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Radicalisation, community and the politics of protest in the Spanish Second Republic, Asturias 1931-1934[*]

In the early hours of 5 October 1934, the sound of dynamite exploding signalled the beginning of a revolutionary insurrection in the coal valleys of the northern Spanish region of Asturias. For two weeks revolutionary militias fought government forces while committees formed by local leftist politicians and union leaders reorganised life behind the lines, requisitioning and distributing food, restructuring medical services, banning money and producing self-consciously revolutionary propaganda. The movement, planned by the socialist leadership in Madrid, was intended to be national, but only in Asturias did it lead to a large-scale revolutionary insurrection during which approximately 2,000 died.[1] The insurrection was a crucial event in the evolution of the Second Republic (1931-1936) and a milestone in the polarisation of Spanish society prior to the Civil War (1936-1939). The insurrection elicited international outcry, investigative trips and solidarity campaigns in response to the repressive measures undertaken by the government to suppress the insurrection. The most important revolution in Western Europe since the Paris Commune, the Asturian insurrection was also the most violent and sustained outburst of protest in the specific juncture of 1934—including the February crisis which threatened the French Third Republic, and a short-lived insurrection by the Austrian socialists in a dark decade for the European left.

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[1] The main accounts of the insurrection date from the 1970s and 1980s. See A. Shubert, *The Road to Revolution in Spain. The Coal Miners of Asturias 1860-1934* (Urbana/Chicago, 1987); D. Ruiz, *Insurrección defensiva y revolución obrera: el octubre español de 1934* (Barcelona, 1988) and P.I. Taibo II's reedited 1978 account *Asturias, octubre 1934* (Barcelona, 2013).

This article analyses political practice and the lived experience of the Asturian coalfields prior to October 1934 in order to provide a new explanation as to why the Asturian insurrection exploded with such force, rethink the process of leftist radicalisation which is central to understandings of the Second Republic and provide a more nuanced approach to the study of democracy and political practice in the Second Republic.[2] In doing so, the article sheds new light on processes of polarisation in interwar Europe more widely. Nevertheless, recent approaches to the interwar period have added valuable insight into political culture and experiences of modernity, interrelated dynamic of left-right mobilisation, and of re-evaluating patterns of violence and its relationship to policing the space of the metropolis.[3] This article emphasises the need to re-evaluate and refocus attention on the industrial working class—particularly beyond capital cities—due to the centrality of the working class to the struggles of the interwar period and socio-political conflicts more broadly.[4]

While the emphasis is on working class politics, this article avoids conceptualising local society in Asturias through the prism of the trade unions. Trade union policy and practices fail to provide an adequate overall explanation of the process of radicalisation; in fact a significant breach opened between the socialist mining trade union and the rank-and-file, and it is more important to understand the trade union as dynamically interacting with

[2] Recent studies of the Republic, often identified with a 'revisionist' turn, have shifted towards being more critical of the socialists' democratic credentials and emphasising 'intransigence', though often from a relatively narrow and traditional political focus. E.g. F. del Rey, ed., *Palabras como puños. La intransigencia política en la Segunda República española* (Madrid, 2011); S. Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933-1936. The origins of the Civil War* (New Haven, CT/London, 2006). A more nuanced approach to democracy in T. Buchanan, 'Anti-fascism and Democracy in the 1930s', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No. 1 (2002), pp. 39-57.

[3] On interrelated dynamics, discursive strategies and overlap between right and left, e.g. J. Wardhaugh, *In pursuit of the people. Political Culture in France, 1934-1939* (Basingstoke, 2009); T. Brown, *Weimar Radicals. Nazis and Communists between Authenticity and Performance* (Oxford/New York 2009). There has been a renewed interest in political violence recently e.g. C. Millington and K. Passmore, eds, *Political Violence and Democracy in Western Europe* (Basingstoke, 2015); D. Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933. Battle for the Streets and Fears of Civil War* (Oxford/New York, 2009) and also in conflict, the rise of paramilitarism and 'brutalisation' after the First World War. R. Gerwarth and J. Horne, eds, *War in Peace. Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War* (Oxford, 2012).

[4] A recent call for a new history of the working class in the Weimar Republic with an emphasis on political practice and how historical actors understood and acted in accordance with their understanding of their context in J. Häberlen, 'Scope for Agency and Political Options. The German Working-Class Movement and the Rise of Nazism', *Politics, Religion and Ideology*, Vol. 4 No. 3 (2013), pp. 377-94.

the grassroots.[5] It is through analysis of the coal valleys using the concept of community that radicalism can be understood, both in terms of intra-communal, locally-rooted struggles and conflicts over the claim to represent and embody the local community.

Scholars have long noted the geographically rootedness of radical politics, from 'Little Moscows' to 'Red Cities'.[6] In Spain, localities have been used as case studies for processes of mobilisation and socio-political conflict.[7] Some have conceptualised community as a significant factor. Ealham attributes the success of the anarchist CNT (Confederación General del Trabajo: National Confederation of Labour) success in Barcelona to its close association with neighbourhood struggles, needs and interests, while Radcliffe examined the Asturian port city of Gijón in order to understand the process of polarisation which culminated in the Civil War, which she conceptualised in terms of a hegemonic struggle. The struggle for political power expressed through collective action was thus rooted in communities articulated around particular neighbourhoods—but also axes such as gender.[8] Taking a similar approach, this article develops the mobilising power of community identity in terms of conflict emerging over defining the local community and how internal dynamics and external developments shaped this. Rather than reifying community or considering it to

[5] As richly undertaken recently by James in his comparative analysis of the discursive projects of trade unions to build collective identities in the Ruhr and south Wales. L. James, *The politics of identity and civil society in Britain and Germany. Miners in the Ruhr and south Wales, 1890-1926* (Manchester/New York, 2008).
[6] S. Macintyre, *Little Moscows: Communism and Working Class Militancy in Interwar Britain* (London, 1980). There is a large literature on 'red cities'—the intersection of neighbourhood, place and left-wing politics, including municipal socialism, e.g. J. Merriman, *The Red City: Limoges and the French Nineteenth Century* (New York/Oxford, 1985); A. Smith, ed., *Red Barcelona. Social Protest and Labour Mobilization in the Twentieth Century* (London/New York, 2002); T. Kaplan, *Red City, Blue Period. Social Movements in Picasso's Barcelona* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1992); H. Gruber, *Red Vienna. Experiment in Working Class Culture, 1919-1934* (New York, 1991). In terms of neighbourhoods e.g. T. Stovall, *The Rise of the Parisian Red Belt* (Berkeley, 1990); P. Swett, *Neighbors and Enemies. The Culture of Radicalism in Berlin, 1929-1933* (Cambridge, 2004).
[7] E.g. S. Juliá, *Madrid, 1931-1934. De la fiesta popular a la lucha de clases* (Madrid, 1984); F. del Rey, *Paisanos en lucha. Exclusión política y violencia en la Segunda República española* (Madrid, 2008); C. Gil Andrés, *Echarse a la calle. Amotinados, huelguistas y revolucionario (La Rioja, 1890-1936)* (Zaragoza, 2000). The fruits of these studies have been consolidated into two recent historical overviews of protest in Spain: R. Cruz, *Protestar en España, 1900-2013* (Madrid, 2015) and J.S. Pérez Garzón, *Contra el poder. Conflictos y movimientos sociales en la historia de España. De la prehistoria al tiempo presente* (Granada, 2015).
[8] C. Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona 1898–1937* (London/New York, 2005); P. Radcliff, *From Mobilization to Civil War. The Politics of Polarization in the Spanish city of Gijón, 1900-1937* (Cambridge/New York/Melbourne, 1996).

emanate from a particular social structure, the approach takes community as a double-edged sword, inherently inclusive and exclusive. Barron's recent study of the Durham coalfields during the 1926 general strike examines how different factors that formed the basis of collective identities overlapped and intersected to construct a more nuanced and complex picture of the relationship between class and community.[9] The emphasis is thus on the practice and meaning of politics at local level in the Asturian coalfields, rather than on longer-term explanations that emphasise social structures. Even as concerns were local, these struggles and worries were informed by an understanding of the national and wider international context.

Radicalisation is a concept central to understanding the evolution of the Republic. This has most commonly been depicted in terms of a chain reaction in which grassroots frustration at the unfulfilled promises of the Second Republic funnelled up through the socialist movement and steered the thinking and actions of the veteran socialist leader Largo Caballero, whose increasingly revolutionary rhetoric led him to gain control of the UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores: General Union of Workers) in early 1934.[10] The idea of radicalisation, without which no history of the Second Republic would be complete, has become more of a descriptive label and less of an analytical tool.[11] Despite appeals since the 1970s for the process to be analysed in more depth, little has been done to engage with the concept or the process in a rigorous manner, while diverging interpretations of

[9] H. Barron, *The 1926 Miners' Lockout. Meanings of Community in the Durham Coalfield* (Oxford, 2009).
[10] See J. Aróstegui, *Largo Caballero. El tesón y la quimera* (Barcelona, 2013), p. 297; A. de Blas Guerrero, *El socialismo radical en la II República* (Madrid, 1978), 20. See also Payne, *Collapse*, pp. 53-4. For Largo Caballero responding to the grassroots see, for example, P. Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War. Reform, Reaction and Revolution in the Second Republic* (London/New York, 1978), pp. 17, 21; N. Townson, *The Crisis of Democracy in Spain. Centrist Politics under the Spanish Second Republic* (Brighton/Portland, 2000), p. 175.
[11] S. Juliá, *La izquierda del PSOE (1935-1936)* (Madrid, 1977), p. 1. More recently, see Payne, *Collapse*, p. 52.

radicalisation—including as a shift to left or convergence with the Communist Party—have emerged.[12]

The concept of radicalisation needs to be rethought and reclaimed for analytical purposes, rather than reduced to a descriptive label. As a term, radicalism is frequently taken for granted under theorised. It is not uncommon for its etymological origin of proceeding to the roots to be cited and also its traditional association with the left.[13] Associated with the idea of challenge, it often implies going beyond the 'mainstream' towards a 'vision of a better world' and how this is achieved.[14] More broadly, to be radical is to challenge. But radicalism as Calhoun notes, is not a 'stable' ideological position.[15] It was not the same to be a 'radical' in nineteenth-century France demanding an expansion of political space and representation to radicalisation as the contemporary concerns around journey by which individuals embrace Islamic fundamentalism.[16] In this article, radicalisation is a dynamic and reactive process often produced by contact and conflict between individuals and groups in which there is a shift towards a more militant, confrontational mode and style of politics.[17] Radicalism is thus contextually rooted; this definition is shaped by the violent, polarising politics of the interwar

[12] J.M. Macarro Vera, 'Causas de la radicalización socialista en la II República', *Revista de historia contemporánea*, 1 (1982), p. 222; S. Souto Kustrín,' Taking the Street: Workers' Youth Organizations and Political Conflict in the Spanish Second Republic', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 34 No. 2 (2004), pp. 132, 134. See also Preston, *Coming*, p. 2. Recently Aróstegui argued for a more nuanced approach. Aróstegui, *Largo*, pp. 302-3.

[13] E.g. A. Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right. The Future of Radical Politics* (Stanford, 1994), p. 1; P. McLaughlin, *Radicalism: A Philosophical Study* (Basingstoke/New York, 2012), p. 17.

[14] I. Kuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley/London, 2010), p. 2.

[15] C. Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism. Tradition, the Public Sphere and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements* (Chicago/London, 2012), p. 6.

[16] Recent studies of 'radicalisation' are very much rooted in the context of Western society in the twenty-first century in that it denotes Islamicist terrorism, even if the concept is unclear, as noted by M. Sedgwick, 'The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22.4 (2010), pp. 479-94 and P. R. Neumann, 'The trouble with radicalization', *International Affairs*, 89.4 (2013), pp. 873-93.

[17] This relational approach that emphasises dynamism follows a shift in studies of political violence towards 'relationalism'. See M. Emirbayer, 'Manifesto for a Relational Sociology', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103 No. 2 (1997), p. 289 and, e.g., E.Y. Alimi, L. Bosi and C. Demetriou, *The Dynamics of Radicalization. A Relational and Comparative Perspective* (New York/Oxford, 2015), though they conceive radicalisation as directly tied to violence. Bartlett and Miller, in contrast, define radicalisation as a process by which individuals shift from moderate to extreme views, but being radical does not necessarily imply violence. J. Bartlett and C. Miller, 'The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 24 No. 1 (2012), pp. 2-3.

period. And it is through the historicisation of radicalisation that new light can be shed on other historical processes of radicalisation.

The article begins with an examination of the nature of the communities of the Asturian coalfields at the beginning of the Republic and how conflict at local level emerged over religion and anticlericalism, sparked by the secularising Republican project. This, along with (politicised) concerns over the mining industry, prompted a shift towards a more militant attitude amongst workers at local level, to which the socialists—who were the main political force in the coalfields and who are the main subject of analysis—responded with an attempt to reclaim the label of 'radical', though without a change in actual political practice. This serves to underline the complexity of the radicalisation process, as argued further in the second section, which centres on the socialist mining union (SOMA: Sindicato de Obreros Mineros de Asturias), demonstrating that the union stimulated dissent and radicalism through its inability to ameliorate the conditions of its members in deteriorating economic circumstances. This is far removed from the traditional view of the socialist hierarchy radicalising into line with the grassroots. Even so, militant, confrontational attitudes did not mean the outright rejection of the Republic, but a more militant interpretation of the regime. The reverberations of Nazism's ascent to power in Germany reached the coalfields, where tensions increased in 1933 over the role and meaning of fascism. The third section argues that the identified eruption of fascism built on pre-existing divisions and anxieties in the coalfields, reshaping community-based struggles. The final section demonstrates that community defence was at the centre of protest in the coalfields in 1934 prior to the insurrection. The actions of the security forces and the protest at indignity and humiliation and in defence of the local community contributed to a radicalising dynamic, with the security forces unable to stem protest and mobilisation. Indeed, the spiral of police action—protest—crackdown only served to increase discontent which rather than centring on labour

issues, was directed at the government. Together, these factors provide an interpretation of the Asturian insurrection and the process of radicalisation that emphasises the politics and lived experience of the working class community.[18] This also advances a new approach of societal polarisation during the Second Republic, which is central to understanding the Spanish Civil War. Spain was far from the only nation-state riven by conflict, fragmentation and the challenge of radicalisation, but it would be the first to be subsumed into a civil war.[19]

I

The coalfields of central Asturias are one of the heartlands of Spanish industry and have an almost mythic status in the history of the Spanish left—not only for the revolutionary insurrection, but also the 'silent' strikes against the Francoist dictatorship in 1962.[20] Asturias thus forms part of a wider image of the mine worker as the archetype of the radical working class. More recent approaches to mine workers have rightly rejected this essentialised view of mine workers, however.[21] In terms of Asturias, the powerful image of industrialised valleys populated by a left-wing proletariat is not an entirely faithful representation of the coalfields as a whole, even if this was the way that the left itself imagined the coalfields. In fact, despite

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[18] I thus share a recent emphasis on the complexity and fluidity of political identities and attitudes towards the state in processes of protest and mobilisation. See, e.g., K. McDermott, 'Popular Resistance in Communist Czechoslovakia: The Plzeň Uprising, June 1953', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 19 Iss. 4 (2010), pp. 287-307.

[19] The context of the 1930s was very different to the break-up of the empires at the end of the First World War and the formation of new nation-states.

[20] For analysis of the mythologisation of 'red Asturias', see F. Erice, 'Entre el mito y la memoria histórica: las huelgas del 1962 y la tradición épica de la Asturias Roja', in R. Vega García, coord., *Hay una luz en Asturias…Las huelgas de 1962* (Gijón, 2012), pp. 413-36.

[21] Deconstruction of the 'radical miner' in D. Geary, 'The Myth of the Radical Miner', in S. Berger, A. Croll and N. LaPorte, eds, *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 43-64. Traditionally, the link between mine workers and radicalism was assumed, with scholars attempting to explain *why* miners were militant. The classic foundational text is C. Kerr and A. Siegel, 'The Interindustry Propensity to Strike—An International Comparison', in A. Kornhauser, R. Kubin and A. Ross, eds, *Industrial Conflict* (New York/Toronto/London, 1954), pp. 189-212. Criticism and alternative theories in G.V. Rimlinger, 'International Differences in the Strike Propensity of Coal Miners: Experience in Four Countries', *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 12 No. 3 (1959), pp. 389-405; M. Bulmer, 'Sociological Models of the Mining Community', *Sociological Review*, 23 (1975), pp. 61-92; P. K. Edwards, 'A critique of the Kerr-Siegel Hypothesis of Strikes and the Isolated Mass: A study of the falsification of sociological knowledge', *Sociological Review*, Vol. 25 Iss. 3 (1977), pp. 551-74.

this projection, community-based conflict fuelled the adoption of more radical political stances.

The Asturian coalfields were characterised by a combination of larger urban settlements clustered around the deep pits on the valley floors and smaller villages clinging to the steep valley sides. Coal mining was the dominant economic activity in the 1930s. In 1934, there were 27,596 mine workers in the province—the vast majority of whom worked in the central coalfields—divided amongst 900 mines. Women were banned from working inside the mines and the number working on the surface in the processing of coal was in decline, totalling only 651 women in 1934.[22] Coal was not the sole economic activity. The important local steel industry was located at the head of the two main valleys in Mieres and La Felguera. There were a number of small workshops and other industries in the urban centres, including a firebrick factory, in addition to small businesses and services. Subsistence agriculture and cattle-rearing was more prominent in the higher reaches of the mountainous interior. As a broad characterisation of the socioeconomic situation of the valley, 'coalfields' or 'mining valleys', thus simplifies the variation in local experience. There was no single mining experience. The term 'mine worker' covered a wide range of roles within the industry while the mines varied from deep pits in which hundreds worked to drift mines on the mountainsides worked by a handful of men. Yet, this variation did not preclude a strong self-image of the coalfields as populated by a left-wing proletariat.

The municipal elections of April 1931 that led to the proclamation of the Second Republic were a clear victory for the republican and socialist alliance in the Asturian coalfields. The results appeared to cement and confirm the prominence of left-wing culture, which had been propagated over the preceding thirty years by trade unions, political parties and cultural organisations in the coalfields. This left-wing culture was moulded through a

[22] *Estadística Minera y Metalúrgica de España*, 1934, pp. 180, 208-9, 469, 477.

dense network of cultural and political centres (*ateneos* and Casas del Pueblo), associations and trade unions.[23] With the proclamation of the Republic, the ranks of the two main mining unions, the socialist SOMA and anarchist and communist SUM (Sindicato Único de Mineros), swelled, reflecting their wider respective national federation (UGT) and confederation (CNT). The SUM claimed 9,000 members in June 1931 while SOMA membership almost doubled between 1930 and 1932, climbing from 38% of the near 30,000-strong workforce to 69%.[24] However, the SUM split in two over internal tensions in autumn 1931, diminishing the union's influence, with a number of militants moving to the SOMA.[25] Trade union and left-wing cultural institutions—along with bars—were at the heart of social life in the coalfields. The overarching left-wing culture based on shared values and expressed through a similar range of practices, such as solidarity through raising funds for strikers or collective expressions of identity on 1 May parades.[26]

Leftist hegemony did not mean that the coalfield communities were politically or socially homogenous. While a minority, the political right did exist and religion was a visible presence, despite the strong current of anticlericalism in the coalfields—as in the Spanish left more widely—and, as elsewhere, this would prove to be a major fault line in the coalfields. Catholicism was far from absent. Confessional schools set up by the mining companies formed an important part of local education provision in the mining valleys; over 5,000 children received their education at schools run by religious personnel during the 1932-3

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[23] See A. Mato Díaz, *La Atenas del Norte. Ateneos, sociedades culturales y bibliotecas populares en Asturias (1876-1937)* (Oviedo, 2008) and L. Arias González and M. J. García, *Los palacios obreros. Casas del Pueblo socialistas en Asturias (1902-1937)* (Oviedo, 2010). For Italian 'houses of the people', M. Kohn, *Radical Space. Building the House of the People* (Ithaca/London 2003).

[24] A. Barrio Alonso, *Anarquismo y anarcosindicalismo en Asturias (1890-1936)* (Madrid, 1988), 326; Shubert, *Revolution*, p. 142. The only full length study of the SUM is Ceferino Álvarez, *El Sindicato Único de Mineros de Asturias* (Oviedo, 2004).

[25] Ceferino Álvarez, , 'El Sindicato Único de Mineros de Asturias (SUM) 1922-1935', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie V, Historia Contemporánea*, 15 (2002), p. 296.

[26] See Uría for discussion of a 'radical culture'. J. Uría, 'Asturias 1920-1937, el espacio cultural comunista y la cultura de la izquierda: historia de un diálogo entre dos décadas', in F. Erice, coord., *Los comunistas en Asturias (1920-1982)* (Gijón, 1996), pp. 250-59. The historiography of the performance of collective cultural and political identities in the interwar period is extensive. For recent studies of France and Germany, see Wardhaugh, *Pursuit*, and N. Rossol, *Performing the Nation in Interwar Germany* (Basingstoke, 2010).

school year.[27] Mining companies had historically played an important role in shaping the rhythms of local society. Paternalist policies meant the construction of housing, transport, company shops, medical care and even water pumps and barracks for the Civil Guard.[28] These policies were uneven depending on the company and while there was clearly an effort to provide a minimum of services in the absence of a strongly articulated modern state, housing, education and infrastructure were inadequate for the needs of the local population.

Secular and anticlerical attitudes were given a powerful boost by the Second Republic, which was strongly associated with the promise of social justice, modernisation and reform by the crowds who feted it. Religion was identified with the old order—the monarchy and the forces of conservatism—and isolated incidents during the celebration of the proclamation of the Republic indicated the existence of suspicions that the Church was hostile to the new regime even in April 1931.[29] The secularising project of the new Republic was enshrined in the Constitution passed into law in December 1931. Differences over religion reflected wider political differences; indeed, the two were intertwined. Defence of religion proved to be a powerful mobilising tool for the right, particularly for Acción Nacional (re-baptised Acción Popular [AP] in 1932 and which would form the main basis of CEDA, the party of the Catholic right that opposed the Republican constitution).[30] The shift towards a more radical, confrontational approach by leftists in Asturias in 1932 was due to the twin process of rightist, Catholic mobilisation and resistance to the implementation of Republican legislation and ideals. Radicalisation was fundamentally a reactive process which was shaped by the divisions within the communities themselves, contrasting claims to represent the local

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[27] A. Mato Díaz, *La escuela primaria en Asturias. Los procesos de alfabetización y escolarización* (Oviedo, 1992), p. 205.
[28] S. Nevares, *El patrono ejemplar. Una obra maestra de Acción Social* (Madrid, 1936), p. 29.
[29] See isolated incidents during the celebration of the proclamation of the Republic that indicate the existence of suspicions that the Church was hostile to the new regime even in April 1931 in *El Noroeste*, 16 Apr. 1931 and *Región*, 19 Apr. 1931.
[30] Preston, *Coming*, p. 35; M. Vincent, *Catholicism in the Second Spanish Republic. Religion and Politics in Salamanca, 1930-1936* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 180-83; W.J. Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875-1998* (Washington, 2000), p. 310. For Asturias, *Región*, 8, 16, 17, 21 Oct. 1931.

community and frustrations at unfulfilled delivery of hopes and expectations associated with the Republican project.

Tensions and conflicts emerged all over Spain over religion, whether Catholics rallying in defence of the crucifix in school classrooms or their opponents pressuring to introduce secularising measures, such as removing walls separating Catholic and civil cemeteries.[31] In Asturias, attention began to turn to parish priests in the towns and villages in autumn 1931 and accelerated towards the end of the year. Priests were criticised by reports in the socialist provincial press for attacking the draft Constitution from the pulpit.[32] Tensions in the pueblos increased in 1932 in response to rightist mobilisation—the AP went on a 'massive recruitment drive'—combined with pressures from the left to implement secular legislation, which connected with pre-existing anticlerical currents within the left.[33] There was a profound grassroots desire to collaborate in the construction of the Republic and collective mobilisation was utilised to push for the implementation of Republican ideals. In April 1932, miners went on strike to demand the removal of Dominicans who staffed a school run by the coal and steel company, Duro-Felguera. The company had closed the school the previous September as the Dominicans were no longer allowed to teach as they lacked qualifications, while the municipal authorities had fruitlessly tried to convince the company to hand over the classrooms. When the company reopened the school with religious staff, 2,000 mine workers went on strike.[34] The strike resulted in a victory for the workforce, though it was the only occasion that the workforce prevailed.

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[31] For a synthesis of regional studies detailing these conflicts, see A.L. López Villaverde, *El gorro frigio y la mitra frente a frente. Construcción y diversidad territorial del conflicto político-religioso en la España republicana* (n.p., 2008) pp. 190-245.
[32] *Avance*, 15 Dec. 1931; *El Noroeste*, 13 Jan. 1932. *Avance* even dedicated its *Actualidad regional* column to the criticisms made by priests. *Avance*, 17, 19 Dec. 1931.
[33] Preston, *Coming*, pp. 36-7.
[34] The request turned out to be a fabrication. M.V. Álvarez Fernández, *La escuela del paternalismo asturiano (1880-1937)* (Gijón, 2006), pp. 281-3; *El Noroeste*, 24, 26 Apr. 1932.

Much more common than industrial disputes was the pattern of small scale conflicts which formed part of the texture and pattern of everyday experience in the pueblos in 1932 and contributed to an escalating dynamic of resistance and reaction. The provincial socialist press published the sentiments of frustration from leftists in the coalfields, who criticised the efforts by priests and the religiously-minded to convince individuals to observe a religious marriage in the context of the Republican government's move to make civil marriages the sole legally recognised form. Religion was a private matter; such individuals should not be interfering in matters through taking Catholicism to the doorsteps of the local population.[35] Even as crucifixes were removed from classrooms in line with government guidelines, they began to proliferate around the necks of Catholics in early 1932. This led to a reaction from 'youths' in Mieres and Sama, who sounded cowbells as women wearing crucifixes walked past on their evening stroll.[36] This adapted the traditional practice of the *cencerrada*, whereby individuals, often remarrying widows or widowers, were taunted by members of the local community on their wedding night.[37] In this case, the bells called attention to and ridiculed local Catholics, who were perceived as an affront to anticlerical culture. Frustrations grew towards the summer at the growing gap between what the Republic was understood to signify and the realities in the pueblos as Catholics mobilised in defence of their beliefs. There was a wave of iconoclasm directed at local churches and shrines in the summer of 1932, in marked contrast to the relative peace of 1931.[38] Such violence was often used just before the local feast day in an attempt to disrupt the patterns of Catholic religious observation, express

[35] E.g. *Avance*, 10, 21 Feb. 1932.
[36] *El Noroeste*, 13 Apr. 1932; *Región*, 25 Jun. 1932.
[37] J. Uría, 'Traditional Popular Culture and Industrial Work Discipline', in J.A. Piqueras and V.S. Rozalén, eds, *A Social History of Spanish Labour. New Perspectives on Class, Politics and Gender* (New York/Oxford, 2007), p. 162.
[38] E.g. *Región*, 18 Jun., 17 Aug., 15 Sept. 1932. Targeting religious images before feast days was not limited to the coalfields. M. Thomas, *The Faith and the Fury. Popular Anticlerical Violence and Iconoclasm in Spain, 1931-1936* (Eastbourne/Portland, 2013), pp. 54-6; López Villaverde, *El gorro frigio*, p. 232.

dissent, and assert that religious practices did not represent the local community. Leftist, secular hegemony was affirmed.

Tensions did not emerge solely over religion. The wider economic context of the early 1930s was hardly an auspicious moment in which to construct a democracy designed to implement social justice for the workers and agricultural labourers. Unemployment rose. In Asturias, the economic problems facing the mining industry in 1932 were refracted through the political context of the Republic. Workers in Turón and Figaredo attributed company slow-downs to anti-Republican company attitudes.[39] This political reading of economic problems compounded pre-existing class-based criticism of the companies. The reaction to this perceived resistance to the Republic—and companies were certainly critical of the government's actions despite the lack of an overall governmental economic policy—helped fuel growing discontent and more confrontational and radical stances and a more militant defence of the regime. In 1931 the socialists had been careful to highlight that the Republic was a bourgeois political system and not *their* regime, even as they participated in its institutions and proudly claimed to be contributing to it as a political project.[40] But criticism of the Republic made it difficult to maintain this fine line and, at local level at least, socialists became more militant in their defence of the regime, in whose project they were affectively invested. This was particularly evident in the response to the failed coup led by general Sanjurjo in August 1932 which was met in Asturias by a call for *more* Republic. *Avance*'s editorial demanded the Republic make 'a sharp turn to the left' while in Sama, workers were prepared to 'take to the streets' in defence of the Republic, empowered by the Republican project.[41] In Langreo, in response to a motion tabled by communist councillors, a local

[39] *Avance*, 9 Mar., 27 Aug. 1932.
[40] E.g. *La Aurora Social*, 15, 29 May, 12 Jun., 18 Sept., 23 Oct. 1931. P. Heywood *Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain, 1879-1936* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 110.
[41] *Avance*, 12, 13 Aug. 1932.

leading socialist councillor declared that the socialists were 'radical', but were also in government and that accordingly they would follow the government line.[42]

The comments by the socialist councillor were representative of a wider desire on the part of socialists to wrestle back the term 'radical' in 1932 from the anarchists and communists. This was a marked shift from their self-proclaimed moderation in 1931, even if a self-proclaimed radical stance did not mean a move away from the Republic itself. Indeed, socialists demonstrated a sharper desire to defend the Republic. This shift was partly in response to the left-right struggles, but also due to tussles within the left itself. It also indicates a change in the political balance amongst the grassroots in the coalfields between 1931 and 1932. Put crudely, to be radical was fashionable and desirable. Several mine workers from La Cobertoria mine criticised the fact that in assemblies 'he who says the most outrageous comments [*barbaridades*] is the one who comes out best'.[43] Sensitive to this shift, the socialists adopted a more assertive attitude. Socialists in Olloniego proclaimed themselves to be the 'true revolutionaries'.[44] This shift in the political balance was partly a response to a growth in union membership: newcomers tried to appear the most radical in order to prove their political mettle. According to reports, workers who had never belonged to unions had become 'the most revolutionary' in Turón while in Bazuelo (Mieres) the most revolutionary elements were those who had previously belonged to the party of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-30), Unión Patriótica.[45] Anticlericalism became an important measure of radicalism: individuals competed to present themselves as more radical by slurring purported religious observance by others. The expulsion of an individual from the communist party was declared with pride in the provincial press—'That is how we communists react to those who humiliate themselves before the Church'—while elsewhere a socialist was under such

[42] Archivo de Langreo, Actas del ayuntamiento de Langreo: 28-04-1932 al 17-12-1932, ff. 98-9.
[43] *Avance*, 6 Dec. 1932.
[44] *Avance*, 17 Apr. 1932.
[45] *Avance*, 23 Mar., 15 Jul. 1932.

pressure that he took to the provincial press to refute rumours that he had smuggled his daughter to a different pueblo in order to baptise her.[46] This internal competitiveness within the left to present oneself as more radical fuelled pressures within the local community, where conflicts between different groups and rumours formed an important part of day-to-day life.

However, even as socialists staked a claim to radicalism, there was no shift in strategy away from moderation. Strike action and violence were to be avoided—they were hallmarks of extremism, associated with communists and anarchists, with their immature and unrealistic demands. SOMA leader Graciano Antuña criticised an anarchist-led strike: 'One is not more radical or more revolutionary for being an early-riser and declaring strikes for trifling reasons. It is necessary to choose the right moment for the fight against capital'.[47] Socialist contestation of the concept 'radical' by leaders was rhetorical; indeed, the fact that the term was often accompanied by its definition indicates a desire to reinterpret radicalism within the Republic itself. Nevertheless, the attempt to appropriate the term was symptomatic of a socialist desire to counter a perceived shift in the political atmosphere at grassroots. This shift was towards greater radicalism emerging out of conflicts over religion and secularism and also internal competition within the left.

II

The wider economic situation continued to deteriorate and the slowdown in the Asturian mining industry, which had historically struggled to compete with British coal, became increasingly marked between 1932 and 1933. Mines closed, short-time working was introduced and there were delays in the payment of wages. The SOMA was reluctant to call a general strike, eventually doing so in the autumn of 1932, which would be followed by two

[46] *El Noroeste*, 13 Nov. 1932; *La Aurora Social*, 6 Nov. 1931.
[47] *Avance*, 24 Sept. 1932.

more over the following months. The second strike was called in February 1933 after the SOMA balloted its members, who voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action, though even as the strike began the SOMA continued to emphasise its limited demands and support for the republican-socialist government.[48] However, the solution negotiated by the SOMA to the second strike only succeeded in alienating grassroots mine workers. Rather than unemployment causing radicalism through stimulating a leftist shift by the SOMA, it was the SOMA's inability to solve the problems faced by its members and to provide hope for a better future, compounded by the alienation of those who lost their jobs that contributed to the adoption of radical positions. Meanwhile, the communists and anarchists struggled to dictate the rhythm of industrial action at local level. In November 1932, the communists were drawn into the general strike called by the SOMA, attempted to prolong it, but ultimately failed to win much support.[49]

The solution found to the February 1933 strike was a reduction in the workforce by 10%—approximately 3,000—through an early retirement and subsidy scheme, and a cap on production.[50] The mine workers voted overwhelmingly in favour of this solution, though it soon became clear, however, that their expectations would not be matched by what happened in practice. There were too few volunteers for retirement and the subsidy scheme, which is perhaps understandable, given that the pensions and subsidies on offer were only a fraction of the daily wage. Wildcat strikes emerged as miners protested at layoffs: they had not expected the measures to affect them personally.[51] Companies targeted cheaper younger workers and there were reports of increasing dissent in the coalfields. Observers reported that a 'revolutionary wave' was being born in the mines and groups of younger mine workers

[48] *Avance*, 2, 7 Feb. 1933. See also Shubert, *Revolution*, pp. 145-6.
[49] *Avance*, 22 Nov. 1932; *Región*, 22 Nov. 1932.
[50] For details, see *Revista Industrial Minera Asturiana*, 16 Mar. 1933.
[51] For unrest, see *Avance*, 8, 17, 18, 21 Mar. 1933.

muttered darkly together, their desperation manifest in a desire for violence and revolution.[52] Resentment was growing at how the union had ostracised younger mine workers, which manifested itself in a desire for greater militancy.

Far from leading radicalism or following its members, the SOMA was actually alienating its members. This is not to say that organisations are inherently antiethetical to radicalism in this understanding of the concept. Trade unions and associations can play an important role in fomenting and providing the structures to encourage radical positions, in addition to adopting a confrontational, militant mode of political action themselves. This was the case with the Socialist Youth, as it was with youth engagement in politics in Europe more widely. The ranks of political formations on the far right and left were often with students and youths.[53] Nevertheless, in Asturias, the SOMA continued in its moderation and caution well into 1934.

The SOMA was also ineffective in addressing the problems faced by the industry and a third general mining strike in the autumn actually only extended the agreement from the previous strike. This led to further dissent and militancy. The fact that thousands downed tools demonstrated SOMA's capacity to organise strike action, but were not necessarily expressions of support for the union. The union was merely capable of unleashing and organising collective action, rather than controlling and directing it. Mine workers organised and collaborated via assemblies at local level and the pressure that they exercised at this level appeared more effective than the union structures. Non-payment of wages led to wildcat

[52] *El Noroeste*, 6, 9 Apr. 1933.
[53] On youth politics and mobilisation, see work by S. Souto Kustrín, particularly her *Paso a la juventud. Movilización democrática, estalinismo y revolución en la República Española* (Valencia, 2013) and also S. Lowe, *Catholicism, War and the Foundation of Francoism* (Eastbourne/Portland, 2010). The historiography on interwar youth is large. A short overview in R. Vinen, *A History in Fragments* (London, 2000), pp. 92-105 and a recent example is R. Clark's study of Romanian fascism: *Holy Legionary Youth. Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca/London, 2015).

strikes in Mieres, to the frustration of the SOMA, which opposed such action, but grassroots pressure was nevertheless successful: Fábrica de Mieres quickly paid the owed wages.[54]

Even with dissent, growing radicalism did not mean an outright rejection of the Republic by socialists at the grassroots. The more confrontational, hardened attitude entailed a demand for a more militant Republic, which was an extension of the feeling expressed in defence of the regime in 1932, but with a still harder edge. This demand for militancy coincided with the radicalisation of Largo Caballero's rhetoric in the summer of 1933. An *Avance* editorial declared, '[a]ll that of "Republic for all" is for all those who want a Republic, but there are people who do not want it, as occurs with every new regime. Well, these people should not be taken into count . . . The Republic has to be introduced against them'.[55] With the collapse of the republican-socialist governmental coalition, elections were convened. The provincial socialist newspaper declared on the eve of the elections: 'IF THEY SPEAK TO YOU OF REPUBLIC FOR ALL, REPLY (sic): Republic for me, because I work. Not for everyone. Not the capitalist who lives at my expense . . . I want my Republic, the Social Republic'.[56] This aggressive assertion of a particular vision of the Republic was a means of distancing the socialists from their electoral rivals, but the effect was to reject the present and project an alternative future. This was the recovery of the future, of a more radical vision. This new Republican future was more strongly defined: it would be a 'social Republic', itself more radical and militant in its implementation and defence of working-class interests, as understood by leftists.

III

There is little doubt that fascism formed part of the 'frame' for the revolutionary insurrection through contributing to the political atmosphere. Although there were very few fascists in

[54] *Avance*, 12, 15, 18 Nov. 1933.
[55] *Avance*, 7 Sept. 1933.
[56] *Avance*, 16 Sept. 1933.

Spain in 1933—and still fewer in the Asturian coalfields—trying to locate *actual* fascists fails to engage with the role that fascism—or the idea of fascism—played in Asturias 1933-4.[57] As a term, fascism injected a sense of fear and threat—not least because of the wider international context—while mapping onto and transforming pre-existing community divisions. Understanding fascism as a frame needs to be taken further; it provided a way of imagining both the enemy and a dystopian future. The fascist enemy was perceived as an internal and external threat, shaped by experiences within the communities and by national politics. This fuelled a sense of anxiety. Gender and politics were intertwined; the right-wing threat was frequently feminised and understood as an opposite to masculine, proletarian identities. Over the course of 1933 and 1934 fascism became part of the language of the coalfields, as is seen in its increased use in the provincial socialist press. Fascism was understood to have appeared in the province for the first time in March 1933 with reports of the plastering of fascist posters in Oviedo but while communists organised a few antifascist rallies, it was only towards the summer that fascism was taken seriously.[58]

As a term, fascism was flexible and there was a lack of clarity as to what fascism actually meant or what the position of Spanish political formations was. Gil Robles, leader of CEDA, visited Nazi Germany in 1933 and an ambiguous attitude towards fascism. He was impressed by the spectacle but critical of the Nazi position towards the Church. *El Debate*, the CEDA mouthpiece, admired Dollfuss, though for the left Dollfuss' Catholic authoritarianism was difficult to distinguish from fascism—or the road to fascism—in 1934.[59] Indeed, the relationship of fascism to Catholicism was particularly vexing. Spain's fascist

[57] Macarro Vera, 'Causas', pp. 179-80. Blas, many years earlier, made similar observations, describing the 'fascist threat' as providing the 'adequate climate'. Blas, *El socialismo*, pp. 114-15. Rey labels fascism the 'mobilising myth' for the left. Fernando del Rey, 'La República de los socialistas', in Rey, *Palabras*, pp. 199-200. The party most closely identified with fascism in Spain, the Falange, was not formed until late 1933 and would not expand into a mass party until 1936.
[58] *El Noroeste*, 19, 22, 30 Mar., 6 Apr., 12 May 1933; *Avance*, 8, 12 Mar. 1933.
[59] See S. Souto Kustrín, 'Octubre de 1934: historia, mito y memoria', *Hispania Nova. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 11 (2013), pp. 473-506.

party the Falange was closely linked to other rightist political forces and the Church: in Asturias the 'most active elements' of the Falangist student union came from Catholic Action, there were forms for joining Falange at the offices of CEDA-supporting *Región*, Canon Manuel Gutiérrez was at the heart of the local party and in Moreda the small Catholic miners' union would become a Falangist centre.[60] The left swung between associating fascism with religion, which was convenient for identifying ideological opponents, and attempting to separate the two. The UGT newspaper declared that Spanish 'indigenous fascism' would be 'monarchist-clerical-capitalist'.[61] In August 1933, the provincial socialist daily *Avance* claimed Catholicism and fascism went hand-in-hand, only to declare both that fascism, 'a reactionary movement', should not be confused with 'clericalism', yet predicted that Spanish fascism would be based on Catholicism less than three weeks later.[62] The situation was far from clear in the provincial socialist press whether in the articles sent in from the pueblos or in editorials themselves. Fascism was used flexibly, as an epithet that nevertheless denoted vehement opposition to leftist political projects.

Meanwhile, wider socialist discourse began to describe Catholicism and fascism as 'the two sides of the same coin', which developed from the projection of the Church as enemy of the socialists.[63] Interpretations of fascism were thus entangled with pre-existing anticlerical suspicions and mapped onto pre-existing divisions in the coalfields. The very nature of fascism—that it was a surreptitious and creeping threat—heightened fears and connected discursively with the frequent (and traditional) accusation of 'Jesuitical' tactics. Fascist propaganda in La Felguera had been slipped into a magazine at a cultural centre.[64]

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[60] M. Suárez Cortina, *El fascismo en Asturias* (Gijón, 1981), pp. 125, 154-6, 165.
[61] M. Bizcarrondo, *Historia de la UGT, vol. 3. Entre la democracia y la revolución, 1931-1936* (Madrid, 2008), pp. 85-6.
[62] *Avance*, 20 Aug., 6 Sept. 1933.
[63] J. de la Cueva Merino, 'Socialistas y religión en la Segunda República: De la Liga Nacional Laica al inicio de la Guerra Civil', in J. de la Cueva Merino and F. Montero García, eds, *Izquierda obrera y religión en España (1900-1939*) (Alcalá de Henares, 2012), pp. 91-3.
[64] *Avance*, 1 Aug. 1933.

This hidden nature was an indicator of the lack of "real" fascists in the coalfields, yet the even if fascism was not overt or publicly recognisable the alertness of the local left meant that fascism was perceived. The very fact that it was undetected served to heighten sense of the threat rather than reduce it.

As the elections of November 1933 neared, fascism had become an important part of the political language of the left, though it would only be in the aftermath that community-based anxieties would be heightened. In truth, leftists were relatively dismissive of rightist mobilisation in the coalfields ahead of the elections: rightists were presented as a negligible and female presence not representative of the local communities, in contrast to the male, leftist proletarians. The gap between such projections of the local community and the actual results fuelled a reactive, radical backlash and anxiety amongst the local left; the local community did not match expectations. In Santullano (Mieres) rightist campaigning was attributed to 'four women' and two teachers, with the use of 'four' likely a linguistic trope to indicate scarcity than an accurate number.[65] This reinforced the claim that these individuals were not representative of the local community. Indeed, rightist campaigners were frequently projected as either a minority or from outside the pueblo; '*beatas*', a term used for religiously-minded older women, arrived in the village of Sinariegos (Aller) directed by 'friars and priests' to criticise socialists.[66] Such comments belittling rightist female mobilisation, which was an important feature of the electoral campaign, were underscored by an undercurrent of misogynism and pride in masculine work-based (and youthful) identities on the left.[67] Thus, despite anxieties around fascism, the right was still portrayed as a negligible presence.

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[65] *Avance*, 2, 10 Nov. 1933.
[66] *Avance*, 28 Oct. 1933.
[67] For female activism for CEDA during 1933, see M. Vincent, 'The Politicization of Catholic Women in Salamanca, 1931-1936', in F. Lannon and P. Preston, eds, *Elites and Power in Twentieth Century Spain. Essays in Honour of Sir Raymond Carr* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 107-26 and also S. Pierce, 'The Political Mobilization of Catholic Women in Spain's Second Republic: The CEDA, 1931-6', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.

The elections of 1933 were a defeat for the republicans and socialists, whose split and mutual animosity was fatal in an electoral system which favoured coalitions and collaboration. In Asturias, a broad rightist alliance candidacy won a clear victory, though the socialists gained most votes in the coalfields.[68] The outcome, though, reflected the national picture where the Catholic CEDA returned the highest number of deputies, but without a parliamentary majority. It fell to the Radical Party, a historic republican party but which had split from the republican-socialist coalition in 1931 and become increasingly conservative, to form governments with the support of CEDA, whose attitude to the Republic was ambivalent at best. These would re-channel the Republic through slowing or reversing the reforming measures of the first biennium.[69] There was a distinct shift in the orientation of the Republic, even if there was not wholesale derogation of legislation from the first biennium.

Even if the socialists had demonstrated that they were the predominant force in the coalfields, the number of votes polled by the right indicated that far more than "four *beatas*" had voted for them. The election results rocked understandings of the local community. The right was more representative of the local community than had previously been supposed, which led to head-scratching and consternation amongst the local left. Calculations in Trubia could not account for it and blamed workers who were 'traitors' and women, both the '*beatería*' and the daughters of workers. In Murias (Aller) rightist votes were also attributed to the influence of women ('you do not get fed if you do not go to mass'), a cooperative run by the small Catholic miners' union and 'disorganised and disoriented' workers.[70] There is evidence that shaking perceptions about the local community led to an increased social

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45 No. 1 (2010), pp. 86-8.

[68] CEDA alliances were regional. In Asturias the coalition was between a historic Asturian republican party and the CEDA. An overview of the CEDA's position and tactics in Preston, *Coming*, pp. 43-50. The most comprehensive national work on the CEDA continues to be J.R. Montero, *La CEDA: El catolicismo social y político en la II República*, (2 vols,Madrid, 1977). There are also regional studies, e.g. E. Grandío Seoane, *Los orígenes de la derecha gallega: La C.E.D.A. en Galicia (1931-1936)* (Sada, 1998).

[69] See detailed analysis in Townson, *Crisis*.

[70] *Avance*, 25 Nov. 1933, 17 Jan. 1934.

pressure within the confines of towns and village. The widow of a notable socialist in Laviana published an article in *Avance* that as a socialist woman she felt isolated and embattled, writing that '[i]n Laviana, like everywhere else, it seems that being a socialist is a crime' while proudly declaring that 'I state [*hago constar*] that I am a socialist revolutionary and I am not ashamed of it'.[71] In her public declaration, she made a radical restatement of her ideas and identity, sparked by a feeling of being under attack.

The elections and change of government had important effects. Now the fascist threat *had* to be present in the coalfields: the ascendance and victory of the right meant that this was inevitable. 'Fascists' were reported to be 'emerging' in pueblos around Asturias, including in Turón.[72] An article from Tuilla (Langreo) tried to convince local inhabitants that fascists did exist locally as 'this pueblo cannot be an exception' claiming that previous enemies had adapted to the 'political circumstances' and become fascists, 'taking up positions cautiously and astutely, taking advantage of our excessive confidence and good faith'. Fascism *needed* to exist because historically there were rightists in Tuilla. The article was a call to mobilisation; action was needed.[73] Yet, even as fascism was said to exist and *would* exist, fascism as incarnated by the Falange was not present within the mining valleys. Indeed, in early 1934, the Falange was still without a centre in Asturias and struggled to mobilise support, as in the rest of Spain.[74]

In addition to the urgent need to identify local fascists, the change of government had an important effect in shifting how the threat to the left was perceived. Crucially, the success of the CEDA meant that the national government was now understood as a (possible) harbinger of fascism. The introduction of measures that marked a distinct change from the

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[71] *Avance*, 23 Feb. 1934.
[72] *Avance*, 9 Jan. 1934.
[73] *Avance*, 7 Jun. 1934.
[74] J. Jiménez Campo, *El fascismo en la crisis de la Segunda República española* (Madrid, 1979), pp. 267-8; S. Payne, *Fascism in Spain, 1923-1977* (Madison, 1999), p. 155. For Asturias, Suárez Cortina, *El fascismo*, p. 159, p. 162.

principles of the Republic—as defined in the first biennium—and a more aggressive approach to policing and strike action were a betrayal and attack on the working class. This combined with the international context, particularly the events in February 1934 in Austria, only served to heighten fears around the role of the government and the possibility of the gradual implantation of fascism from above. In Oviedo in February, an Asturian socialist leader declared that Spain had to choose between two 'roads': 'Germany and Italy, or Russia'.[75] Anxieties and fears around fascism served to energise political action and reduce the options available to the left. Revolution was the only alternative.

The Workers' Alliance (Alianza Obrera) looms large in histories of October 1934 as the materialisation of trade union—and therefore of working class—unity. The first Alianza Obrera per se on a national level promoted by the dissident communists of the BOC (Bloque Obrero y Campesino: Workers' and Peasants' Bloc) in Barcelona in March 1933, and broadened to include the Catalan socialists in December.[76] But even as the socialist line modified to be publicly in favour of alliances, initiatives were subject to the strategic considerations of the socialist movement under Largo Caballero; alliances were to be encouraged where the socialist movement was weak compared to the anarchists.[77]

Focusing on the structure of the Alliance or on the concept as deriving from Maurín, the BOC leader, serves to overlook other—earlier—mechanisms of worker unity. In Asturias, grassroots unity had actually emerged from the beginning of 1933, but the SOMA, in line with the national leadership, was not keen and a local socialist was expelled from the union.[78]

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[75] *Avance*, 4 February 1934.
[76] On the Alliance, e.g. V. Alba, *La Alianza Obrera. Historia y análisis de una táctica de unidad en España* (Madrid/Gijón, 1978); A. Durgan, *Comunismo, revolución y movimiento obrero en Catalunya 1920-1936. Los orígenes del POUM* (n.d., n.p.) [Revised and updated version of *B.O.C. 1930-1936. El Bloque Obrero y Campesino* (Barcelona, 1996)]; R. Navarro Comas, 'El Frente Único, las Alianzas Obreras y el Frente Popular. La evolución teórica de los anarquistas ante la colaboración obrera', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*, Vol. 41 No. 1 (2011), pp. 103-20.
[77] P. Heywood, *Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain, 1879-1936* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 136, p. 138; S. Juliá, 'República, revolución y luchas internas', in S. Juliá (coord.), *El socialismo en España. Desde la fundación del PSOE hasta 1975* (Madrid, 1986), p. 241.
[78] *Avance*, 8 Jan. 1933; *El Noroeste*, 1, 5 Feb. 1933.

This did not stop grassroots frustrations channelling to unity initiatives at local level, such as through joint strike committees. By early 1934, the provincial socialist newspaper was inundated with consultative letters and articles from socialists eager for leftist unity. The newspaper stalled, declaring rather weakly:

> The united front (sic) of the workers is to be found in such clear terms that it can already be considered to be a reality. Given that it has taken shape in a general way, which was what was hoped for, and is effective now that it is so, it need not emerge, therefore, from any private or local initiatives.[79]

Amador Fernández, a SOMA leader, was critical of grassroots initiatives, writing that '[r]ecently we have seen spectacles that leave a lot to be desired', in line with the position of the socialist national leadership.[80] In this reading, the Asturian Alliance, initially proposed by the anarchists, was actually a agreement between socialist and anarchist hierarchies signed behind closed doors in a wider context in which collaboration at local level was routine.

The signing of the Alliance did mark something of a turning a point. It was an opportunity for renewed vitriolic mutual mud-slinging by socialists and communists, which served to sharpen differences between the two movements, even if there was still some grassroots co-operation, albeit fragile. The Alliance thus served to mobilise and heighten socialist pride and self-esteem, rather than as an actual vehicle for militancy in spring-summer 1934, as the socialists actually tried to isolate the Alliance from labour struggles.[81] Indeed, the life of the Alliance in towns and villages is unclear. There were a few rallies in spring-summer 1934, while a later anarchist account has little to say about the life of the Alliance, though collaboration between unions in strike action continued at local level.[82] The

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[79] *Avance*, 7 Jan. 1934.
[80] *Avance*, 7 Jan. 1934. Largo Caballero's similar position in Aróstegui, *Largo Caballero*, p. 354.
[81] Ruiz, *Insurrección*, p. 92.
[82] *Avance*, 3, 5, 6, 17 May 1934; 'Informe del Comité Regional de Asturias de la CNT elevado al Pleno Regional de sindicatos sobre los acontecimientos de octubre de 1934 y otro informe de la Comisión de la Alianza Obrera Regional Revolucionaria remitido al Comité citado', Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica, PS-Gijón, Series J, Box 12, Document 3.

Alliance had important effects for forging a sense of solidarity, even if the Alliance itself was not part of everyday experience. The idea of the Alliance and union structures would be vehicles for mobilisation and organisation during the revolutionary insurrection.

IV

Critical to mobilisation and the eruption of protest—and ultimately the force behind the insurrection—was a desire to defend the local community, local authority and dignity, and a sense of what the Republic should be in the face of (perceived) aggression from the state security forces. There were intense waves of tension and conflict in March-April and September. The key to these episodes was not economic issues; even if strikes were one of the principal methods of protest, the most intense mobilisation came in response to the actions of the security forces.[83] Protest was political in the sense that it was about power dynamics, contesting the role and actions of the state security forces. But it was also about the defence of a certain understanding of the local community and fuelled by a clear sense of humiliation and disempowerment. Consequently, the actions of the security forces were experienced as the confirmation of the distance and incompatibility of the central government with the left and local government in the coalfields. Importantly, however, the actions of the security forces, far from reducing protest, actually only succeeded in provoking further protest, which was due to the cohesion of leftist organisations and, above all, of leftist identities linked to claims to represent the local community. This fusion of community and the left was a powerful foundation for confrontation and is testament to the emotional underpinning of political mobilisation at local level.

The change in the political context was experienced at local level with a more aggressive policing style. Searches began in mid-February 1934 with workers frisked on the

[83] Scholars have mentioned the 'political' nature of strikes in the coalfields in 1934, but this needs to be taken further and redefined. See, for example, Shubert, *Revolution*, p. 152; Bizcarrondo, *Historia*, pp. 103-8.

way to work. The situation in the coalfields was tense, as demonstrated by an incident in Laviana. Two individuals were arrested for carrying knives. They were released after a protest demonstration brought hundreds to the gates of the prison and the security forces withdrew. When a local socialist councillor was arrested and accused of leading the protest, mine workers called a strike.[84] The situation had escalated quickly and indicated both the tensions and the level of cohesion at local level as protestors expressed their alternate concept of justice based on the idea of the self-policing pueblo, traditionally prevalent in a country which had historically struggled to articulate a modern nation-state. The local community would resolve its own problems and police its own interests, according to community-based notions of justice.

In March and April searches increased and the situation deteriorated, serving to erode the (already problematic) relationship between the left and the security forces. A new Minister of the Interior was appointed, Salazar Alonso, who had a 'Manichean view of politics'.[85] Salazar introduced the state of alarm in the whole of Spain in response to strikes in Madrid and a more aggressive policing policy.[86] Such tactics were framed by the local press in political and class terms: *Avance* highlighted that it was the left that was targeted; state actions were understood as criminalising the working class and framed as such by the provincial socialist newspaper, which protested vehemently at the security forces.[87] Meanwhile, the municipal authorities voiced their own criticism of the new government's policies. Even if there was not wholesale derogation of the legislation of the previous biennium, certain measures indicated a distinct shift in the Republic. Some state funding was reintroduced for the Church, the death penalty was reinstated and those imprisoned for the 1932 coup were freed. Suspicions increased and the distance between the government and

[84] *Avance*, 20, 21 Feb. 1934.
[85] Townson, *Crisis*, p. 222.
[86] E. González Calleja, *En nombre de la autoridad. La defensa del orden público durante la Segunda República Española (1931-1936)* (Granada, 2014), p. 122, p. 328.
[87] E.g. *Avance*, 24 Mar., 21 Jul. 1934.

municipal authorities widened, with the latter telegraphing their protest to the government in what they perceived to be a defence of the 'spirit of April 1931' and the interests of the local community.[88] Leftist local authorities were thus willing to challenge the national government and assume a proactive role in protecting the interests and desires of the Republic's supporters. While protestors were defending local communities, union centres and even homes, as well as the spirit of the Republic, the provincial authorities saw protest as a question of public order. The civil governor refused to back down, declaring that searches would continue and he 'was sure that this excitation would not have any consequences'.[89] And the tension escalated into April.

The problem lay in the very nature of the actions of the state security forces, which were experienced as humiliating and a violation of space. On 27 March, miners' food baskets and homes were searched in Laviana, and mine workers left work early in protest.[90] Women were arrested in Langreo for protesting at the search of their homes and councillors complained at the damage to furniture and locks broken by the security forces: 'What is most disgraceful is that those who are the target of body and house searches are those people and social and political organisations who worked the hardest and sacrificed the most in the service of the Republic'.[91] What compounded the humiliation was the use of Republican institutions against its supporters. Protest was stimulated by a powerful sense of dignity and humiliation, which fomented a sense of alienation and incompatibility with the national government. This was seized upon by *Avance*, which continued to attack the government. Over the following months it was repeatedly targeted with fines, banned 94 times over 186

[88] Archivo de Langreo, Actas del ayuntamiento de Langreo: 07-10-1933 al 16-06-1934, ff. 141-2. See similar sentiments in Oviedo: Archivo de Oviedo, Actas del ayuntamiento de Oviedo: 16-06-1933 al 16-06-1934, f. 190.
[89] *Avance*, 28 Mar. 1934.
[90] *Avance*, 28 Mar. 1934.
[91] Archivo de Langreo, Actas del ayuntamiento de Langreo: 07-10-1933 al 16-06-1934, ff. 141-2.

days and its editor arrested.[92] Its radical rhetoric, such as describing how workers in Sama felt they were in a 'full state of war' on being searched on their way out of work, led to a firm response from the authorities which only served to legitimise its stance in the eyes of the Asturian left, who rallied around the newspaper.[93]

Anger was channelled into strikes—the prime method of collective action in the coalfields—which spread quickly, indicating the strong articulation of solidarity and the tensions in the coalfields. Fifteen hundred mine workers at the Mariana mine in Mieres went on strike in protest at arrests (which included that of local communist leaders); this spread to other industries and the municipalities of Aller and Lena the following day, with the number of strikers increasing tenfold. As the situation started to move out of control an appeal was made for calm and in Mieres the three trade unions called for a return to work.[94] Fundamentally, strikes were organised in response to arrests and the actions of the security forces. The security forces and their strategies, far from reducing protest, only succeeded in accelerating opposition.

The escalation coincided with Holy Week. As in 1932, churches, which were a visible and readily available target, were attacked in frustration and protest. Such attacks can also be understood as an attempt to reassert a particular image of a left-wing anticlerical political culture that was projected onto the local community. Attacks on church buildings attempted to disrupt ceremonies and continued, over the following weeks, during fiestas. Iconoclastic violence formed part of the culture of confrontation at local level and the pattern of protest. When individuals were arrested and accused of the violence, strikes erupted. *Avance* printed accusations that the iconoclasm was a conspiracy by the right; while this was implausible it fitted the narrative of a government that was targeting the left, not least when several of those

[92] Shubert, *Revolution*, p. 151.
[93] *Avance*, 27 Mar. 1934.
[94] *Avance*, 3, 4, 5 Apr. 1934.

arrested were prominent local leftists, who were unlikely to have been involved in the violence.[95]

The growing crystallisation of the gulf between the local left and the state was also evident in two further developments. Firstly, in accordance with the socialist plans for a revolutionary movement, guns were being smuggled out of the arms factory in Oviedo from late 1933 and hidden in the coalfields. Despite the range of operations, few weapons fell into the hands of the police, testament to the socialist movement's organisational capabilities. Such operations must have had an important effect amongst the activists involved, tying them together in clandestine networks that attempted to keep ahead of the security forces.[96] The conspiracy thus widened and cemented the sense of 'us' and 'them'. Similarly, a crackdown on the use of political uniforms in the summer was interpreted by the red-shirted Socialist Youth as an attempt to stifle their activism and fuelled opposition. In response, they paraded outside the prison where the editor of *Avance* was being held.[97] Government measures were met with a radical, confrontational response channelled by the socialist youth organisation.

In September the tension increased. A female demonstration was broken up in Sama by the security forces with gunshots and several bystanders were injured. The newspaper report in the socialist press is revealing of the sentiment of alienation and disempowerment. It was no longer a question of distance between the government and the coalfields, but of a 'foreign' power that had invaded the coalfields. Local communities were disempowered and alienated: 'It seems as though we are in the middle of a war. In reality it is an invasion. In reality it is the army of a power foreign to the pueblo which is corralling, flogging and shooting at it'.[98] The mayor requested that the security forces were not present for the funeral—the left would keep order. The fact that it managed to do so only served to underline

[95] *Avance*, 31 Mar., 8 Apr. 1934; *La Voz de Asturias*, 31 Mar. 1934.
[96] As noted briefly by Ruiz, *Insurrección*, p. 108.
[97] Taibo, *Asturias*, p. 105.
[98] *Avance*, 2 Sept. 1934.

that the security forces were the problem. There was a general strike in the coalfields, jointly organised by socialists, anarchists and communists. Demonstrative of the tension was the appeal made by the strike committee for people to leave Sama.[99] The coexistence of the security forces and the working class left was impossible. Meanwhile, *Avance* continued to fan the revolutionary flames, emphasising darkly that Spain was occupied by an army and warning that armies were the causes of wars.[100]

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Without arms or the CEDA's entry into government, the insurrection would not have occurred. Spanish leftists were well aware of the rise of fascism and the authoritarian right in Europe, and were particularly shaken by the failed uprising by Austrian socialists in February 1934. But the force of the Asturian insurrection cannot be solely explained by socialist conspiring, the appointment of CEDA ministers or by references to the wider context. National and international developments are insufficient explanations in themselves. The increasing confrontation and radicalisation of the Asturian coalfields is key to understanding the revolutionary insurrection that exploded with such force in October 1934. These conflicts and radicalism were rooted very much in the industrial communities of the coalfields, but shaped by the wider Spanish and European context.

The socialist shift from participating in government to planning a revolution is generally conceptualised as 'radicalisation', and historians have long it seen as pivotal. Standard interpretations focus on national-level events and the role of Largo Caballero, who it is argued, led the planning of the revolutionary movement with the backing of his (often young) supporters, the *Caballeristas*. To see radicalisation as a straightforward one-

[99] *Avance*, 4 Sept. 1934.
[100] *Avance*, 22 Sept. 1934.

directional process, a shift to the left, and even a 'pro-Bolshevik attitude' is insufficient.[101] That the communist movement was weak was no incentive for the socialists to move to the left and understanding radicalism as convergence with communism is reductive and inadequate for understanding the processes at work during the Second Republic. A similar reductive focus on the responsibility of the socialists can be observed in analysis of why the Asturian insurrection occurred.[102] Indeed, Shubert highlighted in the 1980s that the two explanations of the insurrection—socialist responsibility versus a process of working-class radicalisation—are far from mutually exclusive.[103]

This article has shown that the way that radicalisation is understood and characterised needs to be reformulated. The foregrounding of economic factors and labour politics neglects the way in which the struggles in (and over) the Republic were played out at community level. Rather, the dynamics of protest and radical politics need to be understood in the context of political struggles in and *over* the communities of the coalfields.[104] The coalfields were far from monolithic communities. Attention needs to be paid to divisions within them, as they contributed to the dynamic process of radicalisation. Thus, while the left—in its different facets—was hegemonic, it did not monopolise culture and politics. The conflict over religion was crucial in the context of the secularising Republican project and leftist anticlericalism. It is foregrounding the community as a subject to be constructed and mobilised, as opposed to community as locus or predetermined, that allows for a richer understanding of militancy and

[101] Souto Kustrín, 'Taking', pp. 134-5. See also, though from a cultural perspective, Uría, 'Asturias', pp. 271-5. Payne sees radicalisation as a response to the threat from the left, or the socialist 'temptation' to move to the left due to a weak communist movement. Payne, *Collapse*, pp. 52-3.
[102] E.g. J. Avilés, 'Los socialistas y la insurrección de octubre de 1934', *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie V, Historia contemporánea*, 20 (2008), pp. 129-57. Ruiz recently reiterated both the responsibility of the socialists and the importance of economic factors. D. Ruiz, *Octubre de 1934. Revolución en la República española* (Madrid, 2008). As Souto Kustrín points out, highlighting socialist responsibility neglects the profound divisions in the socialist movement. Souto Kustrín, 'Octubre de 1934', p. 481.
[103] Shubert, 'Revolution in Self-Defence', pp. 265-7.
[104] An approach similar to James in *The politics of identity*.

mentalities during the Republic.[105] In Asturias, only through an appreciation of the struggles over religion, rivalry within the left, anxieties over the emergence of 'fascism', and the actions of the state security forces can both the process of radicalisation and the force of the revolutionary insurrection be understood.

Radicalisation is crucial to understanding the Second Republic, but it needs to be rethought and reclaimed for analytical purposes, rather than existing purely as a descriptive label. Through a focus on political practice and lived experience, this article shows radicalism to be a particular mode and style of politics, which is necessarily confrontational and militant, whether physically, rhetorically or even ideationally. While community divisions helped to drive (reactively) the radicalisation of the left, but this did not mean a rejection of Republican democracy. Rather, the Republic was reinterpreted in a more radical, combative manner. This underlines the need to take a more nuanced approach to the study of the meaning of the Republic and democracy in 1930s' Spain. In this process, emotions were a significant factor in the escalation of protest. Collective fears, anxieties and feelings of humiliation are crucial to understanding the increasingly bitter and confrontational political climate in the coalfields; it was the understanding of state actions as unjust that stimulated the cycle of protest and repression in spring 1934.[106] Without understanding community-based protest and the role of emotions within it, it is impossible to understand the process of radicalisation. Analysing radicalism in this way provides a new framework for understanding the revolutionary insurrection of 1934, the nature of the Second Republic, the polarisation of Spanish society, the Spanish Civil War and interwar Europe.

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[105] Useful in this regard are Radcliff, *Polarisation*; Ealham, *Class*; Gil Andrés, *Echarse*. On a broader national level, Cruz, *En el nombre del pueblo*.

[106] This differentiates my approach from the emphasis on political opportunities prevalent in the Spanish historiography. See Cruz, *Protestar* and Gil Andrés, *Echarse*. More useful for my approach are Lars E. Cederman, K.S. Gleditsch and H. Buhaug, *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War* (Cambridge, 2013), which defends a 'grievance' based approach to mobilisation and political violence, and J. Goodwin, J.M. Jasper and F. Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago, 2001).

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