

## Eruption of the Spanish Civil War and Miguel de Unamuno's death, July 1936 – December 1936

In July, the tensions existing in Spain came to a head, and the civil war began. The tipping point is considered to be the assassination of Lieutenant Jose Castillo, a member of the *Cuerpo de Seguridad y Asalto* (Assault Guard), the police reserves under the left-wing Second Republic. Castillo was also a known anti-fascist operator. In the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup>, a group of Falangists (the fascist political movement at the time) shot him as he left his home to take his post on the night's watch.

Only a few hours after, at 3:00 am on the 13<sup>th</sup>, a group of left-wing militants and police officers, including Lt. Castillo's friend Fernando Contés arrived at the home of Jose Calvo Sotelo a leader in the right-wing nationalist movement and sitting member of Spain's national legislature. Despite his position in Congress which afforded him immunity from arrest, he was asked to join the group and come to the police station for interrogation. On the way, Mr. Sotelo was shot twice in the head.

The coup d'état that initiated the civil war had in planning stages since the February elections, but Sotelo's murder provided a justification of the actions taken on 17<sup>th</sup> of July (Preston, 83). Over two days, military leaders around the nation revolted against the republican state. General Franco and the bulk of Spain's professional military flew across the Mediterranean Sea and launched a ground invasion. Every city and town the nationalists entered fell to what would be known as the White Terror, the destruction of opposition called *limpieza social* (social cleansing) (Beevor). Miguel de Unamuno wrote against these atrocities publicly, putting himself in danger.

Over the remaining months of Unamuno's life, the coup transitioned into the civil war as the republicans maintained control over the critical cities in the nation. A key moment in Unamuno's final work and his role in the struggle for Spain occurred on October 12, in an event celebrating Spain's discoveries in the western hemisphere. He is credited with delivering a stirring and passionate speech against the violence of the nationalists, which led to his removal as rector of the University of Salamanca. However conflicting accounts exist. What is known is that Professor Maldonado spoke in favor of the nationalists and decried the Basque and Catalanian independence movements as "anti-Spain". Unamuno himself was Basque and spoke in response to Maldonado in a way that drew the ire of General Millán Astray

Unamuno was removed from his position at the university and spent the rest of his life under house arrest (Jensen, 426). On December 31, 1936, Unamuno died under mysterious circumstances. Officially he died from gas exposure from a brazier which was lit during a long interview with a visitor. However, his maid reported hearing two screams from his quarters and an autopsy, despite being required by law, was never performed.

Preston, Paul. *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge*. William Collins, 2016.

Beevor, Antony. *The Battle for Spain; The Spanish Civil War 1936–1939*. Penguin Books. 2006.

Jensen, R. Geoffrey. "Jose Millan-Astray and the Nationalist 'Crusade' in Spain." *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1992, pp. 425–47. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260899>. Accessed 10 Dec. 2023.

## V

It is not a matter of simply risking one's life, but rather of risking oneself.

*Vertiefung* = deepening

"Etiquette and upbringing" as they say in Aragón.

Saturday, August 8: Hail Marys in the cathedral at the Pilar of Zaragoza<sup>1</sup>. The Church brings the crowd together, gives them historic and communal consciousness. Do they believe? Does she believe in them? They are on the precipice of death, of communal death. *Finis Hispanie*<sup>2</sup>. The kids here, in the chicken coop with the hens “Bam! Boom! Bam! Boom! Viva España!”

The national faith

Don Casto

A man convinced to reluctantly give his life for a cause, and another, a boy (17 years old!) who will go to one front or another. The first will give his life as a sacrifice, the second does not believe in death. “Over my dead body!” Alhucemas, Don Fabián<sup>3</sup>.

Let us not abuse any corpses.

A letter from Calvo Sotelo, where he refers to Santiago. Did he believe in that? An 11<sup>th</sup> hour conversion. Areilza, San Manuel Bueno<sup>4</sup>. These traditionalists – falangists, etc. – are sustained by a faith in the eternity of their supernatural cause, which at least they think they believe, or that they want to believe. And the others, the opposition, are sustained by a non faith, a despair, by the materialistic sentiment of history.

Whoever threw that bomb at the Pilar has lost all hope and resents others for their belief. It is the tragedy of Prieto<sup>5</sup>. The church fires and the slaughter of priests are religious, expiatory acts.

Huichilobos and the holy war<sup>6</sup>. Santiago. //

## VI

Spain has two halves, one that wants to believe and the other desperate to be incapable of belief.

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<sup>1</sup> On 3 and 4 August, republican forces planted bombs in the cathedral of Our Lady of the Pillar, who is the patron saint of the Hispanic People.

<sup>2</sup> Latin, The end of Spain

<sup>3</sup> The Marquis of Alhucemas protested the forthcoming military coup with a speech in the senate. The preceding quote refers to his speech, Unamuno compares the Marquis to Fabián Vidal, a republican journalist who protested the nationalists

<sup>4</sup> Compares José María de Areilza to San Manuel Bueno, one of his most famous Works that centers around a priest who leads a parish even though he secretly does not believe in the religion he teaches.

<sup>5</sup> Indalecio Prieto supplied arms to the Asturian Coal Miners strike and rebellion. A bloody reprisal from the right-wing government ensued, and the left lost credibility to oppose the 1936 coup that led to the civil war.

<sup>6</sup> Here Unamuno compares the zeal for civil war to the passion around the Running of the Bulls, which he had denounced in earlier publications as savage and bloodthirsty.

Association of Working Teachers of Orense (A.T.E.O)<sup>7</sup>. A church that anathematizes the belief in God but doesn't believe that one can rationally demonstrate His existence is a hopeless church.

An intimate, internecine, civil holy war across all of Spain. "Viva España!" is the expression of her desire for life.

The Requetés<sup>8</sup> "We did not carry out the executions!"

The worst part is not that they are taking lives, but that they are terminating souls, consciences.

I no longer wanted to leave the house, even to walk through the plaza. The men and women there no longer appeared to me as before, as figures I had dreamed up, created as *nívolas*, but rather as flesh and blood – above all, blood – that burst into idyllic eternity.

And the children! The world was no longer my representation.

One day, a bomb of an airplane will fly to the Tower of Monterrey.

And I will be with her.

These wretches, bishop Echeguren, master Romero, who want the church to answer the social question. "My kingdom is not of this world", and yet the people do not believe in the other. Or in the first...

It is not Spaniards against others – there are no "anti-Spaniards"<sup>9</sup> – but all of Spain, one against itself. Collective suicide. //

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<sup>7</sup> ATEO, an organization of professors in Orense. Funded by the Socialist Party Union (UGT). The word "ateo" also means Atheist in Spanish

<sup>8</sup> The paramilitary faction of the Carlist movement.

<sup>9</sup> "Anti-spain" is a direct reference to Professor Francisco Moldonado who spoke vehemently against Basque and Catalan separatists, calling them anti-spain at the famous event in October of 1936.