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# The supreme brother-in-law: Ramón Serrano Suñer and Spanish Fascism during the Franco Regime

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The Supreme Brother-in-Law: Ramón Serrano Suñer  
and Spanish Fascism during the Franco Regime

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the political career of Ramón Serrano Suñer, a Spanish politician whose career lasted from 1933 until 1942. Particularly, it addresses several pertinent questions about Serrano's career and the larger Franco government, including the extent to which it was truly authoritarian and the real strength of authentic fascism in post-Civil War Spain. From 1937-1941, Serrano was the second only to his brother-in-law, the dictator Francisco Franco, in terms of political prominence. Serrano used his personal connections with Franco and José Antonio Primo de Rivera, founder of the fascist Falange party, to vault himself from wartime refugee to the heights of Spanish politics in 1938. By 1940, his power base included direct control of two influential government ministries, leadership within the sole party of Spain, the *Falange Española Tradicionalista*, and an unofficial position as Franco's chief political advisor.

Serrano grew to love the glamour of his position, though, and constantly clamored for more power and influence. As a result, during the Spanish Civil War, he abandoned his sense of political neutrality between the various Nationalist factions under Franco's rule and gained a loyal personal following, later dubbed by historians as the *serranistas*. In so doing, he hoped to make his political career more well-balanced; however, his personal ambition convinced Franco that he was a danger to the dictator's power. Within a month, Franco either removed or reduced his power in three of his previous four sources of government influence, and would exclude him from government altogether in a year's time. In conclusion, this essay asserts that Serrano's dismissal from government was due to his own political maneuvers and an overestimation of the strength of fascism within the conservative Franco government.

## Introduction

On June 24, 1941, Ramón Serrano Suñer stepped out on the balcony of the Falangist party headquarters in Madrid, Spain, to the cheers of thousands of assembled youths. Two days before, German troops began their invasion of the Soviet Union, and universities throughout the Spanish capital were bursting with restless young men who had been watching developments for the World War and were eager to become actively involved, especially if it meant fighting against the Soviet Union, the nation many Spaniards hated the most for its intervention against Franco during the Spanish Civil War. As a Falangist leader and as the Spanish Foreign Minister, Serrano's voice was one which carried special weight with the assembled mass. During his speech, Serrano appealed to the memories of the Civil War, which concluded only two years prior, and the crowd rose to a fever pitch as he loudly pronounced that "Russia is Guilty!" for the problems which had plagued the nation still devastated from three years of civil conflict. As he led the crowd in a Falangist hymn and instructed them to disperse, any common observer would have seen that this man had a special ability to rouse their emotion, a talent which combined with his position as Foreign Minister and personal connections with his counterpart ministers of Germany and Italy meant that he was perhaps the only politician other than Franco himself who could have a decided impact on whether or not Spain would join the larger war. Little could Serrano have known that in just over one year's time, his self-aggrandizing agitations on behalf of the Falange would result in his complete dismissal from government with no fanfare whatsoever.

Ramón Serrano Suñer was born on September 12, 1901 and would live to be just short of one hundred and two years old, a remarkably long life considering his experience

in both the Spanish Civil War and World War II.<sup>1</sup> Despite his long life, his political tenure in Spain encompassed just nine years from 1933 to 1942, during which he held a true position of leadership for only five of these. He was educated at the University of Madrid, where he was trained as a lawyer and distinguished himself as one of the brightest students in his class. However, like any good law student, his personal knowledge alone could not guarantee a place of prominence in Spanish politics. Instead, this position was secured through his network of connections, which few in Spain could rival, especially on the Nationalist side of the civil war. During this time at the University of Madrid, he became close and life-long friends with José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera, who dominated Spanish politics from 1923 to 1930. More importantly, José Antonio is best remembered as the charismatic founder of the Falange, the fascist party of Spain founded in the mid-1930s. Furthermore, in 1931 Serrano married Zita Polo, whose sister Carmen was married to the then-director of the military academy of Zaragoza, the General Francisco Franco.<sup>2</sup>

Serrano entered politics in 1933 out of a desire to protect the legal traditions of Spain and the Catholic Church from revision within the structure of the Second Republic of Spain, which held power from 1931 to the outbreak of war in 1936.<sup>3</sup> Once the war

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<sup>1</sup>*The Telegraph*, "Ramón Serrano Suñer," September 3, 2003, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1440376/Ramon-Serrano-Suner.html#disqus\\_thread](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1440376/Ramon-Serrano-Suner.html#disqus_thread) (accessed January 6, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>*The Telegraph*, "Ramón Serrano Suñer," September 3, 2003, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1440376/Ramon-Serrano-Suner.html#disqus\\_thread](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1440376/Ramon-Serrano-Suner.html#disqus_thread) (accessed January 6, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> In brief, the Catholic Church in Spain had always, up to that point, enjoyed a special relationship with the Spanish government, allowing it special privileges in its actions and allowing it to build a reservoir of power outside of the Spanish state structure. In 1931, a Liberal coalition came to power in the Republic and revoked virtually all of these privileges, driving conservative legalists throughout Spain to run for government office to help reverse these laws. This discussion will be further fleshed out as part of Chapter 1.

began, his personal ties with Franco and José Antonio, combined with his prestigious legal education, made him an ideal figure to help the Caudillo create the foundations of his state.<sup>4</sup> As such, Serrano authored several documents critical to the early foundation of Franco's government and held two significant government ministries under Franco's rule, as well as a dominant position of leadership within Franco's unified party, the Falange Española Tradicionalista (FET).

The Franco dictatorship in which Serrano would become a key leader was a uniquely Spanish creation, with its foundations stretching back to the start of the twentieth century. Having lost the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Spanish nation lost its last remaining overseas possessions, finally destroying the empire which had been the nation's pride since the voyages of Columbus. Having had their collective identity thus destroyed, Spain became an ideological battleground for a vast array of political ideologies ranging from anarchism to fascism, each seeking to contribute its own idea as to what identity Spain would bring with it into the new century. By the mid-1930s, Spain, under the governance of a republic for only the second time in the nation's long history, found its people polarized between those favoring modern systems of government and secular values and those supporting a conservative social and political order based on the teachings of the Catholic Church. In 1936, a group of military generals led the conservative faction in an armed uprising, producing a three year war and concluding in the foundation of a dictatorship under General Francisco Franco which would last nearly forty years and leave an indelible mark on the nation's history which its citizens still have difficulty addressing.

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<sup>4</sup> Franco often referred to himself as the Caudillo, calling on a legacy in Spain of conservative right-wing military figures who often stepped up in times of disorder to rule, often holding power until their death.



Through his time at the height of Spanish national politics, Serrano played a critical role in multiple policy decisions which would have long-lasting implications for the structure of Franco's government. However, as he filled his various positions in support of Franco's leadership, Serrano had to constantly grapple with one overarching ideological problem. Fernando García Lahiguera, a historian who met Serrano on several occasions through a mutual friend, the Falangist leader Dionisio Ridruejo, has ably described this problem in discussing Serrano's promotion to a position of leadership within the party in 1939. For Lahiguera, Serrano had to choose between being "Franco's man" and the "man of the [Falangist] Party." As Franco's man, Serrano was able to stay above the political fray of the Nationalist zone; however, his fate was irreversibly tied to Franco, and he would be unable to have any political power or influence outside of his brother-in-law. In contrast, if he became a leader within the party, he would be able to advance on his own political talents; however, he would no longer be above the partisan fray and would lose the protection which Franco's favor offered him. In the end, this paper argues that Serrano's rise to prominence was rooted in his unique relationship with Franco; however, Serrano eventually chose to seek out personal political prestige by becoming an individual leader within the Falange. In so doing, Serrano's political agitation on behalf of the party, self-serving though it may have been, finally convinced Franco to ally with Serrano's rivals, who saw him as a threat to Franco's power and called for his total exclusion from the government. Indeed, in attempting to increase his political prestige by creating an individual party following, Serrano alienated the very source from which his power came. By overlooking the consequences of his self-serving political actions, Serrano actually sabotaged his own career in Spanish national politics.

For his five-year tenure at the height of Spanish politics, one thing that Spaniards and foreign diplomats could both agree on was that Ramón Serrano Suñer was a polarizing figure. Sir Samuel Hoare, who served as British ambassador to Spain from 1940 to 1944, described Serrano as a “crooked counselor” who was characterized by fanatical extremism and unabashed arrogance.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, American diplomatic attaché, William Leon Beaulac, who served in Spain for the same period, reached a much different conclusion. In his memoir, Beaulac wrote that Serrano “made an extremely important contribution to defeating Germany’s purposes in Spain,” concluding that Serrano was a more moderate nationalist figure than often believed. Beaulac believed that Serrano’s political career was marked instead by an able politician doing his job well and without thanks, as he says Serrano was tasked with keeping the Germans appeased so as to not threaten Spanish interests, only to then be labeled by his opponents as a German sympathizer.<sup>6</sup> Domestically, opinion was also divided as to what Serrano represented. His supporters claimed him to be an inspirational leader, blending a powerful political vision for Spain with the legal talents to make them a reality in an age defined by conservative forces fighting only to preserve the status quo. His opponents were more divided. Some saw him as a dangerous radical bent on driving Spain on a path towards domestic and international self-destruction. Others wrote him off as nothing more than a young child on the national political stage, almost humorously attempting to walk around in the shoes of his older brother-in-law, the dictator Franco.

Historians, too, have been divided as to how to interpret Serrano’s legacy. In his

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<sup>5</sup> Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 39.

<sup>6</sup> William Leon Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 74, 76.

work, Paul Preston identifies Serrano as a dedicated fascist who from the start sought to create a fascist state in Spain and unify Spain in the larger war effort of their kindred nations, Germany and Italy.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Stanley Payne, though agreeing with Preston on Serrano's larger fascistic leanings, believes that much of the passion with which he is said to have pursued Spanish cooperation with the Axis is due to the fact that he inherited a foreign ministry in late 1940 already decidedly on that path, and that to claim him as an Axis minister "was never more than a half truth."<sup>8</sup> Thus, within the field, many large and significant questions continue to be debated about the role which Serrano played in Spain at the time. For example, historians often question the extent to which Serrano was truly a fascist, or if he adopted the trappings of fascism solely to advance his own political identity. Historians also debate the extent to which Serrano, as Spanish Foreign Minister, really sought and attempted to cause a Spanish entrance into World War II on the side of Germany, who aided Franco's Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War. Were his famously-provocative speeches an attempt to inflame Spain into a state of war, or, as William Leon Beaulac held in his memoirs, were his speeches part of a plan by the brothers-in-law to vocally support Hitler's cause while, in action, attempting to subvert Hitler's intentions and preserve Spanish sovereignty?

Despite this degree of controversy about Serrano's political character and the generally-agreed upon significance of his contributions to the foundation of Franco's government, little historical literature exists on him. Historical studies focusing on Serrano as the main subject are virtually non-existent in English, though some very well-written studies exist in Spanish. English-speaking audiences are instead forced to rely on

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 253-255.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 334.

larger narratives on Franco and his government or the development of fascism in Spain in order to glean any real details as to Serrano's life and political career.

Within the field, there exists a rich body of historical literature on both the history of Spain in the twentieth century and of the Franco regime itself.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the best starting point for studies of the time period can be found in Raymond Carr's incredibly detailed *Spain: 1808-1975*.<sup>10</sup> Published in 1982, Carr's work does an unparalleled job of placing the Franco government within the larger continuum of Spanish political and economic history, an understanding of which is absolutely essential to understanding the finer nuances of both the structure of Franco's rule and the many individual right-wing parties who joined to support him on the Nationalist side of the Civil War.

Due to the forty years he experienced in power, Francisco Franco's government has become the object of a wide array of historical works. Any study of Franco himself and the government he shaped should begin with Paul Preston's mammoth 1994 publication, *Franco: A Biography*.<sup>11</sup> In this work, bordering one thousand pages in length including end notes, Preston investigates in great detail Franco's military training, his role in the military uprising, and the many twists and turns his government would take over the duration of his rule. Preston's conclusions tend to be highly critical of Franco; for example, he believes that Franco was incredibly lucky, rather than politically skilled,

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<sup>9</sup> As stated above, a great deal of literature exists on the general topic of the Franco government. Other noteworthy studies on either the government or a specific part of it include: Adrian Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Sheelagh Ellwood, *Franco, Profiles in Power* (New York: Longman, 1994); Carolyn Boyd, *Historia Patria: Politics, History, and National Identity in Spain, 1875-1975*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Stanley G. Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936-1975* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000); Enrique Moradiellos, *La España de Franco, 1939-1975, Política y sociedad* (Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975* (1982; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

when it came to avoiding entanglement with the Axis in World War II. In terms of social history, several prominent works have been published in recent years, noteworthy among them being Antonio Sánchez Cazorla's *Las políticas de la victoria: La consolidación del Nuevo Estado franquista (1938-1953)*. While authors like Preston do a good job discussing the motivating ideologies and critical leaders which shaped Franco's government, Cazorla shines light on how the people of Spain interacted with the Franco government on the ground level. Specifically, Cazorla concludes that the critical early years of the Franco government, the period in which Serrano took such a critical part, was actually marked by a pronounced disconnect from the needs of the Spanish people due to rampant corruption and the fact that many key positions within Spain were allocated based on military service and political alignment rather than actual qualifications for the job.<sup>12</sup>

Studies on fascism in Spanish politics are somewhat more uncommon than general studies on Franco's government; nevertheless, there are several high-quality works available concerning fascism in Spain as an ideology and the Falangist party itself.<sup>13</sup> However, before delving into the story of Spanish fascism, some definition is useful regarding fascism as a political ideology and its manifestations across Europe. In an article entitled "The Five Stages of Fascism," published in *The Journal of Modern History*, Robert O. Paxton offers a succinct but highly informative look at the nature of

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<sup>12</sup> Antonio Cazorla Sánchez, *Las políticas de la victoria: La consolidación del Nuevo Estado franquista, 1938-1953* (Marcial Pons: Madrid, 2000), 26.

<sup>13</sup> For other useful works on Spanish fascism or its counterparts in other European nations, see: Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961); Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Fascism from Above: The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in twentieth-century Spain* (London: Unwin-Hyman, 1990); Joan María Thomás, *Lo que fue la Falange* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 1999); Joan María Thomás, *El Falange de Franco: El Proyecto fascista del Régimen* (Barcelona: Plaza y Janés, 2001).

fascism itself. Particularly useful, he discusses the inherent difficulties in defining “fascism,” as he notes that the movement never had a single manifesto, that its leaders in separate countries rarely met to discuss their common ideologies, and that the term has been overused in the late twentieth century as a pejorative against any disliked right-wing politician.<sup>14</sup> From there, Paxton identifies five unique steps towards the maturation of a fascist system of government as well as his own unique identity as to what constitutes a truly fascist state. As such, this article provides a useful measuring tool by which to evaluate to what extent Franco’s government was truly fascist compared to other such movements throughout Europe. Towards this end, one work which helps compare Franco’s government with other governments of like ideological origins can be found in Stanley G. Payne’s 1995 publication, *A History of Fascism*. As a scholar renowned in the field of Spanish history, Payne’s work expands to encompass a history of fascist movements throughout the world, from the commonly cited nations of Germany, Italy, and Spain to minor nations like Hungary, Poland, and even South Africa.<sup>15</sup> In the process, he discusses the Falange and its founder, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, within the light of a large number of other fascist movements, helping to put the Falange into a global setting in order to analyze where it is unique to the Spanish experience and where it shares characteristics with other contemporary movements.

In the discussion of Spanish fascism itself, the author most prominent in both the quantity and quality of his publications has been Stanley Payne. Publishing numerous titles over a period of over forty years, his work has become a foundation of studies in the

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<sup>14</sup> Robert O. Paxton, "The Five Stages of Fascism," *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (March 1998): 1-4.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 15.

area. Of these titles, the standard continues to be his 1999 publication, *Fascism in Spain*.<sup>16</sup> In this work, Payne traces the origins of fascism as a general ideology in Spain, as well as the birth, life, and death of the Falange itself in Spanish politics. Furthermore, he combines his work on Spain and Germany in the Second World War to discuss the interactions between the Falange and the major parties of the Axis. The enduring legacy of the Falange, according to Payne, was its “partial eclipse” that came with the unification of all Nationalist parties in 1937 into a single movement known as the Falange Española Tradicionalista. As such, the history of the Falange is one in which the leaders of the party forever struggled to get their ideas and agendas put forward, only to be rewarded by a minimal amount of success. By contrast, historian Sheelagh Ellwood tends to emphasize the extent to which the Falange was given predominance in the Franco government.<sup>17</sup> In her 1987 publication *Spanish Fascism in the Franco Era*, Ellwood’s work provides an interesting counter-point to Payne’s notion of the frustrated Falange by emphasizing the extent to which Falangist iconography dominated the early Franco government and the extent to which Falangist sympathizers pervaded the early Franco government’s bureaucracy.

While secondary literature exists on the larger Franco government and fascism within Spain, very little literature focuses on the figure of Ramón Serrano Suñer, despite the fact that studies in both fields identify him as a critical leader during his time at the height of national politics. One of the earliest works to study Serrano as a central figure

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<sup>16</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain: 1923-1977* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Sheelagh M. Ellwood, *Spanish Fascism in the Franco Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

is Heleno Saña's *Franquismo sin mitos*, published in 1981.<sup>18</sup> This work proves to be highly subjective, however, as Saña relies almost exclusively on interviews he conducted with Serrano. As such, the author replicates in his conclusions many of the self-serving edits to the history of the time that are profound in Serrano's own memoirs. For example, he holds that Franco had been scheming against Serrano, attempting to find a reason to remove him from government as early as the spring of 1941, and as such, places all the blame on Franco for Serrano's eventual exclusion from the Spanish government. In terms of establishing greater historical objectivity, two other works establish themselves as high-quality examinations of Serrano's life. The first, and perhaps the most incisive in terms of its commentary, comes from Fernando Garcia Lahiguera, a Spanish scholar who also met Serrano on numerous occasions through his friendship with the famous Falangist leader, Dionisio Ridruejo. In his 1983 work, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia*, Lahiguera's stated purpose is to provide an image of Serrano so that later historians will be able to come back and study the critical role that he played both in the foundation of the Spanish state and the foreign policy negotiations which Spain undertook during the Second World War.<sup>19</sup> Unlike Saña, however, Lahiguera does a fantastic job of actually taking his material from direct interviews with Serrano and providing great historical analysis of it, offering some fascinating commentary on critical issues in Serrano's life that are only hinted at in other works published about the same time period in Spanish history.

Finally, perhaps the best general book to become acquainted with Serrano's life

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<sup>18</sup> Heleno Saña, *Franquismo sin mitos: conversaciones con Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Ediciones Grijalbo, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Editorial Argos Vergara, 1983).



and legacy is a 2003 book simply entitled *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, co-authored by Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan María Thomás.<sup>20</sup> The book is neatly divided into two sections. The first half of the book, authored by Molina, is a biography in the most literal sense of the word, providing a timeline and a lengthy list of narrative events which occurred in Serrano's life with little external historical criticism. On its own, this would have relegated the work to a sub-par historical monograph on Serrano's life; however, Molina's work is supplemented by a second half written by well-known Spanish historian Joan María Thomás. In this work, Thomás attempts to analyze the different "Serranos" which have permeated Spanish history at the time, by which he means attempting to reconcile the Falangist leader Serrano with the foreign minister Serrano, just to name two examples. In so doing, Thomás's discussion is enlightening as he attempts to distill out the real Serrano amidst the sea of propaganda thrown against him by enemies at the time and the wealth of self-serving revisions which were made in his own memoirs and in the works of fellow Falangists alike in the decades following the end of the Second World War.

As seen in the review of secondary literature, several questions persist as to Serrano's life and legacy. Due to the relative wealth of historical interest surrounding all aspects of the Second World War, the most commonly addressed is whether or not Serrano truly sought a firm alliance with the Axis powers. This essay does not fully address all aspects of this question, as the focus here is primarily on the domestic political situation within Spain during the Civil War and World War period. However, Spain's relations with Germany did yield several critical domestic influences, and as such, the

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<sup>20</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2003).

question is addressed in this manner. This work asserts that, despite the statements in his own memoirs and in several later interviews following the end of the Franco government in 1975, Serrano did indeed seek Spanish intervention in the German war. However, he did not do so based exclusively on an ideological sympathy with the German cause; rather, he argued for Spanish participation in World War II as part of a domestic political calculation designed to preserve his own position within Spanish politics. It should be explicitly stated that Serrano's foreign policy approach itself was not a critical factor in his dismissal from government in 1942. Apologists for the Franco regime in the decades after the war would later cite Serrano's dismissal as a sign that Franco was purging the most visible pro-Axis man in his government as a sign to the Allies that he was distancing himself from Hitler. While Serrano was indeed pro-Axis, when he was dismissed in September of 1942, the Germans had still suffered no major defeat in Western Europe, and it would be another two months before the first Allied landings in North Africa. As such, there is no reason to assume that being labeled as "pro-Axis" was a liability at all at the time. Also, Franco had made several inflammatory addresses on his own in support of Germany's war efforts. Thus, in foreign policy, Serrano was firmly in line with Franco's wishes even until his last days as a government minister. Instead, it was Serrano's personal political agitation and agitation on behalf of the Falange which led Franco to dismiss him.

While the most commonly addressed question regarding Serrano deals with Spanish foreign policy at the time, nonetheless several questions about his role as a domestic politician continue to persist in the historical discussion and will be more fully addressed. Of these, the leading question examines the extent to which Serrano was truly

a fascist. The general agreement in the field tends to be that Serrano was indeed a fascist, with historians contrasting his actions and rhetoric with Franco to conclude that the dictator never was a fascist, despite his authoritarian power, staunch nationalistic and anti-communist policies in Spain, and close friendship with the Italian and German regimes of the time. As such, Serrano is often seen as a scapegoat for the more radical actions of Franco's government during the war years. By this, many in the field claim that he was turned loose to be the mouthpiece of radical fascism in the government in the event of a German and Italian victory in the World War, while Franco personally stayed aloof from such partisan rhetoric in order to preserve his chances at survival should the Allies prevail in the war.

This essay holds that prior to the Civil War, Serrano was neither a fascist nor a radical in any sense of the term, but rather a legal conservative devoted to attempting to bring conservative values back into Spain through parliamentary procedure. Indeed, in this regard, this study agrees most with Stanley Payne's assertion that it was the experience of the outbreak of the Civil War and his period of incarceration in Republican-controlled Madrid that "radicalized" him into the political figure that most studies present him to be.<sup>21</sup> Second, this essay rejects the notion of Franco having used Serrano as a political mouthpiece to assuage the Axis while keeping himself safe from Allied repercussions. Instead, Serrano adopted the partisan language of a fascist leader on his own, and for his own goals of domestic political advancement. Furthermore, Franco reacted negatively to Serrano's fascistic rhetoric from the start, a fact which is most clearly demonstrated in the fourth chapter. As such, the conclusion is that Franco did not

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<sup>21</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain: 1923-1977* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 274.

distance himself from Serrano out of any expediency towards the shift of the course of World War II against the Axis powers; rather, he did so exclusively as a reaction to Serrano's domestic political agitation on behalf of the truly fascistic goals of the Falange.

Though the main focus of this study is to bring Serrano's political career and critical role in the foundation of the Franco government to light, nonetheless, the study offers some unique insight into the larger Franco government. Though his government is rightly categorized as authoritarian, nonetheless the power within the Franco government was not as monolithically held and rigidly set as is often assumed in strong-man governments. This is demonstrated through an examination of the power which Serrano was able to accumulate for himself from the spring of 1937 through the fall of 1940, as well as a constant discussion of the various political factions which opposed Serrano and his followers in a state which, officially, held only one united party under Franco's control. Also, Serrano's first debut on the national political stage came through collaboration with Franco on two of the fundamental laws in the formation of Franco's government. These laws, the Decree of Unification and the Law of Central Administration, created many basic structures and principles that would last long into Franco's government. Included among these laws was a deliberate attempt by Franco from the start to balance out the various political forces in the Nationalist coalition. Indeed, this refusal on the part of Franco to openly advocate for one individual political party amongst the various nationalist factions would grow to become a central tenet of his principal of *caudillaje*, the ideological justification he would later use to justify his continued dominance of government in the post-war European climate.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Francisco Franco Bahamonde, *El pequeño libro pardo del general*, comp. Paulino Hermenegildo (Cary-Colombes: Ruedo Ibérico, 1972), 7.

The argumentation in this writing is organized chronologically. The first chapter contains two critical parts, both of which serve as introductory and background material for the remainder of the work. The chapter begins with a discussion of the foundation of the Second Republic of Spain, which lasted from 1931 to 1936. Particularly, some discussion is given to the array of liberal parties which came to dominate the government in 1931, along with the conservative forces which rose to oppose them successfully in the 1933 elections. The second part of the chapter discusses Serrano's career within the Second Republic. The main focus of this portion is demonstrating that, during his time working in the *Cortes*, Serrano was a reformer dedicated to working to reestablish conservative values within the republican structure, as opposed to a revolutionary working to circumvent it altogether. Finally, the chapter concludes with the outbreak of the Civil War, Serrano's imprisonment in Madrid, and his final escape from the city, as these events were fundamental in the creation of the politician which he would later become in the Nationalist zone.

The second chapter begins with Serrano's arrival in the city of Salamanca and the welcome which he received into Franco's home and inner circle of political advisors. The main function of this chapter is to detail the meteoric rise to prominence which Serrano experienced from February of 1937 to January of 1938, during which time he went from wartime refugee to the second most influential man in the Nationalist zone in the political realm. In relation to the overall thesis, this chapter serves the critical function of demonstrating just where Serrano's power came from at the beginning, which contrasts greatly with the sources of power he would later call upon in attempting to make his own political identity in Spain after the war. Throughout this period, the

emphasis is placed on how Serrano moved lock-step with Franco on a number of political issues, such as the value of an official political neutrality between the various factions in the unified party apparatus and in government appointments, ideas which Serrano would eventually contradict once in a position of individual power. However, the chapter concludes by discussing how, as early as 1938, Serrano's actions and statements indicated critical differences from Franco's views as to the direction the Spanish state should develop, including a fundamentally different idea of how to reunite Spain at the conclusion of the Civil War.

The third chapter covers from the summer of 1939 until May of 1941, a date on which Serrano irrevocably moved in his own direction as a politician. As opposed to the second chapter, which emphasized Serrano's unique relationship with Franco and role as intermediary between Franco and the Falange as the base for his power, the third chapter demonstrates how Serrano grew to greatly love the glamour and prestige of his position and advocated for more individual political power. Indeed, a critical question arises and is addressed over the course of this chapter: how could Serrano ever believe that he could be a successful individual politician in a dictatorial system, in which, by definition, power is concentrated solely in the dictator Franco? At the conclusion of the chapter, the assertion of historian Stanley Payne that Serrano had no independent political base at all is critiqued by demonstrating that Serrano did succeed in creating a niche group within the Falange, often referred to as historians simply as the *serranistas*. Thus, Serrano did succeed in creating an individual political base within a dictatorial system. His error, then, was overestimating the amount of political capital such an independent base would yield him in contrast to losing the favor of Franco, who finally saw him as a threat in the

wake of these developments.

The final chapter picks up where the third chapter left off, with Franco finally identifying Serrano as a threat to his power. The chapter also analyzes Serrano's last gasps to preserve his political power in the wake of having lost Franco's favor, and why these steps ultimately failed. In so doing, this chapter addresses the lingering question in the field as to whether or not Serrano truly advocated Spanish involvement in the Second World War. Particularly, this chapter argues that Serrano did indeed advocate Spanish involvement in the war, but emphasizes the domestic ramifications of this action rather than personal or ideological affinity with the Axis powers in a way not often addressed in other works. Finally, the chapter concludes by addressing Serrano's failure to regain his political footing and eventual dismissal from government altogether. Particularly, Serrano's dismissal as part of a larger attempt to discipline the Falange is interpreted as the ultimate sign that Serrano succeeded in creating his own independent political base, as had he not done so, it would not have been seen throughout Spain as a blow to the Falange for him to have been removed.

Finally, a note should be made as to the types of sources used in constructing this argument. Published primary source evidence from this time in Spanish political history is very difficult to come by. Franco did not keep a published collection of documents as did many other leaders, and having been such a highly politicized time of war, very little is available in print. As such, the most common source of primary information used has been contained in the memoirs of figures that were influential in Spain at the time, most notable among them being Serrano's own writings. Two types of memoirs are most common, each with their own source of inherent bias. First, the memoirs of American

and English ambassadorial staff were published in the late 1940s, much closer to the events described, and are considered for this reason. However, these memoirs often encapsulate domestic issues in Spain with larger World War rhetoric from the Allied cause, and as such, many times the Allied ambassadorial accounts ring of political propaganda for the home audiences, especially in the case of Sir Samuel Hoare, who after the end of the war advocated a restoration of the monarchy in Spain. To complement these, several critical Spanish figures published memoirs; however, anything published up until Franco's death in 1975 was subject to government censorship. As such, the more useful and candid recollections of figures such as Dionisio Ridruejo and of Ramón Serrano Suñer himself come in works published after 1975, over thirty years after the events discussed and subject to a good deal of bias, either intentional so as to improve the author's image or unintentional simply due to the large time gap. As such, great care has been taken to moderate the primary source rhetoric with more objective secondary source material in order to isolate out some of the more virulent examples of self-serving propaganda and preserve the useful historical insight which only primary documents can provide for the researcher.



## Chapter 1

### The Tumultuous Road to Salamanca: 1933-1937

In November of 1933, the Second Republic of Spain witnessed its first major political realignment since its foundation in mid-1931. Unable to please the multiple factions on its side, the Leftist government of Manuel Azaña found itself losing power in the Republican parliamentary body, the *Cortes*, to a loose confederation of right-wing conservative candidates. Once the votes were tallied, the majority power in the Republic was held for the first time by conservative elements within Spain. The actual names and faces of these new conservative representatives varied greatly by region and by the particular right-wing faction to which the candidate adhered. It was as a part of this electoral shift that Ramón Serrano Suñer earned his first taste of national political life, elected to the *Cortes* from the province of Zaragoza.<sup>23</sup> Over the course of his time in the Second Republic, Serrano would be dedicated to working within the system to produce wider social change; however, by the time of the uprising of 1936, he would find himself caught in a dramatic upheaval which would permanently radicalize his once-moderate political and social views even as it put his life and the lives of his closest loved ones in the most serious of perils.

Before delving specifically into the tale of the state lawyer from Zaragoza, some general discussion on the structure of the Second Republic and of the right-wing coalition which came to dominate it in late 1933 should be established. The Second Republic was formed out of a whirlwind of events that began in January of 1931 and would stretch over the course of several months. Since 1923, the Spanish government had been dominated

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<sup>23</sup> Heleno Saña, *Franquismo sin mitos: conversaciones con Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Ediciones Grijalbo, 1982), 39.

by the dictatorship of General Miguel Primo de Rivera, who operated nominally on the authority of the Bourbon King, Alfonso XIII. However, by late 1929, General Primo de Rivera's political support began to wane due to a number of sources of discontent in the Spanish populace. These sources, among others, included bad harvests starting in 1928 and a large trading deficit which had a growing impact on the Spanish economy as the countries whose goods it imported began to feel the effects of the global economic downturn at the end of the decade.<sup>24</sup> In the final days of January of 1930, General Primo de Rivera resigned from government, and Alfonso XIII replaced him with General Dámaso Berenguer. However, during this discontent a large coalition of leftist elements, including anarchists, socialists, and more traditional liberal republicans had managed to pool their collective strength and were not content with just the replacement of one general by another. Instead, they sought to change the whole system, which meant removing not only the generals, but the king who appointed them.

The leftist elements of Spain which arose at this time were not aberrations spawned by the world economic crisis, nor were they solely the byproduct of larger international leftist movements which were rising across Europe at the time. Instead, since the time of the French Revolution, a fledgling liberal tradition had existed in Spain, a nation traditionally defined by its conservative values. In general studies, many historians in the field refer to the concept of the "two Spains" which was formed in the aftermath of Napoleon's removal of the Spanish king Ferdinand VII in 1808 and the long, protracted struggle which led to his return in 1814.<sup>25</sup> Once the French domination of the

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<sup>24</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975* (1982; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 588.

<sup>25</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Spain," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/557573/Spain> (accessed October 19, 2010). Interestingly, it was during this war to restore Spanish independence that the

Iberian peninsula was ended, the conservative elements of Spain sought to return Spain to its traditional roots of a strong, Catholic-centered monarchy. However, there were strong elements in Spain which, though they resented French domination of their lands, nonetheless sought to preserve many of the liberal, Enlightened concepts which Napoleon had brought with him, such as the French idea of citizenship and the secularization of the state in the face of the traditionally-powerful Catholic Church. These liberals sought to form a republic in Spain, and clashed directly with conservatives who wanted to bring back the monarchy wholesale. The resulting compromise was the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, balanced by the establishment of a representative body known as the *Cortes*. However, the exact balance of power between the monarchy and the *Cortes* was a continuous source of friction, though most historians of the field agree that, for the most part, the nineteenth century was marked by a trend towards the conservative elements of the nation. Specifically, these conservative elements in Spain militarily rose to restore a conservative monarchy on three separate occasions during the nineteenth century in a series of conflicts generally referred to as the Carlist Wars.<sup>26</sup> In each of these wars, however, they were unsuccessful in achieving their goal of a restoration of a conservative and powerful monarchy. However, neither were the liberals successful in increasing their

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term “guerilla” was first coined to describe the Spanish forces fighting for their independence against the forces of Napoleon’s brothers Joseph, who had been placed onto the Spanish throne in place of Ferdinand VII.

<sup>26</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Spain.” The term “Carlist” refers to the provocation which began the first Carlist war in 1833. In brief, the Spanish tradition held that only a son of the king could inherit the throne; however, Ferdinand VII had no sons. As such, according to Spanish tradition, the throne should have passed to the king’s brother, Carlos, upon his death in 1833. However, Carlos was a known figure of leadership within conservative circles. As such, the liberals of the *Cortes* intervened with Ferdinand VII to change the law before his death to allow his daughter, Isabella, to take the throne. Thus, upon his death, Isabella became Queen of Spain, and was dedicated to pursuing a more liberalized version of the monarchy. The conservatives refused to accept her leadership, and fought to restore Carlos, who they felt to be the rightful king, to the throne. Indeed, even until and through the Spanish Civil War, the Carlists continued to hold that it was Carlos’s line that was the legitimate line of the Spanish throne.

influence in Spain. Only once, in 1873, were liberal elements successful in realizing their dream of a republic in Spain; however, it never found itself able to govern, and ended less than a year later with a military coup to restore to monarchy.<sup>27</sup> By the start of the twentieth century, a notably strong anarchist movement, one of the strongest in the western hemisphere, arose into this already tense political situation, a development which was met with an increasingly intransigent conservative response. In summary, then, Spain had a long history of being divided between liberal and conservative visions of the proper Spanish state. However, neither side of the debate ever achieved a definitive victory over the other, leading to a tense political environment made even more notable by the rise of socialist, anarchist, and communist elements on the left and fascist and militarist elements on the right.

The leftist coalition, as it existed in 1930, realized that the resignation of General Primo de Rivera offered a unique chance to strike a definitive blow at the monarchy, as Alfonso XIII had instructed General Berenguer not to attempt to run a personal dictatorship in the same light as Primo de Rivera. Rather, he suggested for him to chart a course back to constitutional legitimacy in the naïve hope that this, in and of itself, would have been able to assuage the concerns of those who had opposed the old dictatorship.<sup>28</sup> General Berenguer's solution, which had precedent in Spanish electoral history, was to call a meeting of the *Cortes*. This meeting of the *Cortes* would take place in March of the following year; however, by February 1931, Berenguer too had lost enough support to force his own resignation. In the turbulence that followed, the elections of April 12, 1931 were dominated by the Republican-Socialist coalition. Two days later, realizing that

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<sup>27</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 327-328, 336-337.

<sup>28</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 591.

public opinion had swept hopelessly against him, Alfonso XIII fled Spain, leaving the left-wing groups to form their own government while hoping, in vain, that his supporters would be able to amass enough votes to safely warrant his return in subsequent elections.<sup>29</sup>

After a brief provisional government which held power for six months during the heart of 1931, the leftist coalition formalized its ability to exercise power in October of 1931.<sup>30</sup> Structurally, the power to lead the government of Spain was divided between two posts. At the official “head” of the government was the office of the President, which was filled by Niceto Alcalá Zamora, a prominent figure in both the initial agitation for a new government and in the provisional government from April to October 1931. True to European parliamentary style, created below this President was the office of the Prime Minister, who would lead the *Cortes* and exert considerable influence. It was from this position that it was understood that the leader of the largest party of the *Cortes* would be able to wield a large amount of political power, although as can be inferred by the previous description such conceptions were not formalized, which would later cause some confusion in the Republican power structure. The key leader to hold this position in government, starting in October of 1931, was Manuel Azaña, the leader of center-left party often simply referred to as the Left Republicans.<sup>31</sup>

From the first days of the Second Republic, one issue surpassed all others in terms of the amount of contention which arose around it: the relations between the Republic and the Church. The liberal tradition in Spain had long sought out a secularization of

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<sup>29</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 599-600.

<sup>30</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Spain."

<sup>31</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1875*, 603-604; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Spain."

relations between the government and the traditionally-powerful Catholic Church, and conservatives within Spain feared that with the advent of the Second Republic, they would begin to enact these reforms. In July of 1931, as the *Cortes* labored on the creation of a new constitution, the Spanish bishops issued a formal statement to its parishioners advocating resistance to the new law. Specifically, the bishops rejected the statement by the defenders of the Republic that power came from the consent of the governed; instead, they felt that power was derived from divine will. Furthermore, they went to great lengths to quote the Popes of the late nineteenth century in their reaction to the liberties asserted by the French Revolutionaries which, according to these bishops, the leftist elements were attempting to create in Spain.<sup>32</sup> This statement by the bishops only inflamed passions which had been already started in April, when a statement by Cardinal Pedro Segura attacking the Republic had resulting in a wave of riots and church burnings in Republican strongholds.<sup>33</sup> As such, churches became seen not only as places of worship in Spain, but as symbols and rallying points for all conservative opposition to the Republic.

Over the protests of conservative elements in the *Cortes*, Manuel Azaña used his leadership as Prime Minister to ensure that the first constitution of the Second Republic included a complete secularization of relations between the Church and State. Personally, Azaña held that, while Catholicism was traditionally a key component of the Spanish state, the religion had offered very little to the Spanish identity. Rather, he contended that Spanish nationalists had adopted Catholicism, and trumpeted its merits

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<sup>32</sup> "Spanish Bishops on the Proposed Constitution," in *Modern Spain: A Documentary History*, ed. Jon Cowans (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 133-134

<sup>33</sup> "Spanish Bishops on the Proposed Constitution," 133.

throughout Europe for centuries. Thus, Spain owed the Catholic Church no favors, and as such it could nationalize church lands and absolve special Church privileges in education and in direct funding with a clear conscience.<sup>34</sup> As a result, when the final constitution was published in December of 1931, it contained two specific articles that fundamentally removed the Church from the government of Spain. In article twenty-six, the Constitution made it illegal for the government at any level to economically assist any religious institution. Furthermore, it outlawed any religious order which, as part of its vows, pronounced a special level of obedience to any source of authority outside the Spanish state, a clause which specifically targeted the Jesuit order. Finally, article twenty-six stated that the Church would be subject to the country's tax laws and that its lands could be nationalized at the discretion of the *Cortes*. Article twenty-six dealt with the removal of Church privileges; however, in article twenty-seven, the new constitution addressed the issue of religion in general. In article twenty-seven, the new constitution established a complete freedom of religion and explicitly stated that at no time could any individual be forced to make a statement of religious belief. Furthermore, all public religious demonstrations were forced to undergo an approval process by the state in order to receive an official sanction.<sup>35</sup> In conclusion, the fears of the conservatives in Spain were realized in the constitution of the Second Republic that was published in December of 1931. For the first time in its history, the Catholic Church was dislodged from its position of economic, political, and moral authority in the Spanish government, and supporters of the Republic remained wary of the attempts of the clergy in Spain to agitate

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<sup>34</sup> Manuel Azaña, "Spain Has Ceased to be Catholic," in *Modern Spain: A Documentary History*, ed. Jon Cowans (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 137.

<sup>35</sup> "The 1931 Constitution," in *Modern Spain: A Documentary History*, ed. Jon Cowans (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 149-151.

on behalf of a restoration of these privileges.

Though victorious in his initial attempt to enact reform in the Republic, Azaña nonetheless gradually lost the momentum which had swept him into office as 1932 developed. Simply put, each of the component elements of his coalition parted ways after the passage of the constitution in order to pursue its own ends, robbing Azaña of the consensus which had swept him into office. Azaña's Republicans were not a radical party in the same sense as the socialist or anarchist elements on the Left. As such, it had been hoped that his selection as the first Prime Minister would be able to satisfy the concerns of the right-wing elements of Spain, who were terrified at the prospect of a Socialist uprising in the winter of 1931. However, once in power, the errors of this logic proved all too obvious. For the anarchists, socialists, and communists in the Republic, Azaña was by no means radical enough, and they felt that every month that he spent trying to forge some form of general societal consensus resulted in valuable momentum lost in the cause of creating a total revolution in Spain. While being criticized from one side in these regards, centrists and elements on the right began to see Azaña as a dangerous leftist, perhaps in no other area more so than his desire to see a truly secular relationship between the Second Republic and the Catholic Church. As such, many of Azaña's political goals, such as agrarian reform and labor reform, were stymied in the *Cortes* due to staunch conservative opposition and a lack of unity on the Left necessary to overcome it.<sup>36</sup> Further, the deepening of worldwide economic problems over the course of 1931 and 1932 only served to place the Azaña government's failure in starker contrast, producing a popular disenchantment with the Leftist coalition as politicians in Spain began to look excitedly towards the next round of elections, due to take place in late

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<sup>36</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 604, 613.



1933.

Starting in the summer of 1932, the conservative elements of Spain began to plan for what they felt to be a chance to exploit this popular frustration with the Azaña government; however, like the coalitions on the Left, they could not agree on a specific course on which to act. On the far end of the Right, there was a distinct group of political factions that all cited the failure of the First Republic in 1873 to state that republics had never lasted long in the country, and could not function as a respectable government. Thus, the elements on the Right which espoused these views spent their time not concerning themselves with ways to electorally defeat the Left, but rather ways to use the popular discontent to circumvent the Republican system altogether. The most noticeable example of this sentiment can be seen in the ill-designed military coup led by General José Sanjurjo in August of 1932. In brief, Sanjurjo believed that if he led the uprising, the majority of the military would join him and, along with the sentiments of a frustrated populace, defeat the Republic. His attempt failed, as in the city of Madrid itself the Republic still held a good degree of popular support and the Civil Guard and the police failed to join his groups in the coup attempt.<sup>37</sup> Defeated, the general went into exile, where he would constantly plan for another coup attempt in the coming years.

While the Republic attempted to defend its political ground by painting rash actions like the Sanjurjo revolt as the only response the Right could muster, the reality was that an equally strong if not stronger portion of conservative elements in Spain sought to enact change through parliamentary procedure. Several right-wing political coalitions would form in between the summers of 1932 and 1933, but none would be as important as José Maria Gil Robles's *Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas*,

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 89-91.

or CEDA. Over the course of the winter of 1932, Gil Robles began to be a unifying figure for many different right-wing parties, whose particular policies differed but nonetheless agreed upon the desire to restore the Catholic Church to the traditionally privileged position in Spanish society that Azaña had absolved. These parties officially coalesced together in February of 1933 under Gil Robles's leadership, with the intention of using its power to dislodge the Azaña government in the upcoming elections.<sup>38</sup>

The elections of 1933 were contentious for both sides of the political spectrum. Realizing that their hold on government had become precarious in the wake of the resurgent conservative political movement, one of the largest working-class parties in Spain, the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajo*, or C.N.T., called for a general strike, and many anarchist elements either abstained altogether from the process or called for revolutionary uprisings in their local region.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, the Right-wing political elements would not be denied, and as a collective body the right-wing political coalition was able to win 212 seats in the *Cortes*, as opposed to 98 won by the Azaña coalition and 102 won by a party known simply as the Radicals.<sup>40</sup> However, just as was the case for Manuel Azaña, this victorious right-wing coalition soon found its own electoral momentum sapped by the influence of radicals on its side and by the cumbersome structure of the Spanish Republic. The biggest malady that struck at this time was the fact that Niceto Alcalá Zamora once again took the office of the Presidency. Alcalá Zamora held a strong personal distaste for Gil Robles; as a result, he refused to appoint

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<sup>38</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2003), 61-62.

<sup>39</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 624.

<sup>40</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 628.

him to the position as Prime Minister, despite the fact that that CEDA coalition had earned the majority of the right-wing's 212 seats. Instead, he called on Alejandro Lerroux, leader of the Radicals, to become the Prime Minister. However, Lerroux was incapable of governing without the support of Gil Robles's CEDA. As a result, the 1933 election produced even more confusion, as Lerroux and Gil Robles would constantly struggle for dominance within the government, further stoking the popular discontent with the Republic as little actual legislative progress was made.<sup>41</sup>

It was in this political environment that Ramón Serrano Suñer first obtained a seat in the *Cortes* as a part of the turbulent election of 1933. Specifically, he was a member of the *Unión de Derechas*, a party in Zaragoza which was included beneath the umbrella of the CEDA coalition.<sup>42</sup> The road which led him to the *Cortes* was one of incredible promise. Serrano attended the University of Madrid from 1917 until 1923, during which time he served as the President of the Law Faculty Students' Union.<sup>43</sup> Upon graduation, Serrano was one of the leaders of his class, a fact which warranted him a position as a lawyer on behalf of the state, assigned to the city of Zaragoza.<sup>44</sup> He would serve as a lawyer there from 1924 until his election to the *Cortes* in 1933. In 1929, while in Zaragoza, Serrano first met General Francisco Franco y Bahamonde, who had been appointed as the Director of the military academy there by Miguel Primo de Rivera. Further, Franco's wife, most commonly known as Doña Carmen, introduced Serrano to

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<sup>41</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Spain."; Raymond Carr, *Spain 1808-1975*, 628-629.

<sup>42</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 61.

<sup>43</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, "Ramón Serrano Suñer," September 3, 2003, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1440376/Ramon-Serrano-Suner.html#disqus\\_thread](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1440376/Ramon-Serrano-Suner.html#disqus_thread) (accessed January 6, 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 55.

her sister, Zita Polo, whom he would marry in February of 1931.<sup>45</sup>

Through his legal credentials as a lawyer of the state in Zaragoza, combined with his friendship and now familial relationship with General Franco, a man well known within military and conservative circles, Serrano seemed to be a fine choice to be nominated for the *Cortes* in late 1933. Personally, Serrano was driven to the *Cortes* by two key inspirations. First, as a lawyer, Serrano respected the legal traditions of Spain, and feared their dissolution at the hands of a radical leftist government like that proposed by the C.N.T. and its related organizations. Second, as a staunch Catholic, Serrano had sympathy with Gil Robles's original organization from which he vaulted to the leadership of CEDA. This group, known as the *Acción Popular*, was a party designed to support the unique role of the Catholic Church in Spanish society and the one from which he had risen to ascendancy within the CEDA coalition. Particularly, Serrano achieved a minor level of notoriety through his work with the youth auxiliary of the party, the *Juventud de Acción Popular* (JAP), which was dedicated to nonviolent methods of political activism, much to the dismay of the radical groups on the Right who sought a united agitation of right-wing groups in opposition of the Republican system itself.<sup>46</sup> However, Serrano never personally got along well with Gil Robles, and this, combined with the fact that Serrano was a first-time representative to the *Cortes* precluded much direct collaboration between the two right-wing figures.<sup>47</sup> Noticing this personal division between Serrano and the leader of the CEDA coalition, in early 1934 another new representative to the

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 68; *The Daily Telegraph*, "Ramón Serrano Suñer."

<sup>46</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain: 1923-1977* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 274.

<sup>47</sup> Heleno Saña, *Franquismo sin mitos*, 40.

*Cortes* sought to lure Serrano away from CEDA towards his own fledgling party. That representative was Serrano's longtime friend José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the former dictator and the founder of the *Falange Española*.

The *Falange Española* was officially formed in November of 1933; however, it would not evolve into a prominent party until its merger with another group, the *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista* (J.O.N.S.) in February 1934.<sup>48</sup> Its founder, José Antonio, was the voice of the party, and as was the case in many fascist parties, the author of the vast majority of its most fundamental tenets. For José Antonio, the highest ideal of both government and society was to realize the best interests of the *Patria*. It should be stated here that, among the right-wing factions on the Republic, there were various conceptions of what the *Patria* stood for and what groups were included as part of this organically Spanish nation.<sup>49</sup> For his part, José Antonio defined the *Patria* as a “transcendent synthesis” of all individuals of Spain, regardless of class.<sup>50</sup> With such a definition, José Antonio differentiated himself from virtually every other right-wing party in Spain of the time.<sup>51</sup> In his worldview, José Antonio began by analyzing the liberal

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<sup>48</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 99.

<sup>49</sup> The term *Patria* was common parlance among right-wing elements in Nationalist Spain, but it was a term that was often left undefined, at least in formal terms. It referred to the conservative vision of an “authentic” Spanish nation, and depending on the particular group discussed included a mixture of Catholic social doctrine, a strong monarchy ruling with the direct support of the Catholic hierarchy, and a refutation of Republicanized virtues of individual liberties of speech, press, and religion which were attributed to the previous French domination of the peninsula.

<sup>50</sup> *José Antonio Primo de Rivera (anthology)*, comp. Ganzalo Torrente Ballester (Madrid: Afrodísio Aguado S.A., 1942), 56-57.

<sup>51</sup> *José Antonio Primo de Rivera (anthology)*, 150-151. While the doctrine of the Falange was unique among Spanish parties, it held multiple similarities with fascist movements in other areas of Europe, most notably in Italy. Despite this, José Antonio explicitly denied that his intention with Falangist doctrine was to create a Spanish version of a broader fascist system; instead, he claimed the Falange was an authentic Spanish party which, while bearing similarities with these other parties, was intended for the Spanish populace only and not derived from any international cooperation. As evidenced, he cites that he

states which had triumphed throughout Europe in the wake of the French Revolution. In these states, he felt the needs of the *Patria* could never be met, as he criticized the system of liberalism as a system which believes in nothing on its own. Instead, the liberal state is malleable to the whims of whatever voting majority happens to come to power, even lacking the basic instinct of self-preservation to the point of being able to vote itself out of existence.<sup>52</sup>

Out of this ineffective government, which promised all forms of rights which it denied it actual practice, José Antonio thus stated that the workers of the world were justified in their socialist uprisings, as they had to fight for their own survival. In so doing, José Antonio chartered a new course from most Right-wing leaders, who never felt a need to justify socialist elements in Spain, seeing them as having been corrupted by dangerous foreign influences. However, like many fascist leaders, José Antonio felt that socialism was inadequate to solve the problem of the working class, as it taught a doctrine of constant class struggle which, if put into action, would forever be putting members of the *Patria* at war with each other.<sup>53</sup> Thus, José Antonio, by uniting his Falange with the syndicalist J.O.N.S. made an open invitation to all members of the working class to join with his party, a message which gave him a unique avenue of appeal to the youths of Spain who, as mentioned before, had become disenchanted with a political system mired in stagnation virtually since its inception.

José Antonio became a member of the *Cortes* as a part of the broad right-wing

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denied an invitation to join a congress of international fascist leaders when invited and had no intention of ever joining such a body.

<sup>52</sup> *José Antonio Primo de Rivera (anthology)*, 97-99.

<sup>53</sup> *José Antonio Primo de Rivera (anthology)*, 132-133.

sweep to power in November of 1933; however, his party was one of the groups in Spain who were irreconcilable to the idea of Republicanism. In practice, this meant that he advocated the end of the Republican system as a whole, which meant that he would offer no cooperation with Gil Robles's CEDA coalition. Thus, by luring Serrano away from CEDA, he would be making his rival one representative weaker, even as he was securing a personal friend into his own camp. But did Serrano buy into his friend's political doctrine? In many ways, Serrano highly respected José Antonio, whom he met while at the University of Madrid. In fact, so strong was his respect and friendship that he asked José Antonio to serve as his official witness in his wedding in February of 1931.<sup>54</sup> However, when asked to join the fledgling Falange, Serrano politely declined. The main reason for which Serrano did not join the Falange at this time was the fact that, in returning to the main division of forces on the Right, José Antonio was dedicated to circumventing the structure of the Republic altogether, and Serrano simply was not. In a 1982 interview, Serrano spoke about the encounter in which José Antonio asked him to join the Falange, and he responded to his friend by simply saying, "José, I do not feel as revolutionary as you do... I am a reformer."<sup>55</sup> However, in the same interview, Serrano stated that his attitude was forever one of "frontal struggle without equivocation," which has led many historians, including later Falangists who tried to make it seem as though Serrano had always been a Falangist at heart, to state the Serrano was a radical during his

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<sup>54</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 68. In recounting these events, Preston discusses a fascinating story arising out of Serrano's wedding which, from the perspective of a historian, is nothing short of captivating. As mentioned above, José Antonio served as the groom's witness for Serrano's wedding. The official witness for the bride, Zita Polo, was none other than General Francisco Franco.

<sup>55</sup> Heleno Seña, *Franquismo sin mitos*, 64.

time in the *Cortes*.<sup>56</sup> However, the fact that Serrano did not join the Falange speaks louder than such *ex post facto* pronouncements. Serrano did not agree with the goals of the Republic as it existed prior to November of 1933, believing them to be fundamentally threatening to the traditional Spanish way of life. Also, as evidenced by his personal distaste for Gil Robles, he did not agree with all of the objectives being pursued even by the right-wing coalition. However, during his time in the *Cortes*, Serrano was a decidedly right-wing moderate who chose reform within the system over revolution, even to the point of officially staying aligned with a man whom he personally disliked rather than join the revolutionary party of one of his best and most respected friends. However, Serrano's failure to join the Falange does not necessarily correlate to a complete rejection of its ideology; indeed, he respected José Antonio's policies, specifically in regards to the nature of the Spanish *Patria*. Though he did not act as radically on these feelings during the time of the Republic, nevertheless, this attempt to pull Serrano into the Falange fold by José Antonio did sow the ideological seeds which would later fundamentally shape his political character in Nationalist Spain during the war years.

Though as a politician Serrano refused to cooperate with José Antonio Primo de Rivera, this did not necessarily preclude him from personally assisting his friend wherever possible. Specifically, though José Antonio had sought to convert Serrano to his cause, the major prize which he sought in order to greatly enhance the power and prestige of the Falange amongst the right-wing parties in Spain would be if he could win over Serrano's brother-in-law, the respected General Francisco Franco. In this effort, Serrano agreed to serve as José Antonio's intermediary. For the duration of the Second Republic, no one in Spain doubted that Franco was a conservative. At the same time,

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<sup>56</sup> Heleno Saña, *Franquismo sin mitos*, 40.



however, Franco was careful to keep himself distanced from any one political group, demonstrating from early on what would be a signature characteristic of his political rule for decades. This strict outward neutrality by Franco even extended within the usual camaraderie experienced among military officers, as he made sure never to commit to any machinations against the Republican government he so overtly disliked until the last possible moment. This careful balancing act was clearly noticed by the exiled General Sanjurjo, who stated that Franco only “looked out for himself.”<sup>57</sup> Historian Sheelagh Ellwood best describes this political balancing act by likening it to the military training which Franco personally led at the Zaragoza academy. Particularly, she notes how he was a pioneer in Spain of the concept of the “mixed battalion,” or a battalion which included elements of infantry, cavalry, armor, engineering supplies, and medical units. In this way, Franco felt that his regiments would be more adaptable to any situation in which they found themselves, something she sees as paralleled in his political orientation and desire to constantly stay in an advantageous position.<sup>58</sup>

Franco had been well-known in military and conservative circles for years; however, his reputation would be made nation-wide in 1934. During that year, he led the efforts to put down an uprising in the region of Asturias, which resulted when the delicate balance of power shared between Robles and Lerroux tipped in the favor of Gil Robles and his CEDA coalition.<sup>59</sup> As a result of this increasing notoriety, conservative leaders

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<sup>57</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 90.

<sup>58</sup> Sheelagh M. Ellwood, *Spanish Fascism in the Franco Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 104-105.

<sup>59</sup> The Asturian uprising resulted in a great shock to the Spanish populace, and it continued to be a great source of division in 1935 and 1936 based on how the elements of the Left and Right portrayed the events. On the Right, politicians condemned the protestors for breaking the civil order and particularly held up a group of Spanish priests who were killed in the uprising as the victims of the ensuing chaos. On

across the spectrum attempting to court Franco to their cause, thus being able to count as one of their own one of the few influential figures in Spain not identified to a single party. José Antonio Primo de Rivera was one of these leaders, and he hoped to use Serrano's connection as Franco's brother-in-law to succeed where all others had failed. From the years of 1933 to 1936, Serrano attempted on numerous occasions to foster better relations between his brother-in-law and his university friend. In the wake of the Asturian crisis, Serrano delivered a letter to Franco from José Antonio, although Franco did not even bother to reply to it. Undeterred, José Antonio continued to attempt to curry Franco's favor. Less than a year later Serrano tried again to bring the two men together, as on February 5 he hosted a meeting between José Antonio and Franco in his own home. Particularly, José Antonio was worried about the potential outcome of the upcoming elections of the next year, and wanted to see if he could win Franco to his side to help his electoral cause and, short of that, see if he would be willing to support a military intervention against a radical Leftist victory in the election.<sup>60</sup> However, despite his earnest attempts from 1934 to 1935, Serrano could not reconcile Franco with José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Despite their best efforts, neither man could convert Franco into a Falangist, a failed endeavor which would increasingly bear significance over Serrano's later political career as he continued to intercede between the Franco and the Falange, gaining great prestige in the process but always risking political danger lest Franco conclude that he was being too partisan in voicing the concerns of the Falange.

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the Left, however, politicians tended to emphasize the military-led repression of the unrest as the real lasting legacy of a conservative government determined not to allow dissenting voices to speak. For a full discussion of the events and impact of this crisis, see Brian Bunk, *Ghosts of Passion: martyrdom, gender, and the origins of the Spanish Civil War*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 114-115.

Though José Antonio failed to win over Franco in 1935, he had good reason to be concerned heading into the elections of 1936. Just as in 1933 the conservative elements had been able to politically rearm and enter the election energized to take the *Cortes*, so too had the leftist elements of Spain been able to gear up for the 1936 elections. As ammunition, they used the political stagnation which occurred as the result of the precarious power balance between Gil Robles and Lerroux to further stoke the popular frustration with what was generally perceived to be an under-achieving government. Particularly, the Socialist party within Spain helped to galvanize many of the more radical left-wing elements into a Popular Front government, led once more by Manuel Azaña. However, they made one major concession: in order to even get the election to the polls, a compromise had to be worked out with the conservatives that the Socialists would not personally enter the government, but rather cede any positions of influence they received to more moderate members of their coalition. The results of the elections in February of 1936 reflected a bitterly divided nation, even as they signaled a marked triumph for the Popular Front at the polls. In this election, Robles's CEDA party was cast out of power, and Azaña once again found himself in possession of the political power of the *Cortes*.<sup>61</sup> However, while the transfer from CEDA to the Popular Front is a noteworthy story of the elections of 1936, the real story is the polarization of the Spanish electorate which became painfully apparent at that time. In these elections, leftist candidates earned just short of five million popular votes, while rightist candidates earned just short of four million votes; indeed, the right wing elements actually garnered more

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<sup>61</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 639. While Robles's CEDA coalition suffered a rough defeat in the 1936 elections, his group at least fared better than Lerroux's radicals, as Lerroux had personally been implicated in a number of financial scandals in the buildup to the election, leading to total humiliation for his party at the polls.

votes in certain strategic areas of Spain than it had in 1933.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the centrist parties on both sides performed notably poorer than the extremist parties, thus signaling to many on both the Left and the Right of Spanish politics that the time had come to stop focusing on parliamentary policies and to start planning for alternative solutions to the question of how to govern.

In the aftermath of the February elections, the atmosphere was tense with fears of a budding Civil War. On both sides of the political spectrum, extremists planned for their own extralegal methods of seizing power. Indeed, this uncertainty became a vicious cycle, as military generals on the Right stepped up their planning for the eventual uprising out of fear that their plans would be pre-empted by a massive nationwide general strike. Specifically, one Leftist leader, Francisco Largo Caballero, was often cited at the time as having stated his party's desire to see what happened in Russia replicated in Spain in the aftermath of February 1936, a fact which, though somewhat doubted by the varying accounts of the time, nonetheless provided right-wing plotters with all the evidence they needed to assure them of the virtue of their cause.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, though such conspiracies were not as pronounced on the Left due to the fact that their Popular Front government had successfully gained power, nonetheless those who were in positions of power began to plan for the event of a right-wing uprising and ways they could counter using their own political support base. As the agonizing months of uncertainty passed, there is some doubt as to what amount of knowledge Serrano had of the military's planning. What is known is that Serrano continued to correspond often with Franco, who

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<sup>62</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 639.

<sup>63</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Entre el silencio y la propaganda, la historia como fue: memorias* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977), 115.

knew of the plans being made by his fellow generals even if he did not fully join them yet in their revolutionary fervor. Furthermore, Serrano was known to have corresponded also with General Emilio Mola, the man whom Serrano later considered to be the true “mastermind” of the uprising.<sup>64</sup> In addition, Serrano was no doubt personally alarmed when, in response to increasing street altercations throughout February of 1936, the Popular Front government began a policy of retaliation against the Falange, seeking out and ultimately arresting José Antonio on March 14.<sup>65</sup>

Based on the available evidence, it seems that Serrano’s own assertions in his memoirs are accurate when he states that he was not brought into the particular machinations of the military; however, his position as close observer to so many of the key players made it so that he was not completely surprised when the uprising did take place.<sup>66</sup> Several key pieces of evidence seem to point in this direction. The foremost of these is the fact that throughout April and into May of 1936, while many generals were beginning to consider an uprising, Serrano was using his political talents to attempt to work with Gil Robles and his remaining CEDA coalition in relation to a second round of elections to take place in the city of Cuenca. Particularly, he sought to put together a powerful right-wing slate of candidates so that José Antonio, whose time in prison was now over a month and whose prospects of release were getting more desperate, might be part of a winning ticket and, as such, regain his lost parliamentary immunity. To this end, Serrano even convinced Franco to cast off his political neutrality and run as an independent candidate in the election, only to have his friend José Antonio react

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<sup>64</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 73.

<sup>65</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 187-188.

<sup>66</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 73.

negatively against such a nomination as, at best, removing Franco from the military planning which he did so well and, at worst, provoking the ire of the Leftists so that they would assemble their own efforts at defeating the Right.<sup>67</sup> Serrano's maneuvering, though well intentioned, ultimately failed, as the Popular Front government heavily invested its efforts through both legal campaigns to get its voters to the polls and illegal efforts to keep Rightist groups away, resulting in a defeat of the Rightist candidates in the city's election and a de facto condemnation of José Antonio. Had Serrano known about the specifics of the military's planned uprising, he would have been able to get himself, or at least his family, out of the path of the assumed Republican response on Nationalist conspirators. Instead, he was caught off guard by the actual timing of the events, leaving him and his family in great danger with little time to plan for an escape, adding greatly to the personal trauma which Serrano would experience in the next several months. Thus, the fact that Serrano was still in Madrid in the first place may be the biggest testament of all as to his exclusion from the planning circles of the Nationalist revolt.

After months of increasing political tensions and direct altercations between groups on the Left and Right, it seemed all that was left was for the one spark that would set off the powder keg of civil war. That spark came on July 12, when a Carlist leader, José Calvo Sotelo, was visited by members of the Republican Civil Guard who presented orders for his arrest. However, rather than taking him to prison, the guards drove Calvo Sotelo to a secluded area and simply shot him.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, many historians point to this point as the moment at which Franco, at least, became firmly and unwaveringly

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<sup>67</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 193; Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 125-126.

<sup>68</sup> Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 242.

committed to the plan of an uprising.<sup>69</sup> The uprising began on July 17, with Franco leading his forces in Morocco in an uprising to take control of the area. At the same time, General Mola led his troops in revolt, accompanied by many individual generals in several cities across Spain. The hopes were that the Nationalists would be able to claim much of the industrial region of northern Spain, the capital of Madrid, the important commercial city of Barcelona, and then complete the victory with a quick transfer of Franco's forces from Morocco to the south of Spain to dissuade any officers loyal to the Republic from prolonging the fight.

As could probably be expected, these hopes proved to be overly optimistic. First, and perhaps most devastating of all to the original plans of the uprising, the plane carrying General Sanjurjo back into Spain from his exile crashed, killing everyone aboard. It had been planned that Sanjurjo would lead the new Spanish state, with each of the individual Generals acting as governors of sorts in their conquered areas. Now, the generals who remained had to craft an entirely new structure of command to fit the new realities of the uprising. To make matters worse, the uprising failed in Barcelona, where General Manuel Godea was quickly arrested, sentenced, and executed.<sup>70</sup> In Madrid, the uprising met with similarly abrupt end, as General Fanjul quickly found his supporters besieged and after only three days surrendered to the Republican forces.<sup>71</sup> Within this atmosphere, Serrano knew he had to act quickly and carefully if he and his family were to be remain safe. Particularly, Serrano knew that his relationship as Franco's brother-in-law posed the most danger to him, although this was further heightened by his résumé as

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<sup>69</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 204-205; Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 137.

<sup>70</sup> Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain*, 244-245.

<sup>71</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 79.

a right-wing politician from the days of CEDA. He and his family sought refuge in a boarding house run by a personal friend in an attempt to wait for better days to make an escape from the city; however, he was found and arrested a day after arriving at this house.

So began a three-month period in which Serrano was imprisoned in Madrid, and in which he was transformed from an unflinchingly conservative politician with a preference for a moderate course of political and social change into a radical anti-Republican who saw no chance of reconciliation between the needs of the Spanish *Patria* and liberal systems of government.<sup>72</sup> At the start, Serrano recalled having been interrogated about the most obvious question: what did he know of Franco's involvement in the coup? Particularly, his interrogators found it difficult to believe that Serrano had no knowledge whatsoever of at least a general idea of when the uprising would take place. However, this was not the end to the questions, as over his period of incarceration Serrano recalled being asked about Gil Robles's role in the planning and whether or not he knew of any plan to bring back either Alfonso XIII or a Carlist candidate for the throne as a plan to restore the monarchy.<sup>73</sup> During his time in prison, Serrano took great comfort in the visits of his sister Carmen; however, he felt more or less abandoned by Franco and the other right-wing elements, knowing that with each day he spent in jail, the risk of a condemnation to death grew.<sup>74</sup>

After three months, Serrano decided to use what little influence he had left to attempt an escape, so that if he was to die at the hands of the Republicans, he would do so

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<sup>72</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 274.

<sup>73</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 126-127.

<sup>74</sup> Helena Saña, *Franquismo sin mitos*, 57-58.



at least attempting to secure his freedom. From his prison, he requested and was granted a meeting with Doctor Gregorio Marañón, who arranged for him to be transferred to the prison hospital.<sup>75</sup> From this clinic, Serrano disguised himself as a woman and managed to escape. He found passage to the Dutch Legation in Madrid, where he at last found refuge. From there, a diplomat from the Argentine embassy visited and agreed to have him moved to their consulate in Alicante. From there, Serrano was quietly placed aboard a destroyer named the *Tucumán* where he reunited with his wife and children and which would, at last, take himself safely into French territory and out of the reach of the Republicans.<sup>76</sup> This protracted escape, filled with the danger of discovery at any time, proved to have been an experience which forever changed Serrano. Indeed, most historical accounts note how by the time he reached the French border town of Hendaye, he had become prematurely grey despite the fact he was still in his mid-30s, nine years younger than Franco who, as of October 1, found himself in supreme command of the Nationalist military in the place of the deceased General Sanjurjo. However, despite all the personal troubles which accompanied him, Serrano recounted later in life that it was during his time in Alicante before boarding the *Tucumán* that the worst part of the experience hit him. It was there that news reached him that, while he had been successful in escaping Republican Madrid, his brothers José and Fernando had not been so lucky. Indeed, he later recalled that hearing the news of the murder of his two brothers was the “greatest pain of [his] life,” and served to even overshadow his happy reunion with his

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<sup>75</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 83-84.

<sup>76</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 149-150; Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 85-86.

family and relief at having completed his escape.<sup>77</sup>

At the start of 1937, the beleaguered Ramón Serrano Suñer finally made ready to return to Spain, and made preparations to leave from Hendaye to the Nationalist zone of Spain. However, as he readied himself to make the trip back to Spain, he did so as a man in a powerful state of uncertainty. Elated to have personally escaped along with his wife and children, he was nonetheless forever scarred by the knowledge that he had left his two brothers behind, where they found their deaths. Whether or not he knew at that point that his dear friend, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, had been executed in the very city of Alicante where he found refuge at the Argentine consulate is uncertain; however, this knowledge, whenever he obtained it, would add even more to his anger at the Republic. In his time as a representative to the *Cortes* from Zaragoza, he had made a conscious choice to avoid pursuing a revolutionary agenda, even when approached by his longtime friend about joining his new Falange party and abandoning his position in the CEDA coalition in which, by all accounts, he was only marginally satisfied. Indeed, Serrano would later say that during the Republic, he was a politician who “thought more in reforms than in revolutions.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, by mid-July of 1936, Serrano, like all of Spain, found himself caught in the middle of a revolution. From there, he found himself a victim of the Civil War, spending three months in a Republican prison in a constant state of fear for his life and losing his two beloved brothers in the process. Firmly in the grasp of Red Madrid, Serrano would forever lose faith in any system of liberalism in favor of a general inclination towards authoritarian systems of government. However, as can be expected in the case of someone so quickly uprooted and then subjected to such

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<sup>77</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 150.

<sup>78</sup> Helena Saña, *Franquismo sin mitos*, 64.

challenges, Serrano was far from having a concrete political worldview upon which he would act upon arriving in Nationalist Spain; in fact, it is doubtful that Serrano even knew for sure that he would be welcomed into Franco's circle of advisors upon reaching Spain once more. What is clear is that even though he was not a supporter of an uprising prior to July of 1936, he re-entered Spain in February of 1937 with a new level of commitment to aid the Nationalist uprising in any way possible in its war against the hated Republic.

## Chapter 2

### From Refugee to *Cuñadísimo*: 1937-1938

After having endured three months in a Republican prison in Madrid, Ramón Serrano Suñer crossed back into Spain from the French border town of Hendaye newly energized to help the Nationalist cause. While his escape from the Republican zone was difficult, his journey to Salamanca was made easy by the influence of his brother-in-law. When word reached Franco of Serrano's arrival in Hendaye, he immediately sent a car to bring him and his family to Salamanca. Once there, he lodged his brother-in-law and his family in a room of the palace where he lived and also made his headquarters.<sup>79</sup> For a man who made his reputation through appearing calm and measured in all situations, Franco was indeed excited to see Serrano arrive in Salamanca, as he was recorded as telling another official that "I hope you get to know him: he is a man of capacity and efficacy, endowed with an extraordinary sensibility and political vision."<sup>80</sup> A few days later, an article appeared in one of the local newspapers announcing Serrano's arrival and, perhaps, explaining Franco's uncharacteristic sign of excitement. The article states that Serrano had been officially declared dead, as word had reached the Nationalists that his brothers had been murdered and it had been assumed, with a lack of any evidence to the contrary, that he had died with them. Nonetheless, the article proceeded to list Serrano's political credentials in the Second Republic, such as his university training and two-year term in the *Cortes* as a collaborator with Gil Robles's CEDA party. It concluded by saying that his arrival in Salamanca could "rapidly determine a new political

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<sup>79</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 253.

<sup>80</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia* (Barcelona: Editorial Argos Vergara, 1983), 88.

orientation” for the Nationalists.<sup>81</sup>

The two-year period of 1937 and 1938 was the most critical time for Serrano and the politician he would later become. In 1937, Serrano arrived in Salamanca as a refugee of the war, with no political capital at his disposal and an overarching political vision dashed to pieces by his experiences in Madrid. As such, for much of the following year, Serrano exploited the only avenue he held in relation to political power: his relationship with Franco. By the end of 1938, Serrano was still reliant on this familial connection as his main source of political influence; however, he started to create an individual identity in Nationalist Spain through his power as Interior Minister and increasing involvement in the Falange, particularly as a mediating figure between the Franco and the interests of the core Falangists still loyal to the vision of José Antonio. Throughout the process, while he was driven by multiple motivations and loyalties, including familial ties to Franco and memories of a close friend lost in the war, personal political calculations were always at the heart of Serrano’s actions.

As the local article predicted, Serrano found much that he wanted to change upon arrival in Salamanca. In his memoirs, he wrote that it was a very difficult adjustment for him, a politician and lawyer, to participate in a government which “had its justification in the war and for the war” with no independent basis as a political entity.<sup>82</sup> As is the case

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<sup>81</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia*, 90.

<sup>82</sup> Ramon Serrano Suñer, *Entre el silencio y la propaganda, la historia como fue: memorias* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977), 158. In studying this period of Spanish history, one of the most reliable types of source material available are the memoirs of the critical players of the period. While all memoirs must be examined using a critical eye, it is important to note that the memoirs stemming from the period of the early formation of the Franco government are particularly noteworthy for their bias. In many cases, like in Serrano’s memoir cited here, they were not published until many years after the events being recounted. Further, in the wake of World War II, the Franco government, and subsequently all of the key players within it, made concerted efforts to play down their relations with the Axis governments and clean up their own image.

in many military uprisings, the members of the Junta had not planned on a protracted war in July of 1936; instead, they hoped to move quickly into Madrid and oust the Republican leadership. However, the failure of the uprising in both Madrid and Barcelona, combined with the fact that the majority of the Spanish Navy remained loyal to the Republic and slowed Franco's arrival from North Africa, led to a stalemate as the summer waned and fall arrived.<sup>83</sup> As such, much of the political machinery which had developed had done so on its own, with very little coordination from Franco, whose time was occupied with waging the war, or his chief political advisor at the time, his older brother Nicolás Franco. Indeed, Serrano complained that the system headed by Nicolás Franco was filled with disconnections in political structures and a general lack of communication.<sup>84</sup> Of particular concern for Serrano was the system of censorship which Nicolás implemented for the newspapers of the region. This system, Serrano felt, lacked a clear set of definitions of what was allowable to print and what was not; thus, he found that things that were censored in one town could be legitimately printed in another, with little explanation as to the discrepancy.<sup>85</sup> While seemingly a small matter, Serrano used this in his memoir to highlight what he felt was a general lack of attention to detail in the way Nicolás Franco acted which he would remedy once given the chance.

Living in the same building as Franco, Serrano quickly found himself consulted on the most pressing of internal matters, giving him an avenue with which to begin to enact many of the changes he felt were necessary upon his arrival in Salamanca. Indeed,

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<sup>83</sup> Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 244-245.

<sup>84</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2003), 89-90.

<sup>85</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia*, 90.

for all of his political and legal training, perhaps this was the single greatest factor in his elevation to Franco's chief advisor, as his daily access to Franco's ear was something potential rivals could only dream of having. As he set about matching the impressive military mobilization with a corresponding political mobilization in the Nationalist zone, three broad themes came to guide his approach. First, he sought to use whatever influence he could to solidify Franco's base of power. In the process, his second goal was to provide a juridical basis for Franco's power, so that the government of Salamanca could easily adapt to a full, national government upon what he perceived to be its inevitable victory. Third, and perhaps the most important in shaping Serrano's individual career as a politician, he sought to do whatever he could to realize the political vision of his late friend, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, within the context of Franco's overarching government.<sup>86</sup>

Before any substantial change could be made to the political establishment in the Nationalist zone, however, there had to be a general agreement as to what form this government should take. Indeed, beneath the presumed unity of the military's uprising lay a significant number of right-wing factions, all vying for power in the Nationalist zone in order to fully realize what they conceived to be the proper Spanish state. While many parties remained in existence in the Nationalist zone, three emerged as the largest and most influential: the Falange, the Carlists, and the Alfonsine monarchists.<sup>87</sup> Of the three, the Falange was numerically superior, based on its ability to mobilize young recruits to join militias and fight actively on the Nationalist side. Their ideal vision of a government was a fascist-type state, based on the Twenty-Six Points of José Antonio.

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<sup>86</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia*, 112.

<sup>87</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 182.

The second most influential group was the Carlists, formally known as the *Comuni3n Tradicionalista*. They, like the Falange, were responsible for amassing a large number of recruits to the Nationalist side. However, while the Falange had been formed in the mid-1930s as a party designed to appeal to the disaffected youths in Spain, the Carlists dated back from the first half of the nineteenth century. As such, over the course of the preceding century, the Carlists were able to create a more solid political and economic infrastructure, even to the point of opening their own military training academy. The difference between the two parties soon became clear, as the Falange provided a larger number of low-level militia volunteers who, while necessary to continue fighting the war, were also considered to be somewhat expendable. In contrast, the Carlists provided not only trained youths to serve in the militia, but also a large number of men to fill leadership positions based on their training at the independent Carlist academy. In contrast to the Falange's vision of a fascist party-state, the Carlists sought to establish a strictly Catholic monarchy along a rival line to the throne established in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>88</sup> Finally, though smaller in number than either the Falange or the Carlists, the Alfonsine monarchists possessed a degree of legitimacy that the others lacked, as they hoped to bring the Bourbon monarch Alfonso XIII back from his exile, which had begun with the advent of the Second Republic in 1931.<sup>89</sup>

Within the political environment of Nationalist Spain, it is essential to first examine how Serrano envisioned the proper form of the Spanish state. Indeed, while his individual conception of this problem changed dramatically over the course of his full

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<sup>88</sup> Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution, and Revenge* (1986; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 209-211

<sup>89</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 69-71.



political career, as he arrived in Salamanca in 1937 it is clear that Serrano did not yet have any firm convictions on the matter. As discussed in Chapter 1, Serrano had made a name for himself prior to the Civil War working with the CEDA coalition to help achieve right-wing goals within the structure of the Republic. Though he was approached by his good friend, José Antonio Primo de Rivera, about joining the Falange, he declined because he did not yet associate with the opinions of the radicals on the right who believed that a parliamentary system could never work in Spain and, as such, a stronger system of government needed to be imposed. However, the experience of the anarchy in Madrid following the failed uprising, his own imprisonment for three months, and above all else, the killing of his two brothers, had forever freed Serrano of any dedication he may have held for a liberal system of government. From this point, his political career would be marked by a distrust of the liberal governments of the world and a preference for authoritarian-style rules. However, he was far from being aligned with any one political party as he entered Salamanca. While he had personal ties to the Falange through his friendship with José Antonio, whom he trusted and whose vision he respected greatly, Serrano had no firm ties with the party establishment at this time, and none of the leadership of the Falange would have counted Serrano as one of their own in February of 1937. Neither was Serrano a Carlist or an Alfonsine monarchist, as he felt that the beliefs of both parties may have been suitable for the nineteenth century from which they dated, but were somewhat anachronistic given the ideological changes that had swept across Europe in the wake of World War I. Nor was Serrano a man of the military, as he had made his name as a civilian politician, and had no previous background in military training. Thus, the Serrano who made his way to Salamanca had seen his previous

political worldview dashed to pieces in the wake of the Madrid uprising and was starting to form a more radical view; however, in his early days as an advisor to Franco he had not yet managed to craft this general desire for a stronger form of government into a distinct political identity of his own. Thus, his influence at this early date was reliant solely on his relationship with Franco and his ability to serve his brother-in-law in the political consolidation of his rule.

From Franco's perspective, the division on the Nationalist side posed no overt threat to the war effort. Unlike in the Republican zone, where multiple political groups actively fought over control of its military units, all of the sub-groups within the Nationalist coalition accepted Franco's supreme authority as it was given to him on October 1, 1936. Despite this fact, Franco forever sought ways to consolidate his political command, as he viewed his role in the government much in the same manner as his role in the military. This is evidenced by the fact that when Serrano later wrote about his many conversations with his brother-in-law, he claimed that Franco tended to speak of his political obligations in terms of his "command" or his role as the Caudillo. Indeed, Serrano believed it was impossible for Franco to divorce the concepts of military command and political influence.<sup>90</sup>

Franco knew that if he was going to attempt a top-down unification of the various political forces under his military jurisdiction, he would have to act sooner rather than later. The situation at the outbreak of the war left him a peculiar window of opportunity that he would probably never see again; namely, that virtually all of the individual groups on the Right had lost key leaders in the chaos of the early war and had not yet recovered.

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<sup>90</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 186.; Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia*, 113-114.

In the case of the Falange, the execution of José Antonio in November of 1936 was a severe blow, as much of the prestige of the party had developed as a cult of personality and, without his presence, they were adrift both in terms of social doctrine and leadership. The Carlists also lost a key leader with the murder of José Calvo Sotelo by members of the Republican Civil Guard in days leading up to the Nationalist uprising.<sup>91</sup> As stated before, Alfonso XIII was living in exile from Spain, meaning that while the leadership for the Alfonsine monarchists was still intact, it was cumbersome in practice. Even what was left of the CEDA coalition was without clear leadership, as Gil Robles had also gone into exile and was not welcome in the Nationalist zone. Over the winter of 1936, Franco had worked with his brother Nicolás in attempting to create a scenario in which these parties could be merged. By the time Serrano arrived in Salamanca, Franco had already prepared a version of the Twenty-Six Points with his own edits and annotations, as well as a comparison of the speeches of José Antonio and the Carlist leadership to use in helping to reconcile the two parties.<sup>92</sup> This work proved fruitless, however, as Nicolás Franco lacked the political talent necessary to actually implement such a plan of unification. Further, during the spring of 1937, Franco's time and energy were being consumed with military planning for the Civil War, meaning that even if he were inclined to try his own political hand at unification, he was unable to do so.

Serrano's arrival marked a change in this frustrating situation for Franco in regards to his political management of the various Nationalist factions. In Serrano, Franco knew he had a man of respected legal and political credentials. Furthermore,

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<sup>91</sup> Claude G. Bowers, *My Mission to Spain*, 242.

<sup>92</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 183-184; Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain: 1923-1977* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 263.

Serrano was a perfect figure for unification because, as mentioned before, he had no particular attachment to any one of the groups being coerced into a single party. Indeed, at this time, those figures who had known him from the time of the Second Republic knew him only as a member of the now-discredited CEDA coalition.<sup>93</sup> Thus, with Serrano, Franco knew he had a man who, unlike Nicolás, possessed the training necessary to handle the political affairs of the Nationalist zone while he dealt with the military affairs of winning the war. While these elements were important, the most significant reason for which Franco believed Serrano was the key to finally achieving unification was his personal friendship with José Antonio Primo de Rivera. The Falange, along with the other groups within the Nationalist coalition, accepted Franco's command as a military figure; however, they simultaneously retained their own political structure and heavily resented any attempt by Franco to politically influence them. The *camisas viejas*, literally "old shirts" of the Falange, knew that Franco had resented José Antonio's ability to inspire the masses with his oratorical skills, and as such had considered him somewhat of a threat. Further, many were convinced that Franco had the opportunity to save José Antonio as part of a prisoner exchange in late 1936 and chose against it as a means of eliminating a potential rival without any blood on his own hands.<sup>94</sup> Serrano, on the other hand, would be able to be his emissary to this potentially troublesome party. Several of the *camisas viejas* knew of Serrano's friendship with José Antonio. Further, his claim to be an influential leader in the Falange based on this friendship was further

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<sup>93</sup> Pilar Primo de Rivera, *Recuerdos de una Vida*, 3rd ed. (Madrid: Ediciones Dyrsa, 1983), 102.

<sup>94</sup> Pilar Primo de Rivera, *Recuerdos de una Vida*, 100. In her memoir, Pilar Primo de Rivera, José Antonio's sister and the leader of the Sección Feminina of the Falange, states that the rumors that Franco wanted to see her brother killed were unfounded, and that she thought Franco did all he could to save José Antonio. Nonetheless, her commentary demonstrates just how common such perceptions were among the *camisas viejas* as they mourned the loss of their leader.

bolstered by José Antonio's will, written days before his execution in the Republican prison in Alicante. In this will, he lists Serrano alongside another *camisa vieja*, Raimundo Fernández Cuesta, as his "beloved lifelong friends" and names them both as executor-accountants and trustees for his will.<sup>95</sup> Thus, Serrano, through his personal ties to José Antonio, possessed qualifications which would make him acceptable to the *camisas viejas* of the Falange, a group which valued individual friendships and personal and political ties with José Antonio above all else. Furthermore, no matter how much political talent either of the Franco brothers possessed, this type of link to the Falange was something they could not fabricate on their own. Indeed, and it is a point which must be firmly understood, it was Serrano's ability to intercede between Franco and the Falange that was at the root of Serrano's first steps in the realm of Nationalist politics, and it remained an essential element of his political power base even as he continued to gradually replace Nicolás Franco as the Caudillo's chief political advisor.

Immediately from his arrival in the Nationalist zone on February 20, 1937, Serrano and Franco began to work together on what would eventually become the Decree of Unification. Two months later, the document was ready, and all that needed to happen was an event upon which to base this landmark political realignment. Over the course of a month, Franco's agents had been agitating within the Falange leadership, making two rival groups both feel that they had the Caudillo's support to stake their claims to leadership of the largest party in the Nationalist zone. On April 17, the tension between the two groups boiled over, as the supposed official head of the Falange, Manuel Hedilla, led his followers on a raid to retake the headquarters from his rival group. The

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<sup>95</sup> *José Antonio Primo de Rivera (anthology)*, comp. Ganzalo Torrente Ballester (Madrid: Afrodísio Aguado S.A., 1942), 284-285.

altercation left two Falangists dead.<sup>96</sup> Franco now had his crisis, as he officially declared the rival groups to be causing disorder in the rearguard, and two days later, on April 19, made the Decree of Unification official by speech and by radio address.<sup>97</sup> Effective immediately, all political speeches and publications from the various parties were to be suspended in favor of a single, united party. The party would be a synthesis of the two major groups, the Carlists and the Falange, and go by the official title of the *Falange Española Tradicionalista de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalistas* (abbreviated either FET-JONS, or simply FET). Further, Franco himself would be the acting head of the party, with the office of Secretary General created just below him to oversee basic day-to-day affairs and a governing committee named the *Junta Política* created to make the most important of decisions for the party. In his speech announcing the unification, Franco painted the action as a revolutionary turning point in a crusade against all inorganic elements tormenting the Spanish *Patria* which had been given to him and the other Nationalist leaders by divine will.<sup>98</sup>

In the face of such impassioned rhetoric from their supreme leader, few Nationalists resisted the Decree of Unification. Indeed, on the front lines, where the regiments had been unified for some time due to the simple necessities of the war, the Decree of Unification was hailed with great excitement.<sup>99</sup> The one exception to this, once again, was the Falange. In the wake of unification, many of the *camisas viejas* felt as though their name, symbols, and uniforms had been expropriated by Franco without

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War*, 213.

<sup>97</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 168.

<sup>98</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia*, 102-103.

<sup>99</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Política de España, 1936-1975* (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, S.A., 1995), 32-33.

just compensation. They had sought to become the sole party of Spain, based on the doctrines of José Antonio. Instead, they found themselves part of a singular Spanish party which looked and sounded like their own, but in reality was designed to offset the various groups, making sure that none of them had notably more power than another, and in so doing placing Franco in a privileged position. These feelings surfaced on April 25, when Manuel Hedilla, feeling personally betrayed by Franco, who he still believed had supported his candidacy to be leader of the Falange, ordered the regional headquarters of the Falange to accept his orders as leader rather than the orders of the new FET leadership.<sup>100</sup>

Franco's response was swift. As previously mentioned, Franco saw his political power solely in terms of military command. As such, this refusal to obey orders and direct subversion of his authority constituted disloyalty, and Hedilla was arrested and sentenced to death.<sup>101</sup> The *camisas viejas* were shocked, and many moved immediately to plead with Franco upon hearing the news. In this environment, Ramón Serrano Suñer intervened on Hedilla's behalf. Serrano used his personal connection as Franco's brother-in-law to reason with Franco in a way that none of the *camisas viejas* were able to do. In meeting with Franco, Serrano did not defend Hedilla's actions; however, he told Franco that he felt that a death sentence for Hedilla would permanently alienate the old Falange and, as such, sap the potential effectiveness of the FET, which was still largely reliant on militia recruits from this group. Eventually, Franco grudgingly acquiesced to Serrano's argument and commuted Hedilla's sentence, claiming at the same time that

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<sup>100</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 268.

<sup>101</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 271.

“one day, these weaknesses will come back to haunt us.”<sup>102</sup>

This intervention on behalf of the now-defunct leader of the Falange, Manuel Hedilla, marked a notable departure for Serrano from the course he had taken in the first two months of his period in Salamanca; specifically, that of not identifying whatsoever with any individual party in the Nationalist zone. Furthermore, personal intervention into such a heated issue, in which one death sentence had already been decreed, bore a certain element of risk to Serrano. Why, then, did he decide to risk his brief political career and intervene on behalf of Hedilla? After all, at this point, Serrano had no formal affiliation with the old Falange. Thus, it would seem to the casual observer that the safe course of action would have been to toe the line with Franco, further reinforcing his identity as Franco’s man in the face of a potentially-divisive issue. Instead, Serrano decided to act out of a series of personal and political motivations, all of which were inextricably linked to his own self-interest as an aspiring public figure and an increase in his own political influence.

Serrano was able to increase his political capital in three distinct ways by acting on behalf of Hedilla. The first, and perhaps most obvious, of these ways is through an improvement of his position in the Falange, though at the time he was far from being an ardent Falangist. As previously discussed, Serrano had no concrete political ideology upon arriving in Salamanca; however, he seemed to move towards the Falange in memory of his late friend, José Antonio. However, while Serrano’s links to the Falange should not be overlooked, they also should not be overstated at this point. The Hedilla incident occurred at the end of April. At this point, Serrano had not formed the friendships which would pull him further into the Falange fold. Most notably, it would

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<sup>102</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 270.



not be until June that Serrano met and befriended Dionisio Ridruejo, the firebrand leader of the *camisas viejas*. Thus, while it is undeniable that Serrano's Falangist sympathy had some impact, on its own it is insufficient to explain why Serrano took such a potentially risky move. Nonetheless, even if alignment with the Falange was not the prime cause of his actions, he did establish himself in the circles of the Falange as a figure to be trusted, a factor which would later become central to his personal development as a politician.

Aside from personal linkages to the Falange, two other factors motivated Serrano's actions, both of which were inextricably tied to his own political capital. First, Serrano felt that by executing Hedilla, the stability of Franco's government would be put in jeopardy. It must be remembered that while all of this drama was occurring in the Nationalist zone, the Civil War was less than a year old, and its outcome far from decided. In this context, the Falange was still responsible for the largest number of common militia recruits due to its ability to reach the disaffected youths on the Right in Spain who witnessed the rapid developments in Germany and Italy and longed for them to be replicated in Spain. Thus, Serrano believed that to alienate this component group of the FET in order to send a message of justice to the others would forever destroy the zeal with which the Falange participated in the Nationalist's cause. The potential of the FET to be successful would thus be stunted from the start, and, most important of all, Serrano was able to link Hedilla's execution to a decline in Franco's own power. In so doing, he was able to give Franco a concrete reason to spare Hedilla, something which the *camisas viejas*, for all their rhetorical support for their leader, could not do. On a personal level, Franco's blessing was Serrano's sole source of political power in the early months of 1937. Thus, a reduction in Franco's power would have necessarily resulted in a reduction

of his own influence. As such, though he acted to preserve the power of his brother-in-law, a man to whom he felt personally indebted, his own political fortunes were raised in the process.

In the above two reasons, we have seen why Serrano intervened from the perspective of Franco's interests and in the interests of his best friend and his closest followers, even as these actions were indirectly tied to his own political fortunes. However, Serrano knew that his budding political career had been made by the Decree of Unification. A third reason for which action on behalf of Hedilla then becomes apparent: the preservation of his own prestige as a lawyer and politician as evidenced by the success of this newly created organization. Should the FET, which was created by a decree he largely wrote, fail due to an alienation of the Falange, then it would be interpreted that he also failed. In this context, it would not be guaranteed that Franco would continue to use him as his chief advisor, as Nicolás Franco still had equal personal connections to the Caudillo. To summarize, Serrano's decision to act on behalf of Hedilla was one with rooted in many different ideological motivations. On the one hand, he acted out of allegiance to his brother-in-law, whose favor was an intricate part of his political identity. On the other, he demonstrated an early move to the party of his best friend and a desire to ingratiate himself with the party leadership. However, in all of these instances, Serrano's reputation as a politician was improved, demonstrating that once again personal motivations were to be found at the heart of actions which otherwise could have been construed as party loyalty or familial connections.

Even if it is accepted that Serrano's actions were only somewhat related to any personal sympathy with the Falange, Franco, in a sign of his own political opportunism,

nonetheless realized that this intervention could be used to his benefit. Indeed, if Serrano's personal connections to José Antonio had been enough to endear him to the old Falange leadership, then his actions on behalf of Manuel Hedilla solidified his claim to be their representative to the Franco government. Pilar Primo de Rivera encapsulated this thought when, upon hearing of the decision to commute Hedilla's sentence, she remarked that "with Ramón, the Falangists have a good defender."<sup>103</sup> Indeed, in the wake of unification, Franco told Serrano specifically that he wanted him to take the position of Secretary General of the FET, a position in which his role as intermediary between the party and the Caudillo would become official. However, as seen in the buildup to the unification crisis, Serrano did not yet personally believe himself to be a Falangist in the same sense as the *camisas viejas*, such as Pilar Primo de Rivera or Dionisio Ridruejo.<sup>104</sup> As such, he declined to take the position, choosing instead, for the moment, to refrain from having an official position within the government.<sup>105</sup> Several factors pushed Serrano in this direction. First, his rise to political prominence had been nothing short of meteoric. Just two months prior, he was entering the city for the first time with his family. Now, through his authorship of the Decree of Unification, his attempt at increasing his personal political influence in Spain had yielded great results. He was now a recognized name within all of Nationalist Spain and one of Franco's chief personal

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<sup>103</sup> Pilar Primo de Rivera, *Recuerdos de una Vida*, 110. Pilar Primo de Rivera was José Antonio's sister and the leader of the *Sección Femenina* (Women's Section) of the Falange. Through her leadership, the *Sección Femenina* would often be described as the organ in government which most loyally held true to the doctrines of the core Falange, a factor which, added to her personal relationship to José Antonio, resulted in a clear position of leadership within the *camisas viejas* for many years to come.

<sup>104</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 201.

<sup>105</sup> The position of Secretary General was awarded to José Antonio's other "lifelong friend," Raimundo Fernández Cuesta. Nonetheless, even though Fernández Cuesta now officially had the position as mediator between Franco and the Falange, Franco still preferred to utilize his Serrano as his chief intermediary.

advisors, especially in issues regarding law or politics, the two areas in which he excelled. As a result, he had made some political friends, as shown in examples of the *camisas viejas* above, but he had also made some enemies. Although they did not oppose the idea of unification, the Carlists and Alfonsine monarchists resented what they felt to be the overrepresentation of the Falange in the new party, from the nomenclature of the party to its symbolism, even to the point that the Falangist paper *Arriba* had been made the official publication of the FET. They, too, noted that this change corresponded with the arrival of Serrano, and they resented him for it, as they saw the Falangist party-state doctrine as a critical obstacle in the path of a restoration of the monarchy.<sup>106</sup> As a result, Serrano found himself increasingly referred to as the “*Cuñadísimo*,” a play on Franco’s title of Generalísimo using the Spanish word for brother-in-law. Serrano took notice of these criticisms, as evident by the fact that during his discussion with Franco as to why he declined this position, he stated that to place him in such a powerful position so quickly would lead many to believe Franco guilty of nepotism, both sapping his potential effectiveness in this new position and raising suspicions about any future appointments Franco would make.

While Serrano disliked the *Cuñadísimo* criticisms, in effect their arrival in the wake of the unification crisis prove that he was successful in his objective of creating his own political presence in Nationalist Spain. For better or for worse in the eyes of the individual Nationalist factions, Serrano was no longer an obscure refugee fleeing to Salamanca from the Republican zone. Returning to his three goals upon entering Nationalist Spain, Serrano felt that the Decree of Unification fulfilled the first goal; specifically, of assuring Franco’s power in the larger Nationalist coalition. From here,

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<sup>106</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 282.

Serrano now focused his attention on fulfilling the second goal: the creation of a legal foundation for Franco's continued government after the war which, he hoped, would result in an equal boost in his personal prestige as the Decree of Unification. For the remainder of 1937, then, Serrano continued his role as Franco's personal advisor while increasingly spending his time bringing his legal training to bear on the issue of building a political foundation and cabinet structure for Franco.

As he began this task, Serrano continued in his unofficial position as a mediator between Franco and the *camisas viejas* of the old Falange. In this way, Serrano began to get a taste of the difficult position in which he would officially find himself in later years, when he would state that the concerns of the two groups would cause him to suffer "day by day" as he tried to bring them together.<sup>107</sup> Of the core Falangists, Serrano noted that even after the official Declaration of Unification, they were hesitant to accept Franco as their leader, considering him to be an outsider with no appreciation for the basic tenets upon which the party was founded. One *camisa vieja* put this sense of alienation into a good analogy, comparing the core Falangists to a widow who had since remarried, yet only ever spoke about her first husband.<sup>108</sup> These feelings found expression in a growing cult of "el Ausente", or "the Absent One", within the Falange by mid-1937. As part of this, several key Falangists were known to write poems in honor of their lost leader, expressions that were further encouraged by the occasional rumor that José Antonio had not actually been executed, but was still being held in the Republican zone. For his part, Franco held a profound distaste for such sentiments. In particular, he resented the power which José Antonio's image still had to rally these *camisas viejas*, as Franco did not like

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<sup>107</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia*, 113.

<sup>108</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Política de España*, 35-36.

to share power with anyone, living or dead. From Franco's perspective, this sentimental refusal to give up the days of José Antonio represented at its best a waste of time that could be used towards solidifying the power of the FET. At worst, it represented a potential source of division which he needed to watch carefully. Occasionally, Serrano ran headlong into Franco's frustrations with the core Falangists as he carried out his role as intermediary. On one such occasion, Franco stopped him in the middle of what he was saying and commented in an accusatory manner that Serrano seemed to be showing a great deal of worry about his qualifications as a leader.<sup>109</sup> Franco's message was thus clearly delivered: Franco wanted Serrano to help him tame the Falange, but he was unsympathetic to hearing too many of their concerns.

This strange relationship between Franco and the Falange was made further complicated on August 4, 1937, when the official statutes of the FET-JONS were made public. Like in the formation of the party itself, these statutes transferred over basic elements of Falangist doctrine and superimposed on them compromises for other parties and clauses to assure Franco's ascendancy. As an example, the first article of the document stays true to traditional Falangist doctrine by stating that "the Movement is the inspiration and base of the state."<sup>110</sup> Supporters within the Falange interpreted this to mean that the party, then, was the basis from which political change would be made within Spain. However, in article 47 of the document, it states directly referring to Franco that the leader (*el jefe*) assumes the most absolute of authority and is answerable

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<sup>109</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Política de España*, 35.

<sup>110</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 95.

only “before God and History.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, Franco and his supporters could simultaneously claim that the Caudillo held absolute authority over the party in all situations. Once again, a disconnect emerged between the core Falangists and Franco, with both sides obstinately refusing to compromise their views, leaving Serrano in a precarious position.

With the statutes of the party made official, Franco recruited Serrano in a task to create a new avenue of communication between the FET and its supreme leader. In October, these efforts resulted in the creation of the *Consejo Nacional*, a fifty member committee designed to make sure that the aspirations of all the individual groups within the Movement had an avenue to the Caudillo.<sup>112</sup> In the process of creating this council, Serrano’s work on unification was rewarded with a new level of political influence: he was given the authority to help Franco select the individuals who would fill this council. Serrano became a member of this assembly, which Franco oversaw personally in something rather uncharacteristic of him at this early stage of the party. Franco would be aided in this process of leadership by the *Junta Política*, which served as a smaller executive committee for the *Consejo Nacional*.<sup>113</sup> Historians disagree as to how to classify the political orientation of this body, as they generally disagree as to what could be considered to constitute “true” Falangism in the wake of unification. Regardless, the range of Falangists within this fifty person council is generally agreed upon to have been between twenty and twenty-seven, meaning that in all estimates the Falange had the

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<sup>111</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 95.

<sup>112</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer, un documento para la historia*, 121.

<sup>113</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 299.

largest representation of any of the sub-groups within the overarching FET.<sup>114</sup> While historians disagree as to the exact numbers of the political alignment on the council, a general agreement exists that the council failed spectacularly in its mission. During its first meeting in December, Franco grew tired of it and quickly dismissed the assembly with the comment that it “was not a parliament.”<sup>115</sup> Faced with initial failure, the *Consejo Nacional* would be infrequent in its meetings in subsequent years, never really living up to its intended purpose.

After several long months of work, Serrano’s draft for an official Nationalist government was nearing completion in January of 1938. A product of six months of work for Serrano, its publication would assuredly result in an increase in his personal political influence, just as the Decree of Unification had before. The only obstacle left before the final publication of the decree, then, was the creation of a list of ministers to fill the positions that the decree would create. Serrano met with Franco on numerous occasions during this month to discuss the blueprint for Franco’s first cabinet and, as he had with the *Consejo Nacional*, help decide on candidates to fill the various positions. During this process, Serrano firmly established himself as Franco’s chief political advisor and the second most powerful political figure in Spain. During these discussions, Franco gave Serrano complete latitude to disagree with his chosen people to fill certain positions. While seemingly a simple thing, this fact demonstrates just how much Franco trusted Serrano as his advisor. The relationship between Franco and Serrano, as it existed in

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<sup>114</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 283; Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 121. The dispute on these statistics seems to revolve around the notion of who could be considered “genuine” in their support of the Falange. Lahiguera offers a total of twenty-seven by including all members with identifiable links to the Falange of José Antonio, while Payne offers a more conservative estimate of twenty based on how reflective the individuals seemed to be to the concerns of the core Falangist community at the time.

<sup>115</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 283.



1938, was not one in which Franco, as supreme head of state, named a list of men he wanted in government, and only consulted Serrano in areas in which he was still undecided. Rather, Franco earnestly sought Serrano's opinion as to the man whom he would place into each individual ministry. Indeed, while there is no way to know exactly why Franco approached the cabinet appointments in this manner, it seems as though Franco truly respected Serrano's opinion. Whether this was due to his familial relationship, the recognition that his Decree of Unification had met with such bold success, or a simple deference to Serrano's opinion due to the fact that Franco was a military man by training and that Serrano was a politician by training is open to interpretation. However, this last criteria; namely, that Franco deferred to Serrano's greater training in the legal and political crafting of a state, seems to have some weight to it, given that one of Franco's hallmark characteristics over the course of his entire regime was selecting men to fill certain cabinet positions based on their prior training and political orientation and letting them work with some degree of individual initiative, even if it was closely watched by the ever-present Caudillo. In their meetings, Franco idealized Serrano filling a role of Secretary of the Treasury; however, Serrano felt that he lacked the economic knowledge and talent to do the position justice. Instead, he proposed to take over the Ministry of the Interior, from which position he would be able to supervise the domestic political scene in the Nationalist zone, complete with authority over all press censorship.<sup>116</sup>

With Serrano determined to fill the Ministry of the Interior, ten more cabinet positions needed to be filled before the finalized document could be made official. In considering candidates, Franco and Serrano used the following criteria: personal

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<sup>116</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 258.

competence, loyalty to Franco's command, and varied representation of the sub-groups of the party so that, in Serrano's words, all of these political interests would "feel satisfied."<sup>117</sup> One by one, the brothers-in-law went through the individual ministries of government to select figures they felt would best fill the role and submit those suggestions to the approval of the other. For Serrano, the critical moment came when the two arrived at the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. Franco's first nomination for the position was his brother, Nicolás, whom he felt would be more comfortable in this economic position than he had in the political spotlight earlier in the war. Serrano immediately reacted, claiming "there's too much family in the government!"<sup>118</sup> Serrano remembered the outbreak of the "*Cuñadísimo*" accusations following the Decree of Unification, and suspected that once this new landmark shift in Nationalist politics was made official, it would be accompanied by another round of personal attacks at the "Supreme Brother-in-Law." As such, he felt that if Franco were to include both his brother and his brother-in-law in the original cabinet, the various political groups would interpret it as Franco playing favorites more than a concerted effort to make all Nationalist groups feel represented in the government. Staking his budding political career on this move, Serrano then told Franco the solution was simple. If Franco had good, indisputable reasons for which he wanted to see Nicolás Franco placed in the first Cabinet, Serrano would agree and simultaneously withdraw his own name from consideration.<sup>119</sup> Essentially, in the battle of personal advisors to Franco, Serrano had given Franco a choice: he could either stay with his brother, whose tenure as chief

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<sup>117</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 255.

<sup>118</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 258; Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 297.

<sup>119</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 258.

political advisor was marked by confusion, or he could firmly move in favor of his brother-in-law, under whose tenure as advisor Franco had secured political ascendancy over all the groups of Nationalist Spain and whose legal training and personal advice were now helping to solidify his power for the post-war period.

Serrano's gamble paid more dividends than he had hoped. Franco withdrew his brother's name from consideration for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and kept Serrano in his tentative position of Minister of the Interior. With Nicolás Franco no longer in consideration for a Cabinet position, Franco gave his brother a new job: ambassador to Portugal. In so doing, the message was clear, Nicolás Franco's days as Franco's chief advisor were over, and Serrano was now the sole figure holding this position. For his part, Serrano claimed to be caught off-guard by this decision, stating that it was completely Franco's choice. Serrano also records a conversation which he held with Franco two years later, when he was transitioning to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this conversation, Franco surprised Serrano by overtly stating that he decided to move Nicolás to Lisbon because he felt Serrano had no confidence in him. Serrano quickly denied this allegation, stating again that his motivation was simply to avoid the appearance of nepotism in the first cabinet.<sup>120</sup>

Once all of the cabinet appointments had been concluded, Franco waited for an opportunity to announce this new plan for government, officially entitled the Law of the Central Administration of the State. He found his opportunity on January 30, 1938, which was the eighth anniversary of the downfall of the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de

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<sup>120</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 258. As usual, Serrano's claims of ignorance about the dismissal of Nicolás Franco must be regarded with some historical skepticism, as this particular dialogue between the two brothers-in-law is only recorded in Serrano's memoirs.

Rivera, an event which had eventually resulted in the birth of the Second Republic.<sup>121</sup>

The finalized cabinet appointments did a good job of reflecting the concern of the brothers-in-law to represent the diverse interests of the FET. In his analysis of this law, historian Stanley Payne demonstrates this by stating that “of eleven cabinet positions, three went to veteran generals who had served Primo de Rivera, two to right-wing Alfonso monarchists, one to a Carlist, two to relatively apolitical technicians, and three to Falangists, only one of whom was a *camisa vieja*.”<sup>122</sup> This diffusion in favor of the various interests in the Nationalist zone was further advanced by the fact that Franco gave the new Cabinet officials a great deal of individual latitude to determine who would fill the lower levels of their ministries, provided that they did not, in his view, become too troublesome or overly partisan. However, the Law of Central Administration did not just confirm Franco’s dedication to appeasing all groups in the Nationalist zone. It also confirmed Serrano’s ascendancy to all politicians in Nationalist Spain. As Serrano had predicted when cautioning Franco against placing both him and Nicolás Franco in the cabinet, his authorship of the Law of Central Administration made him the focal point of a great deal of criticism from elements within the regime dissatisfied with the results. Further, the fact this his ministry, the Ministry of the Interior, arose as the most powerful due to its broad and far-reaching jurisdiction further cemented his legacy as the “*Cuñadísimo*.” In fact, so powerful was the reaction in this regard that many historians, including Paul Preston and Stanley Payne, have concluded that one reason Franco elevated Serrano to this position was for him to serve as a lightning rod of criticism away

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<sup>121</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 290; Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 295.

<sup>122</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 291.

from the Caudillo.<sup>123</sup> In such criticisms, the general consensus is that Franco knew from the start that his political consolidation would cause a great deal of strife among the various Nationalist factions. Thus, historians who espouse this viewpoint say that one of the reasons for which Franco brought in Serrano to assist in making the government was to make him the target of these dissatisfactions. Once safely in power and after a period of calm, this line of thought says that Serrano was destined to be dismissed as the last remnant of this political turmoil, freeing Franco completely to move ahead with his firm power base.

Upon deeper investigation, though, this type of logic seems to be writing backwards from Serrano's dismissal to his period of ascension. In other words, because historians now know Serrano was dismissed after just five years, they necessarily determine that his political career was destined to be short from the start and look for signs of his inevitable decline even as they discuss his rise. However, such criticism belies the fact that the man who replaced Serrano in 1942, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, remained as Franco's chief advisor for over thirty years, a term which only ended in his own death, not Franco's decision. How did Carrero keep this position for so long? As Raymond Carr notes, the main reason was that he sought to have no political identity outside of his servitude to Franco. In all things, he was Franco's man.<sup>124</sup> After analyzing this period of history, should Serrano have decided to forego an individual political identity and stay as Franco's man alone, there is no reason to assume that Serrano could not have been the one to have stayed in a position in government for thirty years or more.

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<sup>123</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 295; Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 356.

<sup>124</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975* (1982; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 704.

However, as seen in his intervention on behalf of Hedilla and as will be seen again in subsequent chapters, Serrano did not content himself to totally live in Franco's shadow. In so doing, it was the development and implementation of his own political agenda that ultimately drew Franco's concern, the ultimate conclusion of which was his dismissal from government as a political liability.

In many regards, the Law of Central Administration represents the high-water mark of domestic political cooperation between Franco and Serrano. As mentioned, Serrano used his legal skills to draft the majority of the law, and over the course of several months the two men met and often exchanged ideas, both formally and informally. In the months that followed, this beneficial relationship proved even more fruitful for Serrano, as on April 22, 1938, Franco drafted a law giving control of all press and publishing activities to Serrano's oversight as Minister of the Interior.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, though, the Law of Central Administration marked the start of a series of notable divisions which would arise between the two men. With his advent as the second most powerful political figure in Spain, Serrano's political character changed, and he began to display what many, including British ambassador Sir Samuel Hoare, would describe as an inflated sense of self-importance bordering on arrogance. Indeed, as Stanley Payne notes, Serrano believed his role in crafting the new government ensured his superiority to his colleagues, and he was not inclined to disguise it.<sup>126</sup> The budding divides went deeper than Serrano's self-image, however. In the Law of Central Administration, Franco believed that his absolute power over the government was confirmed for years to

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<sup>125</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 292.

<sup>126</sup> Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 41; Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 292.

come, as represented by the diffusion of influence beneath him. Serrano held a different view, however. In the preamble to the document, Serrano wrote that the organization of government would remain “subject to the constant influence of the National Movement.”<sup>127</sup> Returning once more to the initial objectives Serrano was determined to pursue upon arrival in Salamanca, this language left open the possibility of greater party involvement in the government process in the future. In so doing, Serrano took one of his first decided steps towards attempting to realize the vision of José Antonio beneath the auspices of the Franco government.

As he settled into his role as Interior Minister and took control of publications in Spain, Serrano consciously sought out members of the old Falange to occupy vital areas under his dominion. Within the structure of this first government, Franco gave all of his ministers, Serrano included, latitude to choose the people to fill low-level positions in the newly-created ministries. In crafting the larger Law of Central Administration, Serrano had reflected Franco’s desire to spread the positions out amongst the political groups on the right. However, within his own ministry and under his own control, Serrano did not replicate this careful balancing act that was such a critical component of Franco’s political system. Thus, Serrano brought in Dionisio Ridruejo to assist him in press and domestic propaganda, and also consciously recruited Falangists to take care of radio services and foreign propaganda.<sup>128</sup> In so doing, Serrano was making an early statement that, for his part, he was not as wedded to the notion of balanced political representation as his brother-in-law. Furthermore, he demonstrated that he was moving ever-so-subtly in the direction of his friends in the Falange, though he would be careful not to overtly state

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<sup>127</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer: un documento para la historia*, 124.

<sup>128</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 260.

anything to this effect given the strict rules against political demonstrations which his own words created with the Decree of Unification.

1938 was a year marked by slow, bloody developments in the Civil War. One final reason, then, for which Serrano's political view began to drift towards the party during this time was that he fundamentally disagreed with Franco as to how best to ideologically approach the reunification of "Red" Spain into the whole once victorious. Both men shared a common ideological vision of the war in which the Nationalists were just the latest members of a centuries-long crusade to protect the true Spain from foreign corruptions, dating all the way back to the *Reconquista*.<sup>129</sup> As evidenced by Franco's slow, indomitable campaign of 1938, his response to this Crusade was a thorough purge of all elements that were not a part of the organic Spanish nation, including those corrupted by French liberal thought or, more noticeably, by Russian communist influence. Franco's slow, methodical battlefield march was designed to capture all areas of Spain, not just critical areas to force a surrender. Similarly, within the Nationalist zone, Franco spent a great deal of his personal time planning for a brutal repression exacted against open leftists and anyone else who had been critical of the military's uprising.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, Franco's actions indicated a belief that it was fundamentally

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<sup>129</sup> The *Reconquista* refers to the long period of struggle by the Christian kings of Spain to take back the peninsula from the Moors who had held control of at least part of the Iberian peninsula from the years 711 to 1492 and culminating with the expulsion of Jews and Moors from the Spanish peninsula under the reign of the first Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. This ideal of militarily fighting in the name of the "true" Spain against foreign elements attempting to subvert Spain for their own devices would resonate many times over Spanish history, eventually forming what historians have termed the phenomenon of the "two Spains" by the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this view, Spain was divided into two key groups: one in favor of the liberal reforms brought by the French Bourbon monarchs and another in favor of traditional Catholic monarchy along the Habsburg model. In many respects, the Spanish Civil War can be interpreted as the final, devastating chapter in this long tension, with the Right determined to once and for all purge Spain of all foreign elements, as exhibited by the Republican ideals of the Left.

<sup>130</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 296; Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War*, 301-303.



impossible to reincorporate the leftist elements of Spain into the *Patria*. Rather, their misguided beliefs would be ritualistically purged from Spain by a concerted effort of the military whose determination had been lacking in the previous groups who had partaken in the crusade on behalf of the “true” Spain.

While there is no evidence that Serrano spoke out against the severity of the repression of leftists in the Nationalist zone, he nonetheless differed from Franco’s idea that the only way to reintegrate Spain was to kill, imprison, or exile all individuals who were critical of the Right. Serrano also saw the Spanish Civil War as a chapter in the ongoing struggle within Spain to assert its identity, both to itself and to the larger world. As mentioned before, he felt that traditional Catholic monarchy and Carlism were anachronistic and unable to bring the situation to a conclusion. If they could, he thought that this long-running conflict would have ended long before. Instead, the best method to reintegrate the elements of “Red” Spain, from his perspective, was the doctrine of the *Patria* advanced by the Falange.<sup>131</sup> As part of this doctrine, José Antonio had asserted that the uprising of the working class against the liberal state was justified, even if it was misguided, and that the doctrine of the Falange would reach these working masses and unite them in the *Patria*.<sup>132</sup> Thus, as 1938 progressed and Nationalist victory seemed to be more and more assured, Serrano’s personal desire to see José Antonio’s vision realized in Nationalist Spain under Franco was united with this belief in the ability of the Falange to successfully re-incorporate the working classes into respectable Spanish society. In action, this meant helping the Falange to get its voice heard above the other competing voices of the FET.

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<sup>131</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 93.

<sup>132</sup> José Antonio Primo de Rivera, (*Anthology*), 132, 151.

In summary, upon his arrival in Salamanca, Serrano held respected legal and political credentials from the period prior to the military uprising, but few political connections in the aftermath of the start of the Civil War. After a little over a year in the Nationalist zone, he had managed to multiply his personal level of influence through a series of landmark political acts which he helped Franco to achieve. Prior to his imprisonment, Serrano had been devoted to trying to achieve conservative goals within the parliamentary system; however, his experience in Madrid forever radicalized his political orientation. However, it would take time for Serrano to sort out where exactly he fell on the political scale of the Nationalist zone. As he did so, he utilized his familial connection with Franco to quickly create a name for himself within Nationalist Spain as Franco's most trusted advisor. Within two months, he had catapulted himself from obscurity to the highest level of Nationalist politics via his cooperation with Franco on the Decree of Unification. For the remainder of 1937, Serrano served as Franco's main link to the *camisas viejas* of the Falange, even as he declined to accept the position of Secretary General to make this position official. With the advent of the *Consejo Nacional*, Serrano's influence increased as Franco entrusted him with the authority to assist in making appointments to the intermediary body between the FET sub-groups and the Caudillo. In January of 1938, Serrano's role as Franco's chief advisor and second most powerful political figure in the Nationalist zone was cemented as he took charge of the most powerful government ministry in Franco's new government and as his chief rival, Nicolás Franco, was sent outside of Spain altogether. Throughout this process, Serrano was dedicated to serving as Franco's man, as in both the Decree of Unification and the Law of Central Administration one of his key concerns was preserving a balance

of all the sub-groups of the Nationalist zone. However, by the end of 1938, it was possible to see that Serrano's orientation was beginning to shift from acting only in concert with Franco's interests to the pursuit of independent political objectives, even if it was still only on a relatively small scale. Having, he felt, successfully assured Franco's ascendancy in the Nationalist zone with the Decree of Unification and provided a legal basis for the regime with the Law of Central Administration, Serrano turned towards attempting to do what he could to intercede with Franco on behalf of the Falange in hopes of helping to realize the vision of his late friend, Falange founder José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Thus, as early as 1938, Serrano increasingly sought out the assistance of core Falangists in carrying out his duties as Interior Minister, signaling that his firm commitment to being Franco's man as opposed to the man of the Party was wavering even as he was reaching the pinnacle of success as Franco's chief advisor.

## Chapter 3

### The rise of the *serranistas*: 1939-1941

Upon his arrival in Madrid in June of 1940, one of the first people whom British ambassador Sir Samuel Hoare met was the Interior Minister, Ramón Serrano Suñer. From that moment until the day of Serrano's dismissal in 1942, the two did not get along. In his memoirs, Hoare described Serrano as a "fanatic in bad health" and stated that in his political activities, he held "no loyalty except to his own ambition."<sup>133</sup> Historians have since moderated these pointed observations; however, the general picture given of Serrano by general histories of the period nonetheless bears stark similarity to the one Hoare presented. Historian Stanley G. Payne, in his studies of the foreign policy and fascist movements within Spain and throughout Europe during this time period, has been the historian most verbal in his conclusions about Serrano. In one of his latest works, he depicts Serrano's political goals as a desire to be "the real political leader of a more genuinely fascist Spain." However, Payne states that, in spite of the arrogance which Serrano displayed and Hoare so commonly criticized, Serrano failed in his endeavor because "he held no independent power base whatever."<sup>134</sup> However, this conclusion overlooks the fact that in the period of 1939 to 1941, Serrano did indeed build up a strong personal and political following.

The Ramón Serrano Suñer which both Hoare and Payne describe had not existed prior to the end of the Spanish Civil War. Instead, this politician, marked by pride and a level of personal ambition seemingly reckless in a dictatorial state, was made in the

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<sup>133</sup> Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 39, 41.

<sup>134</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 88.

period between 1939 and 1941, following the victory of the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War and a debate among the victorious right-wing factions as to the proper shape of the new Spanish state. Having been appointed to the Ministry of the Interior in 1938, Serrano got his first taste of real governmental power, in the process becoming the second most powerful man in Spain. After this sampling, his appetite for the glamour and prestige of such success proved to be insatiable. Abandoning concerns that had once driven him into Franco's personal circle, such as the pursuit of the goals of José Antonio and the solidification of Franco's power in Spain, Serrano increasingly worked in a self-serving manner. In so doing, he fully abandoned the political neutrality which had been the hallmark of the Decree of Unification and Law of Central Administration that he had helped Franco to write, and instead adopted the full fascistic trappings of a Falange leader. Indeed, quite contrary to Stanley Payne's assertion, Serrano's political career at the height of his power was defined by a concerted attempt to create the very independent power base which he fully well knew he did not have, and he found success with the creation of a sub-group within the Falange who answered his call and would be later labeled by some historians simply as the *falangistas serranistas*.<sup>135</sup>

Already by the start of 1939, Serrano's power within the government had been enough to lead his opponents to label him the *cuñadísimo*, or Supreme Brother-in-Law. Though Serrano hated these criticisms, the degree of self-importance which he held in his dealings with other government ministers demonstrated clearly why such a title for him was so popular among his enemies. In 1939, Serrano saw two key advances in his

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<sup>135</sup> "Serranista" is an adjective formed from a conversion of Serrano's name. Indeed, the fact that even such a term has entered the lexicon of Spanish political history of the period demonstrates that Serrano may have been more successful in creating an independent personal image than often presumed. For an example, see: Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2003), 144.

personal power which would further stoke these emotions. In August of 1939, a few months after his victory, Franco completely overhauled his Cabinet structure to suit the post-war government situation. Serrano was one of only two men to retain his position in the government at that time. Furthermore, Serrano's Ministry of the Interior was modified in this new Cabinet to explicitly include many of the powers that had been added after the Law of Central Administration in January of 1938, including control of press, propaganda, and the police.<sup>136</sup> The affirmation of Serrano's ability to control the press bears some significance in this regard, as following the end of the Civil War many of the newspapers by the individual nationalist factions, such as monarchist-controlled *Ya* and *ABC*, had once again started publishing. Thus, the new power which Franco granted to Serrano affirmed that his approval would still be necessary to oversee political publication, and also assured that the Falangist-printed *Arriba* would still function as the de facto official newspaper of the government.

As a forerunner to this larger reorganization of the government, Franco appointed Serrano to a new position of influence: leader of the *Junta Político* of the FET. Before the Civil War, Serrano had attempted to bring José Antonio Primo de Rivera and Franco together, and during the war he acted as Franco's emissary to the party which José Antonio founded. However, this appointment, made official on July 31, 1939, was the first time in which Serrano was placed in a position of direct leadership in the party.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, with his appointment, power shifted away from Secretary General Raimundo Fernández Cuesta, signaling a fundamental shift in the party politics of the

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<sup>136</sup> Carlton J.H. Hayes, *Wartime Mission in Spain, 1942-1945* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 53; Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 311-312.

<sup>137</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 337.

FET. It was common knowledge that Serrano, and not Cuesta, was the man to whom Franco listened, and as such, his voice became the loudest of authorities within the party. However, this appointment marked a key point in Serrano's political career, and one which should be duly noted. Since even as far back as the Decree of Unification, Serrano had analyzed how best to balance being a leader within the party in contrast to being Franco's designated key advisor. Now, with this elevation to an official position in the party, Serrano had to more openly address these concerns and make a decided stand as to whether or not he would continue to represent Franco's interests, or those of the party. For years he had been serving as emissary to the party, but as he worked himself into his new position in August of 1939, he made a frank and stark analysis of what this service could do for him as an individual politician. In so doing, he contemplated how hitherto he had been "Franco's man," enjoying the blessings of being a favorite of the dictator. However, he knew that the Falangists were resentful of Franco's authority, and so to appear totally as Franco's man could conceivably reduce his ability to lead the new body of which he was assigned as the head.<sup>138</sup> On the opposite side, he recognized the dangers of seeming to represent the party's interests too much, as he knew well that Franco had placed him in the position to keep the activist Falangists from making a nuisance of themselves, and that he was unsympathetic to hearing too many of their concerns.<sup>139</sup>

It was through consideration of this dilemma that Serrano made his first open steps in the direction of becoming an independent voice of leadership within the Falange. Prior to Serrano taking office within the Falange, many contemporary accounts described

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<sup>138</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Editorial Argos Vergara, 1983), 117.

<sup>139</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Política de España, 1936-1975* (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, S.A., 1995), 35-36; Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 197.

how the Falange of José Antonio had become outdated within the Nationalist movement, even as the Falangist salute and uniforms of Franco's unified FET party became the standard practice throughout the Spanish government. However, Serrano respected the definition of the *Patria* advanced by his late friend José Antonio and embodied in the core beliefs of the Falange. As such, his vision of Spain was one in which the needs of the *Patria* took precedent over the concerns of outdated monarchist viewpoints. By taking up the cause of the Falange and becoming a critical leader within it, Serrano felt that he had found a way to secure his own independent personal following, which he would then be able to use to secure his ascendancy over all other Nationalist politicians, save for General Franco himself. Indeed, American ambassador Carlton Hayes noted that even as late as 1942, when Falangist power was decidedly on the wane, he felt the representation of the Falange in the government was disproportional to its actual strength among the populace, and held that Serrano was the man most commonly felt to have been responsible.<sup>140</sup> Historian Sheelagh Ellwood argues that Serrano was a critical figure in the resurgent strength of the core Falange at this time. In her work on Spanish fascism, she convincingly argued that it was neither under José Antonio nor during the Civil War that the Falange reached the height of its power. Instead, she concludes that it was during the pinnacle of Serrano's career that the Falange came closest to realizing its goal of a truly fascist Spain.<sup>141</sup>

Starting in late 1939 and continuing throughout his time in both the Ministry of the Interior and, later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Serrano fully embraced the role of

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<sup>140</sup> Carlton J.H. Hayes, *Wartime Mission to Spain*, 52-53.

<sup>141</sup> Sheelagh M. Ellwood, *Spanish Fascism in the Franco Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 66.



a Falangist leader. Most notably, at least from the perspective of Sir Samuel Hoare, this included the constant presence of a group of blue-shirted Falangist bodyguards who would stand guard at his office during meetings, in what seemed to be a brazen imitation of the Moroccan cavalry units which served as Franco's official guards in his palace at El Pardo.<sup>142</sup> While Serrano's choice of bodyguards may seem trivial, it nonetheless demonstrates much about how he viewed his power. Franco, for his part, made his name as commander of the Spanish forces in Morocco; therefore, the presence of the Moroccan cavalry units as his guards were motivated by a sense of loyal service, a desire to express lingering Spanish imperial power, and a ceremonial purpose designed to remind all involved the source from which his power had first come. As Minister of the Interior, Serrano had complete control of the police. Had he wanted, it would have been a simple matter for him to secure a standard police escort at all times. Instead, he chose to be surrounded by Falangists wearing their proud blue shirts. In so doing, he demonstrated, like Franco, what he saw to be the source of his power. In this way, Serrano expressed for one of the first times that he no longer saw his power rooted in Franco's favor or his familial relationship with the Caudillo; instead, it was rooted in his own individual leadership within the Falange.

From these assertions, it is clear to see how historians like Stanley Payne then conclude that Serrano's driving goal at the time was to be the sole leader of a fascist party in Spain, and argue that he was contriving against even the powerful General Franco. Many of Serrano's contemporaries surely felt this way, as evidenced by a small number who feared that Serrano's elevation to positions of influence was a sign that Franco

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<sup>142</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 29, 59.

intended to place him in power and step away from government.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, perhaps the reason that these intrigues seemed so dangerous, and eventually warranted Franco's action in opposition to them, was that some of Serrano's own followers in the Falange began clamoring for the removal of Franco and an imposition of a truly Falangist state over the course of the next two years.<sup>144</sup>

Before exploring how Serrano systematically pursued this increase in his own power, via an increase in Falangist representation in the government, some clarification should be presented as to how exactly Serrano viewed his own maneuverings. In Serrano's mind, the role he cast for himself was exactly the same as the one he had already filled; he would become the active voice of the Falange in the Franco government. The only real difference would be that the position of the Falange would be made exponentially stronger by the elimination of the outdated ideologies of monarchists, both Alfonsine and Carlist. In this way, the Falange would be made the true single party of Spain in the traditional fascist style.<sup>145</sup> However, he never intended to *replace* Franco as head of state. Serrano felt that Franco, with his influence in the military and with his distinct political skills, was instrumental in keeping the law and order in Spain. As he strove for political power, one of Serrano's most defining political characteristics, to which both his admirers and enemies attested, was an acute fear that anything like the

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<sup>143</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 391-392.

<sup>144</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 368. In particular, Serrano is transcribing a 1941 letter which he received from Dionisio Ridruejo, a close friend and *camsas vieja* leader within the Falange. Ridruejo was known often as a firebrand, publishing editorials in *Arriba*. As such, his voice carried great weight in Falangist circles.

<sup>145</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 274.

disorder of the Spanish Civil War could happen again.<sup>146</sup> Thus, in Serrano's mind, it was not at all counter-intuitive to agitate for a dominance of the Falange in Spain, while simultaneously asserting that Franco's leadership was good for the country. If Franco would not reconcile himself with the Falange, as he had proven himself repeatedly unwilling to do, Serrano would serve as the voice of the party in his ear. Thus, in Serrano's mind, his elevation to the highest peaks of political power would complement, rather than challenge, Franco's dictatorial control of the country, just as his legal talents had complemented Franco's military talents in the creation of legal bases for the Franco government in the preceding years. However, Serrano never actively articulated this philosophy, leaving many of his rivals and supporters to conclude that he was agitating for a rise in power at Franco's expense, a fact which later prove costly for Serrano's political career.

In September of 1939, domestic political intrigues took a back seat to foreign policy matters throughout Spain. Specifically, the German invasion of Poland sent shock waves throughout the Spanish nation, as it did the rest of the world. On September 3, Franco officially declared Spanish neutrality in the conflict. However, different leaders in Spain held vastly different views as to how Spain should approach this new conflict. Many in the military, combined with the vast majority of core Falange, hailed the German invasion as a march of triumph for the new order in Europe, and sought Spanish participation in the glorious conflict. Others were aghast at the fact that the Germans, the long-time ally of the Nationalists, had signed an agreement with the reviled Soviet Union,

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<sup>146</sup> William Leon Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 76-77; Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 41. As mentioned before, Hoare is notorious among scholars of the time for his personally vindictive narrative against Serrano; however, Beaulac is sometimes regarded as an apologist of sorts for the Franco government of the time.

and proffered a more “wait-and-see” approach.<sup>147</sup> A few figures, especially in the military, actually advocated strict Spanish neutrality or allegiance with the British and French governments, believing that Hitler had started a war that he could not possibly win; however, such voices of dissent were very few in the first weeks of the war. Within this jumbled environment, Ramón Serrano Suñer identified the first test of his individual political identity. Among the incredibly few figures who advocated caution and a rapprochement with Britain was Colonel Juan Beigbeder, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Starting in late 1939 and continuing through 1940, Serrano began an open personal feud with Beigbeder, attempting to push him out of the foreign ministry and claim his first personal political victory. He rarely attempted to tie the removal of Beigbeder to the health and strength of the Franco government, and even less did he seek to frame Beigbeder’s removal as good for the Falange. This rivalry was personal, and the glory for this victory would be Serrano’s alone.

Colonel Juan Beigbeder became Serrano’s target for two main reasons. First, he held a position Serrano wanted and could easily translate into a position of influence. Simply put, a feud with the Minister of Agriculture, or the Minister of Industry and Commerce, was not something that would yield a notable gain in popularity and power for Serrano. However, Beigbeder was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and with a war starting in Europe, it was a position which most in Spain realized would become increasingly important as the war spread to the West. Second, Colonel Beigbeder presented an easy target for Serrano. Although he was a military man, and although he, like Franco, had made his name in Morocco, Beigbeder was a very strange man to be a government minister in post-Civil War Spain. Whereas the rest of the country reaffirmed

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<sup>147</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 48-49.

its staunch Catholic views, Beigbeder spoke Arabic as well as Spanish and would occasionally quote passages from the Koran that he kept on his desk at all times.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, during the Civil War, Beigbeder remained behind in Morocco to assure that it remained loyal to the Nationalist side. In his time in command there, he subsidized trips to Mecca, “made Arabic the sole language of the schools, and arranged for the curricula to be ‘Arabized.’”<sup>149</sup> As such, it became quite easy for Serrano to paint him as out of touch with the true character of Spaniards across the country. Furthermore, while he had started out the war being caught up in the pro-German attitude of the military as a whole, Beigbeder was one of the first to come to the conclusion that Spain should avoid an alliance with Germany at all costs. Particularly, he grew to highly respect the power of the British navy not only as a military force on its own, but as a potentially devastating enemy to Spain should they enter the war on the Axis side and be subjected to a total naval blockade.<sup>150</sup> As such, Serrano could easily present him as a coward to his pro-German Falangist crowds, and often criticized his friendship with Sir Samuel Hoare as something which could jeopardize Spanish sovereignty and security.<sup>151</sup>

As the spring and summer of 1940 developed, Serrano used his influence to help push Franco in the direction of a pro-Axis neutrality. However, it should be noted that Spain was on this course with or without Serrano’s influence. One clear example of this inclination from Franco was that just days after his declaration of neutrality, he quietly gave German submarines permission to resupply in Spanish ports, giving them a much

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<sup>148</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 33.

<sup>149</sup> William Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II*, 62.

<sup>150</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 49-50.

<sup>151</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 266.

closer point of access of the Atlantic.<sup>152</sup> Regardless, with every action that the Franco government took to appeal to the Germans, Serrano made sure to emphasize it heavily in the press of Spain. Indeed, through his control of press in Spain, he made Spanish newspapers some of the most notorious outlets for German propaganda in Europe. Particularly, *Arriba* was known to have published many propaganda-laden stories about the weak British and French war effort, a fact which is made more notable because it was the official paper of the government and, as such, received more circulation than any other.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, as Interior Minister, Serrano instructed Spanish police to turn a blind eye towards the establishment of German intelligence activities within Spanish borders, resulting in a thriving German intelligence network existing in Spain by the spring of 1941.<sup>154</sup>

As can be expected, the British embassy staff constantly expressed outrage at these actions, forcing Beigbeder to do what he could to assuage the fears of British ambassador Sir Samuel Hoare that Spain would formally declare itself an ally of Germany. Serrano then labeled Beigbeder's attempts to reassure the British government of Spanish neutrality as pandering to British interests. For Serrano, and indeed for many ardent nationalists within political and militarist circle, standing up to Britain was a matter of national honor. He had long since felt that the European system dominated by Britain and France was largely to blame for Spain's lack of international prestige, and hoped that in a system dominated by a victorious Germany, Spain would be able to be a

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<sup>152</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 48.

<sup>153</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 38.

<sup>154</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 352-353.

junior partner of sorts to the more powerful authoritarian state.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, he shared the indignation of many Spaniards that Britain continued to hold Gibraltar, something which many, especially in the military, felt was an affront to Spanish honor. However, perhaps the most potent reason for which he disliked the British once more ties to the horrors he experienced in Madrid at the outset of the Civil War. For the remainder of his life, Serrano believed that his two brothers who had died in Madrid had attempted to seek refuge at the British embassy and were denied. Though he could never prove that these accusations were true, he nonetheless held a personal, as well as professional, distaste for Britain.<sup>156</sup>

Serrano intensified his campaign to discredit Beigbeder by branding him as out of touch with Spanish core values and as in the pocket of the British following the shockingly fast German victory over France in June of 1940. Indeed, with the Germans victorious in France and with German troops now stationed just across the Pyrenees, Spanish military circles clamored almost to a man for greater relations between Spain and Germany, making men like Beigbeder who still counseled caution and respect for British interests seem at best ignorant or, at worst, unpatriotic.<sup>157</sup> Beigbeder's mission to placate the Allied powers became much more tenuous when on June 12, Franco declared Spanish "non-belligerence" in the war effort. Two days later, Spanish troops occupied the international zone of Tangier in northern Africa. Officially, the Spanish government's position was that it was moving into Tangier as an emergency measure to ensure

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<sup>155</sup> William Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II*, 76.

<sup>156</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 41; William Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II*, 76.

<sup>157</sup> William Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II*, 71.

Tangier's neutrality, and intended to withdraw at war's end.<sup>158</sup> However, Serrano was elated at this decisive action by Spain, and in the press publications on the occupation of Tangier, the official policy of temporary occupation of the area was lost among patriotic euphoria.<sup>159</sup> With the press loudly trumpeting Spanish victory in Africa, Beigbeder was forced into the unenviable task of attempting to reassure the British that Spain had no intention of holding Tangier, a fact which seems even more ironic when one considers the fact that Beigbeder, as part of his love of Spanish-controlled Africa, had actually been one of the loudest supporters in the Cabinet of renewed Spanish action there.<sup>160</sup> Once more, while the rest of Spain was engulfed in patriotic celebration, Beigbeder was made to seem like a pawn of the British.

By September of 1939, Serrano's concerted efforts against Beigbeder were beginning to show fruit. By that time, Beigbeder had become a pariah within military circles and was perceived to be unreliable in dealing with the nation's most pressing international matters. As such, when Franco chose on September 17 to send a representative to Berlin to meet with the German government and discuss the possibility of a meeting between himself and the German dictator, Adolf Hitler, he sent Serrano, despite the fact that Serrano was still the Minister of the Interior and as such technically had no jurisdiction in any foreign negotiations, much less one of such great importance.<sup>161</sup> Beigbeder remained as the Minister of Foreign Affairs for just over a

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<sup>158</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 332.

<sup>159</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 35; Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 362.

<sup>160</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 361.

<sup>161</sup> U.S. Department of State, *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, Report 4, "Notes of a Conversation Between the Fuehrer and the Spanish Minister of the Interior Serrano Suñer in the Presence



month after this; however, his power would never recover. On October 16, 1940, Colonel Juan Beigbeder was surprised to read in the newspaper that he had been replaced as Minister of Foreign Affairs by his political rival, Ramón Serrano Suñer.<sup>162</sup> The timing for this replacement was deliberate. It was exactly one week later that Franco was scheduled to meet with Hitler at the French border town of Hendaye and discuss the possibility of Spain joining the Axis. Both dictators would be bringing their foreign ministers and a translator. As such, Franco wanted to make sure that, in these particularly tenuous negotiations, he had a man who was pro-German, whom he respected personally, and on whom he could rely as his Foreign Minister in a series of potentially tense negotiations. Clearly, Beigbeder no longer fit this description.

As the newly-minted Foreign Minister, Ramón Serrano Suñer accompanied his brother-in-law to the most important international meeting which he would hold throughout his long tenure as Spanish chief-of-state, the position in which he found himself in October of 1940 must have seemed somewhat surreal. After all, it had been only three years prior that Serrano had re-entered Spain from Hendaye, a man with no political connections and whose life and political identity were in shambles. Now, in 1940, Serrano was an influential leader in the Falange and the official Minister of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, after appointing Serrano to his new governmental post, Franco purposefully neglected to appoint a new Minister of the Interior, meaning that Serrano's loyal sub-secretary, José Lorente Sanz, was the acting leader.<sup>163</sup> In reality, this meant

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of the Reichs Foreign Minister in Berlin on September 17, 1940." (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 1.[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/spmenu.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/spmenu.asp) (accessed January 6, 2011).

<sup>162</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, .391. Ironically, Beigbeder had had dinner with Franco on the previous evening. As a final insult, Franco never bothered to inform him that he was being replaced.

<sup>163</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 391-392.

that Serrano continued to hold his power in the Ministry of the Interior. With either official or unofficial control of two government ministries, an official leadership position with the Falange, and with the favor and trust of the dictator Franco, Serrano had reached the apex of his political climb.

However, from his new government position, Serrano could only label his personal campaign to oust Beigbeder from the government as a partial success. It is true that Serrano had managed to use his influence in the Ministry of the Interior to stack the deck against Beigbeder; however, only upon swift and decisive action by Franco was this rival actually removed. Indeed, had Germany gotten bogged down in France, as in the first World War, it is possible that Beigbeder's message of caution would have warranted him a larger degree of favor than Serrano. Thus, Serrano's first direct effort to increase his own political star had worked, and he had gained more power than ever before, but he became painfully aware at that time that he had no independent power base to conduct action against such rivals. Upon his return to Spanish domestic politics in the spring of 1941, he would begin to work towards the creation of this independent political base, and for once the political tightrope between the interests of the Falange and the interests of Franco would prove too thin for him to walk.

In the meantime, following Hitler's failed attempt to get Franco on board with the German war effort in October of 1940, Serrano took part in a pitched foreign policy battle between Spain and Germany that lasted over the winter of 1940-1941.<sup>164</sup> Over the course

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<sup>164</sup> Within the field, there are a variety of opinions regarding how willing Franco was to join Hitler in his larger war, with most historians tending to agree that Franco would have joined with Hitler in the summer of 1940 had the two dictators been able to agree on terms. Franco sought a large amount of economic aid from Germany as well as guaranteed territory in Africa for a renewed Spanish empire. Hitler, for his part, refused to grant any concessions to Spain until the country offered concrete contributions to the larger Axis war effort. For a good overview of all the dimensions of the foreign policy negotiations

of this time, Franco and Hitler corresponded directly, and the nationalistic rhetoric that divided them at Hendaye grew even tenser with distance and time. Hitler's critiques grew most powerful in a letter dated February 6, 1941. In that letter, Hitler openly expressed his frustration with Franco, who in letters and public speeches could be counted among one of Germany's most trusted allies. However, in terms of actual contributions to Germany's cause, Hitler asserted that Franco had contributed precious little and, furthermore, had actually hindered German progress. He reminded Franco that, in no small part, his position of power had been secured through German direct military aid in the Civil War, and called on him to honor this debt.<sup>165</sup>

Spanish-German relations during the World War II years were often tense, and in his meetings with German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and in direct meetings in Berlin, Serrano was often the sole voice present on behalf of Spain. The significance of this should not be lost. In his memoirs, Serrano published the text of several letters that Franco wrote to him during his September 1940 visit to Berlin and in these, this unique relationship between Franco and Serrano becomes apparent. In all three of the letters, dated on September 21, 22, and 24, the tone is one of a family member communicating to another, as opposed to a head of state communicating to his foreign minister. Indeed, one good example lies in the conclusion of the letter sent on September 21, in which Franco concludes by discussing his conformity with Hitler's point of view on the issue of Spanish participation of the Axis. Rather than taking the time to detail his opinion at that point, he concludes simply by stating that "you are

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between Spain and Germany at the time, see Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>165</sup> U.S. Department of State, *The Spanish Government and the Axis*, Report 12, "Letter from Hitler to Franco.", 1-4.

familiar with the differences.”<sup>166</sup> Thus, Franco is relating directly to the fact that Serrano, as close advisor and brother-in-law, has been involved in the policymaking process and knows the nuances of Franco’s viewpoints. Though small, this is a subtle reassurance of Franco’s trust in Serrano to understand not only the large policy objectives of the Spanish state, but also the intricate details which, Franco felt, could often cause unnecessary confusion in international relations.<sup>167</sup> As such, Serrano’s continued meetings with German officials demonstrates that even through the conclusion of 1940, Franco placed more faith in Serrano to be able to act in accordance to his wishes in government than any other figure in Spain, partially due to their familial connection, but also due to their several years of working together at the most basic level of policymaking. Over the years, Serrano would cite, as would his apologists, his actions during this time and the fact that Spain did not join Germany in World War II to say that he never supported intervention of Germany in Spanish affairs. For example, William Beaulac wrote in his description of Serrano that “a man who could stand up to Hitler with such success is not devoid of character nor unworthy of respect.”<sup>168</sup> However, such conclusions are premature, as Serrano pushed much more forcefully for Spanish involvement in the German war over the course of 1941, for reasons which will be more fully pursued in the

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<sup>166</sup>Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 340. The exact text which Franco uses at this point is “pues conoces las diferencias.” The use of the verb “conocer” in this context is interesting. This verb in Spanish means to know something or someone not in a textbook or intellectual way, which is connoted by the use of the verb “saber.” Instead, “conocer” implies knowing someone or something in a familiar way, as in to have met someone and know them through that connection. Thus, at this point, Franco is demonstrating his faith that Serrano knows the differences in his point of view with Hitler not as a foreign minister familiar with the stated positions of the government he represents; rather, this connotes that he is showing that he has faith in Serrano based on his experience in actually dealing with Franco and the formation of Spanish policy.

<sup>167</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 340.

<sup>168</sup> William Beaulac, *Silent Ally in World War II*, 94.

next chapter.

By March of 1941, Hitler had begun shifting his attention to his impending attack on the Soviet Union in June of 1941. As a result, Serrano's time was no longer as busily occupied dealing with the foreign policy concerns of the nation, allowing him to tend to domestic concerns. Specifically, over the winter of 1940-1941, several of the *camisas viejas* who had been active members since the foundation of the party under José Antonio Primo de Rivera had grown disenchanted with his leadership and the pace of change which had accompanied his tenure as leader of the *Junta Política*. They demanded that Serrano assume true leadership in the Falange and champion its ascent back to power within Spain, or surrender power to someone who could.<sup>169</sup> Unwilling to forfeit any of his cherished power or prestige in the government, Serrano saw an opportunity to solidify his control of the Falange. In so doing, he saw a chance to create for himself a source of influence truly independent of the larger Franco government, as the core Falange was one of the few elements of Spain that to any degree resisted domination from the larger FET framework. Specifically, Serrano developed an idea by which he would argue for the resurgence of the authentic Falange. From his position in the Ministry of the Interior, Serrano has long come to the conclusion that the vast majority of members in the FET “never went beyond being merely nominal affiliates.”<sup>170</sup> As such, he increasingly grew to blame the massive party, which had engulfed all the smaller parties in Spain, with having strangled out the actual political spirit of the country, a claim which seems ironic given that this large party was created by the Declaration of Unification of 1937, an act which led to Serrano's heightened role in government in the first place.

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<sup>169</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 354.

<sup>170</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 285.

Several decades later, Serrano claimed that the Decree of Unification in 1937 represented the point at which Falangism was subverted by Francoism. Only once again did he state that authentic Falangism reassert itself in Spain: in May 1941.<sup>171</sup> In that month, the frustrations of the Falangist leaders finally found expression, and it was started with a speech Serrano gave at an event on May 2, 1941, the annual day in which the Spanish celebrated their resistance to French domination after Napoleon's invasion in the 1800s. Before a gathering of Falangists, he proclaimed that the object of the Spanish government should be the creation of a state which places the interests of the national community under a Falangist regime. Furthermore, the subjects who were to carry out this task would be "no more than the political minority moved by the light and by faith," by which he meant specifically those members who had been active in the Falange all along and shared the vision of its founder, José Antonio. The next day, the entire speech was printed in *Arriba*, and the editors even made sure to write in that after this part of the speech, the crowd responded with "enthusiastic applause." The next day, the editors followed up on this message with a brief article commenting on how well received the speech was in Germany.<sup>172</sup>

With this speech, a sizeable outpouring of dormant Falangist sympathy awoke in Spain, and found in Serrano their leading voice. As such, the resurgent Falangists at this time are often referred to as *serranistas* in histories of the period. Particularly, the term *serranista* serves to distinguish this new Falangist sentiment from that of the *camisas viejas*. Indeed, while several *camisas viejas* felt sympathetic to this new call of action from Serrano, many still refused to follow his lead, and still others did so, but saw him as

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<sup>171</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Política de España, 1936-1975*, 32-33.

<sup>172</sup> *Arriba*, "Serrano Suñer pronuncia en mota del cuervo un importante discurso," May 3, 1940, 4.

more of an equal rather than a leader crafted out of the style of José Antonio. Instead, the majority of these newly energized Falangists tended to be youths who were pro-German and itching to be a part of the larger trend of fascism which had, up to the point of May of 1941, seemed almost invincible in its conquests across Europe.

In June of 1941, perhaps the clearest example of *serranista* thought arose in a book published by a Falangist named Angel Alcázar de Velasco. Alcázar had achieved a small degree of notoriety in the summer of 1940, when he was chased out of England for having been accused of relaying damage reports from the German air raids of London back to Spain, where they found the ears of the German agents stationed there.<sup>173</sup> In stark contrast to traditional Falangist values, Alcázar's book seemed to blend in elements of Nazi ideology, including a nearly four page diatribe describing the dangers of the Jews, as well as the oft-criticized Masons, to the health of the Spanish nation.<sup>174</sup> As such, Alcázar's language in the book comes through clearly on the side of intervention in the German war effort. However, the most informative part of his story is the manner in which he rewrites the history of the Falange to emphasize the role of Ramón Serrano Suñer. Particularly, he revisits the Hedilla incident of 1937, in which two rival factions had actually exchanged shots at the Falange headquarters, leaving two Falangists dead and the former president of the organization, Manuel Hedilla, sentenced to death. If left to their own devices, Alcázar asserts that the Falange would have self-destructed at this

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<sup>173</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 116.

<sup>174</sup> To clarify, the Franco government was notorious for its borderline obsession with the idea of Masonic corruption having helped fuel the Republican side during the Civil War. Indeed, wherever popular unrest would spring up during his time in government, Franco would surely see the work of Masons there. However, the FET was not as vocal on the subject of the dangers of Jews in Spain, despite long-standing Spanish resentment of them dating all the way back to their expulsion from the peninsula in the late fifteenth century. In this degree, Alcazar seems to be blending typical Falangist rhetoric with Nazi propaganda to produce something effectively new, hence the justification for distinguishing this strain of Falangism (*serranismo*), from any of its earlier incarnations.

point; however, Ramón Serrano Suñer intervened, saved Hedilla's life, and reminded the party that they should be unified in their mission once again.<sup>175</sup> In so doing, he ignores the fact that Serrano had been at Franco's side in helping to arrange the conflict within the Falange from the beginning, so as to create a spark to justify the publication of the Decree of Unification, Serrano's first major contribution to the Nationalist cause.

The Hedilla incident was not the only area of Falange history to be revised, however. In his narrative, he states that Serrano had always been a Falangist, though his direct advocacy on behalf of the organization had waxed and waned due to the roles he was filling in the government at the time. In so doing, he makes the rather unfounded claim that José Antonio, being the prophet of the party, had long known the role Serrano would play in the framework of the party.<sup>176</sup> Again, in so doing, Alcázar politely declines to mention that Serrano openly declined an invitation to join the party in 1933, choosing instead to remain aligned with Gil Robles's CEDA coalition. In his conclusion, Alcázar mirrors Serrano's conception of his influence as a complement to Franco's power, stating those who were "authentically Spanish" would succeed through the success "of the Caudillo and of Serrano."<sup>177</sup> However, Serrano's political career had come under attack by those, he states, who were enemies of the vision of the truly Falangist state and who were more concerned with their own interests than those of the *Patria*. He ends with a direct call to arms for his fellow *serranistas* to respond and refute these vicious accusations which had arisen against Serrano, further stating that while José

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<sup>175</sup> Angel Alcázar de Velasco, *Ramón Serrano Suñer en la Falange* (Barcelona: Ediciones Patria, 1941), 77.

<sup>176</sup> Angel Alcázar de Velasco, *Ramón Serrano Suñer en la Falange*, 80-81.

<sup>177</sup> Angel Alcázar de Velasco, *Ramón Serrano Suñer en la Falange*, 171-172.



Antonio had provided the ideology and doctrines of the party, only one man was responsible for putting it into action: “RAMÒN SERRANO SUÑER.”<sup>178</sup>

In conclusion, the passionate rhetoric employed by Alcázar de Velasco in support of Serrano and the mass youth agitations in support for Spanish intervention against Russia are emblematic that, contrary to the Stanley Payne’s argument, Serrano had succeeded in creating an independent base of power. From the summer of 1939 to May of 1941, Serrano had labored on increasing his own personal level of prestige, first through a successful personal rivalry with Foreign Minister Juan Beigbeder, and then later through the creation of a sub-section of the Falange loyal to him as their key leader. In so doing, Serrano’s appetite for political power and prestige began to be satisfied; however, in his hunger for influence, he neglected the true source of where his meals had come from. Indeed, in his conception, his advocacy for a true Falangist state and prestige as the voice of the Party bore no threat to Franco and his government. However, Franco was a man who never took threats to his power lightly, and the open Falangist activism in May 1941 represented one of the largest demonstrations for change in his government that he would ever hear in his long tenure as dictator. Indeed, Franco had appointed Serrano as a means of keeping the Falange from becoming a nuisance; instead, Franco saw him as having galvanized the party in agitating for a further role in government, a statement which, in his mind, could only imply a lack of faith in his own abilities as a leader. Thus, by May of 1941, Serrano had successfully created his own section of the Party as an independent source of power. Only over the course of the next several months, though, would he realize that encouraging this partisan activity in the face of

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<sup>178</sup> Angel Alcázar de Velasco, *Ramón Serrano Suñer en la Falange*, 187. The capitals at the end are his emphasis, which I have replicated here to emphasize the boldness by which he advocated Serrano’s cause in the face of the critics who had arisen since his speech on May 2.

Franco's overt attempts to downplay partisan agendas in his government would jeopardize his overall influence in Spanish politics.

## Chapter 4

### The Caudillo's Response: 1941-1942

Following a concerted effort over the year and a half predating his openly pro-Falangist speech on May 2, 1941, Ramón Serrano Suñer succeeded in crafting from the structure of the Falange a unique sub-section which would serve as his own individual power base. In so doing, Serrano succeeded in stepping outside of Franco's shadow, and was able to stand amongst the leaders of the individual factions beneath Franco's government in terms of the power he could exercise in the national government. However, this movement towards being an independent politician, with all of its promise of glamour and prestige, came at a terrible cost. By being able to stand on his own within the political fray of Spain, Serrano also made himself vulnerable to the same shifts in governmental power that affected each individual faction.<sup>179</sup> In so doing, he lost the protection of General Franco, who now actively saw him as a threat to his power and maneuvered successfully to severely curb his power by the late summer of 1941 and exclude him from government altogether by September of 1942. Indeed, in succeeding in his short term goal of creating an individual power base, Serrano unwittingly produced an array of consequences that would rob him of all power altogether in just over a year's time.

In dealing with the years between 1938 and 1940, most of the political commentary and a matching amount of historical narrative focuses on how much power Serrano gained. For example, following the Law of Central Administration, Falangist

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<sup>179</sup> The factions which predominated national politics after the Civil War were, generally, the same as the ones who dominated the Nationalist side during the Civil War. Once again, the three major groups continued to be the Carlists, the Alphonsine monarchists, and the Falange, although the interests of the core Falangists, or *casmisas viejas*, had been severely reduced since the days of the Civil War.

leader Dionisio Ridruejo commented that “without a doubt,” Serrano was the political leader of the new government.<sup>180</sup> Similarly, both Stanley Payne and Paul Preston remark that while Franco held absolute power within the military, it was Serrano who was the guiding force behind the political system in Nationalist Spain and, as such, the dominant figure within it.<sup>181</sup> However, what is often underemphasized within this incredible rise to prominence was the extent to which Serrano was making enemies along the way, as most contemporary figures and modern historians tend only to mention Serrano when involved in major foreign policy negotiations and domestic agitation regarding the larger World War. Once out of Franco’s protective shadow, though, Serrano would feel the full weight of the enemies which he had made for himself during his years of unparalleled success.<sup>182</sup>

Of all the groups within the umbrella of Franco’s unified *Falange Española Tradicionalista*, perhaps the most influential among them was the military establishment. The opinion of the military can be difficult to track during post-Civil War Spain, as many military leaders were also involved in a political faction as well. Nevertheless, some general picture can be obtained by pulling out commonalities between leaders involved in different political factions and through consideration of generally apolitical military leaders. Specifically, many within the military identified as early as 1938 that Serrano was a man to be watched carefully. Particularly, some military leaders were distrustful of the Law of Central Administration, since prior to the creation of a cabinet and political infrastructure for Franco’s government, the military had enjoyed full prerogative in the

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<sup>180</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Editorial Argos Vergara, 1983), 125.

<sup>181</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 292; Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 295-296.

<sup>182</sup> Angel Alcázar de Velasco, *Ramón Serrano Suñer en la Falange* (Barcelona: Ediciones Patria, 1941), 187.

exercise of its powers. Many within the military were hesitant to surrender power in any degree to a civilian system, and as such Serrano, as the face of the Law, became the target for their frustration.<sup>183</sup> In subsequent years, the attitudes towards Serrano within the military would become more evenly split. As the Second World War broke out across Europe and Serrano assumed the position of Foreign Minister, some of the more interventionist generals began to see Serrano as a significant leader, helping to push Spain in the direction of aiding Germany's war effort. However, other saw his presence at key meetings between Germany and Spain as another example of civilian government taking precedent over military personnel. This factor seemed even more shocking to some military leaders given the possibility that they may be called into battle based on the agreements Serrano made with his German counterparts.

Politically, the two major contenders against the Falange were the Carlists and Alphonine monarchists, despite the attempt of the Decree of Unification in 1937 to force all of the right-wing parties into one united group beneath Franco's control. These two monarchist groups, though they had their differences, both saw Serrano as a threat. To both groups of monarchists, the Franco government, as it originally existed in the Spanish Civil War, was simply a means to an end, that end being the restoration of the monarchical heir which they supported. As such, both monarchist groups came to mistrust Serrano as a byproduct of the Law of Central Administration of 1938. While the military resented Serrano for taking their privileges and embodying them in a civilian government apparatus, the monarchist groups were unhappy with the fact that the creation of a cabinet under Franco's helm gave legitimacy to the Caudillo's rule. Previously, they had supported him as a leader to defeat the Republic and install an

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<sup>183</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 123.

authoritarian order in Spain. Once this was done, they had envisioned that Franco would then make preparations for the restoration of the Spanish monarchy. However, they quickly realized that Serrano's Law of Central Administration was designed to convert Franco's temporary *junta* government into a more legitimate, permanent political structure, and as such identified him as a critical obstacle to the restoration of the monarchy.<sup>184</sup>

Unlike the military, where some leaders eventually warmed up to Serrano's leadership, monarchist opposition to Serrano's position of power only grew more profound after the civil war ended and the Second World War began. These groups resented the fact that Serrano's power increased so dramatically in October of 1940, as they believed that the Serrano's elevation to such heights of political power endangered the delicate balance of power beneath Franco which had been so carefully constructed in 1938. Furthermore, as Serrano moved in the direction of the Falange in early 1941, many monarchists feared that Serrano, with his well-known unique ability to influence Franco, would be able to pull the Caudillo with him into realizing the Falangist vision and creating a truly fascist state in Spain. Should this have happened, their goal of monarchical restoration would be farther away than at any time since the foundation of the Second Republic in 1931.

It seems that the monarchists had a good deal to worry about in this regard. A few days before the end of 1940, communication between the German embassy in Madrid and the German capital in Berlin indicated that the German government supported the Falangist claim for a greater role in the Spanish government, with Serrano

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<sup>184</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 118.

specifically stated as a leader in the process.<sup>185</sup> Indeed, following the breakdown of negotiations between Hitler and Franco regarding Spanish entrance into the war, Hitler began to consider ways to circumvent Franco's stubborn refusal to cave to German demands, despite his earlier statements that he had no interest in interfering with Spanish domestic politics. Earlier in the month, German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop had already been in contact with the Carlist leader Don Juan in Rome to discuss returning him to a position of authority in Spain.<sup>186</sup> However, once the Falange communicated its wishes for a greater role in government to the German embassy, the embassy relayed the message to Berlin along with the recommendation that the German leadership actively agitate for an increase in the role of Serrano in government, for they believed he sincerely sought Spanish entry into the war and was being handcuffed by his more stubborn brother-in-law.<sup>187</sup> While it is uncertain how much of this discussion found its way out of the German communication system and into the common knowledge of Spanish politicians, nonetheless there is reason to believe that perhaps the monarchists had some basis in their fear that Serrano might pose an equal or even greater threat to the restoration of the monarchy in Spain than Franco himself.

Despite all of these influential groups within Spanish domestic politics having reason to oppose Serrano throughout the years of 1938 to 1940, Franco continued to trust in what he perceived to be Serrano's "extraordinary political vision."<sup>188</sup> As mentioned before, the combination of Franco's trust in Serrano as a friend and family member along

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<sup>185</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 354.

<sup>186</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 133.

<sup>187</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 354.

<sup>188</sup> Fernando García Lahiguera, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 88.

with Franco's respect for Serrano's legal training meant that Serrano enjoyed the Caudillo's confidence more than any other politician in Spain. However, no matter how much Franco respected Serrano's friendship and legal talents, his speech on May 2 to Falangist crowds crossed two different lines in terms of the political behavior which Franco deemed acceptable. First, the hallmark tenet of Franco's government apparatus was an intentionally-created neutrality between the competing Nationalist factions, which Serrano's advocacy on behalf of the Falange was now violating. In Franco's personal conception of his role in government, the Caudillo was designed to be a truly national leader, impartial to the partisan agendas of those below him and able to see the interests of the *Patria* above these political agendas.<sup>189</sup> For this reason, Franco and Serrano collaborated to ensure a balance between the parties as part of both the Decree of Unification and the Law of Central Administration, despite the fact that Serrano often favored Falangists to fill his own positions within the Ministry of the Interior. Furthermore, even before the war Franco had refused to go along with José Antonio's vision of a truly fascist Spanish state. Therefore, when Serrano advocated for party reform based on core Falangist guidelines in May of 1941, he challenged one of the fundamental values of the Franco government which he had personally had a significant role in creating in his first year as a politician in Nationalist Spain.

Serrano's overt political agitation on behalf of the Falange would most likely have been enough to warrant disciplinary action from Franco on its own, especially considering that he made such an inflammatory speech without first communicating with Franco, despite his ease of direct access to the Caudillo. That said, a second factor which

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<sup>189</sup> Francisco Franco Bahamonde, *El pequeño libro pardo del general*, comp. Paulino Hermenegildo (Cary-Colombes: Ruedo Ibérico, 1972), 7.



guaranteed a quick and decisive reaction against Serrano was the fact that, like most dictators, Franco was quick to attack anything that even resembled a question regarding his power. Franco was particularly careful to eliminate any threats to his power from the establishment of his government through the end of the Second World War, as he felt his power most delicate during that time.<sup>190</sup> Serrano knew this better than anyone, as several times while acting as a mediator between Franco and the Falange he had invoked the ire of his brother-in-law for seemingly advocating Falangist agendas at the expense of Franco's political judgment.<sup>191</sup> As part of Serrano's speech of May 2, he claimed that change needed to be led by core Falangists "moved by the light and by faith" in José Antonio's vision for Spain.<sup>192</sup> However, both Franco and Serrano knew that Serrano's repeated attempts both before and during the civil war to convert Franco into a true Falangist had failed. As such, Franco could not be counted among those core Falangists whose cause Serrano was now loudly trumpeting. Thus, despite the rationalization which Serrano offered that he never sought to replace him as acting head of state, Franco concluded that the change which Serrano now advocated did not include him at all and could only be interpreted as a direct challenge to his power.

Serrano did not have to wait long to experience the weight of Franco's response.

Unlike Serrano, who used a public address to issue his change of political position,

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<sup>190</sup> The best example of Franco's unwavering desire to preserve his power came in 1943. In the prior year, Franco had created a new *Cortes* to create the illusion of a parliamentary system, though it never held much power. In June of 1943, this newly assembled *Cortes* passed a direct appeal led by the monarchists but supported by an array of politicians pleading with Franco to restore the Spanish monarchy. The reasoning given was that the signatories felt the war had shifted against the Axis, and it was the only way by which Spain could resist the retribution of the victorious Allies. Franco rejected this logic, instead interpreting this appeal as a direct challenge to his authority. In response, he dismissed all of its signatories from their posts upon its publication. See Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 464, 492.

<sup>191</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Política de España, 1936-1975* (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, S.A., 1995), 32-35.

<sup>192</sup> *Arriba*, "Serrano Suñer pronuncia en mota del cuervo un importante discurso," May 3, 1940, 4.

Franco stayed true to the quiet form which he first implemented when he dismissed Colonel Juan Beigbeder from the Foreign Ministry through a newspaper article. Three days after Serrano's speech, Franco quietly but deliberately named Colonel Valentín Galarza to the post of Minister of the Interior which had been left vacant when Serrano moved to the Foreign Ministry. Galarza, who was a member of the monarchist faction and a noted anti-falangist, represented a direct affront to the *serranistas*, who were outraged at what they felt to be an over-reaction from Franco.<sup>193</sup> However, Franco was not content with just punishing Serrano; instead, he sought a full punishment of the Falange for what he felt to be their insubordination. As such, Franco appointed two other monarchists to key positions of leadership in Morocco and Catalonia.<sup>194</sup>

Sensing in the week following Serrano's speech that momentum was moving against them, many Falangists within the government came up with a last-ditch effort to convince Franco of their value: they would all tender their resignations from the government. As part of this larger trend, Serrano handed Franco his own letter of resignation on May 12. This move by Serrano is incredibly difficult to understand; however, it seems as though it was part of a concerted effort on the part of the Falange to demonstrate that, should Franco continue to punish them and ignore their wishes, that they could also destroy his carefully preserved balance of power within the government by simply quitting it altogether. The next day, May 13, Franco sent a personal letter to Serrano, asking him to retract his letter of resignation. In this letter, Franco claimed to Serrano that the current political instability was a "time of confusion" sown by the

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<sup>193</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2003), 144.

<sup>194</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan Maria Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 146.

enemies of the *Patria*, and that he must remain vigilant and at his post in order to serve the greater Spanish good.<sup>195</sup> As a result of this letter, and due to the fact that several of the other Falangists seemed to get similar offers of personal reconciliation, Serrano withdrew his resignation and hoped that this reassurance from Franco was a sign that his precious political influence would remain substantial, even if it was not what it had been prior to the ordeal.<sup>196</sup>

By the end of May, though, it was clear that these hopes were simply wishful thinking, and by the start of June Serrano was quietly reduced to a shell of his former political self as a result of the dictator's favor shifting against him. Prior to May of 1941, Serrano's power was unmatched among the political figures of Spain because it rested on four different, but equally significant legs: Serrano's direct relation to Franco as a personal advisor, his official position within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, his unofficial position within the Ministry of the Interior, and his unchallenged position of leadership within the Falange. As already mentioned, Serrano lost his unofficial position with the appointment of Colonel Galarza to the Ministry of the Interior; however, this was just the beginning of the hits his political prestige would take as a result of his overt attempt to create an independent power base within the Falange. On May 7, a small article on the back page of *Arriba* announced that Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco had been appointed to a newly created position: the Subsecretary of the Presidency.<sup>197</sup> While the official newspaper may not have made a large mention of this, it meant a huge blow to

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<sup>195</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan María Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 144.

<sup>196</sup> Sheelagh M. Ellwood, *Spanish Fascism in the Franco Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 68-69; Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography*, 434-435.

<sup>197</sup> *Arriba*, "Don Luis Carrero Blanco nuevo subsecretario del la Presidencia de Gobierno," May 7, 1941.

Serrano, as Luis Carrero Blanco represented Serrano's first true rival as chief political advisor to Franco since Nicolás Franco was sent to be ambassador to Portugal in early 1938.<sup>198</sup>

On May 19, Serrano's power base took another hit when, as part of a government reorganization, Franco placed José Luis de Arrese in the position of Secretary General of the FET. In the original structure of the FET, the Secretary General acted as the head of the entire party, while power could also be exercised through the leadership of its executive committee, the *Junta Política*. In August of 1939, Serrano had been placed into the leadership of the *Junta Política*, shifting power away from Secretary General Raimundo Fernández Cuesta. Now, Franco appointed Arrese to the position of Secretary General in order to challenge Serrano's position in the Falange by presenting his first real rival since Fernández Cuesta. To reinforce this notion, Arrese's appointment brought along with it a reallocation of the control of the Press and Police from the Ministry of the Interior to the position of Secretary General, thus to signal to everyone within the FET framework where Franco's favor now resided.<sup>199</sup>

Prior to May of 1941, Ramón Serrano Suñer had held four distinct areas of power within the Franco government. Nevertheless, he felt that he needed to expand his political power base in order to make it more durable. He achieved this through the creation of an

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<sup>198</sup> The newspaper *Arriba* has a convoluted history at this time. The newspaper began as the official weekly publication of the Falange under José Antonio Primo de Rivera. The paper's first publication came on March 21, 1935, but it would close down in just over a year. In 1939, the combined Falange Española Tradicionalista (FET) created a new paper to serve as its official paper, which it also named *Arriba* in homage to the original Falangist-run publication. By becoming the official paper of the only official party in Spain, the paper thus obtained national circulation. In its early years, core Falangists served as the senior editors, most notably Dionisio Ridruejo; however, by 1941 and 1942, these voices were being replaced by other conservative figures within the FET, leading to a reduction in the inflammatory nature of the publication. See Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 167, 327.

<sup>199</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan María Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 146.

individual political following within the *falangistas serranistas*; however, in so doing, Serrano's political agitations precipitated a reaction from Franco which resulted in the loss of three of his four original areas of power. Over the course of May, he lost his position in the Ministry of the Interior, lost his exclusive position as Franco's chosen advisor, and lost his unchallenged position of power within the structure of the FET. As he went into June, all that remained of his former power was his position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and his leadership of his subsection of the Falange. However, many of his *serranista* followers had concluded that Franco's decisive action against him represented a death blow to the truly fascist vision which they sought to achieve through Serrano's leadership.<sup>200</sup> It was in this context, when many *serranistas* had lost hope, that Angel Alcázar de Velasco published his work, calling all true Falangists to arms in order to support their beleaguered leader from the various forces whom, he thought, were conspiring to taint Serrano's name. However, for his part, Serrano unsuccessfully attempted to plan a way to use his remaining influence within the Foreign Ministry and his own subsection of the Falange to regain his lost prestige.

During the tense month from mid-May to mid-June of 1941, Serrano had only one real noteworthy incident as Foreign Minister, which would foreshadow how he would attempt to regain his national prestige in Spain. In April of 1941, the American ambassador Alexander Weddell met with Serrano and presented him letters to Americans living in Spain stamped with the seal of a German censor. Angered, Weddell remarked that this was a fine statement on the sovereignty of the Spanish state, and Serrano took

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<sup>200</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan María Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 146.

great insult to this perceived slight to Spanish nationalism.<sup>201</sup> Starting in mid-April, then, Serrano actively used his position as Foreign Minister to obstruct the American ambassador from meeting with Franco at all, and in the wake of his May fiasco, he determined to continue this interference as a statement of his continuing influence in the course of Spanish politics. Indeed, this dispute would last over five months, and eventually end with the resignation of Ambassador Weddell from the American embassy in Madrid altogether. Despite the fact that the United States was neutral in the World War at this time, though, this intentional obstruction of direct relations between Franco and the U.S. State Department was often interpreted at home and abroad to be one of Serrano's most overt statements of sympathy for the Axis to this point.

Desperate for a way to re-energize his political followers and with only a lingering debate with the American ambassador keeping him on the scene in Spanish politics, Serrano jumped at what he felt to be his perfect chance for a personal resurgence on June 22, 1941. On that day, newspapers across Spain announced the word that the Germans had launched a full assault on Spain's most hated international rival, the Soviet Union. In the fallout from this major change to the global war, Serrano concocted a plan to use his remaining positions as *serranista* leader and Foreign Minister to make himself a critical figure in the politics of Spain once more. The chief goal of the *serranistas* was the resurgence of the authentic Falangist vision within Spain, and many of its members followed Serrano due to their frustration at Spanish inaction in the larger war. Serrano knew that, during the civil war years, the Falange was one of the titans of the Nationalist cause based on its ability to mass recruits to fight in the war effort. Once the civil war

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<sup>201</sup> William Leon Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 108-110.

was over, the traditional Falange's voice became smaller and smaller in the Franco government, as this chief virtue of the party was no longer in demand. Thus, Serrano decided that he would do what he could to attempt to pull Spain into this new war against the Soviet Union, and in so doing his rhetoric would be able to revitalize this core Falangist base while simultaneously restoring the Falange to its place of prominence in Spanish politics, as its recruits would once again be needed for military service. Should he succeed, Serrano would finally be credited with the revival of the Falange and regain much of the prestige which he lost over the course of the preceding months.

Within forty-eight hours, Serrano began enacting this new political plan of action. On June 22, Serrano lobbied with Franco to take a definitive and official stance in favor of this new development in the German war. As a result, the Franco government officially notified the Germans that they would be willing to help in this new campaign in any way possible short of a full declaration of war.<sup>202</sup> However, June 24 would see Serrano's most famous expression of interventionist rhetoric, an occasion which for a moment seemed to indicate that his plan of returning to his former glory might succeed. In the aftermath of the news breaking of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, a massive wave of youth unrest had broken out in the universities of Madrid. On June 24, thousands of youths gathered at the Falangist headquarters to demonstrate their willingness for an intervention on behalf of the Germans. Seizing the moment, Serrano stepped out on a balcony and provided what is commonly considered to be the most famous speech of his political career.

Serrano's speech that day was actually one of the shortest of his career, as he prefaced it by acknowledging that "now is not the time for speeches" to the approval of

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<sup>202</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 340.

the gathered crowd.<sup>203</sup> The speech quickly became known as the “Russia is Guilty” speech, as Serrano charmed the assembled youths by providing them with multiple justifications by which the Soviet Union had wronged Spain itself, so as to argue that they sought intervention based on Spanish interests and not an ideological affinity with the Axis. According to Serrano, Russia was the root cause of virtually every malady which had struck Spain in the preceding decade. Russia was guilty for corrupting the Leftists of Spain, thus causing the Civil War, along with its devastation. As such, he stated that Russia was guilty for the death of all the honored Nationalists dead who fought in the three-year war. Among these dead, Russia was thus also guilty for the murder of José Antonio, the visionary founder of the Falange, a claim which was met with shouts of “Death to Communism” from the masses.<sup>204</sup> These accusations made, Serrano concluded with the inflammatory statement that “the extermination of Russia is required by the history and for the future of Europe.”<sup>205</sup> Finally, he sent the masses away by leading them in singing the official hymn of the Falange, in a symbol of unity and as a reinforcement, once again, of his role as the leader of the core Falange as opposed to the more complacent FET organization.

There is some doubt as to whether or not Serrano knew about or condoned what happened next. After his inflammatory speech from the balcony of the Falange’s headquarters, a section of the crowd broke off and tore through the streets of Madrid, arriving outside the British embassy to demonstrate against England. From the safety of

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<sup>203</sup> *Arriba*, "El exterminio de Rusia es exigencia de la Historia y del porvenir de Europa,' ha dicho Serrano Suner," June 25, 1940.

<sup>204</sup> *Arriba*, "El exterminio de Rusia es exigencia de la Historia y del porvenir de Europa,' ha dicho Serrano Suner," June 25, 1940.

<sup>205</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 340.



the embassy, Sir Samuel Hoare described the situation as waves of Falangist youths, in a form similar to their street agitations prior to the Civil War, began to shout slogans of “*¡Gibraltar Español!*” and to throw rocks at the embassy cars. At the height of the demonstration, Hoare claimed that a portion of the crowd actually attempted to storm the embassy, but were repulsed by the British security agents, as well as a group of escaped soldiers from the war in France who were seeking refuge in the Madrid embassy until which time they could secure transport back to London.<sup>206</sup> Most disturbingly for Sir Samuel Hoare, he claimed in his memoirs that he saw German press crews filming the violence against the British embassy. As such, he then concluded that the riot against the British was a planned event and that Serrano himself was the mastermind of the riot as part of an attempt to push events in Spain to a fever pitch as part of his effort to restore his political power.<sup>207</sup> However, these claims of a fabricated riot led by Serrano are notably absent in other accounts of the demonstration, and much of this assertion is based simply on conjecture by the British ambassador, who never got along with Serrano.

The most enduring impact of Serrano’s agitation at this time was the creation, at his own urging, of a volunteer division of Spanish troops who would go to fight alongside the Germans in the invasion of the Soviet Union, in much the same manner as many supposedly neutral nations sent volunteer brigades to fight for the Republic during the Civil War. In this way, Serrano believed that the Allies could not complain about Spanish actions without exposing themselves to hypocrisy, and Spain would be able to provide the first concrete contribution to the German war effort which Hitler had so long

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<sup>206</sup> Rt. Hon. Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 102.

<sup>207</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 102.

sought and which, he felt, would ultimately lead to total Spanish involvement.<sup>208</sup> The group quickly became dubbed as “the Blue Division,” so called for the blue shirts of the Falangist youths, both from middle-class and university backgrounds, who made up the overwhelming majority of its initial volunteers, though Franco insisted that the official military hold virtually all command positions.<sup>209</sup> The Blue Division began its training in July, and when it was first deployed on August 19, its membership totaled some 18,000 volunteers. Over the next two years, it is estimated that over 45,000 Spaniards fought as part of the Blue Division at one time or another, with nearly 5,000 killed and 8,700 wounded as part of the fighting, mainly in the northern areas of the German Eastern front.<sup>210</sup>

Despite Serrano’s desperate gamble, the Blue Division never precipitated a full entry of Spain into the Second World War. Simply put, no matter how much Franco may have ideologically wished to contribute to the destruction of the Soviet Union, the Spanish needed a set number of conditions to be met before they could enter the war, and these never materialized. First and foremost, Franco knew that to ask the Spanish people to once again sacrifice for war so soon after the end of the civil war might invite an uprising against his government. Indeed, the German invasion of the Soviet Union occurred just two years after the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War, and the Spanish economy was a long way removed from anything near an ample level of recovery to be able to contribute to the fight. At this time, the British government estimated that,

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<sup>208</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 147-148; Sheelagh Ellwood, *Spanish Fascism in the Franco Era*, 79.

<sup>209</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 148.

<sup>210</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler*, 150, 152.

compared to before the start of the civil war, Spanish industrial capacity was down by thirty-one percent, its agricultural production was down twenty-five percent, and that thirty percent of its naval vessels and half of its railway locomotives were out of commission.<sup>211</sup>

Franco and his advisors within the military knew that the only way to offset this desperate economic situation would be through massive sums of material aid from Germany to offset the embargo which the Allies would place on Spain upon entrance into the war; however, without prior direct contribution to his war effort, Hitler had balked at the idea of becoming too heavily invested in rebuilding Spain. Furthermore, Franco sought an expansion of territory in Africa as a carrot to hold to the Spanish people for participation in the war, under the banner of a renewed Spanish empire at the expense of French holdings there. However, Hitler again proved hesitant to provide these guarantees, as both the Vichy French and Italian governments also eyed many of the same possessions which Franco sought to incorporate into a new Spanish empire. It was because of these disagreements that negotiations between Franco and Hitler stalled in October of 1940, when the window for Spanish entrance into the war seemed most feasible, and the intervening months had done nothing to facilitate a new compromise between the two powers. Finally, even if Hitler had guaranteed all of these demands, the absolute requirement for Spain to enter the war was that the war needed to be short. In the fall of 1940, with France defeated and Britain feeling the pressure of a heavy German assault, it was possible that the war could be brought to a swift end and Franco could reap significant rewards from participation. However, with the opening of a war against the

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<sup>211</sup> Christian Leitz, "'More carrot than stick', British Economic Warfare and Spain, 1941-1944," *Twentieth Century British History* 9, no. 2 (1998): 249.

Soviet Union, combined with the increasingly pro-British stance of the United States, it was clear by the summer of 1941 that the war would not be resolved quickly.

The creation of the Blue Division offered Franco perhaps the only way in which he could legitimately aid the Germans in their war effort, which explains the fact that Franco allowed the creation of this division at Serrano's request, even though his former main advisor had fallen out of his good graces at this time. Indeed, Franco was absolutely confident in an eventual German victory, commenting as late as the summer of 1942 to American ambassador Carlton Hayes that the German holdings in Europe were "impregnable" and that the Allies had exhausted all reasonable expectation of victory against Hitler's armies.<sup>212</sup> Nevertheless, Franco created an elaborate justification for his actions on behalf of the Blue Division in order to explain its mission to the American and British diplomats, just in case they should react negatively in the form of an economic retaliation or direct action against the Spanish in Morocco or the Canary Islands. Franco broke the Second World War into three separate wars, one of which was in the Pacific and of absolutely no concern to him or the Spanish nation. Franco then stated that the war in Eastern Europe between Russia and Germany was a completely unrelated to the war between the Western Allies and Germany, and while Spain was becoming directly involved in the former, it continued to be strictly neutral in the latter. Franco would hold to this vision throughout the war, often using it as a plea to serve as a peace arbiter between England and Germany, for he warned that Russia represented a greater threat to the safety of Europe than the Germans. In all of these ideas, Serrano was in complete agreement with Franco, demonstrating once more that in terms of foreign policy position

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<sup>212</sup> Carlton J.H. Hayes, *Wartime Mission in Spain: 1942-1945* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946), 30.

Serrano was never out of touch with the interests of his brother-in-law. Instead, the decline in his political fortunes was linked exclusively to his self-serving agitation on behalf of a Falangist-dominated state system within Spanish domestic politics.

In the end, Franco's actions in the summer of 1941 proved that Hitler's conclusions in the wake of the Hendaye meeting in October of 1940 were all too accurate about the unreliability of the Spanish in the conflict. Verbally, Franco spoke as one of Hitler's strongest supporters, even to the point of claiming in February of 1942 that, should the road to Berlin be opened and the German capital find itself in peril, that not one division but one million Spaniards would be sent to help.<sup>213</sup> However, when it came to actual material contributions to the German war effort, Spain continued to refuse any concrete obligations. As a result of Franco's stance towards Germany, Serrano's gamble in the creation of the Blue Division actually turned out to be counter-productive. It failed to create a state of war in Spain as he had hoped in order to restore the Falange to its former glory; however, it did succeed in sending tens of thousands of his most ardent supporters out of the country so that they could do him no good in Spanish domestic politics. Indeed, after the deployment of the Blue Division in August of 1941, Serrano's actual political base was narrower than it had ever been.

From his failure to draw Spain into the Second World War, Serrano's political career began a decline from which it would never recover. Ever since the appointment of Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco to the appointment of Subsecretary of the President, Serrano's once-regular personal meetings with Franco had become fewer and farther between. By October of 1941, these meetings, when they did occur, often concluded in "intense" arguments between the two brothers-in-law, a stark contrast between the

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<sup>213</sup> Sir Samuel Hoare, *Complacent Dictator*, 128.

friendship and mutual respect they had once shared and which had led Franco to promote Serrano into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs just one year prior.<sup>214</sup> In January of 1942, Franco left Madrid for a tour of the region of Catalonia, making multiple speeches in major cities in the region culminating in a speech in Barcelona. In previous years, Serrano would have accompanied Franco, helping to make the personal arrangements for the trip and advising him on the speeches themselves; however, on this trip Secretary General Arrese accompanied the Caudillo instead.<sup>215</sup> For most of 1942, Serrano continued to meet with the Axis ministers Ribbentrop and Ciano, with the highlight for him being a trip to Rome in the summer, though it received no real fanfare in the Spanish press. In actuality, Serrano's reputation as a Foreign Minister actually began to decline somewhat over the course of 1942. Serrano's gamble to create a state of war in 1941 had forever painted him in the minds of the military and general public alike as the leading voice for German interventionism in Spanish politics. However, as the German offensive against the Soviet Union began to stall, many Spaniards began to rethink the merit of closer ties with Germany, even to the point of growing to resent the presence of German agents in Spain. Naturally, they blamed Serrano for his lenient policies as Interior Minister when these connections were established, and saw him as continuing to champion a cause which was no longer in Spanish interests.<sup>216</sup> Only once more, in September of 1942, did Serrano's name again appear in national Spanish politics, and it did so only as a means of removing him from the picture altogether.

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<sup>214</sup> Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in twentieth-century Spain* (London: Unwin-Hyman, 1990), 95.

<sup>215</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan María Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 151.

<sup>216</sup> William Leon Beaulac, *Franco: Silent Ally in World War II*, 75-76.

As previously discussed, many of the factions which were formed in the Nationalist zone in the civil war and persisted into the post-war government strongly disliked the Falange and its radical doctrine. Perhaps the loudest among these voices of opposition came from the ultra-conservative Carlists, who were notably strong in the upper echelons of the Spanish military due to the independent Carlist military academy which had existed prior to the civil war. The hostility between these two groups came to a head in Bilbao, a city in northern Spain, on August 16, 1942. On that day, a number of Carlists, including the army minister, General José Varela, were participating in a memorial mass dedicated to the memory of lost Carlist soldiers in the civil war. At the conclusion of the ceremony, as the assembled Carlists left the sanctuary, a group of Falangists began to verbally harass them. As tensions came to a broil, two grenades exploded among the assembled Carlists, injuring between 30 and 117 people.<sup>217</sup> Despite the fact that he was still inside the building when the grenades were thrown, General Varela immediately interpreted this as a direct attack on his life, and pressed Franco to hunt down and convict the Falangists responsible. As a result, six Falangists were arrested, with two receiving death sentences, though one was pardoned on account of injuries received fighting in the civil war.<sup>218</sup>

Ramón Serrano Suñer was far removed from the chaos of Bilbao, spending the month of August on a trip with his family, when he got news of the bombings and the subsequent death sentence to the Falangists held responsible.<sup>219</sup> Immediately, Serrano

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<sup>217</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism in Spain*, 379.

<sup>218</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan María Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 156.

<sup>219</sup> Ramon Serrano Suñer, *Entre el silencio y la propaganda, la historia como fue: memorias* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977), 364.

attempted to intervene and get the remaining death sentence commuted, in a similar manner as he did in 1937 on behalf of Manuel Hedilla. However, Spanish politics had changed massively since 1937. Previously, Franco hesitated from executing Hedilla because Serrano claimed that in so doing he would alienate the still-powerful Falange in his newly created unified party, which was still far from certain that it would succeed. Now, in August of 1942, Franco had an established government infrastructure which was much more durable and the power and prestige of the core Falange had dropped drastically, not to mention the decline in Serrano's own individual political credentials. As such, Franco refused the commute the sentence of Juan José Domínguez Muñoz, who was executed on September 2.<sup>220</sup>

General Varela was not content with just the punishment of the individual Falangists responsible for the bombings, however. Instead, he pressed Franco to punish the entire core Falangist organization, which he long felt to be undisciplined and unworthy of significant government representation. By the start of September of 1942, Franco had a difficult decision to make. If he actually disciplined the Falange, then it would result in a shift in the carefully created balance of positions beneath his leadership that he so valued. However, if he declined to punish the Falange, he would do so at the displeasure of both the Carlist political faction and sympathetic generals in the military of various political factions. As Franco considered his options, his new chief advisor Luis Carrero Blanco presented him with a solution which seemed almost identical in its creation to Serrano's power play in 1938 for the removal of Nicolás Franco from the government. According to Carrero's suggestion, Franco should punish General Varela for continuing to push for a discipline of the Falange, as it implied a lack of confidence in

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<sup>220</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan María Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 156.



Franco's political judgment to do what was necessary for the preservation of the interests of the *Patria* in terms of domestic politics. However, to discipline the military alone would create a scandal, so at least one key Falangist leader must also be punished. Carrero suggested that Franco remove Ramón Serrano Suñer, despite the fact that he had no direct ties to the incident itself. For Carrero, this would be a clear message of punishment for both the Falange and a statement to all involved in politics that no individual, despite political orientation or personal connection and prior service to the Caudillo, would be allowed to create disorder at home.<sup>221</sup>

On September 2, 1942, Ramón Serrano Suñer was called into a meeting with General Franco. In his memoirs, Serrano recalled that he was not informed what the meeting was about, which led him to believe that something of major significance had occurred in relation to the World War and the Franco was seriously considering a change in official Spanish policy.<sup>222</sup> Once Serrano arrived in Franco's office to meet with him, the dictator, with the calm and detached sense which became a hallmark of his political character, simply stated that "in view of the circumstances I am going to replace you."<sup>223</sup> Only then did Serrano learn that he was part of a larger government reorganization designed to punish both the military and the Falange for the disorder they caused. Franco had decided to replace General Varela in his post by a new Falangist minister and simultaneously replace Serrano in the office of Foreign Affairs with a conservative monarchist who had previously held the position in the early years of the Franco

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<sup>221</sup> Adriano Gómez Molina and Joan María Thomás, *Ramón Serrano Suñer*, 157.

<sup>222</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Memorias*, 371-372.

<sup>223</sup> Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975* (1982; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 697.

government, Count Gómez Jordana. As such, Franco adopted Carrero's proposed solution to the political situation, with one addition. In order to prevent any such disorder from recurring, Franco stepped in and took over the official leadership of the FET itself, no longer relying on figures like Serrano or Arrese to be his intermediary to the party.

In conclusion, Serrano's dismissal from government in September of 1942 actually can be seen as the ultimate demonstration of his success in creating an individual party base. After his personal feud with then-Foreign Minister Juan Beigbeder over the course of 1940, Serrano sought an individual political base independent of his relationship with Franco. He thought that in so doing, he would be further broadening his individual power base, which was already broadly distributed between his personal relationship with the dictator, position of leadership within the party, and official positions within two government ministries. Instead, by making himself a partisan leader in the national political scene, he lost the protection that came with political neutrality and with Franco's favor and made himself vulnerable to the types of liabilities that come with being an individual leader in a complex political environment. Notable among these liabilities is the responsibility for the actions of his followers, even when he was completely unaware of their occurrence, as he was with the bombings of September 1942.

After Serrano's speech on May 2, 1941, Francisco Franco finally sided with Serrano's multiple critics among the monarchists and the military who saw him and the cause which he had now chosen to champion as a threat to Spanish national interests. As a result, Serrano's individual agitation within the Falange, designed to stabilize his political fortunes, actually created a response from Franco that robbed him of the

majority of his power base in Spanish politics. Furthermore, his desperate attempts to salvage his political career through advocating Spanish involvement in the German war after the invasion of the Soviet Union fell victim to the complexities of diplomatic negotiations between the Spaniards and Germans which, as Foreign Minister, he should have appreciated more than any other Spanish politician. As he was forced into early retirement in early September of 1942, Ramón Serrano Suñer had no one to blame but himself for the root causes of his ultimate dismissal from the government.

## Conclusion

After hearing that he was being dismissed from the government, Ramón Serrano Suñer first reacted with a stunned silence. A few moments later, he stood to leave Franco's office for the last time. However, in his memoirs, he recalls that he did not do so silently. Instead, according to his personal memoir, he stopped and told Franco that "I hope, for your own good and the good of the country, that you firmly get the idea in your head that the loyalty of a counselor, or minister, is not unconditional loyalty without loyal criticism."<sup>224</sup>

With those words, Ramón Serrano Suñer left Franco's office, and faded into complete political obscurity. He ceased all political activity, including any participation in the Falange, and returned to his private law practice. A few years later, American ambassador Carlton Hayes heard a series of rumors that Serrano was attempting to ingratiate himself with the monarchist camp; however, he noted that these rumors were never substantiated and given the antipathy between the monarchists and Serrano during his time as a government minister, this alliance seems highly unlikely.<sup>225</sup> Despite the fact that Franco lived for another thirty-three years, the rift that this dismissal created between the brothers-in-law would never be healed. Serrano became a political recluse, even as he began to reclaim his once abandoned reputation as a prominent practicing lawyer, contributing to several significant cases in international law and, later in his life, becoming noteworthy for his numerous publications about his experiences in both the

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<sup>224</sup> Ramón Serrano Suñer, *Entre el silencio y la propaganda, la historia como fue: memorias* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1977), 371-372.

<sup>225</sup> Carlton J.H. Hayes, *Wartime MISSION in Spain, 1942-1945* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 58.

Franco government and the Falange.<sup>226</sup>

From the story of Ramón Serrano Suñer, several critical aspects of Franco's domestic governmental structure can be seen with higher clarity. Above all, Serrano's failure to successfully agitate on behalf of the Falange and the powerful opposition offered by the combined strength of the Carlists, Alphonsine monarchists, and the military establishment should lay to rest any lingering ideas that Franco's government ever represented a "fascist" state. Rather, from the start of Franco's formal government structure, embodied in the Law of Central Administration of 1938, the fascists of the Falange were consciously balanced out by more traditional conservative political voices of Spain and would never exercise the kind of power that is traditionally attributed to parties within a fascist state.

Building on this idea, a second aspect of the Franco government which becomes apparent is that power was not as rigidly held as is usually the case in authoritarian governments, for which the contemporary regimes of Germany and the Soviet Union would provide much better examples. Under Franco, several competing factions continued to persist and to vie for power, and these overtly political rivalries were often barely concealed whatsoever within the supposed unity of the singular party, the *Falange Española Tradicionalista*. Furthermore, Serrano's individual political career demonstrates that aspiring individuals could still pursue individual careers of prominence beneath the mantle of the dictatorship, at least in the formative years of the government.

In his work examining Ramón Serrano Suñer's life, Adriano Gómez Molina addressed the various images of Serrano which have persisted throughout the history of

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<sup>226</sup> *The Telegraph*, "Ramón Serrano Suñer," September 3, 2003, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1440376/Ramon-Serrano-Suner.html#disqus\\_thread](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1440376/Ramon-Serrano-Suner.html#disqus_thread) (accessed January 6, 2011).

the period. Historians who examine Serrano's life, he notes, have to attempt to piece together the varying models of Serrano into a unified whole, resulting in many different interpretations of who this man was and what defined him as a politician. While this essay by no means pretends to offer the definitive assessment of the man and what he stood for, nonetheless a silhouette clearly appears; specifically, one of a dynamic political figure whose beliefs and values changed with the situation in which he was placed. Serrano entered politics as a legalist conservative, unsettled by the pace of legal and cultural change advanced by the leftist elements of the Second Republic, but dedicated to governmental order and opposed to revolutionary radicalism. Nonetheless, with the uprising of 1936, Serrano's life and political career changed forever.

After his three-month imprisonment and daring escape from Madrid, Serrano was cured of any desire to seek a constitutional sense of order and compromise, and was radicalized into a belief that the right-wing elements of Spain needed to forever suppress the dangerous leftist elements. However, this radicalization was never truly complete, as even as he agitated on behalf of a truly fascist state in his years of leadership within the Falange, Serrano never wanted to shake the status quo of Franco's leadership due to a fear that the anarchy of the Spanish Civil War could return. In this way, Serrano seems not the radical, but the norm, as Franco would survive for decades after the Civil War by justifying his actions to the Spanish people as necessary to prevent any chance of the recurrence of civil disorder. In this way, Serrano simultaneously exhibited characteristics of a radical and a conservative, dedicated to producing radical change within Spain without seriously damaging the status quo. Even for a master politician, such an effort would be bafflingly difficult to engineer; however, Serrano's political

career was still new, and he was prone to making several critical mistakes out of simple political inexperience.

Ramón Serrano Suñer succeeded as a politician because his power base was as diverse as it was powerful. As a friend and relative of Franco and as a long-time friend of the late José Antonio Primo de Rivera, Serrano was able to carve out a role of unequalled influence both within the official government structure as Franco's main advisor and within the party infrastructure as the "heir" to José Antonio, at least within the *serranista* subsection. Furthermore, his respected legal talents qualified him more than any other government minister of the time for the position of the Ministry of the Interior. His personal ambition and noteworthy public speaking skills also served him well, helping him to outmaneuver his adversary Colonel Biegbeder and install himself in the Foreign Ministry. However, for all of these positive talents and connections, Serrano's vanity, desire for power and prestige, and general inexperience on the nation's largest political stage eventually proved to undo all of the gains which he had made. It should be remembered that the men who would become his opponents, such as the leaders of the two monarchist factions, had been officers in the military or leaders within their particular political unit for many years. Serrano, in contrast, never held a single political office prior to 1933 and never knew political prominence until April of 1937. In many ways, the mistakes he made in agitating on behalf of the Falange in 1941 can be attributed to a zealous, but inexperienced, politician who overestimated the strength of his own power base. In so doing, Serrano's political inexperience led him to throw all of his political fortunes behind this narrow fascist political base, a mistake which someone more experienced in the highest political circles might not have made. Furthermore,

once this gamble had failed, Serrano lacked the discretion to simply toe the line and work his way gradually back into the dictator's favor. Instead, Serrano attempted to regain his lost prestige in one quick maneuver, espousing the most radical of foreign policy notions with his open agitation on behalf of the German war effort.

Thus, in September of 1942, when Serrano left Franco's office, he had nowhere to look but in the mirror for the failures which led him to his position. In later years, Serrano and his apologists would create a number of myths as to why Serrano was dismissed, attempting to make him appear as a martyr or as a loyal politician who was betrayed by sinister elements within the Franco government. Some would blame Franco, saying that he grew jealous of Serrano's charismatic appeal and how it contrasted with Franco's more reserved political abilities. In so doing, these apologists claim that Franco seized on the idea of punishing Serrano for his ties to Germany as a way to reorient Spanish policy in the larger world war, while simultaneously exacting a personal sense of justice on this upstart politician, against whom even he could not compete with directly.<sup>227</sup> Others would blame Luis Carrero Blanco as a sinister agent, conspiring behind the scenes throughout 1941 and 1942 to eliminate the only real rival he would have in securing Franco's favor; however, to subscribe to this theory would be to simultaneously denounce Serrano for his same machinations against Nicolás Franco in 1938. Once all the factors are weighed, there is no doubt some truth to these claims. Franco did see eventually see Serrano as a threat to his power and Carrero Blanco did maneuver against him to secure his own power base. However, these types of political movements were normal in the highest level of national politics, and if Serrano could not

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<sup>227</sup> Heleno Saña, *Franquismo sin mitos: conversaciones con Serrano Suñer* (Barcelona: Ediciones Grijalbo, 1982), 258.



adequately recognize them it was due to his as much to his own inexperience as anything else. Furthermore, Serrano's own missteps in leading the *serranistas* and agitating for Spanish involvement in World War II did more to facilitate his removal than anything Carrero could have planned. Instead, the root of Serrano's political troubles, from which all of his later political miscalculations and controversies would arise, came in 1941 with his decision to abandon the protection which accompanied his identity as "Franco's man" in favor of personal political agitation within the Falange.

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