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Spain Moves to Officially Define Franco as a Dictator

BY **FELICITY CAPON** 4/8/15 AT 6:54 PM

Spain's brutal authoritarian leader Francisco Franco, under whose regime hundreds of thousands were killed, will finally be recognised as a dictator by Spain's Royal Academy of History, its director has announced.

The current entry in the national biography, published in 2011 and written by Professor Luis Suárez, an octogenarian with ties to the Franco regime, describes Franco as a man who "became famous for the cold courage which he showed in the field". His regime is described as "a regime that was authoritarian, but not totalitarian".

Hundreds of thousands of Spaniards died when Franco led an armed revolt against Spain's republican government in 1936, and in the repressions that followed the civil war. Franco's regime only ended with his death in 1975.

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But today, Carmen Iglesias, the newly appointed director of the Royal Academy of History, told a conference in Madrid that the 2011 publication would be corrected to describe Franco as a dictator.

Paul Preston, a history professor at the London School of Economics and author of *The Spanish Holocaust*, describes the initial entry as "amazingly controversial. The equivalent would be Germany making out that Hitler was just an average politician who hadn't done anything particularly reprehensible. There was a huge outcry when the volumes were published".

"It is utterly inconceivable that the things written about Franco could have been written about Hitler," he continues. "If you compare Franco's crimes with Hitler's crimes, not against the Jews and populations of occupied Europe, but against German citizens, Franco was worse than Hitler."

Professor Preston believes that the current definition has been a “smear on the prestige” of the Academy, which could be why the decision to change it has been taken. It is unknown who will be in charge of writing the new definition, and what the new wording will be, other than describing Franco as a dictator. He says there will be those, even within the Academy, who will be unhappy with the decision.

In the meantime, the new definition could offer the families of Franco’s victims some form of comfort.

“When the dictionary came out, it caused a considerable scandal, and was deeply distressing for the families,” says Professor Preston. “No doubt this will be a small compensation for the families of Franco’s victims. It opens a door and that’s a very good thing.”

Emilio Silva, of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, describes the decision as important, but overdue. “It’s very sad that we have had to wait until 2015 for this announcement. If you don’t describe it as a dictatorship, then the victims are not victims of a dictator. It is a very important change, but very late.”

According to Silva, as more of Franco’s mass graves are uncovered across Spain, attitudes towards Franco are hardening. But he deplores the fact that Spain’s Royal Academy of Language still describes Francoism as a “social and political movement” and says that Spain’s academic elite still contains many Franco sympathisers.

“There is a lot of ignorance about the past,” Silva concludes. But the most important way to change attitudes is for people to know the truth.”

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