



DOSSIER

España y la I Guerra Mundial
Cien años después

**GUERRA TOTAL EN TERRITORIO
NEUTRAL: ACTIVIDADES ALEMANAS
EN ESPAÑA DURANTE LA PRIMERA
GUERRA MUNDIAL**

**Total War in neutral territory:
German activity in Spain during the
First World War**

Anne Rosenbusch

independent researcher

anne.rosenbusch@gmail.com

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Resumen: Cuando se examina las relaciones Hispano-Germanas durante la Primera Guerra Mundial resulta evidente que Alemania supo cómo llegar al alma de la España neutral. El objeto primordial de las actividades alemanas en suelo español durante este periodo fue confirmar su neutralidad por cualquier medio e impedir su alineamiento con la Entente. En muchas ocasiones, particularmente en relación con la disrupción de la producción destinada al esfuerzo bélico de los Aliados, Alemania llegó a extremos que claramente violaban la neutralidad de España.

Mientras su propaganda contribuyó a exacerbar el amargo debate entre francófilos y germanófilos, la diplomacia alemana intentó influenciar las decisiones de las figuras más importantes del estado como el Rey Alfonso XIII. Los agentes alemanes buscaron el apoyo de las elites aristocráticas y conservadoras del país. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, también intentaron infiltrarse en ciertos sectores del movimiento obrero para fomentar actividades huelguísticas que interrumpiera el comercio con los Aliados.

Este artículo explora los principales aspectos de la interferencia alemana en los asuntos internos de

España durante la Primera Guerra Mundial y el subsecuente efecto desestabilizador que tal interferencia tuvo en la ya muy frágil situación doméstica.

Palabras clave: Kaiser Guillermo II, General Eric Ludendorff, Comandante Arnold Kalle, Comandante Hans von Krohn, Príncipe Maximilian von Ratibor.

Abstract: In examining Spanish-German relations during the war, it becomes evident that Germany did know how to find the way to the soul of neutral Spain. The overall aim of German activity in Spain was to ensure Spanish neutrality at all costs in order to prohibit Spain from joining the Entente. However, this often meant completely violating the country's rights as a neutral in the European conflict. This becomes particularly evident when examining Germany's attempts to disrupt the Allied economic war effort from Spain as much as possible.

While widespread German press propaganda ensured heated debates amongst *Francófilos* and

Germanófilos, German diplomats tried to influence important power brokers in Spain such as King Alfonso XIII. On one hand, German diplomats and agents bolstered Spain's conservative and monarchist ruling elite, and on the other hand, Germany also supported and infiltrated Spanish workers organisations with the aim of agitating strike action which would negatively impact on Allied trade.

The article will outline the main aspects of German interference in Spanish domestic affairs during the First World War and the destabilising effect this interference had on Spain's already highly fragile domestic situation

Key Words: Kaiser Wilhem II, General Eric Ludendorff, Major Arnold Kalle, Lieutenant Commander Hans von Krohn, Prince Maximilian von Ratibor

GUERRA TOTAL EN TERRITORIO NEUTRAL: ACTIVIDADES ALEMANAS EN ESPAÑA DURANTE LA PRIMERA GUERRA MUNDIAL

With occasion of the centenary of the First World War, a wealth of archival material and scholarly publications have entered the public domain fostering thus new analysis and debate. In the case of Spain, the relative dearth of literature in this subject and period has been gradually corrected during the last years. Within the new bibliography, the field of international relations and diplomacy stands out. Indeed, a number of outstanding publications have been crucial in producing a much more accurate idea of the activities of the belligerent nations in Spain, their control and manipulation of the press, their spy networks, the activities of their submarines, etc.¹ All these new studies highlight how, despite its neutrality, Spain became almost a battleground; a veritable theatre of operation for both belligerent camps.

However, while the above mentioned works certainly make references to Germany's role, they have mostly concentrated in the Allied war effort and documents from Spanish as well as French, British and Italian archives². In contrast to the abundant literature on the relations between Spain and the III Reich, much less research has been completed on Spanish-German relations during the First World War. The most thorough of them is the work by Ron M. Carden³. Nevertheless, although this book provided a very good overview of the period, it was mostly based on German diplomatic records available in U.S.

¹ The best analysis on the state of the question can be found in Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA and Carolina GARCÍA SANZ, "España and la Gran Guerra: un análisis historiográfico a la luz del centenario", *Índice Histórico Español*, 128 (2015), pp. 97-130. The most important publications are Javier PONCE MARRERO, *Canarias en la Gran Guerra, 1914-1918*, Tenerife, Cabildo de Gran Canaria, 2006; and "Propaganda and Politics: Germany and Spanish Public Opinion in World War I", Troy R.E. PADDOCK (ed.), *World War I and Propaganda*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2014; Carolina GARCÍA SANZ, *La Primera Guerra Mundial en el Estrecho de Gibraltar. Economía, política y relaciones internacionales*, Madrid, CSIC, 2012; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT, *Nidos de espías. España, Francia y la I Guerra Mundial*, Madrid, Alianza, 2014; Fernando GARCÍA SANZ, *España en la Gran Guerra. Espías, diplomáticos y traficantes*, Madrid, Galaxia Gutenberg, 2014; Maximiliano FUENTES CODERA, *España en la Primera Guerra Mundial: una movilización cultural*, Madrid, Akal, 2014.

² For instance the study of Fernando GARCÍA SANZ (Italy), AUBERT and GONZALEZ CALLEJA (France), Carolina GARCÍA SANZ (Great Britain), etc.

³ See Ron M. CARDEN, *German Policy Toward Neutral Spain, 1914-18*, New York, Garland, 1987. Other books of interests are Lilian GELOS DE VAZ FERREIRA, *Die Neutralitätspolitik Spaniens während des Ersten Weltkrieges – unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutsch-spanischen Beziehungen*, Hamburg, Institut für Aus-wärtige Politik, 1966; Jens ALBES, *Worte wie Waffen – Die deutsche Propaganda in Spanien während des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Essen, Klartext, 1996. However, these two works only cover specific aspects: propaganda (ALBES) and diplomacy (GELOS DE VAZ FERREIRA).

archives and on the activities of crucial individuals such as the German ambassador to Spain, Prince Maximilian von Ratibor.

‘The way to the soul of the neutrals was barred to us. We did not know how to open it’⁴, wrote General Erich Ludendorff in his memoirs in an attempt to explain the failed German propaganda campaign which he largely blamed for the defeat of the Central Powers in November 1918. Ludendorff’s statement, however, could not be further from the truth in light of Germany’s campaign in Spain during the First World War. Neutral Spain became a battleground for both belligerents right from the outset of the European conflict. Germany opportunistically exploited Spanish neutrality to its advantage. In examining Spanish-German relations during the war, it becomes evident that Germany did know how to find the way to the soul of neutral Spain. The overall aim of German activity in Spain was to ensure Spanish neutrality at all costs in order to prohibit Spain from joining the Entente. However, this often meant completely violating the country’s rights as a neutral in the European conflict. This becomes particularly evident when examining Germany’s attempts to disrupt the Allied economic war effort from Spain as much as possible.

While widespread German press propaganda ensured heated debates amongst *Francófilos* and *Germanófilos*, German diplomats tried to influence important power brokers in Spain such as King Alfonso XIII. However, while on the one hand, German diplomats and agents bolstered Spain’s conservative and monarchist ruling elite, and on the other hand, Germany also supported and infiltrated Spanish workers organisations with the aim of agitating strike action which would negatively impact on Allied trade.

Largely based on a vast array of new primary sources, mostly from hitherto unexplored German archives, this article’s primary objective is to fill the gap left by the aforementioned literature. It will outline the main aspects of German involvement in Spain during the Great War by focusing on three crucial areas: diplomacy, propaganda and intelligence activity.

1. DIPLOMACY

The man at the head of the German diplomatic community in Spain during the First World War was Prince Maximilian von Ratibor und Corvey, member of the Hohenlohe family. He was appointed ambassador at Madrid on 27 February 1910⁵, a month after the passing of his predecessor Count Tattenbach. Ratibor, who had previously served at Vienna, Athens, Budapest, Belgrade and Lisbon, was described by his British counterpart, Sir Arthur Hardinge, as ‘a pleasant colleague, frank and good-natured of jovial appearance, a keen sportsman’⁶. Hardinge also noted in his assessment, expressed in a report from 1913, that Ratibor had not engaged in any particular political activity or intrigues aimed at arousing Spanish feeling against France⁷. Of course this was to change dramatically with the outbreak of the war. The European crisis was to transform Ratibor into Germany’s leading agent in Spain, relentless

⁴ Erich LUDENDORFF, *Concise Ludendorff memoirs, 1914–1918*, London, Hutchinson & Co., 1933, p. 169.

⁵ Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (P.A.), Botschaft Madrid, Karton 362, Äuswärtige Amt to Legationskasse, 14.3.1910.

⁶ NATIONAL ARCHIVES (N.A.), FO371/2103, Foreign Office, Spain & Portugal (War) 1914, Report on Heads of Missions for 1913, Hardinge to Grey, received 31.1.1914.

⁷ *Ibid.*

in his attempt to conquer Spanish public opinion. In his work the ambassador was assisted by embassy secretaries Eberhard von Stohrer and Franz Grimm. Von Stohrer, who had served as embassy secretary in Madrid since 1913, would return to Spain after the First World War when Adolf Hitler appointed him as ambassador on 25 July 1936, the same day the Führer decided to come to the aid of the nationalist coup that would eventually propel General Francisco Franco to power⁸.

Prior to 1914 the German embassy, with its central location on the Paseo de la Castellana, was the place to be for Madrid's upper class society, in particular for the city's affluent youth⁹. Well known for their parties and dances, the Ratibors kept an open and welcoming house, lavishing considerable hospitality on Madrid society¹⁰. In his social functions ambassador Ratibor was greatly helped by his wife, the Princess of Ratibor (nee Countess d'Orsay), and their six daughters. The wife of the German ambassador was referred to as the Doyenne of the diplomatic corps in Madrid¹¹. Princess Ratibor also founded a hospital in Madrid for her German, Austrian and Swiss compatriots. It was located at Paseo de Ronda and was led by a Dr. Wendel¹². Ratibor's daughters seamlessly integrated into Spanish society, speaking perfect Castilian and identifying with Spanish customs and culture¹³. The British ambassador noted the regard given to Ratibor and his family by the Spanish king¹⁴. One of Ratibor's daughters, for example, attended hunts organised by the Spanish royal family¹⁵.

Although Madrid was the centre of German activity, Barcelona was of no lesser importance to the diplomats. Baron Ostmann von der Leye, the German consul at the Catalan capital, and vice consul Alfred von Carlowitz-Hartzisch were equally active in the pursuit for Spanish public opinion as their superior at Madrid. Pro-German sentiment amongst Spanish officials in Barcelona was already evident before the war when the German community of the Catalan capital celebrated the birthday of Kaiser Wilhelm II with a banquet that was also attended by the mayor of the city, former governor general of Cuba, Valeriano Weyler, and other leading Spanish authorities¹⁶. The German diplomats did not shy away from joining in with Spanish customs such as carnival, frequently attended by vice consul Carlowitz who in 1916 dressed up as a Parisian Apache celebrating at the *Circulo Artístico*¹⁷. In February 1917 it was even noted that Carlowitz held a party in his apartment at which he was dressed as a woman and his wife was dressed as a man¹⁸. Despite the seriousness of their mission, German

⁸ P.A., Botschaft Madrid Karton 23 Ausschnitt Artikel Stuttgarter Neuen Tagesblatt, 31.8. [no year given].

⁹ *La Esfera*, 6.5.1916.

¹⁰ N.A., FO371/2103, Foreign Office, Spain & Portugal (War) 1914, Report on Heads of Missions for 1913, Hardinge to Grey, received 31.1.1914.

¹¹ *La Esfera*, 6.5.1916.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ N.A., FO371/2103, Foreign Office, Spain & Portugal (War) 1914, Report on Heads of Missions for 1913, Hardinge to Grey, received 31.1.1914.

¹⁵ *La Esfera*, 16.2.1918.

¹⁶ *La Ilustración Artística*, 2.2.1914.

¹⁷ Bundesarchiv (B.A.), R901/71832, Politische, wirtschaftliche und militärische Lage in Spanien 1917, Hofer to Zfa, 28.6.1917.

¹⁸ Ibid.

diplomats did not lose sight of the more enjoyable advantages of serving in a neutral country. A lengthy exchange of letters stretching over the course of five years shows ambassador Ratibor's pursuit to recover several bottles of wine and champagne which had gone missing at the beginning of the war¹⁹. The partying lifestyle of the German diplomats did not indicate a lack of interest in their diplomatic work, nor was it detrimental to the German cause; on the contrary, it allowed them to mingle with the Spanish upper class, winning the trust of some while simultaneously being able to observe shifts in public opinion and subtly assert their influence.

Given Spain's close economic ties with the Allies, those informal diplomatic networks built up by the German embassy during the war were of great importance to the German war effort. Spain's rich mineral reserves made her an attractive trading partner. Due to the blockade enforced by the Allies almost immediately after the commencement of hostilities, it was mainly Great Britain and France which benefited from those resources. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Spain, in return for coal, had been supplying Britain with iron ore, copper, lead and other minerals²⁰. During the war Spanish imports of iron ore became particularly vital for the British arms industry. About 70% of Britain's overall iron ore supplies came from Spain²¹. A disruption of deliveries, the British munitions office feared, would have brought the manufacture of explosives to a complete halt within three months²². Therefore, it was not only in Britain's utmost interest to preserve good diplomatic relations with Spain and nurture a position of neutrality benevolent to the Entente, it was also in her interest to ensure stability in Spanish domestic politics by avoiding any upheaval which could have hampered trade. Germany, on the other hand, benefited from the fractious Spanish political landscape and social upheaval which in turn negatively impacted on Allied trade. It was therefore in Germany's interest to play off oppositional movements within the country and leverage their influence amongst Spanish power brokers.

German diplomats in Spain sought out collaborators from various backgrounds. Amongst their most important co-conspirators was the Marquis de Villalobar, Spanish ambassador in Belgium, who kept in close contact with Baron Oscar von der Lancken, chief political advisor to the German governor general in Belgium. Lancken had been embassy secretary at Madrid from 1906 to 1907²³. Though not resident in Spain, Villalobar proved to be a useful ally, particularly when it came to influencing King Alfonso XIII. His frequent visits to the royal court allowed for German ideas to be transmitted through him²⁴. Regular meetings between Villalobar and von der Lancken also enabled a better insight into

¹⁹ Archivo General de la Administración (A.G.A.), Leg. 54/1510, Foreign Affairs (Germany), Foreign Office to German Embassy, 3.1.1919.

²⁰ P.A., R12017, Spanien 61 secr. – Die Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland 1917–18, Ratibor to Äuswärtige Amt, 8.1.1918.

²¹ Dirk ZEISELER, *Spanien im Kalkül der britischen Kriegspolitik. Die politische, wirtschaftliche und propagandistische Bedeutung eines neutralen Landes für Großbritannien im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Berlin, Vienna, 2002, p 247.

²² José ÁLVAREZ JUNCO, *The emergence of mass politics in Spain: populist demagoguery and republican culture, 1890–1910*, Brighton, Sussex University Press, 2002, p. 170.

²³ Oscar FREIHERR VON DER LANCKEN WAKENITZ, *Meine dreissig Dienstjahre, 1888-1918. Potsdam – Paris – Brüssel*, Berlin, Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1931, pp 43-7.

²⁴ P.A., R11950, Spanische Staatsmänner 1913–17, Lancken to Auswärtige Amt, 9.10.1916. Villalobar sent telegram to King to inform him about activities of Count Romanones.

Spanish domestic affairs and opinions which were reported back to the *Äuswärtige Amt*, the German ministry for foreign affairs, and the embassy at Madrid. Villalobar's hope was that a German victory would also elevate Spain into a position of power and allow her to fulfil territorial ambitions by reclaiming Gibraltar and annexing Portugal²⁵. According to von der Lancken's memoirs, Villalobar was first and foremost a Spaniard and an ardent monarchist who believed that the future of the Spanish throne would be much more secure with the German Reich by its side. This was so despite having been embassy secretary in London for several years and having many friends amongst the British aristocracy, even being part of the inner circle of King Edward VII. In Brussels he was a popular guest at the royal court owing to the great admiration he held for the king of Belgium. Villalobar's wide-ranging connections and his great diplomatic skills made him a very valuable collaborator for Germany²⁶.

The Spanish envoy to Belgium was also involved in the campaign orchestrated by the German embassy at Madrid to remove the liberal Prime Minister Count Romanones, whose pro-allied stance was a thorn in Ratibor's eye. At the beginning of September 1916, Ratibor requested permission to do everything necessary to dispose of the prime minister²⁷, causing a discussion amongst diplomats in Berlin and the German military high command (*Oberste Heeresleitung* - OHL) about how to proceed in the matter. State Secretary von Jagow suggested involving the Marquis de Villalobar and using the king in order to get rid of Romanones²⁸. However, Villalobar deemed Ratibor too indiscrete to instigate swaying the king by using persons close to him and instead thought it more useful to let Alfonso know Germany was fully committed to entrusting him with peace negotiations²⁹. The king had expressed his wish to take a role in peace negotiations throughout the war and hoped that Spain's neutrality would be recognised favourably³⁰.

Ignoring Villalobar's advice, General Ludendorff demanded that Ratibor be authorised to find a way of removing Romanones without putting pressure on the Spanish king³¹. Finally the *Auswärtige Amt* had to give way to requests from the OHL and prompted Ratibor into action. The substantial power gained by the German military leadership during the war allowed it to have a decisive say in political matters. The military's interference in diplomatic relations with Spain highlights how political considerations were subjugated to military demands despite the risk of turning a hitherto friendly, neutral state against Germany. Portugal's entry into the war on the side of the Entente in March 1916 must have certainly played an important part in the decision to pursue a more aggressive campaign in Spain. Germany could not risk losing another neutral state to the Allies. In November 1916, the German ambassador was able to confirm his plan to remove Romanones, consisting of supporting the neutrality

²⁵ P.A., R123013, Beeinflussung der spanischen Presse 1915–17, Lancken to Auswärtige Amt, 11.7.1915.

²⁶ LANCKEN WAKENITZ, *Meine dreissig Dienstjahre*, pp 164-5.

²⁷ P.A., R12013, Spanien 61 secr. – Die Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland 1916, Ratibor to Äuswärtige Amt, 9.9.1916.

²⁸ Ibid., Jagow to embassy Madrid, 12.9.1916.

²⁹ Ibid., Lancken to Langwerth, 14.9.1916.

³⁰ Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ, *Spain 1914 – 1918. Between war and revolution*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 13.

³¹ P.A., R12013, Spanien 61 secr. – Die Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland 1916, Legationsrat Grünau to Äuswärtige Amt, 15.9.1916.

campaign, instituting press propaganda and influencing Alfonso XIII, was in place³². From Belgium Villalobar began to discredit Romanones in front of the king³³. A campaign against the prime minister, largely supported by the German embassy, was orchestrated in the Spanish press accusing him of leading Spain into war out of personal financial interests. Romanones felt the crusade against him was becoming increasingly violent, creating a suffocating atmosphere³⁴. With other barons of the Liberal Party such as the Marquis of Alhucemas, and the speaker of the lower chamber of the Cortes, Miguel Villanueva, insisting on the continuation of neutrality³⁵, Romanones failed to obtain support from some of his own party colleagues and eventually was forced by Alfonso XIII to resign³⁶.

In addition to conservative monarchists such as Villalobar, German diplomats also received help from unsuspected collaborators. For instance, Alejandro Lerroux, leader of the Radical Republicans, offered his services to the German embassy in January 1918. His intention was to carry out an election campaign based on championing the idea of neutrality and the need for peace in the world³⁷. At the beginning of the First World War, Lerroux had been one of the most ardent supporters of intervention in favour of the Allies but had changed his attitude throughout the conflict presumably to gain wider support amongst the Spanish working class movement which was largely in favour of neutrality³⁸. Given his pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric since his triumphal arrival in Barcelona, Lerroux's objectives remained vague, therefore enabling him to avoid any real political commitments³⁹. As prime minister during the Second Republic his politics were decidedly more moderate than his radical political beginnings.

Fitting in with the popular theme of Germany as a defender of Spanish neutrality, often employed in German propaganda, the *Auswärtige Amt* agreed to work with Lerroux⁴⁰. German diplomatic documents from July 1918 confirm payments were made to the leader of the Radical Republicans⁴¹. While in the summer of 1915 the German embassy was plotting against Lerroux and trying to cause a rift in his party, they now readily accepted his help. German policy in Spain during the First World War was often marked by opportunism, using opposing political forces to their advantage regardless of the consequences for the stability of Spanish domestic affairs.

³² P.A., R11950, Spanische Staatsmänner 1913–17, Ratibor to Äuswärtige Amt, 4.11.1916.

³³ Ibid., Lancken to Äuswärtige Amt, 9.10.1916.

³⁴ Conde de ROMANONES, *Notas de una vida*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 1999, p. 395.

³⁵ Romanones' downfall, including the German-orchestrated campaign and the decisive role of the monarch, is in Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ, *Spain 1914 – 1918*, p. 83.

³⁶ Lilian GELOS DE VAZ FERREIRA, *Die Neutralitätspolitik*, p. 68.

³⁷ P.A., R12017, Spanien 61 secr. – Die Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland 1917–18, Ratibor to Äuswärtige Amt, 8.1.1918.

³⁸ Alejandro LERROUX, *España y la guerra: la verdad a mi país*, Madrid, Viuda de Pueyo, 1915, p. 117. Lerroux argued that the conflict facing Europe in 1914 was too great in its scope and significance for any nation to remain neutral. He stated in this case neutrality was selfish and cowardly.

³⁹ José ALVAREZ JUNCO, *The emergence*, p. 170.

⁴⁰ P.A., R12017, Spanien 61 secr. – Die Beziehungen zwischen Spanien und Deutschland 1917–18, Bussche to embassy Madrid, 10.1.1918.

⁴¹ Ibid., Report from Berlin, 7.7.1918.

German diplomats made good use of their political contacts and asserted their influence on Spanish politics in various ways. They resorted to election bribery, a common feature of Spanish politics at the time, in order to ensure a balance between *Francófilos* and *Germanófilos* in the Spanish government. Similarly to the German propaganda effort, which will be outlined in further detail below, no costs were spared to influence neutral Spain. In June 1915 state secretary von Jagow confirmed to ambassador Ratibor that any amount of money would be at his disposal to win over leading Spanish politicians⁴². Rather than forcing Spain to side with the Central Powers, Germany was cleverly portrayed as a champion of Spanish neutrality, fostering an anti-interventionist mood in Spain and therefore avoiding the country defecting to the side of the Allies. While trying to advance neutrality amongst the working class movement in particular, the German diplomats also exacerbated divisions within Republicans and Socialists. Rumours of a possible revolutionary uprising in Spain financed by Britain and France prompted German diplomats to support anti-interventionist elements amongst the Spanish left, leading to further infighting⁴³.

2. PROPAGANDA

German propaganda during the First World War benefited from Spain's fraught domestic situation as well as strong pro-German sentiments in Spanish society. The network that was set up in Spain was largely facilitated by a small but very active German community who helped to influence Spanish public opinion via the press. With the outbreak of the war the *Auswärtige Amt* made concerted efforts to gain Spain's favour and ensure the country's neutrality.

Throughout the conflict, German efforts preceded and had a greater impact than those of the Allies in the vital matter of controlling the press by purchasing newspapers, something facilitated by the rising costs due to the shortage of paper⁴⁴. The embassy at Madrid became the headquarters for all German propaganda activity. Ambassador Ratibor himself never tired in his pursuit of courting Spanish public opinion and defending the German cause. Within the first weeks of the war he arranged for pro-German articles to be placed in the Spanish press since German news and publications only reached the country at the end of August 1914⁴⁵.

Attempts by the German government and private residents to influence Spanish public opinion had already been made prior to World War I, albeit on a very modest scale. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Spanish press was mainly supplied by the French news agency *Havas* and its Spanish subsidiary, *Fabra*. Reports or news from Germany rarely made it into Spanish publications. Alexander Bruns, director of the Berlitz language school in Madrid, identified this as a problem and though his attempts to establish an office of the German news agency *Wolffsche Telegraphenbureau* in Madrid in 1906 failed, Bruns managed to place German news in Spanish newspapers. By 1908 he had

⁴² P.A., R123013, Beeinflussung der spanischen Presse 1915–17, v. Jagow to Ratibor, 2.6.1915.

⁴³ P.A., R21239, Weltkrieg Nr. 11q Geheim Bd. 1 – Unternehmungen und Aufwiegelingen gegen unsere Feinde in Spanien, Ratibor to Äuswärtige Amt, 18.6.1915.

⁴⁴ For analyses of Germany's manipulation of public opinion and extent of its intervention in domestic affairs through its significant control of large sections of the Spanish press, see Ron M. CARDEN, *German*, p. 56; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT: *Nidos*, pp. 229-65; and Javier PONCE MARRERO: "Propaganda", pp. 293-321.

⁴⁵ P.A., R11862, Spanien No. 46, Bd. 1, Presse, Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 12.10.1914.

gained support from the Spanish government regarding an improved news exchange between both countries⁴⁶.

Besides Bruns, another active German propagandist was August Hofer, the manager of a printing business in Barcelona, who had lived in Spain since 1906. Hofer also blamed the lack of a direct news exchange between both countries for the negative portrayal of Germany in the Spanish press and argued French ideas were being forced onto Spaniards⁴⁷. From 1910 onwards he supplied Spanish papers with German news, with little success, however⁴⁸. It can be said that beside official diplomatic efforts, the German community in Spain played an important role in fostering German Spanish relations during the conflict. Thanks to the work of private propagandists such as Hofer and Bruns before 1914, Germany was able to quickly establish a network that would help to ensure Spanish neutrality benevolent to Germany and the Central Powers.

The German embassy at Madrid was grateful for the work done by privateers and was heavily reliant on their contacts in Spain. In November 1914 the ambassador was able to report to the *Auswärtige Amt* on the early successes of German propaganda which, as he pointed out, were only achieved with the help of the German communities in Barcelona and Madrid⁴⁹. The British Foreign Office also attributed the success of German propaganda to the "army of agents" recruited from German residents in Spain⁵⁰. With the outbreak of the war members of the German colony initiated campaigns to spread pro-German news in Spain in an attempt to win over Spanish public opinion by influencing the press⁵¹. Pro-allied publications were targeted with German propaganda in the hope that editors might prefer printing German news instead of writing their own articles⁵². German publications were also sent to influential Spanish personalities. For example, at the opening of the Cortes in November 1914, the German embassy sent out official documents relating to the outbreak of the war to all senators and deputies⁵³.

The German community in Spain played an important role in establishing unofficial links between both countries, allowing for an even greater permeation of German influence on the Spain. This form of self-mobilisation, as evidenced in the German community in Spain, also demonstrates the willingness of German nationals abroad to participate in their country's war effort. Therefore, it can be

⁴⁶ P.A., R11867, Spanien No. 46 geheim, Bd. 2, Subventionierung spanischer Zeitungen, Oberndorff at Embassy Madrid to Reichskanzler von Bülow, 5.12.1908.

⁴⁷ P.A., R11868, Spanien No. 46, Bd. 3, Subventionierung spanischer Zeitungen, Report A. Hofer regarding suggestions for the organisation of a Spanish-German news service for the press, 5.3.1912.

⁴⁸ August HOFER, *Deutschtum in Spanien*, Barcelona, Wilfried Melchior, 1918, p. 71.

⁴⁹ P.A., R11868, Spanien No. 46, Bd. 3, Subventionierung spanischer Zeitungen, Ratibor to Auswärtiges Amt, 5.11.1914.

⁵⁰ N.A., CAB/24/31, Image ref. 0040, Cabinet Papers, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Information 1917, Weekly report on Spain XIII, 7.11.1917.

⁵¹ P.A., R11868, Spanien No. 46, Bd. 3, Subventionierung spanischer Zeitungen, Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 6.11.1914.

⁵² P.A., R11862, Spanien No. 46, Bd. 1, Presse, Wilhelm Rautzenberg to Nachrichtendienst Frankfurt/Main, 9.11.1914.

⁵³ Ibid., Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 6.11.1914.

argued that German wartime mobilisation was not restricted to the country's national boundaries but instead the patriotic call of duty also reached those living in neutral territories at the outbreak of war.

In the early stages of the war the German propaganda initiative was far from coherent and private initiatives worked alongside and often in competition to official German propaganda institutions. The central bureau for German propaganda abroad during the First World War was the central administration for services abroad (*Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst* - Zfa) which operated under the supervision of the *Auswärtige Amt* that in addition maintained its own news department also responsible for propaganda abroad. The Zfa produced and distributed propaganda material such as pamphlets, posters, newspapers, magazines and books. It also had a department for photographs, illustrations and films. The propaganda of the Zfa mainly targeted neutral countries like Switzerland, the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries and the United States but also included to some extent propaganda in Spain⁵⁴.

A private news service especially dedicated to Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries was founded in Frankfurt am Main in August 1914. The service, which was managed by personalities from industry, banking, press and the diplomatic world, hoped to curb the influence of *Reuters* and *Havas* and supplied material to private news services in Spain as well as the embassy and the consulates⁵⁵. Other official German propaganda institutions were the German military, which was in charge of censorship. In Spain the main German propagandists were the embassy at Madrid as well as the various German consulates which collaborated with the *Auswärtige Amt* and other private propaganda operations.

Amongst those private services was August Hofer's *Deutscher Nachrichtendienst für Spanien* (German news service for Spain). Founded in August 1914, it was to emerge as one of the most important German news services operating in the country⁵⁶. Thanks to access to a radio transmitter, Hofer was able to receive telegrams from Germany which he would translate and then print and distribute to Spanish newspapers as well as sending them to South and Central America⁵⁷. He also published a daily newspaper called *Correspondencia Alemana*, the weekly illustrated paper *La Neutralidad* and *Germania*, which appeared on a fortnightly basis.

Beside his active role in press propaganda, Hofer was also involved in promoting German culture in Spain. In order to combat the negative, militaristic image employed by the Allies, German propagandists were conscious of the need to highlight Germany's cultural achievements. Although German officials did not take cultural propaganda too seriously, they nevertheless hoped to make a positive impression on neutrals by stressing the country's success in the areas of culture and science. Themes of cultural propaganda ranged from town planning, industry, religion, philosophy, to literature

⁵⁴ Jens ALBES, *Worte*, pp 91–2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁶ August HOFER, *Deutschtum in Spanien*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ P.A., R11862, Spanien No. 46, Bd. 1, Presse, Ratibor to Bethmann Hollweg, 12.10.1914.

and theatre⁵⁸. Hofer, for example, organised lectures on new technological developments, Germany's social policies and talks about German music which were accompanied by piano recitals.

An example of German cultural propaganda in Spain was the interview German state secretary von Jagow gave to the German sponsored *La Correspondencia de España* in April 1916 on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Cervantes' death. Only shortly afterwards though, the German embassy had to give up its financial support for the paper as it appeared the *Correspondencia* was receiving larger funds from the Allies. The paper's editors were therefore not interested in collaboration with the German administration anymore, highlighting that collaboration with the belligerents was also opportunistic and motivated by financial needs rather than political convictions⁵⁹. The occasion of the interview with von Jagow, however, was seen as a good opportunity to show appreciation for Spanish culture without being overtly political.

In it the German state secretary praised Cervantes' work, comparing him to Homer and Shakespeare, whom he called eternal figures of the world of literature with which German people were as familiar with as with Goethe. He went on to state that Don Quijote as well as Cervantes' works *La gitanilla* and *Novelas ejemplares* were known to Germans and that 'Germany would willingly give testament to admire, honour and venerate Cervantes work, his noble language and the genius of Spain'⁶⁰. The lavish praise was quickly followed by an attempt at damage limitation regarding the sinking of the passenger ship *Sussex*, which had claimed the life of Spanish composer Granados. The state secretary confirmed that Germany would respect the rights of neutral countries and promised that an investigation into the incident would be carried out⁶¹. The interview serves as an excellent example to illustrate how cultural propaganda was used to distract from the negative impact the war was having on neutral countries. Spain, which was often side-lined by the greater powers in international matters, also felt her culture was not appreciated enough by the Entente, something German propaganda used to its advantage.

While private propagandist August Hofer was operating from Barcelona, in Madrid the vice director of the German electricity company AEG, Wilhelm Rautzenberg, was also running a news service. Other subsidiaries of AEG in Spain carried out similar propaganda work in collaboration with the head office in Madrid⁶². In contrast to Hofer's service, which was specialised in the fast transmission of German news, Rautzenberg's service translated longer articles from German publications and tried to place them in Spanish newspapers⁶³. AEG had been a well-established company in Spain prior to 1914

⁵⁸ Peter GRUPP, 'Voraussetzungen und Praxis deutscher amtlicher Kulturpropaganda in den neutralen Staaten während des Ersten Weltkrieges', in W. MICHALKA (ed.), *Der Erste Weltkrieg, Wirkung, Wahrnehmung, Analyse*, München, Piper, 1994, pp 799–824.

⁵⁹ P.A., R123013, Beeinflussung der spanischen Presse 1915–17, Report embassy Madrid, signed Stohrer, 8.8.1916.

⁶⁰ *La Correspondencia de España*, 23.4.1916.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² P.A., R11868, Spanien No. 46, Bd. 3, Subventionierung spanischer Zeitungen, 1912–14, Ratibor to Auswärtige Amt, 6.11.1914.

⁶³ Jens ALBES, *Worte*, p. 152.

and therefore, its propaganda service was able to build on existing business connection and mainly focused on newspapers in which the company placed advertisements⁶⁴.

The propaganda activities of the German community in Spain were also noted by outside observers. *The Times* reported in November 1915 of an ant-like industry organised with the involvement of all German residents⁶⁵. Another article published in *The Times*, in February 1916, described them as "a veritable army in discipline and cohesion". There is not an idle man among them ... Every German is a natural tout and canvasser for his country ..."⁶⁶. It is difficult to give a precise figure of how many Germans lived in Spain during the period of the First World War since residents were not obliged to register with the embassy or consulates. British estimates saw the German community between 50.000 and 80.000 strong⁶⁷. According to German statistics these estimates seemed to have been exaggerated. Before the war there were approximately 7–8.000 Germans residing in Spain. During the war those were joined by refugees from Cameroon and Portugal bringing the total number of German residents to around 10.000 to 30.000⁶⁸. Although the British and French communities in Spain were far larger than the German, the Allies failed to capitalise on this advantage and did not mobilise their communities from the start of the war, leaving the field to Germany and the Central Powers.⁶⁹ This could be explained by the economic advantage the Allies held in Spain which was often used to pressure the Spanish government in cooperating with the demands of the Entente. As outlined above, Britain in particular depended on Spanish supplies of iron ore and pyrites. In return, Spain urgently needed coal and cotton as well as other supplies which could only be obtained from the Allies⁷⁰.

As can be seen from the initial German campaigns, no centralised propaganda effort in Spain existed at the beginning of the war despite attempts by the German embassy to coordinate, or at least keep track of, the various initiatives. Berlin was content to support the different private institutions in their efforts without taking direct control over their activities. No directive specifically outlining a propaganda policy for Spain was issued and the *Auswärtige Amt* mainly left matters in the hands of the diplomats and privateers on the ground. In the early stages of the war Spain did not have such great significance for Germany as other neutrals, like the United States, which explains the freedom the German diplomats and privateers enjoyed. This, however, changed as the war dragged on longer than initially anticipated and Berlin began to assert more control over propaganda activity.

⁶⁴ Ron M CARDEN, *German*, pp 73–4.

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 23.11.1915.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.2.1916.

⁶⁷ *The Times*, 12.9.1916. NA, FO371/2760, Foreign Office, Spain & Portugal (War) 1916, Secret report Spain, 22.1.1916.

⁶⁸ B.A., R901/30168, Die Überwachung der Auswanderung aus Deutschland nach Spanien 1908–20, German consulate Madrid to Auswärtige Amt, 6.2.1920. BA, R1001/3977, Internierung der Kamerundeutschen in Spanien, Ratibor to Auswärtige Amt, 7.2.1916. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Krieg 1914/5966, *Por la patria y por la verdad* (No 1), 16.3.1915. Dirk ZEISELER, *Spanien*, p. 111. Jens ALBES, *Worte*, p. 174.

⁶⁹ Dirk ZEISELER, *Spanien*, p. 111.

⁷⁰ N.A., CAB/24/7, Image ref. 0064, Cabinet Papers, War Cabinet, Memorandum by the Minister of Munitions, 14.3.1917. Also see, NA, CAB/24/35, Image ref. 0073, Cabinet Papers, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Information 1917, Weekly report on Spain XV, 13.12.1917.

Themes of German propaganda mainly focused on fostering the idea of a defensive war which Germany had been forced into, justifications for the violation of Belgian neutrality, and reasons for the continuation of unrestricted submarine warfare. Other popular topics frequently highlighted in pro-German articles were the export of contraband to the Allies and the use of Spanish ship space for England and France. Those themes were also reflected in August Hofer's publications, with titles such as *¿Crímenes alemanes?* (German crimes?), *El Origen de la Conflagración* (Reasons for the outbreak of the war), *Calumnias inglesas* (English slanders), *La agencia Reuter o la fábrica de embustes ingleses* (Reuter – factory of English lies), *Cómo Bélgica rompió su neutralidad* (How Belgium broke its neutrality), *¿La guerra submarina, es legal?* (Submarine warfare – is it legal?), and *Asesinato de la tripulación de un submarino alemán por soldados ingleses* (Assassination of a German submarine crew by English soldiers)⁷¹. Other publications of his service, for example *La guerra alemana y el catolicismo por católicos alemanes* (The German war and Catholicism for German Catholics), were aimed at Spain's largely Catholic population⁷².

Among the main arguments brought forward against the Allies was the British blockade against Germany which, it was claimed, constituted a cruel transgression from international law and was seen as an attempt to starve the country⁷³. German propaganda in Spain also appealed to the country's colonial and territorial ambitions in Morocco, Gibraltar and Portugal, which in the past had been subject to negotiations with the Allies and often led to Spain drawing the shorter straw⁷⁴.

Although the invasion and occupation of neutral Belgium presented a substantial obstacle to German propaganda, Spanish *Germanófilos* appeared to have been less concerned with the matter. In Spain the European conflict was used to project the opposing viewpoints of traditional monarchists and liberal reformers by siding with one belligerent who was thought best to represent Spain's future. German propagandists often simply had to employ anti-British sentiments amongst Spaniards in order to explain the violation of Belgian neutrality. Since Spain was economically dependent on Britain and France, which frequently used this dependency to exert pressure on the Spanish government to show pro-Allied neutrality, Germany's explanation of a defensive war, forced upon it by the Allies out of fear for German economic dominance, seemed plausible to many Spaniards.

The propaganda network the Germans had built up in Spain depended on the collaboration of Spanish journalists and newspaper editors as well as businessmen, politicians and diplomats. Some of those collaborations were achieved with bribery. Since many Spanish newspapers were struggling financially due to rising prices in paper, financial contributions by German diplomats and private propagandists offered a welcome relief during times of economic hardship. Further pressure was put on newspaper editors when German businesses stopped buying advertisement space in pro-Allied newspapers, ensuring a loss of circulation amongst these publications⁷⁵. Many Spanish editors and

⁷¹ August HOFER, *Deutschtum in Spanien*, pp 17-25.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Abteilung Historische Drucke, Signatur Krieg 1914, 5966, Carlos COPPEL, *Por la patria y por la verdad*, no. 10, 2.3.1915.

⁷⁴ N.A., FO371/2470, Foreign Office, Spain & Portugal (War) 1915, Hardinge to Grey, 3.1.1915.

⁷⁴ Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ, *Spain 1914 – 1918*, p. 10.

⁷⁵ *The Times*, 26.2.1916.

journalists however, were more than willing to make a contribution to the German war effort in the hope this would be to the advantage of Spain.

In brief, control of public opinion, in particular the press, was an important German success. Both the Central and the Western Powers took advantage of the exorbitant rise in the price of paper to come to the financial rescue of different newspapers and thus managed to influence their editorials. In this practice, Germany held the lead while the Allies were largely forced to react before the overwhelming evidence that their efforts were lagging well behind that of their enemies. A secret British Report in October 1917 noted the poverty and weakness of Anglo-French propaganda in Spain in comparison with that of the Central Powers. It confirmed that the substantial sums lavished by the latter on the Spanish press had paid off as public opinion was to a large extent moulded by the German Embassy⁷⁶.

The primary objective of all the publications in Spain, controlled by German capital, was to ensure the strict maintenance of neutrality. To that end, German propagandists cleverly manipulated Spanish public opinion to their advantage and sought collaboration with publications from across the political spectrum. German propaganda activity in Spain reached such heights that by the end of 1917 the British Foreign Office declared half the Spanish press was bought by Germany⁷⁷. Approximately 500 Spanish newspapers were in the hands of the Central Powers by the end of the First World War. Germany controlled virtually most of the conservative press with the exception of *La Época*, the official newspaper of the Conservative party: the most widely read being the Monarchist *ABC*, the *Maurista La Acción*, the Carlist *El Correo Español*, the Catholic *El Debate* and *El Universo*, the Conservative *La Tribuna* and *La Nación*. The last two were practically owned by German capital. At the same time, Germany also invested heavily both in the Liberal press edited by rivals of Count Romanones (the Marquis of Alhucemas' *La Mañana* and Niceto Alcalá Zamora's *El Día*), in some Republican press such as *El Diluvio* and *España Nueva* and in the pro-neutral Anarcho-Syndicalist journals. It was obviously a covert operation in which these newspapers received large amounts of money and in return opposed any departure from tacit neutrality. Whereas right-wing newspapers accused any interventionist politician of treason to Spain, those on the Left stressed the fact that the working class would be the section of society paying with their lives for the madness of entering into the 'imperialist war'. The right-wing press disguised its *Germanophilia* with slogans of patriotism and *Españolismo*. They were the defenders of the ultimate interests of the nation seeking to prevent the country from sliding into a disastrous war and fighting for strict neutrality. Their effort was combined with that of the Left which continually accused those pro-Allied elements in Spain of being behind the orgy of exports which was tearing the country apart⁷⁸.

3. ESPIONAGE

Maintaining Spain's neutrality and curbing Allied influence was not only the main concern for German diplomats and propagandists but also the principal preoccupation of the German military personnel stationed in the country. As noted by the works of Calleja and Aubert, and García Sanz, the

⁷⁶ N.A., FO 395-117. Secret Report (October 1917).

⁷⁷ N.A., CAB/24/35, Image ref. 0073, Cabinet Papers, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Information 1917, Weekly report on Spain XV, 13.12.1917.

⁷⁸ For Germany's control of the press see good accounts in Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ, *Spain 1914 – 1918*, pp. 67-70; Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT, *Nidos*, pp. 229-265; Javier PONCE MARRERO: "Propaganda", pp. 293-321.

Military attaché Arnold Kalle and naval attaché Hans von Krohn were in control of intelligence services in Spain⁷⁹. The second had the task of supporting German military strategy in the Mediterranean by watching ship movements and devising ways to refuel and restock submarines safely. As a neutral country, Spain also offered an ideal outpost for espionage. The attachés were entrusted with the unofficial task of building up a network which would enable them to observe enemy activity closely. Kalle and Krohn's services were also required to counter and prevent Allied activity in Spain. As outlined above, due to the restrictions imposed by the Allied blockade, Spain's main trading partners during the war were France and Britain. German covert activities attempted to hinder that trade greatly in order to undermine the Allied war effort. In doing so, the commercial interests of Spanish firms and individuals who were profiting from trade with the Allies also suffered. To carry out their task effectively the attachés not only had to violate Spanish neutrality, an illegal activity frequently engaged in by both belligerent camps, they also galvanised opposing forces within Spain, accelerating a process of social upheaval which had begun at the end of the nineteenth century.

While Major Arnold Kalle had been officially entrusted with the position of military attaché since April 1913, Lieutenant Commander Hans von Krohn was initially deployed to Madrid in September 1914 to oversee the activity of the secret navy information service in Spain and to ensure the supply of German war ships with goods and news regarding the enemy and its whereabouts⁸⁰. Only in September 1916 did the Spanish government give its consent to the creation of the position of naval attaché at the German embassy, a position which Krohn took on. As Carolina García Sanz pointed out, the idea of a short war played a crucial part in the mobilisation effort, which would explain Krohn's delayed appointment. France, for example, decided initially not to send a naval attaché to Madrid⁸¹.

A thorough analysis of Germany's military archives reveals that the division of responsibilities between the two German attachés was not always clear⁸². Kalle enjoyed a close friendship with King Alfonso XIII, which certainly gave him additional importance and therefore more room to manoeuvre. Despite the importance of naval warfare for Germany, Krohn was relegated to a secondary position and, as Heinz Höhne assessed, was not forceful enough to stand up to Kalle, who was seen as the head of German espionage activity in Spain⁸³. He frequently complained about Kalle failing to inform him about

⁷⁹ Eduardo GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA and Paul AUBERT, *Nidos*, pp. 73-80; Fernando GARCÍA SANZ, *España*, pp. 98-103.

⁸⁰ Heinz HÖHNE, *Canaris: Patriot im Zwielicht*, München, Bertelsman, 1976.

⁸¹ Carolina GARCÍA SANZ, *La primera guerra*, p. 227.

⁸² Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (B.A.M.), RM5/2409, Admiralstab der Marine, Schrift–pp. Verkehr mit Vertretern der Marine, ab Sept. 1916 dem Marineattaché, und anderen Personen in Madrid Bd. 2 Juni – Nov. 1915 [between May and August 1915 various correspondence on argument between Krohn and Kalle regarding Ratibor passing on information about secret naval activities to Kalle].

⁸³ Heinz HÖHNE, *Canaris*, p. 46.

missions and poaching his agents without his consent⁸⁴. Krohn also criticised Kalle for discussing naval matters, such as the sinking of Spanish ships by German submarines, with the Spanish king⁸⁵.

To not compromise Kalle's and Krohn's position as official members of the German diplomatic corps, it was necessary to employ additional support for organising German espionage and counter-espionage activity in Spain. Somebody was needed that worked completely in the background, coordinating the various activities carried out by Germany's agents. In October 1915, the head of the admiralty requested that Captain Lieutenant Wilhelm Canaris, then a U-boat commander, be put in charge of establishing an information service at the Swiss border for gathering news in Italy and France. There was also the possibility of gathering intelligence on the war in the Mediterranean via Spain and allowing agents to act on Spanish soil⁸⁶.

With the outbreak of the First World War Canaris found himself serving as an officer on the SMS *Dresden* which, unable to return home due to the war, was trapped in the Amazon Delta. British cruisers quickly detected the presence of the German ship and attacked the *Dresden* which had steered into neutral waters asking the Chilean government for help. Despite those efforts, the *Dresden* was sunk, its crew was forced to surrender and subsequently interned on the island of Quiriquina situated north of Coronel Bay. While most of the crew stayed on the island for the duration of the war⁸⁷, Canaris fled from Quiriquina on 5 August 1915, crossing the Andes on horseback, he eventually reached Buenos Aires by train⁸⁸. His linguistic abilities – he spoke fluent English and Spanish⁸⁹ – undoubtedly aided him greatly on his journey and were also of advantage for his future intelligence work. On his arrival in the Argentinian capital on 21 August 1915 he reported to the German attaché and then, with the help of a false Chilean passport, boarded a Dutch steamer with destination Amsterdam. Canaris finally arrived in Germany on 30 September 1915⁹⁰.

Not long after he had returned home, Canaris was sent to Spain, where he spent ten months (January to October 1916)⁹¹ building up an extensive intelligence network. He arrived in Madrid on 4 January 1916 together with Albert Hornemann, who was going to assist him. From then on their

⁸⁴ B.A.M., RM5/2410, Admiralstab der Marine, Schrift–pp. Verkehr mit Vertretern der Marine, ab Sept. 1916 dem Marineattaché, und anderen Personen in Madrid Bd. 3 Nov. 1915 – Jan. 1916, Krohn to P.H. [?] Madrid, 13.12.1915.

⁸⁵ B.A.M., RM5/2414, Admiralstab der Marine, Schrift–pp. Verkehr mit Vertretern der Marine, ab Sept. 1916 dem Marineattaché, und anderen Personen in Madrid Bd. 7 Okt. 1916 – März 1917, Admiralty, Code bureau via Auswärtige Amt from Madrid, 18.1.1917.

⁸⁶ B.A.M., RM2/1143, Einrichtung Nachrichtenstelle des Admiralstabs in Spanien, Note Head of Admiralty, Oct. 1915.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 18–9.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸⁹ B.A.M., RM2/1143, Einrichtung Nachrichtenstelle des Admiralstabs in Spanien, Note Head of Admiralty, Oct. 1915.

⁹⁰ Michael MUELLER, *Canaris: the life and death of Hitler's spymaster*, London, Chatham, 2007, p. 20.

⁹¹ B.A.M., PERS6/105, Personalakte Wilhelm Canaris.

respective codenames were Carl and Horst⁹². Canaris' task was to establish a supply system for submarines operating in the western Mediterranean and improve the information service gathering details about ship movements⁹³. By the end of the nineteenth century, German naval intelligence had begun to set up a network of so called *Etappenstationen*. These were posts, run by German naval officers, which recruited foreign shipping agents, ship chandlers and coal suppliers in order to guarantee the availability of vital supplies for German war ships in the event of war. Information from pro-German agents was gathered and it was ensured communication links were kept open. Canaris had been part of organising such espionage posts in Brazil and Argentina in 1908⁹⁴.

With his previous intelligence experience and the skill and resilience he had displayed during his spectacular escape from Chile, Canaris appeared to be the ideal candidate for the job in Spain. The network which he organised together with Albert Hornemann was made up of an information service (*Ausfragedienst*), an agent service (*Agentendienst*) and a service for political news (*Politische Nachrichten*)⁹⁵. Canaris operated mainly from the home of von Krohn and frequently changed his address in Madrid to avoid being discovered. Since the British and French had already broken the German codes, enemy agents were close on Canaris' heels⁹⁶. However, official German correspondence reveals very little about Canaris and his name rarely features in the communication between the embassy at Madrid and headquarters in Berlin, unlike that of his collaborator Hornemann, who is frequently mentioned.

In order to gather news on ship movements, information services were established in all major Spanish ports and coastal towns. In other neutral countries, like the Netherlands for example, Germany established similar intelligence networks focussing on recruiting informants within the shipping and trade industries. Similarly to Spain, Dutch ports became important centres for German covert activity⁹⁷.

By October 1916, Canaris was able to report that German information centres had been set up in Barcelona, Valencia, Alicante, Cartagena, La Linea, Cadiz, Jerez de la Frontera, Huelva, Seville, Vigo, Villagarcia, La Coruña, Gijon, Santander and Bilbao. Barcelona had the highest amount of traffic amongst the Spanish ports and was therefore deemed the most suitable location for information gathering⁹⁸. Nine agents, two of whom were Spanish ships' officers and one was a female cabaret dancer, were working for the German administration in the Catalan capital. In general the information service posts were run by German navy personnel in co-operation with Spanish captains and dock

⁹² B.A.M., RM5/2410, Admiralstab der Marine, Schrift–pp. Verkehr mit Vertretern der Marine, ab Sept. 1916 dem Marineattaché, und anderen Personen in Madrid Bd. 3 Nov. 1915 – Jan. 1916, Telegram Admiralty from Madrid via Auswärtige Amt, 4.1.1916.

⁹³ Heinz HÖHNE, *Canaris*, p. 46.

⁹⁴ Michael MUELLER, *Canaris*, p. 10.

⁹⁵ B.A.M., RM5/2413, Admiralstab der Marine, Schrift–pp. Verkehr mit Vertretern der Marine, ab Sept. 1916 dem Marineattaché, und anderen Personen in Madrid Bd. 6 Juli – Nov. 1916, Bericht des Kapitänleutnants Canaris über Gründung einer Nachrichtenzentrale in Spanien, 15.10.1916.

⁹⁶ Michael MUELLER, *Canaris*, p. 21.

⁹⁷ Wim KLINKERT, *Defending Neutrality. The Netherlands prepares for war, 1900 – 1925*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, p. 192.

⁹⁸ B.A.M., RM5/2413, Admiralstab der Marine, Schrift–pp. Verkehr mit Vertretern der Marine, ab Sept. 1916 dem Marineattaché, und anderen Personen in Madrid Bd. 6 Juli – Nov. 1916, Bericht des Kapitänleutnants Canaris über Gründung einer Nachrichtenzentrale in Spanien, 15.10.1916.

workers. In Seville, a Dutch captain called Hammerstein was in charge of intelligence gathering for Germany. Agents were also recruited to inform on the movements of neutral or allied vessels. A Spanish ship's officer who was stationed on an English steamer operating between Gibraltar and Tangier regularly passed on any important news to the German information service office at La Linea⁹⁹. Canaris and his men also successfully managed to employ a large majority of captains on neutral vessels frequenting the ports at Barcelona, Santander, Bilbao, Huelva, Seville and Cadiz. They were paid according to the value of the delivered information¹⁰⁰.

In order to find collaborators, German intelligence officers utilised established political and commercial links. In Madrid, Eduardo de Riquer, an employee in the Spanish Ministry of State (which became the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1938), was hired to obtain news from various Spanish ministries and to recruit further agents. In Barcelona, five Spanish merchants were also in charge of finding agents. The dancer, who was already working for the German information service, was also approached for further services since she occasionally travelled to England. In southern Spain Albert Hornemann made contact with Spanish fruit, oil and wine merchants who were exporting to Britain. Through Riquer two additional employees in the Ministry of State were hired for the German intelligence services. They were responsible for passing on all information coming from the British and French diplomatic representations in Spain¹⁰¹.

The dissatisfaction amongst those Spaniards not profiting from the war was opportunistically used by German agents to disrupt Allied trade with Spain in the hope of inflicting serious damage on Britain and France. This formed the core of German intelligence activity in Spain. In addition, Germany also benefited from the pro-neutrality position of Spanish business and industry which pressurised Spanish governments not to abandon neutrality. Due to the blockade and geographical distance, Germany was unable to build up closer economic links with Spain which could have rivalled Spanish-British trade and undermined Britain's dominant position on the Iberian Peninsula. The option left to the German administration was therefore to disrupt trade between Spain and Britain in order to disrupt, as much as possible, the Allied war effort.

All news of a political nature was forwarded to the embassy at Madrid, which was also responsible for paying agents in Spanish ministries. The political news service of the German intelligence operation was largely supplied with information coming from Hornemann and Reserve Lieutenant Commander Friedrich Rüggeberg, both located in Barcelona. For the surveillance of persons of interest to the German administration, two Spanish secret police officers, who also reported on any allied counter-espionage activity, were hired. Four agents recruited by Canaris from Spain operated in England and three female agents (a pilot and two anarchists) were active in France. A further agent was hired in Lisbon¹⁰². In Madrid, Antonio Arregui was in charge of an office, provided to him by the director of the German potash syndicate, which processed all intelligence from the information and the agent service and then passed it on to Krohn¹⁰³. Albert Hornemann was responsible for the recruitment of

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

agents in Barcelona where he enjoyed a good reputation amongst non-German economic circles. Due to the city's extensive trade links with Great Britain, German intelligence officers focussed their efforts onto finding collaborators in Barcelona. This city, Spain's main industrial metropolis, became an important centre for German covert activity. In addition to its extensive trade links with Britain, the Catalan capital was also a stronghold of the CNT which German agents managed to infiltrate successfully.¹⁰⁴ While Catalan industrialists were reaping high profits thanks to Spain's neutrality, workers' living conditions were worsening during the First World War. German covert activity sought to use that potential for civil unrest and conflict by mobilising workers to strike action in order to disrupt trade between Spain and the Allies.

Hornemann communicated all information, with the help of German banks in Barcelona and Madrid, to Arregui, who subsequently forwarded it to the naval attaché. Attempts were made to send Spanish agents to England, which proved difficult since not many possessed the necessary language skills and had legitimate reasons to travel to Britain. Canaris mentioned in his report from October 1916 a destruction service (*Zerstörungsdienst*) operating in Barcelona, Huelva, Cartagena, Santander and Bilbao which had delivered its first results by mid-August in Barcelona¹⁰⁵.

As already discussed, Britain's arms industry heavily depended on Spanish iron ore deliveries. Thus, it was in Germany's interest to delay the delivery of such vital exports. German intelligence therefore sought to cause unrest by stirring up strikes amongst workers already dissatisfied with their working conditions and facing a worsening of their living circumstances due to the war-related inflation. In June 1915, the instigation of strikes in the pyrite mines of the Rio Tinto company in the Huelva district was suggested to the Zfa. Despite a flourishing trade with the Allies, miners were only receiving a meagre pay and several conflicts between owners and workers had already occurred¹⁰⁶.

The plan by the embassy to stir up strikes in the Rio Tinto mines also took on the scope of a sabotage plot. Ambassador Ratibor had found a suitable middleman to carry out the necessary work and estimated the costs to be around 700 to 800,000 pesetas per month to be guaranteed for at least three months¹⁰⁷. According to the ambassador, the time was right in July 1915 to implement the plan since production output of the mine had increased and the overall mood amongst the workers was worsening¹⁰⁸. The German Ministry of War, however, thought it would be more effective to destroy the railways transporting material from the mines since these stocked enough material which could be sent out in case of a disruption in production. An explosion of a railway tunnel was suggested while simultaneously a strike should be instigated which could then be blamed for the destruction of the railway¹⁰⁹. This aggressive plan highlights the High Command's drive for total war and preparedness to

¹⁰⁴ Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ, *Spain 1914 – 1918*, pp. 166-9.

¹⁰⁵ B.A.M., RM5/2413, Admiralstab der Marine, Schrift–pp. Verkehr mit Vertretern der Marine, ab Sept. 1916 dem Marineattaché, und anderen Personen in Madrid Bd. 6 Juli – Nov. 1916, Bericht des Kapitänleutnants Canaris über Gründung einer Nachrichtenzentrale in Spanien, 15.10.1916.

¹⁰⁶ P.A., R21239, Weltkrieg Nr. 11q Geheim Bd. 1 – Unternehmungen und Aufwiegelungen gegen unsere Feinde in Spanien, Prof. Stein to Zentralstelle für Auslandsdienst, 3.6.1915.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Ratibor to Auswärtige Amt, 20.6.1915.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Ratibor to Auswärtige Amt, 4.7.1915.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, War ministry to embassy Madrid, 20.7.1915.

target civilians of a non-belligerent country all for the sake of causing injury to the Allies. As the submarine campaign claimed the lives of Spanish merchants, Spanish workers were also seen as targets equal to soldiers in the field¹¹⁰. According to Alan Kramer, the enemy was not just its army but also its nation and culture, a view which subsequently led to a radicalisation of warfare giving way to a systematic and total exploitation of civilians and resources of conquered and occupied territory¹¹¹. The divide between combatants and non-combatants gradually disappeared and atrocities against civilians, although they had also been committed in earlier wars such as the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War, reached an until then unprecedented extent in the First World War¹¹².

Spain, as an important supplier for the Allied war industries, was therefore seen as a fair target for German military planners. In their pursuit to damage the war effort of the Entente, the campaigns carried out by the German diplomatic corps in Spain, whether they were propaganda or covert activities, showed no regard for the rights of a neutral country. As Eric Hobsbawm noted, the First World War was a war waged for unlimited ends with the sole aim of a total victory¹¹³. The example of Spain highlights how this type of total warfare left no room for neutrality.

Although the plan to destroy the railway tunnel had been set in motion, the German embassy was unable to carry it out since details of the sabotage plot were leaked to the British embassy¹¹⁴. Ratibor suspected that some labour activists who were involved in the negotiations regarding the Rio Tinto plot, had passed on some information¹¹⁵. The War Ministry also thought it possible that German telegrams had been decoded or that Allied espionage had managed to uncover the plot¹¹⁶. Nevertheless, German agents managed to infiltrate other workers' organisations such as the *Unión de Obreros Constructores Mecánicos*, with the aim of enforcing strict neutrality. Their efforts proved successful when the union agreed to take industrial action if Spanish neutrality came under threat¹¹⁷.

In addition to infiltrating Spanish workers organisations, German agents also attempted to tap into the strong pro-German sentiments amongst the majority of Spanish officers and sought to foster anti-Allied feeling, while at the same time, maintaining pressure on the king and government not to join the Entente. On the one hand German agents agitated workers into strikes, and on the other hand, they

¹¹⁰ Holger HERWIG, 'Total rhetoric, limited war: Germany's u-boat campaign, 1917–18' in R. CHICKERING & S. FÖRSTER (eds.), *Great War, total war: combat and mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–18*, Cambridge, CUP, 2000, p. 206.

¹¹¹ Alan KRAMER, *Dynamic of destruction: culture and mass killing in the First World War*, Oxford, OUP, 2007, p. 31, p. 68.

¹¹² Ian KERSHAW, 'War and political violence in twentieth-century Europe' in *Contemporary European History*, xiv, no. 1 (Feb. 2005), pp 107-23.

¹¹³ Eric HOBBSBAMM, *The age of extremes. The short twentieth century 1914 – 1991*, London, Abacus, 1994, pp 29-30.

¹¹⁴ N.A., FO371/2468, Foreign Office, Spain & Portugal (War) 1915, Hardinge to Grey, 25.9.1915.

¹¹⁵ P.A., R21240, Weltkrieg Nr. 11q Geheim Bd. 2 – Unternehmungen und Aufwiegelungen gegen unsere Feinde in Spanien, Ratibor to Auswärtige Amt, 29.1.1916.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, War ministry to Auswärtige Amt, 20.1.1916.

¹¹⁷ P.A., Botschaft Madrid, Karton 103, Carlowitz to Ratibor, 21.2.1917.

assured the military their support for maintaining order in Spain¹¹⁸, blaming civil unrest on English and French liberal ideas. By playing opposing groups in Spanish society against each other, instability was further increased, not only making Spain unreliable as a potential partner in war for the Allies but also jeopardising trade with France and Britain. German diplomats, military personnel and propagandists on the ground in Spain, as well as the *Auswärtige Amt* in Berlin, did not intentionally follow this strategy but rather opportunistically sought out collaborations only with the German war effort in mind. Though aware of the immediate consequences of their interference, German diplomats showed no consideration for the long-term effects this might have on Spain. Similar tactics were also employed by Germany in other countries with the aim of promoting the collapse of enemy home fronts through subversion and sabotage. A jihad was incited against imperial rule in Britain's Muslim territories, subsidiaries given to Russian revolutionaries and colonial revolt encouraged against the French in Morocco¹¹⁹.

4. CONCLUSION

Spain during the First World War constituted a great paradox. The support for liberal and democratic ideas propagated by Britain and France was championed by revolutionary factions within Spain whose actions severely hampered vital trade with the Allies. Therefore, it was more beneficial for the Entente's war effort to ensure the maintenance of a conservative Spanish government which would suppress those revolutionary elements. However, while the Allies also needed to ensure that the pro-German parts of Spanish society did not gain the upper hand, they failed to offer sufficient concessions which would have enabled Spain to break off relations with Germany. Germany, on the other hand, supported left-wing workers organisations, Republicans and Anarchists in the hope of causing great instability in Spanish domestic affairs, which in turn would negatively impact on trade with the Allies. Interference in Spain's politics was pursued by German diplomats, propagandists and intelligence agents only with the short-term war effort in mind and without considering the long-term consequences this would have on an already highly fractious country¹²⁰.

German influence on Spanish public opinion ensured a heated debate over neutrality which further widened the gap between *Germanófilos* and *Francófilos*. Some scholars have even described this debate as a civil war of minds and words¹²¹. Widespread German propaganda activity and its success in moulding, to a large extent, Spanish public opinion in the face of great allied economic advantage as well as much larger British and French communities in that country, is further proof for the effectiveness of German propaganda during the First World War¹²².

¹¹⁸ B.A.M., RM5/2417, Telegramme an den Militärattaché in Madrid Mai – Dez. 1917, Military attaché Madrid to OHL, 27.10.1917.

¹¹⁹ Stanley PAYNE, *Civil War in Europe, 1905–1949*, Cambridge, CUP, 2011, pp 18–9.

¹²⁰ More on this paradox and, particularly on the revolutionary crisis of 1917, see the section in this dossier by Francisco J. ROMERO SALVADÓ.

¹²¹ Gerald MEAKER, "A Civil War of Words", in Hans A. SCHMITT (ed.): *Neutral Europe between War and Revolution, 1917-1923*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1988, pp. 1-37; Fernando DIAZ-PLAJA, *Francófilos y Germanófilos. Los Españoles en la guerra Europea*, Madrid, Dopesa, 1973, p. 14.

¹²² Cate HASTE, *Keep the home fires burning: propaganda in the First World War*, London, Penguin, 1977. Haste argues German propaganda to neutrals was in general less efficient than British. Germany failed to seize initiative

The Allies had hoped their advantageous position in Spain would render an intensive campaign unnecessary. The country's dependence on British coal¹²³ was frequently used as a bargaining tool not only to receive vital goods and resources in return but also to put pressure on Spain to align herself with the Allies and curb German influence. Various Spanish governments during the war, however, did not diverge from a policy of strict neutrality and avoided an open declaration of sympathy for one of the warring parties. This can also be attributed to the efforts of portraying Germany and the Central Powers as champions of Spanish neutrality and to a clever manipulation of the ideological differences within Spanish society. Although Allied economic supremacy as well as geographic reality ensured Spain would not join the Central Powers either, Germany counted on the support of most of Spain's conservative sectors (military, aristocracy, landowning class and Catholic Church).

The espionage network Germany built up in Spain during the First World War demonstrates the extent to which the German administration was able to permeate Spanish society. While the full scope of German covert activity may never be fully known, we now have a much clearer picture of the organisational structure of the German network and are also able to identify its key players. One of them, Wilhelm Canaris, who became the head of *Abwehr* – the Nazi's military intelligence service, certainly benefited from his Spanish contacts built up during the First World War when Hitler decided to aid General Franco during the Spanish Civil War.

Sabotage activity against Allied property in Spain shows how the war extended into neutral territory stressing its total aspect. The German service attachés, who before the war served in an advisory position to the embassy, were now transformed into active agents of war, further highlighting the growing strength of its military apparatus during the First World War. The activity the attachés in Spain engaged in had as its main objective to hinder the Allied war effort by sabotaging trade between Spain, France and Britain. This was done by promoting social unrest through the infiltration of workers organisations. Despite an economic boom created by the war, living conditions of the working classes worsened while successive governments failed to implement lasting reforms to stabilise social conditions. German diplomats and military personnel tapped into that discontent by fomenting strikes and spreading propaganda amongst Spanish workers which highlighted increased trade with the Allies while Spaniards had to suffer food shortages. At the same time, Germany also supported the conservative and monarchic elements in Spanish society as represented by the king and his army officers for example. Thus German interference agitated opposing forces within Spain leading to instability which ultimately made the country a less reliable partner for the Allies, therefore ensuring Spanish neutrality and hindering the war effort of the Entente. While Germany pursued a ruthless strategy boycotting the trade with the Entente by violating the rights of a neutral country, accelerating the disintegration of social order and risking the lives of civilians, the Allies maintained their pressure on Spain to deliver exports vital for the war effort and benefited from the repression of social unrest. The internal and external pressures Spain was experiencing during the First World War clearly highlight that neutrality did not shield the country from the effects of war.

not only in counteracting allied propaganda to neutrals about German war guilt but also in exploiting in simplest terms, using simple images, those events which could denigrate the enemy. p. 39. Troy R.E. PADDOCK (ed.), *A call to arms: propaganda, public opinion, and newspapers in the Great War* (Westport & London, 2004). Paddock argues that the Entente powers had the upper hand in the propaganda battle for neutral powers and that Germans did not overcome the disadvantage of admitting to having violated Belgium neutrality. p. 204.

¹²³ Dirk ZEISELER, *Spanien*, pp. 247, 252.