

# Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War

The brainwashing of  
Francisco Franco

Herbert R. Southworth



London and New York

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# Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War

Written by one of the most celebrated historians of the Spanish Civil War, Herbert R. Southworth, this book presents a fascinating account of the origins of the war and the nature and importance of conspiracy for the extreme right. It offers a highly detailed reconstruction of how a plot was concocted to justify the military uprising of July 1936 in Spain, and how the 'facts' of the plot were consolidated and disseminated by right-wing propagandists throughout Europe. Furthermore, the book explores how the myth of the Communist 'secret documents' was perpetuated well into the 1970s.

The latter part of the book, *The Brainwashing of Francisco Franco*, deals with the most influential reader of the documents, General Franco himself. Including an account of Franco's associations with the Entente Internationale contre la Troisième Internationale, it represents a major contribution to the analysis of Franco's 'thought', and provides fascinating evidence of the depths and origins of his obscurantism.

Based on exhaustive research, and written with lucidity and mordant humour, this book acts as both an outstanding introduction to the vast literature of the war, and a monumental contribution to that literature.

**Herbert R. Southworth** was a leading historian of the Spanish Civil War. During a long and varied career, he worked at the Library of Congress, was a publicist for the Spanish Republic during the Civil War, and served with the U.S. Office of War Information in North Africa during the Second World War. In 1946, he founded Radio Tangier, which he managed until 1960. He built a huge collection of books on the Spanish Civil War and taught at the Universities of California and Vincennes, Paris. He wrote widely on twentieth-century Spain, including *El mito de la cruzada de Franco* (1963) and *Guernica! Guernica!: A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda and History* (1977).

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To Pierre Vilar and the memory of his wife  
Gabrielle for their many kindnesses to me.



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# Prologue

Herbert Southworth became a major figure in the historiography of the Spanish Civil War as a result of the publication in Paris in 1963 of his book, *El mito de la cruzada de Franco*. It was issued by Ediciones Ruedo Ibérico, the great publishing house of the Spanish anti-Franco exile run by an eccentric and massively well-read anarchist, José Martínez Guerricabeitia. Smuggled into Spain and sold clandestinely, Ruedo Ibérico's books had enormous impact particularly after the publication of a Spanish translation of Hugh Thomas's classic work on the Spanish Civil War. From the first moments of the conspiracy that became the military coup of 18 July 1936, the rebels were falsifying their own history and that of their enemies. Hugh Thomas's book recounted the history of the war in a readable and objective style – in itself a devastating blow for the partisans of what they called Franco's crusade – and was therefore devoured hungrily by anyone who could get hold of a copy. Southworth did not narrate the war but rather dismantled, line by line, the structures of lies that the Franco regime had erected to justify its existence. The consequence of the arrival in Spain of both books was an attempt by the then Minister of Information, the dynamic Manuel Fraga Iribarne, to counteract their intellectual and moral impact.

There was created in the Ministry of Information a special department under the name Sección de Estudios sobre la Guerra de España. A young functionary of the Ministry, Ricardo de la Cierva y de Hoces, was to direct it. His job was, broadly speaking, to bring up to date the official historiography of the regime in order to repel the attacks coming from Paris. The principal weapon in the armoury of this new unit of intellectual warfare was provided by the purchase of the magnificent library on the Spanish Civil War built up over many years by the Italian journalist, Cesare Gullino. Southworth quickly became the department's main enemy. In comparison with Hugh Thomas, who was already well known after the world-wide success of his book on the Spanish War, Herbert Southworth was virtually unknown. However, there was another crucial difference between the two men. Thomas had written his great book on the conflict but the Spanish Civil War was not going to be the central objective of his life. He was already working on his monumental history of Cuba. Southworth, in

contrast, dedicated his life to the study of the Spanish Civil War. Moreover, against la Cierva, who had the staff and resources of a ministry at his disposal, Southworth had his own arsenal – one of the world's greatest collections of books on the war.

As well as being an anti-Francoist author, Southworth was one of the investors who made possible the Ruedo Ibérico publishing house. That Ricardo de la Cierva y de Hoces saw Southworth as an opponent to be feared was soon revealed. They met in Madrid in 1965. Southworth told me later that la Cierva recounted to him how the police had orders to seize copies of *El mito de la cruzada* found when searching bookshops and the homes of political suspects. La Cierva proudly proclaimed that he recommended and even gave to his friends confiscated copies of the book. However, in Franco's Spain, what was said in private was often far removed from what was said in public. Ricardo de la Cierva wrote

H.R. Southworth is, without argument, the great expert on the bibliography of our war, as seen from the Republican side ... His library on our war is the world's most important private collection: more than seven thousand titles. I am almost certain that he has read all seven thousand. And he keeps, in a tremendous photographic memory, all the important facts and all the relevant cross-references between these books.

*Cien libros básicos sobre la guerra de España*  
(Madrid: Publicaciones Españolas, 1966, p. 40)

This praise was immediately followed by some ferocious, but superficial, attacks on the alleged deficiencies of Southworth's methodology.

Who was this Herbert Southworth, the legendary book-collector who for many years to come would be the legendary intellectual scourge of General Franco's dictatorship? His books would be quarried by the most serious specialists on the Spanish Civil War and his study of the bombing of Guernica would be one of the three or four most important of the many thousands of volumes written on the conflict. Even so, few people knew who he was because, lacking a position in a university, he lacked an easy label. Nevertheless, he had had an extraordinary existence. His writings as a whole contributed to the decision of the Francoist Ministry of Information to set up an entire department just to counter the demolition of regime propaganda. His extraordinary passage from poverty in the American West to crusading left-wing journalist during the Spanish Civil War had elements of a Steinbeck novel. His later transformation into a successful radio-station magnate and then into a scholar of world-wide reputation was reminiscent of one of Theodore Dreiser's self-made heroes.

He was born in Canton, a tiny Oklahoma town, on 6 February 1908. When the town bank, owned by his father failed in 1917, the family moved briefly to Tulsa in eastern Oklahoma. They stayed longer in Abilene, Texas, where his father prospected for oil. Herbert's principal memory of that time

was reading his father's collection of the Harvard Classics. The theft of one of the volumes when he was twelve affected him so deeply that it was perhaps the beginning of his own obsessional book-collecting. He educated himself among the stacks of the Carnegie Public Library in Abilene. There, after months of reading *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, he decided to abandon Protestantism and the conservative Republicanism of the Bible belt. He became a socialist and an avid lifetime reader of what he joyfully called 'the muckraker's school of journalism'. It was to be the basis of his astonishing transformation into a formidable scholar in Europe.

He went to secondary school in Abilene until the age of 15. He worked at various jobs in the construction industry in Texas, then in a copper mine in Morenci, Arizona. There he learned Spanish working with Mexican miners. The collapse of the price of copper after the Wall Street crash left him unemployed. He then decided to work his way through Arizona University and when his savings ran out, he went to the Texas Technological College in Lubbock – better known as the birth-place of Buddy Holly. There he lived in acute poverty, paying for his studies by working in the college library. He majored in History with a minor in Spanish. The work in the library had deepened his love for books. With the encouragement of the college librarian, he left, in 1934, with only one thought in mind – to seek work in the world's most important book collection, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. When he finally got a post in the Document Department, it was at a salary less than half of that he had received in the copper mines. Yet, although it barely allowed him to eat, he was happy just to be able to pass his days among the bookshelves.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, he began to review books on the conflict for the *Washington Post*. Already emotionally affected by the struggle between fascism and anti-fascism, he always said thereafter that the events in Spain gave direction to his life. His articles brought him to the notice of the Republic's Ambassador, Fernando de los Ríos, who asked him to work for the Spanish Information Bureau. He left his ill-paid but secure government post in the library and moved to New York. There he worked with passion, writing regular press articles and pamphlets, including *Franco's Mein Kampf*, his anonymous demolition of José Pemartín's attempt to provide a formal doctrine for Francoism, *Qué es "lo nuevo"*. During this time, he took a Master's degree at Columbia University and formed an enduring friendship with his colleague Jay Allen, the distinguished war correspondent. While in New York, he also met and married a beautiful young Puerto Rican woman, Camelia Colón, although it was not to be a happy marriage. Herbert was devastated by the defeat of the Republic, although, after the war ended, he and Jay continued to work for the exiled premier Juan Negrín. They helped many prominent Spanish exiles who passed through New York, including Ramón Sender and Constanca de la Mora. Herbert also wrote a book about the Spanish fascist party, the Falange, which was rejected by publishers on the grounds that it was too scholarly.

Shortly after Pearl Harbour, Herbert was recruited by the US Office of War Information. In 1943, he was sent to Algeria to work for the Office of Psychological Warfare. Because of his knowledge of the Spanish situation, he was posted to Rabat in Morocco to direct Spanish-language broadcasts to Franco's Spain. At the end of the war, he decided not to use his demobilization air passage home but stay in Rabat, partly to await the fall of Franco but largely because he had fallen in love with a strikingly handsome and powerfully intelligent French lawyer, Suzanne Maury. When both were free to do so, they married in 1948. Knowing that there were no controls on broadcasting from Tangier, Suzanne advised him to buy a quantity of US Army surplus radio equipment with which he founded Radio Tangier. During that time, he travelled regularly to Spain in search of material for what would become the largest ever collection of books and pamphlets on the Spanish Civil War (which now resides at the University of California at La Jolla, San Diego).

The radio station was nationalized by the Moroccan government at midnight on 31 December 1960. Herbert and Suzanne went to live in Paris. He lost money in an effort to launch the potato crisp in France. That, the problems of finding an apartment big enough to house his library which was deposited in a garage, together with an incident in which he was beaten up by policemen during a left-wing demonstration, inclined him to leave the capital. The problem of his by now enormous library saw him move south where property was cheaper. In 1962, he and Suzanne bought the run-down Château de Puy in Villedieu sur Indre. Some years later, they moved to the faded magnificence of the secluded Château de Roche, in Concrémiers near Le Blanc. In the centre of the huge run-down house was a relatively modernized core, the equivalent of a four-bedroom house, where they lived. On the third floor and in the other wings lived the books and the bats.

Once established there, he began to write the series of books that obliged the Franco regime to change its falsified version of its own past. The most celebrated was the first, *The Myth of Franco's Crusade*, the devastating exposé of right-wing propaganda about the Spanish Civil War. Published in both Spanish and French by Ruedo Ibérico, it was decisive in persuading Manuel Fraga to set up the department solely dedicated to the modernization of regime historiography. Its director, Ricardo de la Cierva, in a losing battle with Southworth, went on to write eighty books in defence of the Franco regime. In 1965, Southworth wrote a second book, *Antifalange*, also published by Ruedo Ibérico, a massively erudite commentary on the process whereby Franco converted the Falange into the single party of his regime. It had significantly less commercial impact than *El mito*, because it was a minutely detailed line-by-line commentary on a book by a Falangist writer, Maximiano García Venero, *Falange en la guerra de España: la Unificación y Hedilla* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1967). García Venero was the ghost-writer for the wartime Falangist leader, Manuel Hedilla, who had opposed Franco's take-over of the single party in April 1937. Condemned to years of impris-

onment, internal exile and penury, the book was Hedilla's attempt to revindicate his role in the war. Southworth's accompanying volume revealed such knowledge of the interstices of the Falange that it provoked considerable surprise and admiration among many senior Falangists. As a result of his work on the project, Southworth had engaged in a flourishing correspondence with major Falangists. This continued until his death and was notable for the tone of respect with which many of them treated him.

In 1975, Herbert Southworth's masterpiece appeared in Paris as *La destruction de Guernica. Journalisme, diplomatie, propagande et histoire* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1975), to be followed shortly afterwards by a Spanish translation. The English original appeared as *Guernica! Guernica! A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda and History* (Berkeley, California, California University Press, 1977). Based on a staggering array of sources, it is an astonishing reconstruction of the effort by Franco's propagandists and admirers to wipe out the atrocity at Guernica – and it thus had a very considerable impact in the Basque country. The book did not reconstruct the bombing itself but actually begins with the arrival in Guernica from Bilbao of *The Times* correspondent, George L. Steer, together with three other foreign journalists. From that moment, it is a work of the most fascinating and meticulous research, which reconstructs the web of lies and half-truths which falsified what really happened at Guernica. The most exaggerated Francoist version, which blamed the destruction of the town on sabotaging miners from Asturias, was the invention of Luis Bolín, the head of Franco's foreign press office. To evaluate the work of Bolín and the subsequent manipulation of international opinion about the event, Southworth carefully reconstructed the conditions under which foreign correspondents were obliged to work in the Nationalist zone. He showed how Bolín frequently threatened to have shot any correspondent whose despatches did not follow the Francoist propaganda line. After a detailed demolition of the line pedalled by Bolín, Southworth went on to dismantle the inconsistencies in the writings of Bolín's English allies, Douglas Jerrold, Arnold Lunn and Robert Sencourt.

It might normally be expected that a detailed account of the historiography of a subject would be the arid labour of the narrow specialist. However, Southworth, managed, with a unique mastery, to turn his study of the complex construction of a huge lie into a highly readable book. Among the most interesting and important pages of his book consist of an analysis of the relationship between Francoist writing on Guernica and the growth of the Basque problem in the 1970s. Southworth demonstrated that there was an effort being carried out to lower the tension between Madrid and Euzkadi by means of the elaboration of a new version of what happened in Guernica. For this, it was crucial for neo-Francoist historiography to accept that Guernica had been bombed and not destroyed by Red saboteurs. Having conceded that the atrocity was largely the work of the Luftwaffe, in total contradiction of the regime's previous orthodoxy, it became important for

the official historians to free the Nationalist high command from all blame. This task required a high degree of sophistry since the Germans were in Spain in the first place at the request of Francisco Franco. Nevertheless, the neo-Francoists set out to distinguish between what they portrayed as independent German initiative and the innocence of Franco and the commander in the north, General Emilio Mola. Therefore, Southworth analysed the massive literature on the subject to advance a clear hypothesis: Guernica was bombed by the Condor Legion at the request of the Francoist high command in order to destroy Basque morale and undermine the defence of Bilbao.

This conclusion was not apparently remarkable and scarcely went beyond the first chronicle sent to *The Times* by George Steer, and was no more than was regarded as axiomatic by the majority of Basques since 1937. However, the great French historian, Pierre Vilar, in his prologue to the book, pointed out the importance of what Southworth had achieved in returning to the event itself and removing layer after layer of untruth laid on by censorship, by diplomats serving vested interests and determined propagandists of Franco. In Vilar's view, what gave Southworth's work an importance far beyond the confines of the historiography of the Spanish Civil War was his determined quest for the truth, and his exposure of the way in which journalists, censors, propagandists and diplomats distorted history. In a terrain in which truth has always been the first casualty, the 'passionate objectivity' of Southworth rose up like a beacon and made it an object lesson in methodology. Southworth's research was based on an astonishing array of sources in seven languages amassed in many countries. On the advice of Pierre Vilar, the manuscript was presented in 1975 – successfully – as a doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne. He had already lectured in universities in Britain and France but this was the beginning of a belated academic recognition of Southworth's work in his own country. In the mid-1970s, he became Regents Professor at the University of California.

Herbert was never fully welcome in the US academic community because of his inveterate subversiveness and his mischievous humour. He made no secret of his contempt for Washington's policies in Latin America, which evoked for him the betrayal of the Spanish Republic. Everyday, as an avid observer of what he considered to be the hypocrisy of political theatre, he devoured a stack of French and American newspapers. Along with his political passion, he had a wonderful sense of the absurd and an irresistibly infectious laugh. He was particularly keen on multi-lingual puns, never ceasing to be tickled by the delivery to any restaurant table in Spain of a bottle of fizzy water with its label 'sin gas'. I remember on one occasion at a conference in Germany, the assembled participants were led by the director of the host foundation to see a sumptuous carpet, which we were proudly told, had once belonged to Adolph Hitler. Herbert dropped to his knees and began shuffling around, peering closely at the pile. Herr Direktor asked with concern what was the matter and was completely nonplussed when Herbert replied in his slow Texan drawl, 'I'm looking for the teeth marks!'

His demolition of the fake scholarship of others was often extremely amusing, most notably in his chapter entitled ‘Spanica Zwischen Todnu Gabriet’, in which he traced minutely how Francoist author after Francoist author cited a book which they had never read (Peter Merin’s *Spanien zwischen Tod und Geburt* (*Spain between Life and Death*), but merely mis-copied its title. He once asked me to ensure that his gravestone carried the epitaph ‘HIS WRITINGS WERE NOT HOLY WRIT / BUT NEITHER WERE THEY WHOLLY SHIT’. Despite his austere inquisitorial style, he was a rotund and jolly trencherman.

After the death of Franco, Herbert was regularly invited to give lectures at Spanish universities where he was a major cult figure. His influence was seen in the work of a new generation of British and Spanish scholars. Southworth’s remorselessly forensic writings imposed new standards of seriousness on writing about the war. A pugnacious polemicist, he regularly took part in literary arguments, most notably with Burnett Bolloten and Hugh Thomas. Regarding his great Francoist opponent, Ricardo de La Cierva, he had already published a devastating demolition of his sloppy scholarship, ‘Los bibliófobos: Ricardo de La Cierva y sus colaboradores’, in *Cuadernos de Ruedo Ibérico*, 28–29 (December 1970 and March 1971). However, he ceased writing for a time. In 1970, he saw that his outgoings on books dramatically exceeded income and he decided that he must sell the collection. It was sold to the University of California at San Diego as ‘The Southworth Collection’ and remains the world’s single most important library on the Spanish Civil War. With income from savings dwindling, he and Suzanne also had to sell the Château de Roche in 1978.

I had assumed that, as they had both entered their seventies, they would move to a modern house. Instead, they bought a medieval priory in the village of St Benoît du Sault, an intriguing but inconvenient house in which every room was on a different level and whose long and narrow stone spiral staircase led eventually to another bat-infested study. Inevitably, Herbert began to rebuild his collection and had started to write again. He enjoyed the friendship of Pierre Vilar, of numerous Spanish scholars and of the venerable Dutch anarchist thinker, Arthur Lehning. They lived happily in St Benoît until Suzanne’s health broke down in 1994. Herbert nursed her devotedly until her death on 24 August 1996. He never recovered fully from that blow and, after a stroke, his health deteriorated. Although bed-ridden, with the devoted help of an English neighbour, Susan Mason, he continued to research. Only three days before his death on 30 October 1999 in the hospital at Le Blanc, Indre, he delivered a more fitting epitaph than that quoted above, in the form of the manuscript of the present volume – *Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War: The Brainwashing of Francisco Franco*.

**Professor Paul Preston**  
Series Editor



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I undertook to write this, motivated by the encouragement of Professor Paul Preston. I have been able to complete the book only with the invaluable assistance of Sue Mason and Paul Preston. I here express my debt to each of them.



## Part I

# Conspiracy and the Spanish Civil War

### I

I have always given to two specific, quite singular, chapters of the Spanish Civil War historiography a more inquisitive approach than to other categories of seemingly more fundamental significance – than, for example, to the military or diplomatic history of the struggle. These two specific parts are constituted by the journalism and propaganda of the Spanish conflict. They are to some extent interrelated, at least, overlapping. It is not hard to see why these two subjects are of considerable and continuing interest. The Spanish Civil War involved directly but a small part of the globe, but it drew toward Spain the attention of the whole world; thus the press that covered the Spanish War was more diversified in its actors and in its interpretations than the press that reported on the Second World War; thus the field open to propagandists during the Civil War was large and varied, but in the Second World War, where most of the independent countries of the world were themselves participants, the areas at the disposition of the conflicting propagandas were quite limited.

I was myself actively engaged in the propaganda war of the Spanish conflict, on the Republican side, with, I must now admit, meagre results. When, much later in life, I was able to dedicate a large part of my time to writing about the war in Spain, I devoted a very special attention to the problems of Spanish Civil War propaganda during (and after) the war itself. This activity may well have been caused in part by a sentiment of indebtedness to the Second Spanish Republic for having given me a cause to defend with passionate conviction and, perhaps, a deep desire to win, albeit belatedly, the propaganda war; but I must also confess that the nausea provoked in my being by the nature of the Catholic propaganda in favour of Franco during and after the war was one of the motives that kept the seat of my pants on the seat of the chair, in front of the typewriter.

Of all the arguments advanced by pro-Franco propagandists, during and after the war, the most entangled and the most absurd was that based on certain 'secret documents' that were alleged to prove that the Spanish Communist Party, in collusion with Spanish Socialists and even anarchists,

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as well as foreign Communists and Socialists and Comintern leaders, was plotting, on the eve of the military revolt in July 1936, to seize control – through an armed uprising – of the Spanish government, then already in the hands of the Popular Front.

I had never given more than a cursory reading to the various accounts of these ‘secret documents’ before the day in 1962 when I sat down to study them seriously as part of the preparation for what was to become *El mito de la cruzada de Franco*.<sup>1</sup> In delving into the complicated – and finally to me exciting – story of the ‘secret documents’, I found that the number and nature of their guarantors and sponsors were (or could seem too many persons to be) so important and serious that my own instinctive sentiments of being confronted by a poorly concocted imposture were not sufficient to disprove them, and I determined to do my utmost to reveal their – and of this I was convinced – spurious character. Proof was necessary for I could hardly ignore the opinions of Cardinal Gomá, Salvador de Madariaga, Jacques Bardoux, Hugh Thomas, Douglas Jerrold and others who seemed to give serious consideration to the ‘secret documents’.

## II

Ever since the Russian Revolution of 1917, it has been a profitable enterprise for conservative political movements in Western Europe to publish ‘proofs’ of a ‘secret Communist plot’ in order to win an election, or to justify a Rightist take-over of a government. One of the earliest of such schemes concerned the ‘Zinoviev Letter’, which helped to defeat the British Labour Party in the 1924 elections.<sup>2</sup> The most famous Communist Plot was that of the Reichstag Fire ‘exposed’ by the Nazis in 1933 in order to complete their conquest of the German State.<sup>3</sup> That only three years later another ‘Communist Plot’ supported by ‘secret documents’ should surface, in Spain this time, is hardly surprising.

The ‘proofs’ of the ‘Communist Plot’ in Spain consisted of four ‘secret documents’. Document I was generally called ‘*Informe confidencial no. 3*’. It contained orders and watchwords for an uprising of the Spanish Left against the Popular Front, scheduled to take place between 10 May and 29 June 1936. Document II was usually entitled ‘*Informe confidencial no. 22/11*’ and furnished the names of the members of the proposed revolutionary government and of the military and provincial authorities who were to form the ‘National Soviet’. There was also an estimation of the size of the forces engaged in the operation, curiously labelled by its supposedly revolutionary authors the ‘subversive movement’. The dates for establishing the also strangely labelled ‘National Soviet’ were, as in Document I, from 10 May to 29 June 1936. These two ‘documents’ were at times combined, and it is quite possible that originally they formed a single ‘document’ with II preceding I. (I have chosen to number the ‘documents’ in the order generally

found in the published propagandas.) Document III was headed '*Informe reservado*'. It reported on a meeting said to have taken place in Valencia on 16 May 1936, attended by a delegate from the Third Internationale, by French trade union representatives, by a number of Spaniards (some just come from France) and by two Russian emissaries. Plans were made at this meeting for a revolutionary movement which would break out around the middle of June. Document IV contained general instructions for the 'neutralization of an army and its officers': It did not, in its first printed versions, refer specifically to Spain.

These 'documents' were used in pro-Franco propaganda, after the outbreak of the military rebellion, to justify the revolt of the generals; they were presented as proofs that Franco and the other military leaders had risen in revolt merely to forestall a Communist take-over of the Spanish government.<sup>4</sup> The country, aside from Spain, in which Documents I, II and III were the most widely diffused was England, and England was seemingly the base from which the initial distribution outside Spain was made. Documents I, II and III were given considerable circulation in France, and also appeared in the United States, Germany, Italy and Sweden. In contrast, Document IV first showed up in France, then in England and Italy and rarely appeared elsewhere, except in Spain.

Documents I and II were the most generally employed. This can be explained by the fact that they were the most Spanish of the four 'documents', being limited strictly to Spanish affairs. Document III was also frequently published, but since it dealt not only with Spain, but also with French and Soviet collaborations in Spanish revolutionary matters, the purposes behind its diffusion at times surpassed the limits of the Spanish frontier. Document IV was limited in its appearances outside Spain, perhaps because, as already noted, it did not clearly refer to a Communist conspiracy in Spain during the pre-war months, except in an Italian text and in one Spanish version.

The fact that exactly the same photographic reproductions of certain of the 'documents' were published in more than one country, that the same translations of some 'documents' are found in more than one publication in the same country, or in more than one country, that the same errors in figures and in spelling proper names appear in different copies allow us at times to trace the circulation of the 'documents' from one source to another.

### III

The first known appearance of any of these 'documents' in the propaganda war following the outbreak of the Spanish conflict was in England. This was a highly restricted disclosure, and was kept from public knowledge until 1967; this manifestation of the 'documents' played no role in the public propaganda battles, either during the Civil War or later. Frederick Ramón

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Bertodano y Wilson, Marquis del Moral,<sup>5</sup> who possessed both British and Spanish nationalities – he was born in Australia and had served England in three wars – sent photocopies of Documents I, II and III, with English translations, in a confidential communication to an official of the Foreign Office, with a covering letter, dated 30 August 1936. The letter read in part as follows:

I have secured, after much difficulty, certain secret reports and orders of the Socialist-Communist Headquarters in Spain for the rising projected between 3 May and 29 June but postponed. The document is valuable for the list of Ministers of the 'National Soviet', liaison officers and other details of their colleagues of the French Socialist Party. I enclose a photocopy and I shall be glad if you will communicate it to the Foreign Office with my compliments. The man who sent it has risked his life in doing so. Unfortunately, I only received it three days ago...<sup>6</sup>

The Foreign Office discreetly let it be known to del Moral that it did not consider the 'documents' to be 'genuine'.<sup>7</sup> No specific reason was given for this judgement, but a glance at the 'photographic' copies forwarded by del Moral was sufficient to show that the pages were unconvincing as documentary proof of anything at all. They were constituted by three typewritten sheets, one for each 'document', and possessed no letterheads, dates, or signatures. There was nothing on the three pages to prove that they had not been typewritten an hour before being posted to the man at the Foreign Office. There is a strange error in the English text of Document III. In the paragraph numbered 8 of the Spanish text, there is a reference to a *Biblioteca Internacional*. In the English translation, the word 'Biblioteca' is rendered as 'Bookshop', instead of 'library'.

#### IV

The first public references that I have seen published outside of Spain dealing with the 'documents' are dated October 1936: one in England and the other in France. The English reference is found in the 'Historical Note' which served as a preface to the publication entitled *A Preliminary Official Report on the Atrocities Committed in Southern Spain in July and August 1936, by the Communist Forces of the Madrid Government, together with a Brief Historical Note on the Course of Recent Events in Spain*, first printed in London in October 1936. The title page bore these details: 'Issued by authority of the Committee of Investigation Appointed by the National Government at Burgos'.<sup>8</sup>

In the 'Historical Note' can be read:

All this time [Spring of 1936] there had been repeated and well-founded rumours that the Communists planned to seize power and declare a Spanish Soviet State ... The Communist risings were originally timed for some date between the 3rd of May and June 29th, but were subsequently postponed until 29th or 30th June. This gave the Right an opportunity which they were swift to seize.<sup>9</sup>

Further on in the 'Historical Note' it is stated:

If further evidence of the complicity of the Madrid Government were necessary, the appointment of Señor Largo Caballero as Prime Minister provides it, as he was openly designated as the President of the National Soviet of Spain... An interesting sidelight on the Communist plan was the provision made for a pretended 'Fascist' attack on the headquarters of C.N.T. as soon as the movement was begun ... It is thus established by documentary evidence that this great national movement was begun only just in time to forestall the Communist Revolution organized months before to establish a Soviet in Spain at the end of July.<sup>10</sup>

The 'Historical Note' is unsigned but there are indications that it was written by del Moral himself. At any rate, it was written by the man who received the English aviation journalist Nigel Tangye at Spanish Nationalist headquarters in London in December 1936, just before the journalist, carrying Nazi diplomatic recommendations, left for Rebel Spain to write favourably on the campaign of the Franco forces. Tangye described his host as:

a man with the finest features I have ever seen ... he was tall and slim, and his face revealed the breeding and culture that somehow one expects from the Spanish aristocracy. His hair, worn rather long, was white and in his eyes was a look of inestimable sadness.<sup>11</sup>

In talking of Tangye's projected trip to Spain, he advised the war correspondent: 'But before you go, read the book on the Spanish atrocities. In it I have written a brief history of the events that led up to the revolution.'<sup>12</sup>

Tangye's description could fit del Moral, as is attested by a letter from Sir Arthur Bryant, dated 23 July 1969. Sir Arthur was the writer of the preface to a follow-up volume, *The Second and Third Reports on the Communist Atrocities*, but he did not recall in 1969 who had prefaced the first volume.<sup>13</sup> The publisher of these *Reports*, and of a great deal of other Spanish rebel propaganda in England, was the London house of Eyre and Spottiswoode. The director of Eyre and Spottiswoode was Douglas Jerrold, a militant English Catholic, who played a prominent role in the story of the 'documents'. Unfortunately for the historian, the archives of Eyre and Spottiswoode were destroyed during a bombing of the Second World War,

and there apparently remains no documentary trace of the authorship of the 'Historical Note'.<sup>14</sup>

If the author of the 'Historical Note' was del Moral, it was written by a man who knew that his 'documents' had been judged 'not genuine' by the Foreign Office, but this unpublicized judgement would not have been enough to stop a decided man like del Moral from his campaign in favour of Franco. Del Moral was probably the person most active behind the scenes in England on behalf of the Spanish Nationalists during the Civil War, just as his close friend Jerrold was one of their outstanding advocates in the public view.<sup>15</sup>

It must be underlined here that the first published appearance of a reference to the 'documents' outside Spain before or after the outbreak of the Civil War was in an effort to justify the military uprising.

## V

The second public mention outside Spain in October 1936 to any of the 'documents' appeared in the feverishly pro-Franco Parisian weekly *Gringoire* on 9 October 1936: a French translation of Documents I and II, presented as a single 'document', the original of which had been reportedly found in Majorca among the papers abandoned by the Republican Comandante Bayo, who was defeated in his efforts to recapture the island in August 1936. The presentation read:

The truth is that the national insurreccional movement was begun to prevent an enterprise of Sovietization of which the assassination of Calvo Sotelo was only the prelude. We have in hand a document which proves this fact in a preemptory manner. It was taken from the communists in the course of the action of the 28th Spanish infantry regiment at Palma de Majorca. It is the plan for a Soviet *coup d'état* which the Spanish patriots caused to fail.

The conclusion was: 'The execution of this plan was delayed several times, which permitted the Nationalists to organize to intervene in order to conquer and to save Spain.'<sup>16</sup>

This 'document' was, in so far as one can judge without the Spanish original which has apparently never been published, essentially the text of Documents I and II used by del Moral. There were slight differences in the spelling of certain names, and in the numbering of the 'watchwords'. The most significant change was that in the *Gringoire* paper, the earliest date for the eve of the uprising is given as 1 May, whereas del Moral's 'document' specified 10 May. Such differences can be explained as due to faulty typing, but in the case of instructions for an insurrection they could have led to catastrophe. And anyway, why different texts and so many copies? The

reader of *Gringoire* – if he were of a sceptical turn of mind – might well have asked himself what these instructions for an uprising in Madrid in May and June were doing in Bayo's baggage in Majorca in August. Apparently, such questions were never asked by the editors of the paper. In this case also the purpose of the publication was to exonerate those accountable for the military revolt from any responsibility for the outbreak of the Civil War.

Another 1936 reference to the 'documents' can be discerned in one of the first books published in England on the Spanish Civil War, *Spanish Journey*, written by Eleanora Tennant. The author left Spain on 30 October 1936<sup>17</sup> and, since the publication date is given as 1936, it represents a record of some sort for rapid printing. Unsurprisingly, it was published by Jerrold's old firm, Eyre and Spottiswoode. Tennant gave no source for her information, nor did she give verbatim quotations, but she was certainly inspired by the 'documents' in general, especially by Document III, when she wrote

The Nationalists only struck just in time as a Communist rising on a grand scale had been planned to take place a few days later. The complete plans for the Communist revolution which were prepared in May 1936, under the guidance of Ventura (a delegate of the Third International), have fallen into the hands of General Franco, so there is no secret about them.<sup>18</sup>

Still another early reference to the 'Secret Communist Plot Documents' outside Spain can be found in a booklet written by Federico de Echevarría, first published in all probability late in 1936 in Paris, then in London and New York. The French edition contains a preface dated 'November 1936' and the same date is found at the end of the text. The New York edition, however, had the date 'December 1936' at the end of the text. The French and American editions gave the following information, which evidently came from Document I:

The instructions found in the possession of the Reds and published during the civil war prove that a great *coup d'état* was being prepared in order to set up the dictatorship of the proletariat in Spain. Originally it should have taken place in May, then it was postponed until June, and there were further postponements, the reasons for which are not yet known. Finally, it seems to have been fixed for July 30th. It was forestalled by the National Revolution.<sup>19</sup>

Echevarría did not indicate any source for these details.

Again, both of these authors, Tennant and Echevarría, used information contained in the 'documents' in order to absolve Franco and the military from any responsibility in starting the Spanish Civil War.

## VI

The Popular Front electoral victory in Spain on 16 February 1936 presented Western Europe with a political and moral problem. It was the first time that a political coalition, including Socialists and Communists, had won a victory at the polls in this part of the world. Up to this moment, the expression 'revolutionary forces' in Spain referred by definition to forces of the Left. But now, the Left was in power and the Right in opposition. The first reaction of the conservative political and military elements in Spain was to begin doing what they had always up to then considered to be the base and vile prerogatives of the lower classes: they began plotting to overthrow a democratically elected government. (Of course, some of them tried to argue that the elections of 16 February 1936 were fraudulent, and the government illegitimate, but such arguments were unconvincing, and carried little weight in Spain before 18 July 1936, and did not become unconditional articles of faith of the Spanish Right until after that date.)

But however much the Spanish military and political conspirators might have instinctively believed that any government with the Socialists and Communists in it was by nature illegitimate, once they had launched their revolt and it had not immediately succeeded, they felt the need to explain and justify – especially in the Western political democracies – their 'revolutionary' behaviour. They refused the label of 'revolutionaries'. They were merely trying to *prevent* a revolution, a Communist revolution, that is. This is the sense of the argument advanced by del Moral to the Foreign Office, by the anonymous author of the 'Historical Note', by the editors of *Gringoire*, by Eleanor Tennant and by Echevarría.

In spite of their reactionary ideologies and their conservative dogmas, the Spanish rebels did not want to assume the role of 'revolutionaries' in the Western World, of agents for overthrowing a democratically elected government. They were, they argued in their propaganda, especially in the propaganda of the 'Secret Communist Plot Documents', but seeking to counter a real revolution, that is a social revolution of the Left. Thus, in the examples thus far shown of the pro-Franco propaganda in Paris, London and New York during the first months of the Civil War, the spokesmen of the Spanish Rebels appeal to the politically democratic sentiments of their public, denying the ultra-Rightist and undemocratic spirit of their revolt, and seek to shelter their uprising behind the protection of such sophistries as the 'Secret Documents of the Communist Plot'.

## VII

It was in 1937 that the propaganda campaign outside Spain, based on the 'Secret Documents of the Communist Plot', began in earnest. On 14 January of that year, *L'Écho de Paris*, probably the French newspaper most influential