

# **French Involvement and Solidarity in South West France with the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)**

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All the persons above have contributed to this research and I would like to recognise their role in facilitating my studies and general well-being throughout. Nevertheless any errors relating to the contents of this thesis are mine alone and full responsibility lies with me.

### List of Abbreviations

- ADA Archives Départementales de l'Aude (Departmental Archives of the Aude)
- ADHG Archives Départementales de la Haute-Garonne (Departmental Archives of the Haute-Garonne)
- ADHP Archives Départementales des Hautes-Pyrénées (Departmental Archives of the Hautes-Pyrénées)
- ADPA Archives Départementales des Pyrénées-Atlantiques (Departmental Archives of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, a department before 10 October 1969 known as the Basses-Pyrénées)
- ADPO Archives Départementales des Pyrénées-Orientales (Departmental Archives of the Pyrénées Orientales)
- ADG Arxiu de Girona (Archives of Girona province, Catalonia)
- ADL Arxiu de Lleida (Archives of Lleida province, Catalonia)
- ANC Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya (National Archives of Catalonia)
- CEDA Confederación Española de Derechas Autonomas (Spanish Confederation of Autonomous right-wing groups)
- CDRE Comité de la Défense de la Révolution Espagnole (Defense Committee of the Spanish Revolution-based in Perpignan in the context of this study)
- CGT Confédération Générale du Travail (National Confederation of Labour-French)
- CNT-FAI Confederación Nacional del Trabajo- Federación Anarquista Ibérico ( National Confederation of Labour- Iberian Anarchist Federation)
- FR Faucons Rouges (Socialist, SFIO linked youth group for 6-18 year olds)
- GMR Garde Mobile de Reserve (Riot police until 1945)
- GR Gauche Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Left-Socialist faction within the SFIO)
- JC Jeunesses Communiste (Communist Youth)
- JS Jeunesses Socialistes (Socialist Youth)
- LDH Ligue des Droits de l'Homme (League of Human Rights)
- MOI Main d'œuvre Immigrée (Immigrant workers union, linked to the PCF)
- PCF Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party)
- PCE Partido Comunista Español (Spanish Communist Party)

PPF Parti Populaire Français (French Popular Party- Far-right)

PSF Parti Social Français (French Social Party, prior to June 1936 known as the Croix de Feu league-Far-right)

PSUC Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (United Socialist Party of Catalonia-combined party of the Catalan Socialist and Communist parties)

SFIO Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (French Section of the Workers International- Socialist)

SP Secours Populaire (Popular Aid)

SR Secours Rouge (Red Aid-Communist)

SS Secours Socialiste (Socialist Aid)

UA Union Anarchiste (Anarchist Union)

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## Abstract

My postgraduate research project since August 2009 has focused on the ways in which solidarity and support were created and developed between people in the South West of France and the Second Republic in Spain. The first chapter of my thesis looks at how support for leftist politics and Republicanism in Spain was developed in the South West, a border region with close social, economic and political connections to Spain, especially following the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic in April 1931. The second chapter investigates how community groups, local French Front Populaire committees, Trade Unions and left-wing political parties worked to establish solidarity with the Spanish Republicans, within their local communities, ranging from the large cities such as Toulouse and Perpignan, down to localized actions in smaller sous-préfectures and communes. This chapter aims to demonstrate that support for the Republic took root across the South West and was developed due to the strong links to her Iberian neighbour discussed in chapter one. Chapter three examines how smaller government connected of regional functionaries falling under the aegis of pro-Republicans in the French government circumvented Non-Intervention laws and supported the Republic via partisan acts of assistance in crucial border posts and aerodromes in the South West. This chapter aims to demonstrate that despite the traditional narrative of the Spanish Civil War, which emphasises France's adherence to the Non-Intervention

agreement from August 1936, on a local level a plethora of actions in favour of the Republic were carried out. This research constitutes a significant step towards understanding international solidarity during the conflict beyond the major players such as the USSR and Mexico, countries which flouted the Non-Intervention agreement in favour of the Republic without any qualms. Finally chapter four looks at the volunteers from the South West to fight alongside the Republicans against the Spanish Nationalists backed by Hitler and Mussolini. The chapter will also illuminate the complex network of support services provided in the region to those wishing to enlist in the Republican army, underlining the important social contribution provided by pro-Republican elements within border communities in the South West.

## **French involvement and solidarity in South West France with the Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)**

### **Introduction: Beyond Paris and the Non-Intervention agreement.**

On 8 August 1936 the French government ratified the Non-Intervention agreement which confirmed that France would not supply or permit the supply of any war material to the Spanish Republican government or the Spanish Nationalist rebels.<sup>1</sup>

This event more than any other has served to obscure more accurate accounts of French involvement in the Spanish Civil War, relying on the official version of events to marginalise all other forms of intervention in France in favour of the Spanish Republic. Historiography relating to France's role in the conflict has mostly pigeon-holed 'intervention' as acts undertaken by partisan individuals such as Pierre Cot and Jean Moulin in late July-early August 1936, which stopped once Non-Intervention was agreed upon, and only ever constituted '*quelques gouttes d'eau dans l'océan.*'<sup>2</sup> Whilst there has been research beyond the Parisian initiatives of Spanish Republicans and leftist French politicians, events occurring in the South West are usually portrayed as minor staging-posts; the cities of the *Midi* being useful in the frenetic days of early August 1936, but neglected thereafter.<sup>3</sup> Even those who reveal the existence of clandestine support networks in the South West have a tendency to see such local participants in the latter as peripheral characters who acted without wider support in the community and whose links to the upper echelons of unofficial government partisanship were tenuous at best.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. Howson, *Arms for Spain* (New York, 1998) p.55.

<sup>2</sup> J. Serres., *Été 1936 : La Guerre d'Espagne de part et d'autre de la Bidassoa* (Biarritz, 2006) p.323.  
C. Gindin., *Le Front Populaire: La France de 1934 à 1939* (Paris, 1972) p.155.

<sup>3</sup> Howson., *Arms for Spain* pp.49- 57.

<sup>4</sup> J-A. Rapin., *Tant Pis si la lutte est cruelle : Volontaires Internationaux contre Franco* (Paris, 2008) p.104.



The other central role played by the south western *départements*, yet neglected by scholars, is the part played by communities, groups and individuals in supporting the Spanish Republic's civilian and military sectors from 1936-1939. Frequently, in recent years, a plethora of necessary, yet narrowly focused, academic research, journalism and educational projects have focused on the *Retirada* of January-March 1939.<sup>5</sup> Such commemorative pieces, directed at the squalor and neglect suffered by Spanish Republicans in the mainly coastal internment camps, have eclipsed the enduring, substantial and widespread actions of solidarity carried out by regional Spanish Republican sympathizers across the region throughout the conflict.

Research into solidarity with the Spanish Republic in the South Western *départements* on the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain has been a relatively new introduction to French historiography. The works of Jean Serres and José Cubero are rare and salient examples of how local historians have begun to look at the war and its effects on French solidarity in a regional context.<sup>6</sup> With the exception of Serre's work, the provocations and hostile acts undertaken by Spanish Nationalists (often in collaboration with French Fascists) against French and Spanish Republican interests in the South West have seldom been touched upon as motives for increased sympathy across the population. Such Republican sympathies were manifested in numerous ways: from coalescing in the transport of military materiel into Republican territory, to involvement in solidarity and outright partisan acts in favour of the Spanish Republic, based largely, but not uniquely, upon shared leftist political ideology in addition to republican values.

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<sup>5</sup> See *La Dépêche de Dimanche* 18/10/09, *Hommage aux Réfugiés Espagnols de 1939-1940* (Conseil Général de l'Aude, 2004) and *Les Républicains Espagnols dans les Hautes-Pyrénées : de l'exil à L'intégration* (Conseil Général des Hautes-Pyrénées, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Cubero, *Les Républicains espagnols* (Pau, 2003)

Finally, we might observe that scholars have largely overlooked the impact of Spanish immigrants present in the South West throughout the early twentieth century, and their effect on mobilising their French neighbours in favour of the Spanish Republic, in establishing why French populations supported Spain from 1936-1939. Whilst Skoutelsky has dealt with the connections between Republican Spaniards and French volunteers for the International Brigades, research on the combined efforts of French and Spanish leftist solidarity groups in the South West is thin on the ground, revealing little about the true extent of international collaboration.<sup>7</sup> The same is equally true in the case of historians who have examined the role of specific political movements during the Spanish Civil War. David Berry, for example, in his work on the French anarchists, devotes significant analysis to anarchist volunteers, yet scarcely a paragraph is directed to the wider anarchist movement in the South West that sustained those front-line volunteers.<sup>8</sup> The readdressing of the balance between the better-known combatant aspect of the Civil War and the barren historiographical terrain of solidarity thus clearly requires reappraisal.

Perhaps the most significant role of this thesis is in its regional focus, which offers a distinct insight and reassessment of the South West as a key area within the context of the Spanish Civil War and international solidarity with the Republic. Whilst national studies of French solidarity from 1936-1939 present the Front Populaire government's perspective on intervention in favour of the Spanish Republic, this thesis deals with local people and communities ignored by most historians. Whilst this form of historiography is useful for contextual information on a national level it avoids analysing local communities as political players, equally as important as politicians in far-off Paris. Local people, especially in border *départements*, often had traditional links with Spain and Republicanism that meant they had a

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<sup>7</sup> Rémi Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas: Les Volontaires français dans les Brigades Internationales 1936-1939* (Paris, 1998) pp.189-191.

<sup>8</sup> D. Berry., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle. (Les Anarchistes français volontaires en Espagne)* (Paris, 2008) pp.231-232.

vested interest in supporting the Spanish Republic, regardless of national policies. Furthermore, many communities in the South West, particularly in the Basque Country and Catalonia, had trans-frontier identities, cultures, languages and religions that provided clear solidarity motives for local people. In this light the thesis aims to illuminate the political, social and cultural agency that regional communities had during the Spanish conflict and reappraise the role of communities in relation to the national and international context.

This thesis therefore seeks to go beyond traditional frameworks of Non-Intervention and national policy which have all too frequently ignored regional political and social agency in the events of the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, it will demonstrate the extent to which, for the duration of the civil war, local people and authorities across the South West's leftist and anti-fascist spectrum mobilised to support the Spanish Republic. Whereas previous historical research has largely been reliant on memoirs and the centralised archives of Paris and Moscow, this thesis has examined in depth the neglected yet essential material in the departmental archives across the South West of France and Catalonia. Furthermore, the research has benefitted greatly from the recent declassification of departmental archives relating to the period 1936-1939. Therefore the source material discussed in this thesis can substantially further historical debate on the theme of France and her role in the Spanish Civil War.

The multitude of diplomatic, intelligence, administrative and police reports, portraying a climate of solidarity across the region, are clearly at odds with traditional interpretations of French assistance to the Spanish Republic. Combined they not only call into question how limited French civilian assistance supposedly was from 1936-39, but also the hitherto underestimated extent to which government functionaries and the local administration implicated itself in military assistance to the Spanish Republic. Coinciding with the beginning of this research, the digitalisation, since 2009, of Spanish regional and provincial

archives, containing government and local press resources has also facilitated the clarification of the extent to which French solidarity in the South West had a positive impact on how Spanish Republicans perceived their struggle, and how the solidarity of their northern neighbours provided substantial moral strength even in the most difficult times. Republican diplomatic correspondence has in addition demonstrated the extent to which, from 1936, links with Spanish immigrants to France were strengthened and collaboration with French leftist communities actively promoted, enhancing the solidarity movements and giving them vital official sanctioning needed to provide effective support to the Spanish Republic.

Finally this thesis has undoubtedly benefited from the changing current of French historiography which has begun to shift from focus on the exile of the Spanish Republicans and towards the efforts made by French communities to support the Republic, during the conflict itself.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter one will demonstrate the varying situations and motivations of local populations across the south-western *départements*. It will illuminate how diverse political tendencies were brought together through political meetings and pro-Republican events which then fostered a climate of sympathy towards France's Republican neighbours. This chapter aims to establish the foundations for solidarity that existed in the 1930s in the region and could thus be developed by the end of 1936 by pro-Republican supporters.

Chapter two will show how local people's awareness, often heightened by such events, simultaneously facilitated the active involvement of communities, political groups and professionals in solidarity initiatives such as transporting of supplies to Spain, enabling a

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<sup>9</sup> See Cubero, *Les Républicains espagnols* & Serres., *Été 1936*

visible impact to be made by people from the South West in assisting their Spanish neighbours.

Having established the impact made by civilians in re-enforcing material solidarity to civilians, chapter three will demonstrate how, from July 1936, French government Republican sympathisers, working in covert and partisan solidarity operations, succeeded, in collaboration with local pro-Republicans, in supplying the Spanish Republic with war materiel. Such endeavours clearly carried a high political risk, with far-right groups in France and Spain prepared to go to extreme lengths to expose such undertakings.

Finally, in chapter four, having seen how solidarity activities by French officials increasingly blurred the boundaries of tacit support and active participation, we will see how individuals from the South West, influenced strongly by the plethora of solidarity activities and meetings in their local communities, decided to travel to Spain to participate in the struggle against the Nationalists and their allies. This will underline how volunteering for the Republic was seen as part of a wider tradition of partisan involvement in favour of the Spanish Republic, which was accompanied by parallel ventures in the region to clandestinely supply the Republic. The chapter also aims to emphasise how volunteers were supported in numerous ways by covert support activities which enabled volunteers to be guided into Spain following the introduction of Non-Intervention laws that made volunteering illegal.

Having highlighted the lengths that pro-Republican government-connected and civilian elements in the region went to, in order to provide solidarity and partisan support to the Spanish Republic from 1936, the thesis thus aims to demonstrate that Republican sympathisers across the South West were not peripheral characters, overshadowed by the extensive manoeuvres of Paris, Mexico and Moscow, in their bids to aid the Spanish Republic. The swift and multi-faceted nature of south west solidarity will elucidate how

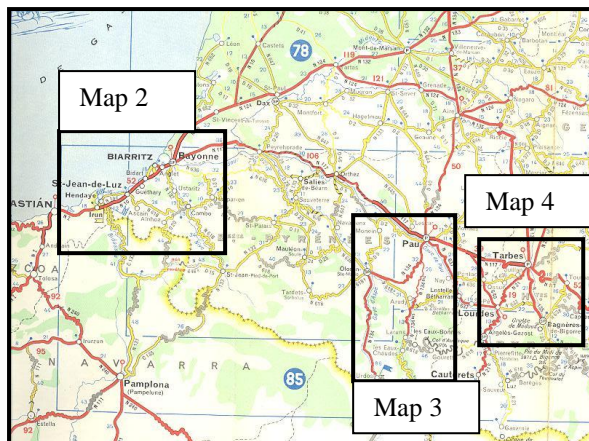
solidarity activities, political meetings, deliveries of supplies to the Republican zone often combined the skills and expertise of a wide range of ideological tendencies and professions ranging from workers to functionaries, diplomats to doctors. This work will prove that such regional actors played a crucial role in solidarity with the Republic, providing a potent reminder that such assistance was neither fleeting nor dependent on financial recompense. It will ascertain that through the solid roots established prior to 1936, south western support for the Spanish Second Republic remained unswerving until the fall of the Republic in March 1939.





**Map 1 Above: Aquitaine and the Basque coast. Below: The Languedoc and Mediterranean coast:**  
Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme, *France:Grandes Routes* (Paris, 1954)

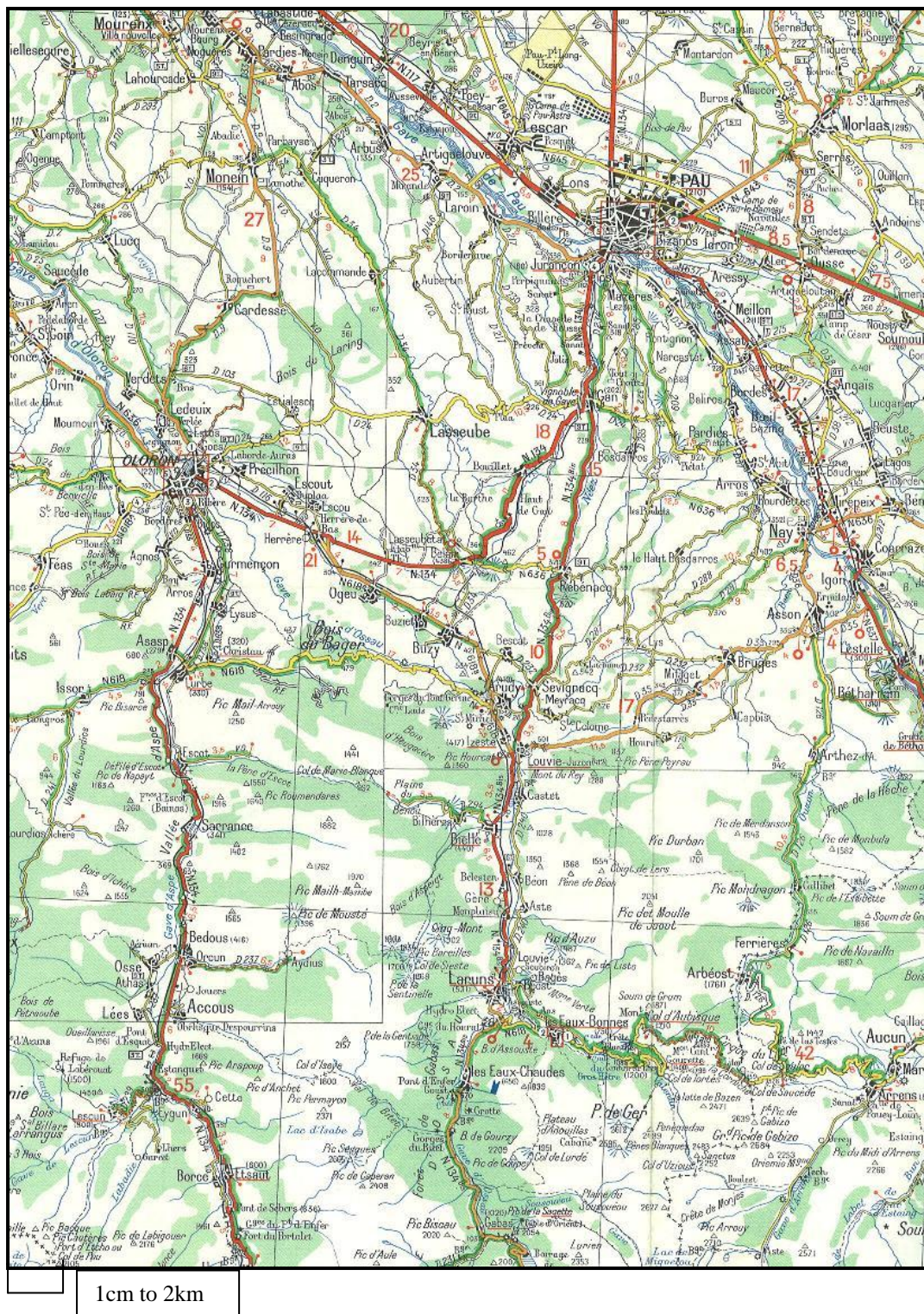




**Map 2** The Côte Basque (Basque coast) and Franco-Spanish border crossing at Hendaye-Irún (Basses-Pyrénées)

Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme, *Carte Biarritz-Luchon 85* (Paris,1963)

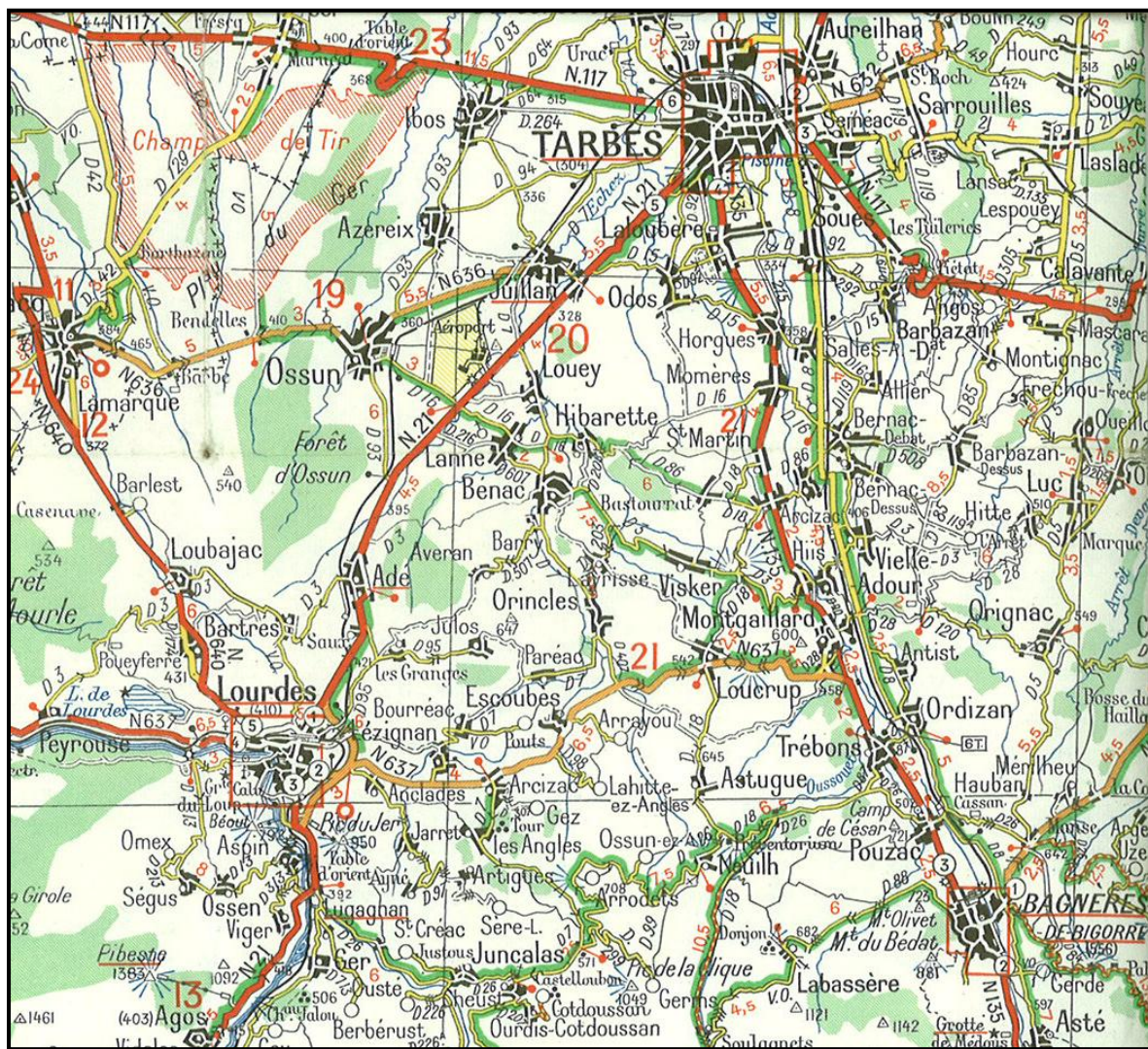




**Map 3 Pau and Oloron-Sainte-Marie (Basses-Pyrénées)**

Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme, *Carte Biarritz-Luchon 85* (Paris, 1963)





1cm to 2km

#### **Map 4 Tarbes and Bagnères-de-Bigorre (Hautes-Pyrénées)**

Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme, *Carte Biarritz-Luchon 85* (Paris, 1963)

## Chapter One: From Sympathies to Solidarity

In order to understand and position solidarity in the South West of France within its context in the 1930s this chapter will demonstrate that strong cross-border links existed prior to July 1936 which then encouraged local people to get involved in solidarity initiatives. The chapter will show how political contexts on both sides of the border facilitated inclusion of all elements of the regional Left. Having provided the contextual analysis of solidarity in the region the chapter will then underline how political meetings succeeded in fostering an inclusive atmosphere conducive to the development of support initiatives. This will then allow us to see how initial pro-Republican demonstrations and meetings were developed into humanitarian relief initiatives, which will be analysed in chapter two.

If the events triggered by the military uprising of the 17-18 July 1936 constituted the beginning of a long process of wartime solidarity and support for the Spanish Republic in France, it is undeniable that such widespread assistance did not arise amongst all sectors of the left in the South West by chance. Indeed it would be correct to say that the roots of the solidarity that would manifest itself during the conflict were already deeply entwined in regional consciousness. That such sympathy to the region's trans-Pyrenean neighbours already existed was in no small measure due to the development of extensive contacts with the northern border regions of Guipúzcoa, Navarra, Aragón and Cataluña in the years before the Civil war. It has been argued by José Cubero that whilst towns such as Oloron-Sainte-Marie remained French in sovereignty, the local inhabitants remained economically tied to their southern neighbours.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, centuries of cross-border cultural ties between Basques

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<sup>1</sup> J.Cubero., *Les Républicains espagnols*, (Pau, 2003) pp.38-39.

How closely Spaniards in the border regions identified economically and politically with their French neighbours can be seen when the population of Irún sang the *Himno de Riego* and the *Marseillaise* on the declaration of the Second Spanish Republic. See J.Serres., *Été 1936*.p.14.

and Catalans with their shared languages and cultures played significant roles in establishing solidarity, meetings often being held, particularly in Perpignan, in the regional language.<sup>2</sup>

Above all, immigration throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century undoubtedly bound trans-Pyrenean populations closer together. This is not to say that immigration to France was never a cause for consternation amongst elements of the Spanish Left, who lamented the drain of emigration to France. To give just one example the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) in particular deplored that:

*En el quinquenio 1921-1925 huyeron a la vecina República 129,000 agricultores españoles. Por Hendaya, Marignac, Saint-Beat, Perpiñan sale nuestra sangre, que escapa... dejando nuestras tierras sin cultivar.*<sup>3</sup>

However, such interpretations of the harmful effects of emigration clearly underestimate the extent to which Spanish immigrants to France developed strong peacetime links with their northern neighbours, and how subsequent political events would draw the two populations together based on shared leftist and republican values. In this vein, François Mazou, an Oloronnais International Brigade volunteer responded on being interviewed about whether he had pre- 1936 connections to Spain and the Spanish people:

*Oui. Situation géographique. Contact avec des amis espagnols. Une partie de la population avait suivie l'arrivée de la jeune République espagnole. Et quand la République était proclamée, tout Oloron était en fête. Et puis je commençais à parler espagnol avec les Espagnols d'Oloron.*<sup>4</sup>

It is also clear that whilst such values could produce moral support for the Republican cause, the *Bienio Negro* and the Asturias uprising demonstrated that trans-Pyrenean links were not only strong in times of celebration, but equally in times of crisis.<sup>5</sup> Thus André Moine, the

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<sup>2</sup> Commissaire Spécial de Perpignan to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 13.09.36. 1M769 ADPO

<sup>3</sup> *Gerona CNT*, 19/6/37, ADG

<sup>4</sup> R. Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, (Paris, 1998) p.190.

<sup>5</sup> The *Bienio Negro* came following the triumph of the Right in the legislative elections for the Cortés in November 1933. This led to a period of social and political turmoil with the Right attempting to reverse the reforms made by the leftist Republicans of 1931-1933. In response to the naming of right-wing ministers of the

head of the Regional Communist Party, when asked about why the local Communist party responded to the Nationalist rebellion with solidarity for the Republicans in July 1936, answered:

*Déjà suite à la féroce répression anti-ouvrière de 1934 dans les Asturies, des dizaines de réfugiés espagnols avaient été hébergés à Boucau et à Tarnos....en juillet 1936, l'agression franquiste contre la République espagnole, le réflexe de solidarité républicaine de nos populations est déjà une ancienne tradition.*<sup>6</sup>

Evidently the events in Spain were particularly resonant in much of the South West especially in host areas of Spanish economic immigration. As can be seen in Moine and Mazou's response above, solidarity was not just based on class, but also on republican values on both sides of the Pyrenees. However, if solidarity before 1936 was appreciated by Republican Spaniards, such assistance to a fellow neighbour was certainly not one sided. At a meeting in Tarbes to celebrate the anniversary of the Spanish Republic on the 14 April 1937 an orator, M. Mamonet, of the Secours Rouge (SR), reminded the audience of the contribution of Spain to the Paris Commune of 1871 and the 39,000 Spanish volunteers to the French army in the First World War.<sup>7</sup>

Such evocations and mutual support make it obvious that by the outbreak of the Civil War, both populations already had large leftist and republican sectors that embraced similar political aspirations and were prepared to reinforce words with acts of solidarity in support of their neighbours.

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CEDA in the government, in October 1934 miners in the Asturias region led an uprising. After initial success the workers were repressed by the army commanded by General Francisco Franco, leading to hundreds of summary executions and torture as well as thousands of imprisonments. For further information on the *Bienio Negro* and the Asturias uprising of 1934 see R. Carr., *The Spanish Tragedy* (London, 1977) pp.45-46.

<sup>6</sup> Serres., *Été 1936*, p.295.

<sup>7</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées. 14.04.37. 4M238 ADHP

If the events of the early 1930s highlighted the capacities of the South West for solidarity with their southern neighbours, the advent of the Spanish Civil War would prove a true test for French populations across the region. Whilst previous solidarity efforts aimed at assisting the refugees of the Asturias uprising had been relatively small scale, the events of Civil War demonstrated that such pre-July 1936 solidarity had not been a momentary phenomenon and indeed can be seen as the beginning of a trajectory that would last until 1939 and beyond.<sup>8</sup>

Of course the 1930s had not just witnessed the development of close relationships between French Republican sympathisers and the Spanish Left, but also the establishment of many Spanish rightist groups whose political agenda was aimed at undermining the Spanish Republic from abroad. Following the establishment of the Second Republic in April 1931, Monarchists, Carlists and personalities of the Spanish far-right, visiting and residing on the Basque Riviera, were involved in various intrigues against the fledgling Republic of Spain. As early as August 1931 Manuel Azaña, the first Prime Minister of the Second Republic declared in a speech directed at the regime's enemies:

*La República tiene sus enemigos...los que intentan perturbar la obra de la República, en Biarritz y dentro de España...*<sup>9</sup>

Thus from the outset of the Republic, the French Basque coast enclaves of Biarritz, Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Ciboure acquired contemptible status to the Spanish Left, becoming synonyms for the foci of anti-Republican conspiracy abroad.<sup>10</sup>

Numerous Nationalist personalities who could hardly have endeared themselves to the Left continued to arrive in Biarritz up until July 1936 and after. The South West was therefore the home not only to French pro-Republicans such as the supporters of the Comité Bilbao and the

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<sup>8</sup> Serres., *Été 1936*, p.295. In 1934 200 refugees were housed by the "Comité Bilbao" in Boucau.

<sup>9</sup> See *Diario de Gerona*, 14/09/31, ADG

<sup>10</sup> These towns had become fashionable with the Spanish Aristocracy since their foundation as playgrounds for the rich at the end of the nineteenth century, where Spanish nobility would flock after a stay in nearby San Sebastián.

Parti Communiste Français (PCF), but also a substantial layer of the *ancien regime* and domestic *personae non gratae* of the *Bienio Negro* era political class, epitomised by the presence before and after July 1936 of José Maria Gil Robles, head of the Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (CEDA). The tone for confrontation between the Republic's local French sympathisers and Spanish rightist refugees was underlined on the 31 July 1936, when *A.B.C Madrid* reported the French Basque PCF's denunciation of the former CEDA leader:

*La célula comunista...pide al gobierno nacido del Frente Popular la adopción de medidas inmediatas para que el jefe fascista Gil Robles y su estado mayor sean imposibilitados de dirigir desde Biarritz la subversión criminal contra el pueblo español...El ex-ministro de Guerra jesuita no es un veraneante cualquiera, enamorado de la hermosa Francia. Es un conspirador...es un beligerante contra la legalidad...*<sup>11</sup>

In this context of rising political tension, on 24 August 1936 Gil Robles was invited by the local authorities to vacate the region, with the ex-CEDA chief subsequently making his way to a house in the Landes, 100 kilometres from the border.<sup>12</sup>

The activities of the refugee right that had previously appeared benign, thus in July 1936 acquired a very different significance. Local leftists were spurred into action in many areas of the South West, including on the Basque and Mediterranean coastlines, as the ideology of many Nationalist refugees and their local far-right supporters lay in clear opposition to the unity of the Front Populaire. For pro-Republicans in the South West it was unnecessary to travel south of the Bidassoa to comprehend the anti-Republican machinations of Nationalists in the region and obvious that solidarity and anti-fascism was as relevant in local communities as in the Spanish Republic itself. This recognition thus enabled a regional unity

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<sup>11</sup> See *A.B.C Madrid*, 31/07/36, p.29. 'En Francia piden la expulsión de Gil Robles'

<sup>12</sup> See *La Vanguardia* 24/08/36. Gil Robles was not the only *persona non grata* the region. On the same day *La Vanguardia* wrote 'A consecuencia de haber sido descubierta en Biarritz gran cantidad de proclamas y manifiestos impresos por los rebeldes españoles la Policía ha expulsado de la población a varios significados enemigos del régimen republicano español, entre ellos al banquero Juan March'

to arise based on Republican émigré and French local opposition to Nationalist activities which will be demonstrated later in the chapter.

In assessing the effectiveness of solidarity actions in the South West later on in the war it is necessary to examine the trajectory of support for the Spanish Republic in the early months of the war. Amongst many aspects that will be analysed in this vein will be the spread of meetings and solidarity events in the regions. This will demonstrate that subsequent solidarity came as a result of an established programme of events that fostered a climate of sympathy for Republican factions as well as resistance to Nationalist and Fascist elements, in the South West and in Spain.

#### The first months-The awakening of consciousness and the development of solidarity movements across the South West

If the fallout of the *Bienio Negro* had limited effect on wider leftist solidarity across the region, the main committees being run by the regional PCF at the outbreak of the Civil war in Spain brought together the diverse components of the French Front Populaire in the South West in unprecedented displays of unity.<sup>13</sup> Within days after the outbreak of the Nationalist rebellion against the Spanish Republic, meetings had been organised across the region. Accompanying such manifestations of Front Populaire unity, committees and solidarity groups developed as it became obvious that the uprising would not be contained and that the danger posed to the Second Republic was increasingly serious.

At the same time it is evident that, whilst the rebellion in Spain was important on the agenda of the regional Left, it did not initially take precedence over national and local issues from the outset. Indeed, it was only clear after the general's attempted coup d'état developed into a civil war, that the issue would develop its own prominence over local political affairs.

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<sup>13</sup> Serres., *Été 1936*, p.295.



Thus at a Front Populaire meeting held in St Cyprien, in the Pyrénées-Orientales , on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, the *Ordre du jour* voted on by the assembled leaders and supporters of the local Section Française de L'internationale Ouvrière (SFIO- Socialist), the PCF and their youth wings was as followed:

1. *Un ordre du jour demandant qu'une enquête soit fait sur les provocations fascistes du 14 Juillet à St Cyprien...*
2. *Une adresse de sympathie au Front Populaire espagnol.*<sup>14</sup>

The Head of the Comité local du Front Populaire, also declared on closing the meeting:

*J'espère que la manifestation d'aujourd'hui servira de leçon aux fascistes de St Cyprien. S'ils recommencent leurs provocations nous reviendrons plus nombreux.*<sup>15</sup>

It is obvious from the meeting that, whilst the nascent Spanish conflict was a noteworthy topic, it was initially seen through the prism of local 'Fascist' events, featuring as an aside to local politics. From the perspective of the speaker it is clear that the strength of local feeling and an ideological ally south of the border were combined factors of support for the Left. Furthermore, it is understandable in the climate of 1936 and the elections of the Front Populaire that national and regional issues were still at the forefront of leftist feeling, unlikely to be superseded immediately by Spanish events, especially when the outcome of the initial rebellion was still uncertain. However, it is clear that in Front Populaire meetings after July 1936 the Spanish Civil War gained a political significance of its own as a rallying point for the regional Left, and would subsequently come to dominate the political agenda across the entire political spectrum. The magnitude of the Spanish cause would lead to an expansion of events and meetings and increasing public sympathy, if not yet committed solidarity.

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<sup>14</sup> Commissaire Spécial de Perpignan to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 27.07.36 1M769 ADPO

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

The contrast between the meetings of July and the subsequent meetings from August 1936 is notable. Whilst the meeting in St Cyprien, a small coastal town, attracted 400 local leftists outside the *Café Pontis*, the meetings in August became altogether different affairs.<sup>16</sup>

Police in Perpignan reported :

*...la soirée sportive organisée par le Comité d'Entr'aide aux Anti-fascistes espagnols, sous le patronage du Front Populaire, s'est déroulée, hier soir au Vélodrome municipal en présence de 4 à 5.000 personnes.*<sup>17</sup>

The upgrading of the conflict to a major regional political event can thus be evidenced in this meeting with the use of an important community sporting venue, in the Prefecture town of Perpignan, with an enlarged audience and with aims that were clearly directed at assisting the Spanish Republic. The police Inspecteur continued:

*TOURNE, Secrétaire adjoint du dit comité, prononce une allocution concernant les affaires d'Espagne ; fait un appel à la solidarité des anti-fascistes et termine en demandant que M. le Préfet des Pyrénées Orientales fasse évacuer du département les fascistes espagnols. M. BRUTUS donne l'adhésion de la municipalité à la lutte contre le fascisme. Et enfin M. BOURRAT ...annonce que des délégués se rendront à Barcelone, dimanche 16 août apporter l'aide moral et matérielle des Catalans français à leurs frères espagnols.*<sup>18</sup>

What is striking is how Spanish events overtook local political events to such an extent that the meeting was directed entirely at supporting the Spanish Republic and expressly intended to give not just moral support to the Republic, but also to show that the organisers intended to travel to Barcelona to support their neighbours. Cultural ties between French and Spanish Catalans were repeatedly emphasised to demonstrate the unity of the struggle on both sides of the Pyrenees. The use of sport and cycling in particular as a vehicle for raising funds shows not only clear adhesion to the ideals of the Front Populaire, but also a diversification of

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<sup>32</sup> Inspecteur Principal de Police Spéciale to Commissaire Spéciale de Perpignan 14.08.36. 1M769 ADPO

<sup>33</sup> Commissaire Spécial de Perpignan to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 14.08.36. 1M769 ADPO

<sup>34</sup> Inspecteur Principal de Police Spéciale de Perpignan to Commissaire Spécial de Perpignan, 14.08.36 1M769 ADPO

political methods to appeal to an even wider Leftist audience. Terms such as *anti-fascist* and *frères* are evoked with the obvious aim of appealing to as wide a spectrum of support as possible on the Left as well as appealing to the traditional cross-border relationship between French and Spanish Catalans.

By September 1936, the unity of this spectrum was obvious to all elements of the local community, with a procession through the town centre comprising 2000 Republican sympathizers led by the assembled local leaders of the SFIO, the PCF, the SR, Faucons Rouges (FR), the Ligue des Droits de L'Homme (LDH), the Confédération Générale des Travailleurs (CGT), the Jeunesses Socialistes (JS) and Communistes (JC) and the Amis de l'URSS. Numerous other personalities including the deputy-mayor of Perpignan, M. Bonnery, and a delegation from the *Conseil Municipal* also marched accompanied by the Socialist deputy for Prades, M. Rous and the Conseiller Général M. Abbadie and various other leftist local representatives<sup>19</sup>. Chants of '*Des avions et des canons pour l'Espagne!*' accompanied the procession with the commissaire finishing his report noting that:

*Il n'y a pas eu de cris contre le gouvernement ou ses représentants*<sup>20</sup>

This was hardly surprising given that every political grouping, as well as their supporters present at the event, were in 1936 part of, or supporting, the Popular Front with most of the left unwilling to do anything that might be perceived as damaging to the Front Populaire's image of unity.

As noted above, unity was clearly the key feature of such meetings and demonstrations, with no reference to differing national political agendas. The appeal of supporting the Spanish Republic was consequently far greater by September as the major political organisms had widened the net of participation to target the whole of the leftist and democratic spectrum.

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<sup>19</sup> Commissaire Spécial de Perpignan to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 13.09.36. 1M769 ADPO

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Finally the meetings emphasise how the local anti-fascist spotlight was redirected from local political feuds with the right and towards local Spanish rightist elements, which were indisputably present on French territory, in the Pyrénées-Orientales.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst such meetings displayed a certain mobilisation of leftist public opinion in favour of the Spanish Republic there were clear reasons why such solidarity events could be organised in the community. In Perpignan notably the establishment of a united front of left-wing political groups in the municipal buildings of the town provided a centre in the region for solidarity initiatives. By August 1936 they would house the offices of the PCF, the SFIO, the Groupe Anarchiste and the Secours Populaire de France (SP), with all the aforementioned political groups constituting the united *Comité de la Défense de la Révolution Espagnole* (CDRE) focusing on different aspects of solidarity.<sup>22</sup> In this way local Republican sympathisers had a clear point of reference in establishing solidarity with the Spanish Republic at the centre of the local community. In addition the spacious interior of the *Ancien hôpital militaire*, the seat of the committee, provided an obvious setting for the plethora of political meetings and the storage of supplies, before transportation over the Pyrenees.<sup>23</sup>

As we have seen active public sympathy in the Pyrénées-Orientales could be mustered from the outset of the conflict as there was the political will across the left to develop the means necessary to support the Spanish Republic. Significantly, meetings could be held with little interference from the local authorities, who clearly welcomed the discretion of the local left's initiatives, the commissaire reporting:

*Au lendemain du commencement des hostilités entre les gouvernementaux et le Général FRANCO, il y eut quelque agitation dans les milieux politiques de Perpignan. De nombreux*

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<sup>21</sup> For an example of an encounter with Nationalist émigrés to the Côte Vermeille in July 1936 see F.Pitcairn., *Reporter in Spain*, (London, 1936) pp.13-14. Nationalist 'refugees' and intelligence agents residing in South West France also carried out numerous acts of sabotage and terrorism against Spanish Republican interests in the region from 1937. See report '*Activité terroriste dans le Midi de la France : Attentats par explosifs*' From Commissaire de Police Mobile, Valentin, to Services de Police Criminelle, 6.07.37, 4M2088 ADH

<sup>22</sup> Commissaire Central de Police to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 12.01.37. 1M631 ADPO

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

*meetings furent tenus dans le but de créer des comités d'entr'aide au bénéfice du Front Populaire espagnol. Dès que les comités furent créés...l'agitation cessa.*<sup>24</sup>

Such reports indicate that, whilst initial events gave the Police room for concern, the creation of official committees had a moderating effect on the various elements of the local left. The commissaire's focus on agitation also implies that solidarity activities, whatever their private objectives, would be tolerated, and thus could continue, as long as public order was not threatened.

Whilst the case of Perpignan remains a key example of how local leftists did organise themselves, it would be insufficient to assert that this town represents a uniform experience for solidarity across the South West, a region comprising nineteen *départements*, five of which border Spain. Nonetheless, the basic characteristics of political and social organisation in the South West favourable to the Spanish Republicans can all be seen in Perpignan. First, the emphasis on unity from the outset, and the collaboration of hitherto disparate political factions. Second, the organisation of political meetings based on multi-polar political stances as well as the formation of a committee containing all leftist political groups. As will be seen, this was demonstrated in numerous other *départements*. This will establish that whilst Perpignan remains a good example of solidarity from July 1936, the same emphasis on unity remained widespread across the South West.

Manifestations of solidarity for the Republic sprang up spontaneously across the region in small towns as much as in the large *préfectures*. In St-Gaudens (Haute-Garonne) for example, Police reports highlighted how local initiatives often came without formal organisation and were the result of local Front Populaire committee and Trade Union initiatives:<sup>25</sup>

*Référence à vos lettres du 20 Aout et 4 Septembre...aucun « Comité d'aide au peuple espagnol » n'a été crée dans ma circonscription.*

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ministre de L'Intérieur to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 20.09.36. 2054 W 36-5 ADHG

*Néanmoins une collecte en faveur des Républicains espagnols en lutte a été ouverte au cours de la réunion organisée dans notre ville par le Front Populaire le 20 Août écoulé.*<sup>26</sup>

Such reports highlight how the Front Populaire managed to mobilise leftist public opinion in favour of the Spanish Republic with little national or even regional direction. In this case formal structures of organisation, namely the *Comités d'aide au peuple espagnol* or the *Comités d'entr'aide* were eschewed in favour of local fundraising, smaller in scale, but still orientated towards meetings in which orators could inform and educate their audiences about the plight of the Spanish Republic. Undoubtedly solidarity, as in the Pyrénées-Orientales, retained regional tinges to alert local populations to the danger of the rebellion in Spain, but also to reinforce the idea of unity. One poster, displayed in Tarbes, announcing a meeting in the Salle de l'Olympia in Bayonne, clearly exalting regional unity:

***‘Amis de la paix et de la liberté ’***

*De Bayonne, de Boucau, de Biarritz, de toute notre région, imitez l'exemple du Peuple Espagnol qui a réalisé la plus large unité, des Républicains aux Communistes et aux Anarchistes, des Catholiques aux Laïques.*<sup>27</sup>

Whilst the appeal of uniting geographically, socially and politically the entire region obviously had appeal to local supporters of the Front Populaire, reinforcing the idea that the entire left could be united in support of the Spanish Republic, the success of solidarity initiatives in the South West lay as much in their inclusion of their Spanish neighbours and national personalities as in the focus on regional issues. Such political actors could bring their knowledge of the conflict to the local areas, but with international perspectives. Thus the above meeting in Bayonne included such speakers as André Marty of the PCF, Paillé of the CGT and Carcarrier of the LDH, the clear message being that if unity could be achieved at a national level then it could certainly be ‘imitated’ at a local level.<sup>28</sup> The success of engaging with local Republican sympathisers also lay in the ability of national personalities to relate to

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<sup>26</sup> Commissaire de Police to Sous-préfet de St-Gaudens, 5.09.36. 2054 W36-5 ADHG

<sup>27</sup> From poster collected in Tarbes 19.08.36. 4M238 ADHP

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

their regional audiences and build a rapport with them, demonstrating that they remained in touch with local concerns and political developments that affected them. The educational element was also built upon to encourage a greater understanding of the significance of the Civil War to an audience unaccustomed to the detail of Spanish politics. In this way at meetings in Pierrefitte, Lourdes and Maubourguet, in the Hautes-Pyrénées in September 1936:

*L'Orateur, M. Vazeilles, député de la Corrèze à traité le sujet suivant: « Pour L'Espagne Républicaine, pour la paix et la sécurité de la France. »*<sup>29</sup>

The fact that the meetings were held in smaller towns in the *département*, over several days and with national politicians relating the significance of the conflict for France, illustrates how solidarity meetings not only brought Spanish issues to a local level but also developed themes recognisable to all: peace, security and Republicanism. The policy of bringing national personalities to the South West was consciously developed throughout the conflict, illuminating how the local rapport remained a key tool for 'outsiders' to engage with people in the region. Thus in 1938 a police report on a meeting revealed:

*Une conférence a été donné à la Bourse du Travail par Mr BERNET architecte à Paris, originaire de Séméac (H.P) délégué permanent du Front Populaire, sur la Guerre d'Espagne, sa position de guerre, et sur ce qu'il a constaté et appris en Espagne pendant son voyage de rapportage (sic) dans cette nation...BERNET (Socialiste S.F.I.O)...manifeste sa joie de retrouver, après 30 ans d'absence auprès de ses vieux camarades politiques, notamment Mr le Docteur Dasque avec lequel il s'était trouven (sic)si souvent à la Bourse du Travail et dans les réunions politiques de l'époque.*<sup>30</sup>

There is particular significance in that the orator, a Parisian delegate of the Front Populaire, Bernet, expressly referred to his local origins before presenting his experiences in Spain showing great tact in enabling the audience to relate to an otherwise distant figure in a comprehensive way. The use of a reference to a local Radical, Dr Dasque, again served to

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<sup>48</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées. 2.09.36 4M238 ADHP

<sup>30</sup> Commissaire de Police de Tarbes to Commissaire Spéciale de Tarbes, 2.06.38. 4M238 ADHP

reinforce the idea of old ties to the area but renewed unity in the changing circumstances of solidarity with Spain.

As we have seen the key to solidarity in the early months of the war, and indeed beyond, was the ability of even small Front Populaire committees to mobilise local leftist opinion in favour of the Spanish Republic, together with a blend of local displays of unity, combined with national and international themes that transcended regional boundaries and reinforced the idea of the need for universal unity and solidarity. Local communities were then able, having been provided the necessary historical and political contextual information, to engage effectively with their Spanish neighbours. In the early stages of the conflict this would come in the form of moral support from within such local areas, accompanied soon after by material support that will be discussed below. The declarations of local political organisations in particular show how this engagement linked and committed the South West to the Spanish Republic. One report on a telegram sent to the President of the Spanish Republic, after a workers' meeting in Tarbes, read:

*Au Président AZANA (sic)*

*« Dix Mille Tarbais réunis, saluent en vous le glorieux peuple espagnol et le gouvernement Républicain que vous présidez, ils emploieront tous leurs efforts pour vous aider dans cette héroïque lutte que vous menez...pour la liberté de l'ordre et de la paix. »*<sup>31</sup>

The telegram is indicative of the local support that was found in many of the south-western *départements*. However, rather than simply offering a display of admiration and moral support for the Spanish Republic, the text clearly states a desire of a significant part of the community to actively participate in actions in favour of the Republic, employing 'all their efforts'.<sup>32</sup>

Such 'efforts' however were not solely orientated towards public meetings and vocal displays of allegiance to the Republican cause. Indeed, the success of the solidarity

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<sup>31</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées. 22/08/36. 4M238 ADHP

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



committees in the South West lay in their ability not only to raise public awareness, but also to raise funds to support the Republic. In the spirit of the Front Populaire, participation in social and sporting events was used as a means of mobilising all sectors of the leftist population in the region. This was vital as it meant that sympathy to the Republic could spread throughout the community, to sectors that political meetings could have limited impact on. As we have seen, in Perpignan, the Vélodrome was used for cycling events to raise funds for the Spanish Republic, but sports were only one area that was employed to this end.

In November 1936 for example, in Tarbes a SP poster displayed in the town offered a *Soirée Dansante* with an entrance fee of ‘*Cavalières 1fr Cavaliers 2fr.*’ An additional incentive lay in the tombola where the purchase of a ticket for 1fr offered a chance to win ‘*Une poste de T.S.F., un vélo, un appareil photographique etc..*’<sup>33</sup>

In a final thought the poster urged young women to participate in solidarity with the Republic:

*‘P.S. Camarades femmes, tricotez des lainages, brodez-y votre prénom. Envoyez des vêtements usagés’*<sup>34</sup>

Such an event obviously offered an exciting evening for the participants conveying through targeted messages the true meaning of the evening, as a fund raising exercise. The propaganda was not devoid of a political explanation, an accompanying address reading:

*Camarade Jeune,  
Le Comité National d’Aide au Peuple Espagnole, a décidé d’envoyer aux... Républicains de Bilbao un bateau chargé de 600 tonnes de vivres et de vêtements chauds...c’est aux comités départementaux du Front Populaire de tout le Sud Ouest... de recueillir les fonds nécessaires pour réaliser ce chargement...*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> SP poster, 11/36. 4M238 ADHP

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

In this case support for the Spanish Republic was clearly aimed at a particular area of solidarity, the Basque Country, and directly targeted the South West for raising the funds for a shipment of supplies to Bilbao. Consequently the reader is included as a vital component to achieve this. The writer may also have been aware that to make the event a success it would be necessary to mobilise Spanish émigrés and local French support with reference to regional geography and politics included as well:

*Toi qui souhaite si ardemment de revoir Irun au pouvoir des gouvernementaux...as-tu terminé ton devoir ? Non ! Toute la Biscaye reconquise, ainsi qu'une partie de la Guipúzcoa, t'impose le devoir absolu d'envoyer là-bas à tes frères Basques, l'assurance de ton... sympathie, en même temps que ton implacable volonté de leur voir chasser, des rives de la Bidassoa, les Carlistes, ennemis de la République...*<sup>36</sup>

Such slogans deliberately play on regional sympathies as well as émigré's knowledge of Spain, with pointed references relating to the proximity of Carlists to France and the threat represented by such a political group to the Republic. The idea that the reader has a duty to assist their Basque 'neighbours' is interestingly directed at a *département* with no direct geographical link to the French or Spanish Basque country, which indicates that the events of Irún were perceived as being sufficient to trigger sympathies across the region.

The reason for the Spanish references become clear on reading the *Compte Rendu* of the dance evening referring to: '250 jeunes gens, et 80 jeunes filles environ, en majorité étrangers'<sup>37</sup> The attendance at such an event mainly of 'foreigners', is hardly surprising given the statistics for Spanish immigrants living in the *département* of the Hautes-Pyrénées (3785 in 1934).<sup>38</sup> Whilst lower levels of local French participation might seem to indicate less support for the Spanish Republic, the participation of local people in a multitude of other solidarity activities organised during the Civil War counters this suggestion.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> SP poster, 11/36. 4M238 ADHP

<sup>37</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées. 15.11.36 4M238 ADHP

<sup>38</sup> *Les Républicains Espagnols dans les Hautes-Pyrénées* (Conseil Général des Hautes-Pyrénées, 2003)p.58.

<sup>39</sup> See chapter two, pp.37-47.

Across the South West the use of sport and culture enhanced the efforts of the solidarity committees in building a relationship between local communities sympathetic to the Republic and their Spanish neighbours. Cinema and theatre in particular were used to educate and entertain supporters across the region. Much like the dances held in Tarbes, they demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of support for the Republic, relying on social events to reinforce the political agendas that were set by leftist political parties. In this way, in Perpignan a *Soirée de Gala* was organised by the local S.F.I.O and the Secours Socialiste (SS) in April 1937 under the slogan ‘*TOUS AU THÉÂTRE MUNICIPAL*’ and using references to the support of the municipality of Perpignan and the participation of: *Artistes Professionnels, Perpignanais et Régionaux*.<sup>40</sup>

Such events underline how in towns such as Perpignan, municipal facilities and support could be provided and large sectors of the left mobilised beyond party boundaries. However, it would be false to suggest that all solidarity initiatives attracted similar support. Often smaller political groups, particularly the Anarchists, prepared solidarity events on a far smaller scale, but with equal educational significance for their supporters. Indeed the Union Anarchiste (UA) in Tarbes held its meetings in October 1936 at the Hôtel des Pyrénées and the Café de la Martinique, small venues, but with speakers who had returned from Spain presenting their experiences.<sup>41</sup> The UA also held a *soirée cinématographique* a few months later with a programme of: *1) Actualités espagnoles 2) Actualités russes*<sup>42</sup>

Whilst evidently the Café venue for meetings might not indicate a large turnout for events, the use of documentaries to heighten awareness of the situation in Spain indicates that even

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<sup>40</sup> SS poster, 4.04.37. 4M769 ADPO. A further *Grande Soirée Artistique* held in favour of the *Combattants Espagnols* in 1938 included a programme of Catalan, Spanish and French song and dance including *Criada Nova*, *El Llit del Capita*, *Un rupin dans les bas-fonds*, held in the Ancien Hôpital Militaire, local cafés, and the Centro Espagnol. The programme clearly highlights how organisers played on regional and international culture and traditions to attract supporters from all sectors of the community. See SIA poster, 9/4/38 1M769 ADPO

<sup>41</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées. 17.10.36. 4M238 ADHP

<sup>42</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées. 23.07.37. 4M238 ADHP

minority political groups organised events that promoted solidarity with the Spanish Republic amongst their supporters. This permeation of Spanish issues, into even minority political groups, in turn allowed for a broad spectrum of support for the Republic to arise encompassing the entire regional Left.

Whereas the above example of the UA in Tarbes might seem to suggest that this organisation's activities were aimed at converted Anarchists, meetings elsewhere in the region held by this movement demonstrate that this was rarely the case. Whilst the latter organisation's meetings included a small core audience of Perpignan's Anarchist movement (20 strong in early 1937 according to the local police) the themes introduced at such meetings were largely designed to transcend the individual political boundaries and enhance solidarity amongst the wider leftist community.<sup>43</sup> In this respect an Anarchist meeting at the *Ancien hôpital militaire* illuminates the inclusive aspect of such meetings, the local police writing that on the 15 March 1937:

*Le meeting organisé le 14 Mars...par le comité Anarchiste de Perpignan...s'est déroulé...à l'ancien hôpital militaire...en présence de 4 à 500 auditeurs...GUERRA de la C.N.T s'exprimant en français a développé les origines de la guerre civile et a défini l'attitude des autres pays vis-à-vis l'Espagne républicaine. Il a fait le procès du fascisme en précisant que la lutte actuelle était la guerre du fascisme internationale contre le prolétariat.*<sup>44</sup>

It was obvious from the outset of the meeting that whilst the speakers belonged to the Anarchist organizations their presentations were not restricted to Anarchist themes. Indeed, the areas developed aimed at informing a local audience about the background to the war and the stance of international actors in the Civil War and were clearly topics that encompassed the concerns and education of all leftist listeners. The emphasis on a war 'against the proletariat' as a whole confirms from the opening moments of the meeting that the Civil war

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<sup>43</sup> Commissaire Centrale to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 12.01.37. 1M631 ADPO

<sup>44</sup> Commissaire de Police Mobile, Allinant, to Préfet des Pyrénées Orientales, 15.03.37. 1M772 ADPO

in Spain is of concern to all workers and thus all political inclinations. As noted above, education remained well into 1937 a crucial concern for orators, French and Spanish alike.

Further impetus was given to such instructive endeavours when by 1937, local communities, for example the Anarchists in Tarbes, began to receive eye-witnesses and participants from the Spanish Republic who could confirm and elaborate upon the anti-fascist discourse of the early months of the war. This undoubtedly reinforced the reality of the situation to leftists, as well as the danger posed by the Nationalist uprising.

In this vein a Perpignan commissaire reported:

*PEREZ MANUEL, emprisonné pendant 4 mois par les fascistes à Majorque...indique les raisons pour lesquelles il est voué à la cause du prolétariat. Il a commenté...les atrocités fascistes citant notamment le massacre de 5.000 ouvriers auxquels on avait au préalable arraché les yeux. Puis il a flétri les bombardements aériens sur les villes sans défense et s'est entendu sur le matériel fourni par les Allemands et surtout les Italiens...*<sup>45</sup>

The impact on local leftist sympathies of such horrifying descriptions of the situation in Spain cannot be underestimated. They seemed to confirm previous rumours from Spain and show the sinister nature of Nationalist atrocities being committed. Furthermore, for sceptics there was always photographic proof displayed to demonstrate the veracity of the macabre atrocity stories being exposed:

*GUERRA...à cité certaines atrocités notamment le jet par un avion fasciste, sur Madrid, d'une caisse contenant un cadavre découpé en morceaux. La photographie en a été prise et elle est affichée dans la salle où s'est tenue la réunion.*<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, as well as conveying a shocking message, the organisers of the meeting wished to avoid any scepticism on the part of more dubious listeners, perhaps more inclined to take such gruesome claims as exaggeration, used for propaganda purposes.<sup>47</sup>

Such harrowing images undoubtedly also reinforced the gravity of the situation in Spain and directed uncommitted listeners towards further identification with the Republican cause.

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<sup>45</sup> Commissaire de Police Mobile to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 15.03.37. 1M772 ADPO

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> It is important to be aware that both Republican and Nationalist factions did fabricate atrocity propaganda.

Furthermore the emphasis on inhumane treatment being directed at ordinary civilians in Mallorca and Madrid is noteworthy in portraying how the solidarity movements aimed to mobilise the support of not just the working class but democrats in general. Fascist violence in Spain was portrayed not simply as a threat to the proletariat but the entire Republican and Democratic spectrum.

Clearly in the above case, whilst the meeting was held under the auspices of an Anarchist committee, the themes exposed spanned the left-wing spectrum, enabling wider identification with the orators and the events of Spanish Civil War. One example of many demonstrating this transcending political approach can be seen at an Anarchist meeting held in Perpignan in March 1937 in which a SFIO orator was described by Police as:

*...Un socialiste venu affirmer que les socialistes français sont avec le C.N.T et la F.A.I pour abattre le fascisme mondial. Celui-ci a précisé que déjà la France et notamment le C.G.T avaient fait beaucoup pour le peuple espagnol et a préconisé une solidarité plus étroite avec ceux qui combattent pour leurs libertés...*<sup>48</sup>

Such declarations are remarkable given that collaboration between the SFIO and the Anarchists prior to July 1936 had been minimal. Therefore, the fact that by March 1937 local socialists were prepared to exalt the unity of the Socialists and the CGT with the Anarchist movements illustrates the impressive transition of the French regional left in the South West. From disparate factions vying for political influence, the aforementioned political groups clearly achieved a large degree of regional unity in the face of Nationalist aggression against a common Republican and leftist ally in Spain.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Commissaire de Police Mobile to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 15.03.37. 1M772 ADPO

<sup>49</sup> Similarly André Moine, Secretary General of the local PCF in Boucau, collaborated with Basque Nationalists during the fight for Irún (The Partido Nacionalista Vasco was deeply Conservative), see Serres., *Été 1936*, p.316. The Spanish Émigré community responded similarly, one poster calling for donations of food and clothing for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Division of the Republican army fighting in the 'Bielsa pocket' in March 1938 read: '*El Comité Antifascista Español de Carcassonne ace un llamamiento a la conciencia humana de todos los Españoles en particular y los humanos en general...*' See 'Comité Español de Carcassonne' poster 3/38 1MD486 ADA

Another pertinent example that provided testimony of this political transformation is shown by the stance of the regional PCF- a party that was consistently at odds with the SFIO and Radicals over Non-Intervention which nonetheless made appeals calling for non-partisan participation.<sup>50</sup> Thus on 19 August 1936, in front of an audience of 5-6000 listeners, Tourne of the Pyrénées-Orientales JC exalted such unity. Police reports recorded this new-found belief in cross-party unity:

*Le Président TERRATS donne la parole à TOURNE. Celui-ci...fait un appel à toute la jeunesse sans exception, ni sans distinction de croyance ou d'opinion, pour aider moralement et matériellement les anti-fascistes espagnols qui combattent pour que la liberté des peuples ne soit pas un vain mot.*<sup>51</sup>

As has been seen in the solidarity meetings across the region, where traditional political parties had often demonstrated contrasting stances, such overtures for unity enabled a wide coalition of the left to emerge which, far from concentrating on its traditional party supporters, opened up the floor to the whole left. Indeed, whilst nationally Communists and Socialists were divided over Non-Intervention, the urgent demands for solidarity with a close neighbour revealed that, whatever the 'official' situation elsewhere, regionally local parties took the initiative and acted in support of the Republic.

Despite the strictly regional and cross-frontier focus of this thesis, it would be erroneous to suggest that solidarity movements were galvanised into action and given the means to respond to the Civil War through regional bases alone. The region did not act in isolation and if solidarity succeeded it was partly due to external actors, who, when joining forces with local sympathizers, permitted the effective functioning of solidarity organizations. As will be seen these external characters could make or break solidarity within the early months of the war.

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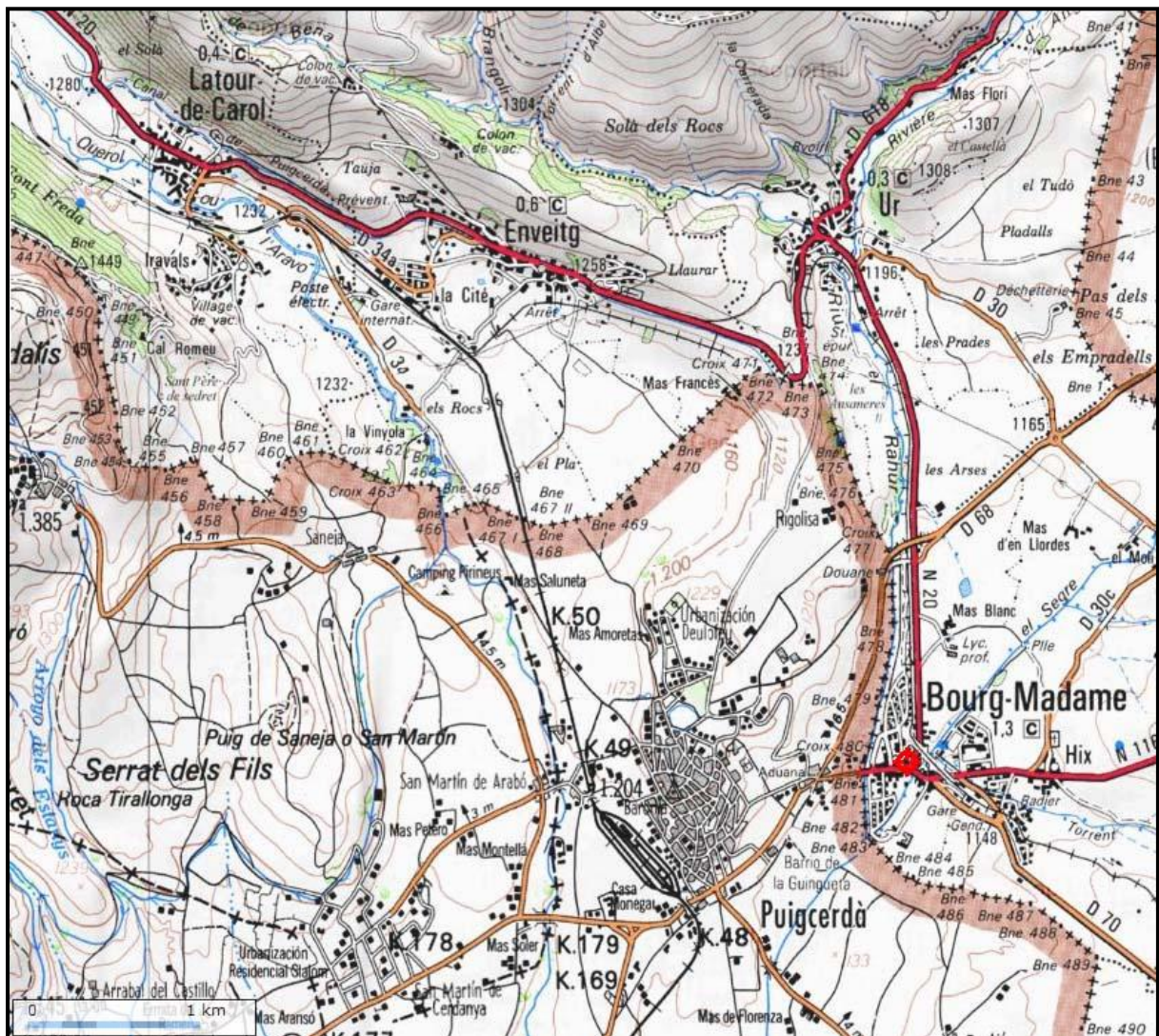
<sup>50</sup>Commissaire Spécial de Perpignan to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 13.09.36.1M769 ADPO

<sup>51</sup> L'inspecteur Principal de Police Spéciale to Commissaire Spécial de Perpignan, 20.08.36 1M772 ADPO

Moreover the geographical nature of the South West presented a challenge for regional Republican sympathizers and the Spanish Republic which was hastening to promote a climate there. Indeed whilst the Republic's sympathisers united, so did her Nationalist refugee opponents across the region whose activities sought to undermine the Republic from the rearguard. Such Spanish Nationalists served as a reminder to local leftists that there was a far-right enemy present not only south of the Pyrenees, but also within local communities. This subsequently led to a greater consciousness of the threat the Republic faced internationally, as well as from within the Iberian Peninsula.

Chapter two will examine how the Spanish Republic's south-western sympathisers, increasingly implicated in solidarity through meetings and shared ideals, transformed words into actions in favour of the Republic; going beyond displays of unity and organizing material aid to the government zone.





**Map 5** Above: The Ariège and Pyrénées-Orientales départements (France)

Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme, *France:Grandes Routes* (Paris, 1954) **Below: Bourgmadame (Cerdagne region, Pyrénées-Orientales, France) and Puigcerdà (Girona province, Catalonia, Spain)** <[www.geoportail.fr](http://www.geoportail.fr)> 'Géoportail: Le portail des territoires et des citoyens' (Géoportail 2007-2010©) [accessed on 23 July 2010]

## Chapter two: Communities Unite- The Spanish Civil War Demonstrates the Loyalties of the Regional Left

Whilst chapter one has demonstrated the roots of solidarity and how it developed from July 1936 chapter two is concerned with how political organisers built upon the initial displays of sympathy with the Spanish Republic and developed the support base in the local communities. In addition we will see how traditional supporters of the Spanish Republic were aided in their efforts by the involvement of actors outside the typical 'leftist' political spectrum, enabling a diverse support base to arise in the region from 1936-1939. The chapter will then focus on how 'hearts and minds' were mobilised for the Spanish Republican cause and the variety of techniques employed by pro-Republicans to ensure that sympathisers transformed words into solidarity actions. Finally, through an analysis of the diversity of solidarity actions in the South West, we will see how campaigns in favour of the Republic were multi-faceted and inclusive of all elements of the local community. This will demonstrate how initial sympathies discussed in chapter one were harnessed to the Republic's advantage, as rhetoric was converted into support actions.

From the outset of the Spanish Civil War there was clearly widespread sympathy for the Spanish Republic amongst the majority of the regional Left in the South West. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that active engagement with the Spanish cause came solely through the pro-Republican meetings held across the *départements* from July 1936. As noted above, the Republic could rely on the core support of hundreds of Front Populaire committees. In this chapter it will be seen how members of such committees were prepared to not just to raise awareness of the Spanish cause but as also endeavoured to ensure the provision of supplies that the Republic lacked. Such aid efforts were carried out in an attempt to rebalance the shortages of basic foodstuffs, medical supplies and clothing created by the

isolation of many of the Republican regions, for example, the Spanish Basque country in August 1936.

The first concerted solidarity efforts organised in the South West were aimed at assisting Irún and Barcelona in late July and early August 1936. The activities organised to assist the former will firstly be examined to establish the extent to which such humanitarian aid initiatives created an atmosphere of support amongst the regional left and the wider community.

As has already been alluded to, the political situation by July 1936 in the southern *départements* of Aquitaine was already overwhelmingly favourable towards nascent solidarity efforts. Indeed in the legislative elections of April and May 1936 the Landes had voted 65.97% for candidates of the Front Populaire with three radicals elected as deputies. In the Basses-Pyrénées, seven deputies were elected including four Front Populaire candidates, the remainder being stalwarts of the far-right, Ybarnégaray in Mauléon, De Coral in Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Tixier Vignancourt in Orthez.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the Municipal elections of May 1935 had resulted in widespread gains for the Left, with Tarnos, Capbreton, Bayonne and Boucau voting overwhelmingly for PCF or SFIO candidates.<sup>2</sup> In the climate of solidarity that would emerge in July 1936 from the events of the Spanish Civil War it is thus of crucial significance to the infant solidarity committees and the more established committees such as the '*Comité Bilbao*' that the leaders of such efforts already had the firm foundations of political support, favourable to their efforts, implanted in the region. However, it must be noted that this climate of solidarity was tempered by the elements of the regional right, whose interests remained juxtaposed to those of their local

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<sup>1</sup> J.Serres.,*Été 1936*,(Pau, 2006) p.276.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,p.276.

leftist representatives and more regularly in alignment with Nationalist elements of the Spanish émigré right, discussed above, in chapter one.

Undoubtedly the support arising in the Landes and along the *Côte Basque* came as a result of the particularly determined and well organised assistance of the left, beginning with the trade unions. On 1 August 1936 the Union des Syndicats Confédérés de l'Adour called for the mobilising of all people of *bonnes volontés* to help assist the population of Irún.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile the established *Comité Bilbao* demonstrated its long running support for the Spanish Republic with a three pronged approach to the war: assisting the refugees and wounded, raising volunteers for the Republican struggle and supplying arms to the combatants of Guipúzcoa.<sup>4</sup> The first aid effort by this committee raised 2376 francs for the defenders of the frontier town, whilst the group's first convoy of pharmaceutical supplies reached Irún on 1 August, demonstrating remarkable organisational capacities. Furthermore, reports in the local Communist press collated by the local authorities confirm that such aid was not temporary and showed no signs of having petered out after the initial drive. Throughout the fighting across the Bidassoa the local aid committees established relentless deliveries of supplies to the Republican defenders which could not have been possible without widespread community support. The sparse formalities required for export of such supplies were revealingly illuminated in one such committee's fortnightly bulletin:

*...Nous allons pénétrer sur le territoire des opérations, Nous allons voir. Frontière. Pont International avec ses barrières d'un part et de l'autre. La visite de la Douane est simplifiée au minimum. Bulletin de sortie à signer, examen sommaire du contenu de la matière et la barrière se lève sous l'œil sympathique des douaniers et des gardes mobiles. C'est avec une émotion contenue que nous franchissons la seconde barrière et que bientôt nous filons à la mairie d'Irun transformé en quartier général.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Serres., *Été 1936.*, p.295.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., *Été 1936*, p.295.

<sup>5</sup> *L'Étincelle des Pyrénées et des Landes*, organe régional du Parti Communiste no.77, 2ième quinzaine d'août 1936. 1M 260 ADPA

Such articles highlight the complicit nature of the local authorities in such initiatives. Whilst hardly participating, the lack of impediment to such efforts can be seen as largely indicative of wider government policy. As long as order was not threatened, the committees were free to operate. The achievements of the Front Populaire organisations, right up to the fall of Irún in early September, were substantial with the local PCF press able to claim by the end of August that:

*Le Comité local de Front Populaire...a été entendu par les habitants de notre région...Il a été effectué un total de recettes de 12.535 francs, dont 8.500 francs par le Comité de Front Populaire de Bordeaux et 4.000 francs de quêtes diverses. Il a été dépensé 6.700 francs...pour envois de farine...de béquilles...d'appareils chirurgicaux ...de produits pharmaceutiques...il reste donc 5.800 francs...qui seront employés en riz, pommes de terre etc...*<sup>6</sup>

The multi-faceted nature of the supplies to Irún and the close collaboration with committees across the region demonstrates how solidarity arose. However, as Jean Serres indicates from interviews with local politicians at the time, if solidarity efforts were successful they came in part as a result of surprising appeals to quarters which had not previously been accommodating towards the left, but which overcame their ideological differences to assist the humanitarian cause. Thus Jean Abbadie, a member of the Jeunesses Républicaines and future mayor of Boucau claimed that:

*S'il est vrai qu'il y avait à Boucau un fossé à cette époque entre ceux qui croyaient au ciel et ceux qui n'y croyaient pas, je tiens à préciser que lors des collectes au porte à porte, nous étions reçus dans les foyers catholiques que dans les autres, et cela était une expérience reconfortante pour nous.*<sup>7</sup>

From such declarations it is clear that despite their political differences the Front Populaire organisations managed to transcend religious and ideological boundaries and incorporate the support of the important local Catholic sector. In this respect the seemingly far-fetched

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<sup>6</sup> *L'Étincelle des Pyrénées et des Landes*, no.78, 1<sup>ère</sup> quinzaine de septembre 1936. 1M 260 ADPA

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Jean Abaddie with Jean Serres cited in Serres., *Été 1936*, p.296.

exhortations on the posters for the meeting at the Salle Olympia, urging a unity à l'espagnole with Secularists joining forces with Catholics seemed rather less incongruous than might previously have been expected. Indeed if Catholics were far removed from the clandestine ventures of many Front Populaire committee members, they were wholeheartedly involved in aid efforts for the Spanish Republicans pouring onto the *Côte Basque* from August 1936.

Demonstrative of the links forged between religious associations and Basque republicans was the *Comité National Catholique d'Aide aux réfugiés d'Espagne*, established by the local Catholic diocese in October 1936 in collaboration with José Antonio Aguirre's Basque government, to rehouse hundreds of Basque children<sup>8</sup>. In this respect solidarity efforts in the French Basque provinces can be seen as being effective as Catholics were able put aside their political differences with the Spanish Republicans due to their Catholicism, which ran as deep amongst Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) supporters in the Spanish Basque provinces as in French Catholic sectors north of the Bidassoa.

Whilst the encompassing of all areas of the local political spectrum in pro-Republican solidarity and humanitarian relief efforts was undoubtedly crucial to developing solidarity in the region perhaps the most important way in which local communities supported the Republic was through the ability of local sympathisers to adapt their foci to the shifting priorities of the Republic. Invariably in areas closer to the border, such groups could become genuine assets to local communities in northern Spain, providing them with a life-line to the outside world, by providing equipment and materials in short supply in Spain. Importantly the campaigns in the South West were also joined directly to military events in Spain, adapting to the urgency of different regions and their fighting. Consequentially we will

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<sup>8</sup> Serres., *Été 1936*, p.297.



examine several campaign examples to demonstrate the effectiveness of local community organisation in the South West and the vital role it played in sustaining the Republic.

As highlighted in chapter one, the involvement of the regional left in support initiatives with the Republic arose from July 1936, with delegates from Perpignan travelling to Barcelona on 16 August 1936, to bring their *frères Catalans* ‘moral and material aid’.<sup>9</sup> Such manifestations of support seem to have been the result of spontaneous leftist response to the military uprising in Spain, but subsequent campaigns were carefully planned and organised to target specific Republican military and civilian campaigns. Examples of this can be seen across the South West, notably in towns which had close contact through emigration to the region and thus close ties to the situation in Spain. In June 1937, for example, several meetings were organised to raise supplies and funds for the Basque defenders of Bilbao. Curiously a town where this campaign was particularly effective was Narbonne, in the Aude *département*, an area on the periphery of the South West, therefore bringing into question the purely geographical factor in Republican sympathisers supporting the Spanish Republic. Clearly the effectiveness of such events lay in the participation of local Spanish immigrants who raised awareness in the local area of the plight of their Iberian compatriots. A meeting held in Narbonne’s *Salle des Fêtes*, on the 3 June 1937, was notably inclusive of both French and Spanish elements of the community as well as an important gender balance, re-enforcing the idea that the success of the support movements in the South West lay in their ability to capture the ‘Hearts and Minds’ of the entire leftist population. The Police observer of the meeting wrote that the meeting was held in:

*...un petit auditoire des deux sexes, composé de deux cents personnes environ, dont une bonne moitié appartient à l’élément espagnol de notre ville...*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Inspecteur Principal de Police Spéciale de Perpignan to the Commissaire spécial de Perpignan, 14.08.36 1M 769 ADPO

<sup>10</sup> Commissaire Central de Narbonne to Sous-préfet de Narbonne, 7.06.37, 1M480 ADA



The organisers of the meeting regretted that the audience was smaller than previously anticipated but this does not suggest that the meeting was not conducive to an atmosphere of support for the Republic. The opening speaker, Montane, speaking in Spanish, then French, allowed for the understanding of the entire audience. Whilst the outcome of the collection of donations was labelled '*faible*' by the officer attending the meeting, it would seem that such localised campaigns were productive. Montane claimed, for example, that the 'Comité Local d'Entr'aide au Peuple Basque' had supplied the workers of the Basque Country with :

*'193000 frs de denrées, de médicaments et autres produits pour soutenir la lutte'*<sup>11</sup>

In examining such clearly differing versions of events, the officer's report must be treated with suspicion, as the local authorities contained many elements hostile to intervention in Spanish affairs, and thus may have played down the significance of pro-Republican initiatives.<sup>12</sup> The figures of funds raised for such campaigns, lauded by local organisers, may also be treated with caution, as evidently the objective of such support meetings was to portray an inclusive climate of solidarity throughout the community. Despite this tendency to downplay or exaggerate levels of support what is clear is that the emotive and political content of such meetings, when animated by talented orators, was sufficient to win over even the police observer in this case. Indeed, the powerful and educational explanations of the significance of the struggle outlined by one orator, who had travelled from Catalonia, representing the Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (PSUC), impressed the commissaire who wrote that despite the speaker's self-declared 'bad French' the latter expressed himself with:

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<sup>11</sup> Commissaire Central de Narbonne to Sous-préfet de Narbonne, 7.06.37, 1M480 ADA

<sup>12</sup> See G.Howson, *Arms for Spain*, (New York, 1998) p.50. For more information on the hostility of the Toulouse Police towards pro-Republican arms smugglers.

*... une finesse remarquable...il fait un historique de l'Espagne depuis 1909...il dit que Bilbao ne craint pas les coups de Franco, mais qu'elle redoute les attaques Allemands et Italiens.*<sup>13</sup>

The importance of the contextual information given early on in the speech, accompanied by its relevance to the current struggle and the Basque campaign, can be seen as even more effective in that the audience was further reminded that their support was vital, especially in the face of the horrors that the Nationalists were subjecting the Republicans to. Ruiz Iza used the previously mentioned tactic of citing public opinion influencing recent events to bring the reality of the situation home. In this case the orator reminded the listeners of the:

*Agonie de Guernica, la ville héroïque et martyre ...il rappelle les crimes sans nom commis contre la population civile ...avec son arbre millénaire au milieu de la place, qui inspirait la poésie et le travail. Malgré tous ces crimes le peuple Basque résiste et fait l'admiration du monde; il vaincra le fascisme. Ruiz Iza relate les incidents du Deuchland (sic), les représailles contre Almeria où 36 femmes ont trouvé la mort...la responsabilité de GIL ROBLES, HITLER, MUSSOLINI ...aidés par le sinistre MARCHS (sic).*<sup>14</sup>

Such explanations of the situation, including criticisms of not only Fascism but also capitalism, represented by the spectre of Juan March's funding of the Nationalists, were clearly intended to shock local people into action regardless of nationality, gender or political inclinations. The references to poetry and labour clearly fulfilled the objective of appealing to intellectuals and the middle-classes as much as the working class. The use of references to Almería and Guernica was no coincidence either. Narbonne, a Mediterranean town, would have been an easy comparison to Almería to highlight the risk of atrocities in France, if people did not act, whilst the bombing of Guernica was also able to evoke local parallels. In this vein one orator, Vidal, of the local anti-fascist committee, related to listeners a recent

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<sup>13</sup> Commissaire Central de Narbonne to Sous-Préfet de Narbonne, 7.06.37, 1M480 ADA

<sup>14</sup> Commissaire Central de Narbonne to Sous-Préfet de Narbonne, 7.06.37, 1M480 ADA

The orator was of course reminding the audience of the recent bombing of Guernica on the 26 April 1937, See A. Beevor., *The Battle for Spain 1936-39*, (New York, 2006) pp.231-232 & G.L Steer., *The Tree of Gernika*, (London, 1938) The second reference in the quotation refers to the Naval bombardment of Almería on the 30 May 1937 when, following the aerial bombing of the German Battleship *Deutschland* on the 29 May 1937, Hitler ordered a reprisal attack on a Republican coastal town.

interview with Cluzel, the Mayor of the French frontier town of Cerbère, who had denounced the strafing of this locality by Italian aircraft.<sup>15</sup>

Such meetings were able to provoke action as they clearly related how the rise of Fascism was not exclusively a Spanish problem, but a universal problem, with repercussions in France as likely as in Spain.

The material results of such meetings were substantial not just in economic terms but also in the level of support they received from local communities. During the fight of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Division in the Bielsa ‘pocket’ of Northern Aragón, in March 1938, the Spanish press praised the workers of the Hautes-Pyrénées who twinned themselves with the aforementioned formation, and constructed a path through snowdrifts to the border from Aragnouet. *La Vanguardia* subsequently reported that:

*...Los camaradas de Tarbes se han prestado a hacerlo practicable. Mientras ellos clavaban a pico, los observadores de No Intervención enderezaban su tedio en campos de tenis...*<sup>16</sup>

The Spanish press’s recognition of the efforts of French Republican sympathisers stretched beyond appreciation of France’s role in assisting with emblematic campaigns, such as that of Bielsa and Bilbao. Local communities in the South West made contributions that belied their small populations, in often remote areas. Thus the anti-fascist committee in Lavelanet (Ariège) would be lauded by *La Vanguardia* which praised the community:

*...demostrando desde...que se inició la Guerra Civil...una solidaridad con nuestro movimiento que merece el más ferviente reconocimiento...*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Commissaire Central de Narbonne to Sous-préfet de Narbonne, 7.06.37, 1M480 ADA. The incursion of Nationalist aircraft into French airspace, following raids on the marshalling yards of Portbou, in Spain, less than 2 miles away, became a source of outrage across the political spectrum. In October 1937 Cluzel would telegraph the Interior Ministry demanding re-enforced Anti-Aircraft defences in Cerbère after a bomber strafed Cerbère and Banyuls-sur-Mer, provoking widespread panic amongst the populace. See Cluzel to Ministre de L’Intérieur, 27.10.37. 4M414 ADPO

<sup>16</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 20/05/38

<sup>17</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 22/05/37. It is important to note that many locations across the South West made contributions to pro-Republican campaigns that appear out of proportion to their populations. For example in

The village in question had, according to the publication, supplied the anti-fascist militias with 4,000 kilograms of potatoes, 615 kilograms of pasta for soup, as well as sugar, cod, crates of jam, sacks of chickpeas and lentils. These were then delivered to the Hospital Clínic in Barcelona.<sup>18</sup> Such support from villages such as Lavelanet was notable, as it indicated substantial support for the Republic, beyond even small provincial centres of political organisation. Other examples of solidarity arose following the bombing of Spanish border towns in the Pyrenees. After one such bombing of Puigcerdà in the Cerdanya region, the town's French neighbours in Bourg Madame and La Tour de Carol played a vital role in assisting the wounded, one publication wrote:

*El veínat francès dels pobles limítrofes s'ha mostrat molt sol·licit amb els habitants de Puigcerdà, acollint en les seves cases dones i infants i auxiliant els ferits. Els metges de la Tour de Carol s'han traslladat a Puigcerdà per a auxiliar curs col·legues espanyols en nombre i la farmàcia de Bourg-Madame ha facilitat material sanitari. Una part dels ferits han estat hospitalitzats al Sanaori francès de Font Romeu i en diverses clíniques de Perpinyà.*<sup>19</sup>

The role of local men in helping the wounded and the opening of the local pharmacy and medical centres to their injured neighbours cannot be underestimated in fostering an atmosphere of solidarity with the Republic. It comes as slightly ironic, however, that *L'Autonomista*, a newspaper whose title indicates its Catalan regionalism, accompanied by a declared position as a *Diari d' Esquerra* (Leftist newspaper) should inadvertently praise the assistance of the Bourg Madame pharmacy, whose owner as well as village mayor, Thomas Casals, was a member of the far-right Parti Social Français (PSF).<sup>20</sup> Therefore in this case

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December 1938 the Oloron Aid Committee donated 1,640 francs to the “*Año Nuevo del Niño*” childrens campaign. In the same campaign, the city of Lyon, one of the largest in France donated 3,000 francs and the Spanish Legation in Bucharest 600 francs. See *La Vanguardia*, 28/12/38 Likewise the Aude and Hérault ‘Womens Committee’ supplied 3 lorry loads of supplies to the *Ayuda Infantil de Retaguardia* campaign in March 1938 sending 5 crates of food, 1 of clothing, 1 sack of sweets, 1 of school equipment and clothes and 87 of bread. See *La Vanguardia*, 16/03/38, p.5.

<sup>18</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 22/05/37

<sup>19</sup> *L'Autonomista*, 24.01.38, ADG

<sup>20</sup> See G.Bonet, *L'Indépendant des Pyrénées Orientales- Un Siècle d'histoire d'un quotidien 1846-1950*, (Perpignan, 2004) p.248.

solidarity was not necessarily forged by political sympathy, but rather by the consideration towards neighbours in time of distress. Arguably however such a case exemplifies why the South West and in particular the border region was so effective in supporting the Spanish Republic. Whilst the politicians of the PSF at national level wholeheartedly engaged in assisting the Nationalists and demeaning the Spanish Republic, such a stance at a local level was clearly incompatible with community life.<sup>21</sup> As previously mentioned, with the stance of the Catholic Church towards assisting Basque refugees after the fall of Irún, the geographical proximity and long term cross-border links made animosity towards neighbouring political adversaries not only inadvisable, but indeed practically impossible, in both examples, economically and religiously.<sup>22</sup>

Despite common border connections playing such roles, outside the realms of political motivation, ideological sympathies towards the Republic clearly played a decisive role in establishing regional support for the Republicans. Indeed the majority of support actions were carried out under a political etiquette. In November 1938 for example the *Dirrecció de l'Hospital de les Comarques Gironines* thanked the Port-Vendres *Socors socialista a l'Espanya republicana* for supplying medical provisions and foodstuffs to Gerona province hospitals.<sup>23</sup> Similarly in March 1938, *La Vanguardia* thanked Dr J. Ducuing of Toulouse, for supplying therapeutic products to the Hospital General de Catalunya, working in collaboration with the *Comité des Médecins et Pharmaciens* and *Comité des Amies de l'Espagne Républicaine*.<sup>24</sup> Evidently the success of such support initiatives lay in their encompassing of not only professional groups such as doctors and pharmacists, Spanish immigrants and Republican sympathisers but also their organisation of aid committees in specific women's

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<sup>21</sup> For PSF details, R.Soucy, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939* (New Haven, 1995) pp.115-203. & J. Wardhaugh, *In Pursuit of The People: Political Culture in France, 1934-39* (Basingstoke, 2009) pp.122-150.

<sup>22</sup> Serres., *Été 1936*, p.297.

<sup>23</sup> *Front*, 19/11/38, p.5.

<sup>24</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 22/03/38, p.3.

groups and professional societies. The role of women in children's campaigns especially has already been noted, but a broad spectrum of professions was also encompassed in the support movements.<sup>25</sup> In this manner the Republic would receive support from, for example, the Pau and Oloron Construction and Public Works confederation, the Basses-Pyrénées Republican Reserve Officers Federation, workers trade unions of the Basses-Pyrénées and the Hautes-Pyrénées and others.<sup>26</sup>

Importantly the solidarity actions of these groups' were assisted by the local Spanish consul, who was able to relay solidarity group's messages of support and aid to the Republic.<sup>27</sup> It will also be seen in chapter three how French state functionaries were also provided support services to the Republic.

In this climate of diverse solidarity initiatives, it is evident that pro-Republican solidarity, across the South West, was successful for several reasons. First, the South West already had solid bedrocks of leftist, republican and democratic political support across the region, demonstrated by the prevalence of elected leftist representatives, following the May 1935 Municipal elections and the April/May 1936 Legislative elections. This meant that pro-Republicans were, from July 1936, surrounded by fellow sympathisers, with large networks of contacts and organisational know-how.

Second, the work of local organisers to establish campaigns that targeted different aspects of the Republican struggle also allowed for focused and productive aid to be delivered to the Republican Zone. Such local leaders clearly harnessed, as seen in chapter one and in the meeting in Narbonne, the value of atrocity stories to shock local people into action. They also

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<sup>25</sup> For the role of Women in the Spanish aid committees see *La Vanguardia*, 16/03/38, p.5.

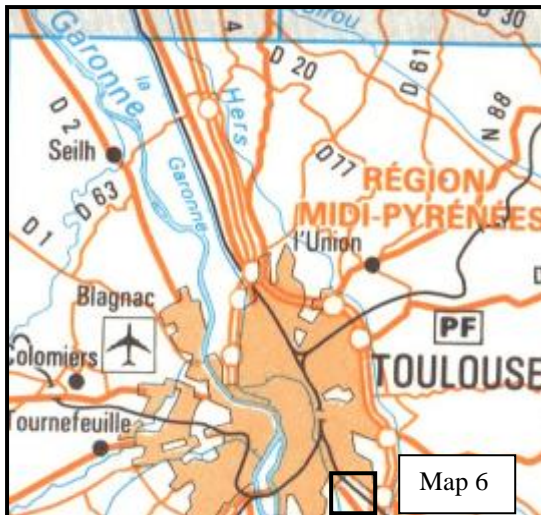
<sup>26</sup> See in order *La Vanguardia*, 21/02/37, *La Vanguardia*, 2/04/37, Commissaire Spécial de Tarbes to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées, 6.08.36 4M238 ADHP & Sous-Préfet de Bayonne to M. Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 24.09.36, 1M 260 ADPA. A Reservist officer from Hendaye, Jean-Baptiste Casalonga was responsible for establishing one of the departmental committees for the reception of refugees from Irún, in September 1936. See Serres., *Été 36*, pp.294-296 & pp.295-299 for more information.

<sup>27</sup> See *La Vanguardia*, 21/02/37, *ibid*, 2/04/37

brought home a reality that could seem distant and reminded listeners of their duty to support the Republic.

Third, the geographical nature of solidarity must also be acknowledged as a vital factor in forging pro-Republican solidarity. Traditional border relationships, relying on shared economic, social, and religious, if not political, connections and beliefs proved resilient to the political upheaval surrounding them and enabled local people, even those not adhering to the Republican ideal, to assist their neighbours for the 'common-good'.

Finally it must be stressed that the solidarity movements largely succeeded in encompassing a large part of the working class, as well as white collar professions and women's groups. The permeation of Republican sympathies into groups as diverse as builders, doctors, *douaniers*, army reservists and trade unions illustrates to a large extent why Republican support in the South West succeeded in assisting the Republic. With the rallying of political tendencies ranging from Communists to Anarchists, Socialists to Radicals, and Republicans to Democrats, the Spanish Republic clearly captured the 'Hearts and Minds' of the left. As shown through examination of local events and connections to Spain, Republican themes remained dominant in local politics and society, infiltrating into sympathisers' daily lives in the work place, the political sphere and even in sporting events and cultural life, ensuring that, even if the events of the Spanish Civil War seemed physically distant, they remained mentally omnipresent.



**Map 6** Above : Toulouse and the Haute-Garonne département

**Below : Toulouse Montaudran airfield**

Institut Géographique National, *Serie Bleue* : Carte 2143 Ouest : Toulouse (IGN : Paris, 1991)



### Chapter three: Allies in the Shadows: The French South West as an example of 'Non- Intervention relâchée'

Whilst in chapter two the impact of support from local civilian committees has been examined, with the impact of actions that supplied and assisted the Republican Home Front amply analysed, it is vital in the context of French solidarity actions in the South West to stress the importance of French government-led initiatives, carried out in the strictest secrecy.

As discussed above, the Front Populaire of Léon Blum contained many elements, including Blum himself, who were favourable towards assisting the Spanish Republic, but were forced, at least officially, to act under the constraints of the 'Non-Intervention' agreement. Any action taken in favour of the Spanish Republic thus had to occur via a covert arrangement known as 'Non-Intervention relâchée'. It is important to underline that, whilst several historians have acknowledged the existence of secret pro-Republican logistical operations, few studies have revealed the regional complexities implied by the Parisian-directed ventures.<sup>1</sup> Although Howson unravels the key characters in the saga of French aid, tracing the organisation of such operations back to the cabinet of the Air Minister, Pierre Cot and his able *Chef du Cabinet*, Jean Moulin, few historians have developed their studies into the South West; fewer still beyond the summer of 1936.<sup>2</sup>

Recently French historians including Jean Serres and Ami-Jacques Rapin have delved deeper into the regional intricacies of French government intervention in favour of the Republic.<sup>3</sup> However, as will be seen, even such studies have definitively failed to connect central

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<sup>1</sup> R.Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, (Paris, 1998) pp.109-140. C.Gindin, *Le Front Populaire ( la France de 1934 à 1939)* p.155. E.Weber., *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s*, (New York, 1994)pp.167-169.

<sup>2</sup> G.Howson, *Arms for Spain*, pp.40-48 Howson's detailed study reveals the key players in the French Non-Intervention relâchée sphere, yet does not go beyond August 1936 in relation to secret operations.

<sup>3</sup> J.Serres., *Été 1936.*, & A-J. Rapin., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle (Les réseaux clandestins de fourniture en armes de la République espagnole)* (Paris, 2008) pp.101-132

government actions with the covert activities of small groups in the South West, detailed in this chapter.

In examining government-led secret activities in favour of the Spanish Republic at both regional and national level it is important to consider the defects of traditional historiography and the complex political atmosphere of 1936-1939. Whilst the far-left, particularly the Communists, took the Non-Intervention agreement literally and saw it as the ultimate expression of the French government's betrayal of the Spanish Republic, the far-right, conversely, was, as Weber argues, 'never convinced' and went to great lengths to expose regional and national personalities secretly supplying the Republic.<sup>4</sup> The protests of the latter were perhaps tinged with a certain cynical irony, given the ardent support of such elements collaborating with Spanish Nationalists.<sup>5</sup> This aspect will be briefly examined later in the chapter, in relation to the efforts of far-right sympathisers, who attempted to sabotage Republican operations through pro-Nationalist collaboration and the far-right press.

Before we look at the regional situation it is important to highlight that the chapter will be examining the actions of covert government connected elements operating in the South West. By government connected elements the thesis will be referring to the cabinet offices of ministers in the Front Populaire government who supported an unofficial pro-Republican interventionist stance. During the course of the chapter the cabinet ministers and aides involved in pro-Republican activities will be briefly explored in relation to their regional subordinates' activities.

This study acknowledges that private individuals, motivated by financial recompense (sufficiently dealt with by Howson) often combined with leftist sympathies, also became

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<sup>4</sup> Weber., *The Hollow Years*, p.169.

<sup>5</sup> On 24 November 1937 Interior Minister Marx Dormoy, announced that the Sûreté Nationale had dismantled a far-right terrorist organisation known as the 'Cagoule' which was armed by Mussolini and Franco. See J-M. Berlière, *Policiers français sous l'Occupation*, (Paris, 2001) pp.99-101.

involved in clandestine ventures, which helped supply the Spanish Republic. However, our focus here will be the unofficial actions of local functionaries, as such officials had a capacity to carry out effective actions in favour of the Republic that individual enterprise did not. This can be explained largely by the fact that government-connected elements, often working alongside like-minded Republican sympathisers, benefitted from the complicity and connections necessary to conceal and co-ordinate their proscribed activities, as well as the protection of political heavyweights. These included Front Populaire personalities including the customs union leader, Gaston Cusin, the Air Minister, Pierre Cot and his *chef de cabinet*, Jean Moulin, who were extremely adept at organising compromising political operations.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, as demonstrated in numerous police and press reports, dedicated yet amateur individuals, particularly Anarchists and Communists, were kept under constant police surveillance and subjected to the routine threat of arrest and imprisonment for activities contrary to the Non-Intervention agreement, limiting their effectiveness as political allies.<sup>7</sup>

As will become clear, this chapter will thus focus on several case studies which illuminate the nature of secret initiatives in the region, tacitly agreed upon and facilitated by select pro-Republican ministers in the Front Populaire government. We will also see the key components of Non-Intervention relâchée on a local level, as well as the relation of such elements to the wider national context of tacit government approval, described above. The chapter will additionally encompass the challenges faced by such local elements, playing a double-game with local authorities enforcing Non-Intervention, as well as examining the implications of functionary-led actions for the Spanish Republic's war effort. Ultimately, the available evidence will show the connections that such hitherto overlooked local actors had

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the role of Gaston Cusin see M.Poggioli., *Cahiers de l'institute C.G.T de l'histoire sociale : C.G.T et la Guerre d'Espagne*, no.62 (June 1997) <[http://www.ihs.cgt.fr/IMG/pdf\\_DOSSIER.pdf](http://www.ihs.cgt.fr/IMG/pdf_DOSSIER.pdf)> [accessed 11 march 2010] Weber., *The Hollow Years*, p.168. & Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir Guidait leurs pas*, p. .

<sup>7</sup> See *Le Temps*, 2/09/36 'Saisie près de Ax-les-Thermes un camion chargé d'armes a destination d'Espagne' See also 1MD480 & 1 MD481 ADA for the activities of Anarchists in this *département* in supplying weapons to Spanish Anarchists and transporting volunteers to Spain

with upper government echelons, demonstrating the effectiveness of south-western elements as part of the wider policy of relaxed Non-Intervention.

From the outset of the Spanish conflict, French government elements who favoured supplying Republican Spain with aircraft and arms did not underestimate the importance of the South West in their operations. Indeed, Howson details the convenience of the private aerodrome of Montaudran, near Toulouse, and owned by the Latécoère aircraft company, as the ideal substitute for the military airfield of Francazal. The latter was avoided after initial setbacks, including the opposition of the Sûreté Nationale and the opposition of the far-right *L'Express du Midi*.<sup>8</sup> Both official and press intrusions on such politically sensitive operations led to Montaudran's establishment as the centre of aircraft transfer operations in the summer of 1936 and this period requires no further exploration. However, the activities in favour of the Spanish Republic continued far beyond 1936 and indeed show a clear trajectory of support for the Republicans until 1938.

Police and prefectoral reports show that, whilst all aircraft except for commercial liners were supposed to be prohibited from taking off from French airfields destined for Spain, by a law coming into force on 18 February 1937, this was not the case for Montaudran. Additionally, under the annexes of the 18 February law, designated border-zone aerodromes were established for correspondence with Spain, these being Marseille-Marignane, Perpignan-Habanère, Biarritz-Anglet and Toulouse-Francazal. Montaudran was thus, in the eyes of the Non-Intervention leaning French Foreign Ministry, international Non-Intervention observers and the local authorities, an airfield out-of-bounds to aircraft leaving for and arriving from Spain.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Howson., *Arms for Spain*, p.50.

<sup>9</sup> See Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939 deuxième série (1936-1939), Tome V (20 Février-31 Mai 1937) (Paris, 1968) p.232. M. Delbos, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères aux Représentants Diplomatiques de France. Also *L'Express du Midi*, 22/05/37 'Les aérodromes Français appartiennent-ils au Fronte Populaire ?'

At the centre of the activities to supply the Spanish Republic with military and aviation equipment, was a certain Jean Blanc, former Air France *chef d'atelier* and *chef radio-télégraphiste* at the airfield.<sup>10</sup> The exact role of Blanc becomes clear through numerous police reports into his mysterious activities, both at the aerodrome and in the city of Toulouse. From March 1937, for example, a steady series of reports by officers monitoring activities at the airfield, by now subject to official surveillance (probably triggered by the events of August 1936), began implicating the former Air France employee with numerous activities, legal and illegal, in favour of Republican Spain.<sup>11</sup> However, far from portraying Blanc as a lone operator, the investigation into Blanc's activities demonstrates a network of support and complicities within the local community and from central government collaborators, which reinforces the image of local leftist support for such initiatives.<sup>12</sup>

The initial impression of Blanc's activities arises from events occurring on the morning of 13 March 1937. A report from the commissaire divisionnaire to the préfet of the Haute-Garonne commenced: ... *un fait quelque peu singulier qui s'est produit ce matin sur l'aérodrome de Toulouse-Montaudran* ...<sup>13</sup> This suggested that an unusual state of affairs had arisen at the airfield, beyond its intended usage. The 'singular' event in question came with the Garde

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For more on the February 18 1937 Non-Intervention laws see R.Haigh, D.S. Morris & A.R. Peters, *The Guardian book of the Spanish Civil War* (Aldershot:1987) pp.81-82.

<sup>10</sup> See Préfet de la Haute-Garonne to Ministre de l'Intérieur, Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale, 3.09.37 & Commissaire de Police Mobile to Commissaire Divisionnaire, 17.03.37 1960 W9 ADHG Archive and series number the same until specified by author.

<sup>11</sup> Howson notes how in August 1936 Montaudran airfield, as private property of Air France, was off-limits to both 'police and snoopers' by June 1937, however, and perhaps as a result of certain indiscretions by Blanc we see in Préfet de la Haute-Garonne to Ministre de l'Intérieur, 16.06.37, a report that detailed '*le terrain de Montaudran est soumis à une surveillance constante de jour et de nuit...3 Gardes Mobiles détachés du peloton de FRANCAZAL qui effectuent leur surveillance sous le contrôle de l'Inspecteur de Police Spéciale chargé des service de l'Aéroport.*' Clearly by the spring of 1937 there was thus considerable risk in carrying out activities proscribed by the 18 February 1937 laws. In Howson., *Arms for Spain*, p.50.

<sup>12</sup> Whilst police reports are generally valuable in showing an accurate picture of events, despite ideological stances that can influence their usefulness, caution must be exercised when reading the local right-wing press, which relished portraying Blanc as a renegade Marxist, acting alone without any external support in the community. Such reports are characteristic of the regional rightist press which loathed the Frente Popular and the Front Populaire in equal measure and did all it could to portray Republican sympathisers as outsiders. This picture of events runs contrary to all the evidence in this study and others, but remains useful as a reminder of the attitudes of the French Right towards the Left during the Spanish Civil War. See *Le Jour*, 27.05.37 '*...Un homme, un homme seul est l'âme du trafic aérien entre l'Espagne Rouge et la France.*'

<sup>13</sup> Commissaire Divisionnaire to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 13.03.37

Mobile detachment at Montaudran being instructed by telephone, by the police commander at Francazal airfield, to authorise the departure of an aircraft, destined for Perpignan. At the same time a group of airfield workers began to unload crates from the aforementioned plane, crates which were:

*...portées par quatre hommes ce qui représente un poids de 80 à 100 kilogrammes et une autre suffisamment longue pour supposer qu'elle contenait des armes...*<sup>14</sup>

During the unloading of the crates the commissaire wrote that a man (Blanc) came out to the aircraft and ordered the employees to reload the crates, saying he would telephone Paris. During this time the enterprise of Blanc, overseeing the loading of the aircraft, was interrupted by the suspicions of the Garde Mobile on the scene who *...en présence de cette merchandise qui [me] paraissait douteuse...* refused Blanc embarkation of the containers.<sup>15</sup> These were subsequently transferred to a hangar nearby, whilst the Garde Mobile commander went to interview the airfield director of Air France, a M. Gonnin. On returning to the hangar following their questioning of Gonnin, the officers discovered that they had been foiled in their attempt to confiscate the suspicious containers, the crates having disappeared. The *Gardes* supposed that the hangars had been returned to Toulouse by taxi, having arrived in this fashion earlier in the morning. Another hint at the true nature of the morning's operations at the aerodrome comes from the Garde Mobile report on the subsequent destination of the aircraft, which mentions that:

*...L'avion transporteur...type Latécoère (sic), piloté par ANE, Robert ...est parti ce matin en destination de Perpignan mais il n'a pas atterri. Cet avion appartenait bien à la compagnie Air -France mais il a fait l'objet d'une mutation... il y a un mois et demi.*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Commissaire Divisionnaire to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 13.03.37

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

The deviation of the aircraft from its authorised destination of Perpignan can only indicate that the pilot flew to Spain, thus, under Non-Intervention laws, committing an offence against aviation regulations concerning the Spanish Civil War.

The irregularity of such operations was not overlooked by the punctilious authorities in Toulouse, the commissaire finishing the first of several reports on the incident writing:

*...J'estime qu'en raison du caractère singulier et mystérieux qui entoure cette affaire...une enquête... pourrait être ouverte par la Brigade de Police Mobile...*<sup>17</sup>

Whilst the police clearly recognised that there was something afoot at the aerodrome and that further investigation was required to look into the 'mysterious' goings-on at Montaudran, the report from the commissaire's superior, the préfet of the Haute-Garonne, to the Interior Minister, provides ample evidence that the airfield's shadowy role in relation to the events in Spain, was known. The report divulged that initial police surveillance of Montaudran had arisen from *...les conditions trop souvent irrégulières du trafic aérien de ce terrain...*<sup>18</sup> In addition to noting the pattern of 'irregular' happenings at Montaudran the préfet noted that, besides the flight of pilot Robert Ane, various other pilots were implicated in strange activities at the Air-France airfield with:

*...ce départ [Ane's] pour le moins aussi suspect que les voyages des aviateurs CORNEZ et DELABRE...*<sup>19</sup>

Following the préfet's ordering of a police investigation into the incident of 13 March, commissaire Ludevic Lautier wrote on the 17 March 1937 to the commissaire divisionnaire, detailing the findings of his enquiry. According to Lautier, on the 13 March the Latécoère 28 aircraft, registration AJHS had been loaded on the orders of Jean Blanc, who in his *procès*

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<sup>17</sup> Commissaire Divisionnaire to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 13.03.37

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Préfet de la Haute-Garonne to Ministre de L'Intérieur & Direction Nationale de la Sûreté Nationale, 13.03.37

*verbal* (judicial statement) claimed that he had received the crates from a delivery driver he could not remember the name of, executing written orders from a M. Edouard Serre, resident in Paris. He also claimed that the crates were of *un volume normal*. Blanc then apparently had the containers returned to the sender, denying all knowledge of the contents.<sup>20</sup>

Blanc had also used an authorised letter from his employer M. Serre to justify his activities:

*Mon Cher Blanc / vous allez recevoir trois caisses. Vous les chargerez sur le Laté [Latécoère] 28 N° 902. En cas de difficulté de chargement vous me les retournerez par la route en les remettant au porteur de la présente / Vous êtes autorisé à vous servir de la présente lettre à toutes fins utiles. Bien amicalement à vous/ signé: Ed. Serre*<sup>21</sup>

Ami-Jacques Rapin, who has examined arms trafficking by French Republican sympathisers in Toulouse, has been inconclusive in establishing the nature of Jean Blanc's relationship with wider smuggling movements. Indeed, whilst Rapin argues that Blanc was connected to persons in the Air Ministry, he provides no further details. He also alludes to Blanc playing a role in the transfer of aircraft to the Republic '*...cela laisse entendre qu'il participe au transit...*'<sup>22</sup> However, such statements remain open to doubt and require substantiated illumination in the context of this chapter.

The evidence available points strongly towards Blanc being a major regional organiser, categorically affiliated with government Republican sympathisers, namely Cot and Moulin. The connection arises through Edouard Serre.<sup>23</sup> That this Air France director should be linked to Blanc provides the evidence connecting South West aircraft and arms smuggling operations to the Air Ministry. Indeed, in Howson's examination of Moulin's principal collaborators in Non-Intervention relâchée, Serre's role features prominently. A pioneering

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<sup>20</sup> Commissaire de Police Mobile to Commissaire Divisionnaire à Toulouse, 17.03.37 & Procès- Verbal no.3 'Déclaration du nommé Jean Blanc' 17.03.37

<sup>21</sup> Procès- Verbal no.3 'Déclaration du nommé Jean Blanc- Lettre de Monsieur Edouard Serre, Paris, 17.03.37

<sup>22</sup> A-J, Rapin., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle*, p.104.

<sup>23</sup> See Howson., *Arms for Spain*, pp.43-44.



pilot and radio engineer with Aéropostale in the 1920s, holding ‘strong left-wing views’, Serre had been transferred to Air France in 1933 after the collapse of Aéropostale, his rise to technical director being overseen through the patronage of fellow leftist, Pierre Cot.<sup>24</sup> Thus as a radio engineer it is obvious that Serre would have close pre-Spanish Civil War contact with regional heads of radio communications in Air France, such as Jean Blanc, enabling him to have regional contacts available on the outbreak of war in Spain. Indeed, this seems to have been precisely the case. A police report from July 1937 records that...*Au début de la guerre civile espagnole, il [Blanc] à demandé et obtenu sa mise en disponibilité...*<sup>25</sup> Clearly, with Air France, the state airline, under the aegis of Pierre Cot in 1936, and with confidants such as Serre in the shadows of covert aircraft transfers, Blanc was in an ideal position to facilitate such activities, and thus obtained temporary leave from his regular Air France responsibilities. His relinquishing of routine responsibilities and his detachment on special duties within the company, however, did not seem to have hindered his contacts within the company, or his use of company property and motor pool, as will be seen below. The dual positions of Blanc in a state owned company, accompanied by additional approved responsibilities, no doubt allowed for this unusual arrangement.

It is noteworthy, in assessing the attitudes of the local authorities towards covert pro-Republican ventures, to analyse police reports from 1937 regarding Blanc’s role at Montaudran. Such intelligence findings allude to possible financial motivations in Blanc’s disposition towards pro-Republican activities, an officer writing that Blanc’s *pas très avantageuse* financial situation had since the start of the Civil War become *brillante*.<sup>26</sup> However, it is contestable for various reasons that money played the predominant role in

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<sup>24</sup> For more on the role of Serre see Howson., *Arms for Spain*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>25</sup> Commissaire Central to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 31.07.37

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Blanc organising activities in Toulouse for the Republic.<sup>27</sup> First, it is known that Blanc was in contact with Serre, an uncompromising leftist, in collaboration with the most well-known Spanish Republican sympathisers in the Front Populaire. Second, a police report specifies that in May 1937 Blanc joined the *mouvement Pivertiste* faction of the SFIO. This Socialist sub-section known as the Gauche Révolutionnaire was led by Marcel Pivert, who, whilst politically a pacifist, was also tacitly in support of intervention in Spain, also justified by this belief.<sup>28</sup> Further proof of Blanc's involvement in this Socialist faction was demonstrated when investigators highlighted him as being a signatory on the movement's national manifesto in May 1937.<sup>29</sup> Police reports on Blanc at various stages in the investigation into his activities portray him alternately as motivated by financial gain or extremist politics. Both stances reveal the conservative tendencies of the Toulouse police department, which, as has been seen above, was against any form of Pro-Republican intervention.

It is of great significance when examining regional activities such as Blanc's at Montaudran, to establish the longevity of such acts of support for the Spanish Republic and their exact motivations and influences. In the case of Blanc it seems that the incident at the aerodrome in March 1937 came amidst a variety of other activities which suggest a role far more important than that of a reliable political intermediary.

An examination of French civil aviation records from 1936-1939 reveals that the Latécoère 28, registered under the civil aviation code F-AJHS, at the centre of the March incident, was based in Toulouse and had belonged in succession to Aéropostale and Air France and was registered from March 1937 to the Fédération Populaire des Sports Aeronautiques (FPSA).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Commissaire Central to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 31.07.37

<sup>28</sup> See Police report, 13.05.37 & Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.128 .

<sup>29</sup> See *Bulletin Socialiste du XVIème. Organe du Parti Socialiste S.F.I.O, n° 41. 05/37*

<sup>30</sup> See < [http://www.goldenyears.ukf.net/reg\\_F-.htm](http://www.goldenyears.ukf.net/reg_F-.htm) > [accessed 11 March 2010]. For information on the formation of the FPSA see H. Noguères, *La vie quotidienne au temps du Front Populaire 1935-1938*, (Paris, 1977) pp.165-169 For information on Spanish Civil War aircraft see: <<http://www.zi.ku.dk/personal/drnash/model/Spain/did.html>> [ accessed on 11 March 2010] The registering of

The latter organisation had been set up by the Front Populaire in 1936 to train young pilots from the proletariat and in 1937 also was under the joint aegis of the undersecretary of state for Sport and Leisure, Léo Lagrange, a staunch pro-Republican sympathiser, and Pierre Cot.<sup>31</sup> That Blanc was able to procure an aircraft registered under the FPSA for pro-Republican activities is unsurprising. His government connected protectors no doubt authorised such an action. Blanc clearly had a role in the FPSA as in May 1937 a far-right press report referred to Blanc as being a member of the Toulouse Aviation Populaire (another term for the FPSA) sitting on its *comité des fêtes*. More interestingly the report also highlighted that Blanc was a friend of Edouard Serre, a fellow Toulousain, confirming what has already been examined regarding Blanc's Front Populaire contacts.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout 1937 the scale of Blanc's involvement in Toulouse-based operations in favour of the Spanish Republic can be seen in the attention he attracted from rightists, Non-Intervention observers and far-right press snoopers.

March 1937 was a frenetic month for Blanc, the latter primarily organising aircraft refuelling for Spanish Republican aircraft purchased in northern Europe, as well as other activities that caught the attention of *L'Express du Midi* and the Toulouse authorities. Evidence from *L'Express* would often suggest a vastly exaggerated stance and hence unreliability in its journalists' reporting of pro-Republican activities. However, even the ideologically opposed rightist press offers a valuable insight into events at Montaudran. The unsurpassed snooping abilities of *L'Express*'s reporters offered many illuminating details- alongside the expected

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this aircraft to the FPSA is also referred to in the report, Le Commissaire Divisionnaire to Le Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 13.03.37. The officer wrote : '...cette avion appartenait bien à la compagnie Air France mais fait l'objet d'une mutation régulière il y a un mois et demie...'

<sup>31</sup> For more on the role of Léo Lagrange in the domain of sport and the FPSA see Noguères., *La vie quotidienne au temps du Front Populaire* (Paris, 1977) pp.149-188 & Weber., *The Hollow Years*, pp.160-162. For more on Lagrange's pro-Republican activities in the South West see Serres., *Été 1936*, p.297.

<sup>32</sup> *Le Jour*, 27/05/37. Toulousain refers to persons from Toulouse

anti-Republican vitriol. For example, in an article entitled characteristically '*La Farce de la neutralité*' the newspaper asked in an exaggerated tone:

*Les aérodromes français appartiennent-ils au Frente Popular?| Comment huit avions hollandais ont pu gagner L'Espagne Rouge en se ravitaillant à Toulouse.*<sup>33</sup>

What is interesting beside the inflated suggestion that the Frente Popular 'owned' French airfields, tellingly reminding us of the ire of the Right towards any breaches of Non-Intervention in favour of the Republic, is the commentary relating to the transit and refuelling of Dutch-built aircraft at Montaudran. As has already been seen above from the comparatively minor incident of the 13 March 1937, any unauthorized departures for Spain via Montaudran were prohibited by the 18 February law (as *L'Express* reminded its concerned readers)The following makes interesting reading, indicating the level of organisational acumen that Blanc and his collaborators must have had:

*...le 9 mars...deux monoplaces Koolhoven PHAMP et PHAMR décollaient de l'aérodrome de Toulouse à midi trente...ils étaient suivis à 16 heures des deux monoplaces PHAMS et PHAMT et du biplace PHAMO. Tous ses avions s'étaient posés à Montaudran le 7 et 8 Mars et ils avaient tranquillement fait leur plein d'essence. Ils n'étaient pas armés mais possédaient des supports des mitrailleuses. Achetés par le gouvernement de Valence (sic) à la firme hollandaise Koolhoven, ils se rendaient en Espagne pour être incorporés dans les rangs de l'aviation rouge. Pour être complet il convient d'ajouter que la même comédie s'est répétée avec la monoplace de chasse Koolhoven PHAMU qui après avoir atterri le...12 mars et s'être ravitaillé en essence est tranquillement reparti le samedi 13...*<sup>34</sup>

It is quite remarkable that such activities could take place given the level of rightist hostility in the region to the Popular Front and official surveillance measures in place. That a squadron of aircraft was able to land at Montaudran and refuel before taking-off, clearly illicitly, for the Spanish Republic, testifies that the pilots relaying the aircraft to Spain knew that they were assured in advance of full logistical support, when they arrived at the aerodrome, and

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<sup>33</sup> *L'Express du Midi*, 22/05/37

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 22/05/37

that they knew they could avoid complications. Furthermore as the reporter wrote, the Koolhovens were unambiguously military aircraft, and thus, even unarmed, were of substantial value to the Republic. That Blanc was in charge of operations is clear. The departmental préfet wrote in relation to an identical aircraft transfer in May 1937:

*...Comme par hazard, BLANC se trouvait sur le terrain de Montaudran, au moment précis où les 15 avions espagnols gouvernementaux y ont atterri le 8 Mai. C'est sous sa direction...qui fut fait le plein d'essence des appareils par les pilotes de l'escadrille aidés par le personnel de la compagnie Air-France au moyen des bidons de 200 litres placés avant l'atterrissage par groupe de 3...*<sup>35</sup>

From the préfet's message it is obvious that Blanc was taking orders from those responsible for assisting the Spanish Republic, and that he had the full collaboration of Air-France employees, despite having obtained leave from the company in July 1936. This demonstrates a significant level of co-ordination, beyond the remit of an ordinary employee. Furthermore, from Dutch aviation records it is known that there was a sale of 10 FK-51 Koolhovens by NV Koolhoven Vliegtuigen, in March and April 1937. Records show that these fighter aircraft, built in 1937, were sold to France and then '*probably to Spain*' between 2 March and 5 June 1937, with the aircraft listed above shown as being sold nominally to France days before their refuelling at Montaudran, and subsequent departure south of the Pyrenees.<sup>36</sup> As an epilogue to the Koolhoven episode, recent research on the Spanish Civil war in Cantabria reveals that the Republic's air force in this region was reinforced when ... *llegaron, a principios de 1937, 10 Koolhoven FK-51...*<sup>37</sup>

The actions of Blanc had thus played an important role in the enabling of these fighters to arrive on the Northern Front. Whilst such actions were important, it is useful, in order to

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<sup>35</sup> Préfet de la Haute-Garonne to Ministre de L'Intérieur, 16.06.37

<sup>36</sup> See <[http://www.goldenyears.ukf.net/reg\\_PH-.htm](http://www.goldenyears.ukf.net/reg_PH-.htm)> [accessed on 12 March 2010]

<sup>37</sup> See E. Gudín de la Lama & J.Gutiérrez Flores., *Cuatro Derroteros de La Guerra Civil en Cantabria* (Logroño, 2005) p.292. <[http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/fichero\\_articulo?codigo=1633999](http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/fichero_articulo?codigo=1633999)> [accessed on 12 March 2010]

comprehend the implications of such covert support actions for the Spanish Republic, to gain an understanding of the network of complicities and co-operation that enabled such sympathies to be transformed into clear-cut solidarity actions. As has already been seen Blanc was not acting alone. It is therefore useful to comprehend the nature of solidarity for the Republic in Toulouse and the characters that fostered the atmosphere of support for the Spanish government.

In social and political terms Toulouse was a hotbed of support for the Republic. One commissaire quoted the Non-Intervention control officer for the region, Colonel Lunn, reporting that the Bar de l'Opéra, run by a M. Monso, an SFIO member, was a rendezvous for local Socialists. He added that the bar was also frequented by municipal functionaries, leftist students and agents of the Spanish Republic passing through Toulouse. Lunn noted that passionate discussions of leftist politics and especially the war in Spain often erupted in the bar.<sup>38</sup> In this light it seems that there was a clear venue for debate of Spanish issues in the city which was well-known to the authorities for its implication in hosting a wide range of potentially suspect characters, ranging from students to Spanish Republican functionaries. Whilst the Bar de l'Opéra features briefly in Lunn's report, the authorities seem to have been more concerned with the happenings at another local bar, the Bar Gambetta, run by a Mme. Bougerolles, also the mistress of Jean Blanc. Blanc was also the bar's landlord.<sup>39</sup> Reports from June-July 1937 reveal that the bar provided another focus of pro-Republican sympathisers. By July 1937 any ambiguity surrounding Blanc's clandestine pro-Republican role seems to have evaporated in the eyes of the police and the rightist press. One article brazenly declared of Blanc's reception of Republican pilots at Montaudran, '*Il commandait jusqu'au chef d'Escadrille*' and gave a pen-portrait of Blanc that read:

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<sup>38</sup> Commissaire Central to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 30.07.37

<sup>39</sup> Ibid & Commissaire Spécial to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 8.07.37

*...il ne ressemble pas au héros du roman, car il n'a qu'un train de vie...simple et mène une existence de bourgeois...Mais il sait le prix de la discrétion, et je suis certain qu'il ne manque pas de courage... intelligent il est.*<sup>40</sup>

Curiously Blanc's leftism did not reduce the effect on the reporter, who seemed strangely overawed by the accomplishments of the Air France connected employee, tempering this with the accusation that Blanc was the '*ravitailleur officiel de Barcelone et Valence*'.<sup>41</sup> This suggestion, however, appears reasonably accurate. Certainly, Blanc took orders from government connected Republican sympathisers such as Serre. Furthermore, reports into activities at the Bar Gambetta and other local facilities reinforce this. In early July an officer wrote of Blanc that the latter was *...en relation étroite avec divers agents du gouvernement de VALENCE....* and that public opinion suggested that on various occasions cars had been seen parked outside the bar, late at night, with the transfer of crates to them. However, the officer doubted that the cases contained *matériel de guerre*, rather aircraft spare-parts.<sup>42</sup> It is worthwhile considering in such reports that Rightist public opinion, inflamed by the often drastically inaccurate reports of publications such as *L'Express du Midi* and *Le Jour*, was often prone to denouncing a multitude of leftist 'clandestine' happenings, with only the most tenuous evidence to support such accusations.<sup>43</sup> Even the official reports of the Non-Intervention observer Colonel Lunn were treated with scepticism by the officer in this case, who wrote that Lunn's accusation of Blanc using municipal vehicles to transport illegal equipment to the aerodrome was doubtful. The officer commented that it was more likely that

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<sup>40</sup> *Le Jour*, 27.05.37

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 8.07.37

<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that the Left was conversely prone to seeing rightist machinations in favour of the Spanish Nationalists at every turn. In August 1936 for example, an investigator in the Basses-Pyrénées wrote: '*...des membres du...Front Populaire, voulant s'improviser "policiers amateurs" viennent parfois porter a ma connaissance des informations que je contrôle ou fais vérifier...c'est ainsi que le 29 Juillet, 3 personnes de nationalité espagnole, disait le policier bénévole avaient pris place, a l'aérodrome civil dans un avion qui...se serait dirigé vers l'Espagne. Or il s'agissait du POTEZ piloté par SENECHAL qui suivait Le TOUR de FRANCE...pour la maison PERNOD fils !... ce même amateur signalait l'entrée de lourdes caisses dans une propriété de MEILLON ; renseignements pris, il s'agissait d'un riche Américain, s'étant rendu acquéreur d'un domaine, y faisait rentrer des meubles de valeur...*' Commissaire Spécial Ducos to Contrôleur des Services de Police Criminelle, Paris, 09.36 ADPA 1M 258

the vans belonged to Air-France, due to their model baring a remote resemblance to municipal vehicles.<sup>44</sup>

The case illustrates how the issue of the Spanish Civil War and Non-Intervention often provoked flights of the imagination as well as inaccuracy, even amongst officialdom charged with accurately detailing ‘infractions’ of the law. Whilst other reports by Lunn on pro-Republican activities in Toulouse were negated by the city’s police department, it is also arguable that such senior officers sought to avoid embarrassment and the wrath of their superiors for their own failure to reduce illegal activities, which they were supposed to be preventing.<sup>45</sup> Whilst police reports must be treated with caution, due to officers’ ideological opposition to clandestine pro-Republican activities, such sources can largely be treated as accurate. Police surveillance of airfields and railway stations was, as seen above, particularly intense; in contrast foreign Non-Intervention observers worked with smaller teams, with little local knowledge and fewer resources to dedicate to investigating Non-Intervention breaches.

As mentioned in reports above, it is clear that the Bar Gambetta was a hive of activity for persons ranging from Air-France employees and ex-colleagues of Blanc at Montaudran, to, according to officers, numerous other figures, who in the context of this case study seem to reveal substantial information about how Blanc was able to pursue his activities. An exhaustive report in July 1937 by the Toulouse police chief reveals that Blanc’s bar was frequented not only by Air-France workers, but also employees from the Latécoère aircraft factory and ‘the majority’ of Soviet agents passing through the town. The police also established that Blanc had friends in the Air Ministry, whom he would phone from the bar. The bar, the officer wrote, was a ....*lieu de rendez-vous des intermédiaires de tout ordre en relation d’affaires avec les agents accrédités du gouvernement de Valence...* and that when

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<sup>44</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 8.07.37 ADHG 1960 W9 Archive and series number the same until further notice by author.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



Spanish Republican squadrons had landed at Montaudran, *...de nombreuses communications téléphoniques ont eu lieu entre le Bar Gambetta et le Ministère de l’Air...*<sup>46</sup>

Whilst such reports certainly suggest that Blanc was a government agent, his contacts with the Air France and Latécoère factory workers come as particularly interesting in the context of Blanc’s lesser known interests in Toulouse. According to the police, Blanc also rented a lock-up, containing spare-parts for planes, including seats and ailerons. We can deduce that such police claims must only have been made after covert surveillance of Blanc’s storage area, as the locality was kept under lock and key by an employee of Blanc’s who only gave access to Blanc’s collaborators.<sup>47</sup> Clearly obtaining parts such as ailerons required the assistance of persons in mechanical positions in the aviation industry, such as those mentioned above, reinforcing the probability that, whilst Blanc’s individual responsibilities were valued by Spanish Republicans and the Air Ministry, such activities were made possible through a greater network of associates than the reports might like to indicate.

The influence that Blanc’s position at Montaudran carried is hinted at when reading between the lines of a report from the préfet of the Haute-Garonne. The determination of some areas of the local authorities to bring Blanc to book for his activities was undoubtedly hindered by friends in influential places, the préfet noting in June 1937 that:

*...le parquet de Toulouse n’avait pas hésité à envoyer une commission ...pour enquêter à son sujet mais je ne sais à la suite de quelles interventions le parquet a été amené à ‘classer’ l’affaire...*<sup>48</sup>

The fact that the préfet openly hinted that the Toulouse prosecutors were thwarted from investigating Blanc by the intervention of an unknown force, able to have archived a judicial investigation into breaches of Non-Intervention, is tellingly indicative of the esteem in which

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<sup>46</sup> Commissaire Central to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 30.07.37/ 31.07.37

<sup>47</sup> Commissaire Central to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 31.07.37

<sup>48</sup> Préfet de la Haute-Garonne to Ministre de L’Intérieur, 16.06.37

certain persons in authority held Blanc's activities. Of additional interest in this domain is a Gendarmerie report from 31 July 1937, in which the commander of Gendarmerie for the Toulouse region wrote to the prefect that his units had *jamais constaté un trafic d'armes au bénéfice des belligerents espagnols*.<sup>49</sup> Given that the Gendarmerie also had responsibility for the Gardes Mobiles stationed at French aerodromes, including those on duty at Montaudran during the March 1937 events discussed above, it seems strange that the Gendarmerie should show a total ignorance of the extensive investigations into Blanc's activities, underway in the city's police department. In this context it is worth referring to a piece published in the rightist daily, *Le Jour*, in May 1937, which had hinted at the authorities' complicity in secret operations at Montaudran, writing:

*..quiconque est un peu informé sur ce qui se passe en Espagne sait qu'il se joue ici une pièce de marionnettes, dont les fils sont tirés par ceux-là même qui devraient faire respecter la loi. Le Gendarme devient voleur. C'est tout à fait du bon guignol.*<sup>50</sup>

In a similarly exaggerated fashion the Republican *Servicio del Extranjero* of the Ministerio del Estado, monitoring Nationalist press releases, noted that in November 1937 the latter continued to believe that the French government was involved in the Republic's use of French airfields, the report highlighting that '*Franco acusa...a Francia, de poner sus aviones y sus aeropuertos a la disposición de la España Leal...*'<sup>51</sup>

Scepticism is undoubtedly required for many such disproportionate accusations, clearly designed to misinform and discredit the Left in the eyes of public opinion. However, it is worth considering the pressure that certain personalities, such as Cot and Cusin, could exert on functionaries, as well as the willing complicity of many more public servants favourable

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<sup>49</sup> Commandant Gendarmerie de la Haute-Garonne to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 30. 07.37

<sup>50</sup> *Le Jour*, 27/05/37

<sup>51</sup> Ministerio del Estado to Presidente de la República (and other Spanish Republican government departments). 29.11.37, ANC 1-1-7- 7466

to the Spanish Republic.<sup>52</sup> That the entire Toulouse Gendarmerie should be implicated in assisting in acts of illegality is questionable. However, the notion that certain elements would have participated in the clandestine operations that Blanc was running is realistic, given the network of useful sympathies that will be discussed below.

The Gendarmerie's obliviousness towards Blanc's pro-Republican activities could equally be extended to a number of his other actions, which were arguably as important as Blanc's aerodrome-based activities. In a 31 July report a police commissaire wrote that when a Spanish [Republican] aircraft crash-landed near Cadours (Haute-Garonne) Blanc telephoned a lawyer at the Toulouse bar to defend the pilot.<sup>53</sup> Jean Serres also refers to a certain 'Blanc' of Toulouse being the registered owner and regional representative of Air Pyrénées, a blockade-running airline created in early 1937 to transport Republican personalities from Biarritz to the encircled northern Zone of Bilbao and Santander.<sup>54</sup> Blanc's involvement with Air Pyrénées is additionally confirmed by a July 1937 police report.<sup>55</sup> The French aviation register also suggests that Blanc sold aircraft to the Republicans with a 1936 Caudron 600 Aiglon F-APCG being registered to 'J M Blanc' in March 1938, listed as 'possibly' sold to Spanish Republicans, and recorded as 'destroyed' in June 1938.<sup>56</sup>

From what we have seen in the case of Jean Blanc and the Montaudran aerodrome affair it is necessary to draw some interim conclusions as to the nature of secret pro-Republican

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<sup>52</sup>Two examples suffice to demonstrate Cot's determination to support the Republic. In August 1936 the co-founder of the aircraft company Loiré et Olivier, Henri Olivier, refused to sell aircraft to the Spanish Republicans. When the company was nationalized in January 1937, the new Cot influenced company administration forced Olivier's resignation. Also in August 1936 the French pilot André Autrique, ferrying an Avia BH-33 fighter to Spain, crash-landed near Bordeaux. This pilot was arrested by French police, but released on the instructions of Cot and Moulin. Howson, *Arms for Spain*, p.48. & p.88. Such examples are particularly relevant to Blanc's activities and his relative avoidance of interference from the local authorities.

<sup>53</sup> Commissaire Central to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 31.07.37

<sup>54</sup> See Serres., *Été 1936*, p.306. See also Howson, *Arms for Spain*, p.96. for the aircraft of Air Pyrenees. See also P.Laureau., *Les pilotes mercenaires pendant la guerre civile: problèmes, légendes et réalités*, Persée Revues Scientifiques, 22, (1986) < [http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/casa\\_0076-230x\\_1986\\_num\\_22\\_1\\_2476](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/casa_0076-230x_1986_num_22_1_2476) > [accessed 12 March 2010] (p.480.)

<sup>55</sup> Commissaire Central to Préfet de la Haute-Garonne, 31.07.37

<sup>56</sup> < [http://www.goldenyears.ukf.net/reg\\_F-.htm](http://www.goldenyears.ukf.net/reg_F-.htm) > [accessed 12 March 2010]

operations in Toulouse. Blanc undoubtedly collaborated with the upper levels of government who supported the Spanish Republic. His connections with Serre are a case in point. Police and press reports that have focused largely on Blanc's role in the supplying of equipment and supplies to the Republicans have overlooked the vital, if not co-ordinating, roles played by a plethora of local collaborators who made Blanc's ventures possible. As has been seen, Blanc worked alongside fellow sympathisers from his former company, Air France, had contact with aviation workers from Latécoère, connections through the Bar Gambetta to Soviet and Republican agents and staff who guarded his storage unit as well as a reliable lawyer from the Toulouse bar. Such connections demonstrate the far-reaching network of assistance that Republican sympathisers and the Spanish Republic received, reinforcing the central tenet of the present work and indicating a range of loyalties considerably more widespread than might have been assumed. Certainly we must be wary about the nature of the authorities' complicity in the events described. Indeed, as we have seen, the police department was extremely tenacious in its investigations into Blanc, going to great lengths to observe him, both at Montaudran and in his other commercial and private ventures. However, the ability of Blanc to have the support from government superiors indubitably facilitated the latter's activities, allowing him and his collaborators to continue their operations, with the knowledge that influential friends could permit them to evade potential sanctions.

The above case study has demonstrated the clear implications of the role played by aviation employees in connection with local Republican sympathisers, and whilst undoubtedly such personalities played a significant role in the supplying of specialist aviation material, the vast majority of smuggling of arms and equipment to Spain was overseen under the aegis of Gaston Cusin. Many studies, including those by Weber, Rapin, and Poggioli have covered the

role of Cusin in relation to his far-reaching contacts in state administration.<sup>57</sup> However, the local implications and components of Cusin's operations in the South West have been given little more than cursory attention by historians, with the exception of Ami-Jacques Rapin, who has focused mainly on the Pyrénées-Orientales.<sup>58</sup> The latter has explained how Cusin's subordinates operated at regional level, but divulges little on the local aspects of Non-Intervention relâchée.

Evidently, as a customs officer and departmental union leader, Cusin's main collaborators in smuggling supplies to the Republic were customs officials and revenue inspectors. Both groups also fell under the remit of the Ministry of Finance, in which Cusin was sous-chef de cabinet in 1936 and senior aide until April 1939<sup>59</sup>. There was also collaboration from the railway workers, working closely with the aforementioned groups in the same border stations. The *cheminots* were additionally notable adherents to the PCF, as will be shown below. For the purposes of this case study, the broader implications of revenue and customs pro-Republican activities on a national scale will be avoided, as the key focus of this regional study resides in the activities of customs and revenue functionaries in the border region, where such activities could influence pro-Republican supplying operations.

In order to demonstrate the motivations behind later pro-Republican actions a clear trajectory demonstrating the levels of involvement of customs and revenue staff in leftist political organisations in the South West in 1936, and political meetings, will be traced. This will then

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<sup>57</sup> Rapin., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle* p.123. & Weber., *The Hollow Years*, p.168. & M.Poggioli., *Cahiers de l'institute C.G.T de l'histoire sociale : C.G.T et la Guerre d'Espagne*, no.62 (June 1997) <[http://www.ihs.cgt.fr/IMG/pdf\\_DOSSIER.pdf](http://www.ihs.cgt.fr/IMG/pdf_DOSSIER.pdf)> [accessed 11 march 2010]

<sup>58</sup> See above footnote 3, p.49. Gaston Cusin was the head of the CGT Customs officers union in 1936 and thus was in an ideal position from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War to establish covert smuggling operations with the Spanish Republic. He was Sous-chef de cabinet to the Finance Minister, Vincent Auriol (a fellow Republican sympathiser from Revel, Haute-Garonne) from June 1936-June 1937, under the Camille Chautemps government of June 1937-January 1938 he was chef de cabinet to the undersecretary of state for Finances, René Brunet. In Blum's second ministry from March-April 1938 he was retained by the Socialist premier in this post and then in Daladier's government from April 1938-April 1939 he was Director of the national printworks. See Rapin., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle* p.123. & Weber., *The Hollow Years*, p.168.

<sup>59</sup> See Rapin., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle* p.123.

form the basis for demonstrating why these functionaries by 1938 became fully implicated in partisan activities in favour of the Republic.

A study of departmental involvement in political organisation in the strategically vital Pyrénées-Orientales provides a thorough insight into levels of functionary engagement in leftist political leadership in the region. In 1936 the sous-préfet of the Prades sous-préfecture wrote to his superior, the préfet of the Pyrénées-Orientales, that the Communist party was making significant gains in local politics with 3,239 votes being cast for M. Terrats, the PCF candidate in the May 1936 elections in this sector.<sup>60</sup> At a *commune* by *commune* level, in the border village of Le Boulou, the PCF was led by Joseph Salbat, an accountant at the railway company the P.O du Midi, the group comprising 150 members. In Port-Vendres a former customs official acted as PCF treasurer, and in Maureillas, near the border, the sous-préfet denounced the propaganda activities of PCF deputies' wives, Mmes. Marty and Péri, residing in the commune whilst their husbands carried out pro-Republican activities in Spain.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile the SFIO in the area counted 5,000 members, it was led in the canton of Céret by Joseph Roigt and Gaston Cardonne, respectively retired and active senior tax officials for the region. Since the legislative elections of May 1936 the prefectural functionary noted that the 'Gauche Révolutionnaire' faction of the Socialist party had gained ground amongst local Socialists with the aforementioned revenue officials also leading this tendency.<sup>62</sup>

In the context of involvement of local functionaries, in leftist political leadership in the area it is unsurprising that enquiries by the préfet to his police observers regarding leftist political reunions in the region should similarly reveal the implication of these officials' colleagues in

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<sup>60</sup> Sous-préfet de Prades to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales ,6.10.36 ADPO. The PCF had obtained 1,008 votes in the sector in the 1932 elections.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

such meetings. Thus an enquiry in 1937 by the Perpignan Sûreté into the organisation of the PCF in the region revealed that there was cause to note amongst other communist activities:

*....l'activité des cellules de BOURG-MADAME et d'ENVEITG, composées en grande majorité des fonctionnaires (douaniers) et employés du P.O. –Midi, à la Gare Internationale de LA TOUR DE CAROL.*<sup>63</sup>

In addition to the widespread involvement of customs officers and railway workers at these strategically important border posts and international stations, the sous-préfet in Prades wrote in September 1936 of customs officers' attendance at a meeting in a café in nearby Mont-Louis. At the reunion an exposé of events in Spain was given by a M. Raymond Zuckermann, of the Parisian *Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes*, with:

*...une vingtaine d'assistants parmi lesquels les douaniers de La Cabanasse formaient la majorité...*<sup>64</sup>

From these reports we thus have evidence of state functionaries' active involvement in both leftist political organisation in the region and attendance of pro-Republican reunions held in border towns, where such official's political inclinations would appear to be in direct contradiction to the Non-Intervention role that Howson has alleged they fulfilled.<sup>65</sup>

It is noteworthy that, despite such functionaries' strategic role at Bourg-Madame/La Tour de Carol and Cerbère, in 1936 at least, even Nationalist high command seems to have shown a remarkable ignorance of the military importance to the Republic of these border stations,

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<sup>63</sup> Commissaire Spécial, Henri Castaing, to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales ,09.37 ADPO

<sup>64</sup> Sous-préfet de Prades to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales ,21.09.36 ADPO The Underlining is the Sous-préfets' (officials usually underlined in coloured crayon for emphasis). See map for station locations.

<sup>65</sup> Howson., *Arms for Spain* p.103. Howson writes that 'the French police and customs kept a close watch on traffic across the frontier of France and Catalonia during the summer and autumn of 1936'. The *official* declarations of the French government would support this, the German Ambassador in France highlighted in August 1937 that: 'Delbos [the French Foreign Minister] stated that the French frontier guards had received the strictest instructions to put a stop to all smuggling of arms...' German Ambassador in France to Foreign Ministry, 10.08.36, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D Volume III* (London, 1951) p.35.

indeed General Mola commented on the 8 September 1936, to journalists in Vera de Bidasoa, after the capture of Irún that:

*La prise d'Irun a pour nous une importance considérable. La liaison par terre entre les armées rouge de Catalogne et du Guipúzcoa est coupée. (sic) C'est par là que passaient le ravitaillement et les armes de provenances étrangères.*<sup>66</sup>

In the context of this chapter it would seem that barring of supplies to the Spanish Republic from abroad was not the foregone conclusion that Mola, with perhaps excessive confidence following the fall of Irún, would have liked to have been the case. It is worth noting that the Nationalist's Nazi allies were under no such illusions. The German Ambassador in France wrote in August 1936 that:

*...on the occasion of a trip to the Catalanian Pyrenees, I had been able to convince myself at first hand of the extensive arms smuggling in favour of the Spanish Popular Front...*<sup>67</sup>

A brief examination of the Spanish rightist press from 1938 reveals that the Nationalists developed an obsession with the Catalan frontier crossings, including Bourg-Madame/ La Tour de Carol. In January 1938 *ABC Sevilla* wrote that:

*...En La Tour de Carol hay cinco trenes más de material de guerra con vagones de diez toneladas cada uno...en Ax-Les-Thermes, ...y en otras estaciones fronterizas el tráfico hacia la zona roja reviste caracteres extraordinarios...Hasta el prefecto de Pirineos Orientales realiza viajes expofeso a La Tour de Carol para comunicar a la seguridad...las instrucciones del ministerio del Interior...*<sup>68</sup>

In this light it seems that the transit of supplies to the Republic via La Tour de Carol and consequently the material's transfer into Republican hands by local authorities was perceived as a major headache by the Nationalists. On a cautionary note, the Spanish Right had a

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<sup>66</sup> Serres., *Été 1936*, p.228.

<sup>67</sup> German Ambassador in France to Foreign Ministry, 10.08.36, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D Volume III* p.35.

<sup>68</sup> *ABC Sevilla*, 29/01/38, p.9.



continual propensity to emit exaggerated denunciations of the French Left's assistance to the Republic, and therefore we must be careful in assuming that such large quantities of supplies, as extensively listed by the Nationalists, were actually supplied. With reference to the involvement of the prefect of the Pyrénées-Orientales, it is important to underline that Rapin confirms that Raoul Didkowski, the préfet of the department during the Spanish Civil War, was in regular contact with Gaston Cusin.<sup>69</sup> That he would have shown the indiscretion alleged in the *ABC* report is doubtful, due to the high political risk his position implied, and must be treated with suspicion.

In examining the levels of solidarity that existed with the Spanish Republic and the key personalities involved in secret supplying operations it is important to assess the exact role of departmental administration, to underline the nature of prefectural and administrative involvement in activities that favoured the Spanish Republic. Whilst Raoul Didkowski and préfets in other strategic departments, such as Maurice Bodenen in Bordeaux, were indeed involved in carrying out secret government orders from ministers such as Auriol and Cot, it would be erroneous to confuse heart-felt solidarity motivated by Republican and leftist politics with duty-bound professionalism.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, Julian Jackson gives perhaps the most accurate description of the préfets' attitudes in the context of the Nazi Occupation of France from 1940-44, writing that *...The majority [of prefects] merely carried out their duties in a spirit of professionalism rather than political zeal...in general French administrators executed orders with efficiency...*<sup>71</sup> This analysis of the préfets' attitude towards orders was clearly the same throughout the period of the Spanish conflict. Certainly in this chapter nuances of political opposition from certain state administrators can be seen, but these tended to surface when political superiors did not pose a risk to the careers of those voicing a greater

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<sup>69</sup> Rapin., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle*, pp.123-124.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>71</sup> J.Jackson., *France: the Dark Years 1940-44*, (New York, 2001) pp.264-266.

degree of criticism. In this case, such nuances are visible in certain prefectural reports after the fall of the Front Populaire in November 1938. In the case of Raoul Didkowsky from 1936-1939, Jackson's description of French préfets would be applicable. Orders from Paris were undoubtedly followed, regardless of personal inclinations towards the opposed Spanish factions. Indeed, whilst Didkowsky did relay arms shipment orders he also followed orders that in November 1938 aroused the hostility of the Left. Following Daladier's order to temporarily prohibit the re-entry into France of certain wounded former International Brigaders, *L'Humanité* complained bitterly:

*...A la frontière un important déploiement de police, sous la direction de M. Didkowski, préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, interdit l'entrée en France des vaillants défenseurs de la liberté...*<sup>72</sup>

However, a great degree of professionalism can be seen in all Didkowsky's decisions, for example, on the return of International Brigaders via Perpignan, the préfet allowed the train transporting the volunteers to stop in Perpignan where they were subsequently loudly fêted by local leftists. Despite criticism from prominent local rightists, which caused Daladier to demand explanations from the préfet, the latter wrote that:

*...quelque important fut le service d'ordre, il me répugnait, pour des raisons que je n'ai pas besoin de souligner de faire charger les Gardes Mobiles contre des Français qui revenaient d'Espagne et qui tous étaient intoxiqués par les paroles, les chants...|J'ai cru nécessaire de proposer au cabinet du Ministre de l'Intérieur une formule qui limiterait les dégâts...je garantissais qu'il n'y a eu aucun incident...*<sup>73</sup>

Instead of viewing such reactions as politically sympathetic to a particular cause, it is evident that Didkowsky acted in a spirit of on-the-spot pragmatism and political damage limitation, as was required by any administrator in such a situation. He reacted similarly in January 1938

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<sup>72</sup> *L'Humanité*, 2/11/38

<sup>73</sup> Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales to Président du Conseil, 14.11.38 4M417 ADPO

following a Nationalist aerial incursion and bombing of French border villages in the Cerdagne, *ABC Madrid* reported:

*...El prefecto del departamento de los Pirineos Orientales ha pedido al gobierno que adopte rápidamente las medidas necesarias para asegurar la protección del territorio y de los ciudadanos franceses...*<sup>74</sup>

From such reports as detailed above, it would be correct to underline that the préfet's actions whether following Non-Intervention *rélâchée* related orders, carrying out instructions from the government that hindered the left, or calling for military protection from Nationalist aerial incursions, all represent prefectural functionaries' professional efficiency and protection of state interests.<sup>75</sup> In this light we must separate leftist initiatives from those carried out by administrators, who, whilst facilitating solidarity through their carrying out of covert orders, did not assume the same political solidarity role as that chosen by leftist *douaniers* and tax inspectors. The latter were evidently motivated by political sympathies and not by protecting the interests of the state.

Having examined different layers of involvement and solidarity with the Spanish Republic it is important to examine the context in which solidarity actions took place and the significance of the border positions in which customs Republican sympathisers operated.

Nationalist strategic objectives in the offensive against Catalonia, from 1938 specifically refer to the role of the Catalan border-posts, with *L'Autonomista* citing the German High Command publication *Deutsche Wehr*, in which the author :

*...confessa que la nostra resistència "ha frustrat els plans de Franco"...afegeix que l'objectiu dels rebels consistia a "separar Catalunya de França"arribant d'una sola empenta...a Puigcerdà,per tal de impedir l'ús de l'estació fronterera de Bourg-Madame...*<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *ABC Madrid*, 25/01/38 p.3.

<sup>75</sup> Didkowsky's later role under Vichy as initial Pétainist and later Resistance supporter is covered in L. Yagil., *Chrétiens et Juifs sous Vichy 1940-44: Sauvetage et désobéissance* (Paris, 2005) pp.210-212.

<sup>76</sup> *L'Autonomista*, 23/05/38, p.3.

This recognition of the importance of the frontier crossings of Catalonia with France becomes crucial to the understanding of the significance of French functionaries' activities such as in Bourg-Madame and La Tour de Carol, which are detailed in a report after the fall of Catalonia in February 1939. It is worth considering when viewing such official sources that, as has already been seen in previous reports from the local sous-préfet, this state representative retained a conservative tone that is reflected in his hostility throughout the report towards the functionaries detailed in it. However, despite the ideological contrasts between the sous-préfet and the subjects of his report, the contents can be treated as accurate as they originate from police officers, whose reports were required to be factually correct-even when their language contains nuances of their political opposition to the activities investigated.

The sous-préfet began his report- ironically to his pro-Republican activities implicated superior, Didkowski, - writing that:

*...de tous les fonctionnaires de douane/ Trop de ces fonctionnaires se sont montrés depuis la révolution espagnole les amis ou les sympathisants résolus des régimes de terreur (sic) qu'a du subir...la population de Puigcerda. D'autre part ils ont...accordé aux gens de Bourg-Madame qui trafiquaient avec les...comités espagnols qu'ils s'empressent bien entendu de refuser à ceux qui franchissant maintenant la frontière et qui ne sont pas leurs amis...*<sup>77</sup>

The sous-préfet also revealed that the customs officials subjected local Rightists such as the Mayor of Bourg-Madame to thorough searches every time they crossed the frontier, whilst themselves traversing the border throughout the conflict *...tout à leur aise avec tous les paquets qu'il leur plaisait de passer...* whilst ensuring that their political adversaries were

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<sup>77</sup> Sous-préfet de Prades to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 21.03.1939 4M417 ADPO. The official is referring to relations following the capture of the Bourg Madame/Puigcerdà *Puente Internacional* by Nationalist *Requetés* on 11 February 1939. See *La Vanguardia Nacional*, 11/02/1939, p.13.

submitted, following the Nationalist capture of the border, to : ... *tant de soin partisan une véritable brimade...*<sup>78</sup>

On a local and even regional level this intelligence suggests that, despite the official's obvious ideological opposition to the customs officer's activities, the latter ensured that supplies to political opponents were restricted, through ideologically motivated yet legitimately permitted searches, whilst the officers themselves contributed to supplying local Spanish Republicans. Such acts clearly contributed to maintaining Republican morale on a local scale, especially in 1938-39, a time of shortages on the Spanish side of the border. After recommending the transfer of the customs officers claiming, perhaps entirely correctly, that the latter would be unable to work with the new Spanish authorities the sous-préfet then gave an interesting in-depth report on the officers concerned and their exact activities, as reported by the commissaire spécial in Bourg-Madame. Listing seven customs officials including the *receveur*, *brigadier secrétaire* - one of whom was the secretary of Bourg-Madame's PCF cell - the prefectoral official stressed that, in contrast to their subordinates, the captain, lieutenant and brigadier of Bourg-Madame customs were blameless in all respects. This suggests that lower levels of officialdom were more widely involved in pro-Republican activities than their perhaps more conservative and career-motivated superiors. The sous-préfet also turned his indignation on the *contrôleur des contributions indirectes* (tax inspector), M. Ribot, whom he accused of having ...*trafiqué pendant plusieurs années avec les membres des comités de Puigcerda...*<sup>79</sup> It is evident from this statement and other information, that whilst many trans-frontier relationships were not tinged with political motivation, as examined above, the involvement of the customs and tax officials with Frente

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<sup>78</sup> Sous-préfet de Prades to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 21.03.1939 4M 417 ADPO

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. It is worth noting at this point that as early as 1934, when Catalan separatists attempted to obtain arms prior to the victory of the Right (CEDA) in the November 1934 elections, the Minister of the Interior sought fit to commission an investigation into the customs officials, the former writing in a telegram: '...*Je suis avisé armes insurgés Catalans transférés de Catalogne en France avec complicité des douaniers français...*' Ministre de l'Intérieur to Préfet Pyrénées-Orientales & Sûreté. 12.10.34 4M 293 ADPO

Popular committee members clearly indicates that political sympathies developed crucial significance in cross-border solidarity during the Spanish Civil War. These sympathies in turn provided Spanish Republican allies with assistance, which might not otherwise have existed. Furthermore, as has already been seen, customs and tax officials, as state functionaries, could provide a range of covert services to their leftist colleagues in Spain which would have facilitated significantly local and national solidarity initiatives. As noted by the Sous-préfet, the conspiratorial interaction of the customs officers made it extremely difficult for hostile French administrators to impede such ventures as ‘...*la douane l’aura sans aucun doute facilité...*’<sup>80</sup> That local authorities should declare their impotence towards the pro-Republican activities of state subordinates demonstrates the effectiveness of localised assistance to the Spanish Republic. As in the Blanc case, such officials relied undoubtedly on a network of contacts in the administration including Cusin, Didkowski and others, allowing their covert activities to be shrouded from the scrutiny of interfering political adversaries.<sup>81</sup> To finalise this case study, it is worth examining in this vein the problems faced by such Republican sympathisers, to demonstrate that solidarity initiatives with the Republic were often undertaken at considerable political and legal risk, making these sympathisers’ activities even more significant in the context of Non-Intervention.

From the outset of the conflict administration sympathisers also had to contend with the continual risk posed by Nationalist espionage of operations supplying the Republic. In

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<sup>80</sup>Sous-préfet de Prades to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 21.03.1939 4M 417 ADPO

<sup>81</sup>A second visit to ADPO in September 2010 revealed a missing page from this report, in it the Sous-préfet de Prades wrote to Didkowski to ask for : ‘...*le déplacement de la grande partie des fonctionnaires de Bourg-Madame...*’ The report crucially reveals that the customs officials would have had the complicity of their police colleagues, the Sous-préfet demanding the replacement of: ‘...*tous les inspecteurs de police pour cette raison qu’ils ont eu des rapports trop fréquents avec les diverses autorités qui se sont succédés a Puigcerda, que malgré ma défense ils leur ont donné trop souvent des facilités ...qu’ils ont accordé ...le libre passage à des habitants de Bourg-Madame dont personne n’ignore on Cerdagne qu’ils faisaient un trafic ...avec les gouvernants de Puigcerda , qu’ils aient été Anarchistes ou Communistes et que par conséquent il leur est devenu quasi impossible de remplir désormais leurs fonctions avec toute la netteté nécessaire ...*’ This report thus demonstrates that customs and police officers colluded in partisan actions in favour of the Republican authorities in Puigcerda, rendering services that would later see them sanctioned. See Sous-préfet de Prades to Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales, 21.03.1939 4M 293 ADPO

November 1936, for example, the Gendarmerie of La Tour de Carol arrested a German spy named Schumann who was caught in the act of photographing the railway line and other strategic points near this important border station.<sup>82</sup> Also dangerous to the work of the *douaniers* and their collaborators at such stations was the risk of ‘Fifth-columnists’ within the customs and railways administration, sabotaging such operations through the filtering of classified shipment details to the Nationalists or the rightist press. In the case of leaking of information to the former faction, *L’Autonomista*, whilst clearly a leftist publication prone to believing in the omnipresence of fifth columnists, gives an insight into perhaps how the Nationalists garnered in their propaganda reports such precise information on the quantity and contents of ‘secret’ shipments via La Tour de Carol and Puigcerdà. On this issue the publication wrote, citing the Socialist *Le Populaire*, that:

*...Es parla de l’existència de un depòsit d’armes a Bourg-Madame. Un dels francesos que ajuden als espies és un inspector de ferrocarrils el qual comunica als rebels totes les informacions relatives a les transmeses de queviures a Espanya sabotajent dits envios...*<sup>83</sup>

Whilst scepticism might normally be required in reading this newspaper’s reports, the original source was *Le Populaire*, a leftist but more detached national French publication, thus its allegations perhaps contained elements of truth. Certainly with regards to the filtering of information to the Rightist press, reports were emitted by publications such as *L’Eclair* and *L’Independent* which verged on collusion with the Nationalists, the former writing in a sensational article in February 1938:

*Nous sommes avertis...*

*Il nous revient, de milieux bien informés, que quarante mille tonnes de matériel de guerre de provenance française...vont être acheminées en Espagne rouge (sic) par La-Tour-de-Carol et Puigcerda...Nous savons aussi que...Franco connaît ce trafic et qu’il est disposé à*

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<sup>82</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 6.11.36, p.7.

<sup>83</sup> *L’Autonomista*, 17.05.38,

*bombarder la gare de Puigcerda...dès que le convoi pénétrera en territoire espagnol... Nous sommes ainsi prévenus...*<sup>84</sup>

In this complicity, and as has been noted from *L'Autonomista*, the operations of the French sympathisers and the shipments undoubtedly had far-right sympathisers reporting their movements, hindering the task of the Republic, facing enemies as well as allies on the French side of the border.

Lastly it is worth highlighting that, despite the prevalence of customs officers friendly to the Republic, not all officials shared the same political views towards such smuggling activities. Jean Serres illustrates this with an example of a Republican freighter being loaded clandestinely with arms on the quays of the Adour, near Bayonne, in September 1936. Whilst one customs officer rushed to alert André Moine and his PCF colleagues, informing them that they had been denounced by a factory watchman, the official also warned that maritime customs officers were about to arrive in their launch. Subsequently, whilst the Communist militants hid amongst nearby pine trees, two were arrested by maritime customs officers, and sentenced to prison for arms smuggling.<sup>85</sup> In another case in March 1937, the maritime customs officers forced the French trawler *Sans Pareil*, into Port Vendres carrying 25 American and Canadian volunteers for the International Brigades.<sup>86</sup>

The political and personal risks implied in involvement in secret operations to supply the Republic were numerous. Officials collaborating with Spanish Republicans and government sympathisers in such activities faced a constant risk of exposure to the Rightist press and the Nationalists. Furthermore, as illustrated in the case of the customs in the Cerdagne railway stations and Bayonne, lower grade functionaries frequently played a hazardous double-game

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<sup>84</sup> *L'Eclair*, 4/02/38

<sup>85</sup> Serres., *Été 1936*, p.312.

<sup>86</sup> Préfet de l'Aude to Sous-préfet de Narbonne, 27.03.37, 1MD483 ADA. The volunteers on the vessel were sentenced to 20 days imprisonment. See Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.133.



with their colleagues and superiors, endeavouring, as in the latter example, to stay moments ahead of their colleagues, attempting to derail such activities.

As demonstrated by the case studies of the Montaudran aerodrome ‘affair’ and Jean Blanc, the South West and its government-connected sympathisers constituted an important part of the Republicans’ international war effort. Blanc’s range of services to the Republic, and efforts to supply the Republicans, despite police and Rightist hostility, demonstrate how the commitment of a numerically small amount of supporters could change the balance of support for the Republic. Furthermore Blanc was not an isolated operator. His ventures relied conclusively on a range of connections, from several government *cabinets* in Paris, to the sympathies of a plethora of Air France and Latécoère aviation workers, pilots, Republican and Soviet agents, lawyers and watchmen.<sup>87</sup> The reader may also recall that other rendezvous locations such as the Bar de l’Opéra evidenced the social support in the community that could foster a climate of support for the Spanish Republic, enabling local sympathisers to engage with the community and debate solidarity issues. Blanc’s pivotal role for the Republic would thus have been greatly reduced if he had not been able to rely on such widespread local and national support for his activities. Similarly, the customs officers of the border stations played a vital, if shadowy, role in assisting the Republic and local border communities in Catalonia. In receiving the collaboration of these officials the Republic was assured a crucial supply route after the capture of Irún. In their localised activities the *douaniers* provided a long-standing sympathetic relationship with local Republicans, whilst obstructing their enemies.

To summarise the role of the South West and its regional functionary actors, it is certain that, despite the difficulties and dangers described in this chapter, such groups and individuals enabled the Republic to draw on a wide range of sympathies in vital administrative positions, allowing the Republican government to continue their war effort via the aerodromes and

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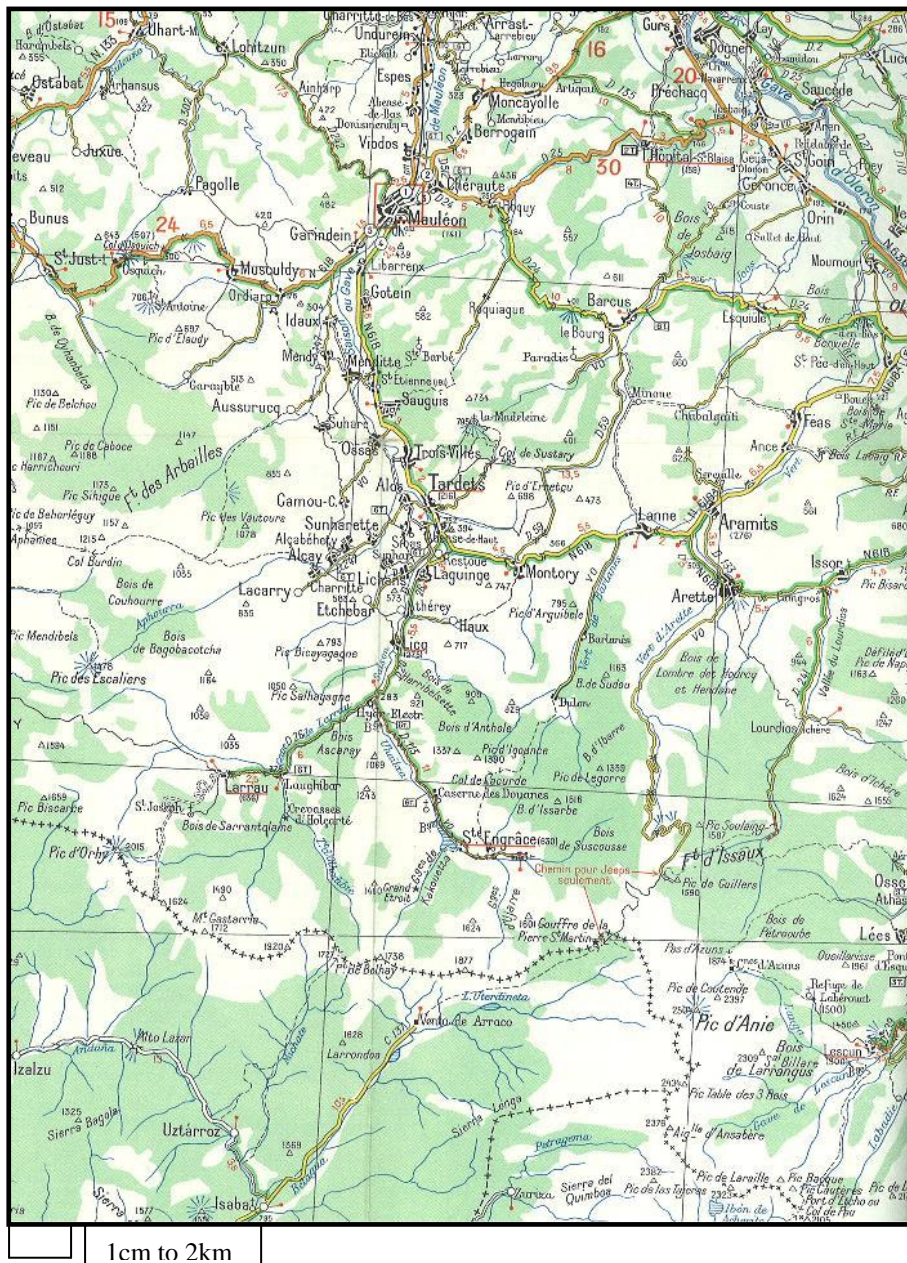
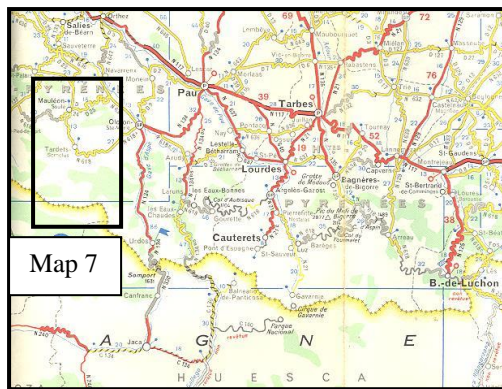
<sup>87</sup> One might recall the Ministries for the Air, Sport and Finances, see above pp.55-74.

Pyrenean railway stations of the South West, establishing important footholds of solidarity between the two Republics.

Chapter four will now show that accompanying such partisan actions in favour of the Spanish Republic in the border zone, elements of the local Left took it upon themselves to provide the most hazardous actions of partisanship and partisan solidarity for the Republic. By partisanship the chapter will be referring to actions such as guiding volunteers across the Pyrenees into Republican Spain and sailing volunteers along the Mediterranean coast clandestinely to Republican ports in Catalonia. These acts took the actions of the customs officials and aviation functionaries even further, by quite literally crossing the line into the Spanish Republican zone to provide support services to International Republican volunteers.

By partisan solidarity the chapter will be dealing with actions that were undertaken by elements of the regional Left to give direct assistance to the Republican army, either in the International Brigades or in indigenous Spanish units.

The final chapter aims to provide an analysis of these unambiguously partisan acts of solidarity, which provided the Spanish Republic with vital trans-Pyrenean support. This will subsequently allow the reader to understand the complexity of regional sympathies, solidarity and partisanship in favour of the Spanish Republic, allowing for the exposure of this seldom examined aspect of regional support for the Spanish Republic.

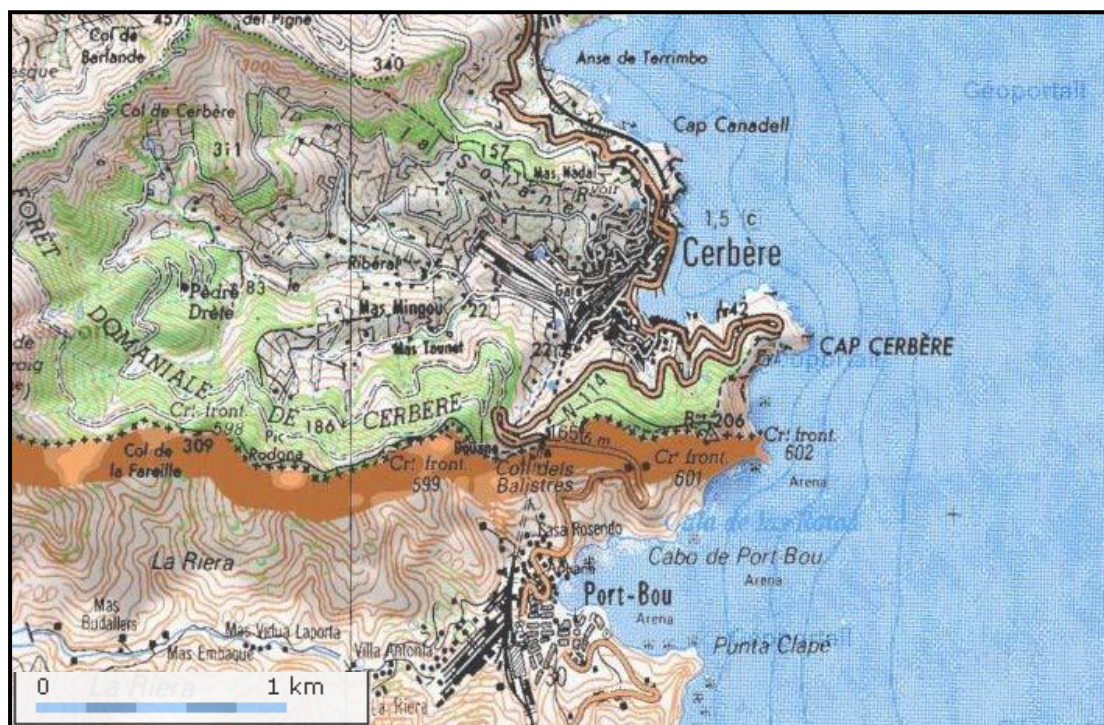


**Map 7 Above :** Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme France : *Grandes Routes* (Paris, 1954)

**Below :** Mauléon, Sainte Engrâce (Basses-Pyrénées) and Navarra (Spain)

Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme, *Carte Biarritz-Luchon 85* (Paris, 1963)

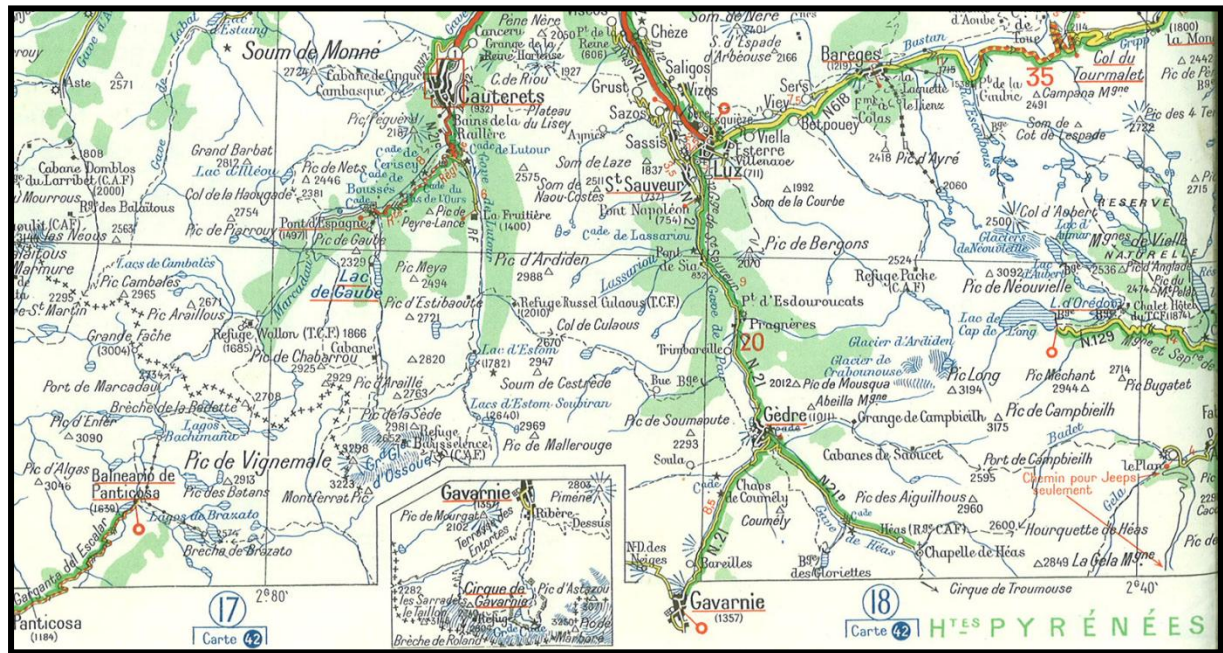
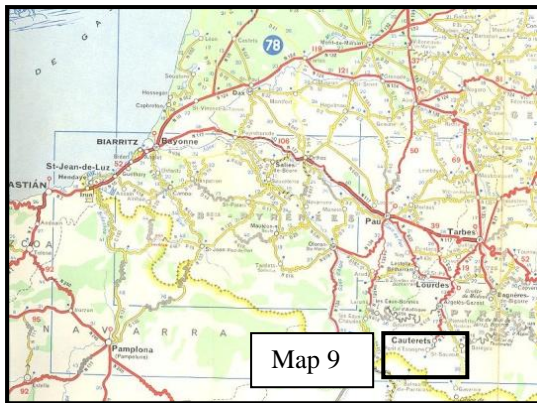




**Map 8 Above:** Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme, France : *Grandes Routes* (Paris, 1954)

**Below:** Cerbère (Pyrénées-Orientales, France) and Port-Bou (Girona province, Catalonia, Spain) and border crossing on the Coll dels Balistres.

<[www.geoportail.fr](http://www.geoportail.fr)> 'Géoportail: Le portail des territoires et des citoyens' (Géoportail 2007-2010®) [accessed on 23 July 2010]



**Map 9 Above:** Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme., France : *Grandes Routes* (Paris, 1954)

**Below : Gavarnie (Hautes-Pyrénées)**

Pneu Michelin Services de Tourisme, *Carte Biarritz-Luchon 85* (Paris,1963)

## Chapter four: Beyond solidarity- Partisan Support Operations and Volunteers for the Spanish Republic

In chapter three the effects of the solidarity of determined, politically-motivated and government-connected functionaries were examined. However, as has been shown, these actions remained largely restricted to the South West and in proximity to the Franco-Spanish border crossings. In this chapter the participation and partisan solidarity of a minority of south-western leftists and anti-fascists will be illuminated, unravelling the national and regional complexities that motivated and allowed French volunteers to be recruited from the South West, and travel to the Spanish Republic. Whilst much research has been done on recruitment of International Brigade volunteers in Paris and the northern industrial *départements*, this chapter will highlight the significance of the South West as a recruitment zone for anti-fascist volunteers and those who facilitated their enlistment and travel to the Republican zone.<sup>1</sup> In this vein the chapter intends to demonstrate the significance of the engagement of a variety of groups of volunteers. This will include French antifascists, Spanish immigrants and second-generation Spanish immigrants, born in France, but intrinsically connected to their ancestors' homeland, linguistically and culturally. With the latter, the chapter intends to analyse the significance of such volunteers' experiences in France, and particularly the South West to shed light on the significance of French political and social background on Spaniards, working and living in a developed republican liberal democracy.

From the outset of the Spanish Civil War, the South West demonstrates a significantly different regional case study in looking at volunteering for the International Brigades and the Spanish Republican army. Whilst Parisian recruitment of volunteers was organised by the

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<sup>1</sup> R. Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, pp.113-122 & L.London, *Le Printemps des camarades*, (Paris,1996)



PCF, across the South West recruitment was largely undertaken by Spanish Republican committees constituted by local émigrés. Indeed Skoutelsky notes how André Moine, the regional head of the PCF, referred prospective volunteers who came to him to contact the regional Spanish committees.<sup>2</sup> However, regional anomalies in the recruitment process also stem from the involvement of Spanish consulates in the region as recruitment centres, as we will see. Importantly, as discussed in chapter one, the South West witnessed throughout the 1930s a forging of close relations between local people and Spanish Republican economic émigrés and political refugees (after 1934) and thus the Spanish Republic retained for such migrants and their French neighbours a close bond.

Previous research conducted by Skoutelsky suggests that there was a comparatively low number of French volunteers from the region, the latter declaring that:

*...La proximité géographique avec l'Espagne n'apparaît donc pas, pour les citoyens français, un facteur incitatif à l'engagement.*<sup>3</sup>

By contrast the contention here is that the cultural, political and geographic connections of the South West with Spain were actually vital factors in the enlistment of Spanish émigré volunteers and their French colleagues, across the region.<sup>4</sup> Whilst overall French volunteers from the South West (Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc Roussillon) constituted approximately 4.8% of French volunteer contingent of the International Brigades, Skoutelsky has done little research into the localised enlisting of French volunteers in the context of international anti-fascist solidarity in the region, described above and in chapter one.<sup>5</sup> In this light the chapter will analyse local case studies from across the South West demonstrating the

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<sup>2</sup>Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.115.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.115.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p.151.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p.151.

forging of antifascist solidarity which, whilst more evident in solidarity actions in favour of the Republican Home Front, also extended to volunteering for the Republic.

From as early as July 1936 recruitment of both French and Spanish volunteers across the South West deviated from the national trend of Communist-organised enlistment, and, whilst often retaining Communist elements, organisation relied largely on Spanish committees. Thus on 29 July 1936 a meeting in Tarbes, appealing for volunteers, was attended by 350 Spaniards. Such attendance indicates that migrant workers were clearly the target audience of the organisers and the reunion was presided by Mssrs. Maumus, Troc and Lasalle, French members of the SR. Speeches by two Spaniards, Frances and Lopez, were also accompanied by an oration by Lasalle.<sup>6</sup> A subsequent call for volunteers received the response of 13 Spaniards, 5 Saarland refugees and 2 local French volunteers. In Skoutelsky's study the low figures for enlistment in the South West are used to downplay regional volunteers' significance.<sup>7</sup> However, as the communities from which volunteers originated were significantly smaller than the northern centres of enlistment, the effect on local communities was perhaps far more resonant, as the figures for enlistment below will demonstrate. Whilst combatant numbers were numerically small, the social context and most crucially the role of the local community were vitally important factors in allowing for enlistment. For example, in Tarbes many of the latter left behind their families, and thus the social support offered to such men's families cannot be overlooked. An officer recording a social support reunion revealed that:

*'...un comité d'action a été constitué pour l'ouverture d'une souscription en faveur des familles des volontaires et une permanence sera établie à la bourse de travail pour recueillir les engagements...'*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées, 29.07.36 4M 238 ADHP

<sup>7</sup> Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.151.

<sup>8</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées, 29.07.36 4M 238 ADHP



What is notable about this early meeting is that local political organisers stood in solidarity with their Spanish colleagues, and the local community, French and Spanish alike, was called to provide for the families of volunteers. Furthermore, the use of the *Bourse du travail*, described for its important role in the community, also indicates the dual significance of both Spanish aid committees and French Republican workers institutions. Whilst in the early months of the Spanish Civil War, regional consuls clearly obstructed recruitment by refusing visas and consular rooms to promote enlistment, the French local political and social institutions such as the SR and the *Bourse du travail* provided potent reminders to Republicans of the recognition and engagement of local people with their anti-fascist struggle. They also made possible the circumventing of the ‘official’ Spanish diplomatic channels, frequently disaffected from the Republic from July 1936.

In looking at the example of Tarbes, the volunteering of Spanish volunteers was not accompanied by widespread enlistment of French volunteers, despite local support in solidarity with volunteers’ families. The same cannot be said of other localities in the South West. In Narbonne, for example, a town on the Mediterranean coastline, and home to a large Spanish migrant worker population, the préfet of the Aude *département* wrote in February 1937 that 12 French citizens had joined 600 Spanish colleagues in travelling to Spain to fight for the Republic. However, in Carcassonne, where 36 Spaniards joined up, and in Limoux where 37 Republicans volunteered, no French citizens accompanied the volunteers.<sup>9</sup> At face value this seems to suggest that areas with larger concentrations of Spanish migrants saw greater levels of French volunteering. Indeed a similar picture is seen in Oloron and Tarbes. In the local sous-préfet’s February 1937 report on departures of volunteers to Spain this state functionary reported that 22 Spanish volunteers had been accompanied by 4 French

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<sup>9</sup> Préfet de l’Aude to Ministre de l’Intérieur, 4.02.37 1MD 40 ADA

volunteers.<sup>10</sup> Similarly in Tarbes 4 French workers joined 26 Spanish counterparts on 6 August to travel to the Republic.<sup>11</sup> As has already been seen in chapter one in Oloron, with François Mazou and his brother Jean, who both joined the International Brigades due to social and political connections with Spanish Republicans, such links, developed throughout the 1930s, certainly played a substantial part in the enlistment of French volunteers. Furthermore, in the Aude from July 1936 to January 1937 only Narbonne saw French enlistment in Spain. As we have already seen in Chapter two, this is not to say that numerous solidarity initiatives in support of volunteers, as in Tarbes, were not taking place. In assessing the number of departures to Spain a certain level of scepticism is certainly necessary. Official figures only detailed the easily-quantifiable departures of volunteers who departed openly via legal border crossings and railways. However, following the 18 February 1937 Non-Intervention laws it is difficult to assess levels of enlistment amongst the various political groupings (Communist, Socialist, and Anarchist), since volunteering for either of the opposing Spanish factions was officially proscribed.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps crucially, following the 18 February laws, which forced potential volunteers to travel illegally to Spain, it is necessary to assess the importance of clandestine *passeurs* or mountain guides and their coastal equivalents, whose role in facilitating the crossing of the Pyrenean passes and Mediterranean coastline represented a vital stage in the trajectory of many volunteers who travelled to Spain. This form of assistance to the Republic has seldom received attention in recent historiography, highlighted by Skoutelsky as being carried out with '*extrême difficulté ...une*

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<sup>10</sup> Sous-préfet d'Oloron to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 3.02.37. 1M 260 ADPA The figures correspond to the period from the 18 July 1936 to the 31 January 1937

<sup>11</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées, 06.08.36, 4M 238 ADHP

<sup>12</sup> Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.133. Skoutelsky details how despite the risk of 1-6 months imprisonment and/or fines ranging from 100 to 10,000 Fr, detentions such as that of the passengers of the *Sans Pareil* (see Footnote 85, p.86. ) were the exception rather than the rule, Non-Intervention relâchée allowed for the double-game, in which the unspoken rule was '*pas vu, pas pris*'. Additionally for men and women prepared to travel hundreds of miles to fight fascism, the minimal risk of detention and a short spell in prison, was as Skoutelsky argues, a small sacrifice compared to that they intended to make in Spain.

*véritable épreuve physique, périlleuse, souvent pratiquée la nuit...*<sup>13</sup> Given this assessment of the hazardous nature of Pyrenean crossings, the existence of networks of guides for international volunteers would provide a clear indicator of political partisanship for the Spanish Republic in the local Pyrenean communities. However, in assessing the importance of such guides, the complex motivations behind such support actions require more detailed analysis. It is important not to relegate support actions such as guiding over the Pyrenees to secondary importance, based on financial recompense combined with political ideology. One might expect the political commitment of such persons to be called into question. However, one must remember that the loss of employment through such activities and the risks (that will be analysed) meant that, as with Blanc and his collaborators, financial gain must be seen as a parallel factor in determining guides' and smugglers' contribution to supporting the Republic.<sup>14</sup> Historically smugglers operated in the Pyrenean region essentially for financial profit, but it must be remembered, as Rapin underlines, that in the Pyrénées-Orientales pro-Republicans and volunteers were '*Aidés par des militants communistes de Céret, qui forment des équipes de passeurs...*'<sup>15</sup> Thus political ideology cannot be downplayed as a factor in this *département*. As political conviction accompanied by payment from the PCF was not incompatible, indeed, the services provided by an experienced *passeur* were valued parts of the solidarity chain and were remunerated, as with other partisan solidarity activities.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Skoutelsky has suggested that there was widespread involvement of local communities in the housing and guiding over the Pyrenees of International volunteers:

*...le dispositif de recrutement et d'acheminement repose sur une foule de personnes, d'horizons divers, déployant les trésors d'ingéniosité pour son bon fonctionnement, surtout après la mise en place du blocus de la République en février 1937. De la famille qui héberge un volontaire en attendant son passage de la frontière, du militant local qui l'organise, au douanier qui détourne les yeux au bon moment, cette mise en place pour l'ensemble des*

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.134.

<sup>14</sup> S. Barrère., *Pyrénées, l'échappée vers la liberté : Les Évadés de France* (Pau,2005) pp.59-60.

<sup>15</sup> A-J. Rapin., *Tant-pis si la lutte est cruelle*, p.125.

<sup>16</sup> Barrère., *Pyrénées*, p.60. This author gives detail about the funding of *passeurs* by the Allies from 1940.

*activités de solidarité avec l'Espagne, et dont tous les maillons n'appartiennent pas au Parti Communiste- constitue, elle aussi un précédent historique...*<sup>17</sup>

In examining Skoutelsky's affirmations, the chapter will now explore how the mountain guide networks functioned and how local leftist militants supported the volunteers for the Republic.

From the spring of 1937 clandestine networks of *passeurs* and *convoyeurs* in the Pyrenean zones were certainly established, corresponding with borders opening onto the Republican zone.<sup>18</sup> On 26 August 1937 a border police officer wrote to his superior in Paris following an investigation into clandestine arms and volunteer smuggling in the Pyrenean zone. The report reveals the diversity and multi-facted nature of the Republic's supporters:

*...les renseignements qui ont été recueillis par L'inspecteur principal PORTERIE...concernant une organisation anarchiste dans le Sud-Ouest pour la contrebande des armes et des volontaires/ Des lieux de rassemblement et de passage des armes et des volontaires auraient été créés dans diverses localités des départements de la Haute-Garonne, de l'Ariège et des Pyrénées-Orientales. Des militants Anarchistes seraient chargés de recevoir les armes et les munitions et d'en assurer le transport en Espagne par les chemins de montagne...*<sup>19</sup>

The report went on to document no fewer than eight points of assembly for groups crossing the Pyrenean frontier. These included meeting places at St. Beat, Burgalays, Mayrègne and Luchon in the Haute-Garonne and Castillon in the Ariège. As the closest *département* to Perpignan and Barcelona it comes as little surprise that assembly points in the Pyrénées-Orientales were more numerous reported with rendezvous points at Prats-de-Mollo, Arles-sur-Tech and Montalban-sur-Tapias.<sup>20</sup> The points of entry into Spain, clearly far-removed from border patrols, indicate the perilous nature of such guides and volunteers crossings. In

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<sup>17</sup> Skoutelsky., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle*, pp.59-60.

<sup>18</sup> By February 1937 when the Non-Intervention laws came into 'force' (we know that numerous customs officers turned a blind eye as seen in chapter three) the French *départements* with borders straddling the Republican zone were the Hautes-Pyrénées, the Haute-Garonne, the Ariège and the Pyrénées-Orientales. By March 1938 only the latter would remain open, with its vital rail connections discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> Commissaire de la Surveillance du Territoire to Contrôleur Générale, 26.08.37. 1M772 ADPO

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.,

this respect the commissaire revealed that crossings in the Haute Garonne included the Pic de la Hage and the Pic de Burat. These peaks reach 2165m and 2154m respectively. In the Ariège the officer wrote that, following rendezvous at Castillon, guides would pass through the Port de Girette, a mountain pass in the Lleida (Lérida) province, culminating at a vertiginous 2442m. Considering that such crossings were, as Skoutelsky highlights, conducted under cover of nightfall, and with the additional danger of nocturnal discovery en route to the border by Gendarmes and *Gardes Mobiles*, it can be appreciated that such endeavours were extremely hazardous.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, whilst Skoutelsky correctly points out that politically sympathetic *douaniers* could be expected to *détourné les yeux au bon moment*, the conduct of their military counterparts did not look so favourably upon violators of the Non-Intervention laws. The commissaire finished one report for example with an officious forwarding of his surveillance report to: ...*MM. Les Colonels commandant les 16<sup>e</sup> et 17<sup>e</sup> Légion de la Gendarmerie, pour surveillance de la frontière aux points indiqués...*<sup>22</sup> Whilst it is certain that militarised formations such as the Gendarmerie were wary of going off-piste, especially at night time, we do know that the entry points to the valleys leading to the most inaccessible *pics* were subject to surveillance from the *Gardes Mobiles*.<sup>23</sup> Therefore it is important to give the interim conclusion that financial recompense could not have been the motivating factor. *Passeurs* were working with leftist groups such as the Anarchists, risking dangerous mountain tracks at night time, with accompanying volunteers, unfamiliar with the country and its language, and of course over mountainous terrain. Such endeavours were certainly motivated by financial payment for services, but also by complex traditional

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Altitudes and peak names from <[www.geoportail.fr](http://www.geoportail.fr)> [accessed on 5 June 2010]

<sup>22</sup> Commissaire de la Surveillance du Territoire to Contrôleur Générale, 26.08.37. 1M772 ADPO

<sup>23</sup> Barrère., *Pyrénées, l'échappée vers la liberté*, pp .55-64. For an account of the *passeurs* during from 1940-44. See pp.68-72. for details the competencies of each of the state security forces.

For information on the *Gardes Mobiles* and surveillance from 1936-39 see *Map of Garde Mobile positions in the Hautes-Pyrénées*, ADHP 4M 238. This map details how three militarised groups surveyed the frontier from August 1936. These included *G.R.M* (Groupes de Réserve Mobile) *Brigades ordinaires de la frontière* and *Brigades spécialisés de la frontière*.

sympathies towards neighbours in the Spanish Republic and local leftist politics, both Communist and Socialist. Aside from the challenging topography of the Pyrenees, the transport of contraband arms and volunteers presented, on a purely legalistic level, a significant risk for such persons to take on a regular basis, especially after February 1937.<sup>24</sup> Clearly all smuggling presented legal complications in the event of arrest, however, it must be remembered that Non-Intervention laws were more stringent than peacetime laws, with an increased presence of state authorities, such as the militarised Garde Mobile, whereas previously smugglers had faced a sparse - and often sympathetic - customs attendance which had presented less of a risk. As mentioned above, private partisan initiatives did not benefit from the assistance of local authorities and thus were certainly more hazardous than government connected pro-Republican actions. To provide just one example of many from the Ariège *département* in September 1936:

*...La Gendarmerie d'Ax-les-Thermes a arrêté un autocamion portant une certaine quantité d'armes destinées au Front Populaire. Les occupants du véhicule, au numéro de quatre ont été gardés à vue et le chargement réservé ...*<sup>25</sup>

Evidently motorised transportation of arms to Spain was clearly more hazardous to pro-Republicans than mountainous crossings. However, in the aforementioned case, the attitude of the local authorities demonstrates the real judicial implications for those who were arrested for illegal pro-Republican activities. Similarly, the report above, by the commissaire de la Surveillance du Territoire, gives a clear example of the stringency of the militarised forces' attitudes towards proscribed activities, including volunteer smuggling, from 1937. This demonstrates that, whilst it will be underlined below how volunteers were initially facilitated in their travels to the Republic, by the complacency of the Front Populaire and local

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<sup>24</sup> A typical sentence for arms trafficking can be seen in the case of Lucien Casier an Anarchist in Narbonne (Aude). The brother of the aforementioned is highlighted in a police report as having been sentenced to 3 months in prison for this infraction of Non-Intervention laws. See IMD 483 ADA police report 2.06.37.

<sup>25</sup> *Le Temps*, 2/09/36

authorities it is evident that from 1936-1939 there were a series of changes that took place with regards to enforcement of the official policy of Non-Intervention. However, we must also temper this knowledge with the fact that professional smugglers were unlikely to have been hindered in their activities as they could rely on the networks of local complicities from *douaniers* and trade union members. Furthermore it must be remembered that such institutions of the state as the customs department did not operate in isolation from their Gendarmerie and police counterparts, and customs officials and their contacts in smuggling would have been forearmed with gleaned information on deployments of *gardes* and Gendarmes that would undoubtedly have enabled route-planning modifications for those concerned.

The role of the guides who assisted volunteers in crossing into Spain via the Pyrenean chain has been touched upon by Skoutelsky and examined in more detail in Sebastian Barrère's thesis on the guides from 1940-44. Lesser known is the role of maritime smuggling of volunteers, briefly seen in chapter three, yet this represents an important aspect of solidarity with the Republic. One particular case that arises in looking at this form of solidarity occurs in the case of Lucien Casier, an Anarchist based in Narbonne. Whilst previous studies by Rapin have researched this militant in relation to his notoriety for arms smuggling to the Republic from July 1936, this chapter is concerned with the lesser known initiatives that Casier was involved in. Such partisan activities extended beyond the realms of arms trafficking, an activity that was, for such a closely observed political character, of limited efficiency to the Republican war effort.<sup>26</sup>

From June 1937, the actions of Casier clearly changed direction. The 18 February laws evidently required volunteers and smugglers to be more discreet in their solidarity actions,

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<sup>26</sup> See Rapin., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle*, p.103 & L'Inspecteur Principal de Police Mobile DOUMERC to Commissaire Divisionnaire Chef de la 14 ième Brigade de la Police Mobile, 26.11.36, 1MD 483 ADA

now proscribed, and therefore, as in the case of the *Sans Pareil*, actively threatened by the zealous enforcement of such laws by elements of the local authorities.<sup>27</sup> On 23 June 1937, for example, the Minister of the Interior wrote to the préfet of the Aude in response to an allegation by the previously mentioned non intervention chief observer for the South West, Colonel Lunn.<sup>28</sup> The latter's investigation in the Aude revealed:

*...l'existence à LA NOUVELLE (sic)...d'un centre de volontaires qui seraient transportés en yachts ou en vedettes en Espagne gouvernementale à PORT BOU, LLANSA ou PALAMOS. Un nommé HERNAEZ, résident chez M. CASIER Lucien...à Narbonne transporterait les volontaires de cette dernière ville à La Nouvelle en Renault 1242 RK.9...*<sup>29</sup>

The Minister's report to the préfet gives us a clear warning as to the legal implications of Hernaez and Casier's actions, the former writing that Lunn had passed his findings on to the Foreign ministry adding that an 'urgent' investigation would be required by the local police, in order to help the ministry *...de répondre aux questions qui lui seraient posées par le Comité de Londres...*<sup>30</sup> Whilst the London-based Non-Intervention Committee was renowned for its inability to curtail the support of the Nazi and Fascist powers for the Nationalists, the presence of the Anarchists' operations in French police reports, and their subsequent investigation, clearly would have presented a far greater risk to the Narbonne militants.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, in this vein in April 1937 the Interior Minister had written to the préfet of the Aude,

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<sup>27</sup> See Préfet de l'Aude to Sous-préfet de Narbonne, 27.03.37, IMD 483 ADA

<sup>28</sup> See Footnote 85, p.86.

<sup>29</sup> Ministre de l'Intérieur to Préfet de l'Aude, 23.06.37, IMD 483 ADA

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> See J. Delperrié de Bayac, *Histoire du Front Populaire*, (Paris, 1972) pp.276-308. It must be remembered that the French foreign ministry was heavily influenced by the Non-Intervention advocating Foreign Office, which had initially latched onto a French suggestion from members of Blum's cabinet hostile to intervention in Spanish affairs. Blum was also under considerable pressure on a national level from the far-right, to enforce Non-Intervention. However, French rightists and Spanish Nationalists also suffered from Non-Intervention enforcement in France. Reports from the Basses-Pyrénées reveal that denunciations of pro-Nationalist smuggling, through Sainte-Engrâce to Navarra, made to police by leftists in Mauléon were thoroughly investigated. One officer's official correspondance, following an anonymous tip-off, read: '*...Bien que je n'ai pas l'habitude de tenir compte de ces sortes de lettres j'estime qu'en raison des événements actuels il y a tout de même lieu de faire procéder a un contrôle...*' Subsequent handwritten notes by the letters' recipient read: '*...Transmis au Capitaine de la section de Mauléon pour enquête diligente par lui-même...*' See Commissaire Spécial to Commandant de la Gendarmerie des Basses-Pyrénées, 1.09.1936 1M260. ADPA



highlighting the developing opposition of the government towards pro-Republican smuggling activities:

*Je suis informé que des organisations, dont le but serait de...faciliter le transport des volontaires au-delà des Pyrénées, seraient susceptibles d'exercer leur activité sur certains points peu accessibles ou isolés du littoral méditerranéen...je vous prie de redoubler la vigilance de manière à rendre impossible tout trafic de ce genre...*<sup>32</sup>

Police reports, shortly preceding the ministerial intervention of 23 June 1937 into Casier and Hernaez's activities at Port-la-Nouvelle, whilst highlighting the small scale initiative of these Anarchists, surprisingly confirm a sophisticated level of logistical organisation that would not usually be associated with such characters. The authorities wrote in June 1937 that:

*...Plusieurs expéditions sont parties au moyen de deux yachts...il y en a cinq vedettes (une se trouve dans le canal les autres sont encore sur wagon) qui possèdent deux moteurs de grande puissance|...Elles possèdent en outre un dispositif spécial qui ne se trouve pas sur les vedettes. En examinant attentivement les moteurs on peut se rendre compte de leur adaptation. Ces dispositifs servent au lancement des torpilles en mettant en marche le mécanisme de ces derniers. D'autres arrivées de ces vedettes sont annoncés...*<sup>33</sup>

Given that Casier's and his militant friend's previous form included low-level arms smuggling, the discovery that Hernaez was engaged in operations using motorised torpedo boats reveals a previously unknown level of technological support for pro-Republican volunteer and equipment smuggling. Nor was such a discovery by the police a one-off occurrence in Port-la-Nouvelle. For example, a report written on 11 June 1937 revealed:

*...suite à notre note concernant le transfert des vedettes de PORT-VENDRES à LA NOUVELLE (sic) au nombre de cinq nous vous informons que ses mêmes vedettes ont été acheminées sur l'Espagne par leurs propres moyens. D'autre part trois autres vedettes sont arrivées au port de la Nouvelle...bien entendu le ravitaillement en essence se fait dans le même port de La Nouvelle.*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ministre de l'Intérieur to Préfet de l'Aude, 28.04.10, 1MD483 ADA

<sup>33</sup> Police report, 2.06.37 1MD483 ADA

<sup>34</sup> Police report, 11.06.37 1MD483 ADA

The acquisition by the Anarchists of eight torpedo equipped launches in June 1937 brings into question the capacities of this organisation for supporting the Republic. Of all the pro-Republican formations the Anarchists were least known for their logistical capabilities. The Communists, owing to their connections with the USSR, were more renowned for running maritime smuggling routes.<sup>35</sup> The 2 June report referring to some of the launches being transported on *wagons* confirms that such equipment arrived by train, demonstrating that they had arrived at Port-la-Nouvelle from Spain or from French suppliers. In either case it is clear that the Anarchists were entrusted with operations on a level not normally associated with them, and from marginal arms smuggling operations in 1936, diversified into maritime smuggling for the Republicans, and provided an important rear-guard support base. Whilst from the investigation detailed above, the provenance of military equipment for the French Anarchists is unconfirmed, it is known that the French government during Non-Intervention *rélâchée* did supply Spanish Anarchists, so logistical support for this group certainly existed from the French *sympathisants* of the Republic.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, this case fits squarely into the schema of Anarchist activities in the Spanish Civil War outlined by David Berry, who emphasises that material solidarity with the Republic was the principal aim of the French Anarchist organisations.<sup>37</sup>

Reports from November 1936 reveal the hostility of the Garde Mobile investigator, but more importantly Casier's motivations for supporting the Republic:

*...Casier n'a pas de profession déterminée, travaillant le moins possible...il est parfois employé comme commissionnaire à la coopérative des Fonctionnaires de la Bourse du Travail de Narbonne...il appartient aux Jeunes Gardes Pacifistes de la ligue Internationale des combattants de la paix...*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rapin., *Tant pis si la lutte est cruelle*, pp.110-114.

<sup>36</sup> E.Weber., *The Hollow years*, (New York, 1994) p.168. Weber argues that the French government sent materiel to the Catalanian Anarchists 'less to fight than to suit their fancy'.

<sup>37</sup> Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.125.

<sup>38</sup> See L'Inspecteur Principal de Police Mobile DOUMERC to Commissaire Divisionnaire de la Police Mobile, 26.11.36, 1MD 483 ADA .To contextualise the officer's remarks regarding Casier it is important to note that the

From this case and others that will be examined below, it is clear that solidarity with volunteers arising in the South West was motivated by a complex series of overlapping factors, tinged with financial recompense certainly, but guided also by pro-Republican beliefs and a desire to protect the region from the devastation seen in the First World War. Whilst leftist propaganda used the traumatic collective memory of the previous conflict to mobilise public opinion against the Nationalists, it must also be remembered that south-western supporters of the Republic, particularly those in the border zone, were horrified by the Nationalist threat present on France's Pyrenean border. From 1937 aerial incursions into French airspace, followed by 'accidental' strafing and bombing of French border villages, provoked fury amongst the French Left and Right on numerous occasions, and raised the spectre of aerial bombardment in France.<sup>39</sup>

The risks undertaken by leftist militants who transported and guided volunteers to Spain were substantial. Indeed, as has already been seen in the case of the *Sans Pareil* such support operations, whilst evidently representing less physical risk than front-line combat to their organisers, nevertheless demonstrated a degree of *sang froid* in evading the coastal patrols of the customs, the inquisitive snooping of the police in the Mediterranean ports and other threats, for example rightist sabotage and Nationalist naval interception.<sup>40</sup> The existence of

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GMR was usually involved in riot control against the Left, where members of far-left parties including Anarchists and Communists would have been particularly repressed.

<sup>39</sup> On the 23 January 1938 fourteen Nationalist aircraft entered French airspace, dropping eleven bombs on the French border village of Osseja, this incident forced the French government to increase anti-aircraft protection on the border. See *La Vanguardia*, 25.01.38.p.3. On the 6 June 1938 nine Nationalist aircraft bombed, without human casualties, up to 50km inside French territory, in the vicinity of Orgeix, Orlu and Ax-les-Thermes. See *ABC Madrid*, 7/06/38 p.3.

<sup>40</sup> For the case of the *Sans Pareil*. see Footnote 85, p.86. The physical risk represented by ferrying volunteers and vessels to Catalonia is also relevant in the context of 1937-39 as Nationalist submarines and aviation posed a frequent risk to Republican and neutral shipping from 1936-39. In March 1937 the British merchantman the *Lansbury castle* struck a Nationalist mine off Cabo Creus and sank off Port-Vendres, see *La Vanguardia*, 5/03/37. The presence of Nationalist warships, notably the *Canarias*, patrolling with impunity off the Mediterranean coast, also posed a risk to Republican shipping, with the French Merchantman the *Ri-Ri* bound for Alicante from Marseille being forced by Nationalist warships to deviate to the Nationalist-held Balearic islands. See *Agence Espagne*, 28/07/37. service de 23h30 .ANC1-1-T-7476. The risk of French far-right sabotage of pro-Republican operations was certainly real, even in a largely leftist *département* such as the Aude. In Narbonne, for example, the local Commissaire wrote in July 1937 that a Ford V8 lorry, parked in a locked

Anarchist involvement in such operations confirms a significant level of commitment to the Republican cause, despite the very real judicial threat represented by the Non-Intervention laws of February 1937.

Having examined the support mechanisms that allowed volunteers to be conveyed to the Republic, it is important in the scope of this chapter to examine the motivations and experiences of regional volunteers who travelled to Spain from 1936-39. In analysing the anti-fascist trajectory of such groups the chapter will focus on the role of second-generation Spanish immigrants, émigrés to the South West in the 1930s and local French citizens who also enlisted. This approach will demonstrate that the geographical, social and political links between the two republics cemented this form of solidarity in the interwar period, with identification with democratic and republican democracies facilitating enlistment and commitment to the Spanish Republican cause. The social factors that motivated recruitment into the international brigades will also be examined in order to assess the variety of overlapping factors that contributed to this form of solidarity.

From the outset of the Spanish Civil War the French government emitted various positions regarding the conflict with communiqués from different ministers and ministries ranging from openly tolerant to hostile, as below. The interior minister Roger Salengro wrote to departmental préfets in August 1936:

*...Le gouvernement soucieux de maintenir strictement sa position de neutralité...se refuse...à admettre que sur son propre territoire, on puisse favoriser la formation et au besoin l'armement de combattants à destination de l'Espagne.*<sup>41</sup>

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garage yard as part of an eight vehicle convoy destined for the Republican government in Spain, was reported by its owner as '...volé dans la nuit du 4 au 5 Juillet et retrouvé sur la quai de Lorraine, l'avant du véhicule immergé dans le canal...' The functionary writing to his superior that the act had been carried out by '...des inconnus appartenant à des groupements fascistes locaux...'. See Commissaire Central de Narbonne to Sous-préfet de Narbonne 6.07.37 IMD 483 ADA

<sup>41</sup> Ministre de l'Intérieur, Roger Salengro to Préfets, 21.08.36 1M260 ADPA

The reality of departures and recruitment for the Spanish Republicans on a regional level was, however, regarded by many in prefectural and police administration as a *fait accompli*. In order to understand the relative ease of such departures, before their illegality in February 1937, the reports written by prefects across the region reveal a *laissez-faire* attitude that undoubtedly facilitated travel to Spain. For example, the *préfet* of the Basses-Pyrénées sent a telegram to the Interior ministry in July 1936:

*Suis avisé que volontaires français munis passeports réguliers se proposent aller Espagne combattre selon leurs opinions soit auprès des rebelles soit auprès gouvernementaux...Sauf avis contraire...il ne sera pas fait obstacle leur départ.*<sup>42</sup>

Such declarations were also accompanied by an acknowledgment that local volunteers could scarcely be impeded from enlisting, since instructions to the police did not allow for thorough inspections of volunteers departing for Spain. The *commissaire spécial* wrote to the *Préfet* of the Basses-Pyrénées regarding the latter's enquiry into departures for Spain that:

*...Il y a...lieu de noter que les volontaires sont partis en se mêlant aux voyageurs ordinaires, souvent sans aviser personne, en tout cas, sans être l'objet d'un contrôle administratif quelconque, auquel ils n'étaient pas astreints...*<sup>43</sup>

Lax attitudes towards allowing departures of volunteers from the South West to the Republic (and the Nationalist zone) clearly stemmed from a lack of political will, as checks could have been attempted with some difficulty had the authorities so wished. Perhaps aside from political will, a realisation that the impracticality of preventing individual departures precluded any formal judicial proceedings into volunteers travelling to Spain. Indeed, even shortly prior to the 18 February 1937 laws, the prefectural authorities in the Basses-Pyrénées recognised that the resources at the disposal of the state in the region were insufficient to regulate departures from the *département's* coastal zone:

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<sup>42</sup> *Préfet* des Basses-Pyrénées to *Intérieur*, 29.07.36 1M260 ADPA

<sup>43</sup> *Commissaire Spécial* to *Préfet* des Basses-Pyrénées, 3.02.37, 1M260 ADPA

*...Je crois devoir vous signaler combien il est difficile, dans les circonstances actuelles d'exercer un contrôle efficace de l'embarquement et débarquement des bateaux espagnols qui viennent mouiller dans le port de Bayonne. Ce port ne comporte...aucun des organisations existent dans les rades fréquentées par les navires...des voyageurs...pour remédier...l'absence d'un service spécialisé, je fais assurer une surveillance...du port et ses abords par la Garde Mobile.| Enfin, quelles que soient les mesures qui puissent être prises, il demeura toujours très difficile d'empêcher les embarquements... clandestins, étant donné la courte distance que sépare la France de l'Espagne...<sup>44</sup>*

From the concerns of the préfet it is obvious that the political climate of the early Front Populaire did not favour the restrictive measures that other nations such as Britain wholeheartedly supported from July 1936. Furthermore, as seen in the above declarations, local authorities were aware that their control over departures for Spain remained more theoretical than practical. Additional lack of political will to restrict volunteering ventures, in the early stages of Blum's Front Populaire administration, can be seen by the evidently *laxiste* attitude of Salengro's successor, Marx Dormoy at the interior ministry. Indeed, the latter wrote in this vein in November 1936 that :

*...il ne saurait question d'empêcher les départs individuels de voyageurs munis de passeports réguliers qui circulent dans notre pays et en sortent sans armes...<sup>45</sup>*

In this light it is clear that in examining volunteering in the South West, the political climate must be considered as a key factor from July 1936-February 1937 in allowing such departures. Not only were any judicial attempts to reduce volunteering viewed as unrealistic by local authorities, attempts to stem the departures of volunteers were additionally perceived in 1936 by the government as being outside the political or public interest.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées to Ministre de l'Intérieur, 13.02.37, 1M260 ADPA

<sup>45</sup> Ministre de l'Intérieur to Préfets, 29.11.36, 1MD478 ADA

Marx Dormoy was also in favour of Non-Intervention relâchée which may have influenced him in not re-enforcing policing prior to British pressure in February 1937. See J.Jackson., *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy 1934-38*, (Cambridge, 1988) p.209.

<sup>46</sup> See Footnote 42, p.107.

In addressing the question of recruitment of volunteers in the South West it is clear that the region had notable differences from those investigated by Skoutelsky and recalled by Lise London.<sup>47</sup> Whilst the PCF was clearly decisive in establishing solidarity, as seen in chapter two, the central forces for recruiting in the region were the Spanish aid committees, Spanish Republicans in the local communities and from late 1936 select Spanish consulates. In this vein, formal structures of recruitment were largely eschewed by pro-Republican recruiters. In the Basses-Pyrénées the sous-préfet of Oloron wrote in August 1936 to his superior that : *...aucune action m'a été signalée en vue de recrutement de volontaires français et étrangers pour l'Espagne.*<sup>48</sup> In a similar manner the sous-préfet of Bayonne also wrote that : *...il n'a pas été créé une organisation quelconque de recrutement des volontaires pour l'Espagne...*<sup>49</sup> Clearly recruitment in the Basses-Pyrénées was carried out on a small scale ,as the local police wrote in August that:

*...les organisations d'extrême-gauche se sont montrées assez prudentes jusqu'à présent. D'après ce que j'ai pu apprendre quelques volontaires seulement (espagnols et français peut-être trois ou quatre) seraient partis individuellement pour l'Espagne.*<sup>50</sup>

Whilst caution regarding police sources would suggest that officials tended to downplay the significance of leftist initiatives in order to present an impression of public order to their superiors, we know from André Moine that the PCFs, role in the South West, particularly on the Basque coast, was limited to an advisory role. In addition, as we saw in chapter two, material solidarity constituted a major aim of the PCF in the region as with the Anarchists in the South West, and explains why the police report above should mention the far-left's 'prudent' approach to recruitment of volunteers. However, the fact that localised recruitment initiatives and departures of volunteers did occur on a small-scale across the South West,

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<sup>47</sup> Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, pp.113-122 & London, *Le Printemps des camarades*.

<sup>48</sup> Sous-préfet d'Oloron to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 18.08.36, 1M260 ADPA

<sup>49</sup> Sous-préfet de Bayonne to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 24.08.36, 1M260 ADPA

<sup>50</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Basses- Pyrénées, 25.08.36, 1M260 ADPA

from even small towns, is demonstrated by the recruitment sources that will be examined below.<sup>51</sup>

Police sources, whilst emphasising to prefectoral authorities the small-scale nature of volunteering in their local area, do recognise that such ventures took place and that local Republican sympathisers were frequently responsible for their enlistment. In December 1936 the commissaire spécial reported to the sous-préfet de Bayonne that, whilst there were no *agences spéciales pour le recrutement des volontaires*, enlistment in the Republican armies nevertheless occurred across the *département* as:

*....quelques jeunes gens de la région- Bayonne-Biarritz-Boucau se sont enrôlés dans les rangs gouvernementaux...*<sup>52</sup>

In characteristic fashion the officer assured his superior that the young volunteers all belonged to Communist organisations (inferring that no ‘contagion’ of volunteering had spread to the wider leftist community) and highlighted that :

*...Tous ces faits sont des actes isolés, dont les auteurs n’obéissant à aucun contrain, sont seuls guidés par leurs inspirations politiques...*<sup>53</sup>

At pains to emphasise the individual nature of enlistment for the Republicans as well as the Nationalists, the officer’s remarks need a further level of examination to reveal who such volunteers were and what motivated them to join the Republicans.

Amongst the *quelques jeunes gens* mentioned by commissaire Sangla in his report would have been Alexandre Dufour, a painter, and François Duveilla an unskilled worker from Biarritz. In analysing these workers’ decisions to depart for Spain the commissaire wrote that the PCF had advised unemployed workers to enlist as:

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<sup>51</sup> Skoutelsky., *L’Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.115.

<sup>266</sup> Commissaire Spécial, Sangla, to Sous-préfet de Bayonne, 10.12.36, 1M260 ADPA

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



*...ils avaient intérêt, pour soutenir la cause, à engager dans les rangs de la colonne internationale luttant en Espagne...*<sup>54</sup>

Whilst one might suspect such volunteers as being motivated by financial gain this seems unlikely. Skoutelsky has highlighted how unemployment was often a motivating factor, not for the financial recompense but due to the humiliation of unemployment. This traumatic experience, provoked by the economic crisis of the 1930s, gave workers the opportunity to defend *leurs convictions les armes à la main*.<sup>55</sup> Certainly in the case of Dufour, political convictions can be seen as the decisive factor in his departure to Spain, as he was a member of the Biarritz JC.<sup>56</sup>

Faith in the ability of the party to support the families of volunteers such as Dufour also seems to have played an additional factor in permitting volunteers to travel to Spain. As seen in Tarbes, the establishment of support organisations for volunteers' families was a prominent feature of enlistment across the region.<sup>57</sup> In the case of Dufour, the police noted that the aforementioned volunteer wrote to his wife, explaining the reasons for his enlistment: *...en l'informant...que s'il revenait il aurait une pension et que s'il était tué, elle et son fils seraient secourus...*<sup>58</sup>

The comradeship of enlistment evidently played a supporting role in such difficult decisions to leave behind friends and family to fight for the Republic. The commissaire wrote for example that Dufour had left with: *...cinq autres camarades de la région...* Similar cases of group enlistment can be seen across the region, to give just one example, this occurrence is also apparent in the case of volunteers from Oloron, which will be seen below.

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<sup>54</sup> Commissaire Divisionnaire de Hendaye to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 10.12.36, 1M 260 ADPA

<sup>55</sup> Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, pp.146-17. Richard Baxell has also debunked the theory that unemployment and a lust for adventure motivated the majority of volunteers in enlisting. See R. Baxell., *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War : The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-39* (London, 2004) p.27.

<sup>56</sup> Préfet du Var to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 03/37 ,1M260 ADPA

<sup>57</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées, 29.07.36 4M 238 ADHP

<sup>58</sup> Commissaire Divisionnaire de Hendaye to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 10.12.36, 1M260 ADPA

Such engagements did not always last long, despite the initial commitment of the volunteers. The préfet of the Var, in Toulon, wrote to his counterpart in Pau in March 1937, for example, that Dufour had abandoned the front before being repatriated from Spain by the French Navy. The latter had arrived in Spain on the 28 November 1936 after passing through the Perpignan recruitment centre. Integrated into the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion (the Henri Barbusse Battalion) he had been sent to the Córdoba front on 22 December 1936 and was wounded in the University City on the Madrid Front:

*...il a pu en échappant à la surveillance des Espagnols, se présenter au Consul de Valence, qui réussit à lui rapatrier. Dufour étant totalement dépourvu des ressources a été pourvu d'une réquisition de transport gratuit...le 22 Mars pour rejoindre son domicile.*<sup>59</sup>

The case of Dufour, whilst illustrating the human weakness of volunteers subjected to levels of violence that they were previously unaccustomed to, also demonstrates how many such volunteers from the region travelled to Spain, without intentions of recompense but with political convictions developed throughout the 1930s. At this point it is worth discussing that, whilst Robert Stradling has in the case of Welsh volunteers portrayed such brigaders as dupes and 'victims' of the Communist party, who once in Spain saw the error of their decision to enlist for the Republic, we can refute any similar suggestion in the case of the volunteers from the south west who are examined in this chapter.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, as we will see, volunteers did not enlist in the hope of (misguided) adventure orchestrated by the PCF, but were conclusively motivated by the defense of a Republican and anti-fascist cause that volunteers saw as equally relevant to defending France from Fascism, as well as supporting a neighbouring people, with similar political and social ideals.

Having examined a case from the Basque coast, a region of significant Spanish emigration, it is important to stress the role of local Spanish émigrés in conjunction with their French

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<sup>59</sup> Préfet du Var to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées 03/37, 1M260 ADPA

<sup>60</sup> R.Stradling., *Wales and the Spanish Civil War: The Dragons Dearest Cause?* (Cardiff, 2004) pp.145-157.

political counterparts in enlisting their French neighbours alongside local Spaniards, across this area and the South West as a whole. Indeed the key recruiters of both nationalities seem to have been Spanish Republicans and leftists. One report mentioned, for example, that:

*...les services de la police spéciale d'Hendaye ont remarqué l'activité d'un Espagnol de Boucau nommé ALVAREZ et des militants communistes de Ciboure RENAUD et BRAMARIE qui ne manquent aucune occasion pour engager des jeunes gens...*<sup>61</sup>

In the same way, Spanish émigrés living in local communities seem to have been integrated into the Republican war effort accompanied by local colleagues. Geographical factors have also been downplayed by Skoutelsky as a motivating factor for enlistment. However, the proximity to Spain allowed not solely for historic interchange of merchandise and solidarity but also the facilitating of access to the Republican zone.<sup>62</sup> The communications infrastructure as well as knowledge of the mountains provided volunteers with multiple options for departure and return from the Republican zone. In the case of the Mazou brothers of Oloron, social connections to Spanish Republican refugees and immigrants and political commitment to communism and pacifism, as well as a geographic perspective of their region, tied to Spanish affairs and culture as much as French, clearly illustrate the integration of all of the above factors.<sup>63</sup>

In examining motivations behind enlistment in the International Brigades it is crucial to underline that such a range of complex, intertwined and overlapping identities and ideals, especially in the border context of the South West, mean that it is too simplistic to see enlistment and indeed solidarity with the Spanish Republic through the prism of class, financial recompense and political party membership. The very nature of border

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<sup>61</sup> Commissaire Divisionnaire de Hendaye to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 10.12.36, 1M 260 ADPA

<sup>62</sup> Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.151.

<sup>63</sup> The case of the Mazou brothers is examined above, p.20 . See also Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas* p.173.

relationships, developed in diverse ways for centuries, means that whilst such factors may be relevant in looking at volunteers from northern France, they cannot be used to categorise South Western volunteers. These combatants were affected by complex social and political interaction with local Spanish Republicans that motivated them as much as their parallel national political adhesion to the Communist and Socialist parties.

In this light, on the 26 January 1937 for example, police in Oloron highlighted the close contact between such local anti-fascists and their émigré neighbours in a report that detailed:

*...le réfugié politique espagnol SANCHEZ TORRERO Ricardo est parti aujourd'hui par le train...pour l'Espagne par Pau, TOULOUSE, NARBONNE et PORT-BOU... Trois espagnols résidant habituellement à Oloron sont partis vers 14h30 en auto, jusqu'à Pau où ils devraient prendre le train pour PORT-BOU... Dans la même auto sont partis deux français TALLEFOURTANE, Irénée,... MAZOU, Jean,...parti en juillet dernier comme volontaire dans les troupes gouvernementales Espagnols, était revenu à Oloron en « permission » depuis une quinzaine de jours...*<sup>64</sup>

Clearly the departure for Spain of émigrés and local sympathisers demonstrates a large degree of cross-border collaboration in anti-fascism. Furthermore, that fact that local Republicans and anti-fascists should return on leave to Oloron and later depart for the front in Spain reinforces the importance of geography, combined with strong social and political ties to Spain. The report also revealed that another *milicien*, Francisco Cavero, had returned to the town via Gavarnie in the Hautes-Pyrénées, demonstrating that, whilst regional rail connections to the Republic were exploited by anti-fascists throughout, the Pyrenean border also provided in certain zones an alternative gateway to the Republican zone.<sup>65</sup>

In the same way that volunteers such as Tallefourthane, Dufour, Duviella and the Mazou brothers, all French Republican leftist sympathisers, joined the International Brigades, the

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<sup>64</sup> Commissaire de Police to Sous-préfet de Oloron, 26.01.37, 1M260 ADPA

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. This can also be seen in the case below of the Republican volunteer, Leonard Togorez who was reported to have crossed into Spain via Gavarnie. See L'Inspecteur Principal de la Police Spécial, ROUSSEL, to Commissaire Spécial, 29.09.37 1M260 ADPA

same can also be seen in the cases of local French-born citizens of Spanish descent. Such volunteers can be seen as having been strongly influenced not only by their families' Iberian origins, but also through the political experience they developed in France throughout the 1930s. Such factors combined to demonstrate the importance of the social, cultural, political and geographical factors that cannot be understated in mobilising volunteers from the South West.

Meanwhile, cases of second-generation immigrants, born in France, who endeavoured to join the Republican struggle, give a clear indication of the strength of feeling towards the plight of the Republic that spanned generational differences.

In Pau in July 1937, for example, a local 'Spaniard' came to collect from the Préfecture in Pau a Spanish visa applied for previously at the local consulate, and affirmed to passport service officials:

*...Je soussigné Leonardo Togores Escanero, né à Lanaja, Espagne, le 24 septembre 1911, citoyen espagnol, ai l'honneur de solliciter le visa de mon passeport...visa qui est nécessaire pour retourner en Espagne.*<sup>66</sup>

Despite Togores Escanero's declaration it appears that his presentation as a Spanish citizen did not entirely convince the local authorities. The commissaire in Pau wrote that Togores Escanero's case had been taken up by the Prefecture's passport service. Subsequently this department wrote that following the visa application.<sup>67</sup>:

*...il fut demandé à TOGOREZ de justifier de sa nationalité espagnole ...Aucune pièce de cette nature ne put nous être présentée, mais les réponses qui nous fit l'intéressé nous permirent de constater qu'il parlait très couramment notre langue tandis qu'il prétendait n'avoir habité en France que pendant quelques mois de sa prime jeunesse. | La suspicion découlant de cette consultation dirigea notre interrogatoire et Togorez nous avoua... être né en France à Pau et avoir servi dans nos armées à Bordeaux...après consultation avec M. le Préfet le visa fut refusé...| Au cours de 2 ou 3 visites qu'il nous fit ensuite, le jeune homme ...se montra décidé*

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<sup>66</sup> Declaration of Leonardo Togores Escanero, Préfecture des Basses-Pyrénées, Pau, 26.07.37 1M260 ADPA

<sup>67</sup> L'Inspecteur Principal de la Police Spécial, ROUSSEL, to Commissaire Spécial, 29.09.37 1M260 ADPA

*à rejoindre l'armée gouvernementale espagnol par tous les moyens et il parut même ne pas admettre que l'absence d'un titre de voyage régulièrement visé l'empêcherait de mettre à l'exécution son... retour en Espagne. Il nous dit...appartenir à un régiment motorisé...en qualité de mécanicien... sur le front de Guadalajara...Il résulte des renseignements...que TOGOIRES aurait été un militant communiste, inscrit à la section de Billere. Il résulte des recherches ... au Bureau Militaire que TOGOIREZ (et non TOGOIREZ ESCANERO) Léonard est né à Pau le 24 Septembre 1911, de José et de ESCANERO Pabla, domicilié à Billere et qu'il a été déclaré « bon pour le service armé» (inapte à l'infanterie défaut de taille)...par le Conseil de Révision au cours des opérations concernant la classe 1931...*<sup>68</sup>

Togorez's initial subterfuge can be seen as natural, given the proscribing of French citizens volunteering with Republican forces from February 1937, but the information given by the passport authorities at the prefecture underlines how significant such politically-versed and militarily-trained volunteers were to the Republic. Indeed, despite Togorez's rejection from the infantry his military service during conscription would have been an important asset to Spanish military commanders, hard-pressed to find personnel with even rudimentary military training. In this vein, Lise London at the Paris branch of the PCF- linked Main d'Oeuvre Immigré (MOI), wrote of Spaniards who advised her superiors of the need for skilled volunteers that: *...Notre peuple est courageux, mais, dans son immense majorité, il ignore tout du maniement des armes...* Spanish advisors also asked London if the party could recruit :

*...militants ouvriers ayant fait leur service militaire, pour apprendre le maniement des armes aux soldats improvisés de la République...*<sup>69</sup>

Skoutelsky concurs with London, arguing that even if such former conscripts were : *...pas de quoi former une armée de élite...* they did provide : *...pour les espagnols dépourvus de...formation militaire, un apport indéniable...*<sup>70</sup> Furthermore as a mechanic, and

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<sup>68</sup> Note de renseignements recueillis sur le nommé TOGOIRES-ESCANERO, par M. LEMEIGNERE, au service des passeports à la préfecture de Pau, 29.09.37 1M 260 ADPA

<sup>69</sup> London, *Le Printemps des camarades*, p.242.

<sup>70</sup> Skoutelsky., *L'Espoir guidait leurs pas*, p.148.

Communist militant, Togorez would have certainly provided the Republican forces with a valued militarily-trained and technically-experienced volunteer. Togorez's regular crossings from the Republican zone to the Basses-Pyrénées were viewed by the authorities as potentially demonstrating this value, the commissaire in Pau writing:

*...s'il est de nouveau en congé on est en droit de se demander si ces allées et venues ne cachent pas certaines missions confiées par le Parti Communiste...*<sup>71</sup>

Whilst the case of Togorez in all probability demonstrated a firm commitment to the Republican cause, rather than a 'Communist party mission' to the region, the report nevertheless underlines how his skills would have been extremely useful to the Republican army.

The case of Togorez also indicates the varying levels of commitment to the Republican cause seen amongst the regional contingent. For example, the *compte rendu* given by Audois volunteer René Masove in February 1937 revealed that this International Brigader had travelled to Spain on the 1 November 1936, being transferred from Barcelona to the Aragon Front and the Sierra de Alcubierre on the 6 November. Given permission for 6 days leave in France on the 30 December 1936, the volunteer's parents forbade him to return.<sup>72</sup> As has also been seen in the case of Alexandre Dufour, some volunteers were also surprised by the ferocity of the war and sought repatriation when the opportunity arose.<sup>73</sup>

In Togorez's case commitment to the Republican cause does not seem to have been called into question. Aside from the administrator's remarks about the dedication of the volunteer, his passport examined by the authorities denoted that he had travelled frequently to and from

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<sup>71</sup> L'Inspecteur Principal de la Police Spécial, ROUSSEL, to Commissaire Spécial, 29.09.37 1M 260 ADPA

<sup>72</sup> Le Commissaire Spécial to M. le Préfet de l'Aude, 2.02.37, ADA 1M 260

<sup>73</sup> M. le Préfet du Var to M. le Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 03/37, ADPA 1M 260

Spain during his service for the Republic with visas showing numerous authorisations for travel including

*...-pasa por Bujamelo [sic-Bujaruelo]...21 de Febrero 1937| Milicias Alto Aragonesas| Dirección G.ral de seguridad Port-Bou entrada 6 Marzo|...Consulado de España Bueno para España vía Port-Bou Marzo 1937| Commissariat Spécial 6 Mars 1937 Sortie Cerbère/ Autorizado para salir de España Botana 17 de Julio de 1937...*<sup>74</sup>

Such regular travels across the Pyrenees reveal a high level of mobility and commitment to the Republican cause, reinforcing how such volunteers as the Mazous and Togorez were trusted by Republican authorities to return to the front line after leave to the South West, easy access due to the regional communications facilitating volunteer's mobility. The illegality of such actions was not always a hindrance to a volunteer's movements. The investigator Roussel wrote that, despite the prefecture having refused Togorez a visa, he had :

*...cependant...pu répasser la frontière, sans doute avec un nouveau passeport délivré par le Consul d'Espagne...*<sup>75</sup>

This remark referring to consular complicity in French citizens volunteering for the Republic, whilst worthy of caution, can perhaps be seen as accurate, given the initiatives of the Spanish consulates seen elsewhere in the region, and indeed from the complicit attitude of the consular staff in Pau who had approved the visa that triggered the administration's investigation.<sup>76</sup> Whilst further consular measures will be discussed below, it is important to stress that as has been seen in police and prefectural zealotry in investigating subterfuge

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<sup>248</sup>L'Inspecteur Principal de la Police Spécial, ROUSSEL, to Commissaire Spécial, 29.09.37 1M260 ADPA

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. As with Francisco Clavero (see p.98.) Togorez made use of Pyrenean passes to travel to Spain. Inspector Roussel writing that had written to his parents 'd'une localité...aux environs de Gavarnie, (en territoire espagnol probablement)... ' See Ibid. This further demonstrates that volunteers familiar with the border zone were able to travel from the South West with ease to rejoin the Republican forces. Familiarity with local geography would thus seem to have been a crucial factor in enabling volunteers to cross into Spain, avoiding border patrols.

<sup>76</sup> See p.102. & footnote 254 p.103.



by French citizens attempting to travel to Spain, local authorities did not facilitate volunteers' ventures, beyond allowing their departures unimpeded from July 1936-February 1937. This is in stark contrast to the accusations made by the Spanish Nationalists during the conflict, with the Republican Foreign Press Intelligence Department highlighting in November 1936 articles published by the German D.N.B news agency, reporting Franco's allegation that: *...el Prefecto de Pau recibe órdenes de Barcelona...*<sup>77</sup> As we have seen local authorities in Pau maintained a stance of legality in the Togorez case that renders Nationalist interpretations of the former's complicity with Republican authorities inaccurate.

Where collaboration with Republican authorities occurred, allowing for cross-border co-operation, it was undoubtedly between the Spanish Republican central government and loyalist consuls in the South West. Whilst departmental archives retain little trace of widespread usage of consulates as recruitment centres for the Republic, reports from the Hautes-Pyrénées demonstrate that certain consuls in the South West were involved in recruitment of volunteers. A case arising in December 1936 for example provides a great deal of information about methods of recruitment and the motivations of volunteers who enlisted for the Republican army in this manner. On the 15 December 1936 the Commissaire Spécial in Tarbes wrote to his colleague in Bagnères-de-Bigorre asking the latter to commission an investigation into :

*...des jeunes gens français en résidence dans le département [qui] se disposeraient à se rendre en Espagne, comme combattants volontaires...*<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See Ministerio de Estado to Presidente de la República et al, 29.11.37, ANC 1-1-7-7466 The D.N.B's printing of news reports alluding to Republican collusion with French administration is curious given that the D.N.B was from 1937 providing a front for Nationalist intelligence operations in Biarritz, the agency providing hotel suites for spies in the town.

<sup>78</sup> Commissaire Spécial to Commissaire de Bagnères-de-Bigorre, 15.12.36 4M238 ADHP

Subsequently the officer interviewed one of the prospective volunteers with the latter's statement providing significant information about local enlistment and personal motives for enlisting in the Republican army. The volunteer concerned, André Loncay, declared:

*...je suis actuellement sans travail et sans aucune ressource...au début du mois j'ai entendu dire par un espagnol résident à Bagnères [Ndlr Bagnères-de-Bigorre] que le consul d'Espagne à Tarbes pourrait m'offrir du travail. Je me suis rendu à Tarbes en compagnie d'un camarade Lafaille...Laffaille et moi avons été reçus par le secrétaire du consul...j'ai été interrogé par le secrétaire qui m'a demandé mes opinions politiques, s'est renseigné sur mon identité et ma profession et qui finalement me fait signer une déclaration par laquelle je m'engageais à me rendre en Espagne pour défendre le Front Populaire pendant la durée de la guerre...le secrétaire ne m'a pas parlé de salaire mais j'ai entendu dire que les français étaient payés dix pesetas par jour | Je suis toujours disposé à partir pour L'Espagne, il n'est pas de même pour mon camarade Lafaille qui a trouvé...du travail...*<sup>79</sup>

Regarding the Republican consulate's importance in the South West, evidently loyal consuls provided a valuable link between central government and Spanish and French citizens in the region. The fact that recruitment was carried out in consular offices with Spanish diplomatic staff illustrates how the Republic's loyal representatives were able to connect local sympathisers with the Republic, providing a service that had been undermined in the early stages of the war by the defection of the majority of diplomats in the region.<sup>80</sup>

The statement of Loncay, whilst evidencing the desperation that motivated some volunteers to join the International Brigades, also suggests that political conviction was a determining factor in all volunteers' enlistment. Indeed, the questioning by consular staff, well versed in political affairs, would have revealed that the prospective volunteer was unsuitable for

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<sup>79</sup> Procès-verbal No. 2988 given by André Loncay to Commissaire de Bagnères-de-Bigorre, 17.12.36 4M238 ADHP

<sup>80</sup> This research has revealed that the Spanish Consuls in Bayonne, Toulouse, Perpignan, Tarbes and Foix all defected to the Nationalists in July 1937. See for Bayonne :Sous-préfet de Bayonne to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 24/08/36 1M260 ADPA & J.Serres., *Été 1936*, pp.277-279. For Toulouse :Consulat d'Espagne à Toulouse, *révocation par l'Ambassadeur de la République espagnole du consul en fonctions à Toulouse*-Series 'Guerre 1939-1945' E-O Côte W2 1960W9 ADHG. For Perpignan :Luis Araquistáin , Ambassade de Paris to André Iglesias Velayos Consulat d'Espagne à Perpignan 1M 1044 ADPO. For Tarbes in 1936:Commissaire Spécial de Tarbes to Préfet des Hautes-Pyrénées, 29.07.36 4M 238 ADHP for Foix : *Le Temps* 18/10/36 'Le Vice Consul d'Espagne à Foix a-t-il été victime d'un guet apens ?' The consuls in Pau and Sète remained loyal. See *Consolat d'Espanya à Sète* ANC1-1-7-7466 and p.101.

service had he demonstrated a lack of conviction in the Republican cause.<sup>81</sup> The unspoken issue of remuneration and lack of questioning in this vein indicates that volunteers such as Loncay, and others from across the region, did not join the Republican forces primarily as an alternative to unemployment. Clearly political commitment was required to envisage the very real sacrifices that fighting for the Republic in Spain implied. Lastly Loncay's determination to travel to Spain, despite police interference with this plan, demonstrates that despite pressure from the authorities volunteers were not easily dissuaded from their plans. Loncay, in being explained the significance of his commitment, would have been aware, as with other such volunteers, that volunteering for the Republic was not a decision that could be taken lightly. Indeed, another volunteer from Salles-Adour near Tarbes, Roger Bernadou, described his experiences on return to the Hautes-Pyrénées writing that he had been:

*...versé à la 14ième Brigade Internationale. | Je n'ai participé que 18 jours aux opérations de première ligne, sur le front de l'Ebre | ...blessé par un éclat d'obus à la tête...j'ai été évacué à l'hôpital de Tarragone...*<sup>82</sup>

Such statements and reports recalling the capabilities of the Republican army, against its better-armed Nationalist enemy demonstrate that volunteers from across the region were aware of the risk they incurred in enlisting for the Brigades. Whilst the contribution of the South West to the latter may have been inferior to that of industrialised northern France, the presence of numerous volunteers from the region in reports on the return of brigaders to France in November 1938 and subsequent Prisoner of War returns demonstrate that the region's anti-fascists played a significant role alongside their international counterparts. Indeed, reports on the return of volunteers via Cerbère, on the 13 November 1938, following

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<sup>81</sup> André Moine of the regional PCF was approached by a prospective Parisian Communist volunteer for the International Brigades in December 1936. Following an interview Moine withdrew the man's PCF membership card and advised him to return to Paris for proper authorisation. The man later joined the Foreign Legion. See Le Chef d'Escadron de Gendarmerie (section de Bayonne), Sartous, to Préfet des Basses-Pyrénées, 24.12.36, 1M 258 ADPA

<sup>82</sup> Statement of Roger Bernadou given to L'Inspecteur de Police Spécial TALASAC. Transmitted to Commissaire Spécial, 15.11.38, 4M238 ADHP

the withdrawal of the International Brigades in November 1938 reveal that 70 volunteers from the *départements* of the South West were amongst 1472 French volunteers on the first train returning to the country. Of these, 27 originated from the *départements* this study has examined.<sup>83</sup> A further 15 volunteers (French and Spanish émigré) from the region were returned in a prisoner exchange of 82 prisoners conducted on the International Bridge from Irún to Hendaye in February 1939.<sup>84</sup> Such returns of international and local prisoners indicate that considerable sacrifices were made by volunteers, and such a commitment cannot be overlooked. The volunteers returned in a similar repatriation in 1937, having been captured on the Madrid front, revealed that whilst most declared to have been ‘...satisfait de l’attitude, à leur égard, des Nationalistes...’<sup>85</sup> captivity in Nationalist camps clearly came at a high price for the dignity of the volunteers, most of whom were Communists. The reporting officer recalling the volunteers’ experiences in Irún prior to their return wrote that:

*...les photographes Italiens ne cessèrent toute la journée de les photographier...se virent remettre chacun 500 francs français des autorités... Italiennes. Le commandant militaire d’Irún leur adressa soulignant les sentiments d’humanité montrés par l’Espagne à l’égard des prisonniers et demanda à ceux-ci de crier « vive l’Espagne » Sans opposer...les prisonniers se contentèrent de faire un vague chuchotement...’<sup>86</sup>*

Whilst the façade of indulgence presented to the press by the Italians might indicate that the Nationalists’ treatment of French volunteers was ‘humane’, the subjecting of the defeated to the humiliation of Fascist photographers and the demands of the Nationalist military governor of Irún was clearly designed for propaganda usage in the Fascist dictatorships and the Nationalist zone. In addition the governor of Irún asked that the prisoners cheer ‘Vive L’Espagne’ demonstrating the vindictive attitude of the Nationalists, whose outward

<sup>83</sup> Préfet des Pyrénées-Orientales to Ministre de l’Intérieur, 14.11.38, 31W 273 ADPO

<sup>84</sup> Commissaire Divisionnaire de Police Spécial to l’Inspecteur Général des services de Police Administrative, 18.02.39 1M260 ADPA

<sup>85</sup> Commissaire Divisionnaire to Sous-préfet de Bayonne, 28.05.37 1M260 ADPA

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. British volunteers faced a similar humiliation in Nationalist Prisoner of war camps and exchanges, prisoners being required to chant Francoist slogans such as *¡España Una! ¡España Grande! ¡España Libre !* to which particular emphasis was placed on the last word. Baxell, *British volunteers*, pp.109-129.

sentiments of mercy were frequently offset with elements of humiliation and revenge. This can be seen in one prisoner's response to the governor regarding the Nationalists' treatment of the captives, the former answering: *...Nous pensions être fusillés; puisque vous nous laissez libres merci!*<sup>87</sup> Not content with allowing the Italians an ample photography session with the prisoners, the latter were trailed by Carlist *requetés* over the International Bridge. The commissaire in Hendaye observed that:

*...deux militaires Carlistes...empiétèrent de quelques mètres sur la partie française du pont et tentèrent de placer leurs appareils de prises de vue cinématographiques afin de prendre la colonne derrière, mais mon service se mit en devoir de les refouler immédiatement...*<sup>88</sup>

Clearly whilst the local police retained little sympathy for the Communists, there was even less affinity between the local authorities and their new Nationalist neighbours.

The experiences detailed above demonstrate that through contact with Republicans and Republican institutions in the region a small number of volunteers from the South West contributed with their Spanish neighbours to the Republican cause in Spain. Whilst many more sympathisers and supporters provided logistical and political support across the region, the notable partisan solidarity of hundreds of *passeurs*, coastal smugglers, and customs officers demonstrates that whilst the region's contribution of volunteers was numerically less than other more industrial regions of France it was no less significant. The solidarity and active partisanship of local people from the banks of the Bidassoa to the Mediterranean coast, seen through the multiple case studies outlined in this chapter, reveals the ingenuity and dedication of the Republic's south-western allies, facing the hostility of local authorities and far-right opponents. Despite the judicial risks presented by proscribed activities in favour of the Republic, local supporters took regular risks with their lives and freedom, as well as their livelihoods, in providing support services to the Republic. On a local level their role was

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<sup>87</sup> Commissaire Divisonnaire to Sous-préfet de Bayonne, 28.05.37 1M260 ADPA

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

significant, and in the absence of open government support for the Republic such activities demonstrate that regionally sympathisers did not resign themselves to accepting a Nationalist victory, but sought daring and often innovative ways of circumventing restrictions that they clearly saw as unjust. This chapter has aimed to underline how solidarity with the Republic often went far beyond the political manifestations of support in the comfort of the community, and for those who were prepared to go beyond words and translate their political beliefs into actions, such initiatives clearly made a difference, providing local partisan solidarity to an embattled Republic short on allies.

## Conclusion

As chapter four has demonstrated the trajectory of sympathies and solidarity in the South West of France extended from political displays of solidarity to support initiatives launched by small numbers of individuals and the enlistment of small groups of leftists in the International Brigades and Spanish Republican armed forces. That French leftist elements, Spanish émigré workers and second generation Spanish immigrants joined Republican forces in Spain, having co-existed in parallel republican and left-wing social and political climates in local communities across the region, has been demonstrated in the previous chapters to have been no coincidence.

In chapter one the framework of solidarity with the Spanish Republic in the 1930s was demonstrated exemplifying how political, social and cultural connections between the border zone and the wider south western region were deeply developed throughout the early twentieth century and significantly from April 1931, following the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic. The rise of leftist Popular Front governments and politics in France and Spain from 1934 further cemented the parallel political currents that significantly impacted upon regional political and social relationships.

Chapter one also examined how diverging political and social currents existed in many communities where pro-Republican actions took place, to recapitulate just a few examples, we can see cases of opposing politics examined in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, Bayonne, Biarritz and Perpignan. Such elements, chiefly associated with the Spanish Nationalist refugee right, evidence how local pro-Spanish Republican sympathisers had visible opponents, not only on

the far-flung frontlines of the Spanish peninsular conflict, but also, in many cases, in their own communities.

Such ideological and irreconcilable political stances demonstrate how pro-Republicanism and leftist politics were mobilised into action by opponents whose activities represented a threat to solidarity to the political, social and cultural values forged in the 1930s throughout the region.

Additionally, chapter one highlighted how the cultural and linguistic ties forged for centuries between peoples on both sides of the frontier, and especially in the Catalan and Basque regions, both allowed for and demonstrated a resurgence of a common regional and transnational identity, the Spanish Civil War demonstrating the profound nature of this traditional relationship. Moreover it is clear that local republicans and leftists supported the Spanish Republic often because the far-right threat was perceived as transcending the frontier, which throughout the period was clearly a theoretical rather than practical border in many respects. Indeed, it has been shown in all chapters that repercussions of events in Spain often reverberated far beyond the nominal Pyrenean border. Abduction, sabotage, defection, aerial bombardment, Nationalist espionage and military intelligence operations, all ingredients of the peninsular conflict, have been shown to have regularly crossed the border into local communities across the region. To recall but a few examples, in chapters two, three and four we have seen abduction and threats to rightists and Nationalists in Foix and Perpignan, sabotage in Bayonne and Narbonne and espionage operations in Biarritz and La Tour de Carol.

Chapter two has demonstrated how the development of a political consciousness of the Republican cause can be seen across the region from July 1936 as local pro-Republican



committees, including those in the smallest *communes* such as Lavelanet and Port-Vendres, were connected to the wider context of the Republican war effort, either through local initiative (Saint-Gaudens, Oloron, Bayonne) or loyalist diplomats (Pau, Tarbes, Sète). Local sympathisers developed solidarity as regional, national and trans-Pyrenean political and diplomatic personalities brought home the reality and implications of the Spanish Civil War, giving oratory performances of evident vigour from Carcassonne to Narbonne, Mont-Louis to Perpignan. Bringing home of the reality of the conflict to thousands of local leftists, previously sympathetic but not actively involved in solidarity initiatives, was crucial in mobilising the ‘hearts and minds’ of local people, allowing them to become involved in pro-Republican activities as Spanish events were felt to have a direct relevance for their lives and futures. Furthermore, as chapter two has highlighted, if local people in the border region readily came to the assistance of their border neighbours it was because there was a recognition of a shared political, social, cultural and economic tradition of interchange between such close communities. Local people recognised how much destinies on both sides of the border and the future nature of social relations between communities would be affected and shared in the event of a Nationalist victory. Many communities thus sought to maintain a balance of neighbourly and politically-motivated solidarity in order to preserve the harmonious balance of local relations.

Chapter three, having established in chapter two how civilian humanitarian efforts were multiplied by pro-Republicans from 1937, examined the unofficial Front Populaire government policy of Non-Intervention *relâchée*, and subsequently revealed further layers of complexity in the south-western region. Parisian-centric historiography by Skoutelsky, Howson and Rapin may have provided a foundation for this investigation, but the regional and local detail has undoubtedly provided the richest levels of information which build on

previous research into the Front Populaire cabinet's stances on Non-Intervention and support for the Republic.

The research in chapter three has also allowed for a reassessment of sympathies towards the Republic in the South West and the level of local engagement in covert operations. As has been seen, the focus of historiography on the initial phase of the Spanish Civil War from July-August 1936, has obscured a significantly more complex situation from 1937, in which local aviation industry operatives such as Jean Blanc developed and diversified their clandestine operations from more remote aerodromes, providing the Spanish Republic with guaranteed safe-zones for its aircraft purchased in northern Europe to refuel and be transferred. Meanwhile, as we have seen, illegal logistical operations conducted by aviation functionaries succeeded as complicity within the local community allowed for their activities to flourish. A climate of social and political sympathies within the largely pro-Republican workers' milieu of Toulouse allowed for popular leftist meeting-places to develop support for the Republic in the region.

Pro-Republican functionaries made good use of connections to the Front Populaire's murkier corridors of power, which enabled for operations to be carried out, in the knowledge that legal complications could be largely avoided due to timely and low-profile interventions from above. Our brief analysis of the Pyrénées-Orientales customs officers in chapter three has also underlined how networks of support stretched from municipal councils, constituted by retired and active colleagues, to local PCF and SFIO cells in local villages and towns. This network of connections stretching from Paris to Bourg Madame enabled their solidarity to span the local, regional and national pro-Republican front as they could draw upon all levels of assistance, from their central government superiors to their local political and professional colleagues. No less evident is the fact that such functionaries had an understanding of local

administration that enabled them to circumvent hostile administrators and facilitate the endeavours of civilian supporters of the Republic.

There is certainly room to challenge assertions by Howson, therefore, that customs officers were officious enforcers of Non-Intervention. The present study has also illuminated the customs' regional role, alluded to by Skoutelsky, but confined in his study to government echelons.

Finally, in chapter four, the provision of support services to future International Brigade volunteers travelling to Spain and the enlistment of such regional combatants has been examined. We have seen in numerous case studies, in the French Basque country, Oloron and Tarbes, how politicised pro-Republican elements in the region chose to enlist in the International Brigades and fight for the Spanish Republic. Such decisions were the result of deeply-entrenched connections to the political, social and cultural context, in the border region of the South West especially, where links to Spanish Republicans, both economic émigrés and political refugees, were part of the local fabric of daily life. Those closest to such multinational *millieux* had strong sympathies for a Spanish government and Republic that was in many respects as important to the local community as the French Republic and the Front Populaire. The strength of the 'local fabric' of many communities in the South West can also be seen in the diverse support actions and volunteer smuggling that took place before and after the February 1937 laws. As has been seen in chapter four in the Ariège, Haute-Garonne and Pyrénées-Orientales networks of *passeurs* provided crucial connections between the two Republics, maintaining the flow of regional, national and international volunteers into Spain, despite the Non-Intervention agreement. That such persons were prepared to risk detention for their activities, as well as attacks from the far-right and local Nationalist 'refugees' demonstrates a social and political commitment that was present in Communist, Socialist and Anarchist circles.

In this light, it has been necessary throughout the present work to underline the importance of the complexity of motivations for sympathy, solidarity and partisanship with the Spanish Republic. Whilst this research has shown the involvement of Communists and Socialists motivated by Republicanism and anti-fascism, we have also seen Anarchists motivated by pacifism, extreme-rightists motivated by humanitarian ideals, Rightists by territorial integrity and Catholics motivated by shared religious beliefs.

Meanwhile we have seen that it is impossible to attempt to reconstruct a profile of the ‘average’ supporter of the Spanish Republic in the South West. Motivations behind sympathies and solidarity for the Spanish Republic were of course multi-faceted, but included antifascism, class solidarity, Communism, Anarchism, Socialism, Pacifism, democratic and human rights beliefs, regionalism and regional identity amongst many important mobilising factors.

Clearly, then, the Spanish Civil War had a wide-ranging effect upon the South West; creating networks of solidarity which forged Popular Front ideals on both sides of the border, creating a genuine solidarity movement which remained durable throughout the conflict. Whilst the solidarity of other regions of the French Third Republic during the conflict ebbed as the conflict continued into 1937, communities and political sympathisers, such as those examined throughout the thesis, remained firmly behind the Spanish Second Republic. The awareness of a shared destiny, and for many communities the first-hand experiences of far-right involvement in favour of the Nationalists, as well as hostile acts by Nationalist agents on French soil in the South West, ensured that a heightened awareness of the conflict remained far beyond 1936.

Throughout, we have seen how supporters from diverse political, professional and social horizons provided solidarity that pre-dated the support that Spain’s exodus of refugees

received in 1939 from various organisations. Moreover it is clear that South Western functionaries sympathetic to the Republic were not merely actors standing in the wings of the Non-Intervention *rélâchée* drama, but vital parts in a politically volatile game. That their contribution has been revealed enables us to understand another layer of complexity in the attitudes of Front Populaire supporters to the Spanish Republic and Frente Popular. Above all the present work has offered a fuller picture of sympathies and solidarity for the Second Spanish Republic in the South West and importantly in the border region. Local communities were not inert onlookers surveying the destruction and suffering of their southern neighbours, but were indeed crucial components of international solidarity, able to mobilise local political, social and cultural bonds with the peninsula and project solidarity initiatives far beyond the Pyrenean peaks.

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