

**A CONVERSATION  
WITH STANLEY G. PAYNE  
ON CIVIL WAR IN SPAIN**

(interviewer Federico Sesia)

**1. In your opinion, what was the main cause that made the Second Spanish Republic fall into the civil war?**

The revolutionary process, as expressed in the full-scale erosion of democracy between December 1935 and July 1936 that blocked parliamentary government, produced major electoral fraud, widespread violation of the laws and the constitution, arbitrary and prerevolutionary acts of many kinds, a great deal of political violence and the deliberate combination by the leftist government of the security forces with revolutionary militants.

**2. Was the Second Republic truly democratic?**

Javier Tusell called it “una democracia poco democrática,” which is about right. There were abuses, but for the most part it was a democratic regime from April 1931 to December 1935.

**3. Some historians wrote that the main threat to the Republic was social injustice and the violence of the right (*sanjurjada, cachiquismo*, etc.); some others believed that anarchist, socialist and communist militiamen, along with the too-much radical reforms made by the leftist government were the major menace. Who, in your opinion, is right?**

There were four violent revolutionary insurrections by parts of the left between January 1932 and October 1934. After the first fully democratic elections of November 1933, won fairly by the center-right, the left presented four requests simply to have the results canceled. I have addressed the final phase in Q1. The extreme right would have liked to overthrow the Republic, but never had the means to attempt it seriously.

**4. Why did the Spanish republicans lose the war, even with the Soviet support and the biggest and most industrialized part of Spain under their control in July 1936?**

First of all because during the first year of the war much of the left concentrated on the revolution rather than the war. Second the left was very divided and sometimes inept. Though the revolutionary militia were soon replaced by a People’s Army modeled on the Soviet Red Army, it never became very proficient, except in defensive battle. But it all comes back to the revolution. Franco, not Largo Caballero, became the “Spanish Lenin,” and was better organized.

**5. Paul Preston supports the thesis that the Republicans’ violence was something spontaneous, a reaction to years of social injustice, or it was a reaction to the**

**nationalists' violence, that by contrast was systematic and was made in order to annihilate every form of opposition. Do you agree with him?**

This is simply to repeat wartime Republican propaganda, with little new added. Revolutionary killings began in April 1931—more than 20—the very first month of the Republic, and continued from there. During the first six months [of the Civil War], the killings were sometimes coordinated by Republican government groups, sometimes not. It is correct, however, that the counterrevolutionaries were generally better organized.

**6. What were the main causes of the religious persecution that took place in the republicans' backquarters?**

Hatred by the revolutionaries of the Catholic Church and clergy as the spiritual and ideological mainstays of the right and of traditional culture in general.

**7. What is your opinion on Preston's works on the Spanish Civil War? And on Hugh Thomas' ones?**

Preston merely writes up wartime Republican propaganda as a sort of history. His best books are the biographical ones, where he shows real talent. Preston is a narrow obsessive, who writes only about Spain, only about 1931-1982 and always of course with the same viewpoint. He can in no way be compared with Thomas, who is a major world-class historian who has undertaken a broad number of major themes both geographically and chronologically. He is also a very objective and professional scholar whose one-volume history of the Spanish war is unsurpassed.

**8. What do you think about Pio Moa's essays on that topic? Especially *Los Mitos de la Guerra Civil* and *Los orígenes de la Guerra Civil Española*?**

Moa had the courage to challenge the dominant politically correct viewpoint. His books on the Republic and the origins of the war are accurate and substantial, a much-needed corrective that basically sets the record straight. His books on the Civil War itself and on Franco are, on the other hand, increasingly polemical. But remember that the issue of the origins of the Civil War is the most important single topic and the one most neglected, as Ortega y Gasset first wrote in 1938.

**9. What are the main differences between Italian Fascism and Spanish Fascism (referring only to the *Falange* before the Civil War)? And between Falangism and Nazism?**

The main difference during the movement phase of the two parties was that from 1933 the Falange professed to be formally Catholic. Second, Falangists did not begin the political violence in Spain, whereas Italian fascists played some role in initiating violence. But the general ideologies had much in common.

There was no doctrine of race or even of anti-semitism. Falangism was rather more elitist than Nazism, not *völkisch*, displayed less violence, less militarist ambition, not the slightest interest in genocide. Little to compare with Nazism, given its Catholic component. Most fascist-type movements had less in common with Nazism. Something like Italian fascism, more moderate, was easier to reproduce elsewhere.

**10. How did the *Falange* change after Franco's triumph in 1939, and how did it evolve during Franco's dictatorship until 1975?**

The first change came in 1937, when Franco made it state party but deprived it of autonomy. The second change during 1943-45, when the defascistization began. The third during 1956-59, when it became clear that the party would never play any dominant role, but that the regime was headed toward mere bureaucratic authoritarianism.

**11. Can we accurately refer to the Francoist regime as a fascist regime?**

Not exactly. It was "semifascist" from 1937 to 1945, then steadily defascistized. The regime relied a great deal on the military and the Church. But vague residues of fascism remained, not much more than that.

**12. Did Franco apply *Falange's* political views in his regime?**

He applied some of them between 1937 and 1942, but in 1943 began to move toward defascistization, though some party institutions, as well as the national syndicates, remained.

**13. Did the Francoist regime evolve into a democracy spontaneously, or was the Spanish transition caused by external (the influence of the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, for example) and internal (the murder of admiral Carrero Blanco and Franco's death, for example) factors?**

Does anything ever happen "spontaneously"? The West European context was relatively supportive of democratization and the Germans, particularly, assisted it, with the United States supportive, yet the key factors were always internal. During the last years of Franco's life, many of the figures inside the regime, certainly including Carrero Blanco, were aware that things were going to have to change. Thus in 1972-73 Carrero protected the new young Socialist leaders inside Spain, as a leftist alternative to the Communists. Ultimately, however, the leadership of Juan Carlos, Torcuato Fernández Miranda, Adolfo Suárez and others was essential.

**14. What do you think about the *Ley de memoria histórica*?**

This is an important part of the leftist project, not only in Spain, to distort history and employ history as a major tool of leftist politics, what is sometimes called "soft totalitarianism" or "soft Sovietism." This sort of thing is not merely limited to Spain.