

The exhumation of Franco

Mon, Oct 14, 2019, 00:08

Sir, – There are so many inaccuracies in the letter by Dr Frank Giles (October 8th) in response to Paddy Woodworth’s article on the exhumation of Franco (Opinion & Analysis, October 7th) that it is impossible to respond briefly.

In order to sustain his point that the Second Republic “was not a healthy, normal democracy”, he lumps together “communists, anarchists, Trotskyites and militant regional separatists” as if they constituted the entire Republican polity when many of those listed were actually as opposed to the Republic as Franco’s military rebels. He ignores the context of profound social deprivation that the Republic was endeavouring to remedy. He also ignores the fact that the plotting for the army revolt of July 1936 actually began within days of the establishment of the Second Republic on April 14th, 1931. That plotting was aided by right-wing obstruction of every attempt at social reform, obstruction that fostered violence which was intensified by the deliberate provocation carried out by the hit squads of the fascist Falange after the February 1936 elections. This engineered a spiral of atrocity and reprisal that justified the long-prepared military coup.

Dr Giles says that “it is a myth that Franco won the war only because he was backed by Hitler and Mussolini”. He is right but not because many of Franco’s troops were Spanish conscripts but because Franco’s victory owed an enormous debt to the British and French foreign policy of non-intervention which deprived the Republic of the ability to buy arms and defend itself.

It is also true that terrible atrocities were committed on both sides, but there were huge quantitative and qualitative differences. Around 150,000 innocent civilians were murdered by Franco’s rebels, and that was part of a deliberate official policy. The appalling atrocities committed within the Republican zone numbered 50,000 and were committed by left-wing extremists whose activities were made possible because the military coup destroyed the apparatus of government. By the end of 1936, government structures had been rebuilt and the random killing stopped. – Yours, etc,

Prof PAUL PRESTON,

London School

of Economics.

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