CHAPTER 8

World War I and Its Impact on Catalonia

Florian Grafl

Immediately after the beginning of World War One, the cabinet in Madrid officially declared Spain's neutrality. One month after the outbreak of the hostilities, on August 25 1914, the Spanish Prime Minister Eduardo Dato wrote to Antonio Maura, his predecessor, explaining his position:

> Our position is not to abandon that policy. We would depart from neutrality only if we were directly threatened by foreign aggression or by an ultimatum. [...] Germany and Austria are delighted with our attitude as they believed us committed to the Entente. France and Britain cannot criticize us as our pacts with them are limited to Morocco. Moreover, we do not owe them anything since in the dreadful year of 1898 they did nothing for Spain. [...] I do not fear that the Allies would push us to take sides with or against them. [...] They must know that we lack material resources and adequate preparation for a modern war. Even if the country was ready to launch itself into a military adventure, our collaboration would have little consequence.[1]

Dato's point, that Spain, due to the defeat in the war against the USA in 1898 and the equally disastrous colonial war in Morocco one decade later which he refers to in this letter, was not in a fit state to participate in the European conflict seems quite convincing and the fact that Spain remained neutral until the end of the War, in spite of constant changes of government in these years, seems to prove him right, even if the policy of Spanish neutrality was not beyond debate during wartime. Already, some days before this letter, on 19 August 1914, *El Diario Universal* newspaper, the mouthpiece of Count Romanones, leader of the Liberal party and one Dato's biggest political rivals, published a controversial article entitled "Neutralidades que matan" (or "fatal neutralities"), arguing that Spain should enter the War on the side of the Entente:

1 The English translation of this letter can be found in: Francisco Romero Salvadó, *Spain 1914–1918. Between War and Revolution* (London, 1999), 6, who refers to the quotation of the original letter in: Gabriel Maura Gamazo, Melchor Fernández Almagro, *Por qué cayó Alfonso XIII. Evolución y disolución de los partidos históricos durante su reinado* (Madrid, 1948), 472–473.

> Geopolitical, economic and diplomatic imperatives impose collaboration with the Entente. Spain is surrounded by the Allies, the sea-lanes are controlled by them, the vast bulk of our trade is with France and Britain and theirs is the largest portion of foreign investment in our country. Moreover, Spain's economic life depends upon British coal and American wheat [...] our collaboration with them would only represent the logical continuity of the international policies undertaken by different Spanish governments between 1900 and 1913 [...]. Neutrality unsupported by the neutral's own force is at the mercy of the first strong state which finds it necessary to violate it. [...] The Balearic and the Canary Islands, the Galician coasts are undefended. [...] If Germany wins, will she thank us for our neutrality? No, she will try to rule the Mediterranean. She will not take French continental territory. She will seize the African coast from Tripoli to Fernando Poo. [...] We shall lose our hopes of expansion in Morocco. We shall lose our independence. We shall lose the Balearic Islands. Nor will German expansion in the economic and industrial domain compensate us for the ruin of the countries with whom out interests in those respects have been up to now identified. On the other hand, if the Allies triumph they will owe us no debt of gratitude and will remodel the map of Europe as they think fit. [...] There are neutralities which are fatal![2]

In fact, during the war years Spain became deeply divided between Germanophiles, who admired the German monarchy for its traditional values as discipline and authority, and whose main supporters in Spain were the clergy, the army, the aristocracy and the upper classes, and Germanophobes, those, such as republicans, socialists, the middle classes and intellectuals, who hoped that Spain would at some point in the future become a fully democratic state.[3]

World War One, however, not only caused serious public debates in Spain, but had far-reaching effects on the Spanish economy and society as well. On the one hand, thanks to the opportunity to deliver goods to both sides of the conflict, some in Spain, mainly the industrialists, were able to gain considerable fortunes. On the other hand, the growing inflation rate during the war years pushed many working class families onto the margins of subsistence and beyond, even. The main consequence of the political, economic and social

2 The English translation of this article again is adapted from: Romero Salvadó, *Spain 1914–1918*, 7–8.

3 The division of Spain into Germanophiles and Germanophobes is well explained by Romero Salvadó, *Spain 1914–1918*, 7–22.

changes Spain underwent during World War One was that the Restoration monarchy headed by King Alfonso XII and later by his son Alfonso XIII, which, after a century of bloody battles for power and military rebellions, had given Spain a certain political stability since its establishment in 1875, came to an abrupt end only a few years after World War One.[4] What followed was another period of rapid political changes, starting with the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in 1923, which soon was overcome by the Second Spanish Republic in April 1931, an attempt to establish a democratic system in Spain, an experiment which, however, failed after a few years and directly led to the Civil War, the biggest catastrophe in the history of Spain.[5]

Given the huge impact World War One had on Spain despite its neutrality, it is rather surprising that the years from 1914 to 1918 have to date rarely been examined as an independent period of time in the history of Spain.[6] Therefore, this case study tries to analyse the impact of World War One on a particular region of Spain – Catalonia – the region where the consequences of the War were most felt, not only due to its geographical proximity to the conflict but also because of the fact that Catalonia, along with the Basque country, was the most important industrial region in Spain (and therefore the most affected by the economic changes caused by the War). Catalonia was also the region where the hopes for an independent state, seperated from the Spanish central state, were strongest.

---

4 A recent book which focuses on different aspects of the downfall of the Spanish Restoration monarchy is Francisco Romero Salvadó and Angel Smith, eds., *The agony of Spanish liberalism. From revolution to dictatorship, 1913–1923* (London, 2010).

5 For the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera Once see the classic work by Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Faciscm from Above: The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera 1923–1930* (Oxford, 1983) as well as the recent monograph by Eduardo González Calleja, *La España de Primo de Rivera (1923–1930). La modernización autoritaria* (Madrid, 2005). Many more studies are available dealing with the Second Spanish Republic and the Civil War, for example: Julián Casanova, *The Spanish Republic and Civil War* (Cambridge, 2010); Manuel Álvarez Tardío and Roberto Villa García, *El precio de la exclusión. La política durante la Segunda República* (Madrid, 2010) or indeed Manuel Àlvarez Tardìo and Fernando del Rey Reguillo, *The Spanish Second Republic Revisited. From Democratic Hopes to the Civil War (1931–1936)* (Brighton, 2011). For the dimensions of the massive bloodshed of the Civil War, it suffices to consult the recent book by Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust, Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London, 2012).

6 Apart from the book by Romero Salvadó already mentioned, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the First World War, as in many other countries as well, new books were published dealing with this period of time in Spain also. Especially worth mentioning are Paul Aubert and Eduardo González Calleja, *Nidos de espías. España, Francia y la primera guerra mundial 1914–1919* (Madrid, 2014), as well as Fernando García Sanz, *España en la Gran Guerra. Espías, diplomátics y traficantes* (Madrid, 2014).

Barcelona was, already in this period, by far the biggest city in Catalonia, the indisputable centre of both Catalanism and industrialization and, due to its port, it was the first place of refuge of foreigners trying to escape the War.[7] Given that the post-war years from 1918 to 1923 constitute one of the most violent periods in the history of the Catalan metropolis, starting with the street fights involving Catalans protesting for the independence of what they believed to be their home country, incidents which were shortly afterwards overshadowed by bloody struggles between entrepreneurs and workers, my main question is how did World War One contribute to the radicalization of the already existing conflicts in Barcelona?

The Catalanists' War in the Ramblas

> As it was expected, last night the demonstrations on the Ramblas and the Plaza de Cataluña continued. At 8 pm the Rambas offered an impressive sight. A huge crowd of people had gathered on this central avenue and made use of its absolute legitimate right to claim the independence of Catalonia. The police, who at the same time had already occupied the Plaza de Cataluña, the Ramblas and the streets nearby, were armed with sabres and took action against the protesters and dissolved the demonstration. The action of the police was as unexpected as brutal. [...] In total nine persons were arrested. The numerous injured persons were brought and cared for in the pharmacies nearby.

This report by the republican newspaper *El Diluvio* on 14 December 1918 shows the intensity of the fights between the Catalanists and the police in the Ramblas in the months after the end of World War One. The victory of the Entente was celebrated with great enthusiasm in Catalonia on November 11th.[8] The Catalans hoped that the rearrangement of Europe after the defeat of the central powers would make it possible that Catalonia, as other regions in Europe, now could become an independent state.

---

7 The most important books on this period in Barcelona are the following: Joaquín Romer Maura, *La rosa de fuego. Republicanos y anarquistas* (Barcelona, 1975); Temma Kaplan, *Red City, Blue Period. Social movements in Picasso's Barcelona* (Berkeley, 1992); Angel Smith, ed., *Red Barcelona. Social protest and labor mobilization in the twentieth century* (London, 2002); Chris Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898–1937* (London, 2005).

8 For the events taking place in Barcelona on the day of the armistice, see: Rafael Tasis i Marca, *Barcelona. Imatge i història d'una ciutat* (Barcelona, 1963), 457–458.

Catalonia has been a part of Spain ever since 1460 when Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabel of Castile married and by unifying their kingdoms laid the foundation of what later turned into the modern Spanish state. Two hundred years later, in the Spanish-French War of 1635 to 1659, the northern part of Catalonia (above the Pyrenees) became a part of France. In the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–1713), fought between the Habsburgs and the Bourbons, Catalonia supported Karl of Habsburg and was severely punished by the Bourbon Philip of Anjou after his victory. Barcelona was conquered by Franco-Castilian troops in 1714 and Catalan culture was repressed severely for the first time.

These measures had an almost devastating effect and it took nearly 150 years until Catalanism revived. The time of *Renaixanca* (rebirth) started with the publication of Bonaventura Aribau's poem *La Patria* in 1833, in which he praised his Catalan home-country and the Catalan language. During that time, however, Catalanism had no political implications but the aimed rather to raise the popularity of Catalan culture, seen for example in the introduction of the *Jocs Florals* (flower games), a Catalan poetry contest, in 1859. The intentions of the Catalan movement changed at the turn of the century. One of the main reasons for this change was the so-called "Disaster of 1898", which had a huge impact on the mentality of the Spanish people. In that year, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, the last Spanish colonies apart from Morocco, were lost in a war with the USA. To everyone at that time it became obvious that Spain had lost its status as one of the leading European imperial powers. This led to a profound mental crisis in Spain which simultaneously cast much doubt on the Restoration monarchy.

As a result, in Catalonia as well as in the Basque country, already at this point the most powerful industrial areas of Spain, for the first time in modern Spanish history political movements claiming the separation from the Spanish central state became popular.[9] In Catalonia, this process started when Enric Prat de la Riba (1870–1917) founded the *Lliga Regionalista de Catalunya* in 1901, a conservative right-wing party which demanded more autonomy for Catalonia. The war in Morocco made it obvious that Catalan people already had started to follow their own interests: when in 1909 Catalan troops were about to be sent to the African continent to support the Spanish army there, huge protests followed which culminated in the "Tragic Week", seven days of rioting in

9 For a detailed examination of the development of Catalan nationalism up to the end of the nineteenth century, see the recent study by Angel Smith, *The Origins of Catalan Nationalism, 1770–1898* (Basingstoke, 2014).

Barcelona.[10] In 1917 the Catalans caused another severe crisis for the Spanish state. When King Alfonso XIII refused to recall the Cortes, the Spanish parliament in Madrid, the Catalans opened their own parliament in Barcelona, provoking a huge political standoff.[11]

Already during World War One Catalan nationalism had grown considerably since the wave of nationalism which had affected all the countries who took part in the hostilities had also spilled over into Catalonia. About 40,000 Catalan volunteers had fought in World War One for the Entente, and in return the Catalans hoped for the support of the Allies in their struggle for independence. These hopes were further nourished by the concept of the self-determination of smaller nations enunciated by the American president Woodrow Wilson for whom celebrations were held in Catalonia and places and streets named after him. The growing Catalan nationalism was noted with concern in Madrid. In the Cortes, for the first time, an autonomy status for Catalonia was discussed. But, in the end, the application for more autonomy made by the Mancomunitat, the Catalan local parliament, was refused on 12 December 1918. Neither did the Allies intervene in favour of the Catalans, as they had hoped for. The euphoria of the first days after the end of the War now turned into frustration and most of the Catalan delegates withdrew from the parliament in Madrid.[12]

After the politicial negotations in Madrid had finally come to a dead end, the demands for Catalan independence were taken to the streets. As in other European cities, street protest in Barcelona had its roots in the religious processions and *festivitive* parades in early modern times.[13] Until the second half

10 The classic study on the Tragic Week is Joan Conelly Ullmann, *The Tragic Week. A Study of Anticlericalism in Spain 1875–1912* (Cambridge, 1968). In the course of the hundredth anniversary of the Tragic Week, many new works were published, for example: Alexia Domínguez Àlvarez, *La Setmana Tràgica de Barcelona 1909* (Valls, 2009); Dolors Marin, *La Semana Trágica. Barcelona en llamas. La revuelta popular y la Escuela Moderna* (Madrid, 2009); David Martínez Fiol, *La Setmana Tràgica* (Barcelona 2009).

11 For an overview of the events of the year 1917 in Spain, see Francisco Romero Salvadó, "Spain's revolutionary crisis of 17: A Reckless Gamle", in *Agony,* eds., Romero Salvadó and Smith, 62–91.

12 For a contemporary view from the perspective of a Catalanist, see Josep Mariá Poblet, *El moviment autonomista a Catalunya dels anys 1918 a 1919* (Barcelona, 1970). For a more distant and objective analysis of the events, see Klaus-Jürgen Nagel, *Arbeiterschaft und nationale Bewegung in Katalonien zwischen 1898 und 1923* (Saarbrücken, 1991), 428.

13 James Amelang, "Public Ceremonies and Private Fetes. Social Segregation and Aristocratic Culture in Barcelona, ca. 1500–1800", in *Conflict in Catalonia. Images of an urban society*, ed. Gary McDonogh (Gainesville, 1986), 21–23.

of the nineteenth century it had become a common feature of public life in Barcelona, where most people were unable to read and write. The joint walk through the streets showed that the protesters shared the same values and desires and as a large crowd gave them a feeling of power.[14]

Already in the last months of World War One there had been smaller violent incidents in connection with the growing Catalan nationalism. On 29 September 1918, the first anniversary of the death of *Lliga* founder Prat de la Riba, a small group of Catalanists equipped with flags of the USA and of Catalonia passed the Paseo de Gracia, a boulevard in the upper-class area of Barcelona until they were dispersed violently by the police.[15] Similar incidents occurred during the last weeks of the War.[16] But only in December 1918 and January 1919 did the fights in the Ramblas became frequent and regularly followed the same pattern: in the evenings, at around 8pm, the Catalanists, who mainly consisted of employees and students, but some workers as well, moved through the Ramblas shouting their demands for Catalan independence.[17] The choreography of protest included, on the one hand, the *senyera*, the red and yellow horizontally-striped Catalan flag, a nineteenth-century symbol of militant Catalanism which during the first decades of the twentieth century turned more and more had into a symbol of national identity as well as a symbol of struggle.[18] On the other hand the Catalanists provoked the authorities as well as the Spaniards by singing the song "*Els Segadors*" (meaning "the cradlers"). This song, which recalled the Catalan uprising against the Spanish monarchy of 1640, had become a kind of unofficial national anthem of Catalonia by the end of the nineteenth century.[19]

---

14 For the meaning of street protest in Barcelona at the turn of the twentieth century, see Kaplan, *Red City*, 13–14.

15 This event is decribed in Albert Balcells, Enric Puyol and Jordi Sabater, *La mancomunitat de Catalunya i l'autonomia* (Barcelona, 1996), 102.

16 For example, such an event is documented in *El Dia Grafico*, 17 Nov. 1918.

17 Enric Ucelay da Cal and Estat Català, *The strategies of Seperation and Revolution of Catalan Radical Nationalism 1919–1933* (Columbia, 1979), 98; Amongst the 42 Catalan nationalists who were arrested between 11–14 Jan. 1919, were five students, four shop assistants and 25 employees, according to Isidre Molas, "Federació Democrática Nacionalista (1919–1923)," *Recerques* 4 (1974): 137–153, here 140.

18 For the meaning of the Catalan *senyera* see Jordi Alberti, *La bandera catalana. Mil anys d'història* (Barcelona, 2010) and also Pera Anguera i Nolla, *Les quatre barres. De bandera històrica a senyera nacional* (Barcelona, 2010).

19 For the origins of the song and its evolution into an unofficial national anthem of Catalonia, see Jaume Ayats, *Els Segadors. De cançó erótica a himne naciona* (Barcelona, 2011) and also Pera Anguera i Nolla, *Els Segadors. Com es crea un himne* (Barcelona, 2010). In an example of its use, it was reported that, after a mass meeting on the evening of 23 Dec.

In the struggles in the Ramblas, the Catalanists not only had to fight the police, but also members of the "Liga Patriótica Española" (League of Patriotic Spaniards), which claimed to have about one thousand members at the beginning of 1919.[20] After three months of regular confrontations, the struggles in the Ramblas reached their climax in the second half of January 1919. On 19 January 1919, two young Catalanists were murdered.[21] Only a few days later, on January 24th, a street fight in the Ramblas between Catalanists and the police left many persons injured.[22] In the following days, more violent clashes took place resulting in seven persons being severely injured. The escalation of violence caused protests all over Spain which put the government under pressure and as a consequence, on 28 January, Catalan symbols were forbidden.[23] In the following years there were only two minor incidents,[24] but on 11 September 1923, the Catalan national holiday, there was another big street battle which resulted in 30 persons being injured when Catalan, Basque and Galician nationalists gathered on the Plaza de Cataluña and demanded autonomous status for their home regions. These incidents were amongst the reasons which encouraged Primo de Rivera to bring forward his coup d'etat, from the originally planned date of 15 September to the night of 12–13 September; one of the first things Primo de Rivera did when he came to power was to ban all Catalan culture from public life.[25]

1918, about one hundred people waving Catalan flags and singing „Els segadors" moved through the Ramblas, see *El Diluvio*, 24 Dec. 1918, About two weeks later, there was a similar incident, as documented in *El Diluvio*, 13 Jan. 1919.

20 Alejandro Quiroga, Nation and Reaction, in *Agony*, eds., Romero Salvadó and Smith, 202–229, here 207–208.

21 Anguera i Nolla, *Les quatre barres*, 188–189.

22 This indicident is documented in *El Correo Catalan*, 25 Jan. 1919.

23 A very detailed overview of the events is to be found in Eduardo González Calleja, *El máuser y el sufragio. Orden público, subversión y violencia política en la crisis de la Restauración 1917–1931* (Madrid, 1999), 346–348.

24 *El Noticiero Universal* reported on 3 May 1920 that, on the day before, on the occasion of the "Jocs Florals" a group sang "Els Segadors" and shouted "Mori Espanya" (or "death to Spain") and "Visca Catalunya lliure" ("Long live free Catalonia"), but this incident did not have any consequences. More than two years later, a similar incident was reported which did not have any major consequences either, see *La Vanguardia*, 12 Sept. 1922.

25 Quiroga, "Nation and Reaction", 202.

The Radicalization of the Class Struggle in Barcelona by World War One

On the evening of January 8th, 1918, businessman José Antonio Barret went on a walk with a friend. Suddenly, they were approached by a group of persons armed with pistols who fired about fifty bullets at them. While his companion was only slightly injured, Barret was hit by twelve bullets and died immediately. Apart from Joan Tapias, who was gunned down on 7 October 1917, Barret was the first industrialist in Barcelona to be assassinated.[26]

Relations between workers and entrepreneurs had been affected by mutual acts of violence ever since the beginning of the industrialization in Catalonia in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1832 the first factory had been erected in Barcelona, but only three years later, it was burned down by the workers who were afraid of losing their jobs because of the introduction of steam engines.[27] As a response, five suspects were executed and the workers' association had to face severe reprisals for years. Twenty years later, in 1855, the first general strike in Spanish history was called out by Catalonian workers in response to the execution of the popular labor leader Josep Barceló who had been judged under dubious circumstances as a common criminal.[28] During this strike, the director of the factory Vapor Vell in Barcelona's labor district Sans was murdered.[29] In the first two decades of the twentieth century, due to the growing influence of the trade unions, strikes in Barcelona became common affairs in the struggles between workers and entrepreneurs. These strikes turned large parts of the city into a battlefield, with regular gun fights between workers and the police. In the second decade of the twentieth century, the strikes became more violent in the way that both blacklegs as well as entrepreneurs were singled out as targets and attacked.[30]

The assassination of Barret, however, put the bloody struggle between workers and entrepreneurs on a new level. Before this, attacks on entrepreneurs had been rather spontaneous affairs, whereas the murder of Barret was carefully planned and carried out. Together with his brother, José Antonio Barret was

26 There are detailed reports on the assassination of Barret for example in *El Diluvio*, 9 Jan. 1918, as well as in the morning edition of *El Noticiero Universal*, 9 Jan. 1918.

27 Ealham, *Class*, 31.

28 See Josep Maria Planes i Martí, *Els gangsters de Barcelona* (Barcelona, 2002), 60–62.

29 Albert Balcells, "Catalunya contemporània" in *Història de Catalunya,* ed. Albert Balcells (Madrid, 2009), 589–886, here 631.

30 The relation between the strikes and the growing violence in the labor conflicts is examined very well in Angel Smith, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction, Catalan Labor and the Crisis of the Central State, 1898–1923* (New York, 2007), 232–240.

the owner of a big company with about 1000 workers which was said to produce munitions for the Allied forces.[31] Due to this fact, the German secret service was deemed responsible for the assassination of Barret.

Already, in 1918, the Spanish anti-German newspaper *El Radical* reported on 6 June of that year that about 70,000 German spies were active in Spain. On one hand this seems exaggerated, but on the other hand different sources seem to prove that the German secret service in Spain was quite influential.[32] In Barcelona, the German secret service effectively gathered information through middlemen about the routes of Spanish cargo vessels carrying goods for the Allied forces which were later sunk by German submarines.[33] Furthermore, the sources indicate that the German secret service also tried to stop the trade between Catalan companies and the Entente by creating unrest among the workers.[34] However, there is no proof that they went so far as to hire persons for contract killings. On the contrary, the fact that *Solidarid Obrera*, the leading mouthpeice of "workers' solidarity" and the labor movement, commented on the murder of Barret with words to the effect that "for all pigs, the day of Saint Martin arrives sometime" rather indicated that the murderers of Barret were to be found in the working class.[35]

Nevertheless, the influence of the German secret service was present in Barcelona even after the end of World War One. Manuel Bravo Portillo, a police officer in Barcelona, had collaborated with the German secret service during the War and, for this, he was suspended from service. Later he became the head of the "Banda Negra" or "black gang", a parallel police sponsored by the the Federación Patronal, the employers' association.[36] The task of the gang was

31 A short biogrophy of José Antonio Barret is to be found in Soledad Bengoechea, *Organització patronal i conflictivitat social a Catalunya. Tradició corporativisme entre finals del segle i la dictadura de Primo de Rivera* (Barcelona, 1994), 327–328.

32 The activities of the German secret service are documented in the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (Political Archive of the Foreign Office) in Berlin and are exemplified by the letter of Otto Engelhardt, former German consul in Seville, to the German president Paul von Hindenburg, PP AA R 72005, 17 July 1929.

33 There were regular reports on Spanish ships sunk by the German "pirates", for example in *El Radical,* 12 June 1918, & 25 July 1918.

34 So it seems that the German secret service tried to exert influence on labor leaders such as Josep Negre, Borobio and Francisco Jordan, see Joan Ferrer i Farriol, *Baltasar Porcel, La revuelta permanente* (Barcelona, 1978), 147–149.

35 *Soledaridad Obrera*, 9 January 1918. The feast of Saint Martin – 11 Nov. – is traditionally the day in Spain when fattened pigs are slaughtered for the winter.

36 The gang is documented in most detail in the memoirs of the former police officer Manuel Casal Gómez, *La Banda Negra. Origen y actuación del pistolerismo en Barcelona 1918–1921* (Barcelona, 1977).

to gather information on syndicalists, with the aim of arresting or even killing them. Bravo Portillo recruited the members of the gang from the lower classes, so the forty to fifty men who formed the gang comprised of former prisoners and pimps, as well as police officers who had been disgraced. The first murder the Banda Negra committed was of Pablo Sabater, secretary of the union of dyers, on 19 July.[37] Although Bravo Portillo was never officially put on trial, it must have been clear to most of the syndicalists that he had pulled the strings and in fact he was killed in an act of revenge not even two months later.[38] The new chief of the gang was a German named Fritz Stallmann. He was born in Potsdam and, like many criminals, came to Barcelona during World War One. There he changed his name to Baron von König, pretending to be aristocratic. He soon became a close friend to Bravo Portillo, from whom he took over the leadership of the gang.[39] With Von König, the violence used by the group also took on a higher intensity. There was no pretence that the victims were to be arrested. They were simply shot in the street. Whereas his predecessor had made the gang relatively loyal to the police and the employers, Von König mainly followed his own ambition to make as much money as possible. Therefore he not only continued with the contract killing of syndicalists but also started to blackmail factory owners.[40] However, in doing so, he lost step by step the protection of the authorities and he was expelled from Spain without trial in June 1920.[41]

The radicalization of the conflicts between workers and entrepreneurs during and after World War One was not only caused by the German secret service and its collaborators, but in more general terms, as already indicated, by the economic and social changes caused by the consequences of the War as well. Barcelona, as the industrial centre of Spain, with hundreds of thousands of industrial workers was greatly affected by these changes, which broadened even further the gap between rich and poor which already existed in Spain.

37 For a more detailed description of the assassination of Pablo Sabater, see Maria Amàlia Pradas Baena, *L'Anarquisme i les lluites socials a Barcelona 1918–1923. La repressió obrera i la violència* (Barcelona, 2003), 95.

38 Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth. The social and political background of the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge, 2014) [original, 1943], 69.

39 For more information on this person see the article by Juan Ventura Subirats, "La verdadera personalidad del 'Baron de König'", *Cuadernos de Historia Económica de Cataluña* 5 (1971), 103–118.

40 Francisco Romero Salvadó, "'Si vis pacem para bellum'. The Catalan Employers' Dirty War, 1919–23', in *Agony*, eds., Romero Salvado and Smith, 181.

41 The process of Von König's expulsion from Spain is documented in the following file; Archivo Historico Nacional (Madrid), AHN 34A (3).

On one hand, the industrialists in Catalonia greatly profited from the War, a period of time which was for example remembered with great enthusiam by the industrialist Pedro Gual Villabí in his memoirs:

> It was a fantastic age [...] in which all businesses were easy and prosperous, giving rise to a real orgy of profits. [...] Every day it was said that it [the War] had radically changed a thousand institutions and a thousand habits and, as I heard these reflections, I kept telling myself: Of course, as it has even changed my wife! Indeed, such an austere, cool and even sometimes unsociable woman became sloppy, attentive and extraordinarily vivacious. A woman who never asked me a single question about my businesses...now followed with interest its progress and enjoyed its excellent prospects.... She bought earrings, other jewels, a magnificent fur coat, expensive tailor-made dresses...and then the automobile.... Oh, the day when we could show off our stunning Renault![42]

On the other hand, the living conditions of the lower classes became even more desperate. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the life expectancy of the 18.6 million inhabitants of Spain had been no more than about 35 years, much less than in other European states. Even if this mainly was caused by the poor conditions of the health system which resulted in high childhood mortality, it seems that the living conditions in general in Spain during that period were very tough.[43] This rate was increased by World War One, which led to high inflation, so that food prices rose between May 1915 and May 1921 by 90%.[44] The poor of Spain did not have much hope that politics could improve their situation. A welfare system, such as it existed in other European states, did not really exist in Spain and it seemed that this was not to change soon. As in many other Spanish cities, food riots also took place in Barcelona in January 1918.

Not surprisingly, crime rates increased during this time as well. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, Barcelona was well-known across Europe for being a centre of vice. Especially infamous was the lower part of the Raval, the waterfront area bordered by the two big avenues Parallel and the Ramblas, which during that time was one of the most densely populated

42 The original version is to be found in Pedro Gual Villalbí, *Memorias de un industrial de nuestro tiempo* (Barcelona, 1923), 106–121. This translation is taken from Francisco Romero Salvadó, *The foundations of civil war: revolution, social conflict and reaction in liberal Spain, 1916–1923* (New York, 2010), 27.

43 Julián Casanova and Carlos Gil Andrés, *Historia de España en el siglo XX* (Barcelona, 2009).

44 Albert Balcells, *El Pistolerisme. Barcelona (1917–1923)* (Barcelona, 2009), 11.

regions in Europe. The contemporary writer Francisco Madrid later contributed further to this infamous reputation by applying to it the name Barrio Chino (roughly translated as China Town) after inner-city Los Angeles, although no Chinese actually lived in Barcelona. Since many contemporary authors and journalists have written a lot about that district, it is not always easy to decide what was based on real facts and what stories were actually only legends which contributed to the moral panic. The district was built in the 1830s as Barcelona's first working-class settlement. In the course of the nineteenth century, thousands of people came in seach of work – firstly from rural Catalonia but later from other parts of Spain as well – and settled down there in order to work in the factories which had been built. In the first decades of the twentieth century, however, the factories closed and were relocated to the suburbs and the district lost its character as an industrial zone. The former factory buildings were turned into bars and restaurants attracting working- and middle-class men from all parts of the city as well as sailors from the harbour.[45] Furthermore, it became Barcelona's centre of prostitution and drug trafficking. For many working-class women, prostitution was the only possible way to make ends meet.[46] There are estimates for the year 1911 which indicate that about 10,000 women were working as prostitutes in Barcelona, but given the fact that the contemporaries took especial notice of the presence of prostitutes in the city during that time, one might guess that the actual figures were a lot higher.[47] The organization of the prostitution was in the hands of so-called *Pinxos*, pimps. They cultivated their own lifestyle and regularly were involved in bloody fights with their rivals.[48] They also were organized in gangs, which fought each other. For example, the well-known pimp L'Aragones was murdered by his rival Nelo and his gang on March 8th 1904.[49]

Drug trafficking was closely connected in Barcelona to prostitution but only started later. Until the beginning of World War One, cocaine was nearly unknown in Barcelona and only during this time did it become popular. As early as 1915, there were many establishments in which cocaine, morphine and other drugs were available and often it was women who passed the drugs to the

45 For a short history of this district, see: Chris Ealham, "An 'Imagined Geography'. Ideology, urban space and protest in the creation of Barcelona's 'Chinatown' c.1835–1936", *International Review of Social History* 50 (2005): 373–397.

46 Kaplan, *Red City*, 85–86.

47 Nagel, *Arbeiterschaft*, 105.

48 Paco Villar, *Historia y leyenda del Barrio Chino. Crónica y documentos de los bajos fondos de Barcelona 1900–1992* (Barcelona, 2003), 61–63.

49 Miquel Badenas i Rico, *El Parallel, história d'un mite. Un barri de diversió i d'espectacles a Barcelona* (Lleida, 1998), 243.

clients. In spite of a 1918 law that prohibited the trade in narcotics, it was only during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera that the fight against the drugs trade in Barcelona was taken seriously.[50] Nevertheless, it remained a social problem until the Civil War: in 1928, a report from journalist Arturo Bono revealed that drug consumption in Barcelona was still a "grave danger" and that the city had about a thousand addicts. Four years later, another newspaper report dealing with drug trafficking in Spain argued that due to its harbour Barcelona had become one of the most important transfer sites for drugs between America and Europe.[51] According to the testimonies of contemporaries, it was mainly foreign adventurers and playboys who had come to Barcelona in the war years who were involved in this business and who had established a kind of criminal underworld, which remained intact for almost two decades until city life as a whole came to a standstill because of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

Conclusion

Despite the neutrality of Spain, World War One had wide-ranging consequences for Catalonia. Probably the most striking effect was the radicalization of Catalan nationalism, whose followers were encouraged by the promises the Allies made to smaller nations and who later took their frustration out onto the streets, so that the Ramblas in Barcelona became the main battleground between Catalanists and Spanish patriots. Although the effects of the War on the Catalan economy cannot be directly connected to the radicalization of Catalan nationalism, they nevertheless were quite siginificant and left the Catalan industrialists and workers in open hostility to one another which, soon after the end of the wartime economic boom Spanish industry has undergone, turned into open acts of collective violence. Finally, the changes in Catalan society which were caused by the waves of foreign immigrants which had come from other European countries to Catalonia – in order to avoid the War or to make profit out of it – should not be underestimated. It led to a significant crime wave, mainly in Barcelona, where the security forces, due to their small numbers (a ratio of one policeman for every 5,000 citizens), were helpless to stop illegal activities which in many cases were initiated and led by former spies and other dubious personalities from abroad. To sum up, it seems no exaggeration to claim that World War One led to a profound radicalization

50 Paco Villar, *Barrio Chino*, 113–115.

51 This report was published in *La Noche*, 4 Feb. 1928 and 27 Jan.1932.

of Catalan society, which became obvious in various social arenas. To make things worse, these struggles became more violent due to the fact that, as a general effect of World War One, weapons such as pistols and guns became much easier to access than in the years before the War. So it makes some sense to conclude that World War One, despite Spain's neutrality, was one of the main reasons why Catalonia, in the five years which followed the War, went through one of the most violent periods in its history.