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The Democratic Revolution as a Path towards the Republic (Spain, 1873)*

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This article offers an analysis of the I Spanish Republic¹ that is centred on the extension of individual rights and the proposal for the administrative restructuring of the Spanish state. Unlike the republican experience of the twentieth century, this is a period that has received very scarce attention from historiography and was viewed with misgiving by conservative historians throughout the twentieth century as it was considered a period of political and social instability.

In this period there was a significant break with the period of the liberal monarchy. A process opened that involved the democratisation of public life and the extension of the rights of the adult male population. There was a process of increasing citizens' participation based on the extension of rights and especially the right of male suffrage, which became universal. The political debate on citizens' rights that took place in this period was to colour

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¹ The Spanish I Republic involved an experiment with a new political regime that was uncommon in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. In this period the republican form of government was the norm in the American continent, but was exceptional in Europe. Only Switzerland and France, since 1870, were governed by republican regimes, although these had a more conservative character than in the Spain case. The Spanish Republic therefore developed in an unfavourable international context; this and pronounced internal instability were factors that help in understanding its brevity. On the other hand, we must understand this Republic as resulting from a process of democratisation of the Spanish political system, which started with the 1868 Revolution and the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy. The Republic and the constitutional project that was put to debate upheld many of the legislative changes approved in 1869, especially those referring to the extension of individual rights.

political debate in Spain until the next Republic in 1931, and was centred on three questions: Firstly, the discussion on the model of state: monarchy or republic; secondly, the debate on the extension of rights: the right of suffrage, of meeting, of association, etc.; and, finally, the role of religion and the Catholic church within the liberal state and Spanish society.

A second aspect of interest in this process is the project to redraw the political-administrative map of Spain. The model of the centralised liberal state was placed in question and a federal model was elaborated within the project of the Constitution, which signified a revolution in the history of Spain. The question of the model of state has been one of the recurring debates in Spanish contemporary history. From the start of the twentieth century the centralised model was placed in question by the peripheral nationalisms and by the autonomist republicans. It resurfaced in the II Republic with the construction of a decentralised state and once again, following the end of the Francoist regime, in today's state of the autonomous communities. The federal proposal in this period for the democratisation of the state, which took the old medieval kingdoms as its starting point, casts light on later political proposals for decentralisation.

Towards the Revolution

With the revolt of the Spanish fleet in the port of Cadiz on September 17 1868, a revolutionary process was initiated that was to usher in the first democratic political experience in the history of Spain. To the cry of "*Down with the existing order!*" the Revolution of 1868 moved beyond the stage of a military uprising or mutiny and approached the European standards of revolution. It has aptly been described as "an anti-dynastic revolution, inspired by a liberal movement with a markedly democratic character, in which the supporters of the republic played a fundamental role."²

The revolt that brought the overthrow of the queen, Isabel II de Bourbon, opened the way to a convulsive period of political changes. From being a parliamentary monarchy, Spain became a democratic monarchy; it subsequently became a federal republic; this in its turn was replaced by a military dictatorship with a republican form. The period ended with the return of the Bourbons, which signalled a return to a monarchic system that suppressed democratic proposals.

This series of changes corresponded to the aspirations of the two great political blocs that played a leading role in the Revolution. These were, on the

² J. Varela, *Política y Constitución en España (1808-1978)*, Madrid, CEPC, 2007, p. 498.

one hand, the bloc formed by the moderate monarchists, who could be identified with the earlier Progressive and Liberal Union Parties and who sought a “moderate revolution,” and, on the other, the bloc made up of the monarchists proceeding from the Democrat Party and the republicans, who sought a deeper change.³ The monarchists were to see their aspirations embodied in the democratic monarchy of Amadeo I and in the Constitution of 1869, while those of the republicans found expression in the Federal Republic and in the constitutional project of 1873. In their turn, these two projects had to contend with the supporters of the overthrown dynasty and those of absolutism, the supporters of the Carlist monarchy. This forms the framework within which the great political instability of the period should be understood.

The overthrow of Isabel II was not just another military revolt in the contemporary history of Spain, since it opened up a process of political changes that for the first time sought to deeply transform the political foundations of the Spanish political system.⁴

The movement that put a temporary end to the Bourbon monarchy in the country was preceded by an intense period of agitation. During the second part of the 1860s, a precarious economic situation and a deep political crisis became evident, which progressively undermined the monarchy of Isabel II. To this was added an international context favourable to change. Thus the revolution arrived in Spain, sweeping aside the monarchy of Isabel II.

The situation of the Spanish economy in the second half of the 1860s did not inspire confidence.⁵ Starting with the economic liberalisation that began in 1854, Spanish capitalists had invested their money in the newly developing sectors: banks and railways. The development of the financial institutions was a good example of this. In the decade between 1854 and 1864 the number of firms in the Spanish financial system increased from five to sixty. With respect to the railways, 4,500 kilometres of railway line were constructed in the same period. The picture for the following decade was the complete opposite. Starting in 1864, the economic situation changed and neither sector was able to meet its obligations to its shareholders. Exploitation of the railways proved to be loss-making and this, together with the international economic crisis and the cotton crisis arising from the American Civil War, brought about a crisis in these companies and in the financial firms

³ Antoni Jutglar, ‘La Revolución de septiembre, el Gobierno Provisional y el Reinado de Amadeo I’, in J. M^a Jover (dir.), *Historia de España. La Era Isabelina y el Sexenio Democrático (1834-1874)*, Madrid, Espasa Calpe, 1988, Vol. XXXIV, p. 645ff.

⁴ J. Ferrando, ‘La Primera República’, in Jover, *Historia de España*, p. 703.

⁵ Reports of the French Consul to the Ministry, January 26 and 31, 1869, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (Paris), Correspondance Consulaire et Commerciale (San Sebastián), vol. 8, p. 135 and ff., and 144ff.

that had invested a large part of their capital in them.⁶ With respect to the bank, only fifteen firms survived the crisis, while only 1,000 kilometres of railway were built in this period and the bankruptcy of the smaller railway companies led to a concentration in this sector.⁷ A further example of this crisis was the collapse of the stock exchange, where the Spanish public debt lost over 30 percent of its value in three years (1864-1867).⁸

While railway construction was underway, it employed a large number of people. But the end of construction work led to them losing their employment, and they joined the mass of the needy that had to live from public charity. Commerce was also affected by the crisis. With the fall in the number of those employed, consumer capacity also fell and hence commercial activity. The precarious situation of the citizens was aggravated because fiscal pressure was essentially based on indirect taxation, which taxed the consumption of basic products. Hence opposition to this type of tax became a factor for mobilising the citizens against the government.

On the other hand, the state spent a large part of its revenues on non-productive activities. Nearly 70 percent of the budget was distributed amongst amortization of the state debt, pensions, defence, the police and the Ministry of Justice, which dedicated 75 percent of its budget to paying the Catholic church. In this way, capital was squandered that could have been used for developing the country; the development and modernisation of agriculture, the country's main economic activity, was ignored.⁹

To this was added the high price of basic products caused by bad harvests in 1868, worsening the already difficult situation of the population. Cereals forming part of the basic diet, such as wheat and barley, rose in price between 50 percent in the coastal areas less affected by the problem and 150 percent in some areas of the interior.¹⁰

At the same time as Spain was undergoing these economic difficulties, a profound political crisis broke out in the second half of the 1860s. The political system built by the Moderate Liberals, based on the Constitution of

⁶ Josep Fontana, *Cambio económico y actitudes políticas en la España del siglo XIX*, Barcelona, Ariel, 1983, pp. 114-123.

⁷ Gabriel Tortella, *El desarrollo de la España contemporánea. Historia económica de los siglos XIX y XX*, Madrid, Alianza, 1994, pp. 107-109 and 143.

⁸ A. Bahamonde and J.A. Martínez, *Historia de España. Siglo XIX*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1994, p. 530.

⁹ M. González, 'La Hacienda Pública y el fracaso del sexenio revolucionario', in A. Gil, *La Revolución burguesa en España*, Madrid, Universidad Complutense, 1985, pp. 81-99, especially pp. 86-90.

¹⁰ Nicolás Sánchez, *España hace un siglo una economía dual*, Madrid, Alianza, 1988, pp. 81-98.

1845, was unable to accommodate the new political situation in the country.¹¹ The lack of peaceful alternation in government office had made *coup d'états* into the instrument for changing the parties in government. On the other hand, the weakness of the Spanish process of nation building, and hence the relative failure of the integration of the citizens into a common national project, meant that the monarchy of Isabel II was placed in question.

These shortcomings in the process of nation-building were caused by a series of factors that had extended over the preceding period. In the first place, the fact that there were two different national projects, one promoted by the Progressives and the other by the Moderates, meant that the project that emerged victorious, the latter of the two, was weakened. On the other hand, the Spanish liberal state was politically and economically weak. To this was added a high degree of administrative inefficiency and certain deep regional inequalities, which were to become greater over the course of the century, due to the unequal development of the periphery and the interior. We must also bear in mind the weak popular legitimisation of the regime due to its democratic shortcomings, the militarization of politics and the involvement of the crown in political life, favouring one option over the others, in this case the Moderate Liberal Party. Finally, we should not forget the weak nation-building activity carried out by the state, due to deficiencies in the spread of education, the slowness of linguistic unification and the lack of external enemies since the wars against Napoleon.

On the other hand, the process of Italian unification and the question of Rome were to influence Spanish politics. The monarchy of Isabel II enjoyed the support of the church and of Spanish Catholics, especially following the signing of the Concordat of 1851. But Spain's recognition of the Kingdom of Italy in 1865 was to deprive the monarchy of the support of the more conservative liberal Catholics, who from then onwards were to put forward electoral candidacies under a Catholic banner and confront the governments of the monarchy over what they considered their anti-Catholic character.¹² Subsequently, with the fall of the monarchy of Isabel II, many of these *neo-Catholics* were to give their support to another branch of the Bourbons, the Carlists, who sought to win the Spanish throne for the duke of Madrid.¹³

¹¹ Miguel Artola, *La burguesía revolucionaria (1808-1874)*, Madrid, Alianza, 1983, p. 366.

¹² Begoña Urigüen, *Orígenes y evolución de la derecha española: el neo-catolicismo*, Madrid, C.S.I.C., 1986, on the question of the recognition of the Kingdom of Italy pages 219ff.

¹³ L.F. Toledano, *Entre el sermó i el trabuco. El carlisme català contra la revolució setembrina (1868-1872)*, Lleida, Pagès, 2001, p. 28ff.

All of this produced a growing opposition to the increasingly weak regime,¹⁴ an opposition that brought together the revolutionary political elites who were distancing themselves from the regime of Isabel II.¹⁵

This became especially evident for three reasons, which summarise what has been set out above. In the first place, there was no space for the political participation of the different parties, given the hegemony of Moderate Liberalism. In the second place, there was a growing lack of popular support due to the harsh repression directed by the government at any show of opposition. In the third place, the queen's alignment with the Moderate Liberal Party led to her being viewed not as a symbol of national unity but as a supporter of this political force and its regime. For all of these reasons, the revolt against the Moderate Liberal Party and its political regime became a revolt against the monarchy of Isabel II, to the cry of "*Down with the existing order!*"

It has already been mentioned that different political forces came together in the revolutionary movement of 1868, but it was the Democrat Party that provided the inspiration for the Revolution's program. The Democratic proposal defended the introduction of universal male suffrage, together with the suppression of the tax on consumption¹⁶ and the military levies.

The power vacuum created with the fall of the Bourbon monarchy was filled by the creation of Revolutionary Committees [*Juntas Revolucionarias*] throughout the geography of Spain.¹⁷ Since the experience of 1808, an absence of government had been the cause for the emergence of committees in the major cities [*juntismo*], a phenomenon that we can also observe in 1868 and in other periods prior to the political crisis (1808, 1841, 1854). This is evidence of the survival of a structure of local powers; these surfaced when the government was overthrown and proclaimed decentralisation as one of their

¹⁴ A list of the different attempts to overthrow the regime can be found in Mikel Urquijo, 'Los orígenes del golpe de estado de 1868 en el País Vasco: una revolución sin revolucionarios', in R.M Mieza and J. Gracia (eds.), *Haciendo historia. Homenaje a M^a Angeles Larrea*, Bilbao, UPV-EHU, 2001, pp. 239-259.

¹⁵ On the composition of the revolutionary elites see Gregorio de la Fuente, *Los revolucionarios de 1868. Elites y poder en la España liberal*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2000 and Gregorio de la Fuente, 'Actores y causas de la Revolución de 1868', in Rafael Serrano (dir.), *España, 1868-1874. Nuevos enfoques sobre el Sexenio Democrático*, Valladolid, Junta de Castilla y León, 2002, p. 39ff.

¹⁶ The tax on consumption was applied to consumer products which meant it was the same for all social groups and tremendously unpopular in the context of the economic crisis that Spain was undergoing in that period.

¹⁷ Valeriano Bozal, *Juntas Revolucionarias. Manifiestos y proclamas de 1868*, Madrid, EDICUSA, 1968.

aims in their political manifestos.¹⁸ The process of formation of the liberal state had not managed to suppress the survival of local powers, which would re-emerge with the blossoming of federalism.

With the change of regime, the population took to the streets in demonstrations, and the “street became republican” in Madrid and along the Mediterranean arc from Girona to Cadiz.¹⁹ This popular fervour in support of the 1868 Revolution became a republican fervour in 1873 that found expression in street demonstrations, the spread of associations and the expressions of republican sociability, all of which emerged strongly within the new framework of liberties.

But this blossoming of committees [*juntas*] was absorbed by the formation of a Central Committee [*Junta Central*] that gave way to a Provisional Government that concentrated power in its own hands in the absence of the queen and facing the lack of a government and parliament.

The new regime did not lack international recognition, a sign of the interest with which political change in Spain was followed. The first country to do so was the United States, on October 10 1868, followed by Portugal, France, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Prussia and the United Kingdom. These countries were joined by the former Spanish colonies of America, which began to try and resolve the litigations existing with Spain arising from the Pacific War.²⁰ This favourable attitude can be explained by the lack of sympathy for the foreign policy of the governments of Isabel II and to the expected change in economic policy following the victory of the Revolution, which would benefit foreign investors in Spain due to an expected opening to free trade.

The Democratic Constitution of the Monarchy

In this political setting constituent elections were called with universal male suffrage. The results returned a parliament in which 23 percent of the parliamentarians were republican, facing a monarchist majority. For the first time in Spanish parliamentary history, republicanism had an appreciable representation, and its newfound strength would find expression in the change in the central terms of the political debate. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the debate had at first been between absolutism and liberalism (1808-

¹⁸ R. Villena, ‘La crisis del Estado centralista y la administración territorial en el Sexenio’, *Ayer*, 44 (2001), p. 87.

¹⁹ Manuel Morales, ‘Cultura política y sociabilidad en la democracia republicana’, in Serrano (dir.), *España*, p. 215.

²⁰ M^a V. López, *La Revolución de 1868 y la I República*, Madrid, s. XXI, 1976, p. 37.

1839) and later between conservative liberalism and progressive liberalism (1839-1868); from this time onwards we can speak of a debate between monarchy and republic.

The parties that had supported the September revolution – the Liberal Union, the Progressives and both the monarchist and republican factions of the Democrats – were agreed on the need to reform the system, but with divergent projects. The elaboration of the new Constitution of 1869 thus reflected the different political projects in dispute.

This process of political transformation was accompanied by a pronounced process of extending political rights to the citizens²¹, arising from the blossoming of political activity that occurred in this period of agitation in Spanish society. The right to vote was extended and there was an advance in the recognition of rights, opening up spaces for political participation that had until then been more restricted.

The text of the new constitution can be considered as “the most advanced of all those in force in Spain in that century and one of the most progressive in nineteenth century Europe.”²²

One of the key questions, the one perhaps subject to the most debate and resolved by the Constituent Parliament of 1869, was the form of government: monarchy or republic. The monarchic option of the governing majority was imposed on the republican minority in the Constituent Parliament. Without any doubt this debate was one of the most significant of those held in this parliament and showed that the terms of debate had changed in the Spain of 1869. Following decades marked by the confrontation between absolutism and liberalism, and subsequently between moderates and progressives, the *Spaniards of 1869* were divided between monarchists and republicans.

The Constitution of 1869 introduced a new element, universal male suffrage, which transformed the monarchy into a democratic one. Its democratic character not only rested on the extension of suffrage to all adult males, but was also shown in the definition of sovereignty and in the election of the new monarch by parliament. The constitution established that sovereignty resided in the nation and was therefore not shared with the king. The legitimacy of the king did not emanate from tradition but instead proceeded from the people through his election by parliament. In the words of

²¹ Florencia Peyrou, ‘Demócratas y republicanos: la movilización por la ciudadanía “universal”, in Manuel Pérez Ledesma (dir.), *De súbditos a ciudadanos. Una historia de la ciudadanía en España*, Madrid, CEPC, 2007, p. 212.

²² Varela, *Política*, p. 500.

S. Olózaga the new monarchy was not a 'contracted monarchy' but instead "the Nation constituting itself."²³

Together with the tendency to limit the power of the state established in this constitution, a clear sign of the democratisation of the political system was Title 1. This contained a broad and detailed declaration of individual rights, doubtless a reflection of the presence of Democratic and Republican elements in this parliament.²⁴

Another of the great debates that took place in the Constituent Parliament concerned the religious question. Facing the majority's proposal of freedom of religious cults, the absolutist²⁵ and more conservative monarchists opposed the loss of an element that they considered consubstantial with Spain.

The Revolution of 1868 ushered in a period of liberties in Spain that also included the press. The decree of October 23 1868 subjected press offences to common legislation and this was accompanied by a series of measures aimed at fomenting journalistic publications, such as a reduction in the price of paper or a reduction in taxes. These measures sought to spread popular publications, following the idea that "the newspaper in Spain is the worker's book."²⁶ This political change made possible the appearance of new publications and resulted in a greater presence of political opinions in those that already existed.

Another of the paths of change was the approval of the provincial and municipal law that introduced elements of democratisation into the local institutions. This was an attempt to adapt the municipal and provincial councils to the spirit of the new laws, developing one of the basic points of the revolutionary program: decentralisation and an opening for greater participation by the citizens in the local institutions with the spread of male suffrage in the elections to these corporations.

²³ Varela, *Política*, p. 502.

²⁴ Without doubt the declaration of rights and the limitation placed on state power are a clear expression of the influence of the Constitution of the United States on this Constitution, J. Oltra, *La influencia norteamericana en la Constitución Española de 1869*, Madrid, IEA, 1972, especially pages 93ff.

²⁵ The Carlist press, highly active in this debate, proclaimed religious unity in the framework of the Catholic church as being above argument, while at the same time it rejected the dogmas of any other religion. It called for state protection of the true faith, its own, and a prohibition on 'the propagation of the error' of other beliefs. It considered a total separation between church and state preferable to what the government proposed: freedom of cults and maintenance of the church by the state. This situation would lead to covert oppression of the church and the real intention was to avoid indemnifying the church for disentailed properties.

²⁶ M. C. Seoane, *Hª del periodismo en España.2. El siglo XIX*, Madrid, Alianza, 1996, p. 233ff.

This boost given to the power of the municipalities was deeply rooted in the republican ideology. The municipalities played a role of the first order in the conception of the republican state, as the basis and source of power. Power emanated from the municipalities, which ceded a part of their sovereignty to the state through a pact. In this way, a more democratic system of government was shaped that was proximal and accessible to the citizenry. At the same time, the increase in municipal power “weakened the coercive capacity of the central state. In this way, local government and democracy appear as solidly united principles in the republican program.”²⁷

One question debated in the new democratic regime, and which held great importance until the end of the century, was the situation of the overseas colonies. The new constitution once again granted representation in parliament to those territories, which they had lost in the Moderate period (1845-1868). Hence, parliamentarians from the Philippines and Puerto Rico formed part of the parliament. But not from Cuba, since elections were not held on that island due to the war that was waged there from 1868 onwards. This conflict placed the proposals relating to the colonial situation at the centre of political debate. The options of granting independence, establishing some type of autonomous government or maintaining the colonial situation were all considered. Facing these options, the Spanish Party in Cuba tried to maintain the *status quo* and created the Overseas Spanish Centres in the Peninsula as colonialist lobbies for obstructing the reform process.²⁸ The prospects of a solution running counter to the interests of the Hispano-Cubans grew with the new Republic, which gave the same rights to the inhabitants of the colonies as those held by the inhabitants of the Peninsula and granted the status of federal states to the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

With the approval of the constitution, Spain became a monarchy without a king. The vacuum in the leadership of the state was covered by general Serrano as regent (June 16, 1869 – January 4, 1871), supported by general Prim as head of government. The government began the search for a king who would accept the new democratic Spanish constitution and who would be acceptable to the European powers.²⁹ Different candidates were proposed: the duke of Montpensier, supported by the former unionists and vetoed by Napoleon III; general Espartero and Fernando de Coburgo,³⁰ both supported by the progressives but who turned down the invitation; Leopoldo Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, supported by Bismark and also by general Prim,

²⁷ Villena, ‘La crisis del Estado centralista’, p. 96.

²⁸ José Antonio Piqueras, ‘La cuestión cubana, de la Revolución Gloriosa a la Restauración’, in Serrano (dir.), *España*, p. 173ff.

²⁹ M^a V. López, ‘La política exterior’, in Jover, *Historia de España*, p. 871ff.

³⁰ This candidacy marked the reappearance of the *Iberista* discourse, which returned with the Republic, with the idea of an Iberian Federation. J. A. Rocamora, *El nacionalismo ibérico 1792-1936*, Valladolid, Universidad, 1994.

who was rejected because of the Franco-Prussian confrontation; and finally Amadeo of Savoy, duke of Aosta and son of the king of Italy. The European powers made their influence felt in this election, vetoing candidates they considered a threat and who might upset the balance of political power amongst the European states and the ruling houses of the continent.³¹

Finally, the Italian candidate was elected with 55 percent of the votes in parliament, and he was to occupy the throne of Spain for a little over two years (January 4, 1871 –February 11, 1873) as Amadeo I. His election was rejected by the republicans, for obvious reasons, by a part of the monarchists who supported the candidates of the Bourbon family, and by the absolutist-Catholic deputies, as he was the *son of the Pope's jailer*, thus further reducing the support for a monarchy that was weak from the outset.

Seven governments succeeded one another during the reign of Amadeo I,³² with an average duration of three and a half months in office, and three general elections were held. The agreement that had been reached in drawing up the constitution did not last and the alternation in office between the Constitutional Party and the Radical Democratic Party, both of which were marked by the autocratic behaviour of their leaders, proved problematic. Thus support for the new monarchic regime was eroded in barely two years.

The Republic

The weakness of support for the new king and the political instability of the period resulted in the monarch's abdication on February 11 1873, giving rise to a new institutional crisis and making Spain into a kingless monarchy.³³

In this situation, the Congress and the Senate meeting in the National Assembly reassumed all powers and proclaimed the Republic,³⁴ leaving the organisation of the latter to the future Constituent Parliament. The transformation of the political regime took place by peaceful means, something that contrasted with the continuous military uprisings that had beset nineteenth century Spain.³⁵

³¹ M. S. Piretti, '1870. Il nuovo equilibrio europeo', in Paolo Pombeni, *Introduzione alla storia contemporanea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006, p. 221.

³² José Ramón Urquijo, *Gobiernos y ministros españoles (1808-2000)*, Madrid, CSIC, 2001, pp. 66-69.

³³ Jutglar, 'La Revolución de septiembre', p. 693ff.

³⁴ *Diario de Sesiones de las Cortes. Congreso de los Diputados*, 10 Feb. 1873.

³⁵ From 1808 to 1868 there were 8 victorious military rebellions and 16 that were unsuccessful, Mikel Urquijo, 'Coup d'état in Spain: from the antiliberal movements to the

The approval of these agreements took place in a parliament where only 20 percent of the deputies were republican and with the participation of only 50 percent of the parliamentarians who formed part of the National Assembly, with a great number opting not to attend the voting sessions. The Spanish I Republic thus came into existence on a very weak footing. In the words of Emilio Castelar: “Nobody has brought the Republic; it has been brought about by all the circumstances.”³⁶

The Republic was recognised by the United States and Switzerland, while the other states held misgivings about an unstable government that found itself in a situation that might result in a revolution similar to the Paris Commune, a prospect which terrified the European liberals.

The National Assembly managed to prolong its existence until the outstanding bills had been passed, amongst which the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico deserves mention.

The republican government dissolved the two chambers and called new unicameral constituent elections.

The Spanish republicans based themselves on three fundamental concepts: the republic was the antithesis of the monarchy; in contrast to monarchic centralisation the republic was inseparable from decentralisation, which is why they proceeded to reorganise the state; and, finally, the state should be completely secular.

The start of the new parliament’s activities was overshadowed by the split amongst the Republicans. Three political groups were formed: the right-wing led by E. Castelar and N. Salmerón; the centre, led by D. José María Orense; and the left-wing, which lacked a clear leader and brought together the more radical Republicans, heirs to the former Intransigent Party.³⁷ The Republican Party was further divided over the way in which its members understood the organisation of the state and the treatment that should be given to workers’ demands.

The new Assembly had a brief existence, its sessions not even lasting for three months due to the profound instability of the period.

democratic revolution (1814-1874)’, *Parliaments, Estates & Representation*, 20 (2000), pp. 177-189.

³⁶ Quoted in J. Ferrando, ‘La Revolución democrática y el mito federal’, in Jover, *Historia de España*, p. 727.

³⁷ Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, *Historia de la Revolución española (desde la Guerra de la Independencia a la Restauración en Sagunto) 1808-1874*, Barcelona, La Enciclopedia Democrática, 1892, vol. III, p. 706.

After beginning its work on June 7, the parliament approved the proclamation of the Federal Democratic Republic.³⁸ In support of the proposal, F. Pi I Margall declared, “As is often said, this nation seems cut out to be a republic like Switzerland or the United States”³⁹ given the historical tradition of kingdoms and the more recent *juntismo*, which had led into a federal conception of the state. However, “not everyone had the same understanding of what federalism meant. For some it was a pact, for others it meant autonomy and for others the broadest decentralisation.”⁴⁰ This divergence of opinions posed a problem for the principal task facing this parliament, the approval of a new constitution for the republic.

There was the precedent of a federal organisational model, created by the federal pacts that had been signed in 1869 by the federal republicans of all of Spain and that had concluded in a national pact in Madrid (July 30, 1869). There were also some texts that had been drawn up since 1832 that could be considered as projects for a federal constitution,⁴¹ although the most developed and extensive document was probably the Project for a Federal Constitution presented by N. Salmerón and E. Chao to the III Federal Assembly in 1872.⁴² This project left some important questions without clear specification, such as the relation between the state powers, and “shows a clear centralism that might jeopardise its federal character.”⁴³

On the other hand, the Federal Republic opened the door to the expression of popular aspirations for social reform. These contrasted with conservative republicanism, which viewed the republic as a “kingless monarchy” and for which any measure of social reform raised the terrifying spectre of the Paris Commune.⁴⁴ The Paris experience of 1870 had strengthened the conservative groups who feared that a radical political change would result in social revolution. This was why a faction of republicanism was evolving towards conservative positions, confronting the popular sectors of this political movement.

³⁸ *Diario de Sesiones*, 7 June 1873, pp. 70-72.

³⁹ Cited in Joaquín Tomás Villarroja, *Breve historia del constitucionalismo español*, Madrid, CEC, 1982, p. 98.

⁴⁰ Josep Fontana, *La época del liberalismo*, Madrid, Crítica – Marcial Pons, 2007, p. 389.

⁴¹ These projects are enumerated in Gumersindo Trujillo, *El federalismo español*, Madrid, EDICUSA, 1967, p. 167, n. 1.

⁴² The text of this project can be found in F. Pi i Margall and F. Pi i Arsuaga, *Historia de España en el siglo XIX*, Barcelona, M. Seguí, 1902, Vol. V, pp. 357-364.

⁴³ Trujillo, *El federalismo*, p. 186.

⁴⁴ According to the traditionalists: ‘The horrors of the Commune were the apocalyptic event that, in the end, came to confirm the repeated warnings of the traditionalists on the consequences of the liberal revolution and upset the peace with which the bourgeoisie enjoyed its fruits’, José Álvarez, *La Comuna en España*, Madrid, s. XXI, 1971, p. 2.

To these differences within republicanism must be added the difficult context of the time: the Cuban war, the Carlist war and, starting in July, the Cantonalist uprisings linked to the republican sector that was promoting social reform, all of which caused great instability in the republican regime.

The constituent process began in this complex situation. Finally, on July 17 the Project for a Federal Constitution for the Spanish Republic,⁴⁵ signed by sixteen members of the constitutional commission, was presented to parliament.

The project, attributed to the pen of E. Castelar,⁴⁶ was based on satisfying three requirements: conserving the rights won in the Revolution of 1868; establishing a territorial division as the basis of the federation; and establishing a clear division of powers that would prevent their being confused.

To this end, Title I of the 1869 Constitution, dedicated to *the Spaniards and their rights*, was maintained wherever it was compatible with republican ideas.⁴⁷ In the title relating to the *public powers*, mention was made for the first time in Spanish constitutional history of “popular sovereignty”, although this can be considered as going together with the separation of powers.⁴⁸

One of the most debated questions in the constitutional project was the proposal for a new territorial organisation. According to the statement of motives: “We have encountered great difficulties in the territorial division. Should we keep the present provinces? How then should a true federation be founded? How is a situation to be brought about in which small states exercise all the functions that correspond to the state, and pay for all the fundamental institutions that the state indispensably needs? Should we destroy the provinces? How can one ignore that we would be harming interests that are deeply rooted in the soil and in the customs of the fatherland? To get around all of these difficulties and conciliate these extremes, we designate the old kingdoms of the monarchy as new states of the Republic, and we allow these states to decide if they will conserve, should they so wish, the provinces, or

⁴⁵ *Diario de Sesiones*, 17 Jul. 1873, Apéndice segundo.

⁴⁶ E. Rodríguez-Solís, *Historia del Partido Republicano español (de sus propagandistas, de sus tribunos, de sus héroes y de sus mártires)*, Madrid, 1893, Vol. II, p. 710.

⁴⁷ Twenty-nine of thirty-one articles from 1869 were maintained. It can be said with respect to this title that ‘the religious question and the right of association are treated in a more democratic way’, Jordi Solé and Eliseo Aja, *Constituciones y períodos constituyentes en España (1808-1936)*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1985, 13^a ed., p. 65.

⁴⁸ Solé and Aja, *Constituciones*, p. 65.

regulate the most convenient and wise territorial division according to their judgement.”⁴⁹

In this new model of state the organisation of the public powers was based on “the most pure and genuine federal ideas. (...) The Municipality, like the State, and the State like the Federation, will be (...) perfectly autonomous.”⁵⁰ Although the state was superimposed on the member states and the constitutions, legislation and activity of the latter had to be adjusted to the precepts of the federal constitution.⁵¹

Finally, a clear division of powers was established “so that the confusion that generates all arbitrariness and tyranny should never arise. The Legislative Power, the Executive Power, the Judicial Power have their concentric orbits separated in all clarity. (...) It is more difficult to understand the difference existing between the Executive Power and the Presidential Power. Nonetheless, we have wished, without under any circumstance depriving it of its character of responsibility, which all powers should have in a republican Constitution, to raise [the Presidential Power] to such a high sphere that it can be like a mediator amongst all the powers and like a moderator of all the complicated machinery of the federal Constitution.”⁵²

The constitutional project consisted of 18 Titles and 117 Articles. One of the most controversial, receiving the most amendments, was Title I *On the Spanish nation* referring to the division of the republic into states. In the first article, the federal division of Spain was established, and Cuba and Puerto Rico were included amongst the states forming part of it. The remaining colonial territories could accede to the category of states, and thus be governed as such, to the degree that their economies developed and social groups emerged that could take over self-rule.

This federal formula was based on the premise of the existence of the Spanish nation, as argued by the moderate republicans against the radicals. The latter wanted to organise the republic from the bottom upwards. The citizens were to elect municipal councils; in their turn these municipal councils would come together to form cantons or states, on the basis of which the Republic would be organised. That is to say, for the radicals Spain was not something pre-existing, instead it was to be formed by the citizens starting from the structures closest to them, the municipal councils.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Diario de Sesiones*, 17 Jul. 1873, Apéndice segundo, 1-2. The underlining is mine.

⁵⁰ *Diario de Sesiones*, 17 Jul. 1873, Apéndice segundo, 2.

⁵¹ Villarroya, *Breve historia*, p. 99.

⁵² *Diario de Sesiones*, 17 Jul. 1873, Apéndice segundo, 2.

⁵³ J. F. Merino, *Regímenes históricos españoles*, Madrid, Tecnos, 1988, p. 143.

The state powers were articulated in a federal form. The legislative power was bicameral, with a proportional Congress and a territorial Senate, with four senators for each state elected by the parliaments of the different states. The Senate lacked legislative initiative. Its function was to examine “whether the laws of Congress ignore the rights of the human personality, or the powers of the political bodies, or the faculties of the Federation, or the fundamental Code.”⁵⁴ This organisation of the legislative power, especially the Senate, differed considerably from that of the USA, which served as a model for different questions relating to federal organisation. The number of senators for each state differed from the American model, as did the duration of the mandate, the procedure for renewal, total in the Spanish project and partial in the American case, and especially the preponderance of the Congress over the Senate in Spain, which is the opposite in the USA.⁵⁵ This pre-eminence of the lower chamber can be understood as an undervaluing of the federal units, since “their possibilities for participation in the elaboration of federal decisions were reduced.”⁵⁶ On the other hand, the centralist tradition of the Spanish state continued to hold weight, despite the project for decentralisation of the state represented by this constitutional project.

The judicial power was also organised in a federal way, since the highest judicial instance, the Federal Supreme Court, should be formed of “three magistrates for each State of the Federation.”⁵⁷ Outstanding amongst its functions was jurisdiction over litigations between the states.⁵⁸

In relation to the powers of the Federation and the states, Title V of the constitution established the exclusive powers of the former. A list of 23 powers included foreign affairs, defence, communications of national interest, the general treasury, the currency, customs... Title XIII established the powers of the states in a less concrete manner. In the first place, it established “complete economic-administrative autonomy and all the political autonomy compatible with the existence of the Nation.”⁵⁹ It conferred the power of approving their own political constitution and of electing their parliament and government independently but within the limits of the constitution. The states were given jurisdiction over “their own policy, their industry, their treasury, their public works, their regional roads, their charity, their education and all civil and social affairs” that the constitution did not confer on the federal

⁵⁴ Art. 70 of the ‘Proyecto de Constitución federal de la República española’, *Diario de Sesiones*, 17 Jul. 1873, Apéndice segundo, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Trujillo, *El federalismo*, p. 196.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 203.

⁵⁷ Art. 73 of the *Proyecto*.

⁵⁸ Art. 78 of the *Proyecto*.

⁵⁹ Art. 92 of the *Proyecto*.

power.⁶⁰ This attribution of residual powers to the states resembled the tenth amendment of the Constitution of the United States.⁶¹

But the constitution did not clearly establish guarantees for the powers of the states, nor the measures that would prevent the federal power from being condemned to inefficiency due to the obstruction of activities by the states,⁶² which is why some authors talk of a decentralised unitarian republic.⁶³

The minority that had not supported this project presented an alternative project as a minority position [*voto particular*] to the parliamentary commission the following day. Their project was indebted to the proposals of F. Pi i Margall,⁶⁴ and had as its title “Project for the Federal Democratic Constitution of the Spanish Republic.”⁶⁵ It meant acceptance by the federal left-wing “of the mechanism of *constitution* of the new legality *from the top downward*, but it also meant, due to its content, the defence of the flow *from the bottom upwards* in the *functioning* and even in the structural transformation of the juridical, political, social, economic and cultural system.”⁶⁶

Following these interventions, the constitutional debates concluded on September 20, without the constitution being approved and with the suspension of the parliament due to the great instability the country was experiencing.

This was recounted as follows by one of the protagonists: “The commission, which I wanted to see appointed on June 13th, wasn’t appointed until the 20th. The constitutional project, which could and should have been presented in the first days of July, was presented on the 17th, by which time Cartagena had rebelled and the provinces were in turmoil. Its discussion began on August 11th. For three consecutive days, one or two hours were dedicated to debates of such importance; there was no longer even the intention to

⁶⁰ Art. 96 of the *Proyecto*.

⁶¹ ‘The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.’ (Tenth amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, ratified on December 15th 1791). Spanish federalism was related to the American example, see J. Ayzagar y G. Capellán, “Federalismo”, in J. Fernández and J.F. Fuentes, dirs., *Diccionario político y social del siglo XIX español*, Madrid, Alianza, 2002, pp. 305-310.

⁶² Trujillo, *El federalismo*, p. 168.

⁶³ R. Miguel, *La Pasión Revolucionaria. Culturas políticas republicanas y movilización popular en la España del siglo XIX*, Madrid, CEPC, 2007, p. 382.

⁶⁴ It is significant that in the work of F. Pi i Margall, *Historia de España en el siglo XIX*, the project of Salmerón and Chao of 1872 is included and not that of the majority of the Constitutional Commission, supported by E. Castelar.

⁶⁵ *Diario de Sesiones*, 26 Jul. 1873, Apéndice primero. It is also reproduced in Pi i Margall and Pi i Arsuaga, *Historia*, V, pp. 364-384.

⁶⁶ Miguel, *La Pasión*, p. 387.

continue with them. The Constituent Parliament thus perished without leaving anything constituted.⁶⁷

The closure of parliament did not prevent the confrontations between the different sectors of republicanism from continuing: “During the rest of 1873, the conflict was maintained between those who, still federal in name alone, were willing to sacrifice federalism in the interests of a policy of order, and those whose federalism was the bitter fruit of disillusion and frustrated ambition and who had nothing to lose by the cruel exploitation of local fears and grievances.”⁶⁸

The weak state of the Republic was due to diverse factors, which together brought about its end. On the one hand, there was a fragmentation within republicanism that weakened the new republic. On the other, the Cuban War, which had started in 1868 under the rule of Isabel II, represented a significant factor that materially and politically undermined all the governments of the democratic Sexennium. In its turn, it prevented the abolition of the levies, promised in September 1868, given the need for troops, a need that would increase with the successive Carlist and Cantonalist conflicts.

With the extension of liberties brought by the new regime, there was a blossoming of the workers’ movement in Spain. The old mutual aid societies began to acquire a more demand-oriented character and new workers’ societies emerged, the seed of internationalism. The I International was organised and the spectre of the Commune haunted the Peninsula, offering an image of social revolution that united the “parties of order” against the Republic. The workers’ movement united with the Cantonalist movement, giving a social character to this movement based in the provinces. Assaults on property occurred and anarchism was introduced by Fanelli. The workers began to break their links with republicanism, turning to internationalism, as is shown by the workers’ revolt of Alcoy⁶⁹ which united the aspirations of workers’ emancipation in the framework of the Federal Republic, in which a universal federation of free associations of agricultural and industrial workers would be possible. The Republic permitted free association and meeting, which facilitated workers’ activity.

A new conflict, which represented a serious difficulty for the Republic, was the Cantonalist movement that sought to put the most radical version of federalism into practice, building a federation from the bottom upwards. It

⁶⁷ Pi i Margall and Pi i Arsuaga, *Historia*, V, p. 293.

⁶⁸ C.A.M. Hennessy, *La República Federal en España. Pi y Margall y el movimiento republicano federal 1868-1874*, Madrid, Aguilar, 1967, p. 222.

⁶⁹ R. Aracil and M. García, ‘Clase obrera y revuelta social: la identidad del cantonalismo alcoyano de 1873’, *Estudios de Historia Social*, 7 (1978), pp. 163-183.

found expression along the Mediterranean arc (Valencia, Murcia and Andalucía), where the longest lasting was the Canton of Cartagena (July 12, 1873 – January 12, 1874). This insurrectional movement forced the government to mobilise troops for its repression, which was complicated in the case of Cartagena as the insurrectionists had the support of the fleet anchored in this port. Doubtless, this new war resulted in a deterioration in the image of republicanism in the eyes of conservative sectors of Spanish society, who saw in the new Republic a weak and unstable government.

Finally, the Carlists, partisans of establishing a traditionalist monarchy, opposed the new democratic regime in parliament and, from 1872 onwards, with arms. A new war broke out that year with special intensity in the Basque provinces and Catalonia and was to last until 1876.⁷⁰

In this context of political instability and civil and colonial wars, parliament restarted its sessions on January 2 1874. But on the morning of January 3, the captain-general of Castilla La Nueva, Manuel Pavía, dissolved parliament, opening a period of formally republican dictatorship.

The new government dissolved all the republican representative institutions: the parliament and the provincial and municipal councils, and started to repress republicanism and deport republican politicians to the overseas colonies: Cuba, the Philippines and the Mariana Islands.

Federal hopes were ended and from then onwards the Republican Party broke up into different groups during the Restoration.⁷¹ The Republican Party remained divided amongst the different factions that had been breaking away during the Sexennium. Ruiz Zorrilla, Castelar, Salmerón, Figueras and Pi i Margall led the different and greatly weakened republican groups against the monarchist parties; they were fractured by their discrepancies over the form of state between federal and unitarian republicans, and over the social question between left-wing and right-wing republicans.

Facing the failure of the attempt to achieve revolution through federalism, the workers' movement⁷² promoted other political and trade union formations with anarchist and socialist roots. These organisations would compete with the republicans for the support of this social sector.

⁷⁰ Vicente Garmendia, *La Segunda Guerra Carlista (1872-1876)*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1976. A general synthesis of the course of this political movement can be found in Jordi Canal, *El carlismo*, Madrid, Alianza, 2000.

⁷¹ Carlos Dardé, 'La larga noche de la Restauración, 1875-1900', in Nigel Townson (ed.), *El republicanismo en España (1830-1977)*, Madrid, Alianza, 1994, pp. 113-135.

⁷² J. Termes, *Anarquismo y sindicalismo en España. La Primera Internacional (1864-1881)*, Barcelona, Ariel, 1972.

Finally, a part of federal republicanism in Catalonia participated in the creation of new nationalist organisations that responded to the demand for a new form of state organisation.

The first Spanish democratic experience failed and was relegated to oblivion by the conservative outlook that became preponderant in Spanish society, at least until fifty years later when Spain once again underwent a republican experience.

Conclusion

On the basis of the arguments set out above, we can propose the following conclusions regarding the influence of the I Spanish Republic on the political debate in Spain.

The social, political and economic crisis that Spain experienced in the second half of the 1860s brought down both the government and the monarchy of Isabel II.

This revolution opened a period of convulsion in the country's history, which saw, in succession, a democratic monarchy, a federal republic, a formally republican military dictatorship and the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy.

The political models in conflict in this period were the monarchy and the republic, whereas previously the dispute had been between liberalism and absolutism and then between conservative liberalism and progressive liberalism.

The change in the Spanish political system involved the development of a democratic model that was embodied in the new Constitution.

This change was influenced by the significant presence of republicanism, a political movement that identified with the democratic proposals.

For the first time in Spanish constitutional history, the new Constitution include a title dedicated to the individual rights of the citizens and representation was widened with the extension of suffrage to all adult males and the inclusion of representatives from Cuba and Puerto Rico in the parliament.

Following the unsuccessful experience of a democratic monarchy, in which the king was elected by parliament, the Republic was proclaimed, but it rested on a fragile foundation because of the weakness of republicanism facing the monarchist options. The coming of the Republic was due more to the failure of the monarchists than to the strength of republicanism.

The republican constitutional project maintained the democratic elements and the defence of individual rights that had been introduced in the 1869 Constitution and added a significant novelty: a change to the model of political-administrative organization in Spain.

The creation of the liberal state had seen the introduction of a centralised model of political-administrative organisation in Spain, based on the provinces, which were similar to French or Italian departments. The constitutional project of 1873 took the federal model of the United States as its model and aimed to organize the state in a federal and decentralized form.

But the federal model proposed in the constitution was restricted by the Spanish centralist tradition. This is evident in the division of powers between the two chambers, to the detriment of the chamber where the states were represented, and in the lack of precision regarding the powers of the states in relation to those of the republic.

The constitutional debate was very brief and the constitution was never approved, but the most polemical point in this debate was the way in which the administrative division was to be carried out. Deputies from different places in Spain presented numerous amendments to alter the division proposed in the project. This can be interpreted as evidence of a strong survival of local identities in Spain facing the liberal national project.

This new political-administrative division also introduced a great novelty by converting the colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico into states, with the same status as the states created on the territory of the Peninsula.

The failure of the Republic was brought about by the weakness and division of the republican movement, the growing opposition of the conservative sectors, which mobilized in reaction to the social demands made in the new framework of liberties brought by the Republic, and by the Cuban, Carlist and Cantonalist wars that devastated Spain.

These changes opened a new political debate in the history of Spain, in which we find three important novelties: the debate on the form of the state, the regulation of individual rights and the questioning of the form of the country's political-administrative organisation.

These issues, together with the social question, were to occupy the centre of political debate in Spain up until the II Republic.

On the one hand, there was the democratisation of public life, which was embodied in the defence of the individual rights of the citizens, the widening of representation and the right of suffrage, initially of men and, in the XX century, of women as well; all of this developed within a process of the transformation of subjects into citizens. The Bourbon Restoration interrupted this process but could not put an end to the debate on individual rights, which was kept alive by the different republican parties and the more progressive liberals. On the other hand, during the period between the two republics there was an open debate over the form of state, whether this should be a monarchy or a republic.

And finally, there was the dispute between centralisation and decentralisation, in which the political-administrative organisation of Spain was put into question. It is important to stress how the debate on the form of the country's political-administrative organisation was to be forgotten by all the big Spanish political parties. This question was taken up again by the new nationalist forces that emerged in the final part of the nineteenth century, but from a new angle. The aim was no longer to replace the centralised model with a federal model, instead the argument was over the political articulation of the Catalans and Basques in a centralised Spain. This marked the passage from a federal model to a model of regional autonomy, which would be embodied in the II Spanish Republic.