



PÍO MOA: FACING THE MYTHS AND PROPAGANDA ABOUT THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR—PART I

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A specialist in the Second Spanish Republic, the Civil War and Francoism, Luis Pío Moa Rodríguez is undoubtedly the most controversial and hated, but also the most read and admired Spanish historian of the turn of the 21st century. Largely ignored or passed over in silence, he is, as many journalists in the Spanish Peninsula like to say, a real editorial, media or cultural phenomenon. His books have been sold in tens and then hundreds of thousands of copies. Moa has become the *bête noire* of the left, the extreme left and part of the right. [Bartolomé Bennassar](#), a historian known in France for his left-of-center positions—he was an avowed supporter of the Jacobin leader of [Action républicaine](#), Manuel Azaña—only saw him as a "provocateur." This slip was minor in comparison with the deluge of blames, vituperations, insults and slanders that Moa was periodically subjected to in journalistic and academic circles for years before being silenced. A hysterical media lynching, relayed and supported by major media, such as the socialist newspaper *El País*, will undoubtedly go down in history.

[***\[Read our fascinating interview with Pío Moa\]***](#)

According to his detractors, Pío Moa "is a pseudo-historian," "a self-proclaimed historian," who "contradicts academic historiographic research," "does not cite primary sources" and "ignores the most elementary rudiments of the scientific method." A "mediocre" author, a "forger," a "false scholar," "lacking in insight and culture," of "recognized intellectual indigence," he only "repeats the essential clichés of Franco's historiography." Worse, behind an apparent bonhomie, he hides "a dangerous character," "the incarnation of evil," the "Spanish version of revisionism and historical negationism," "a fascist," a "camouflaged agent of the Francoist police."

The accusation of being an "agent of Francoism who infiltrated into the Marxist movement [GRAPO](#)," a group of which Pío Moa was a founding member in his youth and which was the armed wing of the PCE(r) (Reconstituted Communist Party of Spain), has been made by left-wing politicians and authors, especially communists (such as former PCE general secretary Santiago Carrillo), but also socialists, and even by right-wing journalists, such as [Pilar Urbano](#). It is all the more malicious because the socialists were in charge of the Ministry of the Interior for decades and had access to the archives of the Franco era (especially those of the dreaded Political and Social Brigade) at their discretion. The socialist Minister of the Interior, [José Barrionuevo](#), acknowledged in his memoirs that nothing was found to support the thesis of infiltration of GRAPO by Franco's agents, nor, consequently, the allegations

concerning Pío Moa. Pío Moa's testimony about the PCE(r)-GRAPO and his personal action can be found in his memoirs [*De un tiempo y de un país: La izquierda violenta \(1968-1978\)*](#).

From 1917 to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the accusation of being a fascist agent was continuous among the Marxist-Leninists to castigate their opponents. It did not fail to have its occasional equivalent in Franco's Spain. Thus, in the 1960s-1980s, the historian and Minister of Culture under King Juan Carlos, [*Ricardo de la Cierva*](#), claimed that the professor at the University of Pau, [*Manuel Tuñón de Lara*](#) (a major figure among French Hispanists at the time, a member of the Communist and Socialist Youth during the Civil War, and the main representative of the Marxist school among specialists in the Spanish Civil War), was a KGB agent.

All of these supposed vices, capital flaws obviously "prevent scientific debate." One cannot dialogue with a monster, a devil, nor mention his name and his works, without risking being banished from the corporation of "scientific historians," expelled from the community of the right-thinking or the camp of the good. Insults, recriminations, infamous shortcuts, heard or embarrassed silences; everything is good to silence the impudent Moa who dared to formulate a vigorously argued criticism, to express an unconventional opinion that was too divergent.

In academic circles, it is fashionable to affirm solemnly (with more or less sincerity, it is true) that History is something other than the cult of memory; that it studies, reviews and revises its fields of investigation constantly; that it has no taboos; that it cannot exist without contradictory debate and free discussion. Perfect objectivity is not possible, it is said; but the honest historian must strive for rigor and impartiality; his mission is to try to get closer to the truth, to understand the reasons of both sides. However, for many, and especially for too many historians of the Spanish Civil War, all these excellent principles have their justifiable exceptions. Pío Moa is one of them. The modern neo-inquisitors, bearers of the only "legitimate word," may well devote articles to him, sometimes even exceptionally chapters in books, but his theses are never seriously discussed. The strategy is always the same: the ad personam attack, the prevarication, the exclusion, the denigration, the disqualification. Hated and demonized, everything is done to exclude Pío Moa from public space. Woe to the iconoclast! Nothing can be excessive enough to get rid of him; not even the degrading methods of the Cheka that we thought were buried.

However, the Pío Moa question is not as simple as its many critics and contemptuous people would have us believe. See, for example, the very Manichean criticisms of the Christian Democrat Javier Tusell

and those of the Social-Marxists Francisco Espinosa Maestre, Santos Julia Díaz, Enrique Moradiellos, Alberto Reig Tapia, Justo Serna, Jorge Martínez Reverte, Ángel Viñas, Carlos Rilova, Helen Graham and Paul Preston. Among the very critical or "anti-Moa" authors of the right, we should mention Jorge Vilches and Pedro González Cuevas.

Honest, courageous and determined, an excellent dialectician, a formidable polemicist trained in the Marxist school, Pío Moa does not hesitate to turn the charge of his opponents against them. His detractors, he says, deliberately ignore the sources he uses and limit themselves to a dogmatic defense of the version disseminated for ages by the Marxist Manuel Tuñón de Lara. "The label of Francoist suits my accusers much better than it does me..." he objects, because "a good part of them had a career in the Francoist civil service or belonged to families that were compromised in the regime, while I was fighting against it." Contrary to what they usually say: "I hardly use Francoist sources, but mainly those of the left." "These admirable researchers, on the other hand, have as a source the old propaganda of the [Popular Front](#)." "Logic in a democracy is that the different versions are freely and openly debated. Why then do they pretend to replace such a natural right with Soviet or soviet-style censorship? Why this rejection of free debate?" While we await an increasingly unlikely answer, Moa invites interested readers to consult his writings.

From Anti-Franco Activism To Historical Research

Pío Moa is not the emblematic figure of an "ideological think tank close to the most conservative faction of the Popular Party," as socialists-Marxist historians and activists repeatedly say. PP leaders have always ostensibly shunned, ignored and avoided him. But he is not an isolated researcher without influence. He has received the support of a minority group of the most prestigious historians. Historians and scholars who have expressed appreciation for the work of Pío Moa include [Stanley Payne](#), José Manuel Cuenca Toribio, Carlos Seco Serrano, Jesús Salas Larrazabal, Ricardo de la Cierva, José María Marco, Manuel Álvarez Tardío, Alfonso Bullón de Mendoza, José Andrés Gallego, Hugh Thomas, David Gress, Robert Stradling, Richard Robinson, Sergio Fernández Riquelme, César Vidal and José Luis Orella.

Thus, for the great historian of contemporary Spain, Carlos Seco Serrano, [Los orígenes de la guerra civil española](#) (*The Origins of the Spanish Civil War*) the work that made Pío Moa known, is "a truly sensational book." The point of view of the English historian Hugh Thomas is no less positive: "*What Pío Moa says about the revolution is very interesting and I think he tells the truth. But he is not so original! He criticizes me*

in his book, but I said almost the same thing: it was the 1934 revolution that started the Civil War and it was the fault of the left. There is a lecture by Indalecio Prieto given in Mexico in which he says exactly that, accepting his guilt." The most prestigious Anglo-Saxon historian of the Civil War, Stanley Payne, known in France for his book, *La guerre d'Espagne. L'histoire face à la confusion mémorielle* (2010), states without the slightest ambiguity in his preface to the republication of Moa's *Los orígenes de la guerra civil* (2016): *"This is probably the most illuminating book on the process behind the Civil War, written by one of the historians who has contributed most to the debate on a crucial period of Spanish history."* It is *"the most important effort of the last two decades, made by all historians and in all languages, to reinterpret the history of the Republic and the Civil War."* And he adds elsewhere, referring to the whole of Pío Moa's work, *"The important thing is that his work is critical and innovative. It introduces a bit of fresh air in a vital area of contemporary Spanish historiography, which for too long has been locked up in narrow formal monographs, old-fashioned, stereotyped, subject to political correction. Those who disagree with Moa must confront his work seriously. They must demonstrate their disagreement through historical research and rigorous analysis, and stop denouncing his work through censorship, silence and diatribe, methods that are more characteristic of Fascist Italy and the Soviet Union than of democratic Spain."* In a few lines, everything is said.

Pío Moa's atypical career deserves to be briefly recalled if we want to understand the heated controversies of which he was and still is the object. Born in 1948 in Vigo, Galicia, Moa was an anti-Franco activist and founding member of the terrorist movement GRAPO (Group of Anti-Fascist Resistance First October), the armed wing of the PCE(r) (reconstituted Spanish Communist Party), from 1975 to 1977. From his clandestine life and his solid Marxist training, he retained a fighting spirit, the vehemence in his words, the taste for diatribe and polemic. Renouncing the revolutionary path, at the end of the 1970s, he permanently withdrew from all political activity. From 1988 to 1990, he edited the historical magazines *Tanteos* and *Ayeres*. He was librarian of the Ateneo de Madrid for three years. Recognized as a writer and historian, in a restricted, not to say confidential, environment, he suddenly emerged from relative anonymity with the publication of *Los orígenes de la guerra civil española*, a real media bomb, in 1999. He went straight to the bestseller list and became one of the most quoted and discussed historians in Spain.

As a resistance fighter, a fighter against Francoism, a Marxist, an unsuspected leftist and a librarian of the [Ateneo de Madrid](#), he had access to the documentation of the Pablo Iglesias Socialist Foundation. After going through and studying the socialist archives in detail, Moa changed his mind radically. He discovered the overwhelming responsibility of the socialist party (PSOE) and the left in general for the socialist putsch of 1934, and consequently for the origins of the Civil War of 1936. Before him, left-wing

authors, as diverse as Gabriel Jackson, Antonio Ramos Oliveira, Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz or Gerald Brenan had intuited the gravity of the events of 1934. Sometimes, the pithy reflection of the anti-Franco liberal Salvador de Madariaga was recalled: "*With the rebellion of 1934, the Spanish left lost even the shadow of moral authority to condemn the rebellion of 1936*" (*España*, 1944). But until then no author had made such a precise and detailed demonstration [Enrique Barco Teruel's book, *El golpe socialista: octubre 1934* (1984), published fifteen years earlier, had gone almost unnoticed]. People used to speak of the "Asturias strike" or the "Asturias revolution." After Moa's book, they speak of the "socialist revolution of 1934." Many do not forgive him for this.

The history of *Los orígenes de la guerra civil española* is fascinating. No one, not a single publisher, wanted the manuscript. Moa was finally welcomed by an independent Catholic publishing house, Encuentro. Ironically, or rather fortuitously, the director belonged to the Oriol family, a member of which, Antonio María de Oriol y Urquijo, president of the Council of State, had been kidnapped twenty years earlier (at the end of 1976) by militants of the GRAPO (Moa's own terrorist-anti-Franco movement). The book was first published in 1000 copies. By chance, it fell into the hands of the journalist Federico Jiménez Losantos, a former Maoist turned liberal and media star of COPE (a Catholic radio station with more than 1.5 million listeners), who gave it enthusiastic publicity. As a result, Pío Moa was thrust into the limelight.

The publication of his trilogy, *Los orígenes de la Guerra Civil*, *Los personajes de la República vistos por ellos mismos* and *El derrumbe de la República y la Guerra Civil* (books that sold more than 10,000 copies), aroused the concern of some "specialists" who wanted to be the heirs of the Popular Front. But the situation became more alarming with the release of *Los mitos de la guerra civil*. Interviewed by TVE2, the author immediately aroused the fury of journalists from the mainstream media as well as a host of official historians. Through the voice of the historian Javier Tusell (Christian Democrat activist, ex-director general of Artistic Heritage), the newspaper *El País* demanded censorship for the unbearable "revisionist." The unions (UGT and CCO) protested in front of the Cortes. All kinds of threats were made and a propaganda campaign even suggested the imprisonment and re-education of the culprit. Since then, Moa has been persona non grata in state universities and public service media.

But Moa is not the type to bend over backwards, get emotional and ask for forgiveness. He is not afraid of the sulphurous image he is given and his readers are too numerous for him to be silenced. More than thirty books have followed *Los orígenes de la guerra civil*; and its success has not waned.

[Among the books published by Moa, we can cite: *Los personajes de la República vistos por ellos mismos*, 2 vols., 2000-2002; *El derrumbe de la Segunda República y la Guerra Civil*, 2001; *Los mitos de la Guerra Civil*, 2003; *Crímenes de la Guerra Civil y otras polémicas*, 2003; 1934: *Comienza la Guerra Civil. PSOE y la Esquerra emprenden la contienda*, 2004; 1936: *El asalto final a la República*, 2005; *Franco, un balance histórico*, 2005; *Franco para antifranquistas*, 2009; *La transición de cristal. Franquismo y democracia*, 2010; *El derrumbe de la Segunda República*, 2013; and *Los mitos del franquismo*, 2013].

His book *Los mitos de la guerra civil* (2003), which has been reprinted some twenty times, has sold more than 300,000 copies in Spain and other Hispanic countries. It was even number one in sales for more than six months. His other books have sold tens of thousands of copies, while the average print run of contemporary history books in Spain is hardly more than 1,000 copies, and the sale of 500 is considered a relative success. It is easy to imagine that the ideological hatred of his opponents was often fed by resentment and envy.

The idyllic social-Marxist or Populist Front vision of the Second Republic and the Civil War, elevated for years to the rank of official dogma, has collapsed with a bang since Moa's work. It still remains hegemonic in the university and in secondary education; but in public debate, in the media and in public opinion, it is no longer the case. Thanks to Moa, the mythical narrative of the socialist-Marxist left, according to which the Popular Front defended democratic legality, freedom, the emancipation of the working class and the modernization of Spanish society, has been put to rest.

Moa does not take up the prejudices of the Franco regime, as the Populist Front historiography repeatedly says. He does not believe that democracy is impossible in Spain. He has been a firm believer in democracy and liberalism for forty years. He has always shown respect for and defense of the 1978 Constitution. Nor does he believe that the Civil War was caused by a communist conspiracy; nor that Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy were a desirable future for Spain. Rather, he argues that the Spanish Republic would have survived if it had truly been democratic.

Moa "*is not an academic historian*," say his detractors. This perennial reproach is, after all, crassly stupid: over the centuries, have not the most interesting historical works often been written by historians who were not university professors? Moa does not hide his sympathy for Gil Robles, the leader of the CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas), a conservative party, a mixture of liberal right-wingers and Christian Democrats ahead of its time, which marked the political life of the 1930s. But don't social-Marxist or left-liberal historians openly show their sympathies for leaders like Manuel

Azaña, Juan Negrín, Francisco Largo Caballero or Santiago Carrillo without being reproached by the guild of "academic historians" as they like to be called?

Pío Moa's affinity for the CEDA and its leader José María Gil-Robles deserves to be highlighted for two reasons. First, to understand that the legend that presents the Civil War as the struggle of a people against its army in revolt—when both sides enjoyed powerful popular support—is an absolute untruth. Second, because the propagandist fiction of a monolithic "fascist" or "Franco" bloc fighting against republican-democrats, defenders of freedom, is a sham. Almost all historiography on the left and right takes up the fiction of a so-called "republican" camp opposed to the "nationalist" camp, as if the latter had only been integrated by monarchists or "fascists."

In reality, the "national" camp (and not nationalist, as is wrongly repeated ad nauseam in France) opposed to the Popular Front camp included as many liberal republicans of the right and center (the Agrarian Party, the Radical Party, the Conservative Party) as monarchists (some liberal and others traditionalist-Carlists), and as many nationalists and phalangists. These different and opposite tendencies were later found throughout the Franco regime (1939-1975). It cannot be stressed enough that the uprising of July 18, 1936, the Civil War and Franco's regime are very distinct events that, as such, can be judged and interpreted in very different ways.

Pío Moa's thesis on the antecedents and course of the Civil War can be summarized with two points.

1st Point: The Civil War was fought between two camps, on the one hand, the nationals ("*nacionales*"), who defended national integrity and unity, Catholic and Christian civilization, private property and personal freedom, at the risk of sacrificing or restricting political freedoms; and, on the other hand, the Popular Front camp, which sought to destroy national unity and replace Christian culture with socialist or Soviet-Marxist culture by suppressing private property, personal freedom and political freedoms. To be more precise, there were three unequal forces in the Popular Front camp. The first, by far the most important, included the communists, the Bolshevik socialists and the anarchists, who aspired to establish a Soviet or collectivist type of regime. The second, grouped together the nationalist-separatists (Catalans, Basques, Galicians, etc.), who wanted independence for their peoples. And, finally, the third, more minority, which brought together the parties of the bourgeois-Jacobin left, which voluntarily or involuntarily played into the hands of the first. This is the essential explanation of a conflict between "totalitarians" and "authoritarians," in which the defense of democracy played absolutely no role.

As for the argument that German-Italian aid was quantitatively (relatively) superior to that of the Soviet Union, it masks the fact that Stalin satelliteized the Spanish Popular Front, while German and Italian support did not deprive Franco's Spain of its independence. This key point of foreign intervention, emphasized long before Moa by the republican-liberal intellectual Gregorio Marañón, had amongst other important consequences Spain's neutrality during the World War, which benefited the Allies so much.

2nd Point: The Popular Front presented itself as the defender of the Republic, while its main parties and leaders violated the law in 1934, planning civil war throughout Spain. They then completed the Republic's destruction in the fraudulent elections of February 1936, crushing freedom with blood and tyranny as soon as they took power. The interpretation of the Civil War as a military, reactionary or "fascist" coup d'état against democracy, with the will to exterminate the people (see the alleged project of indiscriminate repression of the national camp and the "genocidal" and "exterminationist" violence to which socialist-Marxist historians such as Reig Tapia or Paul Preston willingly refer) proceeds fundamentally from the propaganda of the Comintern and post-World War II communism. The exterminationist thesis of the Comintern's propaganda, reproduced today by socialist historians, such as Reig Tapia or Preston, in fact goes back to the first months of the fratricidal war. In October 1936, the College of Lawyers of Madrid already denounced the terror of the factionalists: "*The insurgents' instruction... the most merciless extermination and terror.*"

It was the revolutionary movement and the collapse of the Republican state that led to the July 1936 uprising, not the other way around. It was not poverty, but the demagogic speculation on poverty and the poisoning of consciences by messianic parties (PSOE and PCE) whose doctrine of class struggle was pushing for civil war, that prevented a reasonable, democratic approach to the problem of reform, and that inevitably contributed to the final shock. The PSOE and the UGT (General Union of Workers) did not accept democracy as an end, but as a means, along with insurrection, to achieve socialism. On the other hand—Moa explains—the fiction of a democratic republic, admirable if not idyllic, claimed nowadays by the leaders of the PSOE and the extreme left and massively disseminated in the media and education, is the main reason why the Civil War cannot be assimilated and overcome by Spanish society.

Moa's analysis of the antecedents and course of the Spanish War is undoubtedly open to criticism on secondary points, as is the case with any historian's work—but the main thesis remains solid and well argued. To question it seriously, one would have to provide credible explanations to a whole series of

awkward questions:

Why was the process of bolshevization of the PSOE from the end of 1933, now denied or minimized by socialist-Marxist historians and socialist leaders, deplored in its time and without ambiguity by political actors, themselves socialists, such as the "reformist" Marxists Julián Besteiro or Gabriel Mario de Coca?

Didn't the socialist leader, Indalecio Prieto, write regretting his words and actions in October 1934: *"I declare myself guilty before my conscience, before the socialist party and before all of Spain of my participation in this revolutionary movement. I declare it as a fault, as a sin, not as a glory"* (*Discursos en América*, 1944)?

Why did the President of the Republic, Niceto Alcalá-Zamora, denounce the manipulations, the day after the February 1936 elections, writing in his Diary and Memoirs (February 22 and March 8): *"In most provinces there have been hidden negotiations, tricks, crimes and coactions... Almost all of Spain has done as in Coruña, that is, shameful post-election rectifications of a good number of seats."* *"It has been strangely difficult to obtain the figures of this recent vote... It has taken days of effort because, from April 17 on, the manipulations and prestidigitations to resurrect or dismiss so many candidates have made the task impossible."* And again: *"The Cortes has prepared two parliamentary coups. With the first, they declared themselves indissoluble for the duration of the presidential term. With the second, they dismissed me. The last obstacle was removed on the road to anarchy and all the violence of the civil war."* *"From February 17, and even from the night of the 16th, the Popular Front, without waiting for the end of the counting of the votes and the proclamation of the results... unleashed the offensive of disorder in the streets: it took power by violence"* (*Journal de Genève*, January 17, 1937)?

Why did the Frente Popular deliberately steal 50 seats from the right (claiming 240 of the 473 seats), when without this plundering—a real parliamentary coup—it would not have been able to govern alone? Doubts about this subject are no longer possible since the rigorous and meticulous work of the historians of Rey Juan Carlos University, Roberto Villa García and Manuel Álvarez Tardío: *1936. Fraude y violencia en las elecciones del Frente Popular* (*Fraud and Violence in the Elections of the Popular Front*), 2017.

Let us pass over the *Decalogue of the Socialist Youth* published in *Renovación* on February 17, 1934, and whose point 8 said: *"The only idea that the young socialist must have engraved in his mind today is that socialism can only be imposed by violence, and that any comrade who advocates the opposite, who still*

has democratic dreams, whether high or low, is only a traitor, consciously or unconsciously."

Let's pass over the flood of violence, strikes and illegal occupations in the aftermath of the Popular Front's electoral victory. Let's not forget the panic that took place in March, April, May and June (269 dead, 1287 injured, hundreds of churches, monuments and libraries destroyed). Let's not forget the fiery rhetoric of the official organs of the Socialist Party, *Claridad* and *El Socialista*, which tirelessly repeated: *"Death to the Parliamentary Republic! " "Class war. Let the Spaniards choose: fascism or socialism."*

Perhaps these were just the pitiful words of fanatical "parrots." But why so much verbal violence, unconscious declarations, more or less veiled calls for murder, on the part of the main leader of the Socialist Party, the "Spanish Lenin," Francisco Largo Caballero? A few examples are enough to give the measure of this verbal violence: *"There are communists who believe that they cannot ally themselves with the socialists. I can't explain this position... We are not different from the communists in any way, as you can see"* (Bilbao, April 20, 1934). *"It is not enough to say that we are socialists. Our main master, the founder of scientific socialism, had to call himself a communist in order to differentiate himself from the utopian socialists.... The essential thing, the conquest of power, cannot be done through bourgeois democracy"* (Linares, January 23, 1935). *"Democracy is only the first step towards the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Let no one doubt that power will belong to us, and by force if necessary"* (*El Liberal*, Bilbao, January 20, 1936). *"Elections are only a stage in the conquest of power, and their result can only be accepted with the benefit of an inventory. If the Left wins, we can work with our allies within the law. But if the Right wins, we will have to go to civil war. I want a republic without class struggle. But for that to happen one of them must disappear. And this is not a threat, it is a warning. Let it not be imagined that we say things for pleasure: we do them"* (Alicante, January 25, 1936). *"When the Popular Front collapses, as it undoubtedly will, the triumph of the proletariat will be indisputable. Then we will establish the dictatorship of the proletariat ..."* (Cadiz, May 24, 1936).

Why was Congressman [Calvo Sotelo](#), one of the main leaders of the opposition, threatened with death in Parliament by the Socialist Minister of the Interior, Angel Galarza, and then kidnapped in front of his wife and children on July 13, just before being coldly executed with a bullet in the neck by PSOE militants (aided in their crime by the forces of law and order, and then protected by the Socialist Congressmen Vidarte, Zugazagoitia, Nelken and Prieto)?

On the same day, two of the main opposition leaders, deputies to the Cortes, José Maria Gil Robles (leader of the right-wing Republican party CEDA) and Antonio Goicoechea (leader of the monarchist-

liberal party Renovación Española, of which Calvo Sotelo was president of the parliamentary minority), escaped death. Fortunately, they were not at home in Madrid, one being in Biarritz and the other in Salamanca. Pro-Popular Front authors insist that the assassination of Calvo Sotelo by members of the State Police (Fernando Condés) and Socialist Party activists (Luis Cuenca) was committed in retaliation for the assassination of the Assault Guard lieutenant, José del Castillo, who was responsible for the formation of the Socialist militias. But this assassination was itself part of a chain of violence. A few days earlier, *pistoleros*, members of the JSU (Unified Socialist Youth), had burst into a bar and killed two young Phalangist students.

Once the Civil War started, why were the militants and sympathizers of all the other republican tendencies (Alejandro Lerroux's Radical Party, Martínez Velasco's and Melquiades Álvarez's republican parties, Gil-Robles's CEDA) considered enemies to be extirpated along with the monarchist-liberals, the traditionalist-Carlist monarchists and the phalangists, with the exclusion of the left-wing centrists (the Republican Left and the Republican Union), throughout the territory of the People's Front.

Why were the democratic and republican ministers of the radical party Salazar Alonso, Abad Conde or Rafael Guerra del Río condemned to death and assassinated by the front-populists?

Why did liberals like José Ortega y Gasset, Ramón Pérez de Ayala and Gregorio Marañón, who were known as the "founding fathers of the Republic," or the Catholic-liberal philosopher, friend of Croce and Amendola, Miguel de Unamuno, clearly choose the national camp?

Ortega y Gasset: *"While in Madrid the Communists and their sympathizers were forcing, under the most serious threats, writers and professors to sign manifestos, speak on the radio, etc., some of the leading English writers, comfortably seated in their offices or clubs, were signing another manifesto, in which it was guaranteed that the Communists and their sympathizers were the defenders of freedom. A few days ago, Albert Einstein thought he has the 'right' to express his opinion on the Civil War and to take a stand. But Albert Einstein is radically ignorant of what happened in Spain today as well as yesterday and centuries ago. The spirit that led him to this insolent intervention has long since led to the loss of the universal prestige of the intellectual and bears responsibility for a world that is going adrift because of the absence of spiritual power"* ([*The Revolt of the Masses*](#). Epilogue for the English, 1985).

Ramón Pérez de Ayala: *"My respect and love for moral truth force me to recognize that the Spanish Republic has tragically failed. Its children are guilty of matricide, and it is no less true that there are no*

more republicans on either side." (Letter of June 29, 1937, published in the daily *Times*. See also Marañón's correspondence with Ortega, published by Marino Gomez-Santos, which leaves no room for doubt about his adherence to the national uprising).

Gregorio Marañón: *"If we ask one hundred human beings today, whether Spanish or not, the reasons for their attitude, favorable or contrary to either of the two parties fighting in Spain, some will point to their democratic creed, others to their traditionalism, others to their militarism or antimilitarism, their Catholicism or irreligion—if not a literary and red neo-Catholicism, a very curious species of the current ideological fauna—or their horror for executions and aerial bombings; or, finally, their personal sympathy or antipathy for the respective party leaders. Few will base their position on the real reason for the struggle: 'I defend the Reds because I am a communist,' or 'I sympathize with the nationals because I am an enemy of communism'.... These are the exact terms of the problem: a struggle between an antidemocratic, communist and oriental regime and another antidemocratic, anticommunist and European regime, whose exact form only the all-powerful Spanish reality will model"* (*Liberalismo y Comunismo*, punto VII; *Revue de Paris*, 15 December 1937).

Miguel de Unamuno: *"This struggle is not a struggle against the Liberal Republic. It is a struggle for civilization. As soon as the saving movement of General Franco occurred, I joined him, thinking that the most important thing was to save the Christian western civilization and with it national independence"* (Statement to the correspondent of the North American agency "International News," August 20, 1936, and interview with the Tharaud brothers, November 1936).

Why did Alejandro Lerroux, founder of the Radical Republican Party and President of the Council of Ministers (1933-1935) write: *"Neither Franco nor the army broke the law, nor did they rise up against a legal, normal and normally functioning democracy. They only replaced it in the void it left when it dissolved in 'blood, mud and tears'"* (*La pequeña historia de España: 1931-1936*, 1945)?

Alejandro Lerroux again wrote: *"This is not a pronunciamiento, but a national uprising, as sacred and legitimate as that of national independence in 1808, and even more sacred; then only political independence was defended, now moral, social and economic independence, property, culture and conscience, a whole civilization and history are defended"* (*Diario de la Marina*, 1937).

Many actors or sympathizers of the left and extreme left, such as George Orwell, Franz Borkenau or Arthur Koestler, testified that the Popular Front was under the sway of the Communist Party and

Moscow during the Civil War. In *The Invisible Writing* (1954), Koestler wrote: *"But as the struggle continued, they succeeded in converting the country into an obedient satellite of the Kremlin, through blackmail, terror and intrigue. All this is well known today, but we did not know it then. There is no doubt that our truth was only half known and that our struggle was a struggle in the fog."*

Why are so many explicit and edifying testimonies, from major players of the Popular Front, so often passed over in silence? Didn't Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, historian, rector, member of the Academy of History, minister and then president of the Republic in exile (1962-1971), make this astounding statement: *"If we had won the war, communism would have been established in Spain.... In August '37... Azaña told me that 'the war is lost, but if we win it, we Republicans will have to leave Spain, if they let us, because the power will be in the hands of the Communists.... Listen, you will be shocked when you read that I did not want the victory of the Civil War. But it is true that neither did Azaña. We should have left Spain.... You will be shocked when you read that I did not want the Republican victory, but it is true"* (Interview, *Personas*, nº74)?

Why was the largest massacre of the Civil War perpetrated for essentially religious reasons (nearly 7,000 dead, more than 20% of the clergy)? [The reference work on religious persecution (6832 victims) is that of Antonio Montero Moreno. Between 1987 and 2020, various popes have canonized and beatified 11 and 2053 martyrs of the faith respectively]. Why is it still the subject of so much procrastination when the testimonies of Popular Front ministers are explicit? In the words of the Republican minister without portfolio (1936-1938), member of the Basque Nationalist Party, Manuel de Irujo y Ollo (testimony taken from a memorandum presented to the Council of Ministers on January 7, 1937): *"Outside the Basque Country, the de facto situation of the Church is as follows: All altars, images and objects of worship have been destroyed, with rare exceptions.... All the churches have been closed to worship, which has been totally suspended.... The official bodies received the bells, chalices, candlesticks and all other objects of worship which were melted down and transformed for military or civil purposes.... Buildings and goods of all kinds were burned, looted, occupied or destroyed.... Priests and nuns were arrested, imprisoned and shot without trial by the thousands.... They went so far as to prohibit the private possession of images and objects of worship. The police, who carry out searches, search and destroy with violence and determination all objects related to the cult."*

The Spanish delegate to the Congress of Atheists, held in Moscow in the midst of the Civil War, could triumphantly declare: *"Spain has far surpassed the work of the Soviets, because the Church has been totally annihilated."* And the communist, Jesus Hernández, Minister of Public Education in the

government of Largo Caballero, did not fail to take the opportunity to send a telegram of enthusiastic support: *"Your struggle against religion is also ours. We have the duty to make Spain a land of militant atheists. The struggle will be difficult, because in this country there are many reactionaries who reject the Soviet culture. But all the schools in Spain will be transformed into communist schools."*

Why did the Basque nationalists prefer to negotiate their surrender with the Vatican, the Italians and their Carlist-redeemer brother-enemies (Santoña Pact, August 24, 1937) rather than continue the struggle alongside *"persecuting and atheistic"* revolutionaries?

Why is the account of the Popular Front and the Civil War by the President of the Republic, Manuel Azaña [one of the main perpetrators of the final tragedy, who did not hesitate to say before the socialist putsch of 1934: *"Above the Constitution is the Republic, and even higher, the Revolution"* (El Sol, April 17, 1934)]. Was he hallucinating? *"Each party, each province, each union wanted to have its army. In the columns, the battalions bickered, fought, stole food and ammunition from each other.... Each one thought of his own salvation without considering the common work.... Where was national solidarity? I did not see it anywhere.... One of the worst consequences of these events is the general dissociation, the assault on the State... the Civil War has increased the ambitions, the divergences, the rivalries, the conflicts and the indiscipline, which were bogging down the Popular Front.... Revolutionary hysteria that went from words to deeds, to robberies, to murders, ineptitude of the rulers, immorality, cowardice, barking and shooting among the unions, vanity of parvenus, disloyalty, dissimulation, palaver of failures, exploitation of the war to enrich oneself, refusal to organize an army, paralysis of operations, insolence of the separatists, small governments of caciques"* (Obras Completas: Memorias políticas y de guerra and Velada en Benicarlo, 1966-1968)?

Why, finally, did the main representative of the Marxist-Reformist or "social-democratic" minority of the PSOE, Julián Besteiro (one of the very few leaders of the Popular Front who did not flee Madrid in 1939), declare before the Military Tribunal that sentenced him to life imprisonment, a sentence that was later commuted to 30 years' imprisonment: *"We have been defeated for our faults (of course, to make these faults my own is pure rhetoric). We are defeated nationally for having allowed ourselves to be dragged into the Bolshevik aberration, which is perhaps the greatest political aberration the centuries have known. Russian international politics, in the hands of Stalin, and perhaps as a reaction to his internal state of failure, has become a monstrous crime, far exceeding the macabre conceptions of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy (The Brothers Karamazov and The Power of Darkness). The reaction to this mistake of the Republic in allowing itself to be drawn into the Bolshevik line was truly represented, whatever its faults, by the*

nationalists, who led the great anti-Komintern crusade.... In order to build the Spanish personality of tomorrow, the victorious national Spain will have to rely on the experience of those who suffered the errors of the Bolshevik Republic, otherwise it will be in danger of going astray along the wrong paths that only lead to failure."

General Vicente Rojo, Chief of Staff of the Popular Army, is no less severe. He explains in his book, *Alerta a los pueblos!* (1939): *"On the military level, Franco triumphed because military science and the art of war demanded it.... Politically, Franco triumphed because the Republic had not set a political goal.... During two and a half years of war, our politicians were more preoccupied with small personal and partisan issues than with the great national problems. They lacked the political abnegation to submit to a common ideal superior to that of the parties and the integrity to clean up a vitiated political atmosphere."*

The left-wing Republican, Diego Martínez Barrio, a dignitary Freemason who had been vice-president of the Council of Ministers, wrote, referring to the Socialists-Communists: *"All of them... attributed to us, the Republicans, the sad role of Kerenski. Our mission was limited, according to them, to smoothing the way to power for them, since the democratic revolution was an exhausted stage in the history of Spain"* (*Orígenes del Frente Popular Español*, 1943).

More debatable, without being unreasonable, are Moa's theses on the merits of Francoism. They are obviously unbearable for socialist and Marxist historians who, on the contrary, claim to demonstrate the essentially repressive character of Franco's regime; its roots in organized violence, its will to destroy or subjugate the other through fear. But Pío Moa does not care. Knowing the immeasurably greater horrors of Nazi and Communist totalitarianism, he does not compromise. According to him, the mistakes that Franco could be blamed for—especially the harshness of the repression and censorship in the immediate post-war period and the will to cling to power until the end—were not fundamental. In comparison, the merits of Francoism are major. First, its economic successes are indisputable: Between 1961 and 1975, the years of the "Spanish miracle," annual GDP growth ranged from 3.5 percent to 12.8 percent, and the country rose to ninth place among industrialized nations, a surprising achievement, considering that a regime *"at the service of the Bank, the Church and the Army"* should have caused misery and hunger. Second, Francoism defeated communism and allowed Spain to escape World War II. And third, Francoism defeated separatism and preserved the unity of the country.

According to Moa, Franco's regime, authoritarian but not totalitarian, gave Spain four decades of peace, national unity, independence in international relations, prosperity and reconciliation, with limited

corruption (paradoxically much less than in later years), a fundamentally liberal economy, low taxes and a small state. Francoism created and left a legacy of the middle class, which was essential for the advent and maintenance of democracy; it also re-established constitutional monarchy. Finally, it was Franco's moderate right that took the initiative to establish democracy, while the main left-wing currents were finally intelligent enough to react and adapt, so that during the Transition they helped to consolidate the democratic system. This drastic and peremptory point of view obviously makes socialist-Marxist historians gasp, but paradoxically it is not unlike that of one of the greatest Spanish historians of the twentieth century, the anti-Franco professor Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, who wrote in *España, tres milenios de historia*: "During Franco's era, Spain underwent the broadest, deepest, and most positive transformation in its history."

[\[Click here for Part III\]](#)

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[Featured image](#): "Guzmán el Bueno" (Guzmán the Good), by Salvador Martínez Cubells; painted in 1884.

