

# World War I and Propaganda

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BRILL

LEIDEN · BOSTON

2014

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### PROPAGANDA AND POLITICS: GERMANY AND SPANISH OPINION IN WORLD WAR I

*Javier Ponce*

Whereas in war different warring parties face off against one another, in the field of propaganda, it is in the neutral countries where the direct confrontation between the two sides takes place, and where each side must advertise itself in order to tip undecided minds in its favor. In this sense, during the First World War the propaganda deployed in Spain by the belligerents was something more than just a paper war, but one where words were supplemented by images supplied by the new technical resources of the day. Employing different approaches, pragmatic propagandists, as well as opportunistic and even (frustrated) idealistic ones, used all the means to hand; moreover, assisted by their respective diplomatic services, journalists, politicians, intellectuals and professional publicists also participated in this story. This was also a struggle marked by a clash of different principles and material interests, also quite diverse, supported in this case by vast amounts of money that crisscrossed the face of Spain to purchase opinion, especially that expressed in the press, for immediate reward. We shall here address the issue of German propaganda from the perspective of Spain's international relations and foreign policy during the First World War and aim to produce some new insights based on the analysis not only of the factors governing propaganda in Spain during the war, but also of the objectives, model and instruments of this propaganda. In this sense, we shall consider propaganda as an integral aspect of the foreign policy of Germany. Finally, we shall present some conclusions yielded by this approach.

#### *Determining Factors*

Among the factors that constrained propaganda in Spain during World War I we can mention at least three: the international position of Spain, internal conflict and the barriers to information in the press during the

war. Let us look at the elements that determine these three factors. The first one, the international position of Spain, is determined by its geography, its trade relations as well as by security issues and the progress of the war. Thus, unlike Switzerland, Holland or even the Nordic countries, which were subject to direct pressure by both sides during the conflict, Spain's proximity to the countries that constituted one of the two sides situated it in a field of influence which was less balanced and much better disposed towards the Entente. In connection to its geographical position, the second element determining Spain's international stance is its commercial relations: its economic and financial ties as well as its dependence on trade exchanges of all kinds with the Entente. And the third is the issue of security and the progress of the war: Spanish dependence, for defense questions, on the Entente, which could also bring about the main dangers to Spain's security. Spain's placement in the defensive structure of the Entente had been confirmed in the Cartagena Agreement of 1907, according to which Spain, Great Britain, and France committed themselves to maintain the *status quo* of their territories in the Atlantic and Mediterranean and to consult one another whenever this was under threat.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Madrid had been party with Paris to the Treaty of 1912 concerning Morocco, which had turned the two countries into partners—albeit unequal ones—in a sensitive territory for colonial policies, particularly for the Spanish.

The second factor governing propaganda in Spain was the conflict within the country, marked by a situation that predated the war but that was further exacerbated by it. The situation prior to the war involved a political confrontation between those groups that supported the Restoration regime and those who hoped to reform it or to drive it into crisis, aggravated by a lack of social and economic development, and complicated by regionalist forces. In this situation the war exacerbated the economic imbalance and the social differences, which were now manifestly intertwined with the

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<sup>1</sup> Two of the first studies on this issue were by Enrique Rosas Ledezma, "Las Declaraciones de Cartagena (1907): significación en la política exterior de España y repercusiones internacionales", *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna y Contemporánea*, no. 2 (1981): 213–29 ["the statements of Cartagena (1907): their significance in the foreign policy of Spain and their international implications"]; and Rosario de la Torre del Río, "Los acuerdos anglo-hispano-franceses de 1907: una larga negociación en la estela del 98", *Cuadernos de la Escuela Diplomática, Segunda Época*, no. 1 (1988): 81–104 ["the Anglo-Spanish-French agreements of 1907: a long negotiation in the wake of 98"]. On the subsequent development of Spain's international outreach, see Javier Ponce Marrero, "La política exterior española de 1907 a 1920: entre el regeneracionismo de intenciones y la neutralidad condicionada", *Historia Contemporánea*, no. 34 (2007): 93–115 ["Spain's foreign policy from 1907 to 1920: between the regenerationism of intent and conditional neutrality"].

regionalist problem.<sup>2</sup> There was no reduction in political conflict throughout the war, which drew in ever more Spaniards who did not strictly belong to the social, political and intellectual elites.

The third factor determining propaganda were the barriers to information that the Spanish press had to work around. On one hand, these barriers were related to the material conditions of information set by Spain's economic problems resulting from the war, and secondly, to the ways of handling such information in terms of the origins of sources, the restrictions placed on the freedom of the press, and the pressures from an environment polarized into two camps. As far as the economic issues were concerned, the main problem was the increase in the price of newsprint, which forced the State to intervene and regulate prices. While the press managed at first to address the growth of costs and prevented a rise in retail prices for a few years, difficulties in obtaining supplies from countries at war also affected the printing machinery used by those newspapers employing advanced technologies that were largely dependent on foreign suppliers. Among the material difficulties, we should include a reduction in advertising following the regular publication from 1916 onwards, of blacklists of people and firms in countries other than those of the enemy, with whom all individuals and companies on the Allied side were prohibited from maintaining commercial relations because of their enemy nationality or their association with the enemy. Many advertisers were therefore refused for fear of reprisals that might result in the inclusion of the newspapers on such lists. The newspapers would thus lose all advertisers linked to the Allies, who, by the way, had a strong presence in the largely Entente-dependent Spanish commerce.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the handling of information, the first obvious barrier was the flow of information, which although not negligible, it was filtered by the

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<sup>2</sup> Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *Spain 1914–1918. Between War and Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1999); and by the same author *The Foundations of Civil War. Revolution, Social Conflict and Reaction in Liberal Spain, 1916–1923* (London: Routledge, 2008): 1–147.

<sup>3</sup> The first English and French lists of 1916 already included various Madrid publications: the newspapers *El Correo Español*, *El Debate*, *El Siglo Futuro*, *La Tribuna* and the satirical weekly *El Mentidero*; to which *La Defensa* of Málaga and *El Tradicionalista* of Gran Canaria were soon added; cf. "A proclamation prohibiting trading with certain persons, or bodies of persons, of enemy nationality or enemy associations", *The London Gazette*, 29 February 1916, 2211; and *Listas negras referentes a España publicadas por los Gobiernos de Francia e Inglaterra* [Blacklists relating to Spain published by the Governments of France and Britain] (Barcelona: Librería Española, 1916), 1–16

French agency Havas, via the Spanish agency of Fabra.<sup>4</sup> The ways around the partisan approach of Fabra involved sending correspondents abroad and—with the opening of the German radiotelegraph agency Transocean, which sent information from its Nauen station from 1915—using radio to source news from Germany. At the same time there were national restrictions on the freedom of the press, which had been put into the legislation for the preservation of neutrality promulgated by the Spanish Government since the beginning of the war. Accompanying this declaration of official neutrality on August 4, 1914 a provision was approved by which the press was to observe neutrality: this promised legal prosecution for insults made in the press or at public meetings against foreign sovereigns or similar dignitaries. Later, on March 29, 1917, faced with the threat of a possible general strike, a royal decree authorized censorship of the press—this time in relation also to the press' assessments of the warring countries and of Spain's stance—which granted a discretionary power to civil Governors, who nevertheless, not always exercise it in this way. Prior censorship was maintained intermittently down till the autumn of 1917, but was re-applied by the law for the repression of espionage of July 7, 1918 to guarantee Spanish neutrality.<sup>5</sup> The rule was applied to anyone on Spanish territory who collected information for a foreign power or its agents that was harmful to other powers, and—in light of the difficult situation caused by the submarine war—it banned the publication, dispatch, transmission and circulation of news concerning the movements of merchant vessels. It thus increased censorship even from the very centers of telephone and telegraph communications, becoming in this way in a very useful and effective tool for the government that complemented previous censorship of newspapers, and even substituted for it when such censorship was not being enforced, since in practice, the censorship of communications had been in effect since August 1914.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> María Antonia Paz Rebollo, *El colonialismo informativo de la agencia Havas en España (1870–1949)* [The information colonialism of the Havas agency in Spain (1870–1949)], Doctoral thesis (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> *Gaceta*, 8 July 1918, 81.

<sup>6</sup> José Antonio del Valle, “La censura gubernativa de prensa en España (1914–1931)”, *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, nueva época, no. 21 (1981): 73–126 [“Government press censorship in Spain (1914–1931)”]; and Javier Ponce Marrero, *Canarias en la Gran Guerra, 1914–1918: estrategia y diplomacia. Un estudio sobre la política exterior de España (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Ediciones del Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2006)*, 251–2. [The Canary Islands in the Great War, 1914–1918: strategy and diplomacy. A study of the foreign policy of Spain].

There was a final barrier to information that was conditional on propaganda, and which in this case both reinforced it and came to be reinforced by it. This was the pressure of a public opinion, which became ever more polarized into two camps the longer the war lasted and the greater its impact on Spain grew, for virtually all newspapers belonged to one camp or the other. The messianic character of the war, the first total war, can help us to understand the stances taken in a neutral country, but it was the very intense activity of the belligerents in Spain what gradually reinforced this trend. This took the form of propaganda for war and acquired great importance by managing to attract the media into one's camp and to use it to defend one's own interests. In this context bribery was commonly practiced to obtain the support of a newspaper, as print was the main tool employed to produce a more favorable image of one group and a negative image of the other. In this sense, the adscription to one group or the other implied the acceptance of the attack of its opponents, and on the other hand, the inevitable coloring of editorial policy, news items and advertisements.<sup>7</sup>

In studying the aims, models and instruments of propaganda, we will be considering propaganda, and in this case especially German propaganda, as part of the foreign policy of the belligerents. Because if in neutral countries they deployed diplomatic activities that aimed to win them over or to keep in place policies as favorable as possible to their interests, the pursuit of this aim was also aided by the use of propaganda. Therefore, it is in the neutral countries where the diplomatic efforts of the warring parties came face to face, and where propaganda became a war of propaganda aiming to sway undecided minds in their own favor. This was especially the case after the short war turned into a long one, since in the first months of the war due to the expectation of a German victory alike that of 1871—which many people took for granted—propaganda had not been fully employed. In the case of Spain, this war of propaganda was purely national in the sense that it responded to its internal conflicts and that it was seen by the two sides into which Spanish opinion was already divided as an extension of their own internal struggles. German sympathizers were recruited from defenders of the traditional order, the aristocracy, Church groups and the military, while advocates of political reform, Liberals,

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<sup>7</sup> José Javier Sánchez Aranda, "Las dificultades de informar en tiempos de guerra. La prensa española durante la I Guerra Mundial", *Comunicación y Sociedad* VI, no. 1-2 (1993): 173–87. ["The difficulties of reporting in wartime. The Spanish press during World War I"]. (version online at <http://dspace.si.unav.es/dspace/handle/10171/8104>).



Leftists and Republicans, anti-clerical groups and most intellectuals felt closer to the Allies.<sup>8</sup> They all believed that the outcome of the war would have a universalizing character, since the victory of one side would also lead to the strengthening of the position of their supporters in Spain.<sup>9</sup> And all this despite the obvious differences between the values asserted in Spain and those defended by the warring nations themselves. Let's consider two examples: strictly speaking, those who defended the existing political system and traditional religion in Spain could hardly have seen the German Empire as representing their views, with its resemblance to a federation and with a non-Catholic as its Emperor; the other side, the defenders of republicanism could not have been comfortable supporting the British monarchy or the even more authoritarian regime of the Tsar. There are many more such contradictions that show us clearly that the war between the pro- and anti-factions in Spain, having weak convictions in the international sphere, drew on its internal conflicts.<sup>10</sup> This also explains why Spain remained neutral throughout the conflict, and why the Government of Dato proclaimed this from the start of the war.

We should also take into account the fact that the disastrous war of 1898 against the United States as well as the military attrition in Morocco fuelled in wide sectors of Spanish society the attitude that modern large-scale warfare should be prevented at all costs. On the other hand, involvement in such a war would place an unbearable strain on the army, on a rigged political system, on a backward economy and a fragile social peace, which could threaten the survival of the monarchy itself. With the exception of those who wanted to bring about its downfall and cause regime change or, at later dates, even the sort of revolutionary process which was to take place in Russia, the rest of the political groups assumed that Spain was too weak to participate in the war. Moreover, a majority in Spanish society—

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<sup>8</sup> For the internationalism of Spanish intellectuals and their relation to the press of the period see Paul Aubert, "La propagande étrangère en Espagne pendant la Première Guerre Mondiale", in *Españoles y franceses en la primera mitad del siglo XX* [Spaniards and Frenchmen in the first half of the 20th century] (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1986), 363–80.

<sup>9</sup> See also the classic work of Gerald H. Meaker, "A Civil War of Words: The Ideological Impact of the First World War on Spain, 1914–1918", in *Neutral Europe between War and Revolution 1917–23*, ed. Hans A. Schmitt (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 1–65.

<sup>10</sup> The war between opponents and defenders of the belligerent parties was extensively documented by Fernando Díaz-Plaja, *Francófilos y germanófilos. Los españoles en la guerra europea* (Barcelona: Dopesa, 1973). [Francophiles and Germanophiles. The Spanish in the European war].

illiterate for the most part—remained indifferent, without fully understanding what was at stake in the war nor the ideological struggle that some people saw it to be. Thus, despite commitments to and the proximity of the Entente, there was a weak consensus—even if it ultimately was a consensus—for non-intervention. This consensus—one of few—did not prevent such neutrality, which tried to be strict on a diplomatic level, from becoming tinged with shades and standpoints as it moved to a press permeated by internal political conflicts. In fact, for the educated elite, the war was soon perceived as an ideological war, the outcome of which would leave its mark on the future of all of humanity, so that it could not but affect the situation in Spain and its internal struggle. Let us now look at how such Spanish context saw the unfolding of German propaganda, which compared to the more diverse propaganda of the Allies, represented the overwhelming majority of that put out by the Central Powers.

*German Propaganda: Objectives, Model and Tools*

If we consider propaganda as part of the foreign policy of the belligerents, that of Germany had as its objectives the maintenance of Spain's neutrality. Being aware of Spain's dependence on the Entente in all respects, the most Berlin could hope for was that Spain be kept out of the conflict. Indeed, it was quite impossible that Madrid would accept any offers made by Berlin to enter the war against England and France, as it would suffer immediate military retaliation.<sup>11</sup> Spanish neutrality would allow Germany to ensure entry to the Western Mediterranean, as well as to guarantee it neutral shelters in the territories and waters of Spain, which were of great strategic importance because of Spain's position between two continents and two seas. Finally, as the war drew on and Allied pressure on Spain intensified, the more specific and ambitious objective of German propaganda was to prevent any excessive leaning of Spanish neutrality towards the Allies.

In carrying out this objective, however, Berlin never ceased to use the bait of offers and promised Spain economic aid and political support in the post-war period to free Madrid from the guiding hand of the Entente. Germany also cautiously encouraged Alfonso XIII to continue his efforts

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<sup>11</sup> Telegram from Ratibor to the Auswärtiges Amt, 6 October 1914, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin (hereafter PAAA), Spanien 61, Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland, R 11998.

as a mediator in the conflict, in order to reassure Spanish hopes for a strengthening of its international position and, incidentally, to prevent Spanish sympathies from moving towards the Entente. Moreover, the *Auswärtiges Amt* used vague promises to nourish the idea that Spanish collaboration would be rewarded with the annexation of territories and countries that Spanish irredentism saw as a goal of its foreign policy. To sovereignty over the Straits of Gibraltar was added by the most naive ones, among them Alfonso XIII, the annexation of Tangiers, a free hand in Morocco and a tempting mandate over Portugal, which under the form of an union or close association was to become a permanent goal of foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> Already in October 1914 a communication from Ratibor to the King had led to the fueling of his illusions, as it urged him to intervene in Portugal. Alfonso XIII expressed gratitude, stating that he could not proceed against Portugal as he would have liked, as if he did France and England would immediately occupy the Balearics and the Canary Islands, would bombard all Spanish ports and would block communication between Spain and Morocco.<sup>13</sup> German propaganda was not averse to making use of such offers.

The model adopted by German propaganda was an opportunistic one, the heir to *Weltpolitik* and to the thrust of German policy in pre-war years. Thus, despite Spain's poor relations with Germany in comparison to those with Great Britain and especially with France, Berlin knew very well how to exploit the conflicts that rose out of the close relationship between Spain and the Entente. At the beginning of the war, German presence in Spanish society comprised a large colony consisting largely of business people, and later during the war, officers and men of the many interned German ships. Added to this was the prestige enjoyed by German culture, science, learning centers and universities among Spain's educated elites, many of who had been trained in these institutions.<sup>14</sup> The tools used for propaganda included the press, the cinema and displays of German military power. As

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<sup>12</sup> Hipólito de la Torre Gómez, *Antagonismo y fractura peninsular. España-Portugal, 1910–1919* [Antagonism and peninsular fracture: Spain-Portugal, 1910–1919] (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Telegram from Ratibor to the *Auswärtiges Amt*, 6 October 1914, PAAA, Spanien 61, *Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland*, R 11998.

<sup>14</sup> Many of those who had been schooled in German culture would nevertheless have subscribed to a pro-Allied policy. cf. Paloma Ortíz de Urbina, "La Primera Guerra Mundial y sus consecuencias: la imagen de Alemania en España a partir de 1914", *Revista de Filología Alemana*, no. 15 (2007) ["The First World War and its consequences: the image of Germany in Spain from 1914"]: 193–206; Manuel Espadas Burgos, "De la época bismarckiana a la Gran Guerra", in *España y Alemania en la Edad Contemporánea*, ed. Walther L. Bernecker

far as the press was concerned, we should first say that it had been carefully prepared even before the war, and large sums of money had been invested in it.<sup>15</sup> While it has been shown that German propaganda during the First World War was not especially well organized and coordinated, particularly in the neutral countries, Germany's propaganda activities in Spain were very intense and effective from the start of the conflict.<sup>16</sup> The successful German press campaign was promoted from Madrid by Ambassador Max von Ratibor and from Barcelona, by the businessman/printer, August Heinz Hofer.

From as early as 1912 Ratibor had been trying to expand Germany's news service to counteract the influence of the English and above all the French services, brought to bear through the Havas Agency. At that time, once the *Auswärtiges Amt* in Berlin had filtered it, news from Germany came via the telegraph service of Ernst Hirsch. Then from Madrid it was distributed across the Iberian Peninsula and even to Latin America, relying for this on the services of the press officer Alexander Bruns, whose most outstanding merit, however, was that he was a friend and confidant of King Alfonso XIII. The earliest proposals to create a better-organized German news service were made in the spring of 1912 in a letter that Hofer sent to the German consul in Barcelona. To remedy the shortage of news coming directly from Germany, which was particularly evident in the provinces, Hofer believed it would be necessary to appoint a Spaniard to front the news net in Madrid and to create auxiliary infrastructure in Barcelona, which he offered to direct himself. Furthermore, the financial problems of local newspapers provided an opportunity for German subsidies, which could then require that dispatches from the German service replace those of the Spanish Fabra agency, the news subsidiary of the French agency Havas. Ratibor approved some of Hofer's proposals and proposed to Berlin an expansion of Germany's information service even though the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Gottlieb von Jagow, had pointed out that he had no funding for this and that the existing news service was, in fact sat-

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(Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1992), 63–87 [“From the era of Bismarck to the Great War”]; and Meaker, 24–8 and 59, note 55.

<sup>15</sup> Luis Álvarez Gutiérrez, “Intentos alemanes para contrarrestar la influencia francesa sobre la opinión pública española en los años precedentes a la Primera Guerra Mundial”, in *Españoles y franceses en la primera mitad del siglo XIX*, (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1986), 1–21 [“German attempts to counteract French influence on Spanish public opinion in the years preceding the First World War”].

<sup>16</sup> Ron M. Carden, *German policy toward neutral Spain, 1914–1918* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 55–91.

isfactory, especially as far as Bruns was concerned: he was considered a useful source of information with regard to the King, despite the fact that in the months that followed, Bruns's standing had been damaged by complaints made by German diplomatic representatives in South America who cast doubt on his competence as a press officer.

In Barcelona, Hofer—owner of the printing house “Sucesor de J. de Neufville”—personally undertook measures to make pro-German news stories available to the Spanish public, financing in 1913 a publication for this purpose called *Ibero-Mundial*. His business interests required frequent trips throughout Spain, particularly to remote cities to sell newspapers equipment, so he was in an excellent position to see what propaganda needed to be done throughout the Iberian Peninsula and to influence rural opinion. Moreover, discussions had begun in Barcelona in early 1914 with the newspaper *La Vanguardia*. Its director believed that the Havas agency did not provide balanced news and that if any news did come directly from Germany, they were incomprehensible to editors who did not read German, whereas the majority could understand at least some of French. To counter this linguistic handicap, the owner of *La Vanguardia* urged the German consul in the city to get his Government to set up a telegram service using the German cable directly between Emden and Vigo, which would be funded by Berlin, and which had already been proposed by Hofer in 1912.<sup>17</sup> In the spring of 1914, the situation seemed conducive to the creation of a new structure for the German news service, with an excellent chance of influencing rural opinion and of securing the position of German news in one of the most important newspapers of Barcelona, or so argued Ratibor in a renewed attempt to convince Jagow. However, the latter suggested only consolidating the information service without changing its structure, as well as negotiating with the owner of *La Vanguardia*.<sup>18</sup>

The different types of information and news reports that the Germans were able to get into Spain by themselves at the beginning of the war, would have come from the two German telegraph cables which after leaving Emden crossed under the English Channel and came ashore, one at Vigo, in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, and the other on Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, situated in the middle of the most important shipping routes to the South Atlantic. In turn, on leaving Tenerife, the German cables connected through Monrovia (Liberia), and linked from there on to Pernambuco (Brazil) and—via Lome (Togo)—to Douala (Cameroon). The

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<sup>17</sup> Álvarez, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Carden, 63-7.

Emden-Tenerife cable was thus essential for this telegraphic communication from Germany to Africa and South America, as it strengthened the role of the German information service in Spain as a redistributor of news to Latin America. The other resource available to the Germans was radiotelegraph communication, which broadcasted from powerful German radio stations such as those at Nauen and Norddeich in Germany, or at Kamina in Togo, and whose messages could be received by Spanish radio stations or the telegraph operators of the many German ships which had been taking refuge in Spanish ports since the beginning of the war. Yet, Germany lost most of these media outlets in the early days of the conflict. The importance of the cable from Emden to Tenerife was such, that from the summer of 1912, Great Britain had worked out plans for the post office—aided by the navy—to cut this line, along with the one at Vigo, as soon as instructions to this effect were given. After the Admiralty and War Office had decided that enemy cables were to be cut, the order to the post office was one of the measures that automatically followed from the declaration of war, and on August 5, 1914 the German cables under the English Channel from Emden to Vigo and Tenerife were severed.<sup>19</sup> The next day, August 6, the Spanish naval authorities of Marina put out of operation the radio rooms of German ships moored in Spanish ports.<sup>20</sup> On top of this came in the same month the destruction of the radiotelegraphy station at Kamina, which further increased Germany's difficulties in obtaining information.

Faced with these technical difficulties on the outbreak of war, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Berlin now strongly supported the activities of Ratibor and Hofer, who had not ceased their efforts to establish a news and propaganda service in Spain. The primary recipient of this information should be Alfonso XIII, so that German radiograms containing news of the war that would also be of interest to the King could be received by a Spanish radio station, according to the proposal that the Minister of

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Julian S. Corbett, *Naval Operations (History of the Great War)*, vol. I: To the battle of the Falklands, december 1914 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), 43; P. Chack, *La Guerre des Croiseurs (Du 4 août 1914 a la bataille des Falkland)*, vol. I: Du 4 août au 1 octobre 1914 (Paris: Challamel, Librairie Maritime et Coloniale, 1922–1923), 90; and *Der Kreuzerkrieg in den ausländischen Gewässern (Der Krieg zur See 1914–1918)*, vol. I, edited by E. Raeder, under the supervision of Eberhard von Mantey (Berlin: Verlag von E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1922), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Telegram from the Naval commander at Las Palmas to the Director General of Shipping, 8 August 1914, Archivo del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid (hereafter AMAE), Guerra Europea, H 2990.

State made to Ratibor at the end of August 1914.<sup>21</sup> In September 1914, Ratibor requested financial support for an afternoon daily paper to be published in Barcelona. In fact, the funds for the press at the disposal of the Ambassador had been increased to 25,000 Marks, but this sum had run out at the beginning of October and he found himself obliged to request more funding for the propaganda activity in Spain in order to counteract the information unfavorable to Germany coming from France, compared to the few newspapers that the ambassador felt were totally pro-German, such as the Carlist *El Correo Español* and *El Universo*.<sup>22</sup> Although newspapers such as *La Tribuna*, *La Correspondencia Militar* and *ABC* were considered sympathetic to Germany, the Ambassador believed it necessary to control dailies with wider circulations, even if as soon as 1915, *ABC* already stood at the head of Spanish newspapers in terms of daily sales.<sup>23</sup> Hofer had already personally financed the illustrated weekly *La Neutralidad*, but he needed 5,000 pesetas to continue this work, which seemed important since it had shown the possibilities for successfully supporting and strengthening Spanish neutrality.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, after October 1914, the pro-German stance of *La Tribuna* had a price: 8,000 pesetas a month for the first four months and 4,000 pesetas for the following six months, although soon—in March 1915—it was requested to revise this last sum and to increase it to 6,000 pesetas. This newspaper was to undertake an anti-Portuguese campaign that seemed worthwhile given Portugal's anticipated entry into the war against Germany. Feelers were even put out for a Republican newspaper, *El País*, which had proved to be willing to accept funding from the German Embassy in exchange for a pro-German orientation. At the end of October, Berlin approved the subsidy for both newspapers.<sup>25</sup>

As an example of the great readiness for sacrifice by the German colony in Spain as well as its great interest in the transmission of German news and its influence in the Spanish press, Ratibor cited in October 1914 the

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<sup>21</sup> Radio telegram from Ratibor to the Auswärtiges Amt, 27 August 1914, PAAA, Spanien 46, Die Spanische Presse, R 11862.

<sup>22</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 12 October 1914, *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> María Cruz Seoane and María Dolores Sáiz, *Historia del periodismo en España 3. El siglo XX: 1898–1936* (Madrid: Alianza, 1996), 211–321 [History of Journalism in Spain 3. The 20th century: 1898–1936].

<sup>24</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 6 November 1914, PAAA, Spanien 46, secr. Subventionierung Spanischer Zeitungen, R 11868.

<sup>25</sup> Auswärtiges Amt to Ratibor, 22 October 1914, *ibid.* In the same way the increase requested in March was accepted; Auswärtiges Amt to Ratibor, 21 March 1915, PAAA, Spanien 46, secr. Subventionierung Zeitungen Spanischer, R 11869, also cited in Carden, 69 and 79.



case of Las Palmas. According to the Imperial Vice Consul, there, the small German colony was spending between 1000 and 1100 pesetas each month: 500 pesetas to pay a Madrid journalist who radio-telegraphed German war news every day and another 600 pesetas provided by voluntary donors so that the local newspaper *Diario de Las Palmas* would publish articles favorable to Germany.<sup>26</sup> This was a good demonstration of the power of persuasion of German money, since this liberal newspaper had been founded by Fernando León y Castillo, who had been Ambassador of Spain in Paris for two decades and who used to complain about the pro-German stance of the journal;<sup>27</sup> it was, moreover, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the Canary Islands at the beginning of the war.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the German colony and the officers and sailors of the German ships stationed in Las Palmas had contributed 16,000 Marks towards the war.<sup>29</sup> Not for nothing was Las Palmas the largest shelter of German and Austrian ships of all Spanish ports.<sup>30</sup> The subsidies to the press were maintained, as would seem to be proved by a British memorandum of August 1916, which based on a secret French document estimated that 400 pesetas were paid each month by the German colony in Las Palmas to the local newspaper *La Provincia*, which at this time was its organ of communication.<sup>31</sup> The pro-German stance of this daily, as of so many other pro-German Spanish newspapers, was not foreign to German business interests, which even before the war had been in competition with the dominant British.<sup>32</sup>

In Tenerife the Germans also made use of their own cable station, for, even though communications between Emden and Tenerife had been interrupted by the British at the very outbreak of war, the link from Tenerife

<sup>26</sup> German vice-consul on Las Palmas to Ratibor, 30 September 1914, PAAA, Botschaftsarchiv Madrid (hereafter BAM), Fach 80/83, Nr. 53–64, Pol. 8 i, Nr. 8, Press und Nachrichtendienst im Allgemeinen, vol. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Undated letter from Fernando León y Castillo to Juan Melián Alvarado, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Las Palmas, Fondo Fernando León y Castillo, file 17.

<sup>28</sup> Estadística de la prensa periódica de España (Madrid: Dirección General del Instituto Geográfico y Estadístico, 1914), 46–7 [Statistics relating to the periodical press of Spain].

<sup>29</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 12 October 1914, PAAA, Spanien 46, Die Spanische Presse, R 11862.

<sup>30</sup> 15 German ships and two Austrian were concerned, according to the list prepared by the naval attaché at the British Embassy in Madrid, May 1918, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter NA), Foreign Office (hereafter FO) 372/1169.

<sup>31</sup> Memorandum on German paper *La Provincia*, War Trade Intelligence Department, 28 August 1916, NA, FO 395/30.

<sup>32</sup> On German propaganda in Las Palmas see Javier Ponce Marrero, “Prensa y germanofilia en Las Palmas durante la Gran Guerra”, *Anuario de Estudios Atlánticos*, no. 38 (1992): 581–602 [“The Press and Germanophile sentiments in Las Palmas during the Great War”].



to Africa and South America remained in use. Thus, German news reaching Tenerife—once it had been sent on from Madrid by a trusted agent via the Spanish stations—was published in the islands' newspapers under the heading 'From a German source' or 'From the German colony', and was sent on from there by telegraph to Monrovia and Pernambuco, where it was also published in the press and from where news was likewise sent on to the station on Tenerife. All this was made possible thanks to the involvement of Junyent, an employee of the Spanish telegraph service, who influenced the press on the Canaries, and who worked on behalf of the German service, allowing such communication through the German cable without Spanish supervision.<sup>33</sup> The service provided by the cable between Tenerife and Monrovia led London to consider cutting the line, which the French saw as a vital necessity,<sup>34</sup> as it also was for the British consul in Tenerife, who felt it was essential.<sup>35</sup> The connection from Tenerife to Monrovia would finally be cut by the British Admiralty near Monrovia at midnight on November 19, 1914.<sup>36</sup> As for the radiotelegraphic communications that lay outside the reach of the Allies, the latter worked very hard to reduce any possibility of Germany using them, by putting pressure on Spain to bring into force measures restricting radiotelegraphic traffic. In that same month of November, the Spanish and the British governments agreed on a total prohibition on transmitting and receiving coded messages to or from Spanish radiotelegraphy stations, while subjecting to censorship those messages written in clear language.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, embassies and consulates were permitted to send messages in cipher by cable alone, further harming the Germans who had seen their cables cut by the Allies while they kept their own intact.

In November 1914 Ratibor sought the approval for all propaganda activities that German residents had been carrying out as private individuals in Spain. Berlin proved to be favorable to all of these activities, even though it allocated only 3,500 Marks for propaganda in Madrid and Barcelona. In

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<sup>33</sup> Secret communication from the Imperial Ministry for Postal Services to the Navy General Staff, to the Auswärtiges Amt and the Imperial Ministries for Naval Affairs and for the Colonies, 4 November 1914, PAAA, Spanien 46, Die Spanische Presse, R 11862.

<sup>34</sup> French Minister for Postal Services to the Secretary of the General Post Office in London, 29 October 1914; private, French Embassy in London to the Foreign Office, 3 November 1914, NA, FO 372/636.

<sup>35</sup> Telegram from Croker to the Foreign Office, 12 November 1914, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Confidential and urgent, Secretary of the Admiralty to the Under Secretary of State for the Foreign Office, 22 November 1914, *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Marquis of Lema to Geoffray, 14 November 1914; Marquis of Lema to Hardinge, 15 November 1914, AMAE, Guerra Europea, H 3116.

the latter city, Hofer was to serve in several capacities, since not only was he the agent of the German information service for Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries—sending information for Spain and Latin America—but he also was the coordinator of German propaganda in Barcelona, publishing 6,000-8,000 copies of an illustrated weekly, now called *La Guerra Mundial* (*The World War*). Moreover, he also was responsible for preparing German and Spanish editions of news dispatches arriving from Germany via radio telegram or mail.<sup>38</sup> These editions were sent to the Embassy in Madrid and to the 26 German consulates in Spain and Portugal, as well as to 160 German societies formed by residents in Spain. But particularly important for the propaganda effort was the dispatch of the Spanish edition of these German news stories to 400 Spanish and Portuguese dailies and close to 150 influential Spanish citizens with pro-German interests. Hofer's dedication to the German cause also included preparing photographs from the war, as well as the selection of pro-German articles published in Spanish newspapers for dispatch to the Italian and Romanian press as a counter to Allied propaganda. Hofer also put confidence in film propaganda, since he considered that given the fascination that this newly created medium wielded at that time, nothing could have as much impact as moving images.<sup>39</sup>

Propaganda activities in Madrid relied on the participation of several German residents. Among these, the most notable was Wilhelm Reutzenberg, director of the propaganda division of the subsidiary that AEG/Thomson Houston Ibérica maintained in Spain, and which Armbruster directed. Reutzenberg selected long articles and sent them to nearly 200 Spanish newspapers in Madrid and the provinces, and to a dozen or so in Portugal. Unlike the more topical news of the war which Hofer provided from Barcelona, Reutzenberg tried to round out the work of his fellow countryman by reporting news about life in Germany in a more extensive, educational way, highlighting the activities of the Social Democratic Party as well as accident insurance and health services for workers, and other aspects of daily life that could modify the image some people had of Germany, specifically targeting those groups, such as the workers, who might otherwise have identified more with the Allies. At the same time, Reutzenberg proved to be an effective propagandist, ready to remind

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<sup>38</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 6 November 1914, PAAA, Spanien 46, secr. Subventionierung Spanischer Zeitungen, R 11868.

<sup>39</sup> Hofer to the Nachrichtendienst für die Länder spanischer und portugiesischer Zunge, 7 November 1914, PAAA, Spanien 46, Die Spanische Presse, R 11862.

Spanish readers of the nature of Spain's historical relations with the Allies, and how it had indeed been France and England which had brought about Spain's loss of Great Power status. As far as the British were concerned, it was easy to appeal to Spain's always sensitive claims to recover Gibraltar; as regards France there were some more or less recent accounts still to be settled, from the war of independence against French occupation to the slights done to Spain in Morocco, with the question of Tangier as the most recent unhealed affront to Spain's African ambitions.

Also important in Madrid were the propaganda activities of Carl Coppel, a well-known and respected businessman who ran a watch factory, and who wrote a short pamphlet entitled *Por la Patria y por la Verdad* (*For the Fatherland and for the Truth*) exonerating Germany for its responsibility for the war. Following the success that this pamphlet enjoyed with a circulation of around of 35,000 printed copies, Coppel committed himself to continue this series of short analyses of the war every ten days.<sup>40</sup> Coppel also encouraged the German Embassy to buy war films because of the great impact he felt that these films would have on the Spaniards, and in this he convinced Ratibor, who in the same month of November requested a number of production companies to contact Spanish film companies to start showing films.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the German colonies in other Spanish cities also made every effort to serve the interests of German propaganda, according to what the ambassador pointed out to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, whom particularly appreciated the sacrifices made by the German colony in Las Palmas.<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, at the beginning of December 1914, as Ratibor had requested, the Ministry of Home Affairs authorized all Spanish radiotelegraphy stations to receive and pass on to the press and others who requested them, the news reports transmitted by the station at Nauen or any other German transmitter.<sup>43</sup> Thus, by the end of 1914 the German information service in Spain—which included this complex structure of propaganda activities, as well, of course, as the activities promoted directly by the German Embassy—was making clear progress. The Embassy had created this pro-

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<sup>40</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 6 November 1914, PAAA, Spanien 46, secr. Subventionierung Spanischer Zeitungen, R 11868.

<sup>41</sup> Jens Albes, "La propaganda cinematográfica de los alemanes en España durante la Primera Guerra Mundial", *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez XXXI*, no. 3 (1995): 77-8 ["German propaganda films in Spain during the First World War"].

<sup>42</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 6 November 1914, PAAA, Spanien 46, secr. Subventionierung Spanischer Zeitungen, R 11868.

<sup>43</sup> Marquis of Lema to Ratibor, 11 December 1914, AMAE, Guerra Europea, H 3116.

paganda network in a very short time—although, as we have seen, it had already made preparations before the war,—making perfectly clear the widespread presence of German propaganda in the face of certain inactivity on the part of the Allies until 1916.<sup>44</sup> Ratibor controlled all these activities through Embassy officials, who could block the publication of whatever they considered to be detrimental to Spanish opinion, and the Embassy distributed 10,000 Marks—authorized by the *Auswärtiges Amt*—as Christmas gifts to editors and journalists who served the German cause. *El Correo Español* received 4300 pesetas, *La Tribuna* 1500 pesetas, and *El Debate* 1000 pesetas. Even the *Heraldo de Madrid*, a periodical with divided sympathies, albeit seen mostly as pro-Allied, received a further 250 pesetas, no doubt to reward and encourage its pro-German leanings.<sup>45</sup>

At the beginning of 1915, the German Embassy sent on to the Chancellor the list of the pro-German newspapers in various Spanish cities, in relation to the possibility of advertising in them, which could be a promising approach, seeing that reduced advertising caused by the war had led to a significant lowering of revenues for the Spanish press. The list for Madrid included the pro-German *La Tribuna*, the Carlist *El Correo Español*, the independent *ABC*, the Catholic *El Debate*, as well as less important ones like *La Mañana*, and the Catholic papers *El Siglo Futuro* and *El Universo*.<sup>46</sup> Prominent in Barcelona were *El Correo Catalán* and the Catalan nationalist *La Veu de Catalunya*, while the following neutral papers received mention: *La Vanguardia*, *Diario de Barcelona*, *El Noticiero Universal*, *Las Noticias*, *La Tribuna* and *El Día Gráfico*. In other provinces the list included the newspapers *La Gaceta del Norte*, *Semanario Aurerá* and *El Nervión* from Bilbao, *El Correo del Norte* from San Sebastián, *El Correo de Andalucía*, *El Noticiero*, *Sevilla* and *Sevilla Nueva* from the Andalusian capital, the *Gaceta del Sur* from Granada, *El Correo de Cádiz* from this port city, the *Diario de Valencia* from this east coast city, *El Pueblo Asturiano* from Gijón, *El Eco de Galicia* from La Coruña, *El Diario Montañés* from Santander, *El Porvenir* from Valladolid, *La Defensa* from Málaga, *La Crónica* from Zaragoza, and *El Bloque* from Cáceres.<sup>47</sup> The embassy also opened negotiations with other newspapers to try to increase the number of daily newspapers favoring Germany. In some cases it was not an easy task to deal with Republican

<sup>44</sup> Aubert, 381–94.

<sup>45</sup> Regarding the *Heraldo*, see “A short report on propaganda in Spain, March 1916–March 1917”, John Walter to Hubert Montgomery, 13 March 1917, NA, FO 395/117.

<sup>46</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 11 January 1915, PAAA, Spanien 46, Die Spanische Presse, R 11865.

<sup>47</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 19 January 1915, *ibid.*

newspapers whose readers inclined more towards the Allies, but Ratibor believed it was necessary to get closer to all segments of opinion and thus to try to gain influence over them as well. In this aspect the results were uneven, as even though *El País* had accepted a German subsidy in the fall of 1914, it quickly saw that it could no longer maintain a pro-German editorial policy after this had caused an embarrassing situation with its readers. Its loss was compensated by the radical Republican newspaper *El Diluvio*, of Barcelona, with which Hofer had agreed a monthly payment of 2,500 pesetas in exchange for publishing official German war news and articles about the working classes and health insurance in Germany, which were to be selected by Hofer himself and the German consul in Barcelona, Georg Plehn;<sup>48</sup> however, later on this newspaper returned to its more natural pro-Allied stance, subsidized each month by the British until the end of the war.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, in order to sway the remaining important newspapers, German firms bought advertisements in *El Imparcial* and the *Heraldo*; thus putting pressure on them to use more pro-German news items and reports that, in the case of the *Heraldo*, Bruns was able to channel via a Swiss journalist.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover in early 1915 the German information service for Spain turned to two German film producers, because until then only a few series of slides had reached Spanish cinemas. They succeeded in interesting one of the first movie houses in Madrid to take German films and shortly afterwards began showing in Barcelona and its surroundings "Messter's weekly news" from the Messter-Film-Gesellschaft, which was brought in through a Berlin export company to the Barcelona publisher Seix Barral which, in turn, sold it to the owners of Spanish cinemas. However, only one or two copies of each short could be sold, because in fact, despite the intensification of German propaganda, the number of new releases was very low in the first two years of the war. These first German films were also seen in Cádiz and Jerez de la Frontera, but not in Madrid, Valladolid or Salamanca, because there the civil Governors, who exercised censorship, banned their showing.<sup>51</sup>

With the entry of Italy into the war on the Allied side, Ratibor and the German military High Command believed that France and England would

<sup>48</sup> 48 Carden, 70–80.

<sup>49</sup> Enrique Montero, "Luis Araquistain y la propaganda aliada durante la Primera Guerra Mundial", *Estudios de Historia Social*, no. 24-5 (1983): 253 and 266. ["Luis Araquistain and Allied propaganda during the First World War"].

<sup>50</sup> Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 19 January 1915, PAAA, Spanien 46, Die Spanische Presse, R 11865.

<sup>51</sup> Albes, 79–81.

increase their propaganda efforts to cause Spain to join the conflict too on the side of the Entente.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, it was necessary for Germany to make a greater effort, so at the beginning of June 1915, Jagow authorized new funding to the Ambassador to buy other major newspapers and influence important politicians, and suggested using more energetic methods. Ratibor explored several possibilities, such as the purchase of advertisements supporting Germany in pro-Allied newspapers, but the price demanded by these newspapers was excessive for the influence that such ads could be expected to have. More expensive still would have been the outright purchase of the pro-Allied newspapers in Madrid, which was reckoned to cost between five and ten million pesetas, plus another two to three million pesetas to produce a first-class information service for the newspapers in both Madrid and Barcelona, which would thus have saturated Spain with pro-German opinion. Concrete negotiations were, however, more modest, and were limited to buying a two-thirds interest in the Barcelona newspapers *El Día Gráfico* and *La Tribuna* for 200,000 pesetas, paid in July by Georg Plehn to the owners of the two newspapers. The Commander in Chief of the Austro-Hungarian army, General Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, declared to his German counterpart, General Erich von Falkenhayn, that major investments should be made in Barcelona and Bilbao, where Socialist and Republican opinion was strong and where Francophile sentiments were more openly expressed, as it was concluded by the Austrian high commander from conversations with Spanish politicians who had visited him. The need to influence this section of opinion would also be behind the distribution of anti-British literature among workers in different towns such as Barcelona and Málaga.<sup>53</sup>

The German ambassador had further gained support from provincial newspapers in Zaragoza, Seville, San Sebastián and Las Palmas,<sup>54</sup> but other plans, such as creating newspapers with socialist ideological leanings to counter from within the pro-Allied propaganda of some of the leaders of the Spanish left, were discarded, because the cost of German propaganda activity in Spain was already turning out to be very high. The remaining months of 1915 were wholly devoted to combating pro-Allied propaganda using the press media that had already been won over to the German cause,

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<sup>52</sup> Telegram from Ratibor to the Auswärtiges Amt, 2 June 1915, PAAA, Spanien 46, secr. Subventionierung Spanischer Zeitungen, R 11869.

<sup>53</sup> Telegram from Gaselee to Croker, 15 May 1917, NA, FO 395/121.

<sup>54</sup> After some initial months of relative unclarity, it was from May 1915 that the pro-German stance of the above-mentioned Las Palmas daily *La Provincia* became perfectly clear; Ponce, "Prensa y germanofilia", 598 ["Press and Germanophile sentiments"].



and which had managed to shape Spanish public opinion, which according to Ratibor, was already sufficiently sympathetic to Germany. Ultimately, by late 1915 the subsidized press was already an extensive and well enough developed tool to launch an anti-Allied campaign, such as was indeed launched with regard to the military activities of the Entente on different occasions during the war. However, in December 1915 the relations between Berlin and Madrid underwent a severe reverse when Dato was forced to resign on account of domestic problems caused by the war. The British and French took full advantage of this incident to put heavy pressure on the King, attempting to secure Dato's replacement by the count of Romanones, whose leanings towards the Entente were well known. Romanones introduced a form of neutrality more benevolent to the Entente, in such a way that during his term of office the Germans were forced to make policy concessions to counter the influence of the Spanish Prime Minister, while as mediator, Alfonso XIII attempted—despite the inevitable concessions made to the Entente—to avoid any open adherence to the Allied cause and to leave open the few opportunities for maneuver provided by Germany's offers.

In 1916 German propaganda underwent some new developments with regard to cinematography, which was used to publicize the major advances in German industrial and military technology. In connection to this, the military spectacle generated by the visit of the German submarine *U-35* to the port of Cartagena in June of that year brought a personal message from Wilhelm II to Alfonso XIII as a demonstration of friendship between the two countries. This visit was made possible at the express desire of the Spanish monarch, but it was certainly, and above all, a spectacular act of German propaganda, a masterstroke to impress on Spanish public opinion the power of the German military. However, it brought in its wake clear threats by the Entente to occupy Spanish ports, which led to the publication of a Spanish declaration that made it virtually impossible to repeat such visits.<sup>55</sup> During that summer anti-German reports were widespread in Spanish newspapers, in a press campaign which Ratibor believed had been undertaken with the approval of the Spanish government, and which he felt deserved a sharp protest note from Berlin.<sup>56</sup>

From that same summer of 1916 the German Embassy in Madrid made strenuous attempts to improve propaganda films to compensate for the success and the impact of war films shown by French propaganda. Gustav

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<sup>55</sup> Ponce, *Canarias en la Gran Guerra*, 98-9 [The Canary Islands in the Great War].

<sup>56</sup> Carden, 125-7 and 153-5.

Flamme, a German businessman residing in San Sebastián, where he had founded a pro-German newspaper in 1915, was instructed to show a series of German and Austrian films in several Spanish cities. After beginning his propaganda tour in San Sebastian in September 1916, he dealt with censorship by giving the events a private character and sending out free tickets for the showings. Yet a collection box for the German Red Cross was set up at the entrance, thus allowing the defrayal of the costs of organizing the showings. The next stops on this film tour were Bilbao, Santander, Gijón and Oviedo, in each of which at least two showings were made with the help of members of the local German communities and those sectors of society—like the Jesuits at Gijón—who were more sympathetic to Germany. In some of these cities four or five showings had to be organized in order to meet the heavy demand for tickets, even from the leading authorities, especially military and ecclesiastical, as well as Allied diplomats.

#### *The Submarine War and Propaganda*

In the course of October and November of 1916, the anti-German campaign intensified, and in order combat it, an increase was made to the funding for the press available to Ratibor, who in turn requested more propaganda material. The basic weapon to mitigate Romanones' change of course was the publication of the concessions that Germany was willing to make regarding Spanish shipping and its promises of future economic aid. In the same way, in view of the successful box office income from the film tour—which amounted to more than 9000 pesetas—, Flamme proposed to continue it in Pamplona, Zaragoza, Alicante, Valencia, Granada and Seville, where the German films reached in the last two months of 1916. Now where possible, the films should be purchased and not rented, given the lower cost this would imply. In these cities there were further obstacles to the showing of German documentaries raised by the censorship of the civil Governors in some places, like Pamplona, where an extra showing was allowed grudgingly, or Zaragoza, where the film was absolutely prohibited, although this decision did not prevent them from showing other German documentaries twice. In Alicante, the single showing that did take place attracted few viewers partly because of veiled British threats to put some city traders on blacklists if they went to German films. In Valencia and Seville, they nevertheless managed two showings that resulted in healthy takings for the Red Cross. In Granada it also proved possible—though not



without difficulties—to rent a theatre, but none was found to be available in Cartagena or Almería. Still at the beginning of 1917 six German feature films on the war and the navy were exhibited in Barcelona, in showings organized by a German association, but, in the early part of the year the Romanones government banned public showings of war movies.<sup>57</sup> This coincided with the expansion and intensification of the submarine war and with an increase in sinkings in December 1916, which had now reached the coastal waters of the Canaries and were causing great agitation and alarm among public opinion.<sup>58</sup> This led to a worsening of relations between the governments of Berlin and Madrid, where Romanones was determined to cut back German influence on Spanish public opinion by means of an active press campaign.

From the very first days of January 1917 censorship had proven to be more and more uncompromising with pro-German newspapers and with German news that reached Spain by radio, despite demands from Ratibor that these restrictions be lifted. From the office of the Prime Minister notice was given that Spain would be forced to request Ratibor's recall if the German ambassador did not stop his propaganda activities and his meddling in internal Spanish affairs, which had even led the Spanish ambassador in Berlin to take actions, especially in regard to the press campaign against Romanones, which was attributed to Ratibor.<sup>59</sup> Even as the *Auswärtiges Amt* had instructed him to refrain from interfering in Spanish affairs and the General Staff in Berlin had asked him to conduct propaganda with greater caution, it was General Ludendorff himself who from September 1916 had insisted on more funding to bring down Romanones. It is not surprising, therefore, that at the beginning of February new sums were made available to Ratibor to redouble his activities in the press.<sup>60</sup> This was especially necessary because in the following months of 1917 the progress of the war was to have a clear and increasingly negative impact on Spanish-German relations. In January of that year the decision was taken at the Imperial Headquarters to initiate total submarine warfare starting February 1, in order to cut off Britain from supplies and produce an unsustainable situation.

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<sup>57</sup> Albes, 83–92.

<sup>58</sup> Ponce, *Canarias en la Gran Guerra*, 224–34.

<sup>59</sup> Polo de Bernabé to Count of Romanones, 13 January 1917, AMAE, Guerra Europea, H 3055.

<sup>60</sup> Carden, 147 and 162–3.

The new submarine war was to have great impact on Spain, so much so that German propaganda was forced to adjust to a new policy framework. In addition, that same month of February 1917 was marked by the reappearance of the German submarine *U-35*, which unloaded in waters off Cartagena a varied cargo made up of weapons, explosives and instructions for spies, as well as literature and feature films for propaganda purposes.<sup>61</sup> Polo de Bernabé, the Spanish Ambassador to Germany, received verbal assurances from the *Auswärtiges Amt* that any explosives found in February 1917 in Cartagena were destined to the eventual destruction of the engine rooms of German ships moored in Spain and that this would have been done in a manner that would in no way have caused difficulties or damage to Spanish ports. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly deplored the incident at Cartagena, of which—according to him—he had not been informed, but justified the German Admiralty preemptive action because it had reports that left no doubt concerning British plans to seize these ships, resorting, if necessary, to a coup de main.<sup>62</sup>

The German account of the incident at Cartagena was the first sign of heightened tension in Spanish-German relations. The inconceivable stupidity of the German explanation—in Polo de Bernabé's opinion—was soon compounded by the conflicts caused by the submarine campaign.<sup>63</sup> When on April 9 1917 a German submarine torpedoed the Spanish steamer *San Fulgencio* without prior warning, Romanones pro-Ally Prime Ministerial Office attempted to get the government to sever relations with Germany, following in the footsteps of the United States, but failed due to resistance of the King and his Cabinet, and was forced to submit his resignation. The overthrow of Romanones, who the Germans considered to be the greatest threat to Spanish neutrality, had been the subject of an active press campaign mounted by Ratibor, the German Ambassador in Madrid, who had some bearing on the fall of the liberal leader. Thus, the forces opposed to the President had received support from the Germans in various forms, notably by subsidies to their journals or by the foundation of new anti-Romanones newspapers. In Madrid, the German Embassy collaborated in both the creation and the funding of *La Nación* and *El Día*, and the payroll of pro-German newspapers in the capital now included the also funded *El*

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<sup>61</sup> Polo de Bernabé to Zimmermann, 3 March 1917; Holtzendorff to Zimmermann, 3 March 1917, PAAA, Der Weltkrieg Nr. 11 q Geheim, Unternehmungen und Aufwiegelungen in Spanien, R 21241.

<sup>62</sup> P-Louis Rivière, *Un centre de guerre secrète*, Madrid 1914–1918 (Paris: Payot, 1936), 107–8.

<sup>63</sup> Polo de Bernabé to Gimeno, 24 March 1917, AMAE, Guerra Europea, H 3055.

*Correo Español*, *La Correspondencia Militar*, *La Tribuna*, *La Acción* and *España Nueva*, as well as *ABC*,<sup>64</sup> *El Debate*, *El Universo* and *El Siglo Futuro*;<sup>65</sup> while in Barcelona, San Sebastian, Bilbao and Valencia small propaganda bureaus were opened, which relied on assistance provided by the Marquis of Polavieja and led to the creation of so-called “committees for the defense of neutrality” throughout the length and breadth of the country.<sup>66</sup> To the same end, and as a very effective means of propaganda suggested by the German consul in Valencia in the face of the difficulties caused by the submarine war, the *Auswärtiges Amt* approved making available to Ratibor the sum of 850,000 pesetas to alleviate the poverty of day-laborers on the east coast, who had been hard hit by the fall in exports of fruit, and, if he thought it appropriate, a further 50,000 pesetas for the consul in Santa Cruz de Tenerife to distribute to the needy of the Canary Islands.<sup>67</sup>

García Prieto—Marquis of Alhucemas—and Dato, the successors of Romanones, attempted to restore a more or less strict neutrality. In fact, García Prieto represented the conservative wing of the Liberals, so the German Embassy considered him a suitable candidate. As far as film propaganda went, the new Government of García Prieto was more conciliatory, allowing the screening of movies provided that they were not offensive to other friendly countries and didn't include expressions against neutrality, hence, the authorization of the civil governors was still required. Thus, now in collaboration with the Austro-Hungarian Embassy, the Germans showed again documentaries, which came in equal parts from Germany and Austria.<sup>68</sup> Screenings took place in rooms fitted out for the purpose by the German Embassy in Madrid and by the different representatives of German interests in Spain, which allowed the films to be seen in several Spanish cities as well as in the Canary Islands. On Tenerife films were shown with great success in a film theater for two days in the middle of September 1917;<sup>69</sup> screenings were also held in Las Palmas, where the German shipping company Woermann used its facilities to show German war films for four days

<sup>64</sup> For the British ABC was one of the few pro-German newspapers in Madrid which remained respectable, for which reason it was never included on their blacklists, though other Allied countries thought differently; “A short report on propaganda in Spain, March 1916–March 1917”, John Walter to Hubert Montgomery, 13 March 1917, NA, FO 395/117.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; Seoane and Sáiz, 216–22; and Aubert, 395–99 and 404–8.

<sup>66</sup> Jens Albes, *Worte wie Waffen. Die deutsche Propaganda in Spanien während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1996), 258–322.

<sup>67</sup> Rivière, 49–50 and 120.

<sup>68</sup> Albes, *Worte wie Waffen*, 324–52.

<sup>69</sup> German consul at Santa Cruz de Tenerife to Ratibor, 17 September 1917, PAAA, BAM, Fach 80/83, Nr. 53–64, Pol. 8 i, Nr. 8, Press und Nachrichtendienst im Allgemeinen, vol. 32.

in the fall of 1917, raising 1600 pesetas which were distributed between the Austrian and German Red Crosses.<sup>70</sup>

In any event, because of the submarine war, Spanish diplomacy relations with Germany would remain tense throughout 1917. Already in May, the new Government of García Prieto had demanded reparations and respect for the interests and sovereignty of Spain;<sup>71</sup> and in June—after the fall of García Prieto due to domestic problems—the new Government of the conservative Dato took steps to prevent the entry of German submarines into Spanish ports. At the beginning of June 1917 the German submarine *UC 52* entered the port of Cadiz, where it remained until the 29th. The Allies reacted to its stay as they had done a year earlier when the German submarine *U-35* had visited the port of Cartagena with a personal message from Wilhelm II. The same day as the *UC 52* left Cádiz the Spanish authorities responded to Allied pressure by adopting a Royal Decree prohibiting the entry of submarines of all warring nations into Spanish ports and waters. Thus, when the German submarine *UB 49* entered Cádiz on September 9, 1917, it was duly interned. However, this submarine escaped from the Spanish port on October 6, producing a crisis in Spanish-German relations. This was the reason why at the beginning of the new year of 1918 Wilhelm II sent a personal letter to Alfonso XIII, linking the settlement of this issue to the withdrawal of Von Krohn—the naval attaché at the German Embassy in Madrid—which Spain had requested since October 1917. In response to this letter from the German Emperor, the King of Spain wrote on January 19, 1918 to Wilhelm II about this delicate and vexing issue, trusting in a dignified and satisfactory solution.<sup>72</sup> But before sending him home in February 1918, Von Krohn was given a new task, dealing in fact with propaganda, for he received a number of documentaries which were first to be screened for the King before being distributed in Madrid and Barcelona, via Reutzenberg and Hofer respectively.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, the tightening of the Allied blockade added to the problem of receiving propaganda material from Germany, while, on the other hand, the long blacklists included new pro-German newspapers.<sup>74</sup> From 1917 on,

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<sup>70</sup> German vice-consul in Las Palmas to Ratibor, 31 October 1917, *ibid.*, vol. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Radio telegram, very confidential and urgent, from Alvarado to Polo de Bernabé, 18 May 1917, PAAA, *Der Weltkrieg* Nr. 5 e geh Spanien adh., *Funksprueche: Spanien*, R 20655.

<sup>72</sup> Alfonso XIII to Wilhelm II, Palace of Madrid, 19 January 1918, PAAA, *Spanien* 61, *Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland*, R 12005.

<sup>73</sup> Rivière, 49.

<sup>74</sup> Even if there were some differences between them, the lists produced by the Allies at the end of the war included from Madrid ABC, *El Correo Español*, *El Debate*, *El Siglo*

by using their strict control of shipping and imports, the English also attempted to use the blockade to cut supplies of paper to the pro-German newspapers in various Spanish cities, succeeding in various places, particularly against the pro-German press of the islands, where the blockade was more difficult to evade. In this way, the pro-German newspapers *Gaceta de Tenerife*—which according to the British was subsidized by the German consul—and *La Provincia* of Las Palmas had to deal with a shortage of supplies of paper, which obliged them to reduce their numbers of pages in the spring of 1917 and even more so in the beginning of 1918.<sup>75</sup> However, in the spring of 1918, at the time of the last German offensive, Germany also stepped up its propaganda campaign in Spain from the publicity bureau of Flamme in San Sebastián. From there, the German consulate coordinated the dispatch of film material to the Imperial German consulates, so that from March of that year new German films were once again screened in Tarragona, Zaragoza, Pamplona, La Coruña, Santander, Vigo and Oviedo, moving in the summer of 1918 to Andalusia and Barcelona, where they were seen by 7000 people.<sup>76</sup> Their success in the cities of Catalonia was accompanied by the foundation of Spanish-German societies in Tarragona and Barcelona, which included several prominent members of society, as well as people with economic ties to Germany; such societies thus became new agents of German propaganda, organizing lectures and establishing ties with sympathetic newspapers. Nevertheless, the progress of the war was already working against German propaganda, as the German submarine campaign provoked in 1918 such sensitive situations that Madrid was on the verge of a diplomatic break with Berlin.

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Futuro, El Mentidero, and La Tribuna; from Bilbao La Gaceta del Norte, the Diario de Vizcaya and El Pueblo; from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria El Tradicionalista, La Provincia, and El Día; from Barcelona El Día Gráfico and El Tiempo; from Málaga the Diario Malagueño and La Defensa; from La Coruña El Eco de Galicia and El Ideal Gallego; from Santander El Diario Montañés and El Noticiero Montañés; from Seville El Correo de Andalucía; from Granada the Gaceta del Sur; from Santa Cruz de Tenerife the Gaceta de Tenerife; and from Valencia Las Provincias; cf. Enemy trading list no. 2, revised to March 15, 1918 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 122–41; “Liste officielle no. 12 des maisons considérées comme ennemies ou comme jouant vis-à-vis de l’ennemi le rôle de personnes interposées”, Journal Officiel de la République Française, 21 December 1918, 10968–73; and Consolidated statutory list of persons and firms in countries, other than enemy countries, with whom persons and firms in the United Kingdom are prohibited from trading, complete to Feb. 21st, 1919 (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1919), 122–47.

<sup>75</sup> Croker to Gaselee, 21 June 1917; telegram from Gaselee to Croker, 17 July 1917, NA, FO 395/121; and Ponce “Prensa y germanofilia”, 600.

<sup>76</sup> Albes, Worte wie Waffen, 361–2.

The economic situation, worsened by the submarine war, induced Spain to rely more strongly on the Entente; consequently, Germany threatened to cancel the concessions granted so far to Spanish shipping,<sup>77</sup> such as those relating to the traffic of certain Spanish products,<sup>78</sup> as well as to permits given in the submarine War Zone, in which shipping was prohibited.<sup>79</sup> After the last governments of Dato and García Prieto, the new government of national unity of Antonio Maura attempted to prudently redirect Spanish neutrality, however, now beyond the reach of German propaganda, he was not able to avoid a worsening of Spanish-German relations on the question of submarines, even if at the beginning of the war Maura had shown pro-German proclivities. In August 1918 his government wrote a note to the Berlin government that from that moment on it would replace Spanish ships sunk by submarines with German ships moored in Spanish ports. However, the Spanish government did not carry out this measure, since, according to diplomatic sources, this would have prompted a break with Germany. Besides, Berlin decided to hand over six steamers to Spain as repayment for sunken ships, attempting in this way to appease the Madrid cabinet, as the war situation had worsened considerably for the Central Powers and Germany watched with concern the forced rapprochement of Spain to the Entente.<sup>80</sup> The military outcome was already decided and with the end of the war, in November 1918, came also the end of the propaganda war, in which Germany had been so active during the whole conflict.

### *Some Conclusions*

The present analysis of German propaganda as an integral part of Berlin's foreign policy in Spain permits a few conclusions, especially regarding the aims of Germany diplomacy and propaganda. In this sense, it was noted that Madrid's neutrality was the best outcome that the *Auswärtiges Amt* and pro-German sentiment in Spain could hope for, for if Spain did take part in the war in any way, it could only be on the side of the Entente. As

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<sup>77</sup> Instruction sent by Bussche to Prinz Ratibor, 29 April 1918, PAAA, Der Weltkrieg Nr. 28, Druck der Entente auf Spanien (Tonnagefrage), R 21919.

<sup>78</sup> Chief of Navy General Staff to the Secretary of State of the *Auswärtiges Amt*, 13 February 1918; Secretary of State of the *Auswärtiges Amt* to Polo de Bernabé, February 1918, PAAA, Spanien 61, Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland, R 12005.

<sup>79</sup> Telegram from Polo de Bernabé to Alhucemas, 23 February 1918, PAAA, Der Weltkrieg Nr. 5 e geh Spanien adh., Funksprüche: Spanien, R 20657.

<sup>80</sup> Ponce, Canarias en la Gran Guerra, 323–43.

the German ambassador in Madrid had told Berlin at the outset of the war, taking Germany's side was totally out of the question for Spain, given its proximity to and dependence on France and Great Britain (and the inevitability of their reprisals). The impetus deployed by German propaganda from the start of the war stems then from Spain's international position, tied to the Entente in the Mediterranean agreements of 1907. The purpose of this propaganda was to neutralize any possible Spanish participation in the war on the side of its partners from Cartagena by means of an early massive campaign aiming at strengthening its neutrality. It should be recognized, nevertheless, that neither the French nor the British wanted Spain's direct participation in the war, primarily because in a short war its scant military resources could provide little support, and secondly because in a widespread conflict they mainly sought—and obtained—Spain's participation in the economic warfare. This bore on a more concrete and ambitious aim, which can be singled out in German propaganda: to block any excessive leaning of Spanish neutrality in the direction of the Entente. It is evident that by the end of the war Berlin had to face the reality of the pressure the Entente put on a dependent Spain, which in the summer of 1918 was close to breaking with Germany, as its propaganda was no longer able to make up for the devastating effects on all levels of its submarine war.

Thus, even if the Germans were not able to hold Spain to strict neutrality, at least until 1918 they were able to avoid its complete absorption by the Entente and a decisive swing towards the Allies. To achieve this, they made good use of an excellent propaganda web, linked to its information and espionage service, and massively leveraged opportunities presented to German cash for influencing the opinion of a press beset by chronic economic problems, which were aggravated by the war and compensated to a great extent by the German Embassy in Madrid. The principal argument of such German propaganda responded to the opportunistic model that surrounded Spain's international recovery, to be achieved by a successful Spanish recapture of Gibraltar and Morocco, which was to be made feasible by German proximity and a German victory. This irredentism and this recovery were also a constant factor in the more or less explicit bargaining ploys, which directed in particular to Alfonso XIII, dealt with the intended role of the King and Spain as mediator in the conflict. After all, pro-German sentiment had the advantage of being the more natural and instinctive response to the historical disagreements and difficulties that the relations with France and Great Britain still raised in Spain. Therefore,



this pro-German stance was based much more on the historical dislike of France and Great Britain present in the collective mind of the nation, than on any defense or admiration of Germany, a far away country, of which most Spaniards knew nothing. This argument afforded moreover various opportunities: first, to reach out quickly and easily to the collective feelings of a large part of the Spanish people, who in turn had little idea of what was being discussed in Europe; and, second, the opportunity to win over Alfonso XIII, who often overreached his governments, with a personal agenda that sought to maintain the limited room for maneuver that Germany's offers allowed him in confronting the Allies. It was a question of exploiting to the full an element which was betting on Germany, since the offers made to Spain and Alfonso XIII, and their more or less veiled propaganda were a delaying tactic, which proved effective in galvanizing Spain and its monarch into remaining neutral.

However, in order to assess the achievements of German propaganda with respect to Spain's neutrality, it will be still necessary to analyze the actual room for maneuver open to Madrid's foreign policy, which such propaganda wished to influence. As far as this question is concerned, it is evident that the wriggle room left to Spanish neutrality was tiny, this due to internal weaknesses, imbalances and divisions, and to the threats to the survival of the regime which involvement in the war would pose. And this is the key to the evolution of Spain's neutrality, despite the propaganda and the pressure exerted. In this way, even though the fall in April 1917 of Romanones—when he attempted to bring Spain closer to the Entente—depended on the involvement of the German Embassy and German propaganda, it had much more to do with the refusal of the King and the rest of his government to break the neutrality. Not even in August 1918, with Germany already defeated and Spanish-German relations extremely strained over the submarine question, would Spain take the decision to break off relations with Berlin, given the absence of national and international ties to face the abyss of war. If we bear in mind the tiny margin for movement open to Spain, or to be more precise its impotence, we can judge Germany's use of war propaganda in Spain as both a relative success and failure, stoking and rekindling a fire, which was already well alight—by Spain's desire to recover territory from France and Great Britain—but which was unlikely to burn much more fiercely. The enthusiastic involvement of so many Spaniards in this propaganda war, on one side or the other, had more to do with internal conflicts that saw the war as an extension of these internal struggles. For more than four years, the defenders



and opponents of the political status quo had numerous new propaganda resources at their disposal in the midst of an escalation of words, which magnified the social and political unrest.

To conclude, we can add that the extraordinary build up of propaganda services, especially that of Germany in Spain during the Great War, also had much to do with the messianic character of a total war, which meant no stinting of resources, least of all for propaganda purposes, which, far beyond the aims of German war diplomacy, were greatly overtaken by Spain's own internal dynamics. In this sense, Germany's frenetic activity drove a propaganda war which had a major impact on Spain's internal struggle, and which amounted to a civil confrontation of words, ideas and principles, concealed beneath political inclinations; a confrontation present in the war and precursor of the final crisis of Spain's political system.