The politics of neutrality: the American Friends Service Committee and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939

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ABSTRACT
From the early months of the Spanish Civil War (1936–9) the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the American Quakers’ central service organization, was engaged in a large-scale relief operation on both sides of the front line. While Quaker aid workers on the ground were running hospitals, orphanages and child feeding stations on the Republican and Nationalist side, the operation triggered a sometimes heated debate at home. Quakers had to bridge the tension between the universalist ethos of a transnationally connected and internationally active religious group whose individual parts, in turn, closely integrated into, and were largely dependent on a national framework of action consisting of governments, the media and national-based groups of donors and supporters. Against this backdrop the article will reflect on the complex and shifting meaning of humanitarian neutrality. In the article the author will show how the claim to neutrality, always contested and precarious, could work as a gate opener for humanitarian aid vis-à-vis state and non-state actors alike, as a platform for cooperation with international institutions as well as a deliberately used capital on an increasingly competitive ‘humanitarian market place’.

The Spanish Civil War is generally seen to be a defining moment of twentieth-century European history. The tragedy that unfolded in the wake of the military coup against the Spanish Republic and its elected government in the late summer of 1936 gave rise to an enormous wave of international solidarity which, would also translate into a huge relief effort. In more contemporary terms the Spanish Civil War had all the earmarks of a ‘complex human emergency’, largely because it was so politically and ideologically charged. Aid for its victims, especially the hundreds of thousands of refugees set in motion by the war both inside and outside Spain, was enmeshed in a complex nexus of political mobilization and diplomatic considerations.¹

With this background in mind, the following article will shed light on the contributions of American Quakers and their central aid organization, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), during the Spanish Civil War.² The crucial and – in view of their

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numbers – hugely disproportionate significance of the Quakers’ role in this conflict was owing mainly to the fact that they were one of a mere handful of aid organizations to work on both sides of the front lines for the entire duration of the war.

For the AFSC the Spanish Civil War represented an important stepping-stone towards its development into a respected international aid agency. At the same time it brought to the fore the tensions inherent in the practice of what Michael Barnett has called the ‘alchemist’ branch of humanitarianism, which aims to go beyond mere alleviation of immediate suffering in order to tackle the root causes of humanitarian disasters.3 For the Quakers, who can be seen as quintessential ‘alchemists’, the provision of aid to victims of war, famine and political or social injustice had indeed always had a broader significance and was linked to ideals of peace and reconciliation, core elements of what the anthropologist Ilana Feldman has described as ‘Quaker ethics’.4 The Spanish Civil War, it will be argued, challenged this approach in a number of ways. One clear source of tension sprang from the innate conflict between the universalistic ethos of a transnationally active group whose work nevertheless was highly dependent on parameters imposed by a particularly national environment consisting of governments, media, donor and supporter groups whose interests had to be addressed in order to succeed.5

With this in mind, this article will provide some insights into the complex and shifting implications of humanitarian neutrality6. It will demonstrate that a credible position of both neutrality and impartiality was the essential prerequisite for an aid organisation that wanted to gain access to the site of a humanitarian disaster. Moreover, in politically charged conflicts the unique selling point of neutrality was an undeniable asset given the increasing competitiveness of the ‘humanitarian marketplace’.7 Last but not least, the example of the Spanish Civil War and the question of neutrality in humanitarian intervention furnish us with valuable insights into the dynamic relationship that existed between civil society and government (foreign policy) actors during the period leading up to the Second World War.

Enter relief in Spain

When Friends began to engage in the Spanish Civil War they already built on a much longer humanitarian tradition going back as far as the early Anti-Slavery Movement.8 From the late nineteenth century onwards, both religious and secular developments affecting the Society of Friends on both sides of the Atlantic had elevated Quakers to a prominent position within the emerging field of international relief. First was the Young Friends Movement (YFM) that had emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The YFM aimed to revitalize the Society of Friends in Great Britain and the United States by means of a spiritual renewal combined with a worldly emphasis on social commitment and an activist interpretation of the Quaker peace testimony.9 For much of the twentieth century the liberal and basically non-evangelical interpretation of the Quaker faith represented by the YFM was an ever more important but by no means the only voice. While Young Friends became drivers of the Quakers’ turn towards international relief and while they connected to older traditions of humanitarian action within the Society of Friends at large including the missionary one10, many orthodox and evangelical Quakers still kept their distance and remained critical towards what they perceived as an overly worldly and political road.

The baptism of fire for the YFM’s religion of ‘deeds not words’ came during the First World War. In the United States the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), in which the
YFM took a leading role, was founded in 1917 at the time of America’s entry into the war with the basic idea of providing young Quakers with a ‘constructive alternative’ to military service.\textsuperscript{11} It assigned conscientious objectors to reconstruction and ambulance units working behind the front lines in France and in the Balkans during the Great War. From this starting point the AFSC developed into one of the most important non-state humanitarian groups of the inter-war period. It participated in and in some instances took charge of major relief operations in Germany and Austria (1920–23)\textsuperscript{12} and also during the Great Famine that haunted the early Soviet Union (1921–23).\textsuperscript{13}

After the mid-1920s the AFSC shifted its primary focus back to domestic activities. The sweeping aid projects it undertook for the benefit of victims of the Great Depression, especially miners in the Appalachian Mountain region, played a key role in bringing the Quakers into close contact with the New Deal administration. At the same time the AFSC kept a firm grip on its international perspectives via its peace work and the establishment of summer schools on foreign relations as well as a network of so-called Quaker embassies in Europe. It kept a close eye on European events, especially after the Nazis came to power in Germany. When the Spanish Civil War began, the AFSC was already engaged in a joint relief effort with British Friends to aid refugees from Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{14}

Strictly speaking, the Quakers’ initial contribution in the Spanish Civil War came about by chance, having originated in the activities of the British-American Quaker couple Alfred and Norma Jacob, who had come to Spain in the summer of 1936, scant weeks after the military \textit{putsch} against the duly-elected Republican government. Born in the United States but with British citizenship, the Quaker Alfred Jacob was chiefly interested in taking advantage of the new climate of religious tolerance that had developed after the acting People’s Front came into power at the beginning of 1936, for the purpose of establishing a Quaker mission. Since the \textit{putschist} blockade apparently made Madrid too dangerous, the Jacobs opened their mission in Barcelona, which at that time was Republican territory and as yet far removed from the front lines. At the same time, the first waves of refugees arrived from regions conquered by the Nationalist insurgents, and so the Quaker mission began as a food kitchen for children, which subsequently formed the nucleus of Quaker aid in Spain. Funding for the facility came from the Friends Service Council, the British counterpart of the AFSC and central Quaker aid agency operating in the British Empire. British Quakers reached an agreement with the Save the Children International Union (SCIU), which had already launched a number of projects in the Republican-controlled parts of Spain after the outbreak of the Civil War, mostly children’s hospitals and settlements. In 1936 the SCIU sent Miette Pictet, a Swiss children’s health expert, to Spain to co-ordinate all of these jobs, a move which placed Jacob’s mission formally under her authority.\textsuperscript{15}

Concurrently, at the end of 1936 the American Quakers were preparing ‘to enter into relief work in Spain’, and to this end the AFSC set up a Committee on Spain under the leadership of John Reich, an expert in public relations. Immediately afterwards preparations were initiated for a fundraising campaign for the benefit of Spanish children.\textsuperscript{16} An opportunity for action soon presented itself at Murcia in southwestern Spain, where thousands of refugees had gathered after Franco’s troops advanced into Andalusia. Until the downfall of the Republic in the spring of 1939 Murcia was to remain the capital of the AFSC’s Spanish Child Feeding Mission, which included soup kitchens, several hospitals and children’s colonies.\textsuperscript{17}

While Murcia remained the centre of AFSC activities in the Republican-controlled territories, Barcelona became the domain of the British FSC and smaller Quaker organizations
from Denmark and Norway. The AFSC, being much better financed, supported some aspects of the work in Barcelona. However, the bulk of the resources from which the Barcelona unit and its roughly 250 local helpers provided daily meals for an ever-growing number of refugee children came from non-American sources.\footnote{18}

A little bit later, in the summer of 1937, the AFSC managed to sign an agreement with the Insurgent’s \textit{junta} in Burgos that permitted the American Quakers to set up smaller food kitchens in the Nationalist sector as well. Yet here the Quakers’ work differed substantially from their service in the Republican territories. Not only was the supply situation better and the number of refugees to be cared for smaller, but the local aid agencies on the Nationalist side, for example the women’s relief service Auxilio Social and the Spanish Red Cross, that had chosen the Nationalist side early on in the conflict, did not allow foreign organizations much leeway for independent work. The fact that the AFSC was eager to maintain a mission in spite of these circumstances was mainly based on diplomatic considerations. As the situation on the Republican side became more desperate and the likelihood of Franco’s victory grew, contacts with the Nationalist sector became increasingly important from the perspective of the AFSC’s headquarters in Philadelphia, if they wanted to keep a foothold in Spain.\footnote{19} However, other than in the Republican areas, Quaker aid projects in Nationalist regions seldom included long-term programmes like children’s colonies or hospitals, but were mainly limited to classic relief work.\footnote{20}

Until 1938 Quaker aid in Spain was able to operate with considerable independence on both sides of the conflict. Resources for the aid programmes came from the Friends’ fund drives as well as from other organizations and local committees, which used the AFSC as a distribution channel for their own donations. The situation changed only in 1938, when in the face of the Nationalist advance and the rising flood of refugees a number of predominantly European governments were persuaded to establish the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees in Spain that was loosely affiliated with the League of Nations. Both the AFSC and the FSC subsequently took on the task of distributing grain and other supplies in Spain for the International Commission. Beginning in mid-1938, the Commission also provided the lion’s share of funding for the Barcelona unit of the FSC. This transformed the character of Quaker aid, giving it an effectively official status both nationally and internationally.\footnote{21} This was evidenced by the fact that shortly before the end of the war, the Quaker Howard Kershner, a businessman from New York, took over the job of co-ordinator for all AFSC relief activities while at the same time acting as the Director of Relief for the International Commission in Spain. After the final collapse of the Republic and the fall of Barcelona on 26 January 1939, the Quaker operation under Kershner’s leadership eventually evolved into an organization that not only provided relief for the overcrowded camps in Southern France but also tried to find safe havens in Europe, North America and Latin America for the hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing Spain to escape Franco’s victorious troops.\footnote{22}

**The Spanish campaign**

At the beginning of the Spanish Civil War however, no one could have predicted the eventual extent of the American Quakers’ commitment. Because of the political climate in the United States, chances of success for large-scale fund-raising and aid campaigns seemed to be under an evil star. The gradual tightening of Congressional neutrality legislation after
1935 reflected a broad social consensus that cut across the political camps and reflected widespread opposition to US involvement in foreign conflicts. In the Spanish case the powerful ideological associations which galvanized the public further exacerbated the situation. While the liberal (and left-wing) public in the United States strongly sympathized with the Republican cause, conservative and Catholic milieus entertained strong reservations about the Popular Front government, which was perceived as being anticlerical and essentially socialist. Compounding the problem was the fact that the issues in the Spanish conflict became inseparably entangled with domestic debates on the New Deal legislation, denounced by the political right as being ‘socialist’ and ‘dirigiste’.23

Some of these conflicts became visible within the Society of Friends itself. The AFSC’s decision to provide aid in Spain ‘according to the need regardless of political affiliation’24, had in fact been preceded by heated debates. A considerable number of members neither wanted nor were able to conceal their sympathies for the Republican cause. According to the minutes of the meeting, ‘(c)onsiderable discussion followed on the difficulty of maintaining a neutral attitude in this present situation in Spain’ and ‘that it was only human to be sympathetic with the party which was felt to be right’.25 Others, especially mid-western evangelical and orthodox Quakers outside of the AFSC, signalled their hostility towards the secular Republic. For many of those latter groups, the AFSC’s decision to become involved in Spain fuelled their mistrust of what they perceived as the ‘radical’ and ‘leftist’ programme of the committee. Indeed, during the 1930s the AFSC had sought progressive alliances on many civil-rights questions and maintained a close relationship with some members the New Deal administration. What was more, through their peace work and the organization of summer schools in foreign relations the AFSC had a reputation of being ‘internationalist’. Against this background, initial doubts about the possibility of maintaining a non-partisan stance in a conflict such as the Spanish Civil War were early harbingers of a complex debate about humanitarian neutrality and impartiality that accompanied the Spanish relief effort for its entire duration. The political associations of the conflict and their parallels with domestic policy debates in the United States turned the Quakers’ position of neutrality into a tightrope act, especially regarding their efforts to get financial support for their campaign. Least problematic was their long-established co-operation with the other historical peace churches, the Mennonites and Brethren, as well as with the liberal Protestant Federal Council of Churches of Christ and parts of the American peace movement, for which the AFSC had already acted as a distribution channel for humanitarian aid on previous occasions.26

The problems started as soon as they had to step outside this small circle. A serious handicap was the attitude of the American Red Cross, whose leadership refused any involvement because of the explosive nature of the subject.27 Thus the ARC’s well-organized infrastructure that reached into even the smallest hamlet of the United States became unavailable for fundraising. On a different level, the AFSC first saw this reluctance on the side of the ARC as an opportunity to act as the sole neutral instance in Spain, ideally with public support from the Red Cross, but this hope too was initially disappointed.28 The position would not essentially change until the final phases of the war.29 This compelled the Quakers to depend only upon themselves and a small circle of supporters to both finance and support their goal of providing neutral and non-partisan assistance.

Given the extremely polarized atmosphere in which debates about Spain were conducted in the public forum, this was no easy position, particularly in view of the fact that parallel to the AFSC’s efforts an alliance had quickly taken shape whose primary goal was to repeal
the arms embargo against Spain. This embargo policy, pursued by the Western democracies Great Britain, France and the United States alike, had arguably put the Republic at a grave strategic disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the rebels at quite an early stage of the civil war, since the insurgents were able to count on support from Italy and Germany.

While the priorities of the 'Lift the Embargo' campaign clearly differed from those of the Quakers, in several aspects their work overlapped. Some of the activities of the 'Lift the Embargo' campaign were humanitarian in nature inasmuch as they sought to support the Republican government with urgently needed relief supplies. The implication of relief in this context differed from the Quaker understanding in a twofold way: firstly because it would benefit only one side of the conflict; and secondly because it performed a chiefly political and military function aimed at bolstering the will to resist in the Republican zone. In view of this fact, the Quakers' ostentatious demonstration of neutrality was met with incomprehension from the start. This was clearly demonstrated in the case of the American Friends of Spanish Democracy (AFSD), the largest pro-Republican pressure group, which numbered many prominent liberal progressive personalities including Albert Einstein, James Dewey and Reinhold Niebuhr among its ranks.30 There were enraged reactions when, in January 1937, AFSC-Executive Secretary Clarence Pickett refused an invitation from the AFSD on the grounds that the AFSC wanted to provide relief in Spain 'on the basis of meeting the needs of women and children irrespective of political affiliation' .31 After the AFSD had joined with the more markedly leftist North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (NAC) in mid-1937, it came to an open rupture. In the NAC's view, the neutrality of the AFSC was nothing more than 'a thinly veiled form of collaboration with the nationalists'. The NAC's General Secretary Russell Thayer surely had this in mind when he wrote a letter to the AFSC excoriating the naiveté of the AFSC for having allowed itself to be exploited by the Nationalist side for its own purposes.32 The conflict was further inflamed by the fact that the NAC had a humanitarian wing at its command in the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy (AMBASD), which competed with the AFSC for donations.33 AFSC representatives repeatedly and actively approached potential donors from the liberal, pro-Republican camp and tried to convince them of the advantages of neutrality when providing aid.34 It was no longer merely a question of giving non-partisan observers the opportunity to donate money for the Spanish cause irrespective of the political conflict. In fact, the AFSC presented itself as embodying a better and ultimately purer form of humanitarian aid.35 As the AFSC saw it, its aspiration to provide assistance in accordance with Quaker principles was inextricably entwined with its status as competitor in a fiercely contested humanitarian marketplace.

This being the case, the interpretation of neutrality in the context of the Spanish Civil War was in a state of constant flux. As of mid-1937, when – apart from a few short breaks – the Republicans found themselves on the defensive, there was a much greater need for aid on the Republican side than in the sector controlled by Franco's men. In such a situation the neutrality of a relief activity purportedly functioning on purely humanitarian principles was doubly questioned. In view of the better supply situation in the Nationalist territories, a nearly equal apportionment of aid to both sides meant an *a priori* departure from the basic humanitarian principle of supplying aid on the sole basis of need. It could be argued (and indeed was) that this form of assistance gave the Franco side access to additional resources that benefited the army and abetted military action. On the other hand and in the face of the increasingly desperate situation of the Republican government, whose supply
paths shrank in reverse proportion to their increasing need, any form of help was basically a *de facto* intervention in favour of the Republic, regardless of whether it benefited only the government side or both. When hopes that victory might still go to the Republicans dwindled in the summer of 1938, even their sympathizers realized that the foremost issue was how relief goods could be transported into Republican territory at all. This being the case, in the autumn the AFSC agreed to distribute aid supplies from the AMBSD in the Republican part of Spain and to organize their transport through the International Red Cross. The AFSC accepted earmarking for the Republican side because it provided them with welcome new resources, and in return the AMBSD refrained from all publicity that might have compromised the AFSC. John Reich, the chairman of the Committee on Spain, countered criticism of this practice by stating that ‘our fixed policy has been and remains to divide our supplies between both sides according to need or to put it in a more Quakerly manner, we will endeavor to render aid to the Spanish people wherever they may be in need, regardless of sides. This we believe to be true impartiality.’ De facto the matter marked a deviation from the public stance of strict neutrality. In reality the flexible application of this principle was a fundamental prerequisite for relief efforts.

The US government

Relationships that the AFSC maintained on the political level were hardly less complex. The committee supported initiatives coming mostly from liberal Democrats who demanded a Congressional commitment for the support of Spain and/or the establishment of a general ‘war chest’ for emergencies. The idea of official funding for American aid in foreign conflicts was welcomed by the AFSC as an instrument of positive and constructive internationalism. Many welcomed such measures, which went beyond the neutrality legislation wholeheartedly supported by the vast majority of Quakers, as an alternative to military options. Considering the fact that every initiative of this kind had so far come to nothing, it was the AFSC’s direct contacts with government circles, not least Clarence Pickett’s personal friendship with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, that were of crucial significance.

For the Roosevelt administration, Spain had been a minefield from the first. Especially in light of his domestic projects the President had to keep a weather eye on both the Catholic vote as well as the country’s anti-interventionist mood. What was more, Secretary of State Cordell Hull regarded the purportedly Communist leanings of some Republicans as incompatible with American interests, as did a significant part of Congress. This critical mixture determined the policies of the American government during the first two years of the Spanish Civil War. A ‘moral embargo’ in the summer of 1936 that boycotted the sale of American arms to both parties in the conflict was followed in 1937 by the *Spanish Embargo Act*, which officially made such actions punishable by law. It was only in 1938 that a change of sentiment took place under the influence of increasingly aggressive German policies and also led to a reassessment of the Spanish conflict. It did not bring about the repeal of the arms embargo but it did trigger a change in relief policy towards Spain. Up to this point the relationship of the AFSC with the government had dealt mainly with formalities; from then onwards the association became closer.

As the AFSC had been co-operating with British Quakers on behalf of the International Commission since the middle of 1938, the question of how the US government could contribute became a prime point on the agenda. Following a consultation in the State
Department, Secretary of State Cordell Hull eventually offered to put 250,000 barrels of surplus wheat from the stores of the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation – a federal agency – at the disposal of the AFSC for distribution in Spain.\(^{43}\) In a meeting held at the White House soon afterwards Clarence Pickett persuaded the President himself to approve a further substantial donation for this purpose, and this led to the establishment of a committee made up of prominent personalities under the chairmanship of the Catholic New York financier George MacDonald.\(^{44}\) Although the committee was crowned with only modest success, owing to both personal inadequacies as well as the rapid disintegration of the Spanish Republic in early 1939\(^ {45}\), it nevertheless was an important step for the Quakers who were listed as the official distribution agency. On the occasion of its founding the President stated: 'Both the Red Cross and I are united in supporting this work of the Quakers whose integrity and impartiality are beyond question.'\(^ {46}\) Thus at the end of the civil war in Spain the Quakers were basically awarded an official seal of approval by the President, the State Department and the ARC and thus were able to act as the quasi-official American relief agency. This also opened new perspectives regarding the question of the impartiality of Quaker aid operations. In the context of debates about the establishment of the MacDonald Committee, a telling conflict developed with the American Red Cross whose co-operation in the areas of fundraising and logistics was essential to success.\(^ {47}\) The ARC agreed to co-operate after an express Presidential appeal, but it did not relinquish its fundamental reservations.\(^ {48}\) What triggered the dispute with the AFSC was the fact that the Spanish government would be the chief beneficiary of relief supplies, since only the government was willing to participate in distribution by contributing resources of its own, while the Nationalists had no interest in such an arrangement because of the positive supply situation in their sector. In the opinion of ARC Secretary General Norman Davies, this circumstance gave the entire affair 'a political or partisan aspect, contrary to the policy and spirit of the Red Cross', which was solely guided by 'humanitarian aspects'.\(^ {49}\) Pickett repudiated this assertion that the AFSC was engaging in 'political assistance'. The amelioration of this suffering, which was concentrated on the Republican side, Pickett pointed out to Davis, had to take absolute priority even if it meant that aid was assigned to one side only.\(^ {50}\) The Spain Committee of the AFSC also came to the conclusion that impartiality would remain intact as long as offers of assistance were formally directed to both sides of the conflict. At the end the AFSC once more successfully took the step of asking the President for direct support against the hesitant ARC and some members of the State Department.\(^ {51}\)

**Going international**

While the AFSC focused its efforts on the American scene, at the same time it continued to maintain connections with a broad network of actors outside of the United States. Both the position of the United States as a potential source of aid supplies and the strategic position of the AFSC among American aid organizations were factors that played out in the Spanish case and gave American Quakers a degree of influence otherwise unattainable. It was evident that the AFSC played its role with self-confidence, both in its dealings with British Quakers as well as in its co-operation with the International Commission. In both cases this collaboration was not entirely free of contradictions.

Since the work in Spain had stemmed from a British initiative, the open question from the start was how the American Quakers should define their relationship to their British
coreligionists. For a number of reasons a simple affiliation or merger of both missions in the form of an ‘international’ Quaker relief campaign was out of the question from the American standpoint: once more the question of neutrality was a central one. Although outwardly its work was strictly non-partisan, the British FSC co-operated closely with the National Joint Committee for the Relief of Spain (NJC), an organization of markedly pro-Republican leanings. Prominent members that numbered MPs among their ranks openly supported an intervention by the British government on the Republican side. Under these circumstances the AFSC leadership feared it would endanger its neutral image by working jointly with the British Quakers. In Great Britain, to a much greater extent than in the United States, the conflict marked a turning point for the peace movement with which many Quakers on both sides of the Atlantic identified themselves. Whereas the struggle for neutrality legislation in the United States was a loosely unifying factor for many peace activists, numerous British pacifists turned their backs on nonpartisan positions in the face of the Fascist threat. For this reason the FSC had more pronounced leanings towards the pro-Republican camp and, unlike the AFSC, was ready to accept donations publicly that were expressly marked for disposition on one side of the conflict, as a rule the Republican one. In this scenario the AFSC met every appeal on the part of its British brothers for closer and publicly visible ‘international’ Quaker co-operation with great reserve. Indeed, when the actual joint work in Spain began, Clarence Pickett intimated to the FSC that the AFSC’s effort in that country should always be regarded as ‘an American one.’ Other than that there was close co-operation, including agreements concerning shared promotional material and tight co-ordination among the several relief units working in Spain. As a rule, dissent raised its head as soon as the question of how best to stage the aid campaign for the American donor market came up. Philadelphia usually rejected British proposals to send prominent European speakers to the United States to drum up public interest for the Spanish cause. Domestic policy considerations and the paramount goal of safeguarding the neutral image of Quaker aid in the United States determined the relationship of the AFSC to other international groups like the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees in Spain as well. The commission was founded in response to an initiative of British Quakers, with British Friends continuing to exercise a strong influence on its activities for the entire duration of its existence. Under the leadership of the Norwegian Michael Hansson, then President of the International Nansen Office for Refugees in Geneva and an expert in international law, the committee’s primary goal was to create a non-political framework in which governments would be able to provide resources for humanitarian help in Spain.

Because it was affiliated with the League of Nations, the International Commission was an essentially European organization; at the same time, from the beginning all eyes were fixed on the United States, which had been the main target of the initiative. A memorandum drawn up by the International Commission underlined the paramount importance of the desired US contribution for the Commission’s work. All efforts had to concentrate on the United States, which ‘in a measure far beyond all other countries’ was able to command the resources most needed in Spain. Mobilizing the proven ‘generosity of the American people’ was deemed so important that the potential contributions of every other country were considered merely ‘symbolical.'

All this placed the AFSC in a key position that made it welcome the founding of the International Commission as a potential new source of funding for the Spanish endeavour. Furthermore, the establishment of the Commission held out hopes of shifting the
collaboration with British Quakers onto a new and politically less awkward level. Political neutrality had been a fundamental premise at the Commission’s founding and pushed the issue of partisanship among ordinary supporters of the AFSC into the background. Moreover this form of collaboration was more in line with the AFSC’s self-image as an essentially American organization and as such, working with the American government ultimately made them feel more comfortable than being part of an international alliance of NGOs.

Unlike British Quakers, in previous years the AFSC had already directed its main efforts towards bringing the American government on board as well as setting up an unaffiliated aid organization to raise monetary donations from private individuals.

After the Commission had commenced its operations under the direction of the former Swedish diplomat Malcolm de Lilliehöök in April 1938, the AFSC took some important steps to broker direct contacts with American government authorities. In April John Reich organized a meeting between Ambassador Joseph Kennedy and Committee members Edith Pye and Edward Harvey in London, where they discussed the likelihood of possible US government participation. At the same time Clarence Pickett again used his contacts at the White House to persuade the President to support government funding. John Reich informed Edith Pye about Pickett’s plans, saying that: ‘Clarence has whispered in the President’s ear via Mrs. Roosevelt that he might persuade the large charitable foundations to put up a substantial sum of money for refugee relief to be matched dollar for dollar by public contributions.’ Together the AFSC and International Commission members worked out strategies to guarantee the success of this campaign on the American charities market. So when in the autumn of 1938 the Commission was accused of taking sides in the Spanish conflict because most of the wheat flour it sent to Spain had gone to the Republican zone where the need was greater, the strategy that ultimately succeeded in countering these accusations was hammered out in close teamwork between Philadelphia and the Commission: it offered the Nationalist side alternative goods such as blankets, clothing and castor oil. Also, the AFSC frequently worked as translator for the IC in order to draw on the American donor market, a strategy it set forth in a paper worked out by the Commission in 1938 under the direction of the AFSC. Its primary goal was to find ways of procuring the release of public stores of surplus wheat and at the same time encourage Americans to donate money that would then be used for processing and transporting the goods. To achieve this it pursued a two-pronged strategy: on the one hand it informed the public of the existence of vast food surpluses of wheat and powdered milk that had resulted from certain policies implemented by the Roosevelt administration to stabilize prices for the benefit of producers; on the other it appealed to the obvious self-interest of American taxpayers who would be ‘indirectly lightening their own tax burden’ by reducing these stockpiles. However, the clinching factor for the success of any strategy in the United States was no doubt a further point mentioned in the paper, namely that ‘throughout the initiative should be American’; as far as the public was concerned the proportion of international bodies was to be kept as low as possible. The campaign was to have an American face and ideally be supported by a broad social alliance including churches, universities, chambers of commerce, banks and finally the participating humanitarian organizations. This accorded with the self-image of the AFSC leadership. It welcomed international co-operation as long as this did not endanger its image as an aid organization that was uniquely beholden to American donors. Submitting publicly to supervision by an international agency was thus a red line that must not be crossed as far
as the AFSC was concerned, as such an act would have been almost impossible to justify to supporters in politics as well as among its own clientele.63

The Spanish Civil War and the American Friends Service Committee

In many respects the Spanish Civil War was an important milestone on the AFSC’s road to becoming an increasingly professionalized aid organization. On both national and international levels the AFSC cemented its reputation as an independent yet specifically ‘American’ humanitarian institution. The need to reinforce and/or justify its own claims of neutrality to a sceptical (donor) public, with all the concomitant tensions, contradictions and shifting circumstances involved, demanded a high degree of diplomatic skill. The desire to convey an accurate yet non-static image of its ability to adapt relief work to a variety of situations and recipients while never losing sight of its spiritual principles meant that public-relations work achieved a level of importance never before experienced in the organization. This was particularly important because Spain had to compete constantly with scenes of other humanitarian disasters for the attention of American donors. At the time China was threatened by a Japanese invasion that the public saw as putting US geostrategic and economic interests at risk. On top of that, the missionary activities of American evangelicals had created close contacts within the country and thus focused attention on China, a situation that called for even greater efforts on behalf of the Spanish campaign.64

The importance of public-relations work was measured by the fact that at the very incep-
tion of the relief effort the directorship of the Committee on Spain was given to John Reich, a man who unlike the bulk of relief workers the AFSC sent to Spain spoke no Spanish and was unfamiliar with cultural conditions in that country; therefore, one must assume that it was his public-relations expertise that got him the job. Notwithstanding, Executive Secretary Clarence Pickett also spent a great deal of his own time attempting to influence the manner in which the AFSC campaign was presented in the press. Indeed, in early 1938 Edward Bernays, a pioneer of PR work and one of the country’s leading advertising experts, was approached for help in setting up a Spanish Press Information Service for the AFSC.65

The level of effort expended by the AFSC in this area was based on the fact that the Spanish campaign was directed at a largely non-Quaker clientele and moreover stood in direct competition with other politically defined campaigns that supported only one side in the conflict. Thus on the one hand the Quakers’ non-partisanship was a unique selling point whose public image had to be preserved unsullied at all costs. On the other, they were at a disadvantage vis-à-vis politically one-sided campaigns because they were less able to play on emotions.

That being the case, part of the Quakers’ strategy was to concentrate on aid to children. Obviously, from the First World War onwards the feeding of children and the establishment of children’s colonies had been a tried and true form of assistance used by many organizations, not least because of its advertising success in the American market.66 Furthermore it was a strategy that allowed the Quakers to draw on a wealth of experience gained during relief operations in Germany, Poland and Soviet Russia during the 1920s.67 Children were especially suitable for projecting the desired image of Quaker relief as purely humanitarian, apolitical and impartial. Yet the Quaker campaign differed in an important point from the campaigns of pro-Republican aid committees that also gave children a prominent role: they were not portrayed primarily as victims of political ideologies. Unlike the supporters
of the Republic, Quakers never pointed the finger of guilt to one side or the other. The Quaker campaign showed mothers and children as victims of war itself and apart from that, mostly as beneficiaries of aid. Prominence was given to the actual act of helping. The atrocities of war hardly featured in Quaker publications; instead there was a subtle suggestion that Quaker aid reached those who were most in need of it and that donations given to them fulfilled a strictly humanitarian purpose. The AFSC expended a lot of energy on the choice of suitable pictures to transmit this particular message. John Reich continually tried to encourage the Quaker Aid Mission in Spain to furnish the AFSC with photographs ‘that illustrate the joy of giving as well as that of receiving’. However, an attentive observer could not fail to notice even here the tensions inherent in the neutrality claim: the pictures that found their way into Quaker publications and brochures came overwhelmingly out of the Republican sector. Very rarely did photos from the Nationalist region find their way in. Setting aside the different levels of hardship on either side of the conflict, the work in the National sector was very important for communicating the message of neutrality, but unsuitable as a means of raising donations.

A second prominent theme in Quaker publications was the repeated emphasis on the professional nature of their assistance, which almost completely eclipsed more Quaker-specific content. At best there were some brief references to the religious motivation and traditions of Quaker relief work in the AFSC’s brochures and communiqués. Other than that, the focus was on the aid itself, which was portrayed as an essentially technocratic undertaking not focused on spiritual renewal, peace work and reconciliation, but rather on practical, tangible aid: nutrition, caloric content and vaccines. There were frankly practical reasons for this. Initially the AFSC had worked in affiliation with other organizations in Spain, organizations that did not share the particular motivation animating the Quakers. This was arguably even more true of their relationship with other religious groups than of their transactions with secular organizations like Save the Children. Unlike the Mennonites, for example, who worked within the Quaker mission framework and had a much stronger evangelical orientation, the Quakers rejected the role of “rice Christians” and as a rule considered the saving of souls of lesser significance.

Other than that, the persons delegated by the AFSC fulfilled the increasingly more stringent job requirements for relief workers that had been constantly enhanced since the First World War and were also adhered to by secular humanitarian organizations like the Red Cross. The fact that a large segment of the personnel sent to Spain by the AFSC could look back on a missionary past seemed contradictory only at first glance. In fact it proved that the AFSC valued proficiency in Spanish, which as a rule had been acquired by people with experience of missionary activity in Cuba and Mexico.

Of course, all this did not mean that Quaker ethics as a guiding principle played no part in the Spanish aid campaign inside the organization itself. Awareness of the spiritual nature and importance of specifically Quaker ideals of resolving conflict via individual witness was always upheld, no matter how much the professionalism of the mission was emphasized. Most of the men and women sent into the field by the AFSC pursued their work on the basis of personal commitment, seeing it as a vocation in the aforementioned sense and in no way a technocratic undertaking largely devoid of spiritual content. Like Esther Farquhar, a trained social worker who ran the station in Murcia, they were concerned to bring the ‘reality of divine love’ to Spain, a ‘positive love’ as ‘the only way of solving human conflicts’. Be that as it may, such sentiments were not sufficient qualification for the aid effort. Therefore for
the entire duration of the campaign the AFSC concentrated on recruiting persons such as social workers, doctors and businessmen with relevant vocational experience and only secondarily considered their fidelity to Quaker principles.

Of course, Quaker ethics and humanitarian professionalism were in no way contradictory in the eyes of many of these relief workers. The traditions from which they came were those of social reform circles of the Progressive Age and the New Deal. They saw themselves as not representing the AFSC only but in a much broader sense, an ideal of societal modernization; here Spain provided a nearly ideal projection surface. In many respects they acted as emissaries of a uniquely American concept of scientific progress and believed it was their calling to establish state-of-art medical, social and pedagogic techniques that would outlast their immediate relief efforts. They frequently found allies among the local elites on the Republican side. Doctors, teachers, social-welfare employees supported their project of revitalizing a backward-seeming society.

Apart from Quaker collaboration with the Falangist Auxilio Social, there were no comparable joint projects on the Nationalist side. The work done by the Auxilio Social reflected the Nationalists’ hierarchic and organic views of society and projected a commensurate image of poverty and need that differed radically from that of the majority of American Quaker relief workers educated in social reform. Matters were further complicated because many Quakers were hostile towards the Catholic Church which they chiefly blamed for what they saw as Spain’s backward condition, and also because the overwhelming majority of the clergy espoused the Nationalist cause: this antipathy is clearly evident in the source material. At this point if not before it became clear that in Spain the practice of humanitarian professionalism allied to the practical application of Quaker moral values could only remain politically neutral in a very limited and formal sense.

The sympathies of many Quakers ultimately became public during the final phase of the campaign, and this was in fact linked to the personality of Howard Kershner, who took over the leadership of the Quaker mission on the eve of the Nationalist victory at the turn of 1938/9. His correspondence and subsequently published writings reveal Kershner to be a market radical in the Ayn Rand mould and also a decided critic of the New Deal. Kershner mistrusted the Spanish Republic and its – in his opinion – socialistic and potentially ‘totalitarian’ tendencies, whereas he entertained a good deal of sympathy for the Auxilio Social’s ideas of order and certain aspects of the Franco regime as well. The AFSC had probably been principally motivated by the hope that the appointment would facilitate their access to the Nationalist leadership, but Kershner soon antagonized most of the Quaker relief workers and a good part of the AFSC leadership. The scandal finally broke when the New York Times printed an article by one of the returning relief workers, accusing the Franco regime of misappropriating aid supplies, a reproach that was all the more serious coming from a Friend, as the article itself pointed out, ‘despite the well-known aversion of the Quakers to mix in politics or to comment upon political situations’. To Kershner in turn this seemed tantamount to abandoning the neutrality precept and indeed a betrayal of what he perceived as being Quakerism’s most sacred principles. It must have hurt in Philadelphia to read Kershner’s lines when he wrote back in anger to AFSC headquarters claiming that to ‘go the second mile’ when the Nationalists came to power and to ‘maintain a Quakerly attitude of forgiveness and helpfulness’ would have been the greatest opportunity to demonstrate the Friends’ particular approach to humanitarian aid. ‘I am very sorry to say,’ he concluded, ‘that this opportunity was not always appreciated and that some of our
representatives did not rise to the occasion. Here was, if anything, the final proof of the neutrality concept’s vulnerability. It was also an indicator that the very concept of neutrality, contested as it was, had acquired a quasi-theological status. To be neutral was both to be truly humanitarian and truly Quaker.

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To a degree the foregoing account of a humanitarian operation that was essentially secular and devoid of all religious content reflects the metamorphoses the AFSC had undergone since the First World War during the course of its institutionalization. For manifold reasons the Spanish Civil War served as a catalyst for this development. It provided the AFSC with a boost in prestige, ultimately turning it into a global player prepared to act as representative and intermediary of American aid abroad and to deal with the US administration, foreign governments and international agencies alike, if not on an equal footing, at least with a high degree of self-confidence. In this context the politics of neutrality so ostentatiously pursued by the AFSC drew from many sources and served multiple purposes. To begin with it surely did reflect deep-seated religious and ethical convictions among the AFSC leadership. Beyond and inasmuch as it was promoted as a distinct Quakerly approach to humanitarian aid, it was also a piece of ‘invented tradition’ by which the AFSC sought to construct unity within a Society of Friends which otherwise was divided theologically and politically on many accounts. Furthermore, the key position ‘neutrality’ acquired within the Spanish aid campaign and the AFSCs public-relations work in general indicated the degree to which the AFSC leadership had come to acknowledge its value as a unique selling point to be deliberately used in an increasingly competitive humanitarian market place. In the course of the campaign the AFSC recognized that the advantages of a neutral reputation outweighed the disadvantages it faced against the backdrop of a highly politicized humanitarian emergency.

What happened beyond the Spanish Civil War taught the AFSC a lesson: that in their relationships with governments and donors alike, the very fact of being acknowledged as neutral humanitarians opened up new spaces to take a political stand. While the Quakers worked on both sides of the conflict, their actions were sometimes just shy of a humanitarian intervention on the side of the Republic, and what was more, an intervention that had the tacit approval of the American government.

The Spanish operation in this sense also foreshadowed the net relationships the Quakers would soon be entering into during the Second World War and its aftermath, which saw them in close co-operation with both American and international agencies like the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). It may be seen partly as a late echo of the Spanish debates when the AFSC began to prepare for post-war relief and made a claim to become active on behalf of both ‘displaced persons’ and the population in future occupied enemy territories. The AFSC, a memorandum of 1943 claimed, had ‘no affiliation to any one country, political group […]. We can be – and I think we are – everyone’s friend. We are free to pick up some less popular tasks, to fill some of the gaps which the other agencies are leaving for their stronger fields.’ This was after all ‘not only an important tradition but a specific function.’
Notes

1. Two recent publications on the Spanish Civil War are Casanova, *The Spanish Republic and Civil War* and Payne, *The Spanish Civil War*. In both cases humanitarian aid hardly features at all. The international aid operation is in turn covered in Pretus, *Humanitarian Relief in the Spanish Civil War*.

2. A comprehensive account of British and American Quakers’ Spanish relief operation is Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief Work*.

3. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, 39.

4. Feldman, “The Quaker Way.”

5. With regard to the American Red Cross: Irwin, *Making the World Safe*.

6. On the evolution of humanitarian principles like neutrality or impartiality in the twentieth century see also Paulmann, *Conjunctures, Laqua, Humanitarian cloud*.

7. For the long history of the term and ideology of humanitarian neutrality see Davies, “From the ‘Religion of Humanity’ to the Kosovo War.” In the American case the tensions inherent in relief organisations’ self-portrayed neutrality and impartiality look back to a long history, too, as evidenced for instance in many contributions of a special issue on the First World War: Little, “Humanitarianism in the Era of the First World War.”

8. On the history of Quakerism on both sides of the Atlantic: Punshon, *Portrait in Grey*. For Britain: Kennedy, *British Quakerism*. On Quaker humanitarianism with a strong emphasis on British Friends: Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters*.

9. Greenwood, *Friends and Relief*, 167–77; On the “modernist” revival of Quakerism see also Punshon, *Portrait in Grey*, 237–70.

10. Tuson, “The Business of Relief Work.”

11. J. William Frost, “Early History of the American Friends Service Committee.”

12. For Austria: Adlgasser, *American Individualism Abroad*. For Germany: Proctor, “An American Enterprise?”

13. McFadden and Gorfinkel, *Quakers in Revolutionary Russia*; in a broader context Patenaude, *The Big Show in Bololand*.

14. Schmitt, *Quakers and Nazis*; Darton, *Germany Emergency Committee*.

15. On the SCIU in Spain see Pretus, *Humanitarian Relief*, 82–99; Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, 36–46.

16. Minutes of the AFSC Executive Board, 17/12/1936, in: Archives of the American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia (hitherto: AFSCA), Foreign Service (hitherto FS), record of proceedings.

17. Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, 47–70.

18. At the end of 1938, immediately before the city fell to Franco’s troops, the Quaker-run canteens fed around 19,000 children, in: ibid., 46.

19. Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, 71–90.

20. A report on the situation in the nationalist sector in AFSCA – FS: Board of Directors and Committee on Spain 29/8/1937.

21. Pretus, *Humanitarian Relief*, 127–56.

22. The Committee on Spain was eventually dissolved in 1942.

23. Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War*.

24. Ibid.

25. Minutes AFSC Executive Board 17/12/1936, in: AFSCA – Minutes 1936.

26. AFSCA - FSS Minutes 17/12/1936 and 18/12/1936; AFSCA – Minutes COS. 3/2/1937.

27. The ARC confined their engagement to the evacuation and repatriation of American nationals during the first months of the conflict and it committed only very scarce resources to support the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): Internal memo ARC 1/7/1937, in AFSCA, General Files, Comms and Orgs, Spain 1937, American Red Cross. In addition the ARC had started a major campaign for Chinese war victims in early 1936 and was hesitant to enter into any further commitment that would water down its effect. Clarence Pickett Diary 16/12/1936, in: AFSCA- Clarence Pickett Papers (CPP).
28. American Red Cross (n.n.) to John Reich 1/3/1937, in: AFSCA, General Files, Comms and Orgs, Spain 1937, American Red Cross.

29. An ARC press release in July at least showed “confidence” in the neutrality of the AFSC 12/7/1937, in: ibid.

30. The AFSD’s letterhead listed church next to trade-union leaders as well as intellectuals and civil-rights activists and included, among others, Methodist bishop Francis McConnell, Rabbi Stephen Wise, David Dubinsky, Lewis Mumford, Roger Baldwin, Lilian Wald, John Dos Passos and Upton Sinclair.

31. Clarence Pickett to Madelein Blitzstein (AFSD Philadelphia) 20/1/1937: in AFSCA, General Files, Comms and Orgs (CO), Spain 1937: American Friends of Spanish Democracy.

32. Russell Thayer (Organizational Section NAC) to John Reich 26/8/1937: in: ibid.

33. Russell Thayer to Clarence Pickett 16/9/1937, in: ibid.

34. Thayer on one occasion complained about a speech by John Reich before the Philadelphia Bar association in which the latter had tried to suggest to lawyers that with a view to the War situation the money would be in better hands with the AFSC’s Spanish Children’s Relief Fund than it would be with the NAC. His report was confirmed by one of the participants at that meeting. Russell Thayer to Clarence Pickett 26/9/1937; Russell; John F. Lewis (Philadelphia Bar) to Russell Thayer 24/9/1937, both in: ibid.

35. “We are interested in feeding children who need food,” Clarence Pickett pointed out to Russell Thayer 16/9/1937, in: ibid.

36. A classified letter from February reveals clearly that the donations from the NAC were earmarked for the Republican side and that there was a mutual agreement about the procedure between AFSC and AMBSD. Douglas Jacobs (AMBSD) to John Reich 13/2/39, in: AFSCA, CO 1937: North American Committee to aid Spanish Democracy (Medical Bureau) 1939.

37. Pater Francis Talbot, editor of the influential Jesuit weekly America on several occasions in editorials and in letters outright attacked the AFSC’s practice as an indirect intervention on the republican side. Francis Talbot to John Reich 3/1/1939; 12/1/1939, in: AFSCA – CO: America National Catholic Weekly.

38. John Reich to John Sherman und Douglas Jacobs (AMBSD) 1/4/1939, in: AFSCA, Comms and Orgs, Spain, North American Committee to aid Spanish Democracy (Medical Bureau) 1939.

39. Conversation with Congresswoman Caroline O’Day, Clarence Pickett Diary 21/1/1937, in: AFSCA- CPP.

40. The initiative originated with a group of liberal Democrats led by Congressman Jerry Vorhiis. The AFSC was strongly supportive of the Act and tried to advocate it through various channels, including the State Department, Conversation with State Department officials, Clarence Pickett Diary 28/4/1937, in: AFSCA- CPP.

41. Tierney, FDR and the Spanish Civil War.

42. These formalities included, for example, the registration required from aid organisations working abroad under the neutrality laws or the issuance of passports for Quaker aid workers; Undersecretary of State to John Reich 11/6/1937; in: AFSCA – CO – Spain 1937: Relationship with US government.

43. Cordell Hull to John Reich 19/8/1938, in: ibid.

44. Conversation with President Roosevelt 9/11/1938, in: Clarence Pickett Diary, in: AFSCA– CPP.

45. Note John Reich 11/2/1939 in: AFSCA – CO: MacDonald Committee.

46. Press release MacDonald Committee 11/1/1939, in: ibid.

47. Conversation with President Roosevelt 9/11/1938: Clarence Pickett Diary, in: AFSCA– CPP.

48. Clarence Pickett to Norman Davis (ARC) 10/11/1938, in: AFSCA – CO 1938: American Red Cross; Conversation with Norman Davis 11/12/1938, in: Clarence Pickett Diary, in: AFSCA– CPP.

49. Norman Davis to Clarence Pickett 6/12/1938, in: AFSCA – CO 1938: American Red Cross.

50. Clarence Pickett to Norman Davis 10/12/1938, in: ibid.

51. Special Meeting called to consider developments in connection with shipping flour to Spain in co-operation with the American Red Cross, 10/12/38, in: AFSCA minutes 1938: COS;
Clarence Pickett meeting with Sumner Welles 13/12/1938, in: Clarence Pickett Diary, in: AFSCA- CPP.

52. For an overview Alpert, “Humanitarianism and Politics.”

53. Undated Memo (October 1937) on National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, in: AFSCA CO 1937: Friends Service Council.

54. For the vital role the discussions surrounding the Spanish Civil war had for the peace movement at large see Cortright, Peace, 67–91.

55. As long as the donors accepted the general neutral character of the Quakers’ work, the FSC explained, the FSC saw no problem with earmarked donations. An exchange on the different practices: John Reich to Fred Tritton (FSC) 12/1/1938, Fred Tritton to John Reich 26/1/1938 in: AFSCA CO 1937: Friends Service Council.

56. Fred Tritton (FSC) to Clarence Pickett 12/3/37, in: ibid.

57. Prominent members were the FSC veterans Edith Pye, Hilda Clark and the Liberal Quaker MP T. Edmund Harvey. In August 1938 the International Commission’s members included next to them representatives of the Nansen Office for Refugees of the League of Nation, the Save the Children International Union, the International Migration Service and the Friends Service Council. The countries that contributed to the Commission’s work were Great Britain, New Zealand, South Africa, Belgium, the Swiss Federation, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

58. Undated memo International Commission (most probably early 1938, DRM), in: AFSCA – CO: International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees.

59. Minutes of the Committee on Spain 22/4/1938; AFSC minutes 1938: COS.

60. John Reich to Edith Pye 20/4/1938, in: AFSCA – CO: International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees.

61. Memorandum de Lillihöök regarding the International Commission’s work 24/9/1938; for the discussion of the issue within the AFSC and between AFSC and FSC the correspondence Clarence Pickett to John Reich 4/8/1938; John Reich to Edith Pye 12/9/1938, in: ibid.

62. Undated memorandum Committee of Spain (probably June/July 1938), in: ibid.

63. Edith Pye (FSC) to Malcolm de Lillihöök 8/10/1938, in: ibid.

64. The AFSC’s attempt in 1937 to tone down competition between individual fund drives via a joint Christmas appeal for China, Spain and refugees from Nazi Germany was eloquent testimony to this fact. AFSCA – CO: Board of Directors and Committee on Spain, Record of Proceedings 19/10/1937. A meeting of AFSC and FCC officials with John Mott, one of the leading figures of the American Protestant missions movement brought out clearly the preference among American protestant missionary leaders for a Chinese campaign untainted by other humanitarian crises, Roswell Barnes (FCC) to John Reich (AFSC) 31/12/1937, AFSCA – CO: Federal Council of Churches.

65. Ibid. 30/3/1938. Edward Bernays (1891–1995) had been a pioneer in political propaganda and is credited with having coined the famous Woodrow Wilson quote “Make the World Safe for Democracy.”

66. The AFSC supported children’s colonies also in Catalonia precisely because this form of aid was particularly attractive for American donors. Mendlesohn, Quaker Relief, 44.

67. All these considerations played out when the constitutive session of the COS decided that “emphasis should be placed on the relief of children and nursing and expectant mothers”. Minutes special meeting on Spain 18/12/1936, AFSC – Minutes 1936 – COS.

68. John Reich to Fred Tritton 13/3/1937 in: AFSCA C&O, FSC.

69. Clarence Pickett to Fred Tritton 5/6/1937, in: ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. The conflict between the Jacobs and the British FSC on the one hand and the SCIU on the other had been precisely on the point that Miette Pictet was perceiving the Quakers’ work as less in tune with basic principles of humanitarian “professionalism.” Mendlesohn, Quaker Relief, 36–8; in contrast there was a pronounced conflict between the Quaker Relief workers and their collaborators from the other peace churches, in particular the Mennonites, whose approach to aid work was much more tainted by their evangelicism. See minutes of the Committee of Spain 27/5/1937, in: AFSC minutes 1937 – COS.
72. Minutes special meeting on Spain, 19/10/1937, in: ibid.
73. Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, 36–8.
74. Minutes AFSC Board of Directors, 3/5/1937, in: AFSCA Minutes 1937 – Board of Directors.
75. Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, 159–64.
76. The majority of helpers sent by the AFSC to the Nationalist side were members of other religions such as Brethren or Mennonites.
77. Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*.
78. Howard Kershner (1891–1990), see obituary “H.E. Kershner, 98, A Longtime Worker in Children’s Causes,” *New York Times*, 3/1/1990.
79. Kershner wrote a book in 1936 entitled “The Menace of Roosevelt and his Politics.”
80. Kershner defended his stance in his memoirs of the Spanish operation: Kershner, *Quaker Service*, 99–108. “Little did we think that we would come to having a Friend posing as an apologist of the Franco regime,” one of the aid workers voiced her outrage, cited from Mendlesohn, *Quaker Relief*, 151.
81. “General Franco today stands accused by Alfred Cope, of the American Friends Service Committee with having taken food and milk supplies intended for 100,000 starved babies and diverted them to other purposes because their mothers were not politically acceptable to the Spanish Dictator.” *New York Times*, 9/6/1939.
82. Cited in Kershner, *Quaker Service*, 116.
83. The complexity and ambiguity of the Quakers “politics of neutrality” is reflected in the highly controversial scholarly debate on the relief operation in the Gaza refugee camps in the aftermath of the first Arab–Israeli war from 1948. The AFSC was commissioned to the task by the United Nations on the merits of its neutral reputation. Its neutrality in practice is portrayed here alternatively as a guiding principle, compromised and put under pressure by the warring parties and the political forces that dominated the field (Feldman, “Quaker Ethics” and Gallagher, *Quakers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*) or as a rhetorical tool used to veil a clear bias for the Palestinian cause (Romriowsky and Joffe, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief*).
84. Confidential memorandum on post-war planning 4/6/1943, in: AFSCA, Minutes - FSS 1943.

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