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## Forgotten teachers

El Pais Spain | **BENJAMÍN PRADO**

The dean of Madrid's Complutense University, Carlos Berzosa, has just announced a series of commemorative events in homage to those members of the institution's academic staff who were victimized during the Civil War by General Franco's forces, and who suffered over the course of the 40 years of dictatorship that followed. While there is still time to capture their stories, a book is also to be published detailing the lives of these men and women with the aim of establishing a definitive record of their achievements.

Doubtless the usual voices will dismiss this initiative as both unnecessary and divisive. But for the rest of us, who believe that memory is the only fuel able to power the wheels of justice and truth, it will be interpreted as a way to save that fragile window which is constantly under threat, and which some would convert into a mirror that retrieves the here and now, but which does nothing to allow us to see the past, thus making it invisible. To those who doubt what I say, the University of Leipzig has just published the results of research that show that of the many books on contemporary Spanish history, the space dedicated to the Second Republic, the Civil War and the four decades of tyranny that followed make up just six percent of the total. There it is: 44 years can be reduced to virtually nothing.

Historian Francisco Moreno Valero, in his *La depuración del magisterio nacional* (The cleansing of Spain's academe) cites the cases of more than 60,000 teachers who suffered repression, or had to go into hiding from 1939. The witchhunt for Republican academics began as soon as the war started. To cite just one example, the celebrated playwright and poet Francisco García Lorca was murdered along with teacher Dióscoro Galindo González in Granada on August 18, 1936. From Burgos, which was the headquarters of the military uprising, the bulletins published by the Cultural and Education Commission, headed by poet and playwright José María Pemán, was constantly haranguing the so-called Public Education Cleansing Committees in the following terms: "It is vital to guarantee the Spanish people, with their weapons in hand and prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, that never again will we tolerate, and much less protect or subsidize, those who try to poison the popular soul. The individuals who make up these revolutionary hordes, and whose excesses are the cause of so much concern, are quite simply the spiritual children of teachers and professors who, through institutions such as so-called Free Education, created generations of the uneducated and anarchic."

Soon after, Franco's forces created Provincial Commissions that required all teachers to undergo a cleansing that would establish their political tendencies, and allow those who passed the test to continue working: they were asked, as Moreno Valero notes in his study, to first of all reveal the names and whereabouts of any left-wing colleagues, and secondly, to confirm "what you were doing before July 18 (the date of the military uprising in 1936), what your response to the uprising was, along with your political and trades union affiliation, and what your daily activity was." These declarations needed to be accompanied by statements from their local mayor, priest, and the Civil Guard.

In the case of university teaching staff, the persecution followed the same process. Of the 600 professors in the country before the military coup, only half survived the academic purges against them. The rebels were not content to simply remove teachers from their posts - among them Gregorio Marañón - as the Republican government had done at the start of the war. Some professors were singled out for assassination, such as the dean of Oviedo University, Leopoldo Alas Argüelles, the son of writer Clarín - and whom one supporter of the falange (Spanish fascists) bragged he had killed "to make up for the blasphemies that his father had written in *La Regenta*." The dean of Granada University, Salvador Vila, a favorite student of Miguel Unamuno, along with the dean of Valencia University, Juan Peset Aleixandre, suffered the same fate. To remember is to progress, while forgetting is a province of the realm of lies.

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