



Research Article

HISTORICAL DISINFORMATION. CASE STUDY: THE EVENTS OF CASTILBLANCO

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HISTORICAL DISINFORMATION. CASE STUDY: THE EVENTS OF CASTILBLANCO

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Abstract: Unfortunately, on more occasions than desired, when one turns to historical texts to learn more about a fact of interest, one usually finds elements that disconcert the reader, since the new information distorts his or her first references on the subject. After carrying out the pertinent checks and comparing the data with other more reliable sources, it is found that the story found, even if it has been signed by authors with adequate knowledge and the backing of a high degree, does not correspond to the reality of the fact. Although there is never a single truth and the narrative can suffer involuntary variations, in most cases the references and sources of all kinds allow them to be adjusted, to a large extent, to past reality. There are many occasions in which, when this reality affects events in which the Guardia Civil turns out, for better or worse, to be the protagonist, the stories differ, and a lot, from how the events happened. As a reference example, we have chosen a memory from the history of the Corps which, due to the exceptional circumstances that occurred in it, has generated abundant literature, among which, unfortunately, the negative literature generally predominates. We propose, therefore, with the limitations imposed by a research article, to study the historiography of what were called "Castilblanco events".

Resumen: Desgraciadamente, en más ocasiones de las deseadas, cuando se acude a textos de carácter histórico para conocer más sobre un hecho de interés, se suelen encontrar elementos que desconciertan al lector, pues la nueva información distorsiona sus primeras referencias sobre el asunto. Realizadas las comprobaciones pertinentes y contrastados los datos con otras fuentes más fidedignas, se llega a comprobar que el relato encontrado, aunque haya sido firmado por autores con los conocimientos adecuados y el respaldo de una elevada titulación, no responde a la realidad del hecho. Aunque nunca hay una sola verdad y la narrativa puede sufrir variaciones involuntarias, en la mayoría de las ocasiones las referencias y fuentes de todo tipo permiten ajustarlas, en gran medida, a la realidad pasada. No son pocas las ocasiones en las que, cuando esa realidad afecta a sucesos en los que la Guardia Civil resulta, para bien o para mal, ser la protagonista, los relatos difieren, y mucho, de cómo sucedieron los hechos. Como un ejemplo de referencia, hemos escogido un recuerdo de la historia del Cuerpo que, por las excepcionales circunstancias que concurrieron en él, ha generado abundante literatura de entre la que predomina, generalmente y por desgracia, la negativa. Nos proponemos pues, con las limitaciones que impone un artículo de investigación, analizar diferentes referencias publicadas sobre los que se dieron en llamar "sucesos de Castilblanco".

Keywords: Guardia Civil, Castilblanco, 1931, Second Republic, demonstration.

Palabras clave: Guardia Civil, Castilblanco, 1931, Segunda República, manifestación.

ABBREVIATIONS

DS: Journal of Sessions

FNTT: Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra (National Federation of Land Workers)

GM: Gaceta de Madrid

INE: National Statistical Institute

ORGA: Autonomous Galician Republican Autonomous Organisation

REHGC: Journal of Historical Studies of the Guardia Civil

RTGC: Technical Review of the Guardia Civil.

INTRODUCTION

In the tourist office in Brihuega, or at least it used to be, there was a newspaper article with a headline referring to the creation of one of the most important brands in Spanish commerce: El Corte Inglés. The article reported that it had been founded by Julián Gordo Centenera, a native of that town in the province of Alhueva. This reference clashed with those provided by the brand itself, acknowledging Ramón Areces Rodríguez and César Rodríguez González as founders of the chain. In this case, depending on how you look at it, both pieces of information are true, since Mr. Gordo, just at the beginning of the 20th century, opened a tailor's shop at the junction of Preciados, Rompelanzas and El Carmen streets in Madrid, which he called "El Corte Inglés". In December 1935, César and Ramón, uncle and nephew, bought the establishment and, keeping the name, began a successful economic adventure that would culminate in what today represents "El Corte Inglés" and the different activities associated with the chain.

The point is that, without being able to say that the article in the local press of Guadalajara falsifies reality, the way of presenting the facts is misleading for those who do not know the real history of the commercial group.

On the other hand, the Guardia Civil anthem itself contains a misinforming element in its lyrics, because when the then Lieutenant Colonel Osuna writes "to glorify the name that the great Ahumada gave you", he alters the reality of the historical fact: the name already appeared in the Royal Decree of 28 March, months before Girón took over the organisation, not the foundation (another misinforming element that is often repeated), of the Corps.

Perhaps we could assess the intentionality behind each of the two cases. And so, while the first, without being untruthful, manipulates the historical fact to attribute merit to someone to whom it does not correspond, in the second it does not seem that we can attribute a false spirit to Osuna, but rather to general ignorance, in the context of which he limited himself to reproducing what tradition had been taking for granted.

Any historian who claims to be rigorous in his work must always respect the most essential deontological principles. Although some facts may be subject to the free interpretation of the scholar, those who act as notaries of history cannot commit the greatest crime of the profession: the manipulation of facts. At most, we can agree that they may perhaps be subject to interpretation, at least in the gaps that historical references (or, rather, the absence of such references) may provide. In any case, a distinction must be made between the event and its consequences. Thus, in the battle of Qadesh, we can engage in a corresponding debate as to whether the victory was Ramses II's, as has traditionally been assumed, or Muwatalli II's, as more recent research seems to concede. We can even come to a consensus and sign a table between the Egyptians and the Hittites. What no expert doubts, however, is that the event, the confrontation, took place.

Despite this overwhelming logic, we often find, sometimes recurrently, cases in which the reporter is carried away by his emotions, his personal state or, what is worse, his ideological tendency, to deny a specific event or, faced with certain evidence that prevents him from doing so, to present it in a way that bears no resemblance to the reality

of what happened. The examples given, far from being mere anecdotes for to bring this work closer to the analysis of the references to the events of Castilblanco, constitute a starting point, a basis for understanding that disinformation, as a concept, may be new, but as a self-interested action it has existed since time immemorial.

Evidently, when the protagonist of the events corresponds to a person or institution of special significance, whatever the rank of such significance, the story can go beyond the mere interpretations of the narrator, to the point of becoming a full-fledged attack. On such occasions, because of the nature of what happened, the repercussions achieved or the background of the issue, different versions tend to appear, each one more distorting, although, curiously, with some negative element that unites them. And in these cases there is bound to be some variant which, using an apparently objective tone, contains subliminal messages with a clear negativity, as if we wanted to appear to be passionate fruit eaters and, as proof of this, we declared that we are just as happy to eat delicious strawberries as we are to eat astringent sloes.

Of course, if, for example, we were dealing with a tragic event, we could not miss the usual reference to the testimony of witnesses, which obviously dismantles any official version, although, curiously, such a version is duly documented and, on the other hand, these witnesses are never identified.

The Guardia Civil could not escape the value judgements that, from various sectors, including academia, question some of its actions. And it is here that we consider the analysis of one of the most significant cases in the history of the Corps: the events of Castilblanco. We would have liked to avoid making the same mistakes which, in our opinion, have been made by the different authors we will refer to, but, given our professional status, it will be impossible to achieve such an objective; in fact, we know that we are not free from the possibility that later studies may see in our expositions the same value judgements alluded to above.

The different sources dealt with (documentaries, press, manuals, ...) cover different points of view and interpretations of the facts, the reader having to judge the greater or lesser proximity of the postulates with respect to them, for which we will describe them according to the official account, providing all the information that, adjusted to the established limitations of space, allows us to have sufficient data.

2. CASTILBLANCO: THE FACTS

The town of Castilblanco is located in the *Siberia* of Extremadura, a region in the north-east of Badajoz that borders the provinces of Ciudad Real, Toledo and Cáceres. Today, with a clearly declining population, the census records 844 inhabitants¹ but, at the time of the Second Republic, the village was home to some 3,100.²

¹ INE. Annual Population Census 2021-2024. <https://www.ine.es/>

² INE. Alterations of the municipalities in the Population Censuses since 1842. <https://www.ine.es/intercensal/>

The new regime, that is, the republican period that followed the resignation of Alfonso XIII, was received by the poorer classes as a hopeful land of promise in which everyone would have access to a plot of land to farm; a plot of land from which, of course, they would obtain their livelihood without having to answer to any landowner. However, reality, which is usually very stubborn, imposed itself at all costs, and those initial hopes were diluted as time went by: the longed-for agrarian reform was resisted. In this context, the peasant population, increasingly disgruntled, was raising the tone of its protests, demanding the prompt delivery of land on which to harvest.

The first Republican months were passing and the 1931 calendar was about to come to an end to make way for the new year; in fact, we had already reached the last day, when the trade union Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Tierra (FNTT), the agricultural branch of the UGT, called a demonstration. It was not the first, but, although the previous day's demonstration had not been authorised, it had taken place quite normally and the authorities had done nothing to prevent it. However, the demonstration on 31 December would have a very different ending.

For the time being, the local mayor, Felipe Mangano López, decided that these illegal marches could not be allowed to take place. He wrote to the post commander. José Blanco Fernández, Corporal 1 of the Corps, ordered the corresponding service and was accompanied by his three guards: Agripino Simón Martín, Francisco González Borrego and José Matos González. The four of them left the barracks to meet the demonstration which, at that hour close to midday, was in Calle del Calvario, very close by. For the sake of completeness, we reproduce below some paragraphs from the report drawn up by the Chief of Command :³

"The corporal advanced alone and, with his rifle slung over his shoulder (a detail of great importance, as we shall see later), went to the President of the Casa del Pueblo, Justo Fernández López, whom he found on the right-hand side of the street in the midst of a large number of members. With the calmness of one who believes he is talking to good friends, he approached him, leaving his strength further back, between the groups, and with a kind word begged him to stop the rioting and to stop the group from circulating the streets.

Unexpectedly, and as if responding to a proposed purpose, the corporal's pleas were answered by his interlocutor holding his arms at the same time as others tried to disarm him; Corporal Blanco, a serene, young and Herculean man, pulled away from his adversaries and tried to retreat to prepare himself for defence; Hilario Bermejo Corral (a) "Retuerto", with a dagger and from behind, stabbed him, entering through the back of the neck, piercing the whole of his neck, the tip coming out from under his beard, ..." (Rodríguez Castaños)...." (Rodríguez Castaños, 1970: 156).

As we shall see in the following section, there are more than a few versions which, in clear opposition to what we read in the first paragraph of the lieutenant colonel's account, present the guards as aggressive characters who "with clean shots" were trying

³ Lieutenant Colonel Pedro de Pereda Sanz.

to break up the demonstration. However, it is not only in the proceedings that these assertions are disproved, but in different media, a totally different scenario is depicted, in which the guardsmen chat with those present. Of this friendly relationship with the neighbourhood, we find good proof in the following text:

"At the demonstration of strikers, the guards, without suspicion, mingled with the groups, advising them to be cautious. They took no precautions. In their opinion, they were among friends, who would heed their advice to disband" .⁴

And this is where we return to the previous mention of the detail that the corporal, like the guards, carried his rifle on his shoulder. This is precisely a sign of confidence that all would be peaceful. At no time did they even consider placing their weapons in prevengan. And, as we can see in Figure 1, the disposition in which the guards found themselves among the peasants confirms the idea that they were acting with complete confidence, calm in the face of a routine service that would have no further significance:

"Again and again I heard from the lips of the perpetrators of the unspeakable murder, that the four victims of their fury, were very good men, who had never received from them the least offence, not even discourteous admonitions" (Santiago Hodsson, 1932: 56).

Figure 1.

Calle del Calvario in Castilblanco. The blades indicate where the corpses were left: next to the Casa del Pueblo, in white, that of the Post Commander; the three in black, those of his comrades.



⁴ *New World*, of 8/01/1932.

Another example of this sense of calm is provided by a different media outlet, in this case *Mundo Gráfico*:

"The Guardia Civil moved among the groups recommending order. The guards, without concern, mingled with the demonstrators, neighbours, friends and acquaintances" .⁵

To close this section, we would like to draw attention to the fact that, despite the large number of works on the subject, the incomprehensible unity of action in the response of the Castilblanco residents has scarcely been studied. In the face of the fact that, practically simultaneously, all responded aggressively against the guards, no acceptable explanation has been articulated so far. Without claiming to be a lecturer on the subject, as the culmination of this discreet investigation, we will provide another point of view on what happened which, at the very least, should be assessed in the same terms as other contributions.

Up to now, the different versions tend to agree that the attack was a response by the peasants to the plight in which they found themselves. On this aspect, assumed as absolute truth by a good number of authors, we find different opinions, since, although this discourse that the members of the FNTT of Castilblanco had spent the whole winter without work (Preston, 2020) is the easiest to accept, we cannot disregard the accounts collected in the media of the time, as we will see below, taking as an example an article in *Mundo Gráfico*, or the speech of the Minister of the Interior himself:

"... I do have to say that clichéd phrases are being uttered, which have no reality when it comes to Castilblanco, and that it is not appropriate to speak of caciquismo.

[...] And in Castilblanco that has not happened. That is to say, there was no hatred of the people of the town against caciquismo, nor was there a nucleus of poor elements that could be unleashed at a time of need or indignation of the people, given that most of the people who took part in the events, I won't say that they were wealthy, but they were relatively well off. And it so happens that some of those arrested are individuals who had a few thousand pesetas that they lent at 20 percent. (Rumours.) I mean that this is not the cause that determined the Castilblanco movement"⁶.

Another formula used to justify the violent response of the Castilblanco people relates the aggressions to the shooting by the guard Agripino. Although it has not yet been possible to prove whether this was prior to the attack on the corporal, or whether it occurred afterwards, what is clear is that, even if it was prior, it does not seem logical that those surrounding the post commander would attack him as a reaction to the detonation: given that there was no visual contact between the two positions, nor was it possible to know at the time the reason for the shot, or that it had hit anyone.

⁵ *Mundo Gráfico*, 5/01/1932.

⁶ Debate on the events of Castilblanco, held on 5 January 1932 (DS no. 93, of 05/01/1932: p 2998).

This raises the question of whether these coordinated actions could have been planned in advance. As we have already noted, we refer to the end of this article.

3. THE STORY: DIFFERENT VERSIONS

The brutality of the events shocked the whole of Spain and, beyond the details of the victims' status as civil guardsmen, caused a real social earthquake. All the media echoed the news, especially the most renowned ones, which immediately sent reporters to the town. Perhaps the most prominent was *Mundo Gráfico*, which carried out an extensive photographic report, reproduced ad nauseam in other publications of the time and in most subsequent articles and studies. At the risk of being redundant, here are two of the most widely published: the one taken at the scene of the events (shown above, Figure 1) and the façade of the barracks house (Figure 2). The second is intended to draw the reader's attention to the extent to which the Guardia Civil, as part of society itself, from which it comes and which it must protect, shared the same miseries suffered by the simple people, as on few occasions could a barracks be as humble as the one depicted here.

Figure 2.



Castilblanco barracks.

Over the more than eighty years that have passed since then, much has been written about what happened in that remote village in Badajoz. Of most of the articles or references, unfortunately, we can hardly say that the content of any of them respects the reality of the events and, much less, the dignity of the murdered guardsmen.

We do not know to what extent the discordance with what happened derives from shortcomings in the investigation or, what would be worse, from a specific intention on the part of the authors.

Sometimes they are small details that some people tend to play down because they do not understand that they are decisive for the overall facts narrated. However, in our humble opinion, they should be given due importance, since they allow us to appreciate to what extent the researcher has been diligent in his work, or not. We find several

examples of this, such as "at the end of the demonstration" (Chaput, 2004: 191) or, in the same sense, but situating the action "at the end of the strike on the 31st" (Rodríguez Serrano, 2015: 159). The question that immediately arises, after reading both statements, is: if the demonstration was already over ... what were the guardsmen going to break up? or, to put it another way, what was the point of handing out a notification prohibiting the demonstration when it had already ended? It is clear that the information on something so obvious and simple is not good, and we personally doubt whether the sources used for the rest of his account are equally reliable.

Also very significant, as we pointed out in the Introduction, is the choice of terms used to refer to the demonstrators, in clear contrast to those used to refer to the Guardia Civils. The most significant example is that of Preston, insofar as the prestige he is supposed to enjoy should give greater value to his writings:

"On 31 December, while they were holding a peaceful and orderly demonstration, the Guardia Civil burst into the midst of the crowd and, after a scuffle, burst into gunfire, killing one man and wounding two others. The hungry villagers, in a fit of fear, anguish and panic, pounced on the four guards and stoned and hacked them to death" (Preston, 2020: 69-70).

Clearly, the wording induces the reader to empathise with the villagers ('peaceful and orderly demonstration' or 'starving, in a fit of fear, anguish and panic') and to feel contempt for the Guardia Civil ('burst into the crowd' and 'burst into gunfire'). Of the various thought-provoking aspects of the paragraph, we are left with just one: what qualities would these four Civil Guards not have to be capable of "bursting in" on a demonstration of 500 people? It only takes a few seconds to understand, in view of Figure 1, that it would be impossible for the guards to take any offensive action when completely surrounded by half a thousand souls: in any case, they could only defend themselves, but, as the sentence states, they could not even do that. However, if we analyse the chronology of Preston's account, we see that it suggests a sequence in which the demonstration goes on peacefully until the uniformed men appear and, after the logical clash (he speaks of a "scuffle" of which there is no record), begin to shoot, resulting in one dead and several wounded; in the face of *such an outrage*, the frightened peasants only try to defend themselves, which will result in the death of the four civil guards.

A similar line is found in the following text:

"On 31 December of that same year, in the village of Castilblanco in Badajoz, after having tried to dissolve a peasant demonstration with clean shots, four civil guards died at the hands of the strikers in the midst of unusual acts of barbarism" (Íñigo Fernández, 2010: 185-186).

Although in this case, at least, he seems to compensate for the expression "a tiro limpio" (it could be literal, because it is not clear whether there was time for them to do it in the air, or only one, which caused one death) with the recognition that the mass, so repeatedly described by various authors as "peaceful", actually committed "acts of barbarism".

Rodríguez Serrano is not far behind when he refers to the guard Agripino Simón and says that he was a "Guardia Civil with a cocky air [who] shot and killed Hipólito Corral" (Rodríguez Serrano, 2015: 159).

On another note, and without questioning the harsh conditions of the residents of Castilblanco, we draw attention to the text of the aforementioned article that appeared in *Mundo Gráfico*:

"Castilblanco was not a rebellious town. Rough people, but peaceful, attached to work, which was not lacking. An exception in the Siberia of Extremadura: Castilblanco had no problem of agrarian misery. There was plenty of work. The land was good for everyone: the olive trees, good harvests; the mountains, abundant pastures. The poorest neighbour had a piece of olive grove and made his slaughter. So there was no resentment of misery in the face of social injustice. Work and bread for all" .⁷

As we can see, this description clearly breaks with the repeated discourse of the starving peasant which, stubbornly, almost all the authors included in this study have taken up.

It will always be easy to find those who insist on presenting the Guardia Civil as those tools of the powerful to oppress the working class, as Rodríguez Serrano does:

"The Guardia Civil was in Castilblanco a force of protection and blind obedience at the service of the cacique to execute his outrages and injustices, despising the people, like unredeemed rabble" (Rodríguez Serrano, 2015: 159, alluding to Jiménez de Asúa et al. 2011: 121).

But this view clashes head-on with references from the period. In *Nuevo Mundo*, another publication with a large circulation at the time, we can read the following assessment of the uniformed men:

"The case of Castilblanco is characteristic in this sense. The civil guards in that town, according to later reports, got on well with the neighbourhood. Apparently, the guards, young men, had made good friends with the general population, one of whom was going to marry a girl with a long line of relatives in the village. The guard was friendly and generous, and he was on good terms with the young men..." .⁸

⁷ *Mundo Gráfico*, of 5/01/1932. The reporter Juan Ferragut, accompanied by the photographer José Campúa, travelled expressly from Madrid to Castilblanco to gather as much information as possible. Campúa sold his work to the different media of the time, which is why the same images were reproduced repeatedly.

⁸ *Nuevo Mundo*, 8/01/1932.

It is not that we intend to impose our criteria on those of other authors, possibly more documented, but we believe that, at the very least, these contributions should have the same credit that they can claim for their texts.

4. THE ALLEGED ANTECEDENTS

Over the years, different authors have dealt with the subject with different approaches. Some, while taking the official version as a reference, have enriched the narrative with details, sometimes providing possible sources, but on other occasions do not even refer to them. The most striking, however, are those variants which, ignoring the correlation of the facts that were considered proven in the sentence of the court martial, create a new story or, rather, new stories, as they do not even agree on a common line.

For example, it is interesting to note the reasons behind the call for the demonstration, of which we will hear or read different versions. For Hinojosa Durán, the ultimate cause of the wave of demonstrations throughout Extremadura,⁹ can be found in the events that had taken place a few days earlier in Almendralejo, when the Guardia Civil attacked the mayor of the town, who had offered to mediate in an agricultural conflict. However, we can also read that the demonstration was called "against the provincial governor and the Guardia Civil to denounce their collusion with landowners and caciques who did not comply with the new legislation" (Chaput, 2004: 192). Whichever option is true, what is clear is that the background to the demonstrations in Castilblanco, at least according to these criteria, had little or nothing to do with alleged agrarian demands, which leads us to consider the quotations from *Mundo Gráfico* and *Nuevo Mundo* reproduced above as more reliable.

Returning to Hinojosa Durán, in the documentary he explains that: "... the Guardia Civil is going to beat up the mayor himself..."¹⁰. Given that he does not provide any clear reference, we carried out a search for further information, which led us to find some news items in the press at the time. Thus, in *El Socialista* we read:

*"... on returning to Almendralejo, the mayor, together with other prominent members of the town, was arrested and led through the town in handcuffs, before being taken like a criminal to the prison in Badajoz"*¹¹.

⁹ <https://www.canalextramadura.es/video/los-sucesos-de-castilblanco> (Footage: 20" to 48").

¹⁰ This affirmation is made categorically as a fact that needs no explanation or evidential support, assuming as dogma of faith the declaration of the mayor himself. As we shall see in the development of this section, the facts took a somewhat different course to the one described above.

¹¹ Article by Margarita Nelken, Member of Parliament for the province of Badajoz, in *El Socialista* of 26/12/1931. In the form of an open letter, it was addressed to the Minister of the Interior, Casares Quiroga.

Margarita Nelken's article was echoed by other general media, although with very different approaches, from simply mentioning the fact to accompanying it with comments against it.¹²

For the moment, everything points to the fact that we are dealing with the typical story that presents the Guardia Civil as a repressive force, especially when its actions are directed against the oppressed lower classes and those who represent them.

For his part, the mayor, Ignacio Pavón, gave his own version of what had happened with regard to the attacks he had suffered at the hands of the Guardia Civil, who, according to him, had even tried to assassinate him. After the relevant proceedings were opened, he was arrested, along with the deputy mayor, José Morán, and one of the councillors, Francisco Machado.

Nelken also said in her open letter to Casares Quiroga, in relation to the public exhibition of the handcuffed mayor, that "The mere fact that order was not seriously disturbed at the time attests to the high spirit of civility prevailing among the workers of Almendralejo", or that "Thanks to the truly exemplary spirit of civility of the workers' organisations, it has not yet been necessary to deplore these mournful events in Almendralejo". Logically, the deputy did not mention the events that preceded the arrest, which was motivated by previous acts by the mayor, such as, for example, the insults made against the Corps.

To find out about these events, we have to go back to the end of November, when the olive harvest was due to begin and, as the local day labourers went on strike, workers were hired from other parts of Extremadura. Determined to prevent this, the Almendralejo workers organised groups on the outskirts of the town to attack anyone who tried to go out to do the work they refused to do.

The Guardia Civil, in application of the regulations in force, proceeded to break up the groups which, as is easy to imagine, confronted the couples with everything they had at their disposal. However, given the scenario drawn by Nelken, based on the mayor's own account, it is interesting to note the information we have obtained thanks to the investigation carried out, which, to a large extent, contradicts the idea that the Guardia Civil acted against him gratuitously.

As we have seen, at the end of November, mobilisations took place to prevent other workers from picking olives. Some of the media, critical of the attitude of the local day labourers, headed their headlines with headlines such as "AGAINST FREEDOM OF WORK"¹³. In fact, in an attempt to restore public order, the Guardia Civil injured a woman and arrested several of those involved¹⁴. It was then that the mayor, playing the role of peacemaker, mediated for the release of the detainees, to which Lieutenant Moreno

¹² The headline of the insert in the *Heraldo Alavés* of 16/12/1931 was striking: "A socialist mayor who had the town in fear".

¹³ *El Noticiero Gaditano*, 1/12/1931.

¹⁴ *La Opinión*, 2/12/1931.

agreed. The mayor was not quite right in his predictions, for if the argument used to ask for their release was that this would reassure the workers, the truth is that the result was exactly the opposite. Emboldened by the demonstrators, the released prisoners were paraded on the shoulders of the protesters, in a peculiar return to the bullring (or, rather, to the town), as if they had performed an afternoon of glory in the local bullring, triumphing in the bullfight against the fifth in the bullfight; and this, after having insulted and stoned the guards who were outside the barracks once again.

In view of these facts, we can agree that there was no animosity whatsoever against the mayor and that, in fact, his proposals were taken into consideration to the point of releasing those who, only a few hours earlier, had assaulted the uniformed officers. There were many comments against the intervention of the municipal authority:

*"Almendralejo, as a result of the mayor's conciliatory agreement, has been at the mercy of the strikers"*¹⁵.

However, from this point onwards, and despite having listened to the mayor more than could be expected, it seems that the mayor's attitude had a negative component. This can be deduced from the following reference in the press:

*"At the mayor's behest, the peasants repeated the pedrea over and over again and injured a lieutenant and three guards"*¹⁶.

Indeed, Lieutenant Miguel Moreno Menéndez, Sergeant Millán, a corporal and a guard were injured to varying degrees. Given that there were several occasions on which the demonstrators at least stoned the guards, we have to consider that, to a large extent, the fact that only four people were injured can be considered good news.

To close this section, we cannot ignore the fact that Margarita's letter gave rise to conflicting positions among the political class. On the one hand, the president of the Republican Centre in Almendralejo praised in the press the behaviour of the Guardia Civil, which he said had acted with excessive prudence, limiting itself to defending itself¹⁷. On the other hand, a national MP complained in Congress about the Guardia Civil's treatment of the mayor and councillors¹⁸; the curious thing in this case is that the MP in question¹⁹ was a colleague of the Minister of the Interior.

What most of the media did agree on, perhaps because they were directly affected, was the attitude shown by the mayor in the plenary session on the 16th, when he uttered

¹⁵ *Diario de la Marina*, of 2/12/1931.

¹⁶ *La Voz de Menorca*, of 2/12/1931.

¹⁷ *Heraldo de Almería*, of 29/12/1931.

¹⁸ *La Voz de Navarra*, of 19/12/1931.

¹⁹ Daniel Vázquez Campo, of ORGA.

various insults against the press and the Guardia Civil, accusing them of having mistreated him and trying to assassinate him .²⁰

On the other hand, even recognising that it is not possible to establish proportional comparisons between the alleged reasons behind the reactions attributed to the peasant population and the Guardia Civil, it is striking how, once again, in the case of the former it is always a question of justification while, in the case of the latter, there is only room for reproach.

And so, as an example of the first case according to Hinojosa Durán's theory, we find Rodríguez Serrano:

"The second day at nine o'clock in the morning was attended by around 500, the people of Castilblanco peacefully demonstrated their solidarity with the other peasants of the province of Badajoz, with no intention of committing crime" (Rodríguez Serrano, 2015: 159).

Incidentally, we should bear this quote in mind when pointing to the contradictions about the living conditions of the Castilblanco people. Rodríguez Serrano does not relate the demonstration to their miserable life, but rather as a show of solidarity with their fellow countrymen.

Of the recriminations against the Corps, we can see only a couple of examples, but they are particularly worrying because of the relevance of the author of one of them and the institution sponsoring the second.

In the first case we find a well-known American historian, Gerald Blaney, who is supposed to have special knowledge of the Guardia Civil, not in vain his doctoral thesis was entitled "The Guardia Civil and the Spanish Second Republic, 1931- 1936"²¹, which, in relation to the immediate consequences of the events of Castilblanco, states:

"The potential threat to the Republic was the tensions that arose within the regime itself. It was no mere coincidence that the first signs of rebellion within the Guardia Civil came after the murder of four civil guardsmen in Castilblanco on 31 December 1931. This event was seen by many Civil Guards as orchestrated by the PSOE, whose participation in the left-wing Republican government was perceived as a threat by many military and conservative circles" (Blaney, 2003: 49). (Blaney, 2003: 49-52).

To analyse the second, we shall begin by referring to a book, perhaps one of the most widely recognised in relation to the subject of our study, which is called, quite simply, "Castilblanco". The original was published in 1933 by Editorial España and

²⁰ *El Debate*, 17/12/1931.

²¹ However, the study of the same, carried out by the author of this article, has detected a multitude of relevant errors, such as, for example, attributing actions to people who, at that time, were not even in the supposed location indicated by Blaney.

signed by Jiménez de Asúa, Vidarte, Rodríguez Sastre and Trejo. In just under 300 pages, the text included the interventions of the prosecutor and the lawyers during the sessions of the War Council that tried the accused.

It was republished in 2011 by Professor Sánchez Recio, who supplemented it with a small study of the case and included some annotations, to complete the 330 pages of the current edition.

Among those who have studied the facts, Jiménez de Asúa has become a kind of historical reference point, as the possessor of a supposed absolute truth. However, in order to provide the reader with all the necessary data, we must clarify that we are talking about the lawyer who was at the head of the team of lawyers²² who defended the accused. It is striking that the work has become a source of truth for many, if we take into account that, however much objectivity we may grant to the authors, their writings were written with the aim of making the defence effective, denying the participation of their clients in the events and, in any case, justifying the little that could be recognised. The synopsis of the 2011 edition states:

"From the reading of these texts, despite the judicial rhetoric, one can extract, in addition to the description of the facts, the testimony of the conditions of life in rural Extremadura in the 1920s and 1930s, which can be extended to the whole of the plateau and Andalusia. Its historiographical value is therefore unquestionable".

From this we can draw some simple conclusions:

- If they recognise their involvement, they acted in this way forced by the conditions in which they lived (we have already seen that other sources oppose this criterion).
- It seems that the events could only have occurred as they are recorded in the authors' account. So much so that, according to the author, the *"historiographical value is unquestionable"*, which seems somewhat excessive, as it gives a dogmatic value to his own contributions, which can in no way be considered definitive, insofar as in this same work we have been able to learn of opposing opinions.

However, it is precisely this synopsis that connects us with the second sample that we wanted to comment on regarding the references, almost always in a negative tone, applied to the actions of the Guardia Civil. This synopsis is the one that can be found in many of the book's sales promotions, such as, to cite two examples, on some online sales platforms and on the publisher's own website. And this publisher, as we pointed out above, corresponds to an academic institution, specifically the University of Alicante. Well, in the text that illustrates the content of the work, we can read:

"<<Castilblanco>>. contains the texts of the military prosecutor's report and the defence speeches that four prestigious socialist lawyers, headed by Luis Jiménez de Asúa,

²² Luis Jiménez de Asúa, Juan Salmerón Vidarte, Antonio Rodríguez Sastre and Anselmo Trejo Gallardo

gave at the court martial held in Badajoz in July 1933 against twenty-two day labourers affiliated to the UGT and the Casa del Pueblo, accused of the death of the four local civil guards, This occurred on 31 December 1931, at the end of a peaceful demonstration which the excessive intervention of the forces of law and order, at the instigation of the mayor of the town who was also the manager of one of the large landowners in the municipality, turned into a multiple lynching after killing one and injuring another of the demonstrators. ... "

In this case, what strikes us is the statement that "*at the end of a peaceful demonstration than the disproportionate intervention of the forces of law and order*". At this point in the study, we are not going to discuss the dogmatic truth that the promotion of the book seeks to establish. The reader can judge the contrast between "peaceful demonstration" and the "disproportionate intervention" of those four civil guards, surrounded by five hundred neighbours.

Perhaps the wording of the synopsis could not be otherwise, if we follow what can be read in the book and which we have already reproduced above, about the attitude of the civil guards of Castilblanco "*despising the people, like an unredeemed rabble*". Perhaps he is referring to the irredeemable rabble with whom these same guards were alternating, and one of them was even going to marry a young woman from the village in the near future. Incidentally, Asúa's reference is undoubtedly taken from a speech by Ortega y Gasset (Eduardo, the philosopher's elder brother):

"... in most villages, in some, there are Civil Guards who, for fourteen years, have been accustomed to obeying the cacique, who has an already formed mentality, by virtue of which the people are contemptible rabble,"²³ .

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

If, as a general rule, knowledge of terms and the use made of them is usually of great importance, we can agree that, in this area of "disinformation", the relevance is even greater. The RAE dictionary defines it with two meanings (*Action and effect of disinforming; Lack of information, ignorance*), of which we shall take the first. This leads us to look in the same glossary for the meaning of "disinform", finding, once again, two meanings (*To give information intentionally manipulated to serve certain ends; To give insufficient information or to omit it*), both of which are perfectly valid for understanding our approaches.

In the previous sections we have dealt with examples that could be considered to be affected by the first of the meanings: intentionally manipulated information. We will spend just a few more paragraphs to include a couple of examples related to the second one: insufficient or omitted information.

The first example refers to the connotations of the activity that motivated the intervention of the Guardia Civil, i.e. the demonstration. When researching, the terms "demonstration" and "strike" can be used interchangeably, either because the author in

²³ Speech in the Cortes Generales, 5 January 1932 (DS no. 93, 05/01/1932: p 2994).

question is unaware of the scope of one or the other, or because the difference is not relevant. In this case, we will use the second possibility, since the demonstration (which is what took place in Castilblanco that day) was related to the general strike which had been called in the province of Badajoz for 30 and 31 December.

The strike, and therefore the demonstrations linked to it, had been declared illegal by the Civil Governor, Álvarez-Ugena²⁴. Despite the recurrent excuse that this was an abuse of power, the governor had limited himself to applying Article 1.IX of the Law for the Defence of the Republic²⁵, which considered, among other actions, aggression against the Republic:

"Strikes not announced eight days in advance, if they do not have another deadline marked in the special law, those declared for reasons that are not related to working conditions and those that are not submitted to an arbitration or conciliation procedure."

The problem now arises of discerning between the variety of causes to which the call is attributed; if we are allowed to recover the example of the battle of Qadesh, we can affirm that the fact of the confrontation is unappealable, but we have doubts as to which army was the winner. Among the different options that motivated the strike, we can find everything from disappointment at the lack of progress in the agrarian revolution, to, as we have already seen, a show of discontent against the Governor's mandate, to the response to the events of Almendralejo already mentioned.

Whatever the real reason, it is certain that none of them fitted into the precept of the Law and, therefore, the protest actions envisaged could be legally prohibited. No reference is usually made to this in the different chronicles. It seems that we can consider that this situation of "insufficient information" exists.

In the second case, i.e. omitting any type of reference that the author of the study does not consider appropriate, we can start by looking at the genesis of the Law for the Defence of the Republic itself.

In the various articles, memoirs, books, etc., which attempt to contextualise the events of Castilblanco, there are recurrent references to the situation in which the peasantry found itself, expectant of the promised agrarian reform with which we almost began this work. They even point out, as we have just seen, that the attitude of the Civil Governor was reminiscent of pre-Republican times. However, perhaps it would be appropriate to consider that the first provincial authority had been appointed by the Minister of the Interior, Casares Quiroga, the same man who had signed the Law for the

²⁴ Manuel Álvarez-Ugena y Sánchez-Tembleque. It is interesting to note that the mobilisations of the FNNT (the agrarian branch of the UGT) were aimed at the Governor's dismissal for his alleged conniving manoeuvres with the power of the caciques. Álvarez-Ugena was a member of the UGT (<https://fpabloiglesias.es/entrada-db/alvarez-ugena-y-sanchez-tembleque-manuel/>).

²⁵ L of 21 October 1931 (GM No. 295, 22/10/1931).

Defence of the Republic and who, in turn, had been appointed to the post by the man who had sanctioned it: Manuel Azaña.

With regard to what had happened in Castilblanco, Azaña intervened in the debate²⁶ that had arisen among the deputies of almost all the parties represented in the Chamber, a debate that at times became quite heated. From the extensive pronouncement, we select a few paragraphs that may be particularly significant, both for the praise shown towards the Corps, and when he rejects the accusations of cacique followers:

"The Guardia Civil has, by tradition, the pride of being blindly obedient to the constituted Power, and the Government of the Republic has lost no occasion to state for the record that the Guardia Civil has never, not for one minute, detracted from its tradition in this respect. Let this be stated once again. And when, in an institute dedicated to such serious, dangerous and exposed functions, an excess, a legal infraction, an abuse of power and authority occurs, the responsibility, which is the other pillar of the Institute of the Guardia Civil, falls personally on the person who commits it, but never on the entire Institute.

[...]

And now allow me to express my astonishment, ladies and gentlemen, that on the occasion of an event, in which no one can say that there has been an abuse on the part of the Guardia civil, the very prestige of the Institute has been called into question, or has been called into question; not in the Cortes, certainly, but outside of here.

*Anyone would say that in Castilblanco it was the Guardia Civil who exceeded their duty, and it never ceases to amaze me that when four unfortunate guardsmen have perished in the line of duty, the prestige of the Institute should be called into question, as if it were these guardsmen, not the dead, but the killers. (Applause.) This is a little paradoxical, ladies and gentlemen, and it makes me think, it makes me suspect that perhaps there are some twisted passions at work out there that take advantage of any moment and any pretext to find a difficult situation, not only for the Guardia Civil, but for the Government; that is, not only for the Government, but for the Republic"*²⁷.

A careful reading of that debate sheds much light on a multitude of questions surrounding those events, so many that there is no room for them in the limited space of this article. However, in order to clarify these comments, we reproduce a few paragraphs from the speech by Mr. Hidalgo :²⁸

²⁶ Debate ... (SD No. 93 of 05/01/1932).

²⁷ Debate ... (DS No. 93, of 05/01/1932: p 3004).

²⁸ Diego Hidalgo Durán, Member of Parliament for Badajoz (Partido Republicano Radical).

"In these rallies and in these preparatory meetings for the strike, as the aim of the strike was to go against the actions and procedures of the Guardia civil, with the aim of removing the lieutenant colonel and the governor, the masses were frankly and clearly encouraged to go against the Guardia civil, not understanding that there are unconscious masses who take the idea of going against the Guardia civil in the sense of, in effect, attacking them.

[...]

*That is why it is so strange throughout the province that the strike was not stopped, that it was not prevented, because the preaching was of such a nature, the workers had been told so clearly and precisely that they outnumbered the Guardia Civil, that it was a tacit indication that they should go against them"*²⁹.

In our opinion, the statements made by Deputy Hidalgo are particularly relevant. First of all, it should be made clear that he had won his seat for Badajoz because, unlike other politicians who adjusted their candidacy to the province where their pretensions could best be accommodated, he was from Badajoz, from Los Santos de Maimona to be precise. Therefore, his statements had a very well-founded basis, as a good connoisseur of what was happening in his homeland; what's more, after the events, he had travelled around part of the province, listening to the feelings of his fellow countrymen about what had happened.

There is one more curious reference point. Minister Casares himself, on the supposed relationship between the Guardia Civil and the *caciquismo*, wondered:

*"But, besides, what contact could there be when the head of the Guardia Civil had been there for seven months and had no other friendly contact than with the president of the Casa del Pueblo?"*³⁰.

It is paradoxical that the only person with whom he had a certain relationship was the one who held him down to be stabbed to death.

In any case, if we give some credibility to the statements of Deputy Hidalgo, perhaps we can now understand how the events could have occurred. We believe that this may be the appropriate point at which to close our investigation, but not before including one last reference from Mr Hidalgo's many speeches in that debate:

*"I can only reply to the Minister by saying that all the background to this strike suggested, in a fatal way, that it was going to degenerate into bloody events. It is enough to read the collection of the daily newspapers of Badajoz from the days prior to the strike to be convinced of the great danger that the declaration of the strike posed"*³¹.

²⁹ Debate ... (DS no. 93, of 05/01/1932: p 2993).

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ Debate ... (DS no. 93, of 05/01/1932: p 2993).

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