

2011

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Recommended Citation

Álvarez Tardío, Manuel (2011) "Politics, Violence and Electoral Democracy in Spain: the case of the CEDA, 1933-1934," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1018>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol35/iss1/7>

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Cover Page Footnote

This article forms part of “Elecciones y cultura política en la Segunda República española (1931-1936). El impacto cuantitativo y cualitativo de la violencia en la competencia partidista” a research project financed by the Comunidad de Madrid (Ref. CCG10-URJC/HUM-4935).

Politics, Violence, and Electoral Democracy in Spain:
the case of the CEDA (1933-1934)*

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During the 1930s, the most important political party on the Spanish right was the *Confederación Española de las Derechas Autónomas* (CEDA), not only in terms of ballots and parliamentary seats, but also as a result of its organization and campaigning activities. The party's promoters stimulated a social mobilization which facilitated the CEDA's success in the November 1933 national elections, resulting in the *Cedistas* becoming the largest single parliamentary grouping in the second republican *Cortes* (1933–1935).¹ While the party remained short of the absolute majority required to form a government in its own right, it held the key to the creation of a stable majority in the newly-elected chamber. Although the CEDA had campaigned in coalition with the monarchical right, this temporary alliance neither outlived the elections, nor led to the formation of a conservative anti-republican bloc in the *Cortes*. On the contrary, despite its accidentalist posture towards the Republic, the CEDA entered into a pact with Alejandro Lerroux's Radical Republicans, with the latter in turn having already distanced themselves from the republican left and been deeply critical of previous socialist policies. In opting for this new alliance, the party effectively postponed the achievement of its main objective: constitutional change. Nevertheless, in exchange it received the promise of substantial modifications to the economic and religious policies that had been implemented by left-wing governments

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¹ Two classic but conflicting studies are José Ramón Montero, *La CEDA. El catolicismo social y político en la Segunda República* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Revista de Trabajo, 1977) and Richard A. H. Robinson, *Los orígenes de la España de Franco. Derecha, República Revolución, 1931-1936* (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1973).

between 1931 and 1933, as well as the approval of a full amnesty for those involved in the attempted coup of August 1932.²

Since November 1931, the Catholic right had been campaigning for changes to the new republican Constitution. Yet at the close of 1933, the CEDA – thanks to the will of the people and its newfound status as the largest parliamentary bloc – had become a fundamental element in the maintenance of institutional stability. Therein lay a paradox to which historians have hitherto paid little attention.

For those who had constituted the government during the two years prior to the elections, CEDA's success at the ballot box and the party's subsequent support for the Radical party government represented a naked threat to republican democracy, since the *Cedistas* had never accepted the Constitution and had done little to hide their desire to alter it. Broadly speaking, the left regarded the CEDA as a thinly-disguised "*fascioclericalismo*" whose ultimate objective was the destruction of the Republic.³ For this reason, once the election results were known, they did not hesitate to appeal to the president to employ an elastic understanding of his constitutional prerogatives, and thereby bestow his confidence upon government other than that which might be formed by the new parliamentary majority – the first step towards calling fresh elections.⁴ Even a hitherto moderate socialist such as Indalecio Prieto declared shortly after the elections that "if anyone were to directly, solemnly, and without dissimulation deliver power to the Republic's enemies, the Spanish people would be obliged, at that same moment, to rise up in revolution."⁵ Among the political groupings which had supported the Constitution, the *Lerrouxistas* stood alone in their failure to adhere to that perception, for while they needed the CEDA in order to form a government, the post-election panorama also opened a window to the achievement of what the Radicals had

² On the political background of early 1934, see Stanley G. Payne, *La primera democracia española. La Segunda República, 1931-1936* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1995), 268-277; Nigel Townson, *La República que no pudo ser. La política de centro en España, 1931-1936* (Madrid: Taurus, 2002), 219-262; Manuel Álvarez Tardío, *Anticlericalismo y libertad de conciencia. Política y religión en la Segunda República española (1931-1936)* (Madrid: CEPyC, 2002), 292-326; y Octavio Ruiz-Manjón, "La vida política en el segundo bienio republicano," in *República y guerra en España (1931-1939)*, ed. Santos Juliá (Madrid: Espasa, 2006), 77-91.

³ For the expresión "*fascioclericalismo*," see *El Liberal*, December 3, 1933.

⁴ Roberto Villa García, "Cuando la democracia se sacrifica a la revolución. Los republicanos de izquierda ante los resultados electorales de 1933," in *V Congreso Internacional El Republicanismo ante la crisis de la Democracia. Una perspectiva comparada (1909-1939)* (Priego de Córdoba, 2009).

⁵ *El Socialista* and *Ahora*, November 29, 1933.

spent months calling for: the re-anchoring of the Republic to the political center, and the incorporation of the conservative grassroots into the system.⁶

The secondary literature on the political history of the Second Republic is both abundant, and more varied than it may at first sight appear to be. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find any analysis of the CEDA's position in the political juncture of late 1933 which takes on board the complexities of that context, or indeed which questions whether the parameters employed by the parties of the left in the aftermath of the elections should be taken at face value. Neither the CEDA's words nor its deeds subsequent to the 1933 general election have been analysed in sufficient depth. Indeed, it appears that far too much primacy has been granted – sometimes with paralysing effects – to the following premise: nothing that the *Cedista* deputies or ministers did had any value or purpose other than to contribute to a feast of confusion, aimed at facilitating the destruction of the republican regime by means of covert monarchist infiltration. As Paul Preston has asserted, “beneath the surface of Gil Robles' apparent respect for democratic norms, there always lay the threat of using his power if his objectives were not achieved.” Nonetheless, the definitive work in this sense is undoubtedly that of J. R. Montero, who maintained that the “evolutionary tactics” of the Catholic right were adopted merely to prevent the Republic from destroying the powerbase of the “dominant bloc” (*bloque dominante*).⁷

However, as Javier Tusell has highlighted, when referring to “the CEDA,” historians need to be aware that they are alluding to a grouping which was in reality both complex and heterogenous.⁸ It is therefore crucial that a number of considerations be taken into account, the first being the fact that the party was a coalition which brought together a range of distinct personalities under the undisputed leadership of José María Gil Robles. In second place, the CEDA had been hastily formed around at least two key oppositional premises: on the one hand, the campaign for constitutional change in favour of the rights of Catholics and their church, and on the other the reaction against the policies of the socialist Ministry of Labor. Both positions reveal much about what CEDA's clientele detested, but little about what they wanted, nor indeed how they wanted it. In order to analyse these two aspects in depth, it is necessary to consider the broader context, as well as to take into account both change over time and the continual interaction between the *Cedistas* and other political

⁶ This position was articulated by Lerroux in the inaugural debate of the new government, *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes*, December 6, 7, 19, 20, 1933 (hereafter *DSC*); *Ahora*, December 20, 21 1933; for the Radicals' election campaign, see *ABC*, October 31, November 16, 1933, and Salvador Canals, *De cómo van las cosas de España* (Madrid, 1933), p.45.

⁷ Paul Preston, *La destrucción de la democracia en España* (Madrid: Turner, 1978), 264. Montero, *op. cit.*, I, 99.

⁸ Javier Tusell, *Historia de la Democracia Cristiana en España* (Madrid: Sarpe, 1986), 199.

actors, be they potential allies – in particular the *Lerrouxistas* – or the party's staunchest enemies. This approach is a prerequisite to any accurate gauging of the relationship between the CEDA and democracy, as well as to assessing the stance of the party towards political violence.

This article analyses several aspects of the *Cedista* leadership's political culture and position towards republican democracy, beginning with the November 1933 election campaign – the moment in which the CEDA made its electoral debut and had to demonstrate its commitment to the rules of the democratic game – and concluding with the party's entry into the government at the start of October 1934. Given the constraints of space, it has been necessary to omit analysis of other aspects relevant to understanding the party's growth and its complex relationship with the monarchist and authoritarian right during the first two years of the Republic. Moreover, the trajectory of the right during 1935, and above all, after the governmental crisis of December of that same year – when Alcalá Zamora refused to call upon Gil Robles to form a government, and the latter considered the possibility of a military *pronunciamiento* – is also important, but equally beyond the scope of the discussion presented here. For these reasons, the conclusions reached are of a limited nature, although this ought not necessarily diminish their significance.

Elections and Radicalization

The resort to demagoguery, and the deployment against one's political opponents of a radical lexicon which bordered on the apologetic when it came to violence, were commonplace tactics in the Spain of the 1930s. Both were characteristic of an understanding of political conflict in which the adversary was regarded as a dangerous enemy, bent on monopolizing power at the exclusion of all others. The use of rhetorical devices intended to highlight the opposition's destructive purpose was fuelled by both sides. While the left appealed to the spectre of counterrevolution in order to justify exceptional measures and to radicalize its policies towards labor and on the question of secularization, the right was not immune to the messages being emitted from the other side.

In that context, the conservatives led by Gil Robles, firstly through *Acción Popular* and subsequently in the CEDA, found themselves navigating muddy waters throughout 1932–33. Despite reiterating their rejection of violence and aspiration to succeed via the ballot box – thereby distancing themselves from the Carlists and the authoritarian right – conservatives also absorbed and reacted to socialist discourse when the latter stated that a government controlled by the right would be synonymous with the death of the Republic. Moreover, all of this took place while the government of left-wing Republican Manuel Azaña was zealously applying the law for the

Defense of the Republic in order to obstruct or break up dozens of rightist political gatherings and close numerous conservative meeting places.⁹

In the months prior to the party's formation, the team with whom Gil Robles founded the CEDA at the start of 1933 had been defending the legal route to power. In response to the failed coup attempt led by General Sanjurjo in August 1932, Gil Robles himself had declared that "I frankly state that as far as it depends on me, I will be utterly opposed to military conspiracy as the solution."¹⁰ Furthermore, the *Cedistas'* insistence on condemning the use of violence and encouragement to conservatives to demonstrate their strength via the ballot box had brought them into no small amount of conflict with the monarchists led by Antonio Goicoechea, not to mention the Carlists.¹¹

Nonetheless, as the moment arrived in the autumn of 1933 to compete in national elections, the differences between the *Cedistas* and monarchists were masked in order to facilitate the running of joint candidates, thereby combining the forces of both parties in a broad counterrevolutionary front. Such a strategy was not in vain, since the new electoral system fostered this type of grand coalition by holding out the prospect of a substantial premium to candidates obtaining just a single vote above the 50 per cent barrier.¹²

Against this background, during part of the electoral campaign Gil Robles radicalized his language, and heightened the ambiguity of his rhetoric regarding what the CEDA might do should it come to power. Without doubt, he was competing in terms of radicalism in order to attract the conservative vote, yet his public utterances did not in reality signal a dramatic change at the heart of his discourse. For instance, he never made statements resembling the following declaration by José Calvo Sotelo, monarchist and former minister under the dictatorship: "Over a century ago we allowed ourselves to be captivated by the cry of the Encyclopedia, and to think in the mode of the French. Now we will be unable to avoid the influence of corporatism and fascism"; or that of Pedro Sainz Rodríguez: "We... are going to put an end to this farce of Parliament, of parties, and of popular power." Neither did Gil

⁹ Data on the application of the law for the Defense of the Republic to the conservatives' revisionist campaign can be found in Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa García, *El precio de la exclusión. La política durante la Segunda República* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2010), chapter 5.

¹⁰ Tusell, op. cit., 176.

¹¹ Monarchist criticism can be found in S. Galindo Herrero, *Los partidos monárquicos bajo la Segunda República* (Madrid: Rialp, 1956), 176-182, and the Carlist reaction, for example in the case of Navarre, in J. Dronda Martínez, "Catolicismo político y movimiento católico en Navarra. 1931-1936," IX Congreso de la Asociación de Historia Contemporánea (Murcia, 2008), 9. [Available at <http://www.ahistcon.org/docs/murcia/contenido/portada.html>]

¹² For the basis of the right's electoral union, see José María Gil Robles, *No fue posible la paz* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2006), 96, and on election rules and their consequences, Álvarez Tardío y Villa García, op. cit., 98-127.

Robles, as had been the case for months previously, accept the right to rebel against the republican state – an idea that was lauded in circles around the ultraconservative *Acción Española* and supported by certain members of the Catholic church opposed to the conciliatory policy of Papal Nuncio Federico Tedeschini. It was however the case that the CEDA's leader did lay more stress than he had hitherto done on the idea that his party did not consider democracy to be an end in itself, but rather a means to the achievement of a "new state."¹³ This necessarily worked to strengthen the image disseminated by CEDA's opponents of the party as a clear and present threat to republican democracy.

Moreover, although the electoral campaign was not characterized by generalized political violence, the dialectical confrontation between the socialists and the *Cedistas* developed in a manner that was detrimental to the consolidation of democracy.¹⁴ As their discourse made clear, this was a fundamental conflict between distinct models of society, and both parties deployed rhetoric which transmitted to voters the sense of being part of a decisive battle, not between different forms of management, but between revolution and counterrevolution, between Marxism and anti-Marxism. The elections were, in the words of CEDA candidate for Madrid Rafael Marín Lázaro, "the culminating point" of "a contest between two opposing civilizations: one socialist, the other Christian." On the other hand, the Socialists called for the amputation "of all parts of the body politic found to be gangrenous," and in particular those representing right-wing sponsors of "violence, blood and concentration camps."¹⁵

In the constituent assembly elections of June 1931, the language of *Acción Popular's* manifestos had been relatively restrained. Now this moderation was replaced by a distinctly apocalyptic tone, and one inspired by the most extremist messages which the Catholic right had been propagating throughout the previous eighteen months of campaigning for constitutional

¹³ *Acción Española* 9, October 16, 1933, 205-228, published an excerpt from Aniceto de Castro Albarrán's controversial *El derecho a la rebeldía* (Madrid, 1934); Julián Sanz Hoya, *De la Restauración a la reacción. Las derechas frente a la Segunda República (Cantabria, 1931-1936)* (Santander: Universidad de Cantabria, 2006), 153; Alfonso Bullón De Mendoza, *José Calvo Sotelo* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2004), 395, 400.

¹⁴ There were 321 acts of violence and 34 deaths during the entire campaign, that is, between October 10 and December 3, 1933, Roberto Villa García, *La modernización política de España: Las elecciones a Cortes de 1933* (Madrid: URJC, 2008), 552-562, 574-579, 743; W.J. Irwin, *The 1933 Cortes Elections* (Nueva York, Garland Publishing, 1991) lacks information on this aspect of the campaign.

¹⁵ "El momento actual," *C.E.D.A.* 12, October 31, 1933, 4. Montero, op. cit., II, 297; Election manifesto of the Zaragoza Socialists, in Luis G. Germán Zubero, "Las elecciones generales de 1933 en Zaragoza," in *Elecciones en Zaragoza capital durante la Segunda República*, ed. J. Bueno et al. (Zaragoza: Instituto Fernando el Católico, 1980), 127-128.

revision.¹⁶ The manifesto issued by the Madrid anti-Marxist coalition represented the 1933 election as a stark choice between revolution and counterrevolution: after a “shameful and unforgettable” two years, the moment “to decide between the two opposing forces” had arrived.¹⁷ However, this manifesto was not, as has been sometimes suggested, evidence that “much of the CEDA’s discourse bordered on fascism,” since it was one thing to openly defend dictatorship as a post-election political option, and quite another to engage in harsh criticism of the first two years of the Republic, and to demand the modification of certain laws and the articles of the Constitution which those same laws implemented.¹⁸ In any event, the fact that members of the CEDA allowed themselves to be carried away by a language of combat that was itself the product of a tense campaign cannot be doubted. The campaign material produced by *Acción Popular*, in common with that of its allies in the *Unión de Derechas*, was characterized by extreme alarmism and simplification, while a victory for the left was identified with the advent of Communism, the destruction of religion, and a descent towards anarchy and hunger. Some electoral messages deliberately conflated the parties which had participated in the Azaña government with the regime itself to such a degree that the Republic and the left appeared to be one and the same. In this manner one could learn from the political posters displayed in Seville that to vote for the Republic was not merely “to vote for WORKER UNEMPLOYMENT,” “for HUNGER,” for “THE BURNING OF CONVENTS”: it was “to vote for CIVIL WAR.”¹⁹ In addition, new trends in graphic design allowed an even further turning of the screw on behalf of this alarmist message. A not insignificant degree of subliminal violence could be detected in some of these posters, such as one which attacked the left’s “anti-national” policies of the previous two years through the medium of a map of Spain stained with blood originating from three daggers, which represented Masonry, Socialism and separatism.²⁰ The opponent therefore appeared as a dangerous being who imperilled the very survival of Christian civilization, as well as that of the Spanish nation itself. If the left had begun to brand all conservatives alike as fascists, anti-Marxists seemed to accept such simplifications. They in turn transported them to the other shore, associating the entire spectrum of the left with the same label, which was encapsulated by three terms: the “Masons, separatists and Marxists” who governed Spain and at the same time “served

¹⁶ For one among many good examples of this type of message, see *ABC*, November 1, 12, 1931, and June 28, 1932.

¹⁷ *El Debate*, November 1, 1933; for the June 1931 AN (*Acción Nacional*, founded in April 1931, was the first denomination of AP) manifesto for Madrid, see José Monge Bernal, *Acción Popular (Estudios de biología política)* (Madrid: Imp. Sáez Hermanos, 1936), 165-166.

¹⁸ Quotation taken from Montero, op. cit., II, 298.

¹⁹ Leandro Álvarez Rey, *La derecha en la II República: Sevilla, 1931-1936* (Seville: Universidad, 1993), 336 (emphasis in the original)

²⁰ Robinson, op. cit., 236.

the interests of foreign Internationals.”²¹ The campaign was thus experienced as a struggle between two rival positions representing ideologies which seemed not to share even the minimum common denominator necessary to foster the idea of democratic co-existence among the Spanish people.

The radicalization of the *Cedista* discourse formed part of this context of relentless struggle between Socialists and the CEDA. During those weeks, the “verbal contest” between Gil Robles and Socialist party leader Francisco Largo Caballero played the leading role, with the sheer absence of moderation appearing neither to trouble one side nor the other. Largo Caballero thought the defense of *his* model of a Republic as the means towards Socialism to be compatible with constant warnings about what would take place if his party were not in power, or if the achievements of the past two years were placed in peril. In that sense, while it was not a constant motif of his rallies, he did not appear to be disturbed by allusions to the possibility of “civil war,” or by his own threat that “If the legal route does not serve us, if it hinders our advance, we will cast bourgeois democracy to one side and go for a revolutionary assault on power.” Although Gil Robles never reached such extremes, neither did he distinguish himself on account of his circumspection. In a rally which took place in Santiago de Compostela on February 4, 1933, he had already employed bellicose language to describe the situation which Catholics faced in the coming election: “everyone from this moment is on a war footing...the time has come for words to give way to actions.” He did however proceed to specify that “actions” did not mean the use of force, but rather “that the citizenry act as voters; and that the repeated failures of the government bear their natural fruits...” On November 2 Gil Robles stated in Valladolid that the CEDA condemned the use of violence, but that if the left was employing illegal methods, his party would turn against democracy and install its own system of government. A few days later he reiterated the same message: “If it is the law they want, the law it shall be; if it is violence they want, violence it shall be.” Both the verbal radicalization, and threatening tone typical of the vision of electoral competition as armed conflict, had already been highlighted in an event held in Madrid on October 15. It was on this occasion that the CEDA’s leader produced one of his most controversial statements: since we are aiming for the conquest of a new state, when “the moment arrives, the Parliament will submit itself, or we will make it disappear.”²²

This quotation has been used to support the argument that the CEDA only respected legal norms because they intended to employ them to destroy

²¹ The final quotations are taken from CEDA propaganda in Seville, Álvarez Rey, op. cit., 334-335.

²² *El Socialista*, November 14, 1933; for Gil Robles’s words on October 15, and November 2 and 5, 1933, Robinson, op. cit., 224-225; in Santiago, *El Ideal Gallego*, February 2, 1933; Emilio Grandío Seoane, *Los orígenes de la derecha gallega: la CEDA en Galicia (1931-1936)* (La Coruña: Edicions Do Castro, 1998), 146.

the system from within. Significantly, the additional comments which Gil Robles made in the same speech are not usually discussed, yet these words amounted to a clarification which was quite consistent with the power struggle which he had been engaging in with the monarchical right since late 1932. Firstly, he stated that violence was not the means to achieve power. Subsequently he went on to affirm that “exotic novelties” like fascism were also not the path to be followed, and let it be known that the new state would have to respect individual freedom and permit the achievement of a program of union and social justice. It is important to note that this more or less calculated ambiguity was the regular keynote of Gil Robles’s speeches. On the one hand he demonstrated an emphatic desire to overcome representative democracy with statements like the following: “We want a new politics which will put an end to this sterile parliamentarianism,” or “We are going to experiment, perhaps for the last time, with democracy,” words which hardly served to reinforce the CEDA’s moderate image. Yet on the other, he added – admittedly with little explanation – that his party was totally opposed to dictatorship on the grounds of its traditionalist convictions: “We do not want a dictatorship which stifles individual rights, but neither do we want an excess of individual freedom to put an end to collective rights. We do not want the perpetuation of personal power, but neither do we want a disintegrating parliamentarianism...It is in tradition that I find what is referred to as the limitation of power, justice, and corporate bodies. Let us return to our old traditions, which is to return to Spain...”²³

This ambiguity, coupled with a certain dose of verbal aggression, remained with him throughout the campaign until the final phase, when it then became expedient to emphasise his party’s differences with their coalition partners and thereby open up exit routes which would later justify collaboration with the Radical party. Along these lines, on November 18 although he returned to his insistence that his party was “like an army on the warpath, in the paroxysm of the fight,” he immediately added: “however, I want my final words, in these times of combat, to be words of peace, serenity and love. Words of peace and harmony for all Spaniards...We are on the warpath, but I do not desire that the moment of collision shall arrive, but that everything shall be resolved in the harmony of a united Spain.”²⁴

In their manifesto the Socialists had sought to tar the *Lerrouxistas*, *Cedistas*, and monarchists with the same brush: the candidacy “of August 10,” behind which lay “the same treacherous spirit which had animated the attempted coup of that same date.”²⁵ Yet the reality of the situation was not so straightforward. Despite his rhetorical radicalism, as we have already seen Gil

²³ *El Debate*, November 7, 14 and 18, 1933; Robinson, op. cit., 225.

²⁴ Gil Robles, op. cit., 270.

²⁵ *El Socialista*, November 11, 1933, in Manuel Contreras, *El PSOE en la II República, organización e ideología* (Madrid: CIS, 1981), 346.

Robles himself frequently restated his commitment to political struggle within the limits of the law. Furthermore, it was generally the case that the CEDA's most qualified representatives maintained their confidence in the fact that, as an editorial in *El Ideal Gallego* put it, "a final effort" was possible in order that Spain might be rescued "by peaceful and evolutionary means from her difficult and complicated current situation."²⁶ In Zamora, where the *Unión Antimarxista* campaign (which included the *Lerrouxistas*) engaged in a certain amount of verbal aggression towards Republican candidate Ángel Galarza, the conservative press nevertheless insisted that "it was not legitimate for any party to resort to personal aggression," and that "in order to vote against Galarza disorder was not necessary." In spite of the harshness of the campaign in Valencia, in a radio speech broadcast on the eve of the election, Luis Lucia – leader of the *Derecha Regional Valenciana* (DRV) and prominent CEDA candidate – restated the fact that "politics was a struggle of ideas, and not of people," a "battle of minds, not of muscle." For that reason, politics could not be based upon "abuse, but cordiality."²⁷

While the *Cedista* discourse shared with the monarchists of *Renovación Española* the idea of the election as the final chance to check the revolution, it is nevertheless possible to perceive a substantial difference: the former distinguished between the struggle against the policies of the previous two years and attacks on the Republican regime *per se*. The *Diario de Valencia* frequently repeated the assertion that they were not fighting against the regime itself, but against sectarian politics, and would not therefore depart from the path of legality in order to prosecute that struggle. Convinced that it was necessary to "bring (national) politics to the center," the journal pledged that they would not be guided by a spirit of revenge.²⁸

Electoral Violence and the Conduct of the CEDA

During the election campaign there were a number of violent incidents. The tension produced by the intense competition between Socialists, Republicans and conservatives was sometimes alleviated by the use of physical force, resulting in significant numbers of casualties – some of these fatal. In Valencia for example, the clashes between those who sympathized with regionalist republicanism and members of the regional right "marked in great measure the entire campaign." The decisive moment occurred in the early hours of the 18th, when a member of the DRV was murdered and a number of others

²⁶ *El Ideal Gallego*, November 1, 1933, in Grandío Seoane, op. cit., 182.

²⁷ M.A. Mateos Rodríguez, *Zamora en la II República. Comportamientos y actitudes de una sociedad tradicional: elecciones y partidos (1931-1936)* (Zamora: Instituto de Estudios Zamoranos, 1988), 469. Vicente Comes Iglesia, *En el filo de la navaja. Biografía política de Luis Lucia Lucia (1888-1943)* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2002), 248–249.

²⁸ Tusell, op. cit., 224.

injured while in the process of putting up election posters. Two days prior to this, two other activists of the same party had died at the hands of anarcho-syndicalist gunmen. On the day of the election itself, a number of ballot boxes were damaged, and this was accompanied by numerous incidents of abuse and coercion. Finally, during the voting in the second round which took place on December 3, one of the DRV leadership shot and wounded one of the Socialists who had tried to assault the *Casino Agrario* in Pego, Alicante.²⁹

A number of AP rallies culminated in confrontations between the organizers, particularly the young *Cedistas* charged with the security of their party's events, and those who attended with the intention of disrupting them – usually Socialists or members of other labor organizations. This was the case, for example, in Constantina (Seville) at the close of the campaign. Nevertheless, such problems were not by any means endemic. Our research thus far has demonstrated that there was no systematized and premeditated pattern of activity on the part of young *Cedistas* aimed at wrecking the meetings or obstructing the propaganda of the other parties. On the contrary, at the request of no less than the CEDA itself, Minister of the Interior Rico Avello was obliged to intervene in order to guarantee that Socialists would cease tearing down right-wing political posters, with the former even going as far as to order that those responsible for these actions be arrested. In turn, many Socialist events were wrecked by anarchists, but not by *Cedistas*.³⁰

A considerable proportion of the violent incidents which occurred during the campaign were related to arbitrary decisions taken by the local authorities in question, particularly when it came to cancelling rallies, hindering the distribution of their opponent's campaign material, or refusing to use the local police to protect candidates. At this time the majority of local councils were run by Socialists or Republicans, and not by the CEDA. Taking this dominance into account, such acts of political sabotage clearly cannot be attributed to *Cedistas* in general. Furthermore, this argument is also confirmed by telegrams sent to the Ministry of the Interior reporting the abuses perpetrated by some local authorities. While these documents include protests of various stripes, the largest number were directed against Socialist mayors, followed by Radicals and left-wing Republicans, all of whom devoted considerable effort to obstructing the activities both of conservatives and of their left-wing and republican rivals.³¹

²⁹ *DSC*, December 14, 1933, 36-41; Comes Iglesia, *op. cit.*, 249.

³⁰ For Constantina, see *ABC*, October 22, 1933; for the remaining evidence cited here, Villa García, *La modernización política*, *op. cit.*, 535, 562.

³¹ AHN, Gobernación, series A, leg. 31, various files; Villa García, *La modernización política*, *op. cit.*, 547 and following pages recounts significant numbers of complaints against socialist aldermen. One example of a conservative meeting disrupted by municipal order occurred in Quintanar de la Orden, Toledo, where the *Cedista* Dimas Madariaga was detained

As had already been the case in 1931, conservative activists – in particular CEDA’s youth and women members – were sometimes the object of physical attack, especially in areas where far-left groups were either well-organized or were able to count on the support of the local authority. There was no scarcity, wrote the *Cedista* deputy Monge Bernal, of “insults, abuses and threats, to which many of our women supporters fell victim.”³² Though exceptional, there were also cases of extreme violence in which individuals affiliated with the CEDA were involved. These instances were almost always to the detriment of the *Cedistas*, who in the first round of the campaign counted six deaths among their ranks. In addition to the three deaths of DRV members already mentioned, a clash which took place in Ponferrada (León) resulted in the death of a young *Cedista* and serious injuries to his socialist adversary; the *Cedista* Javier Martín Artajo was shot while returning from a rally; in Daimiel the right-winger José Ruiz de la Hermosa, who had interrupted a Socialist meeting, was murdered minutes later, although the aforementioned event continued “in total calm for the following two hours”; and a CEDA member died in Navalmorales (Toledo) after an encounter with a group of Socialists. A rally held by the Radical-Agrarian coalition in Zalamea de la Serena (Badajoz) ended in a pitched battle with the Socialists who had come to disrupt it. In some towns conservative candidates who had come from outside to campaign had to call off planned events at the last minute and flee in the face of threats. Likewise, a number of attacks on conservative premises were carried out by extremist groups of Socialists and Communists, and various bombs were set off in CEDA offices.³³

Moreover, violence also marred election day itself (November 19), and further punctuated the campaign for the second round of voting (November 20 to December 3). Agrarian and *Cedista* candidates were subject to diverse forms of coercion and illegal detention. In the municipality of Jódar (Jaén), a group of Communists incited by their own mayor and fellow party member killed a CEDA activist. In the Valencian town of Torrente, a dispute between anarcho-sydicalists and right-wingers over the smashing of a ballot box culminated in the murder of the CEDA’s scrutineer and injuries to two other participants. In Gandía the headquarters of the DRV were looted. An affiliate of *Acción Obrerista* who had served as a CEDA scrutineer was killed by Communist gunmen in Seville, where a separate confrontation between *Cedistas* and Communists ended with gunshot wounds to two of those

on the instructions of the civil governor, left-wing Republican Costales. *El Liberal*, November 15, 1933.

³² Monge Bernal, op. cit., 217, 994; for another example of coercion against *Cedistas*, see *El Liberal*, November 15, 1933.

³³ For attacks on conservative premises, see *El Liberal*, November 15, 16, 1933; for Daimiel, Fernando del Rey, *Paisanos en lucha. Exclusión política y violencia en la Segunda República española* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2008), 303; other references are taken from Villa García, *La modernización política*, op. cit., 558 and following pages.

involved. In Burjasot, Valencia, the tally was three injured as a consequence of encounters between members of the DRV and Republicans, while there were various fights reported between *Cedistas* and Socialists in the provinces of Toledo and Zamora. Finally, in Fuensalida (Oviedo), armed Agrarians shot at a group of Socialists who were waiting in line to vote, wounding fourteen people. Regarding the election day of the second round (December 3), there were also a number of incidents, resulting in further tallies of seriously wounded or dead – with *Cedistas* accounting for the largest proportion of these victims. On November 28 the president of the Socialist club in Parla (Madrid) shot an AP activist and his sister, causing the death of the latter three days subsequently; the following day two young *Cedistas* were fatally shot by an anarchist gunman.³⁴

In consequence, the CEDA suffered a further six deaths during the two election days and the campaign's second round which, when tallied with those occurring previously, yields a total of twelve for the entire election period. Furthermore, the data available thanks to an exhaustive analysis of the press and of telegrams sent by civil governors is quite revealing. If we concentrate only on those who fell victim to diverse acts of violence during the campaign up until November 19 – election day of the first round – we can make the following observations:³⁵

- Of a total of 27 dead and 58 seriously injured, 25 per cent were affiliated with the CEDA, which in turn accounted for a similar number of victims to the Socialists (the latter saw 7 dead and 11 injured)
- As regards the perpetrators, we know that more than half of these casualties (15 dead and 34 injured) were victims of left-wing aggressors (Socialists, anarchists and Communists). Those who sympathized with republican parties caused a mere 3 deaths and 6 injured. Most importantly, in view of this article's focus, only 1 death and 8 injured were authored by *Cedistas*.

All the foregoing data indicates that the regional case-studies of Andalucía and Castilla La Mancha undertaken by Macarro Vera and Rey Reguillo respectively do not appear to have been exceptional in their findings: the violence "that we are aware of," wrote the former, had as its basic characteristic the fact that it proceeded from "the ranks of the left." In fact in Andalucía there was simply no parallel between the violence which

³⁴ *ABC*, November 29, 30, December 1, 2, 1933.

³⁵ I am grateful to Roberto Villa García for allowing me to publish this data, which forms part of joint research undertaken under the remit of a broader project on electoral violence. The data in question can be found in AHN (Gobernación), leg. 31, files 5 to 8, and various national and regional newspapers dated October 1 to November 19, 1933.

conservative candidates were subjected to by Socialists and anarchists, and that which flowed in the opposite direction. Notwithstanding the death of a Communist in Seville after a quarrel with *Cedistas*, the other side disrupted more meetings and initiated broader violence.³⁶

After the Elections: A Limited and Ambiguous Commitment

The strident tone and verbal combativeness of the CEDA campaign were both set aside once the polling places were closed. The result, declared Gil Robles, must be “received with calm”; at that moment “words of peace” were what was “necessary.” As the *Cedista* press added, “given that the Parliament is the cornerstone of our political system, it must be accepted...and the practices which its operation presupposes must also be complied with.” The “art of politics” thus counselled “that the triumph be capitalized upon with great moderation and prudence.”³⁷

Gil Robles was about to lead the CEDA along a path which was coherent with what it had been maintaining publicly since late 1932, even though this was at odds both with some of the extremities which had marked the campaign, and with the stance of his monarchist allies. If one were only to take into account the foregoing, the fact that the left – now in opposition – feared that the CEDA would take advantage of its victory to construct the “New State” which Gil Robles had alluded to would not appear surprising. Yet did the *Cedistas* believe that the election results would allow them to put an end to the revolution by destroying the Republic and implementing corporatist prescriptions? It is clear that the ambiguity of the CEDA’s commitment to the republican system remained after December 1933. Nevertheless, the party did take a fundamental step: it was willing to collaborate with the government in order to correct the policies of the previous two years and, if the situation arose in which the Republic could be considered to be a habitable place for Catholics, then the Republic too might be accepted. This was exactly what prominent Catholic leader and leading spirit in the establishment of *Acción Popular* Ángel Herrera had been asserting since the spring of 1931. Shortly before the formation of the Lerroux government, a crucial editorial published in *El Debate* on December 15, 1933 presented the case in the same terms. Here it was taken as a given that insofar as “the rights of God and of Christian conscience were safeguarded,” Spanish Catholics would be able to “reconcile themselves to republican institutions.” To the latter, the editorial went as far as to state that “it would not be legitimate to establish incompatibilities of any sort between the rights and interests of the Church, and the republican form of

³⁶ Del Rey, op. cit., 324-325, 328-329. José Manuel Macarro Vera, *Socialismo, República y revolución en Andalucía (1931-1936)* (Seville: Universidad, 2000), 295.

³⁷ Gil Robles, op. cit., 105; *El Ideal Gallego*, November 23, 1933, in Grandío Seoane, op. cit., 191.

government.” As Gil Robles had asserted shortly after the first round of the election, his party believed a “politics of the centre” to be the most appropriate for Spain, and not only would they “comply in good faith with the Republic,” but they would also “endeavor within it to obtain the maximum satisfaction for the country.”³⁸

The fact that the monarchists were angered by such a staunch defence of the possibilist position on the part of the CEDA and its press in the aftermath of the election is significant. If the former were opposed to the right doing anything which would help to consolidate the system – and there was nothing worse, from their point of view, than supporting a republican government – the *Cedistas* considered exploiting their newfound strength in the Parliament to influence legislation and modify the policies of the previous two years to be entirely legitimate. If Gil Robles’s speech in the inaugural debate of the new government is examined, it is difficult to find the excesses which had characterized the election campaign. Yet the same ambiguity regarding exactly how and when the CEDA’s reconciliation with the Republic would take place, were such an opening to arise, was ever-present in the party’s discourse, and the fundamental issue remained the same: how to deal with the rules of the game which the Republicans and Socialists had passed in 1931. In his parliamentary speech of December 19, the CEDA leader expounded on a number of fundamental points relating to his party’s attitude towards democracy. He affirmed the fact that the CEDA had always been convinced that the Republic’s founders had not wanted to establish an inclusive regime, but that the party had always remained within the law in its struggle to “conquer public opinion.” He could not share, he warned the monarchist deputies, the significance which “some groups on the right” attribute to the election. “For me, honestly,...the Spanish people have voted against the policies of the constituent assembly,” but not against the regime itself. Should the time come when, as a result of the new *Cortes*, public opinion were to come to perceive these policies as inseparable from the system itself, that would be a different matter entirely: in that case a vote against the regime would be entirely possible, and “it will not be for us to oppose the overwhelming tide of Spanish public opinion.”³⁹

This was not the only warning contained within a speech replete with statements directed not towards the left, but to the monarchist faction led by Antonio Goicoechea. Although overlooked in a good part of the historiography, it is precisely this contrast between the latter and Gil Robles that provides the measure of the differences between the *Cedistas* and the monarchists, differences which had been effectively camouflaged by the tension of the election campaign. The leader of *Renovación* emphatically

³⁸ *El Sol*, November 22, 1933.

³⁹ *DSC*, no. 6, December 19, 1933, 76.

refused to support any policy aimed at “saving the Republic” as opposed to “saving Spain,” and with some justification pointed out that the CEDA’s stance would be untenable if the Constitution were not first to be amended. On the contrary, Gil Robles had gone back to calling for the regime to be re-grounded in the political center, and for peace and calm to be restored to the nation. What we ask of the government, he stated, is not that it carry out our program, but that it correct the narrowly sectarian politics of the previous two years, and thereby pursue conciliation among the Spanish people.⁴⁰

Gil Robles’s contribution to the inaugural debate is key to any understanding of the CEDA’s position during the first half of 1934. For that reason it is necessary to highlight the fact that in that very same speech he also made several ideological points which again underlined the ambiguity of his party’s stance on democracy. As a matter of fact he criticized the republican Constitution for being the product of an “ultra-democratic and ultra-parliamentarian” creed at odds with contemporary European trends, and claimed that this could only lead to a dictatorship of the left or of the right, neither of which was deemed a desirable outcome. Overall it would not be accurate to categorize Gil Robles as holding a similar position to that of the authoritarian right, since the nuances were, as always, of considerable importance. When the Fascist José Antonio Primo de Rivera, who had managed to get himself elected as a deputy in the previous election, interrupted Gil Robles to assert that a “comprehensive, authoritarian” dictatorship was the solution, the latter did not attempt to dodge the blow retorting that while it was true that more and more young people in Spain were choosing that path, he did not. He was convinced that “a regime based on a pantheistic concept of the deification of the state and the negation of individual personality, which are utterly against the religious principles in which my politics is rooted, could never form part of my program, and against this I shall raise my voice, even if it is friends or relations of mine who hold that flag high.” After “much applause in the center,” he added a declaration of some significance: his party “would never use the levers that might be put in their hands to go against the political system which had put them in their hands.” If they were to arrive to power, he concluded, the CEDA would seek constitutional reform and subsequently call “elections to a constituent assembly” to ratify those changes. He did not, however, succeed in avoiding a certain threatening tone in words that were aimed at president of the Republic Alcalá Zamora, even if the latter was not directly named: only if the path towards our forming a government is blocked will we address the people in order to tell them that the “evolutionary” route is not possible, that we have made a mistake.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *DSC*, no. 7, December 20, 1933. Gil Robles, 77, and Goicoechea, 113.

⁴¹ *DSC*, no. 6, December 19, 1933, 79.

In line with what Gil Robles had expounded, during the first half of 1934 the CEDA did not evolve towards explicitly authoritarian positions, but neither does it appear that his supporters were suddenly transformed into republicans. There is little available concrete evidence in one direction or the other. What we do know is that they passed a broad amnesty which counted among its beneficiaries those implicated in the coup attempt of August 1932, and anarchists who participated in the December 1933 uprising in which 125 people had died.⁴² We are also aware that the more the CEDA sustained a possibilist approach, the greater the anger displayed by the monarchist right: to the point that Calvo Sotelo began to fear that the *Cedista* support for republican governments would ultimately serve to consolidate the regime. In a February 1934 attack on the CEDA's commitment to parliamentarianism, the young Carlists of Navarre declared themselves to be "sick of legalities and of cronyism." Their elders in turn considered the CEDA to be "a liberal-Catholic party, as pernicious as it was absurd." In the face of "monarchist fury" and the harsh criticisms of the Carlists, the *Cedistas* responded that they were under no obligation to do either "republican work or antirepublican work," and that their party aspired, in the words of Federico Salmón, "to govern within the Republic with total loyalty, that is, without using any lever of power against the Constitution and the regime so long as the people, when specifically consulted on the matter, do not manifest their disagreement."⁴³

On the other hand, during these months the CEDA also took advantage of the favorable political situation to stimulate a significant degree of popular mobilization, encouraging the visible presence of Catholics in the streets and thereby symbolically recapturing part of the terrain lost in recent years. Unsurprisingly, their opponents were ill-prepared for this new situation, which in turn contributed to a strengthening on the part of the left of the sense that a recovery of Catholic power was taking place, and that the Republic was in peril. Although the CEDA did not need public demonstrations to exert influence over the government, in view of the radicalization of Socialist discourse and increasing trade union pressure, this Catholic mobilization and consequent occupation of public space were factors to be taken into account. It was in that contest for the support of the masses, in that not merely symbolic struggle over public space, that the radical and aggressive rhetoric of the *Cedistas* blossomed once again.⁴⁴

⁴² Álvarez Tardío and Villa García, op. cit., 237.

⁴³ Salmón, in Tusell, op. cit., 227; for other "fervent monarchist" criticisms, see *La Verdad*, February 6, 1934; L.M. Moreno Fernández, *Acción Popular murciana. La derecha confesional en Murcia durante la II República* (Murcia: Universidad, 1987), 140; the expression "monarchist fury" is taken from Robinson, op. cit., 246, and the young Carlists, Martín Blinkhorn, *Carlismo y contrarrevolución en España, 1931-1939* (Crítica: Barcelona, 1979), 190; for the other Carlist quotation, see A.M. Moral Roncal, *La cuestión religiosa en la Segunda República española. Iglesia y carlismo* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2009), 149.

⁴⁴ This was of particular importance at a local level, see Del Rey, op. cit., 367.

As was also the case for other political actors, a decisive moment in which to gauge the attitude of the right towards the Republic was the revolution of October 1934. Following the argument put forward by the historian Javier Tusell, the revolution provided a stimulus to “maximalism on the right, not only among monarchists, but also with the CEDA itself.” The emotional impact was so great that even *El Debate* maintained that there had never previously been “such a violent shock recorded in Spain.” From that moment onwards, therefore, even the most moderate elements of the CEDA accepted – if they had not done so hitherto – the idea that the defense of conservative principles formed part of a purely existential struggle between two models of society: “Spain on one side, the nation’s enemies on the other; order and the law in one camp, subversion and illegality in the other.”⁴⁵

Of course this radicalisation should not be overstated, and neither should the fact be lost from view that more than a thousand people lost their lives during those tumultuous days. The uprising of the Socialists and *Izquierda Republicana Catalana* inflamed the language and behavior of the right, but despite everything this was not in practice translated into a radical modification of the CEDA’s legalistic tactics: the party continued to maintain a considerable distance between itself and propositions such as those of ultra-rightist Ramiro de Maetzu, who declared that all possibility of liberal democracy in Spain was dead, and that what was required was a “military monarchy.”⁴⁶ In fact the CEDA’s spokesman Federico Salmón insisted in the *Cortes* that his party “was ready to serve the Republic,” and that they desired “that in the progressive march of republican institutions, all parties and all men might find the legal manner of realizing their aspirations, and that it would therefore be unnecessary at every level and in all respects to defend doctrinal principles through means of uprising or the use the force.”⁴⁷ Several weeks later, Gil Robles in turn restated his party’s support for the government, a position which would serve to ensure that “not a single citizen or political party, regardless of the faction to which they belong, will be permitted to depart from the path of legality and endanger the peace of Spain.” In response to the Socialist discourse brandished by Prieto to justify the revolution as a defensive measure in the face of fascist provocation, the CEDA leader responded that his party was not like the rest of the right, and that as had been demonstrated during the past three years, “not before, not now and not ever had they placed themselves or had to place themselves on any terrain of violence.” What was important, he went on to specify, was the attitude displayed by

⁴⁵ Tusell, op. cit., 240-241.

⁴⁶ Maetzu, in P.C. González Cuevas, “Política de lo sublime y teología de la violencia en la derecha española,” in *Violencia política en la España del siglo XX*, ed. Santos Juliá (Madrid: Taurus, 2000), 134. The condemnations of violence and the continuity of possibilism were clear in the *Cedista* regional press, see for example *El Eco de Santiago*, October 15, 1934, or *El Ideal Gallego*, October 13, 1934, Grandío Seoane, op. cit., 215.

⁴⁷ Tusell, op. cit., 243.

certain groups towards the regime, rather than their formal statements. The Socialists, he admonished Prieto, claimed to be unequivocal republicans, but when “the Republic ceases to serve them, they state that they position themselves against it, opting for the path of violence and attacking the very head of state. They continued to call themselves republicans, and they are enemies of the Republic and enemies of Spain.”⁴⁸

Gil Robles had reiterated on various occasions the fact that his party was opposed to all violence. Nevertheless, what the left perceived in the CEDA was not a commitment to the system, but a mere tactic to destroy it – which in turn justified a defensive response.⁴⁹ Both Manuel Azaña and Indalecio Prieto regarded the government of Radical Republican Ricardo Samper to be a risk to the Republic’s future. In view of the conflict engendered by the *ley de Cultivos* passed by the Catalan Parliament during the summer of 1934, the former warned the prime minister that “the responsibility for the immense misfortune which is approaching Spain will fall on his lordship and on all those who accompany him in this work.” In this light it is not surprising that both politicians and their respective parties – *Izquierda Republicana* and the Socialists – would perceive the CEDA to be a fascist threat. However, from the viewpoint of the republican center-right, it was another matter entirely. The problem, replied Samper (a veteran republican) to Azaña, was that the left labelled “the government presided over by Azaña republican”; in line with this reasoning, anything that the right did would be classified as anti-republican.⁵⁰

To a certain extent this was the case. Neither the behaviour of the Radical Republicans nor the *Cedistas*’ commitment to the system can be measured without reference to this issue, and without gauging the impact which the October revolution had on conservative and Catholic opinion, and even on centre-right republicans. The fundamental issue was a complex one: the founders of the system had conceived of the new democracy as belonging to them, and were more concerned with the radical reforms which they deemed to be necessary than with the classical constitutional checks and balances which would protect pluralism and freedom.⁵¹ This was a system which Lerroux’s republican center-right sought to preserve via certain modifications, and which the *Cedista* right only accepted insofar as it was a transitional arrangement until constitutional reforms might be implemented,

⁴⁸ José María Gil Robles, *Discursos parlamentarios* (Madrid: Taurus, 1971), 299, 303.

⁴⁹ See for example the Republican Félix Gordón Ordás, in *DSC*, 259, November 13, 1935, 10516.

⁵⁰ *DSC*, 105, June 25, 1934, 4009.

⁵¹ G. Ranzato, *El eclipse de la democracia. La guerra civil española y sus orígenes, 1931-1939*, (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2006), 185-201; Manuel Álvarez Tardío, *El camino a la democracia en España. 1931 y 1978* (Madrid: Gota a Gota, 2005), 307-380.

which would in turn bring about a new state more in keeping with traditional, corporatist, and Christian social principles.

The left viewed the CEDA as an augury of the advance of Fascism; in fact the Socialists appealed to the case of Austria and the rise of Dollfuss to justify the use of violence for defensive purposes.⁵² Nevertheless the CEDA itself paradoxically gave solid support to Lerroux's Republican government in its efforts to enforce compliance with the law in the face of the challenge posed in October 1934. Once the revolution had ended, Robles's party did not elect to capitalize on the situation by promoting an extended prorogation of Parliament, which would have resulted in presidential-style government more in line with the CEDA's desire for a strong executive and a new state. Gil Robles unequivocally maintained his traditional stance: as he declared to the monarchists on November 5, the CEDA was in disagreement "with many laws" and aspired to a thoroughgoing "reform of all that must be reformed." Yet they refused to "march through the shortcut"; there was only one possible route, that "of the paths which the Constitution itself has laid down..." In a bitter exchange the following day with Calvo Sotelo, who had been pressing the government for an authoritarian solution, Gil Robles met the challenge thrown down by the monarchist leader when he informed him that: "We have not relinquished our revisionist program...but our duty as citizens is that, as long as this law [the Constitution] is in force, we must respect that fact, *even while within legal channels we endeavor to secure its modification, when the right moment arrives, and in agreement with the parties and with the criteria which public opinion sets forth. This is the only possible tactic*, under penalty of turning ourselves, as has been said previously, into additional revolutionary elements who would be much more responsible because we would intend to do it from a position of power."⁵³

Against Fascism and against Liberalism

This dialectical struggle between the two standard-bearers of the conservative world served to highlight the fact that many *Cedistas* were hardly fascinated by Fascism, even if they did little to conceal their anti-liberalism: "It is in crisis," was Gil Robles's pronouncement on "that old liberal conception which grounded the entire political edifice and the entire social edifice in the individual. Ah! But I fear that long before being rehearsed with full effectiveness, that opposite principle which sets the individual aside and seeks to build everything upon the state will also fall into decadence (very good). I greatly fear the excesses of the individual; I fear far more the excesses of the

⁵² Sandra Souto, "De la paramilitarización al fracaso: las insurrecciones socialistas de 1934 en Viena y Madrid," *Pasado y Memoria. Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 2 (2003), 5-74.

⁵³ DSC, 115, November 5, 1934, 4505, and 116, November 6, 1934, 4560 (my italics).

state (very good...). It is true that a strong power is needed, an organized democracy; but it is no less true that through the simplistic condemnation of those principles, we are led to the most monstrous state pantheism, which causes all personality to disappear.”⁵⁴

On more than a few occasions it has been claimed that the Socialists had “reason to suspect” that the CEDA desired to take control of the government in order to bring down the Republic. Nevertheless, the fact that some Socialists believed that Spain lacked the necessary conditions which would favour the growth of Fascism has not been stressed to the same degree. The Socialist Luis Araquistain recognized in April 1934 that Spain did not possess the “ingredients” from which “Fascism could be obtained.” At that time he regarded the CEDA as a weak party destined to fracture sooner rather than later. Some months previously, in a tense meeting of the Socialist trade union UGT’s national committee held on December 13, 1933, the moderate Andrés Saborit affirmed the fact that nobody could “seriously” claim that there was an “immediate danger of Fascism” in Spain. What had happened, he added, was that we have been taken by surprise by “the thrust of the right, and this scares us and clouds our minds,” but it would be a mistake “to suppose from this that there is a preparation for Fascism underway in Spain.” What did exist in Spain, he concluded, was a “terrible electoral coalition arrayed against us, not against the Republic.”⁵⁵

The corporatist model approved by the CEDA’s founding conference was at odds with that provided by Italian fascism. It was ambiguous, but at the same time it did not make explicit reference to the use of violence as a means of constructing a new state. Of course it was also clearly antiliberal. CEDA’s corporatism was born of an explicit contempt towards party-based pluralism, with political parties themselves labelled as the “inescapable consequence of the same human imperfections,” a “regrettable necessity” stemming from the “rationalist principle.”⁵⁶ Notwithstanding these criticisms, this did not automatically imply the leap towards a dictatorship. The state ought to be “strong, without ever aspiring to be tyrannical,” declared Gil Robles in late 1934.⁵⁷ Since late 1931 the CEDA’s leader had insisted time and time again on the illegitimacy of violence as a means to achieve political victory: “nothing of violence,” “we must drown the bad with an abundance of good: in the face of the overwhelming trade unionism and the *Casa del Pueblo* [Socialist club],

⁵⁴ *DSC*, 116, November 6, 1934, 4561.

⁵⁵ For the “reason to suspect...,” see Edward E. Malefakis, *Reforma agraria y revolución campesina en la España del siglo XX* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1982), 381; for the quotations from Araquistain’s April 1934 article in *Foreign Affairs*, see *ibid.*, 381-383; for Saborit, see Amaro del Rosal, *1934: El movimiento revolucionario de Octubre* (Madrid: Akal, 1984), 41-42.

⁵⁶ Statements in *La Vanguardia*, November 20, 1934; Gil Robles, *Discursos parlamentarios*, op. cit. 383.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 383.

our own *Casa del Pueblo*. In the face of the left-wing newspaper, another better-quality right-wing newspaper. In the face of a left-wing organization, an even stronger right-wing one.”⁵⁸ What Gil Robles had been proposing since the approval of the Constitution was a mobilization on the part of the citizenry, and not a coup d’état, and he stood by this position at least until late 1935. The distinction between his stance and that taken by other sections of the right was considerable, particularly with reference to those who made up the *Falange*, since the latter clearly did defend the use of violence.⁵⁹

In *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*, the papal encyclical published in June 1931, Pius XI had denounced educational totalitarianism and the Fascist state’s promotion of “a false religiosity” incompatible with Catholicism.⁶⁰ This was in part the line which Gil Robles pursued in order to detach the Spanish Catholic right from Fascism. As Professor Montero has described, on returning from the visit to Germany which had included his attendance at the famous Nazi rally at Nuremberg, the CEDA leader had engaged in harsh criticisms of democracy and spoke with admiration of what he had seen. As a matter of fact, he published an article entitled “Anti-democracy” in which he affirmed that “Fascism had much that was useful.” Yet at the same time he also rejected both state pantheism and the Nazis’ systematic use of violence, and stated that Fascism was incompatible with Catholic doctrine – something that he would often subsequently reiterate. With this traditionalist, but clearly non-liberal, vision, Gil Robles sought to keep the CEDA away from Fascism both before and after the elections of 1933. This posture clearly resembled the traditionalist right which predominated in much of Europe during the interwar period, held together by their shared anticommunism and critiques of liberal parliamentarianism.⁶¹

On March 21 of that year, in a speech in Barcelona’s Saló Victoria Gil Robles had outlined the reasoning behind his rejection of Fascism, the same reasoning which he would later deploy in the *Cortes* as a rejoinder to Calvo Sotelo and José Antonio Primo de Rivera. In Barcelona a fairly disparate audience heard him explain that his party was “in radical disagreement with Fascism, as far as its program and the tactics which it inspired were concerned.” Fascism was unacceptable on the grounds of “the propositions of Christian public law”; it merged society and the state, and as far as the latter

⁵⁸ Rally in Cáceres, *ABC*, December 22, 1931.

⁵⁹ Eduardo González Calleja “Aproximación a las subculturas violentas de las derechas antirrepublicanas españolas (1931-1936),” *Pasado y Memoria. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 2 (2003), 51-61.

⁶⁰ Giuliana Di Febo, “El modelo beligerante del nacionalcatolicismo franquista. La influencia del carlismo,” in *Religión y política en la España contemporánea*, ed. Carolyn P. Boyd (Madrid: CEPyC, 2007), 65; Michael Burleigh, *Causas sagradas. Religión y política en Europa* (Madrid: Taurus, 2006), 209.

⁶¹ J. Borejsza, *La escalada del odio: Movimientos y sistemas autoritarios y fascistas en Europa, 1919-1945* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2002), 213.

was concerned, with one single political party it would destroy the personality of the individual. As Catholics, he concluded, we reject Fascist methods: “I think violence built into the system is reprehensible.”⁶²

Hence the corporatism advocated by the CEDA was rooted not in Fascism, but in a traditionalist vision of society – even while this traditionalism remained imprecise and evidently antidemocratic. “Why would we attempt ridiculous caricatures of foreign blueprints?” Gil Robles asked the audience of one of his rallies in Santander. Tradition and Spanish history were more than enough to provide a way out of the crisis of liberal parliamentarianism. Of course this would have to be a gradual process which could only come to fruition when society was willing and prepared.⁶³

Nevertheless, the CEDA’s corporatism was not clearly defined, without doubt deliberately so. In fact for some *Cedistas* it did not imply that all forms of inorganic representation would necessarily disappear: it would be a “serious mistake,” cautioned *El Debate* in late 1934, to assume that the corporate chamber alone would be sufficient. In the latter case, it continued, there would be nobody to represent “general ideas: authority, hierarchy, freedom, interests not attached to any entity or corporate body.” Even after the upheaval of revolutionary October, while Calvo Sotelo declared in the *Cortes* that “the possibility of parliamentary dialog in Spain has disappeared,” Gil Robles argued in various interviews and rallies that he had not ceased to be “a decided proponent of deliberative assemblies,” even though their errors had to be corrected – essentially those which led to the abuse of parliament and misrule. “I am aware,” he continued, “of their multitude of defects, but I do not fall victim to the insanity of aspiring to destroy Parliament. It is very easy to undermine the foundations of institutions, but it is extremely difficult subsequently to fulfill with effectiveness the role which they carry out.”⁶⁴

In common with many other interwar conservatives, the CEDA’s members held social hierarchies and the organic arrangement of society to be, in the words of Federico Salmón, “natural” and therefore “permanent.” Viewed through this lens, and starting from the presumption that tradition must always be prioritized over any ephemeral product of legislation, they did not feel any attachment to a parliamentarianism to which they attributed the breakdown of social order and the ideological fracturing that threatened the integrity of the nation. From there sprung a radical scepticism regarding the future of the liberal concept of representation, as is demonstrated by the words of Salmón himself: “If the Parliament and democracy serve Spain, very well;

⁶² Gil Robles, *Discursos parlamentarios*, op. cit. 216-217.

⁶³ Rally in San Sebastián, October 20, 1935; *ibid.*, 479-480.

⁶⁴ *El Debate*, December 29, 1934, in Tusell, op. cit., 203; statements in Robinson, op. cit., 345 y 357; the differences with Calvo Sotelo are evident in an interview published in *ABC*, November 11, 1934.

if not, it would be necessary to eliminate or abolish Parliament in order to serve Spain, her economy, and the social principles to which we are obliged.”⁶⁵ He would have preferred a presidential system in which executive power did not depend entirely on the legislature, and in which the latter would be able to take decisions under the due advice of a second chamber or “Economic Council.” From their antiliberal viewpoint, the *Cedistas* did not believe in channelling conflict, but rather in overcoming it through corporatist negotiating bodies which would provide national rather than partisan solutions. Yet the crucial fact remains that they did not advocate a dictatorship as the means to achieve that end. What they did state very clearly, and José Calvo Sotelo and José Antonio Primo de Rivera were forced on a number of occasions to listen with evident displeasure to Gil Robles himself say so, was that the CEDA had faith in its ability to change the Constitution through the established mechanisms, and therefore to secure popular support via the ballot box.

⁶⁵ *La Verdad*, March 25, 1933; Moreno Fernández, *op. cit.*, 143-144.