

THE VICTORIOUS COUNTERREVOLUTION: THE NATIONALIST EFFORT IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

(MICHAEL SEIDMAN)

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My goal is winning the future, and to win, we must utterly and permanently defeat the Left. In this effort, we can learn many lessons from Spain in the years from 1930 to 1940 (and in the years beyond, but that is a discussion for another day). These lessons are not just about war, or just about kinetic politics. As *The Victorious Counterrevolution* demonstrates, winning requires those who lead a struggle for dominance to maintain a functioning economy that satisfies the average man. Nobody can go hungry, and to avoid that, ample production, orderly markets, and fiscal stability must be maintained. It is to Nationalist success, and Republican failures, in these areas that Michael Seidman ascribes Francisco Franco's victory, and he makes a compelling and instructive case.

When we talk about economics today, we tend to think of what are abstractions to most people, even if the impacts are not abstractions, such as NAFTA or Federal Reserve policies. What Seidman analyzes is not such national-scale policies, for the most part, but tip-of-the-spear policies and actions, which directly affected each resident in wartime Spain—in short, political economy, not mere economics. He analyzes Nationalist politico-economic practices and then contrasts them with illustrative failures. Naturally, such failures include the Republicans, whose political economy was miserable, due mostly to their inborn ideological imperatives. But failures also include those of one side in two other civil wars: the Russian Civil War of 1917–1922 and the Chinese Civil War of the 1930s and 1940s, where other counterrevolutionaries, the Russian Whites and the Chinese Kuomintang, failed, while Franco succeeded.

That's why the title of this book admits that Franco's fight against the Left was a "counterrevolution." Seidman assumes, without real discussion, that the Republicans were revolutionaries, and thus implicitly illegitimate. That's indisputably the truth, as I have documented at great length elsewhere. In fact, the Republicans at the time described themselves as revolutionary leftists, and made no secret of their goal of imposing a dictatorship of the Left, that in the inevitable course would

have killed far more people than they actually did, as such regimes always do (though they still managed to kill very many). Franco prevented that, which is why he is a hero. But calling Franco a counterrevolutionary is saying the quiet part out loud; most historians feel compelled to mouth lies about the supposed legitimacy of the Republican regime.

Seidman is not, however, a fan of Franco (which is good for him, since the disgusting current Spanish government has just criminalized any expression of support for Franco, his government, or any of his policies—maybe it is time for another war there). His sympathies clearly lie with the Republicans, although he is generally fair and his sympathies only really show up in the negative adjectives applied to the Nationalists, never to the Republicans, and to his pro forma recitation of complaints about supposed excessive Nationalist “repression.” But to accomplish his project, to show through contrasting and comparing with Russia and China that a counterrevolutionary movement can win through economic competence, he has to admit the Republicans were the real revolutionaries.

It’s generally recognized that the Nationalist economy operated well, but apparently this is rarely, if ever, studied with attention. Rather it is explained with the non-explanation that the Nationalists engaged in so-called repression in the areas they controlled, which somehow magically forced the economy to operate efficiently. Certainly the Nationalists justifiably and largely successfully rooted out the leaders of the Left, but as Seidman shows, the Nationalist zone operated mostly as a normally functioning civil society, which is what drove much of its success. Repression had nothing to do with it, and in fact the Nationalists didn’t have the resources to adequately police many provinces, making any “repression” there during the war impossible (although justice for the worst Left offenders was ultimately meted out, after the war). Another common claim among Left historians is that the Republicans could not run a functioning economy because they received insufficient outside support. Seidman also rejects this claim, saying that the Republicans did receive more than adequate foreign aid, enormous amounts, and they simply dissipated it through incompetence. Given the universal performance of Left governments with plenty of resources, most recently Venezuela, this seems obvious. More aid would not have gotten the Republic a different result.

Seidman offers a lot of statistics; this book not a light read, although it's not drudgery, either. He notes that despite voluminous primary source material, very little scholarship has focused on the Nationalist zone of control during the war; scholars prefer to focus on their ideological compatriots, the Republicans. Seidman in particular draws from newspapers, which were heavily censored with respect to politics and war, but not with respect to economic matters and the administration of justice. He covers three major areas of the economy: agriculture, markets, and state finance, each of which required a different set of skills in administration. It appears that Nationalist military leaders typically set the economic policies in the area they controlled, assisted by competent functionaries, with some central discussion and coordination, including a central agrarian bureaucracy, the SNT. The Nationalists did have one key advantage, in that they had plenty of civilian experts in political economy; the Spanish technocratic class mostly fled to the Nationalist zone to avoid Republican terror, so, for example, banking expertise was not in short supply.

Agriculture dominated Spain's economy; industry was relatively limited and concentrated in a few areas of the country. (It was only in the 1950s, through the economic miracle presided over by Franco, that Spain really joined the modern world, in economic terms.) When the war began, in 1936, the Republicans controlled, according to Seidman, seventy percent of the tax base, eighty percent of industry, including almost all textiles, and most of the rail lines, motor vehicles, and petroleum/gasoline stocks and processing facilities. The Republic only controlled thirty percent of agricultural products, but within that they controlled most of the citrus, food oil, and rice production, products valuable in export. They also had all the gold reserves of the country. The Nationalists controlled most of the wheat, wine, and meat production, and they controlled significant ore stocks, which they could export to get cash or in trade for weapons. Still, in short, the Republicans were in a commanding position, not dissimilar to that of the Union in our own (first) Civil War. Given this, and given Franco's inability to quickly capture Madrid and subsequent settling into a war of attrition, the Left should have won the war. Why didn't they? Because they squandered their advantages, according to Seidman.

How did the Nationalists succeed? Mostly by approaching economics as a strictly practical matter, ensuring the confidence of both their citizens and of foreigners in their economy, combined with limited reliance on calls for shared sacrifice. The single most important element was consistency and maintenance of property rights—even official “requisitioning” was rare, and when done, as it was sometimes with motor vehicles, it was approached through negotiation; documented officially; and compensated, with property returned when it was no longer used. The exact opposite was the case in the Republican zone, where ideology and inconsistency ruled, and the inevitable result was immediate destruction of the economy. It was only in part a political matter; yes, the Republicans were fans of such destructive practices as “proletarian shopping,” meaning unfettered looting of small businesses, but it was lack of predictability and lack of the rule of law that was the even bigger problem for the Republicans. This was inherent; their ideology prevented the Left from having the rule of law—after all, no Left regime has ever had the rule of law, and we can see how our own currently ascendant Left regime is actively destroying the rule of law in America, so this is not an abstraction to an American of 2021. But that doesn’t mean Right regimes always do better. Seidman points out that the Russian Whites and the Chinese Kuomintang both behaved much as did the Republicans, and faced very similar problems—more from greed and incompetence than ideology, but with the same result. He also notes that the Chinese Communists, despite their ideology, during the war adopted similar practices to those of the Nationalists, and benefitted in a similar fashion. Temporary policy adjustments by the Left under extreme pressure sometimes occur, such as Lenin’s New Economic Policy, although they always return to their vomit soon enough. But the Spanish Left wasn’t capable of making this kind of adjustment, or at least failed to do so.

It wasn’t just maintaining functioning markets, though. The Nationalists knew perfectly well that many Spanish farmers were barely subsistent, and often on the knife edge of hunger even without war. They therefore prioritized direct assistance to production. They created organizations to loan money to farmers and to make seed available to them, in general favoring rural interests over urban ones. These and other similar policies resulted not only in plenty of cereals to eat, along with

other important agricultural goods such as oils, but in a steady supply of animals necessary for milk, meat, pack carrying, and transport—in fact, animals of all types flourished, unlike in the Republican zone, where animal counts went to nearly zero, as they were eaten (often to prevent confiscation, another recurrent historical theme in any agricultural area dominated by the Left). The Nationalists even ran many fairs for the buying and selling of animals, just as had occurred before the war.

The result was that the average Spaniard under Franco ate well, and that even better food was reliably supplied to the soldiery—not only at the front, but also in the form of sumptuous meals when soldiers were on leave, especially when celebrating a victory. Knowledge of this, spread by word of mouth and deliberately by propaganda, encouraged desertions by the enemy. Foreign observers who had been in the Republican zone were astounded by the way Nationalist soldiers ate, and noted the consequent differences in morale. (Seidman says, “In the last months of the war Madrid residents were receiving officially only 100 grams of bread daily plus several hundred grams of rice, beans, or lentils every other day.”) When those in charge keep bread on your family’s table through ensuring gainful employment and adequate food stocks, their program looks a lot more attractive immediately—especially when your working-class cousin got shot as a “fascist” back in Madrid and your aunt in Barcelona is starving.

What the Nationalists ran were not free markets, however, some Austrian School dream—far from it. Price controls were the order of the day, which naturally brought a black market, which brought threats and punishments from the authorities. Nearly all those punishments were fines, graded according to the offense and the ability to pay—the rich and businesses got huge fines, the poor small fines. Occasionally jail sentences were imposed, but those seem to have been illustrative, not the norm. Fines make sense in this situation—Nationalist money had value, so the fines were a real punishment, and filling the jails would make no sense during a war. I’m a fan of fines as modern punishment, but I suppose they only work when they can be collected, and when the government itself is not simultaneously handing out cash to most people. Most of those punished today wouldn’t actually feel any punishment; fines aren’t really feasible in a fake economy.

Such controls bred, naturally, a fair amount of corruption and graft. Mayors, in particular, tended toward corruption, and punishments were frequently handed out by the military government, including removal from office and employment for those involved in corruption. Some of the corruption was also driven by other internal tensions and conflicts on the Nationalist side, especially between the ideological Falange and more traditional Spaniards. Moreover, as the war came to its end, and the Nationalists were seen as likely to win, corruption increased greatly, and continued into the postwar years. It is notable that Right regimes seem highly susceptible to corruption (that his friends have enriched themselves is the only legitimate criticism of Viktor Orbán), and a controlled economy, whatever its temporary benefits, always offers lush opportunities, which can be held in check by a common goal, but not forever. This is a key management problem after the defeat of our own Left.

Appeals to morality and shared sacrifice helped the Nationalists run a functioning economy, but only worked to a limited extent. You can't eat exhortations. The bogus phrase "we're all in this together," earlier chanted during our own experience of the Wuhan Plague, which mercifully seems to have died as it became obvious it was a total lie, really did apply to most in the Nationalist zone. Not to all—a good percentage of the hardcore leftists had fled to the Republican zone, but many of those with some Republican sympathies stayed, for one reason or another. As is always the case, however, most people in both zones didn't care as much about the conflict as did the zealous, and so quite a few of those with Republican sympathies ended up supporting, even fighting for, the Nationalists, either because they were conscripted or because fighting was more to their taste and benefit than sitting out, or because they changed their political opinions to fit the fashion, as is the typical course for the average person under a dominant regime.

Sacrifice was more appealing to the average man because wages generally steadily increased; it was this, not supposed repression, that kept the workers at work in Nationalist Spain. The economy performed so well that full employment was the norm and labor shortages were common, which of course tended to further increase wages. Even when wages were theoretically controlled, the government generally turned a blind eye to employers overpaying, and in fact officially allowed much

flexibility, while rigorously punishing selling goods at higher than the official price. Labor peace was obtained even among traditionally leftist workers, such as miners; in part this was because the work force was sometimes run on a military basis, but more because of high salaries, increased fringe benefits, and aggressive enforcement by the government of workers' rights, such as fining employers for usury, child labor, and unsafe working conditions. At the same time, the Nationalists managed to significantly expand industrial production, both organically and as they liberated areas with industry from the Republicans.

Perhaps most importantly, the Nationalists, unlike the Republicans, managed to keep state finance stable. Franco was able to successfully collect all kinds of taxes; tax evasion was limited, with middle-class and wealthy Spaniards being willing, even eager, to sacrifice (unlike wealthy Russians). The exact opposite occurred in the Republican zone, where property and income tax collection dropped to nearly zero, as taxpayers argued that taxation was "exploitation." Inflation rocketed in the Republic; not in Nationalist Spain, which tightly controlled the money supply. Contrary to leftist myth, very little of Franco's funding was provided by expropriation of leftists—houses left behind by fleeing leftists were rented out, but actually confiscating property of those tainted by leftist actions merely created destitute wards of the state, so was avoided by the Nationalists. Just as importantly, the Nationalists were able to float bonds to foreign buyers at reasonable interest rates, unlike the Republicans, who could not borrow at all, because nobody believed they could repay, or would if they could.

And, finally, as Franco rolled up the country, the Nationalists made sure that the first thing to arrive in liberated towns was food. "Supplying hungry towns was of incalculable political importance," as Seidman says, and the Nationalists widely used the slogan "No Spaniard without bread." The towns were hungry because the Republicans failed at everything at which the Nationalists succeeded. Administration of feeding the liberated was given over, in cooperation with the military, to the Auxilio Social, a state-funded and state-encouraged charity for women ages seventeen to thirty-five, with great success, and leading to significant propaganda victories.

I read this book as I continue my own study of modern Left-Right civil wars. I have Finland and Spain under my belt; I am moving on to

others, such as Chile and Mexico. As we drift, or hurtle, towards our own nearly-inevitable armed conflict between Left and Right (already begun by the Left; we await only the wholly justified response to the next Left assault), what does Francoist economic success mean for us? In the short term, it reinforces my strong belief that true continuous and existential bilateral conflict will only begin in America when some form of economic catastrophe overtakes us, because unless he is directly threatened, a man in relative economic comfort will not take risks or actively support those who advocate risk, even if he is in spiritual despair. When the average person begins to suffer, unable to any longer rely on government checks and Netflix to grease his path to the next day, or unable to get food or satisfy other crucial needs, then he will fully awake and be susceptible to revolt against the totalitarianism of the Left. Yes, huge swathes of invisible Americans are already suffering—but most of the time they can still paper over their misery with fake money that buys real, if ephemeral, goods, though quite a few, unable to even do that, take drugs or kill themselves, ignored by our ruling classes, who loathe and hate them, and celebrate their deaths. Papering over won't work forever, and when it stops working, and the right leader weaponizes the masses, it'll be a different story, just as it was in Spain.

One difficulty hampering the ability of today's Right to maneuver into necessary position for this future is that we lack the advantages with which the Spanish counterrevolutionaries began the war. They were highly organized with excellent leadership, and they had interlocking support of crucial constituencies, from peasants to the Church to most of the Army. The nascent counterrevolutionaries of the Right in America today have none of this, and a huge proportion of the efforts of the Left today go to preventing them from organizing, most prominently the federal government's terror campaign against the heroes of the January 6 Electoral Justice Protest, the purpose of which is to discourage any future opposition. But, again, that sort of thing only works as long as the economy appears to function. When it fails, all those efforts will be swept away overnight. Or so I predict; your mileage may vary, but I bet it won't.

When the conflict comes, if you are Left, you might object, as the odious David Frum did the other day, that seventy percent of America's economy is located in "blue" states, and so it seems that in a Left-Right

conflict, the Left would easily dominate the Right economically. That's a stupid objection (though Frum is a stupid man, so no surprise). I could adduce many reasons, but let's stick to just two. First, as I have analyzed elsewhere, GDP is a fiction; most of what goes into it is not value produced in any meaningful way. Far more than fifty percent of real value is produced in red states, and output could be increased, unlike in blue states, where little of real value is produced. More gender studies degrees and video game apps will not win a war; corn and guns will, as Franco proved. And second, as this book shows, management during conflict is what matters most, not where you start. In a real conflict, within a short time in America the Left zone would look like Venezuela, and the Right zone be flourishing, at least if it had competent management (something, admittedly, in very short supply on today's Right, but new times will bring forth new men).

So, maybe oddly, this book made me happy. As I have noted before, what Franco justly wrought was destroyed after his death, and now the Spanish are back where they started in 1934, only with a lot fewer children and a lot bleaker future. We therefore tend to assume Right successes are impermanent. I deny this, and I am confident that future Right successes can be permanent—as long as the Left is destroyed and discredited across the entire West. Simple competence based in reality, common on the Right and inevitably lacking on the Left, both tendencies on sharp display in this book, will help us accomplish our goal.