

## **Representing Catalan National Identity. Catalonia during the Spanish Second Republic and the Civil War**

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The advent of the Spanish Second Republic is bound irrevocably to the fall of the Dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera (January 29, 1930), a result of the downfall of those who had supported him from the outset. The figure of Alfonso XIII suddenly became the target of all opposition, besides those who were bitter at the dictator and his former friends. For a time, the king attempted to govern as Primo had, with a directory of ministers presided by General Dámaso Berenguer. Even so, closing the parenthesis of the Dictatorship would not suffice to save the throne since this collapse was the consequence of a process of decomposition of the Restoration system which had begun in 1909 with the Tragic Week, gained momentum in 1917 with the Parliamentary Assembly movement and followed by the revolutionary strike of July-August 1918. By 1923, in the wake of that convulsion, Republican feeling had spread countrywide. Many army officers - including what was left of Primo's Unión Patriótica - thought that the king had acted dishonestly in accepting the dictator's resignation. The Berenguer government had to face up to a challenge from sectors of opinion that were already against the throne and, negotiating pitfalls, it tried to deploy its programme seeking to return to «constitutional normality».

The Republican offensive unleashed in the spring of 1930 took the form of peaceful propaganda, one of its watersheds being Alcalá Zamora's speech in Valencia, running through to the summer of that year, when the different strands of Republicanism converged in the famous Pact of San Sebastian.<sup>1</sup> This pact, uniting Republican,

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<sup>1</sup> The attendees at the meeting in the Hotel de Londres in San Sebastian on August 17, 1930, reflect the forces that would support the first steps of the new regime to be born on April 14, 1931. In attendance were: «historic» republicanism (Alejandro Lerroux); the new Republican Left (Manuel

Socialist and Catalan nationalist politicians and intellectuals, paved the way for the transition from monarchy to Republic. It materialised in the form of an Executive Committee, whose first task was to prepare a revolutionary movement although, at the same time and at the instigation of Manuel Carrasco i Formiguera of Acció Catalana, it had to deal with the claims of Catalan nationalism. In the meantime, three eminent intellectuals, Dr Gregorio Marañón, the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset and the novelist Ramón Pérez Ayala, spearheaded the movement «At the service of the Republic» in Madrid.

Moreover, other discontented elements were also seconding the anti-monarchic movement, including a healthy number of army officers who had come to sympathise with moderate opposition to the king. The prevailing mood in the final months of 1930 was one of great tension, given the subversive unrest, stoked by the more prestigious press and by the propaganda of military circles linked to the Unión Militar Republicana. An uprising was prepared for December. The sequence of events was rapid: the garrison of Jaca, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, led by Captain Fermín Galán and Lieutenant García Hernández staged an uprising, producing a manifesto of the Provisional government, before the attempt was put down. The two officers were imprisoned in Saragossa and shot as rebels and the signatories of the Pact of San Sebastian were arrested. However, in the wake of this military crisis, the support hitherto enjoyed by General Berenguer's programme collapsed while the reputation of the incarcerated Republicans soared.

After an unsuccessful attempt at negotiating with the politicians and once Berenguer's resignation had been accepted, the king appointed another military man, Admiral Aznar, as head of

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Azaña); moderate republicanism (Niceto Alcalá Zamora and Miguel Maura); the representatives of radical-socialism, Marcelino Domingo and Álvaro Albornoz; the Spanish Socialists Indalecio Prieto and Fernando de los Ríos; Galician regionalism (Casares Quiroga) and finally three figures from left-wing Catalanism, Carrasco Formiguera (Acció Catalana), Maties Malliol (Acció Republicana de Catalunya) and Jaume Aiguader (Estat Català).

government. Aznar and the king decided to test public opinion and called municipal elections for April 1931. The elections were held in a buoyant atmosphere and were regarded as a plebiscite from the very outset. Political candidates held mass rallies all over the country. On April 12, when the final results were made known, it was immediately clear that in the major cities of Spain the candidates who supported the monarchy had been defeated. Although official figures returned 29,953 monarchist councillors, as opposed to only 8,855 Republicans, the fact that Republican candidates had won in almost all the Spanish provincial capitals was decisive. This is how the great transformation occurred which extended to the the reformulation of the political and territorial organisation of the State; and, as had been agreed in San Sebastian, the constitution was obliged to afford some degree of autonomy to Catalonia.

### **The Second Republic and the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia**

The proclamation of the Catalan Republic, which shortly afterwards became the Generalitat de Catalunya (Vergés and Cruañas: 1991), heralded the beginning of a constituent period during which the legal structure of the new Catalan autonomy was to be built, under the political hegemony of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Ivern: 1988, 1989), a new party led by Francesc Macià, a self-proclaimed left-wing nationalist. (Colomines: 2003) The other leading social and political powers in public life in Catalonia until the beginning of the Civil War were the conservative Lliga Regionalista, the Unió de Rabassaires, an agrarian trade union close to ERC, and CNT, the large anarchist trade union.

A few hours before the Spanish Republic was proclaimed in Madrid, and shortly after it was proclaimed by Lluís Companys from the balcony of City Hall in Barcelona, Francesc Macià called for the establishment of a Catalan Republic. Three days later, on the 17th, three ministers of the provisional Madrid Government - Nicolau d'Oliver, Marcel·lí Domingo, both Catalans, and Fernando de los Ríos - travelled to Barcelona to negotiate an agreement that would make it possible to replace the Catalan Republic with the Generalitat de

Catalunya. They achieved their aim and also agreed to undertake the process of creating a statute of autonomy that was to be approved by the Spanish Constituent Assembly.

In actual fact, Macià's gesture had been ambiguous and provisional. He gradually abandoned the independentist tone evident in his words. Firstly, he proclaimed «The Catalan State which, with the utmost cordiality, we shall try to integrate within the Federation of Iberian Republics». Shortly afterwards he said: «On behalf of the people of Catalonia, I proclaim the Catalan State, under the regime of a Catalan Republic which, freely and in all cordiality, wishes and calls for the collaboration of the other peoples of Spain in the creation of a confederation of Iberian peoples». Finally, on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>, he wrote the definitive proclamation of «The Catalan Republic as a member State of the Iberian Federation».

Moreover, from the very outset Macià was obliged to seek the support of Madrid in the appointments of new authorities to the position of Captain General, the civil government or judiciary power. Besides Spanish nationalists, most conspicuously represented by the Radical Republican Party and particularly by Emiliano Iglesias, the other important political forces in Catalonia did not support an independent Catalan Republic. Instead, they attacked the authority of Francesc Macià while negotiating with the new Republican authorities in Madrid. The other nationalist party, the Lliga Regionalista, placed the greatest emphasis on defending the rights of Catalonia «in the Spanish State, in perfect harmony with all the elements of which it is comprised ».

The Catalan State proclaimed by Macià on a very strict interpretation of the Pact of San Sebastian which had led to the Republic, became the Generalitat de Catalunya, an autonomous political entity entrusted with drawing up a preliminary project for a statute of autonomy that was to be approved by plebiscite by the people of Catalonia and ratified by the future Spanish constituent assembly. The provisional government of the Generalitat elected, via town and city councils, a regional assembly formed by members of the Catalan Republican-Socialist coalition and former leaders of the nationalist Republican party. This assembly appointed a drafting board, which completed the preliminary version of the statute of

autonomy at the sanctuary of Núria on June 20, 1931. (Cucurull: 1976)

After the government of the Republic and the Generalitat had negotiated several amendments, the citizens of Catalonia had to approve the project. The plebiscite had two phases. Firstly, the town and city councils were unanimous in their agreement; and the referendum of August 2, with a voter turnout of 75%, returned a favourable 99% response. Women, not entitled to vote at the time, collected 40,000 signatures of support for the Statute of Núria. On August 11, a decree issued by the Generalitat declared that the project was the official will of Catalonia and it was presented as such to the Spanish Parliament on the 18<sup>th</sup> by the president of the Spanish republic, Niceto Alcalá Zamora.

The Statute of Núria advocated a federal structure for Spain, the creation of a common government for the Catalan Lands within the Spanish federation and the recognition of the Catalan language as the only official language of Catalonia. A clear distribution of powers was made between the Republic and the Generalitat: the latter would be responsible for internal legislation and for the implementation of education, municipal laws and the internal territorial division, civil and mortgage law, public works, charity, agricultural and livestock resources and public order. Moreover, the Generalitat had executive power in several matters of Spanish law, such as the collection of certain taxes. It comprised a Parliament, the presidency of the Generalitat and its council and a higher court of justice. To implement the new autonomous regime, the main resources envisaged were those of the former county councils: direct taxation and resources of the state in Catalonia that were not bound to central functions of power.

However, the Spanish Constitution of December 10, 1931 curbed the autonomist aspirations contained in the Statute of Núria as Spain rejected the federal formula. According to this constitution, the Statute of Núria was not a project that the Spanish Parliament had to ratify but rather a preliminary project to be modified in all its points (González Casanova: 1974, 719-744). Thus, this first act of autonomous assertion by Catalonia remained legally inconsequential. On May 6, 1932, the debate on the Statute of Catalonia began in Parliament almost one year after its approval by the citizens of

Catalonia. In an atmosphere of suspicion and overt hostility, the Republican members of Parliament transformed the initial project through a long bargaining process during which concessions were made to the most conservative and centralist groups. The skill of Alcalá Zamora and Manuel Azaña's eloquence were not enough to win the Republicans over to the Statute, whereas the Socialists tried to make sure that Catalan autonomy would not hamper their policy of state. The failed coup d'état by General Sanjurjo (August 1932) against what he regarded as a dismemberment of Spain, momentarily united the Republican members of Parliament, and the Spanish Parliament approved a modified Statute of Catalonia on September 9.

### **The institutionalization of autonomy**

The new Statute of Autonomy defined Catalonia as an autonomous region within the Spanish State and

- made bilingualism official
- reduced Catalan legislative power, as well as the implementation of several matters called for by the Statute of Núria
- provided for the appointment of state delegates to supervise implementation by the Generalitat
- rejected Catalonia's exclusive powers in education
- created a mixed security commission for public order
- declared the right of unilateral intervention by central government
- introduced other limitations on the autonomous regime, such as replacing an equal representation court to solve conflicts between the central government and the Catalan Generalitat by a court of constitutional guarantees of the Spanish State. (González Casanova: 1974, 706-754)

In short, the rejection of the federalist Statute of Núria led clearly to regional dependence. Despite this downgrading of the statute, Catalan politicians at the time regarded it as a historic conquest and a re-establishment of Catalonia's self-government. Theoretically, the statute paved the way for progressive legislation and for the re-

emergence and development of Catalan culture. Nevertheless, it was always looked upon as being below the federal ideal and below full autonomy. In practice, other limitations were gradually to affect the Statute, such as the slow transfer of services,<sup>2</sup> the declaration of unconstitutionality of the first major law of social reform (the Law of Contracts of Cultivation) and the partial suspension of the Statute between October 6, 1934 and the victory of the Popular Front in February 1936.

The institutionalization of self-government in Catalonia was therefore represented by the Generalitat de Catalunya which comprised a Parliament, the President and the Executive Council or Government. As stated above, the Generalitat was recognized by the provisional government of the Republic on April 21, 1931, and relations between both institutions were determined by the decree of May 9, 1931. By its decree of April 28, 1931 the Generalitat established its constitution, provisional council, a regional assembly - known as the Provisional Regional Council of the Generalitat -, and commissioners from the provinces of Girona, Lleida and Tarragona, jointly approved the statute. Following the approval of the Statute of Catalonia (September 1932), which defined the functions of the Generalitat, the Domestic Statute was approved on May 26, 1933 by the Catalan Parliament. (González Casanova: 1974, 790-802) According to these texts, the Generalitat was formed by, in the first place, the President, who was elected by Parliament and who had a two-fold role as principal authority of Catalonia and representative of the central state in Catalonia. Thus, he had executive functions for which he was answerable to Parliament which could withdraw its confidence. The Generalitat also comprised the Parliament of Catalonia, elected by universal suffrage. Finally, it included the executive council of the Generalitat, comprised by the President and

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<sup>2</sup> On November 21, 1932 a Mixed Commission of the Statute of Catalonia was established, with six voting members appointed by the Spanish government and six by the Generalitat, to make the inventory of the goods and the rights of the Spanish State which were transferred to the Generalitat, and to adapt the services that were ceded on to the latter. This commission lasted until 1939.

the ministers in charge of the autonomous ministries (known, as of 1936, as Departments) of Justice, Law, Culture, Finance, Defence, Health and Social Assistance, Economy, Public Works, Agriculture, etc).

Another autonomous organism was the Court of Appeal, comprising a president and twelve magistrates, and also there was the Council of Security of Catalonia which dealt with for matters of public order and co-ordinated the action of the Spanish State and the Generalitat. While the cost of the transfer of services from the State to the Generalitat was being studied, the latter's resources were limited to 73 million pesetas (collected through the transfer of certain contributions and share in the State's reserve from taxation), whereas the cost of the services transferred totalled 83 million pesetas.

Parliament was the legislative branch of the Generalitat de Catalunya. The first elections of members of Parliament - the only ones that were actually held, as the initial five-year term overlapped with the Civil War - took place on November 20, 1932. There were 85 seats: 61 were won by Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, 16 by the Lliga Regionalista, 5 by Unió Socialista, 1 by Acció Catalana and 1 by Unió Democràtica. The most important aspect of this Parliament legislative function, greatly conditioned by its short-lived existence and the slow transfer of services, was the drafting of organic texts, particularly the Domestic Statute and the municipal law.

The function of its political control was affected by the parliamentary majority of Esquerra Republicana, which supported the legislative initiative of the Executive Council of the Generalitat (94% of the 133 bills examined by Parliament were approved). The main issues addressed by Parliament pertained to local life, budgets and justice; and, although without legislative capacity, it tackled issues related to the transfer of services, labour and social affairs. It held a total of 259 sessions, the first on December 6, 1932, and the last on October 1, 1938. It had stopped meeting between October 1934 and February 1936 while the Statute had been unconstitutionally suspended. Moreover, only five sessions were held during the war. The structure, organization, and operation of Parliament were largely defined by the Constituent Assembly of the Spanish Republic, and



were similar to those of the contemporary parliaments of liberal democracies.

### **The events of October 1934 and the outbreak of the Civil War**

The conservative about-turn of the Spanish electorate around November 1933, and the access to the central power by a right wing party hostile to Catalan autonomy, placed the left-wing government of the Generalitat in a difficult situation, opening up a latent conflict between both powers. At the same time, in Catalonia the working masses had given up their initial hopes in the new regime and the anarchists had made several attempts at insurrection at a time when the worldwide economic crisis was deepening. The passing of the Law of Contracts for Cultivation by the Parliament of Catalonia, which improved the lot of agricultural workers, triggered opposition from the right wing, headed by the Lliga Catalana (former Lliga Regionalista), and provoked a confrontation with the government of the Republic which resulted in the Tribunal of Constitutional Guarantees trying to curtail Catalonia's autonomy.

The crisis was further complicated by the strength that the Estat Català separatist sector had attained within Esquerra and by the pressure brought to bear on the Generalitat de Catalunya by the Aliança Obrera [*Worker's Alliance*]. This conflict came to a head in the proclamation of a Catalan state made by President Companys on October 6, 1934. However, this institutional revolt must be seen as a step back in the objectives pursued thus far since Companys reneged on one of the outstanding precepts of his political work: the vertebration of the Catalan left into sovereign parties with a line of action based primarily on the Catalan political ethos. Moreover, the revolt of October 6 in Barcelona, coinciding with the socialist insurrection in Asturias, was primarily the result of pacts between parties of the Catalan and Spanish Left rather than any initiative inspired by Josep Dencàs and other home-grown Estat Català radicals, as is often asserted.

In this way, Companys suffered the backlash of an irresponsible Spanish Left that had never reconciled itself with the

electoral victory of the Right. One finds oneself obliged to question exactly what could justify the revolt of the Government of the Generalitat precisely when power was in the hands of its own party, the ERC? The answer is clearly nothing, barring the agreements that the Catalan ministers Lluhí i Vallescà and Joan Comorera had reached with Azaña, Prieto and other left-wing leaders: agreements which president Companys honoured as if they were his own. The Catalan institutional revolt in 1934 was therefore the consequence of agreements made state-wide between politicians, and this is surely why the Catalan people en masse did not get involved as the adventure neither responded to the situation objectively nor served any immediate social needs.

Nevertheless, the heavy-handed repression following the attempted coup, the suspension of the Statute of Autonomy and the implementation of what can only be termed a caricature of autonomy governed by the right wing facilitated a rapprochement between Republican and proletarian left-wing parties, giving rise to the victory of the Front d'Esquerres de Catalunya [Catalan Popular Front] in February 1936. Catalan institutions were re-established and the path of bourgeois reform undertaken anew, leading to a short-lived period of social and political peace (what has been referred to as the «oasis of Catalonia»), which was jolted from its idyll by the military uprising of July 19<sup>th</sup> and the start of the Civil War.

However, in Catalonia, the military uprising and the revolutionary response sparked radical changes in the power relations between the central administration and autonomous government. The first consequence of the new state of affairs was that the Generalitat overstepped the framework of the Statute of Autonomy since it took on a series of functions which, according to the Statute and the Constitution, were exclusively state powers. The new revolutionary climate, as Rafael Tasis wrote in 1937, «has given Catalonia a breadth of powers which outstrip the strict limits of the autonomy established by the Statute of 1932. It has been afforded functions and sovereignty of the State in many matters, such as national defence, hitherto outside its sphere of jurisdiction. The far-reaching economic and social transformation of the country is being accompanied by a re-structuring of state functions, imposed by changing circumstances from one

moment to the next. The Generalitat has had to take charge of state services, which must be attended to directly» (Tasis Marca: 1937, 23). Josep Tarradellas, one of the strong men of ERC, was of the same opinion. However, he made it clear that the aim was not separation from Spain:

Once again Catalonia has given support to its freedoms which for us are not established by a Statute or a Constitution [...], but together with this sincere and loyal attitude, I am sure that Catalonia would also like its political and social ideals to spread throughout Spain so that, on the day of victory, we may all come together in that broad and humane federal Republic which Catalans have always longed for (Tarradellas: 1937).

This new legal framework was arranged around three major concepts: a) defence against the enemy without and maintenance of public order within; b) structuring of a new economy and c) to make the Generalitat the only political power in Catalonia. On July 19, it was evident that the CNT had become the most important force in Catalonia although the police forces of the Generalitat, headed by Escofet, Guarner and Vidal i Jover, participated actively in the defence of the Republic. Also clear was the fact that the Civil Guard had been won over to legality by the Minister of Governance, Josep M. España.

It should thus come as no surprise that the CNT had to address the dilemma, as its leader Joan García Oliver later acknowledged, of implementing «libertarian communism, which is the same as anarchist dictatorship; or democracy, which means collaboration» (García Oliver: 1978). This was the scenario in which the interview between President Companys and a delegation of the CNT was held on July 20, 1936, at which time it was agreed that Companys would continue to be the President of the Generalitat in exchange for the creation of the Central Committee of Antifascist Militia (CCMA), which would oversee in the creation of fighting columns and rearguard patrols and would also take charge of provisioning (Peirats: 1971). Thus, the CCMA was set up on July 21 with the participation of three representatives from ERC, one from the UR, three from the CNT, two from the FAI, one from Acció Catalana Republicana, three from the UGT, one from the POUM and another from the PSUC, after this

party was constituted on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of that month. This duality of power remained more or less in place until the end of 1936, and in certain regards until the events of May 1937. However, what is most significant is that the limits of the Statute were overstepped with the CCMA, as can be seen in the legislation pertaining to defence and public order,<sup>3</sup> the Generalitat's intervention in the Bank of Spain in Barcelona (August 27), the creation of the War Industries Commission on August 7, and four days later at the instigation of the CNT, of the Council of Economy of Catalonia, whose role was to coordinate the collectivised economy.

It was this organism that produced the Socialist Plan for Transformation of the Country,<sup>4</sup> which was accepted by the new

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<sup>3</sup> Decree of the Presidency of the Generalitat of July 21, 1936, which created the Citizens' Militia of Catalonia; decree of the government of the Republic of August 17, 1936, which transferred services which, according to article 8 of the Statute were reserved to the State: border policy, immigration, emigration, foreign citizens, system of extradition and expulsion and other security-specific matters, regardless of whether they were extraregional or supraregional; the creation, on September 27, 1936, of the Domestic Safety Board recognizing the control patrols as elements of public order, besides stipulating that every citizen of military age was to possess an ID card. Similarly, on September 29, a Technical Section or General Staff was created to coordinate the front, and which reported to the Department of Defence, albeit subordinated to the Standing Council of War, with the participation of Sandino, Tarradellas, Fàbregas, Comorera and Nin. By virtue of the decree of October 21, 1936, of the presidency of the Government of the Republic, all public services were transferred «even suppressing, insofar as may be necessary, the action of the State during the present circumstances». By virtue of the decree of the Generalitat of November 21, 1936, when the Nationalists attacked Madrid, the army of Catalonia was created.

<sup>4</sup> The Socialist Plan for Transformation of the Country established: 1) Production was adjusted to suit the needs of consumption; 2) Monopoly of foreign trade; 3) Collectivization of the major agrarian properties and obligatory trade union membership of rural workers; 4) Partial devaluation of urban property by means of taxes and rent reductions; 5) Collectivization of the major industries, public services and community transport; 6) Confiscation and collectivization of abandoned companies; 7) Extension of the cooperative system of products; 8) Open trade union control in private companies; 9) Open control in banking operations until banking

popular unity government of the Generalitat on September 26, 1936. Moreover, on October 15 the Board of Foreign Trade of Catalonia was created, making it possible to open a branch of the Office of Foreign Trade of the Generalitat in Geneva on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of that month, and to establish the countermark of Catalonia. The economic policy of the Generalitat was defined in the so-called decrees of s'Agaró and the Tarradellas Plan of January 8, 9 and 12 of 1937. This Plan contained 58 provisions, which implemented a municipal, banking and credit redistribution, set up a taxation system for Catalonia and created several savings banks. (Arias Velasco: 1977, 225-226)

It is very important to note that the Generalitat awarded itself powers to legislate on workers' conquests until it was possible to render what José A. González Casanova called «legal sovereignty» compatible with the «real sovereignty» imposed by the popular revolution. (1974: 410) This obvious from the decree of August 28, 1936, signed by Lluís Companys, which stated:

At this moment in time, the work of government must ensure a unity of thought that encompasses the economic and social feelings of the proletariat of Catalonia. Thus, at the proposal of the President of the Government, and in agreement with the Council,

»I Decree:

»Only the legal provisions published in the *Diari Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya* [*Official Gazette of the Autonomous Government of Catalonia*] will be enforceable in the territory of Catalonia.»

This decree was extended through the order of September 4, 1936, repealing the order of July 29, 1935, which had entrusted the departments of the Generalitat with the publication of laws and regulations dictated by the government of the Republic. Therefore, with these provisions, the Generalitat became momentarily the sole

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nationalization was realized; 10) Rapid absorption of the unemployed and 11) Suppression of indirect taxes and the establishment of a single tax (Bricall: 1970, 262).

government of Catalonia. However, it is also true that during the first few months of the war an unstable equilibrium prevailed in Catalonia between the CNT-FAI-POUM block on the one hand and the ERC-ACR-PSUC group on the other. The instability was further compounded by the tension between the autonomous government and the government of the Republic.

Relations between Catalan political forces were marked, at least between July and September 1936, by the clear predominance of the CNT which reigned in the streets, but also by the anarchist trade-union's decision to «institutionalise» their revolutionary conquests through the Generalitat. The CNT found an ally in President Companys who, in exchange for preserving formal authority, let them do as they wished. This alliance was prompted by the shared disappointment in the central government's refusal to give credits to Catalonia to meet the needs caused by the war and the collectivisation of its industry. It was this sense of abuse by central government that led the CNT, at the plenary meeting of its Catalan local and district federations held on September 24, 1936, to accept the organisation's incorporation into the government of the Generalitat. This decision took place two months before the CNT agreed to enter the Madrid government presided by Largo Caballero. (Abad de Santillán: 1940) The intervention of Joan P. Fàbregas, the CNT delegate in the Ministry of Economy, denouncing the lack of economic aid to Catalonia from the Republican authorities, proved decisive in leading the anarchist trade unionist to abandon the CCMA and join the autonomous government. The truth is that the confrontation between Barcelona and Madrid became more heated as time went on. Azaña's views, published at the end of the war, are a good example of this:

The Generalidad's actions are insurrectionist. While they say in private that issues of Catalanism have been relegated to second place, and that now nobody intends to take Catalanism to the extreme, the Generalidad is assaulting the State's services and sequestering its functions, the ultimate aim being a *de facto* separation. It legislates where it has no power; it administers that which does not belong to it. In many of its assaults against the State it uses the FAI as its shield. It takes over the Bank of Spain to prevent the FAI from doing it. It takes over the customs, the

border police, the direction of the war in Catalonia, etc. Availing itself of the miserable pretext of preventing the trade unions from stripping the State, it complains that the State does not help it and it falls prisoner of the trade unions. The government of Catalonia exists in name only. The trade union representatives in the government mean little or nothing; their comrades do not obey the government and they do not keep the agreements laboriously reached in council. The decree for the collectivisation of industry was an act of political chicanery in exchange for trade union acceptance of the decrees of mobilisation and militarization. The decree was fulfilled but the others were not. When the Government of the Generalidad issued fifty-eight decrees at once, each one of them a legal transgression, none were observed because the trade unions did not like them. We thus enjoy the double gain of the Generalidad interfering in affairs that do not concern it and anarchic disobedience. The repercussions of the war are now visible. A rich, populous and hard-working country with industrial power is now gagged for military action. While others fight and die, Catalonia talks politics [...] Eight months into the war, Catalonia has failed to organise a useful force, after opposing the organisation and control of any such force by the Government of the Republic. Now, when everyone is crying out for an army, the advantages of having burnt the mobilisation records, of having made bonfires with equipment and saddles, of allowing the FAI to take over barracks and scare off recruits will be reaped. The newspapers, and even the men of the Generalidad, talk daily about the revolution and winning the war. They talk about the participation of Catalonia as a nation rather than a province. As a neutral nation. They talk of the war in Iberia. Iberia? What does that mean? A former country in the Caucasus? [...] since the war is being fought in Iberia, things can be taken calmly. At this rate, if we win, the State will end up owing money to Catalonia. Catalan affairs during the Republic, more than any others, have aroused the military's hostility towards the regime. The pest of anarchy emerged from Catalonia during the war. Catalonia has detracted enormously from the resistance against the rebels and the military thrust of the Republic. (Azaña: 1939,101-104.)

The complaints of the president of the Spanish Republic are harsh, as harsh as those that might be levelled by the Generalitat against the

government of the Republic. However, the fact is that the trade unionisation of Catalan politics is irrefutable; as is the antagonism between autonomous government and State for control of the situation in Catalonia.<sup>5</sup>

In the first year of the war, then, the struggle for hegemony was intense, spawning a scenario of tension between State and Generalitat which was predicated on the differing strategies on war and revolution. The conflict came to a head, of course, in the outbreak of violence and unrest in May 1937.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There are many examples of this tension. For example, the discussion in September 1936 on the relocation of munitions manufacturing equipment from Toledo to Barcelona which did not take place and which eventually fell into the hands of the nationalist army. The demand by the first government of Largo Caballero for Catalan expeditionary troops in Majorca to withdraw from the island and return to Barcelona. The prohibition by the Council of Ministers on April 5, 1937 to send reserves of salt to Catalonia. The decree on militarization of March 1937 to disarm the workers militia. The creation, on April 29, 1937 of the Board of Regulation of Foreign Trade, reporting to the Ministry of Trade, which heralded the beginning of state intervention in the Catalan economy. The decree of May 4 by virtue of which the government of the Republic reassumed the functions of the department of Defence of the Generalitat and transferred them to the organic Division of Catalonia led by general Pozas

<sup>6</sup> In Catalonia, the struggle for hegemony was very complex. The permanent rift between CNT-FAI-POUM and ERC-ACR-PSUC and the difficulties between the governments of Barcelona and Madrid went hand in hand. In the end, as has often been said, this rift mirrored the confrontation between two strategies. On the one hand, the strategy advocated by those in favour of the revolution which meant defending revolutionary conquests at any cost and, on the other, that of the moderates who wanted to focus on wining the war. The second strategy entailed increasing links with the State, particularly in the military aspect, without belittling the autonomous institutions. ERC maintained an ambiguous position, since it sought to consolidate autonomy without cutting itself off from the general interest but, at the same time, it was bound by the support it received from the CNT. (Peirats: 1971, 206; COMORERA: 1937)



### **The events of May 1937 and the decadence of autonomy**

Between September 1936 and May 1937, the tension between the State and the Generalitat increased substantially, as did the tensions among the Catalan political forces. The dilemma between war and revolution was becoming increasingly unbearable and was expressed in the discussion on whether or not there was a need for a unified army, an idea staunchly defended by the communists in the attempts to curb the revolution. It was evident that these contradictory strategies would lead Catalonia to a major internal confrontation, which is what actually happened in May 1937. (Bonamusa:1977; Cruells: 1970; Semprún-Maura: 1975) The bloody explosion at street-level of the differences between the two strategies was resolved with the dissolution of the POUM and the persecution of its leaders, the subjection of the CNT and the predominance of the PCE-PSUC which led to the resignation of Prime Minister Largo Caballero and the establishment of the first Negrín government.

The new government, based on the alliance between the Socialists Juan Negrín and Indalecio Prieto and the Communists, with the exclusion of trade union representatives, engaged in re-forging pre-war political alliances. As far as Catalonia was concerned, the new Republican government strove to limit - and even undermine - the revolutionary impetus, which the new government of the Generalitat, constituted on June 29, would deflate even further:

At last the Popular Front — said the UGT. The new government of Catalonia, based on the Popular Front, has been formed in view of the demands of the CNT and is prepared to collaborate loyally with the Republic. To this end, the whole of Catalonia has shown its satisfaction with a government that is a true reflection of the spirit of the masses, [formed] in order to win the war and bring about the popular revolution. (*Vertical*, 30-VI-1937)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ángel Pestaña, former anarchist trade unionist and leader of the Partit Sindicalista, made the following observation: «We have made our movement hated by sacrificing many liberal men who had fought, throughout their life, against reaction. Revolution, which can bring out what is most noble in man,

The slow but relentless backslide continued with the relocation of the government of the Republic from Valencia to Barcelona on October 31, 1937.

The PSUC, whose hegemony coincided with the CNT's removal from the centres of power (Generalitat, government of Madrid and the dissolution of the Council of Aragon), advocated the further centralisation of the war economy while defending the autonomy of Catalonia on the basis of the legal statute of 1932. The result of this shift in the correlation of forces was the progressive recovery of state intervention in Catalan affairs. Besides the aforementioned decrees, through which the State had recovered the powers of defence and internal law and order, centralisation was consummated on May 20, 1937 with the reshuffle of Catalan military defence and the creation of the Army of the East, commanded by General Pozas. An order of the central government of July 24, 1937, which created a Mixed Government-Generalitat Commission to co-ordinate legal reform, the creation of the Military Information Service (SIM), the dissolution of the War Industries Commission on January 23, 1938, or the suppression, on January 6, 1938 of the Provisioning department of the Generalitat in favour of a National Supplies Commission, were some of the decisions taken by the government of the Republic to recover the ground it had lost in Catalonia in the early years of the war.

Although the government of the Republic was initially welcome on its arrival in Barcelona, the relations between this institution and the Generalitat deteriorated very rapidly to the extent that, following the demise of Prieto, whom the Communists blamed for the fall of the city of Teruel and the advance of the Francoist army towards Catalonia, the new Negrín government encountered opposition from the Generalitat as well as the CNT. Nevertheless, President Companys, supported only by his party (ERC) and the PSUC, issued decree on June 16, 1938, repealing the decree of August 28, 1936, which had established the full sovereignty of Catalonia. The

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also accentuates that which is most repugnant and cruel in us». (*Hora sindicalista*, 30-V-1937.)

Generalitat, once again, was an autonomous government bound by State guidelines, or at least the little that was left of it. The bitter taste of defeat in Catalonia was compounded by the impression that, for other Spaniards as Antoni Rovira i Virgili recalls, the only thing Catalans seemed to be good for was to be used as recruits:

They are good for fighting, for dying, but not to give orders in the army or in the government of the Republic. They even lack the psychological mechanisms for a heroic and decisive Catalan reaction. «Catalans should be more involved in the defence of Catalonia», Comorera himself said, despite his unconditional support of the Negrín government. No important role is or will ever be given to Catalans, except being blamed for defeats and particularly for the final defeat, the blame which was reserved for us from the very beginning if the war was lost.

What a paradox! When the war was led here by the men of the Generalitat they were criticised and accused by the governing bodies [secluded] in Madrid and later in Valencia and at a time when the Aragon front was almost routed, we had conquered three quarters of the region, had laid siege to Huesca, were but a cannon shot away from Saragossa, had sent an expedition to Majorca (fouled up by the central government) and had put together important forces to aid the capital of Spain. And when these self-same governing parties took over control of the war on a front maintained by Catalonia, then the front of Aragon collapsed, and we found the enemy breathing down the neck of Catalonia... (1999: 17-18)

In the meantime, General Franco, who had already taken Lleida and had managed to isolate Catalonia from the rest of Republican territory, published the well-known decree abolishing the Statute of Autonomy on April 5, 1938, which came into effect on February 10, 1939, when Catalonia was totally occupied. And under Franco, once again the national representation of Catalonia had to become clandestine.

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