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Review of: Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey Reguillo, *The Spanish Second Republic Revisited: From Democratic Hopes to Civil War (1931-1936)*

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Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Fernando del Rey Reguillo, *The Spanish Second Republic Revisited: From Democratic Hopes to Civil War (1931-1936)*. Brighton (UK) and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2012. 280 pp.

The present volume is a welcome addition to Nigel Townson's Sussex Studies in Spanish History which continues to offer to English-language readers significant studies of twentieth-century Spain. Like all good histories, this collection of fourteen essays by mostly Spanish scholars debunks myths, i.e. "an idyllic vision of the Republic and a Manichean version of its collapse" (p. 4).

Given its goal of "de-sacralization," it is fitting that Stanley Payne provides "A Critical Overview" of the Republic. His essay is remarkable for its ability to place the Second Republic into the context of interwar European politics and to compare it—rather unfavorably—to the more democratic Weimar Republic which "maintained equal constitutional rights for all sectors of politics and society" (p. 11). Payne makes the stimulating case that the final phase of the Spanish Republic should be compared not to Weimar of 1933 but rather of 1923 "amid ... political crisis, hyperinflation, social collapse, political extremism, and, finally, insurrections from left and right" (p. 15).

Luis Arranz Notario gives a fruitful comparison between the French Third Republic and its less conservative Spanish counterpart, which lacked a commitment to liberal democracy. Even the Francophile Manuel Azaña did not understand the compromises upon which French parliamentary democracy had developed.

José Manuel Macarro Vera analyzes the impact of unwise Socialist legislation on agricultural labor which polarized many villages in southern Spain as early as 1931. These laws had the counter-productive effect of alienating small and medium property owners from the Republic. Generally, Socialists failed to propose a moderate program that could attract centrist support.

Álvarez ably explores the history and historiography of the first mass conservative party, the CEDA. He emphasizes that not only many Catholics' hostility to the new democracy but also the Republic's implementation of "illiberal laicism" (p. 67) doomed it.

Gabriele Ranzato examines critically the Republican left and Azaña's lack of commitment to liberal democracy, which generally reflected that of the left (and the right). Townson re-evaluates the often neglected importance of the political center, "which sought to nationalize the Republic" (p. 98). He convincingly shows the reformist nature of the so-called *bienio negro* and the genuine attempt of Lerroux to be "the Thiers of Spanish republicanism" (p. 111).

Roberto Villa García capably explains the Republic's complicated and changing electoral system and its democratic breakdown after the victory of the Popular Front in February 1936. José Antonio Parejo Fernández has uncovered important documents on the Seville Falange which, he claims, show that it attracted followers from all social classes. However, more local context is needed before his conclusion that the Falange was a truly mass-based organization, like the Nazi party, can be accepted. Tim Rees re-examines the twists and turns of the PCE in a broad context of international and national politics, which maneuvered it into a semi-revolutionary position by 1936.

Rey innovatively explores the links between local and national politics in rural Spain. The continuation of "Catholic" culture led to "intolerance" and "a rejection of pluralism" by both right and left. He also demonstrates the left's initiation of the "spiral of violence," and the important role of small farmers in the mobilization of the right. His judicious conclusion persuasively balances leftist and rightist responsibilities for the civil war.

Julius Ruiz credibly challenges the widely-accepted popular and historiographical interpretation that the Nationalists planned to "exterminate" their opponents. He also demonstrates the shortcomings of explanations which pose that Francoist repression was "genocidal" whereas Republican was "spontaneous."

Gerald Blaney explores the Civil Guard's reactions when a "disorderly" or "revolutionary" Republic attempted to assert civilian control over it. Javier Zamora Bonilla argues that during the Republic "literature, art, philosophy and the sciences" reached "its highest level" but focuses on the relationship between intellectuals and politics. Pedro Carlos González Cuevas admirably summarizes historiographical debates on fascism and, despite appearances, regards Spanish traditionalism as more consequential than its fascist rival.

In my view, the major limitation of this very useful volume is its nearly exclusively political approach. There is no contribution on economic history, and only Macarro's and Rey's essays partially correct the lack of social history.

These omissions result in a certain de-contextualization: Given the economic and social backwardness of the Peninsula, it is unpersuasive to argue that Spanish politics in the interwar period were “no more than a replication of what was happening in the rest of Europe” (p. 5). The sense of Spanish *retraso* produced a desire to break with the past and overloaded the Republican progressive agenda with tasks—the relationship between church and state, military and civilian government, region and nation, and land reform—that the more advanced democracies of Britain and France had accomplished over many decades. The inclusion of more social/economic context might lead to a greater understanding of both the left’s revolutionary desires and the right’s fear of the same. Nevertheless, this coherent collection accomplishes its main goal of offering to scholars the most innovative scholarship on the Second Republic. All students of Spanish history will profit greatly from consulting it.

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