

BLACKFRIARS

THE SPANISH ELECTIONS ANALYZED

AFTER a preliminary period of confusion, it is now possible to gain a clearer view of the political scene in Spain.¹ Two facts emerge: that the Catholic question was not the dominant issue and that it did not decisively swing votes either the one way or the other; that the Catholic deputies who lost their seats (Traditionalists, Alfonsists and others) did so not as a consequence of their Catholicism but because of specific political issues. *Acción Popular*, which we may legitimately describe as *the* Catholic party in Spain, actually increased its representation and is easily the largest party in the new Cortes. The Left gains have been made principally at the expense of the Centre Radicals, who staged a spectacular collapse, despite the promotion of a Centre "hold-the-ring" party by President Alcalá Zamora and Premier Portela. Centre deputies who lost their seats paid the penalty of "betraying the Republic." Don Alejandro Lerroux, one of the oldest Republican leaders, failed in two constituencies, and but a bare dozen of his followers have been returned. Señor Cambó, leader of the Catalan *Lliga* (Right) for many years, was also defeated.

The defeat of Liberalism at the hands of the natural intransigence of the Spanish temperament has been taken little note of by English newspapers. In the old days, when not only political parties but parliamentary democracy and the Constitution itself were kept alive by artificial means (the *turno legal* pact whereby Conservatives and Liberals oscillated in office), it was possible for Liberalism to survive. But of recent years the electors have voted in increasing numbers, considerably outweighing those who voted at the behest of the political *caciques* and overbearing the Home Office machinery for "making" elections. In Spain as elsewhere Liberalism has been the creed of professors and thinkers.

¹ The voting seems to have been fairly even, and the most reliable estimate published in the British Press gives 263 seats to the Left and 210 to the Opposition. *The Times* (March 7) reports that at least 200 seats will be contested as invalid.

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The names of Ganivet, Giner and Unamuno and the ideas of the "generation of '98" meant little to the industrial and agrarian masses. Such men were cheered when their voices chimed with that of the people and so acquired an importance far in excess of their actual influence. In point of fact, the revolutionary leaders had no intention that the Liberal intellectuals should call the tune when the Liberal politicians had succeeded in overthrowing the last barrier and opening the last gate. The success of Liberalism implies its own demise. Based on an excessive belief in human nature, it is destroyed by the forces which it liberates. It is only active and popular so long as there are barriers to be overturned and gates to be opened. In Spain Liberalism is being eaten up by the wild bulls of the Left. Its eighteenth century humanitarianism and its abstraction of dogma, its attempt to evangelize the masses by mere intellectualism, its practical disbelief in the fallen nature of man, and the world which it seeks to create (which is only fit for intellectual individualists to live in), all forecast its failure. In specific Spanish terms, Liberalism has come into conflict with the natural pessimism of the national temperament. The Spaniard has no illusions about human nature. Either he believes in the traditional view, that men need a Church and authoritative government to help save them from themselves, or, usually under the influence of poverty and passion, he lapses into Marxism and Atheism. In this rebellious agnostic atmosphere, if he reasserts himself and becomes a Spaniard once more, he, like Francisco Ferrer, creates a fierce religion out of socialism and is every bit as authoritative in his ideas of government as are his "fascist" compatriots of the extreme Right.

We believe that the recent elections suggested no special or increased antipathy towards Catholicism. We cannot help saying that the prospects for Catholicism are brighter now than they have been at any other time during the past troubled hundred years of Spanish history. The older generation of Catholics, the non-socially minded, aristocratic and capitalist Catholics whose vision was narrow and whose faith was sometimes more formal than apostolic, are passing away. So, too, are the "Catholic anti-clericals" who sup-

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ported the old Liberal Party. They are being replaced by vigorous, all-round Catholics who are anxious to sanctify themselves and others. The needs of *real* and *legal* Spain are being energetically attended to. In the former province, the sanctifying leaven of Catholic Action is at work in all parts of the country. In the latter, Catholic trade unions are being rescued from the "black-leg" position into which unthinking employers had forced them and, within the short space of five years, a splendid political and propagandist organization has created the largest party in the State. Catholicism, therefore, has assembled all its forces, and the field is set for a grand effort at the corporate and individual evangelization of Spain. And, with the withering of the Liberal graft, Spain has a chance of becoming herself again. The harm which Liberalism has done both to Catholicism and Spain by obscuring issues is illustrated in microcosm by the tragic career of President Alcalá Zamora. The man who personally dictated terms to Alfonso XIII is now spurned by both Right and Left, and seeks to be released from an intolerable position.

Socialism is an ape of Christianity. Though there must be an intrinsic opposition between those who seek Heaven-on-earth and those who seek Heaven-in-Paradise, the conflict between Catholicism and Marxism lacks the special bitterness of the Catholic-Liberal struggle. The errors of the Socialist rank-and-file are errors of the heart rather than the head. Even the intellectual minority frequently seek to minimize the difference between Catholicism and Socialism and to avoid a direct conflict with the Church. In France, for instance, the Socialist leaders view the "anti-clerical problem" as a bourgeois red herring drawn by the Radicals across the trail of social progress. It seems certain that many Catholics in Spain vote for the Left because they simply view it as a means of increasing their stock of daily bread, much as the older type of propertied Catholic voted for the Right to protect his own material interests rather than the Church. Too conscious an alliance between capital and Catholicism and the general effect of Liberalism prevented the light of Catholic doctrine from reaching the masses. It is thus not surprising that Socialist propaganda has won so

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many adherents. It is noteworthy that Spanish monarchists frequently adopt a cynical view of the Church's social appeal to the masses. But, as we have remarked, these Conservative Clericals are being replaced by a party which places Catholic teaching in the forefront of its programme and which no longer depends on one class for support. *Acción Popular* is winning the support of workers and the bourgeois as well. The bulk of the industrial and agrarian proletariat are by no means intellectual devotees of Marxism, and *Acción Popular* and its Catholic Agrarian allies will be able to bring the Light into the dark places of Catalonia and Andalusia. *Populus in tenebris vidit magnam lucem.*

To substantiate our claim that it is not Catholicism which has received a rebuff at the recent elections, the Left gains from the Centre must be analyzed. The Centre Radicals, nineteenth century in their mentality, anti-clerical and republican but diffident on the social question, paid the penalty of collaborating with the Right in measures which seemed of Conservative and Monarchist complexion. The semi-socialist Radicals of the Left, represented in the last Cortes only by leading personalities such as Azaña and Martínez Barrio, have increased their holding by almost the same number of seats as the Centre Radicals have lost. These Left Radicals have outstripped their fellow-Liberals of the Centre in realizing that social rather than political issues are the real instruments of national revolution.

These Radicals are noted for their strong defence of regional autonomy. Señor Azaña envisages the creation of a federal Spanish State by devolution of national services. At the moment regionalism is the sharpest characteristic of Republicanism, and it is notable that the Lefts gained their greatest successes in Catalonia and the North. That local liberty is a cause sufficiently strong to swing Catholic votes to the Left is incontestable. In the last Cortes the Basque Nationalists (members of the Right and fervent Catholics) walked out of the House of Congress side by side with members of the Socialist Left in silent defence of Catalan liberties. The Rights, especially those who were monarchist in sympathy even though they had accepted the *ralliement*

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policy, tended to support a centralized State in any event, while the part played by the Catalans in the 1934 revolt led the Centre-Right Government to strip the Generalidad of most of its authority; and many of Gil Robles' followers threatened the total suppression of the Catalan Generalidad. We can appreciate the reasons which created this attitude, but the anti-regionalist trend was a bad electoral mistake. Regionalists began to feel that their aspirations would be in safer keeping in the hands of the Republican Left, and the imprisoned Azaña became their champion. Hence the defeat of the *Lliga* (the Catalan Right party, conservative in general politics and moderate in its autonomy demands, which sits Centre in the Madrid Cortes) by the *Esquerra* (a Left concentration of Marxists and Republicans founded some years ago by President Companys). The defeat of so experienced and astute a politician as Señor Cambó at Lerida, almost as extraordinary as a defeat of Mr. Lloyd George at Caernarvon Burghs, can only be explained by the fact that his party truckled to the centralists of the Right.

Amongst other reasons for the Left victory, we may briefly mention a national characteristic which has made more than one important contribution to Spanish history—the tendency of a substantial minority to support the cause which they think is going to win. Unprincipled voting of this kind, however, is just as likely to support the Right on another occasion.

In conclusion we must say that the Left triumphed for political rather than religious considerations. It is difficult to find evidence that anti-Catholicism as such has made any serious headway. Professor Gil Robles scored a personal triumph at least as remarkable as that of the Left leaders; he was elected both for Madrid and Salamanca. Monarchist and Radical members of the *C.E.D.A.* (anti-Marxist coalition) fared poorly, and Right deputies in general who lost their seats did so because their background suggested centralism, capitalist domination, and the worse features of landed-aristocracy rule. On the other hand, the *real* Left—the Socialist-Syndicalist-Communist *bloc*—did not make any extraordinary advance in the circumstances. The Socialists

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Certainly the result shows that these allies have weakened rather than strengthened the cause; the old men of the sea have weighed the Sinbads down. As traditional anti-clericals they could not attract Catholic votes, and their insipid republicanism lost them their old clientele of revolutionary voters. It may be, then, that in future the Catholic deputies will cut themselves free from both extreme Right and Centre and will stand boldly forth for what they are. Psychologically, this might be more to the taste of the forthright electorate. For the sake of preserving themselves from extinction, both Radicals and extreme Rights will have to support the Catholic lead, thus reversing the late position in which the Right followed the Centre.

The widening of the basis of coalition on the Left, however, exceeded anything attempted by the Right, so much so that the Left victory is a defensive triumph, negative rather than positive. The Left has prevented the Right from attaining power, but itself lacks sufficient homogeneity to undertake with success a continued, positive policy. A Marxist background supports the Socialist-Syndicalist-Communist Left as Catholicism does the Right, but the difference between these elements is more serious than that between, say, Catholic Republicans and Catholic Monarchists. The Socialist leader, Largo Caballero, for all his Marxist paraphernalia of clenched fists and Red flag, his wild talk of civil war, and his *soubriquet* of "the Spanish Lenin," is of no deeper dye than the English Labour Party. Any effort at immediate betterment of the working classes would take much of the sting out of his attack. We must not forget that he actively co-operated with General Primo de Rivera's régime when the Dictator attempted to alleviate the Spanish workers' lot. Furthermore, between the Marxists and the Left Radicals (about 100) there is a gulf so wide that Premier Azaña, despite his parliamentary adroitness, cannot for long avoid a serious crisis. It may well be that the parties in the new Cortes will spend much of their time manoeuvring for position in the event of another election. In this duel of wits, the Right will miss the practised hand of Señor Lerroux.

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