

Spain back to the barricades over Civil War archive

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From David Sharrock in Madrid

THE right-wing Mayor of Salamanca has taken the extraordinary step of barricading the city's Civil War archive to thwart a decision by Spain's Socialist Government to return documents that General Franco seized from Catalonia.

Julián Lanzarote, whose city was Franco's first military headquarters, acted within hours of an announcement by Carmen Calvo, the Culture Minister, that the Government would bow to Catalonia's long-standing demand for the restoration of 300,000 files and 1,000 photographs seized by Franco's secret police when Barcelona fell in 1939.

The barricades have gone up around the National Archive of the Civil War in Salamanca — which is in Castille y León province — after the city refused to comply with a government order to return the documents.

Metal fencing now encloses the elegant building in the historic quarter of Salamanca.

After more than 20 years of controversy, Señora Calvo ruled that the documents — including personal letters, files and anti-Franco propaganda — had been stolen from Catalonia's unions, political parties and regional government buildings.

The opposition Popular Party, which controls Salamanca, is strongly opposed to the return of the papers. It argues that the break-up of the archive would be another step towards the division of Spain into mini-nationalist states.

"Not a single document will leave," Señor Lanzarote said, as workers finished putting up the barriers around the national archive in Salamanca.

Señor Lanzarote sought to suggest that the barriers had been erected in preparation for building work, but they have left only a metre-wide entrance to the elegant building, thereby making it impossible for large vehicles to approach and load the 507 boxes containing the papers from Catalonia.

The barricades may be largely symbolic, but the mayor's party has also announced a legal battle to preserve the unity of the archive, which is expected to take at least three years.

Opponents of the minority Socialist Government accuse it of making concessions to Catalan nationalists in return for their continuing support.

Jesús Caldera, the Labour Minister and a close ally of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the Prime Minister, had said previously that the papers would leave the city only “over my dead body”.

The documents contain information about the nationalists’ crusade against freemasons, communists, republicans and anarchists, all of whom opposed Franco. His revolt against the Spanish Republic prevailed and a democratically elected left-wing government was ousted after a three-year war. In its place, a right-wing military dictatorship was installed, which lasted until a few years after Franco’s death in 1975.

The papers in the archive were used to hunt down potential dissidents. A special unit accompanied Franco’s frontline troops, seizing republican administrative buildings and looting them for documents that might prove useful for future repression. The papers were sent to Salamanca for filing.

The decision to return the documents is consistent with the Government’s decision to set up another commission to study a compensation plan for victims of Franco’s repression. It is likely to include help with financing exhumations from mass graves and reburials, retribution payments and revising the sentences of people wrongly accused of crimes.

Nota: See *Archive Cultures Bulletin n1 and n2* at main page.

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