Changing the Pace of Life, Rationalizing Society: The Disappointed Ambitions of the Franco Dictatorship, 1939–1975

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Résumé

Au début des années 1960, la dictature franquiste a déployé des efforts considérables pour réformer et synchroniser l’emploi du temps, public et privé, en Espagne. Elle prescrivait un emploi du temps plus rationnel qui permettrait à l’Espagne de rattraper les pays économiquement plus avancés et d’améliorer la moralité publique. Cependant, l’opposition vocale de divers groupes sociaux et d’intérêts ainsi que l’incapacité à comprendre la complexité du temps social ont finalement obligé le régime à abandonner sa vision lointaine. La campagne franquiste faisait partie de tentatives transnationales plus vastes de rationalisation de l’emploi du temps et son étude suggère une nouvelle compréhension de l’autoritarisme politique après 1945.

Mots clés : histoire de l’Espagne ; régime de Franco ; autoritarisme ; réforme sociale ; Europe.

Abstract

In the early 1960s, the Franco dictatorship made considerable efforts to reform and synchronize public and private time use in Spain. It recommended a more rational schedule that would allow Spain to catch up with the most economically advanced countries and improve public morals. Yet the vocal opposition of various social groups and interests as well as its inability to understand the complexity of social time ultimately forced the regime to abandon its far-flung vision. The Francoist campaign was among a broader set of transnational efforts to rationalize time use and its study suggests a new way to understand political authoritarianism after 1945.

Key words: History of Spain ; Franco Regime ; Authoritarianism ; Social Reform ; Europe.

Time Reform in Franco Spain

In the spring and summer of 1961, the Franco dictatorship decided to change the rhythm of Spanish life. In a number of decrees, it introduced a far-reaching reform of public and private time. Starting June 1st, workers and employers were supposed to report earlier to work in the morning, to take only short breaks during the working day – thereby abolishing the traditional Spanish siesta – and to finish work in mid-afternoon instead of late in the evening. In addition, the regime ordered banks, shops and department stores to eliminate midday breaks and to close earlier. Theatres and cinemas were ordered to start their evening sessions earlier and close before midnight while restaurants and bars had to finish their services at 1 am at the latest. Even night-busses should start their last trips at an earlier time. Overall, the measures tried to implement a new way-of-life in Spain. Spaniards should live less at night and more during the day, and the boundaries between work and leisure should be more clearly drawn.¹

These elaborate reform measures provoked a heated debate. In the spring and summer of 1961, time reform was the dominating subject of discussion within Spanish society. The state-controlled media reported extensively on the reforms, not least to raise awareness of the necessity for change. A reporter for the influential Madrid daily ABC noted in late April: “At the hairdresser’s, in the pub, in bars and cafeterias, outside the cinema gates, in the busses and at home, opinions for every taste about the new time scheme (horario)”.² In the late evening of June 1st a bohemian group of artists, journalists and self-confessing night-owls even publically “said good-bye to the Madrid nights” by visiting emblematic places of the city’s nightlife such as famous squares, fountains and night-clubs.³

But why did the Franco regime choose to interfere with the rhythms of Spanish life? What were the results of the reform? Were the measures popular among Spaniards? And what does time reform tell us about the Franco dictatorship? This essay tries to answer these questions and to situate the Spanish case within a wider political history of time in Europe after the Second World War.

The Politics of Time

The Franco dictatorship was not the first – nor the last – political regime to take an interest in questions of time.⁴ Modern political systems are always regimes of time. They situate themselves within historical time, define themselves with the help of temporal categories, and, at least since the French Revolution, try to re-order both public and private time to fit their political ideas and visions. These attempts, however, were contested as competing political forces and social movements fought over the control of time.

Since the high middle ages, political elites have tried to persuade people to live a time-conscious life-style. The invention of mechanical clocks was a major step in this direction. As these clocks became more ubiquitous in the following centuries, elites

came to understand time increasingly as a resource that could be molded and used to optimize nations and societies. The vision of a more rational order of time exerted a continuing influence on rulers, state administrators and social reformers. Since the 19th century, governments have increasingly intervened in time by regulating working hours—and increasingly posing limits on them—and holidays, fixing school time schedules as well as the length of military service. Outside of Europe, the colonial powers made the implementation of “Western” time habits a matter of foremost importance as these were seen to be a precondition for social peace, political stability and economic advancement.

It was however the new dictatorships of the 20th century that most rigorously set out to re-order time. They wanted to synchronize public and private time and to accelerate historical time altogether. The German historian Lutz Raphael has labeled these regimes as “acceleration dictatorships” (Beschleunigungsdiktaturen) that entered “into a contest with time itself”. The totalitarian regimes increased the pressure on institutions and individuals to reform their time habits and speed up. They tried to speed up historical time, not the least through a constant intervention into private time. In the last few years, historians have started to analyze this totalitarian approach to time. The German historian Martin Sabrow, for example, argues that both National Socialism and Soviet Communism shared a deeply held belief in the malleability of time that manifested itself in a veritable “cult of time” and the propagation of detailed plans to accelerate social and economic change. The eminent historian of fascism, Roger Griffin, has equally underlined the importance of temporal concepts for fascist regimes. The fascists wanted to discard the decadence of liberal time and introduce a new historical beginning where the differences between past, present and future and between individual and collective time would be made irrelevant. The “dead” time of former epochs would be replaced by a new mythical time. In the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks tried hard to shake off the constraints of time and make society more time-aware and time efficient. During the 1920s, a voluntaristic, “charismatic” conception of time competed with a “rational” one influenced by taylorism. While the former saw the revolutionary will as able to easily overcome time constraints, the later understood time more as an abstract flow that could not be altered but should be put to more efficient use.

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10 Stephen E. Hanson, Time and Revolution. Marxism and the Design of Soviet Institutions, Chapel Hill, Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997; Stefan Plaggenborg, Experiment Moderne. Der sovjetische Weg,
Temporal arguments also play a major role in distinguishing between “modern” totalitarian and “traditional” authoritarian regimes. While totalitarian regimes are associated with a dynamic and future-oriented politics fundamentally changing daily life rhythms, authoritarian regimes like the Franco dictatorship are regularly characterized as politically static and oriented towards the past. Prominent political scientists like Juan Linz have argued that such regimes are above all interested in slowing down historical time by preventing social and cultural change and demobilizing the population. In contrast to the future-oriented “ideologies” of the totalitarian states, their “mentality” is “nearer to the present and the past”\(^ \text{11} \). They only develop a “limited utopianism” because far-reaching political visions would make integrating the different political factions supporting the regimes more difficult. All in all, authoritarian regimes do not aspire to create New Men and a new way-of-life as their totalitarian counterparts but, on the contrary, try to stabilize traditional life forms, social hierarchies and power relationships.

Historical research on Franco Spain has mostly adopted this interpretation.\(^ \text{12} \) It maintained that at least after the end of an initial more openly fascist phase, the regime lost any larger political vision and was mainly focused on sustaining its power. Only a small group of reformers within the regime leadership argued in the 1960s in favour of slightly loosening authoritarian policy in order to maintain Francoist rule in the face of a changing society.\(^ \text{13} \) Against this background, the conflicts between an increasingly anachronistic political system and a modernizing consumer society and new social movements constitute the basic theme of recent scholarship.\(^ \text{14} \) While this is a forceful interpretation, it draws a far too one-dimensional picture of Francoist rule. Regarding our case of time reform, it cannot explain why the regime so heavily invested personal and material resources to plan and implement the reform, even as this policy threatened to divide its social power basis and to alienate large segments of the population – a fact the Francoist elites were very aware of. New trends in the thinking about authoritarianism, too, invite a re-interpretation of Francoism. In the face of the success of authoritarian politics in many countries in the present, the identification of authoritarianism with traditionalism and political stagnation seems less convincing than it did twenty years ago when the fall of Communism seemed to herald in a global age of democracy. In this respect the Franco dictatorship, its social vision and its policies have won new interest.

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Time and History in Early Francoism

Conceptions of time have played an important role in Spanish politics since the 18th century. During the Enlightenment, many influential intellectuals came to understand Spain as a nation distinct from its northern European neighbors not only spatially but also temporally. In their view, Spain had fallen behind more “advanced” countries and had lost touch with progress during the counter-reformation and had settled into a state of social and cultural immobility. A highly-influential “black legend” pictured Spain as timeless, archaic and pre-modern. Romantic travel writers such as Washington Irving gave this picture a positive spin. They admired Spain as a mythical country of authenticity and wonders untouched by the corrupting forces of modernity. Liberals and progressives, however, despaired over the alleged backwardness and immobility of Spanish society. After the defeat to the United States in the Spanish-American war of 1898 and the loss of its last colonies, notions of time became increasingly entangled in the clash of competing political visions to regenerate Spain. While progressives mobilized forces to “Europeanize” Spain by accelerating political, economic and cultural change, the political Right cultivated a nostalgia for the early modern Spanish empire and called for re-connecting to this imperial heritage as a way to ensure Spanish grandeur in the future.

Time politics in the Franco dictatorship unfolded against the background of this ideological battles. But while Franco and his followers rhetorically continued to rally against political and cultural modernity, the Francoist understanding of time was from the beginning far more complex than a simple dichotomy between progressive modernity and authoritarian traditionalism suggests. Even in the early years after the Civil War, Franco and his followers did not just try to re-establish “traditional” time. To start with, like other revolutionary regimes since the French Revolution, the new state established a new calendar marking the beginning of its rule as a historical watershed moment. It did not merely abolish Republican holidays and re-introduce Christian ones, but it laid out an alternative calendar starting with 1936 as the Primer Año Triunfal (The first year of triumph) encompassing a number of new holidays such as Día de la Victoria (Victory Day, April 1), Día del Caudillo (Day of the Leader, October 1), and Remembrance Day (November 20), commemorating the founder of the Spanish Fascist Party, José Antonio Primo de Rivera. Moreover,
in 1943, the regime separated Spain from Greenwich Mean Time—and therefore the British time zone—and introduced Central European Time thus moving the regime temporally closer to continental Europe and Nazi Germany. In a broader historical-philosophical sense, too, the dictatorship tried to separate itself from the past. While the regime extensively used the imaginary of the early modern Spanish empire, and aspired to renew past imperial glory and might, it at the same time took great pains to portray its inauguration as a break with history and as the beginning of a new historical era. It promised to put an end to the vicious circle of ascent and decline in which Spain had supposedly been enchained since its era of greatest power in the 16th century. Where former right-wing military uprisings and not least the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera had fallen short, Franco argued, his regime would altogether overcome the cyclical mode of conflict between progress and tradition that had dominated the preceding centuries. With the revolt against the Republic, a new “holy era” (ciclo de salvación) had come to fruition.

During the first post-war decade, Franco and his followers clung to this narrative. But after 1945, new challenges led the dictatorship to alter its understanding of historical time and, the same time, to intensify its attempts to remodel social time. To start with, after the fall of fascism in Germany and Italy, world opinion increasingly portrayed the Franco regime as a political anachronism thus seriously undermining its political legitimacy. The threat of foreign intervention on behalf of democracy and human rights constituted for some years an earnest concern for the Spanish rulers, forcing them to demonstrate the political modernity of the dictatorship and its compatibility with modern Western political ideas and values. In addition to external pressure, the future became the object of internal queries and concerns within the ruling elites who pressured Franco to clarify his position regarding the future of the political system. Should the country steer towards a constitutional monarchy or should it rather turn into a social-revolutionary corporate state? These were difficult questions for Franco to answer as he had to be careful not to estrange influential but competing political factions. The Franco’s ageing gave these questions a heightened urgency by the late 1950s as internal analysis pointed to “excessive worries about the future” within the ruling elites. Finally, the threat of financial collapse that haunted the country in the late 1950s made a temporal reinvention of the dictatorship and a new focus on social and economic time rhythms desirable. As economic experts demanded a break with the politics of autarky the regime had introduced after its victory in the Civil War.


and the comprehensive liberalization of the economy, pressure grew to conceptualize change and development in a new way. Against this background, the regime increasingly employed the new sociological vocabulary of modernization theory and developmental politics promoted not least by the OECD. The regime no longer portrayed itself as the culmination and final stage of (Spanish) history but stressed its openness towards the future and positioned itself on a global developmental path leading towards a more advanced socio-economic order. The regime aggressively reinvented itself as a developmental dictatorship. Progreso (progress), desarrollo (development) and transformación (transformation) became key terms of Spanish politics in the late 1950s and 1960s. Franco even claimed in the early 1960s that “those are wrong who think we are advocates of political immobility (...) There does not exist material and spiritual progress incompatible with the regime. The horizon of real opportunities is limitless.” Social backwardness made it essential to “to keep a high rhythm to renew Spain”. State and society had to be “renovated and rejuvenated”. These rhetorical and conceptual changes served various purposes. It certainly permitted Franco to avoid committing himself to a specific political order and to deflect criticism regarding poverty, economic hardship and corruption. Above all, however, it helped to legitimize authoritarian rule in the face of international critique. An autocratic regime, the Francoist leadership now claimed, was necessary to guide a backward society through the painful process of modernization. Spaniards were not yet ready for democracy but might be at some point in the future. It would thus be highly misleading to interpret the new rhetorical emphasis on progress and transformation as a move towards democracy or even as reflecting a liberalizing political outlook. Yet it is striking that Franco’s dictatorship adopted a discourse of modernization, renewal and Europeanization which, before the Civil War, had been the trademark of the Republican governments against which the Francoist forces had staged their insurrection.

Making Spaniards more efficient: Reforming social time

The changes in the temporal self-representation of the regime were part of a new politics of modernization through which the regime both tried to give its rule a new stable foundation and to catch up with seemingly more advanced nations. This politics had an significant economic dimension. Parallel to increased military co-operation with the United States and the admission of Spain into the United Nations and its gradual integration into the OEEC, in the 1950s a new generation of Spanish
economists began looking to the United States and an international expert community to overcome the dire economic state of the country. In this sense, it is not surprising that one of the first instigators of the re-ordering of the public and private spheres was an American economist. The Spanish reformers proposed to take international expert advice into account to make the Spanish economy more competitive. They came to power in the severe economic crisis of the late 1950s and began to implement measures in line with Western theories of economic modernization, planning and liberalization cumulating in the “Stabilization Plan” of 1959. The shift in economic policy changed the power relations within the regime leadership. While groups of technocrats, many of whom had strong links to the Catholic lay organization Opus Dei, took control of influential positions, the Falange, the fascist party subordinated by Franco early in the Civil War, lost political influence. Its corporativist plans of economic development were shelved and the mass organization that forced many workers and employers into its ranks had trouble finding a new political and public role within the regime. Overall, the beginning of economic modernization marked an major turning point in the history of the Franco regime even if new studies have emphasized the contradictions and limitations of economic liberalization.

The politics of modernization, however, was not limited to the economy, as most scholarship suggests, but directed towards Spanish society as a whole. Time reform was a major means of the Franco regime in the early 1960s to implement its new social vision of a more rational and more efficient society. The regime wanted to persuade Spaniards to use their time more efficiently and rationally and – as a result – more morally. Their way-of-life should be more in tune with modern “Europe” than with the Spanish past. Changes in the rhythm of Spanish life were supposed to help the dictatorship both to catch up with the advanced economies and to build a more orderly, harmonic and moral nation able to withstand the pace of social conflict and political opposition. In a paradoxical way, the discourse of progress, rationality and Europeanization that had been a trademark of political progressivism during the 1930s now became a centerpiece of the Francoist political dictionary.

In the early 1950s, Spanish newspapers began publishing articles calling for a re-ordering of public and private time. Economists, entrepreneurs, but also psychologists and journalists lent their voices to the fight for a “rational order of time” to bring about an “active, alert and habitually healthy Spain”. In contrast with the seemingly efficient and healthy lifestyle of North-Americans and North-West Europeans, the traditional Spanish rhythm of life increasingly seemed anachronistic and the basis of a morally questionable way-of-life dominated by “laziness and carefree living”. Even the Catholic daily Ya lamented in April 1961 “that we have uncoupled ourselves from the life rhythm of other European countries and our own traditions.

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The industrious nations are nations of early-risers. More specifically, the media argued for a continuous work day (jornada continuada, jornada intensiva) and a strict regulation of the opening hours of shops, restaurants and entertainment facilities. A concerted reform of public and private time was needed to tackle the many deficiencies of Spanish life and not least increase work efficiency.

During the 1950s, the state-controlled press widely disseminated and popularized these proposals. It reported extensively on time reform and popularized demands for a reordering of time. In August 1956, for example, the prominent daily newspaper ABC initiated a series of articles under the headline “Reforming habits by reforming time” (Nuevo Horario para nuevas costumbres). Over several months, the newspaper elaborated on the importance of reordering social time. While the media overwhelmingly supported the reform measures, they also frequently gave room to reform opponents and published critical letters by readers. However, there can be no doubt that the dictatorship put its full weight behind the reform agenda. In doing this, it represented the interest of big industrial companies. The textile company Palao, for example, already demanded in early 1954 the introduction of “a more rational and just order of time” on the Iberian Peninsula. In its view the shortening of the long Spanish siesta and the better separation of working time from free time was a “social necessity” of modern life. The Chambers of Industry and Commerce of the pre-eminent cities Barcelona and Madrid also lobbied for a “modernization of contemporary work time” as a means to bring about a “thorough change of our social order”, and even organized lectures and conferences on the subject. The manager of one of the main department store chains Galerías Preciados, José Fernández Rodríguez, also found the proposed time reforms “logical, rational, and humane”, while the manager of the largest Spanish car manufacturer SEAT, José Ortiz de Echagüe, could see “only advantages” in the planned changes. Both hoped for an increase in worker’s productivity as well as a better integration of the Spanish economy into the European and world markets. Economic interests were important factors, but far from the only reasons for supporting reform. In a broader perspective, time reform responded both to new challenges within Spain and to a broader global popular discourse on time. On the one hand, rapid urbanization and the uncontrolled growth of satellite cities posed severe challenges to the established order of time and society in Spain. Long commutes to workplaces, for example, made it increasingly difficult for Spaniards to return home for the traditional midday siesta while the increase in commuters also posed immense strains on public transportation. On the other hand, the slow advent of the consumer society was accompanied by a broad and amorphous celebration of modern time. Illustrated journals as well as advertisements frequently celebrated an accelerated “rhythm of modern life” and pictured individuals who not only had adjusted to an accelerated life world but drew satisfaction out of their new and faster lifestyle. The yellow press, for example, presented celebrities as role-models who had learned to use their time efficiently without losing attractiveness and health. Moreover, journals offered advice on how to master modern life. Cooking-advice columns, for example,

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31 “Nuevo horario de trabajo (Kommentar)”, in: Ya, 27.4.1961.
suggested time-saving recipes such as the “functional salad” (ensalada funcional) which could be prepared quickly, and businesses offered time-saving devices such as no-iron, wash-and-wear shirts which promised a “utmost productivity at the workplace [...] even if you have to work extra hours”.

Among ordinary Spaniards, the reform agenda met with varied responses. In a true flood wave of letters to newspapers, a heated debate took shape with arguments in favor and against the reform clashing with one another. The leading satirical journal La Codorniz already in its review of the year 1953 gave the debate over “north-American time” (horario norteamericano) a prominent place. In its humoristic depiction of a completely Americanized way of life with an opulent early breakfast with toast and scrambled eggs but without the traditional Spanish siesta, the unease of many Spaniards vis-à-vis the reform proposals became apparent. The mass media gave Spaniards the impression they lived on the brink of a brave new world of technical and social acceleration that seemed to already have become reality in the economically most advanced nations. It demanded of the individual increased efforts to manage his or her limited time resources efficiently, but at the same time promised a more fulfilling, adventurous life without dead time or boredom. In this celebration of a better time order, transnational popular discourses, the political agenda of the dictatorship and the interests of big business all coalesced.

The advocates of reform achieved some early successes. In August 1956, the minister of Labor signed a petition of the insurance lobby into law that proposed a continuous working day in the industry and the abolishment of the custom of working less during the summer months and more during the winter months. The insurance industry followed the lead of many international companies in Spain in which a continuous workday with only short breaks was the norm. In September 1956, moreover, the regime also presented early proposals to modify working-hours within the banking and finance sector. Besides abolishing the siesta, they suggested opening banks for customers not only in the mornings but also in the afternoons. Workers and employees should no longer be forced to leave their workplace to undertake financial transactions.

Overall, however, time reform did not materialize before the spring of 1961. As we will later see, this had a lot to do with resistance to the reform agenda but also with the magnitude of the task the reformers had to tackle. The intricate complexities involved in reordering and synchronizing social time made it inadvisable to hurriedly push through reform measures. Time reform could hardly be limited to certain industries or, for that matter, the economic sphere alone. On the contrary, the interconnectedness of society and the many implications of changing time in one area for other areas made a grand scheme necessary. Any serious attempt to rationalize time use had to keep in mind not only the specific conditions of the different industrial branches but also the different schedules of public transportation, shops and services, schools and

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universities, entertainment facilities, popular leisure activities, and the electronic mass media. High-flying visions of, for example, synchronizing the working-hours of different industries to prevent traffic jams, congestion of public transport, and overcrowding in shops and department stores made time reform all the more complicated. The introduction of a new work schedule in the insurance industry demonstrates that already small moments of inattention could endanger the whole reform project. In introducing a new work schedule, the reformers had astonishingly forgotten to include any breaks at all, leading to significant protests from employees. Finally, as the reformers grappled with these aspects, they stumbled upon a number of hidden social time-arrangements. The mass phenomenon of multiempleos posed a special problem. Many Spaniards worked not only one but multiple jobs to make ends meet. They often needed the long midday break to commute from one workplace to another. Any interference in the time structure of their working day had therefore to necessarily disrupt their carefully orchestrated time arrangements.

In the face of the many problems and reservations concerning the reform agenda, it is hardly surprising that the public debates and proposals did not translate directly into reform legislation. Only the severe economic crisis of the late 1950s and the decision to introduce far-reaching economic reform opened up a window of opportunity to push through radical measures to alter Spanish life with the stroke of a pen.

Implementing Reform

In February 1957, Franco reshuffled his cabinet after a period of an internal power struggles and promoted into positions of power a group of technocrats around Laureano López Rodó who sketched out a program of economic modernization. On July, 21st 1959 they implemented the stabilization plan (Plan de Estabilización), a far-reaching reform piece of legislation which, among other things, devalued the currency, reduced public spending and increased the interest rates to curb rampant inflation. The dictatorship loosened its grip on the economy and removed external trade barriers. The impact of these sweeping measures is hotly debated among historians but it is undeniable that the introduction of this group of reformers into the cabinet opened a window of opportunity to implement a larger reform agenda centered around time.

In January 1961, after more than a year of preparation, the regime finally presented an ambitious package of detailed measures to coordinate and synchronize public and private time in all of Spanish society. The regime announced exact time schedules for the different crafts and trades, entertainment and cultural establishments as well as social institutions. The working hours for the building trades, for example, were set from 8 am to 5 pm with a lunch break between 12 and 13 pm. Shops and department stores were forced to close at 6.30 pm – significantly earlier than the usual 8 or 8.30 pm – and the reformers urged commercial businesses to stay open during midday. Teachers in primary schools had to teach from 9 am to 1 pm and from 3 pm to 6 pm, and theatres were forced to end their first performances no later than 8.30 pm and their second shows no later than midnight. Cafeterias and bars were to close at 0.45 am

and public transport had to close its services at 1.15 am. Overall, the reform package closely followed the suggestions made in the 1950s. Only by refraining from making the continuous workday mandatory did the regime take into account the recent popular protests. However, this slight concession cannot disguise the highly-ambitious and radical plan to instantaneously rationalize and modernize Spanish life.

Time reform met with broad and diverse responses. In the first half of 1961, it became the single most important subject of public debate both in the media and in everyday-life. The extensive media coverage, with dozens of interviews, “opinion polls” and satirical sketches comparing the advantages and disadvantages of reform, as well as the thousands of letters newspapers received from their readers demonstrate that the reforms affected fundamental personal interests, hopes and fears regarding the individual and collective future of Spain.

In this debate, the state-controlled media presented the different opinions, interests and positions surprisingly even-handedly. While commentaries supporting the reform dominated, the press also published critical comments and letters to the editor that criticized the reforms in harsh language. Pueblo, a newspaper close to the fascist party, for example, printed a call by the syndicate of bank employees to modify the reform before the reforms were even introduced. From a wider perspective, the conflicts about the re-ordering of social time can give us useful insights into competing visions of society, their social appeal and the political power of different social groups and networks under the dictatorship.

To begin with, the reform agenda met with applause from a number of groups who, like the regime, saw them as a tool to achieve a more prosperous, more moral and more successful nation. Although it is impossible to quantify support, the readers’ letters the various newspapers published show that many Spaniards hoped for improvements both in public and private life. From a more detailed perspective, some major motives of popular support—besides the already discussed themes of economic efficiency and public transportation—can be identified. Many commentators linked time reform to more traditional moral reform and hoped that a new time order would lead to a more disciplined middle-class lifestyle. They expressed “hope that after some centuries of decline and laziness Spaniards would embrace industriousness”, and that the depressing picture of idle, dehumanized men wasting their days “with empty gazes and expressionless faces” in cafeterias would be relegated to the past. They similarly expected time reform to solve the problem of juvenile rowdism as it would pressure wayward youth into adopting a regular and respectable lifestyle. A social reformist agenda was also an major reason why the Catholic Church supported the reform measures. It especially expected positive effects for family life as men would return earlier from work and spend more time with their families in the evening. Moreover, a better separation between work time and free time would leave Spaniards more time for spiritual reflections and religious practice. The Catholic Church therefore was one of the main supporters of a reordering of time.

Many academics and experts also supported the regime measures which they understood as a step towards a more civilized social order as Spaniards could devote more time to studying and learning. A Madrid professor, Alfonso García Valdecasas, for example, criticized the current time regime as “in many aspects irrational”, while a student from Madrid proclaimed: “The new time regime mirrors the more rational ones of foreign countries (...) I am deeply convinced that it will lead to a better use of time”. Finally, public health experts and doctors had for a long time lamented the detrimental effects of the Spanish way of life with its late meals in the evening and only a short sleep period during the night. They therefore applauded the reforms as propelling their campaign for a healthier and more vigorous Spain. The far-reaching plans, however, also had many vocal opponents. To start with, many Spaniards feared the possible loss of national character, traditions and cultural distinctiveness. The famous actress, Nati Mistral, for example, expected the new time order to rob Spain “of its charm and personality”. Many letters to the editor voiced similar concerns, often demonstrating some form of national chauvinism. “What does it matter to us what other people do?” one writer asked, complaining about the ill-conceived “zeal to copy anything foreign”. Beyond such cultural concerns, specific interest groups rallied against the reforms. It is not surprising that owners of theatres, movie theatres, restaurants and amusement venues were among the first groups to protest. Not without reason they feared a drop in attendance and earnings. The owner of the prestigious Madrid theater Lara, Conrado Blanco, even gloomily predicted the “death of the theatre” altogether. The reforms would make it practically impossible to have two consecutive sessions in the evenings, as visitors could not be persuaded to attend sessions in the early evening. Perhaps the most vigorous opposition came from small business-owners and merchants. They understood time reform as a scheme to give big business an unfair competitive edge. They expected to lose competitive advantage to larger companies and department stores who, with larger staffs, were supposedly better able to guarantee and manage continuous opening hours. Finally, many housewives opposed changes to their daily life rhythm. They felt pressured by the earlier closing hours of shops and stores and feared losing valuable free time during the day. These different protests found a key ally in the Falange. In the 1960s, it desperately tried to regain influence by posing as the social consciousness of the regime in opposition to the new technocratic elites. The Falange also gave voice to suspicions among workers that the time reforms would result in an acceleration of work rhythms and the imposition of new demands and would therefore benefit the employers

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57 Molinero u. Ysàs, Anatomía del Franquismo, pp. 95–106.
foremost. The question of multiempleos and additional work were factored into these reservations as well. In many ways these debates prefigured the conflicts about flexible capitalism of the 1970s. More generally, many Spaniards were concerned that the reforms would unfairly advantage the privileged social classes. An employee, for example, lamented that she had to leave home in the winter at dark while her bosses would only show up at the workplace shortly before noon: For them “there exists no schedule” (para ellos no hay horario). The lead editor of the Falangist newspaper Pueblo, too, was afraid that “we create privileges for the well-off while we limit ourselves to sending all the rest to bed” at an early hour. Alert observers moreover criticized that the reform elites concerned themselves mostly with the large cities of Madrid and Barcelona while ignoring the very different problems affecting rural time.

From a general perspective, time reform had to mitigate the conflicting interests of consumers and producers. The former were expressed by La Codorniz, a mouthpiece of urban middle classes and intellectuals, who repeatedly called for a liberalization of opening hours for shops, entertainment venues and public transportation. In contrast, the Catholic Church and the Falange defended first of all the interests of workers and employees. Deep down, what the regime elites and ordinary Spaniards debated upon was what it meant to live in an urban consumer society and how such a society should be regulated.

But this simplistic picture of clear-cut camps competing with one another needs to be revised, since the line between supporters and opponents was often rather murky. The tourist industry is a case in point. It experienced a spectacular expansion in the early 1960s and quickly became one of the most important and modern economic branches of Francoist Spain. Yet it fervently lobbied to keep the traditional rhythm of Spanish life. They had noticed that the Spanish siesta and late nights were part of widespread expectations among foreign tourists. The different time order was thus in their view a major selling point of a charming and slightly mysterious Spain to for time-pressed and stressed-out visitors. In a certain way, we find here seeds of what was to become the contemporary tourist discourse of “slowing down” and “taking it easy” during vacations. In short, the tourist industry argued in the name of British and German tourists in favor of safeguarding a purportedly authentic, traditional Spain.

Single arguments in favor or against the reforms, cannot be neatly linked to certain social groups either and were often ambiguous. As demonstrated, many commentators saw in the improvement of family life an key reason for supporting the reforms. But references to family life could also be used to oppose time reform. A mother, for example, voiced her concerns in a letter that the new time regime would make a shared family lunch all but impossible.

Similarly, the debate about the impact of the reforms on workers and employees was contradictory. In contrast to the fears of increased time pressure in the workplace, some Falangists saw the reforms in a more positive light. They argued that a new time regime would open up new opportunities to workers. The free evenings would for the first time give workers time to pursue individual fulfillment through education and culture. Moreover, earlier starting times for theatres and

cinemas would democratize night life from which workers and employees had for a long time been excluded because of their earlier working times.64

Contradictions, Failure and long-term Effects

The heated public debate in the spring of 1961 led the regime to tone down its radical reform agenda and seek compromise with its many critics within and outside the power circles of the dictatorship. While time reform was implemented as planned on June 1st, the regime made some major concessions to the opponents of reform. As early as April, the Minister of the Interior in his final decree had allowed for more flexibility in implementing individual measures. For example, he gave the banking sector more freedom to set its working hours and also allowed for different workdays during the summer and winter months. The regime also relaxed its strict demand to introduce a continuous workday in every economic sector. Moreover, it opened up the possibility to request exemptions from the new rules—an opportunity that was widely used in the following months.65 Finally, the dictatorship tried to rhetorically integrate its critics. On the eve of June 1st, its communication services rather defensively once again defended time reform with references to the supposed “anomalies” of Spanish life and claimed that the catalogue of measures would only gradually change life and did not constitute a “total, violent and singular revolution of Spanish life”. In addition, the reform decrees would not constitute a “straight-jacket” but merely “guidelines” for a better life.66 However, the regime far from shelved its ambitious plans. In the following months, it gradually introduced the parts of the original agenda it had not implemented in June. On November 1st, the new working hours for the banking sector were finally put into practice, and on February 1st 1962, the measures regarding the cultural and entertainment sector took effect.67

Despite this success and its stubborn insistence on an encompassing reform, the Francoist leadership was not only unable to pacify its critics but also proved too weak to thoroughly put its far-reaching agenda into practice. After only a short time, the almost complete failure of the reforms became apparent. While it never officially renounced any of the measures, the regime silently stepped back from trying to enforce its vision of a more rational social order.

A major reason for this shift in policy was the plethora of incongruities and flaws of the reforms which rapidly became visible. For example, the prohibition for shops and department stores to open beyond 6.30 pm led to such popular discontent—especially in the weeks before Christmas—that the dictatorship agreed to revise the strict order.68 While at first it only wanted to allow for minor changes, in the long run the old opening hours became once again the norm. The largest department store chain, El Corte

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Ingles, for example, abandoned the new time schedule before Christmas 1965. Overall, it is not easy to determine who took the decisions to roll-back the individual measures, but it seems plausible that both the discontent of the consumers as well as lobbying by small retailers played important roles. In the cultural sector, too, time reform did not prove durable. While at first the theatres and cinemas of Madrid did drastically change their schedule to adhere to the new rules, after a less than a year the majority of theatres had returned to their traditional starting times while the cinemas started their night session only half an hour earlier than before February 1962.

The difficulties and flaws of time reform became perhaps most obvious in the banking sector. as early as December 1961, La Vanguardia Española of Barcelona noticed that at least three different forms of time management co-existed in the sector. While some institutes had completely adopted the new time norms, others had decided to implement an “intensive” schedule without opening in the afternoon. Finally, a third group – among them the influential Basque banking companies – had after only a few weeks returned to their traditional working and opening hours. On December 10th, La Vanguardia dryly noted that at least in Barcelona, time reform had “practically failed without anybody openly admitting it”. An major reason for this failure was the fact that neither the regime nor the banks had made any provisions to cater for the mass of employees during the short lunch break. There were no cafeterias or canteens offering cheap meals, and most employees were hesitant about spending their money in commercial restaurants.

The Catalan newspaper openly pointed to the fact that, especially outside of Madrid, time reform was often silently circumvented or at least adapted to local circumstances. The regime lacked both the will and the power to implement the reforms in all of Spain. In 1967, a citizen of the Spanish region of La Mancha complained in a letter to a newspaper that in his home town “there do not exist regulated schedules” for industry and commerce. During the summer months, some shops opened until 10 pm of even later and the local and regional authorities only occasionally exercised control. Even in the capital itself, in the mid-1960s, the ministry of Labor – of all places – did not adhere to the norm that employees should not work after 7 pm and declared working days up to 10 pm to be legal.

Overall, from the spring of 1962, the far-reaching reform ideas receded into the background. On the one hand, time efficiency and productivity received new attention. A good example of this shift is an editorial published in 1965 which complained that “In a Spanish office, it is more important to arrive on time and then spend the time looking at the white walls till 2 pm than to arrive later and really accomplish something.” On the other hand, new internal and external challenges took attention away from time reform and persuaded the regime to scale down its ambitious plans to re-order Spanish life. A wave of miners’ strikes in Asturias and other regions in the spring of 1962, as well as a prominent meeting of opposition groups in Munich in June

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70 This is the result of a detailed analysis of the entertainment section of the newspaper Hoja de Lunes (Madrid).
72 P. de A. C. Daimiel (Ciudad Real), “Cartas al Director. Los horarios comerciales de Daimiel”, in: Blanco y Negro, 22.4.1967
of 1962 that took a unified stance against Franco, posed serious threats to the dictatorship. However, time remained an important topic of political debate. But as the regime stepped back from its encompassing vision of a new society, the attention shifted to particular questions such as the working hours of janitors and domestic servants, the time at which apartment building doors had to be locked, the advantages and disadvantages of long summer vacations for children and the youth, and the influence of television and its time rhythm on society. The opening hours of shops also remained a hotly debated topic. But until its downfall, the regime shied away from again attempting to massively intervene in public and private time, eager not to arouse public discontent.

There were therefore a number of reasons why Francoist time reform failed. Among these, two stand out. First, the ruling elites were themselves divided about the merits of time reform. Even within the inner circles of the dictatorship, supporters and opponents of reform quarreled. These conflicts inhibited the united reform effort necessary to push through the extremely ambitious reform agenda. Secondly and perplexingly, the reformers almost completely failed to grasp the complexities of time structures in a modern industrial and consumer society with their many sophisticated and intertwined time rhythms. This ignorance stands in sharp contrast to the broad ambitions to re-make Spanish society and Spaniards. It led to grave mistakes and contradictions in the process of implementing the reforms that rapidly curbed the reform enthusiasm even among sympathetic Spaniards. Against this background, the reform effort stalled without however the regime renouncing its goals.

The early 1960s marked an major break in the history of time politics in Spain from another perspective, too. Parallel to the failure of time reform, a number of intellectuals began to question the connection between rational time reform, acceleration, and progress, which had laid at the heart of a modern understanding of time since the 19th century. A growing number of commentators no longer associated the “tempo of modern life” with a rich and fulfilled life. They started to identify technological acceleration and a rationalization of time with a loss in quality of life and advocated a return to a more unhurried and rural life rhythm. An article published in La Vanguardia Española in 1960 put it this way: “It is modern to run. But it could be worthwhile to slow down a bit. This would not be a sign of fatigue, but evidence of earnestness.”

Five years later, the illustrated weekly Blanco y Negro similarly proposed not to expose children to the “hellish tempo of modern life” and to teach them the art of losing time. Other newspapers published advice on how to “learn to relax” in the middle of frenzied activity. Moreover, the mass media began painting a positive picture of an unhurried rural life where “the breakneck movement of the motorcycle and the car have not yet displaced the sleepy and relaxed trot of the donkey”.


While in the 1920s and early 1930s, the vocabulary of “progress”, “modernity” and “Europe” had been closely identified with political Republicanism and the Socialist Left, by the late 1950s and 1960s it had become an integral part of the political discourse of Franco and his followers. Correspondingly, not only intellectuals close to the regime but also the new cultural and political opposition movements began to articulate a severe critique of a politics of accelerated modernity and a defense of a traditional way-of-life. Both Agustín de Foxa (1906-1959), a writer with close ties to Francoist elites, and the free-thinker Francisco Umbral (1932-2007), for example, denounced the supposedly empty acceleration of the modern city and celebrated the mythic, timeless squares and alleys of Madrid just as Francoist architects were planning to demolish them to make room for avenues and faster transportation. In this respect, it seems a worthwhile subject for further research to trace the twisted paths of both right-wing and progressive political thinking up to and beyond the death of Franco.

Summary: Time of the dictatorship and dictatorship of time

Historical research usually depicts Franco Spain as a sclerotic political regime trying to preserve a pre-modern political and cultural order as well as to de-mobilize society. However, an in-depth analysis of the attempts to change the pace of Spanish life in the early 1960s has shown an astonishing zeal to interfere in society and refashion it in an authoritarian fashion. In this endeavor to re-make Spain, time and the pace of life played a fundamental role. The regime viewed them as important social and political resources that had to be controlled and optimized to strengthen the regime internally and make it externally more powerful and competitive. Influential segments of the ruling elites did not only envisage an economic but also a social re-ordering of Spain. From the late 1950s, the dictatorship actively tried to make both public and private time use more rational and more efficient. By changing the pace of life, it wanted to turn Spain from a backward country lacking in productivity and public morals into a modern, “European” country whose inhabitants would be healthier, more productive, more morally responsible and –not least– politically loyal. They tried to bring this society about by synchronizing all social activities and by forcing Spaniards to adopt a new pace of life. A common rhythm should structure the lives of individuals, the different social and economic institutions and the state.

Ultimately, the Francoist elites failed in their attempt to re-make Spain. Nevertheless, the reform attempts give us privileged insights into the dictatorship and can help us to better place it within larger global historical developments. To start with, the utopian project of re-ordering society through re-arranging public and private time was not unique to Franco Spain. While the ordering or time was an key political issue for all modern political regimes, it attracted heightened attention in two contexts. On the one hand, colonial regimes tried to establish their power by re-structuring the way of life of the colonized. On the other hand, revolutionary regimes that wanted to catch-up with the mighty industrialized nations exhibited a special interest in changing the pace of life. For example, the reform of public and private time was a pivotal element of politics in Japan after 1868. We still lack information on other 20th century right-wing dictatorships such as Portugal under Salazar or the authoritarian regimes in Latin America.

America, but the existing research hints at the fact that the Franco dictatorship was not an exception. Francoism shared with other modern authoritarian regimes a belief in the infinite possibilities of intervening and re-fashioning societies from above. In this perspective, the Francoist elites acted as colonialists in their own country. An investigation of Francoist intervention in time also calls into question widely held assumptions of the distinctiveness between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. While major differences existed, it is wrong to understand authoritarian rule as static, backward-oriented and without a vision of the future. The Francoist case demonstrates that authoritarian regimes, too, can develop utopian visions that mobilize substantial political and social energies. Therefore, the model of authoritarianism as developed by Juan Linz in the 1970s has to be revised. While in the Spanish case the visions about how to re-shape society lacked the radical consequences of the totalitarian projects, they were nevertheless and integral part of authoritarian rule. The Franco dictatorship also did not simply want to demobilize the population. While the regime certainly suppressed any political participation, it nevertheless went to great lengths to mobilize Spaniards in the campaign for the rationalization of private and collective life. At the same time popular support for this policy should not be underestimated, a support that was heavily influenced by transnationally circulating popular images of a modern, accelerated way-of-life which for many held the promise of a better, more fulfilling personal life.

Overall, Francoist time reform can help us to better place the regime within post-war European history. The interventions have to be understood as a response to more general questions and problems facing all industrial societies after 1945, such as rapid urbanization, changes in the organization of labor, the advent of a mass consumer society, the increasing influence of electronic mass media on everyday life, and the growing role of spare time. These changes suggested a reorganization of public and private time both in liberal democratic and authoritarian regimes. In this respect, it seems worthwhile to discuss more in detail similarities and differences between Franco Spain and liberal democracies. Overall, Francoism was part of a common post-war European history and marks an authoritarian – ultimately unsuccessful but nevertheless influential – alternative path towards an urban mass-consumer society. Finally, in the context of a political history of time, Francoist time reform and its failure highlight the difficulties of regulating time in advanced industrial societies and the changing resistance to such projects. Through the attempts to implement national reform, local arrangements of time and their logic, whose importance and social power the Franco regime utterly underestimated, became visible. At the same time, the reform campaign pitilessly demonstrated the limits of Francoist power as the regime proved unable to convert the decisions of the regime leadership into a coherent policy and did not manage to overcome resistance at a grass-root level. However, despite these failures, the reforms did have lasting consequences. In the present time, reform is still debated along the lines laid out in the 1950s and early 1960s as many proposals have survived the political rupture of the transition period and the advent of democracy

in the 1970s. More generally, the reforms put into motion a debate over Europe, the pitfalls of modernization and the role of the State that has not lost its significance since. The failed reforms of the 1960s especially changed political discourse on the Spanish right before and after the death of Franco. At the same time, a fundamental shift in the debate over the pace of life occurred in the 1960s as a critique of social acceleration slowly merged with a general critique of authoritarian rule. In this respect, it was not only state repression, widespread corruption, and class politics that fueled opposition against the dictatorship but also an authoritarian modernization politics in the name of rationalization, efficiency and competitiveness.

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