Nations.⁷⁸ Germany's aid to Franco was estimated at 540 million Reich marks, of which Spain paid off about 378 million Reich marks by delivery of minerals, vegetables, fruit and other goods to Germany and by the costs of the Spanish Blue Division sent off to fight along German troops on the Eastern Front during the Second World War.⁷⁹

V. THE SECOND WORLD WAR

As I already mentioned above, Spain's geographic position was of considerable strategic importance in the German war plans. With the loss of Gibraltar, Britain would have had no ship base between home waters and Freetown in West Africa and Britain's quickest access to the Mediterranean Sea would have been cut off; thus the risk of a British assault on Italy would have been diminished significantly. German ships and submarines operating out of Spanish ports, reinforced by German aircraft taking off from Spanish airfields, would have been able to pose a serious threat to British overseas convoys in the Atlantic Ocean. A belligerent Spain would have constituted a serious threat in the back of France and Germany could have used Spain as a 'bridge to North Africa'.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Leitz, 81.

⁷⁶ <http://www.h-net.org/~german/articles/bowen1.html> (12.12.2003)

⁷⁷ Edouard de Blaye, *Franco and the Politics of Spain* (London, 1976), page 543.

⁷⁸ Benny Pollack/Graham Hunter, *The Paradox of Spanish Foreign Policy* (London, 1987), page 7.

⁷⁹ Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, 2003), page 935. Not all of the 378 million reichsmarks to be paid by Franco Spain did actually go to Germany. The remainder of the debt (of which the proportions are unknown to me) was paid off by settlements between Spain and the allies in 1945 after the defeat of the Third Reich.

⁸⁰ Denis Smyth, 'Franco and World War II', *History Today*, 35 (Nov. 1985), pages 10-11.

Matters were, however, not as simple. In 1939, despite the Nationalist victory, Spain was still a politically divided country, a nation in ruins. Franco's primary interest had to lie in the stabilisation of the inner political situation in Spain and the reconstruction of the national economy. The country was not prepared to go to war in the near future. In summer, Franco reformed his Cabinet. It was a balanced Cabinet, composed of pro-German and pro-British members, monarchists and Falangists, civilians and military men.⁸¹ Spanish attitudes towards Germany were divided. De Blaye writes that the abundant help given to the Nationalists during the Civil War by Germany and Italy had "made of Spain, willy-nilly, a vulgar satellite of Hitler and Mussolini", a fact that "the vanity of Franco's generals could not endure".⁸² Most of all, Franco had been deeply disappointed by Germany's signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939, merely five months after the end of a bloody campaign fought in the name of anti-Communism.⁸³ Churchill's speeches against Russia's aggressive foreign policy pleased Franco; in spite of German protest, Spain continued exporting raw materials to Britain.⁸⁴

When the Second World War broke out Franco requested his subjects to observe the strictest neutrality,⁸⁵ but the initial success of the German forces was welcomed in Spain.⁸⁶ The Spanish Foreign Minister Colonel Beigbeder and Under State Secretary Peche y Cabeza de Vaca⁸⁷ even offered to transmit information found in telegrams and written reports from Spanish missions abroad to the German Ambassador in Spain.⁸⁸

In May 1940, Göring gave a favourable reply to the Spanish requests for training aircraft and machines to manufacture planes.⁸⁹ In May/June a pro-German propaganda campaign started in the Spanish press and Franco insisted in his speeches on the themes 'Gibraltar is Spanish' and 'All Morocco should belong to Spain'. The defeat of France had brought the Wehrmacht to Franco's doorstep.⁹⁰ On June 12, Italy declared war and Franco changed Spain's

⁸¹ George Hills, *Franco – The Man and His Nation* (London, 1967), 335-336.

⁸² De Blaye, *Franco and Politics of Spain*, 144.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸⁴ Hills, *Franco*, 340.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁸⁶ According to several reports from Stohrer, the German Ambassador in Spain, to the German Foreign Ministry in Berlin, printed in *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume IX* (London, 1956).

⁸⁷ This is the name of the Under State Secretary as it is given in the official German documents. I apologize in case 'Cabeza de Vaca' (in English: head of a cow) is just a nickname.

⁸⁸ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume VIII* (London, 1954), doc. no. 284, p. 324. Cipher letter from the German Ambassador in Spain to the Foreign Ministry, October 19, 1939.

⁸⁹ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume IX* (London, 1956), doc. no. 239, p. 318. Memo by the Official of the Dienststelle Ribbentrop, May 10, 1940.

⁹⁰ De Blaye, *Franco*, 145.

status of neutrality to that of non-belligerence⁹¹; two days later, Spanish troops occupied Tangier to ensure the neutrality of the zone.⁹²

Franco understood that he had to take a decision quickly. Staying out of the war could lead to the immediate invasion of Spain by German troops. The harvest of 1939 had failed and Spain was weaker than ever before.⁹³ Franco decided to agree to enter the war on the Axis' side, but on his own terms. On June 19, the Spanish Embassy in Berlin let State Secretary von Weizsäcker know that "Spain would be willing to enter the war after a short period of preparing the public".⁹⁴ Spain also claimed large territorial concessions in North Africa (French Morocco, the Oran region of Algeria and the expansion of Spanish Sahara and Spanish Guinea) as well as considerable economic and military supplies in exchange for its participation in the war.⁹⁵

Germany could not afford alienating the French Vichy Government by promising Franco the territories in French Morocco; furthermore Germany could not take the burden of supplying large quantities of food and war materiel to Spain. On June 25, State Secretary von Weizsäcker told the Spanish Ambassador in Berlin that Germany had "taken cognizance of Spain's territorial desires" and would "at proper time give most sympathetic consideration" to Spain's request for military assistance.⁹⁶ Germany judged that a too early entry of Spain into the war could be of great danger to Germany herself.⁹⁷

The Third Reich demanded bases in the Canary Isles and made it clear to Spain that Hitler's troops were prepared to take the Iberian Peninsula in case this was deemed necessary for Germany's own protection.⁹⁸

On October 23, Hitler and Franco met at Hendaye in France. It was their only ever meeting face-to-face. Hitler pressed Franco to enter the war and to grant free passage across Spain to German troops attacking Gibraltar and completing the locking-up of the Mediterranean. Franco agreed to help – and repeated again the conditions necessary for Spanish belligerency alongside the Axis.⁹⁹ All the Germans were able to get off Spain in Hendaye was the signing of

⁹¹ Ibid., 544.

⁹² Hills, *Franco*, 341.

⁹³ Ibid., 343.

⁹⁴ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume IX* (London, 1956), doc. no. 488, p. 620-621. State Secretary von Weizsäcker to the German Foreign Ministry, June 19, 1940.

⁹⁵ Smyth, 'Franco and WW2', 12.

⁹⁶ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume X* (London, 1957), doc. no. 16, p. 15-16. Memo by the State Secretary von Weizsäcker, Berlin, June 25, 1940.

⁹⁷ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume X* (London, 1957), doc. no. 313, p. 442-445. Memo by the German Ambassador to Spain, Stohrer, in Berlin, August 8, 1940.

⁹⁸ Hills, *Franco*, 344-345.

⁹⁹ De Blaye, *Franco*, 145-146.

a Secret Protocol of adherence to the Axis war effort which guaranteed Spain alone had the right to determine when (and therefore if!) she would enter the war.¹⁰⁰

In the following months, Germany would repeatedly try to drag Spain into the war, but Franco always found good reasons to delay Spain's entry to the war.¹⁰¹ In early 1941, a pro-Nazi conspiracy against Franco, plotted by the clandestine *Junta Política*, failed.¹⁰²

In June 1941 Germany launched its campaign against the Soviet Union. On June 22, 1941, Spain asked the German government to permit volunteer formations of the Falange to participate in the campaign.¹⁰³ The dispatch of the Spanish Blue Division, named after the blue shirts of the Falange, offered Spain a possibility to at least partly satisfy Germany's demands for a Spanish participation in the war whilst not infuriating Britain too much.¹⁰⁴ On July 14, the first contingent of 18,000 Falangist volunteers was sent to the Russian front.¹⁰⁵ As Denis Smyth and many other historians have argued, it was a small concession to Germany's demands rather than a heartfelt military commitment. From a strategic point of view, the dispatch of the Spanish Blue Division was not comparable to Germany's deployment of troops to Spain during the Civil War and did not change the known outcome of Germany's campaign against the Soviet Union. Franco's foreign policy was, in Smyth's words, "designed to yield maximum profit, with minimum risk".¹⁰⁶

Franco was unwilling to get further involved in the war on the Axis side and was keen not to alienate the Allied forces. In November 1942, Spain did not threaten the Anglo-American landings in French North Africa.¹⁰⁷ As the tide of the war turned against the Axis powers, Franco started to distance himself from Italy and Germany. In April and May 1943, Admiral Dönitz, head of the German Navy, proposed to Hitler to invade Spain; Hitler refused, claiming that Spanish resistance would be tough – a German invasion of the Iberian Peninsula would result in a weakening of the German war effort.¹⁰⁸

Spanish-German relations were deteriorating more and more. On September 25, 1943, the Blue Division was recalled from the Eastern Front. As some of the volunteers wished to continue fighting alongside the Germans, the Division was at first reduced to three small

¹⁰⁰ Smyth, 'Franco and WW2', 15.

¹⁰¹ Hills, *Franco*, 347-352.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 352-353.

¹⁰³ *Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918-1945, Series D, Volume XII* (London, 1962), doc. no. 671, p. 1080. Telegram from the German Embassy in Spain to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, June 22, 1941.

¹⁰⁴ Denis Smyth, 'The Dispatch of the Spanish Blue Division to the Russian Front: Reasons and Repercussions', *European History Quarterly*, 24:4 (1994), 544.

¹⁰⁵ De Blaye, *Franco*, 148.

¹⁰⁶ Smyth, 'Blue Division', 545.

¹⁰⁷ Smyth, 'Franco and WW2', page 11.

¹⁰⁸ De Blaye, *Franco*, 152-153.

battalions which were in turn dissolved in March 1944. A small number of volunteers stayed with the Wehrmacht and helped to defend Berlin at the close of April 1945.¹⁰⁹

On October 1, 1943, Franco reaffirmed Spain's neutrality and in May 1944, Spain suspended her exports of raw materials to Germany.¹¹⁰ Germany and Spain were no longer allies.

CONCLUSION

The relations between Spain and the Third Reich were at all times dominated by economic interests and strategic considerations. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, German companies and the Reich Government maintained good business relations with the Spanish Second Republic, whilst the clandestine, subversive activities of the National Socialist organisations were aimed at the promotion of pro-German feelings among the population. The importance of HISMA/ROWAK during the Spanish Civil War exposes the economic motives behind Germany's support for the Franco Government. Germany was always keen to discourage trade of raw materials and food between Franco Spain and Great Britain and France. At the same time, as Germany was moving down on the path to war, strategic considerations came to play a more important role. Franco did not get the respect and admiration Hitler had for Mussolini, and was seen as a militarily weak ally controlling a strategically important territory.

Franco on the other hand was mainly interested in the survival of his regime and its destiny once World War II would be over. He tried to resist falling into dependency to Germany as much as possible and repeatedly worked in favour of a rapprochement to Britain and France. He was authoritarian and anti-Communist, but did not share the extreme views of Hitler.

As a result, the Spanish-German relations were best during the Spanish Civil War, when both sides were able to benefit from each other. Franco's active participation in the Second World War, alongside the Axis, would have been a dangerous enterprise for Spain; the Germans would certainly have had the biggest advantages from a Spanish-German military alliance whereas Spain would have had to bear the risks and possible negative consequences.

¹⁰⁹ Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 394.

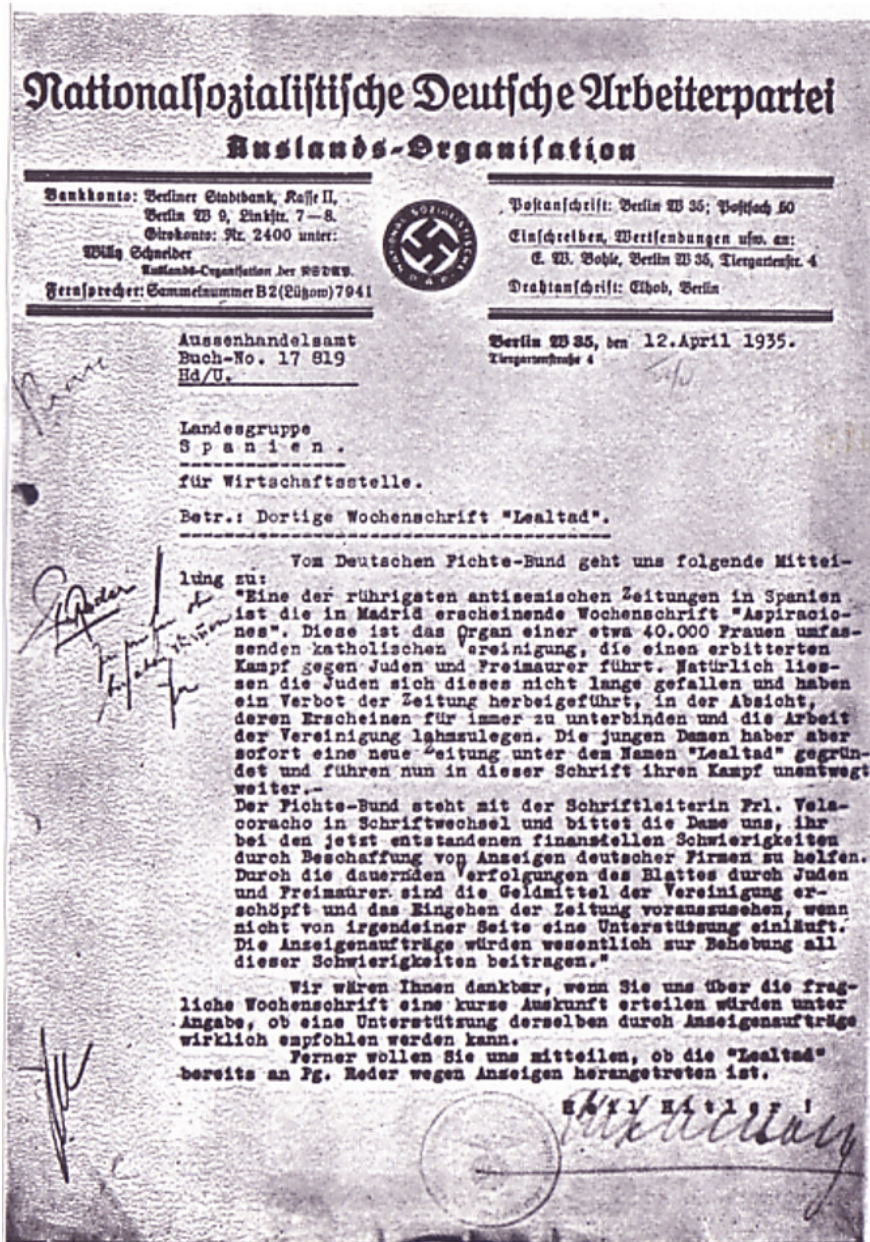
¹¹⁰ De Blaye, *Franco*, 153.

The quid-pro-quo relationship that had tied Germany and Franco Spain together during the Civil War did not survive into the Second World War; the benefits for Spain from a deep alliance with German were not worth the grave dangers that Spain would have had to endure in return.

ANNEX

Document 1

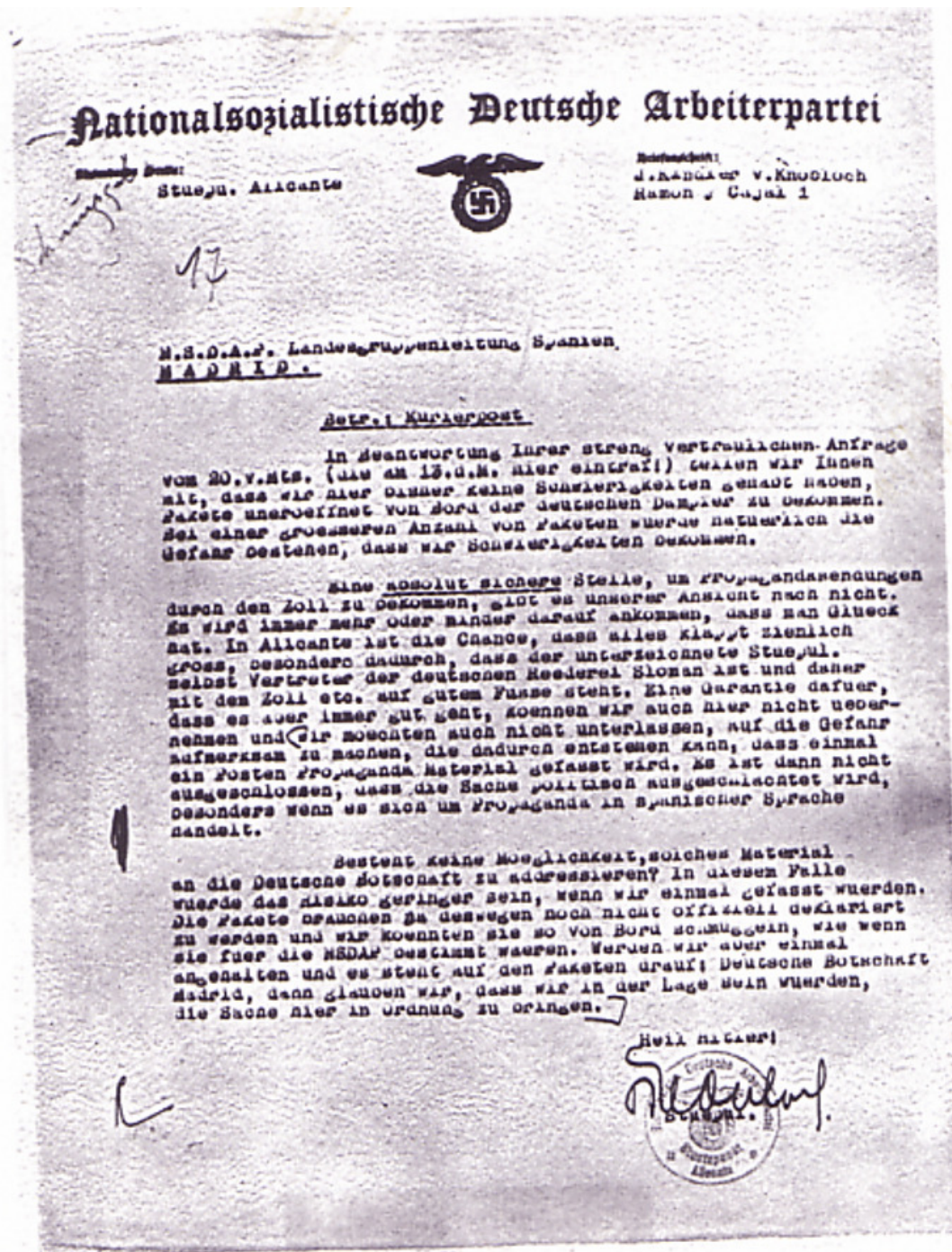
This is a photocopy of a letter from the AO headquarters in Berlin to the Economic Section of the Spanish AO headquarters, dated April 12, 1935. The AO Spain is asked to provide information about the (allegedly) anti-Semitic paper 'Lealtad' and its publisher, a Catholic women's organisation facing financial difficulties, in order to evaluate the possibility of lending financial support (in the form of advertising funds) to the organisation.



Letter photocopied from: Emile Burns, *The Nazi Conspiracy in Spain* (London, 1937), p. 16.

Document 2

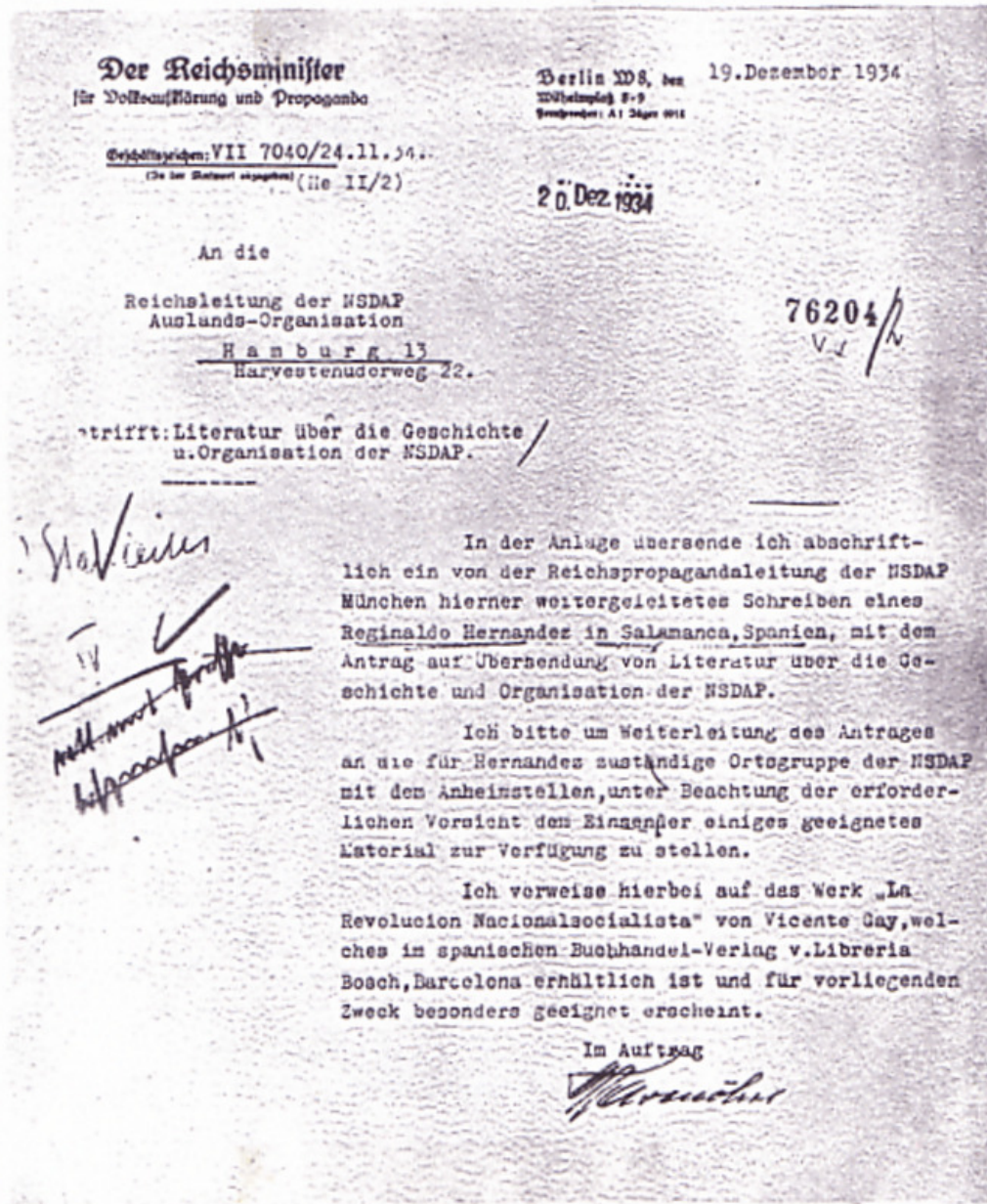
This is a photocopy of an undated letter from the Alicante NSDAP section to the Spanish AO headquarters in Madrid. In the letter, different ways of smuggling National Socialist propaganda material into Spain are discussed. As there is a potential risk of provoking a scandal in case the propaganda material were discovered by Spanish customs officers, the author of the letter asks about the possibility of smuggling the material into the country via the German Embassy in Madrid.



Letter photocopied from: Emile Burns, *The Nazi Conspiracy in Spain* (London, 1937), p. 113.

Document 3

This is a photocopy of a letter from the Reich Ministry of National Enlightenment and Propaganda in Berlin to the Reich headquarters of the AO in Hamburg, dated December 19, 1934. It concerns the dispatch of literature on the history and the organisation of the NSDAP to Reginaldo Hernandez of Salamanca, Spain, "with the necessary precautions", by the local AO section. A Spanish work by Vicente Gay, entitled 'La Revolución Nacionalsocialista', is described as "particularly suitable".



Letter photocopied from: Emile Burns, *The Nazi Conspiracy in Spain* (London, 1937), p. 48.

Document 4

This is a photocopy of a letter from the AO headquarters in Berlin to the Economic Section of the Spanish AO headquarters in Madrid, dated August 22, 1935. The letter requests information about the German Reich Railway agent in Madrid, including information on his attitude towards the "New Germany" and information on the composition of his office staff ("how many Jews, Freemasons, German 'Volksgenossen', party comrades?"). I guess that this letter was probably forwarded to an office of the Harbour Service, as this falls, at least partly, into their domain.

Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
Die Leitung der Auslands-Organisation

Bankkonto: Berliner Sparkbank, Kasse II,
Berlin W 9, Pankstr. 7-8
Girokonto: Nr. 2400 unter:
Willy Schneider
Kassenabz. Organisation der NSDAP
Fernsprecher: Sammelnummer B2 (Röhren) 7941

Postanschrift: Berlin W 35; Postfach 50
Einschreiben, Wertsendungen ufm. an:
E. W. Volke, Berlin W 35, Tiergartenstr. 4
Druckanschrift: Elboh, Berlin

Berlin W 35, den 22. August 1935.
Tiergartenstraße 4

Außenhandelsamt.
Buch-No. 25 137.
Hd/G.

Landesgruppe
S p a n i e n ,
für Wirtschaftsstelle.

Betr.: Reichsbahnzentrale für den Deutschen Reise-
verkehr.



Der Vertreter der Reichsbahnzentrale
für S p a n i e n ist Herr C.F. F r o e h l i c h,
Madrid, Apartado 1011, Calle de Alcalá. Wir bitten
Sie, uns über oben Genannten ausführlichen Bericht
erteilen zu wollen; vor allem auch darüber, wie
seine Einstellung zum neuen Deutschland, zur dor-
tigen Kolonie und zur N.S.D.A.P.-Gruppe ist. Sollte
Herr Froehlich ein Büro mit Angestellten unterhal-
ten, so bitten wir auch um Angabe, über die Zusam-
mensetzung seines Personals, dahingehend, wie viele
von seinen Angestellten

1. Juden,
2. Freimaurer,
3. Deutsche Volksgenossen,
4. Parteigenossen

sind.

2/9/31
durch G. Roder

Heil Hitler!
i.A. *[Signature]*



Letter photocopied from: Emile Burns, *The Nazi Conspiracy in Spain* (London, 1937), p. 144.

Document 5

Document 5 is a letter from Erich Schnaus (Head of the Spanish branch of the AO) to Anton Leistert (Head of the Spanish branch of the German Labour Front), dated April 1, 1936, which exposes the grotesque element of the Nazi's new 'business language' adopted for their internal communications:

“This alteration of our business customs must, however, in no case lead to a decline in our business activities. On the contrary, the transformation, inasmuch as it makes the service of our customers [i.e. the members; note by the author] more mobile, must result in an increased turnover. Otherwise it has no value. Reports on our competitors show that their directors have divided opinions regarding the new method of manufacture. We have to reckon on the fact that the enlargement of our competitors' business will bring about such a tightening up of the financial position that the shares of the competitors' undertakings on the Bourse will not be in a position to hold their ground. For this reason it is particularly necessary for us to send appropriate instructions to our agents and customers in order that they may be prepared to meet any situation.”

The letter refers to the friction in the Spanish Left and the general political unrest in Spain which, eventually, would bring about so much political tension in the country that the government would “not be in a position to hold their ground”.

Letter quoted from: Emile Burns, *The Nazi Conspiracy in Spain* (London, 1937), p. 75-76.

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