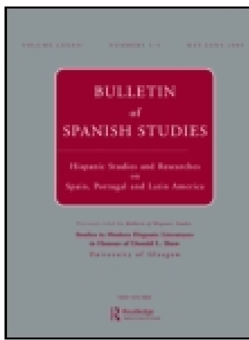

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Casado's Ghosts: Demythologizing the End of the Spanish Republic

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> Negrín was defeated from within the Republic, not because there existed any other strategy to his, but because the very possibility of strategy-making was at an end.[1]

> There's no choice but to hold on until all this goes down the drain. Or until we start hammering one another, which is how I have always believed that this will end.[2]

It is more than sixty years since a rebellion in Madrid against Prime Minister Juan Negrín triggered the implosion of the internationally isolated and internally exhausted Spanish Republic. Three weeks after its detonation on 3 March 1939, the victorious anti-Negrín rebels delivered the Republic's unconditional military surrender to Franco. The rebellion's titular head was a high-ranking Republican military commander, Colonel Segismundo Casado, whose links to the British intelligence services remain to this day a live question.[3] Casado's deepest personal motives were inextricably bound up with his self-perception as a career army officer. But the atomic force his

1 'Negrín fue entonces derrotado desde dentro de la República, pero no porque existiera otra política sino porque había sonado el fin de toda política', Santos Juliá, 'La doble derrota de Juan Negrín', *El País*, 26 February 1992 (the centenary of Negrín's birth), p. 11.

2 'No hay más que aguantar hasta que esto se haga cachos. O hasta que nos demos de trastazos unos con otros, que es como yo he creído siempre que concluiría esto', Indalecio Prieto, in Manuel Azaña, *Obras completas*, 4 vols (Madrid: Ediciones Giner, 1990 [1st ed. 1966–68]), IV, 638, diary entry 29 June 1937 (hereafter Azaña, *Obras completas*).

3 On this connection see Ángel Viñas, 'Playing with History and Hiding Treason: Colonel Casado's Untrustworthy "Memoirs" and the End of the Spanish Civil War', in *Essays on the Spanish Civil War*, ed. Susana Bayó Belenguer *et al*. (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming). MI6 itself is exempt from Freedom of Information requests, but the possibility remains that, with the usual documentary filtration to other government departments, a FOI application might still yield results, as material is subject to continuous declassification.

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coup discharged, and which guaranteed its success, was a phenomenon apart: a blistering release of the immense, accumulated physical and psychological pressures long bearing down on all the organizations involved in the Republic's defence, but here unleashed inwardly, as negative energy against each other—since by this stage it could go in no other direction.

The Casado events were a manifestation of the self-lacerating cost that would be extracted from the Republic's defenders through having sustained a war effort for so long in conditions of radical inequality and lack. These conditions ultimately derived from the embargo underlying the British-inspired policy of Non-Intervention, in place almost from the beginning of the conflict.[4] But if the British government was unwilling to allow the Spanish Republic to compete on equal terms in the war, neither was it prepared to support Negrín's attempts to achieve a peace settlement via diplomacy.[5] Instead of lending its weight to this attempt—which Britain, as the then dominant European and imperial power, was uniquely placed to do, British policy makers chose instead to agree to Nazi Germany's dismemberment of another Republic, Czechoslovakia, the last functioning democracy in central Europe.[6] The agreement at Munich in September 1938 just as surely killed

4 Enrique Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión. El gobierno británico y la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1996), 40–72. For its immediate effects on the Republic, see Ángel Viñas, *La soledad de la República. El abandono de las democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006), 45–78, and Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain* (London: John Murray, 1998), 33–39, 114–19. For its long-term and integral effects, see Helen Graham, The *Spanish Republic at War 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2002), 124–26, 153–58, 351–59, 368–69, 388–89 and a summary in Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2005), 37–39, 87–114.

5 *Cf*. Enrique Moradiellos, 'Una misión casi imposible: la embajada de Pablo de Azcárate en Londres durante la Guerra Civil (1936–1939)', *Historia Contemporánea*, 15 (1996), 125–45 and 'La embajada en Gran Bretaña durante la Guerra Civil', in *Al servicio de la República. Diplomáticos y guerra civil*, ed. Ángel Viñas (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores/Marcial Pons, 2010), 89–119. Also Pablo de Azcárate's posthumously published memoirs, *Mi embajada en Londres durante la Guerra Civil española* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1976).

6 The historiographical mainstream still interprets British 'deafness' towards the wartime Republic as a purely collateral effect of its strategic commitment to the appeasement of Germany and Italy, this stemming in turn from Britain's imperial dilemma—how to ward off a simultaneous military confrontation with its three main competitors, Germany, Italy and Japan. Hence Britain vainly sought throughout the Civil War to detach Italy from Germany in the hope of forging a new Anglo-Italian agreement. Britain's political class still also laboured under the misapprehension that Germany would eventually be susceptible to the old politics of diplomatic agreement—and if its imperial aggression could be deflected solely eastward then that was considered an acceptable outcome. But this imperial explanation 'forgets' that British hostility to the Spanish Republic already existed prior to the civil war, indeed had done so right from the Republic's birth in 1931. Moreover, in the period after the military coup of 18 July 1936 but before the escalation to full-scale war, the British government had done everything in its power to ensure the rapid success of the military rebels: see Enrique Moradiellos, *Neutralidad benévola. El gobierno británico y la insurrección militar española de*

the Spanish Republic, which was then still engaged in the huge battle of the Ebro. It did not die immediately, but Munich corroded belief in the purpose of the Republic's war effort among most of the political forces sustaining it, among the civilian population and, most crucially, among the majority of career officers serving in its army. Negrín's position had been further eroded by the need to keep secret his search for a negotiated peace: if made public, such knowledge would inevitably have undermined the popular will to fight, when only fierce military resistance stood a chance of exerting sufficient pressure on Franco. (Thus the paradox of Negrín, whose public image as a war leader veiled a tireless activity of peace-seeking.) Over time, however, and as the Republic's material crisis intensified, secrecy lent an increasing plausibility to the claims of the prime minister's internal opponents that his was a 'robotic' commitment to open-ended resistance (*resistencia a ultranza*) and a grossly irresponsible one because it ignored the lack of military equipment and the desperate conditions on the home front.

After the spectacularly rapid loss of Catalonia in February 1939, also a material effect of Munich, what followed was the playing out of the endgame of defeat, in a time and space where the Republic had no real political or policy resources left to it, but in which war weariness and fear produced political chimera. In this hallucinogenic landscape, the Casado events unfolded to deadly and enduringly divisive effect among the anti-Franco forces. But to understand what happened, and why, still requires us to excavate these events from beneath an accretion of powerful political myth, layers of which have built up across decades, their influence persisting even today. Their abiding power derives most crucially from the way in which these myths have provided individual and collective 'alibis' for the opprobrium of a devastating defeat (soon thereafter understood to include the unfolding savagery of Franco's post-victory repression), while also serving diverse—even antagonistic—postwar political agendas. Nevertheless, the most enduring of Casado's myths is apparently the most simple: that the rebellion saw a confrontation between 'Numantine' resisters and those seeking to end the war. But what was at stake in February and March 1939

1936 (Oviedo: Pentalfa, 1990), 147–88. The British preference, then, was *a priori* for Franco—irrespective of the issues subsequently raised by appeasement—and that remained the case for the duration of the war. But Negrín never ceased to conceive of Britain's support as the key to Republican salvation. In *La perfidia de Albión*, 18–39, 87–101, Moradiellos stresses the continuities from 1931 more than does Tom Buchanan in his work, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1997), 14–17 and *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain. War, Loss and Memory* (Brighton/Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 1–22. The full meaning of official British hostility requires further elucidation in the context of what Spanish Republican democracy signified for a British establishment fearful of social and political change at home. For example here, note the striking difference in official British assessments of political violence depending on whether they occurred in the rebel or Republican zones (the former viewed—at least in 1936—as a prophylactic, and the latter seen as evidence of barbarism).

was not whether the war would end for the Republic, but *how* it would end, and with what safeguards for the defeated—especially the civilian population.

Republican Schism

The roots of the Casado coup go back to the physical division of Republican territory in April 1938 when Franco's armies broke through to the Mediterranean, isolating Madrid and the centre-south zone from Catalonia—and thus from the land frontier with France. This intensified a feeling of separation from the Republic's political authorities, since both the government and the leaderships of the main parties and organizations offering it support had been located in Barcelona since the autumn of 1937. This shift had been in part to ensure central control of the largest remaining nucleus of the Republic's war industry,[7] but the greater proximity to France also came to be important as the prime minister's diplomatic efforts to get Non-Intervention lifted, and international brokerage for a negotiated peace were increasingly focused on Paris, especially after the March *Anschluss* briefly seemed to concentrate French minds.[8]

For the beleaguered population of the centre-south zone the path of international diplomacy or government strategic intent seemed far less real, however, than their own predicament as a consequence of the territorial division. April 1938 was the Republic's most vulnerable moment militarily—the surging of Franco's armies down through Aragón to the coast caused a vast retreat of Republican forces that broke the military front, sending shock

7 This was of course still part of a diplomatic strategy. In appointing Negrín prime minister in May 1937 Republican President, Manuel Azaña, certainly hoped that his new multi-lingual and cosmopolitan premier, with an excellent network of European contacts, would mobilize through international diplomatic channels to broker a negotiated peace (Azaña, *Obras completas*, IV, 602). If Negrín himself ever entertained the idea that a military victory was possible against an enemy backed by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, it is unlikely to have outlived the loss of the North, and its industrial capacity, in autumn 1937. But Negrín carefully projected the public profile of a war leader throughout the conflict—given military resistance remained the *sine qua non* of his secret diplomatic strategy.

8 The German annexation of Austria produced a re-opening of the frontier with Spain by a reconstituted Popular Front cabinet under Léon Blum. But this fairly soon gave way again to an ascendancy of social conservatives and appeasers hostile to the Spanish Republic; see Ricardo Miralles, 'El duro forcejeo de la diplomacia republicana en París. Francia y la Guerra Civil española', in *Al servicio de la República*, ed. Viñas, 121–54 (pp. 139–54); Ángel Viñas, 'Las relaciones hispano-franceses, el gobierno Daladier y la crisis de Munich', in *Españoles y franceses en la primera mitad del siglo XX* (Madrid: CSIC, 1986), 161–201 and Ángel Viñas, *El honor de la República* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010); David Wingeate Pike, *France Divided: The French and the Civil War in Spain* (Brighton/Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 182–207.

waves through the Republican polity.[9] For those in the centre-south the shock was double because it also meant they were physically isolated—bounded by the sea and cut off from any friendly land frontier. With the most significant Mediterranean ports blockaded by Franco, the question of how to provision a refugee-swelled population also loomed large and soon a sense of psychological remoteness emerged. This in turn bred an atmosphere of increasing alienation, with significant sectors coming to feel 'abandoned' by a government they perceived to be ever more distant from their suffering and needs.[10]

Nor was this only a question of eroded civilian morale, for these worsening material and psychological conditions also pressed down on pre-existing internal fractures within and between the mass political organizations, whose support thus far was what had made the Republican war effort viable against the odds. The more significant an organization's supporting role, the deeper the tensions that now became apparent in the very effort of some of their members to hold things together even after territorial division. Crucially, it was the deteriorating relations between Spain's socialist and communist organizations (PSOE-UGT and PCE) which provide a barometer not only of cumulative and mounting war weariness, but also of how the resulting general erosion of morale and belief in the viability of the war effort then re-activated other internecine tensions that had been kept under control (if not entirely under wraps) by the respective political leaderships. This had previously been possible, if not easy, precisely because the antagonism between these two organizations had always been much more about political rivalry within the new Republican order, rather than ideological difference—that is, about which would become the major interlocutor of the state then taking shape, sculpted by the war.[11]

The PSOE and PCE were not simply two political parties, narrowly understood: they were burgeoning mass organizations, both articulating

9 Juan Negrín in *Epistolario Prieto y Negrín* (Paris: Imprimerie Nouvelle, 1939), 25 and his 'Discurso en el Palacio de Bellas Artes, México, 1 de agosto de 1945', copy in Marcelino Pascua archive, Caja 14 (12) (Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid); *Cf*. Azaña, *Obras completas,* IV, 819–20, diary entry 13 October 1937.

10 The term 'desamparo' ('exposure' in the sense of lacking in shelter or assistance), was frequently used in this regard in the press, including in the PSOE press where its usage blended into issues related to internal factional disputes; see an allusion to both in Juan-Simeón Vidarte, *Todos fuimos culpables*, 2 vols (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1978), II, 858; Indalecio Prieto in *Epistolario Prieto y Negrín,* 92. Former interior minister and now under-secretary, Julián Zugazagoitia, commented on this to Marcelino Pascua, observing that Negrín's speeches urging resistance did not connect with the public mood (letter of 20 June 1938, Marcelino Pascua archive, Caja 2 [2] 16 [AHN]). The growing subsistence crisis is very clear from Quaker relief work sources, see Miscellaneous field reports for 1938 in FSC/R/Sp/1 (file 4); FSC/R/Sp/2 (files 3 and 4); FSC/R/Sp/4 (Friends House Library and Archive, London).

11 Helen Graham, *Socialism and War. The Spanish Socialist Party in Power and Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1991) offers a close empirical reading of this process.

a wide range of other entities through which the Republican population had mobilized for war and through which that mobilization was maintained—from a variety of women's organizations and youth groups, factory, village and urban neighbourhood committees (including the joint PSOE-PCE *comités de enlace*) to cultural, health, welfare and refugee relief bodies. For the PSOE especially, but also for the PCE, the war massively accelerated a process already evident in pre-war Republican years, whereby these movements were becoming the conduits through which previously unorganized sectors of the population began to engage in the public sphere, and thus through which a new national and political fabric was being made. That this process was happening through political organizations was an indication of need—which is to say of the under-development of existing Spanish state structures confronted by the escalating needs of a modern war. The anarcho-syndicalist CNT, while remaining important to the war effort materially because of its mobilizing power, stood at one remove from this organizational competition after May 1937, the point by which the post-coup social revolution it had championed was defeated—by an internal Republican political coalition, by its own organizational fragmentation and by the requirements of total war. The CNT, along with the ultra-anarchist FAI, thus returned for a time to the politically marginal status to which its own strategic vision had consigned it before the war—although its sheer numerical strength would invest its desire for political revenge with great force. As the war effort fell apart in 1938, this would turn the CNT-FAI into a major player in the Casado events.

For the PSOE and PCE, the war massively fed their memberships and political reach; however, its particular conditions also inflected the process to give certain clear advantages to the PCE. The fact that the Soviet Union came, by September 1936, to offer military support to keep the Republic from capsizing was one factor here, but that was always filtered into a more complicated internal picture in which the Communist Party's clear advantage at the beginning of the war had been rooted in its ability to appeal simultaneously to many different social and political constituencies—to a degree that appears paradoxical and which can make the wartime communist movement in Spain difficult to compare historically with others in Europe.[12] One striking example of this heterogeneous and multi-faceted appeal, and one

12 The Greek communist experience is an exception here, with striking parallels to the development of the wartime PCE: see Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece. The Experience of Occupation 1941–44* (New Haven/London: Yale U. P., 1993). But in Spain a much more heterogeneous communist movement was absolutely integral to a mainstream process of state and nation making, albeit still in exceptional conditions generated by war. The important differences do not of course invalidate comparison, which can still be instructive—not least the way in which it highlights the degree to which the emergency of war (broadly construed) has always produced the radical restructuring of communist parties/movements, beginning with the Bolsheviks themselves in the crucible of their own civil war.

which bears significantly on the Casado events, was the presence in the party's orbit of two, eventually antagonistic, constituencies. First, aspiring young people (mostly twenty to early thirty year-olds, whether previously politically active or not and often from affluent backgrounds) to whom the PCE appeared the face of the future, a new broom, and a more energetic alternative not only to a still decidedly frock-coated (culturally *decimonónico*) republicanism, but to the more cautious, bureaucratic ethos of the socialist movement, also with its older, male-dominated leadership and (for some) fossilized attitudes.[13] For these people the Party offered not only a more exciting vision but also potentially a transmission belt through which individual futures could be realized in the new Spain. This phenomenon was encapsulated in Guillermo Ascanio, one of the leading military commanders who would oppose Casado in Madrid in 1939. From an affluent family in the Canary Islands and well educated, Ascanio had trained as an engineer in Germany and in 1930s Spain, having passed through both the CNT and the PSOE, found in the PCE an image of the practical reforming change that corresponded to his own social motivations.[14]

At the same time, the wartime PCE attracted quite large numbers of career officers whose professional formation had come from the military academies of monarchist Spain. While remaining loyal to the Republic, they were socially conservative, but looking for protection in a new environment rendered doubly hostile, first by the military coup itself—which had shattered their whole world—and second by the revolutionary wave it had precipitated inside Republican territory. Unlike the internally divided PSOE, the PCE had, from the very early days of the war, with its disastrous southern killing fields—when the African army marched upwards to Madrid, slaughtering thousands of civilian defenders as it went—put a premium on

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13 The memoirs of two young women activists also draw attention to this 'breath of fresh air', where the PCE is seen as an extension of the Republic's 'new broom', and more as a medium for change than as a doctrinal instrument: see Carmen Parga, *Antes que sea tarde* (Madrid: Compañía Literaria, 1996), 50, and Aurora Arnaiz, *Retrato hablado de Luisa Julián* (Madrid: Compañía Literaria, 1996), 26. This social history of communism in 1920s and '30s Spain is yet to be seriously tackled, but see Rafael Cruz, '¡Luzbel vuelve al mundo! Las imágenes de la Rusia Soviética y la acción colectiva en España', in *Cultura y movilización en la España contemporánea,* ed. Rafael Cruz and Manuel Pérez Ledesma (Madrid: Alianza, 1997), 273–303. For the appeal of the wartime PCE to a mass audience, especially within the socialist and communist youth movement, newly unified in March 1936 and which rapidly became massified in the early months of the war, see Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement. From Comintern to Cominform* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 230–31.

14 On Ascanio, some occasional references in Michael Alpert, *El ejército republicano en la Guerra Civil,* 2nd ed. (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1989), 356, 361. There are also now some online commemorative biographies, for example: <http://www.alternativasisepuede.org/si-se-puede/opinion/item/1190-guillermo-ascanio-moreno-un-gomero-revolucionario-rubens-ascanio> and <http://quieneseran.blogspot.co.uk/2010/07/guillermo-ascanio-moreno-03-07-1941.html> (consulted 22 August 2012). For Ascanio's opposition to Casado, see the discussion later in this article.

the need to build up a conventional military machine to confront the enemy. The party thus afforded these career officers a haven as well as a stability and respect that compensated for the world they had lost, while of course not turning them into ideological, or any other kind of 'believing' communists. Indeed, for the most part, these career officers still retained a nostalgia for and belief in certain notions of *esprit de corps* and even of an underlying social cohesion in Spain as a whole that the rebel coup and ensuing war had in fact already definitively capsized. The tensions, ideological and otherwise, between these officers and many other groups in the PCE were for a time contained by the party's iron discipline—derived from the democratic centralism of its Bolshevik and Stalinist heritage. But under the crisis conditions of late 1938 they would erupt when Casado unleashed the rebellion.[15] And once he had, most of these career officer communists would simply decline to obey party orders to oppose him.[16] As we will see, this included two (indeed for a time three) of the four senior military commanders of the Madrid region. Since this refusal—repeated many times over—occurred in tandem with the party's loss of support from other 'fair-weather' civilian constituencies, the PCE's implosion would be spectacular, and further accelerated on the threshold of defeat by specific agendas of political revenge emerging first and foremost from the CNT-FAI, but also from within PSOE ranks.

Organizational competition between PSOE and PCE had remained a constant factor behind the public language of unity and solidarity in the war effort. And precisely because of the mass nature of the two organizations and their implantation across Republican territory, this rivalry was also a mass event that subsumed innumerable, war-sharpened local and regional political conflicts rooted in what was still predominantly a clientelist culture in Spain, and whose substantive content was very often far from the stylized political discourse in which they were publicly conducted in the columns of party press and *comité de enlace* correspondence. But in the long run it was of course the backdrop of endless military defeat that gave effect to this organizational rivalry—as did the PSOE's sense that it was losing, because its quite rigid, 'old-school' ethos prevented it from competing all-out

15 American journalist Vincent Sheean reported on how these tensions could be glimpsed in reactions to a May 1938 Central Committee speech by the Spanish communist leader Dolores Ibárruri (La Pasionaria) (Vincent Sheean, *Not Peace But a Sword* [New York: Doubleday Doran, 1939], 185–87). How such tensions would erupt under pressure of the Casado rebellion is discussed later.

16 Palmiro Togliatti, in his long confidential report of 21 May 1939 on the end of the war, in *Escritos sobre la guerra de España* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1980), 269–70; on the circumstances of this report's preparation, see Ángel Viñas and Fernando Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome de la República* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2009), 48; Manuel Tagüena Lacorte, *Testimonio de dos guerras* (México D.F.: Ediciones Oasis, 1974), 321; Ángel Bahamonde Magro and Javier Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 1999), 377–78, 386–89, 416–18.

with the PCE to recruit newcomers who lacked what it considered an appropriate level of political culture.[17] The PSOE was further debilitated during the war by the relentless playing out of pre-war internal divisions, a settling of scores for pre-war 'battles' between powerful factions, which in wartime proved unaffordable. The net result was the grave internal fragmentation of the PSOE, which, caught up in this internal 'war', was unable adequately to support Prime Minister Negrín who, as he struggled to find an exit route for the Republic, looked to the PCE to fill the gap. But relations between the premier and the PCE were always threaded through with an underlying tension deriving from the party's suspicions over the implications for itself of Negrín's secret diplomacy.

The Ebro Battle Is Detonated by Munich

Notwithstanding these tensions, Negrín and the PCE both stood squarely behind the launching of the gargantuan offensive across the Ebro river in July 1938, designed with a significant military objective in mind—the defence of Valencia, then in jeopardy of imminent rebel attack—but whose transcending purpose for Negrín was to send a powerful message internationally that the Republic's military viability was open-ended if Franco could not be persuaded to make a peace with guarantees. Launching and maintaining the Ebro offensive across its near four-month duration strained Republican resources to the limit, including its population. Already in its preparatory stages, the attempt to impose a rigorous war discipline in Catalonia caused tensions among new conscripts and civilians alike. To the inevitable depredations to rural society of army requisition (often amounting to troops simply living off the land) was added the particular disaffection of a Catalanist peasantry that had seen Negrín ride roughshod over autonomist prerogative in the interests of centralizing the war effort. This, combined with the chronic shortage of labour power, saw a sullen 'war' between rural society and the Republican military intelligence service (SIM), charged with hunting young men who were in hiding to escape being conscripted (the *emboscats*).[18] Mothers, too, publicly protested the call-up of seventeen-year-olds, the *quinta del biberón*, to fight at the Ebro. War weariness was also evident in the increasing rates of desertion among raw recruits, to which the Army of the Ebro's response was swingeing. This was at root an issue of military discipline in desperate

17 Complaints from the PSOE's local organizations abounded, for example, in a report from Almería in March 1938, PSOE historical archive (Madrid), AH-13-63, p. 80. Conversely, on the eve of the Casado rebellion, the PSOE national executive committee was concerned by the potential reflux of anti-communist populism into the PSOE: Antonio Huerta, minutes of meeting of 11 November 1938, AH-20-4 [n. p.].

18 See the recent TV3 documentary, *Emboscats. Memòria d'una geografia secreta* (July 2012), <http://www.tv3.cat/videos/3921230> (accessed 10 August 2012); Pedro Corral, *Desertores. La guerra civil que nadie quiere contar* (Barcelona: Debate, 2006), 285–340; *Cartes des del front*, ed. Eloi Vila (Badalona: Ara Llibres, 2012).

conditions,[19] but it heightened the political temperature further, especially as both this army and its SIM had within them a strong presence of commanders and policemen who carried a Communist Party card.

What defeated Negrín at the Ebro was not so much the overwhelming airpower provided by the Axis, or the (also Axis-derived) strength of the Francoist reserve, but rather the diplomatic bomb that exploded at Munich in late September 1938. A devastating demonstration of the extent of Britain's commitment to appeasement, the Munich agreement signified the public demolition of Negrín's secret diplomacy, just as it spectacularly detonated the fragile basis of his political support base inside Republican Spain.[20] The Army of the Ebro retreated back into Catalonia, but this was to all intents and purposes an endless retreat finishing only at the French frontier, where its soldiers passed beyond into the internment camps of Daladier's conservative, appeasement-dominated Republic. The political and social environment in Catalonia would not permit a viable defence to be mounted, as everywhere the Munich effect, coming on top of structural fatigue and demoralization, saw the collapse, and sometimes the flight, of its home-front authorities, as Francoist forces advanced across the region. One foreign anarchist volunteer, who took Spanish Republican nationality, fought with the army and was part of that military retreat, noted at the time that the Munich recoil had been too vast for any single political force to master; the 'failure' to do so belonged 'to all of them'.[21] But the body blow would be delivered first and foremost to the PCE, whose strength, effort and prestige had been concentrated in the Ebro offensive. After the fall of Catalonia, the rest was an endgame of defeat, played out viciously in the centre-south zone where the events focused on Madrid.

Endgame in the Centre-South Zone: Casado Unravels the Resistance

Here too the shock of Munich acted as a depth charge in an environment suffused with the sheer exhaustion of nearly three years of war—which had extended from aerial bombardment into ever deteriorating conditions of hunger and shortage. Despair at the Republic's international isolation and uphill military struggle now became the fear of a looming defeat. By November 1938 Madrid's was already a rarefied atmosphere, assiduously intensified by a fifth column growing in confidence by leaps and bounds.[22]

19 For a fuller analysis see Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War,* 373–79.

20 *Cf.* Negrín's comment, via foreign minister Julio Alvárez del Vayo, that 'no hay política francobritánica, no hay más que política británica con asentimiento francés' ('there is no joint Franco-British policy now, just British policy with French acquiescence'), PSOE national executive meeting, 15 November 1938, AH-20-5 [n. p.].

21 Rudolf Michaelis in a letter from Paris to Rudolf, Millie and Fermín Rocker, 16 March 1939 (Rudolf Rocker papers, International Institute of Social History [IISG], Amsterdam).

22 Javier Cervera, *Madrid en guerra. La ciudad clandestina 1936–1939*, 3rd ed. (Madrid: Alianza, 2006), 241–67, 289–95, 381–412.

It was not the least of the components feeding a rapidly growing 'anti-communism' in the city and across the zone, for which there were plenty of takers, given that the PCE had been a bruising player in the internecine conflicts of the war and thus had many enemies within the Republican camp.[23] A key figure in the coalescing of these currents in Madrid was the veteran socialist leader and intellectual, Julián Besteiro, who would become Casado's co-conspirator at the beginning of 1939. Already marginalized from the mainstream of Spanish socialism by the 1930s—the result of an earlier doctrinal dispute—Besteiro nevertheless retained an enormous moral stature, enjoying a special relationship with 'ordinary' *madrileños*.[24] He had remained in the capital virtually throughout the war, through siege and semi-siege and, as material conditions for the civilian populace deteriorated, he came to be their advocate with the Republican government (from November 1936 based successively in Valencia and then Barcelona). In an evolution not unconnected with the earlier doctrinal dispute, Besteiro grew to be viscerally anti-communist during the war, in great part because he saw the PCE's growth as displacing, even 'perverting' the historic rightful mission of the socialist movement, as a shepherd gathering Spanish workers into a reformist synthesis with the state. Besteiro's anger, combined with his growing despair over Madrid's material plight, and what he took to be the deafness of both government and President to this, made him open to very early contacts with the fifth column, certainly by late summer of 1938, but possibly as early as April 1938, via university contacts.[25] The fifth column in turn utilized Besteiro, refining his anti-communism and planting the idea, as they would simultaneously through other vectors, that only the PCE stood in the way of a civilized peace.

Madrid was thus becoming a highly charged political environment in which antagonistic organizations were ready to provide the requisite anti-communist narrative. Whether this came from the PSOE-UGT or the

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23 PSOE antagonists, the former ambassador to Paris, Luis Araquistain and Ramón Lamoneda, party general secretary, agreed entirely on this assessment of the underlying support for Casado: Araquistain to Ramón González Peña, 15 July 1939, Araquistáin archive, legajo 29, no. G 181 (Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid); Lamoneda, 'Manifiesto de la CE del PSOE', Mexico, 15 November 1945, *El Socialista* (México), 10 (January 1946), reproduced in Ramón Lamoneda, *Posiciones políticas-documentos-correspondencia* (México D.F.: Roca, 1976), 205–17 (p. 215).

24 Paul Preston, 'A Pacifist in War: The Tragedy of Julián Besteiro', in *Comrades. Portraits from the Spanish Civil War* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 167–92; for the earlier political disputes see Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), 14–34.

25 For Besteiro's contacts with Madrid's fifth column and the capitulationist 'underground', see Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 256–57 and Preston, *Comrades*, 180–83.

CNT-FAI, it increasingly acquired an ideological veneer: but even with the CNT-FAI's denunciation of the PCE as betrayers of the popular revolution, iconized in 'May 1937', it seems clear that this was ideology reduced to a moralizing force that sought a reckoning. It remains a moot point historically whether this was a response to the siren song of the fifth column, or understood by its proponents as a pyrrhic settlement. But already by mid November 1938 anarcho-syndicalists and socialists had participated in a shadow putsch against Negrín, whose main function, other than general destabilization, seems to have been to assess their likely strength in a future, actual coup.[26] After this, with the tension rising, most local Communist Party groups ceased to meet, their activities folding, as those of the joint PSOE-PCE liaison committees had already done.[27]

But too close a retrospective lens applied to the ingredients of the political infighting here obscures the bigger point that what was arming the centre-south zone confrontation was the crystallizing prospect of defeat. Throughout the war the PCE had deliberately turned itself into the incarnation of war and victory: the party's self-image as invincible, basking in the strength of Soviet aid, had once garnered it support from precisely the same amorphous sectors which, after Munich and the Ebro retreat, saw the communist movement as progressively delegitimized—not for ideology, but for its new association with oncoming defeat. Given the sheer war-induced hybridity of the communist base, the rapidity of this turnabout is unsurprising in a political culture where notions of clientelism remained very strong. Once Catalonia fell by early February 1939, then the sound of the party crashing from its pedestal caused an opportunistic rush as many sectors inside Republican society sought to adjust to the new times. Minds were concentrated by mounting panic at physical isolation, which, although a fact from April 1938, became much more immediate after Catalonia was gone. The sacrifices and deprivations of the war now seemingly futile, disappointment and fear for the future contributed to the desire to blame someone, or at least a tangible entity, for the collective plight. Once again fifth-column sources

26 Archivo Histórico del PCE (AHPCE, Madrid), 'Informe sobre unos hechos acaecidos en la zona centro-sur', Film XVII, Apdo., 214. There are shades here too of score-settling between the CNT-FAI and the PCE which goes back to their confrontation in the Madrid defence council of 1936–37: Graham, *The Spanish Republic at War,* 194–97; Julio Aróstegui and Jesús A. Martínez, *La junta de defensa de Madrid* (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1982).

27 AHPCE, Informes, June–July 1938 covering political and union matters in various centre-south locations, including Villanueva de Córdoba (20 June), Almería (26 June), Murcia (10 July) Film XVII, Apdo. 214. Also global PCE report August 1938, Film XVIII, Apdo. 217. The sheer intensity and vitriol of the divisions under the material pressures of the war are captured in 'Muy Reservado. Informe Sindical', 6 August 1938, Film XVIII, Apdo. 217. A handwritten annotation indicates it was presented to the PCE's Buro Político by Amaro del Rosal. This goes right to the heart of the PSOE-PCE organizational conflict, as he was ostensibly still a leading socialist, but here acting as a PCE informant.

played on this, grooming and channelling a now very volatile public opinion in the direction of blaming the PCE, as indeed Francoist propaganda had been doing for some time. The not-so-subtle message in all this was that the manifestation of public anticommunism could now also be a means of buying favour with the Francoist victors.[28] (Although as these victors did not yet exist, this activity constituted a strategy of war, much as was Franco's declaration of the Law of Political Responsibilities on 9 February.)

What finally triggered the Republican endgame in February–March 1939 in Madrid was the fact that the commander of the capital's military region, Colonel Segismundo Casado, apparently believed in a script that was, in the last analysis, not much less naïve and certainly no less crude or vengeful in its effects than the fear-driven one abroad on the streets of the capital. But whereas those street-level fears had been rudderless, notwithstanding CNT-FAI and minority PSOE dissent, Casado was able to back them with force of arms. Like many other career army officers of similar education and background, Casado already at least half-believed that they, as Franco's direct counterparts, would be able to make the peace 'with honour' that was eluding Negrín—a sentiment that had been encouraged quite strongly since autumn 1938 by certain public statements from pro-Franco personages as well as by the incessant subterranean propaganda of the fifth column.[29] At one level it seems remarkable that such sources could successfully have counteracted the resounding empirical evidence to the contrary, in what Casado and his peers already knew of Franco's conduct of the war since 1936, with the violent repression of those deemed enemies of the new order, recently codified, furthermore, in the Law of Political Responsibilities. But if an intelligence as acute as that of Republican President Azaña could also suffer progressive eclipse in this regard,[30] then that should alert us to the appearance of a powerful, collective subjective factor here entering into play, generated by the pressures of war and the hopelessness of the international situation. Above all, the rarefied atmosphere inside Madrid fed the belief of

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28 The perceptive comments of PSOE journalist and former minister, Julián Zugazagoitia, recorded in his contemporary account, *Guerra y vicisitudes de los españoles*, ed. Santos Juliá (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2001 [1st ed. 1940]), 558–59.

29 On 30 January Casado received a detailed communication written by the Madrid fifth column, in accordance with Franco HQ instructions, which gave the conditions for rendition and encouraged professional army officers to comply in order to improve their chances of rehabilitation: Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 265–66; Cervera, *Madrid en guerra*, 393; the key extract is reproduced in Viñas and Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome*, 91.

30 Azaña's own diary for 1937 records instances of social cleansing in the Francoist zone, for example, of Republican school-teachers (Azaña, *Obras completas*, IV, 685–86, diary entry 19 July 1937). Yet in late February 1939 he refused to assist the Negrín government in its bid to block the Francoist seizure of funds abroad destined to subsidize the evacuation of Republicans. This suggests that at some level Azaña persisted in seeing the end of war in terms of a normalized military victory (Viñas and Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome,* 136–37).

professional officers, mainly those never aligned with the PCE, but even, at least initially, some who were, that they could be reincorporated to a unified army after Franco's victory. Only this very particular environment too can quite explain Besteiro's own surreal belief that the Casado coup would make Franco amenable to a Fabian-inspired collaboration with the trade union movement.[31]

The galvanizing factor for Casado's actions had been Negrín's hasty declaration of martial law in the days leading up to Franco's occupation of Barcelona on 26 January 1939. Negrín had had little choice, faced with the likely imminent fall of Catalonia, but in ceding control of the centre-south zone to the military authorities, it opened the way to Casado's conspiracy, especially given that neither Azaña nor his Vice-President nor the Commander-in-Chief of the Republican armed forces ever returned to Spanish territory after the fall of Catalonia. Casado's motivations remain, however, to this day partly occluded. It seems likely that he wanted to end the war with what he believed, at least for a time, could be guarantees against the arbitrary repression of Republican civilians. He also believed, again at least for a time, that he could achieve this where Negrín could not—not only because he was an army officer, but because he was prepared to do what Negrín would not: to sacrifice the PCE as a mass movement to Franco,[32] which Casado must have known from the beginning *would* mean the extensive executions of civilians. Casado also enjoyed the confidence of the British authorities to the extent that they saw him as a potential route to ending the war swiftly. He had contacts with British intelligence

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31 'Los hombres que tenemos una responsabilidad, sobre todo en la organización sindical, no podemos abandonar ésta. Tengo la seguridad de que casi nada va a ocurrir. Esperemos los acontecimientos y quizá podamos reconstruir una UGT de carácter más moderado; algo así como las Trade Unions inglesas' ('Those of us who have responsibilities, especially in the Union [UGT], have to stay. I'm sure that nothing much will happen. We'll have to see how things turn out, and maybe we'll be able to reconstruct a more moderate UGT—along the lines of the British trade unions'): Besteiro's comments on 11 March 1939 to the civil governor of Murcia, Eustaquio Cañas, in the latter's (unpublished) memoir, 'Marzo de 1939. El último mes' (1948), p. 30. Copy in the Archivo de Ramón Lamoneda (ARLF-172-30), PSOE historical archive (Madrid). Compare a contemporary's view of Casado as 'a wishful thinker with grandiose sentiments and exalted ideas about himself', in *The New Statesman and Nation,* 23 December 1939, p. 930.

32 *Cf*. Negrín's speech of 12 February 1939: 'o todos nos salvamos, o todos nos hundimos en la exterminación y el oprobio' ('either we shall all save ourselves or we shall all descend into extermination and opprobium'), published in *El Socialista* (Madrid), 14 February 1939, p. 1. The speech was intended to send the message that the Republic still had the capacity to continue a limited strategic resistance, but Negrín also believed he had a debt of honour to the communist movement for its contribution to the war effort, although for the PCE his sudden departure from the centre-south zone, as Casado's forces closed in on his HQ, still seemed a betrayal: Togliatti, *Escritos sobre la guerra de España*, 288–91; Irene Falcón, *Asaltar a los cielos. Mi vida junto a Pasionaria* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1996), 171–72.

representatives in Madrid in the early months of 1939[33] and after the *débâcle* of having to effect unconditional military surrender to Franco at the end of March, he and his retinue would be evacuated from Spain aboard a British naval vessel, virtually the only people to be so, given the strong British desire not to offend Franco.[34]

In the wake of the declaration of martial law in late January, Casado suffered a blow to his plans, because he was not expecting Negrín to return to Spain after the fall of Catalonia. But the prime minister returned immediately from France to the centre zone with most of his government and would throughout February consistently seek peace, in effect, on the basis of *one condition only*: a guarantee from Franco of no reprisals against the civilian population. Negrín's position was undermined by several factors. Externally, because Britain was a very weak broker: while its diplomatic channels continued communicating with Negrín, urging him to sue for peace and, at this very late point, seeming to take on board the question of a civilian guarantee and agreement over an evacuation plan, it remained extremely reluctant to risk Franco's displeasure.[35] Internally, too, Negrín's authority to press for brokerage was progressively eroded by his lack of political support, either from his own party, the PSOE, now in major internal disarray, or from the more or less paralysed republican parties. Above all, Negrín's efforts were undermined here by the repeated refusal of President Azaña to return to Spain. This was especially serious, because Negrín's

33 Consular officer, Denys Cowan in Madrid was in contact with both Casado and Besteiro, his report for 16–28 February 1939, in FO 425/416 XXXIX W 5827/35/36; Viñas, 'Playing with History'. For Cowan, see also Peter Anderson, 'The Chetwode Commission and British Diplomatic Responses to Violence Behind the Lines in the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly*, 42:2 (2012), 235–60 (pp. 247, 248 for Cowan's involvement in the Chetwode Commission on prisoner exchange, and pp. 251, 252 for his role at the end of the war in Madrid). As Anderson's evidence demonstrates, although the authorial commentary does not make it explicit, the Munich agreement also virtually capsized the Chetwode initiative because Franco, always uncooperative, afterwards saw no real reason even for pretence, since Munich delivered a clear signal that he was on the home strait.

34 An account of the embarking of Casado's group at Gandia is in the report by the International Delegation for Spanish Evacuation and Relief to Sir George Young, 27 March–1 April 1939, pp. 5–7 (Young Family Archive, courtesy of Sir George and Lady Aurelia Young). I would like to thank Linda Palfreeman for bringing this document to my attention. The Young report also indicates the obstructiveness of both the British and French authorities to general refugee evacuation (pp. 1, 5–7). It is ironic, especially in view of official British views on political violence behind the Republican lines, that the arrangement with Casado seems to have allowed the embarcation among his retinue of ultras, associated with the FAI, who had been involved in extrajudicial killing in Madrid. Casado himself would spend most of the 1940s in London, working sometimes for the BBC, with what was probably financial support from the British authorities (Vinas, 'Playing with History', see note 3).

35 Already by 8 February the British cabinet had taken the decision to recognize Franco as soon as possible, *ideally once Republican resistance had ended*; see Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 222–23; Moradiellos, *La perfidia de Albión,* 350 and *cf.* Anderson, 'The Chetwode Commission and British Diplomatic Responses', 251.

plan—until Casado's rebellion forced him to abandon it—was never an exalted or abstract idea of 'endless resistance', but a staged evacuation. Right from his return to the centre-south zone on 6 February, he sought militarily to secure the evacuation routes and protect the coasts and ports, allowing a retreat to a defensible territorial haven from which the evacuation could be undertaken of those most at risk of execution, because of their active military or political roles.[36] Once this strategy became clear to the Francoists, they redoubled their efforts to ensure the French did not accede to Negrín's requests to send on Republican war material to the port of Valencia. Given the hostility of the French foreign ministry, this was unlikely to have happened, but, once again, Azaña's position hugely undermined everything Negrín was attempting diplomatically at the eleventh-and-three quarter hour, with both the British and the French.[37]

Negrín continued to do what he could, maintaining a relatively low profile inside the centre-south zone in the latter half of February, in part to try to reduce the political temperature. For the same reason, he mainly left in place the professional officers, including Casado himself, over whose loyalty a question mark hung. It was a high-risk strategy to attempt to hold off what Casado himself would in fact precipitate. The Colonel, for his own part, was playing a double game. From the time of Negrín's return he had, through his control of censorship, permitted the misrepresentation of the prime minister as a 'Numantian' madman, which the necessary secrecy of Negrín's long search for a negotiated peace rendered superficially credible to a now fearful and panicking population, prey to the rumour mill. Added to this was the monumental fabulation of Casado's own making, repeatedly elaborated by the Colonel in self-justificatory mode after the war, that the PCE was set to make its own military coup. Opaque in its origins, this 'strategic' myth of communist hegemony in the pursuit of 'endless war' was already discernible when Casado first began to voice his 'fears' in this regard in November 1938. Certainly the myth drew on Negrín's well-documented decision at the start of March 1939 to deploy some communist military commanders to secure key points of his evacuation strategy (for example, the Cartagena naval base). He had long postponed this for fear of the response, but could do so no longer as Casado was himself poised to act. Beneath the Colonel's discourse of

36 On the importance of Cartagena here, see Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 421–22; on Negrín's preparation of funds in France for this and evacuation estimates of at least ten thousand people, Viñas and Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome,* 106. More on evacuation requirements in the International Delegation for Spanish Evacuation and Relief report to Sir George Young, pp. 1, 3, 6 (Young Family Archive) which puts the order of need at sixty thousand (p. 1).

37 A critical account of Azaña's behaviour during his residence at this time in the Spanish Embassy in Paris, is given by Republican ambassador, Marcelino Pascua, in an unpublished text in the Archivo Marcelino Pascua, caja 1 (9) (AHN).

communist hegemony, however, the reality in the centre-south zone was otherwise.

As the rumours of a coup by Casado began to circulate around Madrid on 5–6 February, sparked by others concerning the Colonel's direct contact with the Madrid fifth column,[38] the PCE was already disintegrating, in the throes of its own profound structural crisis. It found itself besieged within a besieged Republic, as many of its new wartime civilian affiliates and supporters joined the rising tide against the party. In Madrid this led a core of local leadership cadres to formulate defensive resistance plans, but it kept these secret from the broader party, its Central Committee, and even from the Madrid provincial committee.[39] For the 'enemy' was inside the party too, as a very result of its own policies of broad, inter-class social alliance (Popular Front). The strain of this realization saw ideological differences in the party surface in February, although they were rapidly battened down by the return from France of the Comintern's ever pragmatic supremo in Spain, Togliatti, concerned to salvage as much as possible from the oncoming storm.[40]

In addition to the PCE's disintegrating civilian base, its core cadres, in facing Casado, were also now up against the collapse of support from army officers once close to the party but now claiming only to recognize the strictly military chain of command, which was nowhere in the centre-south zone clearly favourable to the PCE (only in the Army of the Ebro had the party even potentially had this kind of profile, and much of it now lay interned in France). This was the PCE's parlous position when on 27 February President Azaña resigned, as Britain and France issued their formal recognition of Franco. Not only this, but in the face of it the Soviet Union remained silent: Togliatti received no response to his telegraph request for instructions.[41] So a fragmented PCE, which could no longer rely on many of its own members, was isolated when Casado made his coup on 3 March, backed by the key political and military support of the CNT-FAI, but also with help from sectors of PSOE-UGT. Casado had been forced to act because Negrín was finally set on removing him to a non-active service role. But the coup's exact timing seems likely to have been

38 Casado's military staff had been riddled with fifth columnists (including key ones) since 1938, and they brokered his meeting with Besteiro: Preston, *Comrades*, 184; Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 265, 266, 268.

39 Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 366–71.

40 At a PCE provincial conference in Madrid, 9–11 February, Dolores Ibárruri, and others even more vehemently, called for a 'united front' of workers to guarantee resistance: Togliatti, *Escritos sobre la guerra de España*, 275; Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrondo, *Queridos camaradas. La Internacional Comunista en España 1919–1939* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999), 428–32. *Cf*. the contrast between Ibárruri's speech here and her more 'on message' speech backing a broad social alliance to sustain the war effort, recorded by Vincent Sheean in May 1938 (see note 15).

41 Elorza and Bizcarrondo, *Queridos camaradas*, 434.

determined too by Casado's knowledge that his very 'legitimacy' to act might soon be overturned—for the Republic's Vice-President, who constitutionally succeeded Azaña, had agreed to return to Spain now that he understood Negrín's only condition for agreeing to end the resistance was a guarantee of no civilian reprisals.[42]

Only in Madrid did Casado's coup provoke an armed response from the PCE, which was rooted in its sense of isolation and siege within the city.[43] It was also relatively successful in the opening days, despite the capture by Casado's forces of Domingo Girón, the linchpin of the local party's hastily constructed defence.[44] The PCE was assisted in Madrid by the fact that it had retained the support of some important military commanders. But only of some—and the distinction here is instructive. Three of Madrid's four army corps were headed by career officers with party cards, but all were reluctant to oppose Casado. The one who in the end did so seriously, Colonel Barceló, chose to fight when a comrade-in-arms persuaded him that his position was untenable: the idea inspiring the quietism of all three corps commanders, namely that Franco's army would allow them to return to its fold post war, was a pipe-dream. The officer who persuaded Barceló was Guillermo Ascanio, himself leading one of the other three corps after its commander declared himself *in absentia*.[45] Ascanio, who, as we saw earlier, represented a new social influx to political life in Spain occurring via the PCE, had received his military training during the war in one of the new militia schools set up to build the new Republican army, and by 1939 had reached the rank of Mayor de Milicia. His response to Casado was an instinct of self-preservation[46] but, with his habitual lucidity and eloquence, he was able to convince Barceló that Casado intended serving them up to Franco. For all

42 Viñas and Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome,* 116, 134, 252–54.

43 Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 377–78, 386–89, uses an indispensable contemporary report by Jacinto Barrios, one of several by local communists in Madrid especially, but also centre-south zone-wide, which were incorporated along with many others (by higher ranking cadres, party-connected military leaders and the party leadership itself) into a lengthy secret report to Stalin on the events which ended the war: local reports from Alicante, Murcia and Almería in AHPCE, Film XIX, Apdo. 241. On the making of the report to Stalin, see Viñas and Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome,* 30, 47–63 and for the report itself, 471–626. The sheer violence of the clash in Madrid is evident especially in the local party report by Manuel Fernández Cortinas, in Viñas and Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome,* 59, even though Casado likely inflated his estimate of the death toll when he put it at 15,000 (Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España,* 402).

44 By resisting, time was also gained to prepare the party for clandestinity, AHPCE, Film XX, Apdo. 238; Togliatti, *Escritos sobre la guerra de España*, 210–11, 295–97; Edmundo Domínguez, *Los vencedores de Negrín* (México D.F.: Nuestro Pueblo, 1940), 227. Domingo Girón was executed by Franco: see Juana Doña, *Querido Eugenio*, (Barcelona: Lumen, 2003), unpaginated plates.

45 Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 387.

46 *Cf*. Tagüeña Lacorte, *Testimonio de dos guerras,* 319, on Madrid's exceptionality. We get a fleeting sense of Ascanio's resolve recorded in Dolores Ibárruri, *El único camino* (Madrid:

that Ascanio, and through him Barceló, had a much less nostalgic and therefore more far-sighted understanding of what defeat would mean, their gamble would fail—Barceló was shot by Casado, and Ascanio by Franco.[47] But Ascanio's epitaph is that he was right: and moreover an important historiographical question remains over the wartime 'caste clash' between older career officers trained in the military academies of the monarchy, and the officer cadres which had emerged from the new Republican Army's wartime militia schools. This was a culture clash, too, though not a straightforwardly sociological one—indeed Ascanio's social origins were higher than those of numerous career officers, including Casado.[48]

Beyond Madrid, the conflict triggered by Casado was much more subdued,[49] with all three of the Republic's remaining armies—in the east (Valencia/Levante) and south (Andalusia and Extremadura)—holding aloof from the clash. None of the three senior commanding officers were PCE members, but none displayed any particular anti-communism, with General Menéndez in Valencia typical in his overriding concern to avoid infighting between communist and non-communist troops under his command. Unlike many of the PCE's civilian adherents, senior soldiers, whether close to the PCE or not, had never seen the party's powers as messianic, so there was not any spectacular fall from grace. Menéndez saw the Casado coup matter-of-factly as a way to end the Republican *impasse*. In the end, the same assessment was what saw the PCE's resistance end in Madrid, too, in spite of its military success. But once the Negrín government had left Spain on 6 March to avoid falling prisoner to Casado forces, there was no future in resistance. Togliatti, on his own authority (given the whole of the centre-south zone was *incommunicado*), sent an emissary to Madrid instructing the PCE there to treat with Casado in order to allow party cadres space and time to prepare for the clandestine phase to follow the imminent defeat. By 13 March it was all over in Madrid. In the Valencia region, Menéndez oversaw the parleying between Casado's representatives and those of the PCE.

Editorial Castalia, 1992), 610; also Santiago Carrillo, *Memorias* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1993), 301–02; Dolores Ibárruri, *et al*., *Guerra y revolución en España 1936–39*, 4 vols (Moscow: Editorial Progreso, 1966–1977), IV, 305–06, 309–17. *Cf*. also José García Pradas, *Cómo terminó la guerra de España* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Imán, 1940), 81–91, 100–05.

47 For Ascanio's arrest see *La Libertad*, 22 March 1939, p. 2, quoted by Luis Español Bouché, *Madrid 1939. Del golpe de Casado al final de la Guerra Civil* (Madrid: Almena Ediciones, 2004), 57, 261. Ascanio's imprisonment and pending execution in a letter of 3 July 1941 from Eugenio Mesón (executed with Ascanio) to Mesón's wife Juana Doña: Doña, *Querido Eugenio,* 73, 82 (and a photograph of Ascanio, with biographical details, is among the unpaginated plates).

48 On Casado's social origins, see Ángel Viñas, 'Segismundo Casado López. Coronel', in *25 Militares de la República*, ed. Javier García Fernández (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2011), 215–17.

49 Reports from Alicante, Murcia and Almería in AHPCE, Film XIX, Apdo. 241.

Menéndez's calm, however, was nowhere replicated by the civilian political forces galvanized by Casado in his anti-PCE coalition. Parts of an internally fractured PSOE now made common cause with a CNT-FAI bent on political revenge. Both had been tested beyond endurance by the pressures of a lengthy and erosive war, and thus they became, in effect, the instruments through which Casado achieved his sacrificial offering of the PCE to Franco, in an act of political 'cleansing' through which he aspired to make terms with the victor.[50] This aim was one important reason for the intensive propaganda mantra of the post-coup Casado authorities that the PCE was an alien excrescence serving foreign interests against 'Spain'.[51]

Across the zone PSOE and CNT-FAI entered into a frenzy of reformation, ejecting the PCE from the full range of party, coalition and other joint Republican organizations, making ready for a normality that would never come. Was it simply an irresistible desire to settle scores even if a greater disaster stood ready to overwhelm them all?[52] Or had the panic, despair and exhaustion of the final months led many to understand Franco's siren song literally: that by 'communists' he meant only the PCE, rather than all of those collectivities and individuals, of many parties and organizations, of differing social constituencies and classes who had sought to change or challenge older notions of political and social order in Spain? Some at least had been half-persuaded of this by fifth-column propaganda, unable to see that this was pronounced not as a projection of a postwar truth, but as an act of war.

But unlike ordinary civilians, thousands of provincial and mid-level political activists included, Colonel Casado was in a position better to understand the bigger picture. Yet twice in February 1939 he deliberately

50 Casado's game plan is also implied in the fact that he had retained communist prisoners in gaol until the very end of March 1939: International Delegation for Spanish Evacuation and Relief, report to Sir George Young, entries for 28 and 29 March, p. 4 (Young Family Archive).

51 Casado's imbibing of Francoist views on the 'exoticism' of communists is evident in his comments to an international delegation that, at the end of March 1939, was attempting (largely in vain) to organize Republican evacuation from the ports of the east coast: letter from a delegation member in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 23 December 1939, p. 929.

52 For the socialist movement's own 'frenzy of reformation', see Graham, *Socialism and War*, 240–43. *Cf*. the bitter, lapidary comments by Valencian PSOE leader, Manuel Molina Conejero: 'Lo que se pide es la desaparición del PC como tal, para acabar la guerra. Si este sacrificio se pidiera al PS lo haría sin vacilaciones. ¿Qué os importa desaparecer hoy o dentro de ocho días cuando entre el fascismo?' ('We are being asked to liquidate the PCE as a political party in order to end the war. If the PS[OE] were asked to make this sacrifice it would willingly comply. What difference can it make whether you're wiped out now or in a week or so when the fascists take control?'), AHPCE, Film XX, Apdo. 238, frame 136—comments recorded by his PCE interlocutors and subsequently incorporated into a secret party report. Molina himself was detained immediately by the Francoists (Viñas and Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome*, 377). He was executed at Paterna in November 1939.

blocked attempts by Negrín to treat with Franco.[53] After the war Casado would persist in the fiction that he alone had been prepared to end the war. Ángel Viñas has recently suggested that Casado was impelled in 1939 by his desire to play a leading role, but this arguably reads too much back from Casado's *post hoc* self-obsession, itself the result of the need he felt to justify his role in what ended as the unmitigated disaster of unconditional surrender. There is a more disturbing reading that accords with the contemporary context: for the constant was Casado's preparedness, indeed his determination, to make a scapegoat of the communist movement *en masse*. At the very least he consistently blocked Negrín's evacuation plan—which makes him grossly irresponsible in his disregard of civilian lives, condemning thousands to torture and execution at the hands of Franco.[54] For his coup also triggered the fifth-column rising in the naval base of the key south-eastern port of Cartagena,[55] which in turn provoked Admiral Buiza's disastrous decision to put to sea with the fleet,[56] never to return, which in turn destroyed the possibility of any civilian evacuation whatsoever, as without the fleet's defensive capacity the merchant vessels contracted by the Republican authorities in France would not risk running the Francoist blockade of the Mediterranean ports remaining in Republican hands. This was the scenario that opened the way to perfectly avoidable atrocity—commencing with the suffering and suicide among the thousands of refugees crammed onto Alicante's quays awaiting boats that Casado's actions ensured would never arrive.

53 On 18 and 27 February: see Viñas and Hernández-Sánchez, *El desplome*, 116, 134, 252–54.

54 The magnitude of what Casado's rebellion meant, in terms of the impossibility of any serious evacuation attempt, is evident in the International Delegation for Spanish Evacuation and Relief report to Sir George Young, pp. 1–7 (Young Family Archive). This report gives a sense of the tension and scarcely-concealed panic that gripped people in those final days, and of Casado's own looming awareness of his responsibility (pp. 3–4, 5) faced with Franco's refusal to treat with him, and the fact that across the ports of the east coast (Valencia, Alicante, Gandía), the Falange was already off the leash.

55 For the naval base revolt and prior circumstances, see Bahamonde Magro and Cervera Gil, *Así terminó la guerra de España*, 421–36. Franco, too, understood its key strategic value for the Republic, and a strong fifth column had been active there since April 1938—the base was fertile territory as many naval officers, while remaining geographically/ institutionally loyal, were ideologically pro-Francoist.

56 Admiral Buiza was outspoken in his hostility to Negrín, but the latter opted for a softly-softly approach, given the similar disaffection of so many naval officers. After the internment of the Republican navy by the French in Bizerta, where Buiza had taken it, he would spend most of the rest of his life in North Africa. But it is noteworthy, not to say psychologically suggestive, that in 1947 Buiza offered his services to pilot Jewish refugees to Palestine for which endeavour he was for a time interned by the British in Haifa. Thereafter he lived in Oran until departing for France with the *pied noir* exodus. He died in Marseilles in 1963, aged sixty-one. On Buiza see Pedro María Egea Bruno, 'Miguel Buiza Fernández-Palacios. Almirante habilitado', in *25 Militares de la República,* ed. García Fernández, 155–92.

Casado's Long Aftermath

The appearance of Casado's tendentious, self-justificatory 'memoir' in 1939 was instrumental in the immediate weaving of myth around the end of the Spanish war. The fabulation was eminently believable, even when extreme, precisely because of the depth of the pre-existing fractures and animosities between the Republic's political forces, themselves massively intensified by the real events of the endgame triggered by Casado. In turn, accreting myth would further exacerbate Republican political division at every point throughout the 1940s—when it really mattered, and when, in the crucible of world war, much was still to play for over the outcome in Spain.

But the bitterness of division proved stronger than any imagining of future benefit through political unity. The hostility of the rest of the Republican forces towards the PCE was, after all, based on real political grievances and there was much evidence of how strategically ruthless the party had been in its wartime dealings, especially with the PSOE and CNT-FAI. The postwar memory of these grievances soon had its own measure of political reinvention, even sometimes dishonesty, woven into it. The general effect was to invest the myth-making of Casado, very soon embroidered by others, with a credibility sufficient to overcome its manifest contradictions. If one scrutinizes the central myth of imminent communist take-over in Republican Spain within its advocates' own tendentious explanatory frame of a PCE whose unique *raison d'être* was to serve a Soviet agenda, then nothing could have been less in accord with the USSR's needs at that time—whether one means the Soviet Union in collective security mode, when it was seeking an alliance with France and Britain against an expansionist Nazi Germany, as it was for most of the Civil War; or in the lead-up to the Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939, when it was concerned not to alienate Hitler. Neither scenario, nor the transition between, would have been served by PCE control in Republican Spain. The cumulative effects of the Cold War have latterly produced even wilder fantasy that has the PCE engineering the Casado coup to save the Soviet Union from the discredit of association with defeat.[57]

In the real world of that defeat in 1939–40, its immediate impact on the PCE bled into the effects of the Nazi-Soviet pact to produce a retreat to

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57 *Cf*. Francisco-Félix Montiel, *Un coronel llamado Segismundo. Mentiras y misterio de la guerra de Stalin en España* (Madrid: Criterio Libros, 1998), 42–43, 78, 87–93. Montiel, a professor of Administrative Law who had been a PSOE deputy (Murcia), was one of two high profile *tránsfugas* from the PSOE to the PCE in late 1936–early 1937 (the other being Margarita Nelken). During the war Montiel worked for government press relations. In 1939 he was with the PCE in Madrid—for a time in charge of radio communications (García Pradas, *Como terminó la guerra de España*, 31). Montiel left the PCE because of the Nazi-Soviet pact, although he later returned when the USSR joined the Allies in the war. He left the PCE again in 1950: see Beatriz Ansón, 'The Limits of Destalinization: The Spanish Communist Party 1956–1965', unpublished PhD thesis, London University, 2002, 92.

isolationism. We are now learning that there was rather more nuance to how European communist activists, themselves often in exile, interpreted their own political position in the light of the pact—as a time 'between antifascisms' (i.e. from the Popular Front to the formal resurgence of an anti-Nazi front after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941). But for the PCE, the experience of the war in Spain, of the devastating effect of the western democracies' sponsorship of Non-Intervention which had wrecked the socially reforming Republic's chances of survival, followed by their delivering the *coup de grâce* at Munich, through the internment by a highly conservatively inflected French Republic of many Spanish Republicans and International Brigaders in prison camps, to the likely British collusion with Casado to deliver the Republic's unconditional surrender, opening the way to mass execution and imprisonment of the defeated—all added an edge of serious credibility to the Soviet line that in the new European war initiated in September 1939, ordinary workers could have no interest in defending Britain and France over their imperial opponents.[58] Thereafter too, the impact of Casado continued to make itself felt during the PCE's years of clandestinity under Franco. Significantly, while contemporary Comintern and PCE cadre confidential reports abound on the Casado events, there was never a subsequent formal enquiry—an indication of how the quintessential extremeness and uncontrollability of the broader context in which the events occurred risked exposing awkward truths and 'responsibilities' that could too easily rebound. This is confirmed by the tendency at successive moments of subsequent political crisis within the PCE for dissidents, of diverse persuasions, to raise the need for an enquiry. It is also interesting to hypothesize to what extent a subliminal 'memory of Casado' (i.e. of how the party had harboured an 'enemy within') underlay the notable reluctance of PCE cadres to accept the shift in the 1950s back to a policy of broad alliance against Franco (*reconciliación nacional*) until this was imposed by Stalinist central discipline in 1956. Any investigation here, however, comes up against the difficult question of what served as the medium of transmission for this 'memory', given the very high turnover in the PCE from the 1930s to the 1950s, and even within the 1940s, as a result of the PCE's profligacy with its front-line militants and Franco's perpetual breaking of the party's clandestine cadres, a time when *caídas* were rife.

The mythification of Casado, which began as one man's search for an alibi in the immediate wake of the March 1939 *débâcle*, grew legs as the Cold War developed farther afield through the crucible of WWII. Casado and others seamlessly melded the indigenous, multi-dimensional, war-born 'anti-communism' present in 1938–39 in the Republican zone, already of course a product with its own mythological dimension, with later and even more

58 PCE manifesto of November 1940, 'La guerra imperialista', supporting the Soviet line, AHPCE, Film XX, Apdo. 243.

extravagantly binary myths now extending across the European continent and beyond. By the 1960s, Casado's own ego and his personal financial needs had meshed with Franco's permanent manipulation of Cold War myths.[59] Today, too, in our allegedly post-Cold War times, a resurgence of right-wing populist nationalism across Europe is revivifying the same hoary Francoist myths of a warrior defence against communism.

But the truth of Casado remains something else: it summarily ended Republican resistance in the worst possible conditions, while, like a shrapnel bomb, its exploding fragments—accusations of conspiracy and mutual betrayal within and between the political forces of the Republic—remained live and barbed, a more deadly source of subsequent and sustained anti-Franco division than is yet recognized. This truth of Casado becomes additionally wrenching with the retrospective knowledge that, although the war was surely lost for the Republic, the manner of its ending could viably have been made less lethal, permitting thousands more people to be saved from the execution squads and common graves upon which the Franco state was built.

59 The result was the second, significantly reformulated version of Casado's account, *Así cayó Madrid. Último episodio de la Guerra Civil española*, published in Spain in 1968 (Madrid: Guadiana; repr. Madrid: Ediciones 99, 1977). See the 'backstory' to both the 1939 and 1968 versions of Casado in Viñas, 'Playing with History' in note 3.