

of Francoism. More positively it was a contribution to what has been called 'the pact of forgetfulness' (*el pacto del olvido*), the tacit, collective agreement of the great majority of the Spanish people to renounce any settling of accounts after the death of Franco. A rejection of the violence of the civil war and the regime which came out of it overcame any thoughts of revenge.

In fact, in 1986, the year that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, a war which would see Spain suffer nearly forty years of international ostracism, the country was formally admitted into the European Community. Ten years later, the withering away of Francoism and continued consolidation of democracy were demonstrated when the Spanish government, with all-party support granted citizenship to the surviving members of the International Brigades who fought against fascism during the Civil War. It was a welcome but belated gesture of gratitude and reconciliation which serves as a reminder of a violent and bloody Spain which has perhaps gone for ever.

## ONE

### *A Divided Society: Spain before 1930*

The origins of the Spanish Civil War lie far back in the country's history. The notion that political problems could more naturally be solved by violence than by debate was firmly entrenched in a country in which for a thousand years civil war has been if not exactly the norm then certainly no rarity. The war of 1936-39 was the fourth such conflict since the 1830s. The religious 'crusade' propaganda of the Nationalists joyfully linked it with the Christian *Reconquista* of Spain from the Moors. On both sides, heroism and nobility vied with primitive cruelty and brutality in a way that would not have been out of place in a medieval epic. Yet, in the last resort, the Spanish Civil War is a war firmly rooted in the modern period. The interference of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin ensured that the Spanish Civil War would be a defining moment in twentieth-century history. Yet, leaving that international dimension aside, the myriad Spanish conflicts which erupted in 1936, regionalists against centralists, anti-clericals against Catholics, landless labourers against *latifundistas*, workers against industrialist, have in common the struggles of a society in the throes of modernization.

To understand Spain's progress to the bloodshed of 1936 it is necessary to make a fundamental distinction between the long-term structural origins and the immediate political causes.

In the hundred years before 1930, it was possible to discern the gradual and immensely complex division of the country into two broadly antagonistic social blocks. However, when the Second Republic was established on 14 April 1931 amidst scenes of popular rejoicing, few Spaniards outside of the lunatic fringes of the extreme left and right, the conspiratorial monarchists and the anarchists, believed that the country's problems could be solved only by resort to violence. Five years and three months later, large sections of the population believed that war was inevitable. Moreover, a substantial proportion of them felt that war would be a good thing. Accordingly, it is necessary to establish exactly what happened between 14 April 1931 and 18 July 1936 to bring about that change. Nevertheless, the political hatreds which polarized the Second Republic in those five and a quarter years were a reflection of the deep-rooted conflicts of Spanish society.

The Civil War was the culmination of a series of uneven struggles between the forces of reform and reaction which had dominated Spanish history since 1808. There is a curious pattern in Spain's modern history, arising from a frequent *desfase*, or lack of synchronization, between the social reality and the political power structure ruling over it. Lengthy periods during which reactionary elements have attempted to use political and military power to hold back social progress have inevitably been followed by outbursts of revolutionary fervour. In the 1850s, the 1870s, between 1917 and 1923, and above all during the Second Republic, efforts were made to bring Spanish politics into line with the country's social reality. This inevitably involved attempts to introduce fundamental reform, especially on the land, and to carry out redistributions of wealth. Such efforts in turn provoked reactionary efforts to stop the clock and reimpose the traditional balance of social and economic power. Thus were progressive movements crushed by General O'Donnell in 1856, by General Pavia in 1874 and by General Primo de Rivera in 1923.

Accordingly, the Civil War of 1936–39 represented the ultimate expression of the attempts by reactionary elements in Spanish politics to crush any reform which might threaten their privileged position. The recurring dominance of reactionary elements was a consequence of the continued power of the old landed oligarchy and the parallel weakness of the progressive bourgeoisie. A concomitant of the tortuously slow and uneven development of industrial capitalism in Spain was the existence of a numerically small and politically insignificant commercial and manufacturing class. Spain did not experience a classic bourgeois revolution in which the structures of the *ancien regime* were broken. The power of the monarchy, the landed nobility and the Church remained more or less intact well into the twentieth century. Unlike Britain and France, nineteenth century Spain did not see the establishment of a democratic polity with the flexibility to absorb new forces and to adjust to major social change. That is not to say that Spain remained a feudal society but rather that the legal basis for capitalism was established without there being a political revolution. Accordingly, with the obvious difference that her industrial capitalism was extremely feeble, Spain followed the pattern established by Prussia.

Indeed, even until the 1950s, capitalism in Spain was predominantly agrarian. Spanish agriculture is immensely variegated in terms of climate, crops and land-holding systems. There have long existed areas of commercially successful small and medium farming operations, especially in the lush, wet hills and valleys of those northern regions which also experienced industrialisation, Asturias, Catalonia and the Basque Country. However, throughout the nineteenth century and for the first half of the twentieth, the dominant sectors in terms of political influence were, broadly speaking, the large landowners. In the main, the *latifundios*, the great estates, are concentrated in the arid central and southern regions of New Castile, Extremadura and Andalusia, although there are also substantial *latifundios* to

be found scattered in Old Castile and particularly in Salamanca. The political monopoly of the landed oligarchy was periodically challenged by the emasculated industrial and mercantile classes with virtually no success. Until well after the civil war, the urban *haute bourgeoisie* was obliged to play the role of junior partner in a working coalition with the great *latifundistas*. Despite sporadic industrialisation and a steady growth in the national importance of the political representatives of the northern industrialists, power remained squarely in the hands of the landowners.

There was never any strong possibility in Spain that industrialisation and political modernisation would coincide. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the progressive impulses, both political and economic, of the Spanish bourgeoisie were irrevocably diverted. The removal of feudal restrictions on land transactions combined with royal financial problems in the 1830s and the 1850s to liberate huge tracts of aristocratic, ecclesiastical and common lands. This not only diminished any impetus towards industrialisation but, by helping to expand the great estates, also created intense social hatreds in the south. The newly released land was bought up by the more efficient among existing landlords and by members of the commercial and mercantile bourgeoisie attracted by its cheapness and social prestige. The latifundio system was consolidated and the new landlords were keen for a return on their investment. Unwilling to engage in expensive projects of irrigation, they preferred instead to build their profits on the exploitation of the great armies of landless day labourers, the *braceros* and *jornaleros*. The departure of the more easy-going clerics and nobles of an earlier age together with the enclosing of common lands removed most of the social palliatives which had hitherto kept the poverty-stricken south from upheaval. Paternalism was replaced by repression as the Civil Guard was created as a rural armed police with the principal function of guarding the big estates from the labourers who worked on them. Thus,

the strengthening of the landed oligarchy exacerbated an explosive social situation which could only foster the reactionary tendencies of the owners. At the same time, the syphoning into the land of the capital of the merchants of the great sea ports and of Madrid bankers correspondingly weakened their interest in modernisation.

Continued investment in land and widespread inter-marriage between the urban bourgeoisie and the landed oligarchy debilitated those forces committed to reform. The feebleness of the Spanish bourgeoisie as a potentially revolutionary class was underlined in the period from 1868 to 1874, which culminated in the chaos of the First Republic. With population growth in the middle of the century increasing pressure on the land, unskilled labourers had flocked to the towns and swelled the mob of unemployed who were highly sensitive to increases in bread prices. Hardly less wretched was the position of the urban lower middle class of teachers, officials and shop-keepers. Conditions were perhaps worst in the Catalan textile industry which produced all the horrors of nascent capitalism – long hours, child labour, overcrowding and low wages. When the American Civil War cut off supplies of cotton in the 1860s, the consequent rise in unemployment combined with a depression in railway construction to drive the urban working class to desperation. In 1868, this popular discontent combined with a movement of middle class and military resentment of the clerical and ultra-conservative leanings of the Monarchy. A number of *pronunciamientos* by liberal army officers together with urban riots led to its overthrow. The two movements were ultimately contradictory. The liberals were terrified to find that their constitutionalist rebellion had awakened a revolutionary movement of the masses. To make matters worse, a rebellion began in Spain's richest surviving colony, Cuba. The chosen replacement monarch, Amadeo of Savoy, abdicated in despair in 1873. In the ensuing vacuum, the First Republic was established after a number of working

class risings, an intolerable threat to the established order which was crushed by the Army in December 1874.

In many respects, 1873-4 was to Spain what 1848-9 had been elsewhere in Europe. Having plucked up the courage to challenge the old order, the bourgeoisie was frightened out of its reforming ambitions by the spectre of proletarian disorder. When the Army restored the Monarchy in the person of Alfonso XII, reform was abandoned in return for social peace. The subsequent relation of forces between the landed oligarchy, the urban bourgeoisie and the remainder of the population was perfectly represented by the political system of the 1876 monarchical restoration. Two political parties, the Conservative and the Liberal, represented the interests of two sections of the landed oligarchy, respectively the wine and olive growers of the south and the wheat growers of the centre. The differences between them were minimal. They were both monarchist and were divided not on social issues but over free trade and, to a much lesser extent, over religion. The northern industrial bourgeoisie was barely represented within the system but was, for the moment, content to devote its activities to economic expansion in an atmosphere of stability. Until, in the twentieth century, they would organize their own parties, the Catalan textile manufacturers were inclined to support the Liberals because of their shared interest in restrictive tariffs, while the Basques, exporters of iron ore, tended to support the Conservative free traders.

It was virtually impossible for any political aspirations to find legal expression outside the two great oligarchical parties. Liberal and Conservative governments followed one another with soporific regularity. When results were not faked in the Ministry of the Interior, they were fixed at the local level. The system of electoral falsification rested on the social power of local town bosses or *caciques* (a South American Indian word meaning 'chief'). In the northern small-holding areas, the *cacique* was usually a money lender, one of the bigger landlords,

a lawyer or even a priest, who held mortgages on the small farms. In the areas of the great latifundio estates, New Castile, Extremadura or Andalusia, the *cacique* was the landowner or his agent, the man who decided who worked and therefore who did not starve. *Caciquismo* ensured that the narrow interests represented by the system were never seriously threatened.

On occasion, over-zealous local officials would produce majorities by more than 100 per cent of the electorate. It was not unknown for results to be published before the elections took place. As the century wore on, casual falsification became somewhat more difficult and, if the requisite number of peasant votes could not be mustered, the *caciques* were said sometimes to register as voters the dead in the local cemetery. In consequence, politics became an exclusive minuet danced out by a small privileged minority. The nature of politics in the period of *caciquismo* is illustrated by the celebrated story of the *cacique* of Motril in the province of Granada. When the coach with the election results arrived from the provincial capital, they were brought to him in the local *Casino* (club). Leafing through them, he pronounced to the expectant hangers-on the following words: 'We the Liberals were convinced that we would win these elections. However, the will of God has decreed otherwise.' A lengthy pause. 'It appears that we the Conservatives have won the elections'. Excluded from organized politics, the hungry masses could choose only between apathy and violence. The inevitable outbreaks of protest by the unrepresented majority were dealt with by the forces of order, the Civil Guard and, at moments of greater tension, the army.

Challenges to the system did arise, however, and they were linked to the painfully slow but inexorable progress of industrialisation and to the brutal social injustices intrinsic to the latifundio economy. The 1890s were a period of economic depression which exacerbated the grievances of the lower classes, especially in the countryside. Land hunger was creating an increasingly desperate desire for change, the more so as the



southern labourers came under the influence of anarchism. The arrival of anarchism in the 1860s had given a sense of hope and purpose to hitherto sporadic rural uprisings. Its message of justice and equality found eager converts among the starving day labourers or *braceros*. They took part in outbreaks of sporadic violence, crop-burnings and strikes. In January 1892, an army of *braceros*, armed only with scythes and sticks but driven by hunger, seized the town of Jerez. Anarchism also took root in the small workshops of the highly fragmented Catalan textile industry.

The system was rocked in 1898 by defeat at the hands of the USA and the loss of the remnants of empire including Cuba. This was to have a catastrophic effect on the Spanish economy especially in Catalonia for whose products Cuba had been a protected market. Barcelona was the scene of sporadic strikes and acts of terrorism by both anarchists and government *agents provocateurs*. Moreover, by the turn of the century, the growth of coal, steel and textile industries in the north saw the emergence of a militant industrial proletariat. In the two decades before the First World War, the working class aristocracy of printers and craftsmen from the building and metal trades in Madrid, the steel and shipyard workers in Bilbao, and the coal-miners of Asturias began to swell the ranks of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), the Socialist Party founded in 1879, and its trade union organization, the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT). Surprisingly, however, when the inevitable explosion came, it was precipitated not by the rural anarchists or the urban working class but by the industrial bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, once the crisis started, proletarian ambitions came into play in such a way as to ensure that the basic polarisation of Spanish political life became starker than ever.

The geometric symmetry of the Restoration system, with political power concentrated in the hands of those who also enjoyed the monopoly of economic power, was shattered by

the coming of the First World War. Not only were political passions aroused by a bitter debate about whether Spain should intervene and on which side, accentuating growing divisions within the Liberal and Conservative parties, but massive social upheaval came in the wake of the war. The fact that Spain was a non-belligerent put her in the economically privileged position of being able to supply both the Entente and the Central Powers with agricultural and industrial products. Coalmine-owners from Asturias, Basque steel barons and shipbuilders, Catalan textile magnates all experienced a wild boom which constituted the first dramatic take-off for Spanish industry. The balance of power within the economic elite shifted somewhat. Agrarian interests remained pre-eminent but industrialists were no longer prepared to tolerate their subordinate political position. Their dissatisfaction came to a head in June 1916 when the Liberal Minister of Finance, Santiago Alba, attempted to impose a tax on the notorious war profits of northern industry without a corresponding measure to deal with those made by the agrarians. Although the move was blocked, it so underlined the arrogance of the landed elite that it precipitated a bid by the industrial bourgeoisie to carry through political modernisation.

The discontent of the Basque and Catalan industrialists had already seen them mount challenges to the Spanish establishment by sponsoring regionalist movements – the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV) and the *Lliga Regionalista*. Now the reforming zeal of industrialists enriched by the war coincided with a desperate need for change from a proletariat impoverished by it. Boom industries had attracted rural labour to towns where the worst conditions of early capitalism prevailed. This was especially true of Asturias and the Basque Country. At the same time, massive exports created shortages, rocketing inflation and plummeting living standards. The Socialist UGT and the anarcho-sindicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) were drawn together in the hope that a joint

general strike might bring about free elections and then reform. While industrialists and workers pushed for change, middle-rank army officers were protesting at low wages, antiquated promotion structures and political corruption. A bizarre and short-lived alliance was forged in part because of a misunderstanding about the political stance of the Army.

Military complaints were couched in the language of reform which had become fashionable after Spain's loss of empire in 1898. Known as 'Regenerationism', it associated the defeat of 1898 with political corruption. Ultimately, 'Regenerationism' was open to exploitation by either the right or the left since among its advocates there were those who sought to sweep away the degenerate *caciquista* system by democratic reform and those who planned simply to crush it by the authoritarian solution of 'an iron surgeon'. However, in 1917 the officers who mouthed empty 'Regenerationist' clichés were acclaimed as the figureheads of a great national reform movement. For a brief moment, workers, capitalists and the military were united in the name of cleansing Spanish politics of the corruption of *caciquismo*. Had the movement been successful in establishing a political system capable of permitting social adjustment, the civil war would not have been necessary. As things turned out, the great crisis of 1917 merely consolidated the power of the entrenched landed oligarchy.

Despite a rhetorical coincidence of their calls for reform, the ultimate interests of workers, industrialists and officers were contradictory and the system survived by skilfully exploiting these differences. The Prime Minister, the Conservative Eduardo Dato, conceded the officers' economic demands. He then provoked a strike of Socialist railway workers, forcing the UGT to act before the CNT was ready. Now at peace with the system, the Army was happy to defend it in August 1917 by crushing the striking Socialists with considerable bloodshed. Alarmed by the prospect of militant workers in the streets, the industrialists dropped their own

demands for political reform and, lured by promises of economic modernisation, joined in a national coalition government in 1918 with both Liberals and Conservatives. Yet again the industrial bourgeoisie had abandoned its political aspirations and allied with the landed oligarchy out of a fear of the lower classes. Short-lived though it was to be, the coalition symbolised the slightly improved position of industrialists in a reactionary alliance still dominated by the landed interest.

By 1917, Spain was divided more starkly even than before into two mutually hostile social groups, with landowners and industrialists on one side and workers and landless labourers on the other. Only one numerous social group was not definitively aligned within this broad cleavage – the small-holding peasantry. Significantly, in the years before and during the First World War, efforts were made to mobilize Catholic farmers in defence of big landholding interests. With anarchism and Socialism making headway among the urban workers, the more far-sighted landowners were anxious to stop the spread of the poison to the countryside. Counter-revolutionary syndicates were financed by landlords from 1906 but the process was systematized after 1912 by a group of dynamic social Catholics led by Angel Herrera, the *éminence grise* of political Catholicism in Spain before 1936. Through his organization of determined social Christian activists, the *Asociación Católica Nacional de Propagandistas*, Herrera helped set up a series of provincial Catholic Agrarian Federations which tried to prevent impoverished farmers turning to the left by offering them credit facilities, agronomic expertise, warehousing and machinery in return for their adoption of virulent anti-socialism. Many of those recruited were to play an important role when the landed oligarchy was forced to seek more modern forms of defence in the 1930s first by voting for the legalist parties of the right during the Second Republic and later by fighting for Franco.

In the aftermath of the crisis of 1917, however, the existing order survived in part because of the organisational naivety of