

'Toward a Creative and Original Spain'

By Julián Marías

MADRID—Less than two years ago, Spain was still a dictatorship where for four decades not a single office had been filled by means of elections, where only one political party was authorized, and where the rights of free expression, association, demonstration, unionization, etc., were nonexistent. Today, it is a democratic monarchy with any number of parties—too many, without a doubt; with a Congress and a Senate chosen in absolutely free and peaceful elections, and a high degree of freedom, which some find excessive and which, indeed, has permitted an increasing number of strikes, demonstrations and debates.

How was it possible for a dictatorship to be dissolved without its having been destroyed or overthrown by anyone, for it to have blended back into the country at the same time as the country took on a new shape?

Everything is changing, rapidly and rather smoothly; almost everything has already changed; but there has been no discontinuity or power vacuum or revolution or anarchy.

The Franco years seem incredibly distant; almost everything that seemed impossible has already taken place. The forbidden is most in the forefront: political parties, including the Communists; elections, strikes, regional autonomy; the Generalitat [Catalonia's autonomous governing body] has already been authorized; the flags of the several regions wave, Government television broadcasts programs in minority languages that co-exist with Spanish in some regions.

While two years back it was impossible to criticize the Government, criticism is constant now; it is the Government, on the contrary, that has not uttered a word of insult, disdain or threat to any individual, group, or party, and King Juan Carlos has proclaimed the legitimacy of all political interpretations represented in the Parliament and backed by the votes of the electorate.

Is this not a political miracle? Has Spain changed that much? Or were

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the ideas one held about her mistaken? What has happened since November 1975? I would say just one thing: There has been a beginning of a respect for reality.

The two words repeated most often by political groups since the death of Generalissimo Francisco Franco have been *reform* and *rupture*.

The first was used by those who wanted to maintain the previous regime as much as possible, not wishing to see it ended for good and all. They wished to *reform* the existing regime (not realizing that it could no longer exist without Franco).

The second word was used by those who seemed to believe in what had not happened: the destruction or defeat of the previous regime. They wanted to break the continuity of power, beginning at point zero, to replace the established power with an-



After a Barcelona leftist rally

Merica/Correa/Liaison

other that would not have been either legitimate or democratic.

There was neither reform nor rupture. Power was not abandoned for a single day; the effective legality had not been broken (even though it may not have been truly legitimate); all existent legal machinery has been functioning, but not to preserve or reform the Franco regime, rather, to transform it at its roots so that another regime, new and quite different, could be born.

Crown and Government recognized that their legitimacy would not be complete until it was endorsed by free elections. They have brought forth a liberalization of Spain before its democratization: that is, they first authorized opinions, parties, freedom of expression, association, discussion of real problems, and then they gave the country back its sovereignty through free elections, the first in a democratic way of life. (The only bad elections for a country are the last ones, those after which no one is ever elected again.)

This has been possible because the Spanish people are alive, they have not been crushed by dictatorship; they have not lost their capacity for opinion and decision. There had been a lack of political freedom, which is quite serious, but not a lack of personal freedom, which would have been much worse.

The past decades have seen a deep, silent change in Spanish society, a maturation, relative prosperity, an access to education, the development of the methods and the middle-class possibilities of a European country. Private life had predominance over public life. Spaniards are peaceful today, they want to live together, they do not feel themselves each other's enemies. A silencing up of Spanish society is not proba-

ble; concord is stronger than the spirit of discord.

Spanish political parties are weak; they have few members, deep divisions, ambiguities. They draw their strength from their voters, who, in the majority, are not party members and might change their votes in the next elections. Spanish society today stands above its parties, the mere "receivers" of votes according to preference. The "socialist" vote, by and large, was not socialist: In its election campaign, the Socialist Party did not use any of its specific principles: Marxism, republicanism, class struggle, revolution, but rather a vague appeal to the "people" and for "social justice" (in which all parties coincided).

The Union of the Democratic Center, which won the election with the largest minority vote and is currently in the Government, is not really a party, and that might be where its greatest strength lies. Its platform, personified in Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez, has promised three things: firm support for the monarchy, an innovative transformation of the country, and the continuity of administration and governmental instruments.

The problems are great. The new Spain has begun in a period of general economic crisis that got under way in 1973; there are minority forces on both extremes that wish to impede peaceful transformation: Some do not want a transformation, others do not want it to be peaceful. They are the ones who are sure that they will never win a free election.

There will be economic difficulties (a lack of investment, stock-market manipulations, strikes that are destructive to national wealth); there will be attempts to impede the autonomy of regions within a firmly united Spain; there will be attempts to undermine the prestige of the King, an

obviously decisive factor in this fabulous change, or to reduce him to a decorative figurehead.

Nevertheless, if the Spanish people will continue to be offered intelligent proposals, I think that after some hesitation they will support them with enthusiasm and will complete this march toward freedom and toward a creative and original Spain that began almost two years ago.

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