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978-1-107-05454-7 - The 'Red Terror' and the Spanish Civil War: Revolutionary Violence in Madrid

Julius Ruiz

Excerpt

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Introduction

Although most aspects of the Spanish civil war are keenly debated by historians, few would deny that the approximately 50,000 executions in the Republican rear guard, particularly the killing of more than 6,000 members of the Catholic clergy, seriously undermined attempts by the legally constituted Republican government to present itself in foreign quarters as fighting a war for democracy.¹ Perhaps the most extreme example is that of Ireland, where widespread press coverage of real and imagined atrocities against Catholics in the summer of 1936 not only led to intense public pressure on Eamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil's government to recognise the military rebels (or 'Nationalists') but also prompted at least 2,000 Irishmen to volunteer for General Eoin O'Duffy's pro-rebel Irish Brigade.²

In the United States, in response to the situation in Spain, Catholic lay organisations, press, and clergy closely scrutinised the Roosevelt administration to ensure that its policy of the 'moral embargo' of arms (followed by the January 1937 Neutrality Act) was observed. Although mass leftist executions had largely ceased in the winter of 1936–7, a full two years later rumours that Roosevelt might lift the embargo of arms to the beleaguered Republic provoked petitions containing 1.75 million signatures. These included one signed by the children of the eighth grade of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs School in Long Island pleading:

We love the sisters who are teaching us in school. They are good holy women who teach us to love God and to love our country. We do not want them murdered and treated like the same good sisters who taught the Catholic children of Spain. And

¹ Francisco Espinosa et al., *Violencia roja y azul: España, 1936–1950* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010), 182, 247.

² Robert A Stradling, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War' in Paul Preston and Ann L. Mackenzie (eds.), *The Republic Besieged Civil War in Spain 1936–193* (Edinburgh: EUP, 1996), 115–23. It appears that a maximum of 700 eventually served in Spain.

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we do not want American money and American guns to go to the Loyalists so that they can kill more sisters and priests.³

As it happened, Republican hopes that Western democracies would identify with its cause centred more on France and Britain than Ireland and the United States. But in France, the right-wing press was also 'quickly full of stories about Republican atrocities against Catholics'.⁴ Even François Mauriac, the noted Catholic novelist and intellectual who denounced Francoist conceptions of 'crusade', admitted that 'at the first news of the military uprising and of the massacres at Barcelona, I at first reacted as a man of the Right'.⁵ The domestic political situation was a significant factor in the decision of Léon Blum, the French Popular Front premier, to support a general non-intervention agreement among the European powers in August 1936.⁶

The Conservative-dominated National Government in Britain also enthusiastically embraced non-intervention. When Republican leaders pressed for an end to non-intervention on the basis that they were fighting for democracy, British officials invariably demanded an end to the killings in Republican Spain.⁷ Even the leaders of the British labour movement were reluctant to embrace the Republican cause in 1936. On 27 September, Pascual Tomás, a member of the executive committee of the Socialist General Workers' Union (Unión General de Trabajadores – UGT), gave a passionate speech at an international meeting of trade unionists in Paris calling for international solidarity in support of the Spanish workers. In response, the British delegates asked, 'Who judged the prisoners?' and 'Has there or has there not been much persecution of religious elements?' Tomás found these questions 'a little impertinent', and his answers did not convince his interlocutors, as British labour leaders continued to support their government's policy of non-intervention until 1937.⁸

Killings in Madrid were particularly damaging for the Republic's international reputation. This province, which in 1930 contained 1,383,951 people,

³ J. D. Valaik, 'Catholics, Neutrality, and the Spanish Embargo, 1937–1939', *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (June 1967), n80.

⁴ Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934–38* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 262.

⁵ B. Doering, 'Jacques Maritain and the Spanish Civil War', *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Oct. 1982), 498.

⁶ Jackson, *Popular Front*, 208. See also D. Carlton, 'Eden Blum and the Origins of Non-Intervention', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1971), 40–55; and Enrique Moradiellos, *El reinado de Europa* (Barcelona: Pennsula, 2001), 95–6.

⁷ For the British government's horror at the killings, see, for example, a conversation between Julio Álvarez del Vayo, the Republican foreign minister, and Lord Cranborne, a British minister, in The National Archives (London), FO 371, 20540, W12125/62/41 (henceforth, TNA/FO371/W12125/62/41).

⁸ Fundación Pablo Iglesias (FPI), AARD-257–2 (henceforth, FPI, AARD-257–2). Although support for nonintervention was dropped in 1937, the civil war would continue to bitterly divide the British left. See Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 78–82.

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was dominated by the capital city (952,832 inhabitants).⁹ Some murders had serious diplomatic consequences: the execution of three sisters of the Uruguayan vice-consul in September 1936 led to a break of diplomatic relations with Montevideo.¹⁰ Similarly, the shootings that same month of the Duque de Veragua, a direct descendant of Columbus, with his brother-in-law the Duque de la Vega, led to official protests by Latin American states.¹¹ Three months later, the discovery of the body of Baron Jacques de Borchgrave, the Belgian attaché, in a roadside ditch in eastern Madrid provoked a political storm in Belgium and the payment of 1 million francs as compensation by the Republican government.¹² More generally, international press reports of executions in the capital were a propaganda disaster for the Republic. On 1 October, an editorial in the influential *London Times* declared that the 'most revolting feature of the whole civil war has been the nightly toll of organized political murder in Madrid'.¹³ Exactly nine months later, Frederick Voigt, a self-declared supporter of the Republic, wrote in the *Manchester Guardian*, the British liberal paper, that following a visit to the Spanish capital, he was convinced that 'the number of persons executed in Madrid alone can hardly be much less than 40,000'.¹⁴

THE FIGURES

This was an appalling estimate, but Francoists thought them too low. Using *post hoc ergo propter hoc* reasoning, the rebels routinely cited terror in Madrid as justification for the military rebellion. Thus when declaring the rising legitimate in February 1939, a Francoist legal commission referred to the 'over 60,000' slaughtered in Republican Madrid.¹⁵ After the war, the regime conceded that this was hyperbole. The Causa General, the official Francoist investigation of wartime 'red crimes', concluded that around 18,000 executions had taken place.¹⁶ Yet research carried out after the death of Franco in November

⁹ Santos Juliá Díaz, *Madrid 1931–1934. De la fiesta popular a la lucha de clases* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1984), 423.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, 23 September 1936.

¹¹ Aurelio Núñez Morgado, *Los sucesos de España vistos por un diplomático* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos Argentinos, 1941), 212–14. See also Antonio M. Moral Roncal, *Diplomacia, humanitarismo y espionaje en la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008), 118.

¹² Víctor Fernández Soriano, 'Bélgica y la Guerra Civil: El impacto del conflicto español en la política y la diplomacia de una pequeña potencia', *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, Vol. 29 (2007), 226–8.

¹³ *The Times*, 10 January 1936.

¹⁴ *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 January 1937.

¹⁵ Estado Español, *Dictamen de la Comisión sobre ilegitimidad de poderes actuantes en 18 de julio de 1936* (Barcelona: Editora Nacional, 1939), 78.

¹⁶ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Fondos Contemporáneos, Causa General, 1533, expediente. 44 (henceforth AHN, FC, CG, 1533, exp. 44). All page citations from the Causa General refer to the original pagination.

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1975 has revealed that this figure is also an exaggeration. In 1994, Rafael Casas de la Vega produced the most detailed list of victims to date. His catalogue, based on Francoist archival records and lists sent by religious and civil authorities to the Santuario de la Gran Promesa in the 1960s, lists 8,815 names.¹⁷ What becomes apparent from Casas's investigation is the degree to which the terror centred on the capital and its suburbs, the poor and overcrowded districts that surrounded the city. The repression in the rest of the province was unevenly spread, with 27 per cent of municipalities reporting after the civil war that no one had been killed in their locality (see Chapter 5).

Casas was an army general who openly identified as a Francoist, and historians have criticised his lists as unreliable.¹⁸ It is certainly the case that we should treat Casas's database with some caution. He lists people who survived the terror as dead. Thus he includes the six Molini Burriel sisters among the 617 female victims, even though they were released from jail in 1937; other examples can easily be found.¹⁹ But this does not mean that the figure of 8,815 should be dismissed. Casas did not always list those whose bodies were never found, and whose deaths were recorded late or not at all.²⁰ So although his statistics are not definitive, they nevertheless give a reasonably accurate indication of the general scale of the Republican repression in the province. As José Luis Ledesma has recently written, there is no question that it was Madrid that witnessed the most killings in the Republican zone.²¹ Thus in Catalonia, 'only' 4,713 were executed, despite a larger population.²²

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Establishing the dreadful human cost is only the start. Why did so many die? The terror was selective. It primarily affected military officers, policemen, employers, property owners, members of the fascist Falange, and priests and religious. Why were members of some groups more likely to die than others? Casas's figures indicate that 96 per cent of executions took place in 1936. Why were the first months of the civil war so vicious? Unfortunately, and despite the vast number of

¹⁷ Rafael Casas de la Vega, *El Terror: Madrid 1936: investigación histórica y catálogo de víctimas identificadas* (Madrídejos, Toledo: Editorial Fénix, 1994).

¹⁸ See, for example, Javier Cervera, *Madrid en guerra. La ciudad clandestina 1936–1939* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998), 88–9.

¹⁹ For the Molini Burriel sisters, see their popular tribunal file located in AHN, FC, CG, 130 exp. 1. Similar problems can be found with César Vidal's list of 11,705 victims in his *Cbecas de Madrid* (Barcelona: Random House: Mondadori SA, 2004), 305–58. I am grateful to Lisa Smith for her research on this issue.

²⁰ See, for example, Teodoro del Bulgo Muñoz, an administrator who disappeared on 12 August 1936, and Ramiro Flórez Nin, a post office official who was arrested at home on 12 October 1936, and never seen again in AHN, FC, CG, 1506, exp. 2, 5661 & 5666.

²¹ Espinosa et al., *Violencia*, 409.

²² Josep M. Solé i Sabaté and Joan Villarroya i Font, *La repressió a la retaguarda de Catalunya (1936–1939)* (Barcelona: Abadia de Montserrat, 1989–90).

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books written on the Spanish civil war, the terror in Madrid has been poorly served by historians. With the return of democracy in the 1970s, studies of the capital at war preferred to re-assert the 'heroic' narrative of an antifascist '¡No Pasarán!' [They shall not pass!] Madrid banned in 1939.²³

The one exception was the mass killing of political prisoners taken from Madrid's jails and shot near the villages of Paracuellos de Jarama and Torrejón de Ardoz in eastern Madrid province between 7 November and 4 December 1936. Indeed, 'Paracuellos' – as the massacres have generically become known – emerged as one of the most polemical issues of the entire civil war after Franco's death in 1975. The reason for this lies with the man responsible for public order and prisons when the killings took place: Santiago Carrillo Solares. Only 21 years old in 1936, Carrillo was the Spanish Communist Party leader by the time he returned to Spain from exile in December 1976. Throughout the Transition, the extreme right used the massacres as a political weapon in an attempt to discredit Carrillo, whereas supporters on the left accepted his denials of having anything to do with Paracuellos and placed the blame on 'uncontrollable' elements in Madrid. This politicisation of the massacres inevitably took its toll on the historiography. Right-wing writers excessively focussed on Carrillo's role, whereas some on the left continued to question whether Paracuellos was organised at all.²⁴

The latter claim was finally discredited in 2004 when Jorge Martínez Reverte, researching the battle of Madrid, discovered minutes of a key meeting of the National Confederation of Work and the Iberian Anarchist Federation (Confederación Nacional de Trabajo–Federación Anarquista Ibérica, CNT-FAI) in the movement's archive in Amsterdam describing how prisoners were secretly classified before execution.²⁵ Although few now deny that there were coded orders to kill prisoners, some historians continue to dispute the level of responsibility of Santiago Carrillo. Ángel Viñas argues that the Soviet advisors attached to the Republic's security services were primarily behind the killings. Citing Soviet sources, he goes as far to say that 'ultimately the instigator of the Paracuellos massacres was one of the killers of the period, Alexander Orlov [the head of the Soviet secret police, the NKVD, in Spain]'.²⁶ In his interpretation, it

²³ See, for example, Matilde Vázquez and Javier Valero, *La guerra civil en Madrid* (Madrid: Tebas, D. L., 1978) and Julio Aróstegui and Jesús A Martínez, *La Junta de Defensa de Madrid: noviembre 1936–abril 1937* (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1984).

²⁴ For right-wing attacks on Carrillo, see, for example, *El Alcázar*, 3 January 1977 and Carlos Fernández Santander, *Paracuellos de Jarama: ¿Carrillo culpable?* (Barcelona: Argos Vergara, 1983). For a left-wing defense of the Communist leader, see Joaquín Bardavío, *Sábado santo rojo* (Madrid: Uve, 1980) and Helen Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Carrillo's denials can be found in successive editions of his memoirs, the latest before his death in 2012 being *Memorias* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2006).

²⁵ Jorge M. Reverte, *La Batalla de Madrid* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2004), 577–81.

²⁶ Ángel Viñas, 'Aportaciones para una reescritura de la Guerra Civil española', *Revista del Libros*, No. 159 (March 2010).

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'is possible that at the beginning [Carrillo] was not aware of the operation', but his inexperience, coupled with his recent entrance into the PCE, meant that Carrillo did not oppose the Soviets' plans.²⁷

Blaming the Soviets is nothing new. Francoist historians, such as Ricardo de la Cierva, argued in the 1970s that Santiago Carrillo was following orders from Mijail Koltsov, the *Pravda* journalist in Madrid.²⁸ In any case, the fact that Soviet secret police or Comintern agents claimed in reports to Moscow that they had acted decisively to defeat an internal 'fascist' threat does not in itself demonstrate that they actually planned the killings. Given the context of the Soviet Great Terror of the late 1930s, it would be more surprising if they had not boasted about their 'achievements' – in the Stalinist mindset, the failure to expose spies was as heinous a crime as spying itself. It is significant that no historian has as yet produced compelling evidence from Spanish sources that indicates that the Soviets were behind the operation. Indeed, the substantial post-war testimony of Spaniards who actually carried out the massacres does not support the presence of a foreign mastermind.

This thesis also has important implications for how we assess the role of Francisco Largo Caballero's government in the massacre. Far from seeing it as an accomplice in a war crime, advocates of Soviet culpability portray the government as a victim; Soviet advisors were in Madrid only because the Republic had been abandoned by the Western democracies. Such claims fit comfortably with long-standing pro-Republican narratives that represent terror in the loyalist zone as either a meaningless explosion of popular violence or the work of 'uncontrollables' taking advantage of the collapse of the state to satisfy their own craven desires.²⁹ As Paracuellos does not fit into this paradigm, it is dismissed by Viñas as 'a one-off killing'.³⁰

'CHECAS' IN MADRID?

For a new generation of right-wing historians writing on Republican terror, Paracuellos is anything but a one-off killing. In the eyes of writers such as César Vidal, the massacre was the logical culmination of a Stalinist-style programme of extermination. Their main analytical tool has been the 'checa', the hispanized form of Cheka, the Extraordinary Commission or secret police created by Lenin in December 1917 to eliminate the ideological enemies of the Bolshevik

²⁷ Ángel Viñas, *El escudo de la República: el oro de España, la apuesta soviética y los hechos de mayo de 1937* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2007), 74–6.

²⁸ *ABC(Madrid)*, 18 September 1976.

²⁹ See, for example, Ledesma's argument that Paracuellos was a consequence of the betrayal of the Republic by Western democracies in Espinosa et al., *Violencia*, 236. For 'uncontrollable' narratives, see Alberto Reig Tapia, *Ideología y historia: sobre la represión franquista y la guerra civil*, (Madrid: Akal, 1986) and more recently, Paul Preston, *El holocausto español: odio y exterminio en la Guerra civil y después* (Barcelona: Debate, 2011).

³⁰ *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 May 2009.

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'Checas' in Madrid?

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revolution.³¹ The utilisation of 'checa' to explain the killings in Madrid is nothing new. The Francoist Causa General claimed in 1943 to have identified no fewer than 226 checas that arbitrarily arrested, tried, and executed victims in Madrid.³² Five years earlier, the famous novel of the terror, written by the Falangist Agustín de Foxá, was published under the title *Madrid de corte a checa*.³³

Curiously, there is little evidence that the term 'checa' was widely used by Republicans in Madrid during the terror itself. The word entered antifascist public discourse only in the spring of 1937, when it was frequently employed by anarcho-syndicalists to denounce the policing methods of José Cazorla, the Communist then responsible for public order in the capital.³⁴ This does not necessarily indicate, of course, that no instructive parallels can be drawn between the Soviet chekas during the Russian civil war of 1917–20 and the revolutionary tribunals that emerged in Madrid during the summer of 1936. Both were characterised by arbitrary arrest, often brutal interrogation, 'trial', and execution. Yet the latter was never consciously modelled on the former, especially in killing style. As Agustín de Foxá notably wrote, Madrid bore witness to the 'motorised crime': victims were 'taken for a ride' [dar un paseo] in a confiscated car and shot in the outskirts of the city. Chekists, on the other hand, employed a whole range of killing methods, although the favourite was a bullet administered in the prison basement or courtyard.³⁵

This is a reflection of the fact that wartime Madrid never became 'Sovietised'. Indeed, Russian propaganda had surprisingly limited impact on the population. As José Cabeza San Deogracias has shown, madrileños went to the cinema to see Hollywood films, not Soviet ones; they watched gangster films such as Albert Rogell's *The Tip-Off* with Ginger Rodgers, not revolutionary epics such as *Battleship Potemkin*.³⁶ If we must apply foreign models, then the 'gangsterismo' of Chicago, rather than the exterminatory practices of Moscow, seem more appropriate. The grisly procedure of taking someone for a ride originated in Chicago's gangland wars of the 1920s, which were then popularised in the enormously successful Hollywood gangster films of the 1930s. One should not underestimate the importance of North American cinema on Spanish popular culture: the mono or boiler suit, one of the most famous symbols of proletarian

³¹ For the checa genre of studies, see, for example, Vidal, *Checas*, and César Alcalá, *Las checas del terror: la desmemoria histórica al descubierto* (Madrid: Libroslibres, 2007).

³² Ministerio de Justicia, *Causa General: la dominación Roja en España: avance de la información instruída por el Ministerio Público* (Madrid: Ministerio de Justicia, 1943), 12, 86–92.

³³ Agustín de Foxá, *Madrid, de corte a checa* (San Sebastián: Librería Internacional, 1938).

³⁴ For 'checa' as term of abuse, see Vázquez and Valero, *La guerra civil*, 341–5.

³⁵ George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police: The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-revolution and Sabotage, December 1917 to February 1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 198–203.

³⁶ José Cabeza San Desgracias, *El descanso del guerrero. El cine en Madrid durante la Guerra Civil Española (1936–1939)* (Madrid: Ed RIALP, 2005), 44.

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Spain, became popular during the early 1920s thanks to the films of Buster Keaton.³⁷ Even Spanish Communists should not be assumed to have slavishly modelled themselves on their Soviet friends. One of the most infamous Communist killers in 1936 was known as 'Popeye' (see Chapter 5).

PRINCIPAL THESES

This book is not about Soviet-style checas on the one hand or the nefarious activities of 'uncontrollables' on the other. The terror in Madrid was not extraneous to the antifascist war effort following the defeat of the military rebellion in July 1936; on the contrary, it was integral to it. Securing the rearguard required an organised response. As the Communist José Cazorla euphemistically put it in May 1937 before his appointment as civil governor in Albacete:

In the first moments of the criminal rebellion, when the State lacked its normal organised resources of organisation, antifascist entities swiftly moved in to compensate, creating their own [organisations] that dealt with the demands of the time ... these organisations created their own antifascist rearguard security organs ... [and their activity was carried out] with great efficiency.³⁸

These 'antifascist entities' encompassed all Popular Front trade unions and political parties. This is evident if we examine the network of terror that emerged in the capital in the first month of the civil war. Despite Francoist claims of 226 checas, the evidence presented in the Causa General suggests that 'only' 37 revolutionary tribunals dispensed extrajudicial 'justice' in the city during 1936 to 1939, with 33 being active during the first four months of the conflict. A further 30 centres detained and imprisoned suspects, but definite proof that they carried out executions is lacking, although it is clear that they transferred at least some prisoners to revolutionary tribunals. Irrespective of whether or not they killed, these 67 centres can broadly be divided into two types. The first, and numerically the most common, was a 'defence committee' attached to the local political party or anarchist organisation. These committees were often located within or close to barracks of militia formations preparing for the front and were created alongside others (such as supplies and propaganda) that mobilised the local population for the war effort.

The second type was the police brigade of the Directorate General of Security (Dirección General de Seguridad – DGS). The reaction of the Republican government to the terror was not a straightforward one of frustrated horror; the police were involved in the network of terror. Although the Republican state did not 'collapse' in July 1936 – its bureaucratic structures remained in place – José Giral's bourgeois Republican government all too quickly discovered that its distribution of arms on 19 July to the populace left its authority in tatters

³⁷ *Estampa*, 26 September 1936.

³⁸ *ABC(Madrid)*, 4 May 1937.

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(see Chapters 2 and 3). However, Giral did not resign himself supinely to responsibility without power; he sought to forge an antifascist state that would accommodate the revolutionary forces to his left. Part of this strategy was the appointment of Manuel Muñoz, the Izquierda Republicana deputy for Cádiz, as director general of security at the end of July 1936. In an effort to secure the co-operation of leftist parties and trade unions in policing, he facilitated the mass influx of their militants into the Investigation and Vigilance Force (Cuerpo de Investigación y Vigilancia – CIV), the criminal investigation police. Muñoz also created the Provincial Committee of Public Investigation (Comité Provincial de Investigación Pública – CPIP), a parallel all–Popular Front organisation of criminal investigation that would ‘assist’ the DGS while the latter was being purged of ‘fascists’. Containing representatives of all Popular Front parties and trade unions, it soon became the largest killing centre by far and acted as the hub of the network of terror, receiving and transferring prisoners for execution (see Chapters 4 and 5). Although this was not Muñoz’s original intention, his cast-iron determination not to confront the CPIP or other revolutionary tribunals led to an extraordinary situation whereby the DGS knowingly took part in prison *sacas*. That is to say, it issued fictitious release orders that delivered prisoners into the hands of the CPIP for execution outside the jail (see Chapters 6, 8, and 9).

In statistical terms, the anarcho-syndicalist CNT-FAI made the greatest contribution to this network of terror. Of the 67 centres, 23 (34 per cent) belonged to the CNT-FAI; the Communists (Partido Comunista de España, PCE) controlled 13 (19 per cent), the Socialists (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – PSOE) controlled 9 (13 per cent), and the recently unified Socialist and Communist Youth (Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas – JSU) controlled 6 (9 per cent). A further 14 (21 per cent) were joint Popular Front bodies such as the CPIP. Yet these figures can be deceptive. Although the bourgeois Unión Republicana and Izquierda Republicana did not operate any revolutionary tribunals of their own, their militants were active within Manuel Muñoz’s ‘new police’ and the CPIP. Indeed, they would make a vital contribution to the latter’s murderous activities (see Chapter 5). The Socialists too preferred to work within the police and the CPIP. The bitter divisions within the PSOE between the supporters of Largo Caballero on the left (*caballeristas*) and those of Indalecio Prieto on the right (*prietistas*) have been much discussed, but both wings of the party played their part in the terror. The *caballerista*-controlled Madrid Socialist Party (Agrupación Socialista Madrileña – ASM) made appointments to the CPIP and even established its own police station. The *prietista* party executive had its own police brigade under the command of Agapito García Atadell.

Atadell is perhaps the most notorious figure associated with the red repression in Madrid. Widely praised in the Republican press in the first months of the war, his decision to flee Madrid at the beginning of November 1936 with booty taken from his victims and his subsequent capture, trial, and execution by the rebels in Seville in July 1937 have earned him a prominent place in accounts of the terror.

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Although the Atadell brigade's overall importance in the killing can be exaggerated, it does illustrate a number of truths about the terror in Madrid. The first is that the perpetrators were leftist militants with a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Atadell himself was a printer by trade who before the war had led the Socialist printers' union, the Asociación General del Arte de Imprimir, that counted Pablo Iglesias, the founder of the Spanish Socialist movement, among its previous presidents. His men came from an array of occupations and included printers, hairdressers, and clerks (see Chapter 4).

The socially heterogeneous nature of the brigade was representative of those involved in rearguard policing duties in the capital during the civil war. Lists drawn up by the Republican authorities and Popular Front organisations show a minimum of 4,531 participants, with at least 585 serving in the CPIP.³⁹ Not all would have carried out executions, although they were all part of the machinery of repression. Of these 4,531 rearguard policemen, the occupations of 3,125 (69 per cent) are known. Those with a manual-labour background (964, 30 per cent) were the most numerous, although one should not suppose that unskilled workers dominated in this category: there were 31 construction labourers, for example, but also 70 printers. The second-largest group was pre-war policemen (813, 26 per cent) – a figure that problematizes somewhat the well-known argument that 'uncontrollables' could act with impunity because of the disappearance of the forces of law and order. The third-largest category is those employed in the city's service trades (758, 24 per cent), including 124 drivers, a reflection of the fact that their driving skills were necessary to carry out motorised crimes. There were also significant minorities of civil servants and administrators (261, 8 per cent) and professionals and students (216, 7 per cent). In other words, those involved in the repression reflected the socioeconomic diversity of a city that had yet to industrialise (see Chapter 1).

The second truth is that the reactions of leftist leaders to the terror were ambiguous; general condemnations of 'uncontrollables' coexisted with support for practitioners of terror (see Chapter 6). Prieto and political allies such as Julián Zugazagoitia might have publicly condemned extrajudicial killings, but *El Socialista*, the party newspaper under their control, repeatedly praised Atadell. Moreover, even after the brigade leader betrayed the Republic in November 1936, his subordinates continued to enjoy the backing of the party organisation. Thus Ángel Pedrero, Atadell's deputy, became a close political ally of Prieto, who in 1937 nominated him head of the Madrid branch of the Military Investigation Service (Servicio de Investigación Militar – SIM), the feared military secret police.

Pedrero's subsequent career is indicative of the continuities between the extrajudicial terror of 1936 and state repression of 1937. Although mass killings

³⁹ These data were compiled from the following sources: Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española (Salamanca), Sección Político-Social-Madrid, legajo 1618 (henceforth AGGCE, PS-M, 1618); various lists in AHN, FC, CG, 1531 exp. 19; DGS personnel list of February 1939 in AHN, FC, CG, 1532, exp. 35; and February 1939 SIM personnel list in AHN, FC, CG, 1532, exp. 30.