Introduction

Until the beginning of the Second Republic, Spanish society seemed to have managed to avoid the problems and troubles that had beset most other European countries since 1914. Spain had not taken part in the First World War, and therefore had not undergone the upheaval that this war had caused, with the fall of empires and their subjects, the demobilising of millions of ex-combatants and massive debt caused by the vast spending on the war effort.

The Spanish Monarchy was overthrown not by a war, but by its inability to provide the Spanish with a smooth transition from an oligarchic and cacique-style regime to one of reform and democracy. The fall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship on 28 January 1930, in power from September 1923, led to a process of political radicalisation and an upswing in republicanism. This surge brought together old conservatives who had decided to abandon the King, lifelong republicans, new republicans, socialists who felt the need to influence the movement from the inside, and prominent intellectuals. Together they made a commitment to prepare the uprising against the Monarchy and to implement the Republic.

The insurrectional approach, with its long history of setting the military against politicians, failed in Jaca in December 1930. Just four months later, the local elections of 12 April were turned into a plebiscite between Monarchy and republicanism. It was soon clear that the republicans had won in most of the provincial capitals. Admiral Juan Bautista Aznar's government resigned, Alfonso XIII abdicated, and a good many cities and towns proclaimed the Republic on 14 April 1931.

By the end of that year, with Niceto Alcalá Zamora as President of the Republic and Manuel Azaña as Prime Minister, Spain was a parliamentary constitutional Republic. The first two years of the Republic were given over to the organisation of the army, the separation of Church and State, and the implementation of comprehensive

radical measures with regard to land distribution, workers' wages, employment protection and public education. Never before had Spain experienced such an intense, rapid period of change and class conflict, democratic advances or social conquests.

But at the same time, republican legislation was responsible for bringing into the open some of the tensions that had been germinating during the previous two decades, with industrialisation, urban growth and class conflicts. This opened up a breach between various clashing cultural worlds, between practising Catholics and hard-line anticlericalists, bosses and workers, Church and State, order and revolution.

As a result of these clashes, the Republic had vast problems in consolidating itself and had to confront firm challenges from above and below. It went through two years of relative stability, followed by another two years of political uncertainty and a final few months of disturbance and insurrection. The first firm challenges, which were the most visible as they usually ended up as confrontations with the police, came from below, first as social protests and later as insurrections from anarchists and socialists. However, the coup de grâce, the challenge that finally overthrew the Republic with the force of arms, came from above and from within – that is to say, the military command and the powerful ruling classes that had never tolerated it.

The division of the army and police forces thwarted the victory of the military rebellion, as well as the achievement of their main objective: the rapid seizure of power. But by undermining the republican government's power to keep order, this coup d'état was transformed into open violence such as had never been seen before, by the groups that supported it and those that opposed it. It was July 1936 and thus began the civil war.

There were several distinct conflicts during this war. Firstly, a military conflict was initiated when the coup d'état buried political solutions, to replace them with arms. It was also a class war, between differing conceptions of social order; a war of religion, between Catholicism and anticlericalism; a war revolving around the idea of *patria* and nation; and a war of ideas, beliefs that were at the time at loggerheads on the international stage. It was a war that was impossible to reduce to a conflict between Communism and Fascism, or between Fascism and democracy. In short, the Spanish Civil War was a melting-pot of universal battles between bosses and workers,

Church and State, obscurantism and modernisation, settled in an international context that had been thrown out of balance by crises of democracies and the onslaught of Communism and Fascism.

The destruction of the opponent became the primary objective. The policy of extermination initiated by the military rebels was fervently supported by conservative sectors, landowners, the bourgeoisie, property owners and 'respectable people', who rejected once and for all the defence of their order via the law. Wherever the military coup was unsuccessful, it was time for the long-awaited revolution and the final judgement for the wealthy bosses. With no rules or government, with no mechanisms for forcing people to comply with laws, revenge and class hatred spread with a devastating force to wipe out the old order.

The Spanish Civil War has gone down in history, and in the memory that remains of it, for the way it dehumanised its adversaries and for the horrific violence that it generated. Symbolised by the *sacas*, *paseos* and mass killings, it served the two sides in their struggle to eliminate their respective enemies, whether natural or unforeseen. While carrying out this extermination, the rebels were also given the inestimable blessing of the Catholic Church from the very beginning. The clergy and sacred objects, however, were the prime target of popular rage, by those who took part in defeating the military rebels and who played leading roles in the 'popular terror' that took place in the summer of 1936. Thus, Catholic religion and anticlericalism were passionately included in the battle involving basic themes related to the organisation of society and the State that was being unleashed in Spanish territory.

The international situation at the end of the 1930s was hardly conducive to peace, and this played a decisive role in the duration, progress and final result of the Spanish Civil War, a conflict that was clearly internal in its origin. International support for both sides was vital for fighting and continuing the war during the early months. As the war progressed, non-interventionism, imbalances in the material resources of the two sides, the participation of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and, in most cases, the non-involvement of the western democracies were, together with disunity in the republican camp and unity among the Francoists, decisive factors in tipping the balance towards the final victory of the military rebels.

Spain began the 1930s with a Republic and finished the decade immersed in a right-wing authoritarian dictatorship. It only took three

years of war for Spanish society to undergo a wave of violence and an unprecedented disdain for the lives of others. Despite all that has been said about the violence that preceded the civil war, in an attempt to justify its outbreak, it is clear that the coup d'état of July 1936 marked a watershed in twentieth-century Spanish history. Furthermore, for at least two decades after the end of the civil war in 1939, there was no positive reconstruction such as had occurred in other countries in western Europe after 1945.

The climate of order, *patria* and religion overrode that of democracy, the Republic and revolution. In this respect, there was not much difference between Spain and other European countries. In 1920, all but two (Bolshevik Russia and Hungary, under the right-wing dictator, Horthy) of the twenty-eight States in Europe could be described as democracies or as having restricted parliamentary systems. By the beginning of 1939, more than half of them, including Spain, had succumbed to dictators with absolute powers. Seven of the democracies that were left were dismantled between 1939 and 1940, after being invaded by the German army and incorporated into the new Nazi order, with France, Holland and Belgium being the most significant examples. By the end of 1940, only six democracies remained intact: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland.

But this should never be used as an excuse, a convenient argument for offloading the responsibilities of broad sectors of the Spanish population – the better-educated groups, the owner classes, the political and union leaders, the military and the Church – who did little to conform to the rules and respect the law or the election results, or to defend the freedoms of expression and association, or civil rights.

Thus there is no simple answer as to why the climate of euphoria and hope in 1931 was transformed into the cruel, all-destructive war of 1936. The Republic lasted for eight years, five in peace and three at war, and interpreting them still arouses passionate opinions rather than historical debate.

What I offer in this book is a history of the Republic and the Civil War, based on my own research and the large output of the best specialist historians of the period. I have examined the most significant events, drawn up an account with the main players in this fiesta that ended in tragedy, and have attempted to provide answers, without compromising the historian's constant quest for accuracy and truth,

to some of the basic questions that a good many Spaniards have asked in the seventy years that have passed since the civil war. My personal view, the representation that I offer of those years of tumult, also appears explicitly at different stages of the account. The book's structure, the organisation of the chapters and their titles, are a component of this view. It is not a detached view, or one from somebody who has been commissioned to write a book. Neither can it be a dispassionate consideration, because I have spent over twenty years researching and revealing the darkest and most convoluted part of this past. It is left to the reader to judge whether this history contributes to a better understanding of these events.

PART I

Republic

1 *The winds of change*

'The elections held last Sunday clearly show me that I do not have the love of my people today', wrote King Alfonso XIII in a farewell note to the Spanish people, before leaving the Royal Palace on the night of Tuesday 14 April 1931.

According to Miguel Maura, 'the Monarchy had committed suicide', so he, the son of Antonio Maura, former leader of the monarchist conservatives, had decided 'to join' the Republic almost a year before it was proclaimed, as he stated in an address in the *Ateneo* (literary society) in San Sebastián on 20 February 1930. Maura was joined by other distinguished monarchists who realised that it was better to defend 'legitimate conservative principles' within the Republic, rather than leaving 'the way clear' for the leftist parties and workers' organisations.[1] Nineteen-thirty was a year of noteworthy resignations of politicians who had hitherto been loyal to the Crown. José Sánchez Guerra, the former leader of the *Partido Conservador*, took this step in February, a few days after Miguel Maura. Niceto Alcalá Zamora, a liberal minister under Alfonso XIII, did so in April. In little more than a year – the period that spanned the fall of the military dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera, which had seized power in September 1923, and the abdication of the King – hostility towards the Monarchy spread unchecked through the medium of meetings and demonstrations throughout Spain.

The death throes of the Monarchy

The first signs of the suicide of the Monarchy began to be seen in the last three years of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, when his refusal to

[1] Miguel Maura, *Así cayó Alfonso XIII. De una dictadura a otra*, Ariel, Barcelona, 1966, p. 48.

return power to parliament, and the King's inability to force him to do so, reinforced people's perception that they were one and the same, and gave way to a period of plots and *pronunciamientos* to overthrow the dictatorship by military means. They did not succeed, but Primo de Rivera was put into a difficult position, with his credibility shattered. On 26 January 1930, he asked his Captains-General to express their confidence in him. As no one offered it, he resigned two days later.

The same day, 28 January 1930, Alfonso XIII asked General Dámaso Berenguer, head of his Military Household, to form a government, which was to include certain aristocrats who had the King's confidence and former politicians of the cacique system. Attempts to organise the political system, returning to the situation prior to the coup d'état of September 1923, failed because the dictatorship had destroyed the two parties on which the Restoration regime had been based for fifty years, the liberal and conservative parties, and had left Spain without a Constitution. That left the caciques and their network of clients and political friends in the rural world, but this, by 1930, was not enough to maintain order and constitutional normality.

Indeed, many things had changed in Spanish society during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The repatriation of capital after the colonial defeats of 1898 and Spain's neutrality in the First World War had prepared the way for the spectacular growth of the 1920s. This growth was mainly concentrated in areas that had already had an industrial infrastructure in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The first of these was Barcelona and its area of influence, which experienced notable financial activity and greater industrial diversification, and where, despite the continued dominance of the textile sector, major new companies in the chemicals and metal sectors were being founded.

Much more marked and precipitate in the early decades of the twentieth century was the industrialisation of Bilbao and the Nervión estuary. As Vicente Blasco Ibáñez noted in *El intruso*, 'a forest of chimneys' sprang up there, with 'multicoloured smoke' that radically changed the landscape.[2] It was Spain's second most important industrialised area, more diversified than Catalonia, with insurance

[2] Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867–1928), writer, journalist and republican politician, published *El intruso*, an account of the social conflicts in Vizcaya, in 1904 (there is a recent edition in the Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid, 2000).

companies, chemical works, power stations, banks, machinery manufacture and, above all, steel companies.

The repatriation of capital, the effects of the Great War and the building boom of the twenties had also left their mark in other cities such as Madrid, Valencia, Seville and Zaragoza. These were industries of modest proportions – small workshops, never large factories, mostly dependent on agriculture and building – but they changed the face of these cities and enlarged their urban space.

All these cities doubled in population between 1900 and 1930. Barcelona and Madrid, with over half a million inhabitants each in 1900, reached a million three decades later. Bilbao went from 83,000 to 162,000; Zaragoza from 100,000 to 174,000. Admittedly, these populations are not particularly significant if we compare them to the 2.7 million in Paris in 1900, or the number of European cities, from Birmingham to Moscow, including Berlin and Milan, whose populations were higher than Madrid's or Barcelona's in 1930. But the demographic panorama was undergoing a notable change. The total population of Spain, which was 18.6 million at the beginning of the century, reached almost 24 million in 1930, due mainly to a sharp fall in the death rate. Up to 1914, this demographic pressure had given rise to a high rate of emigration, but from the First World War onwards, it was Spanish cities that experienced mass immigration.

The surge of industry and the growth of the population transformed the old-fashioned medieval cityscape that many Spanish cities still maintained at the end of the nineteenth century. Imbalances in this growth were reflected in the social division of the cities. The new suburbs, built to control chaotic growth in the inner cities, were where the middle and business classes, traders, industrialists and well-to-do professional people were concentrated. On the outskirts, around the factories, were the working-class slums, and it was in these very districts and run-down areas that diseases and epidemics originated. This was because this urban growth also spawned speculation and get-rich-quick building schemes, with no thought for social justice or shared interests.

This urban explosion, and its accompanying social disparities, also saw the germination of the seeds of republicanism, anarchism and socialism, seeds that had been sown in the last third of the nineteenth century. They germinated in response to the solid dominant social block, which was made up of the heirs of the old privileged classes, the aristocracy and the Catholic Church, as well as the rural and

Basque and Catalan industrial oligarchy. From this block came most of those who governed in the corrupt pseudo-parliamentary system that had held sway in Spain between 1875 and 1923, the system that had excluded, either through restricted suffrage or electoral fraud, what began to be called 'the *pueblo*', the urban proletariat, craftsmen, small industrialists and traders, and the middle classes, which many people termed 'the bourgeoisie', but who in fact earned their living from their professions, independently of the capitalist business concerns. Many of these professionals became republicans in the final years of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship.

The fall of the dictatorship effectively caused a sudden process of politicisation and a surge in republicanism, which had hitherto been weak, incapable as it was of breaking the stranglehold of the caciques and of suggesting real alternatives. Various republican sectors had already joined to form a Republican Alliance in 1926, which took its lead from Alejandro Lerroux's old *Partido Radical* and from a new group, *Acción Republicana*, led by Manuel Azaña, which had broken with Melquíades Álvarez's reformists in 1923. The extreme left wing of this new republican initiative was occupied by the *Partido Republicano Radical Socialista*, founded at the end of 1929 by two *Alianza Republicana* dissidents, Marcelino Domingo and Álvaro de Albornoz. The right was catered for by the *Derecha Liberal Republicana*, founded in July 1930 by Niceto Alcalá Zamora and Miguel Maura, the most legitimate representatives of the monarchist sector that embraced the republican cause following the fall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship.

In just a few months, the old form of republicanism, made up of small discussion groups, transformed into a movement of various political parties, with recognised leaders and new social foundations. Among these names were conservatives and Catholics, such as Maura and Alcalá Zamora, passionate defenders of anticlericalism, such as Álvaro de Albornoz, as well as nationalists in *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, such as Francesc Macià and Lluís Companys, or the Galician *Organización Republicana Gallega Autónoma*, led by Santiago Casares Quiroga. Together, despite their noticeable differences in ideology and principles, they formed a comprehensive republican coalition, which came into being on 17 August 1930 in San Sebastián.

From what was known as the San Sebastián pact emerged the revolutionary committee that made a commitment to channel the demands