

THE SECOND REPUBLIC (1)

Alfonso finally called for municipal elections for April 12, 1931. The results were startling: 46 of 50 provincial capitals went Republican. It was said that even conservative Madrid police, worn out by strikes and student riots, voted Republican in order to get a good night's sleep. Although suspect votes from the corrupt rural areas in the end gave a majority to the monarchists, the popular will was clear. As Alfonso himself remarked, "I had the impresión of calling on an old friend and finding him dead".

Events followed rapidly: a republic was declared in Catalonia; in Madrid unruly crowds gathered to demand the king's abdication; General Sanjurjo, by then commander of civil guard, informed Alfonso that he could not guarantee the loyalty of his men; most important, the army did nothing – a kind of negative *pronunciamiento*. On the evening of April 14 Alfonso declared, "Sunday elections have shown me that I no longer enjoy the love of my people". After 231 years the great Bourbon dynasty had succumbed with but a whimper.

There are numerous myths and misconceptions about the Second Republic. Many believe it brought five years of uninterrupted progress toward a democratic Spain, which was then smashed by a military uprising in 1936. In fact, the Republican experiment can be divided into three periods: roughly two years of radical social change under the left-centre, another two years controlled by the right-centre during which much of the previous legislation was overturned; and finally, about six months of Popular Front rule before the civil war. Each of the three periods had to contend with a serious armed rebellion of some description.

Another myth is that a progressive government was destroyed *solely* by a reactionary right. In reality, the moderate parties that launched the great experiment were assaulted mercilessly by both political extremes. The Second Republic was the last great hope for the "regeneration" of Spain and began with a wave of hopeful optimism. Left-wing Republicans wanted to finish the aborted liberal revolution of the 19th century, and the masses of "have-nots" were wildly enthusiastic that a great social revolution had arrived to end their misery. Meanwhile, conservatives watched warily. The key to the Republic's success hinged on the attitude of the middle class, relatively small by European standards but still a pivotal force.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Alfonso call for municipal elections in 1931? What was his response to the results?
2. The text says, "unruly crowds gathered to demand the king's abdication." What does 'unruly' mean? Do you think the crowd was viewed negatively because the text is from the king's point of view? What if you were on the side of the people? Would the king then seem 'unruly'?
3. In the 5 years following the vote, The Second Republic had three different rulers. What was the order and time period of each one? What did they all have to deal with that led to instability?
4. What groups tore apart the moderate government? Which group was responsible for the failure or success of the Republic?