

The causes of the spanish civil war history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Spanish civil war is frequently remembered as a crucial and important moment in the history of Spanish people. To be possible to understand how thousands of persons were killed during this war, it must be ask why the Spanish civil war broke out in first place. In fact, there are five main reasons or causes (fig. 1) which almost simultaneously led to the civil war in Spain in 1936. Before the Spanish civil war Spain was ruled by the king but due the great depression that drove the country into an economic collapse and massive unemployment in Spain and as a result the king was forced to abdicate on 14 April 1931 and Spain becomes a republic.

The new republic emerges and immediately faced a number of major problems due the current circumstances:

Two important regions in Spain wanted independence Catalonia and the Basque region. Had their requests been successful, it would have lead to the breakup of Spain.

The Roman Catholic Church was hostile to the republic and the republic was hostile to the highly influential Roman Catholic Church.

The government believed that the army had too much say in politics and determined to reduce its influence.

Spain was primarily an agricultural nation and the 1930's depression had hit prices for crops. Prime exports such as olive oil and wine fell in value and previously used agricultural land fell into disuse.

The little industry that Spain had was also hit by the Depression. Iron and steel were especially hit as no one had the money to pay for the products. Iron production fell by 33% and steel by 50%.

Unemployment in both agriculture and industry rose and those in work had to put up with a cut in wages as the economy struggled to survive the Depression.

The Republic faced losing the support of those whose support it desperately needed the working class.

(http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/causes_spanish_civil_war.htm)

There are several versions or way to tell about the Spanish civil war however this essay will focus only in the causes of the Spanish civil war and how theses causes had led to the Spanish civil war.

Figure1: The main five causes of the Spanish civil war (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/2530517/Causes-of-the-Spanish-Civil-War-Conclusion>)

The main causes for the beginning of the Spanish Civil War and why these causes had lead Spain into the Spanish civil war

The Political Situation in Spain (1931 to 1936).

Disparate most of the other countries of Western Europe at that time, the Spain have never completed its revolution. Significant economic and social sectors of the country remained under the control of the feudal classes. In other hand the weak and vacillating bourgeoisie was unsuccessful in take

<https://assignbuster.com/the-causes-of-the-spanish-civil-war-history-essay/>

effective measures to insure social and economical progress while the economic and political privileges of the dominant classes were left intact.

As a result of this the progress and development of some sectors were suppressed during the 19th century until the situation of 1931. On April 13 of 1931 unsolvable contradictions between the financial, landowning and the popular forces reached the point of rupture and the king was forced to abdicate giving place to the Second Republic.

Throughout the year 1932 the working class was divided into social democracy and anarchist tendencies. The communist Party was not sufficiently strong to assert its leadership of the labour movement.

(<http://www.mltranslations.org/Spain/civilwar.htm>)

In 1933, in response to the actual situation, during two years, the government unleashed a severe campaign of repression and terror known as the “ Bienio Negro”. Furthermore, in October 1934 the formation of the Popular Front was begun with an extensive popular uprising against the government, especially in Asturias, Madrid and Barcelona (see fig. 2). The formation of the Popular Front had strong Communist support and participation.

On 15th January 1936, Manuel Azaña helped to establish a coalition of parties on the political left to fight the national elections taking place on following month. This included the Socialist Party (PSOE), Communist Party (PCE) and the Republican Union Party. The Popular Front, as the coalition became known, advocated the restoration of Catalan autonomy, amnesty for political prisoners, agrarian reform, an end to political blacklists and the

<https://assignbuster.com/the-causes-of-the-spanish-civil-war-history-essay/>

payment of damages for property owners who suffered during the revolt of 1934. The Anarchists refused to support the coalition and instead urged people not to vote. (<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/SPElections.htm>)

In the elections of 1936, the forces of reaction suffered a devastating defeat mainly because its management was weak and vacillating. However, its fatal mistake was to ignore the repeated warnings of the Communist Party in honour the election agreement, the reaction to defeat was not taken quietly. Therefore when Franco attacked on July 18 of 1936, the country was completely unprepared for the attack and the civil war begun.

Regional situation (1936 -1939)

The regional situation begun much before 1936 however the situation stars to intensify violently in 1921 when an army was sent to Spanish Morocco to bring down a rebellion, critics said that was a massacre and that just emphasise how incompetent Spain's government was. In the following years, Spain people experienced a new regime when King Alfonso agreed that General Primo de Rivera should take control of Spain. He ruled as a military dictator until 1930. Rivera's approach to leadership was fully supported by Alfonso.

However, Rivera did not display the classic features of a dictator. He introduced public works schemes building roads and irrigating the land. Industrial production increased by three times from 1923 to 1930. Rivera also ended the rebellion in Morocco in 1925. (http://www.lacolumna.org.uk/article_asturian%20uprising.htm)

<https://assignbuster.com/the-causes-of-the-spanish-civil-war-history-essay/>

Just after the morocco incident, in 1934 the northern province of Asturias arose (Popular Front), not against progress, but for it and against the newly elected right wing government. The Asturias revolt was of enormous significance to the Spanish people.

In the first place, it showed the capitalists and land holders that the people were not going to wait further but were going to divide the land and control their jobs.

In the second place the Asturias revolt taught the people that to win they would have to expel the government and perform their own laws and traditions.

In the third place combating the government made the workers and toilers understand the value of unity in action and the meaning of revolution also gave them great experiences in the art of civil war.

The defeat of the workers forced the revolutionary identities to take to parliamentary activity in the next election. Anyway, Asturias was at the time a region with great potential for progress. In fact, Asturias was among the most industrialised areas of Spain in the 1930's just like Catalonia and Basque (see fig. 2) which wanted their independence because of the diversity of employment in Asturias, the traditional competitive unions (CNT - National Confederation of Labour and the UGT - General Union of Employers), represented members in the industries, agriculture and service sectors. They were prepared when the crisis came. Hence, the present government could not allow the country to split out by giving them the independence, these provinces were actually essential for the country

progress and development as a whole taking into consideration its industrialization and geographic location, see map below . http://www.lacolumna.org.uk/article_asturian%20uprising.htm

In summary such regions were more advanced organizationally and industrially comparing with the rest of the country therefore they wanted the independence not just because of its socio-economic advantage but also to keep their traditions such as benefits (reform), language and habits. Later, the traditional language was prohibited in those acts involving the public administration or the mass media, being only tolerated at some folkloric or clerical activities but in other hand the most important reason was that the people in these regions wanted make themselves free of the oppression and incompetency of the present government and this in fact contributed considerably for the Spanish civil war broke out in 1936.

Figure 2: The Spanish map showing the locations of Asturias, Catalonia, and Basque just before the war in 1936 (Frances Lannon, Page 10)

Socio-economic situation

Not hindering the fact that Spain were already in the middle of political and regional crisis when the World Wide Recession reached Spain the country was upside down, World Wide Recession had led to a dramatic cut in the demand for coal and to reduce costs the mine owners have reduced the wages and employees. Simultaneously, the National Federation of Farm Workers was cut in the agrarian reform and as result became involved in a bloody strike in June 1934. The Civil Guard had been called in to deal with strikes in industrial areas in May and September of the same year. On 1st <https://assignbuster.com/the-causes-of-the-spanish-civil-war-history-essay/>

September an attack on a Socialist Women's meeting by the Civil Guard saw 6 people killed. All this was boiling away and by October the region was ready for revolt. The election of a right wing government and their hostility in relation to reforms was the final straw. (http://www.lacolumna.org.uk/article_asturian%20uprising.htm)

The liberal-left alliance which has ruled the first Republican government collapsed. This let in a right wing coalition which included ministers from the extreme CEDA (Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas) party. On the 3rd October, CEDA's assumption of the Agriculture, Labour and Justice Ministries seemed to point in Fascism by legal means, as elections had done in Germany and Austria. Across Spain attempts at a General Strike faltered and failed. http://www.lacolumna.org.uk/article_asturian%20uprising.htm

The historic privileges of the Roman Catholic Church were reduced and Priests are now paid by the Roman Catholic Church's chest. The government and the Roman Catholic Church were made two separate entities which should be like that since the beginning. Religious education in schools was stopped.

Many army officers were made to retire early, the wages of those who worked in industry were increased but they were to be paid by the owners of those industries not by the government.

Industries had to deal with the lack of energy resources and the weakness of the domestic Spanish market. They were helped out by protectionist policies, which reduced the competition from foreign products. As in so much of Europe, the popular classes were moulded into an industrial proletariat, <https://assignbuster.com/the-causes-of-the-spanish-civil-war-history-essay/>

living and working in inhuman conditions. ([http://www. mltranslations. org/Spain/civilwar. htm](http://www.mltranslations.org/Spain/civilwar.htm))

Due to all this circumstances the socio-economic situation could be highlighted as one of the main factors that contribute for beginning of the Spanish civil war, the lack of jobs, the poverty, the political regime and the government's abuse of power let the people more susceptible to create a revolt.

Religious situation

Acción Nacional traced its ideological lineage to the social Catholic movements initiated in the late nineteenth century by Pope Leo XIII. Originally conceptualized in the Rerum Novarum of 1891, social Catholicism presented itself as an alternative to Socialism, arguing for the peaceful coexistence of capital and labour. It argued in favour of social reforms but rejected class struggle and collectivization in favour of social justice and the extension of property ownership, explaining that cooperation more effectively sustained workers' rights. The Catholic political intervention make the social Catholicism became the basis for Catholic movements throughout Europe, most notably in France, Germany, Belgium, and Italy, (Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum, 1891).

Azaña believed that the Catholic Church was responsible for Spain's backwardness. He defended the elimination of special privileges for the Church on the grounds that Spain had ceased to be Catholic. Azaña was criticized by the Catholic Church for not doing more to stop the burning of

religious buildings in May 1931. He controversially remarked that burning of " all the convents in Spain was not worth the life of a single Republican".

The establishment of the Second Republic 1931 - several reforms suggested the loss of wealth and privilege for the wealthy, the church and the army.

Example: Agrarian Law 1932 allowed the distribution of all unworked estates over 56 acres to the peasantry; The church and the State was separated, the Jesuit order was expelled (and it's assets expropriated), divorce was legalized etc....; In the Army 40% of the officer corps was retired, republican officers were appointed and soldiers were now liable to civil law (not as before - only military law!). The progressive alliance of Republicans and Socialists were in power 1931 until 1933 when they were replaced by a more conservative government. CEDA (Confederación Espanola de Derechas Autonomas). CEDA had been established as a reaction to the Republican policies - this was the united right. The governments between 1933 and February 1936 tried to slow down and erode the advances that been made the previous years

Military situation

The victory of fascism in Spain has for the present time blocked the march to socialism. In making this critique, however, we do not mean to demean its great accomplishments. For after all is said and done, the Communist Party of Spain was the " soul of the war, the most heroic and self-sacrificing of all the political parties involved." Without its leadership and support the people of Spain would have been crushed in a few weeks and would not have been able to inflict such heavy losses on the fascists.

Mao Tsetung has shown that the fact that objective conditions are right does not automatically insure victory. What is needed in addition is the conscious activity of man - that is, how the war is directed and carried out. Our national war against fascism was by nature a just war. The Popular Front enjoyed the overwhelming support of the popular masses. Although the international situation was "difficult," never has there been such a display of solidarity with any cause. And yet the war was not won. Hence, the logical conclusion is that the conscious activity of the Party was misdirected; that it did not know the proper way to carry on the war.

The government tried to attack those it deemed as having too many privileges in society. But by doing this it angered all those sectors in society that had the potential to fight back - the military, industrialists, land owners and the Roman Catholic Church. These four (potentially very powerful bodies) were unwilling to support the republican government in Madrid. They were also aware that there were countries in Europe that would be willing to give support to their plight as many nations in Europe were scared of communism and Stalin's Russia. Fascist Italy under Mussolini would be an obvious ally as would Germany once Hitler had got power in January 1933.

In January 1932, a number of army officers tried to overthrow the government lead by Manuel Azana, the prime minister. The attempt was unsuccessful as the army, for now, was loyal to the government - after all, it had won the elections fairly and, therefore, had legitimacy. However, a new political party was formed called the Ceda. This was a right wing party dedicated to protecting the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and landlords.

The government of Azana, having lost support from the right, also lost support from the left. Two powerful left wing political parties, the anarchists and syndicalists (powerful trade union groups), felt that Azana's government was too middle of the road. Both wanted a more communistic state and the overthrow of capitalism. Above all, Azana was despised for forming a political union with the middle ground in Spain's political life. He was deemed to have betrayed the working class. The extreme left organised strikes and riots in an effort to destabilise the government of Azana.

Matters came to a head when in January 1933, 25 people were killed by government troops who were attempting to catch some anarchists near Cadiz. This lost the government a great deal of support among the working class and the socialists withdrew their support from the government. Azana resigned as prime minister and elections were called for November 1933.

In this election, the right wing won a majority of support and the largest party in the parliament (known as the Cortes), was the Ceda lead by Gil Robles.

The new right wing government immediately over-turned all of the changes brought in by the Azana government. This angered many but especially the Catalans who had their privileges withdrawn. This was a serious error of judgement as the Catalans and Basques had supported the government in the elections. The way ahead for Robles became clear to many - an attack on the left wing parties of Spain.

It forced the many parties of the left to come together to form the Popular Front. They organised strikes, riots and took part in acts of violence such as

<https://assignbuster.com/the-causes-of-the-spanish-civil-war-history-essay/>

derailing main line trains. In 1934 there was a general strike. Coal miners in the Asturias went on strike but were ruthlessly put down by the army lead by General Franco. Spain appeared to be heading for all out chaos. In a last minute attempt to avoid serious trouble, a general election was called for February 1936. In this election, the Popular Front won and Azana, once again became prime minister.

However, the government of the Popular Front was a farce after the socialists withdrew their support from it; more and more public disturbances occurred and the government had clearly lost control of Spain. In July 1936, a leading right wing politician, Sotelo, was murdered and the right wing politicians and their supporters believed that they were now in serious danger. They wanted to put their faith in a military dictatorship.

The military had, in fact, already made preparations for a takeover of Spain. General Franco assumed control of the military. He took control of Spanish Morocco after overthrowing the civilian government there. His next target was to invade mainland Spain, establish a military government there and rid the country of all those involved in left wing politics. The left would have to fight for survival. The civil war started in July 1936. http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/causes_spanish_civil_war.htm

The emergence and ideological characteristics of Basque and Catalan nationalism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Spain are a dramatic expression of conflict between modernity and tradition in the ethnically heterogeneous Spanish state. Confirming Nair's theory of peripheral nationalism, uneven development in Spain during the nineteenth

<https://assignbuster.com/the-causes-of-the-spanish-civil-war-history-essay/>

century overlapped with spatially delimited ethnic communities, Catalans and Basques, thus enhancing their ethnic identity and facilitating the expression of class conflict in nationalist terms. However, the social bases and the ideologies of peripheral nationalism in each region eventually came to reflect the different patterns of development that they experienced and the relative economic power of their capitalist élites. These structural factors shaped the Basque and Catalan nationalist movements through their influence on class conflict and class alliances within the Basque Country and Catalonia, as well as conflict and alliances between these classes and the Spanish state.

Of course, differences between Basque and Catalan nationalism cannot be explained in purely structural terms. The developmental factors I have outlined in this article helped to reproduce longer-term cultural and economic processes, which had progressively defined the cultural identity of the upper classes in Catalonia and the Basque Country. Describing and explaining this process, however, exceeds the objectives set for this article.

This comparison of Basque and Catalan nationalism shows that “overdevelopment” does not necessarily lead to bourgeois or other pro industrialization nationalistic ideologies. In particular the Basque case illustrates that, as long as the leading classes of “overdeveloped” regions are able to influence state political and economic decisions, they will refrain from the formulation of nationalist programs. Moreover, the Basque case shows that in the analysis of peripheral nationalism, scholars should focus simultaneously on the relationships established between the different social

classes in the peripheral community and the central state and on those established between classes within the peripheral community.

In 1936, the main part of the Christian democrat PNV sided with the Second Spanish Republic in the Spanish Civil War. The promise of autonomy was valued over the ideological differences, especially on the religious matter, and PNV decided to support the republican legal government, including member of the Popular Front. Autonomy was granted in October 1936. A republican autonomous Basque government was created, with José Antonio Agirre (PNV) as Lehendakari (president) and ministers from the PNV and other republican parties (mainly leftist Spanish parties).

conclusion

The Spanish Civil War contributed to bringing about the Second World War - most historians argue that the Spanish Civil War was the prelude to the Second World War. Though A. J. P. Taylor, a famous revisionist, has a different opinion (in his classic book - The Origins of the Second World War) - he argues that the Spanish Civil War was " without significant effect in causing the Second World War". He also criticizes the Anglo-French appeasement policy " British and French policy, or lack of it, not the policy of Hitler and Mussolini, decided the outcome of the Spanish civil war. The republic had greater resources, greater popular backing. It could win if it received the correct treatment to which it was entitled by international law: foreign arms for the legitimate government, none for the rebels. It could even win if both sides received foreign aid, or if both were denied it".