

P15/36

Spain

**The Elections
of February 16th
1936**

S P A I N

THE ELECTIONS OF FEBRUARY 16, 1936

Information supplied by the
Secretariat of the Spanish Parliament

NUMBER OF VOTES OBTAINED

Parties of the Left and Basque Nationalists	4,838,449
Parties of the Centre	449,320
Parties of the Right	3,996,931

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Spain
Parliament
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NUMBER OF DEPUTIES

Republican and Workers' Parties:

Socialists	89
Republican Left	84
Republican Union	37
Catalonian Esquerra	36
Communists	16
Basque Nationalists	10
Marxist Unification Block (Trotskyists) ..	1
Syndicalists	1
Federalists	1
Left Independents	2

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Parties of the Right:

Monarchists	12
Catalonian Lliga	12
C.E.D.A. (Sr. Gil Robles' Party)	87
Agrarian Party	11
Traditionalists	10

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THE TRUE FACTS ABOUT THE VOTING

The following article by Mr. John H. Humphreys appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* on December 28, 1936:

“General Franco’s so-called ‘National Government’ in a manifesto advertised in the English press, claimed that, although in the Spanish election the Left gained a large majority in seats, nevertheless, the Right polled more votes than the Left. It is instructive and perhaps a warning that an unfair system of election should have been named as the first of the justifications put forward for the armed rebellion. The general election was certainly one of the events that led to the civil war. It is important to examine what took place, and not merely because of the historic consequences of the election. The facts have some bearing on the armistice proposals of the French and British Governments; they may be of value in any resulting discussions on the future of government in Spain.

In considering the Spanish election two points should be borne in mind. First, the elections were not ‘made’ by the present Government; the Prime Minister was Señor Portela, a representative of the Centre. Secondly, the method of election was not new; it was of old standing; its unfairness was understood; both parties, Right and Left, must bear the blame for maintaining it, for reform had been proposed; probably both preferred the gamble and the possibility of an overwhelming victory. In any case, the Spanish Government, like the British Government, was duly elected in accordance with the existing law, fair or unfair.

What, then, was the method of election? Each constituency returned several members, but the electors were entitled to vote only for a ‘limited’ number of candidates—that is, for less than the full number of members to be elected. Madrid elected seventeen and the electors were entitled to vote for thirteen; Barcelona elected twenty and the electors could vote for sixteen. The party or combination of parties which obtained a majority of the votes could in Madrid win thirteen seats, and the largest minority, even if nearly equal to the majority, could win only four. There are other details which do not affect the main principle.

The Popular Front

It was the method of election that gave birth to the Popular Front. The Left parties knew that by presenting a joint list of candidates they might secure the special advantage which the law conferred upon a majority. Everywhere joint lists were arranged. In Madrid the list of thirteen comprised five Left Liberals (including Señor Azaña), seven Socialists (including Señor Caballero), and one Communist. The Communists were allotted one candidate out of thirteen, an indication that they were, even in Madrid, a

small party. The formation of a Popular Front led to the formation of Right lists, combinations that included Conservatives of different types, Monarchist and Republican, and also, in a large number of districts, candidates belonging to Centre parties.

In Madrid the result, taking the votes polled by the highest candidate on each list, was as follows :

	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Seats</i>
Popular Front	225,442	13
Right	187,434	4

The Popular Front secured the great advantage which fell to the majority; in Barcelona, similarly, it gained sixteen seats out of the twenty. There are no means of ascertaining the separate strengths of Liberals, Socialists, or Communists, or of the diverse elements of the Right combinations. In Catalonia the Right list was formed principally from the Catalan League. There were in addition a considerable number of constituencies in which there were lists of candidates, Centre parties, which were not affiliated with the main groups.

The Election Result

The 'definitive results' published in *El Sol* on March 3, 1936, gave fairly complete figures for the principal opposing lists, but for the reasons stated the votes for the Right and Centre cannot be shown separately. The election result for the country as a whole was, in round figures, as follows:

PARTY	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Seats</i>
Popular Front	4,540,000	265
*Right and Centre	4,300,000	192

(*It should be noted that this included Catalan League of the Right, with 400,000 votes.)

The voting for the two groups was nearly equal. The Basque Nationalists, 130,000 in number, are also sometimes grouped with the Right, but it seems that they should rather be added to the Left, since their leader has become a member of Caballero's Government. On the other hand, the Right total does not include any votes cast for candidates of the Centre, who were presented in independent lists. These lists elected only seven deputies; for the most part the votes for these lists had no effective value. The full figures are not available, but if they were it would be a moot point to which side, if any, they would belong, as Centre candidates were in some constituencies allied with the Left and not with the Right. The general conclusion on the figures available is that the two main parties or coalitions were very equally supported among the electorate, but that the balance was in favour of the Left. Certainly, there was no majority for armed rebellion.

Spain Not Communist

The facts which an analysis of the election discloses are of considerable importance. In the first place, Spain is neither Communist nor Fascist; these groups had but few candidates; in a Chamber of 473 members there were only 15 Communists. Secondly, it seems clear, both from this and from preceding elections, that what Spain desired was Republican Government, a Government of the Left Centre. Thirdly, the electoral law of Spain promoted the artificial division of Spain into two mutually hostile political armies, and this gravely intensified the bitterness already existing between the various groups. The two-party system led not to a National Government but to civil war. Fourthly, the inclusion of the Communists in the Popular Front, although they formed so small a part of it, has made possible the grossest misrepresentations both in Spain and in Great Britain of the Popular Front Government. But it must be added that it would seem that the Communists, being active, have, since the election, exercised an undue share of influence."

A COMMENTARY BY "THE TIMES"

With the title "A Left Turn in Spain," *The Times*, in its issue of February 18, 1936, makes the following comments on the Spanish elections:

"The pendulum has again swung in Spain. Though the results of Sunday's poll may not be completely known for several days, the Left are clearly in the ascendant, and may have 250 out of the 473 Deputies in the Cortes. In Catalonia the victory of the Left is established, and the question of autonomy is bound to be once more raised, whatever the results elsewhere: already a new Governor-General has been appointed, and the old municipal council has resumed its functions. The big towns—Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao among them—have gone to the Left, and victory in the towns generally presages victory in the country. Señor GIL ROBLES, the rising hope of Spanish Conservatives, secured election in Madrid only on a minority list. The veteran Radical statesman, Señor LERROUX, has been rejected by two constituencies. Though the poll was generally conducted in exemplary manner, feelings gave way to some extent yesterday as the success of the Left became manifest. In the demonstrations which followed, the open fraternisation of shock police with the demonstrators will not escape notice. The Socialist headquarters have counselled the rank and file to keep their exuberance from running into violent channels; and this heartening advice may make the proclamation of a 'state of alarm' a precautionary rather than a necessary measure.

"The PRESIDENT's course of action will doubtless depend on the precise balance of parties in the new Cortes. If the Left secures a

reasonably large majority over all others, he could hardly do other than invite Señor AZAÑA to form a Government. Señor AZAÑA would be no stranger to the office of Prime Minister, and he has shown a conspicuous power of decision, but the ruthless suppression of the peasant revolt at Casas Viejas in his administration still rankles even among those who were his associates for the purpose of Sunday's election. If there is to be a Prime Minister from the Left, Señor AZAÑA is marked out as the man. But Right and Left may be fairly evenly balanced in the Cortes, and in that event there would be a case for continuing Señor PORTELA VALLADARES as Prime Minister. The Centre Party, which he hastily wedged in, a few weeks ago, between the big coalitions of Left and Right, is small in numbers, but may be the key of the Parliamentary situation.

“Whatever the final results, there is no one in this country who will not wish Spain well. In recent years she has been sorely harassed, but there is no reason why she should not be as contented and prosperous a country as any on the Continent. From the mountain fastnesses of Galicia to the smiling plains of Murcia, and from the crowded harbour of Barcelona to the fertile vineyards of Jerez, the traveller sees evidence of Nature's bounty, and of a genial and gifted people. As Señor GIL ROBLES has said, Spain is not troubled by 'grave problems of foreign policy'—though such problems might themselves have imposed a certain discipline and unity. She is fortunate in having frontiers clearly drawn on three sides by Nature. Like Eden, she is watered by five great rivers, and she produces fruits which would have tempted Eve. The magnificence of her scenery, the splendour of her architecture, and the memory of her past could draw visitors from the uttermost parts of the earth. Spain needs only the will to work the democracy which at great trouble she has fashioned. If the minority will acquiesce for the time being in the decision of the majority, and the majority respect the rights of the minority—if, in other words, Spaniards will in the last resort put Spain before party—a bright future lies before the country.”

SPEECH BY SENOR PORTELA VALLADARES

There can be no more authoritative witness to the legality of the February elections than that of Sr. Portela Valladares, who was Prime Minister at the time, and who, as such, handed over the functions of power to the victorious Popular Front.

Señor Portela Valladares, a great proprietor and a Governor under the Monarchy, is a man of conservative tendencies. When the rebellion broke out, he left Spain and went abroad, where he has stayed for a whole year

apart from the Spanish struggle. In September, 1937, he returned to Spain and placed himself at the orders of the Government. On October 1 he was present in the opening session of the Parliament which was opened in accordance with the Constitution. We reproduce here the speech made by Señor Portela Valladares on that occasion.

**SPEECH MADE BY SENOR PORTELA VALLADARES AT THE
OPENING OF THE SPANISH CORTES, IN VALENCIA, ON THE
1st OCTOBER, 1937**

Gentlemen, deputies: The present moments are ones of solemnity and gravity; solemnity and gravity by which our minds cannot but be moved. I realise I have little right to speak here. Therefore I will speak from my heart. This Parliament is the very *raison d'etre* of the Republic; it is the title of the life of Spain. As my first duty towards you, towards Spain and towards the world I must assure you of the legitimacy of your powers. And in doing so I have the following reasons: the Government presided over by me was defeated at the election held by it. That is my testimony to be recorded in the Diary of Sessions and to remain forever written in the life of Spain. Naturally, in reviewing what happened at that time I must point out something that at the time I did not point out. I did not want to mention it before, because it might have appeared disloyal to the country.

I handed over the Government to the People's Front because I was convinced of the latter's triumph, as were also the extreme Conservatives. In connection with the reproofs directed at me at that time for our defeat I must say that I do not lapse now, nor have I ever lapsed, into nonsense. I resigned on February 19. The ministers over whom I presided agreed with me that it was our duty to transfer power immediately, handing over the organs of Government in their entirety. In a democratic régime a Government which has not the confidence of the House has no *raison d'etre*, and, when the people express their voice, as happened then, only the people are right in their decision.

For me to continue in the seat of Government it was necessary to declare martial law. We had to resign or else declare martial law. We signed the decree of resignation, and I handed it over to my successor. To have declared martial law in those circumstances would have meant opening the door treacherously to a clandestine and hidden power. (Applause.)

There may be ideological differences between us, but I wish to affirm here and now my loyalty to the Government. In circumstances such as the present I would always give my vote to whoever was in the seat of Government. Among other reasons because the Government represents the Staff Headquarters of the country at war.

I am confident in the future. I have come here to fulfil a duty and I have trusted in the gallantry of the Spaniards. And I have not been deceived. And standing among you now I tell you that the conviction is growing abroad that the Government of the Republic must win. Without a Republican Government there can be no Spain. And I declare to you, at the same time, that I have been astounded, I have been amazed by this activity, this fervour that I have observed among you.

Allow me, lastly, to dedicate a sincere tribute to the martyrs of my country, Galicia: those brave men who are still fighting in the mountains and fulfilling their duty. I feel, at the same time, that a great change favourable to you is taking place abroad. We are on the eve of an evolution. We cannot ask the governments to make this change quickly. First they must obtain the confidence of their peoples. I am convinced that when the generous words with which the Premier ended his speech are known, the atmosphere will be still better. Peace for all the Spaniards, peace in order to build up a new Spain, on a basis of this parliament. To-day has given me a great and profound satisfaction to have been with you and to see our dear Spain on the threshold of a profound and serious reconstruction. (Great applause.)

SPANISH GOVERNMENT SINCE FEBRUARY 19, 1936

New Government formed as a result of the elections on *February 19, 1936*. The Cabinet was composed of Republicans—nine members of Izquierda Republicana, and three of Union Republicana, with a non-political general at the War Office, and without the participation of the Socialists.

On *July 19*, after the outbreak of the military revolt, the Government resigned and a new one, still containing no Socialists, was set up under Señor Giral, a Left Republican, and member of the previous Government. This was recognised as the Government by all parts of Spain not under control of the rebel generals.

In formal confirmation of this, the Spanish Supreme Court of Justice issued on *August 4* a document calling on judges and magistrates throughout Spain to remember that the acts of Government supporters are legal and those of the rebels illegal everywhere.

On *September 4* the Prime Minister resigned and was succeeded by Señor Caballero who also took the portfolio of War. Six of the Ministers were Socialists. Two, those of Agriculture and Public Instruction, were Communists, one was a Basque Nationalist, one belonged to the Catalan Esquerra, one to the Union Republicana, and one to the Izquierda Republicana.

On *October 16* reorganisation in view of the attack on Madrid, and the necessity of the unification of military command. The Prime Minister was appointed Supreme Chief of the military forces, and the Foreign Minister

(Señor Julio del Vayo), General Commissioner for War. The appointments aimed at the exercise of control of a political-social character over the Militia and armed forces, and to secure co-operation between them.

On *November 5*, the Cabinet was reorganised, and four Ministers representing the C.N.T. were included. They were Señora Montseny, Health; Señor Peyro, Industry; Señor Lopez, Commerce; and Señor Oliver, Justice.

A Propaganda Ministry was set up, headed by Señor Espla, a Left Republican. Señor de Gracia, the former Minister of Commerce and Industry, was appointed Minister of Labour.

Señor Aiguade, of the Catalan Esquerra, became Minister without portfolio.

The Cabinet became fully representative of the Frente Popular.

November 7, the Government withdrew to Valencia, and a Junta under General Miaja took over command in Madrid. It contained a delegate of the Government, a Socialist, and sixteen delegates of the Unions, *i.e.*, two Communists, two Unified Marxists (P.O.U.M.), and two Syndicalists (C.N.T.), two Socialists, two Left Republicans, two Republican Union Party men, two from the Free Youth Party, and two Syndicalists.

On *May 17, 1937*, the Largo Caballero Government fell. Dr. Juan Negrin, the famous biologist, a moderate Socialist, formed a new Cabinet, in which there were no members of the Socialist Left (Largo Caballero's followers), and no representatives of Anarchism (F.A.I.), Syndicalists (C.N.T.), or Trotskyists (P.O.U.M.) (The New Cabinet is formed by three Socialists, one Left Republican, one Conservative Republican, one representative of the Catalan Left, two Communists, and one Basque Catholic.)

Although the Socialist Left, the C.N.T. and the F.A.I. are not included in the Government, they have agreed to support it, or at least to do nothing to hinder its labours.

The programme of the new Government can be summed up under the two following heads: (1) a strong military discipline and greater order in the rear, with the consequent intention of doing away with the demoralising forces of extremism; (2) Reorganisation of the civil service and of the Army; centralising all military matters, whether of air, land or sea, in the hands of the Minister of National Defence, with the firm aim of winning the war as speedily as possible.

To emphasise his intention of supporting Justice free from all spirit of persecution and giving guarantees to every section of the nation's life, the new Prime Minister handed the portfolio of Justice to the Roman Catholic, Señor Irujo.

