

Paul Preston lecture: The Crimes of Franco

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The remains of General Franco lie in the gigantic mausoleum of the *Valle de los Caídos* (Valley of the Fallen), built with the sweat and blood of twenty thousand slave labourers. Franco's monument to his own greatness and to the fallen of his own side in the Spanish Civil War, it took nearly twenty years to carve the 850 foot long basilica out of the hillside of the Valle de Cuelgamuros in the Guadarrama mountains north east of Madrid, and to erect the immense cross which towered 500 feet above it. The fate of his enemies could not have been more different.

Apart from those killed on the battlefields, tens of thousands were officially executed, judicially murdered, between the autumn of 1936 and 1945, when the Axis defeat imposed some caution on the Caudillo. However, there were others, perhaps another 50,000, who were killed without even the simulacrum of a trial. Some were thrown alive from cliffs into the sea, or from high bridges into deep rivers. Others were shot against the walls of a cemetery or by a roadside and buried in shallow graves where they fell or were thrown into disused mineshafts. For decades, their families lived in terror, unable to grieve properly, unsure of the fate of their mothers or fathers, their husbands or sons.

In late 2002, building works in one of the patios of the Municipal Cemetery of Toledo unearthed a huge mass grave containing hundreds of bodies of persons who disappeared at the end of September 1936, after the capture of the city by Franco's forces. In addition to the casualties among the Republican militiamen and troops during the attack on Toledo, afterwards there was a sweeping purge of prisoners, wounded and civilian personnel suspected of left-wing leanings. Without mass DNA testing, it is impossible to know the exact numbers of Republicans killed in the days following the siege. Nevertheless, according to the Cemetery's register between 27 September and 13 October, 727 bodies were buried. There were twenty-one batches of corpses with no details other than the numbers contained in each batch and labelled '*desconocidos*' (unknown). There were eight corpses on 27 September and then sixteen batches between 1 and 3 October making up a total of 564 victims, which includes presumably those killed during the fighting on 27 September and the prisoners and civilians killed over the next six days. The last five batches, one each on 4, 5, 6, 7 and 13 October, saw another 163 bodies.

All over Spain, archaeological activity is producing evidence of the horrors of the Civil War. Equally typical was what happened between July 1936 and December 1937 near the village of Concul in the province of Teruel. Into *Los pozos de Caudé*, a pit six feet wide and 250 feet deep, were hurled the bodies of 1005 men and women, including adolescent boys and girls. Few of them were political militants. Their crime was simply to be considered critical of the military coup, related to someone who had fled, to have a radio or to have read liberal newspapers before the war. It has taken sixty-eight years for their families to find out the truth. Fear prevented anyone from even going near the pit although occasionally at night bunches of flowers would be left nearby. Once the Socialists were in power, people began openly to leave floral tributes. Then in 1983, a local farmer came forward and said that he had kept a notebook with the numbers of shootings that he heard each night throughout the Spanish Civil War. They came to more than one thousand.

Media interest in Caudé and other common graves began three years ago, when a young Navarrese sociologist, Emilio Silva-Barrera, began to investigate the fate of his grandfather who had disappeared in León in the first months of the war. Overcoming the wall of silence and fear built by the Franco regime, which survived the transition to democracy, Silva discovered the truth. At dawn on 16 October 1936, his grandfather, with twelve other Republicans, was murdered by Falangist gunmen near Priaranza del Bierzo. Their bodies were buried in a field next to the roadside where they fell. A shopkeeper, Emilio Silva-Faba was the father of six children aged between 3 months and nine years, his offence his membership in the centre left Republican party. His grandson then located the burial place and persuaded a group of archaeologists and forensic medical experts to take part in exploratory digs. DNA tests of the exhumed bones have now identified Emilio Silva-Faba.

As a result of that 'success', Emilio Silva, together with Santiago Macías Pérez, a local historian from León, founded an organisation, the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, to continue the work. Twenty-six digs are currently ongoing and 109 bodies have been recovered. The Association has 2500 requests for help in locating the remains of relatives. It is impossible to calculate with certainty the number of bodies lying in shallow graves across Spain but the Association estimates that the requests reflect about 10% of the total. There exist gigantic common graves, in Extremadura where mass killings took place at the concentration camp of Castuera, in Asturias in both Oviedo with 1600 and Gijón with 2000, and in various parts of Andalusia. In Catalonia alone, the regional government has located 54 such graves with 4000 corpses in Barcelona alone. There are graves in every part of Spain. As they are excavated, relatives stand nervously, like those awaiting the rescue parties in mining disasters or earthquakes. For those who never knew what happened to their loved ones, even though they know that they were murdered, they still await the definitive confirmation with horror and trepidation. When it comes, as sometimes it does, it permits the shuddering release of pent-up and unacknowledged grief.

It was a Spanish investigating judge, Baltasar Garzón, who pursued General Pinochet on behalf of the 'disappeared' in Chile. Yet in Spain, where there are more than ten times as many cases, despite the private initiative of Emilio Silva who has taken the case to the United Nations, the government of the Partido Popular refused to put resources into the search. Under the PSOE, that is changing. Nevertheless, there is still no census of the dead, no team of historians working on the problem, no funds for DNA testing. The government does, however, contribute to the upkeep of the graves of Falangist volunteers who fought with the Germans on the Eastern Front. Moreover, right-wing historians have been responding to the work of the Association with a resurrection of the Francoist propaganda which implies that the 'reds' simply got what they deserved. With the most virulent of their number riding high in the best-seller lists, the Spanish Civil War is being fought all over again on paper.

The admirers of General Franco, Spanish and foreign, focused on a series of 'triumphs' which, not surprisingly, were also loudly trumpeted by his regime's propaganda apparatus. The most regularly cited of these accomplishments are a victory in the Spanish Civil War allegedly won by superior generalship, the bringing of law and order to an anarchic nation, the maintenance of Spanish neutrality in the Second World War and the masterminding of the Spanish economic miracle of the 1960s. In fact, to his dying day, Franco vengefully kept Spain divided between the victors and the vanquished of 1939. This benevolent father of his nation regarded the civil war as 'the struggle of the *Patria* [the

fatherland] against the *anti-Patria*' and the defeated as the '*canalla* (scum) of the Jewish-Masonic-Communist conspiracy'.

The view of Franco as a magnanimous patriot is difficult to reconcile with the psycho-pathological language used by Francoists to depict their left-wing compatriots as subhuman - dirty, filthy, stinking depraved scum, slime, whores and criminals. This language justified the need for 'purification', a euphemism for the most sweeping physical, economic and psychological repression. The cost in blood of saving a nation's soul mattered little to the victors.

The horrors already mentioned reflect the fact that, like the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft and the Soviet gulags, the Franco dictatorship also embarked on a process of national 'reconstruction' through the execution, forced exile, imprisonment, torture and economic and social humiliation of hundreds of thousands of Spaniards defeated in the Civil War of 1936-1939. The persecution of the compatriots deemed to belong to the 'anti-Spain' (leftists or liberals and their extended families all of whom became non-persons without civil rights) affected millions. From the very first days of the war, terror had been a crucial instrument of the military rebels but to this Franco added a determination to annihilate as many Republicans as possible. Despite the German and Italian hopes for a rapid Nationalist victory, Franco's objective was the gradual and thorough occupation of Republican territory, boasting to a senior Italian officer that 'In a civil war, a systematic occupation of territory accompanied by the necessary purge (*limpieza*) is preferable to a rapid rout of the enemy armies which leaves the country still infested with enemies.' On 4 April 1937, at the beginning of the campaign against the Basque Country, he declared ominously to Mussolini's Ambassador, Roberto Cantalupo, that 'we must carry out the necessarily slow task of redemption and pacification, without which the military occupation will be largely useless. The moral redemption of the occupied zones will be long and difficult because in Spain the roots of anarchism are old and deep.'

The kind of moral redemption which he had in mind, already seen in the massacres which had followed the captures of Badajoz in August 1936 and Málaga in February 1937, more than explained the need for slowness. It would guarantee that there would never be any turning back, not only through the physical elimination of thousands of liberals and leftists but also in the long-term terrorizing of others into political support or apathy. Franco was fully conscious of the extent to which the repression not only terrified the enemy but also inextricably tied those involved in its implementation to his own survival. Their complicity ensured that they would cling to him as the only bulwark against the possible revenge of their victims.

In the south, the horrors were perhaps greatest as a colonial army applied against the civilian population the techniques of terror used in the African wars. The ferocity of the terror was unrelated to the strength of working class resistance. In the case of Badajoz, where the resistance was fierce, nearly 4000 people were killed in one week. Two thousand of them were shot in the local bull-ring in a twenty-four hour period. Piles of corpses were soaked in petrol and burned in the local cemetery, thereby rendering it impossible for there to be an accurate account of those killed. The repression was also bloody in the working class district of Triana in Seville where the workers opposed the coup but in Huelva, where the right took over relatively easily, the repression took more than 6000 lives. What happened in Huelva was representative of what took place in all parts of rebel-held territory, not just those places that had to be conquered by military force. It took place where the military rebels succeeded immediately and where

there was virtually no resistance. This was not the work of uncontrolled elements as happened in the Republican zone where the military rebellion triggered the total collapse of the entire apparatus of law and order. The Falangists and others carrying out the systematic killings could at any time have been restrained by the military authorities. Yet, the military actively encouraged thousands of civilian vigilantes to carry out a dirty war.

The purpose of terror as a weapon to generate fear far and wide was made clear by the broadcasts of both General Mola in the north and, more systematically, by General Queipo de Llano in the south. His obscene descriptions of the bloody atrocities were heard nightly from Seville and may have contributed to provoking some atrocities by his listeners. As news of the murders reached towns that were threatened by right-wing forces, reprisals were taken against the right-wing elements that were assumed to be responsible. The uncontrolled militias were not the same as the disciplined troops of the rebels, who were encouraged by their officers to carry out atrocities. The Republican authorities made every effort to control the 'uncontrolled' elements. Deaths in the Republican zone were carefully registered. Those in the Nationalist zone were not. Accordingly, there are thousands of those who just disappeared. Most deaths were not registered and many were simply buried in collective common graves. Nevertheless, the latest figures suggest that the assassinations in the Nationalist zone were between three and four times those committed in Republican territory.

The horrors of the military repression in Seville and the rest of Western Andalusia in 1936 were gradually extended to the rest of Spain as Franco captured ever more territory. Considerable cruelty was carried out against women in the name of the Francoist concept of redemption – rape, confiscation of goods, execution because of the politics of a son or husband. An image of Nationalist women as virgins or good mothers, unblemished, passive, submissive pious guardians of the moral order, was propagated through the Church and the Falange's women's organization, the *Sección Femenina*. There was a contrasting imagery directed against 'red' women who were depicted both as whores and 'not women'. These accusations, a reflection of the fear provoked in right-wing men by the liberation of women by the Republic, were specifically directed against politically active women like Dolores Ibárruri and Margarita Nelken and more generally against women on the left. In La Coruña, the civil governor, Francisco Pérez Carballos, was shot on 24 July 1936. His wife, Juan Capdevielle, was in an advanced state of pregnancy. She was arrested and in prison, when she heard the news of her husband's fate, she miscarried. She was released but some days later, she was picked up by a Falangist para-military squad, raped and murdered. Widows and the wives of prisoners were often raped. Many were forced to live in total poverty and frequently, out of desperation, to sell themselves on the streets. The increase in prostitution both benefited Francoist men who thereby slaked their lust and also reassured them that 'red' women were a fount of dirt and corruption.

As each area of Spain was conquered, there began a process of political and social purge. This was often justified in terms of left-wing atrocities despite the fact that, in many places the military coup had succeeded within days, if not hours, and there had been no such atrocities. Hundreds of thousands who escaped the random killing were kept in conditions of extreme degradation in prisons and concentration camps. Torture accounted for large numbers of suicides in prison and the authorities, feeling cheated by these 'escapes' from their justice, often reacted by executing a relative of the prisoner. Central to the repression was the systematic economic exploitation of both the rural and industrial working classes. Many thousands were forced to work – and die – in inhuman conditions in penal detachments and work battalions. The threat of

imprisonment forced millions of workers to accept starvation wages. The social humiliation and exploitation of the defeated was justified in religious terms as the necessary expiation of their sins and also in social-Darwinist terms. Denouncing the defeated as degenerate, their children were taken away and military psychiatrists carried out experiments on women prisoners in search of the 'red gene'. In prisons, massive efforts were made to break not only the bodies of prisoners but also their minds.

A good example of what redemption by Franco really meant could be found in the experience of Catalonia after the region's capture in January 1939. Occupied Catalonia experienced an all-pervading terror in a period when merely to stay alive was a major achievement for many. Research into daily life for the defeated in rural Catalonia in the 1940s is deeply shocking, revealing an appalling catalogue of hunger and illness, arbitrary repression and fear – fear of arrest, fear of denunciation by a neighbour or by a priest. The entire process was underpinned by the complicity of thousands of people who for many reasons – fear, politics, greed, jealousy – became informers and denounced their neighbours. The sheer misery of life for the defeated in Franco's Spain accounts for the notable rise in the suicide rate, which was often the consequence of economic and sexual extortion by the powerful. Considerable cruelty was visited upon women under the rhetorical Francoist umbrella of 'redemption' – rape, imprisonment as retribution for the behaviour of a son or husband and confiscation of goods. Soldiers billeted on poor families often took advantage of the unprotected women of the household. There was no shortage of priests ready to defend the honour of male parishioners and to denounce their female victims as 'reds'.

Violence against the defeated was not limited to prison, torture and execution but extended to the psychological humiliation and economic exploitation of the survivors. Franco's policy of economic self-sufficiency or autarky contributed to the repression and humiliation of the defeated and to capital accumulation although its rigidity also delayed eventual growth. Considering himself to be an economist of genius, Franco embraced autarky oblivious to the fact that Spain lacked the technological and industrial base which had made such a policy feasible for the Third Reich. Autarky in Spain brought economic and social disaster – the shortages consequent upon closing Spain to the world provoked the emergence of a black market, the *estraperlo*, which exacerbated the differences between rich and poor. Inevitably, it was those close to the regime who benefited and the defeated who suffered. State interventionism in every aspect of the planting, harvesting, processing, sale and distribution of wheat was so corrupt that it made fortunes for officials while creating shortages that saw food prices rocket. Access to work and ration cards meant getting identity cards and safe conducts which involved certificates of 'good behaviour' from local Falangist officials and parish priests. Inevitably, the defeated suffered materially and were further humiliated while the sense of well being of the victors was enhanced.

The social consequences of autarky and the workings of the black market fitted well with the Caudillo's rhetorical insistence that the defeated could find redemption only through sacrifice. There was a clear link between the repression and the capital accumulation that made possible the economic boom of the 1960s. The destruction of trade unions and the repression of the working class ensured starvation wages that permitted banks, industry and the landholding classes to record spectacular increases in profits. Moreover, the organisation which enabled prisoners to redeem their sentences by work, the *Patronato para la Redención de Penas*, effectively forced thousands of Republican prisoners into slave labour. The penal detachments provided forced labour for mines, railway building and the

reconstruction of the so-called 'devastated regions'. The military penal colonies were set up for long-term public work projects such as the Guadalquivir Canal, dug out over 180 kilometers and twenty years.

The greatest symbol of the exploitation of Republican prisoners was Franco's personal caprice, the gigantic basilica and towering cross of the mausoleum of the Valle de los Caídos. Twenty thousand were employed, and several were killed or badly injured, in its construction, a gigantic mausoleum for Franco and a monument to those who fell in his cause. The Valle de los Caídos was merely one of several enterprises in which Republican prisoners were forced to work to perpetuate the memory of the Francoist victory in permanent form. The ruined Alcázar of Toledo was rebuilt as a symbol of the Nationalist heroism displayed during its three month siege. In Madrid, the entrance to the University City, the site of the savage battle for the capital, was marked by a gigantic Arch of Victory. The Valle de los Caídos, however, dwarfed them all. The human cost of forced labour, the deaths and the suffering of the workers and their families were matched by the fortunes made by the private companies and the public enterprises that exploited them.

After years in which the atrocities of Francoism were silenced in the interests of the consolidation of democracy, it is now possible to put together the overall picture of the Spanish holocaust. Mass graves are one of the most horrendous legacies of the way in which Franco established his power. The true extent of the appalling conditions of the Francoist prison regime is only now beginning to emerge. The daily conditions of starvation and torture and the terror of waiting for the firing squad are things that have long been familiar through the memoirs of survivors. Yet it is only recently that the stories are being to be heard about what happened to the women and children forced into Franco's prisons at the end of the Civil War. Many of the thousands of women imprisoned by the regime at the end of the Civil War were young, some with very young children, some pregnant, some raped and made pregnant by their guards. The consequence was a substantial prison population of children who were punished for the perceived crimes of their mothers. Many died in the good trains into which they were packed to be moved from one prison to another. Many died of hunger, of cold or of disease. In the provincial prison of Zaragoza, forty-two newborn babies died in one week. Many children were mistreated, locked up in dark rooms and forced to eat their own vomit. Thousands were forcibly taken from their mothers and given for adoption or to be brought up in religious establishments. Usually, albeit not always, the removal of a child signified that the mother was about to be shot. Pregnancy did not save a young woman from execution – one judge commenting 'We cannot wait seven months to execute a woman.'

An important part of the story concerns the Spaniards who were victims of Nazism as a result of actions taken by the Franco regime. For many Republicans, forced into exile by the regime, there was no escape from the Nazi war and terror machine. Thousands of exiled Spaniards found themselves among the millions of non-German forced labourers obliged to work for the German war effort. Nearly 15,000 Spaniards were forced to work in the construction of the Atlantic Wall in 1940/41 while approximately 4,000 were deported to the German-occupied Channel Islands. From October 1941, these "Spanish communists", as Hitler described them, were forced to build strong-points on the various islands. Only 59 survived.

In addition to those forced to work for the Nazis, there were many Spaniards who ended up in German concentration camps. The most detailed examination of the fate of the Spaniards who ended up in

Mauthausen in Austria concluded that of the over 30,000 Spanish refugees who were deported from France to Germany, nearly 15,000 were imprisoned in Nazi camps. Of these by far the largest contingent, around 50 per cent, ended up in Mauthausen (making up the second largest contingent of prisoners there), with other groups transported to Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau and other parts of the Nazi camp system. Around half of the Spaniards that were deported were killed. Although the number of Spanish victims of the Nazi terror machine pales into relative insignificance compared to the total number of victims, it is significant that the Franco regime not only did nothing to prevent Spaniards suffering the fate of other Europeans, but actively encouraged the Germans to detain and deport exiled Republicans.

It was not just exiled leftists who, thanks to the Franco regime, fell into the clutches of the Nazis. A major propaganda operation was mounted to deceive large numbers of Spanish workers, driven by hunger, to work in the Third Reich. Franco owed Hitler a considerable debt and the need of the German war industry for labour provided a method of payment. A visit to Germany by Gerardo Salvador Merino of the Falangist union organisation resulted in propaganda about the high standards of living in Germany, high wages and possibilities for saving. No mention was made of the fact that the money earned by Spanish workers would go towards payment of the Civil War debt. Within weeks of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the Blue Division of Falangist volunteers was on its way to fight in Russia. In addition to the combatants, an agreement was made on 21 August 1941 between the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (German Labour Front) and the Falange for 100,000 Spanish workers to be sent to Germany. In fact, after the first batch of 7000 went, their reports of the conditions made it more difficult for the Falange to find volunteers.

The reconstruction of this repression has been rendered difficult by the one-sided destruction of archival material. This begs the question, if Francoism had so much to be proud of, why were the police, judicial and military archives of the 1940s so ruthlessly purged? In the 1960s and 1970s, the archives of provincial police headquarters, of prisons and of the main Francoist local authority, the Civil Governors, disappeared. Convoys of trucks removed the 'judicial' records of the repression. As well as the deliberate destruction of archives, there were also 'inadvertent' losses when some town councils sold their archives by the ton as waste paper for recycling. Despite the losses, enough has survived to permit the reconstruction of the 'legal' repression. The efforts of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, both through their archaeological digs but also by encouraging people to come forward and recount their memories, are contributing to the nation-wide reconstruction of the 'unofficial' repression. Finally, it is possible to have a reasonably approximate overview of the human cost of the military coup of 1936. This has been a cumulative process. Since the death of Franco, huge efforts have been made by local historians to recover surviving documentation, more thoroughly in some areas than in others. Minute studies have been produced for many Spanish regions and figures from the thirty-six provinces which have been researched totally or partially show 92,462 deaths. That is to say 92,462 deaths in 36 provinces, 72% of total, which suggests that the real figure is likely to be around 130,000.

In mid July 1939, Count Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law and the Foreign Minister of Fascist Italy, arrived in Barcelona. He was returning the official visit made to Italy one month early by Ramón Serrano Suñer, Franco's brother-in-law. Having been an enthusiastic advocate of Franco's cause during the Civil War, he was assured of a warm welcome. However, he was not impressed. Among the

entertainments provided for such an illustrious guest was a tour of battle grounds. Near one of them, he was shown a group of Republican prisoners working. Their condition provoked the bitter commentary 'They are not prisoners of war, they are slaves of war'. Later, he was received by Franco in the Palace of Ayete in San Sebastián. On his return to Rome, he described Franco to one of his cronies 'That queer fish of a Caudillo, there in his Ayete palace, in the midst of his Moorish Guard, surrounded by mountains of files of prisoners condemned to death. With his work timetable, he will see about three a day, because, that fellow enjoys his siestas.'¹

It certainly seems to be the case that Franco's sleep was never interrupted by any concern for his prisoners not by any sense of guilt as he signed death sentences. In this regard, he was happy to believe his own propaganda. Following the example of Josef Goebbels, Franco's propagandists presented the repression, the executions, the overflowing prisons, the concentration camps, the slave labour battalions, as the scrupulous yet compassionate justice administered by a wise and benevolent Caudillo. One after another, they lined up to sing the praises of the Caudillo's lofty and noble impartiality. Typical of them was the repentant leftist Joaquín Pérez Madrigal who intoned: 'Franco, Franco, Franco, is the liberator of the Fatherland, the restorer of Law, the distributor of Justice, he who weighs out wealth, love and all things good. Franco, Franco, Franco, has reconquered Spain, he is the saviour of all Spaniards. Of all Spaniards! Franco is the Victor, the Founder, the bringer of Justice and the Magnanimous one.'²

Altogether more specific was the greatest sycophant of them all, his one-time commander and, by the time of the Civil War, propaganda chief, General Millán Astray. Under the title 'To Bring Justice is the most august mission of the Head of State (Franco, the Bringer of Justice)' (Ejercer la justicia es la más augusta misión del Jefe del Estado (Franco, el Justiciero)), Millán Astray reverently described how Franco dispensed justice: 'Twice when our eyes met, they were damp with tears, not because the sentence had been death, but because the magnanimity of Franco's heart had had imposed itself and, in the interests of a justice free of hatred, he had blocked out anything that might stand in the way of serene justice and had commuted the sentence. In all the many cases that the courts had suggested commutation of the death sentence, he agreed. In those cases where he approved the death sentences, the evidence of horrendous crimes against the Fatherland and against fellow man had been so overwhelming that his duty of defending the very existence of the Fatherland and the safety of peaceful citizens that there was no possibility of clemency. In all other cases, generosity was the order of the day. No one, other than those who had committed murder and their crime had been fully proven had been condemned to death.'³

For his biographer, the newspaper editor Luis de Galinsoga, Franco was 'as well as being the Generalísimo of the forces, Head of State, and, for every grief-stricken Spaniard, the distributor of help,

¹ Duilio Susmel, *Vita sbagliata di Galeazzo Ciano* (Milano: Aldo Palazzi Editore, 1962) p.158.

² Joaquín Pérez Madrigal, *Tipos y sombras de la tragedia. Mártires y héroes. Bestias y farsantes* (Ávila: Imprenta Católica Sigirano Díaz, 1937) pp.11-12.

³ General José Millán Astray, *Franco, el Caudillo* (Salamanca: M.Quero y Simón Editor, 1939) pp.61-2, 214.

the guardian and the shoulder to cry on, is also the supreme administrator of justice.⁴ The administration of justice to which the awe-struck Millán Astray and Galinsoga referred was based on Franco's examination of the files on those Republican prisoners not summarily executed as they were captured or murdered behind the lines by Falangist terror squads but subjected to cursory courts martial. Usually, large numbers of defendants would have been tried in large batches, accused of generalised crimes – most often, 'military rebellion', that is to say, having failed to support the uprising of July 1936 – and given little or no opportunity to defend themselves. The death sentences passed merely needed the signature under the word 'enterado' (acknowledged) of the general commanding the province. As a result of the Italian protests, from March 1937 death sentences had to be sent to the Generalísimo's headquarters for confirmation or pardon. The last word on death sentences lay with Franco, not as Head of State, but as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. The fact that pleas for clemency were usually examined by Franco after the condemned had already been executed led to the joke by Franco's chaplain that the Generalísimo wrote 'enterrado' (buried).

In this area, his close confidant was Major, later Lieutenant Colonel, Lorenzo Martínez Fuset of the military juridical corps, who was *auditor del Cuartel General del Generalísimo* (legal adviser to headquarters). The tiny, balding Martínez Fuset was an amiable individual with a child-like smile, much liked by his fellow-officers. He was utterly devoted to Franco, to the point of adulation.⁵ Contrary to the sycophantic myth of a tireless and merciful Caudillo agonizing late into the night over death sentences, the reality was more prosaically brutal. In Salamanca or in Burgos, after lunch or over coffee, or even in a car speeding to the battle front, the Caudillo would flick through and then sign sheaves of them, often without reading the details but nonetheless specifying the most savage form of execution, strangulation by *garrote*. Occasionally, he would make a point of decreeing *garrote y prensa* (garrote reported in the press).⁶ Franco did insist on seeing the death sentences personally, although he reached his decisions in the most cursory manner. On various occasions that Ramón Serrano Suñer was present when Martínez Fuset arrived with folders of death sentences, he would offer to leave. Franco usually told him to stay, saying 'it's just routine stuff, Ramón'. While the Caudillo and his brother-in-law continued to work, Martínez Fuset would read out the name, age and profession of the condemned. Occasionally, without raising his head from the papers that he was examining with Serrano Suñer, Franco would ask 'political party?' and then state the manner in which the death sentence was to be implemented 'garrote or firing squad'. That killing should be so casual would have seemed utterly natural to a man brutalised by the colonial wars in Africa and who had had himself proclaimed responsible only to God and to History.⁷

⁴ Luis de Galinsoga & General Franco Salgado, *Centinela de Occidente (Semblanza biográfica de Francisco Franco)* (Barcelona: Editorial AHR, 1956) p.302.

⁵ Eugenio Vegas Latapié, *Los caminos del desengaño. Memorias políticas (II) 1936-1938* (Madrid: Tebas, 1987) pp.88-9.

⁶ Herbert Rutledge Southworth, *Antifalange; estudio crítico de "Falange en la guerra de España" de Maximiano García Venero* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1967) p.202; Ramón Garriga, *La España de Franco: las relaciones con Hitler* 2ª edición (Puebla, México: Editorial Cajica, 1970) pp.7-8; Ramón Garriga, *Los validos de Franco* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1981) pp.42-3, 72-3.

⁷ Article 47 of the Statutes of FET y de las JONS, published in August 1937, states that 'El Jefe Nacional de Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las JONS, Supremo Caudillo del Movimiento, personifica todos los Valores y todos los Honores del mismo. Como Autor de la Era Histórica donde

España adquiere las posibilidades de realizar su destino y con él los anhelos del Movimiento, el Jefe asume, en su entera plenitud, la mas absoluta autoridad. El Jefe responde ante Dios y ante la Historia.’