

SOUTO KUSTRÍN, SANDRA. “Y ¿Madrid? ¿Qué hace Madrid?” *Movimiento revolucionario y acción colectiva (1933–1936)*. Prólogo de Julio Aróstegui Sánchez y Eduardo González Calleja. Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, Madrid 2004. xxviii, 456 pp. € 22.00. DOI: 5002085900704326X

There was a time in Spain when accounts of the Second Republic and the Civil War were mainly written starting from a way of thinking historically which we call social history. It was understood that it was necessary to go beyond the excesses arising from a historiography which had until then focused on explaining the recent past starting from the subjective decisions of individuals or groups. In order to review interpretations so centred on the contingency, many historians began to adopt, especially in the 1980s, explanatory theories and analytical categories from the social sciences in a relationship which reached its peak ten years later. It was then that most researchers adopted the scientific method based on the development of explanatory and confirmable hypotheses with documentary information previously subjected to a systematic heuristic analysis and to its categorization using the concepts of social sciences, especially sociology.

Lately, however, this way of relating to the recent past seems to have entered a crisis. The complex balance between explanation and documentation has broken down in favour of an unusual devotion to data, in a neopositivist maelstrom in which the document appears to speak for itself. This revival of knowledge through accumulation of information is not just the result of the crisis which, in general, has been experienced by the social sciences and, in particular, by social history, especially following the criticism of the epistemology of modernity. There are, moreover, non-intellectual reasons which in Spain are related to the debate arising from the badly named historical “revisionism”, which was begun by the right wing during the last conservative term of office starting from its identification of the October 1934 crisis as the beginning of the Civil War. Indeed, this is the case because the debate between defenders and detractors of the theory which accuses the socialists of provoking the conflict has been expressed in almost exclusively empirical terms, with theoretical reflection at a historical minimum.

However, as shown by the 456 pages of the recent work by Sandra Souto, “*Y ¿Madrid? ¿Qué hace Madrid?*”, the abandonment of reflection in the Spanish historiography on the recent past has not been complete. On the contrary, here we have a publication which accepts in practice that historical knowledge does not just grow starting from the contribution of new data or the opening-up of new subjects to observation, but also from the interpretation of old documents in the light of new theories and categories, again coming from the social sciences. In her case, Souto demonstrates great skill in the use of explanatory and interpretative resources from the theories of historical sociology, especially from authors such as Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow, in order to develop a detailed study on the collective violence that broke out in the province of Madrid in autumn 1934.

This new development is therefore based not only on the careful analysis of documents almost unpublished to date. What makes Souto’s account really original is her capacity to interpret old and new data from the period studied, 1933–1936, starting from three categories characteristic of the theories of collective action. Firstly, that in addition to the structural determinants prevailing in Spain in the 1930s – for example an extremely unbalanced structure of ownership – individuals and groups require material and social “resources” to mobilize. Secondly, that the success or failure of the protest depends on a changing “structure of opportunities”, which individuals can influence but not control.

And finally, that the forms of mobilization are explained by these variables and not just by the interests and aims of collective action.

An account constructed in this way is firstly important because it converts the Second Republic and more particularly the “rectifying two years” or “black two years” (1933–1936) into objects of study in their own right, rather than, as we were used to, a mere preface to the Civil War. For Sandra Souto, the October 1934 crisis was the result of two modifications to the structure of political opportunities which occurred between 1931 and 1933. The former arose from the emergence of the Republic itself as a politically democratic and socially reforming regime which allowed the development of organizations for collective action. The latter took place following the defeat of the socialists and republicans in the 1933 election and the access to power of a conservative coalition whose policy was based on dismantling or paralysing the different social reforms developed up till then. It is also necessary to add the generalized perception among the left wing that one of the groups of the coalition, CEDA, was “fascist” and that, as such, it would try to emulate the feared German and Austrian experiences.

For its part, the initial success and the final failure of the insurrection and of the general strike in Madrid was due to the structure and nature of the material and organizational resources of the working class. Although the tradition of mobilization inherited from the social struggles during 1933 contributed to maintaining an unprecedented general strike in Madrid, the lack of material and organizational resources – badly organized militias, scarce armaments, non-existence of a defined plan of insurrection, scarce attraction of the military and of the forces of law and order, and prior knowledge of the uprising by the government – explains the emphatic failure of the insurrection both in the city and in its province.

However, for the author, the mobilization, despite failing to realize its aims, had positive consequences for the electoral victory of the left wing in February 1936. Paradoxically, the change in the structure of opportunities which took place starting from the repression – dismissals of workers, closure of premises, judicial or governmental suspension of activities, but also persistence in the capacity of the workers to act on the margins of the legislation in force, contacts within the public institutions, or the taking advantage of the division of the elites – favoured the coming together throughout 1935 of the until then distrustful unions and parties of the left until the finally victorious Popular Front was established.

The reader should not think that Souto’s account is a mere example of local history, so fashionable at present, as Madrid and its province were chosen starting from the hypothesis verified in the text that the city and its province acted as a sounding board for the whole country. “¿Qué hace Madrid?” [“What’s happening in Madrid?”] was one of many ways of expressing the concern for the fate of a local experience which, in view of its status as capital, had to have effects for the whole of Spain. And it had them according to the statements contained in the meticulous – sometimes almost antiquarian – work developed by Sandra Souto, a publication where the social actors observed are also new: young members of unions and working-class parties which fed the militias of Madrid and which explain the radicalization of the protest before and during October 1934.

The work is thus a good example of the way of researching the past that we know as social history, which demonstrates that its echoes can still be heard in Spanish historiography. And they are only echoes because in the ocean of neopositivism, this work is just an island and therefore it is doubtful whether it will be given its due merit. Nevertheless, Souto’s

work is also victim of these echoes because it shows a certain servitude to the theoretical hypotheses on which her account is based. Although it is a work which intends to escape from the structuralism inherent in social history according to which the structures determine – to use an enigmatic word – the interests and actions of the social actors, and although, by using the concept of experience of the past mobilization or of perception of the future political opportunities, the work comes close to more elaborate theories of collective action, it does not completely break with the dichotomous interpretation between structure and action that still reverberates with the echo of social history.

In other words, on ending as enriching a work as Souto's, you are left with the doubt of how, according to its author, the actors of the account perceived or interpreted the world on which they acted. Personally, it gives the impression that they do so from interests – derived from the structures – in such a way that the individuals and groups observed experience their situation from structured class positions, which represents a form of structuralist determinism which is, of course, nothing new in the forms of relating to the past from social history. This is a shame, because the work contains some allusions to another way of dealing with the experience and the perception which are moving toward post-social history and historical hermeneutics, and which would contribute to enriching an account which requires an explanation of why groups and individuals positioned economically in the same social classes perceived and experienced the past and present world so differently.

The onomastic and semantic analysis of the words prevailing in that Spain of the 1930s would undoubtedly allow us to explain in another way the divisions or alliances that characterized the working-class organizations of the period and which are at the core of Souto's work. However, this would represent breaking the old dichotomy between structure and action, positioning language at the centre of historical observation or considering it the constructor of the reality with which the social actors operate. It is true that, for many, a programme of this nature would represent a betrayal of a paradigm which at least fed the resistance in the face of positivism. Nevertheless, it is worth testing other forms of relating to the past, even if just to avoid the naturalizations that we make of it when we ingenuously use the concepts of social sciences as if they were not also historical categories which we can use to literally “reproduce” yesterday.

With her allusions to the enigmatic condition of words as determinant for the October events as “fascism” – which appears actively and passively in the documents researched –, Sandra Souto's work is also a starting point for those who are beginning to be more sensitive to the radical otherness of the language with which our ancestors made sense of their world, and less ingenuous with the use of a way of knowing that generally colonizes the past with stereotypes of ourselves.

*Jesús Izquierdo Martín*

BROCKETT, CHARLES D. *Political Movements and Violence in Central America*. [Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2005. xxi, 380 pp. £45.00; \$75.00. (Paper: £19.99; \$29.99). DOI: 50020859007053266

Anyone who has worked in Central America in the era of revolutionary politics and state violence has an archive of incidents that dramatize the central analytical question of this