

PERSONALLY SPEAKING

Leonardo Cervera

DG: **MARKT**Job: **Desk officer**

Claim to fame:

Just published book on Spanish civil war in Malaga, called "La Primera en el Peligro de la Libertad"



Leonardo's online blog, set in 1937, publishes 'breaking news' about the Spanish civil war.

J.-M. T.

Why did you decide to leave Malaga and come to Brussels?

I was doing well as a practicing lawyer in Malaga so I had no reason to leave apart from the fact that the work as a litigator is very hard, and I have always had a strong European vocation. My wife was not so keen to leave Malaga and only accepted when I promised her that we would return one day.

What is your job in the Commission?

I work as a desk officer in DG Internal Market in the unit in charge of intellectual property. This year I will also take part in the US Fellowship Programme, as a visiting scholar at Duke University, North Carolina.

You have just published your first novel, "La primera en el peligro de la libertad". How would you translate that into English?

I guess that it would be something like: "First in the struggle for freedom". I have chosen this as the title of my book because it is on the coat of arms of the city, and because it was one of the Republican battle cries during the Spanish Civil War. Another famous battle cry of those days was "¡No pasarán!" (They will never get through!) used by the communist defenders of Madrid.

What inspired you to write about the Spanish Civil War?

The Spanish Civil War, from a

literary point of view, is an endless source of inspiration for writing books. In fact, the city of Malaga suffered one of the most tragic and heart-wrenching episodes of the Spanish Civil War. It is estimated that some 150,000 persons (most of them civilians) fled along the coastal road when a Spanish/Italian army crushed the weak and disorganized Republican defense lines on 7th February 1937. During five long days, the warships and planes of Franco's army bombed the endless mass of refugees showing no mercy, in the same way as the communists and anarchists had ruled the city in the name of a bloody proletarian revolution.

As the next Republican city was more than 200 kilometers away, many refugees never made it to Almería. Since then this road between Málaga and Almería is also known as "the death road".

Is the novel based on historical fact or fiction?

It is fiction with a very reliable historic background. For example, most of the fighting and bombings described in the novel have been taken from information contained in civil and military archives. This makes it very difficult for readers to differentiate history from fiction. I have even got some e-mails from readers who claim "to have met" fictional characters!

In other episodes, reality and fiction go hand in hand. Such is the case of the retrieval of the

uncorrupted Hand of Saint Teresa of Jesus, which some militias had stolen in Ronda at the beginning of the war and which Franco seized, after the takeover of Malaga, never agreeing to return it to its legitimate owners or to part from it. It appears that Franco thought that this object provided him with some supernatural protection.

The main characters of the novel are Spaniards who lived through those terrible days, and some foreigners, including British residents who tried to save the lives of members from both sides.

Have you any plans to write more books?

I am not a professional writer so writing my first novel has been a real challenge for me. I had to write at night and during my holidays so it is hard to find the willpower to start on a second book. However, I must say that this book is doing so well and I am getting so much positive feedback from my readers that I might go for my second novel, perhaps a thriller set in the EU Institutions.

To read Leonardo's online blog, where he publishes "breaking news" about the Spanish civil war in Málaga as if he was still in 1937 (at the moment it is 17th January 1937 and Marbella has just been conquered by the Franco troops), go to: ① www.laprimeraenelpeligrodelalibertad.com

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