

This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 26 Sep 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Edited by Javier Muñoz-Basols, Laura Lonsdale and Manuel Delgado

The Routledge Companion to Iberian Studies

Javier Muñoz-Basols, Laura Lonsdale, Manuel Delgado

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Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315709895.ch32>

George Esenwein

Published online on: 28 Mar 2017

How to cite :- George Esenwein. 28 Mar 2017, *The fate of Spain's "Nationalisms" During the Spanish Civil War, 1936 to 1939 from: The Routledge Companion to Iberian Studies* Routledge

Accessed on: 26 Sep 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315709895.ch32>

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THE FATE OF SPAIN'S “NATIONALISMS” DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936 TO 1939

George Esenwein

Today it is widely accepted that Spain is composed of multiple nationalities and regions, which, despite their autonomous status, form an integral part of the nation. Yet, from the nineteenth century on, the Castilian-centred Spanish state struggled to come to terms with the regional populations who felt themselves to be both historically and culturally distinct. This was particularly evident in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when both regionalist and secessionist aspirations of the Basque and Catalan provinces crystallized into full-blown nationalist movements. Despite the reforming efforts and centralizing tendencies of Restoration (1876–1923) politicians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the political and national unity of Spain was never fully achieved. Rather than seeking ways of accommodating regionalism within a national framework, the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923–1930) sought more directly to subdue Spain's ethno-nationalisms by imposing a top-down approach. Yet, after nearly six years of subjugation, regionalism not only survived the dictatorship but it experienced a robust revival under the short-lived Second Republic (1931–1936). The outbreak of civil war in July 1936 marked a new and unique phase in the development of Iberian nationalisms. During this exceedingly turbulent period, both the Basque and Catalan autonomous movements briefly achieved an unprecedented degree of independence from the central government. After the Spanish Nationalists under Francisco Franco emerged triumphant in 1939, regionalists were forced to operate in the shadows of an oppressive state system which actively sought to erase all traces of Spain's deeply rooted ethno-nationalist identities. It was not until democracy returned to Spain in the late 1970s that the autonomous movements would reestablish themselves as fundamental features of the nation's political and cultural landscape.

To understand why Spain's Civil War and its outcome represented a watershed event in the evolution of Iberian nationalisms in the twentieth century, this chapter highlights the achievements of the Basque and Catalan movements between 1936 and 1939. In the first part of the essay we are concerned with identifying the distinguishing characteristics of the Basque and Catalan varieties of nationalism. We then turn to an examination of these movements during the Spanish Civil War period, 1936–1939. In this section, special attention is paid to the conflicts which arose between Basque and Catalan groups striving for greater self-rule and the left-wing forces who sought to centralize all operations of the Republic.

Background: a tale of two nationalisms

By the time civil war erupted on the Iberian Peninsula in July 1936, both Basque and Catalan nationalisms had become dominant forces in their respective regions. But even though the two movements rallied in defense of the Republic against the military-led insurgency, the fact is that they had done so for substantially different reasons. This is because, despite sharing the overarching goal of achieving greater autonomy for their own distinctive communities, the Catalan and Basque nationalists were representative of different varieties of Spain's ethno-nationalisms. In the case of Catalonia, for example, the nationalist agenda was being largely shaped and directed by liberal, progressive forces on the left as represented by the republican party, *Esquerra*. On the other hand, the dominant *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* (PNV) and other Basque nationalist parties comprised mostly conservatives who believed that separatism was the best way of preserving the traditional lifestyle and values of the Basque peoples against the intrusions of both liberal (republican) and reactionary (Carlist) influences. To gain a greater sense of how the differences between these two anti-Spanish nationalisms conditioned their respective experiences of civil war and revolution, it is necessary to review briefly some of the distinguishing features of both movements.

With the advent of fully fledged regionalist political parties at the turn of the twentieth century, the contrasting aspects of the nationalist visions of both the Basques and Catalans became increasingly apparent. Catalan political nationalism, which was first given expression by the *Lliga Regionalista* (Regionalist League), was largely the creation of the industrial bourgeoisie. Though clearly wanting to assert their region's autonomy in social and cultural affairs, this group was above all concerned with advancing Catalan economic interests within the framework of Spain's national power structures. As a result, this variety of Catalan nationalism appealed not to the increasingly populous and left-leaning working classes, but to the more moderate and pragmatic elements of middle-class society.

In contrast, Basque political nationalism was cast in an entirely different mold. Its ideological foundations were laid by the *bilbaino* Sabino Arana during the closing years of the nineteenth century. Deeply moved by his visceral dislike of the disruptive forces of capitalist industrialization as well as for all things Spanish, Arana envisioned the creation of a bucolic Basque nation, Euzkadi, which would embody the racial and cultural peculiarities of the Basque-speaking peoples (*euskaldun*). Apart from stressing the centrality of cultural identity, Arana's romantic brand of nationalism differed from *catalanismo* in every important respect. Instead of embracing modernization, it extolled age-old Basque customs and traditions, and instead of being disposed to diversity it insisted upon exclusivity, particularly in matters relating to race and religion. A propos the role of race in defining the Basque citizens, it is essential to bear in mind that Arana followed J. G. Fichte and the Romantic nineteenth-century nationalists in seeing race (better understood as ethnicity) as the *sine qua non* of all nations. He therefore believed that the Basque nation could only be achieved by excluding all non-Basques from their community. As far as religion was concerned, Arana's nationalist ideology assigned Catholicism a special and indispensable status. Above all he believed that, because liberal Spain had eroded Basque religious sentiment and had undermined the purity and unity of Catholicism, it was necessary to establish an independent Basque Catholic Church. In this way, Catholicism was conceived as a national religion which would form an essential part of the Basque homeland.

It has already been mentioned that *catalanismo* owed its existence to the middle classes, whereas Basque nationalism drew its inspiration from the peasantry and groups displaced by industrialization. This sociological fact imbued the two movements with distinct economic

orientations. Rather than being pro-capitalist like their Catalan counterparts, Arana and his followers associated capitalist development with Spain and therefore they strongly opposed what they saw as the two main protagonists of Basque industrialization: the Spanish immigrant proletariat and the Basque industrial oligarchy. In the former case, the influx at the turn of the century of non-Basque workers to the mining districts and shipbuilding industries centered in Vizcaya had been accompanied by the spread of socialism to the region. The nationalists' early efforts to reduce socialist influence by creating a Catholic-inspired all-Basque trade union in 1911, Solidarity of Basque Workers, SOV – later called the *Solidaridad de Trabajadores Vascos* (STV) – were largely unsuccessful. It was only during the period of the Second Republic (1931–1936) that the STV began seriously eroding the socialists' hegemony among the workers.

Though the major tenets of Basque nationalism formulated by Arana established an ideological framework for the movement right up to the Civil War, they did not serve as a practical guide for the PNV, the party Arana had founded in 1895. In fact, Arana himself and his successors were increasingly obliged to modify the party's agenda over time, granting it a greater flexibility so that the PNV could adapt to the ever-changing social, political, and economic landscape. During the Second Republic, for example, the rise of the anti-nationalist right after 1933 compelled the PNV to downplay its anti-Republican rhetoric and support the left at the polls (Conversi 1997, 76; see also Balcells 1974, 1996). The party's pro-republicanism owed a great deal to the pragmatic thinking of a younger and less dogmatic generation of Basque nationalists led by the lawyer and former football player, José Antonio de Aguirre. Though they vehemently objected to the anti-clerical policies of the left, Aguirre and other moderate elements in the PNV nonetheless showed a willingness to make common cause with republicans if that meant obtaining some form of self-government for the Basque provinces (Fusi 1984, 2002; see also Aguirre et. al 1979; Arenillas 1970; Heiberg 1989).

The coming of the Second Republic had an even greater impact on the development of Catalan nationalism. During the municipal elections which swept the Monarchists from power in April 1931, the recently created *Esquerra* and its republican allies were catapulted into the forefront of regional politics. Their determined efforts to obtain self-rule for Catalonia came to fruition in September 1932, when the Madrid government approved a statute granting Catalan autonomy. Despite the strong resistance they later faced from the anti-regionalist and right-wing forces which rose to prominence during the 1933–1935 period, the Catalans managed to conserve their autonomous status before civil war broke out in July 1936. As we shall see in this chapter, conditions for expanding regional self-government during that conflict were much more favorable in Catalonia than they were in the Basque Country. At least during the first half of the war, the Catalans managed to greatly expand upon the dimensions of their previously won autonomy by effectively creating the basis for an independent Catalan state within the Republican zone.

War and revolution in Catalonia: 1936

Not long after it was launched in Northern Africa on July 17, it became apparent that the military rebellion had had the unintended effect of unleashing a sweeping popular revolution in the towns and countryside where the coup had failed. This was particularly true in Barcelona and other regions which had a long tradition of left-wing radicalism. The CNT-FAI, Spain's classic revolutionaries, were among the first non-governmental organizations to spring into action. In Barcelona the insurgents planned to seize the local garrisons and take over the *Generalitat* (Catalonia's regional government) and other key institutions. But when they began

their assault in the wee hours of July 19, improvised anarcho-syndicalist militias along with a mix of pro-Republican police and civilian groups immediately began cutting off the rebel advances. Following some thirty-six hours of fierce and bloody street fighting, which included a brazen anarchist-led attack on the Atarazanas fortress (one of the city's main military fortresses), the insurgents surrendered, thus depriving them of control of a key Republican region. Of the various groups resisting the uprising, the CNT-FAI emerged as the most powerful force in Catalonia. The then President of the *Generalitat*, Lluís Companys, later recalled the dramatic moment when the fighting had ended and, for a fleeting moment, the reins of power were in the hands of the revolutionaries. Upon entering the halls of the *Generalitat* Palace, anarchist leaders were met by Companys, who indicated to them that he was ready to surrender his government to the victorious workers. According to one eyewitness, the commissioner of public order, Major Federico Escofet, Companys reputedly told the anarchist chiefs: "Today you are the masters of the city and of Catalonia You have conquered and everything is in your power . . ." (Fraser 1979, 111). Companys went on to assure the CNT-FAI representatives that he would resign his post and support their anti-fascist struggle if they so desired. To his surprise, the anarchists refused to take power, accepting instead Companys' offer to join a power-sharing scheme. Under this proposal, the Catalan government would exist alongside a newly created governing body, the *Comitè Central de Milícies Antifeixistes* (Central Antifascist Militias Committee), or CCMA, comprised of both leftist revolutionary and middle-class parties. This unprecedented development would have a profound impact on the future course of events in Catalonia (Bolloten & Esenwein 1990; see also *Catalunya i la Guerra Civil* 1988, and Termes and Porredon 2008). Above all, the revolutionaries' unwillingness to impose their own revolutionary regime meant that the moderate republican parties, including the *Esquerra*, would be able to salvage the basic machinery of the Catalan state system and begin rebuilding its power base in the region.

Meanwhile, the anarcho-syndicalists dominated local affairs by assuming control of the key portfolios in the CCMA: public order, war, and transportation. Through their militias, neighborhood defense committees, and police squads (*patrullas de control*), for example, the anarcho-syndicalists replaced the civil and republican Assault Guards as the symbols of authority. On the economic front, the CNT-FAI channeled their energies into a thoroughgoing collectivization programme. Under their direction, countless small businesses, industries, and agricultural enterprises were taken over and reorganized along libertarian lines.

The stridently anti-Stalinist *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (POUM), which had been formed only a few months before the uprising, also used the opening phase of the Civil War to undertake its own revolutionary projects and gain greater traction in Catalonia's crowded political arena (Alba and Schwartz 1988).

But from the outset it was apparent that the POUM was saddled with a number of debilitating handicaps, not least being its political isolation. Rejected for its Marxist politics by the anarcho-syndicalists, the POUM was no more popular with the moderate republican parties. Perhaps its greatest political setback came during the first week of the war and revolution when its future nemesis, the *Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya* (PSUC) came into being.

Among the numerous political parties then operating in republican Spain, the formation of the PSUC held greatest significance for the *Partido Comunista de España* or PCE (Spanish Communist Party), which had never attracted more than a few hundred followers in Catalonia. At the beginning of the Civil War, the PCE was adhering to the anti-revolutionary "Popular Front" policy which the Communist International had adopted in 1935. Among other things, this reformist political strategy called for forming broad alliances between all anti-fascist working-class and middle-class parties. Amidst the climate of political dissolution and heady

revolutionary transformations which prevailed in Catalonia during the first weeks of the war, the communists were especially fearful that their minuscule forces might be absorbed by their left-wing rivals. To avoid this, they stepped up their efforts to have the handful of unaffiliated Catalan socialist factions merge with their movement. Though initially concerned that such a union would result in communist domination, Joan Comorera of the *Unió Socialista de Catalunya* (USC) and other moderate *catalanista* elements swallowed their misgivings once the revolutionary organizations in Catalonia were in the ascendant. They therefore withdrew their objections to unification even though this meant adhering to the Communist International and, to all intents and purposes, subordinating the new party to the dictates of Moscow. As events would later prove, the concerns Comorera and others had earlier voiced were not misplaced, for the PSUC served primarily as a vehicle for extending communist power and influence in Catalonia throughout the war.

Given its reformist stance on most social and economic issues and in view of its allegiance to the anti-revolutionary Comintern, it is hardly surprising that the PSUC found itself on the same side of the Catalan political spectrum as the *Esquerra*. Yet this did not mean that the overall aims of the two parties were compatible. For while the *Esquerra* saw as its main objective the establishment of an independent Catalan state, the PSUC was obliged to subordinate its regionalist aspirations to the broader national and international goals defined by the communists. In the event, for the first half of the war the two parties entered into a marriage of convenience when it came to curbing the revolutionary movement in the region.

Meanwhile, after having successfully withstood the revolutionaries' initial efforts to dismantle the pillars of liberal political rule in Catalonia, the *Esquerra* wasted little time in mounting a counter-offensive aimed at putting an end to the region's dual power-sharing system. Taking advantage of the fact that rank-and-file anarcho-syndicalists proved incapable of successfully pursuing their revolutionary projects while their politically ineffectual leaders collaborated with the government, President Companys and the *Esquerra* took the first decisive steps towards restoring the *Generalitat's* ruling powers. On September 26 Companys scored a major political victory when he formed a new government comprised of both working-class and middle-class parties – commonly referred to as the “anti-fascist government of unity” – which he used as a stepping-stone to abolish the anarchist-dominated CCMA. On October 1 the CCMA dissolved itself, and its former functions were absorbed by the new *Generalitat* Council. This latest turn of events strengthened the hand of the moderate forces in various ways, but not least because it significantly enhanced the authority of the *Generalitat* and thereby gave the *Esquerra* and other pro-nationalist parties greater political leverage in their efforts to exercise social and economic influence over Catalan affairs.

In the coming months, the broadening of Catalonia's self-governing powers was well underway. With the CCMA no longer acting as a brake on its actions, the *Generalitat* set itself the task of reorganizing Catalonia's war industries and military affairs along non-revolutionary lines. For example, in late October the government's Department of Defense issued a Decree for the Militarization of the Militias, which was meant to end revolutionary control of the improvised militias or columns which had sprung up throughout the region in the early days of the Civil War.

On another level, the council of the Catalan government sought to rationalize the region's ill-coordinated economic activity by establishing legal uniformity for the commercial and industrial enterprises which had been previously caught up in the whirlwind of revolutionary takeovers. Of particular significance in this regard was a sweeping measure passed on October 24, 1936. Among other things, this decree legalized the collectivization of large-scale enterprises which employed more than 100 employees, but placed limits on the practice in

smaller commercial operations. In this way, it was possible to appease the revolutionary members of the *Generalitat's* ruling council – who had earlier agreed to dissolve their anti-fascist militias committees throughout Catalonia – while at the same time afford some relief to small property owners and shopkeepers whose firms were no longer obliged to undergo a process of revolutionary reorganization. The Catalan government was also active in other spheres of regional affairs. On the social front, for example, efforts were made not only to safeguard churches, buildings, and monuments which had been damaged or threatened by overzealous revolutionaries, but also to extend the *Generalitat's* oversight of schools, museums, and other cultural institutions which had formerly been under the administration of the Madrid government. By the end of 1936, the Catalan government was functioning on many levels as a sovereign state. In addition to raising its own army (*Exèrcit Popular Regular de Catalunya/Regular People's Army of Catalonia*), it was issuing its own currency, establishing diplomatic ties with foreign countries, and negotiating its financial and political relations with the Popular Front government on an equal footing.

Nevertheless, it was not long before the Catalan nationalists were forced to confront the fact that the impressive gains they had made during the first year of the war at the expense of the revolutionaries could not be taken for granted. Political pressures between pro- and anti-revolutionary forces in Catalonia continued to build throughout the last months of 1936 and into the following year, finally coming to a head during the notorious May Events of 1937. At this time, the *Esquerra's* decision to ally itself with the PSUC and other pro-Popular Front parties of the central government would change the course of Catalan politics for the last year and a half of the Civil War.

Basques at war, 1936 to 1937

In the Basque region, the events which followed in the wake of the July military revolt followed a different trajectory than they did elsewhere in Spain. Unlike in Catalonia, where the uprising was met with a wide-ranging revolutionary movement which quickly overwhelmed the regional and national governments, no revolution occurred in the Basque areas which supported the Republic. Thus, while ad hoc defense juntas composed of leftist and nationalist parties sprang up in Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa in the first few weeks of fighting, their appearance did not signal the beginning of a revolutionary state of affairs. The few signs of social disruption which did occur – such as a rash of anticlerical assaults carried out by revolutionaries who helped to put down the military insurrection – were quickly contained by the dominant PNV and moderate parties. More problematic for the Basque nationalists was the fact that only a fraction of the Basque Country – the provinces of Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa – remained loyal to the Republic. Not surprisingly, the profoundly conservative and anti-separatist provinces of Navarre and Alava immediately sided with the insurgents. Enthusiasm for the rising was particularly evident in Navarra, the stronghold of the reactionary monarchists who belonged to the Carlist movement (Blinhorn 1975). In the provincial capital of Pamplona, the *pronunciamiento* issued by General Mola – a pivotal figure in the conspiracy – was treated by the town's citizenry as an occasion for celebration. Wearing paramilitary uniforms and their distinctive red berets (*boinas*), Carlist *Requetés* (militias) marched through the city's central streets singing their signature battle cry, *¡Viva Cristo Rey!* (Long live Christ the King), while throngs of onlookers cheered them on. In the following weeks, thousands of well-trained *Requetés* (later fully militarized as the Navarrese Brigades) helped the Nationalists conquer more Basque territories, most notably in Guipúzcoa and its strategically important border town of Irún (Gamboa and Larronde 2005).

The PNV reacted to the rapidly evolving circumstances in the region with predictable caution. While they held no brief for the left's pronounced secularism and radical agenda, they were no less repelled by the Carlists and their anti-regionalist allies on the right. Their initial ambivalence towards both sides was finally dispelled when pro-nationalist villages came under attack by Mola's advancing forces and *Requeté* shock troops. From that point on, the PNV decided that it was in the Basques' best interests to support the Republic.

From the beginning, the Basque nationalists made it clear that their commitment to the republican war effort would be conducted on their terms. Foremost on the PNV's agenda was securing formal approval of the Basque statute of autonomy, which had been held in abeyance since the outbreak of civil war. Their opportunity to do so came after a broad-based Popular Front coalition government was formed in September. At the insistence of the socialist premier Francisco Largo Caballero, the new administration offered to ratify the statute if the PNV-dominated Basque junta based in Bilbao was willing to appoint a representative to serve in his cabinet. Negotiations between the two sides were completed after the PNV deputy, Manuel de Irujo, entered the Largo Caballero government towards the end of the month as a minister without portfolio. On October 1, 1936, a rump session of the Republican Cortes voted in favor of granting the Basques their long-standing desire for self-government (Payne 1971). At this historic assembly, the soon-to-be president of Euzkadi, José Antonio de Aguirre, demonstrated his political acumen by publicly identifying the Basque cause as part of the greater struggle in Spain between democracy and fascism while at the same time reaffirming the Catholic underpinnings of the new state. On October 7, in a ceremony conducted under the ancient oak tree of "Gernika" (Sp. Guernica), the autonomous state of Euzkadi was proclaimed and Aguirre was inaugurated as its new president (*Lehendakari*). From then until its physical dissolution in the summer of 1937 he would preside over a government based in Bilbao which included four members of the PNV and five representatives from the left-wing parties – two socialists, one communist, and one left republican – all of whom showed a willingness to cooperate with Aguirre and the nationalists. The harmony which existed among the disparate ruling factions produced a degree of political and economic stability in the region that was unmatched in the rest of republican Spain.

The most urgent problem facing the Basques at this point in the war, however, was how to stop the relentless advances of the Nationalist and *Requeté* detachments. Since the outset of hostilities, the boundaries of the anti-nationalist zones in the Basque region had been seriously eroded, leaving only Vizcaya and a small portion of Guipúzcoa free of Franco's forces. Partly because it was physically isolated from the main republican zone and partly because the Basque regime refused either to place its armed forces under the command structure of the Republic's Popular Army or to coordinate its own army's actions with those of neighboring republican provinces (Asturias and Santander), the Basque region became a backwater of military engagements. Though resolved to defend themselves at all costs, the Basques themselves seemed ill prepared for undertaking such an ambitious logistical project. Not only did their nationalist militia units (*Euzko Gudarostea*, popularly called *gudaris*) lack any formal military training, but they also suffered from a shortage of essential material. The deficiencies of the Basque army became acutely apparent following the failure of its first major offensive mounted in late 1936. In the meantime, the Basques concentrated most of their energies into building a series of defensive fortifications (*cinturón de hierro*, or iron belt) around Bilbao (Preston 2006). By doing so, it was hoped that they could deter any military efforts aimed at taking the capital.

It was not until the Nationalists launched a major offensive against the isolated northern republican sectors in the spring of 1937 that fighting in the Basque region took center stage

(Cardona 1986; Martínez Bande 1969, 1971). At the end of March, General Mola and his Army of the North attacked the Biscayan front with a force of some 26,000 troops. Though they did not vastly outnumber the Basque defenders, Nationalist soldiers (including Carlist and Moorish shock units) were better trained and more battle hardened than their opponents. More importantly, they could count on the airpower provided by Italian bombers and the German Condor Legion, which had at its disposal some sixty bombers and cutting-edge fighter aircraft such as the Messerschmitt Bf-109. The force of this invasion had a devastating impact on a population that had not as yet become accustomed to intense fighting. Most of all, the relentless aerial bombardments to which Basque towns and villages were now subjected produced horrifying results for them and the rest of the world. After conducting a series of terror-bombing raids against civilian populations in Elgeta, Ochandiano, and Durango, the Nationalists turned their attention to the remote market town of Guernica, the historic and spiritual capital of the Basque region. On April 26, 1937, an event occurred there which was destined to become the most widely publicized atrocity of the Spanish Civil War. Using heavy high-explosive and incendiary bombs, a fleet of Italian and German bombers nearly leveled Guernica in the space of a few hours. According to one seasoned reporter who arrived on the scene the following day, an untold number of civilians had been killed or wounded, and only the lucky few who had found refuge in dugouts during the attacks could be seen rummaging amidst the still-burning ruins of the town's centre. Tellingly, the bombing mission had not destroyed what were presumably the main strategic targets of the assault, the local arms plant and the Rentería bridge.

Given that Guernica was an open city, news of its destruction by aerial bombing immediately sparked a scandal of international proportions. Perhaps the most reverberating of all the responses to the incident came from the renowned Spanish artist, Pablo Picasso, who was so struck by the enormity of the tragedy that he composed a massive painting simply entitled, "Guernica." Through his use of somber colors and startling imagery, Picasso managed to convey on canvas a moving parable, not only of the tragic fate of Guernica but also of the anonymous victims of modern warfare. Closer to home, the publicity surrounding the bombing served to underscore the high price ordinary Basque citizens were paying for their participation in the Civil War. President Aguirre summed up the stark reality facing all Basques in a press release the day after the bombardment of Guernica: "Before this outrage all we Basques must react with violence, swearing from the bottom of our hearts to defend the principles of our people with unheard stubbornness and heroism if the case requires it" (Quoted in Steer, April 28, 1937, p. 17+).

In the weeks following Guernica, the Nationalists resumed their campaign to conquer the Basque region. Though delayed by bad weather for most of May, the offensive reached the outskirts of Bilbao by mid June. The defending forces of the capital, already cut off from the outside world by a Nationalist-imposed blockade of the city's harbor, were short on supplies and therefore unprepared for a long siege. To make matters worse, morale among the Basque troops had ebbed in recent weeks because of their growing disillusionment with the republican regime. In light of the fact that Aguirre's repeated requests for military assistance from the Valencian government had gone answered, Basque nationalists in particular were at the point of breaking all ties with the Republic. In the event, what were widely assumed to be impenetrable fortifications surrounding Bilbao did not hold, and the city fell to the Nationalists on June 19. Aguirre and his administration had fled on the 16th, transferring their "government in exile" to France before returning to the republican zone in October and taking up residence in Barcelona. Meanwhile, the retreating Basque units did all they could to make life difficult for Franco's forces entering Bilbao. Besides destroying key bridges linking traffic to

both sides of the city's main river, they disrupted the water supply, telephone system, and the electrical power services.

The collapse of Bilbao signaled the impending end of Basque resistance in their homeland. Surviving units of the Basque army made their way to Santander only to face defeat there several weeks later. Attempts by the Basque nationalists to sue for a separate peace with the occupying Italian forces was blocked by Franco, who refused to accept surrender without reprisals. By October the few remaining republican holdouts in the northern zone were overrun by the Nationalists (Payne 1975).

After they had conquered the north, Franco's occupying forces immediately imposed a strict and – as far as the Basque nationalists were concerned – unforgiving code of justice and social order. Because they were seen as traitors, pro-republican elements of the Basque population were summarily court martialed. Thousands were either imprisoned or sentenced to die. This included some sixteen so-called "red" Basque priests, who were executed for having sided with the "enemies of God" (Raguer 2007). No less ignored during the repression were the outward expressions of Basque identity. Nationalist symbols, such as the Basque flag, or *ikurrina*, were outlawed as was the use of *Euskera* and other distinctively Basque cultural practices.

Above all, the Nationalist victory meant that, if Basque nationalism were to survive, it would have to do so outside of Euzkadi, which, in the eyes of the Francoists, no longer existed. For many Basques the decision whether to live under Nationalist rule or retain their independence had been made before the fighting in the north had ended. In advance of the invading Nationalist troops, thousands of Basques had already begun a long and arduous trek to foreign destinations. For some, like the 4,000 Basque children who were safely evacuated to Great Britain before the fall of Bilbao, this would mean living most, if not all, of their lives in exile (Bell 2007; Legarreta 1984; *Spain at War*, July 1938). Others, like the Euzkadi government officials who relocated to Barcelona, stayed in Spain for the time being, making their way to safe havens in the unconquered areas of the republican zone.

May events and Catalonia, 1937 to 1939

As noted earlier, during this same period the Basques were fighting to retain control over their homeland, political tensions in Catalonia were coming to a head. Despite their commanding position in the *Generalitat*, the Catalan nationalists were nevertheless obliged to share power with their rivals on the far left. In addition to holding portfolios in the government, the revolutionaries wielded considerable authority through their neighborhood defense committees, police squads, and unions operating in the collectivized sectors of the economy. Finding it impolitic to confront the massive CNT-FAI head-on, the *Esquerra* was nevertheless amenable to the PSUC's plan to undermine the strength and influence of the relatively weak anti-Stalinist POUM. Since its formation in July 1936, the PSUC had rapidly developed into a mass party. Given its strong opposition to the popular revolution, it is hardly surprising that the vast majority of its supporters came from the middle classes, who flocked to PSUC economic organizations such as the Catalan Federation of Small Businessmen and Manufacturers, GEPICI (*Gremis i Entitats de Petits Comerciants i Industrials*). In addition, after having absorbed the POUM's syndicalist-wing the FOUS (*Federación Obrera de Unidad Sindical*), the party now possessed a foothold in the unions. Emboldened by these gains and by the important backing it received from the Comintern and Spanish communists, the PSUC began waging a vociferous campaign of denunciation aimed at wholly discrediting the POUM's political standing in the republican camp. The pressures the PSUC brought to bear against the Tarradellas cabinet

in December resulted in the expulsion of Andreu Nin, who had since September served as the Councillor of Justice and who was the only POUM representative in government. The next few months saw an escalation not only of the PSUC/POUM struggle, but also of the rivalry for power between the anti-revolutionary parties on the one side and the revolutionaries on the other.

On May 3, 1937, the police, on orders from the PSUC and ERC officials, attempted to eject the anarcho-syndicalists from their dominant positions in the main telephone exchange in Barcelona. The bold actions of the government authorities triggered a violent response from the revolutionaries, who immediately reacted by deploying their own forces against their aggressors. Behind the barricades stood the rank-and-file members of the CNT-FAI, who were supported by their counterparts in the POUM. Opposing them were the PSUC, the ERC, and their allies. Fighting between the two sides – the war within a civil war which George Orwell later vividly captured in his eyewitness account, *Homage to Catalonia* – went on for several days before central government reinforcements arrived on the scene. By May 7, the fighting was over and the barricades which had been erected in the working-class districts throughout the city were taken down.

The occupation of Barcelona marked a turning point both for the revolutionary movement in the region and for Catalan nationalism. From this point on, the real power of the anarcho-syndicalists began to dwindle as instanced by the fact that they never again gained the leverage they had once enjoyed through their participation in the *Generalitat* and central government. Because they had proved incapable of subduing the May uprisings on their own, the Catalan government and the nationalist parties also experienced a steep and steady decline in their strength and influence. The intervention of the central government had broadened its control in the region, not least because, in the wake of the May events, it took over all of the rearguard police (*Mossos d'Esquadra*) and military authorities (*Somatent*) formerly under the control of the *Generalitat*. When, in October 1937, the seat of the republican government was transferred to Barcelona, the decline of the *Generalitat's* autonomous powers was accelerated. This became especially evident during the witch hunt and repression that was unleashed against the POUM in the weeks following the May disturbances. Though it played only a minor role in the fighting, the POUM was accused by the PSUC and communists of being a “nest of Francoist spies” which was responsible for the uprising. Despite his misgivings about the shrill and violent conduct of this communist-led campaign of persecution – which was underscored by the arrest and unexplained disappearance of Andreu Nin – the newly appointed premier of the republic, Juan Negrín, took advantage of this development by extending central government control over the Catalan judiciary (Bolloten 1991, 514). At the same time, he stepped up his administration's efforts to nationalize the war industries in the region, eventually placing them, like the courts, under the republican government's military authority. And, finally, Negrín's persistent refusal to bow to the pressures of the Catalan politicians who sought in vain greater representation in his cabinets revealed the extent to which the tide had turned against their efforts to defend the autonomy of Catalonia against the intrusions of the republican government.

During the last year of the war the Catalan and Basque parties worked in tandem to resist the centralizing policies of Negrín and his pro-communist Popular Front government. When a crisis over the government's plans to militarize the war industries, the ports, and courts of law prompted the resignation of the ERC minister of labour Jaume Aiguadé in August 1938, Manuel Irujo, the minister of justice and only Basque representative in the cabinet, resigned in solidarity. Apart from the PNV, however, the ERC had no other firm political allies. Its formerly transactional partnership with the communist-directed PSUC completely crumbled

when Negrín replaced Aiguadé with Josep Moix, a Catalan trade-unionist leader and member of the PSUC. No longer allowed a voice in government affairs, the *Esquerra* was relegated to a position of minor importance for the duration of the Civil War.

Though the struggle between Republicans and Nationalists would drag on for another several months, the war for Catalonia (and the Basque nation) effectively came to an end in January 1939. Bereft of any meaningful self-governing powers, the *Generalitat* found itself at the beginning of the year helpless to mount a last-ditch defense against Franco's rapidly advancing army. In any case, by this point in the conflict the civilian population was so weary from war-induced deprivations that they no longer had the will to continue fighting. By January 15, Tarragona was occupied, and on the 23rd Negrín ordered his government to leave Barcelona for safer quarters in Figueres (Girona) near the French border. Surviving members of the Basque and Catalan governments followed suit, later joining the never-ending stream of republican refugees who were then crossing the Pyrenees into exile. On January 25 Nationalist troops under the command of General Yagüe reached the outskirts of Barcelona. They met no resistance as they entered the vanquished city the next day.

End of Spanish nationalisms?

The war's end brought to a close a significant chapter in the development of the Basque and Catalan nationalisms. Having had their expectations for nationhood rise and then fade during the Second Republic and Civil War period, both the Basque and Catalan nationalists would see their respective autonomous movements languish during Francisco Franco's dictatorship. As the undisputed leader of *el nuevo estado* ("the New State") he would rule for the next thirty-six years, Franco made a point of rewarding those groups which had supported his *movimiento* during the war and punishing those which had not. For example, in the post-war years the pro-Nationalist Basque provinces of Alava and Navarre were accorded rights of (corporatist) self-government and special tax privileges. By contrast, pro-republican Catalans and Basques – particularly those coming from a working-class or peasant background – fell victim to a regime bent on exacting a harsh post-war revenge on its former enemies (Juliá Díaz 1999; also Casanova et al. 2004; Ruíz 2005). Those who were not condemned to death by military tribunals or sentenced to long prison terms were subject to economic, social, and political hardships. Franco's post-war repression was equally concerned with eradicating the cultural practices and institutions associated with Basque and Catalan ethnicities. In the Basque Country, this took many forms, including the burning of Basque-language publications and the forcible closures of "separatist" schools and cultural associations. *Euskera* was banned from public use and even Basque names recorded in civil registries and official documents had to be translated into Spanish. A similar repression was imposed on Catalonia, where overt manifestations of Catalan identity were equated with political subversion. The assaults on Catalan identity mirrored those being carried out against the Basques: besides burning books written in Catalan, the government abolished or suppressed educational and cultural institutions. Even Catalan street names were translated into Castilian or changed to reflect the new Spanish order. With their own widely based language proscribed, Catalans were told in no uncertain terms to "Talk like a Christian. . . . speak [Spanish] the language of the Empire." Reprisals against the Catalans were not limited to the political and cultural spheres. Nationalist extremists, who tended to treat Catalonia as an occupied foreign country, also called for subordinating the region's industries to the demands of Franco's neo-fascist economic institutions (Harrison 2009).

While the dictatorship's offensive against Spain's ethno-nationalisms dealt a crushing blow to the infrastructure of their movements, Franco was not able to extinguish completely the

autonomous aspirations of both the Basques and Catalans. Resistance to the regime came from various sources. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, nationalist politicians living in exile – such as Aguirre and Companys – attempted against overwhelming odds to salvage the remnants of their autonomous governments. Their hopes in this regard faded after the outbreak of the Second World War and again at the end of the war when the prospects of overthrowing Franco’s quasi-fascist regime never materialized. Back in Spain, pro-regionalist sentiments in the Basque Country and in Catalonia found concrete expression in the recurring protests of illegal trade unions and in the grass-root activities of clandestine organizations which were willing to pay a high price to preserve their respective ethnic moral and cultural communities. But it was not until the 1960s that both the Catalan and Basque movements began resurfacing into the public arena.

The resurgence of Catalan regionalism during the 1960s was conveyed in a variety of ways, but most notably through their music, literature, and popular culture. An example can be found in the performances of the noted balladeer Raimón, who helped to launch the *Nova Cançó* musical movement that sought to resist Francoism through the Catalan language. Along with other cultural dissidents, he was able to promote *catalanismo* in both domestic and foreign venues. Even institutions which had supported Franco’s anti-republican crusade, such as the Catalan Catholic Church, eventually came round to opposing the dictator’s inflexible attitude towards the national question. Over time, more and more Church representatives and institutions began defending the Catalans’ right to self-expression.

In the Basque provinces, the PNV played a dominant role in shaping the cultural contest the nationalists waged against the Castilian-centric regime. By adopting a non-violent approach to conserving Basque ways – such as celebrating Basque festivals and reviving their folkloric customs – the party hoped to avoid head-on confrontations with the dictatorship. However, their pacifism as well as their understanding of the overall aims of the Basque movement were challenged from the late 1950s on by a younger and more ideologically driven generation of militants. The emergence of the ETA (*Euzkadi ta Askatasuna*, Basque Land and Freedom) in 1959 marked the opening of a new chapter in the Basque nationalist movement. Rather than being reformist and staunchly Catholic like the PNV, the new organization embraced a revolutionary brand of Marxism – *tercermundismo* (“third-worldism”) – and direct action tactics. Above all, they were dedicated to the idea of waging war on any Spanish government which opposed the creation of an independent Euzkadi. For the next several decades, the ETA’s violent deeds – including the spectacular assassination of Franco’s designated successor in 1973 – would cast a long shadow over the entire Basque nationalist movement. And while the forces of moderation in the region eventually prevailed after democracy returned to Spain in the late 1970s, the bloody record of the ETA was a palpable reminder of the impact the Civil War had had on the development of Basque nationalism.

The Catalans’ road to autonomy, though not problem-free, was not nearly as dramatic as that of their Basque counterparts. In the wake of Franco’s death in November 1975, the nationalist movement rapidly gained momentum. Popular pressures demanding the restoration of Catalan rights – which were highlighted in the autumn of 1977 by the return of Josep Tarradellas, the President of the *Generalitat* in exile – were so immense that it became apparent that Spain’s transition to democracy would have to address this pressing issue. While framing the country’s first democratic constitution in more than forty-seven years, Spanish politicians bore this in mind by inserting a clause into the document which recognized and guaranteed “the right to self-government of the nationalities and regions of which it is composed and the solidarity among them all.” This act was followed by the passage of a Statue of Self-Government for Catalonia, which the Catalans ratified by a popular referendum in 1979. Building upon these

and other pro-regionalist measures passed since the return of democracy, Catalonia has today evolved into one of the most stable and self-contained regions within the Spanish state system.

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