

# Spain, an example for France? The Spanish Civil War Recounted by Far-Right French Intellectuals (1936-1939)

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## Abstract

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) was a conflict with international political and cultural consequences. It had an important influence in France, and many French intellectuals chose their side in the war. Nowadays, some of the French intellectuals that supported the Spanish Republic are well-known. However, an important group of far-right and anti-democratic French writers and journalists took part for Spanish rebels. Some of them travelled to Spain, and in their writings, they justified the war, criticised the Spanish Republic, showed their admiration for Franco and pushed French government not to take part in the war, in a context of political tension in France and Europe. The aim of this research is to analyse the media and the arguments about the Spanish Civil War used by these intellectuals, that found in Spain an authoritarian political model.



The Spanish Civil War was an international conflict. Poster in English against air raids in Madrid.

## Introduction

The Spanish Civil War was an international conflict and a “war of intellectuals”.

Few civil conflicts have stirred passions between international journalists, writers and authors of

all political leanings in that way. But, due to the geographical proximity and the links between both countries, France was one of the most interested nations in the Spanish Civil War, and French intellectuals wrote many articles, books and brochures about this subject.

There is a lack of works about the reactions of far-right French intellectuals. However, their writings about the Spanish conflict show how the war was interpreted by an influent sector of French opinion which recounts a great deal about French political situation on the eve of World War II.

How do far-right French intellectuals interpret the Spanish Civil War according to their political principles? What arguments do these intellectuals use to justify the war and its violence? How are these representations of the war influenced by intellectuals’ fears about the French and European situation in the late 30’s?

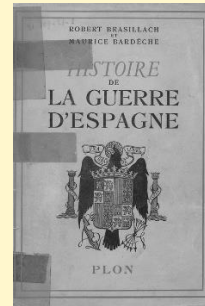
## Materials and methods

I have principally used press sources, in particular the three most important far-right publications in the late 30’s France: *Candide*, *Gringoire* and *Je suis partout*. They had a big print run and held a non-negligible influence on the French right wing.



Moreover, since the start of the war, there had been an outbreak of publications about Spain (essays, historical books, travel books...), that

had also constituted important material for my work.



First edition of *Histoire de la guerre d'Espagne*, by Robert Brasillach et Maurice Bardèche (1939).

## Results

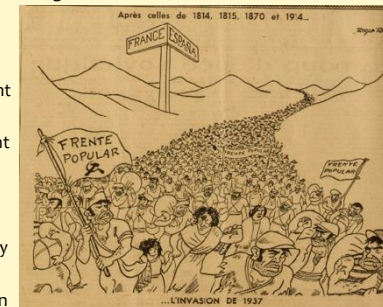
Far-right French intellectuals massively supported Franco, following an argumentation that mixed their own political ideologies, xenophobia, hatred for the left people, a non-interventionist pacifism and a huge fear of communism and the outbreak of a new European war, after the trauma created by the IWW.

They represented the Spanish Civil War as a fight between good and evil, between Spain and foreign ideologies such as communism. Far-right French thinkers dehumanised their enemy (in this case, the Spanish Republic), and they exalted the rebel side, with a particular attraction for its leaders, especially Franco. They harshly condemned violence on the Republican side, but they justified and minimised repression in Francoist Spain, because they considered it essential to fight against communism and the Republic’s disorder.



Anti-Communist caricature about the Spanish Civil War published by *Gringoire*, 21 august 1936.

Far-right French intellectuals interpreted the war as an internal French conflict in some way. In France, in 1936, Leon Blum, leader of a left-wing coalition of parties (le Front Populaire), came to power. Even if Blum’s cabinet had some aspects in common with the government of the Spanish Republic, France only offered non-official help to the Spanish Republic after the coup d’état of July 1936. However, far-right French intellectuals protested against any interventionism in favour of the Spanish Republic. Besides, these authors criticised the arrival of Spanish refugees in France, as they saw them as dangerous revolutionaries, and they did not hesitate to spread fake news about crimes and exactions supposedly committed by refugees.



“The invasion of 1937: xenophobic caricature against Spanish refugees published in *Gringoire* in September 1936.

And, overall, they found in Francoist Spain (that they called “The new Spain”) a nationalist political regime that, according to them, mixed fascism and religion, and modernity and tradition.

## Discussion

The answers to my research questions imply a better knowledge about the pro-Francoist positions in France during the Spanish Civil War (that also was a pre-war situation in Europe). Between July 1936 and April 1939, every intellectual that analysed Spain’s situation had in mind the possible outbreak of a new European conflict. Then, Spain was a mirror which reflected the fears and hopes of many international intellectuals of any political ideology.

The results of this work can be related to the research of other historians about intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War, providing a complete approach of the subject of French far-right authors.

From this starting point, we could explore some other perspectives for future research. It seems particularly interesting to study the journeys to Francoist Spain during the war, that were determinant for the representation of the Spanish Civil War by far-right French intellectuals. Nowadays, we know the texts that these intellectuals wrote about Spain, but we ignore some aspects about the organization, the attitudes of Francoist government and the details of these journeys during the war.

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