

# Half of Spain Died: A Reappraisal of the Spanish Civil War

by Herbert L. Matthews

(Scribner's; 276 pp.; \$8.95)

## Stanley G. Payne

Despite his subtitle, the now retired *New York Times* correspondent has not given us a reappraisal either in the sense of presenting new information or uniquely new interpretations. Whatever personal information Matthews had to offer was included in his previous books, and he sets forth no notable new ideas or interpretations. This book seems to have stemmed from Matthews's desire simply to have a final go-around at the Civil War, whose trauma touched him deeply and left him permanently sensitive to the issues it raised.

During the past twelve years a new generation of scholarship has produced numerous studies dealing with aspects of the Spanish Republic, Civil War and the Franco regime, resulting in the first genuinely scholarly analysis of recent Spanish history. In preparation for this volume Matthews has read the more obvious of the new scholarly studies in English—though evidently not all of them—while apparently ignoring almost everything written in foreign languages, even Spanish.

After introducing his theme, he offers an historical chapter on "The Spaniards," which is by far the weakest part of the book. Matthews does not really know much about Spanish history and, even worse, seems to have made no effort to inform himself. There is no indication that he has even read the basic history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Spain by Raymond Carr. He asserts that "before 1700 . . . Spanish society was . . . without strong class distinctions." One would never guess that he was writing about the country that was wracked for a century by *libros verdes* of bitter disputes over family lineage, that was the scene of the greatest mania

for aristocratization in Western history, the land with the wealthiest, most powerful and overweening nobility in Western Europe.

Matthews quickly repeats the old shibboleth that "Africa begins at the Pyrenees," and this patronizing tone informs much of the book. There is no sense of the modern history of Spain, and little explanation of the modern structural and political problems of the country, other than that the rich oppress the poor and the Catholic Church abets this enterprise. This can hardly be called a serious analysis of the background of the Civil War. "Culturally and economically, Spain never recovered from the Inquisition," according to Matthews, which of course is completely contradicted by the fact that Spain reached its pinnacle of economic and cultural achievement nearly a century after the Inquisition was introduced.

According to Matthews's schema, the Spanish cannot be judged by the normal standards of Western man. They alternate between apathy and convulsion, and periodically "tear their country apart." When, one wonders, did this ever happen save in 1936? He stresses that the political killings in the Civil War were not the result of any "cruel streak in the Spanish character." Instead it is just because "Spanish attitudes toward violence and death are not like those of Anglo-Saxons or, for that matter, other Latins like the Italians."

Needless to say, Matthews never gets around to explaining the nature of such uniquely Spanish attitudes and how they differ from those of other Western nations, except to suggest vaguely that Spaniards of

both left and right tend to be fired by a religious fanaticism not found in other lands.

Rather than an explanation of supposed Spanish bloodiness, this is just bloody nonsense. If Matthews would have bothered to look into the other three revolutionary/counterrevolutionary civil wars of early twentieth-century Europe—those of Russia, Finland and Hungary—he would have found that the proportion of killings was in no way uniquely exaggerated in the Spanish case. In the Finnish instance this comparison is all the more telling because of the Finnish reputation for Protestantism, hard work and progressive North-Europeanism—presumably the characteristics opposite to the imputed Catholic fanaticism and the non-European nature of the Spanish people.

The main chapters of the book deal with the Civil War itself and are a rewrite of the standard pro-Republican account. It has been done better by others. Most of his facts are accurate, but there are also numerous exceptions, above all in his guesses at statistics. The numbers game in the Spanish War remains so completely muddled that it seems best to call a moratorium on new attempts at *histoire chiffrée*, unless one is referring to concrete documents whose authenticity is demonstrable.

Matthews testifies that he now understands the Civil War better than he did while covering it at first hand for the *New York Times*, and readily admits that no "black and white" account could possibly be accurate. Thus he admits a few touches of gray into his basically whitish account of the Republic and a few dim rays of light into his otherwise dark rendering of the Nationalists.

Matthews has not, however, changed his basic judgment of "the most important single reason for the victory of Generalissimo Franco," which was "German intervention." A case can be made for this position, but Matthews does not make it. He has apparently not read either of the two basic studies of German inter-

vention, and is thus unable to make any sort of systematic comparative analysis of the scope and effects of the assistance offered by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to the opposing sides.

Juan Negrín, the diehard wartime premier of the Republican government, reached a different conclusion. The only interesting new datum that Matthews presents in this book is a letter from Negrín dated September 5, 1952; in which the prime minister declares that the causes of the Republican defeat "I held, and still hold, as due more than to the shortage of armaments, to our incommensurable incompetence, to our lack of morale, to the intrigues, jealousies and divisions that corrupted the rear, and last, but definitely not least, to our immense cowardice. When I say 'our' I point, of course, not to the brave who fought to the death or survived after all sorts of ordeals, nor to the poor, hungering and starving civilians. I mean 'we,' the irresponsible leaders. . . ."

The concluding brief chapter on Spain under Franco is not up to the level of his earlier book *The Yoke and the Arrows* (1956), which dealt with the first fifteen years of Franco's rule. Spain has changed much more in the last fifteen years than in the fifteen years before them. Matthews's judgment that in the economic sphere "Spain has progressed little" compared with the rest of Western Europe can be no more than a half-truth, since at its own level the country has kept proportionate pace with, for example, the rapid Italian economic growth of the last two decades. During the 1960's only Japan had a higher proportionate rate of industrial expansion, but you would never guess it from Matthews's account.

This book was evidently written as a final summing up by one of the leading journalistic veterans of the Spanish Civil War. It can be appreciated as the personal testimony of a committed man, but not as an objective statement on the history of Spain.

## The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War by Robert James Maddox

(Princeton University Press; 169 pp.; \$7.95)

## New Left Diplomatic Histories and Historians by Joseph M. Siracusa

(Kennikat Press; 138 pp.; \$6.95)

## The Question of Imperialism by Benjamin J. Cohen

(Basic Books; 280 pp.; \$8.95)

## Imperialism and Revolution by Bernard S. Morris

(Indiana University Press; 81 pp.; \$1.95 [paper])

## Thomas N. Thompson

Much of the recent enthusiasm for radical revisionist writing on American foreign policy stems from frustration and anger over an inability to explain (or to end) U.S. intervention in Indochina. Yet, while the revisionists insisted that U.S. foreign policy has been characterized by a relentless selfishness, much of the radical argument itself has been lost in the passionate rhetoric. Now Robert James Maddox, in *The New Left and the Origins of the Cold War*, has charged that much of that same revisionist writing is the product of distortion and should never have been accepted as widely as it apparently was. Maddox, it should be noted, is no counterrevisionist in the usual sense.

A McGovern supporter, Maddox was involved in the first teach-ins at Michigan State University and has published in anarchist journals. This broadside against leftist writers who he says have cheated in one way or another is aimed at William A. Williams, D.F. Fleming, Gar Alperowicz, David Horowitz, Gabriel Kolko, Diane Clemens and Lloyd Gardner.

In chapters directed at one major

work by each of the seven Maddox charges that "these books are without exception based upon pervasive misusages of the source materials. Although frequency varies from volume to volume, even the best fails to attain the most flexible definition of scholarship."

Not surprisingly, Maddox's book has brought a flood of rebuttals and counterr rebuttals. In reply to Maddox, Gabriel Kolko has suggested a cold-warrior conspiracy to "get" the revisionists. Much has been made of David Horowitz's contention that there is a personal vendetta motivating Maddox's work. A final charge has been leveled against the publisher of the book, Princeton University Press, for not including in the book replies from the scholars attacked.

Such criticisms are beside the point. The purest motives would not excuse distortions on Maddox's part, nor would any motive render untrue what is true. One hopes Maddox will eventually make a public reply to these countercharges. Meanwhile, it is worth examining the substance of these controversial 169 pages.