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Review of: Julius Ruiz, *El Terror Rojo: Madrid, 1936*

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Julius Ruiz, *El Terror Rojo: Madrid, 1936* trad. Jesús de la Torre. Barcelona: Espasa, 2012. 480 pp.

This excellent volume carefully examines Madrid's "Red Terror," i.e., the deaths of thousands of rightists in a city controlled by Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War. It provides new information and a convincing interpretation of many of the terror's most important issues—the Soviet responsibility, Paracuellos massacres, role of the heterogeneous forces of the left and of the so-called "uncontrollables."

Unlike some recent historians, Ruiz believes that the pre-civil war fears of a communist revolution were not merely a product of rightist propaganda but rather a consequence of the revolutionary declarations of leftist leaders—including the Socialist, Largo Caballero—which alarmed the middle and upper classes. Furthermore, frequent disorders—church burnings, strikes, land occupations, and petty theft—frightened property owners. Notable is Ruiz' treatment of the assassination of the extreme-right politician, José Calvo Sotelo, an event that triggered the civil war according to many historians. On 13 July 1936, members of the state police abducted Calvo Sotelo from his apartment in the middle of the night and shot him gangster-style in the back seat of their vehicle. This cold-blooded killing helped to convince a wavering Francisco Franco to join the rebellion against the Republic. Ruiz demonstrates the unwillingness of the Republican government to pursue the assassins. Some of them had served as body guards for the "moderate" Socialist, Indalecio Prieto. Another prominent Socialist leader, Margarita Nelken, hid the assassins, one of whom later became a powerful Republican security chief during the Civil War.

The volume innovatively demonstrates the cultural influence of Hollywood gangster films on the assassins. Neither *The Sailors of Kronstadt* nor *The Battleship Potemkin* could match the popularity of the *Scarface* or *Little Caesar*. The author also emphasizes the importance of the radio, and demonstrates—in contrast to much of the historiography—that the relationship between Nationalist and Republican atrocities was not direct, but rather indirect. In other words, contrary to recent works in English, the Republican terror had its own autonomous dynamic which was not merely a reaction to the enemies' atrocities. If all currents of the revolutionary left participated, only the Communists systematically applied torture to their prisoners. The extent of

prietista and the anarchist participation in the terror surprised me, but Ruiz explains “el hecho de que desenmascarar a ‘fascistas’ en 1936 se consideraba un deber hacia el partido, el sindicato, la revolución y la República” (p. 149). Doormen (*porteros*) were instrumental in denouncing “fascistas,” and sometimes provided several dozen names per day to revolutionary authorities. Newspapers—with knowledge that denunciations could lead to execution—fully cooperated in the hunt for internal enemies. The latter might lose not only their property but also their lives. As in the Nationalist camp, the expropriated possessions—whose amounts were quite substantial—were in theory destined for the war effort but in some cases found their way into the pockets or the homes of the assassins. Revolutionary committees recycled the confiscated vehicles of “fascists,” including the Rolls Royce of a former prime minister which eventually chauffeured a brigade of UGT (Socialist) investigators. In many cases, the common cause of “anti-fascist” unity rendered the Republican government complicit with the assassins. Ruiz emphasizes that it was not *incontrolados* who performed the executions but rather members of the parties which belonged to the ruling coalition, whose ministers generally refused to block the “justice of the *pueblo*.”

The author is instructive concerning the probable involvement in the terror of the recently deceased Santiago Carrillo. Ruiz points out that no historian has convincingly shown that the Soviets were behind the Paracuellos massacres, which were “made in Spain” by young Communists (and anarchists) who feared the backstabbing maneuvers of the fascist Fifth Column as Franco’s forces approached the capital in November 1936. This siege mentality provoked “collective delusion”: “El delirio colectivo es una característica propia de las guerras y las revoluciones” (p. 26). The Paracuellos assassins acted with the knowledge of many members of the coalition government. The author links the Madrid terror to its historical precedents during the French and Russian Revolutions, including the Stalinist purges.

Ruiz decisively refutes the legend of gun-toting priests who, according to anti-clericals, fought the Republic militarily. Not only anarchists but also Communists and Socialists participated in the murders of many of 435 clergymen in Madrid, even if the revolutionary tribunals attempted to distinguish between innocuous religious faith and pernicious clericalism. In contrast to most periodizations, which posit that anarchism faded after the Barcelona Mayday(s) revolt of 1937, Ruiz argues persuasively that anarchist participation in the terror lasted until the end of the conflict in 1939. The author demonstrates the effects of geography and urban space on the execution of terror. For example, 95 of 196 municipalities in Madrid province lacked a telephone or telegraph connection to

the capital, permitting a more autonomous and usually less bloody repression in many villages.

This is probably the best study of terror in a major city during the Spanish conflict. The epilogue, a comparative essay on twentieth-century fifth columns and their relationship with genocide, is both original and stimulating.

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