

POLITICAL PROPAGANDA IN THE BRITISH MEDIA OF THE LATE 1930s (using the example of the humanitarian aspect of the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939)

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The article deals with problems of information warfare history using the example of the British media of the 1930s. The British printed propaganda of the second half of the 1930s presents the object of the study. Its political aspect using the example of humanitarian issues coverage during the Civil War in Spain 1936–1939 is the subject of research. The purpose of research is to give characteristics to interpretations of humanitarian aspects of the Spanish conflict 1936–1939 by the British printed propaganda. It is based on the principles of historicism (understanding of historical facts and phenomena in their interconnection and development in time) and objectivity. Based on the study of about 20 editions of the British press of various political directions, the authors come to the conclusion that a humanitarian disaster as a result of the Spanish War 1936–1939 was recognized by all the editions, however, it was interpreted according to their political preferences. The humanitarian content of the Spanish events provoked sharp polarization of the public opinion in the UK. Major newsbreaks were the following: sufferings of the civil population; refugee problem and the public reaction in Britain towards it; humanitarian campaigns. A “moral standard” of criticism towards the “enemy” was boldly outlined – the focus was made on the inhumanity and threat emanating from him. The Spanish problematic was actively used in information and psychological confrontation and the formation of the “image of the enemy” on the eve of the Second World War.

Key words: British printed propaganda; image of the enemy; information warfare; humanitarian aspects; Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939.

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ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ ПРОПАГАНДА В БРИТАНСКИХ СМИ КОНЦА 1930-х гг. (на примере гуманитарного аспекта гражданской войны в Испании в 1936–1939 гг.)

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Рассматриваются проблемы истории информационных войн на примере СМИ Великобритании 1930-х гг. Объектом исследования выступает британская печатная пропаганда второй половины 1930-х гг., предметом – ее политический аспект на примере освещения гуманитарных проблем гражданской войны в Испании в 1936–1939 гг. Дана характеристика трактовкам гуманитарных аспектов испанского конфликта 1936–1939 гг., предложенным английской печатной пропагандой. Исследование базируется на принципах историзма (понимание исторических фактов и явлений в их связи и развитии) и объективности. На основе изучения материалов около 20 наименований британской прессы различных политических направлений авторы приходят к выводу о том, что гуманитарное бедствие как результат войны в Испании в 1936–1939 гг. признавали все издания, однако интерпретировалось оно в зависимости от их политических предпочтений. Показано, что гуманитарное наполнение событий в Испании вызвало резкую поляризацию общественного мнения Великобритании; основными новостными поводами стали страдания мирного населения, проблема беженцев и общественная реакция на нее в Великобритании, гуманитарные кампании. Был рельефно очерчен моральный уровень критики, «врага» – сделан акцент на бесчеловечность и исходящую от него опасность. Указывается на то, что испанская проблематика активно использовалась в информационно-психологическом противостоянии и формировании образа врага накануне Второй мировой войны.

Ключевые слова: гражданская война в Испании в 1936–1939 гг.; информационные войны; британская печатная пропаганда; гуманитарные аспекты; образ врага.

An ideological component of the Spanish conflict invisibly presented in all of its other international aspects. Breaking the pages of European newspapers with short messages in July, 1936, the Spanish Civil War caused serious information and propaganda wars, exacerbating polarization in Europe on eve of World War II. In early August, 1936 the British leadership and diplomats expressed concerns about the prospects of appearance of hostile ideological blocs in Europe in connection with the events in Spain. A similar fear throughout the Spanish War was expressed by the French side (*Paris-Soir*. 1936. 18 Aug.) [1, p. 90–91; 2, p. 18]. The European propaganda struggle around the Spanish problem gained the true scale with the formation of L. Caballero's Cabinet and the beginning of the International Non-Intervention Committee functioning (September, 1936).

A humanitarian aspect of the Spanish confrontation became one of the most important newsbreaks in formation of the “enemy image” in the British press. It is worth paying attention to a typical, drastically directed against appeasement, a note in “*The Daily Mirror*” in August, 1936: “As long as you read this article, 250 bullets have flew from the barrel of a machine gun in Spain. How many people have they killed?” The rebel leader General F. Franco was viewed by this newspaper as an “executioner” of the civilian population (*Daily Mirror*. 1936. 7 Aug.; 1938. 8 Aug.).

Description of “atrocities” of the Spanish nationalists and their Italian-German allies, for example, in July, 1936 became a wide-spread plot in the left “*The*

Daily Worker” publications. Categorical articles clearly marked a sharp rejection of the rebel camp (*Daily Worker*. 1936. 24, 27, 30, 31 Jule). Subsequently, information on casualties or damages caused by the nationalist forces to civilians may be met almost in every issue of “*The Daily Worker*” (for example, in July, 1937, “*The Daily Worker*” has 28 such rooms 6; *The Daily Worker*. 1938. 1 Jan.).

The refugee problem equally relevant for wars was also exposed by the British media scrutiny. Conservative “*The Spectator*” in early September, 1936, “expressed concern” about appearance of this phenomenon, stressing that big groups of people were constantly leaving the country through the border check post Irun. British newspapers of various political branches often stressed the fact of refugee removal from the combat zone, mainly by British ships (*The Spectator*. 1936. 10 Sept.). The author of the same “*The Spectator*” noted that British sailors often did it while risking their lives (*The Spectator*. 1937. 12 Aug.).

Large-scale “resettlement” obtained the character of humanitarian catastrophe in Spain by the middle of 1937. According to the Catalan government documents, by August, 1938 there were more than one million refugees from the territory of the Republic on the territory of the autonomy [3].

The British media also touched upon the issue of refugee presence in other countries: “*The Times*” with reference to the Republican press cited about 470 thousand of refugees who fled Catalonia in February, 1939, and “*The Spectator*” provided a figure of 300 thousand

refugees (The Times. 1939. 7 Feb.; The Spectator. 1939. 3 Feb.). The main flow invaded France, where not less than 180 thousand people remained for living. Along with civilians the rest of the Republican units and foreign volunteers also moved there (The Times. 1939. 3 Feb.). The majority of forcibly displaced persons were temporarily placed in filtration camps, which provoked indignation of the world democratic community. The Soviet Ambassador to Britain Ivan Maisky wrote that people were sleeping on the ground without any clothes, blankets, medicines [4, c. 169]. Earlier, England had accepted no less than 4 thousand Basque children and few hundred Spanish sailors (The Daily Express. 1937. 13 Nov.). According to "The Manchester Guardian", refugees who appeared in Portugal (2 million) were mainly residents of the province Badajoz (The Manchester Guardian. 1936. 19 Aug.).

The British clerical press was the only direction that often published information also about refugees from the nationalist zone. So, "The Catholic Herald" wrote about the numerous priests who fled to France immediately after the outbreak of the civil war. It was also stressed that many of the chapels had been destroyed, altars had been desecrated. Church remained intact, however, they had been transferred to municipal institutions (The Catholic Herald. 1936. 14 Aug.; 1938. 29 July). "The Catholic Herald" observed a large influx of forcibly displaced persons from Spain to Paris, with the conclusion that France would not manage to eliminate itself from the war in the neighboring country (The Catholic Herald. 1936. 4, 18 Sept.). At the same time, "The Catholic Herald" reacted also with approval on the activities of the "National United Committee to aid Spain" (The Catholic Herald. 1937. 7 May, 26 Nov.). It is also indicative that welcoming humanitarian efforts of Britain and France, "The Catholic Herald" kept fairly reserved, even an unfriendly policy towards refugees from Spain: they have flooded France, and in case of Franco's victory "serious political complications may be expected from this unstable element". 70 % of refugees in France would like to return to the nationalist zone, but the Republican "commissioners" impeded this (The Catholic Herald. 1937. 17 Dec.; 1938. 13 May; 1939. 1 Feb.). "The Tablet" was also writing about a "serious" problem of refugees in France, noting that the "humanity" (in fact, world public opinion) puts pressure on France in order to organize favorable conditions for refugees to stay. The image of the enemy in the British Catholic press in covering the refugee problem was closely linked to the perception of a destructive role of the Republican government.

The fate of Spanish children was also among the worries of the British left intellectuals, some religious and public figures. In November 1936 the "Manchester Guardian" expressed concerns over the fate of "innocent hostages of the situation occurred in the country". It was noted that there was an acute shortage of

clothes and food supplies among the civilian population in the affected areas in Spain. The task of receiving refugees in the UK itself was also stated: "In order to protect them from discrimination" (The Manchester Guardian. 1936. 21 Nov.).

According to the British press, the first steamboat ("Havana") with 4 thousand Spanish refugee children arrived in England on 23 May, 1937 for temporary accommodation in the camp near Southampton (The Times. 1937. 23 May). Further resettlement of some children in private homes, and their further return to Spain after normalization of the situation was envisaged [5]. "The Daily Mirror" appealing to human feelings of its audience was playing an episode: on the first day of their stay in the UK children were scared of the storm, which they took for the bombing. The note was focusing on sufferings of the victims of "the war unleashed by the rebels" (The Daily Mirror. 1937. 24 May). "The Daily Express" published an interview with a Basque boy L. Sansom (January, 1938) who said that only in England he was not afraid of war and that "this land is happier than ours" (The Daily Express. 1938. 6 Jan.).

Mass arrival of a large number of forcibly displaced persons in the UK provoked also critical responses. So, someone A. Wilson in his letter to "The Times" editor (February, 1938) called for transporting Republican children survived from the war back to Bilbao under the protection of Catholic organizations, as far as the arrival of the "masses" of the Spaniards may subsequently create political difficulties (The Times. 1938. 1, 7 Feb.).

The British press also raised questions of the Spanish children fates in other countries. Thus, "The Daily Mirror" reported on the "rebellion" in the children's camp Saint-Cloud near Paris, where in August, 1938 more than 20 Spanish children out of 1800 persons staying in the camp were smashing windows, breaking furniture and throwing stones at the police after they'd heard about the downfall of Santander. After that incident they were interned back home (The Daily Mirror. 1937. 19 Aug.).

There's another companion of wars such as hunger and diseases among the civil population. According to the findings of the liberal "The Manchester Guardian" (summer 1937), despite the fact that many people were dying in Spain from bombings in Madrid and other "open" cities, majority of them became victims of starvation and diseases: "Many languish in unhygienic conditions, almost one in two is malnourished". "The Republican government is doing its best to alleviate the plight of refugees and civilians affected by war: it builds hospitals and disinfection stations, the population is provided with medicines and hot food, the problem of typhus is almost solved in Catalonia". However, the reporter added, "If the world community assisted Spain more seriously it would be to save the lives of many more victims of the war" (The Manchester Guardian. 1937. 23 July).

Humanitarian campaigns in favor of the Republican Spain from the side of left-wing forces and charitable organizations were also among important newsbreaks. The press actively promoted voluntary allocation of funds to help Spain (one of the few aspects of the Spanish war, where different, except for the fascist, currents of the British politics were in agreement). Thus, "The Daily Herald" was writing about the complicated situation in Catalonia in the spring 1938: "250 thousand people in the autonomy camps are urgently in need of the international assistance, some of them cannot eat more than once a day" (The Daily Herald. 1938. 10 March).

Especially much attention to solidarity was paid by the leftist "The Daily Worker" (materials on this topic were present in almost every issue), spreading a powerful propaganda to assist the Republicans (The Daily Worker. 1936. 1 Aug., 31 July). It is significant that in April, 1937 the amount of collected funds, according to the newspaper, significantly decreased. And the intensity of the campaign supporting the Republicans went on the wane. Obviously, it was slightly hindered by inconsistency of the British left-wing forces, because of the lack of a single point of funds accumulation and protracted nature of the Spanish war (The Daily Worker. 1936. 3, 25, 28 Aug., 8 Sept.; 1937. 7 Apr.).

In May, 1937 "The Daily Worker" continued publishing reports on the rallies in favour of the Spanish Republic (The Daily Worker. 1937. 1, 3, 4, 8, 10–29, 31 May). "The Daily Worker" had a special section with the analysis of daily and weekly contributions to relief funds of Spain.

The leadership of the Labour party changed somewhat the position on the Spanish question from July, 1937. The financial support to Republicans became more apparent. It was reported in the labour "The Daily Herald" in July, 1937 that the British Labour movement was planning to create its own Fund to help the Republicans. The rhetoric against the Non-Intervention policy towards Spain toughened (The Daily Herald. 1937. 1 June, 9, 12, 20, 27, 25, 26 July). From January, 1938 "The Daily Worker" increasingly focused on promoting assistance to the International Brigades rather than on humanitarian actions. It is noteworthy, that the topic of providing assistance to refugees was covered to a less extent on the pages of the newspaper. Dynamics of donations remained low and stable. By the end of 1938 calls to help Spain appeared on the pages of "The Daily Worker" less often, and later sporadically (The Daily Worker. 1938. 31 March, 8 Aug., 11 Dec.; 1939. 1 Jan.).

Fascist newspapers considered humanitarian activities from the standpoint of a narrow nationalism. Thus, "The Action" wrote that the aid to Spain was too expensive, stressing that in the UK itself there are many people who suffer from hunger and lack of medicines. The British fascist organizations called for the immediate termination of humanitarian

aid to Spain and reception of Spanish refugees. In some publications such appeals were of a really misanthropic nature. Thus, "The Action" noted that those "philanthropists" who wanted to achieve cheap popularity staged a real hunt for refugees. According to the newspaper, adherents of Franco in Spain more acted as nurses, "cleaning out of the country those infected with the red plague". The edition also criticized initiatives of the various British charitable organizations (The Action. 1939. 18, 25 March).

The focus was also made on the fact that resettlement of refugees on the territory of the United Kingdom becomes a reason for unemployment. The anti-Semitic motive in many materials complied with this theses. "The Catholic Herald" and "The Table" reported on the humanitarian activities of Catholic organizations by publishing materials about alternative funds of providing assistance to Spanish refugees, who fled the country because of the fear of the Republican government (The Catholic Herald. 1937. 1 Jan.; The Table. 1937. 20 March).

The topic of "man and war" was present in the materials of the British press on the Civil War in Spain 1936–1939. For example, "The Daily Mail" published an article on the "fashion on Spain", which was brought by the returning volunteers. In particular, the khaki clothes, the widespread expressions: *No pasarán!* ("they shall not pass!"), *quinta columna* (the "fifth column"), *camarada* ("comrade"), etc., which have become popular in the spoken English (The Daily Mail. 1939. 4 Jan.). "The Observer" chose for its publications other topics and personalities: for example, it wrote about the famous aviator T. Black, who offered his services to the nationalists during the Civil War in Spain and carried out several combat missions (The Observer. 1936. 20 Sept.). "The Daily Mirror" allowed itself to "entertain the audience" with the stories about the adventures of various agents, spies and adventurers in Spain (The Daily Mirror. 1936. 14 Sept.).

In October 1936 "The Spectator" was considering the war itself as an important issue of an inhumane nature using the example of the Spanish Civil War. Explaining the large number of victims of the conflict, it appealed to the mental characteristics and ethnic psychology of the Spanish people: atrocities of War became the result of the split into rival factions, "the nation of warriors and conquerors". The deep context of events was identified, a big role of propaganda in generating this kind of social phenomena was noted: "Exaggeration of atrocities and horrors, which are described by the press of one of the military camps about its opponents, will take place until there is a war" (The Spectator. 1936. 16 Oct.).

Sharing his impressions after visiting Barcelona, "The Spectator" correspondent L. Maknis gave a description of the refugee columns, stressed the high morale that prevailed in their community, despite the

extremely cramped living conditions: “people were joking and laughing, even though many of them lost their homes forever, were sick, almost starved” (The Spectator. 1939. 20 Jan.).

In general, a humanitarian aspect of the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939 was an important addition to the image of the enemy designed by the British press. There were few key moments within this context: a question of responsibility for bombings of civil areas, killings and persecutions of the population (war crimes), a responsibility for the outbreak of the Civil War and the problem of attitude towards forcibly displaced persons (repressions and discrimination on various grounds). A humanitarian disaster as a result of the war was recognized by all the editions, however, it was interpreted according to their political preferences.

The main newsbreaks during that period were the following: sufferings of the civil population (war crimes, bombings, killings and destructions); the refugee problem and the public reaction in Britain; humanitarian campaigns (in most cases in favour of the Republic); the topic of the “man and war” (often publications of an entertaining or sensational nature while referring to specific personalities). In this case, it wasn’t necessary to name the “enemy” openly, but only to point out his responsibility for sufferings of the population in particular, or publications even not related to this subject. This phenomenon vividly outlined “moral standard” of the criticism towards the “enemy” – emphasis on brutality and a threat emanating from him. “Physiological level” of the criticism – such as physical and mental disability, deformity (for example, shown in cartoons) was typical only for the extreme right-wing press.

British editions were divided with respect to the various humanitarian concerns of the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939 according to the antipathy towards the policy of the General Franco (some publications hushed up the facts to a different extent). Left-wing, centrist, part of right-wing newspapers blamed Spanish nationalists for the outbreak of the civil war in Spain. Communist “The Daily Worker” and the Comintern’s “The Inprecorr” had the most rigid and uncompromising criticism over the rebel camp. “The Daily Worker” had a big share of materials on humanitarian topics in general. A very consistent “demonization” of Franco adherents was noticed on the pages of “The Daily Mirror”, “The Manchester Guardian”, “The Daily Express”. Humanitarian campaigns and assistance to refugees were actively discussed in the number of local newspapers. “The Times”, “The Spectator”, “The Daily Mail” and “The Observer”, otherwise, didn’t focus on the fact who had been responsible for the situation to a greater extent while mentioning humanitarian crisis in Spain; events were understood as a consequence of force majeure nature. Labour “The Daily Herald” may also be attributed to this category, which pub-

lished, however, pretty harsh statements about Franco’s policy on refugee issues and bombings of the cities. The clerical press in the face of “The Tablet” and “The Catholic Herald” was inclined to condemn the Republicans, motivating it by the political radicalism of the Republican regime. The same can be said about fascist “The Action” and “The Blackshirt”, which, for example, advocated for the refusal to accept refugees in the Great Britain. The British fascists believed that it was fraught with political difficulties; it would also complicate the problem of unemployment and lead to serious public expenditure.

Without a doubt, problems of bombings of “open” cities, which were often devastating, became an important component of negativisation the Franco’s regime in the British press. The nationalist regime was thus presented as a structure of a terrorist type, dangerous by its nature. Motives of indifference, injustice and cruelty towards the civil population, especially women, children and the elderly people (emphasis on the formation of a sense of the pity), were an important psychological consequence of indication of the “enemy”. Such lines as “deaths of women and children”, “attacks on the crowds of people”, “bombings of the civil targets” became a kind of propaganda clichés.

Humanitarian campaigns to aid the Republican Spain unfolded both with the purpose to provide concrete assistance to the population in the zone of military operations and also in propagandist purposes with the underlined emphasis of the anti-fascist nature of the Spanish war (“The Daily Herald”, “The Daily Worker”, partially “The Manchester Guardian”). “The Daily Worker” made the most ambitious efforts in assisting the “democratic Spain”. “The Daily Herald” was writing about humanitarian campaigns separate from the Communists.

Overall, domestic aspects of the Spanish crisis yielded to some extent to the international ones in the number of references in the British press. Number of such publications reached 34 % in the analyzed materials of about 30 newspapers dated between 1936 and 1939. Moreover, military actions and the actual domestic issues were mentioned almost equally (14 % and 15 %, respectively, humanitarian aspects were touched upon less often).

“The Daily Worker”, “The Daily Express”, “The Manchester Guardian”, “The Daily Mirror”, “The Evening Standard”, “The Inprecorr”, some of the local press took the pro-Republican position in the description of internal political aspects. “The Daily Herald” did not make a focus on its sympathy towards the Republic. “The Times” as “the horn of appeasement”, “The Daily Telegraph” and “The Morning Post” (with significantly expressed sympathy towards Franco’s camp) were trying to stick to neutrality. “The Action”, “The Blackshirt”, “The Observer”, “The Daily Mail”, “The Spectator”, “The Catholic Herald”, “The Daily Sketch” could

be considered as pro-Franco's. It should be mentioned that the editions' sympathy did not correlate clearly with their political affiliations. A typical example is the conservative "The Daily Express", which took a distinctly anti-Franco position, or apparent "impartiality" of "The Daily Herald".

Using the example of domestic political aspects within the Spanish conflict, we can clearly see how the image of the enemy was formed in the British press. In terms of techniques and methods of information warfare, these aspects to a great extent have opened a new chapter in propaganda complementing already existing tactics.

Connotations (variations of the meaning) were among the most profound levels of propaganda in the British press. Depending on the context, a particular definition was coloured with a negative or positive content. Over 20 names of the parties and related to them adjectives can be given to demonstrate this example (for instance, for the Republicans: from "killers" in "The Blackshirt" to "democratic forces" in "The Daily Worker"). The disposition "glorification" – "demonization" played an important role. Moreover, the "party of compassion" was somehow glorified, and the other side was demonized. In this regard, humanitarian aspects of the Spanish Civil War 1936–1939 became the fertile ground for mythologizing, constructing of perfect images in the British printed propaganda. Often construction of myths about "heroes" moved to the archaization of the image, to the historical examples

of courage and valor. In this aspect, the bias estimates in the right-wing and left-wing press was manifested especially clearly. "Hushing" or "exaggeration" became other necessary elements in rendering the image of the enemy (most often they were used while reporting about military actions). Even the choice of the news reports topics, intensity of descriptions of certain facts, phenomena, and events can also be considered as a propaganda technique. Homologating (of political forces, personalities, tendencies), often far-fetched and incorrect, but with a serious psychological effect (e. g., "Caballero = Lenin" in the right-wing press) remained a very common technique.

Thus, events in Spain, their humanitarian content provoked a sharp polarization of public opinion in the Great Britain and throughout Europe. Spanish problem was actively used in mutual information-psychological confrontation between the countries of the continent.

Playing on the effect of "sympathy-antipathy", the British and all-European propaganda (regardless of the political affiliation) managed to shift significantly the angle of perception of the situation happening in Spain. Construction of the false political and psychological stereotypes on both sides, not separation of a propaganda campaign from the actual mechanisms in the foreign policy had extremely negative consequences for the whole complex of international relations. Unfortunately, it happened during almost the most important period in terms of deterrence of fascist aggression.

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