

## THE SECOND REPUBLIC

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### BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

Spain's Second Republic was born, and survived, in discouraging international circumstances: the Great Depression corroding Europe's economies and societies; Hitler extinguishing Weimar pluralism and challenging the European status quo; a brutal 'revolution from above' in the USSR; and, in Mussolini's Italy, a corporate state which bound together workers and managers, ostensibly for the national good. To many in Spain, such developments were healthy, a precedent to be followed.

The results of municipal elections on 12 April 1931 showed that Rivera's successors had failed to reconcile the populace to the monarchist regime. The King left Spain, and a provisional government took power. The politics of the Second Republic functioned – or sought to function – within a dysfunctionally broad spectrum of attitudes and agendas. From anticlerical Socialist Party to dogmatically clerical CEDA; from Catalan separatism to the mystical centralism of the Falange; from Alfonsine monarchists to Marxist POUM; and from conservative army officers committed to restoring the old state to anarchists frustrated by the new.

The Republic's political relations are explained partly by the results of the three general elections that took place during its lifetime. The first, in June 1931, elected a Cortes which drew up a controversial constitution and continued the reforms begun in April. The November 1933 election ushered in governments who did all they could to turn the clock back. The third election (February 1936) brought to power

a government that, though lacking Socialist ministers, set out to reverse the work of its right-wing predecessors.

The 'reformist years' of 1931–3 seemed a malevolent eternity to the opposition right. The governments of Alcalá Zamora and his successor Azaña launched a bold programme of legislation. Thus, the Catholic Church (only 20 per cent of Spaniards were practising Catholics) was disestablished under Article 26 and its state subsidy was to end in 1933. Freedom of belief and religious practice was guaranteed provided it did not offend public morals and although the Jesuits were to be dissolved, other religious orders could continue if they did not endanger the state. However, these orders were barred from undertaking economic activity or teaching, and Church schools were to close within a specific time limit. Thus, the traditional status of the Catholic Church was to end. Clerical conservative Spain was appalled, and the government itself was fractured: in October 1931 Prime Minister Alcalá Zamora and Minister of the Interior Maura – both conservative Catholics – resigned.

Controversy also stalked land legislation. By mid-1931 the Law of Municipal Boundaries protected rural workers against cheap imported labour; arbitration committees on wages and conditions and protection for tenants against arbitrary eviction were established. Predictably, irate landowners and their political allies saw this as a declaration of war, as they did the Law of Agricultural Reform which expropriated, without full compensation, the largest landowners' estates.

The 1931–3 governments also introduced army reforms, limited autonomy for Catalonia, universal suffrage at twenty-three, freedom from arbitrary imprisonment, legal divorce and the abolition of the death penalty. Other innovations included old-age pensions. Progress in hydro-electric power continued from the Primo de Rivera dictatorship. Barcelona University gained autonomy; a People's University was founded in Madrid where adults were taught by postgraduates. Official statistics from the Ministry of Information claimed that by the end of 1932 10,000 new primary schools had been built. Cultural 'missionaries' took theatre, cinema and fine art to the rural populace. But were these life-enhancing changes or, as conservatives saw them, a threat to corrupt morals?

Of these reforms, which would be targeted by the right-wing governments in power from November 1933 to February 1936? In the

process of reversing earlier legislation, CEDA deputies in the Cortes under Gil Robles wielded powerful influence. Thus, the Jesuits could teach again, while state education spending was slashed. There were nearly 19,000 peasant evictions in Estremadura alone, and rural unemployment rose as labourers lost their job security. Trade unions faced assaults from the Ministry of the Interior, whereas amnesties were granted to anyone involved in the August 1932 coup attempt led by General Sanjurjo.

Beyond parliament and law-making, how did left and right behave towards each other? They provided fuel for the Republic's opponents: in May 1931 convents and churches were burned and catacombs desecrated. At Castilblanco near Badajoz (Estremadura) the corpses of civil guardsmen were brutally mutilated. In 1934 the anarchist leader Durruti called a general strike in Zaragoza and a nation-wide strike of labourers was organized by the Socialist land-workers' union, the FNTT.<sup>1</sup> For two weeks that October, Socialist miners took over parts of Asturias, including the capital Oviedo. As things deteriorated in 1936, Madrid was plagued by strikes.

On the political right, the most famous assault on the state before the military revolt of July 1936 was the abortive putsch by General Sanjurjo and his followers in August 1932. A reaction against the Catalan Autonomy Bill and Agrarian Reform Bill, the 'Sanjurjada' failed in its primary goal of seizing power. However, the army learned much from this debacle. Meanwhile, in rural districts landlords resorted to subversion on a grand scale – refusing to allow cultivation and thus putting labourers out of work, and taking advantage of loosely drafted legislation. In turn, many reformers – notably Largo Caballero as Minister of Labour, 1931–3 – lost faith in the power of democracy to enact change effectively.

Versions of democracy survived, nevertheless, through eight years of peace and war. And, during the peacetime Republic, the artist Miró, poet and playwright Lorca and film director Buñuel led a flourishing world of culture. Women gained new prominence in journalism, trade union leadership and politics; the suffragist Victoria Kent became the Republic's first Director-General of Prisons.<sup>2</sup> And in parts of Spain there was a fundamental left-wing social, economic and political revolution – though it took civil war both to achieve it and to destroy it.

## ANALYSIS (1): WHY, DESPITE ITS ACHIEVEMENTS, DID THE SECOND REPUBLIC PROVE SO UNSTABLE?

Between its birth in April 1931 and March 1939 when its last Prime Minister, Juan Negrín, fell from power, the Second Republic experienced fifteen changes of government. This in itself, however, says nothing specific of individual government tenure, one criterion for 'stability'. Azaña's first stint as Prime Minister, from October 1931, lasted nearly two years; at the other extreme, in July 1936 the government of Martínez Barrio survived for barely twelve hours. Of the eleven peacetime governments, eight lasted for six months or less. Add to this the political, social and economic 'wars' already being waged by interest groups all over Spain against these governments (let alone each other) by strikes, propaganda, obstruction and insurrection, and it may seem remarkable not only that anything significant was achieved but that civil war was delayed for so long. At times, Spain seemed locked into a vortex of instability.

The nature of the Republic's achievements was bound to inflame or frustrate: is it therefore more apt to say that it was because of these achievements, rather than despite them, that the Republic was so unstable? Tension between Barcelona and Madrid after the Catalan Autonomy Bill (1932) was due partly to the fact that the Catalan signatories of the 1930 Pact of San Sebastián saw the Bill as too diluted. Historians such as Albert Balcells and Norman Jones have noted the dramatic shift from 'tension' to 'crisis' in the autumn of 1934: inhaling the pure oxygen of Spain's 'October Revolution', Lluís Companys, head of the Catalan Republican Left Party and of the Barcelona regional government, now proclaimed a 'Catalan State within a Spanish Federal Republic'. For this initiative he was sentenced to thirty years in prison; the central authorities suspended the Catalan government (Generalitat), along with the autonomy law itself.<sup>3</sup>

In a democratic environment, what does political stability require? More than an origin based on consensus, which in April 1931 the Republic seemed superficially to have, it needs even-handedness and political subtlety. But these, unlike anxiety and disillusionment, were in short supply. For every newspaper banned, there was an inflammatory speech in the Cortes or at a party rally; for every politician imprisoned, an intimidating parade or debilitating strike. In turn, state attempts to restore equilibrium by force were often counter-productive. Indeed, the theme of provocation is woven throughout the Second Republic. There was readiness to provoke and to be provoked. When, in October 1934, ministers from the Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rightist

Groups (CEDA) joined Lerroux's government, 'the Socialists [took] the bait and launched a hopeless assault on the state',<sup>4</sup> the most dramatic example being the Asturias Rising and subsequent commune which held out for two weeks before being crushed.

If a measure of instability is evident in all political systems, what made the Spanish example so extreme? Analysis of the period 1931–6 alone cannot provide the whole answer. After all, the 1931–3 governments' *raison d'être* was to challenge the pre-1931 order through legislation; the preoccupation of the right-wing governments of November 1933–February 1936 was to restore tradition and conserve it. Moreover, Frances Lannon's close analysis of the experience of the Catholic Church has shown that it already felt deeply insecure before the *annus horribilis* of 1931: would the demonic Republic now deal the final blow?<sup>5</sup> Similarly, landowners had long faced agitation from landless labourers: now, there was an additional scapegoat in the 'destructive Republic'.

The self-interest and self-image of groups and institutions were not only hurt by single-issue reforms aimed by the state directly at them. For example, the army was also antagonistic towards Catalan autonomy because it would destroy the unity of the *Patria*. Similarly, the Church was deeply anxious about land reform and the new politics: CEDA, the Church's political wing, described the 'atheistic' Republic as a communist class dictatorship hostile to the family, private property and the free market.

When centrifugal forces were at work concurrently, then chronic instability would follow. In 1933–4 both CEDA on the right and disillusioned Socialists on the left, led by Largo Caballero, were becoming more anti-constitutional in outlook. For the left this process had already begun in 1931, when its more radical elements felt that their idealized 'new Spain' was being sold out to compromise. The right countered with accusations that the old Spain was being subverted by revolutionary reform. Indeed, much venom was spat at the governments of the Second Republic: that they were more like pressure groups than governments, that their leaders were agitators not statesmen, that their law-enforcement was lawless and that they were led by their followers. And however decisively governments introduced reform, or reneged on it or repealed it, outcry was certain: from those who sought *more* change (Socialist, Communist or anarchist) and those who wanted no progressive legislation at all – army, Church and landowners, great and small.

Paul Preston's detailed research into the contemporary press has shown how newspapers and periodicals played a significant part in entrenching these positions. The press sustained an intoxicating aura of

confrontation, while contributing to the making of revolution and reaction more directly. For example, left-wing papers conducted influential campaigns. One of these led in March 1934 to the forging of an Asturian Workers' Alliance which went on to organize the Asturias Rising. On the right, in a contagious spirit of 'catastrophism', the pro-CEDA Catholic daily *El Debate* intoned in January 1936, 'Between the ruin and the salvation of Spain there is no middle way.'<sup>6</sup> Newspapers were joined in the vanguard of protest by Spanish youth, who themselves had their own political press. Prominent in the Asturias Rising of October 1934 was the Socialist Youth Movement (FJS). On the extreme right, young Falangists led death-raids against the left – notably the murder of an Assault Guards officer in July 1936, in reprisal for which the right's new hero, José Calvo Sotelo, was assassinated.

A dense matrix of instability characterized the Second Spanish Republic, the political momentum veering towards the extremes – within governments such as those of Lerroux; within parties, for example, the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE); and within movements, notably the anarchist National Confederation of Labour (CNT). High-profile operators like Largo Caballero and Gil Robles lost faith in the legal path, a route already despised by Alfonsist and Carlist monarchists and the Falange Española, the millennialist fascist movement of the *new* right.

To conclude: in the period 1931–6, legislation (and the dread of it) reacted with privilege and deprivation, exacerbating pre-existing tensions and leading ultimately to civil war. Speaking metaphorically, the Republic in 1931 had defined itself as an engine of change but it ignored a series of red lights and was derailed. Governments seemed at times less interested in building political bridges than in blowing them up. From late July 1936, the politics of the feud became the tactics and strategies of armies, and a plethora of conflicts now reduced themselves to a definitive formula: the open society versus its enemies. Analysis (2) seeks to consider why hopes of coexistence between Spanish people were dashed. However, as this first analysis has tried to argue, in the crisis atmosphere of the Republic hopes of coexistence were always fragile, and more or less unacceptable: to policy-makers and opinion-formers, to die-hard property-owners and to those they regarded as put on earth to serve them.

### Questions

1. How significant was regional identity during the period 1931–6?
2. 'The events of October 1934 were of decisive importance in the history of the Second Republic.' Discuss.

## ANALYSIS (2): WHY WERE HOPES OF COEXISTENCE BETWEEN THE SPANISH PEOPLE DASHED AFTER FEBRUARY 1936?

This analysis will focus on the fourteen months from May 1935 to July 1936. In order to place the February 1936 elections in perspective, some reference to the upheavals of October 1934 will be made. As will be seen, within a broad definition of 'coexistence', difficulties were to be experienced at all levels. Though there were always constraints and opportunities that prevented total fragmentation, this is not how it appeared to many at the time.

Already in October 1934 three CEDA ministers had been appointed to government, sparking working-class and regionalist revolts. Then, in May 1935, Prime Minister Lerrox reshuffled his cabinet, adding two more CEDA ministers: the CEDA leader Gil Robles became Minister of War. Together, this dissonant quintet would ensure the failure of coexistence in Spain. To call them 'Lerrox's ministers' rather misses the point. At the War Ministry, Gil Robles – pausing on his own resolute ascent to the summit – appointed a triad of generals to key posts, although Franco (Chief of General Staff) was more prepared at this stage to coexist with the Republic than were Fanjul (Under-Secretary of War) and Goded (Inspector-General and Director of the Air Force).

Gil Robles himself expected to succeed Prime Minister Lerrox's own successor Chapaprieta, who resigned over a budget crisis at the end of 1935. But the CEDA leader miscalculated: his glowing references to the death of parliamentary democracy, along with the yells of his youth wing (JAP) for 'All power to the chief!', merely alienated President Alcalá Zamora, who did not appoint him. Yet Gil Robles still had the power to sustain heavy CEDA pressure in parliament, and in the February 1936 election campaign he exhorted JAP to spread propaganda against the Republic.

Much to Gil Robles's fury, however, the right lost the February 1936 elections to the 'odious' Popular Front: a bitterly controversial result whose statistics have been analysed in depth by the Spanish historian Xavier Tusell Gómez. Following the Popular Front victory, more radical right-wingers, notably José Calvo Sotelo, began to dig a deeper furrow in Spanish politics.<sup>7</sup> Would Gil Robles now 'coexist' with such elements on the far right, or would he actively encourage his followers to join them? The view that the 'legal' path had failed was spreading, and Gil Robles could not obstruct the accelerating climb of far-right anti-parliamentary groups. Nevertheless, as Paul Preston has written, 'he played an active, and indeed crucial, role, in parliament and the press, in creating the atmosphere which made a military rising appear to the middle classes as

the only alternative to catastrophe'.<sup>8</sup> Gil Robles used parliament for propaganda, but meaningful coexistence with the state was as unacceptable to him as it was to the militant Socialist Largo Caballero.

In jail after the October 1934 risings, and following his release at the end of 1935, Largo Caballero mused on Marx and revolution. But until the defeat of the right in the February 1936 elections he was prepared to coexist with Prieto, his reformist rival in the PSOE. Prieto's ambition to mobilize a broad front behind the Republic with a moderate reform agenda (what became the January 1936 Popular Front programme) won wide public support, reflected in the Popular Front victory. However, Largo Caballero was committed to his own root-and-branch plan to radicalize the PSOE with Communist Party support and now ended his tactical alliance with Prieto: he vetoed the idea of power-sharing by the PSOE, and his newspaper *Claridad* showed that his tolerance of the government was heavily qualified:

We will not renounce our own right to criticize in order to maintain the vigilance of the working class, which is now marching forward to the final goal of our class, and, at the slightest sign of weakening, to set the working class against its present allies.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, in the rural districts, people were coexisting less with each other than with trauma, confrontation and murder. Left provoked right, and vice versa. Churches and right-wing HQs in Córdoba province suffered incendiary attacks by the CNT. Forcing thousands out of work, landlords flooded arable land and faced the wrath of the FNTT. In the years of reaction (November 1933–February 1936), governments and landlords had driven through progress in reverse. Now the new Popular Front government was set on moving politics and society forward once more – but, just as surely, enraged their opponents when they reinstated forward-looking laws.

The role of the press, discussed in Analysis (1), underlines the limitations of coexistence within right-wing politics. *El Debate* lionized the Falange's mauling of the left, but the Falange scorned this praise, and frequently disrupted CEDA meetings. These were times of shifting loyalties and identities, with agents provocateurs adding to the confusion.

As Gerald Brenan explained in *The Spanish Labyrinth* the limits of coexistence were also evident at the level of 'high' politics. For example, President Alcalá Zamora was in the firing line from his prime minister, Azaña, who was bitterly resentful at Zamora's 'meddling' and his wish to dissolve the Cortes. But, if President Zamora and Prime Minister Azaña could not coexist, who would take the President's place were he to be

impeached for this 'interference'? Ironically, it would be Azaña who now found himself head of state – on 10 May 1936, the fifth anniversary of the first church-burnings.<sup>10</sup> Who would become Prime Minister now that Azaña was President? The Left Republican whom Azaña chose, Casares Quiroga, seemed grudging in his attacks on left-wing violence. Neither Azaña nor Casares and his colleagues had the power to reconcile, inspire and unite. Increasingly, coexistence seemed confined to Casares's cabinet.

During the period May–July 1936, industrial relations hit rock bottom. Shipping, the hotel industry, and tram, railway and building companies all found themselves under economic siege. Employers undermined the arbitration committees and rejected the shorter working week reintroduced after the Popular Front election victory. Among workers' organizations, the anarchist CNT was 'coexisting' with neither the Socialist UGT (General Union of Workers) nor the Communist Party. And even if for the Communists and Largo Caballero's left wing of the Socialist Party revolution was a longer-term goal, their propaganda, along with the economic civil war, was enough, in the words of Paul Preston, 'to verify the exaggerated picture of unmitigated chaos being painted by Calvo Sotelo and Gil Robles'.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, although Prieto was gaining support within sections of the Socialist Party for his more centrist brand of politics, his meetings were attacked by the militant Socialist–Communist youth movement, the JSU – between its assaults on anarchists and Falangists. On this jagged edge of civilian politics coexistence was, for many, a forgotten cause.

There were exceptions to this rule. Catalonia, with its semi-autonomy restored, appeared relatively quiescent in the otherwise 'ominous'<sup>12</sup> spring of 1936. However, relentless headlines of bloody confrontation continued to sap national morale. For many months, with the political stakes so high, there had been no significant centre in Spanish politics. Disingenuously, Gil Robles blamed Spain's agony on the left. But whatever the hierarchy of causes for the impending national earthquake, it is not surprising that the army, or some of it, defender of eternal Spain's integrity, finally rose up. Those who sought to defend the new Spain, despite or because of the chaos of July 1936, resisted; in the final analysis, military could not coexist with military, either.

### Questions

1. Why was the Second Republic not more successful?
2. What was the significance of Gil Robles and Largo Caballero in Spanish politics, 1931–6?

## SOURCES

### 1. THE SOCIALISTS AND THE POPULAR FRONT

#### Source A: a Communist perspective from the Left Book Club, 1936.

Meanwhile the Madrid organisation of the Socialist Party, headed by Largo Caballero, had passed a resolution, to be introduced at the next Socialist national congress, urging organic unity with the Communist Party, and a serious split threatened within the Socialist leadership.

Indalecio Prieto, the right-wing Socialist leader, manoeuvred to oust Largo Caballero, who undoubtedly had the support of the majority of Socialists, as the events of the Civil War proved later. This alarming danger of a Socialist split, the tense situation created later on by fascist provocations in the great wave of strikes, and the clash between the anarcho-syndicalists and the united UGT were grist to the fascist mill.

*Mundo Obrero*, Communist official organ, worried over efforts of the fascists, Trotskyists, and some anarcho-syndicalists to rupture the People's Front, warned that under no circumstances must the united action of Left Republicans and the proletarian parties be broken.

#### Source B: from the reform manifesto of the left PSOE, led by Largo Caballero, March 1936.

We must put an end to the illusion that the proletarian socialist revolution can be brought about through the reform of present social conditions, i.e., that the transformation of private and corporate ownership of the means of production into common ownership by the whole society will result in the abolition of all classes and their fusion into a single community of workers. There is no other alternative but to destroy and rebuild society from its foundations...

Step by step, the dictatorship of the proletariat... will become a fully developed, classless democracy, in which State coercion gradually will disappear. The Socialist party will be the organ of such a dictatorship and will remain so for as long as the transition from one society to another may last, and for as long as the threats from the surrounding capitalist States may warrant the existence of a strong proletarian State...

In order to accomplish this, it is essential to achieve the immediate unification of all revolutionary forces through the fusion, on the political and trade union fronts, of all workers' groups, and the complete divorce of the Socialist party from any reformist or centrist tendency.

**Source C: Martínez Barrio, leader of the Republican Union Party, looks back at the problems of the Popular Front.**

If the trade union movements or the Socialist and Communist parties disagreed with our point of view, why didn't they make it clear? Why did they agree to a pact whose fundamental aim was the consolidation of the Republican regime established in 1931 and of its constitutional charter?

Certain Socialists and all the Communists were suffering from the mirage of the Russian revolution of 1917, and handed us the dismal role of Kerensky. According to them, our mission was limited to smoothing their road to power, since the possibilities of the democratic revolution in the history of the Republic had been exhausted.

**Source D: The pessimistic view of Gabriel Mario de Coca, a Prieto supporter.**

I close my work with an impression of Bolshevik victory in every sector of the party. The Socialist parliamentary minority in the Cortes will be impregnated with a strong Leninist tone. Prieto will have few deputies on his side while Besteiro will be completely isolated as a Marxist dissenter . . .

The outlook that all this leaves for the future of the working class and of the nation could not be more pessimistic. The Bolshevik centipede dominates the proletariat's horizon and Marxist analysis indicates that it is on its way to another of its resounding victories. So that if in October 1934 it only achieved a short-lived Gil Robles government accompanied by the suspension of the constitution and the most horrible, sterile shedding of working class blood, it can now be expected to complete its definitive work in the future [cataclysm].

**Source E: a very different perspective from Source A, by Katharine Atholl, 1938.**

After the General Election of 1936 the Socialist and Communist youth organisations had united, and Caballero was working for a union of the two parties. But he was not a member of the Government, and his proposals for party fusion had been strongly opposed by the Socialist Right Wing, led by Señor Indalecio Prieto. Prieto's following steadily gained ground, and by June had secured a majority on [this] important issue. Whatever declarations, therefore, pointing to revolutionary aims, may have been made by Caballero at this time, it is important to remember that he spoke neither as a member of the Government nor even as leader of a united Socialist Party.

**Questions**

1. Explain the references to: (a) 'Trotskyists and some anarcho-syndicalists' (Source A); (b) 'Certain Socialists'; 'Kerensky' (Source C). (5)
- \*2. Using your own knowledge, and with reference to Sources B and E, explain why: (i) 'unification' was limited; (ii) the PSOE was unable to become 'the organ' of the dictatorship of the proletariat. (8)
3. How accurate do you find de Coca's assessment in Source D? (4)
4. Using these sources and your own knowledge, how far can it be said that the PSOE played an essentially detrimental role in the politics of the Republic, February–June 1936? (8)

**Worked answer**

\*2. [For 2 (i), refer to specific contexts in which 'unity' was apparent, underlining its extent, limitations and impact. For 2 (ii), ensure you place the Socialist Party within the wider political arena and note the unforeseen development of September 1936, which was to find Largo Caballero – who seven months before had demanded such a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' – leading a 'united front' government against Franco's Nationalist rebels.]

2 (i). At the youth-movement level, the Socialist (PSOE) and Communist (PCE) parties did 'unite', as the JSU (United Socialist Youth), in April 1936. But this did not make for a complete meeting of minds. Indeed, pro-Prieto members of this new organization felt alienated: the Communist element had ousted the Socialist Party youth leaders in Madrid, and pro-Prieto meetings were disrupted by militant JSU hostile to the moderate Socialist leader. (Prieto sought cooperation with the Republican government.) At the trade union level, Socialists and Communists did 'unite'; so did the Socialist and Communist parties in Catalonia (late July 1936). This new United Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) affiliated to the Communist Third International (Comintern). Nevertheless, elsewhere in Spain – notably in the north – the moderate Prieto wing of the Socialist Party remained strong, holding a majority on the party's national committee. 'Prietistas' rejected unification with the Communist Party, the cause embraced by Largo Caballero and his more radical Socialist supporters. Furthermore, Prieto attacked 'revolutionary euphoria' (Carr) as a red rag to fascism. Even so, the flawed but obsessive image of a 'communist threat' became more deeply embedded in the minds of the Republic's Nationalist enemies.

2 (ii). To achieve this, the Socialist Party (PSOE) would have needed to be in an effective position of power, which, for the time being, eluded it. It was in fact another Left Republican, Casares Quiroga, who succeeded Azaña as Prime Minister in May 1936. It is true that the now President Azaña had considered appointing Prieto to take his place as Prime Minister, but this had been blocked by Largo Caballero's militant faction of the PSOE. Despite this, Prieto was keen to build bridges to Casares Quiroga's government. Prieto's position was strengthened in June 1936 when more of his supporters were elected to the PSOE's national committee. These developments suggest that the PSOE did not fully accept the Marxist-Leninist 'dictatorship of the proletariat' which Largo Caballero was advocating at that time. In the wider political environment, other working-class movements had their own power bases and priorities, notably the CNT (anarchist) and POUM (Marxist, strong in Catalonia), while the Stalinist PCE (Communist Party) claimed 100,000 members by July 1936. In addition, the Republican government had itself been true to the spirit of reform. Ironically, in September 1936, the erstwhile 'Bolshevik' Largo Caballero became Prime Minister, his cabinet containing two Communists – and, from November, Prieto and four anarchists. In an anti-fascist war to defend democracy, the immediate 'dictatorship of the proletariat' was, from the government's perspective, irrelevant.

## SOURCES

### 2. OPPOSITION TO THE LEFT, 1931–6

**Source F: from the Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Constitution (December 1931), published on 1 January 1932 in the Catholic newspaper *El Debate*.**

Freedom for all associations, even the most subversive; and extreme precautions are taken to limit the religious congregations, which devote themselves to the most rigid perfection of their members, to social charity, to generous teaching and to the functions of the priesthood . . .

Notwithstanding, a distinction must be made between 'constituted power' and 'legislation' . . .

The acceptance of the constituted power does not imply in any way conformity, still less obedience, to legislation which is contrary to the law of God and of the Church. But nations are curable and legislation perfectable. So, without diminution or attenuation of the respect due to the constituted power, all

Catholics will consider it a religious and civic duty to display their zeal and to use all their influence to contain the ongoing abuses of legislation and to change for the better the unjust and damaging laws passed up to date.

**Source G: from the Juventud de Acción Popular (JAP, the CEDA youth movement) Manifesto, October 1932.**

As one of its postulates JAP still has faith in the legal struggle; but we advise the government that we are reaching the limits of its effectiveness: arbitrary suspension of the press, inhuman deportations, imprisonment . . . confiscations and the systematic persecution of the Church create a state of opinion whose consequences for the peace of Spain we would be the first to lament. Seeing that all avenues for legal action are closing, no other alternative remains but to exercise the right of legitimate defence . . .

Forget rebellion. In order to act against the government we shall move within legality: but in questions of . . . defence of our principles, not one step backwards. The Youth Movement wants to demonstrate that we live within Acción Popular's set of ideas, but also we declare that this attitude should not be taken by anybody as a sign of the cowardice of the right . . .

The Youth Movement does not now raise the question of the form of government. Not because we believe this to be a matter of no account, but because we estimate that the time has not yet arrived when this matter should be taken on board. We declare ourselves, therefore, partisans of the status quo. We do seek to not impose our viewpoint.

**Source H: from *Spanish Testament* by Arthur Koestler, 1937.**

All the protective legislation introduced by previous governments was repealed by the Gil Robles regime. The law rendering illegal the importation of non-local labour was repealed. The law with regard to lease-hold contracts was repealed, and more than 100,000 tenant farmers were given notice. The distribution of the land among the peasants was declared null and void . . . and the land was restored to its former owners, who let it lie fallow.

At the same time all unemployment relief was abolished, and the 873 million pesetas allocated to public works by the budget of 1933 was reduced in 1935 to 628 million.

The unrestrained tyranny of the feudal aristocracy was driving the Spanish economic system once more toward ruin. Whilst in most European countries a gradual recovery after the slump was discernible between 1933 and 1935, the curve of unemployment in Spain mounted steadily, reaching its peak in 1935 . . .

The masses had returned to their old state of unspeakable misery and suffering . . . This was the heritage which fell to the lot of the Spanish People's Front in February, 1936 . . .

From the very beginning, the defeated Spanish reaction concentrated all its efforts on making the world believe that Communism had come to power in Spain. It launched one of the most perfidious propaganda campaigns Europe has ever known – and one of the most successful.

**Source I: from the National Front (Bloque Nacional) Manifesto, December 1935.**

What we want is an old, time-honoured State with roots in the history of Spain. This State, which will respect all differences between individuals and provinces, must have the strength to extirpate the anti-national forces that, like a disease, threaten to sap the life of the Fatherland. Therefore, it must be an authoritarian, corporatist, and unifying State . . .

The new State will [restore] to all Spaniards peace and order. This task demands . . . the formation of a wide coalition of counterrevolutionary forces, acting on a well-defined platform . . . that will enable those elected to pursue with total unanimity the full implementation of its policies in parliament.

Such a platform must have as its foundation the replacement of the 1931 Constitution, whose legal status has already been undermined [deleted by censor], as well as the extirpation of Marxism, separatism, and laicism from national life.

**Source J: José Calvo Sotelo speaks in the Cortes, 16 June 1936.**

No more strikes, no more lock-outs, no more usurious interest, no more of capitalism's abusive financial formulae, no more starvation wages, no more political salaries gained by happy accident, no more anarchic liberty, no more criminal loss of production, for national production is above all classes, all parties, and all interests.

Many call that the fascist state. If it is, then I who share that idea . . . and believe in it, declare myself fascist.

**Questions**

1. What is meant by: (a) 'ongoing abuses of legislation' (Source F); (b) 'corporatist' (Source I)? (2)
2. (a) What can be inferred about Koestler's deep feelings in Source H? (3)  
(b) How would a member of the 'defeated Spanish reaction [right]' challenge Koestler's attempt to downplay the significance of communism? (4)
3. What questions would a historian wish to ask of Calvo Sotelo's claim to be 'fascist'? (Source J) (3)

- \*4. Comment on the value of Sources F and G for a historian studying opposition to the left, 1931–6. (6)
5. 'Opposition to the left during the period April 1931 to June 1936 became steadily more militant.' Discuss this view, using these sources and your own knowledge. (7)

**Worked answer**

\*4. [Ensure you pick up on *attribution* (provenance) and that you confront the limitations as well as the benefits of these sources. This will require some knowledge of context.]

Source F presents an 'autobiographical' image of an insecure Church: one that feels itself not only besieged by anti-clerical legislation, but victimized by a biased constitution (paragraphs 1 and 2). It is clear that the bishops' stand on the Republic is 'accidental', desiring change from within: they exhort their readers to apply all possible pressure to have draconian laws repealed. The provenance tells us that the letter was published in *El Debate*. This provenance underlines lay Catholics' support for the bishops' denunciation of the Republic in 1931–2, a republic that, it is implied, is subverting traditional Spain and the religious means to uphold it. However, in this edited extract, the historian misses the full force of the bishops' attack, especially on secularist education policies. Moreover, it should not be assumed that all practising Catholics were anti-Republic. Conversely, Canon Albarrán condoned the notion of a violent uprising against the Republic, which makes Source F look positively restrained. Finally, it should be remembered that governments proved friendly to the Catholic Church between November 1933 and February 1936: to this extent, too, the evidence in Source F should be treated with caution.

Source G can be taken as an authoritative statement of JAP policy in the early years of the Republic. (Acción Popular had until April 1932 been known as Acción Nacional; from March 1933 it would be the keystone of CEDA.) Source G denounces what it sees as arbitrary and autocratic behaviour by Azaña's government and a partisan judiciary. But the tone is ambiguous and the historian would need to be alert to this. 'Forget rebellion' sounds 'accidental'; but 'all avenues for legal action are closing' suggests that a future assault on the Republican state *per se* cannot be ruled out. Thus, for the historian, Source G is a pointer to the JAP's latent 'catastrophism'. This is confirmed by later events: in 1935 JAP called for an authoritarian system and for Marxists and Freemasons to be wiped out; by the spring of 1936 it was marching *en masse* into the ranks of the Falange.



Finally, Sources F and G express only a corridor of views held by two groups and their supporters in 1932. For a fuller picture of opposition to the left during 1931–6 it would be necessary to consult evidence from, for example, such militant monarchists as Calvo Sotelo; the Falange; and anti-Republic factions within the armed forces.

## 3

# THE MILITARY RISING

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### BACKGROUND NARRATIVE

Starting in 1931, a controversial agenda of military reform was pursued by War Minister Manuel Azaña, himself a keen student of military history. His strategic objective was an army that was financially sound, politically neutral and streamlined for war. But were Azaña's reforms an assault on inefficiency and inertia as he stated, or an attack on the fatherland and its keystone, the army itself?

In June 1931 Azaña closed the 'reactionary' Zaragoza Military Academy and in September of the same year deprived the army of much of its judicial role as the Supreme Military Council was dissolved and the captains-general abolished. Many right-wingers were moved to less important posts or sacked. The army remained under-equipped, notably the artillery.<sup>1</sup> In January 1933 the widely dreaded 'review of promotions' investigated those officers whose careers had been blessed by the Rivera dictatorship (1923–30). Although far fewer were affected than was feared, the myth of a persecuted army was reinforced.

Reassuringly for the army, the Radical leader Lerroux came to power in November 1933 at the head of an increasingly rightist government. Those involved in General Sanjurjo's bungled coup attempt (August 1932) were pardoned. General Franco was promoted to Major General with a special brief to lend expertise on military exercises – a dress-rehearsal for suppressing future left-wing rebellions: when the Asturias Rising broke out in October 1934 it was the Spanish Foreign Legion and Moorish troops whom Franco used