**A – CAUSES OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR**

The Spanish civil war is often seen to be an ‘international conflict’ for two main reasons.

1. Many foreign states (Germany, USSR, Italy) as well as volunteers (from GB etc) actually participate in the fighting and are key to the outcome.

2. There are international ideologies involved – the extreme left vs the extreme right.

When one considers the causes of the war, however, it is important to recognise that it arises from a uniquely Spanish situation, which is overlaid by some international ideologies.

**Several ‘phases’ can be identified in the outbreak of the war**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Events** |
| 1923 | General Primo **De Rivera** took control of Spain in a bloodless coup as King Alfonso was under heavy pressure from post-ww1 depression + military defeat in Morocco. The king did not resists the coup. |
| 1929 | Spain hit hard by depression, industrial production fell to 50 percent, and unemployment rocketed. |
| 1930 | The army withdraws support for Rivera and he has to resign. |
| 1931 | Elections are held and **Republicans** won all the major cities in Spain. King Alfonso **abdicates** to avoid civil war and Spain becomes a republic. |
|  | The government was split between **left and right wing republicans**. The former wanted rapid social reform to satisfy the working classes, the latter wanted more moderate change to reduce opposition from church, landowners and the army. |
| **1931-33 – ‘Left’ Republic** | **Azana** becomes prime minister, leading a left wing coalition government. Regions get more self-government. Religious education in school is banned. Many officers in the army were made to retire early on half pay. Huge estates of the rich were nationalized. This land reform was called ***Latifundia***. |
|  | The fascist party **The Falange** with Primo’s son Jose Antonio de Rivera as its leader was formed in protest at the radical reforms of the republican government |
| 1932 | General Sanjuro led an army coup to overthrow the government of Manuel **Azana**, the prime minister. The coup failed as the army remained loyal to the government; after all it had won the elections fairly. |
|  | A right reactionary party **CEDA** was formed in protest to the republican government, which was determined to protect the interests of the church and land owners. Two powerful left-wing parties, the **anarchists** and **syndicalists** (powerful trade union groups) thought **Azana’s** government was too moderate and consequently created political tension |
| 1933 | The extreme left organized strikes to destabilize **Azana**’s government. 25 people were killed by gov troops who were attempting to catch some communists near Cadiz. This lost the government a great deal of support among the left and workers – socialists refused to work with him anymore and another election had to be held. |
| **1933-36 ‘Right Republic’ / National Front** | Azana resigns as prime minister, elections were set up and **CEDA** won a majority of votes and were therefore influential in the next government. Robles, while not PM, managed to get the withdrawal of all reforms initiated by Azana’s government. All left-wing parties joined together to form the popular front, which organized strikes, riots and vandalism. |
| 1934 | Coal miners in Asturias initiated a general strike but were ruthlessly put down by General Franco on behalf of the government. Spain was heading towards chaos. |
| **Feb 1936**  **‘Popular Front’** | An **election** was called to restore order. The left-wing popular front coalition won and Azana once again became prime minister. Right-wing parties formed the national front coalition in reaction. Spain had become extreme politically polarized. |
| Jul 1936 | A leading right wing politician, **Sotelo** was murdered. Right wing politicians argued that they were in danger of a serious communist takeover. They began to favour the idea of military dictatorship. |
| Jul 1936 | **General Franco** assumes control of the military, seized control of Spanish Morocco and crossed over into the mainland of Spain to overthrow the government. **The civil war had begun.** |

**Long term causes: Political instability**  
  
**Weakness of government:**  
In the late 19th century Spain was a constitutional monarchy. There were political parties, but the elections were rigged and the Cortes (parliament) had no real power, as the power was held by wealthy oligarchs. This caused social and political instability.  
  
**The role of the Spanish army:**  
The army was powerful because of its colonial past. Since the loss of Cuba and other outposts, the army was humiliated but also too big and essentially ‘at a loose end’ – this meant it was both inclined and positioned to interfere in politics. It believed that it was the protector of the nation, and this meant that it intervened in politics if a crisis occurred. The army interfered in 1936, which led to war. It was conservative and the Africanistas (who had served in Morocco) were most nationalistic and traditional.  
The army also had a bad reputation with the people as it was brutal, ineffective (it had lost Spain’s colonial assets) and expensive. This caused social tension, as middle/upper class defended military interests as they dominated the jobs as officers and generals.

**The role of the church:**  
The Catholic Church in Spain was wealthy and powerful. It used its influence to support social, economic and political conservatism. The aristocracy had also close bonds to the church as they funded the church. Consequently, the church defended the interests of the upper class. This led to resentment among the poor and urban workers.  
  
**Economic causes:**  
Spain was mainly an agricultural economy and the plight of agricultural workers was a key factor in the discontent that led to the civil war. Agriculture was the main source of employment and there were fundamental problems that made it inefficient.  
a) Work was seasonal and landless peasants had to move around to get a job  
b) Most peasants lived in abject poverty  
c) The agricultural system was feudalistic with poor peasants working on the farms of land owners  
These fundamental problems in agriculture created social tension  
  
There was also the **need for industrial modernization and reform**. Urban workers faced low wages, long hours and bad working conditions. Trade unions were formed but could not achieve anything substantial as employers could always find alternative labour in the countryside. With no legal means, the workers resorted to violent uprisings as the means to effect of change.  
  
Even though Spain’s neutrality during WW1 facilitated a short economic boom with increase in production and exports, the **working-class living standards went down**. In the early 1920s the country faced major economic problems and this led to increased militancy in the working class as well as political polarization. Spain was one of the few places which contained organised anarchist parties on a large scale.  
  
**Regional problems:**  
A cause of tension was the struggle between the centralist state and Catalonia and Basque, which wanted independence. When Robles (national front government) withdrew Ananza’s (republican government) reforms that had granted the regions more independence, tension intensified and led to divisions in Spanish society.  
  
**Short term causes: Political polarization – 1931 onwards**  
Between 1931-36, Spain became politically polarized. Is important to note that when the second republic was established (governments between 1931-36), no one “except a tiny minority on the lunatic fringe on the extreme right or left, believed that Spain’s problems could be solved only by war” (Paul Preston). Thus, the events during the second republic and were crucial for the outbreak of the war.   
  
**‘Left’ republic 1931-33:**  
Azana limits the power of the church. Church was no longer in control of education.   
  
Power of army was also attacked. Government attempted to reduce number of officers by offering early retirement on full pay. This was an offer taken by 50 percent of officers. However, the policy backfired as this meant that the army was radicalized to the right as the officers who stayed in the army were conservative and nationalistic, including the Africanistas.   
  
Desperate economic problems that existed in Spain were exacerbated by the depression. For example, production fell by one third. As a result the government initiated a land reform programme with compensation for land owners. The state took over some estates and the right saw this as a major threat to its interests, and an attempt to copy the Soviet system. Each reform was perceived as an attack by one or more right-wing groups like church, army or landowners. As a result the reactionary right political party CEDA under was formed to protect the interests of the right. Even more extreme, the Fascist Party was also formed (Falange) whose supporters were even less likely to compromise. Spain did indeed become more politically polarized during the left republic.

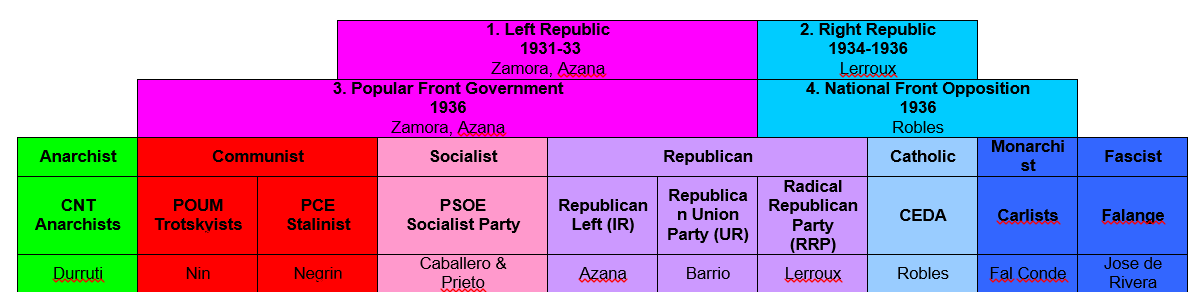
However, Azana also faced opposition from within his left wing group – the anarchists and syndicalists (extreme left trade unions) thought his policies were still too moderate – the excitement of 1931 and led them to believe there would be radical and dramatic change. The violence by Ananza’s soldiers towards strikers in 1933 boosted their support and therefore polarised Spain further – the middle ground was disappearing. This is evidenced by the fact the Socialist Party now refused to work with Azana and new elctions had to be held – the moderates were fragmenting.

However, the left republic brought some stability in the country as regions were given more independence. For example, Catalonia was given its own parliament.   
  
**‘Right’ republic 1933-36 (National Front):**  
As a result of the growing tensions, Azana resigned, new elections were held and the right won. CEDA became the biggest party, with its leader **Robles** as Prime Minister. The right government reversed almost all of the reforms made by the left republic.   
- Church was now given control over education   
- The land reform programme was halted   
- The newly won independence of the regions was withdrawn.   
Threats from a left general strike increased and violence was widespread. The regions now supported a left-wing government. This led to that the right wing government became more authoritarian and brutal in their treatment of political opposition. This, in turn, alienated the left further and pushed many into the arms of the uncompromising extreme left – polarisation increased.

**Popular front 1936:**  
The right wing government disintegrated as the economic and political situation deteriorated. Elections were held in 1936 and a left wing coalition between socialists, anarchists and communists won. Azana became prime minister and started to reverse all the counter reforms made by the right. Anarchists encouraged peasants to seize land in the countryside. Violence increased and Spain became ultra-politically polarized. The government faced increased disorder and the right wing believed that Spain was in the early stages of a left-wing revolution. Civil war drew closer.   
  
**Immediate causes:**  
The victory of the popular front threw right wing CEDA into turmoil. Robles began to use his funds to support plans for a military coup. In fact, an extreme nationalist group of junior military officers (including Mola and Franco) began to plan the coup as soon as the popular front attained power. The catalyst of the coup was the murder of the popular CEDA politician Sotelo. The coup is initiated on the 17 July in 1936. The coup is successful in northern Spain and Andalusia, but it failed in major industrial areas as well as Madrid. Consequently, both sides reach a deadlock and the civil war begins.

**B - COURSE OF THE CONFLICT**

**POLITICAL SPECTRUM IN SPAIN 1930s**

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**REPUBLICANS – Basically comes to mean those who support the left wing government of the Popular Front that was elected in 1936 (however, some of these are revolutionary vs democracy)**

**NATIONALISTS – Those who believe in authoritarian government, usually aiming at upholding traditional authority (however, some alternative revolutionary ideologies, like the fascist Falange)**

**Key point:** Both sides have a spectrum of opinion within them – their ability to create unity with their own group will be a key factor in explaining their relative success in the civil war.

**A – WHAT WERE THE KEY EVENTS OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR?**

**Note the events of the war – the final column is to help you to put these events into their international context. This, for example, sheds light on the timing of foreign intervention (or lack of). Use these events to develop support for the key interpretations underneath.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | **Good News for the Republic** | **Bad News for the Republic** |
| **1936** | July |  | Military uprisings in Spain against the Republican government. Hitler sent 20 transport planes to get Franco’s forces over to mainland Spain | **Hitler reoccupies Rhineland**  **Appeasement -**  **GB & France announce ‘non-intervention’ policy in Spain – Germany & Italy also sign but do not honour it.**  **German Re-armament starts to peak** |
|  | Aug | First International Brigade volunteers arrive in Spain (e.g. ‘Abraham Lincoln’ Brigade) from US to support Republicans. |  |
|  | Sept | The Republican govt, led by Caballero, creates a ‘Popular Army’, uniting the left. | Franco declares himself ‘Generalissimo’ of the Nationalist forces after he defends Toledo from Republicans. |
|  | Oct | First military aid arrives from Stalin – mainly advisers |  |
|  | Nov | The CNT (anarchists) join the Republican govt. De Rivera, leader of the fascist Falange, is captured and executed by the Republicans. | Franco benefits from De Rivera’s execution as it increases his authority over the Nationalists. POUM (Trotskyite communists) refuse to join the Republican govt, fighting independently. |
| **1937** | Feb | Battle of Jarama – Nationalists assault Madrid, international brigades successfully resist. |  | **New French ‘Popular Front’ govt elected – left wing but afraid of civil war spilling into divided France (had strong right wing) if sides with the Republicans** |
|  | Mar | Mussolini’s Italian ‘volunteers’ defeated outside Madrid – Franco and allies give up attack. |  |
|  | April |  | Nazi ‘Condor Legion’ bombs Guernica, shocking the world and destroying the city. Carlist and Falange militias are incorporated into Franco’s army. |
|  | May |  | ‘May Days’ or the ‘War within the War’. Negrin’s communist PCE form a new Republican govt – fighting breaks out between them and POUM |
|  | June |  | Bilbao falls to the Nationalists. Franco consolidates power over Nationalists when General Mola dies in a plane crash. Nin, leader of POUM, is assassinated by PCE agents, dividing the left further. |
|  | July |  | Battle of Brunette – Republican offensive ends in disastrous defeat – military turning point. |
|  | Aug |  | The Vatican recognises Franco as legitimate ruler – unity. |
| **1938** | Feb |  | Nationalists recapture Teural in most bitter battle of the war | **Anschluss**  **Munich Agreement**  **Invasion of Czech** |
|  | April |  | Republican forces split in two by Franco’s assault on Valencia. Strategically decisive. |
|  | May |  | Franco rejects a peace deal from Negrin. |
|  | Jul | Daring night time raid on Valencia successful but rapidly peters out. |  |
|  | Oct |  | Montana Project. Franco secures Nazi continued support by granting them 75% stakes in Spain’s mines. International Brigades sent home by the Republicans |
|  | Dec |  | Battle of Ebro – Republicans being ground down by huge bombing campaigns. |
| **1939** | Jan |  | Barcelona falls to Franco | **Nazi- Soviet Pact** |
|  | Feb |  | Britain / France recognise Franco as ruler of Spain |
|  | Mar |  | Madrid falls to Franco – Negrin and Republic govt flee the country. War over. |

**B. INTERPRETATIONS: WHY DID FRANCO WIN THE CIVIL WAR? / HOW IMPORTANT WAS FOREIGN INTERVENTION?**

You should structure any analysis for why the Republicans lost the civil war around the three key interpretations below (historians would agree that all are important, but emphasis differs around the importance of foreign intervention). Some explanations have been inserted for you – **match some more** from the timeline or your own reading to develop further.

**1. INITIAL ADVANTAGES**

*At first, the advantage seemed to be with the Republicans – controlled population centres and were the legitimate government BUT…*

*The Nationalists controlled the main agricultural areas from the outset, so Franco’s troops were better fed than the republicans. They also controlled the mines and other raw materials.*

*The majority of the professional army was with Franco and the Nationalists, although they were trapped in North Africa.*

**2. QUALITY OF FOREIGN INTERVENTION**

**The ‘non-intervention’ policy of GB and France (see this in context of appeasement) contrasted with the enthusiastic intervention of Hitler and Mussolini.**

*The German airlift of Franco’s troops at the start of the war was crucial in keeping the Nationalist hopes alive in the first crucial phase of the conflict.*

*Nazi Germany obtained 75% of Spain’s mining shares under the 1938 Montana Project in return for urgent military assistance. Prior to this, supplies troops and notably the Condor Legion devastated the Republicans (Guernica etc)*

*The Republic relied heavily upon International Brigades from the West and 500 military advisors from the USSR – but these groups distrusted each other. The international brigades were not competent or professional soldiers.*

*Historian Antony Beevor stresses the importance of foreign intervention in explaining the outcome of the civil war.*

**3. UNITY VS DISUNITY.**

*Franco named himself the “Head of State” and abolished rival political parties within the Right (the Carlists and the Falange)*

*Germany helped Franco to present himself as the defender of Spain against communism. His early recognition by the Vatican helped to consolidate leadership of the Nationalists in his hands.*

*Franco named himself ‘Generalissimo’ and brought the private armies of the right-wing parties (e.g. the Carlists and the Falange) under his control.*

*The Republican parties (anarchists, communists and socialists) were so divided that they started fighting each other in the “Barcelona Uprising” of 1937. Murder of priests and this chaos alienated some more moderate Republican supporters.*

*The Republicans could not decide whether farms should be nationalised or privatised – so production fell, food prices trebled and rationing was introduced – this became known as the war between rebellion and revolution.*

*The disunity of the Republicans, as opposed to the unity of the Nationalists, suggest (and this is part of the historiography) that the outcome of the civil war was determined not just by foreign intervention but by the particular* ***Spanish*** *circumstances.*

**C. WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CIVIL WAR?**

**We should consider the consequences at several different levels:**

The Nationalists won the Civil War, putting General Franco in power.  
  
**Human cost:**

* Around 100,000 Republicans were killed and about 70,000 Nationalists.
* The killing also continued after the war as Franco launched a terror campaign to eliminate opposition that killed approximately a further 40,000-200,000 people known as the "White Terror".
* Thousands of Republicans were held in concentration camps and prisons and Republican children were often taken from their parents to be "re-educated"- placed in Nationalist/Catholic families and others in orphanages- indoctrinated against views of their own parents.
* Divisions and hatred remained in the Spanish society in decades to follow.

**Economic cost:**

* Spain's economy was devastated after the war as 10-15% of its wealth was destroyed.
* The per capita income was 28% lower in 1939 than in 1935 and 70% of Madrid's factory machinery needed to be replaced.
* Madrid's communication systems, including the tram network needed to be rebuilt.
* There was high inflation as a result of the economic crisis and the government started printing more and more money.
* The Republican's land reform was reversed and Spain's agricultural economy remained ineffective and inefficient.
* Huge debts to pay! Spain attempted to find foreign loans for investment but the British and Germans demanded that the debt was paid back first. Franco took some of the Fascist ideas of the corporate state, introducing a level of control that worsened working conditions and stifled entrepreneurs.
* The economy improved due to the outbreak of WW2 and attempted to gain leverage over Britain and France by offering to remain neutral and not to ally with Nazi Germany- also had discussions with the Germans. Once the war broke out, Britain and France signed trading agreements with Spain in 1940.
* However, German exploitation of Spain's resources during the war weakened the economy and the debt still to be repaid gave Britain, France and US influence in Franco's Spain.

**Political effects:**

* Franco emerged from the war as Spain's dictator remained in power until his death in 1975.
* Franco strengthened the Catholic Church’s grip on education and censorship limited cultural expression – in return the Church supported his regime.
* Franco's regime claimed that they had to save the country from communism and the "White Terror" killed thousands of Republicans and led to the exodus of half a million Spaniards- this included most intellectuals in Spain such as lawyers, teachers, researchers, doctors and famous writers.
* In 1939, the Law of Political Responsibility made supporters of the Republicans (either before or during the war) liable to punishment which even included death sentence.
* Key objectives of the new regime was to the restore the power of the privileged and to control the working class.
* Wages were cut and industrial political activism was outlawed; CNT and UGT destroyed!
* Employment for Republicans was almost impossible and the Civil Guard maintained the inequalities of the social and working system.

**On International Relations – make links to the rest of this unit:**

* USSR: Communist had been defeated in Spain and Stalin's small contribution to the Republican cause resulted in divisions within the Republicans and the Soviets lost a lot of intellectual sympathy in the West (seen as attempting to spread communism etc – perhaps fed into GBs reluctance to do a deal with the USSR in the later 1930s)
* It also created divisions between the USSR and Germany and drove the Soviet foreign policy to seek alliance with western power to contain Germany- however western powers showed through appeasement that they had no intentions of standing up to Germany (Czech in 1938) and Stalin signed Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939.
* Hitler and Mussolini: Hitler gained valuable military lessons from the war as he was able to try out the tactic of Blirzkrieg and military equipment. Also tried out the bombing of civilians which would be a common tactic in WW2 – Condor Legion etc.
* Britain and France: The polarized nature of the foreign intervention led to more support for appeasement as it seemed that the opposing forces could exhaust each other without democracies being dragged into the conflict. The apparent weakness of Britain and France over Spain and their wider policy of appeasement led to Hitler changing his perception of Britain and non-intervention encouraged Hitler to become more aggressive! The well-publicised bombing of Guernica etc also strengthened the argument that modern warfare would be devastating to the democracies, in turn strengthening the appeasers. France, in particular, worried that Spain’s example could be replicated in France if they got involved in any military action.
* USA: Remained mostly neutral and the war even strengthened the country's isolationist sentiment.